

CAUSAL ENTAILMENT, SUFFICIENT REASON, AND FREEDOM

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It is well known how highly the Church regards human reason, for it falls to reason to demonstrate with certainty the existence of God, personal and one; to prove beyond doubt from divine signs the very foundations of the Christian faith; to express properly the law which the Creator has imprinted in the hearts of men; and finally to attain to some notion, indeed a very fruitful notion, of mysteries. But reason can perform these functions safely and well only when properly trained, that is, when imbued with that sound philosophy which has long been, as it were, a patrimony handed down by earlier Christian ages, and which moreover possesses an authority of an even higher order, since the Teaching Authority of the Church, in the light of divine revelation itself, has weighed its fundamental tenets, which have been elaborated and defined little by little by men of great genius. For this philosophy, acknowledged and accepted by the Church, safeguards the genuine validity of human knowledge, the unshakable metaphysical principles of sufficient reason, causality, and finality, and finally the mind's ability to attain certain and unchangeable truth.¹

Introduction

My proximate object here is to address the famed view of Elizabeth Anscombe in her lecture "Causality and Determination"² to the effect that it is intelligible that all the requisites may be present for causation to occur (that, in the language commonly deployed, the "sufficient conditions" for causing be present) while nonetheless no causing occurs—even in the absence of all deprivation, impediment, or defect. This proposition, I wish to argue, is frankly unintelligible. However, I would like to take rather a leisurely course to this object because the metaphysical stakes urged on us by means of this proposition—the proposition that everything needed for causing may be present and yet

¹ Pius XII, *Humani Generis*, #29.

² G.E.M. Anscombe, "Causality and Determination," in *Metaphysics and the Philosophy of Mind* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1981), pp. 133-147. (The essay was first published as *Causality and Determination: an inaugural lecture* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1971).

there be no causing—seem high indeed: so high that, were this position correct, far from buttressing or supporting an Aristotelian stance with respect to causality, it might rather be thought that the general dynamics both of the Aristotelian and the Thomistic arguments for the reality of God would be undercut at their fount.

Hence, I propose to do five things: first, to outline an argument against the Humean view that a thing could simply come into existence without any cause; second, to buttress this argument by expounding (in an abbreviated and preliminary way) an account of sufficient reason as an analogical principle; third, to point out that the view according to which all conditions may be sufficient for causation, and causation not occur, destroys the very notion of terrestrial causation, and is incompatible with an analogical principle of sufficient reason; fourthly, to explain how this conclusion is reconcilable with the theistic conviction that God—while infinitely sufficient to cause numberless worlds—is not under the least constraint of necessity to create any world whatsoever; fifth, and finally, I propose to complement the argument vindicating the compatibility of the divine liberty with the nature of causal entailment, with an exposition of St. Thomas's vindication of the compatibility of human liberty with the total dependence of finite being and operation on God.

I. The Humean Proposition That Something May Come from Nothing Without Being Caused

David Hume's famous thought experiment³ is worthy of reflection because it points the way toward understanding the principle of sufficient reason whose rational warrant he was concerned to deny. One argument against the possibility of the state of affairs he hypothesizes is as follows: it is by the very nature of the case impossible to distinguish between a thing coming into being without having a cause, and a thing having a cause for its being of which we are simply ignorant. By the nature of the case, every negation presupposes a prior

³ See David Hume, *An Inquiry Regarding Human Understanding*, "Why a Cause is Always Necessary," taken from David Hume's *The Treatise on Human Nature*, Bk. I, Part III, Section III, the first Appendix (New York: Macmillan, 1985), pp. 177-180.

affirmation. The negation—"this new being does not have a cause"—presupposes some positive knowledge that might provide rational warrant for it. By the nature of the case, the negative proposition, absent any positive evidence, is impossible to prove. It follows—since we could never distinguish there not being a cause from our merely suffering ignorance of the relevant cause—that we cannot have any real warrant for the claim that a new being (or even a new change with respect to a being) is without any cause.

But, it might be alleged that the pertinent claim for Hume's thought experiment is not that a new being (or a new change in a being) is definitely without cause, but only that it is *possible* for a new being, or a new change in a being, to be without cause. But *possible* here means either merely conceivable, or *really possible*. *Real* possibility depends upon positive real evidence and not merely upon conceivability. That a person may conceive "X" does not in itself show that "X" is really possible, that is, that it is a state of affairs which can obtain in the actually existing world. For example: I can conceive that I am in Las Vegas as I write these words, but in reality this is not possible *because I am here*, and it is repugnant to a substance to be in different places at the same instant. Conceivability may in certain special cases give us evidence of real possibility, especially where the nature of the possibility in question concerns thought. But in itself it seems insufficient to establish real possibility.

Someone might say: "I acknowledge that *in this world* not everything conceivable is possible, but is there not a *possible world* in which, at this time, you are in *Las Vegas*?" The counter-question here is, *possible* to whom? If the question is whether we can conceive it, the answer is "yes." If the question is whether its conceivability suffices to make it a real possibility, the answer might seem to be: if there is an infinite, omnipotent God Whose power is limited only by the principle of non-contradiction, then to such a God it *might* really be possible to create such a world. If there is no such God, then the idea that because one can think something it must be realizable in the world seems to be a ludicrous illustration of wish-fulfillment posing as thought.

But even on the theistic hypothesis, real possibility is defined in relation to the divine power. This is to say that that to which the divine omnipotence extends is "possible" insofar as God "could" cause it. But what is really possible thus must take into account the divine wisdom,

goodness, and will—for strictly speaking, by reason of the divine simplicity, nothing is possible with respect to the divine power which does not conform to the divine wisdom, goodness, and will, which is to say: any conceivable things contrary to divine wisdom and goodness are only possible in a Pickwickian sense, since divine power cannot be separated from divine wisdom and goodness. God cannot, as it were, maliciously torture a cat: not because God is not omnipotent, but because divine power is subject to divine wisdom and goodness, and defect, error, and evil are simply outside the proper object of God's power (God does not cause defect, error, and evil; indeed, these have no *per se* cause whatsoever, although they are a function of the defectibility of the creature). Thus, if someone wishes to say that with respect to the divine power some things may be possible in precision from the divine goodness or wisdom, this odd way of speaking should still acknowledge that such conceivables are not, absolutely speaking, *really possible* because the omnipotent God *will under no circumstances cause them*. Indeed, God cannot do so, because evil is further removed from the proper object of the divine will than is sound to the proper object of sight. Of course, this does not mean that God must cause "the best of all possible worlds," since any finite world is still infinitely removed from the divine perfection, and could be improved indefinitely by degrees; i.e., there is no best of all possible worlds. In any case, the divine simplicity in itself renders the use of "possible worlds" logic to be ontologically ambiguous and dubious, and indeed significantly *indeterminate* (for natural knowledge about the divine will appears to be extremely limited and incomplete). Of course—need it be said?—someone who takes himself to have no reason to affirm an omnipotent God has no warrant whatsoever to project any conceivable whimsy into an ontologically *real* possibility, in the absence of real evidence that can sustain such a claim.

The argument above does not completely rule out the use of imaginative thought experiments, because while there is no guarantee of real possibility for every conception, some may prove to be warranted or at least helpful in some respect. However, this is just the point: if a thought experiment is such that it cannot under any circumstances find warrant in real evidence, then—in the absence of any reason to hold that mere conceivability equates with real possibility—the content of such a thought experiment is something that we cannot have a reason to hold. This appears to be the case with

Hume's experiment. Every negation presupposes a prior affirmation. But since we cannot distinguish between there not being a cause of a new being, or a new change in a being, and there being a cause that we don't know, it follows that in principle we cannot have real evidence for holding it to be really possible that something can come from nothing without a cause. By disjunctive syllogism, either we can have reason for holding change in being to occur without a cause, or we cannot. But the former is ruled out because it is intrinsically devoid of rational warrant: ergo, the latter remains.

But supposing that God revealed it were possible, what then? This is a self-contradictory idea because what we mean by God is the first cause of all finite things. Ergo for God to reveal that there is a being He did not cause would be for Him to reveal He isn't God: which is to say, whatever else may be the case, God cannot reveal such a thing.

But all-these reflections on Hume are really a circumlocutory way of referring, by negative argument, to what is positively, more directly, and more clearly disclosed by the principle of sufficient reason.

II. The (Analogical) Principle of Sufficient Reason

Of course, this principle in itself could easily be the subject of an essay. And in a sense that is what this entire essay is in fact about, for the denial of the "nomologicality" or "rule-governedness" of causality as it pertains to terrestrial causes, is a frontal assault at least on certain versions of the principle of sufficient reason. What is at issue, however, is the principle of sufficient reason in its Thomistic rather than in its Enlightenment formulations: a principle stating that every being or reality is intelligible either simply by virtue of itself or through another. For Aquinas, this principle was a function of his teaching of the convertibility of *being* and *true*—i.e., the true is being (real or possible) in relation to some intellect.⁴ And the *ratio* or ground for the being—and accordingly for the intelligibility—of anything is hence either purely intrinsic or through another. Hence, the words of St. Thomas regarding God: "that which has no cause is first and immediate,

⁴ Regarding this teaching of the convertibility of being and true see, for example, his *Disputed Questions on Truth*, I, 1, 2, ad 1.

wherefore it is necessary that it be through itself and by virtue of what it is.”⁵

Hence that which is most fully has its reason for being through itself—is *a se* and in no causal dependence for its being, truth, and good upon any other being—whereas, that which is caused has its being through that which is other than itself (through the divine causality). For Thomas, this is an analogical conception insofar as there are different orders of causality—material, formal, efficient, and final—and also different types of being. All being is intelligible through itself, or through another. While beings in the latter category (comprising things that exist through another) are not devoid of intrinsic causal principles (for example, those which pertain to matter and form), these intrinsic principles nonetheless are *caused* by something other than the subject characterized by them.

Because this account of Thomas’s is founded on the convertibility of being and true, its metaphysical provenance is clear. This Thomistic version of the principle of sufficient reason affirms that being is intelligible, that its *ratio* is to be found in different types of causes and different types of beings, and that in every case either a being is simply intelligible through itself (God) or else its intelligibility is through another (such that the other on which it depends causes it to have the intrinsic principles that it has). No matter what order of causality we delineate or what degree or type of being we specify, the principle of sufficient reason will proportionately apply because being is intelligible in terms of being (nonbeing, and even deprivation, are not absolutely speaking *reasons*), and by the nature of the case such reason can only be internal or external. While many consider the phrase “sufficient reason” exclusively in its Leibnizian sense (Etienne Gilson even accused Garrigou-Lagrange of rationalism because he affirmed that an analogical version of this principle is in all but name taught by Aquinas⁶), the texts indicate that Thomas offers a teaching which can

⁵ *Summa Contra Gentiles*, II, 15: “...quod causam non habet, primum et immediatum est; unde necesse est ut sit per se et secundum quod ipsum.”

⁶ For one clear reference to this, see *Letters of Etienne Gilson, With Commentary by Henri de Lubac*, translated by Mary Emily Hamilton (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1986), note #3, p. 28, where de Lubac quotes and cites Gilson’s *L’Etre et*

properly be denominated a metaphysical principle of sufficient reason. This principle of sufficient reason, like all metaphysical principles for Thomas, is analogical in that it pertains to different beings and to different types of causes in ways that are different and yet proportionately identical (analogy of proper proportionality).

Of course, in speaking at all of being, one runs the risk of violating the Russellian and Fregean embargo on “being” talk. But the datum that being is not an essential predicate does not suffice to show that it is no type of first order predicate whatsoever. Further, there is clearly a difference between the negation of any negation whatsoever, and negation in a real subject. To illustrate the latter: if one says that some person “does not *not* have a nose,” this is not really different from saying that the person in question *does have a nose*—i.e., its meaning is ontologically positive. Whereas, if one says “were there no universe, no rational creatures would negate anything,” *the lack of a real subject* in this proposition does not require that we affirm anything real whatsoever—there is no ontological positivity. So clearly there is a real difference between being and not-being.

Whenever one of two distinguishable items is real, the distinction is real, and clearly no one can deny the difference between real being and merely logical being (this last being the sort of being which pertains to the subjunctive phrase “were there *no universe, no rational creatures would negate* anything”—clearly “no universe” and “not negating” do not affirm some positive reality, because, in the absence of a universe, there is no real subject). That wherever one of the items distinguished

L'Essence (Vrin, 1948) to this effect. Gilson claims that the rational character of an analogical principle of sufficient reason is not Thomas's, but Leibnitz's or Wolff's doctrine. In the meantime, the proposition of St. Thomas that only that which has no cause must be first and immediate, exist through itself, and be necessary, is lost by Gilson in accidental comparison with the rationalists. One must observe here a complete failure on the part of Gilson to see beyond terminology to the doctrine expressly articulated by Garrigou-Lagrange—as though the rationalists owned the phrase itself, or as if Thomas's insistence that only a being *a se* could be by reason of itself does not logically imply an account of sufficient reason for being, a doctrine of that by virtue of which a thing is.

is real, the distinction is real, is evident in the fact that we cannot affirm that the first (the real item) really is the second (the unreal item). Further, there clearly is a difference between a nature conceived and the same nature “instantiated,” a term which often is simply a circumlocution to avoid saying the taboo word “exists.” And if the same nature that is “instantiated” is not conceived, then it would seem to follow as a necessary conclusion that we cannot know it. But since all negations presuppose prior affirmations, we have good reason to *set aside* negative judgments which imply that nothing in the world is naturally knowable, for by the nature of the case nothing could provide evidence of the truth of such propositions. For these and other reasons, the Russellian/Fregean embargo seems an insupportable legacy of anti-metaphysical bias.

To return to our theme, however, while it may be true that we can never have any warrant for claiming that something can come from nothing, it might be wondered whether this is the same thing as having adequate metaphysical grounds for holding that all being is intelligible either through itself or by virtue of another. What is the positive basis for maintaining this? Here one must consider what it means to affirm that the real is intelligible. The intuitive force of the principle is its affirmation that *to be is to have a reason for being*. An argument has already been given above, in relation to Hume, for saying that the negation of sufficient reason—the proposition that there is a being which has no reason for being—is indistinguishable from an avowal of ignorance.

Another way of pointing to the intuitive character of the principle is to consider what it means to say that “being is intelligible through being.” Among other things, this implies that *nothing* is not an explanation, and so for anything to be intelligible is for it to be explained by principles either intrinsic to it or extrinsic to it. If neither is held to obtain, then it is simply affirmed that the being is unintelligible, for these are the only options. But by the nature of the case there cannot be a warrant for the claim that being is unintelligible in this way (for the reason cited in relation to Hume: one cannot distinguish between there not being a reason, and there being a reason of which one is ignorant).

Perhaps more to the point: if these extrinsic and/or intrinsic principles explain the being, then it is not the case that they do *not*

explain it. That is, not only must any new being or change in being be explained, but it is also the case that the very idea of causal explanation involves identifying a factor in virtue of which one thing brings about another. X is only said to be the cause of Y in virtue of some definitory causal attribute, and if this attribute is indeed defined in terms of causal action, then we cannot coherently suggest that (apart from defect or impediment) this attribute is consistent with the absence of causation. This need not be confined to efficient causality—the final cause, the formal cause, and the material cause likewise account for proper aspects of the being they explain. Sufficient reason is an analogical principle extending to all the causes. But for some terrestrial cause to be such as to be fully adequate to account for an effect is—in the absence of any defect or impeding cause—for the cause actually to *cause*. This is to affirm that the primitive meaning of causality is bound up with the doctrine of sufficient reason.

The intelligence discerns that real changes in being require real causes, and further that that by reason of which a cause is the cause it is, is that by reason of which it is said to cause. So that when it is present, the cause causes, and when it is absent, the cause does not cause. It clearly is not intelligible to say that the causality of X with respect to Y is explained by Z, but that when Z is present and there are no defects or impediments, that Y may or may not occur. For this would then appear to be saying simply that Z may, or may not, be adequate to account for the causality of X with respect to Y. And at this point we will wish to find that *in virtue of which* Z sometimes explains X causing Y and sometimes doesn't, i.e., some mysterious factor which, in addition to Z, is needed for real causal adequacy.

We are here at a primary point where intelligence encounters the mystery of the real. Even those who are most suspicious of this principle at the theoretic level in fact conduct their affairs in the world entirely in accord with it. If one's car is not in the lot where one parked it, one does not suppose that it randomly fell into limbo but asks *where it went, how it got there, and why*—and, it may occur to one to ask as to its *material condition* as well.

If a truck hooks up to a car, and there is no impediment either intrinsic (faulty equipment) or extrinsic (some obstacle), and the truck starts to move, we rightly expect the car *to be moved*. If there is no impediment or defect along the way, we expect it to go where the

driver directs it; likewise, we don't expect, upon its arrival, that it will be not a car, but a horse; nor do we anticipate that it will be a car made of broccoli rather than one made of metal. Likewise, if a cake is made with flour, baking powder, butter, eggs, sugar, salt, and vanilla, we do not anticipate that when it comes out of the oven that what it is made of (the second matter of the cake) will be leather; or that it will be, not a cake, but an automobile; or that (in the absence of defect in the oven or some impediment) it will not bake; or that it will begin to bake but never finish baking. To suggest that any or all of these might occur *in the absence of either deficiency or impediment* seems not to be intelligible.

Of course, if either the Russelian and Fregean, or the Kantian, or Wittgensteinian, or any of the multitude of other essentially anti-metaphysical protocols could be sustained, then we might have reason to abandon this principle. But these protocols rejecting the very idea of being as a real predicate appear unfounded. And so we are in a position to state the chief problem with the idea that terrestrial causality is not rule-governed in a way that flows directly from an analogical principle of sufficient reason.

III. The Problem with the Idea that Sufficient Conditions for Causing may Obtain without any Causing Occurring & in the absence of all defect or impediment

From the vantage of an analogical principle of sufficient reason—proportionately verified in every order of causation, and in every being—the problem with the denial of the *nomologicality* or *rule-governedness* of terrestrial causality is clear. *The problem with this idea (that all the required conditions for terrestrial causation may be present without any causing occurring) is that it implies that there is no causal distinction between nothing and something.* For being is intelligible in terms of being and not in terms of nothing, which is to say that non-being is only relatively speaking an explanation. We may say that the two cars collided on the foggy night because one *lacked* working headlights, and so the other *did not see it*, but the lack or nonbeing of working headlights in one car is only an explanation in relation to the reality of the two cars, the road they are traversing, and the real fog. Only in relation to being can deprivation in any sense explain.

The intelligibility in question may be intrinsic (formal or material) or extrinsic (final and efficient), but always when a being is not

intelligible simply by virtue of itself, its being and its intelligibility must derive from another. For example: for a classical theist, clearly the form and matter of a physical thing are insufficient to account for its being, and indeed these principles of form and matter in the thing are themselves brought about in the divine causation of the being.

When we say that any new being or change in being must have a sufficient reason (something does not come from nothing), this implies that there is a principle by virtue of which these come to be. Now, in any terrestrial cause, to say that A causes C by means of B, is to state that when A is such that B obtains – absent any defect or impeding factor – that C is caused. For just as we may not affirm a new or changed being without a *ratio* of the being and the change, so to affirm such a *ratio* is to define it in relation to the being and change brought about. And so, if A causes C by means of B, and A is such that B obtains, then part of the reason why we say that C is caused is that *the causing of C is part of our definition of what it means to say that A is such that B obtains.*

The central and decisive point may be articulated either in strictly Thomistic terms or in more ordinary language. But the point remains. *In Thomistic language, a given quantum of act is associated with a given causal terminus because it is teleologically defined in relation to this causal terminus.* Just as we can't define the efficiency of shoveling snow without mentioning the moving of snow (even if the wind should blow the snow right back where it came from), so we can't define what it means to say that a new being or change in being requires a causal explanation (in whatever order of causation we are speaking, whether final, efficient, formal, or material) without making reference to that which makes us say that the causal principle obtains, which is to say its proper terminus or the respect in which it is a cause. *While this is true in every order of causality, there is a special relevance of this analysis to terrestrial efficient causality. For efficient causality presupposes a teleological ordering of efficient cause to proper effect, without which the efficiency cannot be defined.*

Hence, to say that a terrestrial efficiency is in play is to identify something already as its effect, such that we are not then at liberty to affirm the contrary – in the absence of defect or impediment – without contradicting the very affirmation of efficiency itself. Something is not an efficient cause of something else by *not* causing it, but by causing it. For instance, to say that I am shoveling snow is to identify already the effect of physically removing snow as the effect that my act achieves in

the absence of defect or impediment. If we say that the efficiency is present, but the effect is not, we are simply denying that the *ratio* of a being is truly a *ratio* at all – we are implying that the being in question is efficiently unintelligible. I cannot intelligibly and literally be said to be shoveling snow if I am not removing snow. I may be trying to do so and being impeded by wind, by snow, by weakness in my limbs, or by snow-blindness, but if I am shoveling snow, then I am moving snow. That is what it means. Nor is this simply a logical point but rather a point regarding the very nature of every cause analogically speaking and which is particularly clear with respect to the nature of efficient causation (which obviously is, and is defined, in relation to its proper terminus).

Hence to deny the rule-governedness of causation is also to destroy the intelligibility of the claim that a thing is only a cause as *such a thing*, that is, in virtue of some principle *whereby* it causes – because we are saying that that in virtue of which a thing causes may be present while the thing *does not cause*. And to say that that in virtue of which a thing causes may be present while the thing does not cause is like saying that that in virtue of which fire is hot is *coldness*, or better, is a *mere capacity for heat*, as though this could explain *without a definite quantum of actual heat*, without a definite *ratio* of change, motion, and being. *If* one says that the operation of shoveling snow which moves the snow, and in virtue of which one affirms that snow removal is occurring, is present, *but one also says* that without defect or impediment no snow removal is occurring (even if the snow that is removed is blown back, it may still first be removed), *then* it is not clear that one is saying anything at all.

So that by virtue of which we identify sufficient reason in terrestrial things normally and naturally requires *entailment*. But note why efficiency (in particular) requires entailment: because efficiency is defined in relation to natural finality and so is not truly separable from it. This is in a sense analogically verified of all four causes, there is a “that for the sake of which” of matter, form, and efficiency, and the finality itself is only denominated as finality because it is actually related to these other causes in the way that it is.

So, terrestrial causality involves entailment for the same reason that change and new being require explanation, namely, that there must be *that in virtue of which* change and new being are intelligible, and if *that in virtue of which* change and new being are intelligible is present, then

this naturally implies change and new being in the absence of defect or impediment. To say that A is such as to bring about B because of C does not permit us to waffle on whether C is the element whereby A brings about B. And it does not permit us to say that C sometimes does and sometimes does not enable A to bring about B, because that is to say either that the bringing about of B is without any *ratio*, or that C is not the *ratio* (which is a contradiction) or is only *part* of the *ratio* (if it were the whole, then B would be caused). And the reason for this is that we rightly and necessarily *define* the cause in relation to its proper terminus or effect.

Clearly, then, an efficient cause is defined by what it is ordered to bring about (teleology in the strict sense), and the other causes too are defined by the proper termini of their causing (a broad sense of the *teloi* of causes as such or that in respect to which they function as causes: for example, the end is defined as cause in respect of being that for the sake of which a thing is or acts; the agent or efficient cause is defined as cause in respect of being productive of motion or change; matter is defined as cause in respect of a thing's potential for substantial form, individuation, and change. . .).

But this affirmation that an analogical principle of sufficient reason requires us to affirm that a terrestrial cause - in the absence of defect or impediment - *entails* its effect, leads to a problem. The problem is this: does not the analogical principle of sufficient reason, thus articulated, require us to say that when the cause is present the effect must follow? But, if this is what the principle articulates, *then* it appears that it must be inconsistent with classical theism: because classical theism affirms that God is eternally existent and yet that God *does not need* to cause any world whatsoever, not even the least finite existent. Does this not then overturn the principle of sufficient reason? The remainder of this essay will attempt to address why this need not keep us from affirming a strong analogical principle of sufficient reason.

IV. The Problem of the Non-Necessity of Creation: The Divine Liberty

The true proposition that the cause, God, is eternally posited, while the effect (the world) is in no way necessitated inasmuch as God *does not need to create*, might appear to contradict the principle of sufficient reason. Doubtless there are variants of this principle other than the

Thomistic version which are contradicted by the lack of any real relation of God to finite effects and by the absolute freedom of God with respect to creation. But the Thomistic variant of this principle, which is essentially analogous, need not fear this counter-example.

The reason for the immunity of the analogous principle of sufficient reason from this difficulty is as follows: terrestrial causes *entail* their effects *because they are teleologically defined in relation thereto*. In other words, *terrestrial causes are naturally ordered to ends, and their action is defined by these ends*.

Hence, the question arises: what is the “natural end” of God? Insofar as God is being *a se*, perfect and unlimited, and in no way dependent upon any other being for any perfection whatsoever — just insofar as this is true — it appears that the *natural end* of God is the delectation of the divine being, goodness, and truth, and this end is infinitely fulfilled within God Himself. And so, by contrast with terrestrial causes— which entail their effects because these causes are teleologically defined in relation thereto as in relation to their natural ends— *God’s action is only teleologically defined in relation to God Himself*. The only necessary entailment here is that God know and love Himself. Also, this means that creation is, in relation to God’s natural end of knowing and loving Himself, utterly *ad extra* (with the advent of creation, there are more beings, but not more perfection of being: what changes is that there is a creature and not that the perfection of God is in any fashion altered or enhanced).

All this is to say that creation is utterly gratuitous in a way that is impossible for any instance of natural causality. For creation in no way augments, advances, or is necessary in the least for God to achieve the end of knowing and loving Himself. Whereas terrestrial causes entail effects owing to their definitive teleological relation to that which they cause, God has no such definitive teleological relation to the effect of the world, for the creation of the world will in no way aid God in attaining God’s natural end, which is the infinite embrace of the divine perfection. Hence, creation of any world is an act for which there is no proper parallel in the natural world. For not only does creation (unlike natural causing) not presuppose some natural substrate in which it introduces a change (for creation is the *bringing about* of that which can be changed, not the mere introduction of change); but, even more importantly for our present purposes, *creation is not in any way an act*

needed by God in order for God to achieve the divine natural end, for God already possesses the divine good perfectly. *Creation is utterly gratuitous, an act which while consistent with and conformable to the divine good, is so through the ordering of other, radically gratuitous beings toward the divine felicity.* What is teleologically ordered through creation is not God to Himself, but the creation to God – a creation, to say it again, which God simply does not need.

Hence, only in the case of God – in whom the sufficient condition is always to be found for any possible universe – is it true that when the sufficient condition truly is present that causality may not occur. The reason for the universal extension of this principle to finite being is the convertibility of being and true. Every causality represents a certain influx or surplus of *act*. For there to be such an influx or surplus of act is for causality to occur. For there not to be such where it is due, is for there to be impediment or defect. If causality is metaphysically intelligible in terms of the *quanta* of act – as Thomas clearly holds – then for the right quantum of act to occur is for causing to occur. The “sufficient condition” is neither more nor less than the quantum of actuality required, normally defined in terms of essential limits – that when C is present in A, A will, absent defect or impediment, cause B.

Created means are not necessary for God to attain the end of knowing and loving Himself; further, they do not even augment or aid Him to do this in the least. God’s efficient causality of finite things, while it is conformed to His wisdom, is absolutely free. Finite things are ordered to God, but God does not need this order, and hence there is no necessity in God’s willing creation. By contrast, creaturely causality is defined in relation to natural ends. Thus, for all creatures there is a certain generic necessity with respect to the ordering of means toward the end. Whereas, since God necessarily knows and loves Himself, there is a necessity with respect to the natural end, but no need of motion toward it (it is already infinitely possessed) and no need for means outside of God as requisite for attaining it.

Given the right *quantum* of act, causal motion toward the end on the part of a finite cause will occur because the end is *that for the sake of which* the motion, the quantum of act involved in its causation, and the substance actually causing the motion, exist. Further, and perhaps more importantly, *the motion, the substance actually causing the motion, and the quantum of act involved in causation, are all defined by their ordering*

to the end. And as has been noted above, analogically speaking, this is verified of all the causes, which are defined by their proper termini. For this definition to obtain, it must be the case that where the cause is, there is actual ordering toward the natural terminus, which is to say, it must be the case that there is actual causing (absent defect or impediment). This natural ordering is, curiously enough, also the reason why Thomas affirms that there is remorse in Hell: because although the natural motion to the end is weakened by vice and evil, it cannot be utterly removed, and so even the souls in Hell are defined by their *motio* (however weakened, permanently frustrated, and deprived of its proper completion in perfect act) toward God.⁷ This is to say that even the efficiency of the wills of those in Hell is defined in relation to their natural and supernatural good.

There is much more to be said regarding this idea that all the conditions for a finite thing to perform a causal act can be present with no internal defect or external impediment, and that consequently there still may fail to be any causing. But in essence this idea seems to involve a contradiction in terms: because for all the conditions to obtain means (for terrestrial causes) for that quantum of actuality that defines causality to be present. Nor is this merely an analytic point about the definition of the term; rather, it is a point about the nature of the reality so defined. For it makes no sense to say that everything necessary for burning to occur occurs, and that no burning happens (unless we refer to defect or impediment); indeed, this would be to misunderstand what “necessary” means, or alternately, it would imply that we are simply wrong about what is necessary for burning to occur.

This same point – that causality is associated metaphysically with a definite quantum of act or perfection – explains the classical view that *there is more in cause than in effect*. For, even when the cause is of like species with the effect (as for instance father, as partial cause, to son), the added actuality or perfection of causing pertains to the one but not to the other, and so in this relation the one with the added perfection of actuality is greater (this added actuality or perfection of *causing* can

⁷ See *Summa theologiae* I.85.2.ad 3.

only accrue because something pertains to the cause as cause that does not pertain to the effect).

In relation to this entire argument and to the conclusions derived, some might wish to object that the discoveries of quantum physics deprive these of any general effect. For if those interpreters of quantum physics are correct who claim that determinate causality does not obtain with respect to quantum changes, then what has been said about an analogical principle of sufficient reason would seem to be inconsistent with the empirical evidence. But here the conclusions drawn from the encounter with the Humean thought experiment become relevant. First, it must be repeated that there is no way in principle to determine – even with respect to the Heisenberg Uncertainty Principle – that this does not pertain chiefly to our current capacity to measure subatomic events as opposed to reflecting the very nature of these events themselves (and even were our capacity to measure permanently impeded owing to natural limits, this would not necessarily imply the absence of real determination, any more than my incapacity to know what was in my brother's mind today indicates that today he was mindless). The mere absence of knowledge in itself never equates with an argument for the lack of sufficient reason (although, again, this is an analogical principle which is verified proportionately in differing causal orders). Second, even where we know that it is more or less permanently impossible – at least for the duration of this life – to discover the determinate characteristics of some event, we are not necessarily unreasonable in holding there to be such determinate characteristics. For example, one may not fully know what passed through the mind of one's beloved father during his last agonies. But clearly, he may have had thoughts, some of which he did not communicate to anyone. And such thoughts, undiscoverable though they now be, are reasonable to posit. Likewise, one may surmise that Napoleon did not communicate every single thought he ever had, even in the absence of any capacity for proof. Thirdly, one ought not be timid about insisting that causal reasoning in physics be intelligible, and where it is not, but involves a variety of murky or even contradictory ideas, this should be taken to expose deficiencies of present theory rather than a *lacuna* of intelligibility in the real itself. A pure delight in the whimsical aspects of *Gedanken* experiments, as helpful as this may be within hypothetico-deductive physics, must yield to the requisites of intelligible theory.

Of course, it is a clear metaphysical inference from all these considerations that it can't be the case that God gives us a causal nudge that might or might not eventuate in action: for this is to conceive of God as a creature. While how this may be true and reconcilable with created terrestrial liberty is a question requiring a larger canvas, nonetheless we may summarily identify three salient points reconciling divine liberty with an intellectualist, rather than libertarian, conception of freedom. To this summary purpose the final consideration below is directed, holding in mind the degree to which St. Thomas's teaching on these points is *terra incognita* for so much of modernity and postmodernity.

V. Divine Causality and Human Liberty

It is *infra dig* for many contemporary philosophers to imagine a serious metaphysical issue being solved by anyone, much less being solved by a Saint from the 13th Century. Nonetheless, Thomas did solve this problem, and he solved it moreover in the only manner in which it is susceptible of being solved without either treating God merely as a finite cause, on the one hand, or denying the rational liberty of man, on the other.

Thomas' position is well articulated in three discrete points. The first is clearly the salient along which the entire issue must be considered. To introduce this consideration, one begins with the issue Molina so well identified when he unwittingly unleashed the firestorm *De auxiliis* controversy: within a libertarian conception of freedom, *the will is free only when, all requirements being retained, the will can indeed act otherwise.*⁸ Yet, this conception is clearly incompatible with divine omnipotence and with the affirmation that all being and operation depend upon God as First Cause. Especially is it incompatible with the proposition defended by St. Thomas that in each thing that operates, God is the cause of its operating (cf. the *Summa contra gentiles*.IIIa.67). It is ruled out by the divine simplicity alone – because the only difference between God simply willing “x” and God not simply willing “x” is not any change in God – for God has no real relation to or dependence upon creatures, but indeed the reverse is the case. Rather, the only

⁸ Cf. Molina's *Concordia*, q. 14, a. 13, disp. II.

difference between the hypothetical and immutable divine simple willing of "x" and not-willing of "x" is that insofar as God wills "x", then x exists. It follows that if the divine will is considered a "requirement" or "condition," then it is impossible that when all requirements or conditions are retained that the thing be otherwise. For this will be a contradiction in terms: the contradiction of God actually bringing "x" about and – at the same time and in precisely the same respect – not bringing it about.

The root problem here is the insistence upon defining human liberty *in relation to God*. For the simple divine will is being treated as a "requirement" or "condition" where all such requirements and conditions are retained and the human will can do otherwise – do otherwise *even on the supposition that God by His simple will wills the contrary*. On this decisive point of whether liberty should be distinguished in relation to God, St. Thomas is very clear: the answer is a resounding "no." And this "no" is the first of the salient points that define the issue and contribute decisively to its solution. As St. Thomas argues:

And in regard to knowledge this is clear from what was said above (in the Reply to 14): for just as divine knowledge is in relation to future contingent events, so our eye is in relation to contingent things that occur here and now, as was said (in the Response); hence just as we most certainly see Socrates sitting while he is sitting, but nonetheless it does not follow from this that his sitting is absolutely necessary, so also from the fact that God sees in themselves all the things that take place, the contingency of things is not done away with. And as regards the will we must take into account that the divine will is universally the cause of being and universally of all the things that follow on this, hence even of necessity and contingency; but His will itself is above the order of the necessary or contingent just as it is above all created being. And therefore necessity and contingency in things are distinguished not in relation to the divine will, which is a universal cause, but in relation to created causes which the divine will has ordered proportionately to the effects,

namely, in such a way that the causes of necessary effects are unchangeable, and of contingent effects changeable.⁹

Consider the concluding words of the quotation above: "Necessity and contingency in things are distinguished not in relation to the divine will, which is a universal cause, but in relation to created causes which the divine will has ordered proportionately to the effects, namely, in such a way that the cause of necessary effects are unchangeable, and of contingent effects changeable." As is clear in this quotation from *De malo* and elsewhere, Thomas teaches that God is the cause of universal being and that necessity and contingency are modes of being. Hence, the divine causality not only embraces all that is and that operates, but even embraces the *manner* in which it is and operates. If it were otherwise, necessary causes would be denominated as contingent because dependent upon God; and contingent causes, because actually caused by God, would be denominated as necessary. But necessity and contingency are determined "in relation to created causes" such that the cause of necessary effects are unchangeable, and of contingent effects, changeable.

That is, necessity and contingency are determined in relation *not* to the First Cause, but to the *proximate cause*. Contingent causes are contingent because they do not metronomically always bring about

⁹ Leonine ed., *De malo*.16.7.ad15: "Et hoc quidem quantum ad scientiam patet ex his que supra dicta sunt: sic enim se habet diuina scientia ad futura contingentia sicut se habet oculus noster ad contingentia aue in presenti sunt, ut dictum est; unde sicut certissime uidemus Sortem sedere dumsedet, nec tamen propter hoc sit simpliciter necessarium, ita etiam ex hoc quod Deus uidet omnia que eueniunt in se ipsis, non tollitur contingentia rerum. Ex parte autem uoluntatis considerandum est quod uoluntas diuina est uniuersaliter causa entis et uniuersaliter omnium que consequuntur <ipsum>, unde et necessitatis et contingentie; ipsa autem est supra ordinem necessari et contingentis sicut est supra totum esse creatum. Et ideo necessitas et contingentia in rebus distinguitur non per habitudinem ad uoluntatem diuinam que est causa communis, set per comparationem ad causas creatas, quas proportionaliter diuina uoluntas ad effectus ordinauit, ut scilicet necessariorum effectuum sint cause intransmutabiles, contingentium autem transmutabiles."

merely one thing, or even one limited type of things. Whereas some causes are contingent by way of defect – as an engine is defective when sometimes it starts when the ignition is turned on and there is gas in the tank, and sometimes it doesn't – the human will is a contingent cause not by way of defect but by reason of the nobler mode of rational being *vis a vis* merely physical things. (Although, the noblest will of all would be immutably committed to and harbored in Perfect Good, it is indeed a natural limitation of our willing that its freedom renders acts that should be immutably sustained yet to be susceptible in this life of divagation: indeed, this is a reason why man stands in need of grace so as to be immutably sustained in good, as St. Thomas argues in *Summa contra gentiles*.3b.155, titled “*Quod homo indiget auxilio gratiae ad perseverandum in bono.*”)

This leads us to the second point essential to the affirmation of human freedom within divine causality: namely, that the human will is said to be free because its proper object is one consequent upon intellect, namely the good in general, universal good. Unlike causes whose contingency is partial and is a function of defect or breakdown, the contingency of the human will derives from the nobility of the intellectual form whereby it is specified. Because of this, the will enjoys a commanding indifference with respect to any finite good, for the finite good *is not* universal, and so *cannot* simply determine or necessitate the will.

As Thomas teaches (*Quaestiones quodlibet* 6, q. 2, a. 2), the motion of the will is an inclination following intellectual form – “*motus voluntatis est inclinatio sequens formam intellectam*” – it is desire following and specified by reason. But no finite good is so good that it is universally good – every finite good is in some respect lacking, even though that finite good be here and now what is best for one. It may here and now be best for me that I cease writing and rest, but I can find the notion of rest, howsoever good for me, inferior to writing. Or, the converse may be true: it may be best for me here and now to write, but I may find the good of writing inferior to the good of rest. No finite good is so universally good as to command the will: even at the moment of choice in which one embraces some good, the intellect presents the good chosen as a *limited* good, and so as in some respect not-good, inferior to

universal good.¹⁰ Hence the will enjoys a dominating indifference to the object of choice *even at the moment of choice*, inasmuch as clearly no such object of choice is such as to be able to command the will.

It follows that freedom of the will is rooted in the nobility of intellective form, whereby no finite good can command the will, leaving the will free. Were the will ever to embrace good that is genuinely and perfectly universal good – the subsistent universal good Who is God – then the will would not be free to turn away, because it would have reached perfect repose and complete actuation in the Good. The end, whether natural or supernatural, is not among the things of which the human will is master. To the contrary, the will is ordered toward the Good, and while man may fall short of this ordering, he cannot replace it with another but merely falls into futility.

This leads to the third point. Although the will is free with respect to all finite goods because it is ordered to them under the *ratio* of its proper object, which is the good in general or universal good, nonetheless, the will is the second rather than the First Cause of its own acts. Here the famed words of St. Thomas from *De malo* q. 3, a. 2 ad 4 are clear: “When anything moves itself, this does not exclude its being moved by another, from which it has even this that it moves itself. Thus, it is not repugnant to liberty that God is the cause of the free act of the will.”¹¹

¹⁰ For this teaching of St. Thomas that the rational will is not subjected to or of necessity moved by finite goods because the power of the will exceeds the individual good inasmuch as its capacity regards the universal and perfect good, see *Sth.I.82.2.ad 2*.

¹¹ “Similiter cum aliquid mouet se ipsum, non excluditur quin ab alio moueatur a quo habet hoc ipsum quo se ipsum mouet. Et sic non repugnat libertati quod Deus est causa actus liberi arbitrii.” The antecedent text of this response to the fourth objection is also very much to the purpose: “Ad quartum dicendum quod cum dicitur aliquid mouere se ipsum, ponitur idem esse mouens et motum; cum autem dicitur quod aliquid mouetur ab altero, ponitur aliud esse mouens et aliud motum. Manifestum est autem quod cum aliquid mouet alterum, non ex hoc ipso quod est mouens ponitur quod est primum mouens: unde non excluditur quin ab altero moueatur et ab altero habeat hoc ipsum quod mouet.” -- “To the forth it should be said that when it

Thus the will receives from God a motion whereby it freely determines itself to act (“being moved by another, from which it has even this that it moves itself”). “Free” here is not distinguished in relation to God, because no liberty of indifference to divine causality can exist within a created universe. Yet, this is not a mythical freedom – the will is not constrained by any terrestrial object of choice. Nor is it forced by God, since the very act of freedom is precisely what is caused by God: free self-determination is a natural effect of divine causality. Only the author of the natural motion of a thing may, without violence, apply this natural motion to act. The divine motion is not a violent motion contrary to the nature of that which is moved. Hence, the following words of St. Thomas:

Free will is the cause of its own movement, because by his free-will man moves himself to act. But it does not of necessity belong to liberty that what is free should be the first cause of itself, as neither for one thing to be cause of another need it be the first cause. God, therefore, is the first cause, Who moves causes both natural and voluntary. And just as by moving natural causes He does not prevent their acts being natural, so by moving voluntary causes He does not deprive their actions of being voluntary, but rather is He the cause of this very thing in them, for He operates in each thing according to its own nature.¹²

is said that something moves itself, that the same thing is mover and moved. But when it is said that something is moved by another, the moved is taken to be one thing and the mover another. But it is clear that when something moves another, from this it is not taken to follow that it is the first mover: wherefore it is not excluded that from another it is itself moved and from this other it has even this, that it moves.” Thence the lines follow that “when something moves itself, this does not exclude that it is moved by another from which it has even this, that it moves itself. And thus it is not repugnant to liberty that God is the cause of the free act of the will.”

¹² *Sth.*I.83.1.ad 3: “Dicendum quod liberum arbitrium est causa sui motus; quia homo per liberum arbitrium seipsum movet ad agendum. Non tamen hoc est de necessitate libertatis, quod sit prima causa sui id quod liberum est; sicut nec ad hoc quod aliquid sit causa alterius, requiritur quod sit prima causa eius. Deus igitur est prima causa movens et naturales causas et voluntarias. Et sicut naturalibus causis, movendo eas, non aufert quin actus earum sint

It is of the nature of the free will that it freely determines itself, and this requires that it receive that motion which is given by God whereby it freely determines itself. For nothing can move itself absolutely from potency to act unless it first be moved to act, and the human will is no exception to this maxim. While the vindication of the ontological universality of act and potency as intelligible principles of being exceeds the scope of this treatment, it is without doubt the case that St. Thomas did not consider the human will an exception to this distinction. (Furthermore, denial of the universality of these principles will in short order lead to Parmenidean implications such as the impossibility of change: for in every order potency needs to be distinguished from act, and if there is no genuine potency but only lowest common denominator acts, then change appears impossible – for then nothing is such that it has the potency or power to be otherwise.) This teaching obviously places the activation of the power of the free will within the divine causality, retaining the freedom of the will precisely owing to the nature of the proximate cause and its relation to finite objects while affirming the objective universality of divine providence.

But does this not mean that the will moves of necessity? After all, when God moves me freely to determine myself to choose to eat French fries, I will do so. But how can I be free if I do not have the power to do otherwise?

Two points are pertinent here. The first point is that the fact that I will act in a certain manner if I am freely moved to do so, does not make the action other than free. Freedom is distinguished by the nature of proximate causes in relation to their objects, not by a mythical liberty of indeterminacy with respect to divine causality that erroneously confuses the universal causality of God with the finite causality of a creature. That an act will necessarily occur (necessity of consequence) does not mean that it will occur by means of necessity (necessity of consequent); to the contrary, the act may occur freely. This is manifest with respect to past action: it is necessary with the

naturales; ita movendo causas voluntarias, non aufert quin actiones earum sint voluntariae, sed potius hoc in eis facit; operatur enim in unoquoque secundum eius proprietatem.”

necessity of consequence that I chose to swim yesterday (for this actually was my choice); but it is not necessary with consequent necessity, which is to say by means of necessity, because my choice was free.

The human will is not a mere sensible power ordered to a limited set of objects, inasmuch as its proper object is the universal good. Hence rational creatures are moved by God to their ends in an essentially higher fashion than are non-rational creatures. Nor will it be sufficient to say that even animals, because they are not mere mechanisms, are not subject to a prefixed operative power determined to one. For non-rational animals, while possessed of some spontaneity and exceeding merely mechanical limits, nonetheless are constrained within sensibly delineated boundaries of attraction and repugnance. There is simply no credible evidence that non-rational animals possess a capacity for conceptual as opposed to merely sensible abstraction. Hence they are limited to the sensible order, and as such they lack dominating indifference to sensible attractions and repulsions.

Secondly, even at the very moment when I am freely moved to do "X," I retain the power to do otherwise. But, it may be said, I do not have the power to do otherwise when God freely moves me to do something unless I can actually resist the divine will. Further, did not even the Council of Trent say that the will does not receive grace like something lifeless, and that the will can resist grace? To respond, one should proceed one step at a time. First, power and act are distinct. When it is said that I can act differently than I am freely moved to act by God, what does this mean? It cannot mean that I can simultaneously and in the same respect both act and not-act. Freedom cannot mean liberty from the law of non-contradiction. Hence, by virtue of the possession of rational will, at the very moment that one is freely moved to do "X" one's will nonetheless retains a dominating indifference to "X" inasmuch as the intellect presents "X" to the will as a finite good. Further, the will as a rational power always retains this indifference, even at the moment of choice.

Yet, when I am freely moved to act, I cannot at the same time and in the same respect freely be not-acting. So, in the divided sense – the sense in which one can sit while retaining the power to stand – one "can do other" than one is moved to do. But in the composite sense – the sense in which one clearly cannot sit and stand simultaneously –

one cannot do otherwise, inasmuch as one does not possess the power to act and not-act at the same time.

But what of the teaching of Trent? It helps to know whereof one speaks. To cite the fourth of the canons on justification from the Council of Trent:

If anyone shall say that man's free will moved and aroused by God does not co-operate by assenting to God who rouses and calls, whereby it disposes and prepares itself to obtain the grace of justification, and that it cannot dissent, if it wishes, but that like someone inanimate it does nothing at all and is merely in a passive state: let him be anathema.¹³

One notes of this teaching, first of all, that it affirms that the free will is "moved" by God whose call is that whereby the will "disposes and prepares itself to obtain the grace of justification." So this is *prima facie* incompatible with any view which denies that God moves the will, unless it be said that the definition applies to nothing because predicated on a condition putatively contrary to fact, which is a ludicrous reading of a *de fide* pronouncement.

Further, Trent condemns the view that man's will "moved and aroused by God" does not co-operate "by assenting to God." But indeed, on St. Thomas's teaching, the very effect of the divine motion in the natural order, and of God's simple will to bestow grace in the supernatural order, is that the will operate with God: literally that it co-operate. Indeed, the canon of Trent is very clear: it is of the will moved and aroused by God that we speak; it is such a will that actually and spontaneously co-operates. But of course: this is how co-operation occurs! It is a gift of God, suavely and without violence actuating the

¹³ Henry Denzinger's *Enchiridion Symbolorum, The Sources of Catholic Dogma*, translated by Roy J. Deferrari (Fitzwilliam, New Hampshire: Loreto Publications, 1955), canon 4 of the Canons on Justification, p. 258, #814. (hereinafter cited as *Denzinger*).

freedom of the will. The authors of Trent, preponderantly sympathetic to St. Thomas's teaching, hardly wished to anathematize his doctrine.¹⁴

Further, the canon condemns the view that the will moved by God cannot dissent if it wishes. But this, of course, is perfectly consistent with the "can" of the divided sense; i.e., the will retains the power to dissent, but insofar as it is being moved and roused and insofar as it is cooperating with God, it certainly is not not being moved, roused, and cooperating and certainly is not actually dissenting. Thus the phrase "if it wishes." Moreover, the canon makes clear just what sort of denial of the free creature's power of dissent is sufficient to invoke the anathema of the canon, namely, any type that says that the free creature receives grace "like someone inanimate" that "does nothing at all" and is "in a merely passive state." But the will, on St. Thomas's account, is not inanimate, nor does it under the divine motion do nothing at all. Rather, it freely acts nor is it moved violently but according to its nature (God moves natural causes naturally and voluntary causes voluntarily) so the created will certainly is not "in a merely passive state." Indeed, the whole point of Thomas's doctrine is well articulated in Bañez's terminology of *praemotionis physicae* or physical premotion. "Physical" because real; "pre" because prior by nature – although not prior in time, since insofar as God communicates the divine motion the will freely determines itself; "motion" because a transition from

¹⁴ Indeed, those inclined quickly to reject this teaching should reflect that while the Church does indeed grant liberty to its sons and daughters to expound this matter in different ways, it has indeed, in the words of Benedict the XIV, found that "The Thomists are proclaimed destroyers of human liberty and as followers, not to say of Jansenism but even of Calvinism; but, since they meet the charges with eminent satisfaction, and since their opinion has never been condemned by the Holy See, the Thomists carry on with impunity in this matter...". Of course, he likewise points out that "the followers of Molina and Suarez" can "continue" in defense of their teaching while noting that "the Roman Pontiffs thus far have not passed judgment on this system of Molina." So this pontiff (and this is of course *after* the controversy *de auxillis*) holds that the Thomist position has been adjudicated as meeting the charges with eminent satisfaction and so not condemned by the Holy See, whereas the Molinist position is literally unadjudicated. Cf. *Denzinger*, note #3, pp. 314-315, under text number 1090.

potency to act. Indeed, it is a contradiction in terms for the will to be willing and not to be willing at the same time. Insofar as God moves the will to its own free act of willing, it makes no sense to say that the will is not freely willing.

It is clear that in a very specific sense the will is “passive” in receiving grace: it is not the origin of grace, nor does it cause by itself what grace causes in it. But this is far from the “passivity” of inanimate being that is anathematized at Trent; indeed, there are potencies of living things and of spiritual things. Moreover, those at Trent knew well the Thomistic account, and if they had wished to deny the central teaching of Thomas that act and potency divide being, then they could have done so. That the *Summa theologiae* was instead an inspiration of their work, and is said to have been placed open at the altar near the Bible, is well-known.¹⁵

On St. Thomas’s account, what is imparted to the will is that whereby it freely determines itself to act, so that insofar as the divine motion is received, the will freely determines itself through this motion. It is a capital error to conceive this motion like a violent and extrinsic motion, for it is precisely the perfection of the natural motion of the will in its further application to act that is caused by God. That is to say, what this motion bestows is that which is natural to the actuation of the will. Hence, St. Thomas (*Sth.I.9.6* resp.) argues that only that which causes a thing’s nature can cause a natural movement in it, and that God is the cause of the natural motion of the will to the universal good. And he further argues that:

¹⁵ If this is a myth, its point becomes all the more perspicuous as manifesting the degree to which regard for the teaching of St. Thomas may be understood to have permeated the deliberations of the eminences at Trent. This is a widely held account – as the old 1914 *Catholic Encyclopedia* puts it as part of its listing for Aquinas, “But the chief and special glory of Thomas, one which he has shared with none of the Catholic Doctors, is that the Fathers of Trent made it part of the order of the conclave to lay upon the altar, together with the code of Sacred Scripture and the decrees of the Supreme Pontiffs, the *Summa* of Thomas Aquinas, whence to seek counsel, reason, and inspiration. Greater influence than this no man could have.”

But it is clear that just as all corporeal movements are reduced to the motion of the body of the heavens as to the first corporeal mover, so all movements, both corporeal and spiritual, are reduced to the absolutely First Mover, Who is God. And hence no matter how perfect a corporeal or spiritual nature is supposed to be, it cannot proceed to its act unless it be moved by God. Now this motion is according to the plan of His providence, and not by a necessity of nature, as the motion of the body of the heavens. But not only is every motion from God as from the First Mover, but all formal perfection is from Him as from the First Act. Hence the action of the intellect, or of any created being whatsoever, depends upon God in two ways: first, inasmuch as it is from Him that it has the form whereby it acts; secondly, inasmuch as it is moved by Him to act.¹⁶

God does not simply by Himself cause the free act – as though the will were not a genuine secondary cause, and the act of willing were bestowed to it like a cauliflower made by divine power to grow preternaturally out of a man’s head. To the contrary, the free act is the act of the will itself; it is its own act, and the effect of the will is its own free determination in willing this or that. The distinctions in terms of act and potency preserve St. Thomas’s teaching from what might otherwise be construed as some species of quasi-occasionalism. Thus what God provides (apart from the *esse* of everything in this process!) is that motion whereby the human will freely determines itself in act so that the will freely acts – which is to say that the human will then as a

¹⁶ *Sth.*I-II.109.resp.: “Manifestum est autem quod sicut motus omnes corporales reducuntur in motum caelestis corporis sicut in primum movens corporale; ita omnes motus tam corporales quam spirituales reducuntur in primum movens simpliciter, quod est Deus. Et ideo quantumcumque natura aliqua corporalis vel spiritualis ponatur perfecta, non potest in suum actum procedere nisi moveatur a Deo. Quae quidem motio est secundum suae providentiae rationem; non secundum necessitatem naturae, sicut motio corporis caelestis. Non solum autem a Deo est omnis motio sicut a primo movente, sed etiam ab ipso est omnis formalis perfectio sicut a primo actu. Sic igitur actio intellectus et cuiuscumque entis creati dependet a Deo in quantum ad duo: uno modo, in quantum ab ipso habet perfectionem sine formam per quam agit; alio modo, in quantum ab ipso movetur ad agendum.”

proper secondary cause brings about its effect of willing. Thus, nothing could be more contrary to Thomas's teaching than the idea that the will receives either the divine motion in the natural order, or in the supernatural order (grace), like something lifeless or inanimate, purely passively. Because it is the very nature of the reception of the divine motion that *pari passu* with its reception, the will freely, inwardly, and spontaneously co-operates. God is not a mere finite created cause, but the first cause of the creature and of every perfection that pertains to the creature, while the creature is the genuine and valid secondary cause of its own actions.

Thus the will is not moved violently, like a stone being violently thrown, but rather in both the natural and supernatural orders receives from God that whereby it determines itself freely to act. And what is that? It is divine motion whether in the natural or in the supernatural order (where it is called grace).

Further, as chapter five of the Council of Trent (On the Necessity of Preparation for Justification of Adults, and Whence it Proceeds) makes clear, our free act is anticipated by the grace of God:

It [the Synod] furthermore declares that in adults the beginning of that justification must be derived from the predisposing grace [can.3] of God through Jesus Christ, that is, from his vocation, whereby without any existing merits on their part they are called, so that they who by sin were turned away from God, through His stimulating and assisting grace are disposed to convert themselves to their own justification, by freely assenting to and cooperating with the same grace [can. 4 and 5], in such wise that, while God touches the heart of man through the illumination of the Holy Spirit, man himself receiving that inspiration does nothing at all inasmuch as he can indeed reject it, nor on the other hand can he [can. 3] of his own free will without the grace of God move himself to justice before Him. Hence, when it is said in the Sacred Writings: "turn ye to me, and I will turn to you" [Zach. 1:3], we are reminded of our liberty; when we reply: "convert us, O Lord, to thee, and we shall

be converted" [Lam. 5:21], we confess that we are anticipated by the grace of God.¹⁷

This teaching refers to grace objectively. That is, any particular created grace, treated as an object, may be resisted: say, the grace of going to Mass, which may be resisted by one who instead prefers to sleep. But this teaching that created grace as an object is not irresistible is certainly not instructing us that *the simple will of God* that one actively receive grace is resistible. For the simple will of God is of that which God actually and absolutely brings about in all its determinate singularity (and so it is distinguished from that which God might will as good only more generally and abstractly but not here and now). The only distinction between God simply willing something, and not simply willing something, is that insofar as God simply wills something *it occurs*. Trent clearly is not authoritatively holding that if the omnipotent God here and now actually wills to bring about "x" that this is compatible with "x" being frustrated. Trent's teaching does not promulgate the subtraction of freedom from the created order and from God's providential government of the created order; the will is not demiurgically independent of divine causality, creating *ex nihilo* its own acts and merits. Indeed, it is Trent (cf. Denzinger, #810, from Chapter 16 of the Decree on Justification) that formally refers to Our Lord "whose goodness towards all men is so great that He wishes the things which are His gifts to be their own merits."

So indeed, one may resist as an object any finite good, including created grace. But this is not to say that the omnipotent God cannot breathe life into one in the supernatural order; it is not to say that God cannot move and rouse the will to Good; and it is not to say that if God simply wills the creature's free act that the creature's free act can in the composite sense fail to occur, although at the very moment of its occurring the creature will retain the power whereby it is capable of acting differently (while yet within the divine motion it will not freely act differently; the will can resist "if it wishes" but insofar as it is freely being moved to operate it is not *not* being freely moved to operate: insofar as it is freely moved *it does not wish to resist*). The author of

¹⁷ Denzinger, #797, p. 250.

created liberty perfects this liberty in giving it that whereby it freely determines itself to act.¹⁸

Conclusion

While this essay has covered a great deal of ground, it is but a preliminary reconnaissance of a vast domain of inquiry. Within this domain we find:

¹⁸ Of course, an objector might also cite Canon 17 from the Council of Trent's *Canons on Justification*, rendered in Denzinger as: "If anyone shall say that the grace of justification is attained by those only who are predestined unto life, but that all others, who are called, are called indeed, but do not receive grace, as if they are by divine power predestined to evil: let him be anathema." But the careful reader will not fail to observe the essentially qualifying phrase "as if they are by divine power predestined to evil" – a phrase that targets *positive* reprobation or any putative *active divine ordering* to evil and perdition (for, of course, the power of God is active power: there is no potency in God). But this is as far from negative reprobation as is *doing* from *not doing*. Whereas negative reprobation involves the teaching that God may not in every case overcome with His grace defects which He is capable of overcoming, positive reprobation involves the claim that defect is a proper effect of God; the latter teaching is directly contrary to right reason and to Catholic faith, whereas the former seems required by the convertibility of being and good. And if this were not sufficient – as frankly, in historical context, one might think it should be – it may also be noted that the claim that all the baptized are *ipso facto* predestined to eternal life is contrary to the teachings of Trent in the immediately antecedent canons #15 and #16. The first (#15) anathematizes anyone who says "that a man who is born again and justified is bound by faith to believe that he is assuredly in the number of the predestined." The second anathematizes anyone who says that "he will for certain with an absolute and infallible certainty have that great gift of perseverance up to the end, unless he shall have learned this by a special revelation." In short, the point of this canon 17 of Trent is not to deny the divine predilection in grace, but, first, to deny that the grace of justification is bestowed only upon those who are predestined unto life – for one may fall from grace after baptism – and second, also to deny that divine power positively predestines to evil. Needless to say, neither of these points is involved in the Thomist account of grace, nor would they have been thought to be so involved by the Council Fathers, whose preponderantly Thomist tendencies are beyond historical cavil.

- the vindication of the principle of causality and of causal entailment over against Humean objection;
- the perception that St. Thomas does indeed articulate a non-rationalist and analogical principle of sufficient reason in declaring that only a being wholly *a se* and lacking any cause can be its own reason;
- the realization that to say all causal factors are activated and no causing occurs is – in the absence of defect, impediment, or miracle – unintelligible with respect to terrestrial causality;
- the insight that divine creation is utterly free, because only in the case of God's *ab extra* causing of something from nothing is there efficient causality wholly and definitively extrinsic to the attainment and possession of the natural end by the agent efficient cause (for God does not attain the natural end of His infinite Good by causing me and indeed need not “do” anything to attain His Good, in which he reposes in perfect beatitude);
- the realizations that freedom is not defined and distinguished in relation to God, which would make a muddle of understanding contingency and necessity in finite things, but is defined and distinguished by relation to the proximate cause and its objects; that rational will enjoys sovereign indifference with respect to any finite reality (even, objectively speaking, to created grace); and the realization that the free act of the will must be fecundated by the divine motion in order that it have that whereby it moves itself to act, so that it is the secondary cause, and God the first cause, of its own free acts.

All of these considerations are testimonies, inadequately framed by the present author, to St. Thomas's profound theological and philosophic science and wisdom.¹⁹

¹⁹ For a far more comprehensive treatment of the fifth and final section of this essay, and a full response to Jacques Maritain's widely shared novel dissent to the classically theocentric Thomistic formulation of the problem of evil, the interested reader might wish to examine my essay "*Providence, Liberte Et Loi Naturelle*" translated by Hyacinthe Defos du Rau, O.P., and Fr. Serge-Thomas Bonino, O.P., and published in *Revue thomiste*, Sommaire du n° 3, December of 2002, which considers all these issues on a broader canvas. But even in this marginal space, it behooves one to note that the position of Maritain, Journet, Most, and many others concerning the divine permission of evil exemplifies a critical fallacy whereby the negation of negation by a real subject is treated as something that is not positive. When authors say that "if the creature does not negate the divine gift, then...." one must immediately interpolate: negation of negation in a real subject is something positive, and everything positive is from God. Hence, such authors should say, "If God wills to uphold the creature in good, then...." These cautionary words are framed with the object of alerting English-speaking theologians and philosophers to the dangers of sentiment and linguistic illusion replacing theological *scientia* with a rhetoric pleasing but disutile.