An Apophatic View of God and Creation

Franco Manni

Department of Theology and Religious Studies, King's College London, UK.
E-mail: cosimo.manni@kcl.ac.uk.

Abstract

The English Dominican Herbert McCabe highlighted some ideas of Thomas Aquinas on the knowability of God and on creation, which can usefully challenge some widespread commonplaces. The purposes of this article are two: to present McCabe's sophisticated doctrine on the knowability of God and on creation in a systematic way, and to put this doctrine into its historical context. In the scattered and meagre scholarship on McCabe, both points are missing. In fact, despite being highly praised by leading intellectuals such as Stanley Hauerwas, Alasdair McIntyre, Terry Eagleton, David Burrell, Rowan Williams, Denys Turner, and Eamon Duffy, McCabe has remained widely unknown. According to McCabe, both the American creationists and some atheist scientists believe that God—given that he exists—is a powerful entity within the universe, and thus both the atheist and the creationist expect exactly the same elements in the universe. However, according to McCabe, God does not act like natural causes; he is not an element within the universe and not even the most powerful of all the elements, because he created the universe from nothing and is not part of it.

Keywords: Herbert McCabe, apophaticism, Aquinas, creatio ex nihilo, Richard Dawkins, creationism.

Introduction: Representing God

Herbert McCabe (1926-2001) follows Aquinas's model in dealing with the cause that brought everything else into existence, and particularly

in his emphasis on the *via negativa*. In ancient polytheisms, the gods were given a body and, therefore, their knowability was not a difficult (and important) issue—at least theoretically. Although the three monotheisms do not give God a body, in Western Christianity the most popular idea of God is not actually an idea but an image: an old man with a white beard and a gown who inhabits the clouds in heaven; an image not distant from Phidias' statue of Zeus at Olympia and Michelangelo's creator God in the Sistine Chapel. What ideas are connected with this image? Is God a person? Does God perhaps have a body even though ethereal? Can he make items appear and disappear in and from the world? Is he able to get angry and/or feel compassion? Does he listen to human prayer and change his mind accordingly? Is he able to do literally everything, including what happened in the past? Are there peoples and individuals who are close friends of God and thus endowed with special gifts and powers?

On the other hand, throughout millennia, philosophy also engaged in this quest for the Absolute, which people called "God," in various ways, and did so while almost always distancing itself from those ideas which refer to that image. Here I point to that particular strand which, starting from Alexander of Aphrodisias and coming to Hegel, Feuerbach, and Karl R. Popper, suggests that the closest thing to the Absolute is actually human reason itself and its major scientific and philosophical achievements.

However, the most influential Christian theologian, Thomas Aquinas, tried to show that the ideas we can truly refer to God present him as so much "other" that, to use the words of a commentator of Aquinas, such "otherness has itself lost its threads of straightforward continuity with any conception of 'otherness' of which we do know the how" (Turner 2004, 42).

In his philosophical theology, McCabe criticizes the idolatry of the polytheism which did not emancipate itself from images and thus presents "gods" who suffer from three weaknesses: they perpetuate a warped vision of the nature of things (e.g., that lightning comes from Zeus and the sunshine from a divine chariot which travels throughout the sky), legitimize the power of some human groups, and provoke suffering in their worshippers (McCabe 2005b, 32). By contrast, some monotheistic theologians have conceived an idea of God, mostly a "not knowing," according to which those three errors could not or should not occur, because from such an idea of God nothing can be said about the world and its structure, be it hierarchical or not (Mccabe 2013, 385).

We realize this incapacity to explain (and control) the world starting from our alleged ideas of God, because of a Western theological tradition, which quite apophatically says of God: "That-without-which-there-would-be-nothing-at-all" (Mccabe 2013, 386).

Tradition and Mentors

Aquinas is not just the intellectual hero of McCabe; in fact, he is also the saint who is such "not by what he does and achieves, but by his acceptance of failure" as a true disciple of Jesus, who was abandoned by his friends and crucified. Since Aquinas was an intellectual, his "sanctity of mind" lies:

> not in the many questions he marvelously, excitingly answered, but in the one where he failed, the question he did not and could not answer and refused to pretend to answer. As Jesus saw that to refuse the defeat of the cross would be to betray his whole mission, all that he was sent for, so Thomas knew that to refuse to accept defeat about this one question would be to betray all that he had to do, his mission. And this question was the very one he started with, the one he asked as a child: What is God? (McCabe 2005a, 194)

In fact, Aquinas often underlines that human mind—thereby both reason and faith—is not able to know the nature (essence, *quidditas*) of God: since we cannot know what God is in himself, we should search for what he is not more than for what he is (ST, I, qu. 3, premium). We cannot know him directly, but only by the representations which come from the perfections existing in his creatures. Those representations provide us with the so called "names of God" (ST, I, qu. 13, art. 2). However, McCabe observes (rightly, as we will see below) that this philosophical position has been obscured and put in the background by many Thomists such that the readers of their handbooks and the students of their lectures are not aware of it (McCabe 2005a, 40).

As for McCabe, he avoided this confusion because he had received this apophatic emphasis from his teacher at Blackfriars Studium in Oxford,[1] Victor White,[2] whose major theological work is titled *God the Unknown* but is better known nowadays for his correspondence with Carl G. Jung.

In fact, on the one hand, Alexander of Aphrodisias and his Renaissance followers thought that the Aristotelian Active Intellect was God himself. The eighteenth century European Enlightenment on this very point (i.e., the limits of human reason) strikingly disagreed; in fact, the great Enlightenment philosophers such as Voltaire, Hume, and Kant strongly highlighted the limits of reason more than its power. However, this confusion between God and man was recalled and increased in their polemics against the *philosophes* by the nineteenth century German Idealists, especially by Hegel, who maintained that the Absolute Spirit (that is, the human achievements) was God himself, the God whom

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1. As Ryan (2007, 309) reported and as I heard from Fr Simon Gaine, the current regent at Blackfriars and a former student of McCabe.
2. See an accurate presentation of his intellectual life in Nichols (1997, 53 ff.).

Aristotle named "Thought Thinking Itself." [1] Afterwards, not surprisingly, his "left-wing" follower Ludwig Feuerbach inaugurated the modern atheism while maintaining the same Hegelian premise—the equalization of human mind with God—but denying the existence of an Absolute, or God.

On the other hand, we can trace a "tradition" of apophatic thinkers throughout the centuries: Clement of Alexandria, Pseudo-Dionysius, Thomas Aquinas, Meister Eckart, and Saint John of the Cross. Also, in the second half of the nineteenth century, within Catholic theology, there was the inception of Neo-Thomism. This renewed study of Aquinas gradually brought up a rediscovery of that author's apophaticism: a sharp distinction between human mind and God.

However, this development was not immediate. If we read the 1914 *Twenty-four Theses*, written by the most authoritative Thomist philosophers of that time and approved by the proper Vatican commission, we see that, on the one hand, there is no hint at all to the apophatic *via negativa*/*remotionis* and, on the other hand, there is an explicit claim that we human beings have a certain notion of God's essence (*Acta Apostolicae Sedis* Vl [1914], 38386; VII [1916], 15758). A few years later, we get the passages on the knowability of God in two handbooks of Neo-Thomistic philosophy, which were quite widespread in the Catholic colleges of the first half of the twentieth century, one written by Cardinal Mercier (1917, 2:62) and the other one by Reginald Garrigou-Lagrange (1949, 1:228; 2:3). While reading these passages, we can realize how much the apophatic power of Aquinas' texts had been clearly unperceived yet by their exegetes, as we will see in more detail below.

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1. In his *Encyclopedia of Philosophical Sciences*, Hegel ends his treatise on the history of *human* theoretical activities quoting in Greek that very passage from Aristotle.

In particular, still in the sixties in the anglophone world, the Catholic colleges prescribed the handbook written by Richard P. Phillips (1934, vol. 2, Metaphysics), as we are told by an eyewitness, Fergus Kerr (2002, 20). In Phillips' handbook, reading the chapter "The Nature of God," we do not receive really a clear-cut teaching: on the one hand, Phillips accurately reports that Aquinas is as far from agnosticism as he is from anthropomorphism and that we cannot reach any "quiddative" knowledge of God, but, on the other hand, he writes that we cannot be entirely ignorant of the nature of God if we want to give some sense to the proofs of his existence. Moreover, Phillips looks for a "formal constituent of the Divine Nature" and, without further verbal caution, finds it in "subsisting existence" (Phillips 1934, 2:303-7).

Before WWII, a new current appeared within Neo-Thomism, which was advocated by Maritain, Sertillanges, and Gilson and was later called "Existential Thomism." This current showed more awareness of human reason's limits. Jacques Maritain was not a specialist of medieval philosophy, and there is no clear endorsement of Aquinas' apophaticism in his works (see Maritain 1958; 1952, chap. 7), but there is no claim either about the knowability of God's nature (Maritain 1921, 186).

Étienne Gilson more clearly underlined the apophatic spirit of Aquinas' philosophical theology:

> [We know just what God is not;] the only way of circumscribing his nature is therefore to remove successively from our notion of him all the modes of existing which cannot be his. ... [T]o say what god is *omnino ignotum* ... is to affirm that all knowledge, perfect or imperfect, of the essence of God is radically inaccessible here below. (Gilson 1957, 87, 107)

Gilson criticized Cajetan, whom he contrasted with John of Saint Thomas, often argued with Garrigou-Lagrange, and esteemed Antonin

D. Sertillanges (Murphy 2004, 61), who for his part had written even more radically: "We do not know in any way, by any means, to any degree what God is. ... all that can be said about God is false" (quoted in Bonansea 1980, 5-17).

We know that Victor White, Thomist mentor of McCabe, "was especially indebted to Pére Antonin-Dalmace Sertillanges' *Sant Thomas d'Aquin et son Oeuvre*" (Nichols 1997, 63), and McCabe, for his part, used to say that he did not want to be called "Thomist," but the Thomist he quotes most (and gratefully) is Gilson.[1]

Moreover, McCabe's first philosophical mentor, Dorothy Emmet, who taught McCabe at Manchester University prior to his joining the Dominicans, quotes Gilson's *God and Philosophy* extensively in her book on Metaphysics and writes:

> Can we go on to say anything about absolute being beyond that 'He is'? … Can we say not only *an sit* but *quid sit*? … [D]o the transcendentals [*ens, res, unum, aliquid, verum, bonum*] take us any further about the nature of the *ens realissimum* than we were in saying simply that 'It is'? We can say that is is what it is, and is distinguished from what it is not. But this does not tell us anything about its character (quid sit) …? If the analogy of proportionality cannot tell us the modality of the properties of uncreated being, does it in fact tell us anything? … [Those properties] will not tell us the proper essence of absolute being … We may even go so far as to say that the analogy of proportionality leans towards an agnostic rather than an anthropomorphic conception of the nature of God … [I]t does not enable us to select certain properties as especially characteristic of God. (Emmet 1945, 174-79).

Therefore, it is not a generic reading of Aquinas that influences McCabe via White and Emmet, but the particular reading that

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1. Once in *God Matters* (2005a), and once in *God Still Matters* (2005b).

underlines the unknowability of God. Between the two World Wars, a similar idea was much spread by the Protestant theologian Karl Barth; for instance, White says that Barth was surprised in seeing how much Catholics embraced his ideas of "the absolute otherness of the content of revelation accepted by faith as compared with any apprehension of the Divine attainable without God's gracious revelation" (White 1956, 6). However, what arrives to McCabe is still a Thomism, and, therefore, a teaching in favor of philosophical (or "natural") theology, different from Barthian position.

On the other hand, although human reason allows to build a philosophical theology, we clearly need to define its limits:

> it is impossible to know God's essence, nature or 'whatness' ... [S]ome Thomists watered this idea and said that it is possible to know the divine nature in a sort of 'non-quidditative' way ... but Pere Sertillanges stressed that Aquinas was categorical: we do not know the divine nature at all! ... [W]e can know that God is, even though we cannot know what his existence means. (White 1956, 16, 18).

However, White, outside from any reactionary fundamentalism, maintains that this acknowledgement of reason's limits is not an irrationalistic and fideistic opening; rather, it makes the theologian a travel companion of the scientists. Nowadays sciences discover new aspects of nature that make it more mysterious, and the same happens for our knowledge of God: the more we know about God, the more inadequate we find what we knew about him. On the other hand,

> the more we are sure we have grasped God and that he conforms to our image of him, the less shall we be inclined to penetrate further into the unexplored realms of nature and grace … [T]he fixed image petrifies and stultifies his worshipper into his own likeness, inhibiting his growth and preventing further knowledge of both God and its works. (White 1956, 24)

The theologian is also a travel companion of any serious atheist: "Much apparent atheism can be motivated by a genuine, if not fully conscious, appreciation of and reverence for the divine transcendence" (White 1956, 47). This kind of Thomism came down from White to McCabe.

White and McCabe on How to Study God

Since God is the center of theology, which is supposed to speak about God, and possibly to know something about God, it is worth taking a look at what White and McCabe thought about the theologian's task.

"What is theology?" White wondered and provocatively answered that for many theologians "nowadays theology is not a personal reflection on God, but is just memorising what the other theologians said" (White 1956, 3), a claim which is true, even though one-sided and simplistic. Certainly, McCabe, who was not an academic nor a graduate student (Davis 2016) and not keen on publishing, was immune to the temptation of piling up unnecessary erudition and the temptation of flattering his colleagues and, in the wake of Aquinas, thought that the proper task of theology was to hand down what is known both of God and of man, who comes from God and returns to him (ST, I, qu. 2, premium).

White holds that the general purpose of theology is to understand something of what we already believe by faith ("*fides quaerens intellectum*") (White 1956, 4), and its main method is "deductive": it reasons from truths of faith into their hidden implications—for instance, from Jesus Christ being a true man to see that he has a human heart and human imagination (White 1956, 13). McCabe, for his part, deduced a lot of conclusions of this kind in his writings on revealed theology.

However, as for his "apophatic" philosophical theology, McCabe's main purpose was "not concerned with trying to say what God is but in trying to stop us talking nonsense" (McCabe 2005a, 316).[1] Therefore, it is necessary to avoid mistakes, which, in this case, are not "factual" but rather "nonsense"—that is, affirmations which are logically inconsistent with the ideas we can conceive about God, starting from our observation of worldly reality. For example, if we hold that God is pure act, then we cannot think of him as changeable; moreover, if he is unchangeable, he cannot suffer. Therefore, if we believe at the same time in his unchangeability and sufferance, we believe in nonsense. However, such (nonsensical) affirmations are not usually perceived as inconsistent; since our desire for representing God with images is a steady drive within us and our longing for knowledge is powerful, we can fall into maintaining that we know even though we do not know.

However, "[i]mages are not substitutes for hard thinking," McCabe replies. Nevertheless, while taking account of both our most common daily experiences and Aristotle's epistemology, he also adds that we are animals and therefore *forced* to use images in order to conceive even the most abstract thought. For instance, when we try to conceive *thoughts* about creation, we are forced to represent *images*, say, of the potter who molds the pot, and, in this case, the image is very misleading, because both the potter and the pot are worldly items and therefore interact each other, whereas God (1) is not an item of the world and (2) cannot be external to or alongside the world (he is not "alongside," because he is not "other" in the same way in which the things in the world are "other" than one another). As to the "government of the world" (*providentia*), McCabe, certainly and literally inspired by Sigmund Freud, observes that we imagine God as a maniacal controller of all world's events, like a non-

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1. We could notice that this characteristic sentence is modelled after that which the anglophone analytical philosophers used to describe the philosopher's task.

adult human persona, a non-grown up parent who needs to control his/her children, an "omnipotent new-born." Elsewhere, McCabe says that we imagine God as a Top Person or Big Boss in the universe, while he does not belong to the universe and does not in principle interfere with it (McCabe 2005a, 15, 14, 46, 18, 59).

Therefore, since our mind has a radically sense-based structure, when we have to speak of God, our priority must be to state what God *is not*.

The Fundamental Premise: "Starting from the World"

According to McCabe (and Aquinas), in the same way that the proof for the existence of God is a posteriori [1] (that is, it does not start from an alleged idea of God but from our experience of the world and of some problematic issues such as change, contingency, finality, etc.), our inquiry on the nature of God starts from the world as well: "We know how to talk about God, not because of any understanding of God, but because of what we know about his creatures" (McCabe 2006, 104). The validity of our questions about the world, which is based on the validity of our knowledge of the world, gives validity to our questions about God and our knowledge of him (McCabe 2005a, 3); "what governs our use of the word 'God' is not an understanding of what God is but the validity of a question about the world" (McCabe 2005a, 6).

This a posteriori argument is opposed to theological apriorism, which holds that we know what God is (the Anselmian "*id quod maius cogitari nequit*") and recognizes that "*in hac vita*" (or, at least, "*in hac*

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1. My Italian Neo-Thomist mentor, Sofia Vanni Rovighi, often used to repeat the following sentence from her Neo-Thomist mentor, Amato Masnovo: "In philosophy, God is always a predicate and never a subject."

die") we do not know God yet, but perhaps we could know him in some future ahead of us *("in vita aeterna,"* or *"in alia postera die"*).[1]

This is the fundamental premise: in order to know God, or, better said, to be able to talk of God with true statements, we need to search the worldly beings first, as Aquinas says: "[A]lthough we do not know what God is, we nevertheless employ his effects of grace and nature ... using an effect instead of a definition of the cause" (quoted in White 1956, 45).

"Via negativa"

Augustine said, "*melius scitur nesciendo,*" and also, "si comprehendis non est Deus," because God is "*aliud, aliud valde.*" Aquinas, too, after having proved the existence of God, says that we cannot know what God is, but rather what he is not (ST, I, qu 3 proemium). In recent times, pope Benedict XVI recalled as an important truth what was established at the Fourth Lateran Council: any similarity between the creator and creatures is characterized by an even greater dissimilarity (Benedict XVI 2007, n. 43).

However, it is not easy to realize that the attributes ascribed to God by Aquinas and the tradition after him (such as simple, perfect, good, infinite, eternal, one) are actually negations: non-composed, non-lacking, non-caused, non-univocal cause, non-finite, non-changeable, non-plural. If these negations were understood as affirmations, it would seem to us that we know what God is rather than what he is not, just as our minds could "see" simplicity, perfection, or immutability, whereas in reality human minds can only experience what is composed, lacking, and changeable.

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1. Moreover, we are more open to the Revelation and its striking paradoxes. In fact, the Anselmian "*id quod maius cogitari nequit*" sharply contrasts with Jesus' crucifixion.

In reality, we give God these attributes to specify that "X"—which is needed in order to take away some contradictions from our mundane experience—cannot be conceived as if itself had those contradictory characteristics. For example, in the first proof, the change present in one given thing is not contradictory only if there is *another* thing which moves the former, but since the chain of moved things and movers cannot be infinite, there must be something which moves without change; if this "something" (this "X"—that is, God) was changeable, it could not work as a contradiction-solver.

This negative way of speaking of God is a sort of "getting used" to understanding that that "X" is *other* than the world; we become accustomed through many consecutive analytical removals of the mundane characteristics.

Moreover, God does not explain the events of the world, because he is not a cause which works inside the world; there is no fact or phenomenon inside the world which can make us say that it is caused by God, because, if it was so, God would be an item of the world and of its chain of causes and effects. On the contrary, if God is the reason because of which everything else exists, he is not part of everything (McCabe 2005a, 6):

> So everything-plus-God is not any greater than everything just by itself (or themselves). If this is paradoxical it is because we have illegitimately used the phrase 'everything-plus-God'. You can only add together things that share some common nature or at least belong to some common class. You could add another egg to the clutch because they are all eggs ... But you can only add if you can find some way in which the items have something in common. What we have to do is to say that God has nothing in common with things. (McCabe 2013, 388)

What McCabe tells us here is worth recalling, because, while understanding that God is *not* part of the world, we realize also that he is not a particular cause in it, and, therefore, he cannot explain any effect or phenomenon within the world: all the particular effects/phenomena in the world are explained just by the natural and social sciences, and never by theology.

While following the "*via negative*" ("*via remotionis*"), we avoid making false statements about God, but we do not succeed in knowing what God is: interestingly, McCabe observes that some readers of Aquinas, who writes that God never changes, could think that God is static, and, if they read that God cannot suffer, they could think that God is blunt or careless. However, McCabe objects, this is a mistake similar to the one we could make if we thought that, since God is not a fan of the Glasgow Celtic, he is a fan of the Glasgow Rangers (McCabe 2005a, 41). McCabe suggests that God could be neither a Glasgow football team fan nor a football fan at all, but we are not allowed to deduce any one of these conclusions from the mere negative sentence "He is not a fan of the Glasgow Celtic," because all of them are possible in principle.

So far, we have explored the "*via negativa*" coming to McCabe from Aquinas via White. However, since many Thomists underestimated this apophaticism of Aquinas and tended to forget it, perhaps it is worth recalling that what distinguishes apophatic Thomists from non-apophatic Thomists is a relationship with the Enlightenment and, in particular, with Kant. Speaking about Kant, who in his first *Critique* had well warned against the illusion of understanding things which in reality we are not able to understand—Fergus Kerr quoted Donald McKinnon, according to whom Kant had transformed the concept of agnosticism: from Kant onwards agnosticism is not seen anymore as a

> regret that we cannot jump out of our cognitive skins ... on the contrary has certain kinship with the *via negativa* of classical theology, a purification of our concepts from the vary taint of anthropomorphism, to the intent that we may at least see what it is that, in our attempt to use of these concepts to scrutinise the unconditioned, we are attempting. (Kerr 2002, 23)

This apophatic theology allows us to rebuke both Dawkins's atheism and American creationism.

Richard Dawkins on the Argument from Design

In his book *The God Delusion* (2006), after discussing and rejecting some of the most common arguments for the existence of God, Richard Dawkins concludes that the argument from design is the most powerful, because (1) one of the greatest challenges to the human intellect has been to explain how the complexities of some natural phenomena could have arisen given their improbability, and (2) because it is natural to compare an eye, a wing, or a spider to a man-made artifact and think of a superhuman designer, God, as it is obvious that in the case of an artifact, such as a watch, the designer was indeed an intelligent human being.

Dawkins comments that this, in a nutshell, is the creationist's favorite argument—an argument that can convince only someone who does not understand the main characteristics of natural selection, its simplicity, its necessity, and its slowness. This argument, if well analyzed, is unable to prove the existence of a designer God, because if such an entity existed, it would be more complex than the designed universe and therefore would require a designer-of-the-designer into a progressum ad infinitum. Because of this, contrary to what these Christians expect, this argument is a proof for the non-existence of such a Designer—that is, of God (Dawkins 2006, 111-33).

Since Dawkins claimed that this was the most powerful argument presented by Christians in general, when he uses the word "creationists," he believes that their view is representative of a much larger group—that is, the majority of Christians, if not all of them, and also all the followers of Abrahamic religions.

We can agree with him to some extent, because we recognize that the argument from design is popular among Christians. However, we should notice that there is also an "apophatic" theological tradition, held by the three Abrahamic religions, which provides rational arguments that support a paramount biblical message: although we human beings can be grateful for the amazing features of the world, we must not think that we are able to understand God's thoughts, plans, or "design": his paths are not our paths.

McCabe's Critique

The first and main point is that we cannot know what God is, so we do not know his knowledge, his will, or his intentions; therefore, we do not know his "design": it is true that evolution is unpredictable (whereas, by definition, a "design" predicts), but God's design (God's knowledge, God's intentions, God's will) is unknowable and unpredictable as well. According to McCabe, "what we say about the world compels us to make certain [negative] statements about God, but no statement about God entails any statement about the world" (McCabe 2010, 68). For example, from the analogical attribute of "intelligence" in God, we cannot say anything about an intelligent order or design within the world; the very reason why we cannot is that we are not able to understand what the intelligence of God means.

From the creator God we do not get any information about nature; if we got anything, it would be just our mind's anthropomorphic projections at first onto an anthropomorphic God, and then from that anthropomorphic God onto the natural world. However, creation does

not say anything about the origin of the universe; for example, the Big Bang is fascinating but irrelevant to creation. When we say that God created the world, there still remains the scientific question about what kind of world it is and how it began, if ever (McCabe 2005a, 7-8).

The second point is that creation is a unique cause.[1] Differently from all the other causes, creation does not make any changes in the world (McCabe 2007, 61). Between the creator and creatures, there is the tension between God who is existence and creatures who have existence, whereas between creatures and their natural causes, which are themselves creatures, there is just the strain between potentiality and actuality (McCabe 2005b, 20).

McCabe says that, in contrast to making, creation does not imply any real change from potentiality to actuality (in fact, the "nothing" is not potential to something); nevertheless, our mind considers it *as if* it were a change, because our mind is inadequate, and thus we cannot understand what this particular kind of making means (ST, I, qu. 44, art. 2). However, we understand one kind of making, which is to generate; for instance, when dog Fido is born, it does not change; in fact, prior to its birth, there is no Fido apt to change, but both the active and passive features in its parents do change and, moreover, the world changes, since previously it really had the potential to include Fido.

One difference between creation and causality among creatures is, therefore, that the latter works within a world where every effect is potential: potentiality is there because other things already exist (McCabe 2010, 97). Instead, creation is "ex nihilo"— that is, "not out of anything" that already exists and can change.

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1. Generically defined, cause is a person or thing that acts, happens, or exists in such a way that some specific thing happens as a result; the producer of an effect.

Moreover, ex nihilo (not out of anything) is actually the world, which is created together with what it contains—that is, everything:

> God made everything' or 'God makes everything' sounds harmless enough at first, but let us look at some of the implications. In the first place, if God made everything, God cannot be included in everything. God cannot be one of the beings that go to make up everything. (McCabe 2010, 388)

Thus, according to this doctrine, God is not alongside the world, but we are not able to hold a proper concept of creation and need to build an imaginary pattern representing the creator God and the created universe alongside each other.

The third point is that since God's act of creation does not make changes, it does not leave traces. Therefore, the improbable complexity highlighted by the argument from design is not at all a detection of God's action among natural causes. McCabe criticizes the "theism" of the argument from design, which suggests that it is possible to find traces of God within creation (order, complexity, ingenuity, etc.). According to McCabe, both the theist and the atheist believe that God—if he exists—is the most powerful entity in the universe, and thus "this atheist and the theist will expect to see exactly the same features" within the universe (e.g., ingenuity, peculiar and unexpected changes, and purpose). The difference is that the atheist, while investigating the universe, is not able to find such a powerful entity and thus denies the existence of God and of his creative activity, whereas the theist claims the opposite (McCabe 2007, 75-77).

What is created—that is, what exists because the whole universe exists—does not have any "created" characteristics that could enable us to detect any activity by the creator. There is no quality like "being a creature": the fact that things are created does not leave any traces in them (McCabe 2013, 389). To be created means to exist from nothing,

and an existing thing does not have different qualities in comparison with a non-existing thing. All the other causes do make differences in the world, but God does not: he makes things precisely as they are, the world as it is. You can say that a hurricane has been there, but you cannot say that God has been there, since there are no detectable traces of God. Therefore, the argument from design is false, because you cannot say, "Look how the world is like (orderly, complicated, ingenuous, etc.), so it must have been made by God." You cannot say that this particular world that exists has or had to be made by God. You cannot say that this sort of world must exist instead of others (McCabe 2007, 75).

Conclusion

The first result of these points is the autonomy of sciences. McCabe observes that, strangely enough, creationism itself is opposed to creation, because it makes God an agent inside the universe and thus a replacement of science (McCabe 2005b, 34), whereas a correct philosophical theology permits a science that is freed from mental prejudices and, therefore, as true as it can be. God is not a causal explanation of the world; to explain the world's events, it is enough to have sciences. "One who thinks of God as the explanation of the world has not grasped the absolute transcendence of God" (McCabe 2010, 69) and has not grasped either God's freedom as the creator. McCabe quotes Aquinas: "All depend on God's will as primary cause, a cause which transcends the distinction between must and might not" (McCabe 2007, 77), whereas some theists think that from the point of view of God's causation (and not from the point of view of the natural causes!), some effects must be instead of others (e.g., the development from simple forms of life to more complex forms of life).

However, we need an explanation for the existence of the world itself; that is, how is that there is a causal explanation in it. In other words, God should not be mentioned in scientific explanations, but we need God in order for scientific explanation to exist. We need God because the scientific explanations are adequate, not because they are inadequate (McCabe 2007, 64-65).

The second result is a powerful argument against the "new atheism" of Dawkins, because Dawkins tends to regard all Christians as creationists. McCabe shows that Aquinas and himself are Christians and are right, but they reject the argument from design. Therefore, Dawkins' argument against the creator God is wrong, because the Christian God is not the one believed in by the creationists and disproved by Dawkins.

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