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# Thomas Aquinas and the Justification of the Contingency of Effects in Nature<sup>1</sup>

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Throughout his career, Thomas Aquinas addresses the issue of determinism (*viz.*, the question of whether things happen necessarily) from different perspectives. One of them is what is called in the literature “theological determinism”.<sup>2</sup> According to Aquinas, theological determinism may assume at least two different forms. The first denies the existence of contingent effects by virtue of the following argument: since God’s will is a non-impedible and immutable cause of all things, it makes everything necessary.<sup>3</sup> The second argues that every effect is necessary since none of them can be accidental with respect to divine providence: since God’s providence is universal and, therefore, includes everything, every effect happens necessarily.<sup>4</sup> Aquinas’ reaction to these two forms of theological determinism translates into the effort to justify, on the one hand, the presence of contingent effects in nature without undermining the perfection and efficacy of divine will and, on the other, the presence of accidental effects without compromising the universality of divine providence.<sup>5</sup>

In this paper, I shall focus on Aquinas’ reply to the first form of theological determinism. More specifically, I want to draw attention to one of the central tenets of Aquinas’ strategy for explaining the contingency of the effects in nature, namely the principle according to which, in a series of

<sup>1</sup> I am extremely grateful to Fabrizio Amerini and William Duba for their insightful remarks on earlier versions of this paper.

<sup>2</sup> WEATHERFORD, Robert: *The Implications of Determinism*. London: Routledge 1991, 7. See also SCHABEL, Chris: *Pierre Ceffons et le Déterminisme Radical au Temps de la Peste Noire*. Paris: Vrin 2019, 95–130.

<sup>3</sup> The first form of theological determinism is addressed by Aquinas in: THOMAS DE AQUINO: *Scriptum super libros Sententiarum*, I (*In I Sent*), d. 47, q. 1, a. 1, ad. 2; *Quaestiones disputatae De Veritate* (*De Ver*), q. 23, a. 5; *Summa contra Gentiles* (*SCG*), I, c. 85; II, c. 30; *Summa Theologiae* (*ST*), I, q. 19, a. 8; *Expositio libri Peyermenias* (*Exp Per*), I, lect. 14.

<sup>4</sup> The second form of theological determinism is faced by Aquinas in THOMAS DE AQUINO: *In I Sent*, d. 39, q. 2, a. 2; *Quodlibet* (*Quodl*), XI, q. 3; *SCG*, III, c. 72, 74 and 94; *ST*, I, q. 22, a. 4; *Sententia super Metaphysicam* (*In Met*), VI, lect. 3.

<sup>5</sup> Aquinas outlines his view on God’s providence in THOMAS DE AQUINO: *SCG*, III, cc. 64–III. On this see DODDS, Michael J.: *The One Creator God in Thomas Aquinas and Contemporary Theology*. Washington DC: The Catholic University of America Press 2020, 126–146.

essentially-ordered causes, the contingency of the final effect depends on the contingency of its proximate cause (M).<sup>6</sup>

Through (M) Aquinas intends to explain how the contingency of an effect follows from the series of causes on which such an effect depends. Since scholars have neglected the relevance of (M),<sup>7</sup> I want to fill this gap emphasizing its crucial role in Aquinas' strategy for justifying the contingency in nature. In the following sections, I shall discuss the reasons that induced Aquinas to justify the contingency of effects *only* by (M), namely only by referring to the contingency of their proximate causes, and later recognize the insufficiency of such a position. To do this, I will examine three texts: *Scriptum super Libros Sententiarum*, Book I (*In I Sent*), d. 38, q. 1, a. 5<sup>8</sup>; *Quaestiones disputatae De Veritate (De Ver)*, q. 23, a. 5<sup>9</sup>; and *Summa Theologiae (ST)*, I, q. 19, a. 8<sup>10</sup>.

I will begin (§ 2) with the reconstruction of Aquinas' strategy developed in *In I Sent*, d. 38, q. 1, a. 5. According to this text, the contingency of an effect can be *completely* justified by the contingency of its proximate cause. Such a strategy is based on (M) and on the idea that the causal influence of the first cause is received by the secondary cause according to the modality of the latter.

In § 3, I will investigate *De Ver*, q. 23, a. 5, where Aquinas takes awareness of a problem that the position developed in the *Commentary on the Sentences* involves: explaining the contingency of effects only by referring to the contingency of their proximate causes implies that God could not produce any contingent effect without the help of the contingent secondary causes. This could further entail an emanationist view of creation, ac-

<sup>6</sup> I will restrict myself to considering only the domain of natural causal agents, namely the domain of causes which, lacking will and reason, cannot choose to produce their proper effect or not: when natural causal agents are not impeded, they cannot but produce their proper effect by virtue of their own (substantial) form. Clearly, this difference recalls the Aristotelian difference between irrational and rational potencies: cf. ARISTOTLE: *Metaph.*, IX, 2, 1046a 36–b 23.

<sup>7</sup> With the partial exception of: MCGINN, Bernard: *The Development of the Thought of Thomas Aquinas on the Reconciliation of Divine Providence and Contingent Action*, in: *The Thomist* 39 (1975), 741–752, 747–749; and GORIS, Harm J.M.J.: *Free Creatures of an Eternal God. Thomas Aquinas on God's Infallible Foreknowledge and Irresistible Will*. Nijmegen: Stichting Thomasfonds 1996, 295–298. However, McGinn and Goris limit themselves to affirming that Aquinas rejects the idea that the contingency of effects can be fully justified only by (M), without tracing the reasons of such a rejection.

<sup>8</sup> The *Scriptum super Libros Sententiarum* was written between 1252 and 1256. Cf. TORRELL, Jean-Pierre o.p.: *Initiation à Saint Thomas d'Aquin. Sa Personne et Son Œuvre*. 2<sup>e</sup> Édition revue et augmentée d'une mise à jour critique et bibliographique. Fribourg/Paris: Éditions du Cerf/Éditions Universitaires de Fribourg 2002, 485.

<sup>9</sup> The *Quaestiones disputatae De Veritate* date from the period between 1256 and 1259. Cf. TORRELL, J.-P.: *Initiation à Saint Thomas d'Aquin*, 90–91.

<sup>10</sup> The first part of the *Summa Theologiae* was written between 1265 and 1268. Cf. TORRELL, J.-P.: *Initiation à Saint Thomas d'Aquin*, 207–211.

according to which God can immediately produce one and only one effect and operates by the same necessity as natural causal agents (*secundum necessitatem naturae*).

Aquinas' solution to this difficulty consists of recognizing that divine will determines the modal status of the effects (i.e., necessary or contingent) and, according to this, it adapts the modal status of secondary causes. In short, Aquinas does not refuse (M) but anchors it in God's will that can be rightly considered the principal reason (*ratio principalis*) for justifying the contingency of effects in nature. The solution proposed in *De Ver* also recurs in *ST*, I, q. 19, a. 8: God's will arranges necessary secondary causes to produce necessary effects and contingent secondary causes to produce contingent effects.

However, to reach a full understanding of the reasons why Aquinas calls into question the idea that the contingency of effects can be completely justified by (M), one should take into consideration not only *De Ver*, q. 23, a. 5, but also *ST*, I, q. 19, a. 8. In the latter text, in fact, Aquinas brings to light the intrinsic inadequacy of the position of the *Commentary on the Sentences* through two different arguments that do not occur in *De Ver*, q. 23, a. 5. More precisely, Aquinas notes that the strategy of the *Commentary on the Sentences* involves two difficulties, which I shall discuss in § 4: 1) explaining the contingency of effects *only* through the contingency of their proximate causes leads one to conceive that the contingent status of an effect is independent of God's will; 2) assuming that the contingency of an effect results from the defectibility of secondary (proximate) causes undermines the perfection of God's will, conceiving it as a contingent and impendible cause.

In the above-mentioned texts, the notions of necessity and contingency are considered with respect to the cause-effect relationship, namely both as modalities of the action of causal agents and as modalities of effects. Although in these three texts Aquinas does not offer a proper definition of these two modal notions, he nevertheless associates the notion of necessity with the notions of immutability and invariability;<sup>11</sup> on the contrary, the contingency of a cause is associated with the idea of mutability and failure.<sup>12</sup> If the necessity of a cause indicates perfection in finalizing its causal action (a necessary cause always produces its effect without fail), the contingency means the lack of perfection since a contingent cause sometimes

<sup>11</sup> On the different meanings of "necessity" in Aquinas' works see MACINTOSH, John: *Aquinas on Necessity*, in: *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* 72 (1998), 371–403.

<sup>12</sup> Aquinas introduces the nexus between contingency and variability (or mutability) in *In I Sent.*, d. 43, q. 2, a. 1, ad. 2; see also *ST*, I, q. 19, a. 3. On the relationship between contingency and mutability, see GEVAERT, Jan: *Contingent en Noodzakelijk Bestaan Volgens Thomas von Aquino*. Brussel: Koninklijke Vlaamse Academie voor Wetenschappen, Letteren en Schoone Kunsten van België 1965, 130–149; AERTSEN, Jan: *Nature and Creature. Thomas Aquinas's Way of Thought*. Leiden: Brill 1998, 239–247.



fails to produce its expected effect.<sup>13</sup> Accordingly, what distinguishes a necessary cause from a contingent cause is the fact that, unlike the latter, the former is not subject to change: acting always in the same way, a necessary cause always realizes its proper effect.

## 2. THE FIRST POSITION: IN I SENT, D. 38, Q. 1, A. 5

In *In I Sent.*, d. 38, q. 1, a. 5, Aquinas raises the question of whether God's knowledge includes future contingents. In the response, Aquinas proves that God knows future contingent effects and explains how such knowledge is possible.<sup>14</sup>

To demonstrate that God knows about contingent effects, Aquinas decides to call into question the opposite thesis that contingent effects cannot be included in the domain of God's knowledge. Two reasons can underpin such a thesis: the first has to do with the relation between the cause and its effect (*propter ordinem causae ad causatum*); the second with the relation between the knowledge and the object known (*propter ordinem scientiae ad scitum*).

I consider only the first reason, which intends to prove that there is no room for the contingency of effects in nature through the following argument (A)<sup>15</sup>:

P<sub>1</sub>) it seems (*videtur*) that the effect that results from a necessary and immutable cause is necessary;

P<sub>2</sub>) divine knowledge is the cause of all things<sup>16</sup> and is a necessary and immutable cause;

C) therefore, every thing, to the extent to which it is the effect of God's knowledge, is necessary.

According to (A), divine knowledge cannot cause contingent effects by virtue of the principle of similarity between a cause and its effect:<sup>17</sup> a neces-

<sup>13</sup> Cf. KNUUTTILA, Simo: *Modalities in Medieval Philosophy*. London: Routledge 1993, 129–133.

<sup>14</sup> On the relationship between God's knowledge and the future contingents in Aquinas' thought, see SCHABEL, Chris: *Theology at Paris. Peter Auriol and The Problem of Divine Foreknowledge and Future Contingents*. Aldershot: Ashgate 2000, 33–37; MARENBON, John: *Le Temps, l'Éternité et la Prescience de Boèce à Thomas d'Aquin*. Paris: Vrin 2005, 117–162.

<sup>15</sup> Cf. THOMAS DE AQUINO: *In I Sent*, d. 38, q. 1, a. 5, *sol.*, ed. P. Mandonnet. Paris: Lethellieux 1929, vol. I, 909.

<sup>16</sup> On God's knowledge as the cause of its objects see THOMAS DE AQUINO: *In I Sent*, d. 38, q. 1, a. 1; *De Ver*, q. 2, a. 14. The historical source of this Thomistic thesis is found in AVERROES: *Aristotelis Metaphysicorum libri XIII. Cum Averrois Cordubensis in eosdem Commentariis, et Epitome*, XII. Venetiis: apud Iunctas 1562; anast. rep. Frankfurt am Main: Minerva 1962, vol. VIII, f. 337rB.

<sup>17</sup> (M) should not be confused with the so-called "principle of similarity" between cause and effect (*omne agens agit sibi simile*). The "principle of similarity" states that every causal

sary and immutable cause (such as God's knowledge) can only produce necessary effects.

In his reply to (A), Aquinas agrees with (P<sub>2</sub>), but not with (P<sub>1</sub>). He rejects the first premise, replacing it with (M), according to which, in a series of *per se*-ordered causes, the contingency of the final effect depends on the contingency of its proximate cause. Let me quote the relevant passage:

Quandoque enim sunt causae multae ordinatae, effectus ultimus non sequitur causam primam in necessitate et contingentia sed causam proximam; quia virtus causae primae recipitur in causa secunda secundum modum causae secundae. Effectus enim ille non procedit a causa prima nisi secundum quod virtus causae primae recipitur in secunda causa: ut patet in floritione arboris cujus causa remota est motus solis, proxima autem virtus generativa plantae. Floritio autem potest impediri per impedimentum virtutis generativae, quamvis motus solis invariabilis sit. Similiter etiam scientia Dei est invariabilis causa omnium; sed effectus producuntur ab ipso per operationes secundarum causarum; et ideo, mediantibus causis secundis necessariis, producit effectus necesarios ut motum solis et huiusmodi; sed, mediantibus causis secundis contingentibus, producit effectus contingents.<sup>18</sup>

In the formulation of (M) (*Quandoque enim sunt causae multae ordinatae, effectus ultimus non sequitur causam primam in necessitate et contingentia sed causam proximam*) two elements can be noted: 1) the distinction between proximate and remote causes;<sup>19</sup> 2) the reference to many ordered causes.

To grasp the meaning of Aquinas' criticism of (A) we need to clarify the meaning of (1) and (2) that occur in the formulation of (M). Only in this way can we understand how, for Aquinas, God's knowledge can cause contingent effects.

### 2.1. The Meaning of the Expression *causae multae ordinatae* and the Distinction between Proximate and Remote Causes

When Aquinas mentions the notion of "order" in the expression "*causae multae ordinatae*", he means *per se* or essentially-ordered causes.<sup>20</sup>

agent produces an effect which is similar to it: cf. THOMAS DE AQUINO: *ST*, I, q. 41, a. 1. On the other hand, (M) expresses the relationship of dependence between the modal status of an effect and the modal status of its proximate cause. On the meaning of the "principle of similarity" in Aquinas' thought and on its sources see ROSEMAN, Philippe W.: *Omne Agens Agit Sibi Simile. A "Repetition" of Scholastic Metaphysics*. Leuven: Leuven University Press 1996, 253–306.

<sup>18</sup> THOMAS DE AQUINO: *In I Sent*, d. 38, q. 1, a. 5, sol., ed. P. Mandonnet, vol. I, 909–910.

<sup>19</sup> On this distinction see *Liber de Causis*, prop. 1.

<sup>20</sup> As Caleb Cohoe has recently stressed, this terminology "is not explicitly found in Aquinas but fits well with his understanding of these causal series" (COHOE, Caleb: *There Must Be a First: Why Thomas Aquinas Rejects Infinite, Essentially Ordered, Causal Series*, in: *British Journal for the History of Philosophy* 21 [2013] 5, 838–856, 840). We can encounter the expressions "*causae essentialiter ordinatae*" and "*causae accidentaliter ordinatae*" in:

In an essentially-ordered series, every cause operates simultaneously with the other causes of the series and with the ultimate effect so that, if one of them fails to act, the ultimate effect also fails to occur. This presupposes that every link of the chain essentially depends on the previous ones: the second element of the series and its causal power entirely depend on the first element; the third element and its causal power depend on the first and the second, and so on. Aquinas illustrates this kind of relationship through the following example: the soul causes the natural warmth of the human body; the warmth then moves nerves and muscles, which produce the movement of the hands; the latter move the stick, which ultimately raises the stone.<sup>21</sup> In such a series, then, the first cause is intended to realize the ultimate effect through the intermediate causes.<sup>22</sup>

Another presupposition is that, in a series of essentially-ordered causes, the number of causes has to be finite; otherwise, the relation between the causes would be compromised. Since in a series of essentially-ordered causes each cause acts simultaneously with the ultimate effect, such a series has to be closed by a first uncaused cause.<sup>23</sup> Otherwise, it would proceed *in infinitum*, which is impossible because, for Thomas, an actual infinite cannot exist.<sup>24</sup> On the contrary, in a series of accidentally (*per accidens*)-ordered causes, the number of causes may be infinite. There is no essential order between the causes, so the ultimate effect does not depend on how many causes there are.<sup>25</sup>

This clarification of (1) sheds light on the meaning of (2): with the expression *causae multae ordinatae* Aquinas is referring to a series of *per se*-ordered causes, given that only in such a series can one distinguish the proximate cause from the remote ones with respect to the ultimate effect. Notions like proximate and remote cause (with respect to the ultimate effect) make sense only if referred to a series characterized by a relation of essential dependence.

SIGER OF BRABANT: *Quaestiones in Metaphysicam* [P], II, q. 8; *Quaestiones in Metaphysicam* [M], II, q. 10, and also in JOHANNES DUNS SCOTUS: *Tractatus de primo principio*, III, 28.

<sup>21</sup> Cf. THOMAS DE AQUINO: *De Ver*, q. 2, a. 10.

<sup>22</sup> As an example of this aspect Aquinas offers the following: the blacksmith moves his hand, which moves the hammer; the hammer then thwacks the iron, shaping it according to the purpose of the blacksmith himself. Cf. THOMAS DE AQUINO: *In I Sent*, d. 12, q. 1, a. 3, ad. 4; *ST*, I, q. 105, a. 5; *Super librum De Causis Expositio* (SDC), prop. 1.

<sup>23</sup> The idea that a series of essentially-ordered causes is composed of a finite number of causes comes from Avicenna: cf. AVICENNA LATINUS: *Liber de Philosophia Prima*, VIII, 1. Édition critique de la traduction latine médiévale par S. Van Riet, introduction doctrinale par G. Verbeke. Louvain: Peeters 1980, vol. II [livres V–X], 376, ll. 11–12 and 378, ll. 45–48. Ultimately, the source of this doctrine has to be traced to ARISTOTLE: *Metaph*, II, 2, 994a 1–b. 8.

<sup>24</sup> Cf. THOMAS DE AQUINO: *ST*, I, q. 7, a. 4, *resp.*; I, q. 46, a. 2, ad. 7.

<sup>25</sup> On the infinite number of the causes accidentally (*per accidens*)-ordered, see also THOMAS DE AQUINO: *ST*, I, q. 7, a. 4; I, q. 46, a. 2, ad. 7; *In Phys.*, II, lect. 9; *SDC*, prop. 1. Even in this case the source of this thesis is Avicenna: cf. AVICENNA LATINUS: *Liber de Philosophia Prima*, VI, 2.

## 2.2. *The Criticism of the Argument (A)*

As said, the cornerstone of Aquinas' strategy for replying to (A) lies in the replacement of (P<sub>1</sub>), namely that the effect that results from a necessary and immutable cause is necessary, with (M). More precisely, in the text quoted above, Aquinas does not limit himself to formulating (M), but also roots it in what could be called the "principle of reception". This principle states that the causal power of the first cause is received by the second cause according to the modal status of the second cause itself (*virtus causae primae recipitur in causa secunda secundum modum causae secundae*).<sup>26</sup>

Let me make Aquinas' reasoning explicit to show what role this principle plays.

In a series of essentially-ordered causes, the modality (i.e., contingency or necessity) of the ultimate effect depends on the modality of its proximate cause, and not on the first cause of the series. This is so because the causal power of the first cause is received by the secondary cause according to the modality of the latter, and not according to the modality of the former. This entails that, in a series of *per se*-ordered causes, if the proximate cause is contingent, it can fail and so its effect will be contingent even if the first cause is necessary and non-impedible.

The modal relation between the causes of an essentially-ordered series is well clarified by Aquinas' example of a plant's flowering. In this case, the remote cause<sup>27</sup> coincides with the movement of the sun, and the proximate cause is the generative virtue of the plant itself. The movement of the sun is a necessary and immutable cause: indeed, the sun is always moving in the same way and always causes its proximate effect, namely sunlight.<sup>28</sup> On the contrary, the generative virtue of the plant is not a necessary and immutable cause, given that it can be prevented and thus can fail to

<sup>26</sup> Aquinas adopts this principle for justifying the idea that the movement of heavenly bodies does not always produce necessary effects in the sublunary world: cf. THOMAS DE AQUINO: *De Ver*, q. 5, a. 9, *add.* 1 and 17; SCG, III, 86. The so-called "principle of reception" assumes different forms depending on the theoretical context in which Aquinas uses it. On the extent as well as on the sources of this principle see WIPPEL, John F.: *Thomas Aquinas and the Axiom "What is Received is Received according to the Mode of Receiver"*, in: WIPPEL, John F.: *Metaphysical Themes in Thomas Aquinas II*. Washington DC: The Catholic University of America Press 2007, 113–122; TOMARCHIO, John: *Four Indices for the Thomistic Principle Quod recipitur in aliquo est in eo per modum recipientis*, in: *Mediaeval Studies* 60 (1998), 315–367.

<sup>27</sup> Strictly speaking, Aquinas refers to the movement of the sun as the remote cause (*causa remota est motus solis*) of a plant's flowering. However, in the formulation of (M) Aquinas uses the expression "first cause" (*causam primam*). In *ST*, I, q. 19, a. 6, ad. 3 Aquinas specifies that God is the cause *universaliter prima*, with respect to which every secondary cause is ordered.

<sup>28</sup> Clearly, the invariability of the movement of the sun should not be confused with the invariability of God's knowledge: in fact, the sun, like the others heavenly bodies, is subject to variation according to location (*secundum ubi*), but divine knowledge is absolutely immutable.



achieve its effect, namely the plant's flowering. Hence, although the movement of the sun is a necessary cause, a plant's flowering is a contingent effect since its proximate cause (*i.e.*, the generative virtue of the plant) is contingent and defectible. By virtue of the principle of reception, the causal power of the sun is received by a plant according to the modal status of its generative virtue (*i.e.*, contingency); and, by virtue of (M), a plant's flowering is a contingent effect since the generative virtue of the plant, which is its proximate cause, is contingent. In such a way, Aquinas provides an account of how in a series of *per se*-ordered causes from a necessary, *i.e.*, non-impedible, first cause can follow a contingent effect, namely an effect that does not always occur, through the mediation of a secondary contingent cause, namely a cause that can sometimes fail to produce its effect.

Aquinas adopts such a strategy to prove that God's knowledge produces contingent effects through the operations of secondary causes (*per operationes secundarum causarum*). As the first cause of all things, God produces necessary effects (*i.e.*, eclipses) through necessary proximate causes (*i.e.*, the movement of the sun and other heavenly bodies) and contingent effects (*i.e.*, a plant's flowering) through contingent proximate causes (*i.e.*, the generative virtue of the plant).

The idea that God operates through the mediation of secondary causes is meant to avoid assuming God's knowledge as the proximate cause of all things. If God's knowledge, which is a necessary and immutable cause, were the proximate cause of all effects, it would follow, according to (M), that every effect would be necessary. This would leave no room for contingent effects in nature.

The combination of (M) with the idea that God realizes effects through the operations of secondary causes creates a compatibility between divine knowledge and the presence of contingent effects in the sublunary world (such as the failure of the plant's flowering). By virtue of (M) and the principle of reception, the necessary status of divine knowledge does not make necessary the ultimate effects. Between the first link of the causal chain, namely God, and the last one there are intermediate links, the so-called secondary causes; among these, the modal status of the proximate cause (with respect to the ultimate effect) determines the modal status of the ultimate effect itself.

In short, through (M) and the idea that God operates via secondary causes, Aquinas rejects the deterministic thesis, according to which every effect is necessary since God's knowledge is a necessary and immutable cause. For him, the necessity and the immutability of divine knowledge do not prevent in any way the existence of contingent effects in nature, not even God's knowledge of these effects.

To conclude, in this text the justification of the contingency of effects in nature *completely* lies in secondary causes: according to (M), in an es-



entially-ordered series of causes the contingency of ultimate effects follows from the contingency of their own proximate causes.

If this strategy, based on (M) and the principle of reception, makes compatible the necessity of the first cause with the contingency of the ultimate effect, however, it does not seem able to account for the passage from the necessity of the first cause to the contingency of the intermediate cause. Indeed, according to the position of *In I Sent*, d. 38, q. 1, a. 5, it seems that, in an essentially-ordered series of causes, the modal status (i.e., contingent or necessary) of secondary causes does not depend in any way on the first cause, namely God. As we shall see in § 4.3, Aquinas explicitly tackles this issue in *ST*, I, q. 19, a. 8.

### 3. THE ROLE OF DIVINE WILL: *DE VER*, Q. 23, A. 5

In *De Ver*, q. 23, a. 5 Aquinas discusses the explanation of the contingency of effects developed in *In I Sent.*, d. 38, q. 1, a. 5. In particular, he rejects the idea that the contingency of effects can be *completely* justified by the contingency of their proximate causes and emphasizes the key role played by God's will.

Question 23 of the *De Veritate* consists of eight articles all devoted to the topic of divine will. In the fifth article of this question, Aquinas addresses the issue of whether God's will makes all things necessary. His answer is clearly expressed in the first two lines of the *responsio*: divine will does not make all things necessary (*voluntas divina non imponit necessitatem rebus omnibus*).

The solution can be divided into two parts. First, Aquinas points out the difficulties arising from a position such as that endorsed in the *Commentary on the Sentences*; there, he corrects such a position by integrating it with two new ideas. First, he holds that it is up to divine will to arrange the secondary causes with respect to the modality that it intends to ascribe to the ultimate effect. Second, he argues that God can produce necessary as well as contingent effects even without the mediation of the secondary causes.

In what follows, I shall first (§ 3.1) examine Aquinas' criticism of the position proposed in *In I Sent*, d. 38, q. 1, a. 5. Then (§ 3.2), I shall illustrate the new strategy for justifying the contingency of effects developed in *De Ver*, q. 23, a. 5.

#### 3.1. (M) and Emanationism

In the first part of the *responsio* of *De Ver*, q. 23, a. 5, Aquinas first reconstructs the position developed in *In I Sent*, d. 38, q. 1, a. 5 and later highlights a difficulty that such a position could encounter.

In *De Ver* Aquinas refers to divine will, and not to divine knowledge; this is the first difference with *In I Sent*. The second difference is that the “principle of reception”, which functions as a justification for (M) in the *Commentary on the Sentences*, is no longer mentioned in *De Ver*. Here is the *responsio* of the disputed question:

Dicendum, quod voluntas divina non imponit necessitatem rebus omnibus. Cuius quaedam ratio assignatur a quibusdam ex hoc quod, cum voluntas sit rerum omnium prima causa, producit quosdam effectus mediantibus causis secundis, quae contingentes sunt, et deficere possunt; et ideo effectus contingentiam causae proximae sequitur, non autem necessitatem causae primae. Sed hoc videtur esse consonum his qui ponebant a Deo omnia procedere secundum necessitatem naturae: ut quod ab uno simplici procedebat immediate unum habens aliquam multitudinem, et illo mediante procedit multitudo. Similiter ab uno omnino immobili dicunt procedere aliquid quod est immobile secundum substantiam, mobile autem et aliter se habens secundum situm, quo mediante generatio et corruptio in istis inferioribus accidit: secundum quam viam non posset poni, a Deo immediate causari multitudinem, et res corruptibiles et contingentes. Quod est sanae fidei contrarium, quae ponit multitudinem rerum corruptibilium immediate a Deo causatam; utpote prima individua arborum et brutorum animalium.<sup>29</sup>

The first thing to note is that the position Aquinas intends to criticize is attributed, in general, to “some people” (*quibusdam*). The editors of the *Editio Leonina* do not provide any indication concerning to whom this pronoun refers.<sup>30</sup> Nevertheless, as McGinn stressed<sup>31</sup>, this position coincides, from a doctrinal point of view, with what Aquinas claimed in his *Commentary on the Sentences*:<sup>32</sup> since the contingency of an effect, by virtue of (M), follows from the contingency of its proximate cause, God’s will, which is the first necessary cause of all things, produces the contingent effects only through contingent and impendible causes (*cum voluntas sit rerum omnium prima causa, producit quosdam effectus mediantibus causis secundis, quae contingentes sunt, et deficere possunt*).

Aquinas notes a problem that could ensue from this position, namely that every corruptible and contingent effect cannot be produced by God immediately, but only in a mediate way, through secondary contingent causes (*secundum quam viam non posset poni, a Deo immediate causari multitudinem, et res corruptibiles et contingentes*). Therefore, the divine action of creation turns out to be treated as the action of any other natural causal agent which operates by the necessity of nature (*secundum necessitatem naturae*). Understood in this way, God is similar to a natural cause that,

<sup>29</sup> THOMAS DE AQUINO: *De Ver*, q. 23, a. 5, *resp.*, ed. A. Dondaine. Roma: Editori di San Tommaso 1976, t. 22, 666, ll. 65–88.

<sup>30</sup> Cf. THOMAS DE AQUINO: *De Ver*, q. 23, a. 5, *resp.*, ed. A. Dondaine, 666, l. 66.

<sup>31</sup> MCGINN, B.: *The Development of the Thought of Thomas Aquinas*, 746–748.

<sup>32</sup> One can also find such a position in THOMAS DE AQUINO: *De Ver*, q. 2, a. 14, add. 3 and 5.

lacking reason and will, can only produce one effect. The assumption underlying such a perspective coincides with the Neoplatonic principle, embraced by Avicenna, that from the one derives nothing else but the one (*ab uno simplici procedebat immediate unum*).<sup>33</sup> According to this principle, the one, which is absolutely simple in itself, produces the many only in a mediate and indirect way.

Aquinas is not willing to concede this final assumption since it opposes the Christian faith (*sanae fidei contrarium*), which teaches that the multiplicity of corruptible and contingent beings is immediately created by God<sup>34</sup>.

### 3.2. Aquinas' solution

To avoid the risk of assuming an emanationist view of creation, Aquinas proposes an alternative explanation of the contingency in nature. He assigns to divine will—no more to (M)—the role of principal reason (*ratio principalis*) of the fact that there are contingent effects in nature. This, however, does not mean that Aquinas rejects (M) *tout court*; rather, he sets it in a wider theoretical framework characterized by the idea that what determines the modal status (necessary or contingent) of an effect ultimately coincides with God's will.<sup>35</sup>

In the second part of the *responsio* of article 5, Aquinas offers a new strategy for justifying the presence of contingent effects.

Et ideo oportet aliam principalem rationem assignare contingentiae in rebus, cui causa praeassignata subserviat. Oportet enim patiens assimilari agenti: et si agens sit fortissimum, erit similitudo effectus ad causam agentem perfecta; si autem agens sit debile, erit similitudo imperfecta; sicut propter fortitudinem virtutis formativae in semine, filius assimilatur patri non solum in natura speciei, sed in multis aliis accidentibus; e contrario vero, propter debilitatem praedictae virtutis, annihilatur praedicta assimilatio [...]. Voluntas autem divina est agens fortissimum. Unde oportet eius effectum ei omnibus modis assimilari: ut non solum fiat id quod Deus vult fieri, quod est quasi assimilari secundum speciem; sed ut fiat eo modo quo Deus vult illud fieri, ut necessario vel contingenter, cito vel tarde, quod est quasi quaedam assimilatio secundum accidentia. Et hunc quidem modum rebus divina voluntas praefinit ex ordine suae sapien-

<sup>33</sup> In the syntagm "his qui ponebant a Deo omnia procedere secundum necessitatem naturae", it is also easy to recognize the Avicennian doctrine: cf. AVICENNA LATINUS: *Liber de Philosophia Prima*, IX, 4, ed. S. Van Riet, vol. II, 481, ll. 50–51.

<sup>34</sup> In his *Commentary on the Sentences* Aquinas has more than once rejected the emanationist conception of creation (cf. THOMAS DE AQUINO: *In II Sent.*, d. 1, q. 1, a. 4; *In II Sent.*, d. 15, q. 1, a. 2). He has also explicitly rejected the idea that God can be assimilated to a natural causal agent: as a voluntary causal agent, God does not operate by the necessity of His nature (*ex necessitate naturae*): cf. THOMAS DE AQUINO: *In I Sent.*, d. 43, q. 2, a. 1.

<sup>35</sup> To confirm the fact that Aquinas does not intend to give up (M), we can note that (M) also occurs in the following texts: SCG, I, c. 85; III, c. 72; ST, I, q. 14, a. 13, ad. 1; ST, I, q. 103, a. 7, ad. 3; *In Met.*, VI, lect. 3.

tiae. Secundum autem quod disponit aliquas res sic vel sic fieri, adaptat eis causas illo modo quem disponit; quem tamen modum posset rebus inducere etiam illis causis non mediantibus. Et sic non dicimus quod aliqui divinorum effectuum sint contingentes solummodo propter contingentiam causarum secundarum, sed magis propter dispositionem divinae voluntatis, quae talem ordinem rebus providit.<sup>36</sup>

The premise of Aquinas' argument lies in the idea of a similarity between the agent and the patient: the more powerful an agent is, the more the effect resembles it, since the causal power of the agent will act upon the effect more efficiently and perfectly<sup>37</sup> (*si agens sit fortissimum, erit similitudo effectus ad causam agentem perfecta; si autem agens sit debile, erit similitudo imperfecta*). Unlike other natural causal agents, God's will is the most powerful agent (*agens fortissimum*), so its effects resemble it in every way (*omnibus modis assimilari*).

This point should retain our attention. For Aquinas, affirming that divine will is the most powerful agent implies that everything God wants not only happens but also happens according to the modality He wants, i.e., necessarily or contingently (*ut fiat eo modo quo Deus vult illud fieri, ut necessario vel contingenter*). Insofar as God wants effects to happen according to a certain modality (necessary or contingent), He adapts the modality of secondary causes to produce those effects. God provides necessary secondary causes to produce necessary effects and contingent secondary causes to produce contingent effects.<sup>38</sup> This passage clearly indicates that Aquinas' solution does not intend to reject (M) in itself, but rather to anchor it in God's will, on which ultimately depends the contingency of effects in nature.<sup>39</sup>

A distinguishing feature of Aquinas' new solution is the appeal to the difference between natural agents and voluntary agents. If, in the domain of natural agents, the modality of an effect strictly depends on the modality of its proximate cause, in the domain of voluntary agents, it depends on the volition of its cause.<sup>40</sup> Since God's will is conceived of as a necessary voluntary agent of all things, every effect happens according to the modality (necessity or contingency) wanted by God. If God were a necessary natural agent, every effect would be necessary. But since God is a necessary

<sup>36</sup> THOMAS DE AQUINO: *De Ver*, q. 23, a. 5, *resp.*, ed. A. Dondaine, 666, ll. 89–118.

<sup>37</sup> Cf. THOMAS DE AQUINO: *SCG*, II, c. 45.

<sup>38</sup> This position, although more concisely, can be also found in *De Ver*, q. 6, a. 3, ad. 3.

<sup>39</sup> On this see TE VELDE, Rudi A.: *Thomas Aquinas on Providence, Contingency and the Usefulness of Prayer*, in: D'HOINE, Pieter/VAN RIEL, Gerd (eds.): *Fate, Providence and Moral Responsibility in Ancient, Medieval and Early Modern Thought*. Studies in Honour of Carlos Steel. Leuven: Leuven University Press 2014, 539–552, 545; FROST, Gloria: *Aquinas and Scotus on the Source of Contingency*, in: *Oxford Studies in Medieval Philosophy* 2 (2015), 46–66, 54–55.

<sup>40</sup> Cf. THOMAS DE AQUINO: *De Ver*, q. 23, a. 5, ad. 1.



voluntary agent, then the modal status of each effect is perfectly determined by God.

Before analyzing *ST*, I, q. 19, a. 8, it is worth summarizing the main results achieved by the exam of *De Ver*, q. 23, a. 5. In this text Aquinas stresses that justifying the contingency of effects only by the contingency of their proximate causes could imply the idea that God cannot produce a contingent effect without the mediation of secondary contingent causes. His solution to avoid this implication consists of specifying that it falls to God's will to establish the modality (*i.e.*, contingency or necessity) of effects and, accordingly, the modality of secondary proximate causes. As we shall see in the next paragraph, in *ST*, I, q. 19, a. 8 Aquinas shows through two different arguments the inadequacy of the position developed in the *Commentary on the Sentences* for explaining the contingency of effects.

#### 4. THE INSUFFICIENCY OF (M) IN EXPLAINING THE CONTINGENCY OF EFFECTS: *ST*, I, Q. 19, A. 8

*ST*, I, q. 19, a. 8 is crucial for reaching a full understanding of Aquinas' criticism of (M) as a sufficient condition for explaining the contingency of effects in nature. In this text Aquinas sheds light on the intrinsic insufficiency of the position proposed in *In I Sent*. Assuming such a position implies that: (i) God's will is an impendible and fallible cause; and (ii) contingency and necessity in nature do not depend in any way on God.

In *ST*, I, q. 19, a. 8 Aquinas deals with the question of whether God's will makes all things He wanted necessary, which is the same question that Aquinas faces in *De Ver*, q. 23, a. 5. In the first lines of the *respondeo* Aquinas formulates his answer: God's will makes some things necessary, but not all (*Divina voluntas quibusdam volitis necessitate imponit, non autem omnibus*).

In the first part of the solution of article 8, Aquinas briefly reconstructs the position that he intends to discuss. According to such a position, the modality of an effect, *only* depends on the modality of its intermediate proximate cause: the effects that God produces through necessary intermediate causes are necessary, whereas the effects that God produces through contingent intermediate causes are contingent.

Cuius quidem rationem aliqui assignare voluerunt ex causis mediis: quia ea quae producit per causas necessarias, sunt necessaria; ea vero quae producit per causas contingentes, sunt contingentia.<sup>41</sup>

As in *De Ver*, q. 23, a. 5, in this text Aquinas does not attribute this position to himself, but to "some people" (*aliqui*). Even in this case, there

<sup>41</sup> THOMAS DE AQUINO: *ST*, I, q. 19, a. 8, *resp.* Cinisello Balsamo (MI): Editiones Paulinae 1988, 109.



is no doubt that, from a doctrinal point of view, it coincides with the solution he proposed in *In I Sent.*, d. 38, q. 1, a. 5. However, unlike the text from *De Ver.*, that from the *Summa* does not include the argument that if (M) is assumed without any further specification, then it follows that God cannot immediately produce contingent effects.

#### 4.1. *ST, I, q. 19, a. 8 and De Ver, q. 23, a. 5: divine will as foundation of contingency in nature*

The strategy for justifying the contingency of effects proposed by Aquinas in the second part the *respondeo* of article 8 is the same as *De Ver.*, q. 23, a. 5:

Et ideo melius dicendum est, quod hoc contingit propter efficaciam divinae voluntatis. Cum enim aliqua causa efficax fuerit ad agendum, effectus consequitur causam non tantum secundum id quod fit, sed etiam secundum modum fiendi vel essendi, ex debilitate enim virtutis activae in semine, contingit quod filius nascitur dissimilis patri in accidentibus, quae pertinent ad modum essendi. 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.<sup>42</sup>

According to this passage, when a cause is efficacious and powerful, the effect will depend on the cause itself: with respect not only to its existence but also to the modality of its existence. For example, when, in the generative process of human beings, the active virtue of the sperm is defective, the child will resemble the father with respect to the species (mankind) but not to his accidents (*dissimilis patri in accidentibus*) such as height or eye color. This clearly does not apply to God's will, which is maximally efficacious (*efficacissima*): divine will realizes its desired effects according to the desired modality.

After that, Aquinas briefly explains why God decides that some effects are contingent and others necessary, invoking the idea of the perfection of the created universe: if all effects were necessary, the order of the universe would not be complete and perfect since not all grades of being would be realized.<sup>43</sup>

Aquinas establishes a relationship of dependence between divine will and the modality of ultimate effects and the secondary causes: on the one

<sup>42</sup> THOMAS DE AQUINO: *ST*, I, q. 19, a. 8, *resp.*, ed. Paulinae, 109.

<sup>43</sup> On the notion of *perfectio* see THOMAS DE AQUINO: *SCG*, II, c. 45; *ST*, I, q. 47, a. 2; I, q. 48, a. 2. The idea of the perfection of the universe as a justifying base for the contingency of effects also occurs in other Aquinas' works: *In I Sent.*, d. 39, q. 2, a. 2; *SCG*, I, c. 85; III, c. 72 and 74; *ST*, I, q. 22, a. 4. On the Thomistic idea of *perfectio universi* it is worth considering BLANCHETTE, Olivia: *The Perfection of Universe according to Aquinas*. University Park, Pennsylvania: The Pennsylvania State University Press 1992, 130–141; GELBER, Hester G.: *It Could Have Been Otherwise. Contingency and Necessity in Dominican Theology at Oxford 1300–1350*. Leiden: Brill 2004, 117–118.

hand, with respect to the effects that God wants to be contingent, He arranges secondary contingent causes, which can fail (*defectibiles*); on the other, with respect to the effects that He wants to be necessary, God arranges secondary necessary causes, which cannot fail in their action (*deficere non possunt*).

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.<sup>44</sup>

In this text, Aquinas asserts that the entire order of secondary causes depends on God's will, which adapts (*aptavit*) the modal status according to the modal status required for the effect. Therefore, for Aquinas, it is no longer sufficient to explain the contingency of effects only through the contingency of their own proximate causes; this position needs to be complemented by the idea that the effects are contingent because of God's will. In short, Aquinas' solution refers the contingency of effects and secondary causes back to divine will, thus considering it as the deep root of contingency as well as of the necessity of effects in nature.

However, unlike *De Ver*, in this text Aquinas offers two different arguments to shed light on the inadequacy of the strategy developed in the *Commentary on the Sentences* in accounting how a contingent effect (*i.e.*, a plant's flowering) can stem from a necessary first cause (*i.e.*, God).

#### 4.2. The First Argument

The first argument refers to a series of *per se*-ordered causes, within which the first cause (*e.g.*, the movement of the sun) is necessary, and the second cause (*e.g.*, the generative virtue of the plant) is contingent.

Primo quidem, quia effectus alicuius primae causae est contingens propter causam secundam, ex eo quod impeditur effectus causae primae per defectum causae secundae; sicut virtus solis per defectum plantae impeditur. Nullus autem defectus causae secundae impedire potest quin voluntas Dei effectum suum producat.<sup>45</sup>

By virtue of (M), the ultimate effect (a plant's flowering) of such a series is contingent because its proximate cause (the generative virtue of the plant itself) is contingent (that is to say, fallible). In this case, the causal action of the sun can be prevented in producing a plant's flowering by the failure of the plant itself (*per defectum causae secundae*).

<sup>44</sup> THOMAS DE AQUINO: *ST*, I, q. 19, a. 8, *resp.*, ed. Paulinae, 109. Such a position also recurs in: THOMAS DE AQUINO: *Quodl*, XI, q. 3, a. *un*; *SCG*, III, 94; *Exp Per*, I, lect. 14; *In Met*, VI, lect. 3.

<sup>45</sup> THOMAS DE AQUINO: *ST*, I, q. 19, a. 8, *resp.*, ed. Paulinae, 109.

Assuming that the contingency of the ultimate effect *only* depends on the contingency and fallibility of its proximate cause implies that the defects of such a cause also makes the first necessary cause (the movement of the sun) impeditable since the action of the latter is prevented by the defects of the former. However, as Aquinas notes, this obviously does not apply to divine will. Indeed, being the most powerful cause, God's will cannot be absolutely impeded by the failure of the secondary causes.<sup>46</sup>

The crucial point of Aquinas is the following: if, in a series of essentially-ordered causes, the contingency of an effect were explained only by its proximate cause, divine will would be conceived of as an impeditable cause as much as the causal agents which operate in nature. Such a conclusion appears absurd in the eyes of Aquinas, given that God's will is perfect in itself and cannot be prevented in any way.

Even in *ST*, I, q. 19, a. 8, the contingency of a cause is understood in terms of fallibility and defectibility (a contingent cause sometimes fails to realize its own effect), while the necessity of a cause implies the impossibility of failure (a necessary cause always produces its own effect, without exception).

To conclude, this first argument brings out that the strategy for justifying the contingency of effects developed in the *Commentary on the Sentences* entails the defectibility of the first cause, namely divine will. Since contingency is associated with the notion of *defectus*, if we assume that in an essentially-ordered series of causes, the contingency of the ultimate effect *only* depends on the contingency of its proximate cause, this means that the first cause can be impeded by the defect of the secondary contingent cause. This criticism points out a problem which directly stems from the assumption that the contingency of an effect can be completely justified by the contingency of its proximate cause.

#### 4.3. *The Second Argument*

The second argument deals with the relationship of dependence between the modalities of secondary causes and divine will.

Secundo, quia, si distinctio contingentium a necessariis referatur solum in causas secundas, sequitur hoc esse praeter intentionem et voluntatem divinam: quod est inconveniens.<sup>47</sup>

This argument is very succinct: if necessity and contingency only depended on the modal status of the secondary causes, the distinction between contingency and necessity would be beyond God's intention and will.

To clarify this implication, consider a series of three essentially-ordered causes: A, B, and C. In the case of a plant's flowering, A represents the first

<sup>46</sup> See THOMAS DE AQUINO: *ST*, I, q. 19, a. 6, *resp.*

<sup>47</sup> THOMAS DE AQUINO: *ST*, I, q. 19, a. 8, *resp.*, ed. Paulinae, 109.

divine cause, B the intermediate necessary cause (*i.e.*, the movement of the sun), and C the proximate contingent cause (*i.e.*, the generative virtue of the plant). A, B, and C together generate the effect E (*i.e.*, the plant's flowering).

Now, between A and E there are two intermediate causes: B, which is a necessary cause, and C, which is a contingent cause. If E is contingent, then, by virtue of (M), C must be contingent: the contingency of E depends on the contingency of C. Moreover, through the so-called "principle of reception" one can explain how an ultimate contingent effect (E) can derive from divine will (A), which is a necessary and not impedible cause: the causative virtue of A is received in the intermediate causes (B and C) according to the modality proper to the latter. It follows that the causal influence of A is received by B according to the modality of necessity and, at the same time, the causal power of A and B are received by C according to the modality of contingency. Thus, it seems that the modal status of B and C is independent of A. In other words, the modalities of B and C seem to be independent of God's will (A).

As a result, the strategy developed in the *Commentary on the Sentences* cannot exhaustively explain the relationship of dependence between the first divine cause and the modality of the intermediate causes. This argument expresses the same difficulty that I have raised in the final lines of § 2.2.

## 5. FINAL REMARKS

Aquinas' rejection of the idea that the contingency of effects can be completely justified by (M) can be fully understood taking into consideration not only *De Ver*, q. 23, a. 5, but also *ST*, I, q. 19, a. 8. As shown, Aquinas does not intend to renounce (M) in absolute terms; nonetheless, he revises the position developed in *In I Sent*, d. 38, q. 1, a. 5.

In the text from *De Ver*, Aquinas emphasizes a difficulty that the position developed in the *Commentary on the Sentences* could encounter: justifying the contingency of effects only appealing to the contingency of their proximate causes may imply that God cannot immediately produce a contingent effect. In short, God risks being conceived as a natural causal agent which can only produce one effect.

However, rather than offering a genuine criticism, in *De Ver* Aquinas merely highlights a risk arising from the strategy proposed in *In I Sent*. To demonstrate the insufficiency of (M) for explaining the contingency of effects, in *ST*, I, q. 19, a. 8 Aquinas elaborates two arguments that represent a clear example of internal criticism.

According to the first argument, if, in a series of essentially-ordered causes, the contingency of the ultimate effect did only depend on the contingency of its own proximate cause, then the divine will, which is the first



necessary cause of such a series, would be an impidable contingent cause. Indeed, in this case, the action of God's will can be impeded by the failure of the secondary cause, preventing the realization of the ultimate effect itself. However, as Aquinas stresses, divine will is a necessary and non-impidable cause.

The second argument stresses the fact that if the modality of an effect (*i.e.*, contingency or necessity) were determined only by the modality of its proximate cause, then there would be no relationship of dependence between the modalities of effects and God's will.

As seen here, Aquinas' solution consists of recognizing that God's will is the transcendent<sup>48</sup> and non-impidable cause of the contingency and necessity of effects in nature<sup>49</sup>. In such a perspective, divine will's being non-impidable must not be confused with necessary natural causes' being non-impidable: unlike the latter, affirming that divine will cannot be impeded does not imply that it makes every effect necessary. If so, there would be no room for contingent effects in nature. On the contrary, the indefectibility of God's will should be understood as follows: if God wants a certain effect (*x*) to happen contingently (or necessarily), then *x* will happen contingently (or necessarily). Strictly speaking, the necessity which qualifies the relationship between God's will and its effects (and their own modalities) does not coincide with an absolute necessity but with only a conditional necessity:<sup>50</sup> if God wants a certain effect (*x*) to happen, then *x* will happen,<sup>51</sup> and it will happen according to the modality (*i.e.*, necessity or contingency) determined by God himself.

To conclude, only in *ST*, I, q. 19, a. 8, does Aquinas expose the decisive troubles stemming from the assumption of (M) as a sufficient explanatory condition of the contingency of effects in nature. And he dissolves them by grounding (M) in God's will: God freely determines the contingent status of an effect and, with respect to that, He arranges secondary contingent

<sup>48</sup> This specific aspect is also emphasized by SHANLEY Brian: *Divine Causation and Human Freedom in Aquinas*, in: *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* 72 (1998), 99–122, 117–119; LAUGHLIN, Peter: *Divine Necessity and Created Contingence in Aquinas*, in: *The Heythrop Journal* 50 (2009), 648–657, 654–655.

<sup>49</sup> Cf. THOMAS DE AQUINO: *Exp Per*, I, lect. 14.

<sup>50</sup> In *SCG*, I, c. 83 Aquinas stresses that God wants nothing according to an absolute necessity, but the necessity which qualifies the relationship between divine will and the wanted objects is a conditional, or hypothetical, necessity: assuming that God wants *x*, then, inasmuch as God's will is immutable, it is necessary that *x* is willed by God. See also THOMAS DE AQUINO: *ST*, I, q. 19, a. 3. On the distinction between absolute and conditional necessity an account is also taken of THOMAS DE AQUINO: *In I Sent*, d. 6, q. 1, a. 1; *De Ver*, q. 24, a. 1, ad. 13; *SCG*, II, c. 29 and 30; *ST*, I, q. 82, a. 1; *In Phys*, II, lect. 10; *In Met*, VI, lect. 6. This distinction between the two senses of *necessitas* may be found in BOETHIUS: *De Consolatione Philosophiae*, V, 6, 27. Ed. C. Moreschini. München: Saur 2000, 158, l. 100–159, l. 103.

<sup>51</sup> Cf. THOMAS DE AQUINO: *In Met*, VI, lect. 3. Ed. M.-R. Cathala, R.M. Spiazzi. Taurini: Marietti 1977, 308, n. 1220.



causes; and with the respect to the effects that He deems necessary, God arranges secondary necessary causes.

Through this solution, which occurs in other works as well,<sup>52</sup> Aquinas offers a complete justification of the contingency of effects. Aquinas is able to account for the relationship of dependence between God's will and the modality of secondary causes without undermining the efficacy and the indefectibility of divine will itself.

### *Abstract*

*This paper deals with one of the central tenets of Thomas Aquinas' strategy for justifying the presence of contingent effects in nature, namely the principle that, in a series of essentially-ordered causes, the contingency of the final effect depends on the contingency of its proximate cause (M). I discuss the reasons that induced Aquinas initially to justify the contingency of effects in nature only by (M), and later to call this position into question. My analysis is not limited to De Ver, q. 23, a. 5, but also takes into consideration ST, I, q. 19, a. 8, an underrated text, where Aquinas points out the reasons for the inadequacy of the idea that the contingency of effects can be completely justified by the contingency of their own proximate causes.*

<sup>52</sup> See, for example, THOMAS DE AQUINO: *Quodl*, XI, q. 3, a. un.; *SCG*, I, c. 85; *ST*, I, q. 22, a. 4; *Exp Per*, I, lect. 14; *In Met*, VI, lect. 3.

