

Divine Providence in Aquinas's Commentaries on Aristotle's *Physics* and *Metaphysics*, and Its Relevance to the Question of Evolution and Creation

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Abstract. This paper presents a philosophical argument for divine providence by Aquinas. I suggest that upon returning to Aristotle's *Physics* and *Metaphysics* to prepare his commentaries on these texts, Aquinas recognized that his stock argument from natural teleology to divine providence (the fifth way and its versions) needed to be filled out. Arguments from natural teleology can prove that God's providence extends to what happens for the most part, but they cannot show that God's providence also includes what happens for the least part. In order to prove the latter, Aquinas claims that one must argue from a higher science, which he then does with all characteristic clarity. This paper presents this argument, discusses what this means for his previous arguments from teleology, and discusses the argument's relevance to the contemporary discussion about creation and evolution.

I.

Aquinas's fifth way begins by noting that we observe that some things that lack cognition, namely, natural bodies, act for the sake of an end. This is apparent from the fact that they act in the same way always and for the most part (*semper et frequentius*) pursuing what is best. From this he concludes that these things come to an end by intention and not by chance.¹ The phrase "always or for the most part" comes from Book II of Aristotle's *Physics*. Aristotle used the phrase to emphasize that teleology and chance exist

¹STI, q. 2, a. 3, San Paolo edition (Rome, 1962), 14: "Quinta via sumitur ex gubernatione rerum. Videmus enim quod aliqua quae cognitione carent, scilicet corpora naturalia, operantur propter finem: quod apparet ex hoc quod semper aut frequentius eodem modo operantur, ut consequantur id quod est optimum; unde patet quod non a casu, sed ex intentione perveniunt ad finem." See also *Quaestiones disputatae de veritate*, q. 5, a. 2 (Leon.22/1.143–4.157–62): "ea enim quae casu accidunt, proveniunt ut in minori parte; videmus autem huiusmodi convenientias et utilitates accidere in operibus naturae aut semper, aut in maiori parte; unde non potest esse quod casu accidunt; et ita oportet quod procedant ex intentione finis."

together and that there is no need to claim that either chance or necessity is the ultimate cause of all things. Aquinas, however, often used the phrase to draw what seems to be an opposite conclusion, namely, that everything is governed by God's providence.² It would seem, however, that from the existence of a natural order and teleology operative always or for the most part, one could conclude that God is provident always or for the most part. But to say that God is provident always or for the most part, in a sense, is to deny divine providence, for it suggests that what happens for the least part is somehow beyond God's knowledge or power.

In his late commentary on Aristotle's *Metaphysics* (1270–1272), Aquinas himself acknowledges that the manner in which chance and fortune are dealt with in Book II of Aristotle's *Physics* seems (*videtur*) to negate divine providence.³ Furthermore, also in his late commentary on Aristotle's *Physics* (1268–1270), Thomas suggests that a complete argument for divine providence cannot be made from the study of nature, i.e., physics, but it must be made from a higher science.⁴ We shall follow this thread suggested by Thomas, and we shall see him develop a strikingly metaphysical (and neglected) argument for providence and consider why a complete argument for divine providence must ultimately be metaphysical in nature and what this means for Thomas's earlier arguments from nature or teleology. We shall also discuss how this metaphysical argument is relevant to the question of God and evolution.

II.

For Aristotle, chance is only intelligible as the collision of several *per se* moving causes, and thus it is not properly a cause but a *per accidens* cause. Since knowledge is through causes, and chance happenings do not have real causes, they are not really intelligible. It is quite rational to bury a treasure or to dig a grave, of course, but it is quite by chance (irrational, we might say) that someone finds a treasure while digging a grave. No one could give a reason (state the cause) why someone found a treasure while digging a grave.

²Although the fifth way does not explicitly mention God's providence, Aquinas explicitly concludes from this argument to God's providence in the more developed form of the argument in *De veritate*, q. 5, a. 2 (Leon.22/1.143–4). For other examples of this argument see *Summa contra gentiles* 3, c. 63, Editio Leonina Manualis (Rome, 1934), 296 (the fourth argument); and *Super primam Epistolam ad Corinthios lectura*, ed. R. Cai (Marietti: Rome, 1953), c. 15, lect. 5, n. 420.

³In *Duodecim Libros Metaphysicorum Aristotelis Expositio*, ed. M. Spiazzi (Rome: Marietti, 1950), VI, lect. 3, n. 1203. All dates are from Jean-Pierre Torrell, *Saint Thomas Aquinas: Vol. I, The Person and His Work*, rev. ed., trans. Robert Royal (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2005). For the date of this text, see *ibid.*, 344.

⁴In *Octo Libros Physicorum Aristotelis Expositio*, ed. P. M. Maggiolo (Rome: Marietti, 1965), II, lect. 7, n. 206. See note 6 below for the text.

Aristotle notes that there are some “who believe that chance is a cause, but that it is inscrutable to human intelligence, as being a divine thing and full of mystery.”⁵ Thomas comments that there is something true about this opinion, which reduces all of these events to some divine cause, but he notes that “chance” is a terrible name because it implies irrationality in the divine cause. Aristotle, he says, does not look into the truth or falsity of this opinion because it exceeds the limits of natural science.⁶

But Aristotle's point seems to have been this: what appears to be something like providence is in fact chance. It seems to me that Aristotle regarded the issue as settled and simply moved on. The possibility which Aquinas here hints at and which Aristotle does not address is that there might be some way in which *per accidens* causes are ordered by a *causa superior*. Thomas is quite emphatic that his readers keep this possibility open. Let us see why this problem must appeal to a higher science.

Thomas notes that to be by chance and to be for the least part (*in paucioribus*) are convertible.⁷ This is why one shouldn't try to find treasures by digging graves. What happens always or for the most part, on the other hand, happens according to *per se* causality. When Aquinas says that natural beings which lack cognition act always or for the most part, he means that non-rational agents act according to the “exigency” (or *per se* causality) of their forms. It might seem that they are simply moved movers, that is, necessarily moved by their natures, but Aquinas, of course, insists that they themselves act for the sake of an end.

Someone who says that nature does not act for the sake of an end destroys nature and those things that are according to nature. For these things, which are said to be according to nature, are continually moved by some intrinsic principle until they attain some end. Not to any contingent end, and not from any principle towards any end, but a determined end is obtained from a determined principle: for unless something gets in the way, the same principle always leads to the same end; . . . whence it

⁵*Physics* II, c. 4, 196b 5–6, *The Complete Works of Aristotle. The Revised Oxford Translation*, ed. J. Barnes (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), 335.

⁶*In II Phys.*, 7 (Marietti, n. 206): “Et dicit quod quibusdam videtur quod fortuna sit causa, sed immanifesta intellectui humano, ac si sit quoddam divinum et supra homines. Volebant enim quod omnes fortuiti eventus reducerentur in aliquam divinam causam ordinantem, sicut nos ponimus omnia ordinari per divinam providentiam. Sed quamvis haec opinio habeat veram radicem, non tamen bene usi sunt nomine fortunae. Illud enim divinum ordinans non potest dici vel nominari fortuna; quia secundum quod aliquid participat rationem vel ordinem, recedit a ratione fortunae. Unde magis debet dici fortuna causa inferior, quae de se non habet ordinem ad eventum fortuitum, quam causa superior, si qua sit ordinans. Praetermittit tamen inquisitionem huius opinionis, tum quia excedit metas scientiae naturalis, tum quia infra manifestat quod fortuna non est causa per se, sed per accidens.” All translations and paraphrases are my own.

⁷*In II Phys.*, 8 (Marietti, n. 208).

is manifest that the determinate end which is followed in nature is not followed by chance, but by the intention of nature. Therefore it is apparent that it is against the *ratio* of nature to say that nature does not act for the sake of some end.⁸

Thus it is because natural things act according to the exigencies of their forms that we see so much order in the world and that we can say that nature is that which happens always or for the most part.⁹ For example, it is because a spider is formed in a particular way that it seeks to spin webs, and it is for the

⁸*In II Phys.*, 14 (Marietti, n. 267): "Sed ipse contrarium ostendit dicens, quod ille qui sic dicit, naturam scilicet non agere propter aliquid, destruit naturam et ea quae sunt secundum naturam. Haec enim dicuntur esse secundum naturam, quaecumque ab aliquo principio intrinseco moventur continue, quousque perveniant ad aliquem finem; non in quodcumque contingens, neque a quocumque principio in quemcumque finem, sed a determinato principio in determinatum finem: semper enim ab eodem principio proceditur in eundem finem, nisi aliquid impediat. . . . unde manifestum est quod determinatus finis, qui sequitur in natura, non sequitur a casu, sed ex intentione naturae. Ex quo patet quod contra rationem naturae est, dicere quod natura non agat propter aliquid."

⁹We could state the argument in other terms. Act is form, and form is determinate. That which happens always or for the most part must have a determinate cause, otherwise it would not regularly act the way it does. What is in potency and indeterminate cannot reduce itself from potency to act or from indetermination to determination. Agent (or efficient) causality without final causality is *per accidens* and unintelligible. Because non-rational natural agents act (as efficient causes) regularly, determinately, and intelligently, one must posit in them some ends granted by another intelligence (since they are not themselves intelligent). These ends are granted by God's intelligence to created natures by way of their natural appetite or inclination. See the following texts: *ST I-II*, q. 1, a. 2 (St. Paul, 557): "Prima autem inter omnes causas est causa finalis. Cuius ratio est, quia materia non consequitur formam, nisi secundum quod movetur ab agente: nihil enim reducit se de potentia in actum. Agens autem non movet nisi ex intentione finis. Si enim agens non esset determinatum ad aliquem effectum, non magis ageret hoc quam illud: ad hoc ergo quod determinatum effectum producat, necesse est quod determinetur ad aliquid certum, quod habet rationem finis. Haec autem determinatio, sicut in rationali natura fit per rationalem appetitum, qui dicitur voluntas; ita in aliis fit per inclinationem naturalem, quae dicitur appetitus naturalis." Cf. *In III Sent.*, d. 27, q. 1, a. 2 (Moos, 861) (*Scriptum super libros sententiarum magistri Petri Lombardi*, 4 vols., vols. 1–2, ed. R.P. Mandonnet, vols. 3–4, ed. R.P. Maria Fabianus Moos [Paris: Lethielleux, 1929–47]): "Sic ergo dupliciter aliquid tendit in finem. Uno modo directum in finem a seipso, quod est tantum in cognoscente finem et rationem finis. Alio modo directum ab alio; et hoc modo omnia secundum suam naturam tendunt in fines proprios et naturales, directa a sapientia instituyente naturam." Cf. *ST I-II*, q. 27, a. 2, ad 3 (St. Paul, 673); See also *In IV Sent.*, d. 49, q. 1, a. 3, qc., 1 (Busa, vol. 1, 681): "Sed hoc distat in motibus naturalibus et violentis; quod in motibus violentis impressio relicta a primo motore in secundis motoribus est praeter naturam eorum; et ideo operatio consequens ex tali impressione est eis difficilis et laboriosa: sed in motibus naturalibus impressio relicta a primo motore in secundis motoribus, est eis causa naturalis; et ideo operatio hanc impressionem consequens est conveniens et suavis; et ideo dicitur Sap. 8, quia Deus omnia suaviter disponit: 'quia unaquaeque res ex natura sibi divinitus indita tendit in id ad quod per divinam providentiam ordinatur secundum exigentiam impressionis receptae.'"

same reason that swallows always build the same kind of nests.¹⁰ Although the *causa generans* is a real secondary cause of natures, it is God who is primarily and ultimately causally responsible: "for nature is nothing else than the *ratio* of the divine artist who granted to all things that by which they are moved to their determined end."¹¹

But granting that God causes all of these determinate forms that act in determinate ways, we are really only able to attribute providence to God to the extent that there is order in the world following from these determinate forms. In other words, God is provident always or for the most part,¹² but we can make no such claim about what happens for the least part. From the study of natural forms, much of what happens in the world is intelligible; in fact, it would seem that most of what happens is intelligible, but there is still quite a bit which is by chance, *per accidens*, which is not completely intelligible.

The later Aquinas seems to be more keenly aware that the evidence presented by Book II of Aristotle's *Physics* cuts in two ways: on the one hand the rationality of what happens for the most part seems to be strong evidence for the existence of divine providence, on the other hand the irrationality of what happens for the least part seems to militate against the existence of a supremely rational governor of everything. Because an argument for providence from physics cannot account for what happens for the least part, it is either incomplete or it must appeal to a higher science. As Aristotle's arguments from physics seem to negate divine

¹⁰See for example, *Quaestiones Disputatae De virtutibus in communi*, q. 1 a. 9, in *S. Thomae Aquinatis Doctoris Angelici Quaestiones Disputatae*, vol. 2 (Rome: Marietti, 1953), 731: "Sciendum est autem, quod inclinatio rerum naturalium consequitur formam; et ideo est ad unum, secundum exigentiam formae." Cf. *ibid.*, q. 1 a. 6 (Marietti, 722): "Unde per appetitum naturalem inclinationem habent in id, et per vim cognitivam naturale iudicium habent de illo proprio bono uniformiter se habente. Et ex hoc naturali iudicio et naturali appetitu provenit quod omnis hirundo uniformiter facit nidum, et quod omnis aranea uniformiter facit telam; et sic est in omnibus aliis brutis considerare."

¹¹*In II Phys.*, 14 (Marietti, n. 268): "natura nihil est aliud quam ratio cuiusdam artis, scilicet divinae, indita rebus, qua ipsae res moventur ad finem determinatum."

¹²John P. Rock argues that Thomas's arguments for providence from natural science are completely inadequate. Rock claims that his arguments from physics present three insurmountable problems: "(1) How can we prove a physical finality in natural bodies? (2) Granted we succeed in some cases, how can we conclude to a universal order in the entire universe so much of which is entirely unknown to us? (3) Granted even that the regularity and physical adaptability prove intelligent arrangement, what is to be said of the contingent factor?" While I agree that satisfactory answers to these questions can ultimately only be found in Thomas's metaphysics, I do think Aristotle's *Physics* essentially sets the terms and context for the discussion about providence since natural teleology is such a central part of divine providence. Thus I think it offers more than a "sort of first step to refute blind atomism, a sort of *manuductio*, a phenomenological approach, a psychological preparation for a far more profound and metaphysical study of the problem" (John P. Rock, "Divine Providence in St. Thomas Aquinas," in *The Quest for The Absolute*, ed. Frederick J. Adelman [Boston: Boston College, 1966], 67–103, at 81).

providence by affirming that not everything has some *per se* cause,¹³ so Aquinas's argument from metaphysics, as we shall see, will affirm divine providence by negating that anything is, in a certain respect, *per accidens*.

III.

Aquinas begins his argument, which is in *lectio* 3 of his Commentary on Book VI of the *Metaphysics*, by laying out some important general principles of *per se* causality.¹⁴ First, the higher a cause is, the further (to more things) its causality extends. The order which a cause effects only extends however far the causality of that cause extends, for every *per se* cause has a determined effect, which it produces according to some order. There are effects which seem to have no order and seem to coincide with one another *per accidens* with respect to lower causes, but if they are referred to a common higher cause they will be found to be ordered, not joined accidentally, but produced by one *per se* cause.¹⁵

He then lays out three general grades of causes. There are incorruptible and immutable causes, namely, God; under this cause there are incorruptible but

¹³*In VI Metaph.*, 3 (Marietti, n. 1203): "Attendendum est autem quod ea quae philosophus hic tradit, videntur removere quaedam, quae secundum philosophiam ab aliquibus ponuntur, scilicet fatum et providentiam."

¹⁴The only thing I have found written on this passage is John Wippel's brief discussion of the argument in "Thomas Aquinas's Commentary on Aristotle's *Metaphysics*," in *Metaphysical Themes in Thomas Aquinas II* (Washington DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2007), 240–71, at 262–3. Wippel's discussion is helpful because he makes it clear that this is Aquinas's own argument and not simply an exposition of Aristotle's text.

¹⁵*In IV Metaph.* 3 (Marietti, n. 1205): "Ad horum autem evidentiam considerandum est, quod quanto aliqua causa est altior, tanto eius causalitas ad plura se extendit. Habet enim causa altior proprium causatum altius quod est communius et in pluribus inventum. Sicut in artificialibus patet quod ars politica, quae est supra militarem, ad totum statum communitatis se extendit. Militaris autem solum ad eos, qui in ordine militari continentur. Ordinatio, autem quae est in effectibus ex aliqua causa tantum se extendit quantum extendit se illius causae causalitas. Omnis enim causa per se habet determinatos effectus, quos secundum aliquem ordinem producit. Manifestum igitur est, quod effectus relati ad aliquam inferiorem causam nullum ordinem habere videntur, sed per accidens sibiipsis coincidunt; qui si referantur ad superiorem causam communem, ordinati inveniuntur, et non per accidens coniuncti, sed ab una per se causa simul producti sunt."

Having laid out the principle, Thomas then offers a helpful example: "If one refers the simultaneous flowering of two different plants to their own respective powers, they will not seem to be ordered, but rather it will seem quite accidental that one flowers at the same time as the other. For the cause of the power of this plant extends itself to its own flowering, but not to the flowering of the other plant, it follows that it is the cause of its own flowering, but it is not the cause of its flowering at the same time as the other plant. If, however, they are referred to the power of a heavenly body, which is a common cause, their simultaneous flowering will not be found to be per accidens, but to be ordered by some first ordering cause which simultaneously moves both plants to flower" (*ibid.*, n. 1206).

mutable causes, namely, the heavenly bodies; and under these causes there are corruptible and mutable causes. This last kind is a particular cause determined to its effect according to its singular species. Here, unlike the other two, Thomas has in mind univocal causes: he gives the example of fire generating fire, man generating man, and a plant generating a plant.¹⁶

A cause of the second grade (the heavenly bodies), however, is in a certain way universal and in a certain way particular. It is particular because it extends to a certain determinate genus of being, namely, to those things that are produced through motion. It is universal, however, because its causality does not only extend to one species of movable things, but to all movable things that are altered, generated, and corrupted.¹⁷ But the first grade of causality, God, is simply universal, for its proper effect is *esse*. Thus whatever is, in whatever way it is, falls under the order of its causality.¹⁸

Then Thomas outlines three ways that accidents can happen. First, they can happen because of the intersection of multiple causal lines, e.g., someone discovers a treasure while digging a grave. Second, because of the defect or weakness of an agent, as a traveler collapses in exhaustion, unable to reach her destination. Third, because of the indisposition of matter which does not receive the form intended by the agent, e.g., as wet wood that will not burn.¹⁹

Now Thomas connects the *per se* principles he had laid out with the three kinds of causality and with the three kinds of accidents. It should be no surprise that in the case of the first grade of particular causality we will find much that is *per accidens*. If we further trace back these particular contingents events to the causality of the heavenly bodies, however, we will see that many of these events are not in fact *per accidens*, for although these diverse particular causes are not contained under each other, they are contained under one common celestial cause. In this way, the coming together or the happening of these contingent

¹⁶Ibid., n. 1207: "Invenitur autem in rebus triplex causarum gradus. Est enim primo causa incorruptibilis et immutabilis, scilicet divina; sub hac secundo est causa incorruptibilis, sed mutabilis; scilicet corpus caeleste; sub hac tertio sunt causae corruptibiles et mutabiles. Hae igitur causae in tertio gradu existentes sunt particulares, et ad proprios effectus secundum singulas species determinatae: ignis enim generat ignem, et homo generat hominem, et planta plantam."

¹⁷Ibid., n. 1208: "Causa autem secundi gradus est quodammodo universalis, et quodammodo particularis. Particularis quidem, quia se extendit ad aliquod genus entium determinatum, scilicet ad ea quae per motum in esse producuntur; est enim causa movens et mota. Universalis autem, quia non ad unam tantum speciem mobilium se extendit causalitas eius, sed ad omnia, quae alterantur et generantur et corrumpuntur: illud enim quod est primo motum, oportet esse causam omnium consequenter mobilium."

¹⁸Ibid., n. 1209: "Sed causa primi gradus est simpliciter universalis: eius enim effectus proprius est esse: unde quicquid est, et quocumque modo est, sub causalitate et ordinatione illius causae proprie continetur."

¹⁹Ibid., n. 1210.

events can have one determined celestial cause. And because the power of the heavenly body is incorruptible and impassible, no effect can escape from the order of its causality because it is somehow insufficiently powerful. But because it acts by moving, and because every such agent requires determined and disposed matter, it can happen that the effect of a heavenly body is impeded by an indisposition of matter, and this will be *per accidens*.²⁰

Thus, granting that fate is the effect of a celestial cause, we can say that many things which appear to happen *per accidens* are in fact caused *per se* by a celestial cause, but celestial causes are still susceptible to the indisposition of matter and to the intersection of colliding causal lines, in this case, human causes. For humans, unlike the other animals, are able to receive (in a passive power) an impression from a heavenly body and choose to ignore it.²¹ Here we see that it is true that if we grant a cosmology that includes heavenly bodies, there are some things which appear to happen *per accidens* but can be accounted for by the causality of some heavenly body, i.e., by fate. However, because their causality can be frustrated by human agency or some indisposition of matter, there is also real chance in the cosmos which is yet unaccounted for by some superior cause.²² Therefore, we are not yet justified in concluding to the existence of divine providence.

²⁰Ibid., n. 1211: "Haec autem contingentia, si ulterius in causam caelestem reducantur, multa horum invenientur non esse per accidens; quia causae particulares etsi non continentur sub se invicem, continentur tamen sub una causa communi caelesti; unde concursus earum potest habere aliquam unam causam caelestem determinatam. Quia etiam virtus corporis caelestis et incorruptibilis est et impassibilis, non potest exire aliquis effectus ordinem causalitatis eius propter defectum vel debilitatem ipsius virtutis. Sed quia agit movendo, et omne tale agens requirit materiam determinatam et dispositam, potest contingere quod in rebus naturalibus virtus caelestis non consequatur suum effectum propter materiae indispositionem; et hoc erit per accidens."

²¹Ibid., n. 1212–4.

²²In the cosmos here depicted, Aquinas argues that the causality of the heavenly bodies can account for much, if not most, of what naturally happens. Science, of course, long ago abandoned this theory, but it is worth briefly considering because it sheds some light on where to draw the line between materiality and immateriality in the case of most acts of humans. The heavenly bodies were material causes, albeit the highest and most universal kind, but nonetheless they were material efficient causes of sorts. As this argument goes, they could only be impeded by an indisposition of matter (another material cause of sorts) or by human choice (a non-material cause). What he has in mind in this last case is the manner in which the heavenly bodies can move, by material efficient causality, man's emotions or passions (via the sense powers and their organs), but man is nevertheless free to choose to act upon such motions or passions: *De sortibus*, c. 4 (Leon.43.233–4.124–54); *STI*, q. 115, a. 4 (St. Paul, 536); *STI-II*, q. 9, a. 5 (St. Paul, 603) et *ibid.*, ad 2; *STII-II*, q. 95, a. 6 (St. Paul, 1486–7); *De veritate*, q. 5, a. 1 (Leon.22/1.170.159–96). Thus, because of strictly material causes outside of someone's control, someone may be attracted to (or repulsed from) doing something because of some passion, but he is nevertheless free to act otherwise. However, Aquinas seems to think that for the most part people will act according to their passions. Thus the wise man, according to Aquinas, "rules the stars" (heavenly

He then argues that if those chance events, which are left over after accounting for celestial causality, are further reduced to the highest divine cause, nothing can be found which escapes from its order, since its causality extends to all things insofar as they are beings. Its causality cannot be impeded by an indisposition of matter because in efficiently causing *esse* it causes matter, its dispositions, and their motions and alterations. In other words, there is nothing that can impede it since everything which is caused by it—there is no agent cause in inferior things which is not subject to its order.²³ It follows, he concludes, that all things which here happen, are referred to the first divine cause, and they are found to

bodies) insofar as he rules his passions, but the fool is ruled by the stars, and *stultorum infinitus est numerus*. To translate: the virtuous and continent are not determined by material causality, but the incontinent and vicious have freely chosen to be so determined. Because wisdom is a virtue, and virtue is by definition very rare, for the most part most people follow their passions and are ruled by the stars (material causality). This is why Aquinas thought that astrologers (who study motions of heavenly bodies) can have great success (for the most part) in predicting human behavior and especially the actions of groups of people, although they will have trouble with particular actions since humans are free: *De sortibus*, c. 4 (Leon.43.233–4.124–59); *ST I*, q. 115, a. 4, ad 3 (St. Paul, 536); *ST II-II*, q. 96, a.5, ad 2 (St. Paul, 1487); *ST I-II*, q. 9, a. 5, ad 3 (St. Paul, 603); *De veritate*, q. 5, a. 10, ad 7 (Leon.22/2.171.241–53). Aquinas suggests that one way to view sin is to consider that the sinner has chosen to act as a material form: he really thinks that he is his sensitive nature, he thinks that he is no different than an animal and acts accordingly—that is precisely what perverted self-love is: *ST II-II*, q. 25, a. 7 (St. Paul, 1203). In such cases where someone acts according to this opinion, Aquinas notes, God will justly give him his deserts and he will providentially govern him as an irrational animal: *De veritate*, q. 5, a. 7 (Leon.22/1.155.40–5): “Si autem in providendo ordinem non servent qui congruit rationali creaturae sed provideant secundum modum animalium brutorum, et divina providentia de eis ordinabit secundum ordinem qui brutis competit,” I would like to draw two very important conclusions from this: (1) Only purchase horoscopes in a state of sin; and (2) according to Aquinas’s principles, the modern materialistic study of behavior, psychology, and neuroscience, in particular, should have tremendous success as a science, since, for the most part, most of what people do is determined by material causality, and such sciences are becoming better and better at studying those causes. Of course, such a science will always be unable to account for the choices of the virtuous (and even the continent), but such wonderful and extraordinary behavior may be viewed as a statistical abnormality, which it is, for like chance virtue happens for the least part.

²³*Ibid.*, n. 1215: “Sed si ulterius ista contingentia reducantur in causam altissimam divinam, nihil inveniri poterit, quod ab ordine eius exeat, cum eius causalitas extendat se ad omnia in quantum sunt entia. Non potest igitur sua causalitas impediri per indispositionem materiae; quia et ipsa materia, et eius dispositiones non exeunt ab ordine illius agentis, quod est agens per modum dantis esse, et non solum per modum moventis et alterantis. Non enim potest dici, quod materia praesupponatur ad esse, sicut praesupponitur ad moveri, ut eius subiectum; quinimo est pars essentiae rei. Sicut igitur virtus alterantis et moventis non impeditur ex essentia motus, aut ex termino eius, sed ex subiecto, quod praesupponitur; ita virtus dantis esse non impeditur a materia, vel a quocumque, quod adveniat qualitercumque ad esse rei. Ex quo etiam patet, quod nulla causa agens potest esse in istis inferioribus, quae eius ordini non subdatur.”

be ordered and not to exist *per accidens*, although they may be found to be *per accidens* in relation to other causes.²⁴

We finally have divine providence. And notice the negative character of his conclusion: there is divine providence because nothing exists *per accidens*. There is no possibility of resistance from matter. He can bypass the thorny problem of free decision, since its powers and acts all exist and, as such, are caused by God—this is also why there is no possibility of there being chance by intersecting *per se* causal lines—they must all be created.²⁵ One might ask whether this approach is philosophical or theological since we have had to assume the existence of a God who is the creative efficient cause of the *esse* of all beings. The second and third stage of Thomas's proof for the existence of God in *De Ente et Essentia* 4 will adequately give us, on philosophical grounds, what is here presupposed.²⁶ But Aquinas has plenty of other strong philosophical arguments he can use.²⁷

Here I would also like to point out that providence is included among Thomas's preambles of the faith.²⁸ For after having given this philosophical account, Aquinas says, "this is why the Catholic faith says that nothing happens

²⁴Ibid., n. 1216: "Relinquitur igitur quod omnia, quae hic fiunt, prout ad primam causam divinam referuntur, inveniuntur ordinata et non per accidens existere; licet per comparationem ad alias causas per accidens esse inveniuntur."

²⁵For a discussion of God's moving of the will in free decision, see John F. Wippel, *The Metaphysical Thought of Thomas Aquinas: From Finite Being to Uncreated Being* (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2000), 449–53; Brian J. Shanley, "Divine Causation and Human Freedom in Aquinas," *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* 72 (1998): 99–122; John H. Wright, "Human Freedom and Divine Action: Libertarianism in St. Thomas Aquinas," in *Human and Divine Agency: Anglican, Catholic, and Lutheran Perspectives*, ed. F. M. McLain and W. M. Richardson (Lanham: University Press of America, 1999), 41–7; Tobias Hoffmann, "Aquinas and Intellectual Determinism: The Test Case of Angelic Sin," *Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie* 89 (2007): 122–56. On the question of evil, see W. Matthews Grant, "Aquinas on How God Causes the Act of Sin without Causing the Sin Itself," *The Thomist* 73 (2009): 455–96.

²⁶*De ente*, c. 4 (Leon.43.376–7.102–46). Second and third stage is John Wippel's useful terminology. For a discussion of this text, see the following exchange between John Wippel and Joseph Owens: Owens, "Quiddity and Real Distinction in St. Thomas Aquinas," *Mediaeval Studies* 27 (1965): 1–22; Wippel, "Aquinas's Route to the Real Distinction: A Note on *De ente et essentia*, c. 4," *The Thomist* 43 (1979): 279–95; Owens, *Aquinas on Being and Thing* (Niagra, NY: Niagra University Press, 1981); Owens, "Stages and Distinction in *De Ente*: A Rejoinder," *The Thomist* 45 (1981): 99–123; Wippel, *Metaphysical Themes in Thomas Aquinas* (Washington DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 1984), 107–61.

²⁷For a clear treatment and overview of Aquinas's arguments, see part three of Wippel's *Metaphysical Thought*.

²⁸Brian Shanley has shown, with many examples spanning his entire career, that Aquinas thought God's providence was philosophically demonstrable. See Shanley, "Thomas Aquinas on Demonstrating God's Providence," in *The Science of Being as Being: Metaphysical Investigations*, ed. Gregory T. Doolan (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2012), 221–43. The essay also offers a helpful overview of the kinds of philosophical arguments Aquinas made for divine providence.

randomly and fortuitously in the world and that all things are subject to divine providence. Aristotle, however, here spoke of the contingent things which happen here, in order to particular causes."²⁹

Thomas now turns to address how providence does not make everything necessary. This problem was explicitly raised both in the beginning of this argument and in his commentary on II *Physics*. This is tricky because one must grant that what is foreseen (*provisum*) by God, must come about,³⁰ and it is tempting to draw the conclusion that everything must then come about by necessity.³¹

He begins with an interesting example. It must be known, he says, that the effect and all those things which are *per se* accidents of that effect depend on the same cause; as man is from nature, so are all his *per se* accidents like risibility and his capacity to learn. If there is a cause that does not make man simply be a man (*simpliciter*) but makes him be this kind of a man (*tale*), that would not be the kind of cause that could cause man's *per se* accidents, but it could only use them. For example, a legislator can make man civil, but he cannot make him able to learn; but, the legislator can use the citizen's ability to learn to make him civil.³²

Because God is the cause of being as being, as being is subject to divine providence, so is every accident of being as being, among which are the necessary and contingent. Divine providence concerns not only what makes this being, but also what grants contingency or necessity to being. As God providentially wills to grant contingency or necessity to each being, he prepares mediate causes from which it follows contingently or necessarily. In this way, every effect falls under divine providence as conditionally necessary, and it is true to say that if something is foreseen by God, it will be.³³

²⁹*In VI Metaph.*, 3 (Marietti, n. 1216): "Relinquitur igitur quod omnia, quae hic fiunt, prout ad primam causam divinam referuntur, inveniuntur ordinata et non per accidens existere; licet per comparationem ad alias causas per accidens esse inveniuntur. Et propter hoc secundum fidem catholicam dicitur, quod nihil fit temere sive fortuito in mundo, et quod omnia subduntur divinae providentiae. Aristoteles autem hic loquitur de contingentibus quae hic fiunt, in ordine ad causas particulares, sicut per eius exemplum apparet."

³⁰For a very helpful article on this see Brian Shanley, "Eternal Knowledge of the Temporal in Aquinas," *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* 71 (1997): 197–224.

³¹*In VI Metaph.*, 3 (Marietti, n. 1218).

³²*Ibid.*, n. 1219: "Sed sciendum est, quod ex eadem causa dependet effectus, et omnia quae sunt per se accidentia illius effectus. Sicut enim homo est a natura, ita et omnia eius per se accidentia, ut risibile, et mentis disciplinae susceptibile. Si autem aliqua causa non faciat hominem simpliciter sed hominem talem, eius non erit constituere ea quae sunt per se accidentia hominis, sed solum uti eis. Politicus enim facit hominem civilem; non tamen facit eum mentis disciplinae susceptibilem, sed hac eius proprietate utitur ad hoc quod homo fiat civilis."

³³*Ibid.*, n. 1220. "Sicut autem dictum est, ens inquantum ens est, habet causam ipsum Deum: unde sicut divinae providentiae subditur ipsum ens, ita etiam omnia accidentia entis inquantum est ens, inter quae sunt necessarium et contingens. Ad divinam igitur providentiam pertinet non solum quod faciat hoc ens, sed quod det ei contingentiam vel necessitatem. Secundum enim quod

But when an effect is considered with respect to its proximate cause, not all effects are necessary, but some are necessary and some are contingent according to an analogy to their cause (*secundum analogiam suae causae*). This is because effects in their natures are likened to their proximate causes, but not to their remote causes, to whose condition they cannot attain.³⁴

So it does not follow that if one posits divine providence that one must say that every effect is absolutely necessary, but rather that it is either necessary or contingent. What is necessary and contingent depends on a higher cause that is the cause of being insofar as it is being, from which the order of necessity and contingency comes to the world.³⁵ That concludes Thomas's argument.

The point of the analogy between the soul and its properties is useful. The soul's powers or properties flow inseparably from the soul itself, thus wherever there is a human soul there inevitably is reason.³⁶ The way the analogy works here is that granting that God causes the *esse* of something, contingency or absolute necessity inevitably and inseparably follow that *esse* as its inseparable properties.

But let us move from this metaphorical analogy of proportionality (the soul is to its properties as *esse* is to contingency or necessity) to the referential analogy of proportion, i.e., his mention of analogy with reference to some cause. Thomas has made it clear that univocal predication is only applicable to the third kind of cause he outlined above; but, in the first two, i.e., heavenly bodies and God, he said that effects are likened to their proximate causes, but they cannot be likened to the condition of their remote cause. Thomas means that the more powerful and universal a cause is, the less likeness there is between cause and effect. But the more proximate and specific a cause is, the more like it is to its effect. God,

unicuique dare voluit contingentiam vel necessitatem, praeparavit ei causas medias, ex quibus de necessitate sequatur, vel contingenter. Invenitur igitur uniuscuiusque effectus secundum quod est sub ordine divinae providentiae necessitatem habere. Ex quo contingit quod haec conditionalis est vera, si aliquid est a Deo provisum, hoc erit."

³⁴Ibid., 1221: "Secundum autem quod effectus aliquis consideratur sub ordine causae proximae, sic non omnis effectus est necessarius; sed quidam necessarius et quidam contingens secundum analogiam suae causae. Effectus enim in suis naturis simulantur causis proximis, non autem remotis, ad quarum conditionem pertingere non possunt."

³⁵Ibid., 1222: "Sic ergo patet, quod cum de divina providentia loquimur, non est dicendum solum, hoc est provisum a Deo ut sit, sed hoc est provisum a Deo, ut contingenter sit, vel ut necessario sit. Unde non sequitur secundum rationem Aristotelis hic inductam, quod ex quo divina providentia est posita, quod omnes effectus sint necessarii; sed necessarium est effectus esse contingenter, vel de necessitate. Quod quidem est singulare in hac causa, scilicet in divina providentia. Reliquae enim causae non constituunt legem necessitatis vel contingentiae, sed constituta a superiori causa utuntur. Unde causalitati cuiuslibet alterius causae subditur solum quod eius effectus sit. Quod autem sit necessario vel contingenter, dependet ex causa altiori, quae est causa entis in quantum est ens; a qua ordo necessitatis et contingentiae in rebus provenit."

³⁶See Wippel, *Metaphysical Thought*, 266–75, for a discussion and texts.

as the remote cause of all being, is what Aquinas calls an equivocal cause.³⁷ In such a case, there is a non-univocal likeness between effect and its cause because the effect exists in its cause but in a more eminent way. In this argument for Providence, Thomas has been building to this universal equivocal cause.

It is only when the contingent and the necessary are seen to be caused by God that one can somehow grasp that *everything* (i.e., what happens both for the most part and the least part) is subject to God's providence. But while we may philosophically conclude that divine providence exists, because of the equivocal nature of the first cause we cannot explain why God decided to do this or that in this or that way. All we can know is that these events, which appear to happen by chance, are in fact somehow ordered by divine providence.

IV.

This is, perhaps, Aquinas's last treatment of divine providence.³⁸ In a certain sense, there is nothing new here—all of the steps he uses have been firmly established in other places in his corpus; what is new, however, is the manner in which he puts them together into a very straightforward and powerful metaphysical argument.³⁹

What is perhaps most interesting and striking about this argument is that he leaves out the fundamentals of divine providence, namely, God's sapiential ordering of natures to their ends.⁴⁰ There was no discussion whatsoever of nature and teleology. Nor, for that matter, was there any mention of God's reason or wisdom. He bypasses them altogether and, rather, draws divine providence out of creation, i.e., God's causing of *esse*.

³⁷On equivocal causes see *STI*, q. 4, a. 2 (St. Paul, 22); *SCGI*, c. 29 (Leon.manualis.30–1); *De veritate*, q. 10, a. 13, ad 3 (Leon.22/2.343.158–70); *De Potentia* q. 7, a. 5 (Marietti, 198).

³⁸Thomas treats divine providence in his *De substantiis separatis*, c. 15 (which is dated sometime after the first half of 1271), but there is not enough information about either text to say whether or not it is prior or posterior to his commentary on the *Metaphysics*. It is perhaps worth noting that there is no argument from natural teleology to divine providence in the *De substantiis separatis*, but I wouldn't make too much of that since his arguments follow upon his proofs that God and separate substances have knowledge of particulars, so one wouldn't expect to find such arguments there. Shanley missed this argument, which we have been discussing, so he says that the treatment in *De substantiis separatis* is his last (see "Thomas Aquinas on Demonstrating God's Providence," 239). It is unfortunate that Shanley overlooked this argument since it is practically tailor-made for his expertise. In any case, I am much indebted to Shanley's work, and I consider this article to be a compliment to his paper on providence.

³⁹There is an interesting argument in *STI*, q. 22, a. 2 (St. Paul, 121), which may be a precursor to this argument since it concludes that insofar as beings participate in *esse*, they are governed by God. However, it is substantially less developed and, unlike this one, it is inherently teleological.

⁴⁰See *STI*, q. 22, a. 1 (St. Paul, 119–20): "Ipsa igitur ratio ordinis rerum in finem, providentia in Deo nominatur."

Aquinas's acknowledgement of a need to appeal to a higher science implies that by at least 1270 he seemed to hold that the fact that natures act regularly always or for the most part was not sufficient to prove the existence of divine providence. But in his commentary on Job (1263–1265), he had written that the fact that natural things act for the sake of an end is the “strongest argument” to prove that the world is governed by divine providence.⁴¹ In most of these earlier arguments from natural teleology, Aquinas simply equates the negation of the possibility that all things happen by chance with the more positive claim of the existence of divine providence, as if these were the only two possible alternatives.

In Thomas's defense, there is something intuitive about these arguments from teleology, for in a certain sense one can ignore the problem of chance. Aristotle's description of chance, the intersecting of two *per se* causal lines, certainly denies the possibility of explaining all of the world's happenings through chance. Moreover, it does offer a kind of explanation for all of the chance events in the world. Why are there accidents? Because natures operate according to their natures, chance is simply a kind of accidental byproduct of nature. In *ST I*, q. 103, a. 1 (1267–68) he said that the inference from natural teleology to providence is like that of a man who enters an intelligently designed house and concludes to the intelligence of the builder.⁴² Granting Aristotle's understand-

⁴¹*Expositio super Iob ad litteram*, c. 5 (Leon.26.36.127–36): “Quia Eliphaz proposuerat omnia quae in terris fiunt determinatum causam habere et hoc probaverat per hoc quod res naturales apparebant esse dispositae propter finem, hoc autem, scilicet quod res naturales sunt propter finem, potissimum argumentum est ad ostendendum mundum regi divina providentia et non omnia agi fortuito, idcirco Eliphaz statim ex praemissis concludit de regimine divinae providentiae.” Text cited incompletely in Shanley, “Providence,” 235n44.

⁴²*ST I*, q. 103, a. 1 (St. Paul, 480): “Unde ipse ordo certus rerum manifeste demonstrat gubernationem mundi: sicut si quis intraret domum bene ordinatam, ex ipsa domus ordinatione ordinatoris rationem perpenderet; . . .” The arguments for providence dovetail with the arguments for design. See for example, the last argument of *SCG I*, c. 13 (Leon.manualis.14): “Impossible est aliqua contraria et dissonantia in unum ordinem concordare semper vel pluries nisi alicuius gubernatione, ex qua omnibus et singulis tribuitur ut ad certum finem tendunt. Sed in mundo videmus res diversarum naturarum in unum ordinem concordare, non ut raro et a casu, sed ut semper vel in maiori parte. Oportet ergo esse *aliquem cuius providentia mundus gubernetur*.” Cf. Shanley, “Providence,” 238. As Wippel points out (*Metaphysical Thought*, 434n90), neither Fernand Van Steenberghen nor Norman Kretzmann think this is a philosophically strong argument (Van Steenberghen, *Le problème philosophique de l'existence de Dieu* [Louvain-la-Neuve, 1980], 125–6; Kretzmann, *The Metaphysics of Theism: Aquinas's Natural Theology in Summa Contra Gentiles I* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997], 84, 88–9). Wippel himself notes that “the emphasis in the argument from the *De veritate* [q. 5, a. 2, a fifth way-like argument] is more clearly and explicitly on finality in nature. The present argument is considerably less sophisticated and less developed from the philosophical standpoint and may be regarded as a more popularized version of an argument for God's existence based on order and design.” There is one such argument later in Aquinas's Commentary on the *Metaphysics XII*, lectio. 12 (nn. 2628–31). I think it worth noting that although Aquinas had made similar arguments for divine providence in earlier texts,

ing of teleology and chance, one simply sees order as the governing principle wherever one looks.

However, I would like to briefly consider a question John Wippel raises about Aquinas's fifth way. In the case of non-rational animals, which act rationally always or for the most part, as the argument goes, one must posit a cause of that rationality, i.e., a higher intelligence. This intelligence causes the natural motion as an archer shoots an arrow.⁴³ Aquinas's example of the archer shooting the arrow implies that irrational animals can act teleologically along the lines of final causality, because their natural motion is efficiently caused by the archer, God. Aquinas explains that this being moved by God arises naturally out of their own natures, i.e., action for the sake of their natural end comes from their natural appetite, which follows from their natural form.⁴⁴ Thus the cause of their intelligent motion is their form and the cause of their form is God, who as the

he does not claim to conclude to a provident God here. For a discussion of this and parallel texts, see James C. Doig, *Aquinas's Philosophical Commentary on the Ethics: A Historical Perspective* (Dordrecht, The Netherlands: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2001), 110–22. Doig thinks that this text is about divine providence.

⁴³*STI*, q. 2, a. 3 (St. Paul, 14): "Quinta via sumitur ex gubernatione rerum. Videmus enim quod aliqua quae cognitione carent, scilicet corpora naturalia, operantur propter finem, quod apparet ex hoc quod semper aut frequentius eodem modo operantur, ut consequantur id quod est optimum; unde patet quod non a casu, sed ex intentione perveniunt ad finem. Ea autem quae non habent cognitionem, non tendunt in finem nisi directa ab aliquo cognoscente et intelligente, sicut sagitta a sagittante. Ergo et aliquid intelligens, a quo omnes res naturales ordinantur ad finem: et hoc dicimus Deum." One must also wonder how the argument moves from the need for intelligence to the existence of only one governing intelligence. See Wippel, *Metaphysical Thought*, 485.

⁴⁴*De veritate*, q. 22, a. 1 (Leon.22/3.613–4): "omnia bonum appetunt, non solum habentia cognitionem sed etiam quae sunt cognitionis expertia. . . . unde necesse est dicere quod omnes res naturales sunt ordinatae et dispositae ad suos effectus convenientes. Dupliciter autem contingit aliquid ordinari vel dirigi in aliquid sicut in finem: uno modo per se ipsum, sicut homo qui se ipsum dirigit ad locum quo tendit; alio modo ab altero sicut sagitta quae a sagittante ad determinatum locum dirigitur. . . . Et per hunc modum omnes res naturales in ea quae eis conveniunt sunt inclinata, habentia in se ipsis aliquod suae inclinationis principium, ratione cuius eorum inclinatio naturalis est, ita ut quodam modo ipsa vadant et non solum ducantur in fines debitos; violenta enim tantum modo ducuntur quia nihil conferunt moventi, sed naturalia etiam vadunt in fines, in quantum cooperantur inclinanti et dirigenti per principium eis inditum. Quod autem dirigitur vel inclinatur in aliquid ab aliquo, in id inclinatur quod est intentum ab eo qui inclinat vel dirigit; sicut in idem signum sagitta dirigitur quo sagittator intendit." Cf. *STI*, q. 103, a.1, ad 3 (St. Paul, 481): "necessitas naturalis inhaerens rebus quae determinatur ad unum, est impressio quaedam Dei dirigentis ad finem: sicut necessitas qua sagitta agitur ut ad certum signum tendat, est impressio sagittantis, et non sagittae. Sed in hoc differt, quia id quod creaturae a Deo recipiunt, est earum natura; quod autem ab homine rebus naturalibus imprimatur praeter earum naturam, ad violentiam pertinet. Unde sicut necessitas violentiae in motu sagittae demonstrat sagittantis directionem; ita necessitas naturalis creaturarum demonstrat divinae providentiae gubernationem."

auctor naturae moves natural things naturally.⁴⁵ But is this not, Wippel wonders, to grant that this argument from natural teleology must ultimately be reduced to God as efficient cause?⁴⁶

But even if these kinds of arguments must ultimately be reduced to efficient causality, one is still only able to attribute divine providence to God to the extent that there is order in the world following upon God's efficiently causing natural motion, i.e., it has not been shown that what is *per accidens* has been *provisum*. The way to complete the argument and include both what is *per se* and *per accidens*, is simply to appeal to God as the efficient cause of *esse*—exactly as he does in this argument we have canvassed above.⁴⁷

If I might indulge in a little speculation, it seems to me that when Thomas returned to Aristotle's *Physics* and *Metaphysics* to prepare his commentaries he realized that he needed to address with a bit more clarity the relation between providence and chance. Previously he seemed to have been content to show that chance could not be the cause of everything. But later he seems to have recognized that the argument from teleology to providence needed to be filled out to explain how God's providence also includes what happens for the least part. In order to do that, he had to offer quite a different argument.⁴⁸ I do not think he changed his mind about teleology and providence itself, but I do hold that he recognized a serious objection to his arguments from teleology to providence. He raised the objection himself and answered it. Since Aquinas often made probable as well as demonstrative arguments, it seems to me that, at the very least, we are justified in considering the arguments from natural teleology to providence as probable.⁴⁹

⁴⁵STI, q. 60, a. 1, et ad 3 (St. Paul, 283): "Est autem hoc commune omni naturae, ut habeat aliquam inclinationem, quae est appetitus naturalis vel amor. Quae tamen inclinatio diversimode invenitur in diversis naturis, in unaquaque secundum modum eius"; and *ibid.*, [ad 3]: "sicut cognitio naturalis semper est vera, ita dilectio naturalis semper est recta: cum amor naturalis nihil aliud sit quam inclinatio naturae indita ab Auctore naturae. Dicere ergo quod inclinatio naturalis non sit recta, est derogare Auctori naturae." See also *De malo*, q. 16, a. 4, ad 5 (Leon.23.300.401–10).

⁴⁶Wippel, *Metaphysical Thought*, 484–5; for other texts see his citations there. Wippel wonders "if such an intelligent being orders natural things to their appropriate end or ends by imposing a natural inclination upon them, is this not to say that this intelligence is also their efficient cause? If so, it would seem that the ultimate source of finality in the universe must be identified with the supreme efficient cause of all such beings" (485).

⁴⁷The drawback with the argument, I suppose, is that it does not tell us much about Divine Providence. On the other hand, that is not its purpose.

⁴⁸If one accepts that these fifth way-like arguments are ultimately reducible to God's efficient causality, then this argument can be viewed as a kind of radical extension of that efficient causality since one appeals to the highest efficient cause, God as *causa essendi* rather than God as *auctor naturae*. If one rejects this interpretation of the fifth way arguments, then the contrast is much starker.

⁴⁹On Aquinas's use of both probable and demonstrative arguments, see *SCGI*, c. 9. Aquinas rarely says whether he considers an argument to be one or the other.

V.

Because this metaphysical argument about chance and providence is based on God's causing *esse*, it is particularly helpful (albeit *per accidens*) concerning evolution and creation. The argument depicts a universe in which there is a fair amount that must necessarily remain unintelligible to us. In other words, the universe is intelligible for the most part. This is because knowledge is through causes,⁵⁰ and one cannot have real scientific knowledge of *per accidens* happenings which God contingently causes to happen.⁵¹ The existence of a remote cause of contingent and accidental events can be proven, but it is *quia* not *propter quid* demonstration, i.e., it can prove the fact (*quia*), but not the reason for the fact, which is explained by the immediate cause that produced that fact (*propter quid*).⁵² Aquinas's *triplex via* has here been assumed: reasoning from effect to cause, negation, and supereminence. Such demonstration will tell us that what it has demonstrated is true, but not the reason why; it demonstrates that God is provident, but it does not even come close to telling us why God willed this or that.

If someone asks why this accident happened, to answer: "because God willed it" is true enough, but that is true of everything; it is no explanation of why this accident happened rather than that. In order to explain that, acquaintance with the specific proximate cause is necessary, but we do not and cannot have such knowledge because ontologically God causes these events to happen contingently

⁵⁰*Post. an.* I, 2 (Leon.1/2.252.71b9–11): "Scire autem opinamur unumquodque simpliciter . . . cum causam cognoscere arbitramur propter quam est res, quoniam illius est causa, et non contingere hoc aliter se habere."

⁵¹*Post. an.* I, 4 (Leon.1/2.19.86–97): "oportet igitur scientem, si est perfecte cognoscens, quod cognoscat causam rei scite; . . . et ideo oportet scientem simpliciter cognoscere etiam applicationem cause ad effectum; quia vero sciencia etiam est certa cognitio rei, quod autem contingit aliter se habere non potest aliquis per certitudinem cognoscere, ideo ulterius oportet quod id quod scitur non possit aliter se habere." Aquinas defines the contingent as what is able to be and not be, *ST I*, q. 86, a. 3 (St. Paul, 421): "contingens est quod potest esse et non esse." On our conjectural knowledge of contingencies, see *ST I*, q. 14, a. 13 (St. Paul, 83): "Alio modo potest considerari contingens, ut est in sua causa. Et sic consideratur ut futurum, et ut contingens nondum determinatum ad unum: quia causa contingens se habet ad opposita. Et sic contingens non subditur per certitudinem alicui cognitioni. Unde quicumque cognoscit effectum contingentem in causa sua tantum, non habet de eo nisi coniecturalem cognitionem." See also *De malo*, q. 16, a. 7 (Leon.23.315–16.239–48).

⁵²*Post. an.* I, 4 (Leon.1/2.19.79–87): "Secundo cum dicit: Cum causam quoque arbitramur cognoscere etc., ponit diffinitionem ipsius scire simpliciter.—Circa quod considerandum est quod scire aliquid est perfecte cognoscere ipsum, hoc autem est perfecte apprehendere veritatem ipsius: eadem enim sunt principia esse rei et veritatis ipsius, ut patet ex II Methaphisice; oportet igitur scientem, si est perfecte cognoscens, quod cognoscat causam rei scite."

through defectable causes.⁵³ Thus we can say, as Aquinas himself does, that an accidental event has no cause; there is no cause or reason why someone discovers a treasure while digging a grave.⁵⁴ The word random seems to me to be a perfectly good way to describe such events that must be unpredictable and unintelligible to us. We ought not to try to explain them away by pointing to God as their *causa remota*, as if the reason God caused such and such a thing to contingently and accidentally happen were really somehow intelligible to us. Such an explanation is neither scientific by ancient and medieval standards nor scientific by the standards of modern science.⁵⁵

Some deny teleology altogether and argue that what happens by chance “causes” (nature qua blind watchmaker) what seems to happen according to some order. While Aristotle had argued that what happens for the most part causes what happens for the least part, they argue the complete opposite, namely, that what happens for the least part causes what happens for the most part. Because these *per accidens* events are not caused *per se*, it seems to follow that they are not caused by God at all. This makes some sense, for something cannot be both caused and not caused at the same time and in the same respect. Because modern science is limited to investigating quantifiable proximate causes, scientists correctly describe such events as uncaused and random, or something along those lines. Those who make the further claim that God cannot also simultaneously cause such an event assume that God’s causality must be like any other quantifiable proximate cause—otherwise there is no contradiction. Thus when modern atheists claim to have refuted God’s existence on the grounds

⁵³The proximate causes are not intelligible because they are *defectibiles*, *ST I*, q. 19, a. 8 (St. Paul, 109): “Cum igitur voluntas divina sit efficacissima, non solum sequitur quod fiant ea quae Deus vult fieri; sed quod eo modo fiant, quo Deus ea fieri vult. Vult autem quaedam fieri Deus necessario, et quaedam contingenter, ut sit ordo in rebus, ad complementum universi. Et ideo quibusdam effectibus aptavit causas necessarias, quae deficere non possunt, ex quibus effectus de necessitate proveniunt: quibusdam autem aptavit causas contingentes defectibiles, ex quibus effectus contingenter eveniunt. Non igitur propterea effectus voliti a Deo, eveniunt contingenter, quia causae proximae sunt contingentes: sed propterea quia Deus voluit eos contingenter evenire, contingentes causas ad eos praeparavit.”

⁵⁴*De malo*, q. 16, a. 7, ad 14 (Leon.23.317.406–15): “non est verum quod omne quod evenit habeat causam: quaedam enim eveniunt per accidens, quod autem est per accidens non habet causam, quia proprie non est ens, ut Plato dixit. Unde quod iste fodiat sepulcrum, causam habet; et iterum quod in aliquo loco conditus sit thesaurus, causam habet; set iste concursus qui est per accidens, scilicet hunc volentem sepulcrum fodere in loco ubi est thesaurus reconditus, non habet causam, quia est per accidens.”

⁵⁵If we offer God as the reason this happened, while understanding that God is the *causa remota* and fully understanding the *quia* nature of this claim, then it is certainly scientific according to the science of metaphysics. But if we offer God as the answer to why this happened rather than that, apart from rapture or the beatific vision, it is not scientific by any standard and rightfully open to the God of the gaps criticism.

of evolution, if the refutation is valid, they have correctly refuted the existence of some lesser God.

If such a scientist nevertheless insists that a transcendent God does not exist, that scientist has necessarily overstepped the self-imposed bounds of modern science, which has limited itself to studying being that is clear and distinct, material, quantifiable, measurable, and in this way verifiable. Such a scientist is claiming that the only kind of being is the being he studies. Such a sweeping claim about the nature of *everything* is a metaphysical claim and not one grounded in modern science. Because of its own self-imposed limits, modern science simply must remain silent and agnostic about the existence of an immaterial, infinite, and thus unquantifiable *causa superior*.

Scientists who argue from the randomness of natural selection to the non-existence of God thus have two options. Either they may reason from their own scientific knowledge, but in that case the apparent conflict is due to an anthropomorphic understanding of God, making God more like man than a transcendent *causa essendi*.⁵⁶ Or they may argue from a better understanding of God's transcendence, but in that case they should not cloak their arguments in the infallible authority of their white laboratory coats. They should engage these questions, but should do so fully aware that they are doing metaphysics and not modern science.

What is nice about this argument, in terms of thinking about evolution, is that there is no need to rely on arguments from intelligent design or the fifth way, whatever may be their merits.⁵⁷ It is an altogether different kind of argument, and I think a much stronger argument. There is no need to be anxious about whether or not the evidence on the ground, so to speak, can or cannot be marshaled for or against the intelligence of God's providential governance. Let the evidence speak for itself. Nor can it be pigeonholed as a God-of-the-gaps kind of argument, for everything is caused by God regardless of whether or not we understand it through its proximate cause. As scientific knowledge progresses, we will inevitably discover that what had previously seemed random was not, but we will inevitably also discover new things which are best described as random—some shifting along

⁵⁶See *Expositio libri Peryermenias* I, 14 (Leon.1/1.78–9.438–61), text below in n59. Brian Shanley makes this point in "Divine Causation and Human Freedom," 119; see also Robert Sokolowski's *The God of Faith and Reason* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1993). Sokolowski and Shanley offer lucid discussions of the nature of God's transcendent causality. See also Bernard McGinn, "The Development of the Thought of Thomas Aquinas on the Reconciliation of Divine Providence and Contingent Action," *Thomist* 39 (1975): 741–52; but, Shanley thinks McGinn has exaggerated Aquinas's development, see Shanley, "Human Freedom," 118n50.

⁵⁷For a recent Thomistic defense of Intelligent Design, see Robert C. Koons and Logan Paul Gage, "St. Thomas on Intelligent Design," *Proceedings of the American Catholic Philosophical Association* 85 (2012): 79–97.

these lines is to be expected. But if Aquinas is right, there will nevertheless always be that which we may rightly describe as random in the universe.

Ultimately Aristotle's commonsensical view is vindicated: nature is what happens always or for the most part, and chance is what happens for the least part; the former is intelligible, and the latter is not. This is how the world is to us (*quoad nos*). Nevertheless, Aquinas has proven that God governs what happens for the most part and what happens for the least part: he causes absolute things to happen absolutely; he causes contingent things to happen contingently; and within the realm of contingency, he causes what we may rightly describe as random events to come about randomly.⁵⁸ If someone thinks this is impossible, then they have not properly considered what divine transcendence entails.⁵⁹

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⁵⁸Aquinas himself, of course, does not make this last distinction. But what we would call randomness is undoubtedly part of what Aquinas would call contingency. Not all contingent events could be described as random, for not all are equally unintelligible. Free choice, for example, is a contingent event which is neither completely unintelligible nor completely intelligible. See Tobias Hoffmann's excellent discussion of this point in "Angelic Sin," 122–56, esp. 152–3. Thomists of a more intellectualist bent would here disagree, e.g., Jeffrey Hause, "Thomas Aquinas and the Voluntarists," *Medieval Philosophy and Theology* 6 (1997):167–82; and P.S. Eardley, "Thomas Aquinas and Giles of Rome on the Will," *Review of Metaphysics* 56 (2003): 835–62. For a helpful general discussion of absolute necessity and contingency in creation, see *SCG* II, c. 30 (Leon. manualis.116–9).

⁵⁹Robert Sokolowski offers a very helpful and brief introduction to this understanding of God in *The God of Faith and Reason*. See also these late and helpful texts: *Expositio libri Peryermenias* I, 14 (of 1270–71) (Leon.1/1.78–9.438–61): "Nam voluntas divina est intelligenda ut extra ordinem entium existens, velut causa quedam profundens totum ens et omnes eius differentias; sunt autem differentie entis possibile et necessarium, et ideo ex ipsa voluntate divina originantur necessitas et contingencia in rebus, et distinctio utriusque secundum rationem proximarum causarum: ad effectus autem quos voluit necessarios esse disposuit causas necessarias, ad effectus autem quos voluit esse contingenter, ordinavit causas contingenter agentes, <id est> potentes deficere; et secundum harum condicionem causarum, effectus dicuntur vel necessarii vel contingentes, quamvis omnes dependeant a voluntate divina sicut a prima causa que transcendit ordinem necessitatis et contingencie. Hoc autem non potest dici de voluntate humana nec de aliqua alia causa, quia omnis alia causa cadit iam sub ordine necessitatis vel contingencie, et ideo oportet quod vel ipsa causa possit deficere, vel quod effectus eius non sit contingens, set necessarius. Voluntas autem divina indeficiens est, tamen non omnes effectus eius sunt necessarii, set quidam contingentes."; *De malo*, q. 16, a. 7, ad 15 (of 1270–72) (Leon.23.318.434–47): "Ex parte autem voluntatis considerandum est quod voluntas divina est universaliter causa entis et universaliter omnium que consequuntur <ipsum>, unde et necessitatis et contingentie; ipsa autem est supra ordinem necessarii et contingentis sicut est supra totum esse creatum. Et ideo necessitas et contingencia in rebus distinguitur non per habitudinem ad voluntatem divinam que est causa communis, set per comparationem ad causas creatas, quas proportionaliter divina voluntas ad effectus ordinavit, ut scilicet necessariorum effectuum sint cause intransmutabiles, contingentium autem transmutabiles."

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