A RESPONSE (I) TO LOUIS DUPRÉ

That I must take issue with Louis Dupré's opening sentence, and many other statements he makes in developing his argument, yet find myself in harmony with the tenor of his presentation and heartily concur with his closing reference to the spiritual masters, offers eloquent yet painful testimony to the way two people can share a kinship of spirit while inhabiting quite different intellectual neighborhoods. So be it. Our friendship will be tried, as will your capacity to pass over from one of us to the other, but the exercise which results should exhibit that critical capacity of spirit we call self-transcendence better than either of our expositions. I shall offer some clarifications; then formulate a theological statement of my own to draw out the implications.

1. SOME GRAMMATICAL OBSERVATIONS

Nearly all the clarifications are grammatical, of course. Each taken alone may sound precious, but I hope to show how they can cumulate in a clearer rendition of the issues than the one which Louis Dupré gave us. First, transcendence is not a religious category, but a theological one. And if you do not find that difference compelling, let me illustrate what I mean by reminding you that transcendence does not refer to a quality—of God or anything else. We pray to "almighty God" to to "our merciful Father"; never to "God transcendent." Similarly, homilists speak of a faithful, provident or jealous God; not of a transcendent God.

Their sermons and our prayers show whether the God we worship is transcendent or not, because transcendence refers not to a distinguishing feature of divinity, but to a formal feature of all discourse about divinity. That is why I insist it is a theological category, and not a religious one; yet would agree that it is the theological category *par excellence*, precisely because it names the relation between God and all that is but is not God: in Jewish and Christian terms, between God and God's creation. Thus a theologian might well remind a pandering preacher that God always transcends the concerns of one particular interest group. Yet in doing so he would be trying to correct the drift of the preacher's entire sermon rather than merely supply a feature of the divinity he may have found to be missing.

Louis Dupré realizes, of course, that "transcendence" names the relation between God and all that is but is not God. In fact, his

entire point is to rescue that relation from an infelicitous formulation, that of causal dependency. Without troubling to distinguish among diverse formulations of the cause/effect relationship, however, and notably the shift from medieval to modern times, Dupré assumes the crudest common notion of causality—"the impact of one being upon another"—and finds that notion inadequate to convey the paradoxically mutual formal features of transcendence and immanence between God and God's creation. But that sort of wholesale criticism surely will not do: indeed, the primal causal act—creation—was *ex professo* devoid of impact.

Some clarifications should help. Causality is not a scientific notion any more than transcendence is a religious one. It rather belongs to the philosophy of science to reflect upon the ways in which the different sciences use manifestly causal language. So we may speak of "causal models," but only from a reflective viewpoint capable of identifying the way different frameworks articulate the relationship of causal dependency. Physical impact would be one of these; intellectual persuasion yet another. Clearly these disparate activities do not represent specific instances of a generic activity called causality. But to recognize that—and all but ideological monists do—is to recall that the expression "causes" in "x causes y to ..." is susceptible of analogous application. And that reminder should keep us from trying to understand the activity of the first cause, "whose proper effect is something's very being" (*Summa* 1.8.1.), on the model of any particular causal determination.

The medievals, especially Aquinas, understood this perfectly well, and Louis Dupré is surely confusing us by collapsing the efforts of those centuries with later deist endeavors to fabricate something called "the causal model of transcendence." Many theologians, it is true, did try to assimilate the creator/creature relation to a particular causal model, and the entire *de auxiliis* controversy, to which Dupré refers, offers testimony to such a misguided endeavor. But they simply overlooked the elementary grammatical point on which Aquinas insisted: "'to be made' and 'to make' are used equivocally when said of the universal production of things and of other productions" (*In* 8 *Phys* 2[974]).

For a theologian who holds onto his grammar, then, there can be no causal model for the relationship whereby a creature depends on its creator for its very being. Yet he will not hesitate to describe the relation as causal, since it bespeaks the creature's

origins. The further fact that all God's activity is thoroughly intentional should keep one from putting an impersonal construction on this use of "causal," of course. Beyond this clarification, however, it looks as though Dupré has yet further objections. He credits the classical articulation of transcendence as causal dependence with leading us into contemporary atheism, as philosophers came to realize that "freedom could not have its origin in a causal process."

As Dupré makes it, this solemn pronouncement cannot help but be muddled by his confusion regarding "causal models." If we remove that difficulty by recalling the analogous grammar of "causal" and excising the misleading phrase "causal process," Dupré would have to be saying that freedom could not have its origin in another. In fact, he says something quite similar a little farther on: "to conceive the intrinsic dependence of grace as dependence upon another cause [read: agent] is to deny the free agent's autonomy." To which we must retort: not at all; unless, that is, one is using "autonomy" as more than a mere synonym for "freedom," and accepting a notion of autonomy which is equivalent to unoriginated. But that would simply amount to a definitional atheism, and I cannot believe Louis Dupré wants that.

In summary, then, Louis Dupré has allowed himself to be misled by an unanalyzed and peculiarly persuasive sense of "cause" into recommending that we jettison a quite well-formulated notion of God's transcendence—namely, that of Aquinas. In fact, Dupré's own criterion is adequately met by Aquinas' grammatical considerations in *Summa* 1.3 to 1.11: "the only dependence compatible with full autonomy (*sic*) consists in God's immanent presence and that presence grows more intensive as man partakes more directly in God's own autonomy." For Aquinas' insistence that a subject's to-be is not one of its features, yet is more intimate to the person than anything else, assures us that the source of one's being cannot determine the subject in any manner which might inhibit its freedom. In fact, the very attempt to conceive the activity of a cause whose proper effect is a thing's very being is itself an exercise in transcendence. That the relation remains radically one of dependence rather than interdependence does not in any way undercut the paradoxical internal connection of transcendence with immanence. It simply reminds us that creation remains the primordial religious fact for Jews and Christians.

2. A THEOLOGICAL STATEMENT

That statement should suffice as a concluding theological affirmation, gathering up the point of the piecemeal clarifications. Yet I would like to connect with Dupré's concluding remark about the spiritual writers, by recalling that creation becomes a religious fact for us only as we submit to that transformation process which the scriptures call a new creation. The reason why the relation between creator and creature is continually misconstrued by theologians is that it cannot, properly speaking, be construed at all. We simply have no language for it—which is merely another way of reminding ourselves that we cannot use any of our specific causal models to portray the creating activity of the origin of all things.

So we must turn to those who try to document the activity we can experience—that of being created anew by God's grace. Not that we fare any better in articulating this process, of course, for "transformation" conveys a paradoxical notion itself, as its greek form "metamorphosis" exhibits more clearly. Yet we can gain some toehold on the relationship of creator with creature by attending to the ways in which we can be literally "made over" by an activity so inward that it could never spoil our freedom. And if our personal experience to date is spotty, we can let ourselves be guided by the masters of the inner life. For if transcendence is the theological category *par excellence*, its religious analogue is transformation. As Dupré suggests, it behooves us to begin with the religious writers to obtain clear theological bearings.

DAVID BURRELL, C.S.C.
Notre Dame University