

Charles de Koninck ("Le Cosmos", Laval, 1936):

(1) The sum total of bodily beings that make up nature is partitioned in four species: men, animals, plants, inorganic substances. These only are philosophically definable. These four obviously constitute a hierarchy: one higher than the other in perfection. They are essentially different (ontological species): one has or has not life, one has or has not sense life, one has or has not intellectual life; there is no middle.

In spite of essential difference the four have something in common: men are animals along with dogs; they in turn are vegetative along with plants, and along with inorganic substances they are bodily beings. Yet man is not the mere sum of four (an aggregate); he is one being (not several substances conjoined)

(2) Man is the *raison d'être* of the Universe (the final explanation and end of all other earthly beings) For: a) Nature cannot be ordained to God except through man; since the Universe has its end in God, it must be that it is capable of a return to its Source, and only an intellectual creature of that return. b) No movement properly so-called can be simply an end in itself; movement consists in a going toward something; there cannot be just movement for movement; hence the final term of every mobile being must be something immobile: a being which insofar as it is the terminus, has not to pursue its existence; it will have a successive existence as a composite being, but will be above time by reason of its spiritual form - this is man.

(3) Man is the *raison d'être* of Matter - the Matter in every bodily being is an appetite (a desire) for the human form. For: a) every bodily being, although one in substance, has two substantial principles, viz. Prime Matter, and Form; Matter is pure potency, pure determinability; it is the same in all bodily beings - Prime Matter as pure indetermination reunites all material beings in one same matrix, which is common to them all; it is potency to all forms, from the highest to the lowest. b) Prime Matter is an appetite, a desire for the highest form (See S. Thomas in C. Gent. III, c.22)

(4) In the order of nature Man is posterior to other bodily beings. Man is as much the *raison d'être* of all possible natural forms, as he is of Prime Matter. Every natural form is turned in the direction of man. The essential desire of Prime Matter, which extends indefinitely beyond any form that it has received, is to be actuated by the immobile form of man. And in this perspective the infra-human forms are much less final states than tendencies. Thus there is a scale of natural forms, as steps from one to the other. We are speaking here of the order of nature, and not for the moment of the order of time. But if it can be said in advance and with certainty that matter will receive the human form - without that the existence of any mobile being whatsoever would be contradictory in advance - philosophy has no means of predicting what intervening forms will actually be realized. Intelligence must ultimately come to matter, but only Science can discern the devious path that nature takes to arrive at it. The fixity of infra-human forms is then a counterfeit fixity. We are naturally metaphysicians, and from that the inclination to assimilate the cosmic hierarchy to a series of whole numbers, and to the immobile hierarchy of pure spirits; whereas there is only an analogy between them.

(5) A temporal order in the realization of this hierarchy is postulated by philosophical principles. The mobile as mobile tends toward the spiritual form of man. The movement to this end is proportioned to the degree of perfection. The degree of perfection is determined by the form. Under this aspect every form is invariable and immobile, for by definition a form constitutes a being to be what it is. If the form as form were variable, a being would never be what it is; if the form as such were unmovable, movement would be contradictory. Form is the principle of the diversity of movement without being itself in movement.

The desire of matter, although fulfilled in the measure of the perfection of the form actuating it - and in that measure the composite enjoys a certain finish and rest - remains unsatisfied until it gains the spiritual form of man. Under no matter what form Matter be, it reaches out toward more perfect forms. Thus matter is in its turn principle of movement. But to be principle of movement belongs to neither matter alone, since it is necessarily associated with form; nor to form alone, since it is in itself invariable. In order that there be a determined principle of movement there must be at the same time matter and form. But no nature remains closed in on itself. This must be clearly understood. "Id enim per se videtur esse de intentione naturae quod est semper et perpetuum" (St. Thomas, I, q. 98, a. 1) "That seemsto be essentially in the intention of nature which is always and perpetual". Mobile beings do not advance on a perpendicular plane to fall flat at the end of their course. That would be the same as to say that their form is the principal end, and that their essential orientation toward the spiritual form is entirely accidental, whereas the latter is their *raison d'etre*. But is not nature a principle of movement, and is not the activity or passivity of the mobile of the accidental order? Consequently, is not the perfecting demanded by nature simply of the accidental order? And does not any natural being whatsoever reach its end when it is finished? Let us say that the particular end of natural beings consists in their individual completion of the accidental order. But this particular end is not their principal end. It is true that the more a being is perfect, the more the particular end coincides with the principal end. Matter and form are not accidental principles, but essential. Now these essential principles are the one that are reaching up toward spirituality, and the accidents are only instruments of the substance. If one were to say that the composite finds its *raison d'etre* in the actuation of its accidental powers or potentialities, the implication would be that substance is for the accidents, and that an infra-human being is willed principally for itself. A nature is essentially a principle of ascending movement; it is from the very depths of its being a striving upwards.

A Being the essence of which is composed of matter and form can have its complex existence realized only successively. The unfinished character essential to every hylemorphic substance is the cause of time. The hylemorphic substance is perfectible from the point of view of essence. If a nature were absolutely finished from the point of view of essence it would no longer be hylemorphic; it would no longer be nature in the strict sense of the term. Therefore, successive and continuous duration is above all a sign of a qualitative enrichment of universal nature. Absolutely speaking, it is this very enrichment that "takes time". Every nature tends to surpass itself, since its very essence is ordained to forms always higher, until it reaches a term that is immobile.

(6) The notion of generation in nature - Generation and corruption are explained through matter and form. The cosmic beings that appear and disappear, one after another, and one from another, are drawn from the potency of matter by beings already in existence, and they are reduced to potency in their corruption. Prime matter is not a kind of reservoir that contains in a latent state determined forms that only await the occasion to come into the open. Forms can be contained therein only after the manner of possible cleavages in a line indefinitely divisible. On the other hand generation of new substances is in no way a creation, but the act in which a given composite draws out another from the potency of Prime Matter. Be it understood that Prime Matter is created, or rather co-created (since it cannot subsist outside of a composite), and that any composite being whatsoever is, as a finite being, a created being. Under this aspect the universe opens directly on God. But that does not prevent a composite being from being truly engendered, nor a created being from being its generator.

This brings us to a very important, viz. that from the moment of the existence of the first composite being (granted that the world had a beginning in time) all the natural forms possible were given in the potency of Prime Matter. From then on no special creative act is necessary to draw them from potency into

actuality, provided there exists a sufficient created cause, whatever it be. And, if this sufficient, and created cause exists, the generative causality must be attributed to it in virtue of the principle of divine government through second causes. The principle of sufficient causality demands that the cause in question be on the same level at least as the effect produced. No being can draw from the potency of matter a composite that is superior to itself, at least not as principal cause. It is, then, absolutely impossible for any plant to engender an animal as principal cause.

(7) Philosophical principles call for the functioning of natural beings as instrumental causes of the origin of higher natural beings. - Some are reluctant to see in nature a generalized ascending movement towards forms more and more perfect from the imperfect forms. St. Thomas did not hesitate. (See in De Potentia, q.4, a. 11) The reluctance of modern Schoolmen is easily explained. Since the time of Suarez they have boxed in the universe. They want to explain everything in nature by intra-cosmic causes. Suarez by denying the demonstrative value of the arguments of St. Thomas to prove in a strictly rational way the existence of pure spirits, cut asunder every essential link between the cosmos and the created spiritual world. If we sterilize the world from its very beginning nothing new can come out of it. Creatiönism which under all aspects opens the world directly on God bypassing the universal hierarchy, implicitly rejects what is essential to the Universe, UNITY OF ORDER.

True, in this Creatiönist view there is an ascending movement that actually takes place in the most elementary of vital functions - nutrition. Grass assimilates air and water; the cow assimilates grass; man assimilates the cow. But this cycle or movement remains closed in on itself, if there had been always, inorganic beings, plants, animals. The world in this view is open only to individual multiplication. An ascending movement of this kind is not realized by the internal push of lower natures ordained to higher, but by an influence from above them that they passively undergo. In other words, in this hypothesis of a cycle closed in on itself in time, the perfect ought to precede the imperfect not only in the order of nature (incontestably true), but also in the order of time. Or, at least, they must co-exist. The idea of progress is thus reduced to a purely quantitative increase. At bottom that is a kind of evolution which is only a dispersion, or a regression.

The Ontological view of nature demands something else. We have seen through analysis that the movement deeply rooted in the very nature of mobile being is toward essences more and more complete and perfect. The superior composite being is not something absolutely new with regard to the composite from which it was drawn. It was given in the potency of matter. This excludes at one and the same time univocity and equivocity: two extremes that destroy the very notion of pure potency. If it were univocity, matter would be potency of only one species of composite being; if it were equivocity, the composite beings of different species would have nothing naturally common between them. Matter ties together all composite beings in one same natural genus. Further, the new composite being always contains virtually the perfections of its predecessors which it surpasses. The new, moreover, is realized within well defined extremes: the original cosmos and man. All intermediary forms will bear far reaching traces of these extremes.

Without a doubt, the individual form of a composite being is invariable. An evolution of the substance is impossible. But the form is not the nature. Indeed form considered apart from its relation to matter is no longer nature in the strict sense of the term. Yet, an ascending movement in the substantial order is called for. We know in advance that this ascending movement can be realized only in a discontinuous succession of substances more and more rich in perfection of being. But how establish between them the deep rooted bond that allows us to say that the superior substances were drawn out of the inferior? It is formally realized in dispositive alterations. While the evolution of

substance into substance is impossible, the entire composite is capable of an enrichment that disposes it to a superior whole composite.

We know that an individual composite cannot of itself produce alterations that would terminate in a composite of a superior order. Accidental capacities are measured by their determined and invariable substance. Yet nature demands an ascending movement by way of alterations. How can that be realized without there being already a superior natural substance?

Again we run up against a conception of a spatio-temporal universe closed in on itself, and as cosmos having no extra-cosmic cause. Already the inorganic world obliges us to appeal to a spiritual influence or pressure that puts it in motion, the inorganic withal not having an active principle of motion within itself. This spiritual pressure or push comes not from an univocal cause on the level of the effect, but equivocal - a superior substance that contains virtually the perfections of that which is inferior to it, that is more powerful and more efficacious than all the subordinate causes. (See St. Thomas C. Gent. III, c.23)

This pressure naturally exercised on the cosmos - since natures themselves demand it - suffices to draw out of the potency of the composite given in the beginning all the forms that are necessary to reach the end. And since this pressure is natural, it must act on natures according to the laws inscribed in them. In this ascending movement by which more perfect beings are drawn from less perfect, the given intra-cosmic composite is only an instrument, the spiritual agent being the principal cause. The spiritual pressure will not draw any nature out of any composite whatsoever. The instrument, although it produces an effect superior to itself under the influence of a superior cause, implies nevertheless essential limitations. The more perfect the substances engendered, the more will they be in their turn perfect instruments.

St. Thomas with the ancients thought he recognized in celestial bodies the instruments which spiritual substances use in acting on the cosmos. (See in De Pot. a. VI, a.6 ad 10) St. Thomas made exception for superior animals, the first of which, for him, had to be directly formed by a special intervention of God (although this intervention would be natural, as in the case of the creation of human substantial forms). Yet in this matter he departs from the tradition of the Fathers for purely experimental reasons (not philosophical): "...videmus enim sensibiliter quod aliquis debilis effectus producitur ab agente remoto, sed fortis effectus requirit agens propinquum..." (De Malo, XVI, a.9 c.). If we today are incapable of identifying the instrument, we are none the less necessitated to affirm its existence.

While we thus re-integrate in the universe the spiritual activity that works in it, we do not agree with those of old who saw spontaneous generations spring up on all sides. It belongs to experimental science to find where and under what conditions life arises. Let us add, however, that the passage from the inorganic to the organic probably will never be definable from the scientific point of view - the two are as irreducible as physics and biology. Is there any need to point out that the concept here proposed does not in the least touch the adage: "omne vivens e vivo", a necessary principle in philosophy. What we here reject is the view that the living source of life must be a univocal cause. The principal cause of cosmic life and of its ascending upsurge is neither of the same species nor of the same natural genus; it is none the less a living being.

(8) Origin of the Human Soul and the Human Body - The human soul, although Form of the body, is not drawn out of the potentiality of matter. (It must be immediately created by God). Nevertheless every body is ordained to it either mediately or immediately. The matter that is informed by the human soul must have a proximate disposition to it, and this proximate disposition necessitate that information. The disposition that is the product of the working of nature is not constitutive of the human body, since the body is not human save through the spiritual form that actuates it. Yet that product is the immediate disposition for the human body. Under the influence of pressure exerted in it by a spiritual

agent entire nature works toward the bringing forth of this disposition. This disposition is realized in an incipient way in the measure of progress up the scale of plants and animals.

It would seem that the evolution of the human body would follow the lines sketched by St. Thomas in his teaching on the evolution of the human embryo: a succession of forms, the inferior preparing matter for the superior until finally matter is proximately disposed to the soul (See II C. G. ent. c.89: "Nec est inconveniens si aliquid intermediorum etc...") We have abandoned the doctrine in this particular application, but it is unquestionably valid for cosmic evolution in general.

(9) The First Man - Let us say that in the case of man there exists a prior man who as generative cause is sufficient to bring about the disposition for the human soul. This is univocal causality. Cannot an equivocal cause realize the same effect? And is it not natural to invoke it for the disposition of the body of the First Man. Yes, I say First Man. True, one could raise the point that if this spiritual pressure were sufficient to lift up nature even to the disposition for the human body, and if this equivocal causality is even more perfect than that of univocal cause, the latter would have no reason for its existence. Why would not human beings arise everywhere without human parents?

That is nonsense. We have recourse to equivocal causality only when a univocal cause is insufficient to explain an effect. Therefore, from the moment that there is given a sufficient univocal cause, the equivocal cause becomes on this head, and in virtue of ontological economy, superfluous. In other words, if all humanity can have its origin in one unique first individual, the contrary hypothesis is absolutely without reason. The constitution of this univocal cause is precisely the end of the spiritual pressure. Just as God manifests His power by creating effects which are cause in their turn, so this equivocal causality reaches its peak, when it succeeds in producing an effect that will be thenceforth independent. Creationism is a disguised renewal of the old doctrine of "those who deprive beings of nature of their proper activity", a doctrine energetically combatted by St. Thomas (C. Gent. III, c.69)

If by human body we mean a subject disposed in its ultimate disposition for the human soul, we must hold with S. Augustine that the human body was in the potency of matter from the beginning "according to seminal reasons". By "seminal reasons" we understand the initial composite (matter and form) of the cosmos, the ultimate end (man), the efficient cause (the spiritual agent and the composite). If by "making a human body" we understand the preparatory and dispositive work preceding in time the formal constitution of the human body, we must say that the human body originated by way of an evolutionary process, and that the evolutionary process had man as its objective from the start.