

## Augustine and Aquinas on Foreknowledge Through Causes

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BOTH THOMAS AQUINAS and Augustine think that future human choices between alternative actions cannot be known with certitude through astrology or the assistance of other creatures, such as demons. Both hold that such free actions cannot be so known because free actions are contingent.<sup>1</sup> If we were to have through these means certain knowledge that such an event will take place, then the event would be necessary and consequently not free. Nevertheless, Thomas and Augustine also think that God has foreknowledge of contingent events, and that prophecy concerning future contingents relies on God's foreknowledge.

What makes such foreknowledge possible? Some recent discussions emphasize that for Thomas God's foreknowledge is compatible with free

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An earlier version of this article was given at the Aquinas the Augustinian conference at Ave Maria University, Naples, FL, February 3–5, 2005. I would like to thank Barry David for his helpful suggestions.

<sup>1</sup> In this paper, I will use "free" as synonymous with "free decision between alternative actions." I am not discussing such cases as the free love of the blessed for God, nor am I implying that each agent's freedom is so unlimited that he can perform just any action. Moreover, I am not discussing the important sense in which for Augustine an agent is free only when assisted by grace. For this aspect of freedom especially, see Étienne Gilson, *Introduction a l'étude de saint Augustin* (Paris:Vrin, 1929), 206–9. Additionally, although I discuss God's causation of sinful actions, I do not intend to say that God causes the evil in the actions. For an interpretation of God's permission that is compatible with my account, see J.-H. Nicolas, "La permission du péché," *Revue Thomiste* 60 (1960): 5–37, 185–206, 509–46. See also Steven A. Long, "Providence, Freedom, and Natural Law," *Nova et Vetera* 4 (2006): 557–605.

acts because God's knowledge is eternal.<sup>2</sup> The free acts are not future to God. This explanation is surely a correct reading of one problem that Thomas addresses. I should like to emphasize another aspect of the Thomistic approach, namely that both Thomas and Augustine not only stress that God is separate from the temporal order, but also from that causal order to which alone the terms "necessity" and "contingency" apply. In his discussion of predestination, Augustine emphasizes that God can reveal truths about what will happen to Abraham's descendants because God, unlike any other creature, can infallibly move the human will without sacrificing its liberty. Similarly, Thomas emphasizes that God can know future actions because he causes them and that these actions nevertheless retain their freedom. I shall argue that their basic approaches and concerns are similar, although Augustine's thought develops in the context of reading Scripture and polemics against Stoics and Pelagians, whereas Thomas not only takes into account Augustine's approach, but also uses Aristotle's logic and his own metaphysics.

I shall establish this claim by looking at three positions that are held by each. First, they both argue that necessity is incompatible with human freedom. Second, they both think that creatures of themselves cannot have certain foreknowledge of human actions because such foreknowledge is incompatible with contingency. Third, they both think that God as the first cause has such knowledge and can impart it to humans and angels. Consequently, for both figures certain foreknowledge of contingents is possible not through a creature's natural powers but because of God's ability to cause infallibly a free action without making the action necessary.

Scholarly controversy over Augustine's defense of the compatibility between foreknowledge and freedom often focuses on Books Three and Four of his *De libero arbitrio*.<sup>3</sup> In these books, Augustine emphasizes that

<sup>2</sup> Most recently, see Eleanore Stump, *Aquinas* (London: Routledge, 2003), 131–58. For the distinction between the temporal and causal issues in Thomas, see Harm J. M. J. Goris, *Free Creatures of an Eternal God: Thomas Aquinas on God's Infallible Foreknowledge and Irresistible Will* (Leuven: Peeters, 1996), 53–99.

<sup>3</sup> The literature is voluminous. See William Lane Craig, "Augustine on Foreknowledge and Free Will," *Augustinian Studies* 15 (1984): 41–63; Barry A. David, "The Meaning and Usage of 'Divine Foreknowledge' in Augustine's *De libero arbitrio* 3.2.14–4.41," *Augustinian Studies* 32 (2001): 117–56; David DeCelles, "Divine Prescience and Human Freedom on Augustine," *Augustinian Studies* 8 (1977): 151–60; Jasper Hopkins, "Augustine of Foreknowledge and Free Will," *International Journal for the Philosophy of Religion* 8 (1977): 111–26; David P. Hunt, "Augustine on Theological Fatalism: The Argument of *De Libero Arbitrio* 3.1–4," *Medieval Philosophy and Theology* 5 (1996): 1–30; idem, "On Augustine's Way Out," *Faith and Philosophy* 16 (1999): 3–26; Christopher Kirwan, *Augustine* (London: Routledge,

God's foreknowledge of sins does not cause sinful actions. For our purposes, it is only necessary to make the uncontroversial claim that in this text Augustine argues that free choice is incompatible with natural necessity and that God's foreknowledge does not impose such necessity. Indeed, in this work Augustine argues that neither human nor divine foreknowledge necessitates choice: "So if your foreknowledge is consistent with his freedom in sinning, so that you foreknow what someone else is going to do by his own will, then God forces no one to sin, even though he foresees those who are going to sin by their own will."<sup>4</sup> In this passage Augustine seems to conflate human and divine foreknowledge, while separating both from God's causal activity.<sup>5</sup> But he does not explicitly do so.<sup>6</sup> In this work he does not directly discuss God's movement of the will and how it differs from the order of secondary causes. Nor does he in this context distinguish between God's causation of good acts and his permission of sins. Augustine makes the simple point that the mere knowledge of an act does not compel the act.<sup>7</sup> A more comprehensive account of his thought is given in his *De civitate Dei* and anti-Pelagian writings.

In Book V of the *De civitate Dei*, Augustine attacks astrologers, Stoics, and Cicero.<sup>8</sup> Both the astrologers and the Stoics hold that human acts are

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1989), 92–103; Theodore J. Kondoleon, "Augustine and the Problem of Divine Foreknowledge and Free Will," *Augustinian Studies* 18 (1987): 165–87; Eleanore Stump, "Augustine on Free Will," in *The Cambridge Companion to Augustine*, ed. Eleonore Stump and Norman Kretzmann (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 124–47.

<sup>4</sup> Augustine, *De libero arbitrio* 3.4(9), ed. W. M. Green, *Corpus Christianorum: Series Latina*, vol. 29 (hereafter CCSL) (Turnhout: Brepols, 1970), 281; English *On the Free Choice of the Will*, trans. Thomas Williams (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1993), 78.

<sup>5</sup> For problems with this early treatment, see especially Kirwan, *Augustine*, 95–98.

<sup>6</sup> For the position that in the context "foreknowledge" implies causality, see David, "Meaning and Usage," 142–47.

<sup>7</sup> For a similar interpretation, see Kondoleon, "Augustine and the Problem," 167–71.

<sup>8</sup> For a summary, see Barry A. David, "Divine Foreknowledge in *De civitate Dei* 5.9: The Philosophical Value of Augustine's Polemic," *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* 75 (2001): 479–95; José Oroz Reta, "Une polémique Augustinienne contre Cicéron: Du fatalisme à la prescience divine," *Augustinian Studies* 12 (1981): 19–41. For Augustine's knowledge and use of Cicero, see Maurice Testard, *Saint Augustin et Cicéron*, vol. 1, *Cicéron dans la formation et dans l'oeuvre de saint Augustin* (Paris: Études Augustiniennes, 1958). For his usage of Cicero in Book V of the *De civitate Dei*, see especially vol. 1, 240–2, 280–1; vol. 2, *Répertoire des textes*, 46–52. Augustine's references to Cicero are not always clear; see Testard, *Répertoire des textes*, 48 note 1.

determined. The astrologers think that the stars determine the acts.<sup>9</sup> Augustine thinks that this view is absurd, and he discusses the absurdity in detail. For example, why do twins act differently when both are born under the same stars? The more interesting threat to human freedom is that of the Stoics, who think that every event is part of a fixed order of causes, which is fate.<sup>10</sup> Human actions are part of this fixed order and consequently determined.<sup>11</sup> Consequently, if the agent's inner nature and outer conditions were known, the agent's action could be predicted. Cicero saw that the Stoic view makes human freedom impossible and rejected such a fixed order of causes. Therefore, he concluded that since free actions are not determined by present causes, not even God or gods can know what humans will do in the future.<sup>12</sup> Augustine partially accepted Cicero's criticism of the Stoics. In order to act rightly or wrongly, the action must be in our power. If everything is subject to fate, then we cannot so act because we are not free. The Stoic view is incompatible with the contingency of free actions. Nevertheless, although Cicero was correct to criticize fate, he incorrectly thought it necessary to limit God's

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<sup>9</sup> Augustine, *De civitate Dei* 5.1–7 (CCSL 47, 128–35). For the connection between astrology and the intellectual elite, including Stoics, see Tamsyn Barton, *Ancient Astrology* (New York: Routledge, 1994), 33–7.

<sup>10</sup> For the Stoic background, see Dorothea Frede, "Stoic determinism," in *The Cambridge Companion to the Stoics*, ed. Brad Inwood (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 179–205. Katherin A. Rogers argues for the position that Augustine is a compatibilist with respect to both God and other causes. See "Augustine's Compatibilism," *Religious Studies* 40 (2004): 415–35. She neglects Augustine's explicit statement that freedom is incompatible with Stoic fate because fate implies causal determinism. Much of the textual support for her position rests on Augustine's discussions of grace and freedom and not on determination by created causes. Moreover, she confuses the position that someone without grace is not free to act well with the position that someone without grace is causally determined to perform a particular sin. Augustine accepts the former and denies the latter. With respect to God's causal influence, I shall show that Augustine distinguishes between God's causation and that of creatures in such a way that the word "compatibilism" cannot be properly used in this context.

<sup>11</sup> Augustine, *De civitate Dei*, 5.8–10 (CCSL 47, 135–40).

<sup>12</sup> For the connection between Stoic fate and divination, see especially Suzanne Bobzien, *Determinism and Freedom in Stoic Philosophy* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), 87–96. For Cicero's rejection of fate, see especially David Amand, *Fatalisme et liberté dans l'antiquité grecque: Recherches sur la survivance de l'argumentation morale antifa-taliste de Carnéade chez les philosophes grecs et les théologiens Chrétiens des quatre premiers siècles* (Amsterdam: Hakkert, 1973), 78–80. For his criticism of divination, see 46–49.

foreknowledge. Augustine thinks that denying God's foreknowledge is equivalent to denying God.<sup>13</sup>

Augustine's criticism of Cicero is important because he emphasizes the difference between God's providence and the order among other causes.<sup>14</sup> Unlike Cicero, Augustine does not reject the Stoic belief that the universe is subject to order. Instead, Augustine argues that the problem with Stoic fate is that it does not take into account that it is a separate God who orders everything.<sup>15</sup> Similarly, Augustine agrees with Cicero that the Stoic logical determinism whereby truths about the present entail everything that happens in the future is linked to Stoic fate. But Augustine distinguishes between the Stoic logical determinism whereby we might infer truths about the future from God's knowledge of what is caused by free human action. Consequently, Augustine's key move is to place God outside the ordinary causal order of necessity and contingency. Augustine writes, "he knows unchangeably everything which will be and which he himself will make."<sup>16</sup> The Stoic belief in fate implies that all future truths are entailed by present truths. These truths are based on such a fixed order of causes. Augustine argues that human events are not subject to such causal control by fate, since there is contingency in the normal causal order. Nevertheless, if God's activity is considered along with this order, then there is not fate but providence, and everything does happen according to it.

Augustine differs from both Cicero and the Stoics in that he thinks that the order of created causes is completely subordinated to a causal activity that orders such causes even though it does not necessitate them. Indeed, all causality is subordinated to efficient voluntary causes, the greatest of which is God.<sup>17</sup> Augustine emphasizes that God's causation can infallibly move an agent without taking away the agent's own causal

<sup>13</sup> Augustin Pic, "Saint Augustin et l'impiété de Cicéron: Étude du *De Civitate Dei* V, 9," *Studia Patristica* 33 (1997): 213–20.

<sup>14</sup> Kondoleon, "Augustine and the Problem," 171–75.

<sup>15</sup> Augustine, *De civitate Dei*, 5.9 (CCSL 47, 138): "Ordinem autem causarum, ubi uoluntas De plurimum potest, neque negamus, neque fati uocabulo nuncupamus, nisi forte ut fatum a fando dictum intellegamus, id est a loquendo."

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.: "nouit incommutabiliter omnia quae futura sunt et quae ipse facturus est."

<sup>17</sup> For the importance of voluntary causes in this discussion, see David, "Divine Foreknowledge," 486–94; Reta, "Une polémique Augustinienne," 36–37. These two authors identify efficient with voluntary causation. Kondoleon ("Augustine and the Problem," 174–75) argues that some efficient causes are not voluntary, although they are all subordinated to voluntary causes. At any rate, it is clear that God's will is the ultimate efficient cause, as can be seen in *De civitate Dei*, 5.9 (CCSL 47, 139): "omnia maxime Dei uolunati subdita sunt, cui etiam uoluntates omnes subiciuntur, quia non habent potestatem nisi quam ille concedit."

activity. For example, in Book VII of the same work, he argues that pagans such as Varro did not recognize the difference between the creator and created causes.<sup>18</sup> Even though created causes such as the sun, living creatures, and human beings exercise their own causal power, all such power is subordinated to God. Both God and creatures produce the act. From the perspective of created causes, the future contingent acts are not determined and consequently cannot be foreknown.

In his dispute with Cicero and the Stoics, Augustine does not bring up the central logical issue of whether statements about future contingents can be true.<sup>19</sup> Nevertheless, Augustine in other contexts does emphasize that creatures cannot know future contingents unless they are known in a special way through God. Later in the *De civitate Dei* and in other works, Augustine emphasizes that not only humans but also angels and demons do not of themselves have certitude about future, free human actions.<sup>20</sup> Demons might reveal to us future actions, but that is because of their greater insight into present causes and their ability to know what is happening far away. They know that someone is on their way to visit us well before we do. Moreover, demons can interfere with natural causes so as to bring about what they foretell. Nevertheless, even demons cannot predict free actions with certitude. But good angels can do so. What accounts for the distinction between angels and demons? The difference is that demons infer the future from temporal things, whereas angels can see future contingents as present in God's word. Consequently, Augustine distinguishes between certain and conjectural knowledge of future contingents by distinguishing between whether the knowledge is based on secondary causes or on God. The only certain knowledge of future contingents is based on a knowledge of what God will do. Although in his criticism of Cicero and the Stoics Augustine is somewhat reticent about the connection between God's foreknowledge and his causality, he emphasizes this connection in his discussion of how the good angels know future contingents only by knowing

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<sup>18</sup> *De civitate Dei*, 7.30 (CCSL 47, 211–22). See Kondoleon, "Augustine and the Problem," 174–75.

<sup>19</sup> For Augustine's failure to address this issue, see David, "Divine Foreknowledge," 485–88. For a reading more sympathetic to Augustine, see Reta, "Une polémique Augustinienne," 134–35. For the connection between Stoic causal determinism and bivalence, see Bobzien, *Determinism and Freedom*, 59–86.

<sup>20</sup> Augustine, *De civitate Dei*, 9.22 (CCSL 47, 268–69): "Et ideo certius etiam temporalia et mutabilia ista nouerunt, quia eorum principales causas in Verbo Dei conspiciunt, per quod factus est mundus." The same doctrine can be found in idem, *De genesi ad litteram* 17, ed. Joseph Zycha, *Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum* (hereafter CSEL) 28.1, 17; idem, *De divinatione daemonum*, ed. Joseph Zycha, CSEL 41, 599–618, *passim*.

God as the cause. But we should expect such a connection from the discussion, since, unlike Cicero, Augustine does not criticize the Stoic view that every event of the universe is ordered, but instead criticizes their consideration of this order apart from God.

The connection between God's causal activity and his foreknowledge is more clearly apparent in his arguments against the Pelagians and those who fall under their influence.<sup>21</sup> Augustine expressed this view in his earlier *Ad Simplicianum*, when he developed his position that the *initium fidei* comes only from God.<sup>22</sup> But Augustine's view of God's causal influence does not entail his developed view of the *initium fidei*. After all, this understanding of God's causation and human freedom holds as well for God's influence on the good actions of those who have accepted the faith and even God's permission of sin. But his view on the priority of God's causal influence allows him to stress how God can move the will without violating human freedom in a variety of contexts, including that of the *initium fidei*. For example, in the *De gratia et libero arbitrio* Augustine says that God has power not only over the free actions of the good but also over those of the wicked.<sup>23</sup>

In later writings Augustine directly criticizes the view that humans can resist God's influence on the will. For example, in the *De correptione et gratia* he emphasizes both that God moves the will and that admonition can play a role in helping someone to make a good choice.<sup>24</sup> Nevertheless, no one

<sup>21</sup> John M. Rist, "Augustine on Free Will and Predestination," *Journal of Theological Studies* 20 (1969): 420–47; James Wetzel, "Predestination, Pelagianism, and Foreknowledge," in Stump and Kretzmann, *The Cambridge Companion to Augustine*, 49–58. A still excellent discussion is Gilson, *Introduction à l'étude de saint Augustin*, 198–210.

<sup>22</sup> For this development and an underlying continuity concerning merit, see Augustine, *De praedestinatione sanctorum* 4 (8) (PL 44, 965–6); idem, *De dono perseverantiae* 21 (52–55) (PL 45, 1025–27). See his relatively early (396) discussion of Jacob and Esau in the *De diversis quaestiones ad Simplicianum*, 1.2, ed. Almut Mutzenbecher (CSEL 44, 24–56).

<sup>23</sup> Augustine, *De gratia et libero arbitrio* 19 (40) (PL 44, 96): "etiam illas quae conservant saeculi creaturam, ita esse in Dei potestate, ut eas quo voluerit, quando voluerit, faciat inclinari, vel ad beneficia quibusdam praestanda, vel ad poenas quibusdam ingerendas, sicut ipse iudicat, occultissimo quidem iudicio, sed sine ulla dubitatione iustissimo." For the importance of this passage, see Kondoleon, "Augustine and the Problem," 175–77. In light of recent attempts to avoid this aspect of Augustine's thought, Kondoleon, "Augustine and the Problem," 186–77 note 42, discusses *Ad Simplicianum*, 2.2.2 (CCSL 44, 76).

<sup>24</sup> For the context, see Gerald Bonner, *Correptione et gratia, De, in Augustine through the Ages: An Encyclopedia*, ed. Allan D. Fitzgerald, et al. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1999), 245–46.

can resist God's power. He writes, "he has the wills of men in his power more than they do."<sup>25</sup> Some monastic critics suggested that if everyone is subject to God's will, there is no reason to admonish sinners. Augustine responds to them not by limiting God's omnipotence, but by noting how God sometimes uses admonishment to assist in someone's conversion. In short, his critics confuse the secondary causal order, which is contingent and includes admonishment, with God's power over the human heart.

Scholars who focus on the *De libero arbitrio* often neglect these and similar passages. Has Augustine changed his view on the incompatibility of freedom with necessity, or has he stated that we have freedom even over what is not really in our power? In his *Retractiones*, Augustine argues that he does not change his position.<sup>26</sup> The difference is that these later passages are against Pelagians who deny God's omnipotence, whereas in the *De libero arbitrio* he was concerned with Manicheans who denied freedom. Indeed, if we consider his argument against Cicero and the Stoics, we can see how Augustine only denies that human actions are subject to fate, which is a fixed order of causes apart from God. His emphasis on the incompatibility of freedom with necessity occurs in this context. Augustine never explicitly states that human freedom is incompatible with God's sovereignty over the will.

In the *De praedestinatione sanctorum*, Augustine explicitly connects God's revelation concerning future human events with his ability to cause human actions. God's promise to Abraham is discussed in the context of predestination. God promises to Abraham what God himself will bring about, even though it includes free actions. He writes, "God knew by predestination what he was himself to bring about: whence it is said that he does what will be."<sup>27</sup> In this work Augustine emphasizes that God's foreknowledge cannot be separated from his predestination, namely his causal power to bring about certain kinds of free human actions. Moreover, although God does not cause sin, sin only brings about what God wills.<sup>28</sup> It is important

<sup>25</sup> Augustine, *De correptione et gratia*, 14 (43), ed. J-P. Migne, *Patrologia Latina* 44 (hereafter PL), 944: "magis habet in potestate voluntates hominum quam ipsi suas."

<sup>26</sup> Augustine, *Retractiones*, 5.9; in idem, *On the Free Choice of the Will*, 124–29.

<sup>27</sup> Augustine, *De praedestinatione sanctorum*, 10 (19) (PL 44, 975): "Praedestinatione quippe Deus ea praescivit, quae fuerat ipse facturus: unde dictum est, fecit quae futura sunt." See also *De dono perseverantiae*, 7 (15) (PL 45, 1002); 14 (35) (PL 45, 1014); 18 (47) (PL 45, 1022). See Gilson, *Introduction a l'étude de saint Augustin*, 195–98.

<sup>28</sup> Augustine, *De praedestinatione sanctorum*, 16 (33) (PL 44, 984): "Est ergo in malorum potestate peccare: ut autem peccando hoc vel hoc illa malitia faciant, non est in eorum potestate, sed Dei dividētis tenebras in ordinantis eas; ut hinc etiam quod faciunt contra voluntatem Dei, non impleatur nisi voluntas Dei."

to recognize that Augustine is not arguing here that future human choices are necessitated by an order of causes or that they can be foreknown apart from God's foreknowledge. Abraham can know that his seed will spread and please God only because God has told him. It would be impossible to infer the behavior of his descendants from anything else.

Augustine's treatment of predestination and foreknowledge supplements but does not contradict what he says elsewhere about human freedom. In his earlier work he states that human freedom is compatible with God's foreknowledge but not with ordinary causal necessity. He develops his mature view when writing to Simplicianus on the interpretation of particular texts from Scripture. His approach is further explained and developed in his argument against the Stoics' logical determinism and belief in fate, which is a necessary order of causes apart from God. In his discussions of divination by demons, he emphasizes that demons do not have certain knowledge of the future because they know it only through created causes and not through God. Anti-Pelagian works only emphasize God's providence and the priority of grace over human freedom; they never suggest that freedom is compatible with determination by created causes.

Just as Augustine did, Thomas argues that human free choice is incompatible with causal necessity. Thomas emphasizes the connection between practical judgment and contingency.<sup>29</sup> Since the agent has reason, he can choose between alternative actions. Consequently, free choice requires that these alternatives are not determined. Thomas agrees with Augustine's claim that Stoic fate is incompatible with free choice. If there is a necessary order of causes, and statements about all future human acts are even now true or false, it follows that humans are not free. Thomas builds on Augustine's thesis by more explicitly focusing on the logical issues and how they are founded on an understanding of future events as present in their causes.

Thomas addresses the logical issues in his commentary on Aristotle's *Perihermenias*, in which Aristotle states that it is neither true nor false that "[t]he sea battle will happen tomorrow," since the sea battle is a contingent event.<sup>30</sup>

<sup>29</sup> A representative passage is Thomas, *ST I*, q. 83, a. 1. For the *Summa theologiae*, I use the Leonine edition as reprinted in *Summa theologiae*, 3 vols (Turin: Marietti, 1952).

<sup>30</sup> Aristotle, *Perihermenias*, 1.9; Thomas, *In Libri Peri Hermenias*, lib. 1, lec. 13–5, in *Opera Omnia*, vol. 1 (Rome: Commissio Leonina, 1884–), 59–74. For the many interpretations of Aristotle's passage, see Richard Gaskin, *The Sea Battle and the Master Argument: Aristotle and Diodorus Cronus on the Metaphysics of the Future* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1995). For Thomas, see especially 335–36. I am not sure that Gaskin is correct in his distinction between Thomas's position and his version of the anti-realist position. See also Goris, *Free Creatures of an Eternal God*, 213–55. Goris argues that for Thomas the principle of bivalence holds because the proposition has a temporally definite truth value. It seems to me that it holds only to the extent

As we saw, the Stoics later held the opposed position that such statements were true or false. But Aristotle had rejected the position because he thought that if a statement were so determined, then the event would not be contingent and subject to human choice. On his view, future contingents cannot be known from the past. How then can God know future contingents? Although Aristotle was not directly concerned with such an issue, as a Christian who believes in God's omniscience Thomas was confronted with a difficulty. Nevertheless, Thomas saw, as did many before him, that God's eternity makes it possible to hold that God knows what is future to us, but that these future contingents are not future to him. Whereas God can know the future events in themselves, we know future events only through their causes.

Although Thomas restates this position throughout his writings, scholars usually do not emphasize the connection between this logical approach and his understanding of how necessary and contingent effects are present in their causes. But Thomas consistently connects the logical theory with this emphasis on causation.<sup>31</sup> Being and truth are convertible.<sup>32</sup> Consequently, truth cannot be known unless there is some sort of present being. Since the future is potential and not yet actual, it can only be known as somehow present in its causes. Strictly necessary events, such as eclipses, and those that occur for the most part, such as the generation of a human by humans, can be known in their presently existing causes. But a contingent event is not determinately present in a cause, since the cause must be open to alternatives. For example, one future contingent act cannot preexist in the faculty

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that one or other statement will be true. For Thomas's understanding of free choice, see especially Kevin L. Flannery, *Acts Amid Precepts: The Aristotelian Logical Structure of Thomas Aquinas's Moral Theory* (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2001), 111–43; David M. Gallagher, "Free Choice and Free Judgment in Thomas Aquinas," *Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie* 76 (1994): 247–77. For the classical Thomistic account of the relationship between God's causality and our free choice, see my "Promotion and Contemporary Philosophy of Religion," *Nova et Vetera* 4 (2006): 607–32.

<sup>31</sup> Thomas, *Quaestiones disputatae de veritate*, q. 8, a. 12 (Leonine, vol. 22, 257–60); *ST I*, q. 86, a. 4; 1 *Sent.*, d. 38, q. 1, a. 5, in *Scriptum super libros sententiarum*, ed. Pierre Mandonnet and M. F. Moos, vol. 1 (Paris: Lethielleux, 1929–1947), 907–15. For this issue, see especially Theodore J. Kondoleon, "The Free Will Defense: New and Old," *The Thomist* 47 (1983): 1–42; idem, "God's Knowledge of Future Contingent Singulars: A Reply," *The Thomist* 56 (1992): 117–39. For the view that the connection is not Aristotelian, see Gaskin, *The Sea Battle and the Master Argument*, 49–53.

<sup>32</sup> See especially Thomas, *Quaestiones disputatae de malo*, q. 16, a. 7, resp. I use the Leonine text as reprinted in *The De Malo of Thomas Aquinas*, ed. Brian Davies, trans. Richard Regan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 902.

of free choice, since free choice must be open to alternatives if the act is to be contingent. Consequently, contingent events can never be known in their proximate causes in the way in which necessary events can.

Thomas uses this understanding of the distinction between necessary and contingent events to explain demonic revelations about human events in more theoretical but less graphic detail than Augustine had done.<sup>33</sup> Nevertheless, the approach is similar. Demons have a greater understanding of natural causes than we do; consequently, they can more easily know future events. Nevertheless, they do not know future contingent events with certitude, and they cannot predict when God will act outside the ordinary causal order. Thomas explicitly refers to Augustine's *De divinatione daemonum* on this point.<sup>34</sup> Moreover, good angels can know future events insofar as they know God. Their knowledge of the future is limited in that they each have a more or less limited knowledge of God, who is the cause of the contingent events.<sup>35</sup> The pattern here is strikingly similar to that of Augustine, in that both hold that the angels' superior knowledge of future contingents is based on their knowledge of God as the cause of these future contingents.

Unlike Augustine, Thomas believes that astrological predictions are often true.<sup>36</sup> He thinks that astrologers can infer terrestrial events from the action of the heavenly bodies because these bodies cause future events. Thus, astrologers are able to predict future events because they know them in their causes. Astrologers can predict events such as eclipses with certitude because the heavenly bodies in their view never fail to act in a determinate way. Similarly, Thomas thinks that they can predict earthly events such as rains or a drought because, for the most part, these follow from the actions of the heavenly bodies. Last, he thinks that they can to some extent predict human events because the heavenly bodies influence the passions, and most humans freely follow their passions. Thomas's understanding of astrology may be outdated or just plain too credulous, but the important point is his connection of knowledge about the future with the presence of future events in their causes. Strictly speaking, freely chosen acts cannot be predicted,

<sup>33</sup> Thomas, *ST* I, q. 57, a. 3; II-II, q. 95, a. 1; II-II, q. 95, a. 5, ad 2; *Summa contra Gentiles* 3.154, in *Liber de veritate Catholicae fidei contra errores infidelium seu Summa Contra Gentiles*, vol. 3 (Turin: Marietti, 1961), 228–33; *Expositio super Isaiam*, 3, 507–65 (Leonine, vol. 28, 31–32); 2 *Sent.*, d. 7, q. 2, a. 2 (Leonine, vol. 2, 188–92).

<sup>34</sup> Thomas, *De Malo*, q. 16, a. 7, ad 2 (Oxford, 904).

<sup>35</sup> Stump, *Aquinas*, 118–21, denies that God's knowledge determinately causes human actions. It seems to me that she does not make the important distinction between God's non-causal and causal knowledge, and confuses causal necessitation, which is in the order of secondary causes, with being a contingent effect of God's infallible causal activity.

<sup>36</sup> Thomas, *ST* II-II, q. 95, a. 5.

because they are not determinately present in their cause. Thomas argues that nothing can be predicted from free choice considered in itself. Someone can predict future, free actions only by considering free choice in conjunction with predictable events such as passions, customs, and habits. Moreover, these predictions often fail because humans need not follow their passions, since their free choices are not determined. Consequently, although Thomas disagrees with Augustine over the empirical issue of whether astrologers can accurately predict the future, the conceptual framework is the same. Future contingents cannot be known with certitude because there is no fixed order of causes. We could know all that there is to know about the world at present and yet not be able to predict future contingents.

Thomas's account of prophecy underscores the difference between knowledge about future necessary events and knowledge about future contingents.<sup>37</sup> Most strictly speaking, prophecy is God's revelation to humans of what is far removed from their knowledge.<sup>38</sup> How can God reveal future contingents to prophets if future contingents are unknowable? As Augustine had done, Thomas distinguishes between our ordinary knowledge, which comes from created causes, and the knowledge that comes from God. Future contingents do not exist in the present, but rather only in the mind of God. Consequently, knowledge of them is not natural but depends upon a special revelation. Ordinarily, our knowledge of the future comes from the order of secondary causes that is, at least imperfectly, knowable to us. In contrast, knowledge of future contingents through prophecy can only have God as its source. Usually our knowledge about the future depends on the presently existing causes that we know. In contrast, although prophetic knowledge is about what a created cause does, it only signifies the event and does not depend upon it.

Nevertheless, even prophetic knowledge concerning the future is knowledge of a cause, but the distinctive mark of prophetic knowledge is that it is based on God's knowledge, which is causal. God knows future contingents because he causes them to act contingently.<sup>39</sup> When discussing

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<sup>37</sup> For the contrast of the natural and supernatural knowledge of the future, see especially Alexander Altmann, "Maimonides and Thomas Aquinas: Natural or Divine Prophecy," *AJS Review* 3 (1978): 1–19. For Thomas's understanding of prophecy, see Pierre Benoit and Paul Synave, *Prophecy and Inspiration: A Commentary on the Summa Theologiae II–II, Questions 171–178* (New York: Desclee, 1961).

<sup>38</sup> Thomas, *De veritate*, q. 12, a. 1 (Leonine, vol. 22, 365–70); *ST* II–II, q. 171, a. 2.

<sup>39</sup> See especially Thomas, *De veritate*, q. 12, a. 10, resp. (Leonine, vol. 22, 399–400); *ST* I, q. 14, 8; II–II, q. 174, a. 1. Goris, *Free Creatures of an Eternal God*, 276–304, mentions the connection between contingency and proximate causes, but it seems to me that he wrongly isolates this discussion from the way in which future events can be known only insofar as they are present in their causes.

Augustine's criticism of Stoic fate, Thomas emphasizes that not only does God's knowledge not take away from the necessity of future contingents, neither does his will. The reason is that God is outside the order of necessary and contingent causes. Thomas repeats this point in several passages but it is commonly neglected. Nevertheless, one cannot understand Thomas's view apart from it. He writes that "the necessity and contingency in things is not distinguished through their order to the divine will which is a common cause, but through comparison to created causes."<sup>40</sup> Created effects are necessary or contingent depending upon whether they necessarily follow from their created causes. Future contingents are subject to his providence, but his providence does not take away their contingency because God causes not only the acts but also their necessity and contingency. Consequently, prophetic knowledge about the future cannot err because it is based on the fact that God's causal activity never fails. In this context, Thomas writes, "every effect in necessity and contingency follows the proximate cause and not the first cause."<sup>41</sup> The truth of prophecy is based on the fact that God can unerringly bring about whatever contingent action he wills without taking away its contingency. God knows what future humans will do and reveals this knowledge to us because he himself causes the free actions as the first cause. Causal necessity and contingency is not applicable to the relation of an effect to the first cause, but rather to the relationship between an effect and its proximate cause.

In his discussion of how future contingents are known and revealed, Thomas systematized what Augustine had developed in his disputes with the Stoics and Pelagians. Thomas shows how logical determinism concerning future contingents is avoided by Aristotelian logic, according to which future contingents have no determinate truth. Moreover, he explicitly unravels how our understanding of causal contingency and necessity is applicable only to created causes. Nevertheless, Augustine had explicitly

<sup>40</sup> Thomas, *De Malo*, q. 16, a. 7, ad 15 (Oxford, 910): "necessitas et contingentia in rebus distinguitur non per habitudinem ad uoluntatem diuinam que est causa communis, set per comparisonem ad causas creatas." For Thomas's different modal notions, see J. J. MacIntosh, "Aquinas on Necessity," *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* 72 (1998): 371–403. For the difference between God and secondary causes, see Guy Mansini, "On the Impossibility of a Demonstration of Theological Determinism," *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* 78 (2004): 573–80. I would further emphasize that such a demonstration is impossible because theological determinism is nonsensical, since in the causal order necessity and contingent are meaningful only with reference to secondary causes.

<sup>41</sup> Thomas, *De veritate*, q. 12, a. 11, resp. (Leonine, vol. 22, 403): "omnis autem effectus in necessitate et contingentia sequitur causam proximam et non causam primam."

done the same when he criticized the Stoics not for their position that every event is ordered, but rather for not recognizing that this order must include God's causal power. Moreover, Augustine's discussion of God's promise to Abraham stresses that only God can move the will without taking away its freedom. The truth of the promise is based on the truth of what God will do. Similarly, Thomas stresses that our present knowledge of future contingents can only be prophetic, since they are present only in God and have determinate truth only on account of his decision to cause them. Augustine did not go into detail concerning how future truths are usually known insofar as they are present in their causes, but Thomas's position is compatible with that of Augustine and may go some way toward explaining its deeper philosophical implications.<sup>42</sup>

The similarity of Thomas and Augustine on the problem of prophecy and foreknowledge is an instance of how Thomas often agrees with Augustine on substance, even though he expresses his view in a more systematic and precise fashion. The most relevant texts of Augustine on this issue are polemical. There is even development in Augustine, as he moves from his relatively simple concerns about necessity in the *De libero arbitrio* to the more sophisticated treatments in the *Ad Simplicianum*, the *De civitate Dei*, and the anti-Pelagian writings. Thomas's texts are scholastic. Consequently, he is able to discuss one topic at length and to use conceptual resources borrowed or developed from Aristotle. Nevertheless, there is no reason to conclude that Thomas's development of these themes betrays Augustine any more than Augustine's own development betrays his earlier writings. On this issue Thomas is truly Augustinian. N V

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<sup>42</sup> Although Augustine does not use eternal knowledge as explicitly as Thomas does to address the problem of how future contingents can be known, Barry A. David has shown that God's eternity plays a more important role for Augustine than scholars have generally recognized. See his "Meaning and Usage," 139–42, 151–52, 156; idem, "Divine Foreknowledge," 493–94.