

## SECTION 3

### Whether There Can Be an Instrument of Creation

1. *There are no natural instruments of creation.* My intention is not to discuss this topic specifically and theologically, but only to touch briefly on as much as can be inferred from the lines of reasoning already presented.

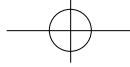
From what has been said one may, it seems, efficaciously conclude that a creature cannot be an instrumental principle of creation – an instrument, I mean, such that (i) by its nature it is instituted for and ordered toward the action in question, and such that (ii) it has a natural instrumental power with respect to that action. For from what was said above about created agent causes it is clear that some of the active powers that are connatural to created agents are instrumental powers and not principal powers – for example, the power of semen.<sup>1</sup> Given this conception [of an instrument], then, we are claiming that on the basis of what has already been said, one may correctly prove that there cannot be a created power that of itself and by its nature is an instrumental power for creating.

This is proved by the fact that a creature's instrumental power with respect to physical and real actions is always an accidental power;<sup>2</sup> but the mode of acting through creation – even as an instrument – cannot be connatural to an accidental power.

The major premise is clear from an induction over all proper instruments – that is, instruments that are so-called not only by virtue of a relation to, or denomination [derived from], some prior agent, but properly by virtue of their own intrinsic mode of acting and the insufficiency of their power with respect to the effect.<sup>3</sup>

In addition, there is a special proof [of the major premise] in the present context: If an instrument of this sort were not an accident, it would be a substance.

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- 1 See *DM* 17.2.22 and *DM* 18.2.15–21.
  - 2 Suarez is here using the term 'physical action' in the sense in which a physical action is contrasted with a moral action. This corresponds to the distinction between a physical cause and a moral cause that he discusses in *DM* 17.2.6. In short, a physical cause of a given effect is one that has a real and immediate influence on that effect, whereas a moral cause of a given effect is one to whom responsibility for the effect is imputed, even if it does not have a real and direct influence. For instance, if I set fire to a building by using a burning torch, the torch (or, more exactly, the fire) is the immediate physical cause of the building's burning, whereas I am the moral cause of its burning. Again, if I refrain from preventing an effect that I ought to have prevented, then I am a moral cause of that effect even though I was not a physical cause of it.
  - 3 Suarez adds this explication to separate the strict sense of the term 'instrument' from the broader sense in which, for example, all secondary causes, including principal secondary causes, are called God's instruments.



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But, then, whose instrument would it be in an act of creation? It would not be its own instrument, as is obvious. Nor, again, would it be the instrument of any other created substance; for no created substance is a principal agent of creation, and an instrument is called an instrument vis-à-vis a principal agent. Nor, finally, would it be God's instrument, since (i) on God's part an instrument is unnecessary for any act of creation, as is obvious *per se*, whereas (ii) as far as the substance itself is concerned, there is no conceivable substance that by its nature requires that it be brought into existence for the purpose of being an instrument of creation, since such a purpose is wholly extrinsic and wholly accidental to the acts by which entities are created.<sup>4</sup> In fact, given that a substance is a *per se* being, it is never the connatural purpose of any substance itself that it be an instrument for any action unless the substance in question is in some sense a partial entity and is related to the substance whose instrument it is as a part to a whole – and even then /767a/ it functions as the bearer of an instrumental power rather than as an instrument by its proper substance.

2. Now [the premise] that an accidental power cannot be a natural instrument of creation can be proved by almost the same argument that was made above concerning an [accidental] principal power.<sup>5</sup> For a form's connatural mode of acting has to be commensurate with its mode of being – and this regardless of whether it acts as a principal power or as an instrumental power, since in both these modes the action follows upon the very *esse* that is natural to the form. But a mode of being that involves independence from a subject cannot be connatural to an accident. Therefore, the mode of effecting something out of no subject cannot be connatural to it, either. Therefore, an accident cannot be a power that is instituted by its nature to operate in this way, even in the manner of an instrument.

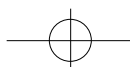
This is well confirmed by the argument St. Thomas uses in *Summa Theologiae* 1, q. 45, a. 5 to prove that a creature cannot be an instrument of creation – namely, that a creature cannot be an instrument unless there is something proper to itself through which it contributes dispositively to the principal agent's effect.<sup>6</sup>

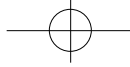
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4 It is important to remember that Suarez is claiming here only that a substance cannot be a *connatural* instrument of creation. Later he will claim that the present argument does not rule out the possibility that God should freely use a creature – through its very substance and not by the mediation of any superadded power – as an instrument in creation. The present argument shows only that such use of a creature would be wholly extrinsic to the demands of its nature.

5 See *DM* 20.2.46.

6 On its surface, St. Thomas's argument seems to imply that any instrumental cause must contribute *per se* to two effects, namely, (i) the principal cause's effect and (ii) an antecedent effect which the instrument causes through its own proper power and which prepares the way for the principal cause's effect. So, for instance, the saw in the carpenter's hand effects (i) the table (the principal cause's effect) and also (ii) the incisions which predispose the wood for the form of a table, that is, for being a table.





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3. Therefore, if in that article St. Thomas were talking about an instrument on the present conception, that is, about an instrument that is instituted by its very nature for the action in question and has a connatural instrumental power for creating, then there would be no problem with either his conclusion or his argument. For as regards the objection that can be raised against the argument – namely, that an instrument’s action is oftentimes not distinct from the principal agent’s action, and that in such a case the instrument does not contribute dispositively to the principal agent’s effect but instead effects it immediately, as many believe to be the case with a phantasm vis-à-vis an intelligible species – as regards this objection, I repeat, there is a suitable reply and a suitable interpretation of the principle in question. For (i) a natural instrument always contributes to the principal agent’s effect according to something proper to itself which corresponds proportionately to something in the effect, whereas (ii) it is said to operate dispositively, not always in the wholly rigorous and proper sense – that is, by inducing a disposition that is antecedent to and really distinct from the principal agent’s effect – but rather *either* in this [rigorous] sense or *else* because the instrument, according to what is proper to itself, is a determinant of the principal agent’s action, where this determination can be traced back to the genus of a material cause or a disposing cause – in the way that a phantasm is a determinant of the agent intellect’s action of producing a given [intelligible] species.<sup>7</sup>

However, a creature cannot by its natural power contribute to creation as an instrument in either of these two ways. It cannot, of course, contribute /767b/ to creation by introducing an antecedent disposition, since this sort of disposing action always presupposes a subject to be disposed – which is incompatible with creation. Nor can it contribute to creation by being a determinant of the principal agent’s action through something proper to itself. For each created form, according to its proper and connatural mode of acting, is incommensurate with the action [of effecting something] *ex nihilo*, and so it cannot, according to anything proper to itself, be a determinant of such an action by concurring with it.<sup>8</sup>

- 7 On the view in question the phantasm (or image) does not produce an antecedent disposition within the intellect itself. Rather, the phantasm furnishes the ‘matter’ for the intellect’s active formation of an intelligible (that is, non-imagistic) species or likeness of the object, and it is a determinant of the intellect’s action in the sense that the content of the intelligible species is a direct function of the content of the phantasm. In this loose sense, then, the phantasm ‘disposes’ the intellect to form an intelligible species of a certain determinate kind.
- 8 The following example will help to illuminate the present point as well as the discussion that follows in the remainder of this section: Suppose God decrees that when Sam next raises his arm, a new human being will be created *ex nihilo*; and suppose further that Sam raises his arm and that a new human being is created. Suarez is claiming that in such a case there cannot be anything connatural to Sam (even though he himself is a human being) or to the raising of his arm that disposes God to create a human being (rather than, say, a kangaroo or nothing at all). That is, without acting contrary to Sam’s nature or to the nature of his gesture, God could just as easily have decreed that a kangaroo will be created when Sam next raises his arm. (By way



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4. The present argument, thus explained, can also be accommodated to *principal* secondary causes, which are said to operate dispositively with respect to the First Cause's effects in the sense that they are determinants of his action through their proper powers.<sup>9</sup> However, in the case of these causes the argument will not be sufficient by itself alone unless one presupposes, as having been proved on other grounds, that by their nature the powers of secondary causes cannot, within their own order, be sufficient for or commensurate with producing an effect *ex nihilo*; for it is only on this assumption that one can prove that secondary causes cannot be determinants of the First Cause's concurrence with respect to such an action.<sup>10</sup> In fact, even when the argument is applied to proper instruments and understood in the way explained above, it presupposes, as having been proved, that a created power cannot be a principal principle of creating. For the argument is grounded mainly in the thesis that an instrument, insofar as it operates dispositively or (as I will put it) determinatively through that which is proper to itself, behaves as if it were a principal power, in the sense of operating according to a mode that is connatural to and commensurate with its nature.

5. Notice further that if we look only at St. Thomas's argument in the cited article, it seems that this argument cannot go through on any conception [of an instrument] other than that of a *connatural* instrument. For if we presuppose the more common view about *divine* instruments that have been supernaturally elevated to works such as justification, transubstantiation, etc., then the principle 'An instrument contributes to the principal agent's effect through something

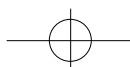
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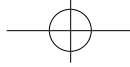
of contrast, if God were to generate a pig from the normal reproductive action of two kangaroos, then he would be acting contrary to the natures of the kangaroos and their action.)

However, it is important to notice that this argument still leaves open the question of whether, in the case as described, Sam is acting as a true instrumental cause of the creation of a new human being or whether instead the raising of his arm is a mere occasion for God's unilateral act of creation.

Here we begin to glimpse the theological dimension of the present question. The scholastics hold that (i) sacramental signs – for instance, the water of baptism – have no *connatural* connection with the supernatural effects of grace associated with them, and yet that (ii) they are true instrumental causes (rather than mere occasions) of those effects. If one further claims that these supernatural effects are created *ex nihilo* in the human soul, then one is thereby committed to the thesis that there can be finite instruments of creation.

- 9 Suarez is here assuming the thesis, which will be explicitly argued for below in Disputation 22, that God acts immediately by his general concurrence in every creaturely action. This action on God's part is called his *general* concurrence precisely because the precise nature of the effect is determined not by God's contribution, but rather by the contributions made by the created agents and patients that are involved in the production of the effect. In this sense they are determinants of God's action.
- 10 Once again, it is important to note that the thesis is limited to the claim that principal secondary causes cannot be *connatural* instruments of creation. See note 8 above.





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proper to itself' is neither necessary nor true on this alternative conception [of an instrument]. For these divine instruments contribute nothing to the principal agent's effect through their own proper power – as is explained at length in volumes 1 and 3 of [my commentary on] *Summa Theologiae* 3.<sup>11</sup>

This understanding of St. Thomas's argument is fully confirmed by the proof of the principle which he adds immediately afterwards when he says: "Therefore, if it (read: the instrument) did nothing here according to what is proper to itself, then its application to the action would be useless. Nor would there have to be determinate instruments for determinate actions." /768a/ This is an excellent line of reasoning in the case of *natural* instruments, which are of themselves ordered to, directed toward, and necessary for their own effects; but the proof has no force at all in the case of *divine* instruments. For it is an absolute truth that divine instruments are not thus directed, but are instead [of themselves] neutral and, as it were, open-ended by reason of their obediencial potency, whereas it is by the divine will and by elevation – that is, by a very special type of concurrence – that they are directed toward determinate actions.<sup>12</sup> Such instruments are, to be sure, unnecessary, since God can just as easily bring about the very same effects without them; yet they will not for that reason be said to be useless. For when they are elevated and taken up, they truly act; and it is not without purpose or just cause that they are elevated in order to act.

6. *The Master of the Sentences did not posit a natural instrument of creation.* Yet even though St. Thomas's argument and line of reasoning do not seem to entail the stronger conclusion, nonetheless, all of his disciples and interpreters take his position to be the more general one that a creature cannot contribute to creation even as an instrument elevated by the divine power.

There is no doubt that St. Thomas fully invites this interpretation when he impugns the Master's position in the cited article. The Master had not claimed

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11 That is to say, there is nothing about the nature of water that makes it intrinsically capable of being an instrumental cause of the grace of justification conferred by the sacrament of baptism. Likewise, there is nothing about the nature of the words "This is my body" that makes them intrinsically capable of being an instrumental cause of the conversion of bread into the body of Christ in the Sacrament of the Altar. Thus, these instruments "contribute nothing through their own proper powers" to justification or transubstantiation. Nonetheless, the Catholic Faith teaches that the water of baptism is in fact a cause (and not a mere sign) of the grace of justification, and that the words of consecration are a cause of the transubstantiation of the bread into the body of Christ. This can be the case only if such sacramental signs are in some way supernaturally "elevated" by God to the status of instruments with respect to the effects in question. (For more on just how this elevation might be accomplished, see §7 and note 14 below.)

Below Suarez will also make use of a non-sacramental example – namely, the fire of hell, which not only torments the bodies of the damned but also produces specifically spiritual sufferings as well.

12 For more on the notion of obediencial potency, see *DM* 20.1, note 7.



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that a creature can be a *natural* instrument of creation, but had instead claimed that a creature can be an instrument of creation by virtue of a *divine* employment; for, as is clear from *Sentences* 4, dist. 5, he was talking about the sacraments insofar as they are divine instruments.<sup>13</sup> Hence, in *Summa Theologiae* 3, q. 13, a. 2, the selfsame St. Thomas, even while expressly distinguishing between a natural power and an instrument of grace, denies that a creature can be an instrument of either creation or annihilation; he says the same thing in *Contra Gentes* 2, chap. 21. And all the theologians who attack the Master's position – for example, Albert the Great, Scotus, Henry of Ghent, and Giles of Rome, in the places cited in the last section – are of the same opinion.

However, to the extent that this disagreement touches upon the notion of a supernatural instrument, it has to be examined in theology; for my own opinion is that it cannot be settled on the basis of the principles proper to creation.

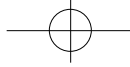
7. For if it were true either that (i) a creature cannot be elevated by the divine power to do anything by a true physical action which exceeds its natural power and strength, or that (ii) a creature can do such a thing only by means of a power, received in it [from without], that has a connatural capacity for such an effect (which is what many theologians believe, and not implausibly) – if this, I repeat, were true, then it would be wholly reasonable and correct to claim that a creature cannot be elevated in such a way as to be an instrument of creation.<sup>14</sup>

13 As noted above, if one holds with Lombard that the grace conferred by a sacrament is created *ex nihilo*, then it follows straightaway that a creature can be an instrumental cause of creation. St. Thomas agrees that the sacraments are instrumental causes of grace, but denies that sacramental effects are created *ex nihilo*.

14 This first position tries to legitimate the strict distinction between creation and sacramental causality by claiming that in order to be elevated to the status of a divine instrument, a creature must be endowed with a superadded power which is by its own nature capable of producing the relevant supernatural effect. Thus, for instance, water has received by divine decree a supernatural power to effect the grace of baptism; and it is because of this power – which, ontologically speaking, is an accident of the water – that the water can play an instrumental role in effecting grace. The same holds for the words of consecration by which bread is converted into the body of Christ. And since Suarez has already argued that no accident, not even a supernatural accident, can be a connatural instrumental cause of creation *ex nihilo*, he agrees that if this first position is true, then no creature can be an instrument of creation.

Suarez, by contrast, thinks it more probable that no accidental supernatural power of the sort in question is involved in sacramental causality. Instead, God “elevates” the water of baptism simply by concurring with its substance in a special way and not by conferring a new accident on it.

Suarez's position seems puzzling at first. If the water does not receive a new power, then how can we differentiate clearly between (i) God's actually *using* the water of baptism to effect grace and (ii) the water's being a mere *sign* that God is effecting the grace by himself alone? Still, Suarez's line of thought becomes a bit clearer if we take a closer look at more mundane cases of instrumental causality.



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If, on the other hand, God is able to elevate a creature in such a way that through its very own being, without anything else being added to it, it produces an effect that exceeds its own natural power – which I judge to be far more probable, since I believe that it is in this way that God elevates water to effect grace and fire to torment spirits and words to transubstantiate – if this, I repeat, is true, then I do not see what reason there could be for denying the implication that God is able to use one creature as an instrument for creating another. For (i) no sufficient reason is given for differentiating [creation from the other actions just mentioned], and (ii) no special argument is adduced to prove that this implication is impossible.

8. The first part of this claim is clear from the fact that the only difference seems to be that creation, unlike the other actions, is not an action on a subject.

First of all, however, this difference is not a universal one. For, as St. Thomas teaches in *Summa Theologiae* 3, q. 35, a. 8, transubstantiation is likewise not an action on a subject. (This is the Master's position in *Sentences* 4, d. 5; St. Thomas follows it in *Sentences* 4, d. 5, q. 1, a. 3, q. 3, ad 4, and defends it in *Sentences* 2, dist. 1, q. 1, a. 3, as does Gabriel in *Sentences* 4, d. 1, q. 1, a. 3, dub. 3.) Moreover, the fact that in transubstantiation something is presupposed as a remote matter and as a terminus a quo (or as playing some other similar role) is wholly irrelevant to the claim that it is less repugnant for a created instrument to contribute to this action than to contribute to creation.<sup>15</sup>

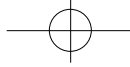
Second, the appeal to the difference in question does not prove what needs to be proved, but instead presupposes it. For from the fact that creation is an action without a subject it is entirely correct to infer that this action cannot be *connatural* to a creature either as a principal power or as an instrument; yet we are nonetheless contending, by appeal to an analogy with other divine instruments, that this action can be communicated to a created instrument *by elevation*. For an action that converts one whole substance into [another] whole substance likewise cannot be *connatural* to a creature either as a principal cause or as an

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After all, when a tool is used by a carpenter, it does not seem to acquire any new power precisely by virtue of this use; rather, it contributes to the principal cause's effect because of its subordination to the carpenter's power. Likewise, Suarez is claiming that the water of baptism achieves its supernatural effect merely because of the special sort of subordination it has to the divine power.

To be sure, God, unlike the carpenter, is not relying on the instrument's natural causal powers in producing the intended effect; instead, he is taking advantage of the water's merely obediencial potency to serve as a cause of that effect. But it is at least not obvious that this disanalogy is sufficient to undermine Suarez's position.

- 15 Transubstantiation is unlike creation in that it presupposes the bread as a starting point and as that which is to be converted into the body of Christ. Still, it is like creation in the sense relevant here, since in transubstantiation no subject or patient is acted upon or transformed. This is clear from the fact that nothing of the substance of the bread – neither its form nor its matter – remains after the conversion, whereas a true change or transformation requires the persistence of some subject of change.



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instrument; similarly, an action on a spirit – especially an action by which a supernatural quality comes to exist in a spirit – cannot be connatural to a body.<sup>16</sup> And yet both these actions are in fact communicated by the divine power through elevation. Therefore, the same holds for the other action, [namely, creation].

9. *An absurdity inferred by some against an instrument of creation is refuted.* The second part of the claim, on the other hand, will readily become clear if we apply the arguments made above concerning principal powers and connatural instruments and come to see that these arguments do not go through in the case of an instrument by elevation.

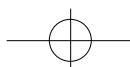
For what some claim follows, namely, that such an instrument /769a/ [must] have infinite power and perfection, does not follow at all, since the action of an instrument of this type proceeds not from its own perfection but from the First Agent's perfection and the instrument's obediential potency. Hence, within the order of instruments [by elevation] it is not the case that a more perfect entity is required for a more perfect effect or action. Nor in this case can there be any scale according to which a greater power is required to produce an entity from a more [remote] potentiality; for with this type of instrument God can educe a form from a subject, no matter how resistant the subject might be. Finally, the very same argument could be made in the case of an instrument of transubstantiation; for an infinite perfection is likewise required in order to transubstantiate by means of a proper or connatural power.

10. Again, it is no cause for concern that, according to others, it follows that something can be taken up [by God] as an instrument for creating itself.

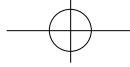
For, first of all, we deny that this follows in all rigor and propriety, since in order for something to be a physical instrument it must necessarily be assumed to exist, and so its own creation is presupposed – a creation with respect to which it could not have been an instrument. (To be sure, the argument in question would have some force against those who claim that a non-existent entity can be a physical instrument; but we ourselves consider this position to be implausible.<sup>17</sup>)

16 This is an allusion to the fire of hell.

17 The existence requirement becomes moot in cases where (i) the effect is produced by an instrument that is separated from the direct causal influence of its principle cause and where (ii) the principal cause has itself ceased to exist in its own right. For instance, in light of various arguments discussed in *DM* 18.7, Suarez attributes the natural motions of a body to the generating thing as a principal cause and to the body's heaviness (*gravitas*) as a separated instrumental cause. But suppose that the generating thing has now ceased to exist in itself. In what sense is it still a cause? Suarez comments at *DM* 18.7.2: "No one will deny [the existence requirement] in the case of natural efficient causality. This is sufficient for our present purposes, but the point must be understood to apply analogically as follows. That which acts through itself exists in itself, whereas that which acts only through a separated instrument exists only virtually in the instrument, since it is said to act only by an extrinsic denomination that is taken from the instrument; but this virtual existence consists in nothing other than the fact that the instrument itself exists."







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Therefore, even if, given [just] the notion of creation, it is possible for any creature whatsoever to be made by a created instrument, nonetheless, given the conditions presupposed and antecedently required for acting, it is not possible for one and the same entity to be an instrument of its own first creation. This becomes evident when we reason in a similar vein about an instrument of generation or of education. For no one will deny that God can use the grace that exists in Peter to produce grace in Paul, and yet [everyone] will deny that God can use that grace to produce itself – not because of the impossibility of this sort of instrumental action taken by itself, but rather because of the aforementioned presupposition of existence for acting.

Thus, if it is true that the same thing can be produced twice, that is, by two complete actions that are truly and properly terminated in its esse, then it is not at all absurd to grant that the same thing, once created, can concur as an efficient cause with respect to its own re-creation – just as the humanity of Christ concurs as an efficient cause in the transubstantiation of bread into that humanity itself. More on this elsewhere.<sup>18</sup>

Finally, if we proceed in like manner through the arguments made above, it will readily become clear that they are irrelevant to the sort of concurrence or efficient causality that occurs through obediential potency.

11. *Whether an action can be so proper to God that it cannot be communicated to any creature.* However, some authors /769b/ deduce [from this] the great absurdity that there is no action with respect to things outside himself that God cannot communicate to creatures, since if there were any such action, it would most assuredly be creation.

My own judgment, however, is that (i) this inference is not a necessary one and that (ii) the consequent, if correctly understood, is not an absurdity.

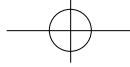
For, [first], someone could claim that the action by which the hypostatic union is effected is loftier and more incommunicable to a creature [than is creation], and that, further, among the treasures of the divine power there are other sorts of actions which surpass creation in other respects.<sup>19</sup> For even if creation is the first of all actions and, as it were, the foundation for other actions, it is nonetheless not the greatest of all actions.

Second, it is one thing to talk about the actions and another thing to talk about the entities produced by the actions. Thus, if we are talking about the *entities* that are made, then it is not at all absurd that God should be able to effect through a creature, as through an instrument, whatever he is able to effect

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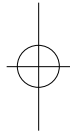
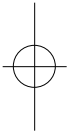
18 For related discussions, see *DM* 26.4, as well as *DM* 50.9.10–18. In the latter place Suarez goes so far as to argue that God can re-create not only substances, but even past temporal instants or intervals. (However, as re-created these instants or intervals have a new relation to other instants and intervals. It follows that the place an instant or interval has in a temporal ordering is not essential to its being.)

19 The hypostatic union is the union of the second person of the Blessed Trinity with his assumed individual human nature.



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through his own power alone. To the contrary, this pertains to the efficacy of God's power – just as, conversely, it likewise pertains to this efficacy that there is no entity God can make through a creature that he cannot make by himself alone. On the other hand, if we are talking about the *actions*, then there are many actions which are so proper to God that they cannot emanate from a creature – for example, the very action of creating by means of a principal power alone. Still, this fact is not peculiar to God; for even a creature's action, insofar as it is the action of that creature, cannot be effected without that creature or by any other creature. We will explain the reason for this in the next section, where, in addition, we will touch on a further argument in light of which still other authors claim that an instrument of creation is impossible, and we will show that this argument is inefficacious.<sup>20</sup>



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<sup>20</sup> See *DM* 20.4.9 and 34.

