

The Causality of Prayer and the Execution of Predestination in Thomas Aquinas

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Introduction: The Question of the Reasonableness of Petitionary Prayer

In a lucid and witty essay published in 1945, C. S. Lewis addressed a common objection to the practice of petitionary prayer.¹ This practice is not confined to Christianity, of course, but at least in relation to the Christian conception of the deity, it can seem to make little sense. The problem is simple. If God is all-wise and all-good, what is the point of asking him for things? He is already perfectly aware of our true needs, and he already wants to provide for them. Many of our requests are ignorant and misguided, and the others, it seems, will be at best superfluous. Nevertheless, as Lewis observes, petitionary prayer is part of the whole Christian tradition. Jesus himself practiced it, urged his followers to do so, and taught them how. Lewis wanted to explain that the real purpose of the practice is not to inform God of our needs or to twist his arm. Rather, petitionary prayer functions as a kind of cause, a way of bringing things about. It does so by divine institution and as a kind of share in God's own causality. And so understood, it makes perfect sense. I think Lewis is right about this.

Another matter, however, is Lewis's particular way of conceiving the causality of petitionary prayer, especially as to its relation to God's own causality and care for the world. I grant that his conception is quite

¹ C. S. Lewis, "Work and Prayer," in *God in the Dock: Essays on Theology and Ethics* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1945), 104–7.

straightforward and clear, and that it even has a strong initial plausibility. Indeed, I suspect that it gives voice to the way in which many thoughtful people who pray for things conceive of what they are doing. This is why, even though it is not the main focus of the present essay, I think that it serves as a good way of entering to the topic. But I do hope to show that it contains some serious problems.

In what follows, I shall first set out Lewis's answer to the question of the reasonableness of petitionary prayer. Then I shall raise one of the problems that I think it faces. This has to do with another attribute that has traditionally been ascribed to the Christian God; namely, omniscience, the knowledge of all things, including all temporal events, past, present, and future. In the essay on prayer, Lewis does not address this problem. But from things that he says elsewhere about temporal events and how God knows them, I think we can gather how he would have solved it.

Rather than evaluating this solution myself, I shall turn next to another twentieth-century British thinker, the philosopher Peter Geach. Although Geach agrees with Lewis in ascribing a causal function to petitionary prayer, Geach's way of understanding temporal events and God's knowledge of them contrasts sharply with Lewis's. In fact, Geach argues—I think persuasively—that a position like Lewis's actually ends up making petitionary prayer unable to function as a cause, and therefore renders it pointless. At the same time, however, Geach's own account of how petitionary prayer fits into God's overall plan has something very important in common with Lewis's. And in my opinion, what they have in common is very problematic.

This will bring me to my main theme, which is Thomas Aquinas's view of the matter. Like Lewis and Geach, Thomas does regard petitionary prayer as a divinely instituted way of causing things. On their temporal status, his position is similar to Geach's. But on how prayer and its effects fall under God's providential plan, Thomas differs greatly from both authors. I find his account far more satisfactory. Unfortunately, it is also considerably more complicated and philosophically challenging, and my presentation of it will have to be correspondingly longer.

The distinctive features of Thomas's view mostly pertain to the metaphysics of divine transcendence. My main task will be to show how, in his account, the full determinacy of God's eternal plan, including that part of it called predestination, not only does not exclude human self-determination, but also helps to explain why our free conduct, and especially our prayers, can make enormous differences in the course of events in the world. I shall lay out Thomas's thought on the matter in several parts, following an order that I shall explain when I get there.

C. S. Lewis and Peter Geach on the Causality of Prayer

Lewis on Petitionary Prayer and Time

Lewis's basic strategy in defense of petitionary prayer is a *reductio ad absurdum*. If God's wisdom and goodness made praying for things senseless, he argues, then they would also make doing anything senseless. "If it is foolish and impudent to ask for victory in a war (on the ground that God might be expected to know best), it would be equally foolish and impudent to put on a mackintosh—does not God know best whether you ought to be wet or dry?"² Lewis presses this comparison between prayer and action. When we act, we cause things to happen. They would not happen if we did not act. They depend on our action. Of course our power to act is from God. But this is just how we should think of prayer: as a divinely ordained way of causing things. God has made some things depend on our prayer. They would not happen if we did not pray.

To be sure, there is a difference. In the case of action, at least its immediate effect is quite certain. "You can be sure that if you pull up one weed that one weed will no longer be there."³ Praying for things does not make them so certain. Prayer's efficacy is at God's discretion. This, however, is not because prayer is a weaker kind of cause, but because it is at least potentially far stronger. Prayer is not intrinsically limited by space and time as our physical action is. Hence God retains a discretionary power over it. Otherwise it would be too dangerous. We would risk what Juvenal envisaged: "enormous prayers which Heaven in anger grants."⁴ But this difference between prayer and action is no objection to prayer's causality. If God lets us cause things at all, there is no reason why he should not let us cause some things through prayer. Lewis quotes Pascal: "God 'instituted prayer in order to allow his creatures the dignity of causality.'"⁵ Lewis adds that really both prayer and action serve this purpose.

Lewis offers an easily understood analogy to convey the overall situation that he envisions:

God has not chosen to write the whole of history with His own hand. Most events that go on in the universe are indeed out of our control, but not all. It is like a play in which the scene and the general outline

² Lewis, "Work and Prayer," 106.

³ Lewis, "Work and Prayer," 106.

⁴ Lewis, "Work and Prayer," 107, citing Juvenal, *Satires* 4.10.111.

⁵ Lewis, "Work and Prayer," 106; see Blaise Pascal, *Pensées*, no. 513 (Brunschvicg numbering).

of the story is fixed by the author, but certain minor events are left for the actors to improvise. . . . He made the matter of the universe such that we can (in those limits) do things to it Similarly, He made His own plan or plot of history such that it admits a certain amount of free play and can be modified in response to our prayers.⁶

As I said, it is my impression that this is how many people think petitionary prayer works. In any case, please keep in mind this comparison with a playwright. I shall be referring to it often.

Now let me bring up a problem for Lewis's account. As I mentioned, it has to do with God's omniscience. I grant that the account fits with God's being all-wise. Whatever happens, and whatever we may ask for, God will discern the best way to respond. What is less clear, however, is whether Lewis's account fits with God's being all-knowing. His wisdom enables him to judge rightly about any fact that is presented to him. But if he is all-knowing, then he should already know all the facts too. Yet, on the playwright analogy, what God eternally knows seems to be only the "outline" that he has ordained for the world's history. Certain events, at least some minor ones, are improvised by the actors. These include our prayers. God will know how to answer them. But to say that his plan "can be modified in response to our prayers" does at least sound as though he did not always know about them, and as though he is continually modifying his plan, in the sense of filling it in, as he learns of them. His initial information consists only of the original script. It does not include the various improvisations that the actors introduce. He learns of those only as they happen. They may not affect the story's overall path, but they do add something to what he originally had in mind. Our actions and prayers offer new information for him to integrate into his plan. At no time does he know everything that can ever be known.

How Lewis would probably resolve this issue comes out, I think, in other writings. It is a simple solution, but radical. He suggests that time itself is only "our mode of perception" and that things are not "really" in time.⁷ The way they really are is as God sees them, and to him they are all "present in an eternal Now."⁸ On this account, God eternally knows all that will ever happen, including our prayers, and he has eternally decided what to do about them. The "modifications" that they involve are eternal too. So God does always know everything after all.

⁶ Lewis, "Work and Prayer," 105–6.

⁷ C. S. Lewis, *Miracles. A Preliminary Study* (New York: MacMillan, 1947), 183–84. See also C. S. Lewis, *The Screwtape Letters* (New York: HarperCollins, 2001), 149–50.

⁸ Lewis, *Miracles*, 183.

On this basis, Lewis even argues that it can be sensible to pray for past events—that is, events we perceive as past—at least when we are unsure about how they have turned out. Such *ex post facto* prayer can make sense, because God is eternally aware of it and can eternally ordain an event that fulfills it—even though, as we see it, the event precedes the prayer.⁹

Instead of commenting on this directly, let me now turn to Peter Geach.

Geach on Providence and Petitionary Prayer

Geach is fully in agreement with Lewis on the reason why petitionary prayer makes sense: it enjoys some sort of causality. He doubts whether natural reason can know whether prayer has any real effects. But he is sure of the revealed teaching that prayer causes things to happen.

In his analysis of what this causality entails, however, Geach is led to reject entirely Lewis's proposal about the nature of time. Geach argues as follows. To say that an event happened because you prayed for it means that it depended on your prayer. This is to say that, had you not prayed, then—other things being equal—it would not have happened.¹⁰ Hence asking for something to happen supposes that both its happening and its not happening are possible. And this in turn means that, at the time of the prayer, the event must be both able to happen and able not to happen.¹¹ Nothing past or present, however, is of this sort. Nor is any future thing that is fully predetermined in its causes.¹²

Geach thus finds the idea of praying for past events absurd. It is not a question of what God can do, but of what we can intelligibly ask for. Whether or not we know that an event has occurred, we cannot ask for it to have occurred. This is because the very fact that we put it in the past means that we consider the matter closed, already settled or determined. In praying for such a thing, we would have to say something like this: "If that did happen at that time, thank you; but if it did not happen at that time, please make it to have happened at that time." We would be asking, at least conditionally, for something that involves a contradiction: that something have happened at the very time when it is assumed not to have happened. Geach is saying that what we pray for must be, or at least must seem to us to be, what is called a future contingent thing. This means something whose coming about or not has not already been determined in the course of the

⁹ Lewis, *Miracles*, 186.

¹⁰ Peter Geach, "Praying for Things to Happen," in *God and the Soul*, 2nd ed. (South Bend, IN: St. Augustine's Press, 1969), 88–89.

¹¹ Geach, "Praying for Things to Happen," 89.

¹² Geach, "Praying for Things to Happen," 93–94.

world. And if pray is truly efficacious, then what we pray for must truly be such a thing.

Moreover, if some of the future is truly contingent in this way, then the future cannot be on an equal footing with the past and the present. That is, things must really be in time. They cannot all be present together in an eternal “Now,” with our merely perceiving them as successive and temporal.¹³ If they were all present, they would all be determined already. Our freedom of choice would be an illusion, and again, petitionary prayer would be senseless.

Geach also rejects the idea that God is seeing all things as present. Future events are not present (yet). To regard them as eternally present would be a mere error. In fact, Geach argues, God cannot be seeing them at all. This is because they simply are not there to be seen.

In saying this, Geach is not denying that God knows the future. He is saying only that God does not see the future, as a spectator does, with a speculative kind of knowledge—a knowledge derived from and conformed to the things known. “God’s mind,” Geach insists, “does not conform to the world.”¹⁴ But God can still know the world and its future events, because he can have practical knowledge of them. Geach likens it to a person’s knowledge of the intentional movements that he or she is going to perform. Often it is practically impossible for people to be mistaken about what they are on the verge of doing.¹⁵ They truly know what they are about to do.

For Geach, in other words, God knows the future “by *controlling* it.”¹⁶ His control is irresistible and infallible, unable to be impeded or to fail. Does this mean that everything is predetermined? Geach says no. Some events can still be contingent. He points out that sequences of contingent events, in which now this possible alternative occurs and now that, often show definite patterns or regularities.¹⁷ Regularity, order, is a work of reason. The ordination by divine reason can be infallible without predetermining every single event. In this way, our free actions and prayers fit into God’s plan. To convey the idea, Geach gives his own analogy—a chess game.

God is the supreme Grand Master who has everything under his control. Some of the players are consciously helping his plan, others

¹³ Geach, “Praying for Things to Happen,” 90–93.

¹⁴ Peter Geach, “Prophecy,” in *Truth and Hope* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2001), 86.

¹⁵ See Geach, “Prophecy,” 85–87.

¹⁶ Peter Geach, “Omniscience and the Future,” in *Providence and Evil* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 57 (emphasis in the original).

¹⁷ Geach, “Praying for Things to Happen,” 95–96.

are trying to hinder it; whatever the finite players do, God's plan will be executed; though various lines of God's play will answer to various moves of the finite players. . . . No line of play that finite players may think of can force God to improvise: his knowledge of the game already embraces all the possible variant lines of play, theirs do not.¹⁸

But now consider this analogy. Is it not just like Lewis's analogy of the playwright? And does it not also collide with one of the attributes traditionally ascribed to the Christian God? This time, the problem does not regard God's omniscience; about that Geach can insist that omniscience means only knowing at any given time everything that can be known at that time. But the problem regards God's immutability or unchangeability.

Granted, the chess master's command of the game is always perfect and does not change. He does not become a better chess player. But he does have to see what the other players do in the course of the game. Geach says that various lines of God's play will "answer to" various moves of the finite players. A chess master may know in advance how to answer any possible line of play. But he cannot know in advance which line the other will choose. He knows this only by seeing the other's choice when it is executed. Then he adjusts his play in view of it. His response may always be perfect. But his knowledge of the moves that are actually made in the game changes as the game progresses.

So it sounds as though, even if at any given time God knows all the things that can be known at that time and is, in that sense, omniscient, over the course of time he will be adjusting his plan. It sounds as though he will undergo some changes. They may not seem important. The essential form of the plan, the grand scheme of things, remains the same. But big or small, such changes are still changes. Whereas, in the Christian God, "there is no change or shadow of alteration" (Jas 1:17).¹⁹

Now, Geach is definitely not a process theologian. "Process theology is not a live option."²⁰ He does not think God can change in any real way. He explicitly denies that God's knowledge "has to be changing to keep up to date"²¹ or that he has "different information available at different times."²²

¹⁸ Geach, "Omniscience and the Future," 58. See also Geach, "Prophecy," 86, 89.

¹⁹ For the teaching of the Catholic Church, see the First Vatican Council, *Dei Filius*, ch. 1 (third session, April 24 April 1870; Denzinger-Schönmetzer / Denzinger-Hünemann no. 3001 [old Denz. no. 1782]: "simplex omnino et incommutabilis").

²⁰ Geach, "Omniscience and the Future," 42.

²¹ Geach, "Omniscience and the Future," 41.

²² Geach, "Praying for Things to Happen," 93.

But how can he deny this? Not as Lewis suggests doing, by denying the very reality of time. As we saw, Geach insists on time's reality. But the only alternative seems to be that God already knows all future events, and this because he has already decided them. His control cannot be limited to general patterns. It must extend to every single thing that happens. But if so, then how has he not predetermined every single thing? How will any event be any less necessary than if it existed in an eternal present?

In fact, Geach himself admits that his account makes it very hard to explain how God could have foreknown individual sins, such as Judas's, without predetermining them. Geach's only answer to this is that sin is a mystery.²³ But as I see it, the problem applies to all events, not just to sins. It seems that either God only learns of them as they happen and "modifies" his plan accordingly, or else he predetermines them. Either there are events that God learns about only when they happen, or else he predetermines all events, and no action, or prayer, or object of prayer, is truly contingent. In short, not only for Lewis but also for Geach, there is the specter of determinism. And Geach himself insists that determinism makes petitionary prayer senseless.

What strikes me most, however, is something else. It is something that Lewis's playwright analogy and Geach's analogy of a chess master have in common. In both, God has a general plan that will be executed no matter what we do. Our actions never do anything more than fill in details, and neither do our prayers. If these details are indeed contingent, able to be otherwise—if they are not necessary or predetermined—it is only because they are, as Lewis calls them, "minor events," merely incidental to the overall plot of the drama or the outcome of the game. In short, the Lewis and Geach explanations succeed in making our actions and prayers sensible only by making them trivial. What matters is the execution of God's plan, and this is inexorable and does not depend on our choices or actions or prayers in any way. Perhaps Lewis and Geach would recoil from this thought, but what they say surely suggests it. I do think we should recoil from it.

Thomas Aquinas on the Metaphysics of the Causality of Prayer and Its Providential Setting

Petitionary Prayer as a Cause

Now let me turn to Saint Thomas. I shall lay out his view of the matter in six sections. In this one, I present his basic conception of petitionary prayer, and I indicate the extent to which he is in agreement with Lewis and Geach

²³ Geach, "Omniscience and the Future," 61–66; see also Geach, "Prophecy," 87–88.

about what makes it sensible. The next section concerns how Thomas thinks all things and all events are contained in God's unchanging knowledge. After that, I begin to try to explain how Thomas thinks the contingency of human things squares with the universal infallibility of God's providence. This is a difficult topic, to say the least, and it takes up two rather lengthy sections. Then, in the penultimate section, I call attention to a fundamental distinction that Thomas draws with respect to the work of providence and the role that creatures play in it. Finally, in the concluding section, I apply the foregoing considerations to prayer and show what they imply about the potential scope and significance of its causality.

Thomas is certainly in agreement with the view that what makes petitionary prayer sensible—or, as Thomas puts it, “suitable” (*conveniens*)—is its causality.²⁴ Like Lewis, Thomas argues that, if God's perfect wisdom and goodness ruled out asking him for things, then it would also rule out ordinary actions such as walking in order to get somewhere or eating in order to be nourished, which would be absurd.²⁵ Of course God gives us many things without our asking for them. Nevertheless, Thomas says, “God . . . wishes to bestow certain things on us at our asking.” He does so “for the sake of our good, namely, that we may acquire a certain confidence in turning to him, and that we may recognize in him the author of our goods.”²⁶

Thomas goes into the causality of prayer in some detail. In general, he explains, request or petition is one way in which reason causes things.²⁷ Another way is command. A command is an expression directed to some agent or power that is inferior or subordinate to the commander's reason. It puts that agent or power under a kind of necessity or obligation to carry out or fulfill what it says. A petition, by contrast, may be directed to an agent that is equal or even superior to the one making it. Of itself, it does not impose an obligation on the agent to whom it is directed. Nevertheless it does serve as a kind of cause of the agent's fulfilling it. It does so, Thomas explains, insofar as it “disposes” (*disponit*) for its fulfillment.²⁸

This seems to mean that to petition functions as a kind of moving or

²⁴ See Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* [ST] II-II, q. 83, a. 2. All translations of Thomas in this essay are mine.

²⁵ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa contra gentiles* [SCG], III, ch. 95/96, Marietti no. 2716.

²⁶ ST II-II, q. 83, a. 2, ad 3: “Deus multa nobis praestat ex sua liberalitate etiam non petita. Sed quod aliqua vult praestare nobis petentibus, hoc est propter nostram utilitatem, ut scilicet fiduciam quandam accipiamus recurrendi ad Deum, et ut recognoscamus eum esse bonorum nostrorum auctorem.”

²⁷ ST II-II, q. 83, a. 1.

²⁸ ST II-II, q. 83, a. 1.

efficient cause.²⁹ Evidently its immediate, proper effect would be precisely a disposition that is favorable to its fulfillment. Whatever the case is with other petitions, however, at least in the case of prayer the person whom it disposes for the fulfillment is not the one to whom it is directed. Prayer neither informs God of one's need for what is requested nor bends his will toward granting it. The one whom prayer disposes is the one who prays. It does so by orienting toward God one's desire for what is requested.³⁰ The causality or efficacy proper to prayer, then, is this: its making the one who prays somehow fit to obtain from God what is prayed for. Theologians call this sort of efficacy "impetration." The word is from the Latin *impetro/impetrare*, which originally meant simply to achieve or to bring about. Later it came to mean to get or to obtain, and now it means to procure something precisely by asking for it.

As for exactly how the disposition for its fulfillment that prayer effects functions as a cause of the fulfillment itself, I shall be able to say a little more about that once I have discussed how Thomas understands its relation to God's own causality.³¹ But here let me say a little more about impetration. A good thing that results from a prayer may not be properly an effect of it as prayer. The thing may not be strictly impetrated, obtained precisely because it is requested. Rather, it may come about because of the prayer's being an act urged by charity. Prayer moved by charity, like any other charitable act, is meritorious. It deserves a reward. And God may reward it by bringing about the very thing that was prayed for. But the efficacy that is proper to prayer as prayer, the impetration of what is prayed for, is not a matter of merit.³² In fact, God sometimes grants the prayers of persons lacking charity, persons who do not merit anything.³³ God grants their prayers out of

²⁹ See *ST* I-II, q. 17, a. 1, obj. 1: "For Avicenna says that the moving cause is fourfold; namely, perfecting, disposing [*disponens*], commanding [*imperans*], and counseling." These are called efficient causes in Thomas Aquinas, *In II phys.*, lec. 5, Marietti no. 180 [5] (Marietti), and here the *disponens* (or *praeparens*) is said to make the matter or subject apt for the final completion of some motion or change, the completion being the work of the perfecting (*perficiens*) cause. See also Thomas Aquinas, *Expositio libri peryermeneias* [EP] I, lec. 7, Marietti no. 86 [5], where optative speech is reduced to petition (*oratio deprecativa*), "because in relation to a superior, a man does not have moving power [*vim motivam*] except through the expression of his desire."

³⁰ *ST* II-II, q. 83, a. 2. See also aa. 15–16 and Thomas Aquinas, *Compendium theologiae* II, ch. 2.

³¹ See comments below at note 75.

³² See the very detailed and careful study by P. De Letter, S.J., "Merit and Prayer," *The Thomist* 19 (1956): 446–80.

³³ See, e.g., *ST* I-II, q. 114, a. 9, ad 1.

mercy. But evidently even these prayers do somehow dispose for receiving the things prayed for. Otherwise they would not be causes of receiving the things at all. The things would not be given in answer to them. These prayers do impetrate things.³⁴ The impetration of prayer, Thomas says, is chiefly a function not of charity, but of faith. Faith moves mountains. By faith one is certain of God's omnipotence and mercy, and thereby hopes for his gifts. It is prayer rooted in faith that impetrates.³⁵

The proper efficacy of prayer, then, is a function of confidence in God's loving fatherly care for us, or in other words, confidence in his providence. This brings us to the problem of the divine immutability. For the precise issue is the immutability of providence.

*Prayer and Its Effects as Temporal Events
Contained in God's Immutable Plan*

Prayer would of course be useless, Thomas observes, if God took no interest in the world.³⁶ There must be such a thing as God's providence, his overseeing and caring for what happens here below. Prayer would also be useless, Thomas says in the same place, if God's providence predetermined everything or made everything happen by necessity. If prayer makes sense, then God's plan for the world, or what Thomas calls the order of his providence, must allow for our making a real difference—by our choices, our actions, and our prayers—in the course that events in the world take. And so, as Geach insists, prayer presupposes real contingency in things.

It also presupposes the reality of time. What we can sensibly pray for are things that have not yet been determined. They must be future things. Like Geach, Thomas holds that there is contingency only in future things. "What has been done—that is, the past—is not contingent."³⁷ No matter how contingent an event is in its own nature, once it has happened it is no longer able not to have happened. "What's done cannot be undone."³⁸ Of course, the present state of affairs that a past event has brought about might be able to be undone or changed. And obviously the thought is not that all past events happened by necessity, as though they were all predetermined to happen. That would mean that none of them was ever contingent, even before they happened. If a past event was contingent, then the necessity of its having happened is not absolute, rooted in its own nature or in its causes.

³⁴ *ST* II-II, q. 83, a. 16, corp. and ad 2.

³⁵ *ST* II-II, q. 83, a. 15, ad 3.

³⁶ *ST* II-II, q. 83, a. 2.

³⁷ Thomas Aquinas, *In VI eth.*, lec. 2, Marietti no. 1138. See also *ST* I, q. 25, a. 4.

³⁸ *Macbeth*, 5.1.63–4.

The necessity is merely conditional—the condition being precisely its having happened. As past, the past is necessary. On this, Thomas and Geach agree.

Nevertheless—and this is where he definitely parts company with both Lewis and Geach—Thomas totally rejects the idea that our prayers (or, for that matter, our choices and actions) somehow fill in details that God's original plan leaves open.³⁹ For Thomas, the eternal plan of divine providence is perfectly determinate, covering every detail of every single event that ever occurs, however small or insignificant the event might be. And the plan is indeed eternal. Hence, no part of it is a result of creaturely input. God receives no new information from us. His knowledge of the world and of every event in it is always perfect and utterly changeless.

Now, Thomas does hold that God eternally “sees” each thing and each event in its own actual being and “presentness.”⁴⁰ For both Lewis and Geach, as we saw, this position entails that all things are eternally present together and not really in temporal succession, even though we perceive them in that way. Lewis accepts that idea, whereas Geach rejects it. But for Thomas, things really are in temporal succession. What is eternally present is only God's vision of them.⁴¹ We must not think of eternity as having no determinate relation to time. It is not mere abstract, indeterminate timelessness. It is simple, successionless, and without parts; but it “includes all time.”⁴² God's present is, so to speak, both before our past and after our future. “Before Abraham was, I am” (John 8:58). He is eternally beholding each thing in the being and presentness that it has, not eternally, but at the particular time of its existence.

How is such beholding possible? We must not be misled by the word “vision.” Thomas inherited the expression “knowledge of vision” (*scientia visionis*) as a way of referring to God's knowledge of things that actually happen at some time. Another expression, “simple understanding” (*simplex intelligentia*), was used to refer to God's knowledge of the things that are possible but never actually happen.⁴³ Despite how it sounds, however, the expression “knowledge of vision” does not mean the sort of knowledge that a mere spectator has. It is not speculative knowledge, gathered from

³⁹ *ST I*, q. 22, a. 3. On the relation between prayer and God's immutability, see the fine study by Rudi te Velde, “Thomas Aquinas's Understanding of Prayer in the Light of the Doctrine of *Creatio ex Nihilo*,” *Modern Theology* 29, no. 2 (2013): 251–63, which draws mainly on *SCG III*, ch. 95/96.

⁴⁰ His term is *praesentialitas*. See, for example, *ST I*, q. 14, a. 13.

⁴¹ See *ST I*, q. 14, aa. 9 and 13; *SCG I*, ch. 66; *EPI*, lec. 14, Marietti nos. 194–95 [19–20].

⁴² *ST I*, q. 13, a. 1, ad 3.

⁴³ *ST I*, q. 14, a. 9.

the things known and measured by them. Rather, as Geach insists, it is practical knowledge. For Thomas, the difference between *scientia visionis* and *simplex intelligentia* consists in the fact that God's knowledge of the things that exist at some time is knowledge that causes the things known. It is unqualifiedly practical knowledge.⁴⁴ Elsewhere he explains that this is called *scientia visionis* simply because only what has being outside the seer can properly be said to be seen.⁴⁵ But this seeing is not caused by what is seen. It is not a result of input from temporal things. Nor is it conformed to the being of the things, as speculative knowledge is.⁴⁶ Rather, the being of things derives from and conforms to God's vision. Thus, his knowledge of vision can also be called *scientia approbationis*, knowledge of acquiescence.⁴⁷ Perhaps we can say that God eternally "visualizes" or "envisions" everything that ever happens.

Because God's knowledge of things does not depend on the things, it can be eternal even though they are not. As Boethius argued, knowledge is in the mode of the knower, not of what is known.⁴⁸ The mode of being that a thing has in itself is not always the same as the mode that it has insofar as it is an object of knowledge. This will also be important for us further on.

The Real Contingency, by God's Will, of Our Causality

The universality of God's causality, its extending to absolutely all things and all events, does not mean that he is the only cause. Thomas rejects

⁴⁴ *ST I*, q. 14, a. 16. Cf. Augustine, *Confessiones* 13.38.53: we see the things that God has made because they exist, whereas they exist because he sees them. Thomas cites a similar passage from Augustine's *De Trinitate* in *ST I*, q. 14, a. 8, sc.

⁴⁵ Thomas Aquinas, *In III sent.*, d. 14, q. 1, a. 2, qc. 2. See also *ST I*, q. 14, a. 9, corp. Evidently the thing would have to be known in its own presentness and not merely as contained in something else that the knower effects, for instance some temporally prior created cause; in that case, one would only be "foreseeing" the thing, not "seeing" it.

⁴⁶ *ST I*, q. 16, a. 5.

⁴⁷ *ST I*, q. 14, a. 8. On this topic, see Brian J. Shanley, O.P., "Eternal Knowledge of the Temporal in Aquinas," *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* 81, no. 2 (1997): 197–224; on *scientia visionis* and *scientia approbationis*, see 216–17. See also Shanley, "Divine Causation and Human Freedom in Aquinas," *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* 72, no. 1 (1998): 99–122. I render *approbatio* as "acquiescence," not "approval"; unlike "approval," *approbatio* does not always imply an endorsement or a positive willing. God knows sins, but he does not will them or approve of them. He only permits them. (Nor does his knowledge cause them; see *ST I*, q. 14, a. 10, ad 2. If the causality of his knowledge does somehow extend to what he merely permits—see *ST I*, q. 14, a. 9, ad 3—I think it must only be with respect to what is positive and good therein. On the sense in which he causes this, see comments below at n. 67.)

⁴⁸ Boethius, *De consolazione philosophiae* 5.pr.6.1–43; cf. *ST I*, q. 14, a. 13.

the view that God “operates” (*operat*) all things immediately and that no created power operates anything.⁴⁹ The world that God envisions includes created causes. Of course they get their causality from him. And he knows whether and how they will exercise it. They cause what he eternally envisions them to cause.

Moreover, Thomas explains, God makes different created causes function in different ways or according to different modalities.⁵⁰ Some of them produce their effects by necessity. This means that they have the potential to produce those effects and have *no* potential *not* to do so. Neither they nor any other creature can impede or prevent those effects. By contrast, other causes have not only the potential to produce their effects but also the potential not to. They are contingent causes. Their potential to produce their effects can be obstructed.

Here it is very important to notice what sort of modality—what sort of necessity and contingency—is properly ascribed to a creature or to a created cause. It is what Thomas calls “natural necessity or contingency.” It is a function of the real potential, or lack thereof, belonging to the thing to which the necessity or the contingency is ascribed. It is something other than what is called “logical necessity or contingency.”⁵¹ This is the necessity or contingency of a truth about something. What is logically necessary is a truth whose negation has a predicate that is incompatible with the subject, or in other words, a truth whose negation involves a contradiction. What is logically contingent is a truth that involves no contradiction and whose negation involves no contradiction either.

The distinction between natural and logical modalities is not trivial, because they do not always correspond to each other. For instance, not everything that is naturally necessary is such that its negation entails a contradiction. An example is the continuation in being of a spiritual substance. This is naturally necessary. Such a substance has no potential to cease to be. Yet its ceasing to be is logically possible, inasmuch as its being depends on God’s conserving influence and there is no contradiction in God’s suspending that influence and allowing the thing to cease.

For our purposes, the point is that, for Thomas, the proper judgment as to

⁴⁹ *ST* I, q. 105, a. 5.

⁵⁰ See *ST* I, q. 22, a. 4. See also, below, beginning with the eighth paragraph of the present subsection.

⁵¹ See Thomas Aquinas, *In IX metaphys.*, lec. 1, Marietti no. 1775. To be precise, this passage is about logical possibility and impossibility. But necessity is nothing other than impossibility not to be, and contingency is nothing other than possibility to be and not to be. See also *In V metaphys.*, lec. 14, Marietti nos. 971–73.

whether a real being, and a real cause, is necessary or contingent is not with respect to logical modality, but with respect to natural modality; that is, with respect to the necessity or contingency that belongs to things in their own natural being, according to the potencies that are real principles in them.⁵² Logical necessity and contingency properly belong to truths about things. Truths properly exist in a mind.⁵³ Of course, if a predicate is true of a thing, then the thing is so, as the predicate says. But that truth can be necessary without the thing's being so by any natural necessity. This can be the case if the truth in question is not the effect of the being of the thing. In the next section, we shall see how it is that natural contingency, which is contingency in the proper sense, can belong to created beings and created causes as they are in themselves, even though a certain logical necessity accrues to them as found in the divine mind.⁵⁴

Now, of those causes that have both the potential to produce certain effects and the potential not to—contingent causes—some of them are such that they themselves determine whether and how they will act. Our wills are such causes. This is what it means, for Thomas, to say that we have free choice. Thomas's understanding of the freedom of choice is what is now called "libertarian." On this understanding, freedom of choice is incompatible with predetermination. Right then, when you make a certain choice about some matter, it is in your power to obstruct that choice and either to make no choice about the matter or even to make an opposite choice. You are not predetermined to make the choices that you make. The notion of a predetermined choice is not even coherent. To choose is precisely to determine oneself with respect to the choice's object. You cannot determine what is already determined. There is nothing that eliminates or suppresses your power not to make the choices that you make, other than your making them. Not even God does so. The fact that he eternally envisions everything we do, and that it all depends on his will, does not mean that everything we do we do necessarily, being unable not to do it.

Here we have a clear difference between Thomas and Geach. As we saw, they agree in holding that God knows the future, not by contemplating

⁵² See Thomas Aquinas, *In I de caelo et mundo*, lec. 25, Marietti no. 248 [3]. See also *In IX metaphys.*, lec. 1, Marietti nos. 1774–75: logical things are called possible equivocally, by a likeness to natural potency.

⁵³ *ST I*, q. 16, a. 1. See also q. 10, a. 3, ad 3: "Necessary signifies a certain mode of truth."

⁵⁴ For fuller discussion of the distinction between logical and natural modalities, see Stephen L. Brock, "G. E. M. Anscombe and Thomas Aquinas on Necessity and Contradiction in Temporal Events," in *Analytical Thomism: Traditions in Dialogue*, ed. Craig Paterson and Matthew S. Pugh (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006), 283–302, esp. 290–94.

something that is not there and not fit to be contemplated, but by a practical sort of knowledge. But Thomas never says, as Geach does, that God knows what will happen in the very same way in which a man knows the intentional action that he is about to perform. If a man can be objectively certain that what he plans to do is going to happen, this is only insofar as his will can make the happening necessary in itself. His foresight of the doing can be infallible only if, or insofar as, he can make the power or agency that is supposed to execute the doing be fully determined to it. He must remove or suppress any potential that there is in things for the doing's failure. He must predetermine the doing. This is not how Thomas thinks God makes certain of the things and events that he plans for.

This cannot be easy to understand. For it is something altogether proper to God. Nothing within our experience, indeed nothing created whatsoever, is like that. We ourselves are certainly not like that. When we, in our limited domain, can make certain that something will happen, it is only because we can take away or block the potential for its not happening. I can make certain that my pen will fall a moment from now because it has the potential and tendency to fall and I can now remove every obstacle to its falling. I can make it be unable not to fall. But God does not have to make a thing unable to act otherwise at a given time in order to be certain of how it will act at that time. In other words, God knows everything that ever happens, but the certainty of his vision of things does not entail his making all of them necessary or predetermined. What it entails is his causing the very modalities according to which things exist or come about. This is what no created cause can do. Thomas's ultimate explanation for it is highly metaphysical.

"The divine will," Thomas says, "must be understood as outside the whole order of beings, as a cause pouring forth being as a whole [*totum ens*] and all its differences."⁵⁵ This does not just mean that God cause all the things that there are, all the beings. It means that He causes the nature of being itself, and he causes all the different modes of this nature. These differences of being, Thomas goes on to explain, include both contingency and necessity, which is to say, both the potential to be one way or another and the potential to be only one way. According to his plan, God makes some things come to be necessarily, with no potential not to come to be. But he makes others

⁵⁵ *EP* I, lec. 14, Marietti no. 197 [22]: "Voluntas divina est intelligenda ut extra ordinem entium existens, velut causa quaedam profundens totum ens et omnes eius differentias." A few lines later, Thomas says that *only* God can cause the modes of being of things; the passage is quoted below in note 71. See also, *inter alia*, Thomas Aquinas, *De malo*, q. 16, a. 7, ad 15; *ST* I, q. 19, aa. 6 and 8; q. 22, a. 4, ad 3.

come to be contingently, with potential not to come to be.⁵⁶ His plan never fails. If a created cause fails to produce some effect that it is apt to produce, the failure itself was part of his plan. But the certainty of God's knowledge of whether the cause will succeed or fail does not entail that the cause has no potential to do otherwise or that its potential to do otherwise has been impeded prior to its doing what it does. Of the contingent causes that have succeeded, God knew, infallibly, that they would not fail, but not because he knew that they could not; they could, and he knew it. And likewise with the contingent causes that have failed. The success or failure of such causes is not predetermined, not necessary. Of course, I am talking about natural necessity, necessity rooted in the natures of the causes themselves.

Granted, once an effect of a contingent cause exists, it has a certain logical necessity. When and so long as it exists, it cannot not exist. This is not because its cause lacked the potential to fail, but simply because not existing is incompatible with existing. "What is, while it is, necessarily is." This, however, is trivial. For the necessity is merely conditional, and most importantly, it does not explain the effect's existence. It only follows thereon. What is not trivial is whether or not the effect was predetermined by what it follows on; that is, whether or not its immediate cause could have failed to produce it.

*The Necessity of What God Knows and Wills—
in Its Being Known and Willed by Him*

Still, there is also another necessity about an effect that is not trivial, because it too is prior to the effect's production—not prior in time, but nonetheless prior in nature and somehow even in duration.⁵⁷ It is a necessity rooted precisely in God's knowledge of things, which is eternal and a cause of

⁵⁶ Strictly speaking, there is no such thing as potential not to be. There is no potential that is defined by or consists in order toward not being. Rather, something is said to have potential not to be inasmuch as it has potential for some form of being that is incompatible with the form of being that it has. Typically this means that it has matter with potential for a form that is incompatible with the form by which it exists. Hence, *per accidens*, it has potential not to be.

⁵⁷ On eternity as prior to the world in duration, see *ST* I, q. 46, a. 1, ad 8. Here and in ad 6, Thomas observes that we inevitably imagine a time before the production of the world. But if we thought of God's providence as really temporal, we could hardly also think of it as infallible without making all things predetermined and so excluding freedom of choice. This is why Boethius insisted that what God has is not *praevidentia* but *providentia* (*De consolazione philosophiae* 5.pr.6.17). God is not in time foreseeing things, but eternally overseeing all time.

things.⁵⁸ Any effect that actually comes to be at some time is something that God eternally knows to be at the time when it is. He knows it in the presentness belonging to it at that time. And even though, as we saw, the logical necessity belonging to it at that time is only conditional, God's knowing it to be at that time is absolutely necessary, since everything in him, including all of his knowing, is absolutely necessary. And of course his knowing it to be at that time entails its being at that time.

Yet not even this makes the effect necessary in itself or in its own being. It makes the effect necessary only in the being that it has in God's mind.⁵⁹ It is the necessity of the truth of his knowledge of it. Our knowledge of a future event cannot be necessarily true unless the event is predetermined, such that its immediate causes have no antecedently unblocked potential to fail. But God's can.⁶⁰ Just as his knowledge of the presentness of things, and of the logical necessity that follows on it, can be eternal even though the presentness is not eternal in itself, so too his knowledge of the things themselves can be necessary even though they are not necessary in themselves. What is contingent in itself can be necessary insofar as it is an object of knowledge. Again, this necessity does not explain the event. It only follows on the knowledge of the event.

One might wonder whether this also holds for God's will, which is more properly a cause of creaturely events than his knowledge is.⁶¹ His will influences things. Even if, unlike his knowledge, his will for things is not absolutely necessary in itself, its fulfillment in things is. It is unimpedible, irresistible.⁶² Does every event that he wills therefore occur with absolute necessity? This would certainly be paradoxical, if Thomas is right that God's will extends to the modalities of things. It would mean that, by his will, what occurs contingently occurs necessarily. But there is no paradox, I take it, because here too the necessity is only logical and belongs to the events only as they are in the divine mind. God's willing an event to occur is an eternal reality, in God. It does entail the event's occurring (when he

⁵⁸ On eternity and being, see *ST* I, q. 10, a. 4, ad 3; on God's knowledge as a cause of things, see q. 14, a. 8.

⁵⁹ See *ST* I, q. 14, a. 13, ad 2; cf. Boethius, *De consolazione philosophiae* 5.pr.6.25–32.

⁶⁰ *ST* I, q. 14, a. 13, ad 3.

⁶¹ See *ST* I, q. 14, a. 8.

⁶² *ST* I, q. 19, a. 3, ad 6; a. 6. What is unable to be impeded is necessary (*EP* I, lec. 14, Marietti no. 183 [8]; see also *In II phys.*, lec. 8, no. 210 [4]. Acts of human free choice (*liberum arbitrium*) are not brought about by necessity and can be impeded, by the will itself (*De malo*, q. 6, a. un., corp. and ad 15; cf. *ST* I-II, q. 75, a. 1, ad 2). For fuller discussion of the general topic see Stephen L. Brock, "Causality and Necessity in Thomas Aquinas," *Quaestio* 2, no. 1 (2002): 217–40.

wills it to). But this, the entailment itself, exists only in God, and it is only a conditional necessity.⁶³ This necessity is not at odds with the contingency that the event has, by God's will, in its own being. This is so even though the event also depends on an influence, natural or supernatural, from his will into things. That influence is not God. It is created. And it does not necessitate the event for which he gives it. It is a contingent, fallible cause.⁶⁴ God infallibly ordains it not to fail, but he does not ordain it to be infallible. What is infallible is only his ordination, which is in him. His ordination is necessarily fulfilled, but the cause that fulfills it does not do so by any necessity of its own.

By the way, the question just addressed concerns only the events that God positively wills, not those that he merely permits—namely, sins. Of sins, his will is not a cause, so the question does not arise.⁶⁵ He influences and moves things toward the events that he wills, and the question is whether this makes those events necessary. He does not will sins or move sinners toward them. “Every sin stems from a defect in the proximate agent, and not from the influence of the primary agent.”⁶⁶ God's eternal knowledge of a sin does entail his willing to permit it, but this willing remains in him, and the permitting itself is only a negation, a not-preventing. Neither his knowledge nor this willing is an influence in the sinner.

⁶³ Thus, Thomas takes the necessity of “if God wills something, then it is” to be merely the necessity of a “true conditional” (*ST I*, q. 19, a. 8, obj. 3). The reply to this objection does not deny this. It says simply that this is the *only* necessity belonging to some of the things that God wills, being the only necessity that he wants them to have.

⁶⁴ *ST I*, q. 19, a. 8, corp. Thomas does hold that God “works [*operat*] in every worker [*operante*],” both by giving things the forms by which they work and by applying their forms to their works (q. 105, a. 5). But of course the forms of many things, whether substantial or accidental, can be impeded from working, and Thomas gives absolutely no indication that God's applying them to their works consists in his producing *any* sort of motion *in* them *leading toward* their works (I mean, any motion over and above their intrinsic, natural inclination thereto, which of course is from him)—let alone an infallible or predetermining one. Granted, in being applied to their works, they go from potency to act. But this does not entail any such middle motion. If it did, an infinite regress would follow. They would go from potentially to actually being so moved, which would entail yet another motion, etc. I mention this especially with a view to the question of an intrinsically infallible movement of grace; on this, see below, note 101.

⁶⁵ Geach says: “Everything . . . happens by [God's] effective or permissive will” (“Prophecy,” 86). To me this sounds too much as though God's permission were a cause of what is permitted. Of course sin would not happen if God did not permit it, but to say that his permission causes it would be to accuse him of permissiveness.

⁶⁶ *SCG III*, ch. 162, Marietti no. 3327: “Peccatum omne ex aliquo defectu provenit proximi agentis, non autem ex influentia primi agentis.”

Thomas does hold that all the action in a sin somehow derives from God's influence, so that he is in some way the action's cause. What he is not a cause of, either directly or indirectly, is the disorder that is joined to the action and that makes it a sin.⁶⁷ Still, I believe, the divine influence from which the action derives cannot itself be a movement or a tendency directly toward that very action. It hardly could be, at least in the case of action that is bad and sinful in species, that is, action that has sinful disorder attached to it *per se*.⁶⁸ For then the influence would involve at least an indirect tendency toward the disorder itself. Such action, by its own nature, deviates from God's order, and therefore surely from the tendency of his influence.⁶⁹ Only the sinner's will tends directly toward the action and, indirectly or secondarily, toward its disorder and sinfulness. This tendency does depend on things that result from prior divine influence, but it is a misuse of that influence, a partial and defective application of it, not altogether in line with the influence's own tendency. God does not move the sinner's will precisely toward any action that is *per se* sinful. Thomas is clear that only the sinner, not God, determines him to his specific act: "God moves a man's will as a universal mover to the universal object of the will, which is the good. And without this universal motion, a man cannot will anything. But a man determines himself, through reason, to willing this or that, which is truly good or a specious good."⁷⁰

⁶⁷ *ST* I-II, q. 79, aa. 1–2; *SCG* III, ch. 162, Marietti nos. 3323–28.

⁶⁸ See *ST* I-II, q. 79, a. 2, ad 2 and ad 3.

⁶⁹ Of course it is not that the overall tendency of God's action fails. It succeeds, however, only via further influence or influences that he ordains: punishment or inducement to repentance, or both (in different respects). See *ST* III, q. 86, a. 4; I, q. 19, a. 6; q. 103, aa. 7–8; I-II, q. 93, a. 6.

⁷⁰ *ST* I-II, q. 9, a. 6, ad 3: "Deus movet voluntatem hominis, sicut universalis motor, ad universale obiectum voluntatis, quod est bonum. Et sine hac universali motione homo non potest aliquid velle. Sed homo per rationem determinat se ad volendum hoc vel illud, quod est vere bonum vel apparens bonum." That God applies every form to its works (see note 64 above) does not entail his determining a man's will to all of its acts. He determines and applies the will to its *primary* act, the work that is natural and proper to it as the form that it is. This is the willing of universal good. By virtue of this act, the will can go on to apply and determine itself, through reason, to willing a particular good. To will universal good *is* to be apt to use reason to determine acts of will about particulars. The immediate and proper agent of this determination is the will itself, not God. (Not every application of an agent to its work is *immediately* from God; only the first or primary one must be [see *SCG* III, ch. 67, Marietti no. 2418].) This is why the determination can be bad, bearing on a merely specious good: the will's use of reason can be defective. Sometimes, it is true, God does *move* a man to will a specific (and true) good (*ST* I-II, q. 9, a. 6, ad 3). But not all *moving* is *necessitating*; some is only *inclining*. For a signal case of such moving, see the consideration of how significant the

But let me stress once more that the causality of God's providence is unique.

Now, the possible and the necessary are differences of being, and therefore necessity and contingency in things and the distinction of each according to the nature of their proximate causes originate from the divine will itself. For he has disposed necessary causes for the effects that he has willed to be necessary, and he has ordained causes acting contingently or the effects that he has willed to be contingent. And according to the condition of these causes, effects are called either necessary or contingent, although all depend on the divine will as on the first cause, which transcends the order of necessity and contingency. *This, however, cannot be said of the human will, or of any other cause, for every other cause already falls under the order of necessity or contingency.* Hence, either the cause itself must be able to fail or, if not, its effect is not contingent, but necessary. The divine will, on the other hand, is unfailing; yet not all its effects are necessary, but some are contingent.⁷¹

So the necessity belonging to God's causality is something strictly divine, uncaused. It remains in God. It does not spill over onto created causalities, even the necessary ones. God's causality is so necessary, so certain or infallible, that it cannot fail even in the production of effects that are mediated by contingent causes and that are therefore contingent in their own being. This is because he causes the very contingency of such causes. Among these causes are human beings. Far from suppressing the freedom of our conduct, the necessity of God's causality is the very thing that undergirds it.

things that depend on our prayer can be in the section "A Crucial Distinction about Providence in General and Predestination in Particular" below.

⁷¹ EP I, lect. 14, Marietti no. 197 [22]: "Sunt autem differentiae entis possibile et necessarium; et ideo ex ipsa voluntate divina originantur necessitas et contingentia in rebus et distinctio utriusque secundum rationem proximarum causarum: ad effectus enim, quos voluit necessarios esse, disposuit causas necessarias; ad effectus autem, quos voluit esse contingentes, ordinavit causas contingenter agentes, idest potentes deficere. Et secundum harum conditionem causarum, effectus dicuntur vel necessarii vel contingentes, quamvis omnes dependeant a voluntate divina, sicut a prima causa, quae transcendit ordinem necessitatis et contingentiae. *Hoc autem non potest dici de voluntate humana, nec de aliqua alia causa: quia omnis alia causa cadit iam sub ordine necessitatis vel contingentiae;* et ideo oportet quod vel ipsa causa possit deficere, vel effectus eius non sit contingens, sed necessarius. Voluntas autem divina indeficiens est; tamen non omnes effectus eius sunt necessarii, sed quidam contingentes" (emphasis added). See also ST I, q. 22, a. 4, ad 3.

*A Crucial Distinction about Providence in General
and Predestination in Particular*

So God infallibly knows, but does not predetermine, our choices, the actions that we freely choose to perform, and the prayers that we freely choose to address to him about things that we consider to be able to come about and able not to come about. This is extremely important: our prayers themselves are among the contingent things that fall under God's eternal plan.⁷² They do not come to it from the outside, so to speak, and lead him to change or modify it. Thomas knows that it can seem as though the immutability of God's plan makes prayer useless. But this, he says, is because we imagine that our prayers fall outside of his plan. We fail to consider that the very existence and efficacy of our prayers are themselves part of his plan.⁷³ We find it hard not to think that we are trying to give him information or to change his mind. I suppose that this is why the immutability of God and of his providence tend to disconcert us more when we are thinking of prayer than when we are thinking of our ordinary physical actions. When we are thinking about what to do, we are focused on the things around us, with God at least somewhat in the background. Even if we know that the success or failure of our actions depends on him, we are not led to imagine that our efforts are aimed at producing a change in him or in his plan. But when we are speaking directly to him, that is how it can look. We have to make a special effort to get past that look. We have to make a special effort of faith. While we can grasp that such a plan must exist, we cannot comprehend it. The modality of its causality does not correspond to that of the things planned for. There is no creaturely analogue for this.

In short, God has eternally arranged that some things happen because of and in answer to human prayer. If, as the saying goes, man proposes and God disposes, God disposes for the proposal too. "We pray," Thomas says, "not in order to change the divine disposition, but in order to impetrate that which God has disposed to be fulfilled by the prayers of the saints"; or in other words, "as Gregory the Great says, 'so that by asking, men may deserve to receive what Almighty God from eternity has disposed to give.'"⁷⁴ And yet we pray freely—that too is part of the plan—and what happens because we pray for it would not happen if we did not.

In the preceding paragraph, I use the word "disposes" advisedly. It recalls

⁷² *ST* II-II, q. 83, a. 2. See also *SCG* III, ch. 95, Marietti no. 2716.

⁷³ *SCG* III, ch. 95, Marietti no. 2721.

⁷⁴ *ST* II-II, q. 83, a. 2. He is quoting a passage on predestination attributed to Gregory the Great (*PL*, 77:188).

the earlier discussion of prayer itself as “disposing” for its fulfillment.⁷⁵ If prayer does that, this is because God makes it do so. It therefore seems clear that the causality or moving power of prayer, with respect to its own fulfillment, is merely instrumental. The principal cause is God: “Our soul works under God as an instrumental agent under a principal agent,” and “an instrumental agent does not dispose for the perfection that the principal agent is to bring about except insofar as it acts by virtue of the principal agent.”⁷⁶ This, I think, makes it easy to see how God can truly be said to fulfill our prayers even though they have no effect on him. He is not subject to their causality, but he causes it. What we ask for, our asking for it, and its depending on our asking are all from him.

Now let us begin to consider how significant the things that depend on our prayer can be.⁷⁷

To repeat: on Thomas’s account, neither our actions nor our prayers fill in or modify God’s eternal plan. They do not affect the plan in any way. For Lewis and Geach, you recall, they do have some effect on the plan. However, it is a very small one. It fills in some details. The things that depend on our prayer would be incidental or marginal to God’s overall purposes, just as the actors’ improvisations are incidental to the plot of the drama and the amateur player’s moves are incidental the outcome of the chess game. But this is not at all how Thomas sees it. The crucial point is a distinction that he draws regarding divine providence.⁷⁸

One thing is the very *ratio* of providence. This is the plan for the world that God conceives and freely adopts.⁷⁹ It is divine providence itself.⁸⁰ It is something that remains in God.⁸¹ It is therefore simple and eternal.⁸² It

⁷⁵ See comments above at note 28.

⁷⁶ *SCG* III, ch. 149, Marietti no. 3218. Thomas often speaks of causes that function “instrumentally and dispositively.”

⁷⁷ I shall not go into it here, but it is noteworthy that Thomas, citing Augustine, thinks that God sometimes does what Juvenal said and grants prayers for sinful things (see comments above at note 4). He does so as a punishment (*ST* II-II, q. 83, a. 16).

⁷⁸ See *ST* I, q. 22, a. 1, ad 2; q. 22, a. 3.

⁷⁹ On the plan as something that God conceives and freely adopts, see *ST* I, q. 19, a. 4, ad 4; q. 23, a. 2, ad 2 and ad 3.

⁸⁰ *ST* I, q. 22, a. 1.

⁸¹ *ST* I, q. 22, a. 1; I-II, q. 91, a. 1.

⁸² See *ST* I, q. 22, a. 1, ad 3 (simple); ad 2 (eternal); I-II, q. 91, a. 1 (eternal). Indeed, the reality of God’s providence, as of that of any of his immanent actions (those of understanding and willing), is God himself; see *ST* I, q. 22, a. 1, ad 3, and q. 16, a. 5, and q. 19, a. 1. Providence does also involve a relation to creatures, but every relation of God to creatures is only a relation of reason. That is, it posits nothing real in him that is either shared with creatures or somehow proportioned to them (*ST* I, q. 13, a. 7).

is unable to fail, and it extends immediately to each and every creaturely reality, necessary or contingent.⁸³ Another thing, however, is the plan's execution. This terminates outside of God. It is temporal.⁸⁴ Of course, it comes about chiefly through God's own influence, but as already noted, the influence from God in creatures is not God. It is creaturely. It is not eternal but temporal. It is not simple but manifold. And only a part of it has a necessary causality. The causality of another part is contingent. Indeed, some of God's created influences in things actually do fail of their proper effects. He permits them to do so.

What is more, not all of God's plan is executed immediately through his influence. Some of it comes about by way of the doings of creatures. And the range and importance of what is mediated in this way is very great. In the formation of God's plan, we play no role at all, not even a small one. But in its execution, the role that we can play is huge. It is by no means confined to "minor events." At least, not unless the salvation of God's elect is a minor event. I refer to Thomas's understanding of that special part of divine providence which is called predestination.⁸⁵ This will take some spelling out.⁸⁶

His relations to creatures do not in any way compromise his absolute distinctness and self-sufficiency. Moreover, even though some of his relations of reason to creatures are temporal, not all of them are (*ST* I, q. 13, a. 7, obj. 3 and ad 3). Hence providence can very well be eternal. These considerations also apply to predestination; see *ST* I, q. 23, a. 2, corp. and ad 1.

⁸³ *ST* I, q. 22, a. 3; a. 4, ad 1 and ad 2, and ad 3; q. 103, a. 6.

⁸⁴ *ST* I, q. 22, a. 1, ad 2.

⁸⁵ For the distinction between predestination itself and its execution, the former being a part of the plan (*ratio*) of providence and existing only in God, and the latter being in those who are predestined, see *ST* I, q. 23, a. 2. The distinction between predestination itself and its temporal execution appears in Augustine's *Confessiones* 13.34.49.

⁸⁶ Scholars in the field will know that, in recent years, there has been considerable discussion of Thomas's doctrines, and those of later Thomists, concerning predestination, divine foreknowledge, grace, free will, and so forth. The literature is far too vast to canvass here, but I should acknowledge that some of my interpretations in the preceding two sections, this one, and the next, are potentially controversial. (For instance, see notes 64 and 70 above and notes 90, 95, 101, 102, and 104 below. In the last four of these notes, I take issue, reluctantly, with positions voiced by the great master of the spiritual life, Reginald Garrigou-Lagrange, O.P. I do so because I find that they are both well known and widely assumed to be Thomas's views, and because I think that in fact they seriously misrepresent Thomas's teachings on grace and predestination and can hinder the understanding of his teaching on prayer—and of Garrigou-Lagrange's own teaching on prayer.) In any case, I hope my interpretations are both clear and not stale. One study that I would recommend is Lawrence Feingold, "God's Movement of the Soul through Operative and Cooperative Grace," in *Thomism and Predestination. Principles and Disputations*, ed. Steven A. Long, Roger W. Nutt, and Thomas Joseph

The eternal plan of predestination, Thomas explains, is quite certain and fixed, in every particular.⁸⁷ But this is not at all to say that those who are predestined will be saved no matter what they do, inexorably.⁸⁸ Their salvation depends on what they do. Nor are they predetermined to do it. They do it freely: up until they actually do it, they have the power and all the conditions needed in order to refrain from do it. God does not block that power or remove those conditions so as to clinch their doing it. Certainly he is a cause of their doing it. Whatever they do toward their salvation depends on his help, his inclining them to do it by his supernatural, gratuitous influence. They can do it only by applying or using that help. But they use it, and do what they need to do, freely.

Especially pertinent in this regard is a passage from Thomas's commentary on the Gospel of John. It concerns John 1:12—"He gave them power to become sons of God." Thomas says that, for adults, in the giving of the grace of justification (by which people become children of God), consent by a movement of free will—*consensus per motum liberi arbitrii*—is needed, and that, "because it is in a man's power to consent and not to consent, he [Christ] 'gave them power.'"⁸⁹ Christ did this, Thomas here explains, not only by producing and offering grace, but also by providing another needed help of divine grace. This grace is "not habitual but moving." It consists in "moving man's free will so that he may consent to the reception of grace."

Clearly what this moving grace directly tends toward is one's consent to grace. However, there is no suggestion that it altogether blocks the power to withhold consent.⁹⁰ Thomas terms this moving grace an interior "calling" (*vocatio*) and says that God calls by "instigating" (*instigando*) the will interiorly. This hardly sound like an irresistible or intrinsically infallible motion. In fact, in saying that "it is in a man's power to consent and not to consent,"

White, O.P. (Ave Maria, FL: Sapientia Press, 2016), 166–91. For a judicious overview of the whole history of the doctrine of predestination, see Matthew Levering, *Predestination: Biblical and Theological Paths* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

⁸⁷ *ST* II-II, q. 23, aa. 6 and 7.

⁸⁸ *ST* I, q. 23, a. 8.

⁸⁹ *Super Ioan* 1, lec. 6, Marietti nos. 153–54: "In datione gratiae requiritur in homine adulto ad iustificationem suam consensus per motum liberi arbitrii: unde quia in potestate hominis est ut consentiat et non consentiat, 'dedit eis potestatem.'"

⁹⁰ Can you do a thing freely if what moves you toward it totally impedes your power to do the opposite? That is, for freedom, is it sufficient that the root power to do the opposite is only blocked, not destroyed? Well, if it were, would other animals not act freely? Dogs have power to run and power to sit. What moves them to run does not destroy their power to sit, but only impedes it. But they do not run freely. See *ST* I, q. 82, a. 2, ad 3; I-II, q. 13, a. 2, ad 2.

Thomas is evidently referring to *one* power. Power to consent to something and power to withhold consent to it are inseparable. This is explicit in his account of consent in the *Summa theologiae*. Consent, he says, involves the application of appetitive movement to something, and this belongs only to agents that have their appetitive motion “in their power,” such that they can “apply it or not apply it to this or that.”⁹¹ The proper function of that gratuitous divine motion is to enable one to consent to the reception of grace. But, inevitably and indirectly, it also enables one to withhold that consent.

Leaving a person free to use it or not is by no means a peculiarity of the moving grace that makes possible one’s consent to the reception of habitual, sanctifying grace. Thomas says quite generally: “The inclination of grace does not impose necessity, but one who has grace is able not to use it and to sin.”⁹² What makes not using it possible, of course, is that one also has inclinations that are somehow opposed to it. The inclination of grace does not totally neutralize such inclinations. It only makes resisting them possible. With its help, people can and often do resist temptation. But people also, despite its help, can and sometimes do give in. Neither habitual grace nor any actual, moving grace is God. His infallibility regarding which graces will bear fruit and which will not does not entail that some of the graces be intrinsically irresistible and that the others be intrinsically inadequate.

The reprobate too are offered all the help they need to be saved. “God does not fail to do what is necessary for salvation.”⁹³ He is “ready to give grace to all, for he wants all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth,” so that “those alone are deprived of grace who offer an obstacle within themselves to grace; just as, while the sun is shining on the world, the man who closes his eyes is blamed if as a result some evil follows, even though he cannot see unless he is provided with sunlight.”⁹⁴ The sun might shine

⁹¹ *ST* I-II, q. 15, a. 2: “Brutum animal appetit quidem, sed non applicat appetitum motum ad aliquid. Et propter hoc non proprie dicitur consentire, sed solum rationalis natura, quae habet in potestate sua appetitum motum, et potest ipsum applicare vel non applicare ad hoc vel ad illud.” The consent required for receiving sanctifying grace is treated in I-II, q. 113, a. 3. (The term *consentit* appears there in the *sed contra*. Consent is a movement of *liberum arbitrium*, which is what this article is saying that justification requires.) The consent may be prior in time to receiving sanctifying grace; see ad 1 in the same article.

⁹² *ST* I, q. 62, a. 3, ad 2. Both here and in I-II, q. 113, a. 3, freedom is seen as the proper mode of rational *nature*. Notice that, for Thomas, “to use” (*uti*) is to *apply* a thing to some operation (I-II, q. 16, a. 1), and is proper to agents that have free choice, just as consent is (a. 2); see notes 64 and 70 above.

⁹³ *ST* I, q. 49, a. 2, ad 3. Also very pertinent is I-II, q. 106, a. 2, ad 2.

⁹⁴ *SCG* III, ch. 159, Marietti no. 3313.

equally on the closed eyelids of two equally drowsy men, yet induce only one to open them rather than to yield to the drowsiness.⁹⁵ Both using God's help to resist temptation and yielding to temptation despite his help are in one's power. Neither the help nor the temptation has to be overwhelming in order for God to be certain of the result. If his plan is that a given grace actually result in a good choice, then it will. But this is because his plan is infallible, not because the grace is. The grace would be infallible only if it altogether blocked the power for the opposite choice, and then its result would not be a choice at all. Nor could its result have merit. Only works of free choice merit.⁹⁶ A choice has causes, but they do not make the opposite choice impossible. Only the choice itself does.

So, predestination is not predetermination.⁹⁷ As Saint John Damascene says, "God foreknows everything but does not predetermine everything, since he foreknows all the things that are in our power but does not predetermine them. For he neither wills malice nor compels virtue."⁹⁸ What Damascene calls "predetermination," Thomas explains, is the imposition of necessity, such as is found in natural things, which are predetermined to

⁹⁵ It may be objected that, *ceteris paribus*, one who has done good works must have gotten more grace or more help from God than one who has not; for, as Thomas says, God's love causes the goodness of creatures, and so if one creature is better than another, God must love that one more. See, e.g., Reginald Garrigou-Lagrange, O.P., *Predestination*, trans. Dom Bede Rose (St. Louis, MO: Herder, 1939), 315. He cites *ST* I, q. 20, a. 3. This article of the *ST*, however, says nothing about grace or any help, and I do not see how it supports Garrigou-Lagrange's argument. To do better works is to be better, but to get more help is not. That one person did good works and was saved, while another did not and was not, does not entail that God helped the first one more. It entails only that he loved the first one more, wanted him to use the help given, and permitted the second one not to use it. The help given, in itself, might be equal. Nor is this to deny that the help is a cause of the very use of it. It is. It inclines one to use it, and without this inclination, one cannot use it. The help is a cause of the use of it, even if its nature is that of a cause that can and sometimes does fail. Only God's will about the matter cannot fail. If, in creating, God causes diverse effects through *no* secondary causes, surely he can also obtain diverse results from *equal* causes.

⁹⁶ See *ST* I-II, q. 21, a. 4, ad 2; q. 114, a. 1.

⁹⁷ Nor is reprobation. If someone is reprobate, it follows necessarily that they will not be saved, but this necessity is merely that of a "true conditional," just as is the necessity by which the predestined are saved (see note 63 above). Moreover, reprobation does not cause the reprobate person's failure to accept or use the grace offered to him, thereby sinning. Reprobation means only that God foresees the person's sinning and wills to permit it and to punish it with damnation. See *ST* I, q. 23, a. 3, corp., ad 2, and ad 3.

⁹⁸ St. John Damascene, *De fide orthodoxa*, ch. 44 (*PG*, 2:30), as quoted in *ST* I, q. 23, a. 1, obj. 1 and ad 1.

one.⁹⁹ To my knowledge, Thomas nowhere posits any special kind of help proper to the elect, let alone a help that, of itself, infallibly elicits works that lead to salvation.¹⁰⁰ In other words, Thomas seems very far from accounting for such works by graces that are “intrinsically and infallibly efficacious” and “predetermining.”¹⁰¹

Again, is such an account even consistent with Thomas’s doctrine of merit?¹⁰² In heaven, where God’s call is indeed irresistible, there is no merit.¹⁰³ His predestining a person to heaven certainly does not depend on his fore-knowing the person’s merits.¹⁰⁴ But equally certainly, it does not eliminate

⁹⁹ *ST I*, q. 23, a. 1, ad 1.

¹⁰⁰ What is called the “grace of predestination” (*gratia praedestinationis*) is something in God (his gratuitous love for those whom he predestines), not something posited in the predestined creature (*ST I-II*, q. 110, a. 1).

¹⁰¹ These expressions are from Garrigou-Lagrange, *Predestination*, 311. On 315 he calls this intrinsically and infallibly efficacious grace “predetermining and non-necessitating.” In the next chapter (316–23), he tries to show that such a notion is not incoherent. I do not think he succeeds. As far as I can tell, what he really shows is only that God’s will is infallibly efficacious and non-necessitating. Throughout the chapter, tacitly, he is either identifying grace with God’s will or at least assuming that the mode of the one must extend to the other (as he also seems to do on 78–79). As I read Thomas, God’s will is indeed infallibly efficacious. But its being so does not require that the created instruments that it uses, among which is grace, be intrinsically infallible. No created thing can be a cause of the very modality with which its effects exist or act. One created active principle can predetermine another to act in a certain way only by insuperably obstructing its potential not to act so. God does not need to do that. If he did, no creature could have free choice.

¹⁰² Or, for that matter, demerit? Let us suppose that at least some graces are resistible, and that not resisting grace requires grace. Does a person’s not resisting a given resistible grace require *another, distinct* grace? If not, and if the person does not resist this one, then it is a grace that is not intrinsically infallible and that nevertheless, by itself, has the result to which it tends. So, in this case, intrinsically infallible graces are *not* always needed, after all, to assure the execution of God’s decrees. Why then should they even be the *normal* thing? On the other hand, if not resisting a resistible grace does require an additional, intrinsically infallible grace, then people’s having resisted grace cannot be the original reason why intrinsically infallible grace is withheld from them. Rather, its having been withheld from them will be the original reason why they have resisted. Does this not make God an indirect cause of sin?

¹⁰³ *ST I*, q. 62, aa. 8 and 9.

¹⁰⁴ See *ST I*, q. 23, a. 5. Let me stress that the view I am proposing does not entail that God be somehow passive. It is not that his knowledge of who does and who does not use grace is derived from their actually using or not using it. But if the certainty of his knowledge does not depend on creaturely information, neither does the infallible efficacy of his will require created instruments that predetermine or necessitate its effects. No infallible created cause is needed in order to “assure” the execution of his decrees (pace Garrigou-Lagrange, *Predestination*, 80–81, 84). To say that such a cause

the possibility, or the need, of the person's performing works that merit heaven. Such works are typically included in the plan of predestination and integral to its execution.¹⁰⁵ Often the execution also includes other works, good but not properly meritorious, whose very nature is incompatible with causes that necessitate them or their proper effects—works such as the consent to the reception of sanctifying grace and prayers that impetrate needed things from God. And even if the impetratory causality of prayer is not a matter of merit, it still depends on faith; and the act of faith, belief, is essentially a matter of free choice. The choice must be helped by grace, of course, but it is helped in such a way as still to be free.¹⁰⁶ Does the notion of predetermining, intrinsically infallible movements of grace even square with the nature of faith? If not, then can it possibly square with the efficacy of petitionary prayer?

*How, and How Far, Prayer Can Contribute
to the Execution of Predestination*

In any case, it is on the role of prayer in the execution of God's providential plan that Thomas's view contrasts most with Lewis's and Geach's. I have argued that the necessity of the truth of God's knowledge of all creaturely doings is neither a function nor a source of necessity in all the doings themselves. To account for it, nothing outside of him should be invoked. And, while we can be sure that he has such knowledge, we cannot grasp what it consists in. To try to explain the infallibility of God's providential plan by appeal to created causes, whether natural or supernatural, is to run afoul of the transcendence of the divine nature.

But there is still the distinction between the plan of providence and its execution. As for the role of created, secondary causes in the execution of God's plan, Thomas goes so far as to say that predestination itself is "helped by the prayers of the saints":

Someone's salvation is predestined by God in such a way that whatever leads the man towards salvation also falls under the order of

is needed, I believe, not only rules out creaturely free choice but also subjects God's causality to created modalities, undermining his will's transcendence with respect to the nature of being.

¹⁰⁵ Again, see *ST* I, q. 23, a. 5.

¹⁰⁶ *ST* II-II, q. 2, a. 9.

predestination; whether it be his own prayers or those of another, or other good works, and such like, without which one does not attain salvation. Whence the predestined must strive to work and pray well, because through means of this sort the effect of predestination is definitively accomplished [*certitudinaliter impletur*]. For this reason it is said: "Labor more than by good works you may make firm your calling and election" (2 Pt 1:10).¹⁰⁷

A few lines later, anticipating the remark by Pascal that Lewis cited, Thomas says that God uses such intermediate causes, lying between him and what he ultimately intends, not out of weakness, but "so that the beauty of order be observed in things, and to communicate even to creatures the dignity of causality."¹⁰⁸ Clearly this beauty is no mere ornament. A great deal may hang on what a creature does. Indeed, on Thomas's account, the things that it makes the most sense to pray for are the very biggest things: grace, virtue, final perseverance—you cannot merit final perseverance, but you certainly can and should pray for it¹⁰⁹—and heaven itself. Again, think how great are the things that Jesus teaches us to pray for in the Our Father.

In order to be sure of accomplishing his will, God does not need to limit our efficacy to minor things or incidentals. To say that he does is, in effect, to see his causality and ours as parts of a scenario that is larger than either of them. It is as though God were the majority shareholder in a commercial venture. He would make the big decisions, but our investments would still add a little capital to his. No. We are not praying to Jove. We are praying to Almighty God, maker of heaven and earth. Christian prayer, we may say, is an exquisitely metaphysical act—as is faith itself. Faith and prayer interface with the utterly universal agent, who is "outside the whole order of beings."¹¹⁰

Creator and creature are not under a common order. Just as God is cause of the whole order of beings—cause of the nature of being and all its

¹⁰⁷ *ST* I, q. 23, a. 8: "Praedestinatur a Deo salus alicuius, ut etiam sub ordine praedestinationis cadat quicquid hominem promovet in salutem, vel orationes propriae, vel aliorum, vel alia bona, vel quicquid huiusmodi, sine quibus aliquis salutem non consequitur. Unde praedestinati conandum est ad bene operandum et orandum, quia per huiusmodi praedestinationis effectus certitudinaliter impletur. Propter quod dicitur II Petr. 1, satagite, ut per bona opera certam vestram vocationem et electionem faciatis."

¹⁰⁸ *ST* I, q. 23, a. 8, ad 2: "... ut ordinis pulchritudo servetur in rebus, et ut etiam creaturis dignitatem causalitatis communicet." See also q. 22, a. 3.

¹⁰⁹ *ST* I-II, q. 114, a. 9.

¹¹⁰ See above at note 55. On the "metaphysical" character of faith as supposing a power to know "universal good and being" and an "immediate order to the universal principle of being," see *ST* II-II, q. 2, a. 3.

differences—so is he cause of the nature of causality itself and all its modes and hierarchies. And so prayer can be extremely powerful. This is not *despite* the eternity and perfect determinacy of God's plan, but precisely because of them. For these are really identical with his transcendent causality, which does not nullify other causes, but infallibly ordains their modalities and their proper effects. Those effects can be as great as he pleases. No matter how great the proper efficacy of a created cause is, it is merely instrumental in relation to God's. Thus, Thomas says that the execution of predestination (like God's government generally) exists in God actively and in the predestined passively.¹¹¹ An instrument is an active, efficient cause, and it has its proper, positive effect, but it is nonetheless passive with respect to the action and the proper effect of the principal agent using it, the effect relative to which it is instrumental. The predestined do things, sometimes great things, that contribute to their salvation and are instrumental thereto. But it would certainly be wrong to say that they save themselves. Saving is proper to God.

One final thought. Thomas sees prayer as an act of the virtue of religion.¹¹² This virtue, he says, is really the same thing as holiness.¹¹³ It is the virtue by which we hand ourselves over to the worship and service of God. Some readers will be familiar with that great Platonic dialogue on holiness, *Euthyphro*. Toward the end, young Euthyphro suggests that, by sacrifices, we serve the gods, offering to them the honor, reverence, and gratitude that are their due, and that, in return, they give us the things we ask them for in prayer. Socrates disparagingly terms this a commercial arrangement.¹¹⁴ On Thomas's account, Socrates is quite right to disparage it. Thomas does of course make sacrifice a requirement of religion, and he takes it to be aimed at expressing our subjection to God and at honoring him as our creator and highest good.¹¹⁵ But prayer, at least when it is rightly offered, is aimed at that too. There is no *quid pro quo*. In prayer, we hand our very minds over to God, subjecting our thoughts and desires to him with reverence and, in a way, presenting them to him, to be used as he sees fit.¹¹⁶ All good prayer

¹¹¹ ST I, a. 23, a. 2.

¹¹² ST II-II, q. 83. For a masterful study of Thomas's understanding of the nature of prayer, see Lawrence Dewan, O.P., "St. Thomas and the Ontology of Prayer," in *Wisdom, Law, and Virtue: Essays in Thomistic Ethics* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008), 365–73 and the notes on 602–6. Also instructive is Serge-Thomas Bonino, O.P., "Providence et causes secondes: l'exemple de la prière," in *Études Thomasiennes* (Paris: Parole et Silence, 2019), 625–46.

¹¹³ ST II-II, q. 81, a. 8.

¹¹⁴ Plato, *Euthyphro*, 14c–15a.

¹¹⁵ ST II-II, q. 85, a. 1.

¹¹⁶ ST II-II, q. 83, a. 3, ad 3.

has “Thy will be done” as its underlying motif. The better we understand the metaphysics of prayer, the more clearly we see that really it could not be otherwise.

I have been critical of C. S. Lewis and Peter Geach, but only reluctantly. They were both great minds and did extraordinary service to the Christian faith. Nevertheless they seem to have had only limited experience of the metaphysical vision of things that Saint Thomas offers us. It should not be allowed to fall into oblivion. The need is grave, and it is not merely theoretical.¹¹⁷ N.V

¹¹⁷ My thanks to Steven Jensen and an anonymous reviewer for very helpful comments on drafts of this paper.