

Discussion

Simplicity, Divine Causality, and Human Freedom: A Critique of Eleonore Stump's *Aquinas**

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*The heart of the king is in the hand of the Lord;
Whithersoever He will, He shall turn it.*

—Proverbs 21:1

ELEONORE STUMP'S *Aquinas* is a massive work, not only in length, but also in scope.¹ It aims to offer both a detailed exegesis of Aquinas's philosophy and to show how it can be applied to address the concerns of contemporary philosophers on a wide range of issues. The book is divided into four parts, each having several chapters: (1) the ultimate foundation of reality (that is, God); (2) the nature of human beings; (3) the nature of human excellence; and (4) God's relationship to human beings. Rather than simply summarize the content of the book, I would prefer to examine in some detail Professor Stump's characterization of God in relation to his temporal effects, since I think her views on this matter are both intriguing and problematic. Further, this is a crucial matter for understanding St. Thomas and a theme that runs throughout all four parts of her book. Accordingly, in coming to terms with Stump's reading of this point, we should also be able to shed some light on her project as a whole.

I will begin by offering a critique of Professor Stump's understanding of divine simplicity. The problem that I will identify in this section is

* I would like to thank Fr. Lawrence Dewan, OP, for offering suggestions that have helped improve this article.

¹ Eleonore Stump, *Aquinas* (London: Routledge, 2003).

central to making sense of a misreading of Aquinas that runs throughout the book. The second section will present a sustained criticism of her argument that God's knowledge is a formal, not an efficient, cause of all created things. I will also offer a defense of interpreting Aquinas as holding that God's knowledge is both a formal and an efficient cause of all contingent, singular events. Finally, the third section will examine the consequences of this view in light of Professor Stump's understanding of free will and the role of grace. It will be shown, *pace* Stump, that the nature of God's knowledge as an efficient cause of all contingent, singular events is not a violation of human freedom, but in fact a necessary condition for a creature to act freely at all.

I. Divine Simplicity

One of the characteristic features of traditional theology is, of course, the claim that God is absolutely simple. That is to say that the difference between God's essence and existence occurs only at the level of the concepts and language that we apply to God, not at the level of reality. Accordingly, all of the properties that we attribute to God are, in reality, the same, even though we use different terms to signify them due to the limitations of our language and understanding. So, for instance, we say that God is both just and merciful; nevertheless both of these terms have the same referent, notwithstanding the fact that they have different senses.

In the course of her defense of God's simplicity, Professor Stump considers a dilemma posed some years ago by Fr. Réginald Garrigou-Lagrange:

God is either determining or determined, there is no other alternative The knowledge of God is the CAUSE of our free determinations, or else it is caused by them. . . . The knowledge of God either measures things or is measured by them. Only anthropomorphism can admit the second term of the dilemma and therefore, from sheer necessity, we must keep to the first. (118–19)

Stump goes on to assert that this way of formulating the problem is simply a false dichotomy that gives rise to irresolvable philosophical problems.

In order to show that the choice between the claim that God determines all other things and the claim that he is determined by them is not exhaustive, Stump does not offer an argument, but a counterexample. This would be fine if it were to the point, but unfortunately it is not. Her alleged counterexample is that of human knowing. Consider a person who knows that an animal is a corporeal substance. Stump claims that:

- (K1) this fact is not caused by the human intellect that knows it; and
- (K2) the human knower is not determined, since the human intellect is not passive, but active in the cognitive process.

Surely no one could object to K1; however, K2 is ambiguous. It might mean either:

- (K2a) the human intellect is not determined at all, since it is active in the cognitive process; or
- (K2b) the human intellect is not completely determined, since it is active in the cognitive process.

If we have to choose between these two readings, clearly K2b is the correct claim. For Aquinas the human intellect, even in its cognition of sensible things, is not completely passive and determined by the material objects it knows. The intellect is also active in the process of knowing. However, this does not at all entail that the knower is completely undetermined by the objects it knows. In order to know that an animal is a corporeal substance, for instance, one must have some experience of animals, so the knower is in this respect at least determined by them. Consequently, K2a must be false. The human knower, unlike God, is both determined and determining of what he knows, albeit in different senses. Such an option is not open to God since, as Stump is well aware (177), the passive aspect of sensation is not a part of his knowing material things. Indeed, there can be no passive potency in God at all. Accordingly, Fr. Garrigou-Lagrange's position stands: God must entirely determine the object of his knowledge or be in some respect or other determined by it.

Stump wants to find a middle ground between God determining all things and his being determined by them because she thinks that without this possibility there would be no way to reconcile simplicity with God's responsiveness to creatures. This is important for much of religious practice. Take for instance the standard belief that God answers prayer. If God answers Hannah's prayer to conceive a child, it seems to follow that God's action must in some way be a result of her prayer and *a fortiori* that prayer must in some sense bring it about that God causes her to conceive.

Stump is certainly correct to say that any adequate account of simplicity must make room for God responding to our prayers and needs. However, it is not clear that it is necessary to deny that God's determining causality extends to every contingent singular act. Indeed, in his own treatment of the efficacy of prayer, Aquinas reconciles the effectiveness of prayer

with the universal scope of divine causality. Accordingly, he argues that petitionary prayer is not a matter of changing God's will, but of fulfilling it; insofar as God wills some things to occur through our prayers: "For we pray not that we may change the divine disposition, but that we may impetrate that which God has disposed to be fulfilled by our prayers, in other words 'that by asking, men may deserve to receive what Almighty God from eternity has disposed to give,' as Gregory says (Dial. i, 8)."² In light of this, it is clear that we need not deny Fr. Garrigou-Lagrange's claim that God's simplicity entails that divine causality determines every contingent singular in order to preserve a place for prayers of petition. Stump's position does not seem to fit with Aquinas's own treatment of prayer.

II. Is God's Knowledge Causal?

Professor Stump's treatment of divine simplicity is motivated by deeper concerns about the causal character of God's knowledge. This follows from the previous concern with simplicity, for if God's knowledge is not the cause of the things God knows, then the created objects of his knowledge would cause this knowledge; any such claim would entail that created things in some respect or other determine the divine nature.

While admitting that there are a large number of texts in which Aquinas explicitly defends the view that God's knowledge is causal, Stump argues that these cannot be taken at face value. The most important argument she gives follows from the fact of evil. The claim that God's knowledge is the cause of all that he knows, seems to be inadmissible in the case of evil, for it would entail either that God is the cause of evil or that he is ignorant of evil. Aquinas explicitly rules out the possibility that God could be the cause of evil in very strong terms. Moreover, he is clearly committed to divine omniscience. Accordingly, Stump concludes, God's knowledge cannot cause all that he knows (160–63).

Unfortunately, while she notes that Aquinas denies that the causal character of God's knowledge requires that he be the cause of evil, Stump

² *Summa theologiae* II–II, q. 83, a. 2, c. Also see *ibid.*, ad 3. I have used standard translations of Aquinas wherever possible. I use the following translations and Latin editions of Aquinas: *Summa Theologica*, trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province, 5 vols. (Westminster, MD: Christian Classics, 1948); *Summa contra Gentiles*, 5 vols., (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1975); *Quaestiones Quodlibetales* (Taurini: Marietti, 1949); *Scriptum super Sententiis magistri Petri Lombardi*, t. 1, ed. P. Mandonnet (Paris: P. Lethielleux, 1929); *De veritate, The Disputed Questions on Truth*, trans. Robert W. Mulligan, SJ, 3 vols. (Chicago: Henry Regnery Company, 1952); *De potentia*, in *Quaestiones Disputatae*, t. 2 (Taurini: Marietti, 1949); *Commentary on the Metaphysics of Aristotle*, trans. John P. Rowan, 2 vols. (Chicago: Henry Regnery Company, 1961).

does not attend sufficiently to his argument in support of this point. In fact, Aquinas explicitly refutes what Stump asserts, namely, that God knows evil. God does not know evil qua evil. This is not because of any imperfection in God's knowledge, but rather because evil qua evil, cannot be known through itself.

In *Quodlibet* XI, question 2, Aquinas distinguishes between knowing something that has its own proper *ratio*, for example, a man or a stone, from something that does not, for example, a privation. In the former cases we know the thing directly through coming to know its *ratio*. But, privations, negations, and relations have no proper *ratio*. Consequently, these can only be known through the relation they have to other things.³ Thus, Aquinas's position is that it is impossible to know any privation per se, for there is nothing there to be known. Rather, a privation is only knowable indirectly through its contrary. Since evil is a privation, it is only known through its contrary: namely, by way of the good.⁴ This is precisely how Aquinas is able to assert that: (1) God, in a sense, knows evil; (2) God's knowledge is causal; and yet deny that (3) God's knowledge of evil causes evil. God knows evil insofar as he knows the good and his knowledge causes the good without causing the lack of good, which is evil. Stump does not offer any sustained attempt to deal with these problematic texts. I find this quite remarkable since so much of her position rests on this argument from evil.⁵

³ *Quaestiones Quodlibetales*, XI, q. 2, c.: "Respondeo. Dicendum, quod propria cognitio uniuscuiusque rei est secundum quod cognoscitur per propriam rationem. In cognoscibilibus autem quaedam sunt quae habent rationem propriam absolutam, ut homo et lapis, quorum propria ratio non dependet ex alio; quaedam vero sunt quae non habent propriam rationem absolutam, sed ex alio dependentem, sicut est in relativis et privativis et in negativis, quorum ratio dependet ex ordine quem habent ad alia: nam ratio caecitatis non est absoluta, sed dependens, in quantum habet ordinem ad visum, cuius est privatio."

⁴ *In I Scriptum super Sententiis*, d. 36, q. 1, a. 2, c. "Sed sciendum est, quod privatio non cognoscitur nisi per habitum oppositum: nec habitui opponitur privatio nisi circa idem subjectum considerata. . . . Unde per hoc quod Deus cognoscit essentiam suam cognoscit ea quae ab ipso sunt, et per ea cognoscit defectus ipsorum. Si autem essentiam suam cognosceret tantum, nullum malum vel privationem cognosceret nisi in communi." This is related to the question of causality in *ibid.*, ad 2: "Scientia Dei nullo modo a re causata est; nec tamen est causa omnium quae cognoscit, sed horum tantum quorum est per se cognitio, scilicet bonorum. Mala autem cognoscit per bona, ut dictum est, in corp. art." Also cf. *ST I*, q. 14, a. 10, c.; ad 2; and ad 4.

⁵ Moreover, these texts were pointed out some years ago in Brian Shanley, OP, "Aquinas on God's Causal Knowledge: A Reply to Stump and Kretzmann," *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* 72 (1998): 447–50.

Stump is, of course, perfectly aware that in many passages Aquinas asserts that God's knowledge is causal. To her credit she brings these to our attention. For example she quotes from *Summa theologiae*:

It must be said that God's knowledge is the cause of things. For God's knowledge is related to all things as a craftsman's knowledge is related to the things he crafts, but a craftsman's knowledge is the cause of the things he crafts.⁶

Clearly, passages such as this, which are by no means idiosyncratic, pose a challenge to anyone who wants to claim that Thomas denies that God's knowledge is causal. In light of this dilemma, Stump sets out two assumptions that she believes are both false:

Assumption A: The causation which God's knowledge has is efficient causation;

Assumption B: What is effected by the causation of divine cognition includes all actions, events, and states of affairs in the world. (179)

Stump reconciles her position with the texts by maintaining that when Aquinas says God's knowledge causes all temporal things, he means that it is their formal cause, not their efficient cause. As she puts it, "When Aquinas says that God's knowledge is causative, he does not mean that God's act of cognition efficiently causes what God knows. He means rather that the divine ideas are formal causes of the things God creates or can create" (181). This theory takes its impetus from Aquinas's frequent comparison between God's knowledge of creation and a craftsman's knowledge of his product. The blueprint in the mind of the architect, Stump points out is the formal, but not the efficient, cause of the house (179–80). Yet, Stump does not provide any text in which Aquinas denies that God is a universal efficient cause.⁷ Rather, she points out that formal causes are necessarily causes of things like substances or artifacts and not acts, events, or states of affairs; consequently, she holds that Aquinas could not hold assumption B. Further, if assumption B is false, assumption A must also be false.

⁶ *ST* I, q. 14, a. 8. Stump's translation. She also quotes from *SCG* I, ch. 66, to the same effect.

⁷ The texts she does offer (390–93) say that God always acts in accordance with each thing's nature and that the nature of a free being is incompatible with coercion. Aquinas, as I will show below, does not see these claims as incompatible with the universal character of God's efficient causality.

While we must be grateful to Professor Stump for explaining the formal causality of God's knowledge more clearly than anyone has done to date, it must be pointed out that her denial of the efficient causality of divine knowledge does not follow from the argument she presents. Neither of the two "assumptions" Stump points to require one to hold that God is *only* an efficient cause of every contingent thing or act. The defender of these two claims is entitled to admit that God's knowledge functions as a formal cause, analogous to the knowledge of a craftsman practicing his art, so long as he holds that God's knowledge is *also* the first efficient cause of every created thing, act, and event. Stump provides no reason to think that God's knowledge being a formal cause must rule out the claim that God's knowledge is also an efficient cause.

Is there any reason to think that God's knowledge must be efficiently causal and not just formally causal? Indeed there is. In all of Aquinas's major discussions of the causal character of divine knowledge, he concludes his discussion of God's knowledge as a formal cause by pointing out that this is an *incomplete* explanation of God's causality. While there seems to be some development in views on this, it is clear that the formal causality provided by God's knowledge is not the full extent of God's causality. From his earliest treatment in the *Commentary on Peter Lombard's Sentences*, Aquinas argues that the formal character of God's knowledge is insufficient to account for the real existence or operation of anything. God must also choose to act:

It is clear that his [that is, God's] knowledge is a cause in the manner of both an efficient [cause] and as an exemplar [that is, formal cause] of all knowledge. But, there is a question as to whether [his knowledge] is the cause of all the objects known. Therefore we must note that knowledge according to the nature [*ratio*] of knowledge does not designate causality, otherwise all knowledge would be causal. But, inasmuch as it is the knowledge of the craftsman producing the thing, it has the nature of a cause with respect to the thing produced through the art. Hence, just as we consider the causality of the craftsman through his art, so too we must consider the causality of divine knowledge. There is a progression in the production of an artifact. First, the artisan's knowledge reveals the end; second, his will intends that end; third, the will orders the act which produces the work, concerning which work the craftsman's knowledge posits the form conceived.⁸

⁸ *In I Scriptum super Sententiis*, d. 38, q. 1, a. 1, c. Note that I am translating *scientia* as "knowledge." This broader term does not capture the Aristotelian sense of *scientia* Aquinas has in mind. On the other hand the translation "science" is rather misleading in English, since we would not ordinarily speak of "God's science" or "the science of a craftsman."

In this early text Aquinas seems to limit the scope of efficient causality as it pertains to God's knowledge, assigning it more properly to his will instead.⁹ Nevertheless, an important point is made here; namely, that a formal cause, insofar as it is *formal*, is never an adequate cause of action. This clearly entails that God's causality must extend beyond being a mere formal cause. Aquinas retains the argument that God's knowledge is a formal cause, while asserting that God's will is necessary as the efficient cause, in order to account for these forms to be realized.

In later texts a progressively greater emphasis is placed on the real identity between God's knowledge and will. This is evident in the treatment from *De veritate*:

It should be observed, however, that knowledge as knowledge does not denote an active cause, no more than does a form as a form. Action consists, as it were, in the procession of something from the agent; but a form as a form has its act of existence by perfecting that in which it is, and by resting in that thing. Consequently a form is not a principle of acting, except through the mediation of a power. In some cases, it is true, the form itself is the power, but not by reason of being a form. . . . Hence, an effect never arises from knowledge except through the mediation of the will, which, of its very nature implies a certain influence upon what is willed. . . . Although in the case of some substances, such as God, will is identical with knowledge. In other substances, namely, creatures, this is not the case.¹⁰

In the *Summa theologiae* the unity of God's knowledge and will is underscored even more forcefully. Immediately after explaining the analogy between God's knowledge and the knowledge of a craftsman, Aquinas argues:

Nevertheless, we must observe that a natural form, being a form that remains in that to which it gives existence, denotes a principle of action according only as it has an inclination to an effect; and likewise, the intelligible form does not denote a principle of action in so far as it resides in the one who understands unless there is added to it the inclination to an

⁹ Accordingly, he introduces the argument by clarifying the way in which we speak of the divine attributes. Also cf. *ibid.*, ad 4: "Ad quartum dicendum, quod voluntas habet completam rationem causae, inquantum objectum ejus est finis secundum rationem boni, qui est causa causarum; unde et imperium super alias vires habet; et ideo absolute voluntas Dei causa rerum dicitur. De scientia autem non similiter se habet sicut de voluntate, ut dictum est, in corp. art.; nec etiam ita comparatur scientia ad scitum sicut vita ad viventem. Unde patet quod ratio non concludit."

¹⁰ *De veritate*, q. 2, a. 14, c.

effect, which inclination is through the will. For since the intelligible form has a relation to opposite things (inasmuch as the same knowledge relates to opposites), it would not produce a determinate effect unless it were determined to one thing by the appetite, as the Philosopher says (*Metaph.* ix). *Now it is manifest that God causes things by his intellect, since his being is his act of understanding; and hence his knowledge must be the cause of things, in so far as his will is joined to it. Hence the knowledge of God as the cause of things is usually called the "knowledge of approbation."*¹¹

The general argument of all of these texts is the same. A formal cause, *qua* formal, does not account for the action necessary to bring anything into existence or for any act to occur. An architect can draw up as many blueprints as she likes, but unless there is the will to do what is necessary to make the building, these will never yield a house. Any craftsman must add the will to act to his knowledge in order for anything to be done. The difference between God and a human craftsman, however, is that God's knowledge is really identical with his will. Hence, in the late treatment from the *Summa*, which I just quoted, God's knowledge can be understood as an efficient cause insofar as we understand this to mean a "knowledge of approbation" in which God's will is joined to this knowledge.¹²

While Stump could perhaps save her thesis that God's knowledge is only a formal cause, not an efficient cause of every thing, action, and event by making a strong distinction between God's knowledge and will along the lines of the text from the *Sentences* commentary, she does not do so. In the context of her book as a whole it is easy to see why. For Aquinas the issue is which of the divine attributes is responsible for God's universal efficient causality, whereas for Stump the issue is whether or not God is really an efficient cause of everything that is and every act that occurs. To the question that she poses, she responds definitively in the negative. Whether this answer is appropriate must be considered in further detail. This will be the aim of the following section.

III. Divine Causality and Human Freedom

Professor Stump's restriction of God's causality to formal causation is clearly motivated by the concern that extending it to efficient causation would undermine human freedom. There are, in fact, two chapters in her book devoted to human freedom. The first treats of human acts of the will in relation to other created causes, while the second examines the

¹¹ *ST* I, q. 14, a. 8, c., emphasis added.

¹² On God's will as the first cause in the order of agents, see *ST* I, q. 19, a. 4; *In I Scriptum super Sententiis*, d. 43, q. 2, a. 1, and d. 45, a. 3; *SCG* II, ch. 23; and *De potentia*, q. 1, a. 5, and q. 3, a. 15.

relation between human freedom and grace. Although my concern is with reconciling human freedom and God's efficient causality, it is worth noting, at least in general terms, Stump's understanding of freedom in its own right.

Stump argues that there is a sense in which Aquinas's treatment of human freedom in relation to other created things is similar to contemporary libertarian accounts. While Aquinas would clearly deny the libertarian view that freedom requires an ability to choose otherwise, due to the fact that saints and angels remain free even after they can no longer choose to dissent from the good, he agrees with the libertarian claim that no act is free if it is brought about through a cause external to the agent. Aquinas's position, as Stump states it, is:

(L1") a decision is free only if it is not the outcome of a causal change that originates in a cause outside the agent. (302)

If "a cause outside the agent" refers to a secondary efficient cause, which is the general context of the claim, then this is an accurate account of Aquinas's position. She goes on to defend Aquinas against a reductionist account of free will in terms of neural events, all of which are causally linked to an origin outside of the agent. Drawing on John Dupré's biology that presents a strong case against reductionism, arguing that neural events on a "macrolevel" are not always reducible to events on the "microlevel." She then rephrases her reading of Aquinas's position to state:

(L') an act is free if and only if the ultimate cause of that act is the agent's own will and intellect. (304)

Again this way of stating the issue is helpful if "ultimate cause" refers to secondary efficient causes, but clearly she does not intend it to be understood in this restricted fashion.

While I think that Stump's argument that Aquinas is not a compatibilist on free will is convincing if we restrict our attention to secondary causes, I do not think that her claim that Aquinas is not a compatibilist with regards to divine causation of human acts of will is defensible. Given what I have said about Stump's account of God's knowledge as a merely formal cause, it is no surprise that she goes so far as to assert that God's causality cannot be an efficient cause of free acts of the human will. She makes this as explicit as anyone could want in her treatment of grace and free will: "The first thing to see in this connection is Aquinas's insistence that nothing operates on the will with efficient causation" (390). In

support of this claim she provides a series of quotations from Aquinas showing that God moves everything in accordance with its nature and that it is not suitable for an agent with free will to be coerced.

This is certainly true, as far as it goes. However, Aquinas is quite convinced that God can be a first efficient cause of every contingent singular event, right down to the individual acts of the human intellect and will, and yet those events take place freely. This is possible since Aquinas recognizes that causality has a hierarchical character. The vast majority of causes are secondary causes or caused causes. However, any series of caused causes depends on a higher cause of a different order, a first cause. It is at this level that God's causality comes onto the scene. But Aquinas is very careful to show that the necessity of a primary cause does not undermine the real efficacy of secondary causes; in fact, it is a necessary condition for those causes to exist and act at all.¹³

This is made clear in *Summa contra Gentiles* where Aquinas argues that no created cause can move the human will except by persuasion. He contrasts this with God's causality: "God alone can move the will in the fashion of an agent."¹⁴ Aquinas gives a series of arguments in support of this point. The most pertinent is that which contrasts creaturely causation of the will, which can only occur through violent coercion, with God's causation of the will, which preserves the integrity of free volition:

If the will is moved by some external principle, the motion will be violent. Note that I am talking about being moved by some external principle which moves in the way of an agent, not in the way of an end. But the violent is incompatible with the voluntary. So, it is impossible for the will to be moved by an extrinsic principle as by an agent; rather, every movement of the will must proceed from within. Now, no created substance is joined to the intellectual soul in its inner parts, but only God, Who alone is the cause of its being and Who sustains it in being. Therefore, by God alone can voluntary movement be caused.¹⁵

Since God is the cause of the intrinsic principle of free movement, that is, the will, God is the only being who can move the will as an agent without violence.¹⁶

¹³ This point is recognized by Norman Kretzmann, with whom Eleonore Stump has frequently collaborated, although he dissents from Aquinas's position on this matter, which he refers to as freedom by divine fiat. Norman Kretzmann, "Goodness, Knowledge, and Indeterminacy in the Philosophy of Thomas Aquinas," *Journal of Philosophy* 80 (1983): 631–39.

¹⁴ SCG, III, ch. 88, 3.

¹⁵ Ibid., 5.

¹⁶ Ibid., 6.

Aquinas goes on to argue that this does not just mean that God causes the power of willing, rather it is also the very movement of the will that is caused. The arguments for this claim are given in a general form at an earlier point in the text where Aquinas argues that God is not just the cause of being and of the existence of all powers, but that he sustains things in being and is the first cause of every operation of a power.

But every application of power to operation is originally and primarily made by God. For operative powers are applied to their proper operations by some movement of body or soul. Now the first principle of both types of movement is God. Indeed, He is the first mover and is altogether incapable of being moved, as we showed above. *Similarly, also, every movement of a will whereby powers are applied to operation is reduced to God, as a first object of appetite and a first agent of willing. Therefore, every operation should be attributed to God, as to a first and principle agent.*¹⁷

For Aquinas every agent cause ultimately acts through the power of God who is the primary agent cause. Yet, the secondary causes really are causally efficacious. This multiplicity and hierarchy of efficient causes is familiar even in the physical order. Consider someone using a brush to paint a landscape. There are a number of causes in this event, and they are hierarchically ordered. The primary cause, in the order of created agents, is the artist. Nevertheless, the brush she uses to paint the picture is also an agent cause. The fact that the brush's movement can only occur if the painter initiates and sustains it does not in anyway undermine the fact that the brush really contributes to the result. This is obvious if we only consider the fact that the results of the same motions by the same artist can differ greatly depending upon the quality of the brushes that are used. While both the craftsman and the instrument cause the same effect, they do so in different ways.

Of course, it might be objected that instruments like a paintbrush do not have free will. But, the point of the example is simply to show that the instrument remains causally efficacious. If an act of the will arises from an internal principle related to the agent's knowledge and this act retains its causal efficacy, then Aquinas maintains that there are sufficient grounds for saying that this act is free. Understood in this sense, Aquinas would view free acts of the will as strictly analogous to the case of the paintbrush. It is only because God is the first efficient cause of these acts that the will can operate at all.

Nevertheless the will is truly a cause in what it does. This point is illustrated clearly in Aquinas's arguments that God is not responsible for evil.

¹⁷ Ibid., ch. 67, 4, emphasis added.

If Stump were right that God is only a formal cause of the will's acts, presumably he would appeal to this claim to avoid the dilemma entirely. Yet, he never does so. Rather, he argues that evil results from a failure in the secondary cause, which cannot be attributed to the primary agent; just as a mistake in painting that results from a faulty brush does not imply a failure on the part of the artist.¹⁸ For St. Thomas: "It is possible for a defect to happen in an effect because of a defect in the secondary agent cause, without there being a defect in the primary agent."¹⁹ In explaining this he uses an illustration much like the one that has just been provided. He argues that a defect may exist in the work of a perfect artisan due to some defect in his instrument. In light of this it is clear that human agents must have freedom, for sometimes they fail as a result of their own choices.²⁰ Hence, even though created things are instruments in the hands of their Creator, this does not eliminate the efficacy of secondary agent causes.

Far from denying the universal scope of God's efficient causality, Aquinas holds that God is the first cause moving both natural and voluntary causes. Now, in his moving of natural causes he does not prevent them from being natural. Neither, therefore, in moving voluntary causes does he prevent them from being voluntary.²¹ As Aquinas himself says,

God moves man's will, as the Universal Mover, to the universal object of the will, which is good. And without this universal motion, man cannot will anything. But man determines himself by his reason to will this or that, which is the true or apparent good.²²

In other words it is a necessary condition of human beings willing anything at all that God be the first mover of their wills. It is as a direct result of this doctrine on efficient causality that we should understand Aquinas's account of God's movement of created things as instruments of the perfect craftsman.

¹⁸ For an excellent detailed treatment of Aquinas's metaphysical explanation of the cause of evil that is in keeping with what is argued here, see Steven Long, "Providence, liberte, et loi naturelle," *Revue Thomiste* 102 (2002).

¹⁹ SCG III, ch. 71, 2.

²⁰ Here it is important to note that this analogy only works if the perfect artisan creates his instrument with the freedom to fail. Such a view is, however, defensible, for as St. Thomas repeatedly argues the perfection of the universe requires that there exists not only the perfect good that cannot fail, but also the good that can fail. In this way it is not just the perfect good that exists, but all degrees of goodness. SCG III, ch. 71, 3; ST I, q. 22, a. 4, c.; ST I, q. 48, a. 2, c.; ST I, q. 49, a. 2, c.

²¹ ST I, q. 83, a. 1, ad. 3.

²² ST I-II, q. 9, a. 6, ad 3. Also cf. ST I, q. 105, a. 4; q. 106, a. 2; q. 111, a. 2; I-II, q. 10, a. 4; III, q. 18, a. 1, ad 1 and 2.

It is at this point that the crucial difficulty arises. If God is the efficient cause of voluntary human acts, how can we avoid vitiating their truly free character? Does not this account of divine causality entail that God moves the will of necessity? Aquinas addresses this concern in the context of his treatment of providence, quoting from Pseudo-Dionysius: "It belongs to divine providence, not to destroy but to preserve the nature of things."²³ Consequently, God acts as the first mover of each thing in accordance with the conditions integral to its own nature. In this manner God moves those things that occur of necessity by means of necessary causes. In the case of contingent things, however, He wills that they occur by way of contingent causes. This is the case with the human will. As St. Thomas writes,

Since, therefore, the will is an active principle, not determinate to one thing, but having an indifferent relation to many things, *God so moves it that He does not determine it of necessity to one thing, but its movement remains contingent and not necessary, except in those things to which it is moved naturally.*²⁴

Both natural and voluntary movements are "impressions" from the first mover. As an arrow is inclined toward its target by an impression received from the archer, so too "every agent, whether natural or free, attains its divinely appointed end, as though of its own accord."²⁵ Movement is, therefore, an impression received from God. Yet, the manner in which this movement is caused by God, be it necessary or contingent, is determined in accordance with the thing's own nature. So it is perfectly compatible with human freedom that God move the will contingently and not necessarily. In this manner God acts as the primary agent cause while still permitting the liberty of secondary agent causes.²⁶ St. Thomas, however, goes even further than this. He argues that far from imposing necessity on human choices divine providence is, in fact, the very cause of their liberty. God "by moving voluntary causes does not deprive their actions of being

²³ *Divine Names*, iv.

²⁴ *ST* I–II, q. 10, a. 4, c., emphasis added.

²⁵ *ST* I, q. 103, a. 8, c. Also cf. a. 1, ad 3.

²⁶ It should be noted, at least in passing, that underlying Aquinas's argument here is a notion of contingency or possibility that is somewhat different from what is commonly accepted in contemporary logic. For Aquinas a thing is possible if it happens sometimes, whereas it is necessary if it occurs always. This is at odds with theories of possibility derived from contemporary modal logic that understand possibility as simply "logical" possibility, that is, non-contradictory. In such theories the actual occurrence or non-occurrence of the state of affairs in question is irrelevant to its possibility.

voluntary: but rather he is the cause of this very thing in them; for he operates in each thing according to its own nature.”²⁷ It is God’s act as the primary agent operating within the human agent as the cause of its own interior principles that gives the will its ability to move freely.²⁸ Further, since God’s causality operates in a way that is internal to the agent, there is no question of coercion or violence being done to the will.

It seems that one who argues that divine causality would undermine the freedom of the human will would have to be committed to the view that God’s causality imposes necessity upon things. However, Aquinas explicitly rejects this position. In fact, Aquinas’s account of causality as an ordered hierarchy is a consequence of his view that God is the creator of being as such. It follows that he creates not merely necessary, but also contingent, beings.²⁹ Moreover, God’s providence, his governance of the world, extends to every act and event, embracing both the necessary and the contingent.

It pertains to divine providence that the grades of being which are possible be fulfilled, as is evident from what was said above. But being is divided into the contingent and the necessary, and this is an essential division of being. So if divine providence excluded all contingency, not all grades of being would be preserved.³⁰

Likewise, in the *Commentary on Aristotle’s Metaphysics*, Aquinas reconciles the universal scope of the causality of God’s foreknowledge with contingency in the created order, arguing as follows:

But it must be noted that an effect and all of its proper accidents depend on one and the same cause; for just as a man is from nature, so also are his proper accidents, such as risibility and susceptibility to mental instruction. However, if some cause does not produce man in an absolute sense but such and such a man, it will not be within the power of this cause to produce the proper attributes of man but only

²⁷ ST I, q. 83, a. 1, ad 3.

²⁸ It should be noted that for Aquinas an act is voluntary if it arises from the interior principles of the agent. Hence, God can move the will to a free act as an exterior principle insofar as he brings about the movement of the agent’s own interior principle.

²⁹ I would like to thank Fr. Dewan for showing me the importance and relevance of this point. For a fuller account of the metaphysical background to this position, cf. Lawrence Dewan, “Thomas Aquinas and Being as a Nature,” *Acta Philosophica* 12 (2003): 123–35.

³⁰ SCG III, ch. 72, 3. Also note ch. 73, which reconciles providence with human freedom.

to make use of them. For while the statesman makes man a citizen, he does not make him susceptible to mental instruction. Rather he makes use of this property in order to make a citizen of him.

*Now, as has been pointed out, being as being has God Himself as its cause. Hence just as being itself is subject to divine providence, so also are all the accidents of being as being, among which are found necessity and contingency. Therefore it belongs to divine providence not only to produce a particular being but also to give it contingency or necessity; for insofar as God wills to give contingency or necessity to anything, He has prepared for it intermediate causes from which it follows either of necessity or contingently.*³¹

Hence, it is clear that God is the cause of all that is. Neither the necessary nor the contingent falls outside of the scope of his causality. Yet, he causes each thing to come about in accordance with its own nature. In this way God's efficient causality is seen to be a necessary condition of any act, whether free or unfree, necessary or contingent.

Conclusion

In this article I have argued that Eleonore Stump's account of divine simplicity, God's knowledge and human freedom is inadequate. Divine simplicity requires that God be a determining cause of every individual thing, act, and event. Nevertheless, Aquinas's account of causation in terms of an ordered hierarchy of causes allows him to preserve the real efficacy of causes at the levels of both God and creatures. The universal scope of divine causality does not undermine, but makes possible true human freedom.

This understanding of efficient causation as an ordered hierarchy is one of the least understood points in Aquinas's thought. Indeed, even Brian Shanley, who concurs with the claim that God's knowledge is causal, argues that attempts to explain how divine causality is related to human freedom lead to "a diminished sense of the transcendence of the Creator."³² However, strictly speaking, divine causality is not a mystery. In fact, Aquinas's most compelling arguments for the existence of God and virtually all of his arguments for the divine attributes depend upon the notion that created causes are ordered in a structured hierarchy and that they are radically dependent upon a first agent cause of every contingent singular event. In this context, it is interesting that Professor Stump does not address either Aquinas's proofs for God's existence nor his demonstrations of God's attributes. Her discussions of God's goodness, simplicity, eternity, and knowledge are largely limited to showing the

³¹ *Commentary on the Metaphysics* VI, 3, nos. 1219–20, emphasis added.

³² Shanley, "Divine Causation and Human Freedom in Aquinas," 120–21.

coherence of Aquinas's conclusions, while avoiding discussion of the role of God's causality in the arguments that elucidate the divine nature.

Even though I have been rather critical of her treatment of these issues, that should not deter readers from this work. In fact, this is the best book on Aquinas that has appeared for many years, and it is not likely to be bettered for some time. A great number of issues are treated with an amazing clarity and depth. Moreover, her ability to present Aquinas's philosophy in dialogue with the most important work of contemporary philosophers can only be applauded. Far from a mere historical exegesis of Aquinas's thought, Professor Stump presents us with an account of Aquinas as a philosopher whose thought is profoundly relevant and capable of holding its own in the philosophical discourse of our time. **N V**