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Creation and Divine Being in the Christian Neoplatonism of William of Auvergne

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ABSTRACT: This paper considers William of Auvergne's understanding of creation and divine being. As William of Auvergne, and especially his doctrine of creation, have been largely overlooked, the present paper outlines the metaphysical foundations for his understanding of creation, his understanding of divine being, how God is the cause of all things, and how all things then, in some sense, manifest God. Additionally, this paper considers William's extensive use of metaphors to give some understanding of the relationship between God and creatures, how God is the exemplar cause or archetypal world for all things, and the spiritual vision animating his philosophical teachings.

Key Words: William of Auvergne, God, Creation, Esse.

For most people interested in medieval philosophy and theology, St. Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274), St. Albert the Great (1200–1280), St. Bonaventure (1222–1274), and St. Anselm (1033–1109) receive the lion's share of attention. The generation immediately prior to Aquinas and Bonaventure has today, however, been largely overlooked. Still, this generation contains many very accomplished thinkers who are of the utmost importance for understanding the context within which the latter generation developed. In this earlier generation, one of the most significant figures was the Master of theology and then Bishop of Paris, William

of Auvergne (1190–1249).[1] This nowadays forgotten bishop developed perhaps the most sophisticated metaphysics before Aquinas, one in which the distinction of essence and existence (*esse*) figured prominently, and was without a doubt an important source for the young Dominican.[2] To develop this metaphysics, William drew heavily on Avicenna, and Aristotle at times too, and accepted the teaching of the philosophers when he found them to be in accordance with the truth but rejected and corrected them when he thought they contradicted the truth of the Christian faith.[3]

While William has been largely overlooked, his understanding of the real distinction of essence and existence, though controversial, has received the most attention.[4] His doctrine of creation, however, has received less attention and this

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[1] I will use Fr. Roland Teske's translation of William's *De Universo* and *De Trinitate* when the texts to which I refer have been translated into English. William of Auvergne 1995: *The Trinity, Or the First Principle* (*The Trinity* hereafter), in the English translation by Roland J. Teske, S.J. and Francis C. Wade, S.J. William of Auvergne 1998: *The Universe of Creatures: Selections Translated from the Latin*, in the English translation by Roland J. Teske, S.J. Latin texts of the *De Universo* are taken from Guilelmi Alverni Episcopi Parisiensis 1963: *Opera Omnia*, edited by François Hotot, vols. 1-2, with Supplementum, edited by Blaise Le Feron. The Latin texts of the *De Trinitate* are taken from William of Auvergne 1976: *De Trinitate: An Edition of the Latin Text with an Introduction*, edited by Bruno Switalski. For the standard account of William's life and thought see Valois 2012: *Guillaume d'Auvergne, évêque de Paris (1228–1249): Sa vie et ses ouvrages*. For a more recent and unique treatment of William's life, thought, and context see Smith 2023: *Fragments of a World: William of Auvergne and His Medieval Life*.

[2] See Maurer's introduction to Aquinas's *De Ente et Essentia*: Aquinas 1968: *On Being and Essence*, in the English translation by Armand Maurer, 2nd edition, 10. Gilson 1946: "*La Notion D' Existence chez* Guillaume D' Auvergne" in *Archives d'histoire doctrinale et littéraire du Moyen Age*, 91.

[3] Teske 2006: "William of Auvergne's Debt to Avicenna" in *Studies in the Philosophy of William of Auvergne*, 217.

[4] I have no interest in defending the claim that William held a real distinction of essence and existence in creatures in a manner largely consonant to that of Aquinas in this paper. Indeed, I think it is rather obvious that he did. I will simply point the reader to the key articles on this topic. See especially Caster 1996: "The Real Distinction Between Being and Essence According to William of Auvergne" in *Traditio*, 201-23. See also Caster 2004: "William of Auvergne and St. Thomas Aquinas on the Real Distinction between Being and Essence" in *Being and Thought in Aquinas,* edited by Jeremiah M. Hackett, William E. Murnion, and Carl N. Still, 75-108. Caster responds primarily to Gilson's interpretation of William in Gilson

is rather unfortunate since it is the topic to which he perhaps devoted the most attention.[5] In William we find not only a philosophical doctrine of creation and divine being but a spiritual (and, to some degree, Platonic) vision of reality. Unlike modern persons who often assume that the existence of the universe is just a brute fact or that, even if it is created, see it as merely a brute effect or machine that reveals virtually nothing of God's nature, William sees all of reality as manifesting and reflecting a God who is at once incomprehensibly transcendent and yet intimately present to all things. And because all things come forth from God, all things provide some path by which one might be led to that inexhaustible source of all things. In an attempt to bring to light the philosophical vision of this

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1946: "*La Notion D' Existence chez* Guillaume D' Auvergne". See also Caster's 1995 Marquette PhD dissertation "The Real Distinction in Creatures between Being and Essence According to William of Auvergne" for a detailed summary of the secondary literature and defense of a real distinction in William of Auvergne.

[5] There really is very little in the way of secondary literature on William's doctrine of creation. It is addressed at perhaps greatest length in Davis 1973: "Creation According to William of Auvergne" in *Studies in Mediaevalia and Americana, Essays in Honor of William Lyle Davis, S.J.*, edited by Gerard G. Steckler and Leo D. Davis, 51-75. As well as to some degree in Caster 1996: "William of Auvergne's Adaptation of Ibn Gabirol's Doctrine on the Divine Will" in *The Modern Schoolman*, 31-42. Teske 2006: *Studies in the Philosophy of William of Auvergne* is also of considerable value as several articles in this book relate to the question of creation, particularly the following essays: "William of Auvergne on the Eternity of the World" (29-52), "The Identity of the '*Italici*' in William of Auvergne's Discussion of the Eternity of the World" (53-64), "William of Auvergne and the Manichees" (81-100), "William of Auvergne's Use of the Avicennian Principle: '*Ex Uno, In Quantum Unum, Non Nisi Unum*'" (101-20), "William of Auvergne's Arguments for the Newness of the World" (145-60), "William of Auvergne's Rejection of the Platonic Archetypal World" (161-78), and "William of Auvergne on Time and Eternity" (195-216). The topic of creation is also dealt with to some degree in Masnovo 1945-1946: *Da Gugielmo d'Auvergne a san Tommaso d'Aquino*, vols. 2-3. Yet, as helpful as these works are, they are far from exhaustive, focusing mainly on the issue of the eternity of the world and they do not examine many key texts I bring forth in this paper. Creation is also briefly touched on in Neil Lewis and Katrin Fischer 24 September 2008: "William of Auvergne" in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, edited by Edward N. Zalta & Uri Nodelman, online <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2023/entries/william-auvergne/>. Revised 18 March 2023. Nor do we find an extended treatment of creation in Antonella Sannino's more recent work (2022) *Reading William of Auvergne* or Smith's 2023 *Fragments of a World: William of Auvergne and His Medieval Life*.

forgotten Parisian Master, in what follows I will first briefly lay out William's metaphysics of essence and existence, which serves as the philosophical foundation for his argumentation for the existence of God and his understanding of creation. Next, I will examine how God is the cause of all things, how God is named, how all things manifest and reflect God, and finally how all things desire God. It is here that we especially find what I have termed William's "Christian Platonism" with many similarities to Plotinus—even though William, to a large degree, understood his philosophical thought to also be Aristotelian.

I. Foundations of Creation: Avicennian-Boethian Metaphysics of Essence and Esse

At the heart of William's metaphysics is his synthesis of the Avicennian distinction of essence and existence with the Platonic notion of participation. For William, something must have its existence or its "to be" (*esse*) either essentially or by participation. Something has *esse* according to its essence when its "essence is for it *esse*" so that the thing "itself and its *esse* … are one in every way."[6] For William, ultimately, there can only be one such reality and this is God. On the other hand,[7]

> something else is said to be by participation insofar as it has something which is in no way one with the essence of the being and does not pertain to its essence. In fact, it is utterly beyond the account of the substance of the being.

Participation, thus, entails composition, as such a being is resolvable (*resolubile)* and divisible (*partibile*) into what participates (*participans*) and what is participated (*participatum*) as if conjoined from these two principles *(coniunctum ex illis duobus*). For any being that participates in *esse*, the being itself (*ens ipsum*) is other (*aliud*) than its being (*esse eius*) and is not "simple in the ultimate degree of simplicity" (*ipsum ens non esset simplex in ultimo*). Such beings are, therefore, composed (*compositum*) of what participates (*essence*) and what is participated (*esse*) and so are

[6] Auvergne 1995: *The Trinity*, 65.
[7] Ibid, 65-66.

necessarily differentiated from that singular reality whose essence is its *esse*. As William makes clear in *DT* I, the meaning of participating in being (or goodness) is that the creature has *esse*, but its essence is not identical to its *esse*. Rather, *esse* is had as something beyond its essence (*praeter essentiam*) and so in this sense can be described as an accident. Thus, for William, to say that something is composed of essence and *esse*, that it participates in being and that its being is accidental to it, are all different ways of saying the same thing. As William writes:[8]

> Everything that is said of a thing is either essential to it or accidental to it. That is, either it is its essence or part of the essence, or it is entirely beyond the essence. This latter is what we call accidental, and we say that it is had or is said by participation. Being, then, is said of everything either by substance or by participation (*aut substantia aut participatione*). Or rather it will be said of one thing substantially, of another accidentally.

William expands on this metaphysics of *esse* in *De Trinitate* (*DT*) II, where he states that *esse* has two meanings (*intentiones*). In one sense it means the essence or substance of a thing. In this first sense it "is what is called the substance of a thing, its being (*esse*) and its quiddity, and this is the being (*esse*) the definition signifies and expresses."[9] Thus, following the Latin Avicenna's *Liber de Philosophia Prima* I.5, in one sense the *esse* of a thing is its essence.[10] However, the[11]

> second intention of that which is being (*esse*) is that which is said of each thing by this word "is" (*est*), and it is beyond the definition of each thing. Being (*esse*) is not included in any definition; for whatever we imagine, whether a man or an

[8] Ibid, 66.

[9] Ibid, 68-69.

[10] Latinus 1977: *Liber De Philosophia Prima Sive Scientia Divina* I-IV, Édition critique de la traduction latine médiévale, par S. van Riet, 35: "Et hoc est quod fortasse appellamus esse proprium, nec intendimus per illud nisi intentionem esse affirmativi, quia verbum ens significat etiam multas intentiones, ex quibus est certitudo qua est unaquaeque res, et est sicut esse proprium rei. Redeamus igitur et dicamus quod, de his quae manifesta sunt, est hoc quod unaquaeque res habet certitudinem propriam quae est eius quidditas."

[11] Auvergne 1995: *The Trinity*, 69.

> ass or anything else, we do not understand being (*esse*) in its definition. To this there is one sole exception, where being (*esse*) is said essentially, because its essence cannot be understood except through being itself (*ipsum esse*) since the essence and its being (*esse*) are in every way one thing.

The second sense of being is the real existence that is indicated by the word "*est*" as when we say, for example, "Socrates is." Furthermore, the argument William gives to distinguish the sense of being as essence from that of real existence is what Aquinas scholars have come to call the *intellectus essentiae* argument, namely, that from knowing the quiddity of a thing in terms of its essential definition (*ratio*), one does not understand real existence within that quidditative concept. The quiddity of a thing, however, is what makes the thing in question to be the kind of reality it is. For William, it is the essential truth of the thing. Yet, from knowing the essential definitions of some creature alone, one cannot know whether the creature in question actually exists. Thus, the metaphysical principle that accounts for what it is cannot be the same principle that accounts for the fact that it is.[12] Thus, being in the sense of existence, is not possessed by creatures essentially and, to use the Boethian language William employs to articulate this Avicennian metaphysics, there is a composition in every creature of *id quod est* and *esse* or that by which (*quo est*) it is. William even seems to be the first Scholastic Master, again following Avicenna, to hold that angels are purely immaterial beings, but still holding that they are composed of essence (*id quod est*) and existence (*esse or quo est*) and so are still differentiated from the absolute simplicity of God.[13] Existence, however, is possessed only by God essentially and he is, according to William, *ipsum suum esse*, i.e., he is his own being.[14]

Beholden to Avicenna, because creatures do not possess being in virtue of their essences, William regards them as possible beings in *DT* VI, as opposed to God who is *necesse esse per se*. As possible beings, they are not sufficient of

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[12] For this reading of Aquinas's *intellectus essentiae* argument see: Twetten 2019: "How Save Aquinas's 'Intellectus essentiae Argument' for the Real Distinction between Essence and Esse?" *Roczniki Filozoficzne*, 129-43.

[13] See the untranslated *De Universo* IIa-IIae 8, (*Opera Omnia* vol. 1: 852).

[14] This phrase, *ipsum suum esse*, as we shall see, comes from *De Universo* IIa-Iae 10.

themselves to account for their existence in act (*esse in effectu*).[15] Yet, considered absolutely, their essences do not preclude the possibility of their existence. They are, we might say, absolutely considered, "existence neutral".[16] Thus, in order to actually exist, such beings must receive the act of being (*effectum essendi*). And this is what a possibile being is: that which is able to receive the act of being (*potens scilicet recipere effectum essendi)* from God, the giver of its being (*esse*). God, then, gives the act of being to every creature (*acquirens ei effectum essendi*).[17] William, therefore, understands existence as the act of the possible essence and as something received by creatures from God. Interestingly, William then develops this understanding of being as act even further in *De Universo* (*DU*) IIa-Iae 11 as the *actus essendi*, explicitly regarding it as the *actualitatem* of essence. Here William writes that the universe[18]

> confesses that its potentiality and … its impossibility to exist through itself (*sibi esse impossibile esse per se*). Hence it confesses that its potentiality or possibility of existing is natural to itself and comes from itself, but that it has received its actuality or its act of existing from elsewhere or from something else (*actualitatem autem, sive actum essendi recepisse aliunde, sive ab alio*). The reason is that the possible or the potential, insofar as it is such does not come into the act of existing or being (*non venit in actum essendi, sive ad esse*). And it does not come into the act of existing or being through something similar insofar as it is similar, that is, insofar as it is potential or possible. Rather, it remains in its potentiality or possibility insofar as it lies in itself. Hence it remains in non-being according to act or in non-being actually.

Existence is here regarded as the actuality of the merely possible essence and as the *actus essendi* which comes to it from another. Creatures are therefore composed of potency (essence) and act (the *actus essendi*). God alone is *purus*

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[15] Auvergne 1995: *The Trinity*, 83.
[16] De Haan 2020: "Necessary Existence and the Doctrine of Being in Avicenna's Metaphysics of the Healing" in *Investigating Medieval Philosophy* vol. 15: 367.
[17] Auvergne 1995: *The Trinty*, 83.
[18] Auvergne 1998: *The Universe of Creatures*, 133.

actus.[19] And without the reception of this act, the creature, which considered in terms of itself is merely *possibile*, would remain in non-being. In *DT* VII, William further clarifies the nature of the essence-*esse* composition:[20]

> Since possible being (*ens*) is not being through its essence (*ens per essentiam*), it and its being (*esse*), which does not belong to it essentially (*quod non est ei per essentiam*), are really two (*duo sunt revera*). The one comes (*accidit*) to the other and does not fall within its meaning (*rationem*) or quiddity (*quidditatem*). Being (*ens*) in this way is, therefore, composite (*compositum*) and also resolvable (*resolubile*) into its possibility (*possibilitate*), or quiddity (*quidditatem*), and its being (*esse*). From this it is clear that it is caused by something that draws its possibility into the actuality of being (*effectum essendi*) and by something that conjoins (*a coniungente*) its being (*esse*) with its possibility.

Here we find that since possible being is not *ens per essentiam*, but is only an *ens per participatione*, then it and its *esse* are in fact, or in truth, two. Such a being is therefore composed of its essence (or possibility) and its *esse*. Essence and existence must, as we have already seen, be conjoined and so such a being is in need of a cause. This composition in all creatures, then, is what clearly differentiates them from God and makes them in need of a cause of their being while God is necessarily not in need of a cause. William even goes so far as to regard essence and existence as "parts" of the concrete existing creature. This is evident from *DU* Ia-Iae 3, where arguing against the "Manicheans" he writes:[21]

> Everything composite in any way is caused in some way by its parts of which its totality consists (*ab ipsis partibus componentibus totalitatem ipsius),* and it is the

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[19] Auvergne 1995: *The Trinity*, 77.

[20] Ibid, 87.

[21] Auvergne 1998: *The Universe of Creatures,* 35 (translation modified). omnino enim compositum quolibet modorum causatum est ex partibus, ex quibus consistit totalitas ipsius, et est compositoris adunantis, seu agregantis, partes illius, et adducentis, in totalitatem ipsius. Jam ante declaratum est in prima parte primae philosophiae, quia omne huiusmodi causatum est possibile esse per se, et est recipiens esse supra se, quod est aliud ab ipso, et propter hoc est in eo potentialiter sive possibiliter, quoniam est ei accidens, hoc est, adveniens ei, et receptum ab ipso supra totam completam essentiam suam (Opera Omnia, Vol. 1, 594).

> work of the composer who unites and brings together the parts and makes them into a totality … every effect of this sort is possible through itself and receives being upon itself (*recipiens esse supra se*) which is other than itself (*quod est aliud ab ipso*) and, for this reason, it is in potentially or by way of possibility, because it is an accident of it (*ei accidens*), that is, something that comes to it (*adveniens ei*) and is received (*receptum*) by the whole complete essence.

The main thrust of William's argumentation against the "Manicheans" is that it is impossible for there to be two first principles since this would necessarily require that one or both of them be composed. However, if one of them is composed, then it would be in need of a cause and so could not, in fact, be a first principle after all. The reason for this is that it would be dependent upon the conjunction of its parts and so its existence would ultimately be in need of an explanation. Such a thing, then, will necessarily be composed of essence and existence and so will have to receive *esse* from a cause beyond itself. William is, thus, following a strand of argumentation present in Plotinus and Aquinas such that whatever is ontologically complex is not ultimately self-explanatory and so must be reducible to a cause that is supremely simple. This Platonic dimension to his thought can be seen explicitly when he states in *DT* IV that "plurality" and composition or "resolvability" is "not constituted so as in itself to settle or to determine the intellect, but only to the extent that it itself ends in unity."[22] All composition, therefore, must lead to supreme unity and simplicity, just as all possibility must lead to what is *necesse esse per se*.

Esse is, therefore, something that is other than (*aliud*), received by (*receptum*), occurs to (*accidit*), comes to (*adveniens ei*), and is beyond (*praeter*) the creaturely essence. Since existence is outside the essence of a creature, then in some sense it is also an accident (*accidens*)—although William is quite aware that it is not merely a categorical accident, since in *DT* II he first distinguishes substance from accidents, and then substance itself from existence. Still, since the creaturely essence is in potency to existence, William regards the *esse* it receives as the actuality of the *possibile* essence and its *actus essendi*. Finally, although William

[22] Auvergne 1995: *The Trinity*, 77.

understands existence as, in some sense, an accident, he also understands it as what is most fundamental and intimate within a thing, with God thereby being intimately present to all things as causing their very existence. As he writes in *DU* Ia-Iae 30, "the creator is next to (*proximus est*) and most present (*praesentissimus*) to each of his creatures; in fact he is most interior (*intimus*) to each of them."[23] William then states, that if one could subtract away all accidental and substantial forms the last thing to remain would be *esse* or *entitas* and, therefore, its giver (*dator ipsius*). Thus, if you could subtract from Socrates his specific and generic forms, the last thing that would remain is *esse* and it "will remain for him like his most intimate garment or undershirt (*quasi intimo indumento et velut interula*) by which the Creator clothed him."[24] For William, then, while God is fully transcendent of creatures and "not somehow counted among them" (*non connumerato aliquatenus*) but "is supereminent and stands above them in an unlikeness that is beyond thought," he is also fully immanent to creation, and is immediately present to all things as causing their existence.[25]

II. Divine Being

William uses the essence-existence distinction and the principle that "everything that is, either is its own *esse* or something else is *esse* for it" as his point of departure for demonstrating the existence of God, which he bases on "efficient causality" (*a forinseco causante*).[26] For William, "if for each thing *esse* is other than the thing itself it is necessary to proceed in a circle or in a straight line and it will go on to infinity."[27] William, however, goes on to reject both of these possibilities. By proceeding in a circle, he means to reject two things (A and B) mutually being the cause of each other's existence. It is not clear whether A and B represent two

[23] Auvergne 1998: *The Universe of Creatures*, 100.
[24] Ibid.
[25] Ibid, 131.
[26] Auvergne 1995: *The Trinity*, 72. The meaning here is that the efficient cause is external to its effect, while matter and form are internal causes.
[27] Ibid, 69.

distinct beings or essence and existence. Nevertheless, William concludes that if A depends on B and B depends on A then something "will be before its own being and proceed in being its own being and will have being before its being and will have being before it is."[28] Ultimately then, on such a supposition, neither the existence of A nor B will be rendered intelligible. Nor does an infinite regress of causes fare any better. For if A depends on B and B on C and C on D, then ultimately the being of A cannot be explained for "an explanation of this sort has no end, and on this account neither does the very being of A."[29] To posit an infinite regress is to "block the path of philosophizing and destroys the principle and root of knowledge" and is to "posit infinities and unintelligibilities." Thus, there must ultimately be some reality in which essence and *esse* are not distinct and such a reality cannot not be, cannot even be understood not to be, cannot be caused and so is uncreated.

As we have seen, God is *ens per essentiam* since in him essence and *esse* are in every way one, while a creature is an *ens per participatione*. Because of this, William offers a host of divine names, but the most significant are *necesse esse per se*, *ipsum suum esse* and *purus actus*. William then goes on to connect this metaphysics of divine being to Exodus 3:14, stating that since in God there is no distinction of essence and existence, then being is his *proprium nomen* and it was "not without reason that he gave his name to Moses." For *ens* "expresses his essence to such a degree that by it he wanted to make himself known to the sons of Israel."[30]

Following Avicenna, William observes in *DT* IV that on account of this metaphysics, God is in no way in a genus, since whatever is in a genus must be in some way composed and so would require a cause.[31] Like Aquinas, for William, God does not even "follow after common being and thus is not under it" (*quod non*

[28] Ibid.
[29] Ibid, 70.
[30] Ibid, 78.
[31] Ibid, 74-76.

est post esse commune, quare nec sub ipso).[32] William's insight here is strikingly reminiscent of Plotinus, who states in *Enneads* III.8.9, that the One is, "none of all things, but prior to all things" and, immediately thereafter in III.8.10, that it is "the productive power of all things."[33] In fact, in another passage also quite reminiscent of Plotinus, William states that the Word of God is "the power productive of all things" (*virtus omnifica*).[34] This also means, however, that God is not one being among others, nor is he one member among others contained within a more universal category. Rather, God is *ipsum suum esse* and *purus actus*.

As such, being (as well as all other terms) cannot be predicated of God and creatures univocally. This point is especially evident from *DU* IIa-Iae 10:[35]

> I say that being (*esse*) is not said of the creator and other things according to one meaning (*unam intentionem*), nor is it said univocally (*univoce*). In the same way white is said of the color and of a surface equivocally (*aequivoce*). For the color is said to be white essentially and not according to participation. It is not, after all, said to be white because it has or participates in whiteness, but because it is whiteness itself. But a surface or a wall is white in the opposite way. Thus the creator is not said to be a *being* (*ens*) by having *being itself* (*ipsum esse*) but because he is his own being (*ipsum suum esse*) so that in every respect that which is (*quod est*) and that by which he is (*quo est*) is understood to be the same in him. But in nothing else is it this way, for in everything else (*in omni*) that which is (*quod est*) is one thing (*aliud*), and that by which it is (*quo est*) is another (*aliud*), and in general everything other than the creator is said to be a being (*ens*) by participation (*secundum participationem).*

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[32] *De Trinitate* IV, (Switalski, 30-31). For this in Aquinas see: Wippel 2007: "The Latin Avicenna as a Source for Thomas Aquinas's Metaphysics" in *Metaphysical Themes in Thomas Aquinas II*, 37.

[33] Plotinus 2018: *The Enneads* III.8.9-10, edited by Lloyd P. Gerson, 366. Plotinus also writes that the One "is a measure and is not measured, and it is not equal to other things, such that it is among them. If this were not the case, there would be something common to it and the things numbered, and that would be prior to it. But there cannot be anything prior to it". *Enneads* V.5.4, 587.

[34] Auvergne 1998: *The Universe of Creatures*, 91.

[35] Ibid, 130.

Here William explicitly precludes univocal predication between God and creatures since creatures have being by participation, while God does not. Rather, using the example of whiteness to illustrate this point, creatures have being similar to the way in which a surface has whiteness and so is composed of that which is white (the surface) and that by which it is white (whiteness). God, however, does not *have* being but rather just is *ipsum suum esse*—like pure whiteness itself. Again, this means that in God there is no composition of that which is (essence) and that by which it is (*esse*), while such a composition holds in the case of everything other than God. As such, there is no univocal *ratio* of being which extends to, and therefore embraces, both God and creatures. Rather, being is said primarily of God and only secondarily, derivatively, and by relation to God, of creatures.

The predication of terms of God and creatures is taken up in more detail in *DU* Ia-IIae 33. In this text, William first observes that the creator is truth through himself, the first truth, and that the universe is a "very empty and very thin shadow (*umbra vanissima, ac tenuissima*) in relation to him and in comparison to him." Certain terms, however, are predicated of both the creator and creatures, but when said of creatures they "signify slight shadows (*umbras exiguas*), nods (*nutus*) and vestiges (*vestigia*) and tiny signs (*signa permodica*) of those things that they signify in the creator." For example, when "power" is predicated of a creature, by comparison to God, it is as if it is not worthy to be called power. Rather, it is a "slight trace" of the creator. Thus, power is not said univocally (*univoce*) of the creature and creator.[36]

Still, such predications as goodness, sweetness, generosity, beauty, and nobility "in some way make known to us … the magnificence or excellence of the creator and are used in reference to creatures in accordance with their appropriate smallness (*ad creaturas pro suae exiguitatis congruentia referuntur*)."[37] William's reasoning here is, implicitly, based upon the fact that whatever is in the effect must in some way be in the cause and, as such, the perfections found in creatures must bear some likeness to the creator. In this way they can be regarded as signs of him.

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[36] Ibid, 200.
[37] Ibid, 201.

The goodness and sweetness of creatures are, as William is always eager to add, only a faint shadow of the goodness and sweetness of the creator. For[38]

> the term 'power' therefore when it is imposed truly and signifies in its proper sense, names only power that is free from impotence in every way (*potentiam puram usquequaque ab impotentia*) … The situation is the same with being (*ente*) and entity (*entitate*), true and truth, good and goodness, beautiful and beauty, wise and wisdom, lofty and loftiness, and noble and nobleness. It is, therefore, obvious from these and through these the true and proper significations (*propriae significationes*) of such predications belong only to the creator (*soli creatori conveniunt*) and apply to other things only equivocally (*aequivoce*), and to some extent (*secundum quid*) or by relation (*ad aliquid*) or in some likeness (*similitudinem*) that is very small and most far from the creator (*longissimi distantem a creatore*).

Much like Aquinas, William's point seems to be that in their absolute signification, these terms express no finitude, impotency or imperfection and so apply properly to God and, in fact, apply to God primarily. Thus, for William, God and creatures do not both possess wisdom, for example, in the manner that Plato and Aristotle might both be said to be wise. Instead, God is wisdom itself, and creaturely wisdom is a reflection, or "slight trace", of what he is. The same goes for being. There is, therefore, no need of a univocal category to span the infinite interval of God and creatures so as to account for their similarity and the unity of being. Rather, God as Being Itself, is what accounts for the unity of beings and the likeness of all beings to Being, just as there is no need for a broader category of "whiteness" which would embrace both whiteness itself subsisting *per se* and a thing that merely happens to be white. Subsisting whiteness, if there were such a reality, would be white essentially and not by participation. Indeed, it would not be something *having* whiteness at all such that it could be counted among (*non connumerato*) all the other things that merely have, or participate in, whiteness for it would be whiteness itself.

[38] Ibid.

William's reflection on predication is continued in *DU* Ia-IIae 37 where he states that some predications belong to the creator according to the "most exact truth" and according to the "original imposition" of the name. Yet, God shares these names, such as being, powerful, wise, good, and beautiful with all or some creatures. Such names "belong to the creator alone according to their truth which is purified and unmixed with the contrary in every way. But they are shared with other things by a certain likeness, though one far distant."[39] As William notes,[40]

> For this reason they are not shared univocally, but equivocally (*non univoce, sed aequivoce*) and by a most remote likeness (*distantissima similitudine*). But this diversity of meanings and intentions does not prevent (*non prohibet*) them being truly said of creatures (*vere dicantur de creaturis*).

Importantly, such predications are truly said of creatures and God. William, thus, avoids a pantheism that would seek to emphasize divine being to the complete exclusion and elimination of creaturely being. Instead, God exists and so do creatures. And so "being" is predicated of both. But "being" taken absolutely signifies a purity that is unmixed with non-being and potency and so in its primary sense it belongs to God. This is the exact point Aquinas makes, although with more precision, in *Summa Theologiae* I.13.6, when he states that such terms are predicated of God primarily according to the reality they signify, but are drawn primarily from creatures and so are imposed with our creaturely mode of signification and all their inherent limitations that must be denied of God. Creaturely being is always accompanied by finitude, limitation, privation and negation and so such terms that explicitly express no finitude or imperfection are not predicated of creatures primarily but are divine names. Creaturely being, then, is only an effect and similitude of divine being.

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[39] Ibid, 208.

[40] Ibid, 209. Insofar as these terms are truly said of creatures according to a *similitudine* and yet are not univocally said of God and creatures, in Thomistic language, William is clearly implying some conception of analogy. This aspect of William's thought, however, requires more research and has been largely overlooked.

III. God as Cause of the World

God is the ultimate cause of all things since everything other than him is composed and so is necessarily in need of a cause. This is because, as we have seen, every being whose essence is not its existence "has *esse* acquired from something other than itself."[41] Thus in *DT* IV we find that[42]

> every being (*ens*) owes its own being (*suum esse*) and every being owes itself (*se*) to the first being (*primo enti*), since there is not a being save from it and through it. In this way it is clear that the universe is an outpouring (*fluxus*) and overflowing (*exuberantia*) of that being (*esse*), which is the universal source of being (*fons universalis essendi*). Therefore, all things (*omina*), to the extent that they are (*in quantum sunt*), are the outpouring and the overflowing of this first, most pure and most abundant source (*affluentissimi huius fontis*).

We see here that not only the *esse* of creatures is due to God's creative activity, but also their essences. William then employs the rather Platonic imagery of emanation or outpouring and overflowing to express God's creative act. Thus, while William refers to God as the *primum ens* in this passage, it is also clear that he is the universal cause of all things, the *fons universalis essendi*. As such he must be nothing among all those things that he creates, as if he were thought to be a first among others, or another item contained within the larger array of things that are. Rather he is "first" in the sense that he is ontologically prior to all things as the cause of the existence of all beings.

Interestingly, this Platonic imagery of emanation or overflowing is often opposed to what is taken to be a proper Christian account of creation, since God creates freely. William, however, finds it to be a helpful image, one he turns to again and again, for indicating that absolutely everything in the universe comes forth from God, just as all the water in a pool, say, comes forth from its font. In this sense the imagery, although William will recognize its limitations, is a fitting accompaniment to creation *ex nihilo*, which holds that there is no presupposed

[41] Auvergne 1995: *The Trinity*, 79.
[42] Ibid, 80.

material subject of creation. Indeed, this is the significance of using this metaphor precisely after saying that a thing owes its existence and its very self (essence) to the creator. Thus, as the cause of all things, God is aptly referred to as the *fons universalis essendi*—that reality which is continually conferring existence on all things.

Returning to Avicennian terminology, William states that *possibile* being is like a path that "leads us to being necessary through itself" (*necesse esse per se*)—that reality which cannot not be and is entirely sufficient unto itself (*esse sufficientiae*) and not in need of a cause.[43] The universe, however, is in every part and as a whole, merely *possibile*. For[44]

> if we consider the universe in itself, we will not find anything but possibility (*nisi possibilitatem*) in it. Once we posit only possibility in the universe taken in itself, the universe is only possible (*tantum possibile*). But beyond the universe there is no being (*non est ens*). Therefore, the universe is in actuality (*est in effectu*) neither from itself nor from another. In itself it is not being in actuality, and outside the universe there is nothing that gives it being in actuality (*extra ipsum non est quod det ei esse in effectu*), since there is nothing (*nihil est*) outside the universe … Hence if we suppose that everything is *possibile* the result is that nothing actually is (*nihil esse in effectu*). Thus, it follows that something is that is not *possibile*. But this will necessarily be *necesse esse per semetipsum*.

As Teske has pointed out, this passage is remarkably similar to Aquinas's Third Way since it holds that if all that is were merely possible, then in fact there would be nothing in existence right now.[45] This is because the possible, that which is but need not be, must always depend on what is not merely possible in order to exist at all. All things, therefore, would sink into absolute non-being if not sustained by God, who is *necesse esse per se*. As William writes: [46]

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[43] Ibid, 83.
[44] Ibid, 83-84.
[45] Ibid, 84. See Teske's fourth footnote.
[46] Ibid.

> The universe would sink into non *esse,* unless the foundation of the universe were standing by itself, sustaining it by its might and power, for a dependent whole must collapse without its support. Thus the universe would collapse and sink into non *esse*, unless there were a power which stands through itself and supports the universe. Since the universe stands firm, it necessarily stands only by the power of one sustaining and supporting it. For, what comes into being from non-being or after non-being, sinks back into that from which it was drawn, insofar as its own power goes. For its possibility does not suffice to keep its being from vanishing.

To follow Aquinas, there are two distinct but related meanings of the phrase *ex nihilo* that are implied in a correct philosophical account of creation, and both of which are explicitly present in William's works.[47] First, as this passage makes clear, for William, creation is *ex nihilo* in the sense that the creature has non-being prior to being by a priority of nature, such that were the creature left to itself, it would sink or vanish into absolute non-being. Regarding the second sense, William is also explicit that God creates without any external means saying "he used nothing external, since he needed no matter nor any instrument" for his act of creation.[48] And in this sense a creature is *ex nihilo* insofar as it is not from any pre-existing material substrate. Indeed, God would not be the creator of all things and the universal source of all being if there was some matter or instrument that he just happened to "find", so to speak, and then employed in order to create. Instead, the potency by which the creature is created is not a pre-existing material substrate, "but the potency by which the creator has the power to create."[49] Thus, before creatures were created, they only existed in the active potency of the creator.

Furthermore, for William, no creature exists without a first initial moment of its existence. Thus, while Aquinas agreed but held that this is only something that is believed on the basis of revelation and could not be demonstrated by natural reason, William thinks this conclusion can be shown by natural reason. This topic deserves a study of its own, but suffice it to say that one of William's main reasons

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[47] Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* I.45.1 ad 3, Leonine *Opera Omnia,* vol. 4, Roma 1888.
[48] Auvergne 1998: *The Universe of Creatures*, 68.
[49] Ibid, 191.

for holding that the universe has a temporal origin is that the infinite cannot be traversed.[50] Still, in great similarity to Aquinas, William allows for the sake of argument that if a creature did exist without an initial temporal beginning to its existence, it would still be in need of a sustaining cause and so would still be created. In *DU* IIa-Iae 10, William holds that always to be is proper to the creator alone, and no created thing has the power always to be. Yet,[51]

> Even if it were true that some of them always exist (*etiamsi verum esset, quod quaedam ex eis semper sit*), it belongs to no one of them that it subsists by its own power (*nulla enim sua virtute eis est ut subsistant*). It has already been explained to you elsewhere that being is accidental to each thing but the creator, to whom it is essential (*esse accidit unicuique, praeterquam soli creatori, cui soli essentiale est*). For he is by his own power and he always is by the strength of his stability. Each of the other things, however, is as it is and as long as it is by his power and gift, and insofar as it lies in itself (*quantum in se est*), each would fall back into non-being (*recideret in non esse*) if the power and goodness of the creator did not retain it and make it stable in being.

Existence is accidental to creatures since it is not possessed in virtue of their essences and so creatures would fall into non-being if not sustained by the creator. In this way, even if a creature always was it would nevertheless still be created *ex nihilo*. Its existence would have no temporal beginning, but its existence would not be self-explanatory and so would be in need of a cause. To use more explicitly Avicennian language, such a creature would only be necessary by means of another, not *per se*, and would still necessarily depend on the donation of being from God, without which it would be nothing. And in another text William allows for the possibility, again I believe only for the sake of argument, that there is an infinite regress of caused causes extending backwards into the past. Yet, even if this were the case, such an infinite regress[52]

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[50] Auvergne 1995: *The Trinity*, 107. See Teske 2006: "William of Auvergne's Arguments for the Newness of the World" in *Studies in the Philosophy of William of Auvergne*, 145-60.
[51] Auvergne 1996: *The Universe of Creatures*, 131.
[52] Auvergne 1995: *The Trinity*, 81 (italics added).

> will still not have a completeness in itself, since its intention includes the need of another and a lack so that it is not sufficient unto itself. If you said that nothing prevents something of this kind, which is being (*esse*) in need, from needing another and this other again needing a third, and so on to infinity, *this very infinity of such beings will need another beyond itself* (*ipsa huiusmodi entium infinitas erit indigens alio ultra se).* For it makes no difference whether this infinity has a first or does not have one. Thus this infinity is no more sufficient unto itself than any one of its members.

Thus, for William, an infinite number of possible beings or, as he calls them at times, beings in need, are not sufficient to account for the very existence of the totality of *possibile* being in the first place. Rather, this whole series would be *possibile* in itself and so need not be at all. As such the whole infinite series would be in need of another outside of itself to impart to it existence. To simply keep positing an infinity of possible beings, and so things which need not exist, in order to explain why anything exists at all, is simply not possible.

IV. Free Creation

So far, William has relied heavily on Avicenna's metaphysical principles but goes on to reject the necessitarianism and mediation of creation in the Avicennian account. Again, this topic deserves its own study and is very complex, but what William takes to be the most powerful argument for Avicenna's position is that if God is the creator of the universe and is immutable, then there seems to be no sense to be made of God not having created the world from eternity. For there is nothing that could prohibit God's act of creation, nor could he at some point acquire either the power or desire to create since this would involve change, it seems that creation must be from eternity. Furthermore, from the pure simplicity of the divine, for Avicenna, only one effect could proceed immediately from God.[53] Thus, God by knowing himself as absolutely simple, creates the first

[53] William, however, does accept this Avicennian principle but applies it to the Trinity. See Teske 2006: "William of Auvergne's Use of the Avicennian Principle: '*Ex Uno, In Quantum Unum, Non Nisi Unum*'" in *Studies in the Philosophy of William of Auvergne*, 101-20.

intelligence, and this intelligence then creates the body and soul of the first sphere and the second intelligence. The second intelligence then creates the next and so forth until we arrive at the *dator forarum* which creates our sensible world.

William's main counter, however, is that God acts not by natural necessity but by will. Thus, effects begin to be when he wills. Nor is it necessary that if God wills something from eternity that the thing willed exists from eternity. Rather, one must distinguish between the act of will itself and the thing willed. I can, for example, will, without changing my will, that something begins to be at a certain point later in time. Thus, on God's side of things his act of will is eternal and on account of his divine simplicity is identical to his essence. However, on the side of the thing willed, God wills from eternity that the universe has a particular duration and does not exist without a temporal beginning. And so God's eternity is not actually a barrier to a universe with a first temporal moment. William also goes on to use Avicenna's *Liber de Prima Philosophia* IX.2 against Avicenna since there he says that nature operates in the manner of a servant.[54] Thus, if nature operates by necessity, or without free choice, then the cause of nature as a whole must act freely, i.e., not by natural necessity or as directed by another. Thus, the "Aristotelians" (really Avicenna) "forgot what they rightly said, namely that nature does not operate according to choice and will, but in the manner of a servant because nature really depends on the … will that gives order to all things."[55]

Furthermore, since God operates by will, and not natural necessity, his creative act is not limited to one immediate effect. Rather, God has power over "the *possibile* absolutely", that is, "everything that in itself can be created." Indeed, all creatures are equally close to non-being in the sense that none of them need

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[54] Avicenna 1980: "Liber De Philosophia Prima Sive Scientia Divina V-X" in *Édition critique de la traduction latine médiévale*, edited by S. Van Riet, 448: "Naturalis enim non agit per electionem, sed ad modum servientis."

[55] Auvergne 1995: *The Trinity*, 112. See Teske's fifth footnote. See also Auvergne 1998: *The Universe of Creatures*, 126-27. See also Miller 2002: "William of Auvergne and the Aristotelians: The Nature of a Servant" in *Medieval Philosophy and the Classical Tradition*, edited by John Inglis, 221-60. See also Davis 1973: "Creation According to William of Auvergne" in *Studies in Mediaevalia and Americana*, 65.

exist at all and so no creature has an immediate claim on God's creative act. Thus, on Avicenna's account, "the power of the creator would not be in the ultimate degree of amplitude since it would be restricted to a certain *possibile*."[56] Again, these issues require more analysis but for our present purpose it is sufficient to note that William takes issue with the necessitarianism of Avicenna and the limitation of God's creative act to (immediately) only one intelligence, as this does not do justice to the divine will and power, nor to the personal nature of God revealed in Scripture.

William also takes issue with the Avicennian account of the mediation of creation since, as we have seen, God is intimately present to all things as causing their existence. Even though God is in all things he is still "pure", "solitary", "separate", and "unmixed" with all things.[57] For "the first being, however, is absolute and free through all things, filling and illuminating them by his omnipresence, because no place or matter holds it bound."[58] And he fills "all things like a light cast over the universe." William also finds scriptural justification for this teaching in Jeremiah 23:24 where God says, "I fill heaven and earth"[59] and Paul's statement in Romans 11:36 that all things are from him, through him and in him.[60] And so, as separate and unmixed with all things, God is also everywhere present to all things. In *DT* VII William introduces one of his favorite metaphors for thinking about the divine: God as pure light.[61] Not so much the sun, however, since it is still tied to matter and is a particular finite object being, in some sense, here and not there.[62] The error of the Avicennian universe then, is in part that

[56] Auvergne 1998: *The Universe of Creatures*, 123.
[57] Auvergne 1995: *The Trinity*, 89.
[58] Ibid, 89.
[59] Ibid, 88.
[60] Ibid, 91.
[61] Ibid, 89. See also Auvergne 1998: *The Universe of Creatures*, 99. Notice also Plotinus's *Enneads*, VI.8.18, 876: "For what is in the One is many times greater than what is, in a way, in Intellect. It is just as when light is scattered abroad from a single source, which in itself is luminous. The scattered light is an image, its source is the true original."
[62] Auvergne 1995: *The Trinity*, 89.

God is in some sense here and not there, creating this and not that. William states in *DU* Ia-Iae 27, that this erroneous position is due to the fact that[63]

> They thought that distance could be something for the creator, and they supposed that the creator could be remote from some things and close to others (*aestimaverunt creatorem longe esse a quibusdam et prope quibusdam*) and that, for this reason, he does not operate through himself (*non operari per se*) or does so to a lesser degree (*aut minus operari*). They did not understand, then, the supereminence (*pereminentiam*) of the creator and the amplitude and strength of his power by which he stretches from the height of the universe to the bottom (*a summo universi usque deorsum*) and from the first creature to the last, containing, holding, retaining all things (*omnia continens, tenens et retinens*) as he wills and as long as he wills. Otherwise, they would fall back into non-being (*reciderent in non esse*) from which they have been drawn by him. He is, therefore, within all things (*infra omnia*), he is under all things (*sub omnibus*), sustaining all things, not only as king (*non solum ut Rex*) and emperor dominating all, but even as a spring most overflowing (*fons influentissimus*) from which there unceasingly descend rivers (*rivi*) and streams (*fluenta*) of his goodness upon his creature, that is, upon all the ages and upon individual ages and within all things and in all things, nourishing, propagating, moderating, and ruling all things. For this reason he produces all things in all things (*propter hoc operatur omnia in omnibus*).

In this text William takes direct aim at Avicenna's doctrine of mediated creation where God is thought to only immediately and directly cause the first intelligence, which then causes the next descending intelligence. This second intelligence, for Avicenna, then causes the third and so forth until the production of the tenth intelligence, which causes our terrestrial world. However, contra Avicenna, William holds that God is immediately present to all things on account of his supereminence. In this passage William also further shows his predilection for the Platonic imagery of God as a spring pouring forth the totality of beings. In fact, created essences are the "vessels of the outpouring and overflowing of the first font"[64] as God pours forth *esse* on all things, which is then received according to

[63] Auvergne 1998: *The Universe*, 97.
[64] Ibid, 92.

the capacity of creaturely essences. Furthermore, it is again striking how similar William's imagery in this passage is to Plotinus. For again in *Enneads* III.8.10, Plotinus bids us think of the One as "a spring which has no other source, but gives all of itself to rivers while not exhausting itself in the rivers but quietly remaining itself, while the streams which go forth from it are still all together before they flow their separate ways."[65] Yet, for William, this spring is also the personal God of Scripture, in whom all things live and move and have their being and who is also entirely beyond all things.

Some things, however, are in a sense immediately created by God, while others are not. Immaterial substances and the heavenly bodies are created immediately by God alone, while the rabbit in my backyard, for example, was generated by its parent rabbits. As William writes:[66]

> creation is the activity of the creator alone (*creatio singularis est operatio creatoris*), because at the good pleasure of his will alone without any means or help he bestows being upon what he wills (*absque ullo medio, vel adminiculo, largitur esse cui voluerit*). And in this way or meaning he is said to create only non-bodily (*incorporales*) or incorporeal substances (*substantias incorporeas*) with the sole exception of the heavenly ones. For other substances are generated through action and passions and they are generated through many conflicts of agents and patients.

How then are certain things created immediately by God insofar as they are not educed from potency to act from a presupposed material substrate (i.e., incorporeal substances and the heavenly bodies) and others are generated from such a substrate, while God is at the same time intimately present to all things as the cause of their existence? Does this then threaten to collapse back into the Avicennian picture with God creating certain things immediately and others mediately? I think the answer is to see God's creative act as, on the part of God,

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[65] Plotinus, *Enneads* III.8.10, 366.

[66] Auvergne 1998: *The Universe of Creatures*, 198.

one act by which a multiplicity of effects are brought forth and established in a certain order. William even suggests this in *DU* Ia-Iae 21, when he writes:[67]

> when the Creator speaks once and emits, as it were, the single ineffable spiritual sound of his speech (*unicum sermonis sui ineffabilem sonum spiritualem emittente*), the universe of natural products goes forth (*procedit*) in the world, as if the universe of creatures hears his word (*verbum eius audiat*). For if, by the one will or intention of the one king or prince who intends to take or storm some castle or city, so great a multitude of effects and instruments goes forth in the army or in the siege of that castle, or if this happens by one word by which he commands his army to storm that castle, why is it surprising if by the word of the omnipotent Creator (*ex omnipotentis creatoris verbo*), though it is one in every way (*licet uno per omnem modum*), the countless variety of effects goes forth in the world (*procedit innumerabilis varietas operum in mundo*)?

God's creative act, then, is like a single word by which the totality of things is brought into being. It is not the case, therefore, that God creates this soul and then that angel and then the rabbit in my backyard by different and successive acts. Rather, on God's part, his creative act is simply one by which he gives being to all things. However, in this totality certain things simply come forth from no material subject and other things come forth through prior causes. Nevertheless, all things are immediately dependent on, related to, and enveloped within this single creative act. As such, by being in all things as causing the existence of all, God is not one more member among others contained within the totality of things that are, causing this but not that. Thus, the rabbit in my backyard and the angel Gabriel are both just as equally created, since both would collapse immediately into nothingness if not sustained by God. Indeed, for William, "the creator is the cause of all things equally and without qualification (*causa est simpliciter, et aequaliter omnium*), as he knows and understands all things equally."[68]

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[67] Ibid, 78-79.
[68] Ibid, 93.

V. The World as Manifestation of God

God is not only the cause of the world but is manifest and reflected in all things. Thus, again following largely in the Platonic tradition, for William, God is at once hidden or clothed and yet manifest and revealed in all things. As William writes:[69]

> all things in some manner clothe the first being (*primum esse*) … since it is interior to all that is (*intimum est omnium quae sunt*), though it is not the subject of these things or a part of them (*subjectum eorum aut pars*). Just as we would say that the sun is covered by the cloud (*solum vestitum nube*) behind which it is seen, so the author of the universe is seen by the intellect behind the cloud, as it were, of the universe (*sic velut sub quadam nube universi ipse universitatis auctor intellectu conspicitur*).

Again, we see that for William God is interiorly present to all things and in this sense is clothed by all things. He is not, however, in all things as their material subject nor as a part. Furthermore, just as one might not be able to see the sun directly, since it is hidden behind the clouds and yet still know that the sun is present due to the illumination of the clouds, so God is not some immediate object of experience within the world but is revealed and "seen" through the existence of the world. Thus, God is at once hidden and manifest, revealed and clothed, known and unknown, in all things. Continuing on in *DT* VII, we find that God is, in a sense, the being (*esse*) of all things since without him they would fall into nothingness, but[70]

> is none of those things which are by participation in it. It is one essence, pure, solitary, separate from and unmixed with all things, yet filling all things like light cast over the universe (*implens tamen omnia ad modum sparsi luminis super universum*). By this filling or outpouring, it makes all things reflect it (*impletione sive perfusione faciens ad se relucere omnia*). This is their being (*esse*), namely, to reflect it (*et hoc est eis esse, relucere scilicet ad ipsum*), and they can do so only through

[69] Auvergne 1995: *The Trinity*, 85.
[70] Ibid, 89.

> it, that is, by possessing it (*in habendo scilicet ipsum*), just as air reflects its source of light by possessing its source of light (*sicut aer relucet ad illuminatorem suum, in habendo scilicet ipsum*) insofar as it is possible for the air.

Like Plotinus' statement that the One is nothing among beings, God is unmixed with all things and is nothing among those things which participate in him. William then connects two of his favorite images for thinking about the divine, that of a fountain and pure light. As pouring forth all things, all things are reflections of God. And this is what the existence of everything and all things together is: to reflect him. In this way all things possess their cause and the source of their existential light. God, then, is like a pure light reflected in and filling all things. And as reflected in all things, he is manifest in all things; and yet, as nothing among beings, is clothed or hidden.

VI. Metaphors for Creation

In *DU* Ia-Iae 17 and 18, William analyzes a number of metaphors and images of creation which he finds in some respect deficient. Nevertheless, while the secondary literature has rightly noted that William criticizes these images, it has not sufficiently noticed the respects in which William actually accepts and employs these exact images, often quite enthusiastically.[71] As William states explicitly, these images[72]

> do really (*revera*) state useful comparisons (*comparationes utiles*) for imagining the supereminence of the creator over the universe and over individual things in it and for raising up the human intellect (*ad erigendum intellectum humanum*) and for contemplating to some extent the magnificence and glory of the creator.

[71] I, therefore, take a much more positive view of William's use of these images and analogies than does Davis in 1973: "Creation According to William of Auvergne" in *Studies in Mediaevalia and Americana*, 62-63.
[72] Auvergne 1998: *The Universe of Creatures*, 66.

Thus, all these images are rejected in some capacity and accepted in another, which is, of course, not surprising, since all our images and metaphors for creation and the divine action lag in some respect.

The first image that William refers to is how some have held that everything proceeds from the creator in the manner of an emanation from a fountain (*per modum emanationis ex fonte*). The creator is, then, like a fountain and creatures are like rivers and streams that flow from him. As we have seen, William himself has already employed this imagery a number of times to describe the divine act of giving being to absolutely all reality. Yet, this cannot be literally true because what emanates from a fountain, before it comes forth, is pre-contained in the fountain as a part of it (*erat in fonte pars eius*). This, then would entail that what comes forth from God is in him as a part of him. God, however, is perfectly simple and not composed of parts. Thus, the creator cannot properly be called the fountain of the universe (*creator non potest dici fons universi proprie*).[73] Still, even in this passage William allows for a sense in which the creator "is said to be the fountain of the universe through an unlikeness (*dissimilitudinem*), though a very remote one (*licet longe distantem*)." Thus, Caster's statement that "in no sense … does William accept an emanationist framework" is not entirely accurate.[74] Take also, for instance, *DU* IIa-Iae 10 where William invites us to think of all things coming forth from the creator as streams from their source.[75]

> You now have no doubts that the creator is the cause of all other beings and that they are his effects and that he stands in relation to them in some way as the source of them and they stand in relation to him as streams (*ex modo aliquo per modum fontis ad ipsa, et ipsa per modum rivulorum ad ipsum*). Likewise, he is like a root in relation to them (*per modum radices as ipsa*) and they are … like branches in relation to him (*per modum ramorum ad ipsum*), though not in a proper sense (*licet non proprie*) but by a likeness (*similitudine*) that is, if I may say so, quite unlike (*multum dissimili*). Between created things, then, and the creator of all of

[73] Ibid, 65. This criticism is expanded in Auvergne 1998: *The Universe of Creatures*, 200.
[74] Caster 1996: "William of Auvergne's Adaptation of Ibn Gabirol's Doctrine on the Divine Will" in in *The Modern Schoolman*, 41.
[75] Auvergne 1998: *The Universe of Creatures*, 131.

> them … the creator is not somehow counted among them … since the creator is distant from them by an immeasurable distance and is supereminent and stands above them in an unlikeness that is beyond thought.

In this text William highly endorses the stream/source metaphor for thinking about God. Still, he notes that this cannot be held in a proper, or literal, sense. For whatever we say of the creature and creator, must be conditioned by the fact that the creator is beyond all things in "an immeasurable distance" and in an "unlikeness that is beyond thought." Thus, when approaching William's works, we must remember that a metaphor is only a metaphor, but that it still must convey something of the actual nature of what it attempts to describe.

Returning to *DU* Ia-Iae 17, William notes that others have said that the universe proceeds from the creator as a form reflected in a mirror (*in speculo*), and here too William concedes that "there was truth in their meaning" (*veritas fuerit in intentionem eorum*). The truth here is that, as we have seen, the *esse* of all things is to reflect that which is *ipsum suum esse*. William will also return to this imagery when discussing the exemplars of all things in the divine mind, as we shall see. Yet, this imagery cannot be literally true since there is nothing presupposed to God's creative act that could receive the universe. Rather, "the universe was nothing before it was created."[76] Furthermore, the face reflected in the mirror is often clearly reflected and so the image seems to be of the same beauty as the person or face reflected in it. But[77]

> the universe is far from the creator and from his beauty by an unlikeness of incomparable distance (*distantiae dissimilitudine longe est a creatore*). But as you see that the beauty of the one looking into the mirrors is reflected more or less in accord with the difference of mirrors. So the likeness of the beauty of the creator is reflected in the diversity of creatures (*in diversitate creaturarum, quod in quibusdam magis, in quibusdam minus, relucet similitudo pulchritudinis creatoris*), in some more, in others less, and this in accordance with their receptivity (*receptibilitatis*) and their nearness (*appropinquationis*) to him.

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[76] Ibid, 65.
[77] Ibid, 67.

God, thus, "wanted to make all things like to himself to the extent that the nature of each could be receptive of beatitude, that is, of goodness"[78] and in this sense all things reflect him, although not according to a perfect likeness. Furthermore, on account of certain things being "nearer" to God according to their likeness to him, there is a greater and more noble likeness of God in separate substances than in human souls, in human souls than brute animals, and so forth.

Still others say that the universe proceeds from the creator as a shadow from a body. We have also already seen William use this imagery and he returns to it on a number of occasions.[79] But, William observes, a shadow is not something that, strictly speaking, proceeds from a body. Rather, a shadow is merely the "prevention of light" and so is a privation. This analogy, however, conveys the important truth that by it we understand that the supereminence of the creator to the universe is like that of a body to a shadow. For a shadow is "in no way comparable to a body in strength or goodness." While we might say that the shadow is real, its reality is very faint in comparison with a body. Thus, for William, every power, wisdom, goodness, beauty, life, sweetness, and greatness in creatures is a shadow of the power, wisdom, goodness, beauty, life, sweetness, and greatness of the creator—being only a "slight shadow" in comparison to the creator.[80] While William is not referring to Plato's *Republic* here, there is certainly a compatibility between this metaphor and Plato's allegory of the cave, such that the divine—which William will also regard as the archetypal world—is we might say Really Real.

Still others say that the universe is like a footprint of the creator. Like all these images, this, of course, cannot literally be true, since God does not literally walk, nor is there anything presupposed to creation for God to walk on. Yet, this helps us to understand the remote distance of the creator from the universe and the smallness of the universe in comparison to his immensity. More importantly, this helps us to understand that the universe and the things in it are signs or paths

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[78] Ibid, 67.

[79] The shadow and signs metaphor also returns in ibid, 200.

[80]William of Auvergne, *The Universe of Creatures*, 67. *De Universo* Ia-Iae 18, (Opera Omnia Vol. 1, 612).

that lead us to the creator, just as an animal's footprint leads hunters to their hiding place. Such imagery indicates William's general methodology that our knowledge of God must be derived from creatures. This image also helps us to understand how much the creator "wanted to be found and with what great helps he wanted to help those who seek him, for he left so many and such great footprints and signs by which he could to some extent be found."[81] God, for William, is thus not merely the absolute upon which the contingent depends but is the alluring personal God revealed by natural reason and Scripture who wants to be found by his creatures.

Still others again say that the universe proceeds from the creator in the manner of an odor from perfume. This helps us to understand that all the sweetness "of the universe is a scent of the divine goodness and sweetness" and seems to be particularly employed by William to help his reader get their meditation on God out of their head, so to speak, inciting in them a longing for the source of all things who is immeasurably sweeter than any object given to us in this life. Furthermore, in an Augustinian vein, "the human heart was created for this font of sweetness" (*cum enim ad ipsum fontem suavitatis creatum sit cor humanum*). William, however, also notes the "smallness of the hearts" (*parvitas codium*) which are inebriated, submerged and absorbed in the sweetness of the universe and "cling to these scents and seek out with such zeal and … inhale them with such ardor of desire while the fontal and profound sweetness is either neglected or completely ignored." Finite goods can thus be signs and paths to the transcendent font of all goodness, who is goodness itself, or by being taken as ultimate ends in themselves can become obstacles and barriers that lead one away from the ultimate end for which they were created: this "font of sweetness."[82]

Finally, there are those who say that the universe proceeds from the creator as an artifact from an artisan. This position comes close to the truth, since God creates by means of his intellect and will. But this language can also be misleading. The limitation is that God uses no external instruments in creating, nor is there

[81] Ibid, 67.
[82] Ibid, 68.

anything presupposed to God's creative act, unlike how the artisan uses pre-existing materials and applies to them some determinate form. Indeed, such a picture would be that of the supreme being of modern deism, but not that reality which, as the fullness of being, is that in which all things live and move and have their being. Rather, if God required certain means and instruments in order to create, then there would be an infinite regress between him and the universe, as the means and instruments by which he creates would also have to be created by means and instruments *ad infinitum*.[83]

It is true, however, that God creates by means of his Word, which is not an external spoken word, but one spoken in a "spiritual way" (*modo spirituali*). Because God creates by intellect, there must be in him his understanding or Word by which he creates. But because God is simple, this word must be identical to God himself. Thus, the art by which the creator produced all things is the "act of thinking" which is his intellectual Word and, ultimately, the Second Person of the Trinity. Yet, our art by which we make things in this world is a deliberative and discursive process that goes "from potency to act one part after another" and is composed of many "parts and conclusions." But this cannot be the case with God, for "in the creator just the opposite is the case, since his art is simple in the ultimate degree of simplicity and in act … in the ultimate of actuality."[84] Rather, this art is the exemplar of all things. This leads into some of the most explicitly Platonic elements of William's thought, namely that the essences of things pre-exist in the divine mind as the archetypes by which God creates all things and, indeed, just are the Word and Wisdom of God. Thus, the archetypal world relates especially to, and is identified with, the Second Person of the Trinity. As William writes:[85]

> The archetypal world (*mundus archetypus*), that is, the exemplar of all those which were made or created by the creator or which will be or even can be made is properly the wisdom eternally generated by the creator (*ab ipso creatore aeternaliter genita*), which the law, doctrine and faith of Christians calls the Son of God and

[83] Ibid.
[84] Ibid, 70.
[85] Ibid, 211-12.

> God (*dei filium et Deum*) … Wise men and teachers of the Christians call this God and the Son of God the art of the omnipotent God full of living reasons (*artem dei omnipotentis plenam rationem viventium*), and they understand living reasons as those species or ideas which Plato posited (*rationes viventes intelligentes ipsas species, vel ideas, quas Plato posuit*) according to the conception and opinion of those who had thought well and praiseworthy in this manner concerning Plato and his philosophy. The blessed and venerable Son of God, then, is the exemplar and world or universe of such species and ideas and the art full of living reasons, which are one in it (*quae omnes unum in ea sunt*) … and these reasons which we have mentioned are the Platonic species or ideas or forms (*et istae rationes praedictae species, vel ideae, vel formae Platonicae sunt*).

Thus, while William is quite adamant in rejecting the separate existence of a Platonic world of forms and in this sense is much more Aristotelian (at least on the standard interpretation of Plato and Aristotle), since he regards the essences of things as in things. Nevertheless, following Augustine, he fully accepts the Platonic world of forms insofar as he identifies such forms with the Second Person of the Trinity.[86] And as contained within the second person of the Trinity, who is just as purely actual as the Father,[87] such ideas or species are not inert abstractions, but living reasons. There they are the fullness of intelligible life resulting, we might say, ultimately from the very act by which the Father knows himself, although in God they are all one and, in fact, just are God. All reality, therefore, is a manifestation and reflection of God's own act of self-knowledge.

As such the Word of God is "said to be the likeness of the universe as the exemplar and the universe shines back towards him with all its wonderfulness and beauty."[88] And the universe is the "tiniest shadow and slightest vestige of him" who is "the most complete Word of the Father by which the Father eternally spoke himself in the most complete utterance and all things in it and through it."[89]

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[86] See Teske 2006: "William of Auvergne's Rejection of the Platonic Archetypal World" in *Studies in the Philosophy of William of Auvergne*, 161-78.
[87] Auvergne 1995: *The Trinity*, 77.
[88] Auvergne 1998: *The Universe of Creatures*, 173.
[89] Ibid.

Thus, again we see that all things are manifestive of God, but not merely in their very existence which they receive from God, but in their essences or intelligible contents which are also, in turn, reflections and manifestations of the Word of God spoken by the Father. Obviously, then, unlike the forms in our intellects, God does not receive them from an external source. Rather[90]

> our wisdom is a wisdom, as it were, impressed after the manner of an exemplification (*exempli*), and like light infused and illuminated, and like a book inscribed with the likenesses of things, and like the appearance of forms reflected in a mirror. For our intellect is like a mirror in which the appearances of the intelligibles are reflected. The first wisdom, however, is necessarily like the exemplar of all things through itself, not inscribed or engraved from the outside, but through its essence it is the art and exemplar of all things. Hence, it is the intelligible world (*saeculum intelligible*) and what some call the archetypal world (*mundum archetypum*). It should be called the wisdom and art of the universe (*ipsa debet dici sapientia et ars universi*), likewise the mirror (*speculum*) and image (*imago*) and intelligibility (*ratio*), since in it there are the intelligible contents and the exemplar ideas of all things essentially (*quoniam apud eam sunt rationes, et ideae exemplares omnium*), not impressed (*non impressae*) or infused or adventitious or acquired in any way (*sive acquisitae ullo modo*), but essentially (*sed essentialiter*). Hence, all things are one in it because its being (*esse*) and its essence are one in every way. This wisdom is brilliant light, beyond which there is no light. Hence, it is the light of all lights, since every other light is but illumined light, not giving light through its essence.

This is the core of what I have termed "William's Christian Neoplatonism", the acceptance of the Platonic world of forms, but the identification of that world with the divine intellect and especially the Word of God. As William says, God himself is the intelligible world, to which the forms of all things must ultimately be reduced, but in him they are one in every way because God is not ontologically composite. And if the archetypal world were something existing apart from God, then it would have to be created and so would itself depend on an exemplar in the

[90] Auvergne 1995: *The Trinity*, 105.

divine mind upon pain of an infinite regress.[91] All things then, not merely in their existence, but also in their essential contents are reflections and manifestations of God, the "first light" who in creating is "revealing itself and all other things."[92] As William says, the divine archetypal world is the very *ratio* of the created universe and, as such, we might add that it is the essence of all essences. For what the essences of things are, are faint similitudes of that very divine mind in which the Father knows himself in his Word. Or to use another analogy of William's, the universe is like a word or sign which bespeaks the wisdom and goodness of the creator. It is like a book written "for those who correctly philosophize" (*recte philosophantibus*). And the creator is the "summation of the whole book (*totius libri summa*), and the whole intention of the same book aims at opening and clarifying it (*ad quam aperiendam et elucidandam*)."[93]

VII. All Things Desiring God

Finally, why does God create? Since God is the fullness of actuality, there is nothing for him to acquire in creating. The only reason he creates is, therefore, to share his own goodness, perfection, and joy. As William writes in *DT* XII, "his goodness and benignity are such that he wills everything without being induced, persuaded, enticed, or forced by something else."[94] God's act of creating, then is supremely free not in the sense that it is simply arbitrary, but because it is not undertaken out of any intrinsic need. Rather, creation is pure gift. Nothing forces God to create, nothing entices him to create such that he is persuaded by the acquisition of some additional actuality, nor is there some moment when God realizes that to create is the thing that most fittingly corresponds with who he is. Rather, to create simply follows on who he is, as the source of all being, abounding in goodness. As William writes, God is "benign by essence (*iuvans per essentiam*) with vast benignity and essential and gratuitous generosity … [and he bestows]

[91] Auvergne 1998: *The Universe of Creatures,* 211.
[92] Auvergne 1995: *The Trinity*, 105.
[93] Ibid, 117.
[94] Ibid, 116.

gifts without having been persuaded or forced, not for gain, but in absolute freedom" (*gratis omnimodo*).[95] It is here we see the synthesis of the Christian understanding that God is personal and creates freely, with the Neoplatonic understanding of the good as diffusive of itself. Indeed, there is no contradiction between these two for William as he is committed to the position that God creates freely by means of intellect and will—and so is unlike a plant—but also holds that "nothing else but his most pure and most generous goodness induced him to create … and this is not decreased or increased or otherwise changed in any way."[96] Thus, the ultimate meaning of being is joy, for God[97]

> has the greatest joy in himself (*maximum gaudium est ei de se ipso*), but the joy he has in himself cannot be something other than himself (*non potest aliud esse a se*). Hence, he is joy itself (*quare ipsum gaudium ipse est*). He should not be thought to be happy by reason of something other than himself and thus, when he has attained that, be judged to be happy.

God, therefore, just is his own joy, or beatitude. This is what he seeks to share in creating and it is this ultimate good that is implicitly sought in the desire of any creature for any additional actuality or in the preservation of its own being. Indeed, all things seek God, for every creaturely good—every actuality sought by creatures—is a pale likeness to, or reflection of God. As William writes, "each thing conserves and defends its *esse* with all its power. For the *esse* in each creature is a kind of clinging to the creator (*quasi quoddam creatori adhaerere*), and it cries out that this essence is the good of all goods" (*bonorum omnium bonum*).[98] Indeed the "universe cries out that this being (*esse*) is best since the universe prefers it to everything else." And[99]

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[95] Ibid, 118.

[96] Auvergne 1998: *The Universe of Creatures*, 128. Here, William is actually articulating why Aristotle held that the universe was created from eternity. But, from the context, it seems clear that he agrees with this statement. He simply holds *contra* Aristotle that it was not possible for the universe to be created from eternity.

[97] Auvergne 1995: *The Trinity*, 159.

[98] Ibid, 118.

[99] Ibid, 91.

> one is incredibly deaf if he does not hear the cry of the universe. Thus the love of the universe stretches forth for the universal and most common good, which as a whole is attained by all and by each singly. This highest love declares that he is the highest good of all, and this pure love declares by a sure sign that he is pure goodness. I say pure love, because he is loved by all neither along with another nor because of another; rather they seek pure and bare being (*esse*).

Again, we see that in desiring to preserve their own being, all things implicitly seek the divine. Indeed, in this passage William draws an intimate connection between creaturely and divine *esse*, since it is precisely in their existence that God is intimately present to all things. All reality, therefore, is not merely an effect of God's, nor are creatures merely a reflection of him in either their existence or their essences, but rather all reality is also a striving after and longing for the divine.

VIII. Conclusion

Although he is today largely overlooked, in his own day William of Auvergne was one of the most important figures on the academic, ecclesial, and political scenes in Paris. When William is examined today, he is often compared to, or contrasted with, Aquinas. Such comparisons are inviting as the similarities between these two thinkers are numerous. This paper, however, has tried to set aside all comparison with Aquinas (although not completely successfully) in order to examine William's understanding of creation and divine being on his own terms. What we have found is a remarkable spiritual vision of an accomplished metaphysician and theologian who combines both dense philosophical arguments with a plethora of images, analogies, and metaphors.

Of course, as was pointed out above, all of William's images and metaphors of creation cannot be literally true when applied to God and the world. Nevertheless, these images serve the important role of inciting in his reader (and himself) a spiritual longing for the God he writes about philosophically. As we have seen, William uses the imagery of a face reflected in a mirror to give the sense that all things reflect or manifest God. As such, one's encounter with any being is always already, in a hidden way, an encounter with God. This is not only insofar

as God is intimately causing the being of all things but also because the natures of all things are fragmented reflections of the divine essence. William also uses the imagery of a fount pouring forth countless streams and rivers not to show that God acts by a necessity of nature—William's imagery of God as an artisan helps to counterbalance this aspect of the emanation metaphor by helping to show that God acts by means of intellect and will and so is at once both free and capable of loving and being loved by his creatures in a personal way—but to indicate that all that is comes forth from God. In this way, for William, the imagery of emanation and the doctrine of creation *ex nihilo* are in no way contrary but rather mutually imply each other.

The imagery of the universe proceeding from its creator as a shadow from a body is also quite striking as it gives the reader a sense of how much more *real* God is than are the creatures which we normally suppose to possess the fullest sense of what it means to be. Finally, the images of a footprint, nature as a book in which is inscribed divine wisdom, and regarding all good things as faints scents of divine goodness point to how the purpose of creation is to lead all rational intellects back to the first cause and final end of all things. In particular, this last image encourages the reader (and, again, William himself) to recognize the good things in creation, but also to move beyond them to their ultimate source. Thus, however much one enjoys and delights in creatures, they are only the faintest and most distance scent, reflection or taste of a God who is at once the absolute font of all being, perfection and joy.

In this way, William's metaphysical reflections on creation and divine being open up quite naturally to a profoundly spiritual and even mystical view of reality. There is in William of Auvergne no distinction of theology and spirituality nor of the God of the philosophers and the God of Revelation. Rather, in William we find a philosophical, theological and spiritual vision of all things coming forth from the God who is intimately connected with, reflected in and sought after by all things and yet is, at the same time, the God revealed in the person of Jesus Christ.

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