

THE CREATURE BEFORE GOD

Part I

Ontological Vertigo

Contents

1	What Possibility Cannot Do	1
2	Act and the First Mover	1
3	The Fathers: Life That Does Not Arise from Us	1
4	The Thomistic Center: A Relation with Weight on One Side	2
5	Dependence without Rivalry	3
6	When the Truth Will Not Stay Outside	4
7	At Reason's Shore	5
8	No Place Outside the Claim	5
	Notes	7
	A Scope, Method, and Qualifications	8
	B References	10

1 What Possibility Cannot Do

Possibility, by itself, does nothing. Wood may be able to burn for a hundred years; the possibility will never light it. A mind may be able to understand; the capacity will not teach itself. Whenever *can be* becomes *is*, something actual is already at work. Aristotle begins here, with change. But the distinction will not remain confined to motion. It presses toward a harder fact: before anything can become otherwise, it must be.

That first asymmetry concerns change. It says nothing yet about why there is wood, mind, or world at all. A cause of becoming and a cause of being answer different questions; the first cannot be made to yield the second by a change of vocabulary.

2 Act and the First Mover

The ancient world left Christian thought two unfinished ascents. Neither reached free creation from nothing. Each nevertheless made the ordinary order of change and intelligibility point beyond what is derivative within it.

In the *Republic*, Plato places the Good beyond the objects whose truth and being it makes intelligible. In the *Timaeus*, whatever comes to be requires a cause, and the ordered cosmos points toward a maker looking to an intelligible model. These texts establish a vertical grammar: what appears does not contain the whole account of its intelligibility or actuality.

Aristotle makes the decisive distinction between potency and act. Change is the actualization of what is potential; what is only potential cannot, in the same respect, actualize itself. In Book XII of the *Metaphysics*, the order of motion therefore requires an eternal actuality that moves without being moved. Heaven and nature depend upon a first principle. Aristotle's eternal cosmos, celestial movers, and emphasis on final causality leave unresolved whether that first principle is a free universal cause. They nevertheless give durable form to the narrower conclusion: derivative actuality is not its own sufficient source.

Aquinas gives the argument its most compact Christian statement in the First Way. Whatever passes from potency to act is actualized by what is already actual in the relevant respect. If an actualizer is itself being actualized here and now, its power to actualize is derivative. A here-and-now order composed only of such derivative actualizers would never possess the underived actuality through which any member acts. Aquinas therefore concludes to a first mover not moved by another.

"First" does not mean merely earliest. The argument does not depend upon a first measurable instant, and Aquinas elsewhere denies that natural reason demonstrates a temporal beginning of the world. Nor is the First Mover a first domino whose work is finished once later motions begin. The priority is explanatory: intermediaries act only insofar as they possess or receive actuality.¹

The conclusion remains limited. An unmoved mover is not yet the Creator of Christian confession. The First Way does not by itself state the full doctrines of free creation, providence, or Trinity. Aquinas reaches divine simplicity, goodness, intellect, will, and universal causality through further arguments. That order matters; otherwise a genuine ascent is replaced by a name attached too quickly to its first terminus.

Whatever else the first principle is, it cannot be another borrower in the order it explains.

3 The Fathers: Life That Does Not Arise from Us

The Fathers begin elsewhere. They do not extend Aristotle's analysis of motion until it becomes creation. On the ground of Christian revelation, they confess that what is made begins and continues under the will of God.

3.1 Begun and continued by another

Irenaeus is answering the claim that a soul must be unbegotten in order to endure. He distinguishes God, who alone is without beginning, from everything made. Created things begin and continue as long as God wills them to exist.

The soul is not life itself but participates in life bestowed by God; “life does not arise from us.”² The asymmetry is plain: continuance is conferred; the giver does not receive continuance from the recipient.

Athanasius sharpens the Creator-creature distinction against both spontaneous origin and formation from coeternal matter. In *On the Incarnation*, God makes the universe from nothing through the Word and grants existence out of goodness. In *Against the Heathen*, the Word also orders and preserves the created whole. Human beings are mutable creatures; incorruption is not native to humanity but a gift. The governing judgment remains: the Word is not one fragile participant among others. He is the divine giver through whom creatures are called into being and held in order.³

3.2 More inward than the self

Augustine turns the same dependence inward. At the opening of the *Confessions* he asks how he could exist unless God were in him, then corrects the direction: rather, unless he were in God. He later calls God more inward than his inmost self and higher than his highest part. This is not pantheism. In Book VII he rejects the thought that God is a spatial substance spread through the world, then apprehends the immutable Light above his mutable mind. Divine transcendence and divine intimacy intensify together: the cause of being is not a part enclosed within the creature, yet no created cause is present at a deeper explanatory level.

For Augustine, dependence is already present in the mind’s act of judgment. His changeable mind judges mutable things by unchangeable truth; the life by which he seeks God is upheld in the act of seeking.⁴

Across these witnesses, one uncreated God calls creatures from nothing through the Word; created life and duration are gift, and divine presence does not dissolve the distinction between giver and recipient. The First is no longer only the terminus of motion. He is the giver from whom created life begins and by whom it continues.

The resulting asymmetry requires a more exact account of relation: created life depends really upon the giver, while the giver does not receive life or continuance from what is given.

4 The Thomistic Center: A Relation with Weight on One Side

4.1 Existence received under a limit

Motion has brought the argument to a first mover; it has not yet reached the source of existence. Aquinas’s argument from participated being begins from a different datum: the actuality of anything whose existence is limited to a received mode. The lines converge, but neither may substitute for the other.

A finite thing has an essence: a definite way of being this kind of thing rather than another. But knowing what a human being, an oak, or an angel is does not yet show that such a thing exists. This distinction in thought does not by itself prove a real distinction between essence and existence. Aquinas further argues that whatever possesses existence without being existence itself receives it from another; creatures possess caused existence according to a limited nature.

The first universal cause cannot receive the actuality it ultimately explains. Aquinas therefore identifies God not as one being with an unusually secure possession of existence, but as subsistent being itself, *ipsum esse subsistens*. Its force here is precise: creatures have being by participation; God does not participate in a more basic actuality. If the proposed first cause received existence, the explanation would not yet have reached the source of participated being.⁵

4.2 Creation as a real relation in the creature

Aquinas makes the asymmetry explicit in the language of relation. Creation, considered passively, places in the creature a real relation to the Creator as the principle of its being. The creature’s very condition is *from another*. In God, however, creation adds no accident, perfection, or change. The divine act is identical with the simple divine being; the new term is the creature.

His earlier treatment of divine names states the pattern with still greater clarity. God is outside the whole order of

creation; creatures are really ordered to him, not he to them in the same ontological order. Aquinas accordingly calls the creature's relation to God real and the corresponding relation in God a relation of reason.

"Of reason" does not mean fictional. God really knows, wills, creates, and preserves creatures. The phrase denies that creation installs in God a dependent feature by which God becomes more actual. The name "Creator" is newly true when creatures exist, but no intrinsic divine alteration has occurred. The ontological weight lies on one side: the creature is constituted as an effect; God is not constituted as God by producing it.

4.3 Conservation is not an ancient event

Creation in Aquinas's strict usage names the total origin of a creature's being without presupposed matter or subject; it does not by itself imply temporal newness. Present dependence is treated directly under conservation. An agent may cause only a thing's becoming, as a builder builds a house that afterward stands through the properties of its materials. The universal cause of being is different. Every creature depends on God precisely for being, and therefore cannot subsist apart from the divine conserving action.

Aquinas uses light in air as an analogy. Air is genuinely illuminated, but its light does not become self-rooted through duration; it remains dependent on the illuminating source. The comparison has limits—God is not a physical emitter and conservation is not a sequence of repairs. Aquinas says that the conserving action continues the action by which God gives existence, without motion or time. The counterfactual "without this action the creature would not be" states an explanatory dependence. It does not picture an intermittent God deciding from moment to moment whether to resume.

The recognition of present dependence did not disappear when medieval vocabulary ceased to govern philosophy. In the Third Meditation, Descartes argues that past existence does not by itself account for present existence. Preservation and creation differ only conceptually in the respect under discussion: a cause is required not only for the self's production but for its conservation now. The present tense of dependence survives.⁶

The conclusion is substantive rather than definitional. An objector may treat finite existence as a brute fact or claim that, once produced, it persists without a cause of its being. Aquinas answers that the universal cause gives the act of being that no creature possesses by essence. The disagreement concerns whether finite existence requires a present cause, not the verbal meaning of finitude.

Every creature therefore receives the act by which it exists and is presently conserved in that act; the first cause receives its act from neither the creature nor another. The dependence is ontological and asymmetric.

The claim remains incomplete until it explains how a received act of being can ground rather than eliminate proper created operation.

5 Dependence without Rivalry

The principal objection is causal: if every created act rests upon God, divine causality seems to leave no explanatory work for created causes. That inference treats the two causes as competitors within a single order. Aquinas denies precisely that univocal comparison.

God gives creatures not only existence but definite natures and powers. Fire heats, parents generate, physicians heal, intellects understand, and wills choose. When God works in every agent, the agent's proper operation is not suppressed; it is grounded. Even conservation can employ ordered created causes while God remains the principal cause. The creature is not less real because its dependence is more radical. It can act in its own right precisely because the Creator causes it to be the kind of cause it is.

The point extends to freedom. God moves voluntary causes according to their voluntary mode rather than by converting willing into compulsion. Divine causality does not occupy a portion of the will's agency and leave the remainder to the creature. The act, insofar as it has actuality, may be wholly from God as first cause and, in a different causal order, wholly from the person as a responsible secondary cause. When the act is sinful, its defect belongs to the created will rather than to God.

This distinction protects both metaphysics and empirical inquiry. A biochemical account of metabolism, a neurological account of perception, and a historical account of a decision can each be true at its own level. Divine causality is

not inserted where an empirical explanation fails. It concerns the actual existence and operation of every cause that empirical inquiry succeeds in identifying.

An instrument may therefore disclose more and more of the created order without ever approaching a point at which its success competes with the Creator. The instrument registers determinate interactions within that order; it does not stand outside being and decide what may count as real.⁷

Consequences of non-rival causality

- The Creator is not merely a remote starter; creatures are presently conserved.
- Created causes possess and exercise real powers rather than serving as occasions for divine action alone.
- Dependence does not make creatures parts, modes, or pieces of the divine substance.
- Even a hypothetically beginningless creature would depend for being; the priority is not chronological alone.
- Primary causality can ground an act precisely as voluntary rather than replace it with force.
- Dependence on God does not suspend moral agency before injustice, error, or any particular evil.

The *Catechism* holds the two sides together. God upholds creatures “at every moment” and enables them to act; he also grants them the dignity of being causes and principles for one another. The same doctrine that denies creaturely aseity establishes creaturely agency.⁸

The rivalry objection presupposes a self-grounded agent later displaced by divine action. Aquinas’s account contains no such prior agent. Primary causality establishes the secondary cause with its proper powers; it does not enter after the fact to occupy territory the creature once possessed.

The denial of self-origination therefore entails no denial of secondary agency.

6 When the Truth Will Not Stay Outside

An argument can include the knower before the knower has included himself. “Every creature receives being” may be affirmed as a universal proposition while the act of affirming it remains, for the moment, outside attention. The judgment then closes over the one who judges without adding a new premise.

6.1 The Gaze and the Retreat

Augustine gives that interval an exact form. In *On the Trinity*, he asks the reader to attend to Truth itself. The mind receives something like a first flash, cannot sustain the gaze, and slips back into familiar earthly images. The scene catches an intellectual movement: contact with truth precedes the retreat by which the mind recovers its accustomed standpoint.

In the *Confessions*, the knower himself is implicated. Before the immutable Light Augustine knows himself as made, and later knows his changeable mind as judging mutable things by unchangeable truth; before eternal Wisdom he both shudders and burns, *inhorresco et inardesco*. Trembling is not yet refusal. Disproportion may be felt at the same moment that likeness awakens desire. *Recoil*, in the stricter sense used here, is the movement that interprets the disproportion as a reason to withdraw.

Augustine later distinguishes seeing the country from finding the way to it. He had learned where the truth lay, but not the way by which the knower could be healed to enter and remain in the country he had seen; making that passage requires the humility of Christ and grace. His conversion narrative exceeds the metaphysical argument. The apprehension of truth and the healing by which one lives within it are not identical.⁹

The distinction matters. A contemplative experience cannot validate an invalid inference, and Augustine’s account does not promise a reproducible sensation. It describes a possible reception of a judgment whose truth rests on the argument rather than on the experience.

Dependence is true before consent; consent changes the person’s relation to the truth, not the truth’s ontological force.

6.2 Humility without self-contempt

Aquinas prevents humility from becoming self-contempt by pairing it with magnanimity. A difficult good both attracts and occasions retreat. Humility restrains the appetite from reaching beyond right reason; magnanimity strengthens it against despair and urges it toward genuinely great goods according to right reason. The virtues are compatible because both preserve truth.

This pairing is decisive. Pride converts received good into an occasion for inordinate self-exaltation, sometimes treating it as though it came from oneself. False abasement denies that a good was given. Humility refuses the fantasy of self-origination; magnanimity insists that what is received is truly one's own to exercise. Neither truth survives without the other.

C. S. Lewis makes the attentional point in modern terms: genuine humility ends habitual self-occupation. Humility therefore begins with self-knowledge but matures into freedom from making the self its own horizon.¹⁰ These virtues concern the reception of dependence. Non-rival dependence alone, however, does not establish that the first source wills the good of what depends upon it.

7 At Reason's Shore

Cause is not yet love. Non-rival causality can account for creaturely existence without yet showing that the first source wills created good as good. That requires a further judgment about intellect and will.

Within Aquinas's cumulative argument, the First Mover is not left as an unnamed source of motion. Subsequent questions identify the first principle as free of potency and composition, as subsistent being itself and supreme good, and as intelligent and willing. Because the divine goodness is already complete, creatures are not willed as though God needed them in order to become perfect. They proceed from will, not from a necessity imposed by deficiency.

Aquinas can therefore speak of divine love without reducing it to a passion. To love is to will good to another. Human love is awakened by a goodness it encounters; God's will causes the being and goodness that it loves. Every existing thing is therefore an object of divine love, Aquinas argues, because every actuality and perfection exists through the divine will. Natural theology can accordingly reach a true, analogical judgment: the uncreated source freely wills the good of creatures.

Vatican I supplies an authoritative doctrinal boundary around these claims. *Dei Filius* confesses a God really and essentially distinct from the world, freely creating not to acquire or increase divine beatitude but to manifest perfection through goods bestowed upon creatures. When the constitution turns to faith, it says that the human person wholly depends upon God as Creator and Lord. The council defines the Creator-creature distinction and the freedom of creation; it does not canonize every Thomistic explanation used here.

Even so, that analogical judgment cannot penetrate the inner life of God. Gregory Nazianzen approaches the theological cloud with longing born of hope and fear born of creaturely weakness; he affirms that the order of effects permits the mind to know that God exists while denying comprehension of the divine nature. That fear is not flight from dependence but the mind's truthful awareness that the first source exceeds its mode of knowing. Pseudo-Dionysius likewise lets causal affirmation pass through negation and eminence: the source is not contained within the creaturely mode of any predicate. Aquinas expressly denies that the Trinity can be demonstrated by natural reason.¹¹

That boundary is not agnosticism. Metaphysics can discover that the first source lacks nothing, gives being freely, and wills the good of what exists. It cannot turn that discovery into knowledge of the divine inner life or of the creature's whole due response. Its integrity lies partly in stopping where its evidence stops.

8 No Place Outside the Claim

Every creature receives being and is conserved in it; its nature and actions are genuinely its own; the first cause neither receives actuality from those actions nor acquires perfection by producing them. The dependence is present, total in the order of being, noncompetitive, and asymmetric.

The word *every* closes the remaining distance. It includes the one who has followed the argument. The eyes crossing this line, the intellect joining premise to conclusion, the will deciding whether to remain attentive: none stands outside the claim as a spectator. The act by which the judgment is made is itself among the acts whose actuality is being received.

I am.

I am not from myself.

Existence is not added to a self already waiting to receive it. There is no more original self behind received being to which the mind can retreat. Nothing has become less certain: *I am*. What gives way is the imagined foothold of a self more original than its received being. This is ontological vertigo: the certainty remains while the fantasy of self-grounding does not.

To say *I am not from myself* is not to retract *I am*. It is to understand it. Recoil would protect not the creature but the fiction that the creature first possessed itself and was afterward subjected to God. Consent relinquishes that fiction; it does not create the dependence but freely agrees to it. Adoration gives that agreement a form. Humility receives the truth without self-contempt; magnanimity receives the good as truly one's own to exercise. Attention need no longer make the self its own measure.

The mind may try to turn conservation into a remote mechanism: a necessary force that happens to keep the world running. But the argument has not reached an impersonal transfer of energy. It has reached intellect and will, a source who freely causes created good. Nor does conservation describe a distant artisan inspecting an old work. Augustine's reversal remains exact: God is not contained as one item within the world; the creature is present to God and depends upon him at a depth no spatial nearness can measure.¹²

Press the asymmetry further. God does not become more perfect by creating. The world fills no absence in him. I do not complete God. If the first source required the creature in order to possess his perfection, dependence would finally run both ways.

It does not.

Yet I am.

No creature possesses a prior claim to existence. Creaturely being is freely bestowed. That sentence can remain notional, a proposition safely kept among other propositions. Its concrete sense appears only when the present tense is allowed to remain present: existence is being given in the instant in which these words are read.

What is neither compelled by lack nor owed by justice is gift. For Aquinas, to love is to will the good of another; in God, that willing does not discover the creature's goodness as something already there but causes it. Reason can therefore say more than *I am caused*. It can say: *I am because God wills that I be*.

Divine non-need is not indifference. Consent does not diminish the asymmetry; it changes the way the creature receives it. The self that does not complete God is nevertheless willed by God.

There has been no instant of creaturely existence in which the giver was absent. He did not arrive when the argument found him. He was already there in the act of questioning, in every flight from the question, in every ordinary hour during which existence seemed self-explanatory. He is there now. If another creaturely instant is given, he will not have become newly present to it.

What begins to recede is not reverence before the first source but the demand to stand outside dependence in order to be real. The loss is imaginary. The discovered presence is not.

Reason has therefore reached a precise conclusion, and a precise limit. It can know analogically that the first source freely wills and causes created good. It cannot by this argument enter the inner life of God, derive the Trinity, or specify the whole relation into which the creature has discovered itself. A mechanical First Mover is no longer enough; neither is a generic word for transcendence. The one who gives this act of being has always been present to it.

God loves.

The creature is being held in existence now.

The next question is no longer whether God is near. It is what truth requires of the creature to whom he has never been absent.

Notes

¹For the sequence of sources, see Plato, *Republic* VI, 508e–509b and *Timaeus* 27d–29b; Aristotle, *Metaphysics* XII.6–7, 1071b3–1072b30, with *Physics* VIII.5–6; and Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* (ST) I, q. 2, a. 3 and q. 46, a. 2, with *Summa contra Gentiles* I.13. Jowett and Ross supplied the public-domain working English. The ancient texts are antecedents, not accounts of Christian creation from nothing; the First Way is not made to carry Aquinas’s later conclusions by itself.

²Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* II.34.2–4, in Roberts and Rambaut’s public-domain *Ante-Nicene Fathers* (ANF) English. His immediate subject is the soul’s duration, not a later scholastic theory of *esse*; the wording is used only for the asymmetry it directly states.

³Athanasius, *On the Incarnation* 3–5 and *Against the Heathen* 40–42, in the public-domain *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers* (NPNF) working English. His language of corruption and return toward non-being also serves the soteriological account of sin and redemption; it is not flattened here into a single scholastic formula.

⁴Augustine, *Confessions* I.2.2; III.6.11; VII.1.1–2, 10.16–11.17, and 17.23, in the public-domain NPNF working English. These loci govern the reversal of spatial assumption, the union of inwardness and transcendence, and the mutable mind’s judgment by unchangeable truth.

⁵Aquinas, ST I, q. 3, a. 4; q. 4, a. 2; q. 44, a. 1; and *De ente et essentia*, ch. 4. Subsistent and participated being are the article’s adopted Thomistic articulation, distinct from the First Way and not represented as a definition imposed on every Catholic school.

⁶For relation and conservation, see Aquinas, ST I, q. 45, a. 3; q. 13, a. 7; q. 104, a. 1, including ad 4; and *De potentia*, q. 5, a. 1. Descartes’s later restatement is in the Third Meditation, for which Haldane supplied the public-domain working English. Descartes is cited only for present conservation; no identity of method or metaphysics is implied.

⁷The companion essay *Against the Instrumentalists* examines the stronger claim that physical detection or measurement supplies the exclusive boundary of knowledge or reality. The present argument needs only the narrower distinction stated here: an empirical account of a secondary cause and a metaphysical account of its received existence do not answer the same question.

⁸Aquinas treats proper secondary operation and voluntary motion at ST I, q. 83, a. 1, ad 3; q. 104, a. 2; q. 105, aa. 4–5; and I–II, q. 10, a. 4; the defect of sin at I–II, q. 79, a. 2; see also *De potentia*, q. 3, a. 7 and *Summa contra Gentiles* III.67–70. The authoritative synthesis is CCC 301 and 306–308. These sources distinguish causal orders without making agency or responsibility merely apparent.

⁹Augustine, *On the Trinity* VIII.2.3; *Confessions* VII.10.16, 17.23, 20.26–21.27; and XI.9.11, in the public-domain NPNF working English. These passages illustrate arrest, trembling, and the Christian passage from sight to healing; they are neither a proof of conservation nor a promise of reproducible sensation.

¹⁰Aquinas, ST II–II, q. 161, a. 1, especially ad 3, and q. 129, a. 3, ad 4, governs the compatibility of humility and magnanimity. Lewis’s narrower attentional point is paraphrased from *Mere Christianity*, III.8; no Lewis wording is reproduced, and the familiar aphorism about “thinking of yourself less” is not attributed to him.

¹¹For the cumulative Thomistic claims, see ST I, qq. 3, 6, 14, and 19; q. 44, a. 4; q. 13, a. 5; q. 20, aa. 1–2; q. 21, a. 1, especially ad 2–3, and a. 4, ad 4; and q. 32, a. 1. See also Vatican I, *Dei Filius*, chs. 1 and 3; Gregory Nazianzen, *Oration* 28.2–6; and Pseudo-Dionysius, *Divine Names* V.1–8 and *Mystical Theology* I.1–3. The council governs the doctrinal boundary without canonizing every Thomistic step; the apophatic witnesses limit comprehension rather than replace demonstration.

¹²The companion essay *In Support of the Particular* treats a related recoil: the preference for an abstract or impersonal ultimacy over the God who knows, wills, and acts within particular histories. Part I does not yet derive those revealed histories. It establishes why transcendence cannot be reduced either to remoteness or to abstraction.

A Scope, Method, and Qualifications

A.1 Reader, question, and method

This is Part I of *The Creature Before God*, a trilogy of discursive metaphysical and spiritual-theological articles for a serious general reader. It asks what the phrase “ontological vertigo is the reflexive apprehension of asymmetric dependence” can mean within a Catholic and specifically Thomistic account of creation, how related judgments have appeared across the centuries, and why arrest need not end in recoil or self-contempt. It stops at the analogical judgment that God loves and the present apprehension that the creature is being held in existence now. Parts II and III trace how the creature answers that arrest through willing, embodied, and graced agreement with the truth.

The governing phrase and its taxonomy are project synthesis, not received technical definitions. “Apprehension” means an intellectual judgment; “arrest” means the interruption when that judgment is grasped as true of the knower; “recoil” names withdrawal; “consent” names free agreement; and “adoration” names that agreement taking determinate form as reverence before God and service rendered to him. The reader-facing argument approaches these terms through a cumulative movement from potency and act to received being rather than through a boxed thesis, and reserves its most compressed first-person language for the conclusion. No affect proves the judgment or indicates sanctity, infused contemplation, private revelation, or a state of grace. The opening’s concrete examples and the conclusion’s increasingly spare form are literary enactments, not additional premises.

Source class	Function in the article	Governing boundary
Ancient philosophy	Supplies participation, ontological priority, potency and act, and unmoved actuality.	Plato and Aristotle are neither made implicit Christians nor credited with creation from nothing or Thomistic conservation.
Conciliar and catechetical teaching	Governs one free Creator, real distinction from the world, total creaturely dependence, and genuine secondary causality.	Dogmatic and authoritative boundaries do not canonize every Thomistic step in the article.
Patristic witness	Supplies creation from nothing, continuance by divine will, divine intimacy, intellectual arrest, and apophatic restraint.	Later terms are not retroactively placed in a Father’s text; breadth is not an authority count.
Thomistic theology	Provides the principal account of the First Way, participated existence, relation, conservation, noncompetitive causality, humility, magnanimity, divine justice, and divine love.	The claims form a cumulative argument; school metaphysics and philosophical conclusions remain distinct from revealed Trinity.
Mystical witness	Shows true knowledge received in trembling and purified by apophatic restraint.	Images and experiences illustrate apprehension; they do not substitute for demonstration or promise a reproducible feeling.
Later Christian witness	Preserves present conservation and describes humility’s freedom from self-preoccupation.	Descartes and Lewis are used narrowly; neither governs the paper’s metaphysics or authority structure.
Project synthesis	Defines ontological vertigo, arrest, recoil, consent, adoration, and self-forgetfulness and orders the final movement from received being to analogical divine love.	The taxonomy and final formulations belong to this article, not to a cited source.

A.2 Included and excluded scope

Included are selected ancient antecedents; representative patristic accounts in Irenaeus, Athanasius, Augustine, Gregory Nazianzen, and Pseudo-Dionysius; Aquinas on the First Way, participated existence, creation, conservation,

relation, secondary causality, humility, magnanimity, divine justice, and divine love; Descartes on present conservation; Lewis on self-forgetful humility; and doctrinal boundaries in Vatican I and the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*.

Excluded are a comprehensive history of metaphysics; a defense of every premise against every contemporary objection; the Kalam argument and physical cosmology; a complete account of providence, evil, grace, deification, Trinitarian processions, mystical prayer, or theodicy; and adjudication among Thomist, Scotist, Suárezian, Palamite, or contemporary analytic accounts of dependence. The conclusion is not a composed prayer. No legal, jurisdictional, or mutable disciplinary conclusion is made.

A.3 Material qualifications

1. The definition describes the article's adopted Thomistic conclusion; it is not itself a demonstration. Brute-fact and "existential inertia" objections remain substantive disagreements about causal explanation.
2. The First Way concludes to a first unmoved mover. Divine simplicity, subsistent being, universal free creation, providence, and love require Aquinas's further arguments; Trinity requires revelation.
3. "First" names explanatory priority, not necessarily the earliest moment. Aquinas denies that natural reason demonstrates a temporal beginning of the world (ST I, q. 46, a. 2).
4. The asymmetry is limited to the order of created being. It does not deny that God truly knows, wills, loves, addresses, and covenants with creatures.
5. Aquinas's claim that the creature has a real relation to God while the corresponding relation in God is one of reason denies a received accident or perfection in God; it does not make divine action imaginary.
6. Essence and existence are metaphysical principles, not two objects or substances. Their real distinction in creatures and *ipsum esse subsistens* are the article's adopted Thomistic articulation.
7. Participation in being does not make a creature a fragment, mode, or material part of God. Creator and creature remain really and essentially distinct.
8. Creation, conservation, and concurrence are distinguished: total origin without presupposed matter; persistence in received being; and divine action in the operations of real secondary causes.
9. Present dependence is not repeated temporal re-creation. God's eternal act produces and conserves temporal effects without change in God.
10. Dependence in being is not identical with corruptibility or modal contingency. Even an incorruptible creature, or one necessary through another, possesses being from another (ST I, q. 44, a. 1, ad 2).
11. Primary causality does not reduce created causality or freedom to appearance. The whole effect can be from God and from a creature in different causal orders.
12. Consent means willing agreement with creaturely truth; it does not make dependence true, constitute supernatural faith, excuse passivity before evil, or erase responsible secondary agency.
13. Humility and magnanimity are complementary virtues. "Nothing from oneself" means non-aseity, not worthlessness, total corruption, or denial of received natural and supernatural goods.
14. An initial shudder is not treated as culpable refusal. Recoil names withdrawal grounded in an interpretation of dependence as threat.
15. Creation is neither compelled by a lack in God nor antecedently owed by justice to a recipient not yet existing. God nevertheless acts according to divine wisdom and will and, within the created order he establishes, gives each nature what belongs to its condition (ST I, q. 21, a. 1, especially ad 2–3; a. 4, ad 4).
16. Divine love is predicated analogically. The conclusion "God loves" means that God freely wills and causes created good; it neither enters the divine inner life nor demonstrates the Trinity (ST I, q. 13, a. 5; q. 20, aa. 1–2; q. 32, a. 1).
17. Divine concurrence with a sinful act does not make God the author of the defect constituting sin: God causes the act's actuality, not its defective mode (ST I–II, q. 79, a. 2).
18. Pseudo-Dionysius is identified as an anonymous late-fifth- or early-sixth-century Christian author, not as the convert of Acts 17.

A.4 Translations, rights, currentness, and review

Patristic checking used the identified public-domain ANF, NPNF, and Parker witnesses, together with stable work and locus citations. Thomas is cited by work, question, article, chapter, and reply; governing Latin loci were checked in the Corpus Thomisticum where identified, with public English used as a working aid. Descartes is cited by the Third Meditation.

The focused paraphrase of C. S. Lewis’s *Mere Christianity*, III.8, reproduces no Lewis wording. The popular sentence “humility is not thinking less of yourself, but thinking of yourself less” is not attributed to Lewis because the C. S. Lewis Foundation identifies it as a common misattribution. Official texts, translations, and all other source wording remain outside the project’s CC BY 4.0 grant. The surrounding synthesis is project-created.

The core online witnesses were checked through 20 July 2026; the added Augustine and Gregory loci were checked on 21 July 2026. The present revision deepens the already audited claims about conservation, presence, and analogical divine love without adding a consequential source premise. Twelve concise endnotes carry exact source loci, translation witnesses, branch qualifications, and companion pointers while the main chain remains complete. It remains an internally source-audited working study. Production-review state and artifact disposition for this revision are recorded in the repository research scope. The article has not received independent philosophical, patristic, Thomistic, mystical-theological, dogmatic, literary, or ecclesiastical review and claims no ecclesiastical approval.

B References

Authoritative Catholic witnesses

- First Vatican Council, dogmatic constitution *Dei Filius* (24 April 1870), chs. 1 and 3 and canons 1.3–5: the simple God really distinct from the world, free creation from nothing, divine non-need, providence, and the creature’s total dependence; official Latin.
- *Catechism of the Catholic Church* 301 and 306–308, on sustaining action and genuine secondary causality; official English.

Ancient philosophical antecedents

- Plato, *Republic* VI, 508e–509b, on the Good as source of intelligibility and being; *Timaeus* 27d–29b, on becoming, cause, and the cosmic craftsman. Benjamin Jowett’s public-domain English was used as a working witness at the Internet Classics Archive and *Timaeus* text. The article does not identify these doctrines with Christian creation.
- Aristotle, *Metaphysics* XII.6–7, 1071b3–1072b30, on actuality, the unmoved mover, and the dependence of heaven and nature; W. D. Ross’s public-domain working English, Internet Classics Archive. See also *Physics* VIII.5–6.

Patristic and late-patristic witnesses

- St. Irenaeus of Lyons, *Against Heresies* II.34.2–4, on God alone unbegun, created duration according to divine will, and life by participation; Alexander Roberts and William Rambaut’s 1885 ANF working English, online witness.
- St. Athanasius of Alexandria, *On the Incarnation of the Word* 3–5, on creation from nothing through the Word and creaturely mutability, NPNF working English; *Against the Heathen* 40–42, on the Word ordering and preserving the created whole, working English.
- St. Augustine of Hippo, *Confessions* I.2.2; III.6.11; VII.1.1–2, 10.16–11.17, 17.23, and 20.26–21.27; XI.9.11, on existence through divine presence, inwardness and transcendence, the changeable mind’s judgment by unchangeable truth, seeing without yet possessing the way, and *inhorresco et inardesco*; *On the Trinity* VIII.2.3, on the mind’s first flash of Truth and return to familiar images. Public-domain NPNF working English: *Confessions* VII, *Confessions* XI, and *On the Trinity* VIII.
- St. Gregory Nazianzen, *Oration* 28.2–6, on longing and fear before the theological cloud, the failed attempt to grasp God directly, and knowledge of God’s existence from created order without comprehension of the divine nature; NPNF working English.
- Pseudo-Dionysius, *Divine Names* V.1–8, on the superessential cause from whom beings receive existence; *Mystical Theology* I.1–3, on affirmation, negation, and unknowing. John Parker, trans., *The Works of Dionysius the Areopagite*, vol. 1 (London: James Parker, 1897), public-domain working edition.

Thomistic framework

- St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* I, q. 2, a. 3 (the First Way); q. 3, a. 4, q. 4, a. 2, q. 6, aa. 1–2, q. 13, a. 5, q. 14, aa. 1 and 8, and q. 19, aa. 1, 3–4 (subsistent being, goodness, analogy, intellect, free will, and willing creatures without need); q. 20, aa. 1–2 (divine love and its causation of created goodness); q. 21, a. 1, especially ad 2–3, and a. 4, ad 4 (divine justice, derivative created dues, and creation without an antecedent creaturely claim); q. 32, a. 1 (Trinity not demonstrable by natural reason).
- Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* I, q. 13, a. 7 (Creator–creature relational asymmetry); q. 44, aa. 1 and 4, q. 45, aa. 1–3, 5, and q. 46, a. 2 (participated being, creation, its finality, and the temporal-beginning limit); q. 83, a. 1, ad 3, q. 104, aa. 1–2, and q. 105, aa. 4–5 (freedom, conservation, and secondary causes); I–II, q. 10, a. 4 and q. 79, a. 2 (divine motion without coercion and the defect of sin); II–II, q. 129, a. 3, ad 4, and q. 161, aa. 1–5 (magnanimity and humility).
- Aquinas, *De ente et essentia*, ch. 4, on created essence and existence and the first cause whose essence is existence; *De potentia*, q. 3, a. 7 and q. 5, a. 1; *Summa contra Gentiles* I.13, II.15–21, and III.65–70, for the First Way, creation, conservation, and secondary causes.
- Latin loci checked in the Corpus Thomisticum Leonine-text corpus; the New Advent Summa was used as a working public English index. Work, question, article, chapter, and reply take precedence over either site’s wording.

Later witnesses

- René Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy*, Third Meditation, on present conservation and the conceptual distinction between preservation and creation in the respect argued; public-domain Elizabeth S. Haldane translation, online witness.
- C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, III.8, “The Great Sin,” on genuine humility as freedom from self-occupation. The point is paraphrased; no Lewis wording is reproduced. The common aphorism about “thinking of yourself less” is not attributed to Lewis; see the C. S. Lewis Foundation attribution record.

Last revised (UTC): 2026-07-23T13:29:33Z

Reuse and rights. To the extent Triptych holds the rights, project-created content and design are licensed under CC BY 4.0. Scripture, liturgical or official texts, received prayers or hymns, quotations, fonts, and other third-party material retain their own status; public-domain material remains public domain. Identify changes. Attribution implies neither Triptych nor ecclesiastical approval. See [LICENSE](#) and [THIRD_PARTY.md](#) in the source.