

Efficacious Grace and Free Will: Six Inadequate Arguments

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During the *de auxiliis* controversies, the idea of efficacious grace was used extensively as an attempt to explain the manner in which God infallibly achieves his will at the level of supernatural grace. One meaning of efficacious grace has often been considered inconsistent with the idea of free will. The inconsistency—if there is any—depends upon a particular meaning, according to which efficacious grace has three important characteristics: it is an infallible physical pre-motion. (1) Efficacious grace is “physical” because it moves after the manner of an efficient cause rather than after the manner of a final cause (which would be called a “moral” motion).¹ (2) The motion is prior (or a pre-motion) because it causally precedes the act of the will to which it gives rise. Finally, (3) the motion is infallible because that toward which it moves the will in every case must be achieved.

Suppose, for instance, that God gives Jerry an efficacious grace to help Jane, who is in need. The grace is not merely the enticement of some good (a moral movement), but is the movement of an efficient cause, after the manner by which fire heats water. Furthermore, the grace is efficacious prior to Jerry’s actual choice and does not depend upon his will for its efficacy. Finally, once Jerry is moved by this grace, he will of necessity (or infallibly) choose to help Jane.

In what follows, references to efficacious grace will refer to this particular

¹ Reginald Garrigou-Lagrange, *Predestination*, trans. Dom Bede Rose (Rockford, IL: Tan., 1939), 241, 263–66.

understanding, with these three characteristics. Other conceptions of efficacious grace, such as that given by Jacques Maritain, are not relevant to this paper.²

The combination of these three characteristics is sometimes thought to be inconsistent with a particular understanding of free will, according to which the will is the only created cause that determines itself to its final action. Since efficacious grace is a created cause (and not the divine will), since it is an efficient cause, since it is causally antecedent to the final act of the will, and since it determines the will to act, it is inconsistent with free will. Or so the argument goes, at any rate. Whatever the details of this argument, most people will concede that there is, at the very least, an intuitive inconsistency between free will and efficacious grace. To be moved infallibly by an efficient cause seems incompatible with the movement of the will, the agency of which is free, and which therefore is not moved determinately to some effect.³

Those who wish to defend efficacious grace have advanced a contrary claim—that efficacious grace is consistent with human free will—which might be called the Consistency Thesis. Apparent inconsistencies are nothing more than apparent. In defense of the Consistency Thesis, a multiplicity of Thomistic arguments are offered by authors such as Reginald Garrigou-Lagrange, Steven Long, and Taylor O'Neill.

This paper is concerned to show neither the truth nor the falsity of the Consistency Thesis. Rather, it considers six of the arguments defending the thesis and finds all of them wanting. Whatever their merits for other purposes (and often their merits are great), these arguments are inadequate to the task of defending the Consistency Thesis. They are often not bad arguments; they are simply insufficient. They are not enough to show a consistency between efficacious grace and free will. This goal, although modest, is significant, for when confronted with the six arguments readers can be left with the impression that the question is settled.

² See, for instance, Jacques Maritain, *God and the Permission of Evil*, trans. Joseph W. Evans (Milwaukee, WI: Bruce, 1966).

³ Petr Dvorák, "The Concurrentism of Thomas Aquinas: Divine Causation and Human Freedom," *Philosophia* 41, no. 3 (2013): 617–34, at 630–31; Mark K. Spencer, "Divine Causality and Created Freedom: A Thomistic Personalist View," *Nova et Vetera* (English) 14, no. 3 (2016): 919–63, at 949–50; Brian J. Shanley, "Divine Causation and Human Freedom in Aquinas," *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* 72, no. 1 (1998): 99–122, at 116.

The Problem Clarified

The enemies of efficacious grace suggest the following implication: if the will is moved to act by an infallible physical pre-motion, then the will is determined. The Consistency Thesis may be defended by denying the implication. Even when moved by an infallible physical pre-motion such as efficacious grace (so the defense will argue), the will can remain undetermined. All the arguments discussed below (if they are indeed arguments in defense of the Consistency Thesis) take this approach, although the fourth argument does so only in a very indirect manner.

The first argument claims that efficacious grace requires only a conditional (or composite) necessity; it implies no absolute necessity in the will. The second argument claims that efficacious grace is consistent with the will being undetermined with regard to particular good objects. The third argument claims that efficacious grace does not cause violent determination in the will. The fifth argument claims that efficacious grace does not move the will after the manner of a necessary cause but only after the manner of a contingent cause. The sixth argument claims that efficacious grace works together with sufficient grace, by which the agent has the ability either to act according to grace or not.

Although the fourth argument is advanced in a manner strongly suggesting a defense of the Consistency Thesis, it does so only indirectly, by way of the thought of Aquinas. According to Aquinas (so this argument claims), God moves the will—even at a natural level—after the manner of an infallible physical pre-motion, of which efficacious grace is a supernatural example. Even supposing this interpretation of Aquinas is correct, it might follow, nevertheless, that the will is determined in its action. How, then, is this argument a defense of the Consistency Thesis? Through the supposition that Aquinas maintains the freedom of the will. Aquinas himself, then, maintained both that (1) God moves the will after the manner of efficacious grace and that (2) the will is not determined. If Aquinas is a good guide (a point granted by many of the opponents of efficacious grace), then efficacious grace must be consistent with the freedom of the will.

This paper argues that all six of these arguments are inadequate to the task. They do not suffice to defend the Consistency Thesis. The first three of these arguments maintain that the will lacks determination. The arguments are inadequate because the particular forms of indetermination involved are indeed necessary for free will but they are not sufficient. These three arguments successfully establish some lack of determination in the will, but they fail to argue for the correct indetermination. They fail to argue that

the will remains undetermined by the causality of efficacious grace. The lack of absolute necessity (argument 1), the lack of necessity with regard to the object of the will (argument 2), and the lack of necessity from violence (argument 3) are all indeed consistent with efficacious grace. They are also consistent with a necessary determination arising from efficacious grace. Therefore, they do not effectively establish the Consistency Thesis.

The fourth argument is inadequate because it provides insufficient evidence in support of its interpretation of Aquinas. It relies upon few texts of Aquinas. This alone would be no mark against the argument, if the texts themselves were unequivocal. As it is, they do not say what the argument claims. Those already convinced that God's physical pre-motions move infallibly may see this claim within the texts. Indeed, they may find it difficult to see anything else. Nevertheless, the texts do not make this claim. This paper, for its purposes, need not show that these texts have been interpreted incorrectly. It requires only a weaker claim, namely, that these texts are reasonably open to alternate interpretations. One such alternative—reasonable within the context of Aquinas's thought—will be offered below. This interpretation does not deny that God moves by way of physical pre-motions; it simply maintains that some of these pre-motions are not infallible. Indeed, in much of what follows the point of contention concerns the fallible or infallible nature of God's movements.

The fifth argument is inadequate because it makes two ungrounded assumptions. It begins by noting that sometimes God achieves an effect infallibly even while that effect itself remains contingent or even when the effect is brought about by a contingent cause. The argument supposes, however, that God must achieve an effect infallibly by way of an infallible physical pre-motion. Another possibility, expressly mentioned by Aquinas, is ignored. Furthermore, the argument assumes that cases of free will are themselves cases in which God chooses to achieve an effect infallibly.

Finally, the sixth argument is inadequate by way of an equivocation. It claims that the freedom of the will is safeguarded on account of a different kind of grace, namely, sufficient grace. The argument works, however, only by way of equivocating on what it means to be sufficient.

Before proceeding, a couple of caveats are in order. First, the advocates and the detractors of efficacious grace might well be working under different notions of what it means for the will to be free. In some sense, of course, a free will is not determined, but different views might disagree over the nature of this lack of determination. The detractors, for instance, might claim that a free will cannot be determined by any efficient cause besides its own act. The advocates, on the other hand, might claim that a

will remains free when determined by efficient causes, or at least by certain kinds of efficient causes, just so long as the will is not determined by its object. I do not in fact perceive any great difference on this matter. In any case, everyone involved seems to be in agreement that the will should not be determined by efficacious grace.

Second, discussions of grace and free will eventually touch upon the topics of divine providence and predestination, two particularly thorny issues. The idea of efficacious grace is inextricably intertwined with a particular understanding of providence and predestination. Fortunately, the modest aims of this paper need neither prove nor disprove this particular understanding. Rather, it need show only that this particular understanding is not the only realistic possibility within the context of the thought of Aquinas.

Third, the six arguments presented below are apparently advanced by various authors in defense of the Consistency Thesis. Perhaps, however, the authors do not in fact intend the arguments to apply to the Consistency Thesis. Perhaps they intend to use the first argument, for instance, only to exclude absolute necessity from the will; they do not intend to apply the argument to the apparent necessity arising from efficacious grace. Similarly limited intentions might apply to the other arguments.

If these are their intentions, then the authors cited in this article have done a poor job of clarifying their position. Steven Long, for instance, twice uses the first argument immediately after explaining how grace moves the will.⁴ The same can be said of Reginald Garrigou-Lagrange.⁵ Long does the same for the second argument, and Garrigou-Lagrange explicitly applies it to efficacious grace.⁶ Taylor O'Neill and Garrigou-Lagrange apply the third argument to physical pre-motion in general, of which efficacious grace is a particular example.⁷ Garrigou-Lagrange offers the fourth argument to explain that the will is moved infallibly and then immediately notes that the will is not moved necessarily.⁸ Long offers the fourth argument as establishing physical pre-motion for free acts of the will, of which efficacious grace

⁴ Steven A. Long, "St. Thomas Aquinas, Divine Causality, and the Mystery of Predestination," in *Thomism and Predestination: Principles and Disputations*, ed. Steven A. Long et al. (Ave Maria, FL: Sapientia Press, 2016), 59, 66.

⁵ Garrigou-Lagrange, *Predestination*, 81, 277–78.

⁶ Long, "Divine Causality," 58–59; Garrigou-Lagrange, *Predestination*, 318–19.

⁷ Garrigou-Lagrange, *Predestination*, 268; Taylor Patrick O'Neill, *Grace, Predestination, and the Permission of Sin: A Thomistic Analysis* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2019), 22–24.

⁸ Garrigou-Lagrange, *Predestination*, 80–81.

is a particular example.⁹ The fifth argument appears in Garrigou-Lagrange's defense of physical pre-motion and in O'Neill's account of how God moves the will.¹⁰

Perhaps the authors consider these arguments insufficient to the task. Indeed, perhaps they never presented the arguments in order to defend the Consistency Thesis. If so, they will have no complaint against the general thesis of this paper, except to suggest that it is wholly unnecessary. As it is, however, it seems to be necessary, for the presentation of the arguments typically leaves the impression that they serve in defense of the Consistency Thesis.

The remainder of this paper consists of eight sections (and a conclusion). Six of these address the six arguments: the second section ("Composite and Divided Senses of Necessity") addresses argument 1; the fourth ("The General Object of the Will") addresses argument 2; the fifth ("God Moves the Will Interiorly") addresses argument 3, the sixth ("God Is the First Mover of All Agents") addresses argument 4; the seventh ("God Wills Contingent Causes to Act Contingently") addresses argument 5; and the ninth ("Sufficient Grace Preserves Freedom") addresses argument 6. The remaining two sections develop various ideas needed to clarify earlier points: "Active and Passive" in the third section and "The Special Problem Posed by the Will" in the eighth.

Argument 1: Composite and Divided Senses of Necessity

Following the lead of Aquinas, authors such as Reginald Garrigou-Lagrange, Steven Long, and Taylor O'Neill use the distinction between the composite and divided senses of necessity in order to defend human free will.¹¹ Long and O'Neill, for instance, ask how God can cause free human actions, a question placed within the context of infallible physical pre-motions such as efficacious grace, and then they turn to this distinction for an answer.

⁹ Long, "Divine Causality," 54–58; see also Joseph G. Trabbic, "*Praemotio Physica* and Divine Transcendence," in Long et al., *Thomism and Predestination*, 152–165, esp. 153–55.

¹⁰ Garrigou-Lagrange, *Predestination*, 243–44; O'Neill, *Grace*, 27.

¹¹ Garrigou-Lagrange, *Predestination*, 81, 277–78; Long, "Divine Causality," 59; Steven A. Long, "Providence, Freedom, and Natural Law," *Nova et Vetera* (English) 4, no. 3 (2006): 557–605, at 585; O'Neill, *Grace*, 28–32; R. J. Matava, *Divine Causality and Human Free Choice: Domingo Banez, Physical Premotion, and the Controversy De auxiliis Revisited* (Boston: Brill, 2016), 83–88.

Garrigou-Lagrange uses it to explain how efficacious grace can be infallible while the will remains free.

The following example illustrates the distinction. Ben does not sit of necessity because he could be standing. Still, the following proposition is true: necessarily, if he is sitting, then he is sitting. Ben cannot be standing while he is sitting. This kind of necessity (the composite or conditional sense) indicates nothing about the inherent nature of Ben as he sits. The sun shines of necessity (in the divided or absolute sense), but Ben does not sit of necessity (in the divided or absolute sense). It is of the very nature of the sun to shine, but it does not belong to Ben, in his nature, to sit, for he can also stand. Nevertheless, conditional necessity applies both to the sun and to Ben. Necessarily, if the sun shines, then it shines; likewise, necessarily, if Ben sits, then he sits. This conditional necessity does not reach to the nature of the reality; it reaches only to the necessary relation between two propositions.

The distinction is indeed valid, and it does apply to divine movement and free will. Nevertheless, the argument is insufficient to defend the Consistency Thesis. It can be applied with equal validity to all contingent events, even those that are not free. The sun shines of necessity, but a castle (in chess) does not rest on the space E4 of necessity. By its nature, the castle can be on any space, or off the chess board entirely. Nevertheless, if the castle is on E4, then necessarily the castle is on E4. The castle, however, is not free. As she plays, Hanna moves it across the board with complete determination.

Absolute necessity is not the same as determination. The castle is on space E4 with no absolute necessity, but it is determined to be on E4. A contingent event, in Aquinas's view, is one that has the potential to be otherwise. The nature of the sun (in his physics) is to shine; it has no potential to be otherwise. The chess piece, however, has the potential to be in multiple places. It ends up being in this place rather than in that place by a kind of determination. Nevertheless, it remains contingent. It has no inherent necessity but only a necessity that comes from outside.¹²

The distinction between contingency and freedom may be brought home with another example. Ben is sitting, but he is sitting freely (we are told), because he could be standing. It turns out, however, that Ben is an invalid who cannot stand of his own accord. Still, Hanna can lift Ben into a standing position. Whether he is in a standing position or a sitting position, then, is a contingent matter. He is, however, rather like the chess piece. He himself cannot make the determination but must be moved by Hanna.

¹² Stephen L. Brock, "Causality and Necessity in Thomas Aquinas," *Quaestio* 2, no. 1 (2002): 217–40, at 221–22.

In relation to Hanna, Ben is precisely in the situation of someone under the influence of efficacious grace. Ben cannot stand of his own accord, but if Hanna lifts him, then he will be standing. Similarly, Jerry will never help Jane unless he is given efficacious grace, in which case necessarily he will help her.

The analogy, however, breaks down on one point that may prove to be crucial: the manners in which Ben and Jerry are moved are not the same. Hanna moves Ben with an external force while God moves Jerry by an interior movement. Perhaps the interior movement of efficacious grace can save Jerry's freedom. This question will be examined below (in the section entitled "Argument 3: God Moves the Will Interiorly").

At the moment, however, it suffices to recognize that the distinction between two senses of necessity, composite and divided, does not by itself save Jerry's freedom. It establishes only contingency, not freedom. This argument, in other words, does not conclude that acts of the will are simply undetermined, which is an impossibility. Rather, it argues that acts of the will are not determined in relation to a particular cause. In this case, they are not determined by the necessity of the nature of the will. They still might be determined by some other cause, such as efficacious grace.

Aquinas himself, someone might object, uses the composite and divided senses of necessity in order to defend the freedom of the will.¹³ In fact, he uses the distinction (as will be examined below) only to deny necessity in the will, as the distinction itself allows.¹⁴ Even if we suppose that he is concerned about freedom in the will (which is something more than lack of necessity), it does not follow that the argument is adequate, in Aquinas's mind, to protect free will from efficacious grace. It would follow only if Aquinas thinks that God moves the will by efficacious grace, which is open to dispute. If Aquinas has another conception of how God moves the will, then his argument might be adequate for that conception. Aquinas is simply arguing that God does not move the will by a kind of necessity in the will itself.

Another way of making this point is to distinguish between the divine will and the movement of efficacious grace. Aquinas's argument is well adapted for its target, which is the divine will. It is not well adapted for another

¹³ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* [ST] I-II, q. 10, a. 4, ad 3.

¹⁴ Taylor O'Neill, on the other hand, cites two texts that are excellent examples of the distinction, but they are not, as he claims, texts in which Aquinas addresses the consistency of the divine movement and human freedom (*Grace*, 28–29). The first text (ST I, q. 19, a. 3) addresses the lack of necessity in the divine will, not the human will, and the second text (*Summa contra gentiles* [SCG] I, ch. 67, no. 10) addresses the consistency between divine foreknowledge and human free will.

target, the infallible nature of efficacious grace. Garrigou-Lagrange, Long, and O'Neill, however, apply this argument not simply to the divine will; they apply it to efficacious grace as well.¹⁵

Active and Passive

The merits of this argument and of the arguments that follow can be better understood the better we understand the agency of the will. So far, we have seen that the agency of the will is contingent. We may take a first step at a better understanding by recognizing that the will is an active potential and not merely a passive potential.

Ben can be in the standing position, but he can realize this position (given his disability) only by being placed in this position by Hanna. Reed, on the other hand, is able to stand on his own. If he wishes to stand, he needs no assistance from Hanna. It is as true for Reed as it is for Ben, however, that if he is sitting, then necessarily he is sitting.

Both Ben and Reed are potentially in the standing position, but they have two quite diverse potentials. Ben has the potential to be moved into this position; Reed has the potential to move himself into this position. The two differ as passive and active potentials. With a passive potential one thing is able to be changed by another. With an active potential, one thing is able to change another.¹⁶ The passive potential and its realization remain within the subject, which receives actuality from outside. The active potential has its own actuality within one subject (or one part of a subject) and moves out to realization in another subject (or another part of a subject); as Aquinas puts it, following Aristotle, "An active principle is the principle of some change in another insofar as it is another."¹⁷ Water has a passive potential to be heated, because it can receive heat within itself from some outside source. Fire has an active potential to heat because from its own heat it can bring about heat in the water.

The example of Reed reveals that the distinction of subjects is not always clear-cut. The fire heats an entirely distinct subject, namely, the water, but Reed moves himself. Even this self-movement, says Aristotle, involves one

¹⁵ Long, "Divine Causality," 66; O'Neill, *Grace*, 28–29; Garrigou-Lagrange, *Predestination*, 81 (on the other hand, see 279).

¹⁶ Aquinas, *In IX metaphys.*, lec. 1, nos. 1776–77; see also *ST I*, q. 25, a. 1.

¹⁷ *In IX metaphys.*, lec. 1, nos. 1776: "Principium activum, quod est principium transmutationis in alio in quantum est aliud." All translations from the works of Aquinas are my own.

part moving another part.¹⁸ The muscles, for instance, have the capacity to move the bones, which thereby move the limbs. The active potential within the muscles still moves out of itself—although not outside of Reed—to move the distinct subject of the bones.

Even the chess piece, within Aquinas's physics, has a quasi-active potential to move downward. It moves outside of itself in this limited sense: it moves outside its current place. The chess piece, then, has both the passive possibility to be moved by Hanna to this space or to that space and the quasi-active potential to move downward by its own weight.¹⁹

Contingency applies to both active and passive potentiality. Clearly, however, freedom belongs to active potentiality. In relation to freedom, then, it does little good to point out that Ben sits contingently. His entirely passive ability to stand in no way indicates that he is free to stand. Contingency establishes merely that Ben is not necessitated by his very nature; he still might be necessitated by something else besides his choice, such as efficacious grace.

In the modern era, we tend to think that all causes, excepting possibly the will, are necessitated. Aquinas, however, had no scruples describing natural causes as contingent.²⁰ For Aquinas, a contingent cause is simply one that can be frustrated. The downward movement of a rock can be frustrated by some obstacle, as when the rock rests on top of a pillar. Remove the obstacle and the movement flows from the nature of the rock, which has weight.

Active potentialities can be frustrated precisely because they, in some manner, move outside themselves. Consequently, some obstacle can intervene between the active potential and the subject in which the change might come to be. To use an example that does not transfer entirely to our modern physics, some insulating substance might intervene between the fire and the water.

We might be inclined to call such causes necessary. After all, if the obstacle is absent, then the cause will necessarily act, but if the obstacle is present, then the cause will necessarily not act. Aquinas is quite willing to concede this description of the situation, but he will insist that the cause is contingent: that toward which it is moving might not come about. The cause is not defined, as is often the case in our post-Humean world, by the entire situation. Rather, the cause is defined by the internal impetus of the active

¹⁸ Aristotle, *De motu animalium* 702a21–703a22. See *In IX metaphys.*, lec. 1, nos. 1776.

¹⁹ Aquinas, *De veritate*, q. 6, a. 3, ad 7.

²⁰ Aquinas, *In I perymeneias*, lec. 14, no. 8; *In II phys.*, lec. 8, no. 210; *ST I*, q. 115, a. 6. See Brock, "Causality and Necessity."

potential.²¹ The fire is moving out to heat, even if something in the current conditions prevents it from heating. The rock has an impetus to a downward place, even if something in the current situation prevents it from actually moving downward. These contingent causes, then, might be described as conditionally necessary: their effect will come about on the condition that no obstacle intervenes.

Argument 2: The General Object of the Will

Garrigou-Lagrange, Long, and O'Neill use another argument to defend the Consistency Thesis.²² The will is free, so the argument goes, because it is fixed only upon the good itself and not necessarily upon this or that particular good. Consequently, when a particular good is presented to it, the will is not determined to move toward it.²³ The good of eating pizza, for instance, is only a particular good and does not exhaust the object of Jerry's will. As such, he need not move to this good. His will can, so to speak, focus upon that which is lacking in the good.

This argument is fine so far as it goes, but it does not go far enough. When giving the argument, Aquinas himself draws a parallel with the sense of sight.²⁴ An object partly colored and partly transparent, he says, need not be seen by the power of sight. If you happen to look at the transparent part, then you will not see it. Clearly, however, the power of sight is not free. Given that it is directed to the transparent part, then it will not see the object; given that it is directed to the colored part, then it will see the object. The power of sight itself, however, cannot direct itself this way or that; rather, it must be directed.²⁵

The inadequacy of the argument can be better understood by recognizing that the will belongs to a very interesting subset of active potentials. It belongs to those that are active but also passive.²⁶ Because they are passive, they can receive some determination to a particular effect.

In Aquinas's physics, fire is entirely active and in no way passive. The

²¹ *In II phys.*, lec. 8, no. 210.

²² Garrigou-Lagrange, *Predestination*, 318–19; Long, "Divine Causality," 58–59; Long, "Providence," 564; O'Neill, *Grace*, 25–28.

²³ *ST I-II*, q. 10, a. 2.

²⁴ *ST I-II*, q. 9, a. 4.

²⁵ See Michael D. Torre, *God's Permission of Sin: Negative or Conditioned Decree? A Defense of the Doctrine of Francisco Marin-Sola, O.P., Based on the Principles of Thomas Aquinas* (Fribourg: Academic Press Fribourg, 2009), 222.

²⁶ *ST I*, q. 79, a. 2; *I-II*, q. 1, a. 3.

power of sight, however, is in some way active and in some way passive. When Jane sees a table, we attribute the act of seeing to her. At the same time, we recognize that she is acted upon by the table. She has, thinks Aquinas, an active capacity to see color. This active capacity, however, must passively receive the likeness of the particular color. Consequently, the active capacity to see is open to multiple particular actions, such as seeing green or seeing blue, and the capacity is itself passively determined to one particular action by the object seen.

The will, like the power of sight, is an active potential that is also passive. It actively moves out to attain various goods, but it is passively moved by reason to this or that particular good; it receives the goods from the perception of reason.²⁷ Jerry, with his will, desires to eat because reason has presented eating as a particular good. Just as the power of sight is directed to color but must have its activity specified to this or that color, so the will is a power directed to the good, but it still must have its activity specified to this or that good.

Aquinas argues for the freedom of the will, then, by noting that particular specifications to this or that good do not fully encompass the object of the will, which is for goodness itself. What is good in some particular way is also not good in some other way. Presented with the object of pizza, then, Jerry need not move toward it with his will, for the pizza has some aspects about it that are not good.

This argument is inadequate to defend the Consistency Thesis, for (as Aquinas himself states) it addresses only part of the freedom of the will.²⁸ It concerns the passive element of the will, the determination it receives from its object. Free will, however, has another part, which Aquinas attributes to the exercise of the action rather than to the object of the action. In contrast to the power of sight, the power of the will is free to exercise itself or not.²⁹ Explaining only the inadequacy of the object does not, in fact, distinguish the will from many other powers, including the power of sight.

Efficacious grace does not move simply after the manner of an object, for which reason its movement is called physical. Rather, it moves like an efficient cause. It moves with regard to the exercise of the act. Pointing out that the will is free with regard to its object, then, is of little help in relation to efficacious grace, which does not move by way of the object of the will. Jerry may not be determined by the good of the pizza, but if he, like the power of sight, is directed (rather than directs himself) to look at the good

²⁷ *ST* I-II, q. 9, a. 1.

²⁸ *ST* I-II, q. 9, a. 4.

²⁹ *ST* I-II, q. 9, a. 3.

part of the pizza, then he will indeed move to the pizza. If his will is just like his power of sight, which cannot direct itself but must be directed, then his desire will be fixed and determined based upon the power that does the directing, which turns out to be efficacious grace.

Once again, this argument does not establish what is needed for the Consistency Thesis. It establishes that acts of will are not determined in relation to a particular cause, namely, by particular good objects. The Consistency Thesis requires something else, namely, that the will is not determined by efficacious grace.

The general object of the will has an unexpected aspect. While it is the source of free will, it also provides one avenue, for Aquinas, by which God can move the will irresistibly.³⁰ If the power of sight is presented with an object that is entirely colored and in no way transparent, then it will necessarily see this object. Similarly, if the will is presented with an object that is entirely good and in no way deficient in good, then it will necessarily desire this object. Such is the state of the blessed in heaven. They see God, who is in all ways good; consequently, they must love God. A similar irresistible movement might be found in certain other cases, perhaps even in the infusion of sanctifying grace.

This irresistible movement does not save the Consistency Thesis, for it is a movement according to object or final cause. In contrast, efficacious grace acts according to efficient cause.

Argument 3: God Moves the Will Interiorly

Garrigou-Lagrange, Long, and O'Neill point out a distinctive feature of efficacious grace—in contrast to other efficient causes—that might help the Consistency Thesis.³¹ The power of sight is moved by an exterior power, such as the will. In contrast, God moves the will precisely by inspiring an interior impulse. For this reason (so the argument goes), the will can remain free even in the face of the directive power of God.

This argument as well is inadequate to the task. Aquinas himself gives this argument to show that God can move the will according to its nature.³² Although God is external to the will, he need not move the will violently. The chess piece can be moved from the outside by Hanna, which movement Aquinas considers violent, or it can be moved from its own internal weight,

³⁰ *De ver.*, q. 24, aa. 8–9.

³¹ Garrigou-Lagrange, *Predestination*, 82, 268; Long, "Providence," 560–61; O'Neill, *Grace*, 22–24.

³² *ST* I-II, q. 9, a. 6; q. 10, a. 4; I, q. 83, a. 1, ad 3.

which movement Aquinas considers natural. Since God moves the will with an interior impulse, he does not move it violently, even though he himself is external to the will.

The purported problem with efficacious grace, however, is not that it moves the will violently; rather, the problem is the manner of its movement; it moves the will infallibly to a particular good. The movement of efficacious grace is not God himself; rather, it is something within the will, as the argument now being considered insists. This very interior movement, however, is an infallible movement to some particular good. Its interiority does not remove this feature of efficacious grace.

The argument, then, rightly concludes that efficacious grace does no violence to the will; acts of the will are not determined by an external moving cause. It is inadequate to conclude that the will remains free in the hands of efficacious grace. Garrigou-Lagrange, Long, and O'Neill may well be using this argument, following Aquinas, only to assert that God moves the will naturally without doing violence to it. Then the argument is well taken. Nevertheless, it is no defense of the Consistency Thesis. The Consistency Thesis might follow from this argument, however, if it were buttressed by a further claim, namely, that God, as an external cause, moves the will precisely after the manner of efficacious grace. The fourth argument attempts to establish precisely this further claim.

Argument 4: God Is the First Mover of All Agents

The fourth argument in defense of the Consistency Thesis does not directly concern efficacious grace. Rather, it concerns God's movement of the will according to nature rather than according to supernature. This natural movement has the same (supposedly) objectionable feature of efficacious grace, namely, its infallible movement. If the natural acts of the will are free despite this irresistible movement, then there is no reason to suppose that an irresistible movement at the supernatural level is opposed to human free will.

The infallible natural movement is at the heart of this fourth argument. It is founded upon the following syllogism. (1) God's movement (or causality) cannot be frustrated. Therefore, (2) if God moves some creature (such as the will) to some effect, then it will infallibly achieve this effect. But (3) God must move all creatures, including the will, to their activities. It seems to follow that (4) the effect (including the act of the will) must follow infallibly.

The argument seems to have impeccable metaphysical pedigree. It notes that God must be the first mover of all creaturely action, including the acts

of the will.³³ Consequently, even at the natural level, God must move the will to some particular good. If it were otherwise, the will would have some actuality that did not come from God. If, for instance, God moved the will simply to the good in general and left the will itself to make a determination to particular goods, then this determination would arise independently of God. Aquinas, however, clearly states that God must move the will to its actuality.³⁴ It follows that God must move the will by directing it to a particular good, leaving nothing to be determined by the creature itself. Otherwise, the power of the will has an actuality that does not arise from God, who must be the first mover of all action.

The argument is presented as if the chief contention concerns premise (3) in the syllogism above. The other premises are considered beyond dispute. One text of Aquinas is taken to be incontrovertible vindication of the view.

Movement in bodies requires not only the form that is the principle of motion or action; it also requires the motion of the first mover. But the first mover in the order of bodies is a celestial body. Consequently, however much fire has perfect heat, it will not bring about change except by the motion of the heavenly bodies. Clearly, however, just as every bodily motion is reduced into the motion of the heavenly bodies as into a first corporeal mover, so all movements, whether bodily or spiritual, are reduced into the very first mover, which is God. Therefore, however perfect the nature of a body or spirit, it cannot proceed to its action unless it is moved by God, who does not move according to the necessity of nature, as with the movement of the heavenly bodies, but who moves according to the wisdom of his providence.³⁵

This passage certainly confirms premise (3), but this premise does not in fact pose the difficulty for the Consistency Thesis. The supposed trouble with efficacious grace is not that God is its ultimate source. Rather, the trouble concerns the manner in which efficacious grace operates, namely, infallibly. In short, the real difficulty does not seem to be premise (3), but premise (2). In agreement with premise (3), someone might well concede that when the fire heats water, its movement must ultimately originate in

³³ Garrigou-Lagrange, *Predestination*, 80–81; Long, “Divine Causality,” 54–58; Long, “Providence,” 558–64; O’Neill, *Grace*, 13–22, 34–37; Trabbic, “*Praemotio Physica*,” 153–55.

³⁴ *ST* I-II, q. 9, aa. 4 and 6; *De malo*, q. 6; *SCG* III, ch. 89.

³⁵ *ST* I-II, q. 109, a.1.

God while at the same time denying, in opposition to premise (2), that the fire is moved infallibly to heat the water. The above quoted text indicates nothing to the contrary.

It might be objected that premise (2) follows from premise (1), but no sane Thomist will deny premise (1). But is it really true that premise (2) follows from premise (1)?

The best reason to question the inference arises from Aquinas's teaching on contingent active causes, which he says might fail to bring about their effects on account of some obstacle. These contingent causes may also be identified as sufficient causes.

A sufficient cause, for Aquinas, should not be confused with contemporary philosophical notions of sufficient causes or sufficient conditions. According to these modern notions, sufficient causes necessarily bring about their effects. In contrast, Aquinas's sufficient causes line up with contingent active potentials, which can be frustrated. In effect, a sufficient cause means what its name implies: it is enough to bring about the effect, although it might not necessarily bring about the effect. Aquinas says, for instance,

If every effect proceeded from a natural cause and if every cause produced its effect of necessity, then it would follow that every cause is a necessary cause. But both antecedents are false. Some causes, even though they are sufficient, do not produce their effects of necessity, because they can be impeded, as is plain in every natural cause.³⁶

With its tendency to move downward, a rock is a sufficient cause of the downward motion. Nevertheless, it might be impeded. If it sits on top of a pillar, for instance, then it will not move down. Similarly, a fire that has enough heat to boil a pot of water might fail to do so, if some insulating material is interposed between the fire and the water.

Contingent causes are sufficient—and not efficacious (or infallible)—for two reasons. First, they move outside the agent; second, the agent is not the only cause in the universe.³⁷ The rock is moving outside itself, to a place where it is not, but the pillar is vying for the same intervening space. Likewise, the fire is moving out toward the water, but the insulating material is a separate cause that vies for the same intervening space. If the rock did not move outside itself, then another cause could not interpose between the rock and its effect. On the other hand, if the rock were the only cause in the

³⁶ *De malo*, q. 6, ad 21. See also q. 16, a. 7, ad 1; *ST* I-II, q. 75, a. 1, ad 2.

³⁷ *ST* I, q. 19, a. 6.

universe, then nothing could interpose to prevent its effect, even though it moves outside itself.

We now seem to be faced with a conundrum. Aquinas asserts that God must move all creatures to their actions, but God's movements must always attain their effects. Otherwise, creatures could resist God's movement. But then what are we to make of Aquinas's teaching that contingent causes can be frustrated? If fire is to heat, then God must move it to heat; but God's movement is infallible; therefore, if God moves the fire to heat, then it must heat. On the other hand, fire is a contingent cause, so it need not always heat. Put differently, it is a sufficient cause, so its activity can be frustrated from attaining its effect.

Two possible resolutions to this dilemma present themselves. The first notes that God gives fire the ability to heat, and in this manner fire is a contingent cause of heat. It does not follow that God always moves the fire from the ability to the actual act of heating. When there is no obstacle, God moves it to the act of heating; in the presence of an obstacle, God does not move it. When God moves the fire, then, he moves it infallibly, so it will indeed heat. Nevertheless, the fire is a contingent cause, because it does not always heat (in Aquinas's physics), although it always has the power to heat. This resolution aligns with the manner in which efficacious grace operates.

Unfortunately, this first resolution does not accord well with the manner in which Aquinas speaks of the failure of contingent causes. They fail because an obstacle intervenes. The obstacle itself seems to have the causal efficacy to prevent the action from attaining its effect. The first resolution suggests, in contrast, that in the presence of an obstacle there simply is no action because in that case God does not move the creature to act.

A second resolution is more in accord with the notion of an intervening obstacle. God does indeed achieve something inexorably; it is the very movement of the secondary cause. If God moves the fire, then the fire necessarily moves beyond itself. The fire does not and cannot resist this movement of God. Nevertheless, the fire can fail to achieve the goal of this outward movement. Its success depends upon the absence of obstacles.

The point can be clarified by a distinction between two different senses in which something might act. When we speak of some thing acting, we primarily refer to the accomplishment of the action. If we say, for instance, that Barb kills Scott, we mean that she brings about the death of Scott. In a secondary way, however, we can refer to a failed action. Suppose, for instance, that Barb plans on killing Scott, aims her gun, and pulls the trigger, but then the gun jams and Scott gets away. We might say that Barb "tried" to kill Scott. Alternately, we might say that she performed a failed act of killing,

for what is most essential to the action is its telos, its movement out to some goal.³⁸ Barb is moving out to the death of Scott, even though his death is never achieved. Most essentially, then, her action is an act of killing, but it is a failed act. This movement toward a goal is something real in the thing. In Barb, we might identify it with an act of the will, such as intending, but it is real also in the fire, which is moving out to heat the objects around it.

God moves the fire to the most essential element of action; he moves it to an impulse beyond itself to some goal. He infallibly achieves this most essential element. Nevertheless, this movement in the fire does not necessarily accomplish its goal. The outward movement might be frustrated, as is Barb's action of killing. If God wishes to accomplish the goal, then he will do so (as will be suggested in the next section) not by making the secondary cause infallible; he will do so by assuring that no other secondary causes frustrate the movement.

If the first resolution of the dilemma is established conclusively as the view of Aquinas, then it seems to follow that when God moves the will naturally, he moves it infallibly to some particular action. If this natural movement is consistent with free will, then it seems to follow that efficacious grace, which likewise moves infallibly to some particular action, will also be in accord with free will, however much appearances might suggest otherwise.

On the other hand, if the second resolution is correct, then God infallibly moves the will to have some impulse toward an action, but he does not move it infallibly to carry through with this impulse. The natural movement, which God has given to the will, might be prevented from achieving its goal on account of some obstacle. The manner of this prevention will be discussed below.

The standard proof text (quoted above) for God's movement of all creatures, however, does not in any way suggest the first resolution. It conforms perfectly well with the second resolution. Consequently, premise (2) does not follow conclusively from premise (1), at least not without additional argumentation. This fourth argument, then, is itself inadequate to the task of defending the Consistency Thesis.

³⁸ Steven J. Jensen, *Good and Evil Actions: A Journey through St. Thomas Aquinas* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2010), 232–33.

Argument 5: God Wills Contingent Causes to Act Contingently

Garrigou-Lagrange, Long, and O'Neill have recourse to another inadequate argument in defense of the Consistency Thesis.³⁹ When God moves the creature infallibly to a determined effect, the cause and effect are nevertheless contingent because God wills them to be contingent, for God's will extends not only to what happens but also to the manner in which it happens. Irresistibly, then, God makes the creature to act contingently. As Aquinas says in a reply to an objection,

From the fact that nothing resists the divine will, it follows not only that those things happen that God wills to happen but also that they happen contingently or necessarily according to his will.⁴⁰

On one reading of this passage, God makes something to be and then he also gives it the quality of being contingent or necessary. On another reading of this passage, God decides that he wants something to happen and he decides that he wants it to happen contingently, so then he prepares a contingent cause to bring it about. This latter interpretation is precisely that given by Aquinas in the body of the article.

God wills some things to be done necessarily and other things contingently in order that there might be an order in things for the completion of the universe. Therefore, for some effects he adapts necessary causes, which cannot fail and from which the effects arise of necessity, but for other effects he adapts contingent causes, which can fail and from which the effects arise contingently. Consequently, the effects willed by God do not happen contingently because the proximate causes are contingent but rather because God wanted them to arise contingently and then prepared contingent causes for them.⁴¹

In short, Aquinas is not claiming that the following proposition is false: events happen contingently because they arise from contingent causes. Rather, he is claiming that a crucially different proposition is false: events happen contingently *only* because they arise from contingent causes. The addition of "only" excludes other causes; most especially, it excludes the

³⁹ Garrigou-Lagrange, *Predestination*, 243–44, 270; Long, "Providence," 561, 567–68, 592; O'Neill, *Grace*, 27.

⁴⁰ *ST I*, q. 19, a. 8, ad 2. See also q. 22, a. 4, ad 1.

⁴¹ *ST I*, q. 19, a. 8.

divine will and the divine wisdom. It is as if God makes certain causes, some of them necessary and some of them contingent, and then he is left to face the consequence that some events will happen necessarily and others contingently. Instead, says Aquinas, God first of all wants some things to be necessary (such as the sun shining or the movements of the heavenly bodies) and other things to be contingent (such as fire heating water or rocks falling). For this reason he makes some causes to be necessary causes and other causes to be contingent.

This second interpretation, however, seems to face a difficulty. If God prepares a contingent cause—contingent in reality and not only in words—then it is possible for the effect to fail. By the original supposition, however, God decides that he wants the effect to happen (and that he wants it to be contingent). But if God wants the effect to happen, then it will happen and there is no possibility that it will fail.

Even human beings, however, can use contingent causes with a certain necessity. A contingent cause will bring about its effect as long as there is no obstacle in the way. If we remove all obstacles, then the effect will follow. If Hanna lets a rock drop after having made sure that no obstacle is in the way, then it will indeed drop to the ground.

God, of course, can more surely remove obstacles than any human being.⁴² He can assure, then, that a contingent cause will bring about its effect. He will do so not by changing the way that he moves the contingent cause. Rather, he will do so because he controls the other causes as well.⁴³ The effect will come about not because God moved it infallibly to come about. Rather, he moved it with the possibility of failure, but then he also removed that which might cause the failure. In precisely this manner, Aquinas explains the way in which God's will must always be fulfilled.

Something can happen outside the order of some particular agent cause but not outside the order of a universal cause under which all the particular causes are contained. A particular cause fails from its effect on account of the impediment posed by some other particular cause, which is contained under the order of the universal cause; consequently, an effect is in no way able to go outside the order of the universal cause. . . . Since the will of God is the universal cause of all things, it is impossible for the divine will not to attain its effect.⁴⁴

⁴² *De ver.*, q. 23, a. 4, ad 2.

⁴³ *ST I*, q. 103, a. 7, ad 3.

⁴⁴ *ST I*, q. 19, a. 6. See also q. 103, a. 7.

The Special Problem Posed by the Will

This obvious way in which God can use contingent causes to achieve an effect with necessity may not be so obvious if one's inquiries begin with the will, as is apt to be the case in a consideration of grace. The will, like many other created causes, is a sufficient cause. God moves it to some end, but an obstacle might still prevent the will from carrying out this end. In the case of the will, however, the obstacle is different. The obstacle to fire is found in something outside itself, as is the obstacle to the downward movement of the rock. In contrast, the will places its own obstacle to action.

The cause that makes the will to will something does not always achieve its result out of necessity. For the will itself can place an impediment in the way, either by removing the consideration that leads it to will or by considering its opposite, namely, that the object proposed as good is also not good in another respect.⁴⁵

Neither in the objection nor in the reply does Aquinas identify the cause that moves the will to a particular action, but only three plausible possibilities present themselves: either Aquinas is speaking of God, who is the external cause of the action in the will, or he is speaking of a consideration of the intellect, or he is speaking of a desire within the will itself, which can be the cause of another desire. These latter two possibilities, however, collapse into a single possibility, for intellect and will together combine in order to move from one desire to another, even as Jerry moves himself from the desire for health to the desire to take medicine by way of considering the means to health.⁴⁶

The first possibility will not do. God is not a contingent cause and his efficacy cannot be impeded by some obstacle. It remains that Aquinas is speaking of the second (united) possibility. Indeed, in the body of the article, Aquinas explicitly states that "the will moves itself and all other powers" to the execution of its actions, after the manner of an efficient cause.⁴⁷ The causality of some first desire, then, is sufficient to bring about the second, but it can be impeded by the will itself.

We can now see why the will is a problematic place to start in understanding God's movement of contingent causes. The will places its own

⁴⁵ *De mal.*, q. 6, ad 15.

⁴⁶ *De mal.*, q. 6; *ST I-II*, q. 9, a. 4.

⁴⁷ *De mal.*, q. 6.

impediment to the divine movement. God himself cannot place the impediment, or he would be responsible for sin.

The contingency of the will, then, seems to lack one avenue of control that is available for other contingent causes. God can move a rock to go down contingently, and he then can assure that it will go down by removing all obstacles, or he can assure that it will be frustrated by placing an obstacle. If God moves the will to a good action contingently, however, he cannot assure the accomplishment of his plans in the same way.⁴⁸ He cannot place an obstacle, nor can he remove all obstacles. He absolutely cannot place an obstacle, because then he would be the cause of sin. He cannot remove all obstacles—or at the very least he will not typically remove all obstacles—because it is within the contingency of the will to place its own obstacle.

In the case of the human will, then, God cannot assure the fulfillment of his own will in the same way as in the case of other contingent causes. If we begin with the human will, we might conclude that God moves creatures infallibly to some action, but at the same time he assures that the mode of the action remains contingent. On this view, God can infallibly move a human being to the material action of sin, and yet this action can remain contingent, arising fallibly from the human will.⁴⁹ Having begun with the human will, we then might conclude that God moves all contingent causes in this manner. Does not Aquinas himself say,

God moves even the will unchangeably because of the efficacy of his moving power, which cannot fail. Nevertheless, because of the nature of the will moved, which relates indifferently to diverse goods, it is not led with necessity but remains free. Thus, in all things, divine providence works infallibly, but from contingent causes come contingent effects insofar as God moves all things proportionately, each thing in its own manner.⁵⁰

This text, however, should not be read in isolation. It could mean, in line with efficacious grace, that God moves the will infallibly to some particular action but the action is still contingent because the will itself is contingent. On the other hand, it might mean that God infallibly moves the will to

⁴⁸ With his middle knowledge, Luis de Molina fell into the trap of supposing that God arranges the will just as we might arrange natural causes.

⁴⁹ Thomas M. Osborne, "How Sin Escapes Premotion: The Development of Thomas Aquinas's Thought by Spanish Thomists," in Long et al., *Thomism and Predestination*, 192–213.

⁵⁰ *De mal.*, q. 6, ad 3.

desire some action, but then it remains free to carry through with this movement or not.

According to the interpretation given above (in my sixth section, “Argument 4: God is the First Mover of All Agents”), God infallibly moves the fire to heat only in the sense that he gives the fire an impulse to pass on heat; given God’s movement, the fire cannot but have this impulse. Nevertheless, God does not infallibly move the fire actually to pass on the heat, for the impulse that he gives to the fire can be impeded. The same might be said for the will. God infallibly moves the will to desire some good, perhaps some particular good action, but he does not infallibly move the will to actually carry out this desire, since the will like other sufficient causes can be impeded. In the case of the will, however, the impediment is placed by the will itself.

This latter interpretation accords well with what Aquinas says only a little farther along.

In some respect, the human will can diverge from the divine will, namely, insofar as the person wills something that God does not want him to will, as when he chooses to sin. At the same time, God does not will that the human will not choose this action, because if that were God’s will, then it would happen, for everything that God wills happens. And even though the human will does diverge from the divine will with respect to its movement, nevertheless, it cannot diverge with regard to the outcome or result. For the human will always achieves this result, namely, that God fulfills his will in the man.⁵¹

The manner in which the human will falls under the divine will with regard to the outcome or result is more clearly stated elsewhere.

We see that what seems to recede from the divine will in one order will return to his will according to another order. According to what he is in himself, for instance, a sinner recedes from the divine will by sinning, but he falls into the order of the divine will when, through God’s justice, the sinner is punished.⁵²

In other words, if a person sins, then he goes against what God wishes him to do, but he falls under the order of divine justice, so that the result still conforms to the divine will.

⁵¹ *De mal.*, q. 6, ad 5.

⁵² *ST I*, q. 19, a. 6.

An analogy might help convey the idea. Ben is Hanna's son and she is teaching him to play chess. She always wants him to make good moves and she directs him to such actions. She sees that he is now making a terrible blunder, but she permits him to do so—she does not intervene to correct his move—because she thinks that she can teach him through his own mistakes. She permits the mistake, then, insofar as she can use it for teaching. Similarly, God permits our sins insofar as he knows that he can still work with them, bringing good out of evil, at the very least by way of punishment.

The contingency of the human will is especially difficult because with regard to it God has a permissive will. He does not will that a person should sin, but he does permit him to sin. As Aquinas expresses the matter, "God neither wills that evil should be done nor does he will that evil should not be done, but he wills to permit that evil should be done, and this permission is a certain good."⁵³ God's will, then, is fulfilled in the very permission of the possibility of sin but not in the sin itself, which is contrary to his will. Still, even the sin falls under God's will as an object of his punishment.

Aquinas identifies two orders of divine providence.

The order of divine providence may be considered in two ways. First, in general, insofar as it arises from the cause that governs everything. Second, in particular, insofar as it arises from some particular cause that carries out the divine government.⁵⁴

God is the governing cause of everything and can never be resisted because he orders all causes. Efficacious grace, or any other movement from God, is a particular cause carrying out the order of the divine government. Such particular causes, at least if they are contingent, can be resisted.⁵⁵ Efficacious grace is a particular cause that gives rise to a contingent effect; nevertheless, it is never in fact resisted; it always infallibly achieves its goal.

In fact, God need not make his will irresistible by way of an infallible created cause (efficacious grace). God's will is irresistible because God holds within his hands all causes, including the different natural desires within the will. The sinful person takes one of these natural desires apart from the order of the whole, thereby thwarting the purpose toward which it is properly directed. As a consequence, he also acts against God's will. Nevertheless, he does not resist the divine will, which places the sin and the sinner under

⁵³ *STI*, q. 19, a. 9, ad 3.

⁵⁴ *STI*, q. 103, a. 8.

⁵⁵ *STI*, q. 103, a. 7.

another divine order. God accomplishes his will even in those situations in which the particular causes that he sets in motion are obstructed by an obstacle that he himself does not place.

Because God is outside the temporal order, we can never fully understand how God achieves his will. For causes besides the will, we can recognize that God himself can choose to place an obstacle or he can choose to assure that no obstacles will be placed. We often achieve our own wills in precisely this manner. Molinism makes the mistake of applying the same reasoning to the will. In the case of the will, however, God cannot achieve his will in this manner, because the human will itself places or does not place an obstacle to the divine movement.

In order to avoid Molinism, one might suppose that God achieves his will by a special kind of movement, by an infallible physical pre-motion, realized at the supernatural level in the form of efficacious grace. When this movement is declared not to be special but to be the ordinary way in which God moves creatures, then the whole structure of divine providence, which achieves its goals by way of sufficient causes that fit within the entirety of causes, is lost.

The enigma of the will leaves our minds affirming certain truths without understanding the manner in which they are all true. We recognize that God himself does not place an obstacle to the movement of the will; only the sinner himself places the obstacle. We also recognize that God still submits the sinner and his sin to his divine will. This submission need not arise from a particular cause that moves the will toward sin. It need not arise from a created cause that is infallible; nor need it arise from the withholding of such causes.

We recognize that when no obstacle is placed, then the sufficient movement that God has placed in the will achieves its goal. We also recognize that God is outside time, so that he is equally present to the initial sufficient movement and to its achievement. Without the addition of a special created cause, then, the divine will is accomplished with certainty.

Beginning with the difficult case of the will, one might be tempted to escape from this enigma by making a particular cause, efficacious grace, that is both needed for a good action and is never resisted for a good action. When this particular cause is withheld, then sin follows necessarily (or one might say "in all cases," if one wishes to avoid the word "necessarily").⁵⁶ Nevertheless, sin follows contingently, because God wills that it be so (that is,

⁵⁶ O'Neill, *Grace*, 41–43; Long, "Providence," 587–88.

God wills that it be contingent). Having made this inauspicious beginning, one might take this model of causality and apply it to all created movement.

One might also apply this model when approaching texts of Aquinas. Article 4 of question 10 in *Summa theologiae* I-II, for instance, asks whether God moves the will from necessity. This article can be read in two distinct ways, depending upon which model of contingent causes one has in hand when approaching it. According to the model of efficacious grace, God moves things with infallible physical pre-motions but their actions and effects are nevertheless contingent because God wills them to be so. According to the model of sufficient causes, God moves creatures beyond themselves in such a way that they can be impeded by another created cause.

In the corpus, Thomas says,

It does not belong to divine providence to destroy nature but to preserve it. Therefore, God moves everything according to its condition, so that by way of the divine motion from necessary causes the effects follow from necessity and from contingent causes the effects follow contingently. Since the will is an active principle that is not determined to one but relates indifferently to many, God so moves it that it is not determined from necessity to one but its motion remains contingent and not necessary, except in those things to which it is naturally moved.⁵⁷

Through the lens of the first model, someone might conclude that God moves the will infallibly to some particular action but nevertheless the action is contingent. With the second model, one might suppose that God does not move the will infallibly, since that is not according to the nature of the will; rather, he moves the will as a sufficient cause that might fail.

All of the replies to the objections, as well, can bear these dual readings. The first reply reads,

The divine will extends not only to [the fact that] something is done by the thing that it moves but also to [the fact that] it is done in the manner fitting to the nature of the thing. Therefore, it would be more repugnant to the divine motion if the will were moved from necessity—which would not be fitting to its nature—than if it were moved freely, as is fitting to its nature.

⁵⁷ ST I-II, q. 10, a. 4.

Through the lens of the model of efficacious grace, this reply means that God moves the will infallibly to a certain action but that action is nevertheless contingent. Without the lens, it simply means that God moves the will to some action contingently, such that it can be impeded.

In the second reply, only the last line need concern us. It reads, "God wills that it is natural for everything to be subject to the divine power." Given the model of infallible physical pre-motion, "being subject to the divine power" means being moved infallibly. Without this lens, the phrase simply means that God moves something according to its nature, which is sometimes to move contingently—with the possibility of some obstacle—rather than infallibly. As noted above, of course, God—who sits outside time and wills both the sufficient cause and its achievement (realized when no obstacle is placed)—might still achieve his will infallibly, although the creature is moved fallibly.

Finally, it is worth considering the third reply in greater detail, for in it Aquinas introduces the distinction between the composite and divided senses of necessity, the distinction used by the first inadequate argument. Aquinas says, "If God moves the will to something, it is impossible, given this supposition, that the will is not moved to it. Nevertheless, it is not impossible simply speaking. Therefore, it does not follow that the will is moved of necessity by God."

Depending upon the model of contingent causality used, this text has two quite distinct meanings. On the model in line with efficacious grace, God moves the will infallibly to something, but the only necessity involved is conditional. Necessarily, given that God moves Jerry to take medicine, Jerry wills to take medicine. Nevertheless, Jerry does not will to take medicine of necessity.

On the model of contingent causality in line with sufficient causes that can be impeded, God does not move the will infallibly. Rather, he moves Jerry to take medicine much as he moves the fire to heat. He gives the fire an impetus to move out beyond itself, to give its heat to something else. This movement, however, can be impeded. What God infallibly achieves, through this movement, is the impetus within the fire. The actual heating of the water does not follow infallibly from this movement, since it might be impeded through some insulating obstacle. Of course, if God wishes the water to be heated, then he can achieve it infallibly by assuring that no obstacles are in the way. He does not achieve his will infallibly by making the very movement of the fire infallible; he achieves it because he is the first cause of all causes, including potential obstacles.

God moves Jerry to take medicine by way of the desire to seek health. Just

as the impetus of the fire moves beyond itself but can be impeded, so the desire for health moves beyond itself to the desire for the means for health, but it can be impeded. Suppose that Jerry places no obstacle, and he proceeds to desire to take medicine, but suppose that he has diverse medicines that he might take. He must further determine which medicine to take. Now he has another impetus moving beyond itself. He has the desire to take medicine moving beyond itself to the desire for some particular medicine. Once again, this movement can be impeded. This pattern is followed—as it is with any chain of ends and means—until Jerry comes to some first action that he must choose.⁵⁸

At each step, the desire is in the will only because God so moves the will. And at each step (until the last), the desire is moving beyond itself to another desire. But at each step, this movement can be impeded. If it is not impeded, then the chain continues. If it is impeded, then the movement does not reach the next contingent effect (which is another desire in the will).

Consider the middle step in the chain above, the step in which Jerry desires to take medicine (but has not yet determined which particular medicine). When considered in relation to God's movement, this step might be characterized in two ways. On the one hand, God is moving Jerry to this very desire, that is, to the desire to take medicine. On the other hand, God is moving Jerry—in this desire—to a further desire (the desire for some particular medicine).

The reply to the third objection can be viewed in terms of either of these characterizations. Viewed in terms of the first characterization, it is impossible—given that God is moving Jerry to this desire—for Jerry not to have the desire. On the other hand, since God moved Jerry to this desire only by way of the first desire (the desire for health), which could have been impeded, it is not impossible, simply speaking, for Jerry not to have this desire. God moved Jerry to this desire by way of a sufficient cause, namely, by way of Jerry's desire for health. Since Jerry placed no obstacle, this movement was not impeded; consequently, it achieved its object, which is the desire currently under consideration, the desire to take medicine. This desire did not happen from necessity.

Nevertheless, God can achieve his will with certainty. Because he is outside time, willing both the initial desire and its achievement, he has no need to place a cause within creation that is prior to the achievement but

⁵⁸ For a more detailed account of the interplay between reason and the will, see Steven J. Jensen, *Sin: A Thomistic Psychology* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2018), 238–84.

attains it infallibly. He can move two separate wills to the same good action, and he can move them by the exact same kind of created causes, causes that are sufficient and can be impeded. One will places an obstacle, the other does not. He still submits the first will (which placed an obstacle) to his own will by placing it under another order within creation, such as punishment. For the second will (which did not place an obstacle), he can still achieve his will with certainty but not because he has placed a different kind of cause. No new cause is needed, since the initial movement was sufficient to achieve the good action. As Aquinas notes, operating and cooperating grace are not two different graces; they are the same grace considered with regard to different effects.⁵⁹ Nothing new in creation is needed, then, to realize the goal. And nothing new in creation is needed to make the goal certain, for within creation it is not certain but contingent. Its certainty lies within God's eternal will.

In light of God's movement, Jerry's desire to take medicine can also be viewed as God's movement to the further desire, that is, the desire for some particular medicine. Viewed in terms of this second characterization, it is impossible—given that God is moving Jerry to the desire for some particular medicine—that Jerry is not moved to the desire for some particular medicine. On the other hand, God is moving Jerry to this desire (for some particular medicine) in such a way that it can be impeded. Jerry is not moved, therefore, of necessity.

The first of these two possibilities fits more precisely with what Aquinas actually says. In either event, however, the passage does not take on the meaning that follows from the model of efficacious grace. In either event, God does not move the will infallibly. He moves it according to its nature, which is contingently, such that it can be impeded.

When God moves Jerry to some particular desire, then, he does so by way of a prior desire, and this prior desire is a contingent cause. It is a sufficient cause that can be impeded. When no obstacle is placed, then the subsequent desire is realized, but only contingently, since it arose from a cause that could have been impeded.

Argument 6: Sufficient Grace Preserves Freedom

We will close with a final inadequate argument in defense of the Consistency Thesis. This argument involves another kind of grace, namely, sufficient grace. By this grace, someone has enough grace to perform the good action.

⁵⁹ *ST* I-II, q. 111, a. 2, ad 4.

When Jerry is given sufficient grace, for instance, he has enough to perform the good action of helping Jane. At this point, it is up to him whether he acts according to the sufficient grace or not. It is his choice whether he will reject God's grace. With his free will, he makes the determination.

Just as stated, this account certainly seems to leave room for free will. Indeed, it closely parallels the alternate account given above. Sufficient grace, however, does not tell the full story. As it turns out, Jerry will in fact act upon the sufficient grace only if God also gives him efficacious grace.⁶⁰ Furthermore, if God gives him efficacious grace, then necessarily (or infallibly) Jerry will act upon the sufficient grace. The introduction of efficacious grace as a necessary element in the good action is what poses the problem. It seems to undermine Jerry's free will. Indeed, it seems to undermine the sufficiency of the sufficient grace. The sufficient grace is not in fact enough for Jerry to do the good deed; he also needs efficacious grace.

The word "sufficient" overlaps with the terminology of sufficient cause, discussed above, but it is not clear whether the two ideas—of sufficient grace and sufficient cause—have any overlap beyond the verbal.

We might find within Aquinas's operative grace a sufficient cause, but it does not follow that it is a sufficient grace, as described above. Aquinas's operative actual grace can act in much the same way as natural desires.⁶¹ God gives Jerry a natural desire for health, but he can also give Jerry a supernatural desire for the beatific vision. Or he might give Jerry a supernatural desire for a particular good deed, such as helping Jane in need.⁶² These desires, while sufficient for the good action, are contingent. Jerry might place an obstacle. He might act under some other desire besides the desire arising from grace, such as the desire to avoid inconvenience. The operative grace, then, might not lead to the meritorious action. Nevertheless, it is enough. In itself, it has what it takes to bring about the good action, although an obstacle might prevent its realization.

The sufficient grace described above, which is a kind of correlative of efficacious grace, is another matter. It does not have enough to bring about the meritorious action. Rather, an additional grace—an efficacious grace—is needed for the meritorious action. Supposedly, the sufficient grace makes

⁶⁰ O'Neill, *Grace*, 78–80.

⁶¹ See Maritain, *God and Permission of Evil*; Maritain, *Existence and the Existent*, trans. Lewis Galantieri and Gerald B. Phelan (New York: Pantheon, 1948); Lawrence Feingold, "God's Movement of the Soul through Operative and Cooperative Grace," in Long et al., *Thomism and Predestination*, 166–91.

⁶² *ST* I-II, q. 9, a. 6, ad 3.

Jerry able to perform the action. The ability, however, is only a passive potential, not an active potential.

The idea may be conveyed with the following analogy. Ben is able to stand in the sense that he is able to be lifted into a standing position by Hanna. His potential is entirely passive. But now let us suppose he is not able to stand even in this passive sense; he is completely rigid, so that he cannot even be moved by another into a standing position. Hanna is able to shake him, however, and loosen his joints, so that thereafter he can be lifted into a standing position. In this manner, she gives him the passive potential to stand. It is passive because he still cannot stand on his own but must be lifted by Hanna. He is, nevertheless, one step closer to standing. At least he is able to stand in the passive sense. The shaking up is like sufficient grace. It does make Ben able to stand (that is, perform a meritorious action), but it does not give him an active potential to stand.

In contrast, Reed has an active potential by which he can stand. Let us go further and say that this active potential is already moving him into a standing position, even as the weight of a rock is moving it downward and the impetus of fire is moving it outward to heat other objects. By this active potential, Reed will stand unless some obstacle is placed in the way. Perhaps a bar might be placed in the way, preventing his upward movement. If Reed himself places the bar, then we have an analogy for Aquinas's operative grace. God gives Reed a movement to the meritorious action (standing), which will reach fulfillment as long as Reed himself does not place an obstacle in the way.

This operating grace can truly be called sufficient. The sufficient grace described at the beginning of this section, on the other hand, is sufficient in name alone.⁶³ It is not, in fact, enough for the good action. It is only a passive potential to receive the good action. If Hanna shakes Ben (gives him sufficient grace) but does not lift him into a standing position (give him efficacious grace), then he cannot stand. The further thing needed to put him into a standing position is not given. This notion of sufficient grace, then, is inadequate to defend human freedom.

Given this inadequate notion of sufficient grace, efficacious grace becomes determinative.⁶⁴ A passive potential is contingent, but lacking a movement outward, it can only receive its actuality. It cannot give the actuality it has

⁶³ See Torre, *God's Permission*, 217.

⁶⁴ O'Neill, *Grace*, 76.

(which in fact is only potentiality) to anything else. Such a passive potential has nothing of its own leading to action. It can only receive an action.⁶⁵

When the supernatural analysis is carried over into the natural domain, so that the human will is always moved passively, the way that a chess piece is moved across the chessboard, then human free will appears to be lost not only at the supernatural level but at the natural level as well. Sufficient grace that is not enough—sufficient grace in name alone—is the destruction of free will. When carried over into the domain of all nature, this passive movement transforms the secondary causality of nature into the impotent potentiality to receive; the active potential to give has been lost.

Conclusion

On the face of it, efficacious grace is inconsistent with free will. Several authors, however, have presented arguments that suggests the consistency between efficacious grace and free will, which we have called the Consistency Thesis. This paper has examined six of these arguments and has found all of them wanting. They are not adequate by themselves, nor cumulatively, to defend the Consistency Thesis.

The fallible movements of the human will should not lead us to doubt the love of God. On the contrary, they should assure us that God does not simply decide to refuse us his grace, independent of our own sin. His grace is always flowing and drawing us sweetly to himself. N.V.

⁶⁵ Sufficient grace, it will be insisted, does indeed give the capacity for the good action. It is just that the person will not realize this capacity unless God wills it, which he wills by way of efficacious grace. Indeed, God will always give efficacious grace as long as the person does not resist sufficient grace (Garrigou-Lagrange, *Predestination*, 238–39). The capacity is there within the sufficient grace (O'Neill, *Grace*, 146). These statements concerning sufficient grace have the appearance of a desperate attempt to keep the sufficiency despite the fact that efficacious grace has taken all the sufficiency for itself.