# THE PSYCHOLOGY OF FREEDOM AND THE METAPHYSICS OF NECESSITY

**THOMAS AQUINAS ON THE WILL**

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## ORIENTATION AND AGENDA

> "No one can do justice to Aquinas's theory of the will in a few pages. It is rich, complicated and controversial, and a thorough treatment of it would require a book length study." -- Eleonore Stump[1]

The limitations faced by Eleonore Stump in her paper "Intellect, Will, and Alternate Possibilities" will be doubly true of this paper. Whereas Stump considered only the psychological aspects of Aquinas's view of the will, here we will attempt to undertake a more ambitious project, including also an examination of the will in terms of Aquinas's metaphysics. Typical of the scholastic method, Aquinas's teaching on the will leads us through a veritable labyrinth of questions, definitions, and distinctions. Yet, despite the difficulties involved, the power, clarity, and continuing influence of Aquinas's thought make even a preliminary investigation worthwhile. The key question, of course, is determining if Aquinas was a compatibilist or an incompatibilist. Not surprisingly, depending on which strands of Aquinas's thought are emphasized, one can come to either conclusion with a great deal of plausibility.

We will first examine the medieval psychology of Aquinas as it bears upon the question of free will. Then we will turn to a discussion of Thomistic metaphysics, including Aquinas's picture of God's activity in the world. Finally, we will seek to integrate Aquinas's view of human psychology with his metaphysics, in an attempt to locate Aquinas on the contemporary map of compatibilist/incompatibilist options. It will be the tentative claim of this paper that a holisitic analysis of Aquinas lands him in the theistic-compatibilist camp. Evidence used to substantiate this position will be drawn from Aquinas's way of dealing with such difficulties as the problem of evil and petitionary prayer. Those who place Aquinas on the incompatibilist side of the line have grasped an important aspect of Thomistic thought, but seem to have missed something as well.

## THE PSYCHOLOGY OF FREEDOM

[1] Eleonore Stump, "Intellect, Will, and Alternate Possibilities" 250.

Clearly, Aquinas believes in human freedom. Consider the following propositions from *Summa Theologica (ST)*:

> And forasmuch as man is rational is it necessary that man have a free-will…Free-will is the cause of its own movement because by his free-will man moves himself to act…The proper act of free-will is choice: for we say that we have free-will because we can take one thing while refusing another; and this is to choose…There must needs be something voluntary in human acts.[2]

These statements, and numerous others like them, strongly imply that Aquinas holds to robust view of human freedom. For Aquinas, such freedom is necessary to morality: "Man has free-will: otherwise counsels, rewards and punishments would be in vain."[3] Unlike inanimate objects, such as stones, which act without judgment, and unlike brute animals, which act from instinctual, rather than free, judgment,

> man acts from judgment, because by his apprehensive power he judges that something should be avoided or sought. But because this judgment, in the case of some particular act, is not from natural instinct, but from some act of comparison in the reason, therefore he acts from free judgment and retains the power of being inclined to various things. For reason in contingent matters may follow opposite courses...[4]

We have reasons for acting, so our choices are not free in the sense that they are irrational, arbitrary, or uncaused. Rather, it is precisely our reasoning, or judging, that serves as the basis of our freedom. Because we may freely follow different patterns of reasoning about particular choices, our choices are free. Thus MacDonald is entirely correct in offering the following as a summary of Aquinas's "reason-based indeterminacy":

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[2] Thomas Aquinas, *ST* I.83.1, 3; I-II.6.1.
[3] *ST* I.83.1.
[4] *ST* I.83.1.

> If Aquinas's account is defensible, it preserves genuine indeterminacy in human agency while at the same time securing a necessary connection between an agent's free choices and her reasons for acting. He does this, in effect, by identifying the locus of the indeterminacy essential to free human activity in *reason* rather than in the will. As he sometimes puts it: the will is open to moving in different directions only because deliberating reason can go in different directions.[5]

In other words, our actions are free precisely because they originate from within us and are rationally motivated:

> Of actions done by man those alone are properly called *human*, which are proper to man as man. Now man differs from irrational animals in this, that he is master of his actions. Wherefore those actions alone are properly called human, of which man is master. Now man is master of his actions through his reason and will; whence, too, the free-will is defined as *the faculty and will of reason*. Therefore those actions are properly called human which proceed from a deliberate will.[6]

We also see Aquinas's concern to preserve human freedom in that he rejects any kind of compulsion or coercion on the will. "As to the will's own proper act, violence cannot be done to the will."[7] In a sense, this is an analytic truth: a forced will is no will at all. An act done under compulsion is not an act of the will; or, as we quoted Aquinas above, it is not a proper act of man.[8]

Unfortunately, Aquinas has not left matters this simple. There are at least two complicating factors that need to be taken up in order to do full justice to his explication

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[5] Scott MacDonald, "Aquinas's Libertarian Account of Free Choice," *Revue Internationale de Philosophie* 52 (June 1998), 312.
[6] *ST* I-II.1.1.
[7] *ST* I-II.6.4.
[8] Not even God can force the will! See *ST* I-II.6.4.

of human psychology and freedom. One is the exact relation of the will to the intellect; the other is the sense in which the will may be said to act of necessity, in such a way that it could not have chosen otherwise.

How does Aquinas conceive of the will's relation to the intellect? As we have already hinted at, for Aquinas, the will follows the intellect. Only the intellect can act on the will directly.[9] The will is a "blind mouth"[10] that hungers for goodness, but must rely on the intellect to make judgments about what is good. When the intellect presents the will with something as good, the will chooses it. In such a way, the intellect moves the will as its final cause.

Thus, Aquinas rejects the will's autonomy. As MacDonald puts it, "Our choices essentially follow and depend on acts and states that are external to the will itself. Our choices are essentially motivated, and the reasons that motivate choice are immediately generated by the intellect rather than the will."[11] The will is not a self-moved mover, except in the sense that prior acts of the will have downstream consequences for future acts of the will.

How, then, does Aquinas maintain human freedom if the intellect determines the will? As we have already noticed, for Aquinas, the location of human freedom is, properly speaking, the reason rather than the will. Freedom of the will is really a derivative of the freedom of the intellect in making judgments about the good.

What about the second complicating factor, namely, the fact that the will seems to be necessitated by some external objects? While rejecting the "necessity of coercion" as "altogether repugnant to the will," the "necessity of end is not repugnant to the will…[and] neither is natural necessity repugnant to the will."[12] But what are these necessities that do not violate the will? "Necessity of end" has to do with the means/ends relationship: If one wills to cross the sea, it is necessary that one will for a ship. "Natural necessity" concerns what the will must will because of its nature. Aquinas claims the will must of necessity will happiness. Stump explains: "Because God has created it [the will]

[9] Of course, the intellect itself may be acted on by such things as the passions and prior acts of the will, but can also resist their influence.
[10] The terminology is from Stump, 251.
[11] MacDonald 314.
[12] *ST* I.82.1.

as a hunger for the good, the will by nature desires what is good; and whatever is good to such an extent and in such a way that a person cannot help but see it as good, the will wills by natural necessity." The good for man, of course is his happiness, so "a person necessarily wills happiness."[13]

But if man must necessarily will the good, i. e., his own happiness, how can this be reconciled with what has been said earlier concerning freedom? The necessity to will happiness is only a general necessity. The particulars (i. e., what I think will make me happy in any particular case) are left open to my deliberation, which is where the freedom of the reasoning process re-enters the discussion. Only if the intellect presents some particular choice or object as good to the will, must it be chosen. Of course, the intellect could present the same choice or object under a different description, in which case it does not have to be chosen.[14] Or, the intellect could refrain from thinking about some object at all, preventing it from being chosen.

By no means has our discussion done justice to the intricacies of Aquinas's position on human freedom. However, we have examined enough material to see that he is concerned to lay the ground work for a strong affirmation of human freedom, rooted in the intellect and exercised through the will. Freedom, in fact, is essential to what separates man from the animals. While man of necessity desires his own happiness, determined by what his intellect perceives to be good, his reasoning process remains free. Thus, according to Aquinas, man has psychological freedom.

## THE METAPHYSICS OF NECESSITY

According to Stump, "It is certainly possible to consider Aquinas's understanding of the will without going on to ask what is entailed by combining that understanding with his account of God's grace and operation in the world."[15] In one sense, this is certainly true. For the purposes of study, we may section off Aquinas's psychology and isolate it

[13] Stump 251.

[14] Objects that lack full goodness in any way can be presented under varying descriptions, depending upon what the intellect focuses on. God is the one exception, in that he lacks no goodness. When the intellect perceives his goodness, he must be chosen because the intellect can present him in no other way. This allows Aquinas to maintain human freedom and the impeccability of the saints in heaven. As the saints behold the beatific vision, they cannot help but think of God's goodness, and in doing so, they cannot will anything other than God. They are not compelled, strictly speaking, and yet they are unable to do otherwise.

from the larger metaphysical issues of his thought, as we have done in the preceding portion of this paper. However, if we want to arrive at a complete view of Aquinas's theory of the will, and certainly if we want to answer whether or not Aquinas was a compatibilist or incompatibilist, we must unite his psychology with his metaphysics. If we do not integrate his overarching view of God's action in the world with his view of man's action in the world, we have lopped off a crucial part of his world view and are left with an incomplete, secularized Aquinas.[16] Ultimately, Aquinas's theism must not be severed from his psychology, and allowed to drift away like a hot air balloon. All Aquinas has to say about human freedom at the psychological level must be contextualized by his theistic metaphysics.

How then does Aquinas conceive of God's action in the world? [17] According to Aquinas, God -- and God alone[18] -- is sovereign over his creation.[19] All things come to pass necessarily because God has planned them and causes them.[20] In other words, Aquinas believes in a fine-grained providence:

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[15] Stump 251.

[16] Thus, I can agree with MacDonald's paper as far as it goes, but his conclusion that Aquinas fits a libertarian mold is a bit premature, it seems. MacDonald acknowledges the limited scope of his paper, admitting he has left aside "those issues [related to the effects of divine grace on choice] in order to focus on the nature of Aquinas's theory of action considered in itself" (309). It is just these features that MacDonald leaves out that are needed to discover where Aquinas fits into our modern grid of compatibilist/incompatibilist positions.

[17] By this question, I do not have in mind questions such as "How can God, who is disembodied, act in the physical world?" or, "How can God, who is outside of time, act in time?" These are worthy questions for consideration, and no doubt, we could get Thomas to answer them for us. But they are not the most directly relevant questions to our study and it would take us too far afield to answer them here.

[18] In *ST* I.103.3, Aquinas rules out multiple governors of the universe (i. e., polytheism).

[19] In fact, according to Aquinas, a doctrine of creation implies a doctrine of sovereignty (or providence): "Therefore it belongs to the Divine goodness, as it brought things into existence, so to lead them to their end: and this is to govern [i. e., this is providence]…For the same reason is God the ruler of things as he is their cause, because the same gives existence as gives perfection; and this belongs to government…Therefore as God is the first universal cause…of all being in general, it is impossible for anything to occur outside the order of the divine government" (*ST* I.103.1, 5, 7). Aquinas asserts that God, who brought all other things into being, also keeps them in being, and in so doing, rules over and controls them in such a way that they are brought to their proper end (*ST* I.104.1).

[20] This necessity can be found in Aquinas not only in his discussion of God's sovereignty/providence, but also in his discussion of God's knowledge. God's knowledge is the cause of all things (*ST* I.14.8). God is omniscient in such a way that, "Whatever can be produced or thought or said by a creature, and also whatever God himself can produce, all is known by God, even if it is not actually existing…Since as shown above, God knows all things; not only things actual but also things possible to him and to the creature; and since some of these are future contingent to us, it follows that God foreknows future contingent things" (*ST* I.14.9, 13). Because God knows all hypotheticals and actuals, all future events are foreknown by him, and therefore necessary. Even events contingent to us have a kind of necessity for God, because if God

> It is necessary to attribute providence to God…All things are subject to divine providence, not only in general, but even in their own individual selves…It necessarily follows that all things, inasmuch as they participate in existence, must likewise be subject to divine providence…God governs all things immediately…We must say that God has the design of the government of all things, even of the very least.[21]

Providence rules out luck or chance:

> Since then, all particular causes are included under the universal cause, it could not be that any effect should take place outside the range of the universal cause. So far then as an effect escapes the order of a particular cause, it is said to be causal or fortuitous in respect to that cause; but if we regard the universal cause, outside whose range no effect can happen, it is said to be foreseen. Thus, for instance, the meeting of two servants, although to them it appears a chance circumstance, has been fully foreseen by their master, who has purposely sent them to meet at the one place, in such a way that one knows not about the other…Things are said to be fortuitous as regards some particular cause from the order of which they escape. But as to the order of divine providence, *nothing in the world happens by chance*, as Augustine declares.[22]

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foreknows the future it is fixed. Thus, Aquinas would have nothing to do with process theism, openness-of-God-theism, or middle knowledge views, which in some way seek to escape the problems associated with providence by not only denying God's omnipotence but also his omniscience.

[21] *ST* I.22.1, I. 103.6.

[22] *ST* I.22.2, I.103.7. In I.103.1, Aquinas refutes the ancient philosophers who believed the world was governed by chance. It would be interesting to test the view of Aquinas against the theories of modern physics. Many scholars believe the Heisenberg Principle does not warrant belief in pure chance; rather it focuses on the limits of our knowledge and prediction abilities. See Paul Helm *The Providence of God* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1994) 142ff.

The universal cause Aquinas has in view is providence. This universal cause is responsible for all particular causes. Ultimately, there can be no chance or pure autonomy in the creation because all events are planned and foreseen by God: "God is the cause of things by his intellect, and thus it behooves that the type of every effect should pre-exist in him…it is necessary that the type of the order of things towards their end should pre-exist in the divine mind."[23]

Providence includes the moral evil that takes place in the universe, as well as the predestination of some to heaven and the reprobation of others to damnation.[24] It also includes events that appear to be contingent. In an amazing statement, he says

> The effect of divine providence is not only that things should happen somehow; but that they should happen either by necessity or by contingency. Therefore whatsoever divine providence ordains to happen infallibly and of necessity happens infallibly and of necessity; and that happens from contingency, which the plan of divine providence conceives to happen from contingency.[25]

Planned contingencies! It seems Aquinas has given us a paradox: We have necessary contingencies and contingent necessities. How can this paradox be resolved?

Aquinas achieves a solution through dual causality:

> [God] is pure act, and is also the first cause of being in all things…If therefore, he bestowed his likeness on others in respect of being, in so far as he brought things into being, it follows that he also bestowed on them his likeness in the point of acting, so that creatures too should have their own proper actions…Therefore it is unreasonable to say things have not their proper actions…It is, also, clear that the same effect is ascribed to a natural cause and to God, not as though part were effected by God and part by the natural

[23] *ST* I.22.1.
[24] *ST* I.23.3. We will come back to the difficulties involved in this when we deal with Aquinas's theodicy.
[25] *ST* I.22.4. See also I.103.7.

> agent: but the whole effect proceeds from each, yet in different ways: just as the whole of the one same effect is ascribed to the instrument, and again the whole is ascribed to the principal agent…It belongs to the dignity of a ruler to have many ministers and various executors of his rule: because the greater the number of his subordinates of various degrees, the more complete and extensive is his dominion shown to be. But no government can compare with the divine in point of dignity. Therefore it is fitting that the execution of divine providence be committed to agents of various degrees.[26]

Several things should be noticed here. First, we see Aquinas's doctrine of analogy kick in: God's creatures act as causal agents just as God does, and in a way that images God, but at a different level. Creatures reflect God's being and acting on a creaturely scale.[27] Second, Aquinas understands God's providence to be executed through instruments or agents, each according to its "degree" or nature. God's providence uses means, and uses them according to their created capacities. Third, Aquinas sees no conflict between primary and secondary causal levels. God's activity as the first cause does not cancel out the activity of creatures as secondary causes. Primary and secondary causation are compatible. As he says elsewhere, "God's providence procures its effects through the operation of secondary causes."[28] It is this third point we want to focus on.

How do these causal levels relate to one another? How is it that divine causation does not negate free will?

> Free choice is the cause of its own movement, because by his free choice man moves himself to act. But it does not

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[26] Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles* III, lxix, lxx, lxxvii. Quoted in W. T. Jones *A History of Western Philosophy, vol. 2, The Medieval Mind* (Orlando: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich Publishers, 1969) 235-6.

[27] As Aquinas says, God created in order "to share his own goodness by making things as like to him as possible" (*ST* I.19.2). One of the ways in which God shares his goodness with his creation is in granting to his creation secondary causality, patterned after his own primary causality. The "dignity of causality is imparted even to his creatures" (*ST* I.22.3).

[28] *ST* I.23.5.

> of necessity belong to liberty that what is free should be the first cause of itself, as neither for one thing to be the cause of another need it be the first cause. God, therefore, is the first cause, who moves causes both natural and voluntary. And just as by moving natural causes he does not prevent their actions from being natural, so by moving voluntary causes he does not deprive their actions of being voluntary; but rather is he the cause of this very thing in them, for he operates in each thing according to its nature.[29]

As the first cause, God causes all secondary causes, including human choices. Human causal power (and other creaturely causation) is granted by God. It is not essential to liberty that it possess the power of primary causation, so man can maintain freedom even while not being the primary cause of his actions.[30] Rather, God's primary causation allows, enables, sustains, and establishes secondary causation.[31] Yet, it must always be remembered, secondary causes are truly *causal*. In terms of this hierarchy of causes, Aquinas is able to affirm *both* God's continual upholding and governing of his creation, as well as the universe itself containing genuine causal powers, varied according to the nature of the agent.[32]

At this point, a careful qualification should be made, lest common misconceptions of Aquinas's position take hold. Aquinas does not believe God and God's creatures act on the universe in identical ways. They both cause the same action but not in the same way. To speak metaphorically, primary causation is vertical and secondary causation is

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[29] *ST* I.83.1.

[30] Keep in mind that for Aquinas man's power of free choice is a *creaturely* reflection or analogue of God's absolute power of free choice. God has freedom appropriate to the First Cause, whereas man has freedom appropriate to his God-given degree of being.

[31] As Aquinas says, "If God provided for all things himself and without intermediaries, all secondary causes would be put out of action" (*ST* I.22.3). Secondary causation is not independent of God in any way. God *could* do all things immediately or directly, but chooses to use secondary causal agents.

[32] If Aquinas were to deny the first of these (the primary causation of God) he would have been a proto-deist. If he had denied the second (the secondary causal power planted within the creation), he would have found it impossible to maintain the psychological freedom and human responsibility discussed earlier, and would have slipped into fatalism.

horizontal.[33] While Aquinas never explains exactly how the two levels relate, he does believe them both to be necessary:

> God does act sufficiently within things as the first agent cause and that does not imply that the activity of secondary causes is superfluous; the one action does not issue from two agents at the same level; there is, however, nothing against one and the same action's issuing from a primary and a secondary agent. God does not merely impart forms to things, but upholds them in existence, applies them to their actions and is the end of all actions, as we have determined.[34]

Whatever Aquinas might say about the relation of these two levels of causality, clearly he does not believe they compete with one another or conflict with one another in any way. They are simply two different orders of causation. Neither would Aquinas allow some kind of mechanistic relationship to exist between the two levels. God treats his creatures according to their natures, not as puppets or robots. In the case of man, this means treating him in terms of his psychological freedom. Perhaps Aquinas would want to say that the relation between the two levels is mysterious or incomprehensible – but then, such categories have never been popular with philosophers.

Whatever one thinks of Aquinas's account, it must be realized that his model is not susceptible to scientific analysis -- or critique -- because God is not part of the physical universe. Aquinas has given us a philosophical (or theological) *model*, rather than a scientific *theory*. Aquinas's God transcends the creation; he is located outside the

[33] Admittedly, Aquinas's doctrine of dual causality is compromised by his Aristotelian notion of "being in general." He begins with this Greek, "chain of being" ontology rather than, to use the traditional Christian terminology, the "Creator/creature distinction," in which the Creator's underived being is distinguished from the creature's dependent being. It seems that, at this point, Aquinas's reliance on Aristotle allows a foreign element into his system.

[34] *ST* I.105.5.

universe, so there is no scientific way of detecting his involvement in the world. The relationship between the two levels of causality cannot be scientifically described.[35]

Perhaps an illustration will help make this important point more clear. We may compare the Thomistic two-level model to an author writing a novel or a playwright writing a script. When Macbeth cries "Out, out, brief candle!" why does he do so? On one level (the secondary or horizontal level), we might say it was because the doctor just reported to him that his wife had died. This true enough, as far as it goes. But on another level (the primary or vertical level), we could say he cried out because Shakespeare caused him to do so. Both answers are true, each in its own way. The action proceeds from Macbeth in one sense and from Shakespeare in another sense, without any contradiction. Macbeth responded "freely," according to his own emotional state and so forth. Yet he also responded according to the plan of Shakespeare's design for the plot of the play.[36] This dual efficacy is analogous to the duality of human and divine causality.[37] God does not operate at our level any more than Shakespeare operates at Macbeth's level. It is pure folly to treat the playwright as though he were, metaphysically speaking, simply another one of the characters in the play.

A specific example of dual causality in action is God's work of grace on the human will:

> The predestined must necessarily be saved, yet…[in a way] which does not do away with liberty of choice…Man's turning to God is by free choice; and thus man is bidden to turn himself to God. But free choice can be turned to God

[35] This is not say it is a myth, for Aquinas believes it to be true. It *is* to say that Aquinas is trafficking in metaphysics and not in the physical sciences, and this distinction must be kept in view by both proponents and critics of Aquinas's approach. See Helm 71.

[36] This illustration has been adapted from Jones, 237, 283, but has been greatly altered. It is an especially appropriate illustration for Aquinas, given his overall doctrine of analogy between the Creator and the creature. One could object and claim that living human beings are much greater than fictional characters, but the Thomist could respond that God is infinitely greater than Shakespeare! If a playwright can create fictional characters who have freedom appropriate to their level of existence, but who remain under his control, why can't God create real people with freedom appropriate to *their* level of existence, but who are still under his control? Obviously, the analogy has its limitations, but it is a helpful working model for what Aquinas is trying to say.

[37] This dual causality doctrine has several implications. For example, it is in principle possible that an agent could will an act with one purpose or intention in view and God could will the same act with a different purpose or intention in view.

> only when God turns it…It is the part of man to prepare his soul, since he does this by his free choice. And yet he does not do this without the help of God moving him…Even the good movement of free choice, whereby anyone is prepared for receiving the gift of grace, is an act of free choice, moved by God…Man's preparation for grace is from God as mover, and from free choice, as moved.[38]

## AQUINAS AS COMPATIBILIST

It should now be evident why a compatibilist reading of Aquinas is at least plausible, if not virtually certain. At the psychological level, Aquinas believes strongly in human freedom. If we were to isolate this level, we might be led to think that Aquinas was a libertarian of some sort; but when we look at the bigger picture (and Aquinas was certainly a "big picture" philosopher), we find that human freedom is not the only form of causation in the universe. There is another form of causation, initiated by God, that is ultimately responsible for man's causal powers. There is nothing in Aquinas's account of human freedom that rules out this dual causation doctrine.[39] Man causes his actions; God causes man's actions. Both are true, and there is no contradiction because the types of causality are different. Man's causation is that appropriate to his level of existence. God's causation of man is not contrary to man's nature, but in accordance with it; God's causality goes "with the grain" of the nature God has given to man. At the risk of over simplification, we can get further confirmation that Aquinas fits into a compatibilist mold by looking carefully at how he deals with two significant problem areas: first, the problem of evil and predestination/reprobation; and then secondly, petitionary prayer.

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[38] *ST* I.23.3, I-II.109.6, I-II.112.2, 3. Quoted in Jones 283. See also *ST* I.23.5. Again, for Aquinas, an action can proceed fully from a creature and fully from God without any apparent tension between the levels of causation.

[39] Even the "absolute" liberty of man's "meta-judgments" (as MacDonald calls them) is relative, subject to God's overarching causality: "The rational creature governs itself by its intellect and will, both of which require to be governed and perfected by the divine intellect and will. Therefore above the government whereby the rational creature governs itself as master of its own act, it requires to be governed by God" (*ST* I.103.6). At the deepest level of man's freedom, he is under the ruling and causal power of God. God's providence extends even to man's thoughts and judgments. Aquinas does not explain how our judgments can be free and yet also under the rule of divine providence, but it clear that he believed this to be the case.

Aquinas's Augustinian understanding of evil as privation means that, in one sense, evil has no cause, because evil is a lack, a defect, a tending to non-being.[40] And yet, in so far as evil is parasitic on the good, indirectly it has God as its cause. Therefore, Aquinas may consider evil to be a part of God's providence:

> Even though it may seem to us that all things happen equally to the good and to the evil since we are ignorant of the reasons for God's providence in allotting these things, there is no doubt that in all these good and evil things happening to the good or to the evil there is operative a well worked out plan by which God's providence directs all things.[41]

It would be wrong to say evil is outside of God's providence for Aquinas. According to Aquinas, God has good and wise reasons for including evil in his providential designs:

> Since God, then, provides universally for all being, it belongs to his providence to permit certain defects in particular effects, that the perfect good of the universe may not be hindered, for if all evil were prevented, much good would be absent from the universe. A lion would cease to be live, if there were no slaying of animals; and there would be no patience of martyrs if there were no tyrannical persecution. Thus, Augustine says: *Almighty God would in no wise permit evil to exist in his works, unless he were so almighty and so good as to produce good even from evil…*[Thus evil cannot be] removed from the care of divine providence…[42]

While there may be emotional problems with following Aquinas's argument here, there should not be an intellectual problem with it. It is a "greater good" argument. Consider

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[40] *ST* I.49, I.2.79, etc. To be more precise, evil does not have formal or final causes. It does have material and efficient causes, but these are ontologically good.
[41] Thomas Aquinas *Providence and Predestination*, trans. R. W. Mulligan (Chicago: Regnery, 1953) 44. Quoted in Helm 42.
[42] *ST* I.22.4.

an illustration: When my son was only a few weeks old, I paid to have someone stick him with needles. I could have prevented the incident, but believed I had morally good reasons for permitting this evil. Of course, I am referring to my son's immunization shots. Aquinas's point is simply that God has his reasons for including evil in his providential design, just as I had good reasons for inflicting my son with pain. We may not be privy to the reasons; we may not even be capable of understanding an explanation if it were offered (just as my son could not have understood what was happening to him). But nonetheless, we must assume that God is acting rationally and benevolently.[43]

A particular application of providence is predestination and reprobation.[44] Why does God predestine some to life and reprobate others to death? Aquinas does not view predestination and reprobation as symmetrical: "Reprobation differs in its causality from predestination." Whereas reprobation is due to sin, "Predestination has its foundation in the goodness of God."[45] And yet the asymmetry of predestination and reprobation is not absolute, in that both serve the same good purpose of God:

> The reason for the predestination of some and the reprobation of others, must be sought in the goodness of God…Now it is necessary that God's goodness, which in itself is one and simple, should be manifested in many ways in his creation…Thus it is that for the completion of the universe there are required diverse grades of being, of which some hold a high and some a low place in the universe. That this multiformity of grades may be preserved in things, God allows some evils, lest many good things should be hindered, as we said above. Let us then consider the whole of the human race as we consider the

[43] Aquinas does give us what he believes to be God's reason for ordering providence as he does. We will come to this in the following paragraph.

[44] "As men are ordained to eternal life through the providence of God, it likewise is part of that providence to permit some to fall away from that end; this is called reprobation" (*ST* I.23.3).

[45] *ST* I.23.3. In other words, the reprobate are damned because of something in them (sin), but the predestined are not saved because of anything in them. "Foreknowledge of merits is not the cause of predestination…Predestination is not anything in the predestined, but only in the person who predestines. It

> whole of universe. God has willed to manifest his goodness in men: in respect to those whom he predestines, by means of his mercy, in sparing them; and in respect to others, whom he reprobates, by means of his justice, in punishing them. This is the reason why God elects some and rejects others.[46]

God must reprobate some, lest there be gaps in the chain of being and God's goodness not be fully manifested.

The point here is not so much whether or not Aquinas is right about his theodicy and his explanation of predestination and reprobation.[47] Rather, the point is to demonstrate how his modes of thinking about these questions are very much what we would expect from a compatibilist. He does not deny God's providential governance, when it might have made his argument much easier. Nor does he appeal to a typical free will libertarian defense. Rather, he continues to emphasize God's causal determination the whole way through, without ever denying the reality of human freedom.

We find the same thing when we look at Aquinas's view of petitionary prayer. The question to be answered here is obvious: If God has pre-planned everything in terms of his providence, how can there be room for prayer? Aquinas certainly considers prayer to be an aspect of virtuous living. But how can it have any causal efficacy if God has already ordained what he will cause to come about in the world? Here we see Aquinas steer sharply away from fatalism, just as he seems to steer away from pure libertarianism in his discussion of evil and predestination. While Aquinas admits that prayer cannot alter God's decree of predestination, he points out that there is more to predestination than just the preordained end; there are also the means that must be employed to bring the end about. If all things are part of God's providential design, prayer (and other means) must be included. The warrant for these means is found in Scripture which is full of commands and warnings "exhorting us to prayer and other good works." Thus, Aquinas's position is clear:

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depends upon the simple will of God" (*ST* I.23.5, 2). Predestination is about mercy; reprobation is about justice.

[46] *ST* I.23.1, 3.

> [I]n predestination two things are to be considered – namely, the divine preordination; and its effect. As regards the former, in no possible way can predestination be furthered by the prayers of the saints. For it is not due to their prayers that anyone is predestined by God. As regards the latter, predestination is said to be helped by the prayers of the saints, and by other good works; because providence, of which predestination is a part, does not do away with secondary causes but so provides effects, that the order of secondary causes falls also under providence. So, as natural effects are provided by God in such a way that natural causes are directed to bring about those natural effects, without which those effects would not happen; so the salvation of a person is predestined by God in such a way, that whatever helps that person towards salvation falls under the order of predestination; whether it be one's own prayers, or those of another; or good works, and suchlike, without which one would not attain salvation. Whence, the predestined must strive after good works and prayer; because through these means predestination is most certainly fulfilled.[48]

For Aquinas, providence does not cancel out the efficacy of prayer but guarantees it! Providence is inclusive of both means and ends. Again, our point here is not to prove whether or not Aquinas's view of prayer is actually correct, but simply to show that his way of working out the problem is very compatibilistic. He clearly affirms the harmony of primary and secondary causation, of God's providence and man's freedom, of predestination and prayer.

## CONCLUSION

[47] One may compare Aquinas's teaching here with that of the Apostle Paul in Romans 9.
[48] *ST* I.23.8.

This paper has attempted to provide a tentative but holistic analysis of Aquinas's view of the will. In order to understand his position in its entirety, we have had to look at both his psychology and his metaphysics. Psychologically, Aquinas is very concerned to safe guard human freedom. Not only is this freedom needed to preserve morality and responsibility, but it is a way in which man images his Creator and is distinguished from the lower creation. Metaphysically, Aquinas holds to God's comprehensive providential ordering of all that comes to pass. Aquinas thus has to a two level view of causation. God is the primary causal agent. Man and other creatures have a secondary causal agency which depends upon and is established by God's causal power. Providence embraces both primary and secondary causation, so that events flow from both types of causes. Applied to the problem of evil, Aquinas follows his metaphysic to its logical conclusion: God providentially decreed evil (including the reprobation of sinners to damnation) for the sake of a greater good. In light of all of this evidence, it seems we are justified in locating Aquinas in the theistic-compatibilist camp.

None of this is to say that Aquinas has solved all the problems inherent in his position. The two level view of causation needs further explication, particularly in relating the two levels to one another. Why opt for two kinds of causation when one would seem to be adequate to produce all the events in the world? If one level is necessary and sufficient, why add the second? How do we relate this "two storey" view of reality to empirical science? Moreover, we might question the chain of being metaphysics that seems to be part and parcel of Aquinas's theodicy. On this view, God reprobates some just so the universe will contain all possible degrees of being. Is this really a worthy conception of God and his purposes? There are further problems we could list, no doubt, but whatever problems Aquinas has, we believe they can be most faithfully dealt with if Aquinas is treated as a compatibilist.