

Recovering Hierarchy Of Being –by David Oderberg

BEGIN Transcript

Nicholi: Okay. Good evening and welcome to this another installment of the Humane Philosophy Ian Ramsey Centre Seminar Series which is run in collaboration with a grant we have received from the John Templeton Foundation, Science, Philosophy & Religion in Central and Eastern Europe, and beyond. I should probably dispatch with my obligation to thank our sponsors to begin with who are the Institute of Philosophy at the University of Warsaw of this Ian Ramsey Centre, and our hosts Blackfriars Hall of the University of Oxford.

Most importantly, it is my great pleasure to introduce today's speaker, Professor David Oderberg, who's Professor of Philosophy at Redding University and who did his Defill [phonetic] here at Oxford and previously completed his education at Melvern University in Australia. He is a self-described consequentialist and in opposition to philosophers like Peter Singer. He has offered over 30 papers in philosophy. A few more than that. Over 30 includes any number over 30, and at least four books including Essentialism, Applied Physics, Moral Theory, and The Metaphysics of Identity Over Time. Today he is going to be speaking to us on a topic in metaphysics, recovering the hierarchy of being. So please join me in giving our speaker a very, very warm welcome this evening.

David Oderberg: Thanks very much, Nicholi. So the first thing is am I being heard okay? Yeah? How long am I instructed to speak for before I draw us to an end?

Nicholi: Forty minutes, and then some time for questions.

David Oderberg: Okay. That should be fine. I'm not quite sure because this is in the form of a PowerPoint rather than my usual thing which is to kind of present a fully written paper. I'm not sure if I'm going to finish too early, too late, or what. But I'll string it out if necessary, to make sure that it goes to finish at 40, 45 minutes. So thanks very much for coming to this talk. So, yeah, the topic. Recovering the hierarchy of being is something that I've been thinking a lot about recently and kind of in the process of developing a paper, hopefully for publication in the not-to-distant future. It's a topic that I've been interested in for a while, but it just sort of had an opportunity to present itself, to work something out, in a more kind of rigorous way than just simply having a few intuitions. The intuition, the intuition being some things are better than others. Some things are not just morally, not just normatively, but some things are metaphysically better than others, basically, is the intuition. So I'm going to try to explain what that actually means, and why I think this concept of the hierarchy of being is so important, and why it is, contrary to appearances, capable of being recovered basically. Here's a famous quote from Alexander Pope, Essay on Man, talking about what's usually called the great chain of being that I'm sure you'll be familiar with the term. Probably, some of you will be familiar with the quote, "Vast chain of being which from God began natures ethereal, human, angel, man, beast, bird, fish, insect, what no eye can see. No glass can reach, from infinite to thee. From thee to Nothing."

I'm not a huge poetry expert, shall we say. I'm not a huge poetry reader. But I really admire poets who are able to put abstruse philosophy into quite pithy lines in a way that Pope does because there's so much philosophy just to capture it in a really genial way in that passage. So when we think of *The Great Chain of Being*, which I will sometimes refer to *The Great Chain of Being*, but I don't like the terminology. I prefer just the more neutral, bland term, the hierarchy of being is associated most famously with the book by Arthur Lovejoy called *The Great Chain of Being* which came out in 1936. That's a monumental work in the history of ideas, and arguably it is the book which kind of created the history of ideas as a discipline really. Many people attribute the history of ideas to Lovejoy in his famous book *The Great Chain of Being*. The book is a history of the idea of the great chain of being, and the kind of sub-ideas which are a part of that from Plato right through to The Enlightenment. Lovejoy describes it as a part of the history of Western man's long effort to make the world he lives in appear to his intellect, the rational one. He quotes T.H. Green, "why should the world as a whole, be what it is." *The Great Chain of Being* is supposed to be an answer to that perennial question. He goes on to say "if the worlds being, or extent, or range of diversity which its components exhibit have no intelligible reason, then they might equally well have been other than they are. The constitution of the world would be but a whim or an accident."

So the great chain of being or the hierarchy of being is probably the most, I think, one of the most significant attempts in the history of thought to answer questions like why is the universe the way it is, rather than some other way? Why does the world have the kind of constitution that it has? Importantly, Lovejoy is very quick to kind of dispense with any crude kind of sciency answer to the question which would appeal to say the laws, the fundamental laws of nature, or something like that. He says, "What we're interested in is also the conformity of the world to the very curious set of primary laws which empirical science discovers." These can't just be "brute facts." Now obviously, I mean most people nowadays, I guess, maybe philosophers nowadays would say, no, they are brute facts, and so on. So that's something we can discuss. But he, and I'm with him on this, think that these can't be just brute facts. But, you know, if there's going to be an explanation in the offering, it's going to be an explanation which comes with both the fundamental laws and the particular constitution of the world in conformity with those laws. So historically, *The Great Chain of Being* was the way in which Western man, from Plato, thrived through to the 18th Century, made the world intelligible. This is hard. It's hard for me, and it's hard for I'm sure probably everyone in this room to understand, to appreciate the importance of that last fact, that last historical fact.

When I first came across Lovejoy's book many, many years ago, I can't remember when I first saw it in some bookshop. I immediately dismissed it as some kind of weird pseudo-New Agey kind of thing which it was not the sort of thing that would be on any respectful philosophy syllabus. It's not something I ever encountered as a student. It's just not something you think any philosopher to teach other than perhaps in a specific course on the history of ideas. It didn't seem to be ... It's just kind of one of those things, a bit like ... so I'm going to be ... I was going to say a bit like books by Mortimer Adler, but that's really unfair because although he's not taught, there's a lot of good stuff in Mortimer Adler. But those kind of books that came out

of America in the 30's and 40's, they're just kind of somewhere on the periphery, if you like, philosophical mainstream, Western philosophical thinking.

But, you know, once you get into it you realize that that's such a wrong way of looking at things. What Lovejoy is exploring in *The Great Chain of Being* is the concept which from Plato ... this is no exaggeration ... from Plato to the 18th Century. So we're talking over 2,000 years this was the way in which Western man made the world intelligible. Not the only way. There were other things going on, of course, but that was one of the main conceptual tools, or conceptual kind of structures or framework in which Western man used to make the world with over 2,000 years. Well, where is it now? It's gone. You really need to pull those and reflect when you think about the fact that any idea that was so prevalent in philosophical thinking for two millennia or more, is virtually absent from the intellectual landscape. You must ask yourself, why is that? Was it such a bad idea? Is there not anything of value there? Can for 2,000 years Western man made the world intelligible by appeal to it.

That's kind of a starting point for me. If philosophers have thought of something so fundamental to their world view, and not just philosophers, but people of all kinds and stations in life, had something like this in mind for such a long period of time. There's something to it.

Well, *The Chain of Being*, as Lovejoy analyzes it is broken up into three fundamental principles. One, is the principal of plenitude. Okay, so Lovejoy's own formulation ... I'm just realizing a missing quotation mark there. Sorry about that. Lovejoy says, "The universe is a plenum formarum in which the range of conceivable diversity of kinds of living things is exhaustively exemplified." Actually, yeah. One of the problems with the book is when you look, when you go hunting in the book for a rigorous statement of the principle, of the fundamental principles, they're actually quite hard to find. The principles are kind of enunciated sort of in passing, but he never stops in the way you kind of want, or at least as a kind of analytical philosopher. I kind of like, you know what I'm saying, right? Here's the principle. Give it a label, and give me the principle in a more rigorous way. So, you know, a living thing ... actually, it's not just living things. Even Lovejoy recognized, not just living things are plenum formarum, but he mentions living things.

Daniel Wilson, who has written a very interesting, at least one. No, a couple of commentaries on the reception, the content and reception of Lovejoy's book says, "frames and as all conceptual possibilities must be realized in actuality, the principle plenitude." Again, that's not as rigorous as it could be, but it's maybe a little bit better or at least then acceptable for the same or restricted version given by Lovejoy.

The principle of continuity again. It's a tough one to ... to make more rigorous. He states that "if there are two given natural species" ... now, he's not necessarily talking about living things necessarily, just natural species. "If there is between two given natural species a theoretically possible intermediate type, that type must be realized." Because if not, then the principle of plenitude would be false. If continuity is false, then plenitude is false. Plenitude entails continuity, and then as he puts it, "really echoing the kind of Neoplatonists. The good or the

absolute would be lacking." There would be something missing in the absolute's manifestation of itself by the diversity of forms. Of the principle of gradation, he says, "All things may be arranged in a single graded scowl and aturi [phonetic], according to their degree of perfection. So the scowl and aturi are a very familiar concept, the latter of nature.

Audience Speaker: Is this Wilson?

David Oderberg: No, no. The 50's, that's Lovejoy. So the picture, again, this is Lovejoy talking. The conception of the plan and structure of the world, which through the Middle Ages and down to the late 18th Century, most philosophers, most men of science, and indeed, most educated men accept without question. The conception of the universe as a great chain of being. Again, "the universe, composed of an immense, or by the strict but seldom rigorously applied logic of the principle of continuity of an infinite number of lengths ranging in hierarchical order from the meagerest kinds of elements which barely escape non-existence through every possible grade up to the ens perfectissimum," or in a somewhat more orthodox version to the highest possible creature between which, and the absolute, being the disparity was assumed to be infinite. "Every one of them differing from that immediately above, and immediately below it by the least possible degree of difference." It's a lot to take in there. We can go back to that and maybe try and teach some of that if you like. I mean, again, there's a lot of question marks over the formulation of how to understand it. Well, the great chain of being broke, and the evidence for that is no one believes it anymore. It broke ... I mean Lovejoy does his best to kind of, you know, trace it. He does an amazing job. You know? I mean the patience required to do the kind of conceptual kind of archeology that he does is quite astounding. Sometime in the 19th Century, sometime in the 19th Century, over a period of time that we don't know exactly the extent of, people just stop believing it.

Why did the chain break? Well, I think the reasons that are both moral and metaphysical ... and this is a bit of Lovejoy talking, and a bit of me talking here, so I'm not saying all of this Lovejoy would agree with, but quite a bit of it. He's most interested in the 5th reason that I've listed here, which is by far the dominant cause for the break of the chain according to Lovejoy. But the way I see it, you've got a number of things. One, the Protestant Reformation. These are overlapping causes too. I'm just picking sort of things. Picking events and moments in history out. There overlaps between them, and each one has things going on in it which I think explain why it was that the chain kind of melted away, as it were. So the Protestant Reformation, which obviously has many, many facets to it, but I think the kind of leveling that you get, at least among some of the Protestant Sects that break away from the Catholic Church have the kind of leveling you find in a kind of democratization of religion. If you want ... I'm going to put it that way, tentative democratization and privatization of religion I think contributed to a more skeptical attitude towards divinely ordained hierarchies, I guess. Now, that's very rough and ready, and again, I'm sure there were people in the audience who will have views about that. We can maybe talk about that, but it's one cause that I can identify, which Lovejoy doesn't put as much emphasis on.

Then you've got Galilean, Houston, and the Copernican Principle. Right? The idea that man was dethroned from the center of the universe through the work of, you know, first, Galilean, but Kepler, and the whole Heliocentric Theory, you know, there was just no longer a place for man at the center of that. There was no evident way in which he could get, he could extract any kind of metaphysical hierarchy from the whole Heliocentric system, and the Copernican Principle, which stands to this day that there is no kind of privileged point of reference in the universe, and it is not the center of the universe. The universe really has no center, and so on. Don't ask me more on that, I'm not a physicist. Again, we can perhaps talk about that if people want to. But anyway, Copernican Principle, no center of the universe.

Antifeudalism and egalitarian, and egalitarianism, again, the leveling that you get through various social movements and anti-hierarchical movements is going to naturally feed into a loss of belief in any kind of transcendent hierarchy that somehow ordered the universe. The Enlightenment, again. In some respect, and in Enlightenment, you find the hierarchy of being still held onto very strongly in the Enlightenment by Enlightenment thinkers. Man is the crown of all creation, and the Creator is maybe kind of some sort of day-sticking [phonetic] personal kind of being, but man is the crown of Creation. Man is in control of nature. So all that kind of rationalism that you get from the Enlightenment is all there, and so that's not particularly inimical to the hierarchy as such. But again, within the Enlightenment you have political movements which tend to have a more democratizing and flattening affect on the way in which the universe, and mankind, and living creatures, and so on, are structured.

Evolutionism, which Lovejoy places the most emphasis on, and he thinks you have to replace the hierarchy of being, which is static with the dynamic metaphysics of becoming. You know? I mean that Evolutionism as a theory is a kind of metaphysical view of the world feeds into, of course, evolution as a kind of biological theory. So hierarchies get replaced with constantly changing and mutating and transforming species. You have extinctions, and you have new species being created or coming into existence, and so on, and so forth.

Finally, the other thing, which I should have said really, these two things of what Lovejoy is really concerned about, evolution, he's a man of romanticism. In fact, actually, I sort of misspoke a bit earlier because really it's romanticism which for him is the main cause of the end of the heart, of the chain, [indiscernible] [0:20:22]. Again, theologies are becoming of self-development. Development of something. Development of the cosmos. All of these kinds of dynamical views of theology are in opposition to a more static hierarchical view of the universe.

So there was that fact, and also to just kind of zoom in a little bit. The fact is that the great chain of being, the hierarchy of being brought with it a lot of baggage that was not to put too fine a point on it. It'd be ridiculous. So Lovejoy says, "since every place on the scale must be filled, since each is what it is by virtue of the special limitations to differentiate from any other, man if he was to keep his place, and not to seek the transcendent. It'd be good for a being if a given grade that seemed evident must consist in conformity to its type. No great improvement in men's political behavior or any organization of sight that could be hoped for, for principles of plenitude and gradation could in this way, among their many uses, be made to serve the

purposes of a species of pessimistic and backhanded apologetic, both for the political status quo, and for the accepted religion," whatever that religion that happened to be in that particular era of Europe.

Again, Pope says, "order is heavens first law, and this confessed summer, and must be greater than the rest, more rich, more wise." So what happens here is the metaphysical hierarchy gets transformed into a kind of social hierarchy with social stratification, often in minute degrees here, and these two things from Diego validate on the one hand the kind of ecclesiastical hierarchy, and then the temple hierarchy. The ecclesiastical hierarchy, of course, you have the various ranks of clergy and so on. Then within the temple hierarchy, you have the masters and servants, and workers, and the more intellectually endowed people, and what have you. All the different, kinds of social examples of social stratification. So it got all tied up with all of that, which is overall a mistaken view of the way to use the world planned hierarchy. Richardson's novel *Pamela* has a very interesting statement here. So he has one of the characters saying, "Why is providence to various parts of various minds dispense. The meanest slaves are those who hedge in ditch, are useful by their sweat to feed the ridge. The ridge in due return impart best or which comfortably feeds the labor and paw. Nor let the ridge the lowest ridge disdain, he's equally a link of nature's chain, labors to the same, and joins in one view, and both are like the will divine pursued. And at the last, our leveled kind enslaves without distinction in the silent grave." So he's just really mouthing there a kind of typical view of the social stratification of being which he's not necessarily endorsing. It's just that people did use the hierarchy at least implicitly as a way of reinforcing existing social stratification and social hierarchies. You also get metaphysical and scientific accesses as well, not just social and moral ones.

So this is an extract from Charles Bonnet, he's [indiscernible] [0:24:01] Palingenesie. You know, you get ideas. I suppose it's easy to laugh at these things. I mean it's easy to laugh at all science done before, you know, the modern period or something. So I don't want to try and get cheap laughs out of it, but he's got a hierarchy with shellfish above tube worms above moths or something. Insects, gall insects. I had to look up what a gall insect is. You know, gall insects that create little nests and things on trees and plants to keep their eggs and keep their young and stuff. Yeah. Tapeworms, polyps. I mean I don't know. Is a tapeworm better than a polyp or are gall insects superior to a tapeworm? I have no idea. I'm sure Bonnet had his reasons. The thing is, again, I'm kind of rubbishing it a bit. I don't want to be too harsh because you think yeah, there's reasons. Bonnet was no fool, but it's just that if you take the hierarchy to such minute depths or to such minute extents, then you end up with kinds of strata which just don't look plausible. They just don't look right. I mean you'd have to argue really hard to be able to prove that a gall insect was better than a tapeworm in some biological way or something. So you get these metaphysical, biological, scientific, and also moral, political, and social excesses attached sort of like I think of them as kind of these incrustations or, you know, attaching to the basic hierarchy, and which cause the hierarchy in a way to collapse. What I'm trying to recover is something in the hierarchy that can be rid of at least most of these incrustations, and present something that gives food for thought. So can we do better.

We should put aside the moral and political excesses as either wrong or at least not directly found on any kind of metaphysical truth. So the idea the king is superior to his subjects or the king is superior to the queen. The queen is superior to the prince. The prince is superior to the princess. This is what people believe. You know? Then all the various other ranks in the kingdom, and then down to the dukes, and your royals, and your barrons, all the way down to the meanest surfs. Right? We need to put those moral and political excesses to one side, I think for metaphysical reasons. So we say why would we think the king is somehow metaphysically superior to, I don't know, anyone else in the kingdom. The king does not have a monarchical essence. There's no such thing as monarchical essence for human beings. So no king is essentially a king in that sense. The king's essence is the same as the essence we all have, which is to be a rational animal, vests to be human. So what has the monarchical essence is the role, the monarchical role has the essence of being monarchical, obviously. Now, the monarchical role has certain monarchical features, whatever the features are of a king. So the role does.

Now, if that role attaches to a human being in such a way that we are entitled to say that that human being is superior to other human beings, then that's not going to be for metaphysical reasons. It's going to be for moral reasons or political reasons. It would be because somehow that role has a moral superiority to other roles. I think we can all kind of be on board with that in some way. You know? Even in our highly egalitarian society, we still believe we should obey those who govern us, at least to some degree. Right? They're the law. They're our judges and what-have-you.

So we can accept all of that, but it's not going to be for metaphysical reasons or the metaphysical essence of a judge. It'll be for the essence of the roles. The roles will attach for moral reasons and carry certain moral features with them. Also, we shouldn't treat the hierarchy of being as a corollary of the absolute, to use a term from Lovejoy. The Neoplatonist impetus given to the hierarchy of being I think is very interesting. I don't want to, you know, say bad things about the Neoplatonist. It gets difficult to fathom, I guess, when you start thinking about the absolute, and the absolute having to somehow being a bit obliged to manifest itself through a stratum or strata of forms which reflect the infinite diversity somehow inherent within the absolute. You have to do a lot of work to make something graspable out of that in my view. I don't want to create or dismiss it. I just don't think we should approach the hierarchy of being through the Neoplatonist gate. That's all I want to say.

I also think ... this might be a little bit more controversial, particularly given the location and the audience. I don't think we should assume the existence of God, or for that matter any other immaterial agents as part of a hierarchy. So if we're going to defend the hierarchy, sure. You will see that God is going to have a place in a hierarchy, but I don't think it's something you should just assume. If you assume that the hierarchy must contain God, then a lot of people will think, well, why? You know, I mean if that's the kind of assumption that you have to make then there must be something wrong with the hierarchy in the first place, if that's what you have to assume. I don't think we need to assume that. We can paint the picture that has God as part of the hierarchy without assuming that God has to be in the hierarchy. You know?

Maybe that sounds a bit obscure, but I'll maybe try and make that a little bit clearer later. I certainly don't think the hierarchy can be used in any direct way as a proof of the existence of God. Put it that way.

I think we need to define the hierarchy in terms of essential powers. That is to say the powers that are the essence of the beings within the hierarchy. What we need to do, in my view, is to look towards a highly generic hierarchy compatible with specific non-hierarchical arrangements. I think this is likely the view that Aristotle himself had in his books on the animals and elsewhere. He allows and endorses, as far as I can tell, the idea that although there are hierarchies in a very generic, there's kind of a generic hierarchy of essential powers among beings, but within a particular local kind of region. You're not going to be able to find hierarchies between different biological species of animal and so on, but there's no reason why we should expect that to be. Maybe there is, but it's not obvious that there is, and he points out examples where it is not the case. I think that's more in line with Aristotle's view. I think what we need to do is make the principle of gradation, the centerpiece of the hierarchy, not the principle of plenitude or the principle of continuity. It's the principle of gradation, which to me is the heart of the hierarchy.

So here's one formulation of the principle of gradation from a wonderful book. A book that is like right next to my, you know, it's on my iPad, of course, and right next to my desk whenever I'm working, recently reprinted by a very good friend of mine in Germany. It's available in print by Bernard Wuellner called the *Summary of Scholastic Principles*. Principle 210 says, "in material and living bodies, we find an ascending order of perfections in which the higher beings have their own perfections, as well as those of the lower levels of being." That seems to me to be a much better way of thinking of the principle of gradation. While that continuity and plenitude, well, Lovejoy says, "if there is between two given natural species of theoretically possible intermediate type, that type must be realized." Again, why believe it? Because if you didn't believe that, plenitude would be false because there would be theoretically possible entities which didn't exist.

And Wilson, "all conceptual possibilities must be realized in actuality" says colored plenitude. Why should we believe this either? It might be that continuity is true and plenitude is false. Plenitude implies continuity. I don't think continuity implies plenitude. I'm not denying that there might be some form of those two principles that is true. I don't think it's going to be the forms that you typically see as enunciated in Lovejoy and in some of the Neoplatonists. It's going to be something a bit different from that. But I would say I think gradation is really at the heart of the hierarchy.

So the principle of continuity. Here's a version given by Wuellner, Principle 212. "The order of the universe displays a gradual scale of perfections, from end to end through all essentially different, intermediate steps." 214, "in every superior nature, in it's least perfectional operation, borders on the highest protection or operation of the nature ranking next below it in a scale of being." Again, I think those are more plausible ways of thinking of continuity. And gradual scale of paopothy [phonetic], what the devil do you mean by gradual? Essentially,

different, and bordering, and so on. I think you can say things about that. As I develop this into the paper that hopefully it will become. I will have more to say about that.

The reference to the numbers here, so it's a constant theme of much of the Neoplatonist thought, and the Neoplatonist thought on this topic, and also, I include here the Renaissance Platonists. But to draw an analogy with numbers, that each number, just talking about the natural numbers, the natural integers. Each integer is made up of units. Right? Nothing is sophisticated here. So in other words, each integer contains within it units lower in the scale, and that if we think of the gradation or the scale of being that way, then we can kind of think of in a level, you have a being that kind of wraps up within it the perfections in the lower scales, but also has more. It wraps up those perfections and has something extra as each number does. It's just an analogy, right? This is not supposed to be some sort of proof. It is quite a suggestive analogy.

Principle of Plenitude. So Wuellner 216 and 217. 216, "by the free choice of the Creator, the universe of being contains all essential levels of perfections and of natures." Also, 217, "the superior one is represented by many inferior beings." Again, I think these are much more fruitful ways of thinking about plenitude, rather than some extremely strong principle to the effect that every conceptual possibility, to use Wilson's term, it has to be realized in reality, or something like that. Perhaps it's too strong. But something like these are a bit more plausible. I think one has to do a bit of finessing about what is meant by essential levels. I think essential levels is a bit, maybe not the most helpful terms, but I think that can be made a bit more precise here. I'm only guessing what Wuellner had in mind, but I'm going to do my best to kind of come to a reasonable interpretation. All I'm doing here is come into an excellent book by Colin Tudge called *The Variety of Life*. If you want to be convinced of the incredible diversity of life, then have a look at this book, and you'll be absolutely amazed.

So how do we define superiority. It all comes down to a metaphysical definition of superiority. We have a concept of metaphysical superiority. So informally, members of species are then. I'll just say species, members of. Species S-1 is superior to Species S-2, means, is defined as S-1 can do what S-2 can do and more. That's the informal idea. So recall, in material living bodies, we find an ascending order of perfections in which the higher beings have their own perfections, as well as those of the lower being. They can do what the lower beings can do and more. That's the heart. That's the intuition or the heart of metaphysical superiority. We need to explicate can do in terms of essential powers, otherwise, we wouldn't be talking about species qua species. So you might have two bird species that are extremely similar to each other, but one has an ability to, I don't know, build nests that are stronger than for the other one. I'm going to say that bird is superior to the other one. This could be a really contingent matter, depending on what the environment is or the niches that they're in, and so on. It leads to a lot of work to show that one of the bird species is superior to the other, just because of the sort of nest building capability. That's just not strong enough. We need to talk about the essential powers of the species, qua species.

The species I think we need to talk about, I think are the most generic in the hierarchy. That sounds weird, until you realize that we're talking about metaphysical species, which may or may not be biologically recognized. So we have to get over this hurdle of thinking that when a metaphysician says species, they mean biological species. Well, maybe most of them do, but I don't. When I say species, I mean metaphysical species, unless I say specifically, biological. So it's not that weird. We want the most generic species in our hierarchy to be able to explain superiority in terms of the most generic species in our hierarchy. And these species are, and there's nothing original or unfamiliar, at least, to some of you here. To recapitulate, purely material bodies, plants, animals, humans. Then quite query, we back to disembodied minds and brackets divine being.

Now, a divine being is not a species. God is not a species. God is an individual. But it's not crucial that God be a species in order to be in the hierarchy. It's not crucial that something be a member of a species, or in some way itself a species, or to be in the hierarchy. It could be done with individuals. The main factor is essence, essential powers. God has an essence, even though God is not a genus or a species, or a member of a genus, member of a species. God has an essence, and that's enough in my view. So the powers we're concerned with must be the most generic.

So again, you might have a cryptic plant species. These are plants that again are morphologically almost identical, but they have an essential difference. For instance, their toxicity. You can have different fungi here that produce a different toxicity with respect to grapes and blueberries. But you don't want to say, well, that fungus is superior to that fungus because that one can do this kind of poisoning, but the other one can't. Then the other one can also do the first kind of poisoning as the other one as well. That's not going to be good enough. So merely having an extra highly specific power does not make for superiority. It won't be absolute superiority if S-1 and S-2, each have one such power. If S-2 can do something S-1 can't, and S-1 can do something that S-2 can't. Then they'll be superior to each other. That's one work.

What we want is a kind of absolute superiority, not relative superiority. So what we're after, the most generic powers of the essences of the most generic metaphysical species of things. The most generic powers, or the essences, or the most generic metaphysical species of things. So the hierarch will look something like that. Again, nothing original here. I tweaked it a little bit in the way I like it to look and what I wanted to express, but basically, you know, I think the era stavia [phonetic] and domestic view of this is pretty much it. So it kind of speaks for itself in a way. I want to point out just a couple of things.

One, so with God and angels, both of which are traditionally in the hierarchy, we're talking about bracketing them together as mind without body. Whereas, in the case of God, you have kind of active intellect without reason. So God's not rational. God's not a rational being. God has no reason. God has just kind of an active intellect which is just a pure active God, uses His intellect. Angels on the other hand, as Aquinas points out, have passive intellects. They are told things by God. Okay? They don't have active intellect's either, at least in St. Thomas' view.

They don't have reason. They are given what they need to know by their Creator. You have here body without life, body and life without mind, body life without reason, and body life, mind, and reason. It starts to get a bit wrinkly at the top. Then you have prime matter without form. Then you have got the top, pure act, pure mind, rational sense, sentient. The other thing I just want to point out, well, two things. One is that I class the rational sentient and the vegetative as a sub-class within a broader class of living things. So in that sense, angels and a divine being are living. They're just not organic. Right? They're living. So I take organic to be a sub-class of the living. The agency is a receiver of the forms that are expressed in these various kinds of things, except for, right, only up to a certain period. Not in the case of God and equivocally in the case of angels because angels have potency, but they don't have prime matter. There are little things you have to add there. Then, pure act is the creator of the things below, and pure potency is the receiver of the things above is the basic kind of picture here.

There are some facts that we need to account for. So, one, plants are superior to mere bodies. Plants are not just another kind of body. Basically, if you're a reductionist, this is not for you. I'm not going to convince any reductionist about any of it. You just think that plants are more matter, that there's nothing sort of essentially special about living things, and either you'll be reduced to physics and chemistry if we just knew enough. This is going to be of very little interest to you.

Angels are superior to humans because they're obviously not just another kind of human. That's just should be pretty obvious. There are religions in which people think that humans can turn into angels, over all angels really, or something like that, but not where I come from. Angels are another, kind of human. Bats are not superior to mammals. We do not want to have our definition of superiority better not yield the result that bats are superior to mammals because bats are just another kind of mammal. To say that bats are superior to mammals borders on the incoherent. We don't want that result. We do want the first two. We want all of these results. We want plants to be superior to mere bodies. We want angels to be superior to humans. We don't want bats to be superior to mammals.

So the definition that I've got at least for the moment, until someone comes up with a counter-example, which usually happens when we do these things. One can only do one's best. Species S-1 is superior to Species S-2 is defined by two clauses. One, the set of S-2's generic powers are a non-redundant proper subset of them, is a proper sub-set P in S-1's powers. And two, S-1's generic powers minus P, are not explained by it's being a species of S-2.

So S-2's generic powers are not all ... or some non-redundant proper subset of them, which I'll explain as a proper subset. But S-1's generic powers, minus all the ones in P, are not explained by its being a species of S-2. So let me try and explain that in the time that we've got left, maybe five minutes or so if we can get through this.

So for set of S-2's generic powers, or a non-redundant subset of them is a proper subset P of S-1's generic powers. So, for example, the powers of a body are a proper subset of the powers of a plant. Because plants are bodies. They're just not mere bodies. Contrary to the reductionist.

They're not near bodies, but they are bodies. So the powers of body are a proper subset of the powers of a plant. You know plants are very mechanics, like rocks do. The powers of a human are not the proper subset of the powers of an angel, for example. Humans have reason. They have bodies. So they're not the proper subset of an angel. Angels don't have reason or bodies. But there is a non-redundant proper sub-set of the powers of a human that is a proper subset of the powers of an angel. Namely, intellect and will. So angels have intellect and wills, and humans have intellect and wills. So you have a non-redundant subset of the powers of a human that is a proper subset of the powers of an angel. But for angels, reason is a very non-trivially redundant, and the body is trivially redundant. So reason is probably non-trivially redundant because God tells angels what they need to know. So because He does it, it's redundant for angels to have reason. Now, the question is not trivial. Could they have reason? Could they be given ... if God withholds information, are they capable of reasoning? I don't know. No idea. But as is, officially, because they're told what they need to know, their reason would be redundant for them. Body is trivially redundant because angels don't have bodies, essentially. So, of course, it's trivially redundant. They don't need bodies, and they couldn't have them.

Intellect and will, however, are non-redundant because they're essential. It's essential to angels. Angels wouldn't be angels if they didn't have intellects and wills. Two, so S-1's generic powers minus P are not explained by it's being a species of S-2, so how does that work? Well, take the powers of a bat and subtract the mammalian powers, and what have you got left. This is extremely biologically ... right? This is not supposed to be some kind of a textbook precision. That would take a lot of slides to do that. But just let's keep it simple for the sake of the presentation. That power minus mammalian power is the power of flight because bats are the only flying mammals. So bats are the only flying mammals. All the other stuff other mammals have in various shapes and sizes, well, flight is unique to bats. Now, the power of flight in bats, it presupposes and is explained by bats being mammals. That's the key point. So remember, clause two, S-1's generic powers minus P are not explained by it's being a species of S-2, for S-1 to be superior to S-2. Now, bat flight is explained by the fact that bats are mammals, so that's the standard kind of analysis that shows the kind of homology of the bat fore-limb and for example, the fore-limb of a mouse. So that's fine. So bats do not turn out, on my formulation, bats to not turn out to be superior to mammals, and that's just the way I want it. So lucky me, they don't come out as superior to mammals. That would be a bad result. You know? I haven't gerrymandered, I mean it just makes sense. I mean the definition I've given is intuitively plausible. It's not like here's the result. Well, probably here's the result, and I don't want ... I need a formula that's going to make sure that I don't get that result. But also, here's an intuitively plausible formulation, and let's hope it doesn't actually yield a result I don't want. And actually, it doesn't yield a result I don't want. Not here anyway.

Vegetative powers presuppose, but are not explained by, bodily powers. So, yeah, if you have vegetative powers, you're a plant, then you're going to have bodily powers. But these vegetative powers are not explained by bodily powers. Remember, if you're a reductionist, this is not for you. I don't believe, and I've read extensively on this. It doesn't mean it's right, but I have a developed view on this. But vegetative powers are not explained by bodily powers.

So on that score, plants do come out as superior to mere bodies. Now, angelic powers minus non-redundant human powers, give you the angelic intellect, which is passive and non-discursive. The angelic intellect is not explained by angels being a species of humans, which by definition, they are not. So angels are superior to humans by the definition of superiority that I give. They have a passive and non-discursive intellect which is not explained by their being a species of human. Why? Because they're not species of humans.

The same argument would apply to the superiority of God over angels and humans. Just substitute divine intellect for angelic intellect. Again, the divine intellect is not explicable by God's being a kind of anything else lower in the hierarchy because God is not a kind of anything else lower in the hierarchy. So, yeah, it gets wrinkly at the top. It gets tricky, but I think we can fit these in. Again, this is not supposed to be an argument for God or for angels or anything. I'm just saying if you want God and disembodied spirits to be in the hierarchy, as for 2,000 years people did, then I think you can do it. If you think about it carefully, you can do it.

So to sum up, the basic entity-tunistic [phonetic] hierarchy of being, I think, can be defended, and if you put aside metaphysical prejudices, I think it is actually in accord with common sense. Now, there might be further sub-hierarchies, but I think we should rightly reject many that were held until the 19th Century. So I'm not leaving ... I'm not ruling out other sub-hierarchies within biological species. I don't know how it would work out. You have to think very carefully about it, but I don't think it's essential to the hierarchy in the entity-tunistic tradition, at least.

So one thing that I'd like you to hear, which is inconsistent with thinking of the hierarchy more loosely in terms of God-likeness, which is a very common theme in the Neoplatonist than others, or an increase in power or nobility, and the retreat from matter, which is extremely important in the defense of the hierarchy. It is a concept that you see among people who defend the hierarchy, not excluded by anything that I've said. It's just that I'm not defending the hierarchy in those terms. The hierarchy also does not exclude local cyclicity. So, for example, the food chain. We end up as food for worms, and Ash Wednesday is the perfect day for us to reflect on that very important point. So are worms superior to us because they end up eating us? Well, there are places where people eat worms as well. We eat them. They eat us. You know? Well, I don't know. I could make some very unpleasant, topically unpleasant jokes at the moment about eating various kinds of animals. I won't.

So, you know, are they superior to us, are we superior to them? Well, you know, the food chain is only a chain in one sense. It's a cycle in another sense, and it also doesn't include local reverse superiority. In other words, there are senses in which animals that seem very low in the hierarchy are actually superior to us, or the all truth. You know? Cockroaches are more likely than us to survive a nuclear war. Yeah, probably. They're very hardy creatures, cockroaches. Turtles live longer than us, etcetera, etcetera, etcetera. There might be a kind of reverse superiority in a very local sense, if you're thinking just about longevity, or health, or flourishing or something like that. That's all compatible in my view with the hierarchy of being.

Finally, you won't find an argument for the existence of God here, but I do think you what you will find is a suggestive schema. That's the strongest that I would put it. In other words, if you think of the hierarchy as a bit of a kind of a jigsaw puzzle, so I'm going from linear. I'm going from one-dimensional to two-dimensional here. So it's not brilliant, but if you think of the schema as a bit of a jigsaw puzzle, then you might think it's a bit puzzling if there were certain pieces that weren't there. You really might want to fill them in with some extra pieces, like well, disembodied minds. There you go again, minds that are in body. Or like disembodied minds. You can have matter without form or pure potency. What about pure actuality which God is identified with, etcetera, etcetera. So I think there's the suggestive thing. But I don't think the hierarchy was ever or maybe not consistently offered as an argument for the existence of God. It was more an explanation of, given the existence of God, how God would fit into the hierarchy, and what makes God superior to other creatures, and how all those creatures are superior to each other. So that's it. Thank you very much for your patience.

Nicholi: Thank you very much for that fascinating, very rich, very thought provoking and more generally provoking talk. We've got roughly the full time for questions. I can see many hands already, but we'll start at the front here with Professor Trig [phonetic]. If you can just wait until the microphone gets to you. As we've mentioned, it won't make you speak louder, but it will make sure that your comments and questions are recorded, and Ralph will come around and give the microphone to you.

Professor Trig: One of the things that strikes me about the principle of plenitude, that all conceptual possibilities must be realized in actuality, is that it actually renders empirical science pointless because we could do all of our research by just sitting in an armchair thinking what must be the case, and hey, presto, it is the case. So therefore, there is no point in empirical science. So you need a gap between necessity and contingency, between possibility and actuality, unless you want to say, well, actually empirical science is not worried about it at all.

David Oderberg: So if that's how you frame the principle of plenitude, and I don't want to frame it that way. So to fix it ...

Professor Trig: Well, I was quoting it all conceptually, I guess.

David Oderberg: Yeah, yeah. So to the extent ... All I want to say is that I think that there might be a defense in a principle of plenitude. Not that one. I think that you're right. I think you're half right. So what I would say is, yes, if the job of science is to find out what there is kind of empirically speaking, then yeah, you could do it from the armchair if something like that strong version of plenitude were correct. However, I think there is more to science than just simply finding out what there is empirically. There's also finding out what things are like. It might be that although a strong principle of plenitude could tell you that, there are things that have certain kinds of features sufficient to put them in kind of the interstices between other known existence or maybe another possible existence, that it wouldn't follow from that that you would know everything about what that things was like. So there might still be some empirical work

to find out, well, what are these things like in the minutia. So I think it's half right, what you're saying.

Professor Trig: I just add that actually in physics, this principle of plentitude does seem to be alive because when people are talking about mini worlds, some mathematicians acknowledged, well, there are an infinite number of possibilities, and there are actual hells, and there are an infinite number of universes.

David Oderberg: Well, some people say that.

Professor Trig: Well, I think ... and I think they're quite wrong, but --

David Oderberg: Me and you both.

Professor Trig: But I'm suspicious of plentitude.

David Oderberg: Me and you both, yeah.

Male Speaker 1: Thank you. I'm concerned about different senses of hierarchy of being which your employing. It seems to me that it's the case that one can talk about the hierarchy of created being, but it is a mistake, I think, and then Thomas would think it's a mistake, to put God in that hierarchy. That God is not part of the hierarchy of being. So when you talk about God's being, God is in a sense beyond any category of created being. Therefore, there's sometimes, I think there's sort of a proper sense of hierarchy of being which does not have God as a part, and there's a kind of metaphorical sense about when one talks about God as the highest element in the hierarchy of being. But I think it's dangerous not to make that distinction, so that we're not putting the Creator, and this is simply a metaphysical argument. We're not putting the Creator as part of the hierarchy of being.

David Oderberg: Thanks. So again, I think that's half right. Ha, ha. Again. I'll tell you why I think it's half right. So there was an extensive debate throughout the entire life of *The Great Chain of Being* as to whether God belonged in the hierarchy, and if so, in what sense. It was an endless, and to some extent, tedious debate about whether God was in the hierarchy. Now, you have both sides. You have both sides saying kind of what you're saying, that God is kind of ... To put God in the hierarchy is in a way to categorize God, to put God as part of some part of taxonomy, to think of God as just another being and He is superior to all the other beings, and that's all mistaken because God is infinitely distant from all the other beings. So there's no way that something that is infinitely different from everything else could be superior to everything else. And then you have others who said, well, yeah, we need to think about certain things. God is Creator and God is superior to the Creation. If you think God is not superior to the creation, then that's looking, I would say that God was not superior to the creation. Not just morally, but metaphysically, would be, if I could put it this way, offensive to pious ears. It's temporarious to make a claim like that, even if you do it in good faith.

You're trying to make a good point, but God is superior to the creation. So then, and also, if humans are made in the image of God, that humans are made in the image of God, but we're not co-equal with God. Where in the image of God, chiefly in the soul, but all ... chiefly in the soul, as the catechism says, but not solely in the soul. Chiefly in the soul. So how do we account for that if we don't want God to be in some way superior to humans, but yet, capable of being in a hierarchy with humans such that that superiority shows some kinds of commonality, just to put it in a very loose sense. Very loose analogical sense of commonality. I think the answer is to say, well, yeah, to the extent that you think of God as just another being to fit in the taxonomy in the puzzle, that's wrong. That is wrong. I agree with you. To think there's some measurable distance, and I don't know how you would do that, between God and creatures, is also wrong. Yet, I think we do, we should say God is superior to all other creatures, and that God is above them all.

The definition I give, although I didn't go into that, the definition I give would achieve that. That God would come out, as you would hope, superior to all of the creation. Without, as I actually said in passing, requiring us to think of God as being in a species, or a species, or a genus, or in a genus, or just another being. You can just say God is an individual, and God is individual in fact in a pure and natural reason. God is just a particular individual, a being, not a kind of being, just a being. God has an essence. Right? There's a divine essence. So surely, well, surely, it's not an argument. But it seems to me intuitive that that essence, the essential powers of God, and God has essential powers, is going to be the source of the explanation of why it is that this other intuition is true, namely that God is wholly dominant over and is wholly distinct and superior to all of the creation. So that's how I would answer that kind of question, if you get what I mean.

Nicholi: We've got many more questions, and I assure you, I'm not following the hierarchy of being and picking you out only to raise that kind of [inaudible] [1:04:35]. Let's allot more time.

David Oderberg: Yes, of course.

Nicholi: Do you mind? Thank you.

Male Speaker Two: Sorry, thanks. It's really interesting, and is there anything intuitively attractive and solves a lot of the normal problems that people face with this. So I'm not sure I've quite solved this in my mind yet.

David Oderberg: Good.

Male Speaker Two: I'm just trying to work out what the significance of metaphysical superiority is. So I've got ... I think some of these chains kind of being in the past. I've got a kind of foggy notion that it's quite normatively significant to say the old classical theory of beauty, and people talk about beauty as the pursuit of perfection or the ideals and facecisms [phonetic] of pursuit of perfection. Then there are ideals of human conduct which are supposed to be about trying to approximate perfections. That makes this all extremely important if something like

that is right. It has a great significance on how we live. I can just imagine this challenge to what you're saying, which is you've told us that some things have powers that other things don't have. We knew that. There are some general species of things which have highly generic powers that other generally don't have. We knew that as well, but I ... so what? What does the claim of superiority add to the mere claim that some have powers that other things don't have? If it's over what it adds in these normal implications about beauty or the good life, then how do those ... if you want to, I guess ... but if those are what are added, how do those implications follow from the mere fact of differential powers.

David Oderberg: So I made a real point of not going down that alley. Right? As you can tell, right? I very carefully assued [phonetic] any attempt to draw out, shall we say, I think normative consequences of this hierarchy. I'm not even sure in my own mind whether I want to go down that path at this stage. I think it can ... part of what I'm doing here is ... what I have to do is kind of tear away the hierarchy that I think is plausible from the kind of accretions which are normative and moral, which have built up on top of that over the centuries, which caused the whole thing to collapse actually. So I think in a way, and this is probably going to sound like a bit of a cop out, but understanding now is the right time to sort of talk about that. Let's see if any philosopher in the world is willing to agree with some of this before we begin to think about whether there are any normative consequences. So that's kind of a cheap answer. Now, I think that the obvious thought that comes to mind is that, well, inferior species in the hierarchy are in some sense for the beings that are above them. Now, the question is, well, if that were true, what kind of foreign-ness would that be. They sub-serve them. What kind of ... now ... the term subservient. You say subservient, and then immediately you start thinking about the master superior to the slave and all this. That's why I just think this gets us in the wrong text and the wrong direction.

Talk about foreign-ness. In one sense, there's the mere bodies for the plants, and the animals, and humans, and in what sense the plants are for the humans. And in what sense the animals are for the humans. Well, you know Aquinas talks about this at length as do others. I think there is a kind of foreign-ness of notion to be had here. Again, pretty intuitive in the way in which things that are superior in the hierarchy make use of the things that are lower in the hierarchy for their own well-being and flourishing. So there's that kind of normative aspect, which is not, by the way, a moral feature. So I think it's a normative feature. The next step, if you were to try to think about what are the consequences of this? If it were true, what would follow? Well, I think the fact that if it were true, that would be pretty important in itself. But what would follow from that, normatively speaking. Well, you don't immediately get into anything moral. You have to look at kind of the normativity of the setup. So the fact is that minerals feed plants, and plants feed animals, and animals feed people. But people don't feed angels, thank God. And angels don't feed God, and we don't feed God. So obviously, it starts to break down. So I think the normative aspect of it is going to be ... if there is one, is going to be ... it may be multi-dimensional. I think it will be some sort of scale, but it's going to be multi-dimensional, and I think it's maybe going to have some interesting features to it. So I'm just not going to say more at this stage because I think now is not the time for that kind of investigation. I've got to get my head around, you know, this first.

Male Speaker Three: Thank you very much. Fascinating presentation. I want to just reach a couple of historical considerations in relationship to what Bill and Roger have said in relationship to modern science, and doctrine, and God, respectively. First of all, it could be argued, and I think this plot very strong argument. What got Christians persecuted was that they were seditious because they were seen as rejecting the hierarchy of being whether understood on the platonic or historic lines. Second point would be that the doctrine of creation out of nothing. As it developed, was a rejection of the hierarchy of being as it had been expressed in pagan philosophy and in forms of Christianity in which we now reject because we call them Nostic. Thirdly, from the doctrine of creation out of nothing, it becomes possible to talk about Jesus Christ as having his own distinctive identity and reality, so that the platonic denuge [phonetic], as a principle of continuity, drops out of the cosmic hierarchy, and you have a gap, as it were, between God and creation. That enables Christians to understand the saving work of Jesus Christ. So again, to understand the saving work of Jesus Christ, one has to drop a platonic or histoic hierarchy of being. Fourthly, there will be some in this room who will agree, and some will disagree, that in fact, a timistic kind of understanding of analogy secures the distinction between God and creation, and the skatist univicality [phonetic] of religious language actually serves to promote a hierarchy of being.

David Oderberg: So there's three. I think there was another point.

Male Speaker Three: So sedition.

David Oderberg: Yeah. There's another point.

Male Speaker Three: There's four. There was sedition.

David Oderberg: Yeah. There was persecution. There was creation of nothing. The saving work of Christ. And then something about skotism.

Male Speaker Three: And then termism versus skotism.

David Oderberg: Yeah. I mean I said ... Yeah, I will, and surprisingly, I would disagree with pretty much all of that. Although, it may be that I'm just having trouble understanding. Let me just dispense with the fourth point. I mean I've never once read Skotis [phonetic] without being completely baffled about what he's talking about. So, you know, Skotis is primarily, in terms of the tension between the kind of Neoplatonic understanding of creationism, isimitation [phontic], and God as freely creating. So, yeah, you could probably make a case that Skotis' understanding of the totally inscrutable will of God to create is in some sense enimical to the hierarchy. I wouldn't necessarily dismiss that, but I'm no Skotist and no expert on Skotis, so I'll just kind of leave that there. In terms of the three previous points, I'm not quite sure I understand them. I didn't get the point about Christians being persecuted. Christians have been persecuted ever since there has been Christians. So what point in history are we talking about.

Male Speaker Three: So this is about where the hierarchy of being gets broken up. Yeah, I'm an Anglican priest.

David Oderberg: Yeah.

Male Speaker Three: I recognize the process of reformation was damaging for Christianity. Plus, I would want to say that there are other trends already in place. The breakup, the hierarchy of being, including all those four things which I've mentioned.

David Oderberg: So how does the persecution fit in there?

Male Speaker Three: Because there is a stoic, Neoplatonic conception of the hierarchy of being whereas above [indiscernible] [1:14:28] saying if you don't worship the emperor, your metaphysics is out of order, and both of those are unacceptable in that world view, and Christians repudiate that world view by refusing both the metaphysics and the earthly hierarchy and pay obeisance to the emperor. We're talking about the first few, so there's [interposing] [1:14:53].

David Oderberg: Yeah. I understand what you're saying. Just that, that seems to me a real stretch. There may be something to that, but just, boy, you need to fill in a lot of gaps in order to make that case. You know, the Christians in the early centuries of the church were far less interested in hierarchies than they were surviving. To say they repudiated the emperor, I mean even that is a highly tentative [phonetic] way of putting the attitude of Christians towards their earthly masters. Even if they did, somehow implicitly, if they were seen as rejecting the Pagan hierarchy, that doesn't mean that they rejected all hierarchies. They rejected the Pagan hierarchy and the deification of the emperor. That sort of thing. That doesn't mean they rejected all hierarchies. So I think there's a lot of steps in that story that you need to fill in to make a plausible case. In terms of, again, I couldn't understand. Feel free to help me out, and tell me if you are, but creation ex nihilo [phonetic]. How does creation ex nihilo militate against hierarchy? I missed the argument. How does creation ex nihilo, how does that militate against the hierarchy?

Male Speaker Three: Because it introduces an absolute distinction between God and creation, and it's that absolute distinction which makes science possible.

David Oderberg: Right, right, right.

Male Speaker Three: As well as many stories of science.

David Oderberg: Right. So this harps back to the point that was made earlier. Well, yes, I don't think that undermines the hierarchy. It just makes clear how you should understand the hierarchy. So it's one thing to repudiate the hierarchy. It's another thing to misinterpret the hierarchy. Creation ex nihilo means that you need to understand the hierarchy very carefully. Right? That you can't just put God out. Yes, the diagrams and the kind of medieval pictures I

showed you. Angels are sitting at the top, and just God is above everything, and God is just another thing in the hierarchy. These are just ways of presenting these things to popular consciousness. Of course, God is completely, utterly distinct from, to the extent that one wants to use this terminology. I'm not infinitely distanced from creation. Again, I'm not sure how to understand distancing here, other than metaphorically because it's accurately distinct from and infinitely distant from creation. I don't think that of itself, at least if my definition is correct, which it may not be.

But if it is plausible, at least, it's not clear why God would not come out as superior to his creation at the same time as being utterly distinct from it. Why would one expect God wouldn't be metaphysically superior to his creation? Why would one resist that? The only reason I can see for resisting that would be to say, well, because if you do that, then you're just treating God ... You're conflating the creator and the creature, and your taxonomizing God, and such. But I'm saying, no, I don't think you need to go that route. You don't need to do any of that in order for God to come out as superior to other creatures. Yet one could spell that out.

So I mean, okay, I'm just going to throw this out there, and I don't ... I need to work on this to make sure I'm getting it right, but just to throw it out there. Say, okay, I can see how God is superior to angels because there's a non-redundant proper subset of the angels' generic powers, namely intellect and will which are also God's powers. But God has powers which are not explained by being any kind of angel, because God obviously isn't a kind of angel. But then, what about God being superior to rocks. How does that work? Well, is there a redundant proper subset of rock powers which also belong to God? Well, no, because that really would be conflating the Creator and the creature if you wanted to start giving God some kind of body or something like that other than, you know ... We're not talking about the reincarnation. I'm just talking about God as a spirit. That wouldn't look good. So one has to say something like, well, it's the null set. There are no generic powers of rocks which are ... sorry. The key, the non-redundant proper subset of God's generic powers that are found in rocks is just the null set. I don't see why that wouldn't be a problem. And so of course, you know, the null set is going to be one of the proper subsets of God's powers. Of course, God has powers that are not explained via a kind of body because God isn't a kind of body. I think it can kind of work out okay, but nothing that I'm saying there. It commits me to conflating the Creator and the creature anyway. Something like that. So anyway.

Male Speaker Three: [Inaudible] [1:20:29] Sebastian, and see how he deals with that. Do you know what that means? So one of the things you dismissed is an excess or, you know, an accretion is applying this hierarchy of being to political and social questions. It strikes me Evan Berke [phonetic] and Joseph Demotra [phonetic] both begin their works criticizing the French Revolution with an affirmation of the hierarchy of being. I worry that your dismissal of this presupposes the two-shop distinction between or division between the metaphysical and the moral. So, yes, I know I have to be short. So something like this.

Presumably, the king at the beginning of the dynasty, is just a congrad [phonetic], a myrothal [phonetic] or that. It might not have that moral claim. But after four generations of the

accumulation of the wisdom for resonance of prudence or whatever, then now you have someone who has actualized a potency of their nature that no one else in the kingdom has, and therefore, this is actually a very sound application of the hierarchy of being.

David Oderberg: How is that a sound application? Just give the last bit. I missed the last bit.

Male Speaker Three: Just if you grade natures in the hierarchy of being, at least in part, according to their capacities both in act and in potency, then you've got one person down the dynasty who actually has actualized a potency, namely relative prudence that no one else in the kingdom has if say Michael Ochot [phonetic] is right that it takes four generations to acquire the virtues necessary to govern.

Male Speaker Four: [Inaudible] [1:22:56]

David Oderberg: Well, you're talking about virtues, which shows that precisely when it comes to something like the superiority of the monarch in, you know, that the superiority of the monarch is a moral superiority. If there's any superiority, it's moral, not metaphysical. You don't have the virtues of the ruler. If there's a superiority there, it would be moral. It will be a right to a certain kind of obedience, and a right to a certain kind of rule, and a right to practice certain kinds of virtues that other, proper to a monarch or proper to a ruler that subjects are not entitled to exercise. None of that shows that there's such a thing as the monarchical essence other than the essence that belongs to the role, not the person. So it doesn't matter how many generations pass. You know?

It doesn't matter how many kings a king is born from, it doesn't make them anymore essentially a king than if they are the first king ever to be crowned. You know? It doesn't matter whether you're king Saul or whether you're, you know, Gerald Bowen [phonetic] or something like that. It doesn't matter when, you no more have the monarchical essence by a function of time than you do by some kind of miracle other than specific divine intervention I guess to confer with authority in the case of Saul. I mean these things happen in various ways. There are certain processes whereby one becomes a king. There's no such thing as the king or the essence that attaches to the king. It attaches to the function.

So again, if you're going to move from a metaphysical account to a moral account, you're going to have to go through a number of steps that I don't go through. I'm not sure quite how that would work. In a way, again, this could be just a bit much here, and a bit kind of too top of the head stuff, but in a way, I wouldn't want that to work. I would be very surprised and find it a bit disconcerting if you could generate moral hierarchy just out of metaphysical hierarchies, just like that as though some sort of metaphysical superiority just entailed without further argument a kind of moral superiority because then what work is morality actually doing? You know, what is morality? What is moral authority? What is moral superiority? If it just falls out of a metaphysical account of everything, that looks so ... that's like it could be the hierarchy in the worst possible sense. The sense that I could understand why an early romantic, who was confronted with that kind of thinking would just reject it. There's got to be more give and take here. There's got to be a kind of, you know, discursive process whereby you get from a metaphysical hierarchy of some kind or other to a moral hierarchy of some kind rather. It was

part of the fate of the hierarchy that I think those steps weren't taken, at least in the rougher stages. It just became such commonplace, you find that in poetry. You know? When you get to the point you're finding philosophy just kind of routinely turned out in poetry for the, you know, for [indiscernible] [1:26:18] of people. Probably something has gone wrong. Probably, you know, this is not being presented correctly. So I just would want to say you've got to go through a lot more steps to get to where you're suggesting from where I am, if that kind of makes sense.

Nicholi: You've got one minute for a final question at the front here. I know there are several hands up, but we'll have a little bit more time after the formal part of the unit.

Male Speaker Five: I was kind of interested in your comment on evaluation, and that's one of the things came to corner my acceptance. It puzzled me because there are, of course, a lot of different varieties of the chain of evolutionism. The laurel, for example, seems to have something like a chain of being at the center of this, is an evolution comment. Darwin also talks about higher and lower sometimes. For example, the descent of man where he talks about animals having incoherent versions of powers well-developed in human beings, don't seem reconcilable in some conception of the chain of being.

David Oderberg: Yeah, that's right. And Lovejoy, when he discusses this, points out that it's not that evolutionist thinking in a very broad sense that it does away with all hierarchy. He doesn't say that, and it doesn't. What he says is that evolutionist thinking turns a static kind of self-contained hierarchy into a dynamic gappy hierarchy, where you have, for example, extinction. So one of the things that really started to upset the apple cart was when people discovered extinctions. It's that, well, hold on. Everything is supposed to be substantiated. So what about these extinct creatures. Well, of course, you can play ... You can do a bit of temporal, you know, work on that and say, well, actually, in stance of that or some time or other in the earth's history, but that might look like a bit of a cheap. The fact of extinctions does seem to make the hierarchy look more dynamic rather than static. So you're right. The evolution or extinction doesn't do away with hierarchies, but these kinds of hierarchies are going to look so different to the metaphysical hierarchy that I'm talking about because the kind of superior powers are going to be very narrowly circumscribed. They're going to be very particular. They're going to be multi-dimensional. As Aristotle says in his commentaries ... books on the animals, you have cases of animals where one has one particular kind of power, superior to another because it can do things it kind of can't. But the other one has another kind of power.

Yeah, bats can fly. Mice can't fly. If you're a bat, in some ways you're superior because you can escape certain kinds of predators that a mouse can't escape. You can escape a cat much more easily than a mouse can escape a cat. But on the other hand, bats can't run. You know? If a bat happens to fall to the ground and hurt it's wing, then you know, it's going to be a big trouble whereas a mouse can scurry off. Right? So you have all that. So it doesn't ... those kinds of hierarchies are very kind of messy and not very orderly. They're going to look quite different.

Nicholi: As I said, medit [phonetic] all the questions, but there are still some refreshments at the back. For those of you who want to hang around and ask our speaker a few more questions, we might have a little bit of time for that still. But before we do, please join me in thanking Professor Oderberg once again for this evening.

END Transcript.