

*I have translated the following from St. Bonaventure's commentary on the second book of Peter Lombard's Sentences. - Dr. Shields*

## Commentary on Distinction I

### Part I

On the Creation of Human Nature, in Regards to its Efficient Principle in General

“The Creation of things” etc.

### Division of the Text

This second book, which begins “The creation of things” etc., is divided into two parts. In the first part [I] it treats of the condition of man; in the second part [II] of his fall and temptation (*tentatione*), starting at distinction twenty one below [where it says]: “The devil therefore seeing” etc. The first part has two parts, for because man has something in common (*communicat*) with all creatures, and everything else [in the cosmos] is done for man's sake (*propter hominem*), it therefore first [IA] treats of the condition of things in general. Second [IB], however, [it treats of things] individually, below at distinction two [where it says]: “Concerning the angelic nature, however,” etc.

The first part has two parts. In the first [IA1] it determines the condition of things as regards their efficient principle, in the second part [IA2] [it determines the condition of things] as regards their end, where it says “And because it is incapable of its beatitude”, etc. The first part has three little parts. In the first [IA1i] he proposes the truth, which is expressed in the authority of Sacred Scripture. In the second part [IA1ii], however, he explains the authority, where it says “Creation is done out of nothing” etc. In the third part [IA1iii], however, because erroneous positions are overthrown by that authority, it concludes at last with their elimination, where it says “Of these and of similar errors, therefore,” etc. And each of these parts has two further parts. For in the first part [IA1ia] it presents the authority of truth, in the second part [IA1ib] the error of Plato, where it says “For Plato” etc. Similarly also the second part has two parts. In the first [IA1iia] it explains the authority and the words of the authority. In the second [IA1iib] it presents the error of Aristotle, where it says “Aristotle, however, two” etc. In the same way the third part has two parts. For in the first part [IA1iia] it completes the disproof of the errors, in the second part [IA1iib], however, it completes the confirmation of the faith, where it says “Therefore let us believe” etc.

### Treatment of the Question

For the understanding, however, of those things which are said in this part [of the text], questions are raised here about the departure of things into being:

- First, in regards to the entity of the principle.
- Second, in regards to the unity [of the principle].
- Third, in regards to the essence of production.

Concerning the first, two things are asked:

First, it is asked whether things have a causal principle.  
Second, whether they have a beginning in time.

Article I  
On the Entity of the Principle

Question I  
Whether Things Have a Causal Principle

We proceed thus as regards the first question:

Since the Saints and the philosophers agree that all worldly things had a productive principle, both because of the *variety* of things, and because of the *changeability* of things, and because of the *order* of things, and also because of the *imperfection* of things—for *multitude* originates from unity, and *motion* or changeability from the immutable, and *order* is ultimately reduced to something that holds first place and the *imperfect* to something perfect—therefore this being presupposed (namely that things have a causal principle in some way), the question is whether things are *wholly* produced—that is according to both their material and formal principle—or only according to one or the other principle. And it seems that they are produced according to both:

First, [there are arguments drawn] from *that which produces* [the world], as follows:

Argument 1. To the extent that the producer is prior and more perfect, to that extent it pours more into the thing; therefore the first and most perfect [producer] pours in everything and pours into everything; and if this is so, it therefore produces the whole thing. But the first cause is such, therefore etc.

Argument 2. Again, the more noble and more perfect is the agent, the fewer things it needs in order to act. Therefore the most noble agent needs nothing outside itself. Therefore, if it alone existed it would still produce things. But [it would] not [produce things] out of itself, since it itself is a part of no thing. Therefore [it would produce things] out of nothing (*ex nihilo*). It is clear, therefore, that God is capable [of producing] the whole substance of the creature.

Argument 3. Again, that which acts due to its form is able to produce a form. Therefore, with equal reason that which acts with its whole being is able to produce a whole being. But God acts with His whole self, since He is wholly simple. Therefore He produces the whole product.

Again, this very thing is shown [with arguments drawn] from *that which is produced*, as follows:

Argument 4. What is not from another is from itself. Nothing, however, which is from itself needs another in order to be. But every intrinsic principle of a thing needs something else in order to be, for form needs matter and vice versa. Therefore, etc.

Argument 5. Again, the efficient and final causes are correlative causes, therefore that which is not *from something else* is not [directed] *to something else*. But all things are [directed] to something else according to everything that they are, because according to everything that they are they desire the good, and there is no rest except in the highest good. And that this is a good argument is shown as follows. For if good and being are convertible, therefore what is in itself a being is in itself good. But what is in itself good is not for the sake of something else.

Therefore what is not *from something else* is not *for the sake of something else*. If therefore all wordly things are, in their whole being, *for the sake of something else*, therefore they are [in their whole being] *from something else*.

Argument 6. Again, if a thing is not totally from another, this is either by reason of its *form* or by reason of its *matter*. It is established that it is not by reason of its *form*, because we see that forms are produced, and if forms were not produced, nothing at all would be produced. If you say [it is not totally from another] by reason of its *matter*, *on the contrary*, as the Philosopher says in the *Metaphysics* “actuality is before potency.” It is certain that he is not speaking of active potency but of passive potency. Therefore since the *actuality of a thing* is from another, similarly also the *matter*. *If you say* that [the text] is not to be understood as speaking of the actuality which is the *form* but as speaking of the *efficient cause*, the same thing follows, [namely, that there is an efficient cause prior to the matter and producing it.] — And *further*, I ask why matter is not from another? If because it is the principle out of which everything else is made, and it does not have anything whence it comes to be, then I ask about *form*, whether it is made *out of something else* or *out of nothing (ex nihilo)*. If *out of nothing*, then with equal reason *matter* is also made out of nothing (*ex nihilo*). If *out of something else*, I ask what that something else be. Not the essence of matter. This is established because form is simple; therefore form is not made out of matter in such a way that matter *be* its constitutive principle. Nor is form made out of matter in such a way that matter *becomes* form. Therefore it is made out of something else which is *in matter*. Then I ask, from what is that [other thing which is in matter]? And it is established by the same reasoning that it is not from matter. Therefore either one will proceed to infinity in causation or it is necessary to posit that the essences of forms are produced by the first artisan out of nothing (*ex nihilo*). Therefore by equal reason matter is too.

There are arguments for the other side. First, [arguments drawn] from the *producer*.

Opposing argument 1. The first is this: Every effect is in some way similar to its cause. But the first principle is pure act, having nothing of the possible. The matter of things, however, is pure possibility through its essence, having nothing of actuality. Therefore since matter is in no way similar to the artisan, it is not from Him.

Opposing argument 2. Nothing base and dark proceeds from the most beautiful and luminous agent. But God is beauty itself and light itself, and the material principle is base and dark. Therefore, etc.

On the part of *things* it is shown [that they are not produced] in regards to their *formal principle*:

Opposing argument 3. “For everything which is produced and comes to be, comes to be from something similar to it in name and species, as human being comes to be from human being,” as the Philosopher says in the seventh book of the *Metaphysics*. If therefore the forms of things are principles of producing, and the principle of producing precedes the production of things, therefore things are not produced as regards their *formal principle*.

Opposing argument 4. Again, the artisan cannot produce [anything] unless he knows beforehand [what he is going to produce]; but he cannot know beforehand except through forms [which he has in his mind]. But he is not able to know through forms which do not in any way exist. Therefore it was impossible for the Highest Artisan to form the world unless the forms already existed, through which he knew [what He was going to form.] And those forms similarly could not have been produced except through forms. Therefore if one is not to proceed to

infinity, one must posit that the forms of things are not produced.

Again, this very thing is shown as regards the *material principle*.

Opposing argument 5. “Everything which is produced, is produced out of *something else* or out of *nothing* (*ex nihilo*). But out of nothing nothing comes. Therefore all things are produced out of something else.” That something else, however, is matter. Therefore if one is to come to a stand and not proceed to infinity, matter is not produced. It can be seen that nothing comes to be from nothing. For the production of a thing is an action, but every action requires something on which it acts, therefore also every production does. Therefore there is some subject for every production, and matter is precisely this. Therefore, etc.

Opposing argument 6. Again, I ask about production or *passive creation* [i.e., the attribute of being currently created, as opposed to God’s act of creation], whether that be a *substance* or an *accident*. Not a substance, therefore an *accident*. But every accident is based in something. But it cannot be based in something created, since what is created naturally comes after creation. Therefore it is necessary that it be [based in something] uncreated and different from God, because creation-passion is in something else. Therefore it is necessary that everything which is produced is produced out of something else. And therefore the Philosopher says in the first book of the *Physics* that matter is ungenerated.

#### Conclusion

*The world is produced from nothing both according to its totality and according to its intrinsic principles.*

I RESPOND: It is to be said that this is the truth: that the world has been produced in being, and not only according to its whole self, but also according to its intrinsic principles, which have been produced not out of other things but from nothing. — However, this truth, even if it is now manifest and clear to any faithful person whatsoever, was nevertheless hidden from philosophical wisdom (*prudential philosophiam*), which wandered off the path in the investigation of this question for a long time. For there were certain ancient philosophers who said that the world was made by God and out of His *essence*, because they did not see how something can come to be out of nothing (*ex nihilo*). And only God existed in the beginning, and therefore they said that He made all things out of Himself. — But this position appeared improbable not only to the faithful but even to subsequent philosophers, namely that the wholly invariable and most noble essence of God become the matter of corporeal and variable things, which [namely the matter] is of itself imperfect unless it be perfected by form.

There were also others who said that the world was made out of *preexistent principles*, namely out of matter and form, but the forms were latent in the matter, before Mind distinguished them. Anaxagoras posited this. — But because right reason cannot grasp that all the forms be in [some] matter *at the same time*, therefore this position was disproved by subsequent philosophers.

There was also a third group, which posited a world made out of *preexistent principles*, namely matter and form, but they posited [that] *matter* [exists] in itself, and that *forms* are separate and afterwards are conjoined [to matter] at a certain time by the highest Artisan. And these were the Platonists. — But because it seems unreasonable that matter was imperfect from eternity, and that the same form be equally separate and conjoined, and [because] it seems absurd to posit a threefold human, namely the *natural* [human], *mathematical* [human], and *divine*

[human], therefore this position was also rejected by the subsequent philosophers.

There was also a fourth group, namely the Peripatetics, of whom the prince and leader was Aristotle, which, approaching nearer to the truth, said that the world is *made (factum)*, as one reads in the second book of the *Meteorology*—“I say, therefore, that the sea has been made”—and in the beginning of *On the Heavens and World*, and as one can draw out from many other passages [of Aristotle’s works]. But they said that it is not made out of preexisting principles. For, as [Aristotle] wants to maintain in the first book of *On Plants*, where he speaks against Abrucalis, the world was always full of plants and animals. Whether, however, he held that matter and form are made out of nothing, this I do not know; nevertheless I believe that he did not arrive at this conclusion, as will be better seen in the second question [below]. Therefore he also fell short, although less than the others.

Where, however, the skill of the philosophers falls short, Sacred Scripture aids us, which says that all things have been created and have been produced in being according to everything which they are. And reason also is not discordant with faith, as has been shown above in opposing [the view that creation is not *ex nihilo*, i.e., in arguments 1–6.]

Response to opposing argument 1. In regards to the objection concerning similitude, namely that matter is a being wholly in potency, it is to be said that matter is not made for its own sake, but for the sake of the sustaining of form, which is its act. Therefore although matter be not similar to God in act, nevertheless it is assimilable [to Him] through form. Whence Augustine says that matter itself, even if it have not the act of form of itself and in itself, nevertheless for its very capacity for form takes the place of a form. Therefore that [argument’s solution] is clear.

Response to opposing argument 2. In regards to the objection that what is base, etc., it is to be said that [matter] is called neither base nor dark except by comparison. For matter is not pure privation, nay rather it has by reason of its own essence something of beauty and something of light. Whence Augustine says that it has mode, species, and order, although imperfectly. It is not necessary, however, that God produce all things equally similar to Himself, but rather according to gradation. And therefore, in order that the gradations be complete, it is necessary to posit something near *God*—and this is most similar [to Him]—and something near *nothing* [namely matter], and this is similar [to Him] in some way, although not wholly nor perfectly [similar], insofar as, although it have in itself the least amount of good, it is nevertheless optimally ordered.

Response to opposing arguments 3 & 4. In regards to the objections that everything which is produced *is produced* by something similar in form, and similarly *is known* [by a form of the same kind], it is to be said that there are agents that act by *nature* and ones that act by *intellect*. A *natural* agent produces [things] through forms which exist in reality, as a human [produces] a human [by having a human form], and an ass an ass. An intellectual agent produces through forms which are not anything in reality, but rather ideas in the mind, as when an artisan produces a chest. And things [i.e., the world as a whole] are produced in this way, and in this way the forms of things are eternal, because they are God [because He is His ideas, just as He is His justice.]. And if Plato posited [the existence of Forms] in this way, he is to be commended, and Augustine attributes this view to him. If however he proceeded further [and posited the Forms as existing outside of God’s mind and also separate from matter], as Aristotle attributes to him, without doubt he erred and his argument, which has been stated already, proves nothing at all. For just as the Philosopher shows, the [supposed] Forms of things outside of God and separated from [material] individuals accomplish nothing at all, neither for action nor for knowledge.

Response to argument 5. In regards to the objection about *matter*—namely that matter

cannot come to be because it would have to come to be either out of something else, or out of nothing, [and both are impossible]—it is to be said that matter comes to be out of nothing (*ex nihilo*), and this [happens] through creation. — In regards to the objection that action takes place on something, it is to be said that *to create* is not to act, but *to make*, and this refers [to the difference] between acting and making. For *acting* requires something *on which* one acts, not something *which* one acts, whereas the converse is true for making [i.e., one makes *something*, not *on something*.]

Response to argument 6. In regards to the latter objection, asking in what does creation-passion [i.e., the attribute of being currently created] inhere, the response is twofold. Certain [thinkers] say that it is neither a substance nor an accident, but a way towards both, and such a thing precedes that towards which it is naturally [directed], although it have being in it. — Others say something different, namely that for something to be created is nothing other than now to be for the first time, nor does creation signify any middle nature between God and the creature, but only signifies the *being of a thing* while connoting an order to the first efficient cause by which [it comes to be] and to non-being, in such a way that that order nevertheless inheres totally in the created being, and not in nothing. Hence when it is said that something comes to be from nothing, this can be understood in three ways: either *materially*, as a knife is made from iron, or *causally*, as a son from his father, or *ordinally*, as midday comes to be from morning. In the first two ways it is true that nothing comes to be from nothing. In the third way, however, it is true according to nature, but false supernaturally. For by means of an infinite power, which does not need the support of matter, it is just as easy that something be produced out of nothing (*ex nihilo*) as from something else. Otherwise the power of the first principle would not be infinite, but it would need the foundation of matter. And therefore this is to be attributed of necessity just to that power, although it be not possible that something similar to it be found in anything created. For this is proper to it, just as also omnipotence itself is.