

Thomist Premotion and Contemporary Philosophy of Religion

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ALTHOUGH the problem of reconciling God's providence and human freedom is widely discussed in contemporary philosophy of religion, the traditional Thomist understanding is for the most part either ignored or quickly dismissed.¹ This Thomist understanding was developed in the early modern discussions concerning predestination and is intimately connected with Thomas's understanding of how God knows future contingents. According to this view, although humans can freely

¹ The classical Thomist view is not discussed in Linda Trinkaus Zagzebski's overview of contemporary accounts, "Recent Work on Divine Knowledge and Free Will," in *The Oxford Handbook of Free Will*, ed. Robert Kane (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 45–64. For summaries of the Thomist doctrine, see A. M. Dummer-muth, *S. Thomas et doctrina praemotionalis physicae seu Responsio ad R. P. Schneemann, SJ, aliosque doctrinae scholae Thomisticae impugnatores* (Paris: L'Année Dominicaine, 1886); idem, *Defensio doctrinae S. Thomae Aq. de praemotionali physica seu Responsio ad R. P. V. Frins, SJ* (Louvain: Uystpruyst; Paris: Lethielleux, 1895); N. Del Prado, *De gratia et libero arbitrio, pars secunda: Concordia liberi arbitrii cum divina motione juxta S. Augustinum et D. Thomam* (Freiburg: Consociatio Sancti Pauli, 1907); Réginald Garrigou-Lagrange, *De deo uno: Commentarium in primam partem S. Thomae* (Paris: Desclée, 1938), 509–56; idem, *God, His Existence and His Nature: A Thomistic Solution of Certain Agnostic Antinomies*, 5th ed., vol. 2, trans. Bede Rose (Herder: St. Louis, 1941), 268–396; idem, *Predestination*, trans. Bede Rose (St. Louis: Herder, 1946). There are at least two relatively recent articles that presuppose or argue for aspects of the Thomist position: Theodore J. Kondoleon, "The Free Will Defense: New and Old," *Thomist* 47 (1983): 1–42; Steven A. Long, "Providence, liberté et loi naturelle," *Revue Thomiste* 102 (2002): 355–406. See the English version on page 557 of this issue of *Nova et Vetera*. Kondoleon is concerned with Plantinga's understanding of free will and Long's article is a criticism of Jacques Maritain.

choose between different acts, it is God who first moves the will, and the will's motion is predetermined by his infallible eternal decrees. God knows what someone will do in the future because he eternally decrees either to cause or permit the human action. The great Thomist commentators designate such a motion of the will by God as "physical premotion." The motion is physical because God moves the will not just morally, that is as a final cause, but as an agent. It is "premotion" because it has priority over the created agent's own causal activity. This priority is not in time but rather in the causal order. I shall argue that this concept of premotion is at least *prima facie* coherent and has not been shown to be incoherent by those philosophers who now either ignore or reject it.

Premotion is rejected by most contemporary Thomists who think that the classical Thomist emphasis on God's will as an inadequate or false account for explaining his eternal knowledge of contingent actions.² Moreover, most Thomists are now uncomfortable with the view that God's motion of the human will is infallible. In general, there is a worry that a strong view of providence and predestination threatens human freedom. This worry is not limited to Thomists. There are now many theories that state that God does not have control over each human action. These theories are sometimes described as "open theories"; God is open to different determinations of the future by the human will. Consequently, the future lies to some extent beyond the control of God's

² The classical Thomist position is sometimes described as "Bañezian." This tradition contains many variations. With respect to the common aspects of it, it seems to me that this tradition is fundamentally faithful to St. Thomas. The works of Dummermuth (*Thomas et doctrina praemotionalis physicae*) and Del Prado (*De gratia et libero arbitrio*) are instructive on this point. In this article I use the word "Thomist" to designate this tradition. For a sampling of alternative contemporary Thomist approaches, see David B. Burrell, *Freedom and Creation in Three Traditions* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1993); Christopher Hughes, "Aquinas on God's Knowledge of Future Contingents," in *Mind, Metaphysics, and Value in the Thomistic and Analytical Traditions*, ed. John Haldane (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2002), 143–59; Norman Kretzmann and Eleanore Stump, "A Reply to Shanley," *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* 72 (1997): 439–45; Eleanore Stump, *Aquinas* (London: Routledge, 2003), 118–22, 131–58, 178–82, 389–404; Brian J. Shanley, "Eternal Knowledge of the Temporal in Aquinas," *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* 71 (1997): 197–224; idem, "Divine Causation and Human Freedom in Aquinas," *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* 72 (1997): 99–122. There are many such alternative "Thomist" accounts that have developed in the context of the "problem of evil." See Brian J. Shanley, *The Thomist Tradition* (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 2002), 92–127. For the Molinist objection concerning God's causation of evil actions, see note 17 below.

will. Thomas Flint has argued that these open theories are incompatible with a Christian understanding of providence, although he also thinks that Thomist physical premotion is incompatible with human freedom.³ Consequently, he and others are sympathetic to Molinism, which attempts to combine the belief that God's providence extends to every single human action with the belief that God cannot determine a free action.⁴ Molinists oppose their view both to open theories and the classical Thomist account. According to Molinism, God foresees what humans would do in particular circumstances before he creates that world with those circumstances. God then creates that world in which humans behave just as he had foreseen. This view was held by many Jesuits and developed alongside and through conflict with the Thomist doctrine of premotion. It is significant that whereas in the past Molinists have been the Catholics who most emphasize the freedom of the will as opposed to God's causality, in contemporary debates Molinists are among the few who hold that God's providence extends to each human action. They are among the few philosophers whose views are not obviously in conflict with the Christian tradition. Indeed, the explicit rejection of premotion is characteristic of those philosophers who are most sympathetic to traditional Christianity, namely Molinists and contemporary Thomists. Other contemporary philosophers seem to be unaware of the classical Thomist position.

It is my belief that the contemporary dismissals of physical premotion are unfounded because they neglect key distinctions that are developed by such commentators as Dominic Bañez and John of St. Thomas in the context of their reading of Thomas Aquinas. My argument here is not that such commentators faithfully represent the teachings of Thomas, or indeed that their understanding of his teaching correctly describes how God knows and wills human actions. These statements may be true, but they are impossible to defend in one article. My position is that the absence of premotion from contemporary debates has not yet been justified. No one has developed an argument against premotion that works if the distinctions made by the Thomists are granted. Indeed, the critics of Thomism are often unclear about which aspects of the Thomist position

³ Thomas P. Flint, "Two Accounts of Providence," in *Divine and Human Action: Essays in the Metaphysics of Theism* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University, 1988), 147–81. See also Alfred J. Freddoso, introduction, in Luis de Molina, *On Divine Foreknowledge (Part IV of the Concordia)*, trans. Alfred J. Freddoso (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1988).

⁴ For a contemporary presentation, see especially Thomas Flint, *Divine Providence: The Molinist Account* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1998).

they are attacking. My argument has three parts. In the first, I shall explain some key Thomist distinctions concerning necessity and pre-motion. In the second, I shall argue that many philosophers who object to the Thomist position misconstrue the relevant understanding of necessity and contingency. In the third, I shall focus directly on their denial that the doctrine of pre-motion is helpful for discussions of how God moves the human will. The first two sections illustrate that the Thomists think plausibly that our understanding of necessity is connected either with a logical necessity or secondary causality. Consequently, in order to show that the will is free, they argue that human actions are necessitated neither logically nor by secondary causes. In the third section, I argue that Thomists do not simply beg the question by asserting that God's pre-determining decrees are compatible with human freedom. They have an understanding of God's causation that allows both for God's infallible motion and the contingency of many created events, among which are free human actions.

I. Recovering the Historical Context

Although many philosophers of religion have some understanding of the debate between Thomists and Molinists, many aspects of this debate are misunderstood and often taken out of their historical context. I draw attention to this context to show that Thomists developed their position only to defend the traditional Thomist and Augustinian thesis that human actions are undetermined even though they fall under God's providence. Moreover, since most of the literature on pre-motion considers only twentieth-century writers, the contemporary focus is often on later worries over "the problem of evil" rather than on the central issue of the earlier period, which is how to understand God's predetermination of contingent events.

"Premotion" is a word that was developed by sixteenth-century Thomist commentators in the context of controversies over grace, and it remained part of the Dominican theological vocabulary at least until the middle of the twentieth century.⁵ The Dominican literature on pre-motion is vast and there are many disagreements among the commentators and later theologians.⁶ In this article, I shall focus on two Thomists, namely

⁵ In addition to the works cited in note 1, see Réginald Garrigou-LaGrange, "Prémotion physique," in *Dictionnaire de théologie catholique*, vol. 13.1, cols. 31–77.

⁶ For the theological context, see Alister McGrath, *Iustitia Dei: A History of the Christian Doctrine of Justification*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 273–84. The classical Thomist literature is vast. I have selected Bañez, the first commentator to develop the doctrine of pre-motion, and John of

Dominic Bañez and John of St. Thomas. In the sixteenth century, Bañez, who is also famous for having been Teresa of Avila's confessor, used it to attack Jesuits who softened the Thomist understanding of predestination, which he understood to be identical to that of Augustine. Bañez was among the first to develop and explain the Thomist position. In the seventeenth century, John of St. Thomas, the last great commentator, treated predestination at great length and placed the doctrine of premotion in its historical context. He argued that whereas Protestants such as Martin Luther, and most especially John Calvin, held an understanding of grace that destroyed human free will; Pelagius and his followers held an understanding of free will that threatened the Catholic doctrine of predestination.⁷ Although Calvinists and Pelagians are opposed in their emphases, they both agree that it is impossible for God to infallibly move a human action that is nonetheless free. Thomists used the word "semi-Pelagianism" to describe those who hold that although God's grace is necessary for a meritorious action, humans can choose to either accept or reject the initial grace. Indeed, some accused the Molinists of being semi-Pelagian.⁸ John of St. Thomas thinks that Molina and some other Jesuits hold views that are at least close to semi-Pelagianism and perhaps even imply it.⁹ The Dominicans responded to the Jesuits by more sharply distinguishing between secondary causes and God. Whereas the human will cannot be determined to a free action by secondary causes, it can be so determined by God's motion. "Premotion" designates this motion. Their central point was that God's causation differs from secondary causes so that notions of causality that are taken from secondary causes cannot be applied to it.

Among the many contemporary and early modern objections to premotion is that this doctrine is not found in the writings of Thomas himself. It is true that Thomas never uses the word "premotion." Indeed, the commentators also use such unusual words as "predetermination" and "predefinition."¹⁰ "Predetermination" can be especially confusing because

St. Thomas, widely regarded as the last great Dominican commentator. But I do not wish to deny the importance of such figures as the Carmelites of Salamanca. See their tract. 4–5, in *Cursus theologicus*, vol. 2 (Paris: Palme, 1876).

⁷ John of St. Thomas, *Cursus theologicus*, d. 23, a. 5, in *Cursus theologici*, vol. 3, eds. Solesmes (Paris: Desclée, 1931–1946), 46–60.

⁸ McGrath, *Iustitia Dei*, 282.

⁹ For example, see John of St. Thomas, *Cursus theologicus*, d. 28, a. 5 (Solesmes ed., vol. 3, 443–62).

¹⁰ Garrigou-LaGrange, *Prémotion*, 44–56. There is an excellent bibliography on 55–56. For Thomas, see for example *Summa Theologiae* I, q. 23, a. 1, ad 1. For the *Summa Theologiae* I use the Leonine edition as reprinted in *Summa Theologiae*, 3 vols (Turin: Marietti, 1952).

although Thomas in some contexts explicitly denies that the will is predetermined, the commentators use this word to develop Thomas's own thought.¹¹ But it is important to consider the word's use and context. When Thomas rejects predetermination he is using the word as indicating that God imposes a necessity on the will that is the same as that found in natural things. The commentators agree that the will is not so determined, but they use the word "predetermination" to indicate that God infallibly moves the will. They coined new words or changed existing ones in order to take part in controversies over grace.

Although the commentators differ in the details of their theories, they do share a common terminology and understanding of premotion. Perhaps their terminology is neglected because the commentators are believed to have disfigured Thomas's theory. Although my concern is with whether the contemporary objections against their views are cogent, one point should be addressed. It has been claimed that Thomas did not develop a doctrine on God's motion of the will in the way that the commentators did because he recognizes that their attempt at precision is unattainable.¹² A more likely reason is that he was not concerned with addressing the views of Protestants and Jesuits. Different historical periods can call for different vocabularies. The commentators used the word "premotion" because they needed to distinguish not only between God's causality and that of creatures, but also between God's moving the will and both his creation and conservation of it.

Why is this motion called "premotion"? The prefix is inserted in order to draw attention to the priority of God's causality.¹³ This priority is not one of time. God moves the will to act precisely at the time when the will acts. The difference between the two actions is that a human being is not the first cause of his act. Premotion is the way in which the human being passively receives God's motion. The human being who chooses a particular good does move himself to this good. Nevertheless, this movement from potency to act requires a first cause. The doctrine of premotion is that someone who freely acts both moves himself as the secondary cause and is

¹¹ "Fastidiosi stomachi scrupulus iste est, sic distinguuntis inter motionem et determinationem. Sic enim ad hoc ponit D. Thomas praemotionem seu motum in voluntatem, ut indifferentia ejus et suspensio resolvatur, quid aliud est praemotio quam praedeterminatio?" John of St. Thomas, *Cursus theologicus*, d. 25, a. 4, no. 11 (Solesmes ed., vol. 3, 192).

¹² "Like Wittgenstein, Aquinas knew that we must not presume to speak about what lies beyond our ken." Shanley, "Divine Causation and Human Freedom," 101.

¹³ Garrigou-LaGrange, "Prémotion," 41–42.

directly moved by God as the first cause. Moreover, Thomists emphasize that this premotion is physical.¹⁴ This word “physical” is awkward because it brings to mind the causality of a physical body. But the word has a different meaning that can be best understood in context. Like the Thomists, many Catholics adhered to the Augustinian belief that God can infallibly move a free action, even though they differed from the Thomists by attributing this infallible motion to his final causality or some sort of sympathy caused in the will.¹⁵ For them, the motion is moral rather than physical. In contrast, Thomists used the word “physical” to emphasize that God is not only the final cause of the will but also the first efficient cause. God is the first efficient cause of every action, including those that are sinful. Even a sinner is not the first cause of his movement from potency to act. The sinner’s own fault is in his turning away from the due end. But God permits the action and causes it insofar as it has being so that he can bring about some greater good, which may even be the manifestation of God’s own justice through punishing the sin.

According to the Thomists, when anyone freely determines himself to choose some good he is also infallibly moved by God. How is freedom from necessity compatible with this infallible motion? A standard objection that even Thomas faced is that if God’s will must always be fulfilled in every particular, then every event is necessary and not contingent. The standard reply is that contingency is compatible with the necessity of supposition or composition.¹⁶ Taken in a divided sense, Peter’s repentance is contingent. But taken in a composed sense, that is along with God’s will that he repent, the repentance is necessary. By itself a statement can be contingent even though it is necessary when considered in conjunction with another. Thomists use consequents that have contingent antecedents to show how the consequent can be contingent even

¹⁴ Ibid., 42–44. See especially John of St. Thomas, *Prima pars philosophiae naturalis*, q. 25, a. 2, in *Cursus philosophicus thomisticus*, vol. 2, ed. B. Reiser (Turin: Marietti, 1930–1937), 496–99.

¹⁵ Garrigou-LaGrange, *Predestination*, 168–170. For Scotists, see especially John of St. Thomas *Philosophia naturalis*, IV, q. 12, a. 3 (*Cursus philosophicus*, vol. 3, 395–97).

¹⁶ ST I, q. 19, a. 3; q. 23, a. 6, ad 3. See especially Dominic Bañez’s commentary on q. 19, a. 3, in *Scholastica commentaria in primam partem angelici doctoris D. Thomae usque ad sexagesimamquartam quaestionem*, ed. Luis Urbano (Dubuque: W.C. Brown Reprint Library, 1934, 1964), 413–14. Thomas also says that it is “impossible” for God’s motion of the will to fail: “si Deus movet voluntatem ad aliquid, impossibile est huic positioni quod voluntas ad illud non moveatur.” ST I–II, q. 10, a. 4, ad 3. For an interesting catalogue of Thomas’s modal notions, see J. J. McIntosh, “Aquinas on Necessity,” *American Catholic Philosophical Association* 72 (1998): 371–403.

when it necessarily follows from the antecedent. Consider the following statement: "If God wills Peter to repent, then he repents." Thomas and the Thomists admit that there is a necessity of consequence here. If the antecedent is true, then the consequent must be so. Nevertheless, the consequent, namely "Peter repents," should not be understood as necessary when it is considered by itself, namely apart from God's decree. The act is contingent because it is not determinately present in any proximate cause, but is instead freely chosen by Peter.

Not every necessity of supposition is the same as that of God's pre-determining decrees. The Thomist understanding of premotion presupposes this distinction between the necessity of supposition or composition and other kinds of necessity. Furthermore, the distinction in this context depends upon an understanding of necessity and contingency among causes and effects. The logical issue is connected to the Thomist understanding that effects are either necessary or contingent on account of their proximate causes. For Thomists, such contingent effects as human actions are not determinately present in their proximate cause, even though they can be determinately present in the first cause. Consequently, there are at least two kinds of objections to the Thomist position.¹⁷ First, some thinkers may object to its understanding of necessity and contingency among secondary causes. Second, they may accept aspects of this understanding but reject the position that the contingent effects are determinately present in the first cause, namely God. Consequently, before addressing the contemporary arguments against premotion itself, I shall consider whether and how contemporary philosophers misunderstand or misconstrue the Thomist understanding of contingency.

II. Necessity and Secondary Causes

The standard objections against the Thomist account of the necessity of supposition or composition are that this necessity is unintelligible or that it does not preserve our intuitions about contingency. Moreover, the necessity of supposition can be used in different contexts. All past and present events are necessary by supposition, but this kind of necessity might seem innocuous, whereas that necessity of supposition which considers human acts along with God's will appears to violate human freedom. The most extreme libertarian might be glad to admit that past

¹⁷ I am not here concerned with the objection that the Thomist position entails that God is responsible for evil actions. This objection does not seem particularly difficult to me, and has been overwhelmingly refuted by J. H. Nicolas, "La permission du péché," *Revue Thomiste* 60 (1960): 5–37, 185–206, 509–46. See also Garrigou-LaGrange, *God*, vol. 2, 365–96.

and present free actions cannot be changed, and yet hold that their necessity is in no way based on God's decrees. I shall show that on the Thomist view the relevant contingency is based on the contingency of the proximate cause, and ultimately God's decision to cause a contingent event. The necessity of supposition with respect to God's will is ultimately compatible with such contingency.

Although necessity was not first discussed in the context of disputes over predestination, it took a prominent role in modern debates over the issue. But the role of the necessity of supposition in debates over human freedom is usually not well understood. When discussing Antoine Arnauld's somewhat Thomist post-1683 position, Robert Sleight mentions his use of "the notorious distinction between the composed and divided senses."¹⁸ Christopher Hughes has criticized its use in the context of God's knowing future contingents by claiming that since present and past events cannot be changed, then they should have absolute necessity and not the necessity of supposition.¹⁹ Another approach is to agree with the Thomist distinction between the kinds of necessity, but argue that it cannot preserve human freedom.²⁰ They would agree that one cannot infer "It is necessary that *p*" from "it is necessary that 'If *g*, then *p*.'" Nevertheless, if the antecedent is necessary, and the consequent necessarily follows, then it would seem that the consequent is necessary. For example, if it is necessary that God knows that Peter will repent, and it is also true that if God knows of this repentance, Peter will repent, then it should follow that Peter's repentance is necessary. Molinists admit that the Peter's action need not be necessary, but hold that such contingency is rooted only in God's free choice. Thomas Flint follows Molina in stating that on the Thomist view free acts would be contingent only because God did not need to create the world in which Peter repents.²¹ If such were the only reason, only God's liberty would be preserved. On their account, the necessity of supposition preserves the contingency of the human act, since the act need not occur; but the freedom of the act is not preserved.

¹⁸ Robert Sleight, "Arnauld on Efficacious Grace and Free Choice," in *Interpreting Arnauld*, ed. Elmar Kremer (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996), 167–68.

¹⁹ Hughes, "Aquinas on God's Knowledge," 152–57.

²⁰ Linda Trinkaus Zagzebski, *The Dilemma of Freedom and Foreknowledge* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 7–9; John Marin Fischer, "Introduction: God and Freedom," in *God, Foreknowledge, and Freedom*, ed. John Martin Fischer (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1989), 13–14. Alvin Plantinga, "On Ockham's Way Out," in *God, Foreknowledge, and Freedom*, 180–81, thinks that there is no reason to hold Thomas's view that if God knows that someone will act, then it is necessary that the agent will do so.

²¹ Flint, *Divine Providence*, 89–90.

These criticisms do not address why Thomists think that the free act is compatible with a necessity of supposition with respect to God's eternal decrees. One difficulty with understanding the Thomist account of necessity is that in contemporary philosophy there is as yet no widely accepted standpoint from which to evaluate it. Many contemporary philosophers think that any sort of necessity entails a fatalism that is incompatible with human freedom.²² Often they attempt to explain possibility in terms of possible worlds. But, as Plantinga notes, it is difficult on this view to capture the difference between the logical possibility of someone's performing an action and our ordinary understanding of whether someone is able to perform such an action: "Ability and logical possibility do not coincide."²³ According to Thomists, there is more to contingency than just logical possibility. How do they understand contingency and how it relates to a free choice between alternative goods? In this section I will show that from a Thomist perspective contingency is compatible with a certain kind of logical necessity, even though contingent effects cannot be determined by their proximate causes. The compatibility between contingency and a necessity of supposition with respect to God's decrees is not an ad hoc solution to the problem of God's foreknowledge and providence, but part of a wider understanding of contingency.

Bañez explains the necessity of supposition in the wider context of the different kinds of necessity. For our purposes, the most relevant are: (1) logical necessity; (2) physical or natural necessity; and (3) the necessity of supposition.²⁴ Logical necessity has its foundation in the divine mind. For example, it is necessary that a human being is a rational animal and that a human being is risible. Nevertheless, it is not necessary that there actually be any human beings. If there are human beings, then they are rational. He contrasts the necessity that humans be rational with the way in which the heavenly bodies are necessary. Physical or natural necessity is in created things. According to his cosmology, there are beings that are necessary in that they are incorruptible. Nevertheless, it is not necessary that they exist. God freely chooses to give them their being. But, supposing that he creates them, their existence has a necessity that no corruptible being has. Bañez's

²² For the general issues, see Mark Bernstein, "Fatalism," in *Oxford Handbook*, 65–81.

²³ Plantinga, "On Ockham's Way Out," 211.

²⁴ Bañez, *In ST I*, q. 19, a. 8 (Valencia, 428–29). For more on the necessities of composition and division, see John of St. Thomas, *Philosophia naturalis*, I, q. 25, a. 3 (*Cursus philosophicus*, vol. 2, 505–7). For the historical context, see Jeffrey Coombs, "The Ontological Source of Logical Possibility in Catholic Second Scholasticism," in *The Medieval Heritage in Early Modern Metaphysics and Modal Theory, 1400–1700*, The New Synthese Historical Library, 53, ed. Russell L. Friedman and Lauge O. Nielsen (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 2003), 191–229.

physics may be outmoded, but there is an important distinction here between that necessity that comes from the nature of a thing apart from its existence and the necessity of an existing necessary body. Indeed, according to his cosmology there is necessity even in contingent natural events, such as the procreation of animals, because of the causal role that the heavenly bodies play.²⁵ Physical necessity is an absolute necessity. In contrast, the necessity of supposition is not absolute but *secundum quid*. The necessity of the consequence does not entail an absolute necessity of the consequent. Since Peter absolutely speaking wills to be healthy, he wills to have medicine.²⁶ The consequence is necessary. But the consequent, namely that he wishes to have medicine, is not absolutely necessary.

It is important to recognize how Bañez connects the necessity of the consequent with that of supposition. His concern is with contingent events, which have only a necessity of supposition and not one of physical or logical necessity. It is true that the heavenly bodies are necessary only if God has created them. There is a necessity of consequence. The consequent is necessary in the sense that they are necessary beings with respect to secondary causality, but not in the sense that it is necessary for God to create them. There is something about them that cannot be otherwise supposing that they exist. According to his cosmology, no defects or secondary causes can destroy them. In contrast, contingent events can be changed by defects or secondary causes.

How can contingent events have this necessity of supposition? Thomas considers an objection based on the premise that "If God wills something, then it is."²⁷ According to this objection, since everything God wills must happen, then everything is necessary. Thomas answers that whatever event follows from the divine will has that necessity or contingency that God wills it to have.²⁸ Although everything that happens may

²⁵ Bañez, *In ST I–II*, q. 109, a. 1, in *Comentarios inéditos a la prima secundae de Santo Tomás*, ed. Vincente Beltrán de Heredia, 3 vols. (Madrid, 1942–1948), vol. 3, 22–23.

²⁶ "Ista consequentia est necessaria, Petrus vult absolute sanitatem, et iudicat medium necessarium esse potionem amaram, ergo vult potionem illam; non tamen consequens est necessarium, 'vult potionem' absolute loquendo." Bañez, *In ST I*, q. 19, a. 8 (Valencia, 429).

²⁷ "Sed res creatae a Deo, comparantur ad voluntatem divinam sicut ad aliquid prius, a quo habent necessitatem: cum haec conditionalis sit vera, sit aliquid Deus vult, illud est; omnis autem conditionalis vera est necessaria. Sequitur ergo quod omne quod Deus vult sit necessarium absolute." *ST I*, q. 19, a. 8, obj. 3.

²⁸ "Unde et ea quae fiunt a voluntate divina, talem necessitatem habent, qualem Deus vult ea habere: scilicet, vel absolutam, vel conditionalem tantum. Et sic, non omnia sunt necessaria absolute." *ST I*, q. 19, a. 8, ad 3.

be necessary when considered in conjunction with God's will, not everything is necessary absolutely. Bañez comments that the following consequences hold: "God wills something to be, therefore it will be in the way and when he wills it to be."²⁹ God wills a contingent event to occur at a particular time and contingently. He can even will that it occur freely. It is contingent whether Peter sits or not. Nevertheless, while he sits it is necessary that he sit. Thomists think that the present is necessary in a sense. Nevertheless, this necessity is not absolute. Peter sits freely. Consequently, his sitting is not necessary in a divided sense, that is when considering his sitting by itself. While he sits, he is sitting freely. Nevertheless, his sitting is necessary in a composed sense. While Peter sits, it is necessary that he sit. It cannot be the case that he is both sitting and not sitting.

Even though contingent natural events and free actions have this *secundum quid* necessity, they are not necessary in an absolute sense. Contingent effects are contingent because they have contingent proximate causes.³⁰ Such contingency is not just logical but founded in the proximate cause and effect. Ultimately, this contingency has its source in God's will to produce the effect contingently through secondary causes. It is important to recognize that contrary to classical mechanics, Bañez thinks that there is contingency in many non-rational events.³¹ Although fire always generates fire, it is contingent whether this fire generates this other fire. Moreover, sometimes natural causes fail. Peter might beget a monster, although it is unlikely. Natural contingent effects are produced by causes that can be impeded. With respect to free choice, Peter may or may not decide to sit. His sitting is contingent simply speaking.

The position that Peter's decision to sit is undetermined does not entail that human actions are entirely unpredictable. Thomists do not claim that we can make no predictions about human actions.³² If we consider the faculty of free choice in itself, then we can make no such predictions. But a particular human being is inclined to certain decisions on account of custom and also his bodily disposition. Consequently, if the

²⁹ "Deus vult aliquid fieri, ergo fit eo modo et quando vult fieri." Bañez, *In ST I*, q. 19, a. 8 (Valencia, 430).

³⁰ Bañez, *In ST I*, q. 19, a. 8 (Valencia, 434).

³¹ *Ibid.*, 430.

³² "Huiusmodi effectus in causis quidem ad utrumlibet nullo modo cognosci possunt per se acceptis; sed si adiungantur causae illae quae causas ad utrumlibet inclinant magis ad unum quam ad aliud, potest aliqua certitudo coniecturalis de effectibus praedictis haberi, sicut de his quae ex libero arbitrio dependent, aliqua futura conicimus ex consuetudinibus et complexionibus hominum quibus inclinantur ad unam." Thomas, *De veritate*, q. 8, a. 12 (Leonine 22.2, 259). Cf. *ST II-II*, q. 95, a. 5.

faculty of free choice is considered alongside these other causes, then the free action can be predicted. But this predictability does not take away the contingency of the action since the action proceeds primarily from free choice, and free choice is not determined to any action. Moreover, human actions cannot always be predicted. Customs, passions, and dispositions can be resisted, although usually they are not. For an act to be contingent, it needs only to follow from the faculty of free choice. Although other causes may incline the agent to an action, this inclination is not the same as determination. Free actions are not determinately present in their causes.

Contemporary philosophers often connect free choice with a freedom from any sort of infallible causal influence, and they do not emphasize that most free acts result not only from free choice, but from the influence of other causal factors. This view departs from the Thomist account in two ways. First, Thomists distinguish between contingency and freedom. Non-rational effects can be contingent and yet they are not free. Free actions are those contingent effects that are caused by an agent through his faculty of free choice. The emphasis is not just on contingency but on the agent's intellect and will. Second, Thomists see God's infallible causal activity as the source of an effect's necessity or contingency. God's agency does not take away contingency.

Bañez develops but does not depart from the way in which Thomas and Thomists understand contingency. Throughout his works, Thomas emphasizes that effects are contingent because they are not determined by their proximate causes, and, ultimately, because God has decided to produce them as contingent. Human actions are such undetermined effects. Even though present and past human actions cannot be changed, they are still contingent with respect to their proximate causes. The necessity of the past or present does not take away from the contingent nature of the effect. Cajetan emphasizes this point when he states that present and past contingents are necessary only according to their state and not according to their nature.³³

It is unclear whether contemporary thinkers would accept non-rational contingency. It is incompatible with classical mechanics. Nevertheless, there is an important conceptual distinction between non-rational events that must happen, natural events that occur for the most part or unless they are impeded, and that contingency that is required by free choice. Bañez emphasizes that even if it were the case that God created the world from the necessity of his nature, there would still be contingency on account of

³³ Cajetan, *In ST I*, q. 14, a. 3, no. 4 (Leonine 4, 188).

the way in which causes can be impeded.³⁴ Consequently, at least one Molinist criticism, namely that the necessity of supposition preserves only God's contingency, does not work. Against the Scotists, Thomists argue that even if there were a necessity of nature in God himself, so that he were not free, there would be contingency in the world.³⁵ The contingency in nature is rooted in God's power to cause that certain events occur contingently. Thomists presuppose that we can know that there is contingency before we know that God can produce events either necessarily or contingently. Critics of premotion need to explain whether and how they are attacking the Thomist understanding of contingency.

Thomists disagree on details, but they all base the relevant contingency partially on their understanding of the secondary causes through which God wills to produce the event. A freely chosen action is a special kind of contingent action. A rational agent chooses between different acts. Although Peter does not choose to beget a human being rather than a monster, he can choose whether to beget or read. This later possibility is an example of a free act that is necessary only *secundum quid*, that is only with respect to God's eternal decree. John of St. Thomas emphasizes that Calvin does not properly distinguish between the necessity of supposition and absolute necessity.³⁶ If God moves the will then it is impossible that the will should not be so moved. Nevertheless, the necessity is not *simpliciter* but *secundum quid*. The Thomist view requires that no contingent event can be determined by its secondary causes. John of St. Thomas argues that the statement "Peter will read tomorrow" is contingent today precisely because its occurrence has not yet been determined.³⁷

Thomas's understanding of future contingents is important because it shows how our understanding of contingency in created events is connected with our understanding of secondary causes. Following Thomas's *In libri perihermenias*, Thomists go so far as to deny that the principle of bivalence holds for future contingents, even though they accept the law of non-contradiction.³⁸ An assertion A, which is about a future contingent event, is

³⁴ Bañez, *In ST I*, q. 19, a. 8 (Valencia, 431).

³⁵ In addition to Bañez see Cajetan, *In ST I*, q. 19, a. 8, nos. 11–15 (Leonine ed., 4, 246).

³⁶ John of St. Thomas, *Cursus theologicus*, d. 23, a. 5, no. 14 (Solesmes ed., vol. 3, 52). For the rejection of this distinction among early Reformers, see Chris Schabel, "Divine Foreknowledge and Human Freedom: Auriol, Pomponazzi, and Luther on 'Scholastic Subtleties,'" in *Medieval Heritage*, 165–89.

³⁷ John of St. Thomas, *Cursus theologicus*, d. 19, a. 2, no. 5 (Solesmes ed., vol. 2, 413).

³⁸ *In Libri Peri Hermenias*, lib. 1, lect. 13–15 (Leonine 1, 59–74). An excellent translation and commentary can be found in *The Philosophy of Thomas Aquinas: Introductory*

neither true nor false. Nevertheless, it is true that “*A* or *not-A*.” The assertion *A* is true only when it has some determinate adequation with the object. Consequently, statements about the future are true only insofar as they are about what is now presently the case. Future necessary events now have a determinate being in their causes. Some future natural events can be said to be true insofar as their causes presently have some determinate inclination to them. Fire generates fire. But free events do not have such a temporally prior and determinate presence in their causes. Since they are contingent, they at present have no determinate being. Nevertheless, it cannot be the case both that “Peter will read tomorrow” and “Peter will not read tomorrow.”³⁹ But neither statement will be true or false until the next day when he chooses to read or not. When Peter reads, he does so freely precisely because his reading was not determined by previous causes. Once he has started reading, his reading has a *secundum quid* necessity. Nevertheless, his reading is not necessary either in the way that his having rationality is necessary or even in the way that it is for his posterior to press down on the seat rather than to float into the air. Our understanding of whether an event is necessary is based on our knowledge of whether an event has been determined by secondary causes. This understanding of the contingent as not being determined by secondary causes is developed not only in a theological context, but can be seen in logic. Nevertheless, this understanding of contingency helps to explain how an event can be contingent in itself and yet necessary with respect to God’s eternal decrees.

Thomists think that God knows future contingents only through his eternal decrees. They could not be known any other way.⁴⁰ They all follow Thomas in holding the following: It is not that future contingents

Readings, ed. Christopher Martin, 31–48, 15–17. For Bañez, see especially, *In ST I*, q. 14, a. 13 (Valencia, 350–64). Notice his cautious criticism of Cajetan on 357–358. In this exposition, I follow John of St. Thomas, *Cursus theologicus*, d. 19, a. 1–3 (Solemes ed., vol. 2, 406–25).

³⁹ John of St. Thomas, *Cursus theologicus*, d. 19, a. 3, nos. 2–7 (Solemes ed., vol. 2, 420–22). See also Thomas, *In Libri Peri Hermenias*, lib.1, lect. 13, no. 12 (Leonine ed., 1, 62–63).

⁴⁰ For Thomas, see especially *ST I*, q. 14, a. 13. A somewhat sympathetic and plausible construal can be found in Arthur N. Prior, “The Formalities of Omniscience,” in *Papers on Time and Tense* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1968), 26–44. Simo Knuuttila connects the discussion with his view that pre-Scotistic modal theories are statistical in his “Time and Modality in Scholasticism,” in *Reforming the Great Chain of Being: Studies in the History of Modal Theories*, ed. Simo Knuuttila (Dordrecht: Reidel, 1981), 208–17. His interpretation of Thomas as holding only a statistical account seems forced. The best recent account is Theodore J. Kondoleon, “God’s Knowledge of Future Contingent Singulars: A Reply,” *Thomist* 56 (1992): 117–39.

are determinately true but cannot be known as future, but rather that there is nothing to know. Since future contingents have no determinate truth, not even God can know them as future. He knows them as present and as their cause. Sometimes it is claimed that the later commentators such as Bañez and John of St. Thomas shifted from an earlier position that God's foreknowledge depends on his eternity to the newer one that his foreknowledge is primarily grounded in his divine will.⁴¹ But Thomas himself connects the two claims.⁴² The Thomist understanding of contingency is so strong that God could only know future contingents insofar as they are eternally present to him through his divine decrees. We can know such future events only through revelation, and then only because God has eternal knowledge of them. In turn, his eternal knowledge is based on his eternal decree that the events happen. His statement that Peter would deny him three times was true in an entirely different way from which our ordinary statements about necessary future events are true.⁴³ Thomas argues that statements about the future are true only insofar as they are causes that are present to us.⁴⁴ In themselves future contingents are neither true nor false. Even the statement about Peter's denial was true not because it was based on the preexistence of the effect in then present secondary causes, but rather because it was true through God's eternal decree.

Although the Thomist position is sometimes compared with fatalism, it is not fatalistic according to the normal use of the word. Indeed, the debate is about how such a word could be used. If our understanding of contingency is taken from that of secondary causes, then it may not be applicable to God's causality.

The disagreement between the Thomists and the Molinists is in large part over this connection between necessity and causality. Indeed, one Thomist objection to Molinism is against their claim that God knows

⁴¹ Brian J. Shanley, "Aquinas on God's Causal Knowledge: A Reply to Stump and Kretzmann," *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* 72 (1998): 450–455. For Thomas's earliest commentators, see Julianus Groblicki, *De scientia Dei futurorum contingentium secundum S. Thomam eiusque primos sequaces* (Krakow: 1938). For the connection between the two issues, see especially Bañez, *In ST I*, q. 14, a. 13 (Valencia, 352). For the way in which the thing is contained in eternity not merely as in an efficient cause, see especially John of St. Thomas, *Artis Logicae Secunda Pars*, q. 23, art. 2 (*Cursus philosophicus*, vol. 1, 737).

⁴² Thomas, *De malo*, q. 16, a. 7, ad 15. I use the Leonine text as reprinted in *The De malo of Thomas Aquinas*, ed. Brian Davies and trans. Richard Regan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 908–10.

⁴³ John of St. Thomas, *Cursus theologicus*, d. 19, a. 3, no. 7 (Solesmes ed., vol. 2, 421–22).

⁴⁴ See especially Thomas, *De Malo*, q. 16, a. 7, c. (Regan trans., 902–4).

what someone will do in a particular situation apart from God's willing to create that situation.⁴⁵ According to the Thomists' understanding of contingency, this claim is nonsensical. If an event is contingent, then it cannot be previously known from its secondary causes. The Thomist position is not simply question-begging, but based on a plausible understanding of our use of the terms "necessary" and "contingent."

This emphasis on the connection between contingency and a real ability to be otherwise explains why Thomists emphasize that premotion is not prior in time to the free choice, and that it is the passive reception of God's motion. If it were prior in time, then the future contingent would be determined and consequently not contingent. Similarly, if it were determined by a secondary cause other than the agent, then it would be previously knowable in its cause and consequently not contingent.

In order to successfully defend or dismiss the Thomist position, it would be helpful to show either that there is some incoherence in the theory or even what aspects of the theory are rejected. Contemporary critics of Thomism do neither. They are probably objecting to one or more of the following three positions. First, they might deny that necessity of a present event can either be absolute or *secundum quid*. But most philosophers would probably think it important to distinguish to hold both such statements as "While sitting, it is necessary that he sit," and "His sitting is not necessary but contingent." Nevertheless, Christopher Hughes's denial that such present events are necessary only by supposition may indicate a tension here with some contemporary understandings of modality.⁴⁶ But it is possible to agree with Thomas that the present has a *secundum quid* necessity and yet hold that it is impossible for present contingents to be so necessary with respect to God's predetermining decrees. Consequently, they might only or also be disagreeing with the attempt to explain contingency in terms of whether secondary causes can be impeded. The second objection is the worry that God's foreknowledge or causality could wipe out contingency entirely. This objection consequently assumes a different understanding of what it means to be contingent. Nevertheless, I know of no current argument that the Thomist understanding is wrong. Such an argument might include not only an alternative account of contingency but also one of causality. Modal and causal terms are difficult to pin down. Nevertheless, the critics of the Thomist position should recognize that the Thomistic understanding of a contingent event as one that is undetermined by

⁴⁵ For example, see Garrigou-Lagrange, *God*, 518–21; idem, *Predestination*, 317–18.

⁴⁶ Hughes, "Aquinas on God's Knowledge," 154–57.

secondary causes has a strong foundation in common usage. Third, the critics might additionally object to the position that contingent actions are free when they are necessary with respect to God's eternal decrees. Indeed, this last objection is at the heart of the Molinist argument that the necessity of supposition merely shows that God's causation of the act is contingent, and not that the act is itself free. Consequently, it is important to consider why Thomists think that God can infallibly move someone to perform an action freely.

III. Why Only God Can Predetermine the Will

Thomists connect contingency with secondary causation. A contingent event is one that cannot be known from the secondary causes alone. The contingent event does not preexist determinately in the secondary cause. A free human action is contingent because it is caused not by secondary causes but by the agent's power of free choice, which is an ability to choose otherwise. If an agent has this ability, then his action is not determined by other secondary causes. Consequently, although Thomists think that free action is incompatible with this kind of determination, they also think that every event is predetermined by God. This position does not simply rest on the fact that God's causation is mysterious, but rather on the belief that God's motion is infallible and that he is the source of contingency. Consequently, he infallibly moves even contingent events without making the events necessary.

A characteristic feature of the Thomist approach is the sharp distinction between primary and secondary causality. God and creatures do not cause effects in the same manner. Creatures act on their own and yet at the same time God is causing their action. Thomas writes, "the same effect is not attributed to the natural cause and the divine power as if it is partly done by God and partly by the natural agent, but the whole is caused by both, according to a different way."⁴⁷ It is not as if free acts were partially caused by God and partially by the human agent. Instead, both the human agent and God are entire causes of the free act. The human is the secondary cause, and God is the primary cause.

Some thinkers base their position that God cannot predetermine a freely elicited human act on the fact that no creatures can do so. For example, Thomas Flint argues that if another agent determines someone

⁴⁷ "Non sic effectus causae naturali et divinae virtuti attribuitur quasi partim a Deo, et partim a naturali agente fiat, sed totus ab utroque, secundum alium modum." Thomas, *Summa contra Gentiles* III, ch. 70. I use the Leonine edition as reprinted in *Liber de veritate Catholicae fidei contra errores infidelium seu Summa contra Gentiles*, vol. 3, (Turin: Marietti, 1961), 99.

(Cuthbert) is to buy an iguana, then Cuthbert is not truly free.⁴⁸ Flint thinks that Thomists would agree with him with respect to every determining agent other than God. Only God can so predetermine a free action. Although he thinks that the Thomists have difficulty in accounting for how God causes the substance of an evil act, his main point seems to be that they do not adhere to what he describes as a traditional libertarianism. He inclines to the view that “the causal activity of *all* other agents up to *and at* the time of the action be compatible both with the agent’s freely performing the act and with the agent’s freely refraining from performing the act.”⁴⁹ He thinks that God is a member of that set of agents whose causal activity must be compatible with either alternative’s being chosen by the agent. I shall argue that this approach does not address how Thomists claim that the predetermination of an act must be compatible with the agent’s ability to do otherwise.⁵⁰ Indeed, the Thomist account rests on the fact that only the creator can move the will because he creates the power to choose between alternative possibilities and then efficiently causes the whole act, including its contingent mode. If God physically predetermined the will through intermediate causes, then in Thomist language such motion would not be predetermination but determination, and consequently incompatible with free choice.

Only the creator can so move the will. Some recent writers, such as David Burrell, think that a recognition of God’s creative activity makes it unnecessary to resort to the traditional account of premotion and predetermination.⁵¹ Burrell does not reduce God’s causality to creation and conservation, but he thinks that the traditional understanding of premotion does not take into account that God’s movement of creatures is in the context of creation. But the defenders of premotion do take God’s creation into account, even though they distinguish between God’s creation and his motion.⁵² This distinction is not in God but it is in creatures. Humans are all created by God. Nevertheless, not every motion

⁴⁸ Flint, *Divine Providence*, 87–89.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 89.

⁵⁰ Stump and Kretzmann attribute this understanding of God’s causality to Thomas himself. They confuse his statement that free choice is an ability to act differently with their own position that it is an ability to act differently even with respect to God’s will. See Kretzmann and Stump, “Reply to Shanley,” 441, no. 8. For the importance of this distinction, see John of St. Thomas, *Philosophia naturalis*, IV, q. 12, a. 3 (*Cursus philosophicus*, vol. 3, 399).

⁵¹ Burrell, *Freedom and Creation*, 95–138. See also *idem*, “God’s Knowledge of Future Contingents: A Reply to William Craig,” *Thomist* 58 (1994): 317–22; Shanley, “Divine Causation and Human Freedom,” 115–17, 120–21.

⁵² Garrigou-Lagrange, “Prémotion,” 39–41.

received from God is a creative act. Our ability to choose presupposes that God has created us with free choice. We do not freely choose whether to be created, even though once created we can choose between alternatives. We have no choice over whether we have free choice, although once we have free choice we can exercise it. Every free decision presupposes creation, but it also presupposes an additional movement toward one good rather than another. This additional movement must ultimately come from God. Although the agent moves himself to the good, the agent is not the first mover.

Thomists emphasize that God's creation of the will explains why only he can move it efficaciously not merely as the will's object but also as its first mover.⁵³ God gives the will its inclination and moves it interiorly. Even angels can only move the human will through persuasion by showing it a good or by exciting the passions.⁵⁴ This point is important because it shows how Thomists are able to give a reason why only God can predetermine the act. The distinction between God and secondary causes is not made in an ad hoc fashion only in order to preserve God's providence over human acts, but is a basic element of their natural theology. A key difference between Thomists and their critics is in the understanding of God's causality.⁵⁵ Many critics appear to think that God's causality is on a par with that of creatures. Both must freely contribute to the act. In contrast, Thomists think that the difference is in the type of causality. God causes the free decision as the universal cause, whereas the agent causes it as the proximate cause. But both completely cause the act.

It is important to recognize that there is no intermediate between God's causal activity and the will.⁵⁶ The Thomist position has been recently interpreted as holding that there is a created real term (*intentio*) by which God moves the will, and that this term is part of a causal mechanism that threatens God's transcendence.⁵⁷ Although Thomists do not express themselves identically on this issue, John of St. Thomas and other Thomists do think that in addition to God's will and the creature's movement there must also be that received motion that is in the moved

⁵³ ST I, q. 105, a. 4.

⁵⁴ ST I, q. 106, a. 2; q. 111, a. 2.

⁵⁵ The critics of the Thomist position seem to assume an Ockhamist understanding of God's causality. Some of their arguments are not that different from Ockham's arguments against Thomas. See Marilyn McCord Adams, *William Ockham*, 2 vols. (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1989), vol. 2, 1304–11.

⁵⁶ Dummermuth, *Thomas et doctrina praemotionalis physicae*, 49–52; Del Prado, *De gratia et libero arbitrio*, vol. 2, 141–200.

⁵⁷ Shanley, "Divine Causation and Human Freedom," 115–16.

object.⁵⁸ These Thomists see themselves as following Thomas in stating that God's action does not have being as a natural thing does, although it does have intentional being.⁵⁹ Indeed, there is such intentional being in every motion. What is the purpose of stating that there is such intentional being? This position simply follows from the wider understanding of how all creatures receive God's motion. Thomists follow Thomas in saying that all created events have such being insofar as they are moved by God. The reception of God's motion is not the same as motion by secondary causes or self-movement. Such reception has intentional being. With respect to free acts, there is a reception of the movement by the agent that is distinct from the agent's self-movement. Both God and the agent cause the action, but they do not belong to the same order. They are not two partial causes of the act, but instead God is the superior cause and the agent is the inferior cause. This point does not entail that there is an intermediate real being that does the work in moving the will. Indeed, if there were such a being, then it could not predetermine the will so that the agent acts freely. Only the first cause can do so.

The opponents of Thomism seem to assume that God's action is constrained by a creature's necessity or contingency. But Thomists emphasize that God belongs to an entirely different order. Thomas himself writes:

The divine will should be thought of as being outside the ordering of existent things. It is the cause which grounds every existent, and all the differences there are between them. One of the differences between existents is between those that are possible and those that are necessary. Hence necessity and contingency in things have their origin in the divine will, as does the distinction between them, which follows from the description of their proximate causes.⁶⁰

A creature's freedom does not enable it to act against God's will of good pleasure. God's omnipotence is not constrained by what someone might

⁵⁸ Dummermuth, *Thomas et doctrina praemotiois physicae*, 50–51. For a discussion of three different Thomist approaches, see John of St. Thomas, *Philosophia naturalis*, I, q. 25, a. 2 (*Cursus philosophicus*, vol. 2, 500–503).

⁵⁹ "Id quod a Deo fit in re naturali, quo actualiter agat, est ut intentio sola, habens esse quodam incompletum, per modum quo colores sunt in aëre, et virtus artis in instrumento artificis." Thomas Aquinas, *Quaestiones disputatae de potentia*, q. 3, a. 7, ad 7, in *Quaestiones disputatae*, 2 vols, 8th ed, eds. P. Bazzi et al. (Turin: Marietti, 1949), 59. John of St. Thomas, *Philosophia naturalis* I, q. 25, a. 2 (*Cursus philosophicus*, vol. 2, 501), notes that this motion is not a permanent and habitual quality. See Aquinas, *ST I-II*, q. 110, a. 2.

⁶⁰ *In libri peri hermenias*, lib.1, lect. 14, no. 22 (Leonine 1, 70), trans. Martin, 44–55. See also *ST I*, q. 19, a. 8.

try to do. God makes it possible for someone to freely act and then moves that person to act in a determinate way. However, the very meaning of what it is to be contingent makes it impossible for God to determine a free action through secondary causes. It is important to recognize that the discussion here is not about logical possibility, but the possibility of an effect with respect to a proximate cause. In order to be free, the action must be contingent. A contingent action must be undetermined with respect to its proximate causes. If premotion were some sort of intermediate and real proximate cause, then an act so determined would also be a necessary act. As I have indicated, Thomists often use the word “predetermination” and not “determination” in order to indicate that the discussion is only about determination with respect to God’s eternal decrees and not about a determination like that which results from a proximate cause. Nevertheless, John of St. Thomas notes that sometimes Thomas does use “determination” to describe how a contingent cause is moved to its effect.⁶¹ But, strictly speaking, God does not determine the will. Indeed, such a claim would be nonsensical, since it would place God’s causation on par with that of creatures. The Thomist doctrine preserves God’s transcendence by asserting that only he can predetermine the will because as the ultimate cause only he is the root of necessity and contingency.

John of St. Thomas emphasizes that God’s operation with respect to the human will is twofold.⁶² First, he gives the agent its powers (*virtutes*) and conserves them in being. Second, he moves and applies them to action. In free creatures, God causes not only a potency to opposites but he also moves them to one of them. The second operation does not frustrate the first. His premotion of the will does not take away from his creating it as the kind of thing that has a potency to opposite acts. God conserves the will’s liberty even as he moves it to a particular good. Only God can do this because he alone is the root of our liberty.⁶³ An example might help to illustrate his point. Suppose Socrates freely chooses to sit. God not only moves him to sit, but he gives Socrates the powers

⁶¹ For example, in the *prima pars*, see q. 10, a. 3, ad 5; q. 105, a. 1, ad 3. For texts and a discussion, see John of St. Thomas, *Cursus theologicus*, d. 25, a. 4, no. 11 (Solesmes ed., vol. 3, 192).

⁶² John of St. Thomas, *Cursus theologicus*, d. 25, a. 4, nos. 3–8 (Solesmes ed., vol. 3, 187–90); d. 25, a. 5, nos. 1–7 (Solesmes ed., vol. 3, 199–203). See also *Philosophia naturalis*, d. 25, a. 2 (*Cursus philosophicus*, vol. 2, 502–3); ST I, q. 105, a. 5.

⁶³ John of St. Thomas, *Cursus theologicus*, d. 25, a. 4, no. 1 (Solesmes ed., vol. 3, 186); d. 27, a. 4, nos. 40–41 (Solesmes, vol. 3, 388–89). For a convincing argument that this is indeed the position of Thomas, see John of St. Thomas, *Cursus theologicus*, d. 25, a. 4, nos. 9–11 (Solesmes ed., vol. 3, 191–93). He gives a fair sampling of texts. See also Kondoleon, “God’s Knowledge,” 136–39.

through which he can make such a choice. Socrates's sitting does not take away from his power of free choice. God causes both the substance of the act and its mode; he causes not only Socrates's sitting but also his freely sitting. God takes away Socrates's indifference to sitting or not doing so, but God does not take away Socrates's ability to sit or not sit.⁶⁴

The Thomist understanding of God as the source of a free act's mode explains why an act can be freely chosen even though it is necessary when considered in conjunction with God's eternal decree that the act occur. Flint and others think that for an agent to freely choose an act he must be able to do otherwise irrespective of God's causal contribution to the action. Thomists admit that the agent must be able to do otherwise, but they have a different understanding of what this ability entails. God does not merely contribute to the action, but he gives Socrates his free choice and moves him to sit freely. Before Socrates freely decides to sit, he is free to sit or not to sit. This freedom is rooted in the free choice that God has given to him. Once Socrates decides to sit, he is no longer able not to sit at the moment in which he sits. Nevertheless, this necessity does not take away from his ability to have done otherwise. He has free choice because his intellect and will are not taken away. Moreover, his sitting is contingent in a way that the motion of the heavenly bodies or his being a rational animal are not. Finally, although God predetermines that Socrates sit, this predetermination does not take away his intellect and will. As the first cause, God infallibly moves Socrates to sit freely, even though Socrates is the free secondary cause of the act. Because of these distinctions, Thomists can consistently hold that Socrates freely sits even though his sitting is predetermined by God. Socrates was able not to sit. The understanding of the necessity of supposition with respect to the past and present helps the Thomists to argue that human acts can be contingent and yet have a necessity of supposition with respect to God's decrees. Events can be necessary because they are taking place or have taken place, and yet contingent because they were not determined by their secondary causes. Similarly, a human action can be contingent and yet necessary with respect to God's decrees because they are not determined by anything but the agent's free choice and God's decrees. The real difference between Thomists and their critics seems over whether God can be the cause of the act's mode. If the Thomist claim is granted, then

⁶⁴ "Sufficit dicere, quod positis omnibus requisitis, etiam motione Dei, prout prae-bet determinationem ad actum tollendo quidem indifferentiam potentialem et suspensivam, prae-bendo autem et conservando modum indifferentiae actualis et potestatis dominativae, potest oppositum facere voluntas." John of St. Thomas, *Philosophia naturalis*, IV, q. 12, a. 3 (*Cursus philosophicus*, vol. 3, 399).

there is no difficulty in maintaining that the act could have occurred otherwise even though it has a *secundum quid* necessity with respect to God's eternal decrees.

Are Thomists compatibilists about God's predetermination and human freedom? Compatibilism is the position that human freedom is compatible with necessitation. A Thomist should think that compatibilism is at best ambiguous when applied to God and secondary causes. If the relevant concept of necessity is taken from our discussion of the order of secondary causes, then this concept cannot apply to God's premotion. God is the source of contingency and the first mover of contingent events. With respect to free human acts, he both gives the power of free choice and moves the agent to make a decision freely. Thomism is a kind of compatibilism only if by "compatibilism" we mean that free choice is compatible with predetermination by the first cause. But this kind of compatibilism differs from others in that God causes an event to be either necessary or contingent with respect to their secondary causes. Ultimately, God is the source not only of all his effects, but also of their necessity and contingency.

Indeed, from the Thomist view it is a serious conceptual confusion to assimilate the question of whether human acts are determined to the question of whether God's premotion is compatible with human freedom. An event is contingent with respect to its proximate cause. Disputes over whether events are in themselves necessary or contingent are consequently disputes that are either over that necessity that results from a creature's nature or that necessity that results from an effect's necessarily following upon its proximate cause. If contingency is required for free choice, then human choices cannot be determined by some proximate cause. The question of whether God predetermines is irrelevant to such a dispute. It is not the case that Thomists are libertarians with respect to secondary causes and compatibilists with respect to God's causality, but rather that the terms do not properly apply to God's causality.

I have argued that the standard objections to premotion do not work when considered in the context of the wider Thomist understanding of God as the root of a creature's contingency and freedom. Although the arguments may work if a non-Thomist account of God's causality is granted, those who reject premotion do not give reasons why their own accounts should be assumed. If contemporary philosophers of religion introduce the Thomist doctrine of premotion into their discussions, then they should either show that its presuppositions are incorrect or that there is some sort of internal inconsistency. As the discussion stands, critics of Thomism usually ignore the Thomist account of necessity and

contingency or provide supposed counterexamples that to the Thomist merely suggest that free choice is incompatible with determination by another secondary cause. These counterexamples cannot defeat the Thomist position because Thomists agree that there is such an incompatibility. The real disagreement is over whether the examples are counterexamples. To the best of my knowledge, no one in the contemporary literature has directly attacked the Thomist account of how free decisions are predetermined by the first cause. **N-V**