

The solution to the problem is not exceedingly difficult if strict adherence to the teaching on this point is maintained, and close attention is paid to the words of St. Thomas. Indeed, it is hard to see why it has required such an involved discussion on the part of so many authors, in view of the fact that bad luck, as well as good, is commonly spoken of, and like chance, fortune too, is an accidental cause, both sharing the character of being unfavorable agents as well as favorable ones, in relation to good and bad effects.

The answer to the difficulty is that, the undesirable effect, although not in itself a possible object of intention, is nevertheless reducible to an end, as an evil to be avoided. Hence, it is included among the possible objects of purposeful activity, insofar as it has, negatively, the character of an end. In the *Physics* St. Thomas intimates this when he says:

Et dicit quod eufortunium et infortunium dicitur, quando habet aliquod bonum vel malum cum magnitudine: nam eufortunium dicitur quando sequitur aliquod magnum bonum; infortunium autem quando sequitur aliquod magnum malum. Et quia privari bono accipitur in ratione mali, et privari malo in ratione boni; ideo quando aliquis parum distat a magno bono, si amittat illud, dicitur infortunatus; et si aliquis est propinquus magno malo, et liberetur ab illo, dicitur eufortunatus. (56)

It will be useful now to consider briefly the difference between chance as it is understood in the philosophy of nature, and as it is used in reference to mathematical laws of probability. As explained earlier, it is not enough that an effect be rare in order that chance be assigned as the cause of it. Nevertheless, those things in nature that are rare, are said by many to have come about by chance. But the statistically rare can not be identified with what is by pure chance; what is rare from the viewpoint of probability is often something intended

by a higher cause. The occurrence which is rare in the sense of being statistically improbable, in reality often constitutes a victory of form over matter. It is for this

57. Chapter III, pp.106-08

58. St. Thomas, In VI Metaph., lect.III, n.1205:

"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 sibi ipsis coincidunt; qui si referantur ad superiorem causam communem, ordinati inveniuntur, et non per accidens conjuncti, sed ab una per se causa simul producti sunt;" ibid., n.1211-1212: "Haec autem contingentia, si ulterius in causam caelestem reducantur, multe horum inveniuntur non esse per accidens; quia causae particulares etsi non continentur sub se invicem, continentur tamen sub una causa caelesti communi...Quamvis igitur multa, quae videntur esse per accidens reducendo ipse ad causas particulares, inveniuntur non esse per accidens reducendo ipse ad causam communem universalem, scilicet virtutem caelestem, tamen etiam hac reductione facta, inveniuntur esse aliqua per accidens, sicut superius est habitum a philosopho."

59. St. Thomas, Contra Gentiles, II, c.30: "In quibus vero forma complet totam potentiam materiae, remanet adhuc in materia potentia ad aliam formam. Et ideo non est in eis necessitas essendi, sed virtus essendi consequitur in eis victoriam formae super materiam, ut patet in elementis et elementatis."

very reason that the perspective of finality is so important for a correct understanding of accidental causality in nature; for unless the role of final causality is given its proper place in a consideration of natural causes and effects, the kind of contingency that is most characteristic of the natural universe will be overlooked, and the most striking evidence of divine providence will be neglected. An example may serve to make this clear:

From a statistical point of view, the appearance of life is a phenomenon that is highly improbable, being given all the material conditions necessary to support it and enable its continued existence in the universe. From the statistical improbability of these conditions coming about, some might be inclined to attribute such phenomena to chance, as well as other less improbable occurrences, such as, the  
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formation of the planets. Actually, however, in the light

60. Sir James Jeans, *L'Univers*, trad. Georges Gros, Paris, Payot, 1930; pp.277-278: "Le calcul mathématique démontre que pour donner naissance à un système planétaire, deux étoiles doivent se rapprocher à une distance qui ne dépasse pas la valeur de trois fois leur diamètre; puisque nous connaissons la répartition des étoiles dans l'espace, nous pouvons calculer avec une certaine approximation la probabilité d'un tel événement; on trouve que, pour une durée d'existence de plusieurs trillions d'années, cette probabilité n'est guère que de 1 sur 100,000... Tout ceci nous indique que seulement une parcelle infiniment petite de l'univers peut se trouver dans les conditions voulues pour donner asile à des êtres vivants. Il faut que la matière primitive se transforme en radiations pendant plusieurs trillions d'années pour donner une quantité minuscule de cendre inerte sur laquelle la vie peut exister. Alors seulement, s'il survient un accident extrêmement exceptionnel, cette cendre, et pas autre chose, peut se trouver expulsée du soleil qui l'a produite et se condenser en donnant naissance à une planète. Mais ce n'est pas tout: il faut que ce résidu de cendre ne soit ni trop chaud ni trop froid; sinon, toute vie y sera impossible."

of final causality, life is seen as a result of universal nature's intention to produce more and more perfect natural forms, by subduing the indisposition of matter to receive these forms. Finally, by disposing the matter to receive successively higher natural forms, the goal to which all of nature is ordered, and for the sake of which prime matter is created, is made immediately possible; the preliminary dispositions having been accomplished through this continuous process, the natural subject is then able to receive a form that is not imposed by a natural agent; this form, the human soul, is the final perfection, and the term to which matter was originally ordered. (61)

At the same time it may be noted that what is merely statistically probable, is a result of the necessitas materiae. For the matter remains disproportionate to the forms; in terms of statistics alone, it is, by its relative indifference and indetermination more often successful in setting aside the causality of the particular natural agent than the natural agent is, by its determination successful in overcoming the indetermination of the matter. A familiar example of this is the large number of seeds provided for the production of a single plant, most of which do not take

61. St. Thomas, Contra Gentiles, III, c.77: "Cum igitur virtus divinae providentiae sit maxima, per aliquam media ad ultima suam operationem perducere debet...Exigit igitur divinae providentiae perfectio quod sint causae mediae executrices ipsius."

root and grow. This very profligacy, however, is, for the limited natural agent, a means of overcoming the indispositions of the matter. Hence, the statement that nature achieves its effects for the most part, must not be identified with the expressions of probability formulated in statistical laws. The important thing to note is that finality is not involved in laws of probability. The mathematical expression of a regularity in physical phenomena, in terms of statistical "laws of chance", does not permit the transference of this sense of chance (which abstracts from finality), to a philosophical context, where the word "chance" has an entirely different meaning. What is "by chance" in the statistical sense is not at all by chance in a philosophical sense. The term "chance", is equivocal in these two cases. For the statistician the expression "by chance", does not refer to finality, but merely to a formulation of the various alternatives in physical phenomena, in abstraction from the intention of any agent. The foundation of these calculations is, in reality, nothing other than the necessitas materiae.

We might reiterate here what was said earlier in speaking of the determination of the natural agent: what is rare or exceptional in relation to particular nature may not be rare at all in reference to a superior cause; what appears improbable in view of statistical probabilities, is not

necessarily improbable from the point of view of nature, acting for an end. The chance event is not unlikely just in relation to proximate causes, as has been shown, but is altogether undetermined to be before it is; by this is meant that it does not fall within the intention of either particular or universal nature. Thus, what is improbable statistically, can be the object of a more general intention that is directed to the end of the whole of nature, and which provides many possibilities precisely in order to achieve the intended effects. This profligacy on the part of nature is required in order to overcome the indetermination of matter; and although matter is necessary for natural becoming, the agent must subdue a certain material indisposition in order to introduce the natural form. (62)

Even when a particular agent does not succeed in producing what was intended, if something does come about by chance it can accidentally contribute to the end of universal nature; in such a way chance may compensate for the insufficient determination of the natural case.

At this point, then, a closer investigation of the casual event and its cause, chance, must be undertaken.

62. St. Thomas, Contra Gentiles, II, c.30: "In quibus vero forma non complet totam potentiam materiae, remanet adhuc in materia potentia ad aliam formam. Et ideo non est in eis necessitas essendi, sed virtus essendi consequitur in eis victoriam formae super materiam, ut patet in elementis et elementatis. Forma enim elementi non attingit materiam secundum totum ejus posse; non enim fit susceptiva formae elementi unius, nisi per hoc quod subjicitur alteri parti contrarietatis."

5. The reason for the accidental effect is the insufficient determination of the cause; but such a contingent cause fails, only when there is some impediment.

A great many modern scholastics assert that all things in the material universe come about necessarily, provided that the totality of causes operating in nature be taken into consideration, and if the intervention of free agents be left out. A natural cause may fail, they say, but this is only because of an impediment; they add that the impediment itself is a cause having a determined character. Thus, if all the causes at work are included, it is evident that the impediment is necessary; hence, it is also evident that everything resulting from this interference is necessary. Taken individually, in relation to its proximate cause, an effect may be contingent; in this sense rare events are said to happen by chance. But according to these writers the term is only relative; for if the original constellation of the universe is considered, and we suppose that no voluntary agent disturbs the flow of natural events, it is clear that everything is perfectly determined from the beginning, and happens now, and in the future, with complete necessity. The absolute impossibility of foreseeing the future is granted, only in the domain of voluntary operations; the effects of such activity cannot be foreseen since they result from acts freely performed.

It would appear that an incorrect interpretation of certain important texts, where St. Thomas speaks about contingency and necessity, has led to the position outlined above; the following passage is one that is often presented in support of the determinist view:

Primum enim non est verum quod, posita quaecumque causa, necesse sit effectum poni. Sunt enim quaedam causae quae ordinantur ad suos effectus non ex necessitate, sed ut in pluribus, quae quandoque deficiunt in minori parte. Sed quia huiusmodi causae non deficiunt in minori, parte, nisi propter aliquam causam impediens, videtur adhuc praedictum inconueniens non vitari; quia et ipsum impedimentum talis causae ex necessitate contingit. - Et ideo, secundo, oportet dicere quod omne quod est per se, habet causam, quod autem est per accidens, non habet causam, quia non est vere ens, cum non sit vere unum. Album enim causam habet, similiter et musicum; sed album musicum non habet causam, quia non est vere ens neque vere unum. Manifestum est autem quod causa impediens actionem alicuius causae ordinatae ad suum effectum ut in pluribus, concurrit ei interdum per accidens, unde talis concursus non habet causam, inquantum est per accidens. (63)

It is strange that this should be interpreted as a denial of intrinsic contingency, in view of the fact that St. Thomas himself, considers the difficulty explicitly:

Ostensum enim est quod quamvis ex impressione corporum caelestium fiant aliqua inclinationes in natura corporali, voluntas tamen



non ex necessitate sequitur has inclinationes. Et ideo nihil prohibet per voluntariam actionem impediri effectum caelestium corporum, non solum in ipso homine, sed etiam in aliis rebus ad quas hominum operatio se extendit. - Sed nullum tale principium invenitur in rebus naturalibus, quod habeat libertatem sequendi vel non sequendi impressiones caelestes. Unde videtur quod in talibus, ad minus, omnia ex necessitate proveniant: secundum antiquam quorundam rationem, qui supponentes omne quod est causam habere, et quod, posita causa, ex necessitate ponitur, concludebant quod omnia ex necessitate contingant. (64)

He then goes on to resolve the difficulty:

Primum enim non est verum quod, posita quaecumque causa, necesse sit effectum poni. Sunt enim quaedam causae quae ordinantur ad suos effectus non ex necessitate, sed ut in pluribus... Et ideo, secundo, oportet dicere quod omne quod est per se, habet causam, quod autem est per accidens, non habet causam, quia non est vere ens, cum non sit vere unum... (65)

Cajetan, in a profound and complete commentary, admits of having been convinced, for a long time, that the meeting of natural causes with impediments, had a per se cause; that the results of such encounters are accidental, only in regard to us, - but that they are in themselves, predetermined (66) by the whole constellation of causes at work.

64. St. Thomas, op.cit., corpus (Italics ours)

65. Ia, Q.115, a.6, c

66. Ibid., Commentary of Cajetan, n.11:... "Probatur: quia in caelo nullus est per accidens; omnia enim sunt ibi per se. Ergo concursus istorum inferiorum habet per se causam secundum esse; quamvis quod nos sit per accidens, quia latet suae connexionis perscitas. - Et haec ratio multo tempore me vinctum tenuisse videtur." (Italics ours)

Now it is this very position that is taken by modern scholastic writers; but it is hard to see why such a view should be held, for it is not the teaching of St. Thomas; and in his commentary on this question, Cajetan advances the most convincing arguments against it. Nevertheless, the following remarks of three different modern writers are representative:

Si on suppose qu'il n'y a dans l'univers aucun agent libre (intelligent), il est clair que tel événement survenu ici-bas (par exemple le fait que tel écureuil grimpe sur tel arbre à tel moment sur telle montagne) était infailliblement prédéterminé dans la constellation de tous les facteurs de l'univers posée à l'origine. (67)

No matter to what extent mechanists may reduce natural operations to the rule of necessity - that is, to physical law - they come in the end face to face with stark contingency. Given matter, the nature which it actually has and its original distribution, and probably many other things, the present universe - let us admit - must have evolved. But you are given an awful lot when you are given matter, its nature, and its distribution! Starting with them, you can construct a universe in terms of the necessary laws of the movement of such matter so distributed; but this necessity comes into the picture only after the matter is presupposed. The necessity, therefore, is the product of a sheer contingency and consequently is itself contingent through and through: it is, but it might not have been. (68)

67. J. Maritain, Les Degres Du Savoir, p.58

68. Brother Benignus, Nature Knowledge And God, p.89

Pour affirmer tout d'abord qu'un déterminisme vrai domine le cours des événements naturels, il faut mettre chacun d'eux en rapport avec la somme des influences qui contribuent à sa production. Il est clair qu'envisagés de cette façon ces événements sont déterminés complètement par l'action des causes dont ils dépendent...Et, dès, lors, on conclura que dans le système d'Aristote le monde de la nature tout entier est soumis à un déterminisme rigoureux, dans la mesure que où l'on fait abstractions dues à l'activité intelligente et libre de l'homme. (69)

As St. Thomas explains in question 115, the reason that the contingent cause which is ordered to its effects only for the most part, or ut in pluribus, can actually fail, is that it is occasionally impeded. But if chance is an intrinsic cause and rooted in a passive potency, how is it possible that it can be an impediment? If, on the other hand, the impediment is determined, how can there be effects that are truly accidental; for the cause that is defective does not actually fail unless it is impeded by some other active cause? Is it not necessary to admit, at least, a kind of collective determinism, as the authors who have been quoted plainly assert? This difficulty has led many to deny the absolute unpredictability of the casual event; the cause of the chance occurrence, they say, is nothing other than the series of active causes that meet to produce it, each of these causes being per se

69. A. Mansion, Introduction à la Physique Aristotélicienne, pp.325-26

ordered to an effect of its own, different from the one  
(70)  
that their encounter brings about.

In reply to this it must be said, first, that any failure of a cause to produce an intended effect is due to the imperfection of that cause; this imperfection is reduced to a passive potency which, in natural things, is their potential principle, matter:

Deficere autem in actione sequitur imperfecti-  
onem: et ideo potentia defectiva quocumque  
defectu, ad potentiam passivam reducitur, ut  
patet ex I Caeli. Et haec intelligenda sunt  
de defectu actionis ex parte causae qui est  
ab intrinseco, de quo est objectio. De defectu  
autem eius ex parte extrinsecorum, manifestum  
est ex aliquo impediante provenire: sed quomodo  
inferius dicetur. (71)

The apparent assumption that the impediment to a  
cause's operation is active only, is unwarranted. As  
Cajetan explains, there is a passive or material impedi-  
(72)  
ment, as well as an active one. The passive obstacle

70. J. Maritain, Reflections on Necessity and Con-  
tingency, p.29: "This bird's falling from its nest today is  
an event to which no nature tended of itself. It is a purely  
fortuitous or chance event and is due simply to the interfer-  
ence of a number of independent sets of causes...The event  
in question depends solely upon an assemblage of factual events  
or upon a, purely factual necessity."; A Preface to Metaphysics,  
p.141: "Chance, a fortuitous event, presupposes the mutual  
interference of independent lines of causation."

71. Cajetan, Ia, Q.115, a.6, commentary, nn.7

72. ibid., n.16: "...Impedimentum est duplex: alterum  
activum, alterum materiale. Activum enim est quod impedit  
actionem ut recipitur in passivo. - Et rursus, materiale contin-  
git dupliciter. Uno modo, ex actione alterius agentis, sicut  
aquesitas ligni impedit combustionem; et enim, quamvis materi-  
ale impedimentum sit, est tamen effectivae a causa pluviae,  
quae madefecit lignum. Alio modo, ex ipsa conditione materiae;  
sicut frigiditas aquae impedit calefactionem, cuius tamen,  
frigiditas non est alia causa nisi ipsa natura aquae, quae  
occurrit ut materia calefactibilis."

to the success of a natural cause, may be an indisposition in the subject due to previous active causes; the wetness of wood, for example, is an obstacle to the active cause, fire. But beyond this kind of opposition to the agent, which is really a determined thing since it is derived from some active cause, there is the natural indisposition of every material subject upon which a natural cause acts. This is nothing other than an indisposition caused by the passive principle, matter, which is never completely dominated; either by the form it has or the one it receives. In the potency of the matter, then, is rooted the contingency of the natural thing. The foundation of chance and uncertainty is the possibility of the non-existence of the natural effect:

*Et quoniam manifeste patet quod posse deficere in minori parte, quod est radix casus et fortune et omnis contingentiae in naturalibus, consequitur posse non esse. (73)*

Because the possibility of matter is a potency that is "ad utrumque oppositorum", and because a purely natural cause is not one that is absolutely "determinatum ad unum", the coming to be of a certain natural thing is not absolutely assured. Hence, when an impediment is said to be the

reason why the cause fails in a given case, by impediment must be understood, not simply the thing that impedes the action of the cause, but more precisely, the relation of this active obstacle to what is impeded. It is from this relation that the impediment is called an impediment.

Impedimentum enim duo dicit: scilicet rem quae impedit; et relationem ad aliud, ex qua denominatur impedimentum. Et de impedimento quidem activo, dato inquantum res est, habeat causam per se; sed inquantum impedit, non oportet, quia impedire pertinet ad concursum, qui potest esse per accidens. De impedimento autem materiali si eodem modo est, habet aliquam causam necessarium, sive illa sit aliud agens, sive sit conditio materiae; oportet dicere quod inquantum impedimentum est, est per accidens. Et hoc est venire ad concursum; quia nihil aliud est dicere quam quod concursus talis agentis cum tali materia hic non habet causam. Et sic impedimentum ex parte materiae, et hic concursus est omnino idem. Si autem impedimentum materiae, etiam inquantum res est, in particulari sumptum non habet causam aliquam quam necessario sequatur; tunc ex impedimento materiali dupliciter fit per accidens, et ex parte concursus, et ex parte rei concurrentis. Et sic impedimentum materiale includit impedimentum concursus et addit: et sic distinguitur ut minus commune a magis commune. (74)

In other words, it is the defective character of a natural cause that makes an impediment possible; the natural cause is defective because of its matter and the contingency of its form. Thus, what in fact does come to be, does not come to be necessarily; its coming to be

can be prevented, since the matter upon which the agent operates is not perfectly subject to that agent's causality. Moreover, the insufficient determination of a natural cause, insufficient that is, to bring about its effects all of the time, is rooted in the cause's own admixture of potency - a potency which is to be identified with its negative indetermination.

The active obstacle, then, can be another efficient cause; this is something quite determined. In the passive obstacle, however, the indisposition resulting from prior active causes (which is thus something determined) must be distinguished from the natural indisposition of the corruptible thing, "*quod potest esse, et non esse*". It is the latter that is the cause of what is accidental as such. In this regard it should again be noted that "*potentia defectiva quocumque defectu, ad potentiam passivam reducitur*." Thus, every obstacle involved in an accidental event is rooted in an indetermination; either the insufficient determination of the natural form, or the complete indetermination of matter.

The words of Cardinal Cajetan, expressed near the end of his commentary on Q.115 of the Prima Pars, present a concise summary of the difficult question of contingency in nature, and the points covered in this section dealing with the natural cause and the reason for its occasional fail-

ure; here Cajetan points out both the root and complete cause:

Scito tamen hic quod ratio contingentiae naturalium dupliciter potest assignari: uno modo, ex parte complementi; alio modo, ex parte radicis. Radix quidem huiusmodi contingentiae est natura potentiae inventa in naturalibus, quae et possunt deficere in minori parte, et sunt in potentia contradictionis, ut dicitur in I Periherm. Complementum vero contingentiae est concursus accidentaliter causarum, sive activae et passivae, sive activarum inter se, etc. Et propterea non opposita dixit, sed utrumque assignavit in diversis locis divus Thomas: in VI siquidem Metaphys., radicem; hic vero et in I Periherm., et in libro Contra Gentes complementum tetigit. (75)

In the light of these distinctions, it may be seen that the teachings of St. Thomas on contingency in the Metaphysics, and in the Perihermeneias, far from being opposed, actually complement one another; this may be gathered clearly from (76) his words in the Contra Gentes. For in the Metaphysics he reduces the contingency of the natural thing to its materiality; (77) in the Periherm., he adds to this explanation of the root of contingency, by showing that an active cause, not entirely determinatum ad unum, is required, in order that the

75. Ia, Q.115, a.6, Commentary of Cajetan, n.20

76. Contra Gentes, III, c.86 - see chapter II, pp.37-41

77. In VI Metaphys., lect.II, n.1186: "Et quia defectus ejus quod est ut in pluribus, est propter materiam, quae non subditur perfecte virtuti agentis ut in pluribus, ideo materia est causa accidentis aliter ((quam ut in pluribus,)) scilicet accidentis ut in paucioribus; causa inquam non necessaria, sed contingens."



effect be truly contingent:

Unde dicendum est quod possibilitas materiae ad utrumque, si communiter loquamur, non est sufficiens ratio contingentiae, nisi etiam addatur ex parte potentiae activae quod non sit omnino determinata ad unum; alioquin si ita determinata ad unum quod impediri non potest, consequens est quod ex necessitate reducat in actum potentiam passivam eodem modo. (78)

What should be observed, finally, is that the only kind of contingency admitted by most modern scholastics is extrinsic contingency. This is the kind of contingency that is true of every creature insofar as its existence depends upon the divine liberty. (79) But this is only a contingency

78. In I Periherm., lect.XIV, n.9

79. St. Thomas, In I Periherm., lect.XIV, n.22: "Sunt autem differentiae entis possibile et necessarium; et ideo ex ipsa voluntate divina originantur necessitas et contingentia in rebus et distinctio utriusque secundum rationem proximarum causarum: ad effectus enim, quos voluit necessarios esse, disposuit causas necessarias; ad effectus autem, quos voluit esse contingentes, ordinavit causas contingentem agentes, idest potentes deficere. Et secundum harum conditionem causarum, effectus dicuntur vel necessarii vel contingentes, quamvis omnes dependant a voluntate divina, sicut a prima causa, quae transcendit ordinem necessitatis et contingentiae;" - Ia, Q.9, a.2, c: "Omnes enim creaturae, antequam essent, non erant possibles esse per aliquam potentiam creatam, cum nullum creatum sit aeternum; sed per solum potentiam divinam, inquantum Deus poterat eas in esse producere. Sicut autem ex voluntate Dei dependet quod res in esse producit, ita ex voluntate Dei dependet quod res in esse conservat." - See the Commentary of Cajetan, n.7

secundum quid; contingency in the strict sense comes from an intrinsic principle that renders the natural thing indeterminate to some extent, and in a state of possibility in regard to existence and non-existence. This latter contingency is rooted in the pure indetermination of matter, and the imperfect determination of the natural form, and is inseparable from nature. Nevertheless, it is precisely in reference to the effects of chance and fortune, founded on an intrinsic potentiality, that divine providence is most strikingly revealed. Before bringing the discussion of accidental causality in nature to a close, this must be explained.

6. Conclusion - The intellect can conceive as one what is not one in nature.

Things which in reality have no per se connection, can be conceived together by the mind, and may stand as the object of a true judgment. If it is a question of a judgment bearing on the present or past, then an enunciation about such things is necessarily true or false. The statement, "Socrates, the grammarian, is musical", is necessarily true or false, for he is either a musician or he is not. What this proposition signifies in reality, however, has only an accidental unity, for it is per accidens that a grammarian

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be also a musician.

As St. Thomas explains, an entity of this kind is not  
(81)  
an unum per se, but is one in name only. But even though  
what is signified by the subject, "grammarian", and what is  
signified by the predicate, "musical", do not have a neces-  
sary connection in themselves, the intellect can, neverthe-  
less conceive them as one; this is because, the intellect,  
unlike nature, is not determinatum ad unum. And what has  
no per se unity in physical reality can have a per se unity  
in the intellect insofar as, in the intellect, one can be  
ordered to the other. Thus, an agent operating by intellect  
and will can conceive together as an object of intention,  
and preordain to be joined contingently in reality things

80. St. Thomas, In VI Metaphys., lect. II, n. 1178: "Et ideo dicitur in Primo Elenchorum, quod secundum accidens faciunt syllogismos contra sapientes; ut patet in istis paralogismis, in quibus dubitatur utrum diversum an idem sit musicum et grammaticum. Ut fiat talis paralogismus. Musicum est aliud a grammatico; musicum autem est grammaticum, ergo musicum est alterum a se. Musicum enim est aliud a grammatico, per se loquendo; sed musicus est grammaticus per accidens. Unde non est mirum si sequitur inconueniens, non distincto quod est per accidens ab eo quod est per se."

81. ibid., n. 1176: "Probat idem per rationem; dicens, quod rationabiliter hoc accidit quod scientia non speculatur de ente per accidens; quia scientia speculatur de his quae sunt entia secundum rem; ens autem secundum accidens est ens quasi solo nomine, inquantum unum de alio praedicatur. Sic enim unumquodque est ens inquantum unum est. Ex duobus autem, quorum unum accidit alteri, non fit unum nisi secundum nomen; prout scilicet unum de altero praedicatur, ut cum musicum dicitur esse album, aut e converso. Non autem ita, quod aliqua res una constitutur ex albedine et musico.

which have a per se unity in the mind only.

Et ideo dicendum est quod ea quae hic per accidens dicuntur, sive in rebus naturalibus sive humanis, reducuntur in aliquam causam praecedentem, quae est providentia divina. Quia nihil prohibet id quod est per accidens, accipi ut unum ab aliquo intellectu; alioquin intellectus formare non posset hanc propositionem: Podiens sepulchrum invenit thesaurum. Et sicut hoc potest intellectus apprehendere, ita potest efficere. (82)

A man who knows that a treasure is buried in a certain place can send a friend to dig a grave in the same location. Although the finding of the treasure while digging a grave has no per se unity in reality (for if such were the case, one could not dig a grave without finding a treasure), it can be the object of a per se intention on the part of the man who orders one to the other by a deliberate act. Note

82. St. Thomas, Ia, Q.116, a.1; - In I Periherm., lect.XIV, n.15: "Sed considerandum est quod id quod est per accidens potest ab intellectu accipi ut unum, sicut album esse musicum, quod quamvis secundum se non sit unum, tamen intellectus ut unum accipit, in quantum scilicet componendo format enunciationem unam. Et secundum hoc contingit id, quod secundum se per accidens evenit et casualiter, reduci in aliquem intellectum praecedentem; sicut concursus duorum servorum ad certum locum est per accidens et casualis quantum ad eos, cum unus eorum ignoret de alio; potest tamen esse per se intentus a domino, qui utrumque mittit ad hoc quod in certo loco sibi occurrant."

that the finding of the treasure is still fortuitous for the one who digs the grave, since he did not intend this. (83) In this way, what is accidental in relation to a particular cause, can be reduced to a superior cause per se. But insofar as the event is reducible to a higher cause per se, it is not accidental, but intended.

We should not be led by this consideration, however, to the conclusion that everything that happens outside of the intention of a particular agent, can be reduced to some higher created cause, acting per se. This would be to fall into the error of those who fail to distinguish the mode of existence that a thing has in the mind, from its mode of existence in reality; it may explain how determinism becomes held by so many modern scholastics. For since there is a tendency to project into reality what can be only in the mind, the determinist is inclined to attribute a per se unity to what is one per accidens in reality. It would also explain why ignorance of the causes at work is assigned as the reason that many occurrences are said to be by chance; i.e., if we knew all the causes operating, we would not say that such and such a thing is an accident, but

82. See above, footnote n.82; In VII Metaphys., lect.VI, n.1403: "Sciendum est quod nihil prohibet aliquam generationem esse per se cum refertur ad unam causam, quae tamen est per accidens et casualis, cum refertur in aliam causam." - The same thing applies in the case of the two servants, as is evident from St. Thomas's words in the Periherm.

(84)

that it was determined to be. Modern authors are thus inclined to speak of relative chance, and restrict chance to the accidental intersecting of different lines of causa-

84. Charles A. Dubray, S.W., Introductory Philosophy, p.495: "Physical beings set naturally in the same way, but if several physical beings combine to produce a result both unusual, because this combination seldom occurs, and unforeseen, because unusual, we call this result accidental, although it is due to natural causes...Accidental is therefore a relative term which applies to results due to an unfamiliar and unforeseen course of circumstances."; - J. Maritain, in Reflections on Necessity and Contingency, p.35, accepts the possibility of predicting the casual event from a knowledge of all the antecedent causes, for a mind that would know all of these factors, but denies this possibility for a mind that is in ignorance of these: "This, however, namely, the fact that, 'the cause of a future contingent event is of such a kind that it fails to make known with certitude the thing to which it is preordained....' - why the cause fails to make known with certitude, its effect, is not clearly stated; but it becomes evident that the reason intended is that the cause here referred to, is nothing other than what the author calls, 'the almost infinite number of actual factors in the universe since the first moment of the existence of the universe...' does not prevent future contingent events (events of nature imperfectly assured in their causes, or again events of chance), which are to be produced in the course of time, from appearing necessitated in fact with regard to the transfinite multitude of factors that we would have under our eyes, were we able to take into consideration, as we said above, all the placements of causes of all the agents of the universe and their complete history (excluding, by hypothesis, the intervention of free agents)... In this sense it must be said in a universal way that the future contingents which we are now discussing - although necessitated in fact with regard to the almost infinite number of actual factors in the universe since the first moment of the existence of the universe - are not capable of being foreseen with certitude." - This is, of course, a rigorous determinism, which in fact, denies any indetermination intrinsic to the things themselves. In such a system, the inability to predict the future is purely accidental, being due, simply, to an ignorance on the part of the observer.

tion (As explained, this intersecting is not really chance at all, but an effect of chance.) This point of view is well expressed in the following passage:

It is true, nevertheless, that we do not know and may never know the purpose of many things, and it is likewise true that many occurrences in nature and life result from chance. However, it is necessary to distinguish between what may be called absolute and relative chance. If we admit that all agents act in view of ends in accordance with their natures, the possibility of relative chance is not denied. It is quite conceivable that several independent causal series may have a chance encounter at a given point or moment and thereby produce a fortuitous event. While each series as such is causally determined, the intersecting of the different lines of causation is purely coincidental in that it is without a cause save only the pervasive causality of an all-knowing Mind or Providence which as such constitutes and acts as a First Cause. (85)

The concluding remarks in the above text are deceptive, for it is certainly true that the intersecting of the different lines of causation is accidental, and has no per se cause except Divine Providence. But seen in this way, contingency is only a kind of collision of agent causes, in abstraction from what permits such a collision. This must be distinguished from the contingency of that which is the effect of an accidental cause. What is neglected in such

an analysis is the indetermination of matter, the passive principle to which the effect of chance is due. If we speak only of agent causes, or rather, as in the above text, of causally determined series, there can be no question of an undetermined result, and the intersection can no longer be called accidental. The denial of absolute chance is the denial of contingency in the strict sense, and the affirmation of a complete determinism in nature. It will not then be necessary to attribute immediately to the universal causality of the First Cause, the coming to be of accidental events; for such a view posits a created per se cause of the casual effect, which would be nothing other than the causally determined series. Those who maintain such a position, project into reality, what can be only in the mind; because a thing can have a per se unity in the mind is no reason to affirm that it must have a per se unity in reality.

Let us recall, then, that in virtue of the positive indetermination of the intellect and will, that which is fortuitous can be the object of a per se intention in a superior cause. The master, for example, can be the per se cause that two of his servants meet, while in regard to the servants and their intention, the meeting is fortuitous. Thus, a created cause can sometimes be the per se cause of



a fortuitous encounter. Nature, however, cannot be a remote cause of that which is, in itself, casual, because nature is an intrinsic principle, determinatum ad unum:

Non enim aliquis eventus amittit rationem fortuiti nisi reducat in causam per se. Virtus autem caelestis corporis est causa agens, non per modum intellectus et electionis, sed per modum naturae. Naturae autem est proprie tendere ad unum. Si ergo aliquis effectus non est unus, non potest per se cause eius aliqua virtus naturalis. Cum autem aliqua due sibi per accidens coniungitur, non sunt vere unum, sed solum per accidens. Unde huius coniunctionis nulla causa naturalis per se causa potest. (86)

Nature is not a rational potency that is "ad utrumlibet", in regard to its effects. For this reason, the chance event as such is not extrinsically contingent, for extrinsic contingency is defined in terms of the positive indetermination of the rational potency, which is at liberty to determine itself to either of two contraries. But it should not be thought that, in distinction from the casual effect, what is fortuitous

86. St. Thomas, Contra Gentiles III, c.92; (Italics ours) In I Periherm., lect.XIV, n.14: - "Similiter nec in aliis corporalibus effectibus rerum corruptibilium, in quibus multa per accidens eveniunt. Id autem quod est per accidens non potest reduci ut in causam per se aliquam virtutem naturalem, quia virtus naturae se habet ad unum; quod autem est per accidens non est unum; unde et supra dictum est quod haec enunciatio non est una, Socrates est albus musicus, quia non significat unum. Et ideo Philosophus dicit in libro De Somno et vigilia quod multa, quorum signa praexistunt in corporibus caelestibus, puta in imbris et tempestatibus, non eveniunt, quia scilicet impediuntur per accidens."

always has some created per se cause, as in the example of the master and the two servants. It is necessary here to distinguish between the deliberate agent acting freely, according to a positive indetermination, and as a limited, finite cause, who is unable to insure absolutely the existence of the intended end. According to the first mode of operation, which springs from a perfection of the cause participating in the perfect liberty of the First Cause, any effects are contingent extrinsically. But since every created cause is also limited, in so far as it is, in some measure, potential, the possibility of effects that are not intended is always present. The reason for this is that a created cause does not cause the very existence of its effects; being is per se an effect of God alone. It follows that there can be fortune even among the angels, for they too, are limited causes, and do not dominate perfectly everything that can happen to what they intend. In this way, an end-like effect, that is unintended and rare, is intrinsically contingent, since it is the intrinsic imperfection of the cause, and not intellect and will, that is responsible; note, that to the extent a thing is subject to reason it is not accidental:

Et licet ea tantum agent a fortuna, quae habent intellectum, tamen quanto aliquid magis subiacet intellectui, tanto minus subiacet fortunae. (87)

Of purely fortuitous events, only God can be the per se cause, just as only He can be the per se cause of what is casual in nature. Indeed, the necessary and the contingent divide being as such; but God alone is the cause of being as such; therefore, only God can dominate all contingency:

Rursusque, virtus humane anime, vel etiam angeli, est particularis in comparatione ad virtutem divinam, quae quidem est universalis respectu omnium entium. Sic igitur aliquod bonum accidere potest homini et praeter propriam intentionem; et praeter inclinationem caelestium corporum; et praeter angelorum illuminationem; non autem praeter divinam providentiam, quae est gubernativa, sicut et factiva, entis in quantum est ens, unde oportet quod omnia sub se contineat. Sic ergo aliquid fortuitum bonum vel malum potest contingere homini et per comparationem ad ipsum; et per comparationem ad caelestia corpora; et per comparationem ad angelos; non autem per comparationem ad Deum. Nam per comparationem ad ipsum, non solum in rebus humanis, sed nec in aliqua re potest esse aliquid casuale et imprevisum. (88)

Because God is the per se cause of being as such, nothing can escape His infallible providence; no created cause can be an absolutely universal cause of this kind. But this is precisely what the authors who deny intrinsic contingency require, when they speak of a necessity de facto predicable of natural effects. St. Thomas states

in more than one place that the comprisal of the whole order of causes in nature does not make the coming to be of natural things absolutely necessary. Yet this is the repeated assertion of modern scholastic writers who seem to obtain a necessary cause by the addition of contingent ones:

This bird's falling from its nest today is an event towards which no nature tended of itself ... These singular events, whether they belong to the category of events of nature or to that of events of pure chance, are determined by their antecedents (which antecedents are similarly determined) according to combinations of indefinitely complicated sets of historical

89. Contra Gentes, III, c.86: "Ex multis contingentibus non potest fieri unum necessarium: quis, sicut quodlibet contingentium per se deficere potest ab effectu, ita et omnia simul." ; In I Periherm., lect. XIV, n.10: "Hoc igitur quidam attendentes posuerunt quod potentia, quae est in ipsis naturalibus, sortitur necessitatem ex aliquo causa determinata ad unum quam dixerunt fatum. Quorum Stoici posuerunt fatum in quadam serie, seu connectione causarum, supponentes quod omne quod in hoc mundo accidit habet causam; causam autem posita, necesse est effectum poni. Et si una causa per se non sufficit, multae causae ad hoc concurrentes accipiunt rationem unius causae sufficientis; et ita concludebant quod omnia ex necessitate eveniunt. Sed hanc rationem solvit Aristoteles in VI Metaphysice..."; In VI Metaphys., lect. III, nn.1212, 16: "Quamvis igitur multa, quae videntur esse per accidens reducendo ipsa ad causas particulares, inveniuntur non esse per accidens reducendo ipsa ad causam communem universalem, scilicet virtutem caelestem, tamen etiam hac reductione facta, inveniuntur esse aliqua per accidens, sicut superius est habitum a Philosopho... Relinquitur igitur quod omnia, quae hic fiunt, prout ad primam causam divinam referuntur, inveniuntur ordinata et non per accidens existere; licet per comparisonem ad alias causas per accidens esse inveniuntur..."

events that inter-cross in the course of time. ...These events, on the supposition of all their antecedents, were necessitated by them; but the antecedents themselves, not having derived from a cause or an essential structure which by itself required them, could have been different from what they actually were; consequently, they remain contingent; they are never anything but facts. (90)

It is plain that the only contingency of which it is a question here is extrinsic; for the author states that once the antecedents are supposed, that is, placed in existence by the Creator, the effects follow necessarily. This type of contingency, as has been explained, is predictable of every creature from the fact that any might not have existed, since each depends on the Divine liberty and is a product of it. That it is only this extrinsic contingency in question is clear from the assertion, "But the antecedents themselves, not having derived from a cause or an essential structure which by itself required them could have been different from what they actually were." Moreover, the statement, "In short these events were infallibly predetermined in the constellation and the history of all the factors that were posited in the beginning," is unmistakable. (91)

90. J. Maritain, Reflections on Necessity and Contingency, pp.29-30

91. ibid., p.30

But the necessary cause of all the future events, whether this cause is supposed to be the sum total of the historical antecedents, or the initial constellation of things posited at the outset, or a combination of both - cannot be simply a necessary cause of just any kind; it would have to be one that causes the very being itself of its effects. Otherwise it would not dominate all contingency, because necessity and contingency are accidents of being as such.  
(92)

It should be observed also that God does not know future contingent events simply because they are present to Him in His eternal science of the vision; this would imply a passivity in God, as if the divine science depended on things in order to know them; it is rather because God is the infallible cause of these future contingents, and because His causality is measured by His eternity. Thus,

92. St. Thomas, In VI Metaph., lect. III, nn. 1220-1222: "Sicut autem dictum est, ens inquantum ens est, habet causam ipsum Deum: unde sicut divinae providentiae subditur ipsum ens, ita etiam omnis accidentia entis inquantum est ens, inter quae sunt necessarium et contingens... 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 necessariosit. 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 cujuslibet alterius causae subditur solum quod ejus effectus sit. Quod autem sit necessario vel contingenter, dependet ex causa altiori, quae est causa entis inquantum est ens; a qua ordo necessitatis et contingentiae in rebus provenit."

God knows future contingent events in the free eternal  
 (93)  
 decrees of His will. Hence, to overcome the essential  
 indetermination of the potential principle in nature,  
 knowledge alone is not sufficient. The only One who can  
 know with absolute certitude all future contingencies is

93. St. Thomas, Ia, Q.16, a.7, ad tertium: "Dicendum, quod illud quod nunc est, ex eo futurum fuit antequam esset, quia in causa sua erat ut fieret. Unde, sublata causa, non esset futurum illud fieri. Sola autem causa prima est aeterna. Unde ex hoc non sequitur quod ea quae sunt, semper fuerit verum ea esse futura, nisi quatenus in causa sempiterna fuit ut essent futura. Quae quidem causa solus Deus est."; - John of St. Thomas, referring to this passage, adds: "Ita D. Thomas; sed Deus non est causa ut res illa fiat, nisi per decretum suae voluntatis, quia eo remoto solum res manent pure possibiles; ergo res ut futurae non cognoscuntur a Deo, nisi in causa talis futurationis quae est sua voluntas: per hanc enim discernuntur a statu purae possibilitatis." - Curs. Theol., T.II, p.414a36; ibid., p.419a 21-b22: "Ex his colliges quomodo verum sit quod S. Thomas dixit in hac quaestione [Ia, Q.XIV, a.8 ad 1], explicans dictum Origenis, quod ((non propterea aliquid erit quia Deus scit futurum)): Quod D. Thomas explicat de scientia nude considerata ut non habet rationem causalitatis ex adjuncta voluntate. Quando vero dicit ((praescire Deum aliqua, quia sunt futura)), intelligitur secundum rationem consequens; sequitur enim si aliqua sunt futura, quod Deus ea praescit: non tamen secundum rationem essendi, quia res futurae non sunt causa quod Deus ea sciat. Haec enim doctrina ex diotia optime explicatur; quia scilicet posito decreto seu voluntate Dei, illa est causa quod res sit futura, et quod cognoscatur a Deo ut futura: quia sic scientia cum decreto habet rationem causalitatis, ut aliquid sit futurum. Non tamen intelligi potest, quod futurum ante omnem voluntatem Dei sit causa ut sciatur a Deo tamquam futurum: quia nihil est futurum determinata ante causalitatem voluntatis Dei. Quam tamen doctrinam S. Thomae non possunt sustinere qui ponunt futura esse determinata ante omnem voluntatem Dei, et ideo praesciri a Deo quia sunt futura seu supponuntur futura."

the Universal Cause of these future events according to their whole being. God causes such things to be, and to be contingently. (94) And it is because of the complete universality of divine providence, that what is in itself fortuitous, can be ordered by God for man's benefit; thus it is, most of all, that we can speak of good fortunes.

Moreover, in regard to nature, unless nature itself is intellect and omnipotent, there cannot be within nature, a per se cause of what is accidental. Nevertheless, chance can contribute to finality by compensating in a way, for the insufficient determination of natural causes. For if natural causes were always successful, thus removing the possibility of accidental effects, many good things in nature would be prevented from coming to be; the reason for this is that a natural cause is restricted by its very determination to effects that do not exhaust the capacity of universal nature and of matter. Just as the deliberate

94. St. Thomas, In VI Metaphys., lect. III, n. 1220: "Ens in quantum ens est, habet causam ipsum Deum; unde sicut divinae providentiae subditur ipsum ens, ita etiam omnia accidentia entis in quantum est ens, inter quae sunt necessarium et contingens. Ad divinam igitur providentiam pertinet non solum quod faciat hoc ens, sed det ei contingentiam vel necessitatem. Secundum enim quod unicuique dare voluit contingentiam vel necessitatem, praeparavit ei causas medias, ex quibus de necessitate sequatur, vel contingenter;" see also, Ia, Q. 22, a. 4; Q. D. De Ver., Q. 23, a. 5; Contra Gentes I, c. 67; In I Periherm., lect. XIV, nn. 16-23; and, Contra Gentes II, c. 30



sets of man may bring about effects that are rare and unintended, and yet fortunate and fruitful, so too, matter has capacities that the First Cause of all nature can bring to fruition for the increase of perfection in the universe. And it is in this way, owing to chance effects, of which God alone is the per se cause, that some natural ends become determinately possible, and, as parts of an orderly whole, reflect the infinite wisdom of the Creator. (95)

But to attempt to explain intrinsic contingency - most properly found in the purely casual event - by seeking within the universe for a per se cause of what is accidental, is to attribute to creatures, a universal causality that belongs only to God. Thus is it said in the Book of Ecclesiastes that, "Under the Sun the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, nor bread to the wise, nor riches to the skillful: but time and chance are in all..."

95. St. Thomas, Contra Gentes III, c.74: "Ad perfectionem autem rerum requiritur quod non solum sint in rebus entia per se, sed etiam entia per accidens: res enim quae non habent in sua substantia ultimam perfectionem, oportet quod perfectionem aliquam consequantur per accidentia... Oportet igitur ad perfectionem rerum quod sint etiam causae quaedam per accidens... Non est igitur contra rationem providentiae, quae perfectionem rerum conservat, ut aliqua fiant a casu vel fortuna."

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