

EXEMPLARY CAUSALITY IN THE FIRST BEING

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Let me tell you then why the creator made this world of generation. He was good, and the good can never have any jealousy of anything. And being free from jealousy, he desired that all things should be as like himself as they could be. (Plato, *Timaeus*)

The existence of God is not self-evident to us, for *we see the glories of the earth, but not the hand that wrought them*. If knowledge of Him is to be had, it must be by way of a demonstration *quia*; that is, from His effects, which are more known to us, to His existence as the Cause of those effects. In his fourth proof of the existence of God, St. Thomas begins *ex gradibus qui in rebus inveniuntur*:

For there is found in things something more and less good, and true, and noble, and the like. But more and less are said of diverse things, inasmuch as they approach in diverse ways something which is most. . . . There is therefore something which is most true, and best, and most noble, and as a consequence most being (*maxime ens*). . . .¹

Beginning with the fact that there are things which are more and less noble, or true, or being, it is when we look to what it is to be “more or less such-and-such” that we discover a greatest possible in that genus. When we call one man better than another, or a horse better than a stone, we mean that the

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¹ Ia, Q. 2, a. 3.

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one approaches some standard of goodness more closely than the other, and that this standard is not itself deficient (for then it would be no standard), but has the complete perfection possible for things of the kind which are being compared. That this *maxime ens* must exist in reality becomes clear when we consider the nature of deficiency. We say that a thing does not measure up to a standard, only if it is *possible* for something to measure up. We would not say that something is “lacking” if there were no possibility of having what is lacked. When we say that a horse is better than a stone, of course we are not blaming the stone as stone for not being sensitive, but we are saying that a being can have more actuality than a stone has. It is in virtue of what is possible, then, that we call something deficient, or “less”. The final step is made when we consider what it is for something to be possible. We would only call something possible, in the sense that it can be brought into act, when there is already something in act which can cause the possible thing to be actual. The conclusion is that either the *maxime ens* exists really, or that something else exists really, which can bring it into act—but the actual thing, in the case of being, must exist at least as much as the beings which it might cause, so that there must be a *maxime ens* in act, which all other beings approach, and this is God: “Therefore there is something which is to all beings the cause of their being, goodness, and every other perfection; and this we call God.”

If this argument concludes, and if it is only possible to know the existence of God through His effects *as such*, then the relationship between the *maxime ens* and every other *ens* must be one of cause and effect. The kind of causality of which St. Thomas speaks in the Fourth Way is traditionally called *exemplary* causality. The nature of the exemplary causality of the *primum ens*, however, is not immediately evident. If it is indeed a cause, we should be able to say how it relates to Aristotle’s list of causes—whether it is one of the four, or is somehow beyond all of them. To this end, we would do well to begin by consulting the Authorities.

In his commentary on *The Divine Names* of Dionysius, St. Thomas speaks of the exemplary cause, using language very similar to that of the Fourth Way: "exemplar enim est ad cuius imitationem fit aliud."² This definition seems to fit the *primum ens* well, for it is by imitation, or likeness, that diverse beings "approach what is most being". St. Bonaventure, in his *Breviloquium*, speaks of the exemplary cause in like manner:

... since the principle from which the perfection of the universe proceeds is most perfect, it must act from itself, according to itself, and because of itself since in none of its actions does it need anything outside itself—it must have, with regard to any given creature, the force of a threefold cause, namely, efficient, exemplary, and final; it is even necessary that every creature be related to the first cause according to this threefold condition. Every creature is constituted in being by the efficient cause, made to conform to the exemplary cause, and ordained to a purpose.

Again, to "conform" suggests an approaching by way of imitation. The name "exemplar" seems to be fitting to the cause whose existence is demonstrated in the Fourth Way, for the primary meaning of "exemplify" is to be a model for imitation. Elder siblings are an example, whether good or ill, for their younger siblings, who imitate their actions.

How is it, then, that to be imitated by another is to be a cause of that other? A brief excursion into the Realm of Being may provide a helpful beginning to an answer. Plato, among the first to speak of causes other than material causes in a clear way, places great importance on what he calls the Ideas or Forms, which he believes are necessary to explain certain things in our experience. In *The Republic*, he sums up his position:

We both assert that there are, . . . and distinguish in speech, many fair things, many good things, and so on for each kind of thing. . . . And we also assert that there is a fair itself,

² *In De Div. Nom.*, C. V, L. III, 665.

a good itself, and so on for all the things that we then set down as many. Now, again, we refer them to one idea of each as though the idea were one; and we address it as that which really is.³

The nature of these absolutes and their relationship to the many is further explained by Socrates in the *Parmenides*:

... the best I can make of the matter is this—that these forms are as it were patterns fixed in the nature of things. The other things are made in their image and are likenesses, and this participation they come to have in the forms is nothing but their being made in their image.⁴

Just as "being" is most properly said of the *primum ens*, whereas every other being, according to St. Thomas, is only such by participation, so Plato's Being is most truly being. It is the exemplar of all beings, because they are made in its image.

In using the words "pattern" and "image", Plato is giving us a hint of the reason for calling these absolutes forms. A statue is an image of a man because its shape, not its matter, is like that of a man. Likewise, a cookie cutter is a pattern for the cookies because of its shape, or form.

Moreover, "pattern" and "image" seem to signify some order between the like thing and that which it is like. We say that a son is like his father, or the image of his father, rather than that the father is like the son. If we were to come upon two triangles identical in form, and there were no recognizable order between them, we would rather say that they were "alike" than that one was like the other, or the image of the other. This order is usually an order of causality. The image of mountains in a lake is like the mountains, rather than the mountains like the image, because it is the mountains which are original and real, and the image which is derivative and an appearance. In speaking of "patterns", "images", and "likenesses" then, Plato is suggesting that the exemplar is prior

³ *Republic*, Bk. VI, 507b.

⁴ *Parmenides*, 132d.

to and somehow a cause of its participating counterpart, and that this causality is very much connected to form.

Is "exemplar", then, simply another name for the formal cause? There would be immediate difficulties with such a statement, if left unqualified. Aristotle does call the formal cause a "pattern": "... the form or the pattern, this being the formula of the essence, and also the genera of this. . .",⁵ but it seems that he is not speaking of the Forms of Plato. This pattern is not something subsisting separately from the many, and more real than they, but rather a form which only exists in the many which have it in common—a shape has no status apart from the shaped thing. The form is one in account, but exists nowhere except in the many individuals which participate it. This is clear from his criticism of Plato's Forms: "Again, it would seem impossible for a substance to exist apart from that of which it is the substance. Accordingly, how could the Ideas, being the substances of things, exist apart from them?"⁶ The form of a thing ought to be *in* the thing, then, whereas the exemplar exists apart from the individuals which it causes.

Not only is Plato's exemplar separate from things, but it is also diverse from them. While Aristotle calls the form "the account of what it was to be", Plato is at pains to make it clear that "beautiful" is not said univocally of any particular beautiful thing and of Beauty Itself. He speaks of a particular being as a "shadow" and "image", and of Being Itself as "that which truly is". Socrates says in the *Phaedo*, "This thing which I see has a tendency to be like something else, but it falls short and cannot be really like it, but only a poor imitation."⁷ Likewise, in St. Thomas' account, it quickly becomes clear that there is an infinite distance between the Form of the *primum ens* and the forms of creatures. Nor is the name purely equivocal, however; if it were, there would be no reason to

⁵ *Metaphysics*, 1013a27.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 991b.

⁷ *Phaedo*, 74d.

invoke Beauty and the *primum ens* as the *source* of every individual beauty and being. Rather, as St. Thomas explains, these names are predicated *analogously* of God and His creatures:

Because each effect not equal to the virtue of the agent cause, receives a likeness of the agent not according to the same account, but deficiently . . . names of this sort are said of God and creatures according to an analogy, that is, a proportion.⁸

But although "being" can truly be said of both God and creatures by way of a proportion of His creatures to Himself, God's Being or Goodness is yet entirely other than that of His creatures because of its supereminence. Since the *primum ens* is of an utterly diverse nature from any particular *ens*, we would not dare to say that its form *is* the form of any particular *ens*. There is a formal likeness, but not a formal identity. To say that God's form is the same as the forms of His creatures would be the height of Pantheism.

St. Thomas does, nevertheless, call the exemplar a sort of formal cause. He avoids certain difficulties by distinguishing between different sorts of form. First, he divides form into intrinsic and extrinsic form:

But cause is said in another way as species and example, that is exemplar; and this is a formal cause, which is compared to a thing in two ways. In one way as the intrinsic form of a thing, and this is called the species. In another way as extrinsic to the thing, yet in the likeness of which a thing is said to be made; and according to this, the exemplar of a thing is called the form.⁹

This answers the charge of Pantheism, as well as the first difficulty—that if the exemplar were the form, it would be separate from that of which it is the form. The formal causality of the exemplar is here limited to *extrinsic* formal causality.

⁸ Ia, Q. 13, a. 5.

⁹ *In V Meta.*, L. II, 764.

To speak of extrinsic formal causality is not simply to assert that the form of a thing is separate from it. St. Thomas acknowledges individual forms in things, but he also recognizes a different *sort* of formal causality, in which the cause is extrinsic to the thing. Merely to name the exemplar as the extrinsic form would not be enough to explain the exemplar's being prior to the thing caused. The statue in the mind of the sculptor is not prior to the statue simply by being the extrinsic form, for then, by the same reason, the intelligible form in a knower's mind would be prior to the thing known—but we would rather say that the thing is prior to the knowledge (at least in the case of the human knower). Therefore, in order to understand the causality of the exemplar, we need to look to something beyond extrinsic formality alone. The particular causality of the exemplar is made clear by distinguishing three ways of speaking of formal causality, which St. Thomas does in his article on Ideas in *De Veritate*:

But the form of anything can be said in three ways. In one way from which (*a qua*) a thing is formed, as from the form of the agent proceeds the formation of the effect. But because it is not from a necessity of action that effects attain to the complete notion of the form of the agent, since they frequently fall short, especially in equivocal causes; therefore the form from which something is formed, is not said to be the idea or form.

In another way the form is said of something according to which (*secundum quam*) something is formed, as the soul is the form of a man, and the shape of the statue is the form of the bronze: and although the form, which is a part of the composite, truly is said to be its form, it is not customarily called its idea; because this name "idea" seems to signify a form separate from that of which it is the form.

In a third way the form of something is said of that *to which* something is formed; and this is the form of the exemplar, in the likeness of which (*ad cuius similitudinem*) something is constituted; and in this signification the name of idea is

usually taken, as the idea is the same as the form which something imitates.¹⁰

The intrinsic form causes a thing by being *secundum quam* something is formed, as being a part of the composite itself, whereas the extrinsic form or exemplar is that *ad quod* something is formed, by way of similitude.

The meaning of "exemplar" has perhaps become clearer—we may say, at least, that it is related to its effect as the extrinsic form which is imitated. Yet it is difficult to see how this relationship is truly causal. Parmenides raises a serious objection to the Forms, because it appears that they don't cause anything at all:

The significance of things in our world is not with reference to things in that other world, nor have those their significance with reference to us, but as I say, the things in that world are what they are with reference to one another and toward one another, and so likewise are the things in our world.¹¹

Aristotle further articulates and perfects this objection in its full force:

What do the Forms contribute to the eternal things among the sensibles or to those which are generated and destroyed? For, they are not the causes of motion or of any other change in them. And they do not in any way help either towards the knowledge of the other things (for, they are not the substances of them, otherwise they would be in them) or towards their existence (for they are not constituents of the things which share in them) . . . Moreover, all other things do not come to be from the Forms in any of the usual senses of "from". And to say that the Forms are patterns and that the other things participate in them is to use empty words and poetic metaphors. For, if we look up to the Ideas, what will their function be? Any chance thing may be or become

¹⁰ Q. 3, a. 1

¹¹ Parmenides, 133e.

like another thing even without being copied from it, so that, whether Socrates exists or not, a man like Socrates might be born. Likewise, it is clear that this might be the case even if there were to be an eternal Socrates.¹²

Aristotle's complaint seems to be that the positing of the Forms is useless if there is nothing to link them to the sensible forms which they supposedly cause. In order for an extrinsic form to be the cause of a thing, and in order that the likeness not be accidental, there needs to be something apart from the extrinsic form itself which connects them. When two men look alike who are not related, we are surprised and attribute this to chance. If we cannot see a *reason* for a likeness between two things, why should we say that this is a causal relationship?

St. Thomas has called the exemplar not only an extrinsic form, but a form *ad quod* another is formed. In order to deepen our understanding of this, let us look to another explanation of exemplar causality. In the *Divine Names*, Dionysius defines the exemplar cause, as Theology speaks of it, in a very helpful way:

The exemplars of everything preexist as a transcendent unity within [the Preexistent]. We give the name of "exemplar" to those principles which preexist as a unity in God and which produce the essences of things. Theology calls them predefining, divine and good acts of will which determine and create things and in accordance with which the Transcendent One predefining and brought into being everything that is.¹³

This definition is in agreement with what has been said so far about the exemplar: a predefinition, or definition, is a statement of the "what it was to be", and things are formed "in accordance with" the exemplars. The new element in this definition, though, is the explicit reference to an *agent*.

¹² *Metaphysics*, 991a10.

¹³ 824c

Dionysius is distinctly associating the exemplar causality of God with the act of creation. St. Thomas agrees with him in this. Recalling that the exemplar is the form *ad quod* another is formed, he points out that "ad" seems to imply an order to an end. An end is something intended by an intelligent agent, whether the end be his own or another's, whom he is ordering towards that end. This applies to ordinary, non-divine exemplary causality as well, to which we should look first as the more known to us. In particular, an investigation of the exemplary causality of ideas, although this does not immediately address the peculiar exemplary causality of the *primum ens*, pertains to exemplary causality in general, and will prove helpful. In his article on the Ideas of God, St. Thomas speaks of two ways in which efficient causality is bound up with form:

An agent, moreover, does not act for the sake of a form, except insofar as a likeness of the form is in him. This happens in two ways. 1. For in certain agents the form of the thing to be made preexists, according to natural being; just as in things which act through nature, as man generates man, and fire, fire. 2. In other [agents], according to intelligible being; as in things which act through understanding, and thus the likeness of a house preexists in the mind of a builder. And this can be called the idea of the house; because the artisan intends to make the house like the form which he conceives in his mind.¹⁴

The first sort of likeness, which doesn't require the immediate agent to be intelligent, is always eventually reduced to the second, which requires an intellect acting for an end determined by itself: ". . . similarly an operation of nature, which is toward a determinate end, presupposes an intellect, presenting the end to the nature, and directing the nature toward that end, for which reason every work of nature is said to be a work of intelligence."¹⁵ It is the form preexisting in the mind

¹⁴ Ia, Q. 15, a. 1.

¹⁵ *De Veritate*, Q. 3, a. 1.

of an intelligent agent that we most properly call the exemplar or idea:

If therefore something comes to be in (*ad*) the imitation of another through an agent which does not determine the end for itself, it is not from this that the imitated form will have the notion of exemplar or of idea. For we do not say that the form of the generating man is the idea or exemplar of the man generated; but we only say this when a thing acting for the sake of an end determines the end for itself, whether that form be in the agent, or outside of the agent.¹⁶

It seems that agent causality is the link between this world and the Other which makes exemplar causality intelligible. Aristotle saw this: “. . . even if the Forms do exist, still no thing which participates in something is generated unless there is a mover.”¹⁷ The Forms would have nothing to do with this world, unless the things in our world were made like them according to the intention of an intelligent efficient cause. The distinctiveness of the extrinsic form of the exemplar is that it is a form whose likeness is intended by an agent.

Intelligent efficient causality is itself only intelligible in light of exemplar causality, for the agent derives the end of his action from the exemplar. There is nothing original apart from God; all else is necessarily a likeness. God looking to Himself as a pattern for creation gives a fullness to His agency which efficient causality alone cannot explain: “. . . the unnamed goodness is not just the cause of cohesion or life or perfection so that it is from this or that providential gesture that it earns a name, but it actually contains everything beforehand within itself.”¹⁸ To be an intelligent agent, one must know and intend a form—the only alternatives are to act by chance or of necessity. But to act by chance is to act unintelligibly, and to act by necessity is to be directed by another,

¹⁶ Ibid., Q. 3, a. 1

¹⁷ *Metaphysics*, 991b5.

¹⁸ *On the Divine Names*, 569d.

and not to act intelligently. Efficient and exemplar causality, then, cannot exist without one another.

The agent and exemplar are so closely bound together that we should address the possibility of their being two aspects of, in fact, the same thing. Duns Scotus seems to suggest this: “Now an agent that acts knowingly, orders its effect to the end it has in mind; but this is nothing else than to function as exemplar cause of that effect.” Perhaps we call the cause “agent” or “moving” insofar as it is the beginning of motion or change in another, and “exemplar” insofar as it prepossesses in its mind the form which it gives to its effect. St. Thomas says that exemplarity is in the very *ratio* of any artistic agent, and especially of the First Agent:

For when we call the builder the principle of the house, in the account of this principle is included the concept of his art: and it would be included in the account of the first principle, if the builder were the first principle. God, moreover, who is the first principle of things, is compared to created things as an artisan to artifacts.¹⁹

It is in this very linking of the agent and exemplar, however, that we can see a distinction between them. While it is required that an agent have the form of the effect in some way, it is not necessary that the agent be the same as this form, or that the form be able to be predicated of the agent. The architect is not himself the form *ad quod* his house is formed; the idea of a house which he has in his mind is the form looked to. Univocal agent causes, as in the case of natural generation, prepossess the form by themselves being of the same nature as their effects—but this is in virtue of their being univocal agents, not in virtue of their agency simply (Further, most cases of univocal agency are not cases of immediate *intelligent* agency). Equivocal causes exceed their effects in form, are not of the same nature, and cannot be univocally called by the same name.

¹⁹ Ia, Q. 27, a. 1.

But what should be said about God, who is the first agent and the first Exemplar of all things? He is clearly the most equivocal of agent causes, and is in no way of the same nature as His effects. Yet it cannot be said that the idea of the effect, which He prepossesses in His mind, is distinct from Him, just as neither can it be said that His mind is distinct from Him. Anything which, in our manner of speaking, is "had" by Him, or "of" Him, or "in" Him, must be nothing other than His very substance, because of His utter simplicity. Thus any idea which God has must be His very Self. But the identity of the substance of the First Agent with His Ideas is peculiar to Him. In a man, the idea is an accident of his substance, and does not subsist as he does. In God, it is the fact that His Ideas exist in an absolutely perfect mode which makes them the same as the Agent; not the fact that they are ideas. It is not as an equivocal *agent*, then, who prepossesses the forms of His effects perfectly, that He is Himself called the exemplar: it is the imperfect forms of His creatures, existing in Him perfectly, which are the exemplars, according to the account which has been given, for those are the intended forms.

The language of "ad quod" and "intended form" might lead one, on the other hand, to suspect that the exemplar is nothing other than the final cause. Something intended by an agent is also that for the sake of which he acts. What does the sculptor intend, if not the statue which he has in his mind? "Approaching" and "ad quod", as we have said, suggest an inclining towards an end. Further, Dionysius has called exemplars "divine and good acts of *will*". But the object of the will is the good, which is the final cause.

Here it may be helpful first to remember the difference between an idea, and that of which it is an idea. When we know something, we know it *by* its intelligible form, which acquires a certain existence in the mind apart from the thing known. That intelligible form in the mind we call the idea. The object we are knowing is not the intelligible form but the thing, the composite. The exemplar is called both "idea"

and "form"—"idea" seems to respect the exemplar as a certain existence in the agent's mind, whereas "form" respects it as related to the thing caused. Neither are the same as the thing caused. Thus the idea which the sculptor is imitating is different from the statue for which he acts, which he knows in a way before he sculpts.

Further, to ask what is the cause of the statue is different from asking what is the cause of the sculpting. We say that the exemplary cause of the *statue* is the idea, whereas it is the final cause of the *sculpting* which is the statue in the mind of the sculptor. The final cause of the statue is that for the sake of which the statue will exist, such as the edification of the citizens. It may happen that the same thing is both exemplar and final cause of the same thing, as when we say that God is the exemplar and final cause of creation. But while the exemplar causes by way of being imitated, the end causes by being a principle of desire. The same thing, then, may cause something in more than one way.

The "approaching" of the *exemplatum* to the exemplar, and the form "ad quod", then, are said in a sense different from that in which a thing is said to approach its end. The holy man inclines towards God and approaches Him as the end, while he also approaches God by being like Him. St. Thomas speaks of this second sense of "ad" in discussing the way man is made in the image of God: "In order to designate the imperfection of the image in man, man is called not only the image, but 'to the image' (*ad imaginem*), through which a certain motion tending into perfection is designated."²⁰ Man tends towards God in the sense of approaching His perfection by way of likeness, "But it cannot be said of the Son of God that he is 'to the image', because he is a perfect image of the Father."

But we should not forget our original intention, which was to discover what sort of a cause is the *primum ens, as such*. The being of a thing, and the degree of that being, is somehow

²⁰ Ia, Q. 35, a. 2, ad 3.

caused by its imitating or approaching the most perfect Being. In this account, God Himself, His Substance as such, as the words of Scotus suggest, should be the Exemplar, rather than the forms of creatures contained in Him. He knows everything in one act, by knowing Himself, the Form which precontains every possible perfection. Since it is only act which is knowable, He need not go outside of Himself to know all things, for He is pure Act, and there is no act which is not first in Him. God knows and intends His creatures, even the lowliest, by a most perfect Idea of *Himself*. Is it His Substance as such which is properly the Exemplar of things, or His ideas of things, according to our account?

One difference of the exemplar causality of the intended form from the exemplar causality of the *primum ens* is a difference of the *likeness* of the cause to the effect. The way in which a thing imitates something other than it is different from the way a thing "imitates" the idea of it. In order to make this clear, let us use the example of a sculptor and his statue. It is true that the sculptor intends to make his statue "like" his idea of it. But it is also true, and prior to this, that he intends to make his statue like Socrates. He knows that the likeness will be limited by the deficiency of the material, so he intends only to make the statue as like to Socrates as is possible for a statue. It is then that he forms in his mind an idea of the very thing which he wishes to create, which is not an idea of Socrates, but an idea of a statue. Insofar as that idea of a statue is the exemplar, he intends his statue simply to conform to it, in the way that knowledge of a thing conforms to the thing, or is equivalent to it. The idea of a thing is, in a way, not really other than the thing, but rather its form existing in a certain mode. When we say that a thing is "like" the idea of it, it seems that "like" is being used in a secondary sense. A thing is more properly "like" something which is other than it. Further, a thing is more properly said to "approach" something which is both other than it and better than it. Now the idea of a statue is better than a statue in a way, because of its

immateriality, but it would be strange to say that the statue is "approaching" the immateriality of the idea. The statue does not become better as it is more immaterial. Thus it seems more appropriate in this case to say that the statue "conforms to" or matches the exemplar, rather than "approaches" it. Because of the perfection and utter transcendence of Socrates, or of the *primum ens*, however, he or It is properly said to be "imitated" and "approached" by the things it causes, because it cannot be matched or reached.

Because of this difference in likeness or imitation, by which exemplar causality is defined, it seems that the way in which Socrates causes a statue, or the *primum ens* causes being, is distinct from the way in which the idea of the statue causes the statue, or the idea of Man causes men. Yet it seems that both are causes, as something the likeness of which is intended by an agent. God intends to create men not only to conform perfectly to the Idea of Man, but also to conform imperfectly to Himself. Men can conform perfectly to the Idea of Man, because the Idea of Man contains within it the ideas of the limitations which are a part of human nature. Man can only imitate God imperfectly, because human nature is as nothing to the divine perfection and infinitude.

This twofold exemplarity may bring light to Plato's question of whether there are Forms corresponding to everything. He is certain that there are forms of Being, the Good, the True, the Beautiful, and other such things, but of the rest he is unsure:

And also in cases like these, asked Parmenides, is there, for example, a form of rightness or of beauty or of goodness, and of all such things? . . . Yes. . . . And again, a form of man, apart from ourselves and all other men like us—a form of man as something by itself? Or a form of fire or of water? . . . I have often been puzzled about those things, Parmenides, whether one should say that the same thing is true in their case or not.²¹

²¹ *Parmenides*, 130 b-d.

His obvious analogous naming of the forms, and his constantly reminding us of their perfection and transcendence, points to the kind of exemplar causality by which the Divine Essence as such causes creatures. In this sense of exemplar causality, only those things predicated essentially of God are the exemplars, such as Being, Goodness, Beauty, Wisdom, Truth, and the like.

This kind of causality seems to match our original account of exemplar causality, because it is a form looked to by an agent, and things are what they are by likeness to it. It seems to fit the definitions of the exemplar causality better in one way, because things are more properly “like” forms which transcend them. In another way, however, it does not seem to fit the accounts, because it is not, strictly, the extrinsic form of the thing caused—the form of the cause superexceeds the form of the effect.

Two considerations of the exemplar which should be kept distinct from one another in our thought, are the fact that it is a cause, and that it has a form. St. Thomas defines a cause thus: “. . . those things are called causes upon which things depend for their existence or their coming to be.”²² Now the existence of a thing depends upon both the idea of it in the agent’s mind, and the superexceeding form which determines that very idea. It depends primarily upon the superexceeding form, because it is defined with reference to that form. The statue of Socrates, as such, is defined by its likeness to Socrates, and all beings are defined by their degree of likeness to God. The idea of the thing, to which the thing is conformed simply, is secondary to the superexceeding exemplar, although a more immediate cause of the thing. The statue depends upon both forms by being likened to them, although in different ways, in the determination of its own form.

In what way is the exemplar said to be a *formal* cause? Something is not a formal cause simply by causing the form in some

²² *In I Phy.*, L. II, 5.

way—the agent causes the form of a thing, but is not himself a formal cause in Aristotle’s sense. The word “form” first means “shape” or “appearance”, which first refers to the shape inhering in the matter of the thing. Hence the first sense of “formal cause” is the *intrinsic* form whereby a thing is what it is. Any secondary senses of formal cause should be able to be referred to this primary sense. The formal cause of a thing, then, must cause the form of the thing by being somehow formally present *in* the thing.

The intelligible form of a thing can be seen as formally *in* the thing in two ways: first, it is simply the intrinsic form of the thing, but considered in a certain way—the intelligible form is named such not as being other than the intrinsic form, but as it is able to cause knowledge. The second way, which makes the intelligible form to be an exemplary cause, is its presence in the thing by way of likeness. This notion is shared by both the idea of the thing and the *primum ens*, and divides them from other sorts of formal cause. The fact that Being Itself, then, does not have the same form as its effects, does not interfere with its being a formal cause in Aristotle’s sense. What is essential to the exemplar is that its form is present in its effect by way of likeness, and that this form is looked to by an intelligent agent. Both of these notions are fulfilled more perfectly in an exemplar whose form exceeds its effect, and most perfectly in the *primum ens*. Presence by way of likeness is more perfectly fulfilled because the effect is most properly like something better than itself, and being looked to by an agent is more perfectly fulfilled because the agent looks first to the superexceeding form—art imitates nature, which far exceeds it, and nature, God’s “art”, imitates Himself, Who infinitely exceeds it.

Let us examine more closely the peculiar causality of the *primum ens*, which is the more interesting to us. In what way are creatures, many and manifold, “like” their Creator, who is one and simple? It is commonly said that the diversity of creatures is due to their imitating diverse aspects of God. Yet

this can only be a division of Him in notion, for God does not have “aspects”, as though He were a cut diamond with many faces. A creature cannot imitate only a part of God, because He is partless. Dionysius suggests that the diversity of creatures should be understood in terms of their approaching the Divine Essence in varying degrees:

Now this is unified and one and common to the whole divinity, that the entire wholeness is participated in by each of those who participate in it; none participates in only a part. . . . There are numerous impressions of the seal and these all have a share in the original prototype; it is the same whole seal in each of the impressions and none participates in only a part. . . . Maybe someone will say that the seal is not totally identical in all the reproductions of it. My answer is that this is not because of the seal itself, which gives itself completely and identically to each. The substances which receive a share of the seal are different. Hence the impressions of the one entire identical archetype are different.²³

That things receive different degrees of being according to the capacities of their natures seems clear from the way we speak—we say that men are better than stones, without attending to any particular man or stone. But the essence, as well as the being of a thing, comes from God. Unlike the sculptor, who takes the form and the matter of his statue from outside of himself, God has nothing to “work with”. There are no preexistent essences to which he may add the appropriate amount of being, and then stir well. Everything, including all potency, must come from Himself. The very essences of things, then, must be nothing other than to be like God in varying degrees. For if He knows everything through Himself, the very definitions of things must somehow be referred to Him as Exemplar.

In the course of this investigation, we have seen first, with the help of St. Thomas and Plato, that the causality of the

²³ *On the Divine Names*, 644a.

First Being is in some way formal, and depends upon its being imitated by another. Aristotle’s objections to the separateness and diversity of the Forms led to the clarification of the exemplar as an extrinsic form of a certain sort, namely the form “ad quod” another is made, which distinguishes it from other sorts of form. The objections of Parmenides and Aristotle, which questioned the causality of the Forms, led to the idea of the necessity of an agent in understanding the nature of both exemplary causality in general, and in particular the exemplary causality of God. Refuting the possibility of the exemplar’s being an agent or a final cause lent plausibility to the original suspicion, that God as the Exemplar is properly a formal cause. This was eventually confirmed in distinguishing two distinct types of exemplary causality, and seeing that, although they differ in significant respects, they alike fulfill the notion of formal causality. Thus the *primum ens* may be called a sort of formal cause, as the Exemplar of all things. It remains to be understood, then, by what likeness it is possible for creatures, limitless in their variety, to approach the absolutely simple and undivided Essence. Let us wonder at this, praise God for it, and hand the task to the Wise Man; it is far beyond the capacity of this inquiry. This, however, is certainly true: the only way that we are able to know God in this life is by attending to His creatures, which in some way reveal the Archetype of which they are the images. The only way in which “The Good” or “Wisdom Itself” can mean anything to us, though we are infinitely far from comprehending God’s Goodness and Wisdom, is that God has allowed our goodness and wisdom to participate in His. Thus this exemplar is not only the cause of being and becoming, but also of our knowledge, through its effects.