



So how does God create through evolution? How do we bring together an account of evolution with a Christian understanding of God's providential guidance of history?

As we have already discussed in earlier essays in this series on evolution and Christian faith, the passionate drive to answer this question—what is God?—propelled St. Thomas to the heights of contemplative prayer and to a profound insight of theological brilliance: After carefully thinking about certain features of creation, he discovered that God must be unlike any other being in the world if He is to be its cause. Therefore, St. Thomas concluded that God alone must be the act of existing itself. Or to put it another way, God's essence—what God is—is His existence. He is existing itself. This insight about the nature of God lies at the heart of Thomistic theology.

Understanding God to be the act of existing itself clarifies the distinction between the Creator and His creatures. As noted above, for St. Thomas, God alone is existence by nature. In contrast, all other creatures are not God precisely because their act of existing has been received from God who alone is self-existing. In scholastic terminology, every creature has its existence not by nature but by participation.

To illustrate what St. Thomas means when he says that creatures have their existence not by nature but by participation, he explains that a glowing rod of iron held in a fire is not fire by nature, but it is fire by participation. It is not fire, but it is like fire, because the true fire has made it like itself. In the same way, each creature exists because God who is existence itself holds that creature in existence at every time and place. If God ceased to hold us in existence, we would simply disappear. We would be annihilated.

Significantly, the distinction between the existence of the Creator by nature and the existence of His creatures by participation protects the integ-

rity of both the Creator and His creatures. Within the Thomistic theological synthesis, the creature is able to have a distinct and, in a qualified sense, independent nature without severing its dependence upon its Creator.

Consequently, because it possesses its own nature, a creature is able to act according to that nature without violating the Creator-creature relationship. In this way, the creature can claim some autonomy in its actions. Indeed, St. Thomas argued that it is fitting and proper that God would create creatures that can act as true causes—in other words, that can act from their own natures like a cat meowing because it is a cat—since this

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better reflects his power. It manifests a greater benevolence to impart causality upon another rather than to withhold it.

With St. Thomas' theology of creation in mind, we can now turn to a more in-depth discussion of how God creates through evolution. God acts in the world first as a first cause who gives things their existence. He also acts as a primary cause working through secondary created causes. In an analogous sense, God is like the carpenter who makes a puppet. It is only an analogy because God in creating the puppet gives the puppet its own nature and therefore its own independence in a way Geppetto could never have created Pinocchio. It is only God who is able to make a creature—say Geppetto the craftsman—and give the creature its own natural powers—Geppetto's ability to make a puppet.

Thus, divine causality because it is transcendent cannot be equated to the creaturely causality that we see around us. When God acts as an efficient cause in creating a creature, He does not make it

move only as creaturely agents like human engineers would make things move that they create. Rather God makes the creature movable by nature so that it can move itself. Further, as Creator, God is not simply the efficient cause for the existence and actions of His creatures. Since He gives each creature its nature, He is also responsible for its material, formal, and final causes.

First, by making a being a particular existing kind of thing here and now, say a rose bush, God specifies its formal and material causes. God makes it a rose bush and not a cherry blossom. Next, by giving a creature a nature which is ordered to a particular end, God specifies its final cause. He gives the rose bush a natural inclination to make roses and other rose bushes.

Thus, when a creature acts, God acts in and through it by sustaining it in existence, giving it the nature that is the source of its actions, and actualizing that nature in the here and the now. All of these facets of divine agency are only possible because God is the act of existing itself. God creates the rose bush by giving it its existence; He gives it its natural ability to make roses because He gives its nature its existence; and He actually moves it to make roses when its nature is inclined to do so in the early summer because He gives these biological activities their existence.

But how can God know contingent events without undermining their contingency? For God, all created temporal events are present to him simultaneously in the eternal here and now. They remain contingent—they could have been otherwise—though they are known by God with certainty as present before him. Consider this analogy: When I see my student sitting in a chair in my classroom, his sitting in a chair remains contingent—he could have been standing up. However, I know this contingent event with certainty because when I see my student sitting in that chair at a particular time and place, he cannot be doing anything else right there and then.

In the same way, the eternal God knows all temporally contingent events with certainty because He sees them as happening right here and now. Indeed, they are contingent precisely because He knows them as such.

Evolution understood within the perspective of classical theism would consist of innumerable



events where God working as First Cause ordains, as only God can, the course of every contingent event in evolutionary history. He would do this by working through the individual and contingent things as individual and contingent causes, whether they are molecules, cells or organisms, that He has brought into existence at particular times and places, as particular contingent kinds of things. God can design through chance.

Finally, I note that within this conceptual framework, the perceived problem of reconciling a changing world and a non-changing God who are in relationship with each other is a non-starter. The created order is an evolving one precisely because God who does not evolve knows it as evolving and gives it existence precisely as such. Thus, there will always be a radical relationship of existential dependency of the creature on its Creator: The changing creature can only be changing because it was created as such by an unchanging Creator. 

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