

Albert and Aquinas on Virtual Containment

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I. Aquinas and Albert's glosses of virtualiter

1. "What is altogether potestative and virtual is not essentially but potestatively and virtually in anything that is under its power or is subject to it."
2. "An effect can be similar to the cause in two ways. First, according to the same species; as man is generated by man, and fire by fire. Another way, according to virtual containment; as the form of the effect is virtually contained in its cause, so also the animals produced by putrefaction, and plants and minerals are like the sun and the stars, by whose power they are produced. In this way the effect is similar to its agent cause according to all that to which the power of the agent extends."
3. "The likeness of the generating nature remains virtually in the seed."
4. "Just as the human body is virtually in the seed, not having however the perfection of the human body in act, which consists in the distinction of the organs, but it comes little by little by the power of the seed to such a perfection; so is there, in the beginning of generation, the soul..."
5. "And in this way we should say that the first principle of the powers and of the nervous organs of veins and arteries is the heart, virtually and materially originating everything."
6. "So became, whatever was in the first principles of reason seminally or virtually, explicit according to the perfect cognition of all those to which the power of the first principles could extend."
7. "In the demonstrative sciences there are some common [claims], in which the particular conclusions, as it were, are contained virtually as in some seed; therefore, those who have the habit of [knowing] those common ones, are not related to the particular conclusions except in remote potency, which needs a mover in order to reach it in act."
8. "The heavens, although not similar in species to these animals that are generated by putrefaction, there is still some similitude inasmuch as the effect virtually preexists in the active cause."

Albert, *Ethica*, I, 3.14 (p. 48a): totum potestativum et virtuale non est essentialiter, sed potestative et virtualiter in quolibet est sibi subjectarum potestatum et virtutum.

Aquinas, ST I, 105.1, ad 1: Uno modo, secundum eandem speciem; ut homo generatur ab homine, et ignis ab igne. Alio modo, secundum virtutalem continentiam, prout scilicet forma effectus virtualiter continetur in causa, et sic animalia ex putrefactione generata, et plantae et corpora mineralia assimilantur soli et stellis, quorum virtute generantur. Sic igitur effectus causae agenti similatur secundum totum illud ad quod se extendit virtus agentis.

In Sent., II, d. 31, q. 1, a. 1, ad 4: similitudo naturae generantis in semine virtualiter manet

De pot., q. 3, a. 9, ad 9: sicut corpus humanum in semine est virtualiter, non tamen habens actu humani corporis perfectionem, quae in distinctione organorum consistit, sed paulatim per virtutem seminis ad perfectionem huiusmodi pervenitur; ita in principio generationis est ibi anima....

Albert, *De animalibus*, III.1.4: et hoc modo dicendo semper primum principium virtutum et membrorum nervorum venarum et arteriarum est cor virtualiter et materialiter originans omnia.

De ver., q. 18, a. 4, co: ita quidquid seminaliter sive virtualiter erat in primis principiis rationis, totum erat explicitum secundum perfectam cognitionem eorum omnium ad quae virtus primorum principiorum se extendere poterat.

De ver., q. 12, a. 1, ad s.c. 3: in scientiis demonstrativis sunt quaedam communia, in quibus particulares conclusiones quasi in quibusdam seminibus virtualiter continentur; unde ille qui habet habitum illorum communium, non se habet ad particulares conclusiones nisi in potentia remota, quae indiget motore ut in actum pertingat.

De pot., q. 3, a. 11, ad 12: Caelum autem licet non sit simile in specie cum huiusmodi animalibus ex putrefactione generatis, est tamen similitudo quantum ad hoc quod effectus in causa activa virtualiter praeexistit.

9. “We should note that something is said to be in another in several ways. . . . According to the first way, all things must be said to be in the first cause in one way, because that by which all things are in the first cause is one and the same thing, namely divine power, for effects are virtually in their cause. But according to this mode, the first cause is in things in diverse ways, because the first cause is in the things caused inasmuch as it imprints a likeness on them, while diverse things receive the likeness of the first cause in diverse ways.”

In Liber de Causis, l. 24: Considerandum est quod aliquid dicitur esse in alio multipliciter. . . . Secundum igitur primum modum dicendum est quod omnia sunt in causa prima uno modo, quia scilicet illud secundum quod omnia sunt in causa prima, est una et eadem res, scilicet virtus divina; sunt enim effectus virtute in sua causa. Causa autem prima secundum hunc modum est in rebus diversimode, quia scilicet causa prima in rebus causatis est secundum quod eis similitudinem suam imprimit; diversae autem res diversimode similitudinem causae primae recipiunt. Sed modo secundo est e converso. Nam causa prima secundum unum modum agit in omnia et ideo dicitur esse in rebus omnibus secundum dispositionem unam; non autem omnes res recipiunt eodem modo actionem causae primae et ideo dicitur quod res omnes non existunt in causa prima secundum dispositionem unam.

II. The Problem of Fit

Walter Ott, “The Case against Powers,” in *Causal Powers in Science: Blending Historical and Conceptual Perspectives*, ed. Benjamin Hill, Henrik Lagerlund, and Stathis Psillos (Oxford: Oxford University Press, forthcoming).

1. Independent: “powers are independent of their manifestations.”
2. Intrinsic: “any intrinsic duplicates are dispositional duplicates.”
3. Essential: “there is no interesting sense in which the set of possible manifestations varies from one world to the next”.
4. Reciprocal: “manifestations are a mutual affair” (Williams, 87); “powers come in bundles” (Ott).

“Stated briefly, the problem is that powers have to work together when they produce manifestations (reciprocity), but as they are not relations (intrinsicity), and they cannot change with the circumstances (essentialism), the fact that they are causally harmonious is without explanation.” (Neil E Williams, “Puzzling Powers: The Problem of Fit,” in *The Metaphysics of Powers: Their Grounding and Their Manifestations*, ed. Anna Marmodoro (London: Routledge, 2010), 84105, 89.)

“Imagine, for instance, what would happen if jigsaw puzzle manufacturers divided the task of creating jigsaw puzzles amongst a variety of different laborers, without providing each with any indication of what the final image was to be, and without allowing for any collaboration. What are the odds that such a jigsaw puzzle could ever be put together?” (Williams, *ibid.*, 90.)

“Imagine a heavy rock with the power to smash a particular martini glass. The powers of the rock (r) are such that when it impacts on the martini glass (m) with a certain high velocity (v) it will result in a state of affairs that is or includes m ’s being smashed. However, m ’s powers are such that if struck by r at v , m emits a loud ‘ping’ but does not break. Now imagine that we strike m with r at v . What happens? Does m shatter – as was r ’s power, does m remain intact, and emit a loud ping sound – as was m ’s power, or does nothing occur, because the two powers do not fit? The answer: none of the above.” (Williams, *ibid.*, 91.)

“Why does the power of fire to burn paper never run across paper with the power to turn into a chicken when encountering fire?” (Ott, *ibid.*)