

**St. Thomas Aquinas**  
*Commentary on the Book of Causes*

**Lecture 14\***

After determining about the First Cause and the intelligence, here he determines about the soul. And he first determines about it according to the condition which it has [with respect to] other things, and secondly he determines about it according to itself, where he writes "Every knower", etc.

Concerning the first issue he gives the following proposition: *In every soul sensible things are present by that which is their exemplar, and intelligible things are present in it because it knows them.* But to understand this proposition, let us look at that which is written in Proclus's book concerning this issue. For in proposition 195 the following is stated: *Every soul is every thing, sensible things in an exemplary way, and intelligible things iconically.* And *iconically* means after the manner of an image: for the image is that which is made in similitude to another, just as the exemplar is that to whose similitude another thing is made. But this proposition is proven, both here and in Proclus's book, in the following way. The soul, as is shown in the second proposition, is a middle *between intelligible things which are entirely separated from motion* and therefore are made equal to eternity, *and those sensible things which are moved* and fall under time; and because the former are the cause of the latter, it follows that *the soul is the cause of bodies* and intelligence is the cause of the soul, in the way explained above.

But it is clear that the effect must preexist in the causes in an exemplary way, because the causes produce effects according to their similitude; and conversely, *the things caused have an image of their causes*, as Dionysius also states in Chapter 2 of *On the Divine Names*. So, therefore, the sensible things which are caused by the soul are in it in an exemplary manner, i.e. such that things of this sort, which are under the soul, are caused according to an exemplar and similitude of the soul, *but the things which are above the soul are in the soul in the manner of something acquired*, i.e. by a certain participation, such that they are compared to the soul as exemplar, and the soul is compared to them as an image: similarly, therefore, it is clear that sensible things preexist in the soul as in a cause which in some way is the exemplar of the effect.

But he explains next how he understands the soul, saying: *I understand the soul as a virtue acting upon sensible things.* According to those who posit the celestial bodies as being animated, the soul of the heavens is the cause of all sensible bodies; just as each of the inferior souls is the cause of its own body. Therefore no inferior soul has universal causality with respect to sensible things; and thus sensible things are not in [the inferior soul] in the manner of a cause, but only in the soul of the heavens which has universal causality over sensibles; and this he here calls: *a virtue acting upon sensible things*. Indeed, each of the souls which are here has a certain causality with respect to its own body, but does not cause [the body] itself either by sense or by intellect; therefore it does not pre-have intelligible and exemplar reasons of its body, but rather it causes [the body] itself by a natural power. Thus it is also stated in *On the Soul*, book II, that the soul is the efficient cause of the body, but such an agent does not act by any exemplar reason properly taken, unless the nature itself by which it acts we say to be 'exemplar' because the effect which is produced is its similitude in some way; and in this manner, in the nature of the soul all sensible parts of its body preexist in a virtual way, for they are fitted together by the potencies of the soul which proceed from its nature.

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\* This translation is based on the Latin text contained in *Super librum De causis expositio*, edited by H.-D. Saffrey, Fribourg, 1954. This translation is for informational purposes only, and should not be cited for the purposes of academic publications without prior comparison with the Latin text. Translation by [Erik Norvelle](#), published under a Creative Commons 2.0 Non-Commercial Share-Alike license.



And although sensible things are in the soul, which is their cause, nevertheless they are not in it in the manner in which they exist in themselves. For the power of the soul is immaterial, although it is a cause of material things, and it is spiritual, although it is a cause of bodies, and is without corporeal dimension, although it is a cause of things having dimension. And because the effect is in the cause according to the virtue of the cause, it follows that sensible bodies are in the soul indivisibly and immaterially and in a non-bodily fashion. And just as things inferior to the soul are in it in another manner than they exist in themselves, similarly superior things, i.e. the intelligences, are in the soul in an inferior manner than they are in themselves, i.e. iconically or in the manner of an image, as Proclus states; the place of which has been stated here [already]: *in an accidental manner*, i.e. in some inferior way of participation, i.e. as intelligible things, which are indivisible and united and immobile in themselves, are in the soul divisibly and multiply and movably in comparison with the intelligence,- for they are proportionate to this so that they are causes of multiplicity and division and the motions of sensible things,- or else he says that immobile things *are in the soul in the manner of motion*, because, according to the Platonists, the soul itself is that which moves itself, but according to Aristotle it is the principle of motion of a things which moves itself.

And finally, as a epilogue, he concludes what he proposed, and [the conclusion] is manifest from the premisses. And from what has been said here, it will be clear how the superior souls of the heavens, if the heavens are animate, would be able to know sensible and intelligible things: for they know them in the manner in which they are in them.