

ALL THAT IS IN GOD

*Evangelical Theology and the Challenge of
Classical Christian Theism*

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CHAPTER 1

Models of Theism

Two distinctly different models of Christian theism are presently vying for the heart and mind of evangelical Christianity. The approach of classical Christian theism is what one discovers in older Protestant confessions such as the Belgic Confession, Thirty-Nine Articles of Religion, Westminster Confession of Faith, and Second London Confession of Faith. This approach is basically in keeping with the view of God as found in the works of patristic and medieval Christian theologians such as Athanasius, Augustine, Anselm, and Aquinas. It is marked by a strong commitment to the doctrines of divine aseity, immutability, impassibility, simplicity, eternity, and the substantial unity of the divine persons. The underlying and inviolable conviction is that God does not derive any aspect of His being from outside Himself and is not in any way caused to be.

In contrast to this older view of a radically independent, simple, and purely actual God stands the newer approach of theistic mutualism,¹ called by some “theistic personalism.”² In an effort to portray God as

1. “Mutualism,” as I am using the term, denotes a symbiotic relationship in which both parties derive something from each other. In such a relation, it is requisite that each party be capable of being ontologically moved or acted upon and thus determined by the other. This does not necessarily require parity between the parties involved. Accordingly, a mutualistic relation could obtain even if only one of the parties involved were the architect and ultimate regulator of the relation.

2. The label “theistic personalism” appears to be the coinage of Brian Davies. See *An Introduction to the Philosophy of Religion*, 3rd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 2–16. I have chosen to use the term “mutualism” instead of “personalism” simply for the sake of clarity. Davies’s objection to theistic personalism is at its heart an objection to the mutualism that seems to be entailed in all univocist understandings

more relatable, theistic mutualists insist that God is involved in a genuine give-and-take relationship with His creatures. Theistic mutualists may disagree among themselves on precisely how much control God has over the give-and-take process, but all agree that God is somehow involved in such an exchange. Edward Feser explains that the proponent of this newer theistic outlook ordinarily “objects to the notion of God as immutable, impassible, and eternal—finding it too cold and otherworldly, and incompatible with a literal reading of various biblical passages—and typically has philosophical objections to the notion of divine simplicity.”³ Feser identifies modern philosophers such as Alvin Plantinga and Richard Swinburne as advocates of this approach. Theistic mutualism is committed to univocal thinking and speaking with regard to God and the world and thus conceives God as interacting with the world in some way like humans do, even if on a much grander scale.⁴

The orbit of theistic mutualism extends well beyond the realm of philosophy. It also appears in the writings of several evangelical theologians, perhaps most conspicuously in those of the open theist

of the term “person.” David Bentley Hart calls the mutualist conception of God “monopolytheism” since, as he explains,

it seems to involve a view of God not conspicuously different from the polytheistic picture of the gods as merely very powerful discrete entities who possess a variety of distinct attributes that lesser entities also possess, if in smaller measure; it differs from polytheism...solely in that it posits the existence of only one such being. It is a way of thinking that suggests that God, since he is only a particular instantiation of various concepts and properties, is logically dependent on some more comprehensive reality embracing both him and other beings.

The Experience of God: Being, Consciousness, Bliss (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2013), 127–28. Hart rightly characterizes, in my opinion, what is inevitably involved in all univocist views of God.

3. Edward Feser, “Classical Theism,” *Edward Feser* (blog), September 30, 2010, <http://edwardfeser.blogspot.com/2010/09/classical-theism.html>.

4. Univocist approaches to thinking and speaking about God necessarily conceive of God’s being as existing (in some respect) within the same order of being as that of creatures and thus as existentially correlative to them. A God who can be moved or affected by His creatures, even if only in accord with His choice to be so moved or affected, is such a God.

persuasion.⁵ Less obvious perhaps is how deeply theistic mutualism has taken root in the thinking of many who adhere to the older Protestant confessions. Theologians within the various confessional branches of evangelicalism—usually Calvinists—have been among the most vociferous opponents of openness theology, in particular with regard to the question of divine exhaustive foreknowledge.⁶ Nevertheless, many of them share with open and process theists the theistic mutualist belief that God's being is such that He is capable of being moved by His creatures. There are undoubtedly many reasons for this adherence to theistic mutualism among modern evangelical Calvinists, and it is not my purpose in this volume to investigate each of these reasons. Suffice it to say that confessional Calvinists who uphold any aspect of theistic mutualism are faced with the peculiar and perhaps insurmountable challenge of reconciling their mutualist understanding of the God-world relation with the language and intent of the classical Reformed creeds.

It should be noted that there are both hard and soft versions of theistic mutualism. The harder sort regards God as a person who allows other beings to function as first causes or absolute originators of actions, events, or objects and who Himself stands as an onlooker within creation, susceptible to an increase in knowledge. Hard theistic mutualism also tends to regard God as needing the world in some respect; thus, He is compelled to create and sustain it. It is this harder theistic mutualism that is espoused by open theists and process theists. Soft theistic mutualism, in contrast, tends to hold that God does not create the world by dint of absolute necessity; neither does He need the world in any significant sense. Moreover, many soft theistic mutualists do not believe that God is intellectually open or in process of development. Indeed, many who subscribe to the softer

5. See Clark Pinnock et al., *The Openness of God: A Biblical Challenge to the Traditional Understanding of God* (Downers Grove, Ill.: IVP, 1994). See also Clark H. Pinnock, *Most Moved Mover: A Theology of God's Openness* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2001).

6. See, for example, Bruce A. Ware, "Defining Evangelicalism's Boundaries Theologically: Is Open Theism Evangelical?," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 45 (June 2002): 193–212.

variety of mutualism have stood firmly against intellectual and volitional “becoming” in God. They maintain that God neither learns nor depends on creation for His knowledge and that His will is not changed by the actions of creatures. Nevertheless, they do allow for a measure of ontological becoming and process in God. This is to the extent that they—along with the harder theistic mutualists—insist that God undergoes changes in relation and in those alleged intellectual and emotive states of His that are thought to correlate to His changing relations with creatures. This ontological openness to being changed by creatures, whether initiated by God or by creatures themselves, is the common denominator in all forms of theistic mutualism. Theistic mutualists may disagree among themselves on precisely how much process and development to allow in God or even over what the ultimate source or cause of such development might be. But all hold to a divine ontology that allows for God to acquire and shed actuality of being.

At first glance, the moniker “theistic mutualism” (or “theistic personalism”) seems harmless enough. Perhaps it is even attractive insofar as orthodox Christians believe in a God who subsists as three persons in relation and who lovingly calls us into the joy of personal fellowship with Him.⁷ No doubt patristic, medieval, Reformation, and Puritan theologians held forth the glorious prospect of the sinner’s reconciliation to God and the benediction of unbroken fellowship with Him in glory. Theistic mutualists recognize that classical Christian theists believe such things. They are not convinced, however, that the traditional emphasis upon a wholly unchanging, simple, and purely actual God is sufficient to deliver such blessings to us. They think that if God cannot change or be affected by the world in any way, then our relationship to Him seems overly one-sided and thus rather impersonal and nondynamic. Furthermore, the Bible depicts God as ensconced within our history as one whose relationship with humans plays out along the same temporal lines as relationships between human persons—loving and merciful at one moment (Ex. 3:7–9), grieved and angry at another (Ex. 32:9–10; Ezek. 16:42–43), turning away from

7. See John 3:16; 17:3, 21; and 1 John 1:3: “And truly our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ.”

man and returning to man in mercy and reconciliation (Ex. 32:14; Ps. 80:19; Mal. 3:7). These are the components that make personal relationships truly personal, are they not? From the viewpoint of theistic mutualism, such dynamic reciprocity and mutuality seem to call for an overhaul of the well-intentioned, if misguided, classical emphasis upon a God who cannot change in any way whatsoever. Intended to replace the older strong account of an absolutely unchangeable God, the newer doctrine makes space for mutual give-and-take with God in an interpersonal way. The nineteenth-century German Lutheran theologian Isaak August Dorner expresses this revisionist outlook with pointed clarity:

We will have to teach the following: that not only does humanity change in its relation to God, but the living relations of God to humanity...also undergo changes, as both are manifest in the world. And if we establish this point, then the concept of God is not merely the wooden concept of the highest being, but the vital absolute personality that stands in a living relation of mercy and love to the life of the worlds and its changing needs and conditions. Without reciprocity between God and world such vital relations would have no authentic reality.⁸

Dorner is particularly insistent that for God to stand in an authentic, loving relation to the world, He must be open to human action and influence upon Him. He continues, "It is also to be said further that the relation of love between God and man must be a *reciprocal relation*, as this is required by the nature of love. Consequently, it is to be taught that God *himself*, who on the side of generating power remains eternally the sole original principle, enters the realm of the ethical or love in a reciprocal relation; *yes, God enters into a relation of mutual and reciprocal influence.*"⁹

But should the newer ideal of a mutually interactive, give-and-take relationship with God be allowed to eclipse or adjust the claims of classical Christian theism? The concern from the classical perspective

8. Isaak August Dorner, *Divine Immutability: A Critical Reconsideration*, trans. Robert R. Williams and Claude Welch (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1994), 110.

9. Dorner, *Divine Immutability*, 148.

is that theistic mutualists have made human personal relations, which are irreducibly correlative, the paradigm for understanding all meaningful relations. To the extent that theistic mutualists believe God to exist in such a relationship with the world, they appear to undermine His perfection and fullness of being. In short, God has been reconceived as deriving some aspects of His being in correlation with the world, and this can be nothing less than a depredation of His fullness of life and existential absoluteness.

Some adherents to the classical view regard the mutualist account of the God-world relation as advancing an idolatrous form of theism insomuch as it locates the being of God inescapably within the order of finite beings, even if it still affirms that He is the greatest being in that order. The Anglican theologian E. L. Mascall argues that a God who derives any actuality of His being from His creatures—which the God of theistic mutualism necessarily does—could not possibly be the first cause of all creation. This is because He would “provide a foundation neither for himself nor for anything else.” Mascall concludes, “Unless we are prepared to accept the God of classical theism, we may as well be content to do without a God at all.”¹⁰ Catholic theologian Herbert McCabe notifies us that “there has been a deplorable and idolatrous tendency on the part of some Christians to diminish God. In order that God may *stand in relationship* with his creatures, he is made one of them, a member of the universe, subject to change and even disappointment and suffering.”¹¹ He deems this mutualist understanding to be a “false and idolatrous picture of God” because it unavoidably considers Him to be “an inhabitant of the universe, existing alongside his creatures.”¹² More recently, the Eastern Orthodox scholar David Bentley Hart has insisted that any proposed alternative to the God of classical theism “can never be more than an idol: a god, but not God; a *theos*, but not *ho Theos*; a being, not Being in its transcendent

10. E. L. Mascall, *He Who Is: A Study in Traditional Theism* (London: Longmans, Green, 1943), 96.

11. Herbert McCabe, *God Matters* (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1987), 18. Emphasis original.

12. McCabe, *God Matters*, 11.

fullness.”¹³ The reason for these strong objections to mutualist understandings of God is that such a God is inevitably mutable and finite and as such is unworthy of worship. This unhappy verdict is not meant to attack the intentions of theistic mutualists. Many seem to have been unwittingly caught up into the mutualistic way of thinking about God, wholly unaware of its idolatrous implications.

In the chapters that follow, I aim to spotlight the conflict between the classical and mutualist perspectives on God by examining some of the significant doctrinal flashpoints—most notably, divine immutability, simplicity, eternity, and substantial unity. Not all of the theistic mutualists with whom I engage are equally at odds with these various tenets of classical orthodoxy, and indeed, many believe themselves to be in basic agreement with these dogmas. As I hope to make clear, this agreement is often more imagined than real and frequently follows from a misunderstanding of the genuine meaning and implications of the classical doctrines. It is not uncommon nowadays, for instance, to encounter claims that God is both immutable and mutable, both impassible and passible, both simple and complex, both timeless and temporal, and so forth. This newfound proclivity for a dualistic both/and approach to theism is particularly fashionable among modern Calvinist theologians who for various reasons dislike the strictures of classical theism but are unwilling to embrace the more radical position of open theism or some other form of process theism. Arguably, however, such theologians have already embraced a rudimentary form of process theism to the extent that they allow some measure of ontological becoming and dependency in God.

Part of the reason many evangelical theistic mutualists do not recognize that they have already adopted a form of ontological becoming in God is because they have lost sight of what “being” means. They mistakenly assume that “being” indicates merely “nature” or “essence.” Rather, it denotes any actuality or “is-ness” whatsoever, that is, any participation in the act of existing (in *esse*, or “to be”).¹⁴ If God should not

13. Hart, *Experience of God*, 250.

14. Etienne Gilson contrasts the essentialist understanding of being with its true existential meaning. Philosophy and theology continue to be plagued by ignoring the

be all that He is in and of Himself infinitely and eternally, then He would no longer be pure and simple being but rather becoming, and thus dependent on that which supplies new actuality to Him.

Such a conception of God must not go unchallenged if we are to be true to Holy Scripture and to the faithful explication of Scripture's meaning as it has been handed down to us in the various conciliar statements and Reformed confessions. It is the desire to rehabilitate a robust understanding of God's ontological absoluteness that motivates this volume. For Calvinists in particular, this work is twofold. Negatively, it requires that we identify and abandon those newer doctrinal constructions whereby God's being has been relativized. Positively, it requires the rehabilitation of the catholic orthodoxy of the older Reformed confessions and theologians, particularly with respect to the understanding of God's actuality. The chapters that follow by no means approach the magnitude of this task, but are offered simply as a beginning to that much-needed work.

deeper existential sense of "being." See *Being and Some Philosophers*, 2nd ed. (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1952). See also Joseph Owens, *An Interpretation of Existence* (Milwaukee, Wis.: Bruce, 1968). For a comprehensive study of being as it would have been understood by Thomas Aquinas and many of the Protestant scholastics who followed him, see John F. Wippel, *The Metaphysical Thought of Thomas Aquinas: From Finite Being to Uncreated Being* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2000).

CHAPTER 2

Unchanging God

Does God change? Perhaps no question more clearly illuminates the conflict between the older teaching of classical Christian theism and the newer commitments of theistic mutualism. Open theists and process theists generally contend that divine immutability suggests imperfection in God. The thinking is that ability to change is better than being unable to change. Thus, a perfect God must be changeable in some significant ways. Process theist Burton Z. Cooper claims that “the perfection of God lies in the quality of the relative response rather than in the priority of the (absolute) act.”¹ He questions the traditional “assumption that perfection excludes passivity.” In order to avoid completely losing the continuity of God’s identity, process theists regard Him as comprised of two aspects of being: one absolute and the other relative. Charles Hartshorne explains that “God...is in one aspect of his being strictly or maximally absolute, and in another aspect no less strictly or maximally relative.”² Such dipolarity is designed to allow God’s identity both to remain constant and to be subject to genuine process and development, especially in the context of a relationship with beings outside of Himself.

While there is a strong affinity for process theism among open theists, evangelical Calvinists in contrast have been at the vanguard in repudiating these newer theisms. This makes it all the more remarkable

1. Burton Z. Cooper, *The Idea of God: A Whiteheadian Critique of St. Thomas Aquinas’ Concept of God* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1974), 94.

2. Charles Hartshorne, *The Divine Relativity: A Social Conception of God* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1948), 32.

that so many recent evangelical Calvinists seem to endorse a similar divine ontology to that of open and process theism. In particular, it seems that the belief that there is both absolute and relative actuality in God is no longer unique to process theists. Many recent Calvinists advance their own version of the absolute-relative distinction by distinguishing between God's essence, which is said not to change, and other contingent—thus, “relative”—aspects of His being. It is in the contingent aspects of His being in which He undergoes changes. Where these Calvinistic theologians tend to differ from process and open theists is simply with regard to the source and scope of change they allow in God. This newfound willingness on the part of many Calvinists to permit a measure of mutability in God is perhaps most accentuated in their unfavorable judgment of the classical doctrine of divine impassibility.

In what follows, I will first briefly articulate the older view of God's self-sufficiency and immutability together with a few remarks on how the tradition accounts for biblical depictions of God as undergoing change. Second, I will set forth the theistic mutualist claims of some select modern Calvinists, with special attention given to the diminishment of divine immutability. Third, I will address the question of whether reconceiving divine sovereignty as a power God exercises over His very being is sufficient to forestall the potential problems of a weakened doctrine of immutability. Finally, I will consider what is at stake if the classical doctrine of God's immutability is softened.

The Self-Sufficient and Unchanging God of Classical Theism

Classical Christian theism is deeply devoted to the absoluteness of God with respect to His existence, essence, and activity. Nothing about God's being is derived or caused to be. There is nothing behind Him or outside Him that could increase, alter, or augment His infinite fullness of being and felicity. For this reason, He cannot subject Himself to changes because every change involves a cause that brings to the subject an actuality of being that the subject lacks in and of itself. Causes, simply put, make things to be. Therefore, if God is wholly uncaused and self-sufficient in the plenitude of His being, then He

cannot be moved to some further actuality. This would suggest some imperfection or absence of being and goodness in Him.

Divine Aseity and Pure Actuality

The perfection that maintains God's self-sufficiency is sometimes referred to as God's aseity (from the Latin *a se*—of himself, from himself). Herman Bavinck explains the significance of this doctrine: "When God ascribes this aseity to himself in Scripture, he makes himself known as absolute being, as the one who *is* in an absolute sense. By this perfection he is at once essentially and absolutely distinct from all creatures."³ The English Puritan Stephen Charnock makes a similar point regarding aseity: "God is of himself, from no other.... God hath no original; he hath no defect because he was not made of nothing; he hath no increase because he had no beginning. He was before all things, and, therefore, depends upon no other thing."⁴ That which has no beginning cannot begin to be in any respect. One clear implication of this doctrine is that God neither derives anything from His creation, nor is He the cause of Himself: "It is evident from the word 'aseity,' God is exclusively from himself, not in the sense of being self-caused but being from eternity to eternity who he is, being not becoming."⁵ This doctrine is supported by a number of biblical passages.

In Job 22:2–3, Job's friend Eliphaz challenges Job with a set of rhetorical questions:

Can a man be profitable to God,
 Though he who is wise may be profitable to himself?
 Is it any pleasure to the Almighty that you are righteous?
 Or is it gain to Him that you make your ways blameless?

3. Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, ed. John Bolt, trans. John Vriend (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2004), 2:152. For a fine, recent discussion of this doctrine, see John Webster, "Life in and of Himself: Reflections on God's Aseity," in *Engaging the Doctrine of God: Contemporary Protestant Perspectives*, ed. Bruce L. McCormack (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 107–24.

4. Stephen Charnock, *The Existence and Attributes of God* (1853; repr., Grand Rapids: Baker, 1979), 1:321.

5. Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 2:152.

The thrust of these questions is that God is not obligated to man because God cannot receive anything from him. God is not a little better or worse off because of us. We add nothing to Him and deduct nothing from Him. John Calvin makes this point in a sermon on this passage:

For we bring him no gain and he is made neither hot nor cold (as I say) by us; and as we can do him no good, so also we can do him no harm.... For we imagine that God might receive some commodity by us, as though he had need of us. But contrariwise, he can neither increase nor diminish: he is in such sort the fountain of all goodness, that he will borrow nothing of another man, and that which men bring unto him, is not to relieve his necessity, or augment him in anywise.... Now if any men would ask the question, wherefore then doth God require of us, that we should be diligent to serve him? It seems that he hath some respect to himself. No: there is no consideration but of us, and of our salutation: God hath no respect of his own profit, when he gives us the rule of good living, and commands us to abstain from evil, and requires us to do this or that.... He considers what is good for us and expedient for our salvation.... As for God, he remains always safe and sound. It is true that (as much as lies in us) we offend his Majesty, abolish his justice, and are guilty thereof. Yet it cannot be said that we diminish anything of God, or that we can rob him of that which he has, or that we can reach unto him, to do him any injury. No truly.⁶

In Job 35:6–7, Eliphaz's charge is repeated by the young man Elihu:

If you sin, what do you accomplish against Him?

Or, if your transgressions are multiplied,

what do you do to Him?

If you are righteous, what do you give Him?

Or what does He receive from your hand?

6. John Calvin, *Sermons of Master John Calvin upon the Book of Job*, trans. Arthur Golding (London: Impensis Georgij Bishop, 1574; repr., Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1993), 389. Throughout the use of this source, I have updated the spelling.

Calvin expounds upon the aseity of God from this passage: “But we must apply this doctrine to the present intent of Elihu: which is, that God is not like mortal men, which are moved and touched. And why? Because they have need of another’s help, and cannot set light by [i.e., disregard] other men’s force. Thus you see what the cause is that we be moved and carried to and fro. But there must no such dotages enter into our head concerning God.”⁷

In the context of the Job narrative, both these rebukes of Eliphaz and Elihu are in response to Job’s insistence that he is righteous and that God thus owes him a hearing and an explanation regarding the calamity that has come upon him (see Job 31:33–37). The two rebukes imply that God owes no one anything because He receives nothing from the creature. God is not touched or moved by His creation inasmuch as touching or moving conveys new actuality to the one touched or moved and thus indebts the one moved to the mover.

Lest we conclude that all this is merely the unsound counsel of Job’s misguided friends, we should consider God’s own words in Job 41:11, as they bear a striking similarity to those of Job’s friends: “Who has preceded Me, that I should pay him? Everything under heaven is Mine.” The Hebrew term for “preceded” (פָּרָק) could also be translated “confronted” or “come to be in front of.” The idea is that no one has gotten out in front of God or gotten the upper hand on Him by giving something to Him so that He is now indebted or obligated to that person (see Paul’s citation of Job 41:11 in Romans 11:35). The reason God can receive nothing from us is because we have nothing to give Him that He does not already possess. When God gives to His creatures, He does not give away—that is, He does not divest Himself of being and actuality when He gives good gifts to humans. Consequently, we have nothing to bestow on God that He does not already perfectly and infinitely possess in His fullness of being. As we cannot subtract from His infinite beatitude, neither can we replenish or enlarge it.

7. Calvin, *Sermons on Job*, 642. In these sermons, Calvin emphasizes God as the source of all being who Himself cannot be moved by His creatures.

Another important text for establishing God's aseity and perfect self-sufficiency is Acts 17:23b–28. In the context, the apostle Paul is confronting the idolatry and ignorance of the Athenians.

Therefore, the One whom you worship without knowing, Him I proclaim to you: "God, who made the world and everything in it, since He is Lord of heaven and earth, does not dwell in temples made with hands. Nor is He worshiped with men's hands, as though He needed anything, since He gives to all life, breath, and all things. And He has made from one blood every nation of men to dwell on all the face of the earth, and has determined their preappointed times and the boundaries of their dwellings, so that they should seek the Lord, in the hope that they might grope for Him and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us; for in Him we live and move and have our being, as also some of your own poets have said, 'For we are also His offspring.'"

After appropriating the language of Solomon that God does not dwell in temples made with hands (1 Kings 8:27), Paul informs his Athenian interlocutors that God is not served by human hands as though He needed anything. The reason we do not give to Him is because He is the one who gives to all life, breath, and all things and thus receives from none. Moreover, we live and move and have our being in Him. If this is the case, then there cannot be some actuality of being that we possess and God lacks. Again, God's giving to us of all these things does not entail divine divestment such that when we "serve" Him with those gifts He is somehow enriched or repaid by our actions.

God's glory is not actually increased when we glorify Him. His perfect fullness of love is not intensified by our acts of obedience. His intrinsic, infinite hatred for sin is not made a little hotter by our transgressions. All these things—being glorious, loving, opposed to sin—God simply *is* in and of Himself. The delight He manifests in repentant sinners and the wrath He reveals against the ungodly are nothing but His own fullness of perfect being variously disclosed with reference to particular creatures at different times (see Psalm 18:25–27). Man is not the agent by which these actualities are produced in God.

Human actions are simply the occasions for the unfolding of God's *ad extra* display of these unchanging and unacquired virtues.

God's aseity also entails that He is perfect and purely actual in being. Because He depends on nothing outside Himself, one can only conclude that God simply is that act of existence by which He is. Classical theists insist that God is being, not becoming. He has no passive potentiality or capacity by which He might become more or other than He is. This means that even His relation to the world as its Creator and Sustainer does not produce any new actuality in Him. One of the better known arguments for God's pure actuality appears in Thomas Aquinas's demonstration that God as first cause is the "Unmoved Mover." In summarizing his five ways for proving God's existence in his *Summa theologiae*, Thomas establishes that the first efficient cause of being must itself be pure act.⁸ He contends that anything in motion (broadly conceived as anything that changes whatsoever) must have previously been in passive potency to that motion and thus moved to that motion by some source of actuality external to itself. As Thomas states, "Nothing can be reduced from potentiality to actuality, except by something in a state of actuality." Nothing can be made actual except by something already actual. Furthermore, it is "impossible that in the same respect and in the same way a thing should be both mover and moved, *i.e.*, that it should move itself." An external agent already in act is required for the reduction of potency to act. Anything put in motion (*i.e.*, anything previously in passive potency) is put in motion by another and, as Thomas notes, "that by another again."⁹ But this chain of movers cannot go on infinitely, or there would be no first mover—that is, no ultimately sufficient reason for movement.¹⁰ Since

8. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* Ia.2.3, in translation as *Summa Theologica*, trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province (Allen, Tex.: Christian Classics, 1981).

9. Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* Ia.2.3.

10. Aquinas's argument is not that God is the first cause or mover in a mere chronological sense but rather that He is the first inasmuch as He is the most fundamental source and explanation of contingent being wherever and whenever it is found. This understanding of Aquinas's claim controverts the old accusation that his Five Ways teach that God is the first link on the great chain of being with creatures and thus stands univocally with them in the same order of being. See the discussion in Brian Davies,