

## A Báñezian Grounding for Counterfactuals of Creaturally Freedom: A Response to James Dominic Rooney, O.P.

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### Introduction

In a recently published article, James Rooney, O.P., critiques a fundamental aspect of Réginald Garrigou-Lagrange's articulation of the relation between divine causality and creaturely freedom, which I also defended in my recent book.<sup>1</sup> Specifically, Rooney argues that at least some of what Garrigou-Lagrange holds is rooted in a Molinist rather than Báñezian understanding of human freedom and divine causality. The aim of this paper is to articulate the basic objections raised by Rooney and to show why the objections fail. We shall not provide an exegetical or textual analysis of Báñez himself, but rather will establish a speculative grounding and agreement between basic principles of Báñezianism and Garrigou-Lagrange's articulation, ultimately affirming the necessity of positing creaturely counterfactuals for Báñezianism.

Rooney makes two distinct (but related) objections to Garrigou-Lagrange's treatment. First, he claims that Báñezianism as a system rejects the notion of "alternative possibilities" when considering the creaturely will and its relation to divine causality, especially in regard to physical premotion. I shall argue that this is incorrect, and indeed misses *one of the constitutive elements of Báñezianism*—in fact the *very grounding for its claim that infallibly moved actions remain free*. Second, Rooney claims that Garrigou-Lagrange posits

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<sup>1</sup> James Dominic Rooney, O.P., "Banez's Big Problem: The Ground of Freedom," *Faith and Philosophy* 38, no. 1 (2021): 91–112.

a circular argument regarding the reality of sin. Garrigou-Lagrange's argument would be circular if it corresponded to a single order of causality or if counterfactuals of creaturely freedom were incompatible with Báñezianism. But we shall argue that they are not. As such, the argument is not only not circular, but rather elucidates a constitutive element of the Báñezian system, thereby refuting the objection. In short, Garrigou-Lagrange's articulation of Báñezian premotion admits of counterfactuals without relying upon divine passivity, and it remains internally coherent.

### Rooney's Critique of the So-called "Garrigou Manoeuvre"

Rooney begins the essay by outlining a few of the major differences between a Molinist and Báñezian view of human freedom. Rooney's argument is that there is a potential "grounding problem" for Báñezianism, or at least for Báñezianism as articulated by Garrigou-Lagrange. As Rooney notes, Báñezianism posits that God's efficacious grace is ontologically antecedent to our good actions (and his permission of sin is ontologically antecedent to our sin). But how does this position retain *free* choice, if divine causation or permission is infallibly determinative and antecedent to creaturely choice? Rooney says:

The Banezians need to account for how it is possible that a creature can do otherwise in the special case when God moves the creature to act through grace. Specifically, what grounds the truth of the claim that, even when God determines human free choices from eternity such that a human being has only one course of action open to them, those human beings are morally responsible for their actions? If the Banezian view entails that human beings, acting under grace, strictly lack any ability to do otherwise, then the view is incoherent.<sup>2</sup>

As such, we can see that "the ability to do otherwise" is an essential, grounding element for defending Báñezianism against radically compatibilist or double-predestinarian views of human freedom, which have been condemned by the Church at Trent and in subsequent condemnations of Jansenism.<sup>3</sup> Of course, the phrase "ability to do otherwise" is metaphys-

<sup>2</sup> Rooney, "Banez's Big Problem," 94.

<sup>3</sup> See the Council of Trent, sixth session. See also, for instance, Innocent X's 1653 bull *Cum Occasione*, which condemns the following proposition in Cornelius Jansen's 1640 *Augustinus*: "Some of God's precepts are impossible to the just, who wish and strive to keep them, according to the present powers which they have; the grace, by which

ically ambiguous, which Rooney admits. Various articulations of a more metaphysically precise grounding for the preservation of free choice under the influence of efficacious grace (or while efficacious grace is withheld) have been put forth, and Rooney focuses on a particular “strategy” which he associates with Garrigou-Lagrange and myself.<sup>4</sup> He terms this strategy the “Garrigou Manoeuvre.”

Rooney notes that “Garrigou-Lagrange claims that there is something in virtue of which God denies someone efficacious grace, and that this is in the control of the sinner.”<sup>5</sup> He quotes Garrigou-Lagrange as saying that a person “is deprived of efficacious grace because by sinning he resists sufficient grace. . . . [Therefore,] God refuses efficacious grace only to one who resists sufficient grace; otherwise there would be an injustice involved.”<sup>6</sup> We ought to note here two things: (1) Garrigou-Lagrange does indeed state this, and he does so often, throughout his many books and articles on sufficient and efficacious grace; (2) Garrigou-Lagrange’s motivation here is clear: he wants to articulate precisely how the withdrawal of efficacious grace can be *penal*, that it is not withheld without some ontologically antecedent evil in the creature. To negate this fact would be to neuter the ability for an (ontologically) subsequent withholding of grace to act as a manifestation or execution of the divine justice (rather than being arbitrary, or at least prescinding from being adequated to something within the soul of the individual).

Here enters Rooney’s objection: Garrigou-Lagrange, like every Báñezian, also posits that all good, including the good of salutary acts, comes from God as its primary cause. As such, the Báñezian rejects the notion that there is anything *in* the creature which precedes God’s eternal decrees. All creaturely acts (good or bad), just like creaturely being itself, come forth from God’s creative and governing *ad extra*. Thus, we have the Thomistic principle of predestination *ante praevisa merita*. Election is not caused by foreseen creaturely merits, but rather election is itself the cause of creaturely merit. God is active rather than passive in the bestowal of election upon free creatures.<sup>7</sup>

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they are made possible, is also wanting” (Denzinger-Schönmetzger no. 1092, English at [patristica.net/denzinger](http://patristica.net/denzinger)).

<sup>4</sup> Rooney, “Banez’s Big Problem,” 94: “I will take Taylor O’Neil’s [*sic*] recent *Grace, Predestination, and the Permission of Sin* as an exemplar of this line of argument, what I’ll term the ‘Garrigou Manoeuvre.’”

<sup>5</sup> Rooney, “Banez’s Big Problem,” 97.

<sup>6</sup> Réginald Garrigou-Lagrange, *Grace: Commentary on the Summa Theologica of St. Thomas, Ia IIae, q. 109–14*, ed. Paul A. Böer (St. Louis, MO: B. Herder, 1952), 223.

<sup>7</sup> See Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* [ST] I, q. 23, a. 5.

But do we not then have a circular argument? On the one hand, all that the creature has it has as contingent upon the ontologically antecedent eternal decrees. And yet, simultaneously, Garrigou-Lagrange has argued that God does not withhold efficacious grace except on account of some ontologically antecedent refusal in the free creature. But does the refusal itself not require (as a condition, if not a cause) the withholding of grace, without which the creature would act well on account of having *received* efficacious grace? Rooney states that we have an apparent circularity in Garrigou-Lagrange's account of grace and freedom.

Rooney notes that Garrigou-Lagrange and I appeal to the principle of predilection and the defectible nature of the creature to safeguard the divine innocence. Creatures are not owed to be upheld in all moral perfection and will, of themselves, freely fall into sin if not perpetually upheld in all moral perfection.<sup>8</sup> Rooney thus moves to the full statement of his objection, saying:

God doesn't need to save me from myself, although He certainly can. But the story requires an assumption: that there are truths about what my capacities permit me to do, independent of or prior to whether God has decided to give me efficacious grace or not. This is *not* to say that I can do things absent the divine motion, which all Banezians deny, but that there are truths about my *capacities*, prior to and independent of God's efficacious grace. These facts about my capacities are what are supposed to explain why it is true that I could have done otherwise even at the very moment that God is causing me to perform some particular action. . . . This makes a significant difference because, for the Garrigou Manoeuvre to preserve the responsibility of creatures for their sins, there have to be counterfactuals of freedom that God knows independently of His decision to create that creature

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<sup>8</sup> Rooney, "Banez's Big Problem," 101: "The central claim of the Garrigou Manoeuvre is, then, something like this: that it is sufficient for my being free that I have the relevant capacities for free action, even if I never actualize them to choose an action that is not sinful. The story of how I sin, then is this one: all God does is know that I inevitably will commit sin without His help (perhaps in all nearby modal worlds). He is under no obligation to save me from myself, and so Him leaving me without efficacious grace does not make Him responsible for my sins. God does not take away or impede my normally-functioning capacities for choice when I sin. To the contrary, when I sin, I act fully from my own capacities and volitions; God has only refrained from miraculously intervening in those normal processes in such a way as to stop me from doing what I want to do. And that, surely, cannot be something prejudicial to my freedom."

and to give them efficacious grace. But, if Banezianism is true, there are no such truths.<sup>9</sup>

We can see that Rooney's critique of the Garrigou manoeuvre is grounded fundamentally in the notion that Báñezianism has no basis for speaking about counterfactuals. Rooney states this explicitly, saying, "Banezianism is vindicated as non-compatibilist, but at the price of holding that there are counterfactuals of freedom—and so at the price of making the Manoeuvre inconsistent, *because it would entail the falsity of Banezian claims that there are no counter-factuals of freedom.*"<sup>10</sup> Báñezian defenses of the divine innocence which appeal to counterfactuals are internally incoherent, and thus fail, precisely because they rely upon ontological antecedence in the creature which is itself the negation of the basic principles of Báñezianism. Rooney says:

The Manoeuvre needs it to be true, prior to or independent of whether God has chosen to give me efficacious grace, that it is always the case that I will inevitably use God's sufficient grace badly, in order to argue that God is under no obligation to save me from what I *would have done* if God had not intervened. But this is clearly a Molinist assumption, a counter-factual claim about what I would have done that is not made true by any decision of God's about whether to give me efficacious grace or not.<sup>11</sup>

### How Ought a Báñezian Define a Counterfactual?

As we can see, Rooney's critique hangs or falls depending upon the ability for Báñezianism to posit counterfactuals without grounding them in Molinist middle knowledge, a knowledge which is held passively rather than actively in regard to the events in the created order. But in order to explore whether counterfactuals could be posited in an authentically Báñezian way, we need first to define a counterfactual. What does Rooney mean by the term? We should begin by noting that Rooney seems to use "counter-factual" and "alternative possibilities" interchangeably. He also refers to "modal worlds" and at one point notes: "What I do without His grace are *my* acts, even if

<sup>9</sup> Rooney, "Banez's Big Problem," 102.

<sup>10</sup> Rooney, "Banez's Big Problem," 106–7 (emphasis mine).

<sup>11</sup> Rooney, "Banez's Big Problem," 104.

there is *no world where* I use my capacities well.”<sup>12</sup> But the problems with equating counterfactual with “possible worlds” are several.

The language of possible worlds could be congruent or incongruent with the commentatorial tradition’s “necessary” and “contingent.” But it depends precisely upon its usage. In other words, if one were to argue that an act which takes place in all worlds *that include the condition of God’s willing x* would, by virtue of this information alone, suffice to call that action *necessary*, then the language of possible worlds would depart from the Thomistic distinction of *necessary* and *contingent*, because here “possible” and “impossible” are defined most formally by the quantity of conceptualized worlds in which *x* fails to occur, rather than defining “possible” and “impossible” most formally by the *mode by which x* occurs.

For St. Thomas, what is necessary for true free choice is not the number of worlds in which the free creature wills *x*, but the manner in which the free creature wills *x*. If God can move me infallibly but freely (i.e., contingently) to perform *x* in this world, then he could just as easily do so in all possible worlds. That the set of all possible worlds (under the condition of a divine motion) in which I do *x* would be exhaustive but does not preclude that, in each and every one of them, the action would still be elicited contingently in respect to the free creature.

In defining “counterfactual,” let us then use a very general and common-sense definition of “that which is not but could have been.” A counterfactual is subjunctive in mood rather than indicative. And yet the hypothetical of a counterfactual in question is not an absurdity (like “if God did not exist”), but something intrinsically possible (“if I had sat rather than stood”).<sup>13</sup>

### The Báñezian Grounding for the Counterfactuals in Nature and Contingency

If it is true that Rooney holds the Garrigou manoeuvre to be incoherent on account of Báñezianism’s incompatibility with the notion of creaturely counterfactuals, then it is true that the manoeuvre can be shown to be coherent if it can be demonstrated that counterfactuals of creaturely freedom are a constitutive element of a Báñezian understanding of providence.

<sup>12</sup> Rooney, “Banez’s Big Problem,” 102 (emphasis mine).

<sup>13</sup> I take this to be essentially synonymous with what the medieval tradition terms “future contingents.” See “Future Contingents” in *The Cambridge History of Later Medieval Philosophy*, ed. Norman Kretzman, Anthony Kenny, Jan Pinborg, and Eleonore Stump (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 358–81.

While it is true that Báñezianism holds that God's decrees are eternal and antecedent to all events within the created order, this does not mean that those events unfold in an eternal or ontologically simultaneous manner which would preclude counterfactuals. Báñezianism holds at root that cause and effect, including free acts, are *governed by motions*. This is the grounding for true participation of secondary causes working *with* the universal cause of God to bring about some shared effect. Likewise, this is the grounding for claiming that free creatures participate as secondary causes in bringing about their own free acts. The mode of participation is itself affected by (or flowing from) the state of the free creature *in the given moment of action*, a state which is itself dependent upon a myriad number of necessary and contingent events that have affected that free creature by a priority of time and nature, even if said influence is willed simultaneous to its effect *by God*. In other words, that which is willed *outside of time* by God unfolds *in time as causally interrelated*.

### **That God Governs Free and Contingent Acts via *Motiones* and Not *Creatio***

The Báñezian position has never been that God governs the created order merely by *creation*. If free acts were the product of creation and not motion, *then* it would be true to state that they come forth *ex nihilo*, without any meaningful way of speaking about counterfactuals. Rather, the very cornerstone of Báñezianism is that the created order in general and free actions in particular are governed by *physical premotion*. Unlike creation, if free acts come forth as the effect of *motions*, we are metaphysically speaking about a change in the patient, moving to act as cause *according to the mode of the one receiving the motion*. God *moves* things to cause according to their own nature and disposition (excepting miracles); for instance, the four-hundred-degree oven bakes a cake and a four-thousand-degree oven incinerates it. The man who broke his leg walks with a limp even while we can say that, had he not jumped off the balcony, he would not limp. That is a counterfactual.

In short, a counterfactual is a tenable and even constitutive element of the Báñezian position precisely because that position *recognizes the real distinction between potency and act, claiming that free creatures have a certain range of potencies in any given moment of action, and that this range of potencies is itself determined not just by God directly, but by God indirectly and through the causal mediation of other, external influences on the will and the self-chosen, interior disposition of the will, which we refer to as "habitation"*

and “*inclination*.” This seems tantamount to the basic Báñezian claim that God has control over not only the coming-to-be of a given effect but also the mode by which that effect comes to be. St. Thomas says in so many places that God moves contingent things contingently, but this would be impossible if free acts were created rather than bestowed upon the creature as a motion which befits and corresponds to its nature, taking into account that disposition of the creature *even as it moves the creature to this particular act*.

And yet, it is *creatio* rather than *motio* which seems to ground Rooney’s understanding of Báñezianism. He says:

God did not create Peter so that Peter would inevitably repent of his betrayal by internal necessity. Instead, in the same “logical moment” that God chose to create Peter, God can be imagined to thereby have chosen to create all of Peter’s other actions because, even though Peter comes to exist and act at definite points in time, those acts are all present to God in eternity.<sup>14</sup>

However, there is simply no reason why the timelessness of God’s decrees necessitates that individual decrees or motions are not responsive to previous ones. A priority of time is not necessary; a priority of nature suffices. God causes the lion to eat the gazelle on account of the gazelle’s injury rendering it unable to flee. That injury was itself governed by providence, but providential effects *in the created order* are responsive to other things in that same created order. God does not just write the ending of the story, but he explains how the reader arrives at that ending, fitting each portion of the story to correspond with each other.

Garrigou-Lagrange explicitly rejects this notion of free acts as effects of *creation*.<sup>15</sup> Moreover, I argue against the same thesis as held by Robert. J. Matava.<sup>16</sup> The reason for this is simple: creation does not permit *cooperation and secondary causation* in creatures. If God created my free acts, they would be directly and exclusively the work of God rather than primarily and remotely the work of God *and* secondarily and proximately my own work. I am entirely passive and receptive to my coming into *existence*, for I cannot participate before I even exist. But I *can and do* participate in

<sup>14</sup> Rooney, “Banez’s Big Problem,” 99.

<sup>15</sup> Réginald Garrigou-Lagrange, *Predestination*, trans. Dom Bede Rose (Charlotte, NC: TAN, 1998), 256–58.

<sup>16</sup> Taylor Patrick O’Neill, *Grace, Predestination, and the Permission of Sin* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2019), 312–16.

my free *acts* precisely because they are a *change* (not a creation) within an already existing me.

It is granted that change is distinct from creation, and that creation precludes the range of possibilities out of which *this act* comes, for there is no “out of” at all (as Denys Turner says, “Nothing is not a funny kind of something”); *ex nihilo* simply negates that creation is “out of” *anything*. There is no preexisting patient to receive change, and thus the effect in question is not one potency among others which is brought into act; in this case, there is nothing and then there is the act itself.

But if we return to the bedrock Báñezian position that God governs free creaturely acts by *promotion* rather than creation, we have a robust grounding for an “out of”: God draws forth a change in a preexisting creature with a true range of preexisting potencies. That the creature *exists at all* is the effect of God’s creation. That the creature *exists in this way* is the effect of God’s governance via antecedent promotions. There is no need to appeal to passivity in God in order to maintain preexistent states which ground “alternative possibilities.” Those “possibilities” are the range of potencies which were truly *in the power of the creature to have brought forth into act*. Garrigou-Lagrange says:

The potential indifference which the faculty had before performing its act has been replaced by the actual indifference of the act itself that is already determined, and it tends with a dominating indifference toward a particular good that is absolutely out of all proportion to the universal scope of the will that is specified by universal good.<sup>17</sup>

To put it more simply, when the creature determines itself to one act *in fact*, it remains simultaneously true that the creature remains logically undetermined to that one act, due either to a thing’s nature or to some accidental but causally significant quality (*supervenients*). Consider St. Thomas:

Quality in man is of two kinds: natural and [*supervenients*]. . . . The [*supervenientes*] qualities are habits and passions, by virtue of which a man is inclined to one thing rather than to another. And yet even these inclinations are subject to the judgment of reason. Such qualities, too, are subject to reason, as it is in our power either to acquire them, whether by causing them or disposing ourselves to them, or to reject them.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>17</sup> Garrigou-Lagrange, *Predestination*, 262.

<sup>18</sup> *ST I*, q. 83, a. 1.

That which defines Winston *qua man* perdures across various changes to Winston, which is really just to say that, apart from the death of Winston or some witch turning him into a newt, the changes to Winston wrought by determining himself to particular acts *are all merely accidental changes*. Those accidents which define Winston *qua Winston* are changeable, but still condition and influence how Winston acts *hic et nunc*. Both of these qualities provide a Thomistic *grounding for alternative possibilities*, and this is even true when potential indifference is reduced to actual indifference because some free will determines itself to a particular act (leaving some other potencies never to be reduced to act). In other words, I participate in the stacking nature, as it were, of my free acts as self-determinative. But my nature and inclinations are not antecedent to God's creation and providence, but rather flow from it.

### Refusal of Efficacious Grace for Antecedent Defect Rather than for Subsequent Sin

Having established a *divinely active grounding* for counterfactuals of creaturely freedom, we can turn now to the specific grounding of Garrigou-Lagrange's statement that the refusal of sufficient grace is the reason for the refusal of efficacious grace. For Garrigou-Lagrange, as I have argued, "refusal of efficacious grace" always refers to *act* and not to its antecedent defect. In other words, the antecedent permissive decree occasions a *defect* while the refusal of efficacious grace occasions a *sinful act*.<sup>19</sup> Of course, even defects logically necessitate a lack of some grace of perseverance or right reason, but this is not referred to as "efficacious grace" by Garrigou-Lagrange, or at least not the same actual grace which explains the movement of the will.

Moreover, when Garrigou-Lagrange speaks about the refusal of efficacious grace as being responsive or flowing from that antecedent defect, he is speaking according to the order of *material causality*. It is true that defects *must also be permitted*, but that permission is not the permission of an act or sin, but rather a defect in the intellect which will account for freely choosing to act in an evil way. As such, the *antecedent permissive decree* is a *sine qua non of defect*, while the *refusal of efficacious grace* is a *sine qua non of sin*. There

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<sup>19</sup> Réginald Garrigou-Lagrange, *The One God: A Commentary on the First Part of St. Thomas' Theological Summa*, trans. Dom Bede Rose (St. Louis: B. Herder, 1943), 687: "The denial of God's efficacious grace is not indeed a moral evil, but it is a just punishment which presupposes the guilt of sin. To be without grace is a privation of good, and is not a moral evil but a punishment. Thus, this denial of grace differs from the non-maintenance by God of anyone in the performance of good."

is no circularity present. If we want to break things down into ontological moments, we might say that: first, God permits a defect by not upholding a creature in right vision regarding some good; second, the creature, of itself, lacks vision necessary for a good action; third, on account of the defect, God often *fittingly* permits the act to being drawn through, as it were, the defect, thus perverting the act; this we call the refusal of efficacious grace which leaves the creature on its own to produce a sinful act; and finally, we have the sinful act itself.

Garrigou-Lagrange states:

If efficacious grace is not refused because of a previous sin, it is refused at least because of an accompanying defect. Apart from the first sin, the created liberty through its own defectability resists sufficient graces, such as good inspirations or good advice, and thus puts an obstacle in the way of efficacious grace which was somehow offered in the sufficient help.<sup>20</sup>

Notice here that the motive for permitting a sin *as punishment* is rooted either in a defect at the level of intellect or will or in some previous sin. But *both of these* are anterior to *this sinful act*. Garrigou-Lagrange is not stating that the permission of defect and the permission of sin are the same permission, for indeed, that *would* be a circular claim. The refusal of efficacious grace *as penal* is rather motivated by something antecedent in the will which is about to sin. However, it ought to be noted that this does not mean that God is passive to something *in the creature*, as in Molinism, for the Molinists claim that what is in the creature is *really and truly distinct from God's creation and governance of the creature*, whereas in the present case, *what is in the creature is there precisely under the influence of the divine governance*. In other words, grace can be fittingly refused by virtue of something in the creature which makes it unfitting to receive grace *hic et nunc*, but that it is unfitting is already permitted by God and might have been otherwise. Moreover, it ought to be noted that this is not merely some novel or one-off addition of Garrigou-Lagrange to the Báñezian doctrine. Garrigou-Lagrange cites several other commentators who also maintain this notion of a penal refusal of efficacious grace.<sup>21</sup>

<sup>20</sup> Réginald Garrigou-Lagrange, *God: His Existence and His Nature: A Thomistic Solution of Certain Agnostic Antinomies*, vol. 2, trans. Dom Bede Rose (St. Louis, MO: B. Herder, 1949), 370.

<sup>21</sup> For instance, John of St. Thomas, on *ST* I, q. 19 (disp. 5, a. 6, no. 61): "Guilt at least accompanies and in some order of causality, at least material, precedes the refusal of

Fr. Rooney seems not to adequately note this distinction, again—namely that, for Garrigou-Lagrange, the refusal of efficacious grace normatively follows (ontologically, if not temporally) a defect in the intellect. The intellect disregards some rule or misapprehends something lower as something higher. This defect is not itself a sin, for it has not yet come forth *from the will* as an *act* contrary to the natural or revealed law. Moreover, the defect itself (or an antecedent sinful action) is punished only insofar as the creature had a potency not to defect (e.g., disregarding a known rule rather than being ignorant of it). As such, we can truly say that there is no circularity regarding permission of defect and refusal of efficacious grace as a result of defect and its subsequent perverted action. But God does not always punish defect or permit a defect on account of some previous sin. Still, that God should wish *sometimes* to punish on account of defect and sometimes not is ordered by the divine pleasure. Sometimes God upholds a creature from defect and thereby grants it the efficacious grace to perform a salutary act. Sometimes God permits the defect and then *fittingly* withholds the efficacious grace which would override it, as it were. He is not bound to do so, yet refusal of the overriding efficacious grace is certainly not contrary to justice either, for it merely *allows the creature to continue on as it currently thinks and wills*. In fact, “removal” or “withholding” is a bit of a misnomer. As Ferrariensis (Francesco Silvestri) says, *not giving* efficacious grace neither instills the will with something which moves it to sin (it is not causal; nothing happens) nor removes the *potency* to have done otherwise, which is grounded in a *sufficient grace which the will does indeed already possess*. Garrigou-Lagrange states clearly:

We must therefore distinguish between God's mere permission of sin, which is evidently prior to the sin permitted, and His refusal of

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help, and this suffices for saying that man voluntarily puts an obstacle to God's operation even with regard to the first refusal of efficacious help. For truly, when efficacious help is refused to a man, as far as the man is concerned there is sin or inadvertence, and each is voluntary, and thus there is concomitantly a voluntary obstacle. But that there is also previous culpability according to some kind of causality is evident, because for whatever sin there is required the permissive will of God and there follows defect on the part of man, or a slipping through his own frailty, which leads to nothingness and defect, just as by the absence of the sun the sky becomes by its very nature dark. . . . Thus the refusal of help is only in the deficient subject, not before the deficiency; and yet the defect follows upon the refusal of help. In that priority, therefore, of material and disposing cause, the defect which accompanies the refusal of help is the cause and reason why God forsakes us, because, namely we freely put an obstacle in the way, concomitant with God's abandonment of us” (quoted from Garrigou-Lagrange, *God: His Existence and His Nature*, 289n120).

efficacious grace on account of this sin. This refusal is a punishment that presupposes the defect, whereas the defect presupposes the divine permission. . . . God's withdrawal of efficacious grace is a punishment, and it is a punishment that presupposes at least a first defection.<sup>22</sup>

Now, why does God permit defect in defective creatures sometimes and sometimes uphold the defective creature from defect? We can provide three related reasons. First, God does not owe it to creatures that they always be upheld from every defect. He prevents many, but not all. Second, why God permits this or that defect is certainly unknowable to us, but each has its place in the providential ordering of the universe toward a higher good and the highest good of its parts. As such, St. Thomas often says that the sin of the persecutors is permitted for the good of the martyrs. The defect which accounts for that sin is obviously permitted with the same higher good as motive. Thirdly, insofar as man is not just defectible by nature but is also himself guilty of sin, the antecedent permissive decree, while motivated by the inscrutable orchestration of providence, nonetheless, could be seen as taking on a fittingly penal tone when it is permitted. As a way of illustration, consider how, while God often upholds me from defects, he sometimes permits me to fall not just into defect in general, but even defects that follow naturally from my own antecedent and self-determinative actions. Hence, St. Thomas says: "Although anyone reprobated by God cannot acquire grace, nevertheless that he falls into this or that particular sin comes from the use of his free will."<sup>23</sup> It would not be unfitting but indeed it would even be just if God sometimes (or even always) permitted that a man who had committed many lustful actions were to suffer the intellectual perversion of being unable to see women as anything but objects of pleasure (a defect of reason) which is the natural result of his vice.

Given all of the above, we can see here the grounding for the basic Thomistic notion that the permission of sin is never gratuitous, as if it were unnatural or unbecoming for God to permit a defectible creature to be less than perfect; in a certain sense, a sinful creature is due punishment in justice, and sometimes that is replaced by God's mercy. However, *in both cases*, while a certain level of *fittingness* can always be gleaned, the motive that explains this permission or that grace is known only to God, hidden in the infinite depths of the divine wisdom. In other words, there is a fittingness in the relation of the parts to each other, but that God relates the parts in this

<sup>22</sup> Garrigou-Lagrange, *Predestination*, 208–9.

<sup>23</sup> *ST I*, q. 23, a. 3, ad 3.

way rather than another fitting way is itself a completely free and radically unnecessary effect of the divine will. Just so, the metal worker, if he wills to make a chain, will fit and weave each link into the next, but this follows only upon the completely contingent will to make a chain at all. By virtue of the nature of the chain, the links are necessarily fitted and locked together; by virtue of the nature of the chain-maker, he is radically free and uncompelled by the chain he fits, unless he sets himself to the task.

### The Real Distinction between Cause and Permission

Here we must say more about the meaning of “reason for” in the statement “the creaturely refusal of sufficient grace is the *reason for* the divine refusal of efficacious grace.” Indeed, “reason for” and “because” can be taken in many ways. Rooney thus argues that Garrigou-Lagrange’s position is “apparently viciously circular.” He says:

If God chooses not to give me efficacious grace, then it is impossible that I ever act in a way that does not resist God’s offer of entering into union with me (i.e., sufficient grace). But then it seems that, if God decides to not give someone efficacious grace, and that person can do nothing independent of and prior to God’s decisions to cause or impede God from giving that grace, the vindication Garrigou-Lagrange offers is apparently viciously circular: God denied me efficacious grace because I resisted sufficient grace, but I resisted sufficient grace in virtue of God’s withholding efficacious grace from me.<sup>24</sup>

Here we should begin by noting that Garrigou-Lagrange is aware of this objection and responds to it explicitly. Garrigou-Lagrange says:

It is granted that if efficacious grace were given to a man he would not sin, but it does not follow that he sins for this reason or [by] cause of not being given efficacious grace. The permission of sin is only a condition of sin, not its cause. We must beware of confusing a cause which exerts a positive influence with an indispensable condition which does not exert an influence; *otherwise there would be a vicious circle*, as when it is said: I believe the Church to be infallible because God revealed this; and I believe God revealed it because it is affirmed by the Church. In the second proposition “because” is not taken in

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<sup>24</sup> Rooney, “Banez’s Big Problem,” 97.

the same sense as in the first, for it does not signify the formal motive of faith, but only the indispensable condition of faith, that is, the infallible proposition of the object of faith. Similarly, in our present case, the permission of the first sin and not being preserved in good is an indispensable condition of this sin but not its cause, for sin as such requires only a deficient cause. But on the other hand, not sinning or being preserved in good is an effect of the preserving hand of God.<sup>25</sup>

In other words, it may be true that Báñezianism claims both that “man is deprived of efficacious grace because he resists sufficient grace, and man resists sufficient grace because he lacks efficacious grace,” *but only* if the word “because” is used in an *equivocal* sense. In that case, the statements only *appear* to be circular. As Garrigou-Lagrange notes, they are circular only if “these two propositions were true *with the same acceptance of the conjunction ‘because.’*”<sup>26</sup> Garrigou-Lagrange continues:

The fact is that in these two statements the word “because” is not used in the same sense. . . . The first proposition contains the formal motive why man is deprived of efficacious grace, namely, because he resists sufficient grace. The second does not; that is, it would be erroneous to say that the motive of his resistance is because he lacks efficacious grace; he would thus be sinning on account of an insufficiency of divine help, so that God would be a defective and deficient cause.<sup>27</sup>

And I think that this is precisely what accounts for the confusion in Rooney’s understanding of the argument. He, too, uses words like “because” and “in virtue of” in a univocal manner. The material cause of the *sin* is the defective state of the creature and its non-consideration of the rule. The proximate motivation of God’s withholding in this case is to befit, in justice, a defect which he antecedently permitted. That is, God actively governs the creature *to become a material cause of sin*. The remote motivation of God’s withholding in this case—that he determines that it is more befitting *of the whole created order* for him to respond to the defect in justice rather than in mercy—is known only to the divine wisdom. There is a sense in which one motion is responsive to the effect of a previous motion insofar as God does not govern singulars as compartmentalized, but as being responsive to each

<sup>25</sup> Garrigou-Lagrange, *Grace*, 226. O’Neill also responds to this in *Grace, Predestination, and the Permission of Sin*, 126–29.

<sup>26</sup> Garrigou-Lagrange, *Grace*, 260.

<sup>27</sup> Garrigou-Lagrange, *Grace*, 260–61.

other. But that responsiveness *is not a divine response to something antecedent to divine influence in the creature*. Hence, St. Thomas says:

There is no reason why one effect of predestination should not be the reason or cause of another; a subsequent effect being the reason of a previous effect, as its final cause; and the previous effect being the reason of the subsequent as its meritorious cause, which is reduced to the disposition of the matter.<sup>28</sup>

Perhaps it is helpful to replace the word “because” with two clearly equivocal senses of the word: “cause” and “when.” As such, Garrigou-Lagrange in particular (and the Báñezian in general) holds that man is deprived of efficacious grace *by cause of* his resistance to sufficient grace. Simultaneously, man resists sufficient grace *when* he lacks a grace upholding right reason from defect. What is *not held* is that man resists sufficient grace by cause of God’s refusal to grant efficacious grace. This would mean the same thing as saying that God *causes* the defect which accounts for some sin, but this is so clearly denied throughout the entire Báñezian tradition that it hardly requires repeating. If God caused the defect in the creature, then God would be causing a privation of due being, which is not only infelicitous and untrue, but indeed metaphysically impossible. By their very natures, God is an unfailing cause while man is a failing cause. St. Thomas himself repeats in myriad places that the cause of sin is to be found not in the divine motion but in a defect in the patient which renders its action to be flawed, as when an injury to a leg renders the bipedal motion to produce a limp.

Rooney clearly confuses the disparate influences of grace and permission—that is, the real difference between a *causa* and a *conditio sine qua non*. For example, Rooney says that:

God’s permission for my sin, not giving me efficacious grace, is what makes it true that I will commit sin, . . . and there is no relevant distinction between God “causing” and God “permitting” me to sin by withholding efficacious grace. . . . God’s decision not to give me efficacious grace is what made it true that I would sin.<sup>29</sup>

Again, the tension which Rooney decries is only an *apparent* tension, and that appearance is due to an inattentiveness regarding the uses of “reason

<sup>28</sup> ST I, q. 23, a. 5.

<sup>29</sup> Rooney, “Banez’s Big Problem,” 106.

for,” “because,” and “makes it true.” The efficient cause of a sinful act is the creature resisting the further act for which an actual grace is sufficient, while those causes are themselves logically subsequent to (though not caused by) God’s *not giving* efficacious grace, a *sine qua non* of the existence of the act’s deficient nature.

### Why the Critiques of the Manoeuvre Fail

Rooney goes on to state: “If it were true that there are no counter-factuals of freedom, then God’s decision to withhold efficacious grace from me is what *makes* it impossible for me to do anything other than sin, because God’s decision cuts off all relevant alternative possibilities where I do not sin.”<sup>30</sup> The argument here is certainly that, in a state in which efficacious grace is withheld by God *and* refused by the creature according to an antecedent defect, it is “impossible for me to do anything other than sin.” But as we have already established, this is false precisely because it prescind from considering the *mode of causation* and considers only that which happens. It misses the fundamental Thomistic teaching, embraced by Báñez and many others, that God moves contingent things contingently, and thus the infallibility of the divine motion is truly distinct from the mode by which that motion is carried into act in the patient. Yet Rooney says that, if Garrigou-Lagrange’s account is true, “I will inevitably sin, and there are no alternative possibilities open to me, in all those worlds where God does not give me efficacious grace.”<sup>31</sup> But this is simply to deny the very distinction in question, between sufficient and efficacious grace. Moreover, it is, if not an explicit embrace of, at least a serious flirtation with denying the real distinction between potency and act itself (i.e., what Aristotle calls the error of the Megarians). It is indeed true that man outside of grace is incapable of persevering in every good or performing acts of a supernatural character. If man were called, in a state of ungraced *natura pura* to (1) persevere in every good, without ever failing, and/or (2) supernatural acts, *then* God would be commanding the impossible. *But this is why all humans receive a grace which is sufficient for following the commandments and meriting eternal life.* This is the habit or state or disposition which provides the potency, or real possibility, to perform these sorts of actions. And to deny that the reduction of a possessed potency to act was impossible simply by virtue of the fact that the potency just so happened not to be reduced to act is to deny the very

<sup>30</sup> Rooney, “Banez’s Big Problem,” 107.

<sup>31</sup> Rooney, “Banez’s Big Problem,” 107.

reality of potency as such; it is to claim that there is only non-being and act, and necessitates holding the position that a potency exists only insofar as it becomes reduced to act, without which it cannot be spoken about as something real. But both Aristotle and St. Thomas explicitly deny this, and in multiple places. St. Thomas says:

[Aristotle] draws his intended conclusion, saying that, if the absurdities mentioned above cannot be admitted [e.g., from Aristotle: "one who is not building does not have the power of building, but only one who is building, when he is building"], it is obvious that potency and actuality are distinct. But those who hold the foregoing position make potency and actuality the same insofar as they say that something has potency only when it is in a state of actuality. And from this it is evident that they wish to remove from nature something of no little importance, for they eliminate motion and generation, as has been stated. Hence, since this cannot be admitted, it is obvious that something is capable of being which yet is not, and that something is capable of not being which yet is. And "it is similar in the case of the other categories," or predicaments, because it is possible from someone who is not walking to walk, and conversely it is possible from someone who is walking not to walk."<sup>32</sup>

Notice here the necessity of returning to *motion* rather than creation, that which describes change metaphysically as the reduction of some potency to act.

The compatibility between providence and contingency is at least implicitly rejected by Rooney when he says: "When there are only sinful possibilities open to me, and I would find it unthinkable or undesirable to do anything *but* sin, I did not put myself in this position. Instead, it would appear that God was the one who put me in this position by choosing to withhold efficacious grace from me from eternity."<sup>33</sup> This quote, I think, contains three constitutive elements of Rooney's argument, all of which we have dealt with extensively above. But, to tie them together and respond summarily in turn:

1. When I am without efficacious grace, there are "only sinful possibilities open to me."

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<sup>32</sup> Aquinas, *In IX metaphys.*, lec. 3, no. 1803.

<sup>33</sup> Rooney, "Banez's Big Problem," 108.

2. When I am without efficacious grace, "I did not put myself in this position."
3. When I am without efficacious grace, "God was the one who put me in this position."

Ad 1. *Denied*. For this claim effectively denies the true potency of sufficient grace, denies the real distinction between potency and act, and thus collapses potency and act into act alone.

Ad 2. *Distinguished*. Insofar as the statement implies that I did not participate in the fittingness of being free from efficacious grace, and that I was not truly the cause of the defect which made me unfitting and which rendered my act sinful, *I deny*. But *I affirm*, insofar as the Báñezian does state that the free creature does not cause in God the withholding of efficacious grace, which he bestows and withholds, though fittingly, according to a fittingness which is known only to the divine wisdom.

Ad 3. *Distinguished*. Insofar as the statement implies the same influential inertia on behalf of the creature, *I deny*. Insofar as it is God who bestows or withholds grace as he sees fit, and not as responsive to anything in the creature not itself governed by God (though certainly as responsive to himself, insofar as he fits creation to creation as he wishes), *I affirm*.

### On the Transcendence of Divine Decrees and the Immanence of the *Effects* of Divine Decrees

As we have seen, Rooney argues that Garrigou-Lagrange's position holds only if there are counterfactuals of human freedom, and this is true. But Rooney also mistakenly takes counterfactuals of human freedom to require the existence of things outside of the divine will, and this is false. First, it ought to be clear that God has knowledge of all possible counterfactuals, both those that relate to free actions and those that do not. St. Thomas clearly affirms that, "Whatever therefore can be made, or thought, or said by the creature, as also whatever He Himself can do, all are known to God, although they are not actual. And in so far it can be said that He has knowledge even of things that are not."<sup>34</sup> Further, we know that God's knowledge is not caused by created things, but rather is their cause; nothing exists apart from God's eternal decrees.<sup>35</sup>

<sup>34</sup> ST I, q. 14, a. 9.

<sup>35</sup> ST I, q. 14, a. 8.

In no way does positing counterfactuals of creaturely freedom necessitate Molinism. What defines Molinism is not the claim that God knows counterfactuals. What defines Molinism is the *mode by which* God knows counterfactuals, specifically as being independent of the divine will. But this is not what the Báñezian or Garrigou-Lagrange claims. Counterfactuals of creaturely freedom are known as following God's own self-knowledge regarding which decrees he could effect and which ones he does effect. Recall that premotions do not cause a creature to cause  $x$  robotically; rather, they cause a creature willfully and freely to cause  $x$ . As such, God knows (simply) the singulars that he does will and the singulars that he might have willed, as well as the range of potential actions for a creature in any given circumstance *as conditioned by the antecedent motions that creature received from God*. That a motion is responsive to a previous motion does not mean that God is responsive to creatures as compartmentalized from divine influence, but rather that God wills particulars in the created order to be responsive to each other. Unlike in Molinism, where response is passive in God, here response is active.

Consider an example: Let us say that circumstance  $y$  features Winston standing in a field. There are a great number of motions which Winston could receive which would result in many different kinds of actions. But that number is not infinite. There are limitations *in this singular moment* of both a natural and a moral (*superveniens*) kind. For example, Winston certainly cannot be made *to fly freely*, for, as a man, he has no power to fly at all. God could make Winston fly in such a way that Winston does not willingly cause his flight (by a miracle of obediencial potency, God could levitate Winston around) or God could (by miracle) give Winston wings and the power of flight, *and then* he could be moved to fly *freely*. But in the first case, the flying would not be free, and in the second case, the flying would be contingent upon a very different circumstance from  $y$ . In other words, Winston standing in a field without wings is surely a different state of affairs from Winston standing in a field with wings. While both states are governed actively by God, they nevertheless establish distinct states of what is possible for Winston.

Pace Molina, however, the limitations of the moment are themselves dependent on, rather than independent of, God's eternal decrees. Thus, we have true counterfactuals and potencies for alternative actions without necessitating Molinism, without grounding counterfactuals in an ungoverned nature and some character of the created will known only passively by God.

All of this is to say nothing other than that, for Báñez, God governs free, singular actions *via singular and disparate physical premotions*, either

as natural motions or as actual graces. Fr. Rooney says: “Instead, in the same ‘logical moment’ that God chose to create Peter, God can be imagined to thereby have chosen to create all of Peter’s other actions because, even though Peter comes to exist and act at definite points in time, those acts are all present to God in eternity.”<sup>36</sup> That God decrees the entirety of Peter’s life and his singular actions simply and from eternity is certainly true. But there’s a real distinction in regard to *how* those singulars are brought about in the creature. As we have noted, creation is *ex nihilo*, precluding creaturely participation in motions to free acts. To state that God creates all of Peter’s actions is to ignore and to metaphysically preclude the most basic and constitutive Báñezian principle: physical *premotion*.

Note that no good action lays claim on God to bestow further good *from without*, because there is the greatest inequality between man and God. To whatever extent that man merits, he merits on account of that which he possesses already only on account of what God has already given him. Thus, St. Augustine calls merit “grace for grace,”<sup>37</sup> and while St. Thomas denies that man qua man can merit grace *de condigno*, he affirms that man can merit *de congruo*,<sup>38</sup> by a certain fittingness, given the nature and disposition of the creature, while also recognizing that even *just this nature and disposition* itself comes from God. “Grace for grace” means that God crowns his creatures not as he owes *to them* to do, but as he owes it *to himself*, to crown fittingly when he wishes to crown fittingly. Indeed, God can owe nothing to the creature *simpliciter* by virtue of its radical contingency upon God. This same radical contingency is the grounding for the recognition that election is *ante praevisa merita* and reprobation is *ante praevisa demerita*. There is *nothing which God grants or withholds from men which is caused or necessitated by something in man as existing independent of God’s own eternal decrees*. This would be metaphysically impossible, even if it is maintained by the Molinists. St. Thomas says:

Hence man’s merit with God only exists on the presupposition of the divine ordination, so that man obtains from God, as a reward of his operation, what God gave him the power of operation for.<sup>39</sup>

God does not crown his own handiwork because he must or because there is something in that handiwork which is ontologically antecedent to

<sup>36</sup> Rooney, “Banez’s Big Problem,” 99.

<sup>37</sup> See ch. 21 of St. Augustine, *De natura et gratia*.

<sup>38</sup> *ST* I-II, q. 114, a. 3.

<sup>39</sup> *ST* I-II, q. 114, a. 1.

his own causality and decrees. Again, this is impossible. But nor does this render impossible the notion that God *responds* to the actions of creatures by *ordering the entire story of the creature such that aspects of its story fittingly flow from or merit those aspects which come posterior in time*. In other words, *God does not just make the creature good; he makes the creature participate in its own becoming good*. God does not just impute goodness, but controls even *how it becomes good*, giving the creature a participation in its own becoming good. And thus he gives his good for his good and his grace for his grace, *in the creature*. God does not just crown his handiwork; he crowns it *fittingly*, and *even this is more glorious, for it better displays or manifests God's power not just to do but to do orderly, in a becoming manner. It manifests that God does not just make particulars, but fits them each to the other into an ordered whole*. Thus, the work is befitting adornment even if it is not owed anything from its Adorner *simply*. Just so, an author may find it fitting to resolve a conflict for a virtuous character *even while* he is under no obligation to write any particular ending, or even to write an ending at all. Thus, reward and punishment for acts which flow from election or reprobation are not to be understood as causal of God's decrees. God does not withhold efficacious grace to the sinner because he must. Indeed, we know this to be true, for all men are sinners and grace is, by its very nature, unowed to men. And yet we know that all men receive some share of it nonetheless. As such, we know that sometimes God bestows unowed grace to sinners. When he does not, the refusal is not causal of God's divine decree, but rather God's divine decree refuses efficacious grace *fittingly and according to God's wish to exercise his justice*. It is a contingent refusal but refused *meaningfully, as punishment*. But as with all things which fall under the *conveniens*, it is not truly necessarily or as owed *simply*, and thus it might just as well have been different; God could have responded to defect with mercy and an efficacious, actual grace.

### Conclusion

In sum, I think that there are two orders being conflated by Fr. Rooney. But the Báñezian maintains that, in the created order, bestowal or refusal follows in a non-arbitrary way from that which comes before. In the order of the divine decrees, the whole sequence is willed according to God's good pleasure without any passivity. There is contingent but non-arbitrary response at the level of secondary or created cause and effect, but the response resides within the character and intelligibility of created cause and effect. There is no response at the level of the divine decrees, no *tit for tat* between God and creatures. The doll-maker fashions clothes to fit the doll, but they fit

the doll only because the doll-maker contingently wishes for them to exist at all. The fittingness of the size and color of the clothes is in relation to the character of *the doll*, not of the maker, and it in no way necessitates that the doll-maker make them in the first place.

Put another way, this is really only to state that occasionalism is false, and that God does not cause the natural operations of the universal directly and without mediation, but rather gives the dignity of causation to natural things, causing as proportioned and conditioned by the distinctive natures of created things.<sup>40</sup> But this nature or disposition is not, as Fr. Rooney asserts, a “brute fact,”<sup>41</sup> but is itself existent by God’s good pleasure. Thus, providence is better termed “art” rather than some kind of passive response or justice of equality. What I do by art is responsive to myself, and thus it retains its radically active mode. What I do by justice or necessity is always in relation to another, and thus introduces an element of passivity which is impossible in God. But this is to say nothing other than that God not only creates but governs things, and that he not only governs things, but governs them *sweetly*. In whatever congruent, analogous, or weak way we might use the words “owed” or “responsive” here, we mean that which God owes to himself, or that which God responds to in his own decrees *ad extra*. God adorns neither arbitrarily nor necessarily. Rather, it is done according to his good pleasure, a pleasure which is neither meaningless nor beholden, but *just so*.

Far from relying upon a middle knowledge which sits outside God’s own self-knowledge, it relies only upon a distinction between the good which God wills necessarily and the good which God wills contingently. The whole lot of *congruous* merit is included in the decree of election. But that it is simultaneous and simple in God in no way means that the complexity and parts of the creaturely story cannot be fitted responsively, fittingly, to each other.

This is why Garrigou-Lagrange’s statements are not circular, nor do counterfactuals of creaturely freedom *per se* necessitate divine response or passivity to creatures. One can certainly see the intelligibility of the line of Fr. Rooney’s argumentation. If Garrigou-Lagrange’s statements referred to the same order, and thus God’s eternal decrees themselves were posterior and yielding to something antecedent in man, then we would indeed have an incoherence. Indeed, this is the essence of my critique of the “revisionist Thomism” of Francisco Marín-Sola and Jacques Maritain.<sup>42</sup> For example, it

<sup>40</sup> Aquinas, *Summa contra gentiles* III, ch. 77.

<sup>41</sup> Rooney, “Banez’s Big Problem,” 110.

<sup>42</sup> O’Neill, *Grace, Predestination, and the Permission of Sin*, chs. 5–6.

cannot be *both* that divine decrees are ontologically antecedent to human action *and* that human action is the determinative of divine decrees or physical premotion. But the coherence of Garrigou-Lagrange's statements is grounded specifically in the fact that the statements describe two different orders and two different senses of "because." The divine decrees are utterly transcendent and active; God responds to nothing in creation, but God chooses that *things within creation should respond to each other*. God is not responsive to creation, but God *does* bestow response *into creation*. God governs the world not just by brute making, but by art and the infusion of natural relations and causations between subjects and objects in the created order. There exist within created causes natures and dispositions which modify their range of potencies and the mode of their acts, but these are determined by God's decrees rather than determining them.