

Providence, Freedom, and Natural Law^{*}

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Not only does God protect and govern all things by his providence, but He also, by an internal power, impels to motion and action whatever moves and acts, and this in such a manner that, although He excludes not, He yet precedes the agency of secondary causes.

—*Catechism of the Council of Trent, Article One*

The truth that God is at work in all the actions of his creatures is inseparable from faith in God the Creator. God is the first cause who operates in and through secondary causes: “For God is at work in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure.” Far from diminishing the creature’s dignity, this truth enhances it. Drawn from nothingness by God’s power, wisdom, and goodness, it can do nothing if it is cut off from its origin, for “without a Creator, the creature vanishes.” Still less can a creature attain its ultimate end without the help of God’s grace.

—*Catechism of the Catholic Church, no. 308*

Introduction

THE INTENTION of this essay is to explain St. Thomas Aquinas’s account of human freedom as a created and divinely actuated liberty, and to argue that this understanding is essential to the Thomistic conception of natural law. But to be clear: I mean to argue not only that this is true of the doctrine of St. Thomas, but that this is the true account, and furthermore that profound awareness and understanding of what the

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natural law is, is impossible with the contrary and now widespread notion of human liberty as standing utterly outside the divine providential government.

To this end, I first set forth St. Thomas's positive account of human volition and divine causality. Then I consider two general lines of objection to St. Thomas's teaching, the first briefly and the second in great and abundant depth. The first line of objection is rooted in concern lest this teaching deny human freedom and self-determination. The second objection flows from Jacques Maritain's revision of the classical reading of St. Thomas's teaching and implicitly is based on his view that this classical reading makes God too complicit in evil. An answer in sufficient depth to this great Thomist seems justified by the datum that any wrong step here gravely imperils St. Thomas's radical metaphysical theocentrism and the doctrine of natural law flowing from it. Because the line of criticism associated with Maritain is a brilliant effort to wed the principles of St. Thomas to an account that finally recedes from these same principles, because the matter itself is of intrinsic importance; and because Maritain's analysis seems (despite his native Thomistic genius) to be yet another shoot, within the Catholic life, of a growth of sensitivity about and concern for autonomy that has dislodged awareness of the theonomic character of natural law, for all these reasons, the response to Maritain constitutes the largest portion of this essay.¹ Nonetheless, my essential argument is only completed within the final section. Therein I will argue that the metaphysical and theocentric conception of natural law—according to which the natural law is nothing other than one mode whereby the divine mind orders the rational creature to its end—is impossible if human volitional activity is outside of the divine causality.

I. "Without Me You Can Do Nothing"

St. Thomas's account of human freedom in relation to divine causality is perhaps most historically and doctrinally clear in his reflections on one line from the Gospel of John (14:10): "Without me you can do nothing." These words suggest many lines of inquiry, all of them greatly enriched by his teaching. Among these are the nature of good and evil, as well as the properly theological question concerning the nature of predestination. But here I will focus upon one primary point: the question of the relation of divine providence to freedom and moral law.

¹ Another reason may also be given: that Jacques Maritain, as one of the foremost Thomistic teachers of the past several hundred years, is one who stands so close to the font of Thomas's metaphysical principles that even when he may seem to err, recourse to the salve of these principles always is near at hand.

“Without me you can do nothing.” One of the chief meanings of these words according to St. Thomas Aquinas is—as he writes in chapter 67 of the first part of the third volume of the *Summa contra Gentiles*—“That in all things that operate God is the cause of their operating.”² St. Thomas further writes in chapter 67:

Hence it is clear that in all things that operate God is the cause of their operating. For everyone that operates is in some way a cause of being, either of essential or of accidental being. But nothing is a cause of being except in so far as it acts by God’s power. Therefore everyone that operates acts by God’s power.³

The effect of being is not properly contained by any created nature, either in essence or in operative power, and so, if the effect of being is to be achieved by a creature’s operation, this requires that the creature be applied to action by divine power, moving it to produce this effect.

This teaching remains the source of great difficulties for those who wish to preserve theism while denying divine omnipotence. And this category of brow-furrowed theists contains more occupants than may at first be apparent. Speech about human freedom often supposes that the reality of a free act cannot be caused by God. It is widely thought that if God is a cause of the free human act, then this cause must be only a remote precondition—a sort of deistic stage-setting—and not a causality that extends as far as moving the human person freely to act, actualizing the person’s free self-determination. Yet the denial that God activates and moves human creatures freely depicts divine causality as coercive or violent, and defines human freedom in metaphysical terms more proportioned to God than to a creature that can neither be nor act apart from God.

This strongly contrasts with the teaching of St. Thomas, who describes the divine causality of freedom as follows:

² ScG, IIIa, 67: “Quod Deus est causa operandi omnibus operantibus.” All Latin citations are drawn from the Leonine editions, with the exception of the *Summa Theologiae* which uses the Leonine text but as found in the Ottawa edition (Ottawa: Collège Dominicain d’Ottawa, 1941). Translations are a combination of my own (especially notes 9 and 48 below); or from Anton Pegis’s *Introduction to Saint Thomas Aquinas* (New York: Random House, 1948), and also his translation of the *Summa contra Gentiles* (Notre Dame and London: University of Notre Dame Press, 1975); or from the Benziger edition of the *Summa Theologiae* (New York: Benziger, 1948).

³ Ibid.: “Ex hoc autem apparet quod Deus causa est omnibus operantibus ut operentur. Omne enim operans est aliquo modo causa essendi, vel secundum esse substantiale, vel accidentale. Nihil autem est causa essendi nisi inquantum agit in virtute Dei, ut ostensum est (c. praec.). Omne igitur operans operatur per virtutem Dei.”

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.⁴

Far from moving the human will violently, God is the cause of the natural motion of the will, constituting it as what it is. He articulates the same point more starkly in the following lines from *De malo*, q. 3, a. 2, ad 4:

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.⁵

⁴ ST I, q. 83, a. 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 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."

⁵ "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 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."

Indeed, apart from God the natural motion of the will could neither be—it is not self-existent—nor be applied to action, since the act of the will represents a surplus of actuality that itself must be reducible to the first cause. Everything that moves from potency to act is moved by another in act—indeed, *quod movetur ab alio movetur* is for St. Thomas an evident principle.

Thomas considers that God is both the first author of the will's being and of its natural motion⁶ and free choice. God moves necessary things necessarily, and contingent things contingently (cf. *ST* I–II, q. 10, a. 4, ad 1). He puts the point pronouncedly when he writes:

Man is master of his acts, both of his willing and not willing, because of the deliberation of reason, which can be bent to one side or another. And although he is master of his deliberating or not deliberating, yet this can only be by a previous deliberation; and since this cannot go on to infinity, we must come at length to this, that man's free choice is moved by an extrinsic principle, which is above the human mind, namely, by God, as the Philosopher proves in the chapter on *Good Fortune*.⁷

God is the first mover, the first object of appetite, and the first willer. Thus as he puts it, “every application of power to action is chiefly and

⁶ Here, see *ST* I–II, q. 9, a. 4, ad 1, ad 2, and ad 3: (Ad 1) “It is of the nature of the voluntary act that its principle be within the agent; but it is not necessary that this inward principle be a first principle unmoved by another. Therefore, though the voluntary act has an inward proximate principle, nevertheless, its first principle is from the outside. Thus, too, the first principle of natural movement, namely, that which moves nature, is from the outside.”

(Ad 2) “For an act to be violent it is not enough that its principle be extrinsic, but we must add, *without the concurrence of him that suffers violence*. This does not happen when the will is moved by an exterior principle; for it is the will that wills, though moved by another. But this movement would be violent, if it were counter to the movement of the will; which in the present case is impossible, since then the will would will and not will the same thing.”

(Ad 3) “The will moves itself sufficiently in one respect, and in its own order, that is to say, as a proximate agent; but it cannot move itself in every respect, as we have shown. Therefore it needs to be moved by another as first mover.”

⁷ *Ibid.*, I–II, q. 109, a. 2, ad 1: “Dicendum quod homo est dominus suorum actuum, et volendi et non volendi, propter deliberationem rationis, quae potest flecti ad unam partem vel ad aliam. Sed quod deliberet vel non deliberet, et si huiusmodi etiam sit dominus, oportet quod hoc sit per deliberationem praecedentem. Et cum hoc non procedat in infinitum, oportet quod finaliter deveniatur ad ad hoc quod liberum arbitrium hominis moveatur ab aliquo exteriori principio quod est supra mentem humanam, scilicet a Deo; ut etiam Philosophus probat in cap. *De Bona Fortuna*.”

primarily from God" (*Summa contra Gentiles*, 67). On this account the positive substance of our own willing is, like our very existence, simultaneously most our own while being most a gift.

St. Thomas expressly addresses the need of all creatures for prior divine motion to account for their acts in the *Summa Theologiae* I–II, q. 109, a. 1, resp.

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.*⁸

On this account, we are moved from potency to act by God in that very act whereby we freely determine ourselves. One may consider two persons, each of whom exists and is preserved in being by God, and each of whom is capable of rational volition. One of these proceeds to act, while the other does not. St. Thomas teaches that the one that acts cannot *proceed to act* without being moved by God ("non potest in suum actum procedere nisi moveatur a Deo"). Elsewise finite human creatures roam the earth creating *ex nihilo* the added perfection or reality of their free determinations, entirely outside of the divine causality and the divine providence. Further, all rational approaches to God hinge upon the universal dependence of finite being upon God. Insofar as our free self-

⁸ Emphasis added. "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."

determinations represent an added reality that did not before exist, *a fortiori* the first cause of these determinations must be found in God. Indifferent premotion—the idea that the natural motion of the will does not require divine application to act in the case of the act of self-determination—does not seem compatible with Thomas’s language.

Lest there be any doubt about the secondary causality of the rational creature’s acts of free self-determination, St. Thomas expressly applies to these acts the governing principles of the metaphysics of *esse*, and of the real distinction of act from potency as such. This application is nowhere clearer than in his insistence that just as the creature will fall into non-existence apart from divine conservation in being, so it will fail of good apart from divine conservation in the good. his words are arresting:

To sin is nothing else than to fall from the good which belongs to any being according to its nature. Now as every created thing has no being unless from another, and considered in itself is nothing, so does it need to be conserved by another in the good which pertains to its nature. For it can of itself fall from good, just as of itself it can fall into nonbeing, unless it is conserved by God.⁹

These words bring to mind St. Thomas’s language in the fifth chapter of *De ente et essentia*, where he describes the immediacy of the divine causality of the *actus essendi* as like the causality of the light in the air by the sun. If the sun is eclipsed, the diaphanous medium of air is no longer light, and if God does not uphold a creature in being, it ceases to be. It is *this very logic* that St. Thomas here applies to the need of the creature to be *conserved by God in that good that pertains to its nature*, just as the creature must be *upheld in its being by God* if it is not to cease existing. Clearly then the rational creature’s acts must be activated by God at every instant, and the creature cannot be the absolutely first cause of its actual self-determination without being converted into a being *a se*. If God withdraws preservative causality, the creature is permitted to fall. And this permission is not like the permission given by one creature to another: for the salutary effect cannot be achieved should God not uphold the creature in good. The rational creature does not roam the cosmos creating *ex nihilo* the being of

⁹ Ibid., I–II, q. 109, a. 2, ad 2: “Dicendum quod peccare nihil aliud est quam deficere a bono quod convenit alicui secundum suam naturam. Unaquaeque autem res creata, sicut esse non habet nisi ab alio, et in se considerata nihil est, ita indiget conservari in bono suae naturae convenienti ab alio. Potest enim per seipsam deficere a bono, sicut et per seipsam potest deficere in non esse, nisi divinitus conservaretur.”

its own free determinations wholly outside the divine causality, but rather God is the first cause of these determinations, and the rational creature the secondary cause.

Freedom of the will, for St. Thomas, is rooted in the intellect. He teaches that the will has the natural character of being undeterminable by finite goods (cf. *ST I*, q. 82, a. 2, ad 2), as this pertains to the motion of the will as an *inclinatio sequens formam intellectam*, an inclination following the form of reason (“*motus voluntatis est inclinatio sequens formam intellectam*,” *Quaestiones quadlibetales*, Quodlibet 6, q. 2, a. 2). Because the object of the will is universal or rational good, no finite good is so compelling that reason is bound to command the will to embrace it. Every limited or finite good is, in some respect, perceivable as *not good*. For instance it is good to get up in the morning—but it is bad to do so when one is weary. It is good to read a great work of literature—but it is bad because it strains the eyes. It is good for one to follow the argument of an essay, but it is bad if the author is verbose, or one needs coffee, or—God forbid—the reader prefers the philosophy of Jean-Paul Sartre. Every finite good is by its nature limited and from some point of view not good: No created good is the subsisting universal good. Were willing held *not* to be an inclination following the form of reason, this would curiously imply either that the will were itself an intellect, or else that we could will without any object of will. I have sometimes suspected that my brother philosophers may not quite know what they are doing, but heretofore I have been reluctant to press the point quite so far as this.

Since we affirm or negate God primarily in our response to created things, and naturally lack a direct knowledge of God, the human person’s response to God is free. But if one achieves the beatific knowledge of God, then God is known as he is: the Perfect Good Who is in no way undesirable, and Who answers and fulfills the order divinely instilled in the human heart. This divine ordering of the person is not subject to human dominion or caveat. Thus if one were to merit the beatific vision there could be no possibility of refusing God because the will would be utterly perfected in cleaving to Perfect Good.

Freedom is not an utter libertarian independence of God, but a function of the nature of the rational creature’s action, which contrasts with the determination of the operational power of irrational beings to only one effect. The rational creature’s freedom does not refer to its independence of divine motion for action, but rather it refers to the immaterial mode in which the rational agent is moved, a nobler mode owing to its spiritual nature. As St. Thomas argues:

It should be said that when it is said that God left man to himself, this does not mean to exclude man from divine providence, but merely that he has not a prefixed operating power determined to one as with natural things; because they are only acted upon as though directed by another towards an end—for they do not act of themselves, directing themselves towards an end, as do rational creatures through free choice whereby these take counsel and make choices. Hence it is significantly said: *In the hand of his own counsel*. But because the same act of free choice is reduced to God as to a cause, it is necessary that whatsoever happens from the exercise of free choice be subject to divine providence. For the providence of man is contained under the providence of God, as a particular cause under a universal cause.¹⁰

The pattern for this inclusion of particular under universal causality is spelled out quite clearly by St. Thomas in the third volume of the *Summa contra Gentiles*:

For two things may be considered in every agent: namely, the thing itself that acts, and the power whereby it acts: thus fire by its heat makes a thing hot. Now the power of the lower agent depends on the power of the higher agent, in so far as the higher agent gives the lower agent the power whereby it acts, or preserves that power, or applies it to action: thus the craftsman applies the instrument to its proper effect, although sometimes he does not give the instrument the form whereby it acts, nor preserves that form, but merely puts it into motion. Consequently the action of the lower agent must not only proceed from it through the latter's proper power, but also through the power of all the higher agents: for it acts by virtue of them all: and just as the lowest agent is found to be immediately active, so the power of the first agent is found to be immediate in the production of the effect: because the power of the lowest agent does not of itself produce this effect, but by the power of the proximate higher agent, and this by the power of a yet higher agent, so that the power of the supreme agent is found to produce the effects of itself, as though it were the immediate cause, as may be seen in the principles of demonstration, the first of which is immediate. Accordingly just as it is not unreasonable that one action be

¹⁰ Ibid., I, q. 22, a. 2, ad 4: "Dicendum quod in hoc quod dicitur Deum hominem sibi reliquisse, non excluditur homo a divina providentia; sed ostenditur quod non praefigitur ei virtus operativa determinata ad unum, sicut rebus naturalibus; quae aguntur tantum, quasi ab altero directae in finem, non autem seipsa agunt, quasi se dirigentia in finem, ut creaturae rationales per liberum arbitrium, quo consiliantur et eligunt. Unde signanter dicit: 'In manu consilii sui.' Sed quia ipse actus liberi arbitrii reducitur in Deum sicut in causam, necesse est ut ea quae ex libero arbitrio fiunt, divinae providentiae subdantur; providentia enim hominis continetur sub providentia Dei, sicut causa particularis sub causa universali."

produced by an agent and by the virtue of that agent, so is it not absurd that the same effect be produced by the inferior agent and by God, and by both immediately, though in a different way.¹¹

It is not the purpose of this essay expressly to consider the teaching of Bañez. But surely it must be seen that his famed terminology of *premotionis physicae* traces the teaching of St. Thomas quite aptly: There is a motion bestowed by God without which the rational creature cannot proceed to its act of self-determination. This motion is “prior”—hence *premotion*—not in a temporal sense, but in the sense in which the cause is prior to that which is caused: Apart from this moving of the rational creature from potency to act with respect to its act of self-determination there can be no such act. But of course, in time, the motion is simultaneous with the activation of the power of self-determination. It is “physical” not in the sense of being a material thing, but in the sense of being real. And of course its character as a motion has been noted.

II. Two Objections

It must be noted that there are many implications of Thomas’s teaching which account for the tendency to reject it. Some authors believe it too deeply implicates God in the scandal of moral evil; others think it insufficiently safeguards human liberty or that salvation would be more accessible were it more wholly a function of a human act not indebted for its being to divine causality; and of course, continental *a priorists* live off the

¹¹ ScG, IIIa, 70: “Haec autem difficultatem non afferunt si praemissa considerentur. In quolibet enim agente est duo considerare, scilicet rem ipsam quae agit, et virtutem qua agit: sicut ignis calefacit per calorem. Virtus autem inferioris agentis dependet a virtute superioris agentis, inquantum superius agens dat virtutem ipsam inferiori agente per quam agit; vel conservat eam; aut etiam applicat eam ad agendum, sicut artifex applicat instrumentum ad proprium effectum; cui tamen non dat formam per quam agit instrumentum, nec conservat, sed dat ei solum motum. Oportet ergo quod actio inferioris agentis non solum sit ab eo per virtutem proprium, sed per virtutem omnium superiorum agentium; agit enim in virtute omnium. Et sicut agens infimum invenitur immediatum activum; ita virtus primi agentis invenitur immediata ad producendum effectum: nam virtus infimi agentis non habet quod producat hunc effectum ex se, sed ex virtute proximi superioris; et virtus illius hoc habet ex virtute superioris; et sic virtus supremi agentis invenitur ex se productiva effectus, quasi causa immediata; sicut patet in principiis demonstrationum, quorum primum est immediatum. Sicut igitur non est inconveniens quod una actio producatur ex aliquo agente et eius virtute, ita non est inconveniens quod producatur idem effectus ab inferiori agente et Deo: ab utroque immediate, licet alio et alio modo.”

artificial dichotomy of nature and reason. All these objections cannot be treated adequately within the scope of this essay. But response is given here to two criticisms: first, the criticism that this account is simply incompatible with human freedom; and second, that it makes God too greatly complicit with moral evil when this implication might be avoided simply by introducing the notion of a divine motion that can be resisted (or as Jacques Maritain puts it, “shattered”) by a pure negation of the creature. Because the second criticism has greatly arrested the theological imagination of many serious Thomistic and non-Thomistic scholars, theologians, and philosophers—and even more because the metaphysical profundity of Thomas’s radical theocentrism is at stake—the response to this second argument is provided in depth. Only after these responses are made will I turn to the implications for natural law of the denial that human freedom is subject to divine motion and actuation.

Ila. Self-Determination and Freedom

As to the first, the denial of God’s causality of free human acts seems predicated on the confusion of *self-determination* with *absolute independence*. But as St. Thomas points out, an agent may be self-determining and still not be the *first cause* of that self-determination, just as an agent may be a *cause* of being without being *the first cause*.

The actuality of a thing is not a static possession, but is at each instant received from and preserved by God. As this is true of first act, it is alike true of second act or operation. Were we not caused to be, and caused to be rational and free; did our wills not receive their natural motion from God; and were this natural motion not then further activated and applied by the superior agency of God—*then* we would neither cause ourselves to exist, nor bestow upon our wills their nature and natural motion, nor apply the natural motion of our wills without being moved from potency to act with respect to that very act whereby we determine ourselves. That self-determination has *conditions* does not detract from the fact that it is self-determination—although it does detract from the rationalist claim of absolute independence. Further, it is obvious free acts have conditions, and that not all the conditions of the free act are within the power of the one acting. For example, that the agent *exists* is a condition prior to its acting and wholly outside the power of the agent—yet it cannot act if it does not exist. But the agent is not the cause of its own existence. Similarly, as a created liberty that is not compelled by any finite good, but which is not everywhere and always willing, human freedom requires prior activation by God. It helps to consider, as St. Thomas points out, that *necessary* and *contingent* are modes *consequent* upon being, while God

is the universal cause of being.¹² God can cause both the necessary and the contingent precisely because God is even less confined in the same order with the creature than a novelist is confined in the same order with the characters in his novel.¹³

Yet another aspect of this same objection insists that on St. Thomas's account the creature is not "free" to choose God. But the choice of God is always indirect and *via* creaturely mediation, and the objects of such choice precisely cannot compel the will, because as noted above the object of the will is universal good, and the subsisting universal good is God rather than any finite good. But in one respect the objection is correct. If by saying that the creature is not free vis-à-vis God what is meant is that the creature has no liberty apart from divine causality, then this is true: There is no libertarian freedom over against or outside the divine causality, because the only real liberty is caused by God. Free choice is free because it is rooted in the intellect, and this defines the way in which the rational creature moves and is moved to its end: It moves to its end not in the way of subrational being, which is determined to but one physical effect, but through free rational self-determination, of which it is the proximate cause, and God is the first cause. Any objection to this will be tantamount to an objection that the will is a creature. As has been seen above, just as the creature is a proximate cause of being without being the first cause, so likewise the creature is proximate cause of its self-determination without being the first cause.

As a final word about this type of objection, it should be ceded that there is no libertarian freedom with respect to divine causality (if there were, surely we would be given a preconsent form before creation). But the way God causes our *actions* is as free actions whose rational character is not

¹² Cf. *ST* I, q. 22, a. 4, ad 3: "Et considerandum est quod necessarium et contingens proprie consequuntur ens, inquantum huiusmodi. Unde modus contingentiae et necessitatis cadit sub provisione Dei, qui est universalis provisor totius entis, non autem sub provisione aliquorum particularium provisorum" (We must remember that, properly speaking, necessary and *contingent* are consequent upon being as such. Hence the mode both of necessity and of contingency falls under the foresight of God, who provides universally for all being; not under the foresight of causes that provide only for some particular order of things). "Et considerandum est quod necessarium et contingens proprie consequuntur ens, inquantum huiusmodi. Unde modus contingentiae et necessitatis cadit sub provisione Dei, qui est universalis provisor totius entis, non autem sub provisione aliquorum particularium provisorum."

¹³ The point of comparison is not the unreality of the characters, but the even more radical distance obtaining betwixt the created order and God compared to the distance between the novelist and his work.

limited to one physical effect. Far from the parody of divine motion constituting the reduction of the creature to a puppet on a string, to be moved rationally is to receive an essentially higher perfection than any corporeal motion—whether violent or natural—attains as its term. We are moved by God according to our nature, and as this is rational and hence free from all creaturely compulsion, we are moved rationally and freely. The deepest response to the Kantian account of ethical autonomy is found here. For it is the constant maxim of St. Thomas that *operatio sequitur esse*, that operation follows being. A thing can only *act* according as it *is*. But even Kant must acknowledge that our being is heteronomous: We do not cause ourselves to be, our being is received. Since we can only act as we are, and our being is received from without or—as Kant puts it—heteronomous, it is then metaphysically impossible that our operation in any respect be absolutely autonomous. Of course the more appropriate terminology is not merely that of heteronomy, but as Pope John Paul II has put it in *Veritatis Splendor*, *participated theonomy* (no. 41). Our being and action participate in the order of divine government—the eternal law.

Iib. Divine Complicity with Evil and the Idea of Resistable Divine Motion

Iib.1 The Classical Account

It cannot be denied that in the classical Thomistic account¹⁴ evil requires divine permission and that this permission—while it does not make the mode in which the evil occurs to be necessary rather than contingent—nonetheless is not like the “permission” of a creature. Because if God permits the failure of a creature, the creature will fail, whether freely or necessarily. Hence the pertinence of St. Thomas’s words from *Summa Theologiae* I–II, q. 109, a. 2, ad 2, quoted above:¹⁵

To sin is nothing else than to fall from the good which belongs to any being according to its nature. Now as every created thing has no being unless from another, and considered in itself is nothing, so does it need to be conserved by another in the good which pertains to its nature. For it can of itself fall from good, just as of itself it can fall into nonbeing, unless it is conserved by God.

¹⁴ I take this account to be that reading of the texts of St. Thomas clear in the works of Bañez, John of St. Thomas, and Cajetan—authors who, despite differences, uphold the same general line of account—and which Réginald Garrigou-Lagrange, and Jean-Hervé Nicolas, have defended in the twentieth century. It is, frankly, the simple force of the texts of St. Thomas themselves.

¹⁵ See note 9 above.

These words are arresting, because they make patent that, for St. Thomas, the conservation in good follows precisely the same logic as the conservation in being, and hence one cannot read “can of itself fall” as implying “may or may not of itself fall.” Because the creature of itself is nothing, it is something only inasmuch as it is caused and conserved in being by God. And this logic is alike verified in the line of good: “Unaquaeque autem res creata, *sicut* esse non habet nisi ab alio, *et in se considerata nihil est, ita indiget conservari in bono suae naturae convenienti ab alio.*” As indicated above, this is merely to follow the maxim that *operatio sequitur esse*, that operation follows being, that a thing can only *act* according as it *is*. The existential indigence of the creature, which requires the divine conservation of its being, is matched by its operational dependence on God to act or to be conserved in the good proper to its act. This is simply an inference from the convertibility of being with good at each successive grade of being, such that in addition to the initial being and good of a thing, there is also the superadded being and good represented by a thing’s perfective acts. Whereas, in God, being and good are simply convertible, that which is simple in God is composite in creatures. And so creatures achieve their good only through many acts whose superadded perfection is itself traceable to the First Cause of all being, good, and truth. As St. Thomas puts it (*Summa contra Gentiles*, III, a.20):

From what has been said, it is evident that, although God possesses his perfect and entire goodness according to the manner of his simple being, creatures nevertheless do not attain to the perfection of their goodness through their being alone, but through many things. Therefore, although each one is good inasmuch as it exists, it cannot be called good absolutely if it lack other things that are required for its goodness. Thus a man who, being despoiled of virtue, is addicted to vice, is said indeed to be good in a restricted sense, namely, as a being, and as a man; but he is not said to be good absolutely, but rather evil. Accordingly, in every creature to be and to be good are not the same absolutely, although each one is good inasmuch as it exists; whereas in God to be and to be good are absolutely one and the same.¹⁶

He continues in this same passage to point out that each thing tends to a likeness to God’s goodness as its end not only in its being but in “whatever is required for its perfection”; not only in respect of substantial being,

¹⁶ See also *ST* I–II, q. 18, a. 1, resp. “Solus autem Deus habet totam plenitudinem sui esse secundum aliquid unum et simplex; unaquaeque vero res habet plenitudinem essendi sibi convenientem secundum diversa” (But God alone has the whole fullness of his Being in a manner which is one and simple, whereas every other thing has its proper fullness of being in a certain multiplicity).

but also in respect to that which is accidental and belongs to its perfection, as well as in respect to its proper operation. Now none of this perfection can be unless God causes and conserves it—otherwise the creature fails in good. The argument that this applies only to *ontic* nothingness and not to moral nothingness is unfounded. Indeed, as indicated in *Summa Theologiae* I–II, q. 109, a. 2, ad 2, St. Thomas expressly applies this logic to the conclusion that if God does not uphold the creature in moral goodness the creature will of itself fail, just as it will of itself fail in being if God does not conserve it in being. This is not only the authentic doctrine of St. Thomas Aquinas, but an inference that is inescapable from the very nature of being itself. The first nothingness of the creature before God is the root of creaturely defectibility; and actual defect is a second nothingness of the creature whereby it fails of the divine motion and actuation, discovering the fissure of its own finitude when permitted to embrace its own devices to the exclusion of the extrinsic principles of law and grace set over it for its perfection.

As defects, error and sin are never most properly free because no one as such chooses them, but only (under the impetus of disordered appetite) chooses some apparent good. Granted that freedom extends to them insofar as the sinner prefers to perform an evil act even though it be evil, choice cannot reach out to the act save under the aspect of some apparent good.¹⁷

¹⁷ See *ibid.*, I–II, q. 75, a. 1, resp.: “Omnis autem causa per accidens reducitur ad causam per se. Cum igitur peccatum ex parte inordinationis habeat causam agentem per accidens, ex parte autem actus habeat causam agentem per se, sequitur quod inordinatio peccati consequatur ex ipsa causa actus. Sic igitur voluntas carens directione regulae rationis et legis divinae, intendens aliquod bonum commutabile, causat actum quidem peccati per se, sed inordinationem actus per accidens et praeter intentionem; provenit enim defectus ordinis in actu ex defectu directionis in voluntate” (Now every accidental cause is reducible to a cause per se. Since then sin, on the part of its inordinateness, has a *per accidens* efficient cause, and on the part of the act, a per se efficient cause, it follows that the inordinateness of sin follows from the cause of the act. Accordingly then, the will lacking the direction of the rule of reason and of the divine law, and intent on some mutable good, causes the act of sin per se, but the inordinateness of the act *per accidens* and beside the intention: for the lack of order in the act results from the lack of direction in the will). See also *idem*, *De Malo*, 3, 2, ad 1: “Ad primum ergo dicendum quod homo qui peccat licet per se non uelit deformitatem peccati, tamen deformitas peccati aliquo modo cadit sub uoluntate peccantis, dum scilicet magis eligit deformitatem peccati incurrere quam ab actu cessare” (To the first therefore it should be said that the man who sins while he does not will the deformity of sin per se, still the deformity of sin in a certain way falls under the will of the sinner, namely, because he rather chooses to incur the deformity of the sin than to desist from the act).

Of course, there is no *per se* cause of defect, and so God is not the *per se* cause of evil.¹⁸ Further, evil is a deprivation of the good owing to a subject, and as such is precisely not a being but the deprivation of what is owed to a being. Even the seeming ontological positivity of some evils derives from disorder, from deprivation of that which is owing to the subject, as the ontological positivity of excessive pain that no longer serves any teleological function derives from the deprivation of right order in the flesh that constitutes disease. So, for this reason, too, God is not the direct and *per se* cause of evil.

It may be said that what unfolds in this world—both necessarily and contingently—is that which the Infinite Good brings forth given certain initial defects that are permitted. In this respect the permission of defect brings to mind the infinite distance of any universe *vis-à-vis* the divine perfection according to St. Thomas Aquinas. There is no best of all possible worlds, because any possible world is infinitely inferior to God (which means that it will be subject to certain limits that are truly ontological imperfections). Given this datum, the permission of other evils for the sake

¹⁸ ST I–II, q. 79, a. 2, resp.: “Dicendum quod actus peccati et est ens, et est actus; et ex utroque habet quod sit a Deo. Omne enim ens, quocumque modo sit, oportet quod derivetur a primo ente, ut patet per Dionysium, V cap. *De Div. Nom.* Omnis autem actio causatur ab aliquo existente in actu, quia nihil agit nisi secundum quod est actus; omne autem ens actu reducitur in primum actum, scilicet Deum, sicut in causam, qui est *per suam essentiam* actus. Unde relinquitur quod Deus sit causa omnis actionis, inquantum est actio. Sed peccatum nominat ens et actionem cum quodam defectu. Defectus autem ille est ex causa creata, scilicet libero arbitrio, inquantum deficit ab ordine primi agentis, scilicet Dei. Une defectus iste non reducitur in Deum sicut in causam, sed in liberum arbitrium; sicut defectus claudicationis reducitur in tibiam curvam sicut in causam, non autem in virtutem motivam, a qua tamen causatur quidquid est motionis in claudicatione. Et secundum hoc Deus est causa actus peccati, non tamen est causa peccati, quia non est causa huius, quod actus sit cum defectu” (The act of sin is both a being and an act; and in both respects it is from God. Because every being, whatever the mode of its being, must be derived from the First Being, as Dionysius declares [Div. Nom. v]. Again every action is caused by something existing in act, since nothing produces an action save insofar as it is in act; and every being in act is reduced to the First Act, namely, God, as to its cause, who is act by his Essence. Therefore God is the cause of every action, insofar as it is an action. But sin denotes a being and an action with a defect: and this defect is from the created cause, that is the free will, as falling away from the order of the First Agent, namely, God. Consequently this defect is not reduced to God as its cause, but to the free will: even as the defect of limping is reduced to a crooked leg as its cause, but not to the motive power, which nevertheless causes whatever there is of movement in the limping. Accordingly God is the cause of the act of sin: and yet he is not the cause of sin, because he does not cause the act to have a defect).

of a higher good is to some degree originally prefigured in the creation of the creature—with its ineluctably accompanying ontological defect of finitude—for the sake of the *ad extra* communication of the divine good. Of course this ontological defect as such is not moral evil; but it is ontological defect, and it is necessarily tied with the creation of finite beings for the sake of their real but deficient imitation of the divine good.

It is perhaps discomfiting to think, but nonetheless true, that the step to create at all involves a greater ontological dissymmetry (that between the uncreated God and finite being) than does the subsequent permission of evil for the sake of a higher good by God, whereby the defectible finite creature as such is allowed to suffer defect (dissymmetry between the creature and deprivation of its proper good). This does not mean that all else but a monistic one insusceptible to plurification—all of creation—is somehow by nature morally evil. It merely indicates the operational indigence of the creature, whose action mirrors its existential dependence: Just as of itself it cannot exist unless upheld by God, similarly the finite rational creature of itself is subject to operational defect. A finite knower and willer (even in a state of pure nature and apart from consideration of original sin) as such cannot operate perfectly—nor for that matter, operate at all, as it cannot proceed to its act without being moved by God—apart from divine aid.

Yet whatever defects God permits, the infinite goodness of God brings forth from them condign effects manifesting the ultimate self-subsisting Being, Truth, and Good that is the common good of all creation and the end in nature and grace of all intellectual creatures. Imagine a million possible worlds as created by God, with varying degrees and types of defects (apart from the ontological defect of finitude common to all), and in and from each the infinite perfection of God would bring forth higher goods essentially manifestative of the ultimate common good of the commonwealth of being. The manifestation of God in each would be good, and not one world would be such that God could not create a better. Hence it is not the presence of defect, but the creation of something from nothing, the bringing of good from evil, which is conspicuous.

Nonetheless, whatever being and good that the act marred by evil has is caused by God and, moreover, is caused precisely in a context in which the evil afflicting the act is divinely permitted. Why is it permitted? This is one of the great questions both of natural and revealed theology. God does not cause evil, which, as defect not convertible with being, is more outside the formal object of the divine will—outside the divine Good—than is color to hearing or sound to sight. But God does permit evil.

The answer of the Thomistic tradition has always been that God permits evil only for the sake of a higher good, because only God can

bring something out of nothing and good out of evil. Hence God permits persecutions for the sake of the patience of the saints, and ultimately permits evil for the sake of the manifestation of his justice and his mercy. This reasoning is prominent in *Summa Theologiae* I–II, q. 79, a. 4, ad 1–4:

(*Ad 1*): Every evil that God does, or permits to be done, is directed to some good; yet not always to the good of those in whom the evil is, but sometimes to the good of others, or of the whole universe: thus He directs the sin of tyrants to the good of the martyrs, and the punishment of the lost to the glory of his justice.

(*Ad 2*): God does not take pleasure in the loss of man, as regards the loss itself, but by reason of his justice, or of the good that ensues from the loss.

(*Ad 3*): That God directs the blindness of some to their spiritual welfare, is due to his mercy; but that the blindness of others is directed to their loss is due to his justice: and that He vouchsafes his mercy to some, and not to all, does not make God a respecter of persons, as explained in I, q. 23, a. 5, ad 3.

(*Ad 4*): Evil of fault must not be done, that good may ensue; but evil of punishment must be inflicted for the sake of good.¹⁹

The passage referred to above—*Summa Theologiae* I, q. 23, a. 5, ad 3—is even more pronouncedly clear:

The reason for the predestination of some, and reprobation of others, must be sought for in the goodness of God. Thus He is said to have made all things through his goodness, so that the divine goodness might be represented in things. Now it is necessary that God's goodness, which in itself is one and undivided, should be manifested in many ways in his creation; because creatures in themselves cannot attain to

¹⁹ Ibid., I–II, q. 79, a. 4, ad 1–4: (*Ad 1*) “Dicendum quod omnia mal quae Deus facit vel permittit fieri, ordinantur in aliquod bonum; non tamen semper in bonum eius in quo est malum, sed quandoque ad bonum alterius, vel etiam totius universi. Sicut culpam tyrannorum ordinat in bonum martyrum; et poenam damnatorum ordinat ad gloriam iustitiae suae.”

(*Ad 2*) “Dicendum quod Deus non delectatur in perditione hominum quantum ad ipsam perditionem, sed ratione suae iustitiae, vel propter bonum quod inde provenit.”

(*Ad 3*) “Dicendum quod hoc quod Deus aliquorum excaecationem ordinat in eorum salutem, misericordiae est; quod autem excaecatio aliorum ordinetur ad eorum damnationem, iustitiae est. Quod autem misericordiam quibusdam impendit et non omnibus, non facit personarum acceptionem in Deo, sicut in Primo dictum est.”

(*Ad 4*) “Dicendum quod mala culpaе non sunt facienda ut veniant bona, sed mala poenae sunt inferenda propter bonum.”

the simplicity of God. Thus it is that for the completion of the universe there are required different grades of being; some of which hold a high and some a low place in the universe. That this multiformity of grades may be preserved in things, God allows some evils, lest many good things should never happen, as was said above (I, q. 22, a. 2).

Let us then consider the whole of the human race, as we consider the whole universe. God wills to manifest his goodness in men; in respect to those whom He predestines, by means of his mercy, as sparing them; and in respect of others, whom he reprobates, by means of his justice, in punishing them. This is the reason why God elects some and rejects others. To this the Apostle refers, saying (Rom 9:22, 23): "What if God, willing to show his wrath [that is, the vengeance of his justice], and to make his power known, endured [that is, permitted] with much patience vessels of wrath, fitted for destruction; that He might show the riches of his glory on the vessels of mercy, which He hath prepared unto glory" and (2 Tm 2:20): "But in a great house there are not only vessels of gold and silver; but also of wood and of earth; and some, indeed, unto honor, but some unto dishonor."

Yet why He chooses some for glory, and reprobates others, has no reason, except the divine will. Whence Augustine says (Tract. xxvi. in Joan.): "Why He draws one, and another He draws not, seek not to judge, if thou dost not wish to err." Thus too, in the things of nature, a reason can be assigned, since primary matter is altogether uniform, why one part of it was fashioned by God from the beginning under the form of fire, another under the form of earth, that there might be a diversity of species in things of nature. Yet why this particular part of matter is under this particular form, and that under another, depends upon the simple will of God; as from the simple will of the artificer it depends that this stone is in part of the wall, and that in another; although the plan requires that some stones should be in this place, and some in that place.

Neither on this account can there be said to be injustice in God, if He prepares unequal lots for not unequal things. This would be altogether contrary to the nature of justice, if the effect of predestination were granted as something owed and not given from grace. In things which are given gratuitously, a person can give more or less, just as he pleases (provided he deprives nobody of his due), without any infringement of justice. This is what the master of the house said: "Take what is thine, and go thy way. Is it not lawful for me to do what I will?" (Mt 20:14, 15).²⁰

²⁰ Ibid., I, q. 23, a. 5, ad 3: "Dicendum quod ex ipsa bonitate divina ratio sumi potest praedestinationis aliquorum, et reprobationis aliorum. Sic enim Deus dicitur omnia propter suam bonitatem fecisse, ut in rebus divina bonitas repraesentetur. Necesse est autem quod divina bonitas, quae in se est una et simplex, multiformiter repraesentetur in rebus; propter hoc quod res creatae ad simplicitatem

Yet even the exultet—"O happy fault, O necessary sin, that gained for us so great a Redeemer"—fails fully to uncloak this mystery. For what is the higher good for the sake of which God permits an individual soul to be lost for eternity? The adequate answer to this question may be found only in the beatific vision. Every evil is permitted for the sake of a higher good, and finally that good resolves into the ultimate good, the good of the manifestation of the divine mercy and justice, and the knowledge of God himself. Yet an intuitive understanding of the beatific good capable of revealing the nature of the fittingness of the permission of some particular evil is accessible within and confined to the vision of the essence of God: for only this vision constitutes as full a knowledge of God and of all things in God as human nature is capable of receiving with divine aid.

divinam attingere non possunt. Et inde est quod ad completionem universi requiruntur diversi gradus rerum, quarum quaedam altum, et auaedam infimum locum teneant in universo. Et ut multiformitas graduum conservetur in rebus, Deus permittit aliqua mala fieri, ne multa bona impediatur, ut supra dictum est.

"Sic igitur consideremus totum genus humanum, sicut totam rerum universitatem. Voluit igitur Deus in hominibus quantum ad aliquos, quos praedestinat, suam repraesentare bonitatem per modum misericordiae parcendo; et quantum ad aliquos, quos reprobat, per modum iustitiae puniendo. Et haec est ratio quare Deus quosdam eligit, et quosdam reprobat. Et hanc causam assignat Apostolus, *Ad Rom.* IX dicens: 'Volens Deus ostendere iram, idest vindictam iustitiae, et notam facere potentiam suam, sustinuit, idest permisit, in multa patientia, vasa irae apta in interitum, ut ostenderet divitias gloriae suae in vasa misericordiae, quae praeparavit in gloriam.' Et II Tim. II dicit: 'In magna domo non solum sunt vasa aurea et argentea, sed etiam lignea et fictilia; et quaedam quidem in honorem, quaedam in contumeliam.'

"Sed quare hos eligit in gloriam, et illos reprobavit, non habet rationem nisi divinam voluntatem. Unde Augustinus dicit, *Super Ioann.*: 'Quare hun trahat, et illum non trahat, noli velle diiudicare, si non vis errare.' Sicut etiam in rebus naturalibus potest assignari ratio, cum prima materia tota sit in se uniformis, quare una pars eius est sub forma ignis, et alia sub forma terrae a Deo in principio condita, ut sic sit diversitas specierum in rebus naturalibus. Sed quare haec pars materiae est sub ista forma, et illa sub alia, dependet ex simplici divina voluntate. Sicut ex simplici voluntate artificis dependet, quod ille lapis est in ista parte parietis, et ille in alia; quamvis ratio artis habeat quod aliqui sint in hac, et aliqui sint in illa.

"Neque tamen propter hoc est iniquitas apud Deum, si inaequalia non inaequalibus praeparat. Hoc enim esset contra iustitiae rationem, si praedestinationis effectus ex debito redderetur, et non daretur ex gratia. In his enim quae ex gratia dantur, potest aliquis pro libito suo dare cui vult, plus vel minus, dummodo nulli subtrahat debitum, absque praeiudicio iustitiae. Et hoc est quod dicit Paterfamilias, *Math.* XX: 'Tolle quod tuum est, et vade. An non licet mihi quod volo, facere?'"

Still, it has been thought that because God is the cause of the positive act in which he nonetheless permits evil that this may constitute divine complicity in the evil act. Now, it is true that no evil act could exist at all without divine permission, and that the positive substance of any evil act—not that which constitutes it as evil, but whatever being and goodness it possesses—must be understood to be caused by God. But while God permits evil for the sake of a higher good, he is in no way a per se or direct cause of evil. In the end, the divine permission of evil, like an author's permission of defect within the context of a story, must be justified in relation to the nature and purpose of the whole work of creation. And since this work of creation is for the sake of the manifestation of the divine truth, goodness, justice, and mercy, it is in relation to these purposes that the permission of evil must be understood.²¹ Yet the adequate knowledge of the relation of any evil to these goods is not fully knowable apart from beatitude. Here the classical account given by St. Thomas stops, because it has followed the thread of causal reasoning as far as it may be followed, and—even accented by the truths of divine revelation—we converge at this point upon mystery.

²¹ Cf. *Ibid.*, I–II, q. 79, a. 4, resp. (and see also ad 1–4 cited earlier in the text): “Dicendum quod excaecatio est quoddam praeambulum ad peccatum. Peccatum autem ad duo ordinatur: ad unum quidem per se, scilicet ad damnationem; ad aliud autem ex divina misericordia vel providentia, scilicet ad sanationem, inquantum Deus permittit aliquos cadere in peccatum, ut peccatum suum agnoscentes, humiliantur et convertantur, sicut Augustinus dicit in libro *De Nat. et Grat.* Unde et excaecatio ex sui natura ordinatur ad damnationem eius qui excaecatur, propter quod ponitur etiam reprobationis effectus; sed ex divina misericordia excaecatio ad tempus ordinatur medicinaliter ad salutem eorum qui excaecantur. Sed haec misericordia non omnibus impenditur excaecatis, sed praedestinati solum, quibus “omnia cooperantur in bonum,” sicut dicitur Rom. VIII. Unde quantum ad quodam, excaecatio ordinatur ad sanationem; quantum autem ad alios, ad damnationem, ut Augustinus dicit in III *De Quaest. Evang.*” (Blindness is a kind of preamble to sin. Now sin has a twofold relation—to one thing directly, that is to the sinner’s damnation—to another, by reason of God’s mercy or providence, namely, that the sinner may be healed, in so far as God permits some to fall into sin, that by acknowledging their sin, they may be humbled and converted, as Augustine states [*De Nat. et Grat.* xxii]. Therefore blindness, of its very nature, is directed to the damnation of those who are blinded; for which reason it is accounted an effect of reprobation. But, through God’s mercy, temporary blindness is ordered medically to the spiritual health of those who are blinded. This mercy, however, is not vouchsafed to all those who are blinded, but only to the predestinated, to whom “all things work together unto good” [Rom 8:28]. Therefore as regards some, blindness is ordered to their healing; but as regards others, to their damnation; as Augustine says [*De Quaest. Evang.* iii]).

II.b.2 Regarding Maritain's Revision

The weight of this mystery is troublesome to many modern authors. Among the greatest Thomists of the twentieth century, Jacques Maritain himself seems to have suffered the burden of this difficult contemplation.²² He considered it necessary to argue—in a pattern that some argue is originally derived from the teaching of Fr. Marín-Sola, OP²³—that God moves the creature by motions that are “shatterable” or resistible. Fr. William Most also has argued along similar lines.²⁴ Because I know best Maritain's expounding of this argument (which some have considered to be superior to Marín-Sola's prior and arguably original development of this argument),²⁵ I will address his formulation, although the pattern of

²² See Jacques Maritain, *Existence and the Existent*, trans. Lewis Galantiere and Gerald B. Phelan (New York: Pantheon Books, 1948), esp. 85–122, which comprise chapter four, “The Free Existent and the Free Eternal Purposes.” I address Maritain's formulation because I am more familiar with it. And here I must acknowledge my great respect for, and indebtedness to, his teaching on many important points, which makes it all the harder to part company with so sublime a guide even here where the evidence seems to me to require it. I should further add that there is some reason for thinking that it was Fr. Marín-Sola, OP, who may first have developed this account and inspired Maritain along similar lines. Michael Torre marshalls a brilliant and important defense of Marín-Sola against the classical Thomistic argument in his two-volume dissertation, *God's Permission of Sin: Negative or Conditioned Decree, A Defense of the Doctrine of F. Marín-Sola, OP Based on the Principles of St. Thomas Aquinas* (Ph.D. diss., Graduate Theological Union, 1983). But finally—or so it seems to this author—his argument fails adequately to answer the two primary objections marshalled in this essay and implicitly by those Dominican theologians who, like Garrigou-LaGrange and Nicolas, refused to surrender the formulation put forward by St. Thomas himself. For all of that, his work stands as an instructive survey of the course of this discussion and a powerful work of advocacy in behalf of Marín-Sola's account, and one hopes that it will be published more prominently and gain a wider hearing by all those concerned with this question.

²³ Cf. Torre, *God's Permission*, 824–29.

²⁴ Fr. Most's position, from his treatise *Grace, Predestination, and the Salvific Will of God: New Answers to Old Questions* (Front Royal, VA: Christendom Press, 1997): “And the physical movement that produces the positive consent is given only on and after the condition of non-resistance.” Most comments that Maritain's account is broadly identical with his own: “Maritain approaches the problem as a philosopher rather than as a theologian, but his implications in theology are plain, and he himself points them out. The broad lines of his solution are identical to ours, even though there is a considerable difference in some respects. He finds the point of entry for evil in non-consideration of the moral rule.” *Ibid.*, 485.

²⁵ Torre notes that Jean-Hervé Nicolas, OP, thought this, see Torre, *God's Permission*, 825.

this account is found in several authors.²⁶ It may be said that a prime aim of this account is to retain the positive authorship of all being and good by God, while affirming that the divine permission of defect may—or may not—yield defect. If this is theoretically feasible, the primacy of the creature in the line of evil will be affirmed without any diminution of the divine authorship of all being and good.

According to Maritain as he expounds the matter in *Existence and the Existent*, the creature may shatter or nihilate shatterable divine motions by a pure negation constituted by non-consideration of the rule of reason. This negation is not in itself evil, but becomes a source of defect in relation to an act that is not informed by consideration of the rule of reason. On this account, God *conditions* the bestowal of an efficacious motion that actually brings about the salutary act of the will upon the creature *not negating* such a shatterable motion. If the creature simply refrains from negation (a negation that consists in non-consideration of the rule of reason) then God will bring the initial *shatterable* motion to perfection within an *unshatterable* motion.²⁷ Thus the creature is held to be the unique and primary cause of evil whereas God is held to move the created will inceptively with a motion that—while resistible—if not

²⁶ In addition to Maritain and Marín-Sola, Fr. Most lists several other contemporary authors who seek a similar solution to the problem of the relation amongst divine causality, free acts, and evil, including Fr. Philippe de la Trinite, OCD, Dom Mark Pontifex, OSB, Charles Cardinal Journet, and F. Muniz. Cf. Most, *Grace, Predestination*, 484–85 and 516–18.

²⁷ Maritain, *Existence and the Existent*, 94: “[B]efore the *unshatterable* divine activation, by which the will to good of creative Liberty infallibly produces its effect in the created will, the divine activations received by the free existent must first be *shatterable* activations.” He continues: “It depends solely upon ourselves to shatter them by making, upon our own deficient initiative, that thing called nothing (or by nihilating). But if we have not budged, if we have done nothing, that is to say, if we have introduced no nothingness and no *non*; if we allow free passage to these influxes of being, then (and by virtue of the first design of God) the shatterable divine activations fructify by themselves into the unshatterable divine activation. This unshatterable divine activation is none other than the decisive *fiat*, received in us. By Its *fiat* the transcendent Cause makes that to happen which It wills. By virtue of that unshatterable divine actuation, our will, this time, unfailingly exercises its liberty in the line of good, produces the good act.” So Maritain endeavours to preserve God’s first causality in the line of good, while making the first cause in the line of evil to be the creature. But for the creature to suffer any nonmoral defect, which can become a moral evil, seems already for it to lack something, which could be only by divine permission: unless it is for it to have something ontologically positive, which could be only by divine causality. See also his *St. Thomas and the Problem of Evil* (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 1942), 26–30.

resisted will be completed and perfected by God. Granted that God does not efficaciously uphold the creature who fails, the creature nonetheless is the actual cause of its fall inasmuch as it fractures or shatters the divine motion; while, if the creature does not shatter the divine motion, then God perfects this shatterable motion with an unshatterable motion that irresistibly moves toward the good act. God remains the cause of all being and good.

The negation of non-advertence to the rule of reason is only a defect in relation to an act that ought to be informed by such consideration (apart from this relation to an act, taken in itself, this non-consideration of the rule is not a defect, since one cannot always be considering the rule). For it is clear that in things that are ruled and measured by another their good flows from their conformity to the rule, while evil derives insofar as they are not governed by the rule.²⁸ As St. Thomas teaches, in *De malo*, 3, 1, ad 13:

The defect which is presupposed in the will before sin is neither a fault nor a punishment, but a pure negation; but it takes on the nature of fault from the fact that with such a negation it applies itself to a work: for by reason of the very application to a work it incurs responsibility for that good which it lacks, namely, actually heeding the rule of reason and divine law.²⁹

Speaking of this teaching, Maritain well expresses its character in these words:

There is a moment of nature, not of time, where the creature has as yet done nothing, where it has as yet made no choice, (that is why there is as yet no fault, but mere negation or absence of being) and where, nevertheless, it has already done nothingness in the sense that it has not considered its rule, freely and voluntarily—it has introduced the condition which will cause the texture of being to give way; that is why there

²⁸ *De Malo*, 1, 3, resp.: “Quod sit patet: in omnibus enim quorum unum debet esse regula et mensura alterius, bonum in regulato et mensurato est ex hoc quod regulatur et conformatur regule et mesure, malum uero ex hoc quod est non regulari uel mensurari” (Which is manifest, as follows: In all things of which one ought to be the rule and measure of the other, good in the thing ruled and measured is from this, that it is ruled and conformed to the rule and measure, but evil from the fact that it is not ruled or measured).

²⁹ *De Malo*, 3, 1, ad 13: “dicendum quod defectus qui preintelligitur in uoluntate ante peccatum, non est culpa neque pena, sed negatio pura; set accipit rationem culpe ex hoc ipso quod cum tali negatione se applicat ad opus: ex ipsa enim applicatione ad opus fit debitum illud bonum quo caret, scilicet attendere actu ad regulam rationis et legis diuine.”

will be faultiness now that it acts with that voluntary nonconsideration; such an act will bear in itself the teeth-marks of nothingness.³⁰

In this Maritain admirably articulates the doctrine of St. Thomas. The point of variance between Maritain's teaching and classical Thomism is this: He wishes to assert that both the one who actually negates and the one who does not actually negate are equally *permitted* by God to negate (not to consider the rule of reason), and evidently he means this *in the composite sense*. For, of course, one whom God freely moves to consider the rule retains the power at another time not to consider the rule. But for classical Thomism, such a one cannot, at the very instant of being freely moved to consider the rule, not freely consider the rule.

In other words, all conditions being given, even the one who does not negate but considers the rule of reason is, on Maritain's account, able to negate at the very instant when he does not negate, and this person receives no more aid toward this effect of non-negation than the one who *does negate*. This is to say that God gives a motion that has no actual natural effect save insofar as the creature does not negate. This seems to one formed in classical Thomism to imply something absurd, namely, that not to negate (the same non-negation upon which efficacious aid is predicated in this theory) calls for no more divine help than to negate: that the effect of being and the effect of nothingness are achieved by precisely the same divine causal influx. That is, God so conditions the giving of efficacious motion toward the salutary act upon the creature's *not negating* the prior "shatterable" or negatable divine motion toward *consideration of the rule*, that only when the creature does not negate does God move the creature efficaciously. Speaking of this Maritain writes:

And when the creature does not produce nothingness under grace (this is no merit in its part, for not to take the initiative of nothingness is not to do something, it is only not to move under divine action)—when the creature does not take the initiative of nothingness, then divine motion or grace merely sufficient or breakable fructifies of itself into *unbreakable* divine motion or into grace efficacious by itself.³¹

This strongly differs from the classical account, wherein if a creature does not negate this is because God upholds the creature and efficaciously moves it to consider the rule; and alike wherein, if God permits a creature to fall from some perfection, this implies that God is not causing the

³⁰ Jacques Maritain, *St. Thomas and the Problem of Evil* (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 1942), 33.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 37–38.

contrary and hence this fall, rooted in the defectibility of the creature of itself, will occur. Accordingly, this is the primary matter of contention.

Maritain's revision of classical Thomism is a genuinely beautiful account—because of its deep sense of the asymmetry of good and evil and its clear intention to distance God as far as possible from any complicity in evil. Nonetheless there are several points upon which this position founders. I address these points, as well as certain others inevitably raised by rejection of Maritain's account, in the following seven considerations, which are not of equal significance. Of these considerations, I wish to add that it seems to me that the first and, even more, the third are perhaps the most critically central in illuminating the reasons for the superiority of classical Thomism to the Maritainian revision, while the sixth is of prime importance in understanding the classical account.

1. The negation in question is constituted either by something positive, or by the lack of something positive. But if it is constituted by something positive, then it is received from God, and so God causes this negation. And if it is constituted by the lack of something positive (as both Maritain and St. Thomas hold), then God has not bestowed that positive gift that would constitute the contrary of this negation. Even given the distinction between the privation of that which is due and the privation or mere negation of that which is not absolutely due, this holds. Thus, either way, it transpires that we are in precisely the position we were in before, namely, that the negation of "shatterable" divine motion by the creature is (and must be if this negation is to occur) permitted by God—and this is tantamount to saying that God does not conserve some creature in its proper good and permits the ensuing evil for the sake of some higher good.

Nor is the only problem that of a "resistable" or "shatterable" motion, but rather perhaps even chiefly the problem of *in what* resistance may consist that could conceivably fall outside the dichotomy of being and lack of being. On any account that acknowledges divine omnipotence, the divine permission of evil must precede its realization, and this permission must certainly consist in not causing the contrary of that which is permitted. If one resists where another does not, that one who resists either has something the other lacks, or lacks something the other has, unless resistance is no real difference at all, in which case we may set it aside as a bedside fable. Yet we know that defect and sin are not fables but quite real (although obviously not in the sense of being convertible with being). Even granted that a negation is not like a deprivation inasmuch as deprivation is of something

strictly owed, negation still must consist of act or lack of act—it cannot inhabit an ontological limbo peopled with beings of reason into which we breathe life when radical theocentrism disturbs the tranquility of rationalist idylls.

We are simply looking the implications of “be” and “not-be” directly in the face. Negation as such must be either something positive or the absence of something positive; negation must be either something the creature does or something it does not do: The law of excluded middle permits no other possibility. But these possibilities suffice to demonstrate that either God has not bestowed that the lack of which constitutes the negation or—if the negation as such is taken to be positive—that God has caused it. One grants that the creature is defectible, but any actual defection presupposes the divine permission, since nothing pertinent to being in any way can occur unless it is at least permitted by God. And so the proponent of the pure “negation” of a merely “shatterable” divine motion must admit that such negation must be permitted by God if it is to be, and moreover that if God caused either something positive—or at least something different—in the agent, this negation would not be.

Thus this first objection to the new theory shows that this theory in no way suffices to alter the datum that negation is either permitted by God in the non-conserving of the creature from the lack of being³² in which this negation consists, or else (if negation were thought to be positive) that it is caused by God in the creating of that being in which it consists. St. Thomas’s position is actually the first, but one or the other must be affirmed regarding the nature of negation—it must either consist in something positive or else in the lack or deprivation (so long as it is understood that we do not here mean by “deprivation” the refusal of what absolutely speaking is owed to a subject) of something positive. There is no *tertium via* hovering between being and non-being that eludes the twilight zone of the excluded middle.

³² “Lack of being” here is, in a sense, a deprivation, provided that we do not understand it as a deprivation of that to which a creature is absolutely titled and so itself an evil. It is not in itself moral evil: Although where an agent commits moral evil there will first have been negation, negation is also found where there is no moral evil. For example, an agent does not constantly advert to the need not to steal watches—this aversion is not performed, is negated, by the agent—but this is irrelevant inasmuch as the agent is in no situation permitting, or temptation inducing, the theft of a watch. Negation must signify either something positive or the lack of something positive: there is no other possibility. And if it is a lack of being, we can only conclude that of which it is the lack is not created by God, this absence is divinely permitted.

Perhaps the capital difficulty of Maritain's account is that implicitly it invents a category that is neither being, non-being, nor even imperfect being. For although he speaks of negation as "nihilating," yet it must be seen that the effect of being incurs a different causality than does the absence of such an effect. So if the creature "nihilates," this can only be because God does not cause that being contrary to the negation.

The reason of negation either pertains to being or to lack of being, because there is no other possible category. But non-being or lack of being as it pertains to volition implies that God does not cause that which is lacked—that God *permits* the lack to occur (if he did not, there would be no lack), which given this permission, this non-causing of that which is lacked, infallibly but freely will occur. Similarly, if one does not give alms to a particular beggar, that beggar will not receive the alms, and this lack is the beggar's own, which he has of himself, and is not *caused* by the non-bestowal of alms. It is not owed to a defectible creature that it be kept from all defect.

"Negation" as a pure "non" reflects a *lack* (for example, the *non-advertence* to the rule of reason is nothing but the lack of this advertence and so cannot occur when the creature is efficaciously moved to advert to the rule), but a lack implies that God has not caused that which would render the lack not to pertain, has *permitted* it to affect the action of the creature. This implies that the remedy for every evil is to be found in God while also raising the question of the permission of evil. The radical defectability of the rational creature's motion toward and persistence in the good is tribute to the creature's need for divine activation toward, and conservation in, the good.

It must be remembered that negation can only be known as negation in relation to an act that is conditioned by negation (Maritain insists that this negation is a pure *non*,³³ but *non-being as such is not knowable*), and so God must *intend to permit the deprived act to be as a condition of knowing this negation*, unless the act with reference to which it is known is the actual human being, as, for example, when we know that someone is not considering the rule of reason because that person is sound asleep or otherwise occupied. It follows in any case that negation is known only in relation to some act, and an act that is caused precisely together with the negation (this need not be a sin: God causes us to sleep or to be preoccupied with conundrums of various sorts, and surely for most of us while we are sleeping or being

³³ Maritain, *Existence and the Existent*, 94.

preoccupied with a [non-moral] problem we are not considering the divine law). So even when it is not a fault or a punishment, non-consideration of the rule of reason must be permitted by God, as were God efficaciously to move us to consider the rule of reason at any time we would consider it.

2. No problem arises with respect to the idea of pure negation as being neither deprivation of that which is strictly owed (because non-consideration of the rule of reason is only a source of defect if the creature proceeds to choice and not merely in itself) nor anything positive. Hence in *Summa Theologiae* I, q. 48, a. 2, ad 1, St. Thomas writes that “Evil is distant both from simple being and from simple ‘not-being,’ because it is neither a habit nor a pure negation, but a privation.”³⁴ A privation is the lack of something due, whereas a negation is a simple non-being. The problem arises in failing to draw the systematic implications of the datum that as negation is not constituted by something positive, it is constituted by a lack of that which is positive (even though the consideration of the rule is not something that is absolutely owed but only in relation to some act). As the lack is something that might be remedied by God, it must be acknowledged that it is permitted to be by God and that did he cause the contrary it would not be.

God permits morally significant negation as such, that is, negation constituted by the turning to choice of the creature without consideration of the rule of reason. This permission means all that the older Dominican analysis has argued that, in the composite sense, such negation permitted in relation to the creature’s act of choosing is impossible with the non-occurrence of a free defective act. But God could refuse to cause such an act, could move the creature otherwise, and could efficaciously will that the consideration of the rule, as something positive, actually occur in relation to the act. As he does none of these, in the composite sense—that is, given that God does not cause the contrary—the creature will freely act without consideration of the rule, defect will distort this act, and the free defective act will be its own.

3. *The Maritainian analysis contains a critical fallacy whereby being is regarded merely as the negation of nought.* Maritain clearly acknowledges that the

³⁴ ST I q. 48, a. 2, ad 1: “Dicendum quod malum distat et ab ente simpliciter, et non ente simpliciter; quia neque est sicut habitus, neque sicut pura negatio, sed sicut privation.”

negation of *not considering* the rule of reason—nihilating or “noughting” the divine motion—is not an act.³⁵ But he writes that:

when the creature does not produce nothingness under grace (this is no merit in its part, for not to take the initiative of nothingness is not to do something, it is only not to move under divine action).³⁶

But how can not taking “the initiative of nothingness” be “not to do something” and “only not to move under divine action”? If the initiative of nothingness is not a positive act, then the language describing it as “moving” is wholly metaphorical. And the contrary of the negative is a positive. This difficulty is heightened further in the following lines of Maritain from *Existence and the Existent*:

It is proper to remark here that if “not to nihilate” and “to consider the rule” come practically to the same thing, nevertheless there is, formally, a clear distinction between the two, and the first formality is the condition of the second.³⁷

³⁵ Cf. Maritain, *St. Thomas and the Problem of Evil*, 29: “In the first moment there is an absence of consideration of the rule: and that, by virtue of the pure initiative of the created will as a defective primary cause—I do not mean by the *action* of created will, since at that moment there is still nothing positive, there is as yet no action—I mean by the defective (and free) *initiative* of the created will.” See also page 34: “[T]he creature slinks, not by an action but by a free non-action or disaction—from the influx of the First Cause.”

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 37. This formulation is arresting in holding that non-resistance is not something positive—a judgment that seems hard to square with it being the contrary of a simple non-being of negation in a creature. If non-resistance is something positive efficaciously caused by God in some—which the ensuing body of point three argues—then (a) clearly when it is not caused the corresponding negation is permitted, and (b) if God then concurs in an action of the rational creature, this action will be one that is divinely permitted to be deficient.

³⁷ Maritain, *Existence and the Existent*, 100, note 10. It should be noted that if one holds that non-resistance is something positive from God whereby negation does not occur, then the rest of the account fails. For that one not negate means an absence of a pure non-being, which in context means the positive act of consideration of the rule and hence God’s actual causing of this consideration. Hence it seems to me that Maritain correctly saw that non-negation had to be given formal priority over actual consideration of the rule if his account were to be upheld (contrary to some others who do not hold this but nonetheless argue for some version of the revisionist account). Yet this seems to be, for all the reasons articulated in my third point in the text above, a pure fallacy. This same problem is found in many authors—to name but one, for example, Fr. William Most, who writes in *Grace, Predestination*, 187–88, “causality is not required for non-beings, among which are the absence of resistance.” Since the absence of resistance is consistent with there being no subject and indeed no universe at all, this is true;

This account fails to explain how it can be that *whether* the divine motion is effective can be consequent upon whether the creature negates or nihilates or shatters the divine motion, when this very negation itself *presupposes* that God has not efficaciously moved the creature to consider the rule. One cannot consider the rule of reason without being efficaciously moved to do so by God, and only if one is not efficaciously moved by God to consider the rule of reason does negation occur.

It is the lack of actual consideration of the rule that constitutes the creaturely negation, and *in this context* the negation of this negation implies *something positive in the creature from God*. If these terms are admitted, and it is argued that God conditions the giving of efficacious motion upon non-negation on the part of the creature, *this is backwards*: For the non-negation on the part of the creature is nothing other than its considering the rule of reason, and this is caused by God. Thus to say that God conditions the giving of efficacious help toward a salutary act upon non-negation of the motion to consider the rule, is tantamount to saying that he conditions one efficacious help upon his having provided another efficacious help. Thence it clearly follows that God permits a defectible creature to fall when he permits the creature's action while not moving the creature to consider and apply the rule in act.

It is *absolutely essential* to note that we may not say in the strict sense that God conditions the gift of efficacious help upon "non-negation" *alone, simpliciter*, because the mere absence of negation as such *does not imply the existence of anything*. For example, we may hypothesize that a universe *not be* in which hence there would not be any creaturely negating—here we hypothesize a negation of negation. Yet this negation of negation does not even imply the existence of any creature or created act. God cannot condition the bestowal of efficacious help upon *non-being*, and thus the absence of negation here must be the presence of something else, caused by God. Thus it is not merely by *an absence of negation* that the rule of reason is actually considered by some creature, but by the positive substance of an act of consideration that owes its being to God.

In sum, the creature can only avoid non-consideration of the rule of reason—can only avert negating—insofar as it is efficaciously

but if we speak of the *absence of a particular negation in an existing being*, then we are necessarily speaking about something positive (if there is not pure non-being with respect to something, then in that same respect there must be being), and this must come from God.

moved by God *actually to consider the rule*. Hence the claim that God conditions the giving of an *unshatterable* or *efficacious motio* toward the salutary act upon the creature's non-negation is tantamount to saying that God conditions the giving of efficacious aid toward the good act upon his giving of efficacious aid to advert to the rule of reason. For the actual consideration of the rule of reason by the creature is a consideration of which God is in any case the first cause, and *it is the efficacious gift of this consideration that constitutes non-negation in the creature*. There is no way out of the dilemma than to admit that God must permit creaturely defect if it is to occur, and that if it is permitted it will occur, because it occurs only where God does not actually preserve the creature by causing the contrary. This will be viewed as unjust only if it is supposed that God owes the remediation of every defect to the defectible creature.

To say that the creature does not fall prey to a negative hence is to assert a positive whose prime source is God. God has caused in the one creature, who does not negate, what God has not caused in another whom he permits to negate. As noted above, Maritain's analysis suggests that the one who does not negate is equally "permitted" to do so. This is true in the sense that the power to resist sufficient divine aid is retained by the one who does not negate. But in the composite sense it is not logically possible that the creature negate inasmuch as moved freely not to negate. Given the divine actuation of the creature whereby it is moved to consider the rule it will not simultaneously fail freely to consider it although it retains the power not to consider it: Power and act are not the same. As it is actually considering the rule, the power not to consider the rule cannot be simultaneously exercised while nonetheless the power (in the divided sense) remains.

Divine permission of evil—non-sustenance in the good—thus is a necessary condition for the creature falling back upon its own defectibility. The non-being of simple negation in relation to choice is impossible with the omnipotent God efficaciously willing the contrary. We may perhaps adjust the saying of Einstein, who commented that "God does not play dice with the universe," to note that God does not play dice with the will, moving it in a way that may or may not freely achieve any effect.

If the creature considers the rule, the creature is efficaciously moved by God freely to consider the rule, and if it does not, and then acts, then God has permitted the creature to suffer a free defect. It is implausible to say that there is no intrinsic difference in the aid bestowed in the two cases: In the one, a pure negation is permitted

in a context in which it becomes the seed of evil, while in the other that which is absolutely contrary to such negation—the consideration of the rule—is *actually caused by God*. The difference here is quite literally that between “is” and “is not”—between being and not-being. It makes no sense to say that the same causal influx that yields being may just as well yield non-being, as though the First Cause were playing darts whilst smoking hashish. Perhaps this causal influx is thought to be insufficient to cause being in the absence of some other positive factor? But every positive factor is from God, so if we say that the *motio* toward consideration of the rule requires an additional positive factor to become an actual, rather than merely potential, consideration of the rule, then this *motio* plus the added positive factor from God will yield the efficacious motion that is distinct from the merely potential one. Upon these conjoined motions the efficacious advertence to the rule will be predicated. To say that a causal influx is efficacious in positing its positive effect for so long as this effect is *not negated* by the creature—when by “not negated” we can mean only that the effect contrary to negation has actually been caused by God—is a vicious circle.

It seems clearly true that, before the human creature is efficaciously moved by God to consider the rule, it is *always negating* in the sense of *not considering* the rule of reason, and that this will persist until God efficaciously moves the creature *to consider the rule*. Just as one sleeps until one wakes, one does not consider until one does consider, and actual consideration has only one First Cause and that is God. To say that God does not cause this consideration of the rule because one negates it is simply backwards because one is always negating consideration of the rule *unless* God causes the contrary. Apart from God moving us to consider the rule, one would never cease non-consideration of the rule. One might as well project this reasoning *ad extra* and claim that God is not causing a non-existent elephant solely because the whole cosmos is freely non-considering it. Hence the conditioning of divine act *ad extra* by non-being is reasonable only inasmuch as it follows the divine permission of an *act* deprived of some perfection (whether this perfection is due or not). Elsewise nonentity as such is granted a spurious causal power whereby it constrains divine creation—whereas, to the contrary, relative negation, and deprivation, are knowable in relation to *beings* that God permits to be constrained by negation or deprivation. Since God permits this—that is, does not cause the contrary—these deficits of being will infallibly pertain to the creature. As pointed out under

point one above: Negation is not even knowable save in relation to an act.

If it is said that the creature is moved to consider the rule only because it does not fail to consider the rule, we are back to the original misportrayal of act as merely the negation of nought, dwelling in the kingdom of tautologies. This is not conspicuously helpful in ontological analysis. Precisely as being tantamount to simple non-being, the role of negation in the genesis of evil underscores the divine permission whereby the creature fails of its good—for according to St. Thomas the logic of divine conservation in being and good is the same.

4. Let us suppose for a moment that it were intelligible that one who negates and one who does not negate actually receive identical causal influx from God. Nonetheless, it must be asked whether on the account of these authors (Maritain and those who hold similar theories) it is possible for God to move the human will freely and efficaciously.

To his credit Maritain (like Marín-Sola and Most) maintains that God can without violence move the will infrustrably.³⁸ Although Maritain's treatment maintains that God conditions his efficacious motion—even at the natural level—upon the non-negation by the creature of his “shatterable” or resistable motion, this condition reflects, on his account, a divine self-limitation. But the moment it is conceded that this is a divine self-limitation, then the question arises again: Why does God limit himself in such a way as to permit that evil that is the negation at the heart of a free evil act—especially when it lies within the divine power to move the creature efficaciously and freely so that this negation would not occur or, alternately, when God could simply refuse being to the act that the negation would deform?

³⁸ Cf. Maritain, *Existence and the Existent*, 97–98: “I do not deny (but this lies outside the purely metaphysical considerations within which I intend to remain) that God can, if He so wills, transport a created existent at one stroke to the performing of a good free act by an unshatterable or infallibly efficacious activation or motion. This is a question of his free predilections and of the price paid for souls in the communion of saints.” See also Most, *Grace, Predestination*, 472: “We hold that God can, when He so wishes move the will of man physically and infrustrably in such a way as to forestall or even cancel out the resistance of that man, without taking away *secondary* freedom.” By “secondary freedom” Most means only that the creature is not the first source of the action—something which, on the principles of St. Thomas, pertains to all creaturely action as such, but which Most thinks not to be true of certain acts of created liberty. Cf. Most, *Grace, Predestination*, 158 and 159.

The answer given will be that this is the price of freedom. But the freedom described is not something pertinent to the *nature* of the creature. Such freedom residing merely in divine self-limitation is not that freedom St. Thomas holds to flow from the nature of the intellect and to reflect the sovereign indeterminacy of the rational will before finite goods that are not the subsistent universal good: A freedom that specifies the nobler way in which the rational will is naturally moved by God. Rather, *this* freedom of Maritain's teaching is an accident caused by God not-acting or acting (depending upon whether negation is conceived as constituted by lack of being or by being, by something that is not positive or by something that is positive). Moreover one notes that this answer is simply a species of the answer: "for the sake of a higher good"—the answer that was found unacceptable when the good for the sake of which evil was permitted was the transcendent divine good for the sake of which all things are. This good of a libertarian freedom of the will vis-à-vis God is not natural to the will (that is why on this account the conditioning of efficacious motion upon the absence of negation is a *self-limiting ordinance* of God), and the idea of God placing a limit upon his action does not suffice to create a natural capacity of the creature to place itself outside the divine causality.

Thus in the newer theory we have at hand only an inferior type of the traditional answer, which states that evil is permitted for the sake of a higher good that is finally the manifestation of the mercy and justice of God himself. It is inferior because, in the newer account, the good for the sake of which evil is permitted is not the infinitely transcendent God and the manifestation of his justice and his mercy. Rather, on the new account, the good for the sake of which evil is permitted is an accident extrinsically pertinent to our acts, which in no way defines the essential character of our acts as does true freedom, and which accident is merely the *ab extra* effect of a self-limiting ordinance of God. On reflection, even were this answer possible—which the first and third objections in particular seem to show not to be the case—it would be drastically inferior to the traditional account that justifies the whole in the only manner in which it can be intelligibly justified: in relation to its transcendent purpose. Further, the traditional account renders clear that which is susceptible of being made clear, and leaves in the shadows that which can be made clear only through the beatific knowledge of what lies hidden in God.

Nor does Maritain's account do away with the essential mystery: the question why God permits evil when he need not do so. By the very

logic of being and good, the only possible answer to this question is: for the sake of a higher good. Hence God must be said antecedently to permit this negation—even if it is construed precisely as does Maritain—since that which is efficaciously contrary to such negation must be affirmed to be both within the divine power and in no way violative of freedom (for God moves each creature according to its nature, and hence as Maritain acknowledges may efficaciously and without violence move the rational creature to a free act).

5. It might be asked, “why then should the creature be penalized for an evil act which it cannot help but enact when God does not conserve it in good?” I am inclined to think that this question evinces a tendency of the human imagination to forget that responsible and free acts are still responsible and free. The datum that God brings about necessary things necessarily, and contingent things contingently, does not make necessary things contingent (because they depend on God) or contingent things necessary (because God causes them). One must beware of moving from the premise that God causes a thing to the premise that it is thereby itself ontologically *necessary*.

Here, too, the great confusion will be implicitly to imagine God and the creature as within the same order. So that God permits a free defect does not suffice to make this defect *unfree*, even on the supposition that given knowledge of God’s permission we know that it will come to pass. Hence, precisely because of the responsible freedom of the agent, penalty will be merited for a deliberately evil act. That God might have upheld a creature from defect means that had the person’s free act been different, it would not be evil, or, alternately, that had God not willed the higher good for the sake of which he permitted the evil, the evil would not have been permitted. But freely performed evil acts do not become worthy of reward, or neutral, merely because their existence implies an antecedent divine permission of evil. Whatever necessary and sufficient conditions there may be for free and deliberate perfidy, it is not an occasion of merit.

Yet it remains true that God is finally the one responsible for the whole of creation, and that the permission of any evil can be only for the sake of a higher good. And this is the deeper mystery: It is not intuitively clear to us now, *in via*, how and why certain evils may be related to higher goods and, finally, to the beatific Good Who is God. Yet this absence of intuitive wisdom does not deprive us of the rectitude of judgment necessary to see that the divine good is infinitely transcendent of any created good, and that the final reason for the

permission of evil will pertain to the manifestation of the divine justice and mercy.³⁹

6. When God permits the rational creature in some particular freely to fall from the efficacious governance of law and grace, its existential and moral nothingness of itself becomes manifest. "Resistance" is a term commonly used, yet the root of this effect is a lacuna of defect permitted by God that—as a window onto the radical ontological and moral insufficiency of the creature—finds therein its sole adequate explanation. Free defect is free, but it is *defect*, and as such (see, for example, *De malo*, 3, 1, resp.), it has no per se cause. One must not fall prey to the temptation to poetize defect as an arcane species of act immune from the principle of the excluded middle. We face here a defect of created freedom itself left to its own devices, using its dominating indifference over any finite good to make itself rather than God the center of its intentional cosmos. God permits this defect, *but it is the defect of the creature*, not of God who is the only efficacious source for its remediation and healing. Hence the words in Hosea 13:9: "Destruction is thy own, O Israel; Thy help is only in Me."⁴⁰

That it is within the divine power to prevent any defect of the creature (other than the ontological defect of finitude) does not make the permission of operative defect wrongful. This permission existentially manifests the truth that our aid is only in God, and our destruction is of ourselves: a critical truth that all intellects must admit is both essential to the manifestation of the transcendent common good of the whole universe who is God and ordered to realization of the need for

³⁹ Another common objection inquires why one ought to strive if God ordains all that is to be from all eternity. But He ordains that some things be *by means of our free striving*, and so to take his ordering of things to be a reason not to strive is to treat one's striving as though it is not itself ordered by God, and this is foolish. One might as well say that because the action of the lieutenant flows from the plan and command of the general, therefore the lieutenant ought never to act—whereas manifestly the plan and command of the general envision, cause, and require the action of the lieutenant.

⁴⁰ It is perhaps the condign moment to point out that in a sense that free defect which imperils salvation is either not to do what is in us or not to ask God's help for what exceeds our power. Defect being our own, the Church's maxim to do all that is in us to do (positively), and to ask God's help for what exceeds our strength, is simply the maxim not to give up. That persons do give up is permitted by God, but not only is it not caused by him but it is contrary to what he does cause (multiple sufficient graces which if not resisted will be perfected in efficacious graces). Yet it is true that the defect at the root of resistance is permitted by God (else it

the virtue of humility.⁴¹ It is truly the lance that penetrates the heart of the prideful fallacy of the rational creature's absolute autonomy: Such autonomy is, insofar as it can be approximated, the condition of the damned, bereft of the divine aid. And this may be tasted in the bitter fruits of evil by those who have fallen to it, in their alienation and loss of the divine friendship. These defective acts are free acts proceeding from mind, will, and heart, acts occurring despite the real power to act otherwise. God's permitting of free defect does not make the defect unfree, nor make the defect his own rather than the creature's, but merely manifests what *absolute* moral autonomy on the part of a creature is. Yet it only exists within divine providence as permitted for the sake of higher good. Surely the creature's good and salvation rest more securely in the care of the omniscient and omnipotent God, than in a spurious supreme governance by its finite defectible self.

There is no *per se* cause of defect, and the language of the creature *nilhilating*—which rhetorically suggests such a cause despite Maritain's intention to the contrary—in a sense grants too great a dignity to the defectibility that is at the root of moral evil. Nonetheless, it is the nothingness and defectibility of the creature that is the radical root of moral evil, and *the nothingness of the creature is its own*; indeed, it is the only thing that is absolutely and solely its own. Hence the intention of the Maritainian schema—to point out that the creature has the “initiative” in the line of evil—is in a sense honored in the classically Thomistic account. While there is no *per se* initiative of evil (for properly speaking initiative pertains to act, not to defect), the radical root of evil lies within the creature's nothingness, from which if it is not upheld both in being and in operation by the extrinsic causality of God, it will fail. Failing in act in this way is proportionate to the nature of the creature's actual agency—a finite agent cannot avert all operational defect without divine aid. It is tutoring in this datum that largely constitutes growth in the virtue of humility.

God owes to the creature in the strict sense nothing whatsoever, although he owes it to his own goodness that his providence be gener-

could not occur), and the contrary of the defect is not efficaciously willed by God. Also, that God not efficaciously will the further good effect contrary to the evil choice engendered by the free defect—while this materially presupposes the free resistance of the creature—is permitted for the sake of higher good.

⁴¹ This is indeed a “kingdom of ends” of a most different sort than the Kantian, objectively ordered to the acknowledgment of the transcendent Good for the sake of whom everything is and acts, the extrinsic common good of the whole universe of created being and the special beatitude of all intellectual creatures.

ous, just, and merciful, and to his own spoken promises in revelation that these be kept. That God permits the moral insufficiency of the creature to be manifest is not for God to *cause* this insufficiency (it is not something *positive* with a per se cause, but a lack that is the creature's own). Likewise for the wise to withhold counsel is not for them to cause the ignorance of their interlocutors, nor do the virtuous cause wickedness by failing to correct every fault, for ignorance and fault the others have of themselves. Hence St. Thomas notes:

Now God cannot be directly the cause of sin, either in Himself or in another, since every sin is a departure from the order which is to God as the end: whereas God inclines and turns all things to Himself as to their last end, as Dionysius states (*Div. Nom.*, i): so that it is impossible that He should be either to Himself or to another the cause of departing from the order which is to Himself. Therefore He cannot be directly the cause of sin. In like manner neither can He cause sin indirectly. For it happens that God does not give some the assistance, whereby they may avoid sin, which assistance were He to give, they would not sin. But He does all this according to the order of his wisdom and justice, since He Himself is Wisdom and Justice: so that if someone sin it is not imputable to Him as though He were the cause of that sin; even as a pilot is not said to cause the wrecking of the ship, through not steering the ship, unless he cease to steer while able and bound to steer. It is therefore evident that God is nowise a cause of sin.⁴²

God bestows sufficient aid to the creature, which is a determinate positive effect constituting a potential for a further good (the salutary act in question). When free defect on the part of the creature—proceeding from its own will—is permitted (and in no way caused) by God, this defect will condition the act of the creature such that it falls away of itself from the potential for good constituted by the

⁴² *ST* I–II, q. 79, a. 1, resp.: “Deus autem non potest esse directe causa peccati vel sui vel alterius. Quia omne peccatum est per recessum ab ordine qui est in Deum sicut in finem. Deus autem omnia inclinatur et convertitur in seipsum sicut in ultimum finem, sicut Dionysius dicit, I cap. *De Div. Nom.* Unde impossibile est quod sit sibi vel aliis causa siscedendi ab ordine qui est in ipsum. Unde non potest directe esse causa peccati—Similiter etiam neque indirecte. Contingit enim quod Deus aliquibus non praebebat auxilium ad evitandum peccata, quod si praeberet, non peccarent. Sed hoc totum facit secundum ordinem suae sapientiae et iustitiae, cum ipse sit sapientia et iustitia. Unde non imputatur ei quod alius peccet, sicut causae peccati; sicut gubernator non dicitur causa submersionis navis ex hoc quod non gubernat navem, nisi quando subtrahit gubernationem potens et debens gubernare. Et sic patet quod Deus nullo modo est causa peccati.”

prior sufficient motion, which the creature thus is said to resist. If God does not permit such antecedent voluntary defect it will not be, whereas if God does permit it—if he does not preserve the creature from this defect—it will be. This defect is the creature's own, for of itself it is deficient with respect either to actuating itself toward, or sustaining itself in, the good proper to its nature.

General (and efficacious) divine concurrence in the creature's acts assures it of some actuation toward and possession of the good, but actuation and conservation in the good proper to its nature requires proportionate divine assistance. Likewise, the student may be assured some achievement of insight into his study through the ordinary teaching of the master, but for the student to gain a flawless and fixed command of the subject—to be sustained in the full good of his study—argues special tutelage whether by native genius, the master, or the Holy Spirit. The effect requires its proportionate cause. The free creature is a deficient cause, susceptible of defect, and of moving back and forth from good to evil, and yet again back to good. As St. Thomas puts it in arguing that perseverance in good requires divine aid, “everything that is changeable of itself needs the aid of an immovable mover, in order to stand fast to one thing.”⁴³ The finite creature is certainly not ordered of its nature to evil, but its defectible agency is such that its acts cannot be preserved from all failure without proportionate divine aid.

The creature *of itself* is operationally deficient as its operative power is proportioned to its ontological finitude. A free, rational creature that *as created, of itself does not exist*—and which hence *is not its own law or rule of operation*—is likewise *of itself defectible in act* unless upheld in act by an extrinsic power, namely, by God. It is of itself deficient in operation, and hence, apart from divine aid, of itself falls away from the good. Indeed, the creature cannot even proceed to a defective act without divinely imparted motion, much less to an act integrally good, or to a comprehensive pattern of acts integrally good and to persistence therein.⁴⁴ By contrast God is the source of all in the creature that is, and that is good, and he can overcome any evil. Can there be a more salutary motive at once for humility and gratitude? Or a cause of greater hope than the perfect wisdom and goodness of the all-provident God?

⁴³ From *ScG*, IIIb, 155, titled “Quod homo indiget auxilio gratiae ad perseverandum in bono”: “Omne enim quod de se est variabile, ad hoc quod figatur in uno, indiget auxilio alicuius moventis immobilis.”

⁴⁴ Cf. *ibid.*, whose title is “That Man Needs the Divine Aid in Order to Persevere in Good.”

7. The question why God permits moral evil—the loss of a single soul—can only be understood vis-à-vis a higher good. Finally this higher good is the beatific good and what befits or is necessary to its communication and to the manifestation of divine good, mercy, and justice. But this is necessarily obscure for any creature prior to the beatific vision itself, since what is required for the manifestation of divine goodness, mercy, and justice, and entailed in the beatific vision, is to a significant degree hidden in God. As intimated above, in the end, the divine permission of evil, like an author's permission of some defect within the context of a story, must be justified in relation to the nature and purpose of the whole work of creation. So there is necessarily a tension of incompleteness in the account, because there is no way to reconcile all the elements entailed by the real providential permission of evil without knowing everything pertinent to the communication of the divine nature and the manifestation of divine good, mercy, and justice.

Yet it is clear that evil is permitted for the sake of a higher good by the One Who alone is Good. Thus one is rightfully confident that all intellects seeing the Uncreated Light in beatific vision will also see *ad extra* how God, through permission of evil, brought forth greater good and a more befitting manifestation of the divine good that is the common good of the whole universe and the special beatific good of all intellectual creatures. As every intellectual creature must admit that the purpose of the whole of creation is the manifestation and communication of the transcendent good, no intellectual creature may with reason fault God himself for that which essentially befits this manifestation and communication, whose character will be fully revealed on the Last Day. The truth that our aid is solely in God, but our destruction of ourselves, is an essential truth pertaining to the manifestation of God's goodness and the communication of the divine nature, as well as to our own salutary self-knowledge in humility. Hence this truth may be seen to be befittingly manifested in the permission of free defect and moral evil, even apart from fuller consideration of the manifestation of divine justice and mercy for the sake of which this permission occurs. As noted above, free defect is free: Deliberate evil is not made worthy of meritorious reward merely because God permits it for the sake of higher good.⁴⁵

⁴⁵ Often against this account it is urged that if God permits creaturely defect in relation to our free acts, this implies that the antecedent will for the salvation of all men is not sincere. But one may will something sincerely and precisely, and yet not will it efficaciously. The authors urging this point find their justification

II.b.3 Conclusion about Maritain's Revision

It follows, then, that unless we are to abandon the high Thomistic metaphysic for the sake of superordinating an unintelligible libertarian freedom to the First Cause of all being and act, that we cannot suppose that God's permission of evil is conditioned by mere negation *in the absence of prior divine permission for such negation* such that—in the composite sense—the negation cannot but freely occur. That species of creaturely negation that wounds an act can only occur because of the divine permission of evil, and if God were efficaciously to move the creature so as to uphold it in good, then evil could not mar its action (and morally significant

of the damnation of souls in relation to the putative good of libertarian freedom vis-à-vis God, while the permission of evil for the sake of the higher manifestation of the transcendent Good is troubling to them. Yet the latter is a far better reason than the former, just as the Good Who is God is a far greater good than any finite good. Hence it is not the sincerity of God's antecedent will to save all men that should be in question, but rather the logic of those who find infinite good to be insufficient reason, but finite good—and a finite good which on analysis seems *spurious*—to be sufficient reason for the permission of damnific evil. Of course such critics also suppose that free defect is somehow unfree owing to God's permission of it, and so cannot fathom either its punishment or the truth that evildoers really have the power not to sin, a power of which their defective wills keep them from availing themselves. The critics of the traditional Thomistic position desire from God something that is strictly impossible—that something positive simultaneously be caused and not be caused. When it is pointed out to them that God cannot gratify such a wish, they say that on the Thomistic account God is the cause of that defect that God permits. But if defect is permitted this necessarily implies that the omnipotent God has not caused the contrary, and if God causes the contrary this means that defect is not permitted. Only insofar as God wills to permit limit, negation, and defect in his effects are these to be found there. God is not a creature, the efficacy of whose causality can strictly be impeded. If he were, then abandonment to divine providence would be no different in kind from abandonment to a creature. It follows that if God simply wills something then it will be, and that if an effect does not exist, we may from this infallibly infer that God does not simply and absolutely will that effect. The resistance to this proposition is a headlong flight from metaphysical clarity into obscurantism, as though biblical interpretation could dispense with metaphysical wisdom while retaining adequacy to divine revelation. Loss of the principles of non-contradiction and the excluded middle is a high price to pay for seeking to sustain an account of human liberty inconsistent with the metaphysics of creation and divine omnipotence. There is also in the criticism of the classical Thomistic teaching the subtle deflection of emphasis from God to the creature, as though the latter and not the former were the indispensable key to created good. Yet all creation is nothing but a finite manifestation of God.

negation would not occur).⁴⁶ As St. Thomas puts it in chapter 142 of the *Compendium Theologiae*:

good is rendered more praiseworthy when compared with particular evils, just as in relation to the darkness of black, the radiant brilliance of white is more pronouncedly manifest. And so through this—that evil is permitted to be in the world—the divine goodness is more clearly shown forth in the good, just as divine wisdom is more patently manifested in ordering evil to serve good.⁴⁷

Of itself and apart from the divine conservation of being, the creature is nothing. Likewise, of itself, and without divine activation toward and conservation in the good proper to its nature, the rational creature freely falls inward upon itself and fails of its good, revealing its volatilized moral nothingness in second act. This is St. Thomas's authentic teaching. We now must turn to the most central implication, both historically and doctrinally, of the *denial* of this teaching: an implication that has haunted the counsels of Christendom from inside the tradition of Catholic reflection itself, and in the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries has entered a phase of extreme virulence.

III. The Impossibility of Natural Law If Our Volition Is Not Subject to Divine Causality

This brings us to a decisive implication of rejecting the Thomistic interpretation of the words, "Without me you can do nothing." If one denies that the human will receives not only its being, but also its natural motion and application to action from God, one makes of the will a *демиургически unmoved first mover*. But divine providence extends only so far as the divine causality.⁴⁸ It follows that if the human will is not subject to divine

⁴⁶ Of course, divine aid is only withheld because of prior free resistance; but this prior resistance itself traces to defect and negation, and these must be permitted if they are to be (no other answer is consistent with the omnipotence of God). The free defect is free, it manifests the nothingness of the creature apart from divine aid, and finally it is permitted for the sake of higher good.

⁴⁷ *Compendium theologiae, Capitulum CXLII*: "Tertio, quia ex ipsis malis particularibus commendabilia redduntur bona dum eis comparantur, sicut ex obscuritate nigri magis declaratur claritas albi. Et sic per hoc quod mala permittuntur esse in mundo, diuina bonitas magis declaratur in bonis, et sapientia in ordinatione malorum ad bona."

⁴⁸ *ST I*, q. 22, a. 2, resp.: "Cum enim omne agens agat propter finem, tantum se extendit ordinatio effectuum in finem, quantum se extendit causalitas primi agentis" (For since every agent acts for an end, the ordering of effects toward that end extends as far as the causality of the first agent extends). And again: "Unde necesse est omnia quae habent quocumque modo esse, ordinata esse a Deo in

power, then naturally it is not subject to the divine government. But natural law is nothing other than a mode of the divine government through secondary causality. St. Thomas makes this point clearly in the following passage from the *prima secundae* of the *Summa Theologiae*:

I answer that, as was stated above, law denotes a kind of plan directing acts towards an end. Now wherever there are movers ordained to one another, the power of the second mover must needs be derived from the power of the first mover, since the second mover does not move except in so far as it is moved by the first. Therefore we observe the same in all those who govern, namely, that the plan of government is derived by secondary governors from the governor in chief. Thus the plan of what is to be done in a state flows from the king's command to his inferior administrators; and again in things of art the plan of whatever is to be done by art flows from the chief craftsman to the under-craftsmen who work with their hands. Since, then, the eternal law is the plan of government in the Chief Governor, all the plans of government in the inferior governors must be derived from the eternal law. But these plans of inferior governors are all the other laws which are in addition to the eternal law. Therefore all laws, in so far as they partake of right reason, are derived from the eternal law. Hence Augustine says in *I De Lib. Arb.* that *in temporal law there is nothing just and lawful but what man has drawn from eternal law.*⁴⁹

finem" (Hence all things that exist in whatsoever manner are necessarily directed by God toward the end); and again: "necesse est omnia, inquantum participant esse, intantum subdi divinae providentiae" (it necessarily follows that all things, inasmuch as they participate in being, must to that extent be subject to divine providence). Of God, Thomas says that "Et cum cognitio eius comparetur ad res sicut cognitio artis ad artificata" (His knowledge may be compared to the things themselves as the knowledge of art to the objects of art). In *ibid.*, I, q. 22, a. 3, resp., St. Thomas defines providence as entailing two things, "scilicet ratio ordinis rerum provisarum in finem; et exectuio huius ordinis, quae gubernatio dicitur" (That is, the exemplar of the order of things foreordained toward an end, and the execution of this order, which is called government).

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, I-II, q. 93, a. 3, resp.: "Dicendum quod, sicut supra dictum est, lex importat rationem quandam directivam actuum ad finem. In omnibus autem moventibus ordinatis oportet quod virtus secundi moventis derivetur a virtute moventis primi, quia movens secundum non movet nisi inquantum movetur a primo. Unde in omnibus gubernantibus idem videmus, quod ratio gubernationis a primo gubernante ad secundos derivatur; sicut ratio eorum quae sunt agenda in civitate, derivatur a rege per praeceptum in inferiores administratores. Et in artificialibus etiam ratio artificialium actuum derivatur ab architectore ad inferiores artifices, qui manu operantur. Cum ergo lex aeterna sit ratio gubernationis in supremo gubernante, necesse est quod omnes rationes gubernationis quae sunt in inferioribus gubernantibus, a lege aeterna deriventur. Huiusmodi autem rationes inferiorum gubernantium sunt quaecumque aliae leges praeter aeternam. Unde omnes leges, inquantum participant de ratione recta, intantum derivantur a lege aeterna. Et

The point must be seen: Natural law is simply one mode whereby the Divine Mind orders or governs the rational creature toward its end. But the Divine Mind cannot govern a creature to its end if that creature is by its very nature absolutely ungovernable or wholly independent of his government: The idea is a contradiction in terms. If the creature is not dependent upon God in being, both to be, to be preserved in being, and to act toward and for the sake of being, then the universal providence of God over being does not extend to it. Thus if our free human acts escape dependence upon God for their coming-to-be, it will be an axiomatic inference to separate the governance of these acts from the divine government. Human action then comes to represent a zone of being and good *beyond the divine power and outside the scope of divine government*. This is contrary to the divine omnipotence and for this reason alone a foolish conclusion. But it clearly and unequivocally also implies the impossibility of natural law.

Since the natural law is nothing other than a rational participation in the eternal law; and since if man cannot be subject to divine ordering, he must be outside the divine power, it will then also follow that man's moral actions cannot be subject to eternal law. The absolute and unconditional autonomy of the human will is impossible with natural law. This is precisely the antitheistic conclusion drawn by much of modernity and postmodernity. It is in principle identical to the criticism that the existence of God renders true and absolute creativity impossible for man.⁵⁰ Insofar as man cannot create anything *ex nihilo*, apart from antecedent matter, this is of course true: Creation in the absolute sense is reserved to God. But as this criticism is posed by antitheists, it obscures the distinction between this lack of absolute creativity and the lack of what we normally mean by creativity—for example, the inspired insight causing the development of true theories, great works of art, brilliant strategies, and so on: a lack of creatures in no way implied by the existence of God. Needless to say, this criticism is erroneous. It is mirrored by the confusion of the relative autonomy of man within divine providence—which flows from man's rational nature and sovereign indeterminacy with respect to all finite goods—with a quite different *absolute autonomy* that is wholly spurious even with respect to the noblest of angelic creatures.

The reasoning of *Summa contra Gentiles*, III, a. 70, applies directly here and manifests the nature of the error in question: “[T]he power of the

propter hoc Augustinus dicit in I *De Lib. Arb.*, quod ‘in temporali lege nihil est iustum ac legitimum, quod non ex lege aeterna homines sibi derivaverunt.’”

⁵⁰ For example, Maurice Merleau-Ponty wove these confusions with great skill. Cf. his comments on God and human liberty, *Sens et non-sens* (Paris: Les Éditions Nagel, 1948, 1966), 356.

lower agent depends on the power of the higher agent, in so far as the higher agent gives the lower agent the power whereby it acts or preserves that power or applies it to action.” But this description depicts the basic character of passive participation in the eternal law by every creature whatsoever. Thus if the lower agent does not receive its power to act or the preservation of that power or its application to act from God, then it will exist and act apart from divine governance.

Recall that on St. Thomas’s account of the natural law, man first passively participates in the divine ordering of nature. All creatures receive their being, natures, natural powers, and ordering to ends passively from God.⁵¹ But because man is created rational, he receives being, nature, natural powers, and ordering not only passively, but also—and by the very nature of this passive participation—receives these *actively, preceptively, and rationally*: as providing reasons to act or not to act. It is this finely delineated metaphysic of moral order that is jeopardized by suggesting that human agency is causally outside the sphere of divine governance. For how can a rule govern something that is naturally outside its governing power? The legislature of Indiana does not pass laws governing the molecular structure of carbon, nor does the Senate of the United States deliberate on whether to command angels to pay more taxes. And, though it may disbar him, even the Supreme Court of the United States does not command William Jefferson Clinton to be continent.

Once the Thomistic metaphysic of morals is denied, the implications for the moral life cascade. The normativity of the natural law will no longer reside in the identity of absolute being, truth, and good in God, but instead in the determinations of autonomous human reason. Nature and reason go from being manifestations and expressions of divine order, to being either antipodes of divine order or, perhaps, to opposing one another in an endless and fruitless dialectic. God moves from being the author and perfecter of human liberty and virtue, to being a threat to authentic human freedom and an alien distortive influence upon morality. The symmetry of these implications with Kantian autonomism is arresting. Yet unlike the express rationalism of Kant, these implications flow from an intra-Catholic source: metaphysical failure to reconcile divine providence and human freedom. Even had Kant and Hegel never written, the failure to affirm that *every* perfection of act—including those perfections of act that pertain to human willing—stems *first* from God and only secondarily from the crea-

⁵¹ Indeed, all creatures also receive their natural powers, and the application of these powers to act, from God.

ture, is a failure pregnant with manifold antinomian disorders destined to disrupt the counsels of Catholic intelligence.

Somehow, the ensuing absolutely autonomous kingdoms of the will are to be brought under a different regime of divine law in revelation. Russell Hittinger has amusingly and profoundly described this problem as that of “Cartesian minds somehow under Church discipline.”⁵² But if *per impossibile* there could be a being by nature utterly independent of divine causality and hence not ordered by or toward God, why would it then require divine direction? And how could it be subject to further supernatural direction without violence toward, or mutation of, its nature? It is perhaps in these terms arresting to note that some theologians—for example, the Greek patriarch, in his address at Georgetown University⁵³—actually hold that grace entirely mutates human nature rather than elevating and redeeming it. Once natural order is erroneously cast in the role of an antitheonomic principle, what else can grace be but a violation or mutation of nature?

Once human freedom is held to be causally independent of God, the conditions for the separation of natural and eternal law are achieved: The “prenuptial agreement” of their temporary cohabitation guarantees future calamitous conflict. Eternal law then is brought in—if it is brought in at all—only as a theological gloss on an already sufficiently constituted moral order, rather as the limits of jurisdiction of one sovereign power help to demarcate the limits of an adjacent kingdom.⁵⁴

This denial of God’s causality over human freedom—not as we find it in the minds and with the motives of Catholic theologians such as Molina, but simply in its objective character—thus appears to be a critical intra-Catholic contribution to the evolution of secularist antitheism in the moral realm. For what do we mean by secularism save the claim that the public order is outside the jurisdiction of divine rule? And what could more directly imply this posture than the claim that our free actions

⁵² Russell Hittinger, “Natural Law and Catholic Moral Theology,” in *A Preserving Grace*, ed. Michael Cromartie (Washington, DC: Ethics and Public Policy Center; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1997), 1–30.

⁵³ Cf. Patriarch Bartholomew, “Dialogue, From an Orthodox Perspective,” *Origins* 27 (1997): 333 and 335–37. He claims that divine glory “recreates or otherwise regenerates us into something other or different in essence than our previous nature” (335). He also argues that “therefore we do not engage in idle talk and discuss intellectual concepts which do not influence our lives” (335). But of course, if human nature itself is not redeemed, one had better be silent about natural interrogatories, preserving obscurantism untouched by reason.

⁵⁴ I do not believe it to be straining matters too far to read the teachings of Bernard Häring or Josef Fuchs as more or less explicitly maintaining just such a metaphysically unfounded separation between natural moral order and eternal law.

are naturally outside the divine government? It is the moral implications of this metaphysically unfounded autonomism that Pope John Paul II addresses and corrects in *Veritatis Splendor*.

One must say again: A thing can only act as it is. The rational human person is first, foremost, and always, a *creature*, whose existence comes to it from outside, from God. Because this is the character of its being, it will—by a law of metaphysical necessity—manifest this derived being in the very nature of each and every one of its acts. Because its being and act are dependent upon God, the natural norm of the rational creature's being and act is to be found in its participation of the eternal law, which participation is a means whereby the divine mind moves the rational creature toward its end. At its heart this motion is ineluctable: The first precepts of the natural law are inexpugnable, and the desire for the Last End is not among those desires of which man is master. The further precepts of the law, its conclusions and determinations, are all so many ways in which God moves the rational creature toward the End. This would not be possible were rational being a law to itself, immoveable by God, and absolute first author of its own acts.

Human—and angelic—liberty are *created liberties*, which typify the noble mode of the divine motion of human and angelic persons toward their finality. For no matter how perfect a creature may be, it cannot proceed to its act unless it first be moved by God. This highlights in a profound fashion that the first necessity of any truthful personalism is its metaphysical veracity. Accounts of the human person that begin by separating the creature from divine causality in either being or operation ineluctably distort the nature of the person, of personal being, and of personal activity. Person denotes, not an enclave of unintelligible libertarian aseity or arbitrary exemption from the laws of being *qua* being, but the noblest part of the *created order*. In this light, one recollects the following words from *Fides et ratio*:

It should never be forgotten that the neglect of being inevitably leads to losing touch with objective truth and, therefore, with the very ground of human dignity. This in turn makes it possible to erase from the countenance of man and woman the marks of their likeness to God, and thus to lead them little by little either to a destructive will to power or to a solitude without hope. Once the truth is denied by human beings, it is pure illusion to try to set them free. Truth and freedom either go hand in hand or together they perish in misery. (no. 90)

Freedom flows from the rational nature of man, whereby the will is ordered toward universal good and thence cannot be compelled by any

finite good. It is a nobler, universal mode whereby God moves the rational creature toward its end. Like any and every good, its radical actuating source is *ipsum esse subsistens per se*, the Uncreated Light Who is God.

Thus it is with characteristically seraphic wisdom that St. Thomas concludes chapter 67 of the first part of the third book of the *Summa contra Gentiles*, whose chapter title is “That, in all things that operate, God is the cause of their operating”:

Hence it is said (Is 26:12): “Lord, Thou hast wrought all our works in us”; and (Jn 15:5): “Without Me you can do nothing”; and (Phil 2:13): “It is God who worketh in us both to will and to accomplish, according to his good will.” For this reason Holy Writ often ascribes natural effects to the divine operation: because He it is who works in every agent, natural or voluntary, as it is written in Job 10:10, 11: “Hast Thou not milked me as milk, and curdled me like cheese? Thou hast clothed me with skin, Thou hast put me together with bones and sinews”; and again in Psalm 17:14: “The Lord thundered from heaven, and the highest gave his voice: hail and coals of fire.”⁵⁵

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⁵⁵ ScG, IIIa, 67: “Hinc est quod dicitur Isaiae 26, 12, ‘Omnia opera nostra operatus es in nobis, Domine’; et Io. 15, 5, ‘Sine me nihil potestis facere’; et Phil. 2, 13, ‘Deus est qui operatur in nobis velle et perficere pro bona voluntate.’ Et hac ratione frequenter in Scripturis naturae effectus operationi divinae attribuuntur, quia ipse est qui operatur in omni operante per naturam vel per voluntatem: sicut iillud Tob 10, 10.11, ‘nonne sicut lac mulsiste me, et sicut caseum me coagulasti? Pelle et carnibus vestisti me, ossibus et nervis compegisti me’; et in Psalmo (17, 14), ‘intonnit de caelo Dominus, et Altissimus dedit vocem suam, grando et carbonem ignis.’”