

idea. At the time of St. Thomas Aquinas everybody believed—Catholic and Infidel and Arab and every other person—that living things did come from non-living things. Was it wonderful? Of course it was not. People had no microscopes. They saw meat that was left exposed too long, with living things arising from it. Eels were thought to come from vinegar; indeed their life-history—marvellous enough—was only cleared up a few years ago. The discussion which was held between St. Thomas Aquinas and the celebrated Arab philosopher, Avicenna, was not as to Biogenesis or Abiogenesis—whether living things came from dead things—for both of them believed that living things did come from non-living things—but the Arab believed that they arose by the mere operations of Nature, while St. Thomas' theory was that they came from it by the direct mandate of the Creator. That was the point at issue between them.

The first person to challenge the theory that living things arose from dead matter was an Italian named Redi, who wrote his book in 1672. He was a physician and a poet, and he proved in a little book that if you put a screen over a joint of meat, so as to keep the flies off, it would not develop maggots. That was the beginning of discoveries which have had quite extraordinary effects. I don't know whether Redi was a Catholic or not, but considering the time at which and the country in which he lived, it is reasonable to suppose that he was.

Things went to sleep, so to speak, until the 18th century, when the matter became a live issue between two men occupying opposite sides in this controversy, both of them Catholic priests. One of them was Turberville Needham. He was the first Catholic priest to be made a Fellow of the Royal Society—a very high distinction. As things have turned out he was on the wrong side. The person who opposed him was another priest by the name of Spallanzani. He carried Redi's experiment a little further. He