

misinterpreted these two men we should come to an even deeper appreciation of their doctrine on teleology in nature.

Suarez appears to be saying that we ought not to speak of natural agents as 'acting for an end'; rather we should say that the operations of natural agents are 'on account of an end' and are 'the effects of a final cause'. He then adds the reason for his insistence on this precise phraseology, which is that the actions of natural agents do not issue from them as properly their own, but should be attributed to the principal agent, namely, the Author of nature under whose direction and intention natural agents operate. In other words, there is activity for an end in nature, but that activity belongs properly to the Creator, and not to the natural being.

It is evident that this is contrary to all we have just explained, and is untenable at least from the point of view of Aristotelian-Thomistic teaching. As this conclusion of Suarez is a logical consequence of erroneous conceptions of the notions of 'good' and of God's creative and conservative action<sup>(69)</sup>, we could not justly refute it without carrying ourselves far afield.

---

69) See Charles Hollencamp, Causa Causarum, for a just critique of Suarez' position on these questions.

We can, however, assert that as an explanation of Aristotle's and St. Thomas' opinion, it is definitely false. Not only is this obvious from our own foregoing exposition, it is equally plain if we turn to the texts of Aristotle and St. Thomas to which Suarez appeals for support. He refers to the Summa Theologica, Ia, q. 103, a.1, and to the Summa Contra Gentiles, Bk. III, ch. 24, noting especially the example used by St. Thomas of the arrow directed toward the target by the archer. The doctrine presented by St. Thomas on both occasions is essentially the same, so it suffices for our purpose to consider one passage, and we choose that of the Prima Pars.

The purpose of this article is to establish that there is actually an Intelligence governing the universe. The argument is a posteriori, being based on the fact that nature acts for an end. The example of the arrow is given in the response to the first objection where the argument is summed up for us.

Ad primum ergo dicendum, quod aliquid movetur vel operatur propter finem dupliciter: uno modo sicut agens seipsum in finem, ut homo et aliae creaturae rationales; et talium est cognoscere rationem finis, et eorum quae sunt ad finem: alio modo aliquid dicitur operari, vel moveri propter finem, quasi ab aliquo actum, vel directum in finem; sicut sagitta movetur directa ad signum a sagittante, qui cognoscit finem, non autem sagitta. Unde sicut motus sagittae ad determinatum finem demonstrat aperte quod

sagitta dirigitur ab aliquo cognoscente; ita  
certus cursus naturalium rerum cognitione  
carentium manifeste declarat mundum ratione  
aliqua gubernari. (70)

When he uses the terms 'operari' and 'moveri', we see that St. Thomas is speaking of a motion, of a motion that is determined to some one term, and therefore directed. But we know that for him directed motion, whether it be action or passion, is the effect of final causality. If the directed motion is an action, it is efficient causality, if a passion, it is the result of efficient causality; in either case, final causality is presupposed. The argumentation proceeds from the directed motion to the existence of an intelligent agent who directs. For direction to an end demands a universal knowledge of the end and of its relation to the means. Since natural agents lack this knowledge, recourse must be had to some ordering intellect, God. To illustrate this point, St. Thomas uses the example of the arrow and the archer. Just as the flight of the arrow to the target requires a directing cause, the archer, so natural operations, which are purposive, call for an intelligent mover.

Two factors, both misconceptions, induce Suarez to infer from this passage that St. Thomas is implying

---

70) Ia, q. 103, a. 1, ad 1.

that activity for an end does not properly belong to natural agents. The first is his mistaken notion of final causality. In harmony with Aristotle he calls final causality a 'metaphorical motion', but he falsely regards this as only a matter of the convenience of words. (71) For him final causality is a real action, distinguished only by reason from efficient causality, and 'motio metaphorica' is a convenient way of noting that distinction.

Neque contra illam quicquam obstat objectio supra facta, quod actus voluntatis potius est effectus quam causalitas finis. Nam imprimis in ipso actu voluntatis possumus distinguere actionem ab actu, et actum dicemus esse effectum, actionem vero quatenus in suo genere est a fine, esse causalitatem ejus, sicut proportionaliter dicendum est de causalitate effectiva. Deinde, etiamsi in illo actu non distinguantur ex natura rei illae duae rationes, sed fingatur esse pura actio, nihilominus non repugnat

- 
- 71) Perhaps this is the source for Hobbes' criticism: "These small beginnings of motion, within the body of man, before they appear in walking, speaking, striking, and other visible actions, are commonly called endeavor. This endeavor, when it is toward something which causes it, is called appetite, or desire... And when the endeavor is fromward something, it is generally called aversion. These words, appetite and aversion, we have from the Latins; and they both of them signify motions, one of approaching, the other of retreating... The Schools find in mere appetite to go, or move, no actual motion at all; but because some motion they must acknowledge, they call it metaphorical motion; which is but an absurd speech, for though words may be called metaphorical, bodies and motions cannot." -- Thomas Hobbes, Leviathan, in English Philosophers from Bacon to Mill, pp. 148-149.

ut eadem res, quae est effectus causae, in eo genere, in quo est effectus, sit etiam causalitas, quando ille effectus est ipsamet actio, sufficitque distinctio rationis, ut distinguantur per modum causalitatis, vel per modum effectus, sicut in causalitate activa manifeste constat. (72)

Quare cavenda est aequivocatio in vocabulo metaphoricae motionis; nam respectu nostri illa particula, metaphoricae, additur ad distinguendam illam motionem a motione efficientis causae, non vero ad excludendam illam a tota latitudine motionis et causalitatis realis proprie dictae; cum vero Deus dicitur moveri aut allici a bonitate sua, tota locutio est metaphorica, ad explicandam solam rationem divinae voluntatis. (73)

Supposing this, Suarez was perfectly logical in concluding that the activity of natural beings is not really theirs, and therefore no causality from the end influences them when operating. Since final causality is an action, distinct only by reason from efficient causality, the action of the final cause and that of the efficient cause are identical. Hence, directed motion is at the same time final causality and the effect of the final cause, namely, efficient causality. The directed motion of natural agents, consequently, is both final and efficient causality, and since they are directed by the Divine Intelligence their motion is not properly theirs but is the transient action of God in them. And this is

---

72) Suarez, op. cit., sec. 4, n. 12. (Underlining mine.)

73) Suarez, op. cit., sec. 9, n. 3. (Underlining mine.)

to be understood in the same manner as we understand the directed motion of the arrow does not pertain to the arrow but to the archer. But manifestly this could not be St. Thomas' meaning, because for him directed motion is the effect of final causality and really distinguished from it.

Suarez' second pitfall was to take St. Thomas' example of the arrow in a univocal sense. If this were true, if the directed motion of natural beings were the same as the directed motion of the arrow, we could then certainly agree with Suarez that natural operations must be properly ascribed to God, as to their principal cause. The arrow is an instrument in the hands of the archer, and an instrument qua instrument operates entirely in virtue of the principal agent.

*Causa vero instrumentalis non agit per virtutem suae formae, sed solum per motum quo movetur a principali agente. Unde effectus non assimilatur instrumento, sed principali agenti: sicut lectus non assimilatur securi, sed arti quae est in mente artificis. (74)*

But note the logical consequences of this position. The motion received from the principal agent comprises the sole operative power and the very 'esse' of the instrument.

---

74) IIIa, q. 62, a. 1.

Instrumentum... non operatur nisi inquantum est motum a principali agente, quod per se operatur. Et ideo virtus principalis agentis habet permanens et completum esse in natura; virtus autem instrumentalis habet esse transiens ex uno in aliud, et incompletum; sicut et motus est actus imperfectus ab agente in patiens. (75)

The form by which the instrument operates is simply the transient action of the principal agent, and the effect following from the action of the instrument is thus attributed to the principal agent as to its per se proper cause, and only secundum quid to the instrument itself. We say the archer scores a bullseye and not the arrow. And if we say that natural agents are directed exactly like the arrow, we would be equivalently stating that a natural operation is really the transient action of God in the creature. God would be the per se (76) and

75) IIIa, q. 62, a. 4.

76) We can say, indeed in one sense we must, that God is the per se cause of every natural effect. He is not only the proper cause of the 'esse' of every effect (cf. Q.D. de Pot., q. 3, a. 7), but He gives to every created agent its capacity to act and to produce an effect: "Deus est causa actionis cuiuslibet in quantum dat virtutem agendi, et in quantum conservat eam, et in quantum applicat actioni, et in quantum eius virtute omnis alia virtus agit." -- Q.D. de Pot., loc. cit. But this gives us no reason to deny causality to natural agents, so that the effects ordinarily ascribed to them would be attributed immediately, and exclusively to God alone. He certainly could have produced every effect without mediant causes, but in fact He, as Prime Cause, willed to produce things through created agents, as secondary causes: Non igitur auferimus proprias actiones rebus creatis, quam-

proximate cause of every natural effect. Logically this conclusion leads to Pantheism. St. Thomas, and, I trust, Suarez would never hold this. The Angelic Doctor expressly repudiates this position:

Quod Deum operari in quolibet operante aliqui sic intellexerunt, quod nulla virtus creata aliquid operaretur in rebus, sed solus Deus immediate omnia operaretur; puta ignis non calefaceret, sed Deus in igne; et similiter de omnibus aliis. Hoc autem est impossibile.(77)

But the point is that for St. Thomas the example of the arrow is an example. He is merely trying to illustrate his line of reasoning: as directed motion is always the effect of final causality, and as such entails intelligence, so from the directed motion of natural beings we can argue to the existence of an intelligent ruler of the universe; just as the directed motion of the arrow attests to the existence of an archer. There yet remains a tremendous difference in the two cases. The natural operation is assigned to the natural agent as to its proper cause, for the natural agent acts in virtue of a principle which

---

vis omnes effectus rerum creaturarum Deo attribuimus, quasi in omnibus operanti." -- Contra Gentiles, III, ch. 69; "Deus operatur ut causa prima; requiritur tamen operatio naturae ut causae secundae. Posset tamen Deus effectum naturae etiam sine natura facere; vult tamen facere mediante natura, ut servetur ordo in rebus." -- Q.D. de Pot., q. 3, a. 7, ad 16. Cf. Contra Gentiles, III, ch. 69, 70, 77; Ia, q. 105, a. 5; In II Sent., d. 1, q. 1, a. 4.  
77) Ia, q. 105, a. 5.



is permanently its own, as we know from the definition of nature and from what was previously discussed. The motion of the arrow, on the other hand, has to be attributed to the archer as to its per se cause, for the reason that the arrow is an instrument and acts solely through the efficiency of its moving cause. The principle of the arrow's motion is the transient action of the archer, which is not a principle belonging to it, but an incomplete act violently impressed by the archer, and it ceases to be once the end of the motion is reached. St. Thomas clearly points up this difference between the two:

Dupliciter autem contingit aliquid ordinari et dirigi in aliquid sicut in finem: uno modo per seipsum, sicut homo qui seipsum dirigit ad locum quo tendit; alio modo ab altero.... Sed hoc dupliciter contingit.

a) Quandoque enim in quod dirigitur in finem, solummodo impellitur et movetur a dirigente, sine hoc quod aliquam formam a dirigente consequatur propter quam ei competat talis directio vel inclinatio; et talis inclinatio est violenta, sicut sagitta inclinatur a sagittante ad signum determinatum.

b) Aliquando autem id quod dirigitur vel inclinatur in finem, consequitur a dirigente vel movente aliquam formam per quam sibi talis inclinatio competat; unde et talis inclinatio erit naturalis, quasi habens principium naturale; sicut ille qui dedit lapidi gravitatem, inclinavit ipsum ad hoc quo deorsum naturaliter fertur;... Et per hunc modum omnia naturalia, in ea quae eis conveniunt, sunt inclinata,

habentia in seipsis aliquod inclinationis principium, ratione cuius eorum inclinatio naturalis est, ita ut quodammodo ipsa vadant, et non solum ducantur in fines debitos. Violenta enim tantummodo ducuntur, quia nil conferunt moventi; sed naturalia vadunt in finem, in quantum cooperantur inclinanti et dirigenti per principium eis inditum. (78)

This distinction was in fact marked off by St. Thomas in the very article to which Suarez made reference, (79) -- something that makes it all the more difficult to understand how the latter could have stumbled so. In the mind of St. Thomas natural agents really act for an end. They do so by reason of a principle that is their own. This principle is nature itself, the intrinsic principle of motion and rest, and that by which the natural

- 
- 78) Q.D. de Ver., q. 21, a.1 (underlining mine); cf. ibid., q. 27, a.4. Natural agents may in a sense be said to be instruments of God in producing their effects. "... Instrumentum dupliciter dicitur. Uno modo proprie; quando scilicet aliquid ita ab altero movetur quod non confertur ei a movente aliquod principium talis motus; sicut serra movetur a carpentario... Alio modo dicitur instrumentum magis communiter quidquid est movens ab alio motum, sive sit in ipso principium sui motus, sive non." -- Q.D. de Ver., q. 24, a.1, ad 5. It is in the common acceptation of the term that the natural agent is said to be an instrument. It acts in virtue of the principal agent, God, and so it can be said to be an instrumental cause of the effect that follows from it. But that power to move or to act that the natural agent receives from God, is a permanent principle in itself, its own nature. Therefore true causality can be attributed to it, whereas an instrument in the strict sense cannot be said to be properly a cause.
- 79) Cf. Ia, q. 103, a. 1, ad 3.

being is inclined toward a determinate end. It is, further, in that inclination that we find the very causality of the end. But because properly to act for an end entails knowing the 'ratio' of the end, i.e. its suitability to the agent and to the means, the function of this knowledge must be supplied by the Author of Nature in the case of natural agents. The Creator does this by making the nature of each a determination, an inclination for a definite good. That is why St. Thomas often refers to natural things as directed, or moved, to their ends, comparing their direction by the Author of Nature to the direction of an arrow by the archer, -- always maintaining though a deep-seated difference in the two instances.

As regards Suarez' appeal to Aristotle, there is no difficulty. He cites the *De Caelo* and claims Aristotle thinks that nature does not operate under the influence of a final cause "*dum conjungit Deum et naturam, dicens nihil facere frustra, satis indicat naturam in agendo propter finem subordinari Deo.*"(80) Definitely Aristotle admitted that nature is subordinated to God in operating for an end, but he also proved that nature acts for an end by its own activity. In fact, he defined nature in terms of finality, making it the very principle of action for an end.

---

80) Suarez, op. cit., sec. 10, n. 5; cf. *De Caelo*, I, ch. 4, 271a30-34.

## Chapter Five

### NATURE AS A CONTINGENT CAUSE

In the two preceding chapters we demonstrated that nature acts for an end, and saw how this is possible although nature lacks the intelligence requisite for purposive action. This latter difficulty was resolved by pointing to a determination in the natural agent that is at once a participated 'ratio' obviating the need of intelligence, and the very attractive influence of the final cause on the agent. But our case is not yet closed. The problem of the casual returns to trouble us.

The obviousness of chance led us to dispose of it at the outset as an objection to final causality in nature. We saw that without finality chance itself lacks meaning. Unless natural agents act for an end, unless the casual itself represents a possible intended goal, it is altogether futile to speak of chance. And indeed chance may be left unconsidered insofar as it constitutes an objection to the fact of purposiveness in nature; it cannot be so lightly dismissed when it is a question of how nature acts for an end. If natural agents are determined by their very nature to operate for a definite goal,

why is it they do not always attain their end? If the natural being acts purposively from a determination in its nature, how are the anomalies of nature to be explained? How do we account for monstrous generations, for example?

We can be deliberately equivocal in our response and say that due to an indetermination, nature, though having a determination, fails on occasion to attain that to which it is determined. A reflection on Aristotle's retort to an identical difficulty will dissipate the apparent confusion.

"Now mistakes come to pass even in the operations of art: the grammarian makes a mistake in writing and the doctor pours out the wrong dose. Hence clearly mistakes are possible in the operations of art also. If then in art there are cases in which what is rightly produced serves a purpose, and if where mistakes occur there was a purpose in what was attempted, only it was not attained, so must it be also in natural products, and monstrosities will be failures in the purposive effort. Thus in the original combinations (cf. 198b32) the 'ox-progeny' if they failed to reach a determinate end must have arisen through the corruption of some principle corresponding to what is now the seed." (1)

Of its very definition art is the employment of determinate means for a fitting end. (2) The calligrapher

---

1) Phys., II, ch. 8, 199a33-b7.

2) "Nihil enim aliud ars esse videtur, quam certa ordinatio rationis quomodo per determinata media ad debitum finem actus humani perveniant." -- In I Post. Anal., lect. 1, n. 1.

if he truly possesses his art, does not take counsel about what strokes he will make to form properly each letter of a word. His arm and pen glide along smoothly as he unhesitatingly writes each letter, word, sentence. He does not have to deliberate owing to a determination from the art he has acquired. In the plurality of instances he succeeds in his efforts, but from time to time he blunders; his arm may slip, or an imperfection in the pen may cause a blot of ink. On the occurrence of such a mistake, we would not deny the existence of the writer's art, by claiming he was not determined by it to produce a definite effect, a good effect that he usually achieves. No; we recognize that while he is an accomplished copyist and is thereby sufficiently determined to copy a perfect draft, he is at the same time a limited agent and therefore cannot always be in control of all the conditions requisite to a successful work. (3)

- 
- 3) "Et dicit (Arist.) quod circa illas operativas disciplinas quae habent certos modos operandi et sunt per se sufficientes, ita scilicet quod effectus operis eorum non dependet ex eventu alicuius extrinseci, circa has inquam artes non est consilium, sicut de litteris conscribendis. Et huius ratio est quia non consiliamur nisi in dubiis. Non est autem dubium qualiter debeat scribi, quia certus est modus scribendi et non est dubius, et non dependet effectus scripturae nisi ex arte et manu scribentis. Sed de his est consilium quaecumque fiant per nos, idest in quibus oportet nos praedeterminari qualiter fiant, quia non sunt in se certa et determinata." -- In III Ethic., lect. 7, n. 467; cf. Q.D. de Pot., q. 3, a. 6, ad 5.

Similarly it is with nature. The natural agent is determined in its nature to operate for a suitable term. Generally it attains this goal; sometimes it does not. When it fails on the rare occasion, that does not give us reason to infer the non-existence of a determination to a particular end in the agent's nature, nor to negate the sufficiency of that determination.<sup>(4)</sup> The natural agent is determined to a particular effect and will produce it, provided its causality is not interfered with either by an exterior agent or by a misplay of its own principle. While the determination in the nature of the agent is adequate to obtain its end, nevertheless because it is a contingent and not a necessary cause, the actual achievement of its end can be prevented. And the reason for the contingent causality of a natural agent is to be found in an indetermination in the agent itself.

---

4) " 'Posita causa quacumque, necesse sit eius effectum poni'. Hoc enim non oportet in omnibus causis: quia aliqua causa, licet sit per se et propria causa et sufficiens alicuius effectus, potest tamen impedi ex concursu alterius causae, ut non sequatur effectus." -- Contra Gentiles, III, ch. 86. "Nam peccatum vel malum non accidit in actione naturae, nisi propter impedimentum superveniens illi causae agenti; quod quidem non est nisi in paucioribus, ut sunt monstra in natura, et alia huiusmodi." -- Q.D. de Pot., loc. cit.

I.- POSITIVE AND NEGATIVE INDETERMINATION (5)

This indetermination of which we now speak differs radically from that which we previously discovered to be in voluntary agents, and less properly, though somewhat, in animated natural agents. That was an indetermination which we may call 'positive' or 'active', since it is itself a perfection and is concerned with the order of operations. "Operari sequitur esse." An agent will possess this indetermination to the degree that it is actual, that is, according to the perfection and determination of its essence; the more determined, the more unique the essence of an agent is, the more indetermination, freedom it will have in its activity. Thus, since God is absolutely unique, absolutely simple in that His essence is the plenitude of existential determination, He is also completely indeterminate and free in the production of creatures. And to the extent that creatures recede from the Infinite Actuality and complete Uniqueness of God, in proportion will their active indetermination lessen. "Libertas a necessaria coactione nobilius invenitur in

5) Cf. Charles De Koninck, Réflexions sur le Problème de l'Indéterminisme (Québec: Les Presses Universitaires Laval, 1952), pp. 3-15, where the author explains these two kinds of indetermination.



Deo quam in angelo, et in uno angelo quam in alio, et in angelo quam in homine." (6) In the spontaneity of animated natural beings, which is not properly liberty, the same kind of indetermination is instanced. Inorganic beings, however, have no positive indetermination, since, being moved in every way, they are completely determined in their operations.

There is then a correspondence between the degree of essential determination or uniqueness a being has and its active indetermination; the more 'one' an agent is essentially, the more indeterminate it is operationally, and conversely, the less it is one, the less is it indeterminate. But if we can speak of a being as less unique, less determined essentially, we can also say that it is more indeterminate essentially, -- this is the indetermination we call 'negative', and which we now invoke to explain nature as a contingent cause. (7) We refer

---

6) In II Sent., d. 25, q. 1, a. 4.

7) "... Ita quod contingentia ex potentia, necessitas vero ex actu oriatur. Cuius etiam signum est quod in his inferioribus, in quibus plurimum est de potentia, maxime viget contingentia; in rebus vero superioribus, maxime actus naturam participantibus, aut omnino non est, aut secundum quid est contingentia; simpliciter enim entia illa necessaria sunt, et tantum habet contingentiae, quantum potentiae cuiusdam admixtionem patiuntur. Unde actus purus omnino liber est a contingentia omnino." -- Cajetan, Comment., In Iam, q. 86, a. 3, n. 7.

to it as a 'negative' indetermination, because, as was implicated, it follows from a defect of 'being' and is proper to finite entia inasmuch as they are finite. As creatures recede from the Infinite Actuality and Simplicity of God, they are essentially less actual, less simple, and therefore more indeterminate. In other words, this indeterminateness is in direct proportion with the finiteness of the creature; the greater the finiteness, the greater the negative indetermination.

Now the finiteness of creatures may be regarded in a double light: first, in itself, insofar as it is a certain degree of finitude; secondly, in relation to the Creative Power by reason of which the finite is. (8) Viewed in this second way, every creature is said to be extrinsically contingent because it depends for its existence on the active indetermination of God's Will. This will be explained shortly.

- 
- 8) "Si autem loquamur de infinito secundum quod convenit formae, sic manifestum est quod illa quorum formae sunt in materia, sunt simpliciter finita, et nullo modo infinita. Si autem sint aliquae formae creatae non receptae in materia, sed per se subsistentes, ut quidem de angelis opinantur, erunt quidem infinitae secundum quid, inquantum huiusmodi formae non terminantur neque contrahuntur per aliquam materiam: sed quia forma creata sic subsistens habet esse, et non est suum esse, necesse est quod ipsum eius esse sit receptum et contractum ad determinatam naturam. Unde non potest esse infinitum simpliciter." -- Ia, q. 7, a.2.

To consider the finiteness itself of creatures, we must take into account that creatures are not merely more or less limited, more or less negatively indeterminate depending on the distance of their recession from the Infinite Actuality of God; their degree of recession, or want of actuality, may be such that a radical sort of finitude is entailed. Every creature is finite from the fact that its existence is received from another, namely, from the Creator. But a separated substance is finite only in this way, that is, by reason of its composition of essence and existence. Such a grade of finiteness, however, does not render impossible essential simplicity and necessity. Considered in itself the essence of a separated substance is simple, necessary, and determined only to 'being'. But they are not all equally so, let it be understood. Some are more simple than others, more determinate, etc. Each separated substance has specific to it a certain indetermination by want of 'being', inasmuch as the essence of each is more or less close to its act of existence, more or less in 'potentia ad esse'.

... Dicendum quod ipsa substantia angeli quodammodo se habet ad esse eius ut materia ad formam, ut dictum est. Materia autem, si eius essentia definiretur, haberet pro differentia ipsum suum ordinem ad formam, et pro genere ipsam suam substantiam. Et similiter in angelis ex ipsa natura substantiae ad esse accipitur specifica differentia.

Unde secundum hoc angeli differunt specie, secundum quod in substantia unius est plus vel minus de potentia quam in substantia alterius.(9)

The cosmic creature, on the other hand, is finite in still another way; not only is its essence limited in that its 'esse' is received, but the essence itself is composed of form and matter, owing its being this thing to individuation by this matter. The cosmic essence is so distant from the Uniqueness of the Divine Essence, hence, so less one, that it is sundered, as it were, and requires the dual principles of matter and form to give it unity. This essential composition entails a new kind of potentiality, a new type of negative indetermination; and we find the principal source of that indetermination in matter itself, which is the principle of individuation.(10)

It is important to recognize the radically different character of the finitude and consequent indetermination of separated substances from that due to the pure indetermination of matter in cosmic creatures; for two reasons. First, the indetermination by default of 'being' is the foundation of what we call 'intrinsic contingency', and both expressions ('intrinsic contingency' and 'negative

---

9) Quaestiones Quodlibetales (ed. Marietti), Qdl. 9, q. 4, a. 1 (6), ad 3.

10) Cf. Ia, q. 7, a. 1 and 2.

indetermination'), while having a common signification applicable to separated substances, are nonetheless said almost exclusively of natural agents, as proper to them. We employ them now for what they signify as common terms to give us a clearer idea of the meaning they assume when applied to natural beings. Nevertheless, if we do not take into account the absolute difference in the finiteness of separated substances and that of cosmic beings, we may be inclined to think that they are univocally intrinsically contingent, which would be utterly false.

In view of this caution it would be well to follow the example of St. Thomas and refer to the indetermination of separated substances, as a 'substantial potentiality for existence', or a 'certain admixture of potentiality'.<sup>(11)</sup> This is fitting also for the reason that these expressions are less apt to becloud the fact that separated substances are simple, necessary essences.

---

11) "In his autem quae sunt sine materia, non potest esse diversitas, nisi secundum quod natura unius est magis completa et in actu existens quam natura alterius. Ergo oportet quod illud quod venit ad perfectionem complementi et puritatem actus, sit unum tantum a quo proficiatur omne illud quod potentiae admixtum est: quia actus praecedat potentiam, et complementum diminutum." -- In II Sent., d. 1, q. 1, a. 1; see also Q.D. de Ver., q. 8, a. 16, ad 1; Q.D. de Spe., q. un, a. 4, ad 2.

notwithstanding that their necessity is caused and so implies defect, (12)-- something we may be prone to overlook in our eagerness to point out their limited actuality.

## II. CONTINGENCY

It has been stated that we may consider the finitude of a creature either in relation to the Creative Power that produced it, or in itself; the former enabled us to assert that the creature is extrinsically contingent, and the latter, that it is intrinsically contingent. In order to explain extrinsic and intrinsic contingency, we need first a general explanation of what we mean by the 'contingent'.

### A - GENERAL NOTION OF THE CONTINGENT -

First of all, the contingent and the possible, notwithstanding their formal diversity, are materially the same and therefore convertible. For every mode of the possible we will have a corresponding mode of the contingent. The possible is divided into the logical and the physical; the former is opposed to the impossible, and it is that which is not impossible to be, thence including every essence that has a capacity for existence.

---

12) Cf. Contra Gentiles, II, ch. 30.

The latter is opposed to the necessary, and extends to whatever is able both to be and not to be, having simultaneously a capacity for existence and non-existence (not, be it remembered, a capacity for simultaneous existence and non-existence, - for this implies a contradiction.)

Non est possibile quod per hunc modum possibile defendatur. Possibile enim quoddam est quod ad necessarium sequitur. Nam quod necesse est esse, possibile est esse; quod enim non possibile est esse, impossibile est esse; et quod impossibile est esse, necesse est non esse; igitur quod necesse est esse, necesse est non esse. Hoc autem est impossibile. Ergo impossibile est quod aliquid necesse sit esse, et tamen non sit possibile illud esse. Ergo possibile esse sequitur necesse esse.

Hoc autem possibile non est necessarium defendere contra hoc quod effectus ex necessitate causari dicuntur, sed possibile quod opponitur necessario, prout dicitur possibile quod potest esse et non esse. (13)

The logical, or absolutely, possible (opposed to impossible) is founded on the non-repugnance of terms, and is common both to necessary and possible (physical, opposed to necessary) beings. What is absolutely possible, cannot be regarded in the light of existence, since it is not considered as subjected to the physical influence

---

13) Contra Gentiles, III, ch. 85; "Alio modo possibile dicitur secundum quod est commune ad ea quae sunt necessaria, et ad ea quae contingunt esse et non esse, prout possibile contra impossibile dividitur." -- In IX Metaph., lect. 3, n. 1812.

of some real potency. It is merely the capability of an essence for existence, inasmuch as in the understanding of the notion of that essence, existence is not excluded as absolutely repugnant to it. In order that a thing be absolutely possible, it is not necessary that the thing exist at some time, but simply that it be capable of being placed in existence by the Omnipotent Will of God (although something is not so possible because God can produce it; God can produce it because it can be produced. The reason for the logical possible precludes from the Active Power of God).

*Dicitur autem aliquid possibile vel impossibile absolute, ex habitudine terminorum: possibile quidem, quia praedicatum non repugnat subjecto, ut Socratem sedere; impossibile vero absolute, quia praedicatum repugnat subjecto, ut hominem esse asinem....*

*Nihil autem opponitur rationi entis, nisi non ens. Hoc igitur repugnat rationi possibilis absoluti, quod subditur divinae omnipotentiae, quod implicat in se esse et non esse simul... Quaecumque igitur contradictionem non implicant, sub illis possibilibus continentur. (14)*

The physical possible is opposed to the necessary, and is then that which is not necessary to be or not to be. It is able both to be and not to be, and is also referred to as the real possible, since it has its roots in some real potency. (15) And as a potency is

---

14) Ia, q. 25, a. 3.



properly a principle of change in another qua other, whether that principle be active or passive, it follows that a thing is possible that is subject to change either with reference to a potency in itself (but qua other), or in another.

Dicendum quod in rebus a Deo factis dicitur aliquid esse possibile dupliciter. Uno modo per potentiam agentis tantum; sicut antequam mundus fieret, possibile fuit mundum fore, non per potentiam creaturae, quae nulla erat, sed solum per potentiam Dei, qui mundus in esse producere poterat. Alio modo per potentiam quae est in rebus factis; sicut possibile est corpus compositum corrumpi. (15)

From this we can see that something may be necessary in itself, i.e. determined only to being, inasmuch as in its essential makeup it has no real capacity for non-being, and yet be mutable or possible with respect to the extrinsic active potency of God. Such is the case of separated substances, who, once created, must be, although with reference to the active power that made them,

- 15) Cf. In IX Metaph., lect. 3, n. 1811. "... Possibile potest sumi vel relative seu comparative ad aliquam potentiam, vel absolute et in se. Relate ad potentiam dicitur aliquid possibile, ex eo quod alicui potentiae subicitur; et sic supponit ipsam potentiam et ab ea accipit denominationem extrinsecam, ad eamque habet relationem subiectionis; et ab aliis vocatur haec possibilitas physica. Absolute dicitur aliquid possibile ex eo quod in se, et ex habitudine terminorum, etc." -- J.S.T., Curs. theol. (ed. Solesm.), T. III, Disp. XXXI, a. 1, n. 5, p. 578.
- 16) Q.D. de Pot., q. 5, a. 3; cf. Ia, q. 9, a. 2.

it must be said that it was not necessary that they be; they could have been, or they could not have been. (17)

This possibility, which is an extrinsic denomination from a principle exterior to the thing called possible, holds for all creatures. But some creatures are said possible also from an inherent principle of mutability. This paper is possible to be or not to be not only because it was not necessary that a man make it, but also because, once made, it contains within itself a real capability both to be and not to be; as, for example, to be destroyed by fire, or by aging. (18)

To these forms of the possible we have corresponding species of the contingent. Answering to the logical possible, there is the common contingent, often called Contingens Altum; and to the possible that follows the necessary, we have the Contingens Necessarium; lastly, to the physical possible, there corresponds Contingens Non-Necessarium. (19)

The common contingent, since it is convertible with the logical possible, is opposed to the impossible and is that which is not necessary to be, or contingens

- 
- 17) Cf. Q.D. de Pot., loc. cit.  
18) Cf. In I Periherm., lect. 14, n. 7.  
19) Cf. Prior Analytics, I, ch. 13, 32a15-b15; St. Albert, Comment. Priora Analytica, I (Opera Omnia, Paris: Vives, 1890) Vol. II, pp. 476-484, 537-540.

non esse (20) Hence whatever does not imply a contradiction may be said contingent in this way. And just as the absolute possible includes necessary beings, so we have a mode of the contingent that follows upon necessary being. This is the necessary contingent, and is that which can be, contingens esse. (21)

Both these contingents do not figure in our present problem, and so we need not concern ourselves with them any longer. This may seem somewhat curious, since we have just spent much energy examining the notion of the logical possible so as to understand them. This was necessary, however, in order to avoid confusion with the non-necessary contingent, (22) which principally preoccupies us.

- 
- 20) It is also given the name of 'contingens altum', because it has special properties that do not belong to any of the species of the contingent under it. The common contingent cannot be reduced to the special modes of the contingent as a genus to its species; it remains distinct from them owing to its peculiar properties. Cf. St. Albert, op. cit., p. 476.
- 21) "Contingens dicitur secundum genus commune, aut secundum acceptionem specialem; si dicitur secundum genus commune: tunc est contingens quod convertitur cum possibili, et hoc vocatur contingens commune... Alius autem contingentis modus, quod dicitur contingere id quod est necessarium: quia sequitur si aliquid necessesse est esse, quod illud idem contingit esse." -- St. Albert, loc. cit.
- 22) Leibniz, for one, failed to make these distinctions, and with what consequences will be seen in the following chapter.

The non-necessary contingent, being materially identical and convertible with the physical possible, is divided against the necessary. What is so contingent is said to share in the 'nature of possibility', since it is able to be or not to be, contingens esse vel non esse.

Manifestum est enim etiam in rebus naturalibus esse quaedam, quae non semper actu sunt; ergo in eis contingit esse et non esse; alioquin vel semper essent, vel semper non essent. Id autem quod non est, incipit esse aliquid per hoc quod fit illud; sicut id quod non est album, incipit esse album per hoc quod fit album. Si autem non fiat album permanet non est album. Ergo in quibus contingit esse et non esse, contingit etiam fieri et non fieri. Non ergo talia ex necessitate sunt vel fiunt, sed est in eis natura possibilitatis, per quam se habent ad fieri et non fieri, esse et non esse. (23)

Like the real possible, the non-necessary contingent may be regarded as possible to be or not to be, either with reference to a potency extrinsic to itself, or in respect to a principle inherent in it by reason of which it is said contingens esse vel non esse. This division, however, is made only in so far as the contingent is materially the same as the possible. But the contingent is formally distinct from the possible, and in virtue of its distinctive formality, another division

---

23) In I Periherm., lect. 14, n. 6; cf. Contra Gentiles, III, ch. 86; and commentary of Sylvester of Ferrare, n. III, 2 (ed. Leon, Vol. XV). (Underlining mine.)

more proper to the contingent can be made.

A thing is said to be physically possible in relation to a potency that can produce it; (24) hence possible being is caused being, and is opposed to necessary being, or uncaused being. Something is said to be contingent, however, that proceeds from a non-necessary cause; it is not necessarily precontained in its cause, that is, it is not pre-contained in such a way that it is impossible that its cause not produce it. From this we can see immediately that the contingent is said first of an effect. -- and of an effect that proceeds from an undetermined cause. (25) While both the possible and the

- 24) "... Possibilia, quae dicuntur secundum potentiam, omnia dicuntur per respectum ad unam primam potentiam, quae est prima potentia activa, de qua supra dictum est, quod est principium mutationis in alio in quantum est aliud. Nam alia possibilia dicuntur per respectum ad istam potentiam." -- In V Metaph., lect. 14, n. 975. Mark that that we are speaking now of the possible and the contingent inasmuch as they are opposed to the necessary.
- 25) Although speaking explicitly of one type of the contingent (contingens ad utrumlibet), John of St. Thomas gives us at the same time an insight into the contingent ut sic: "Nec distingui debet inter contingentiam et indifferentiam seu indeterminationem, ut aliqui dicunt: quia contingens dicitur aliquid ex causa indifferenti ad utrumlibet in actu primo et antequam de facto producat; ergo, antequam effectus producat, ex eadem parte, ex qua habet contingentiam, habet indeterminationem, scilicet ex causis: extra causas autem nondum aliquid habet, vel si aliquid habet determinate, ibi amittet contingentiam ubi habet determinationem." -- J.S.T., Curs. Theol. (Scolasm.), T. II, p. 420; cf. *ibid.*, p. 410.

contingent are not necessary, both are able to be or not to be, each nevertheless has a different emphasis. The possible referring to the power able to produce it, emphasizes its able-to-be-ness, whereas the contingent, in relating to the indetermination of its being as pre-contained in its cause, emphasizes its able-not-to-be-ness. Thus, I can say 'it is possible for me to walk', signifying that I have within me the power to accomplish that action of walking. But I say 'my action of walking is contingent', meaning it was not necessary, it could not have been. So 'possible' refers to the actuality of its cause, and 'contingent' to the potentiality, or indetermination of its cause. (26) The reason for the indetermination in the cause may be either a perfection, in which case it will be an active or positive indetermination, or an imperfection, a defect owing to the finiteness of the cause. The first founds extrinsic contingency, and the latter, intrinsic contingency.

#### B - EXTRINSIC CONTINGENCY -

As effects are precontained in their cause, so are they said necessary, or contingent, -- necessary, if

---

26) Cf. Sylvester of Ferrara, Comment. Contra Gentiles, I, ch. 87, n. VI (ed. Leon, Vol. XIII); Ia, q. 9, a. 2.

they are absolutely determined in their cause, so that their actually coming-to-be must follow; contingent, if they are not so determined, but a possibility that they do not become is present. Contingent effects will be distinguished then according to the mode of indetermination they have in their cause.

Cum autem aliquid est in praesenti habet esse in seipso, et ideo vere potest dici de eo quod est: sed quamdiu aliquid est futurum, nondum est in seipso, est tamen aequaliter in sua causa: quod quidem contingit tripliciter. Uno modo, ut sic sit in sua causa ut ex necessitate ex ea proveniat; et tunc determinate habet esse in sua causa; unde determinate potest dici de ea quod erit. Alio modo, aliquid est in sua causa, ut quae habet inclinationem ad suum effectum, quae tamen impediri potest; unde et hoc determinatum est in sua causa, sed mutabiliter; et sic de hoc vere dici potest, hoc erit, sed non per omnimodam certitudinem. Tertio, aliquid est in sua causa pure in potentia, quae etiam non magis est determinata ad unum quam ad aliud.(27)

If the effect is indifferently in its cause, so that the cause itself is not more determined to producing it than to not producing it, we say the effect is contingent ad utrumlibet, -- each alternative is equally probable. Let it be well understood that the effect is said thus to be contingent solely with reference to the active potency of the cause that can produce it. Though certainly a defectibility in the nature of the effect is

---

27) In I Periherm., lect. 13, n. 11.

implied, inasmuch as it is dependent on its cause for its coming-to-be, nevertheless the effect is not said to be contingent for that reason. It is contingent ad utrumlibet solely by reference to an extrinsic active potency, -- 'per potentiam in altero'. (28) This is what we mean by extrinsic contingency and its root is the active indetermination of a free will, or in other terms, the 'libertas contradictionis' of a voluntary agent. "Quaedam vero se habent ad utrumlibet, quia scilicet non magis se habent ad unam partem, quam ad aliam, et ista procedunt ex electione." (29) That which I make but am free not to make, is extrinsically contingent, because it is dependent on the active indetermination of my will.

Extrinsic contingency, as was remarked, abstracts from the imperfection of the effect that is in this way

- 28) "... Omnis autem creatura aliquo modo est mutabilis. Sciendum est enim quod mutabile potest aliquid dici dupliciter: uno modo, per potentiam quae in ipso est; alio modo, per potentiam quae in altero est. Omnes creaturae, antequam essent, non erant possibiles esse per aliquam potentiam creatam, cum nullum creatum sit aeternum: sed per solam potentiam divinam, inquantum Deus poterat eas in esse producere. Sicut autem ex voluntate Dei dependet quod res in esse producit, ita ex voluntate eius dependet quod res in esse conservat... Sic igitur per potentiam quae est in altero, scilicet in Deo, sunt mutabiles, inquantum ab ipso ex nihilo potuerunt produci in esse, et de esse possunt reduci in non esse." -- Ia, q. 9, a.2; cf. Contra Gentiles, III, ch. 86.
- 29) In I Periherm., lect. 13, n. 9.



said to be contingent; it is contingent merely with relation to the active indifference of its cause. It is important to insist upon this because, as I think is patent, the term 'contingent' is analogical, and it so happens that the extrinsically contingent is said to be contingent only in a common or broad sense of the term. The contingent is properly divided against the necessary, and therefore the contingent signifies non-necessity. "*Ens autem dividitur per contingens et necessarium: et est per se divisio entis.*"(30) Hence that will be more properly contingent which is essentially non-necessary. But extrinsic contingency applies with equal force to necessary and to non-necessary created beings. All creatures, for instance, are extrinsically contingent on the creative power of God, Who is absolutely free in His Creative Act. Yet separated substances are necessary essentially, insofar as their essence contains no real potency to non-being, whereas natural essences do have such a potency.(31)

In view of this notation that what is extrinsically contingent, and insofar as it is such, has only a minor claim to the analogical predication of the contingent, it is truly remarkable that some Scholastic

---

30) Contra Gentiles, III, ch. 72.

31) Cf. In II Sent., d. 1, q. 1, a. 1, ad 3; Ia, q. 9, a.2.

authors appear to maintain that this is the only form of the contingent to be found in our universe. Mr. Jacques Maritain, for one, writes:

When a certain bee visits a certain rose at a certain instant of time, we say that the event is contingent. Still, neither the rose nor the bee is a free agent; everything which befalls them is determined by the meeting or the interaction of properties of the nature of each and of the actions occasioned by the environment. As a result, to a divine intellect which would know absolutely all the ingredients of which the world is made, all the factors involved in the world and the entire history of all the successions of causes which have been evolved in the world since its beginning, the visit of that bee to that rose at that particular instant would appear as an infallibly or necessarily determined event. (32)

The author goes on to explain, and says:

These singular events (the blossoming of a hazel tree; the fall of a bird from its nest), 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 events that inter-cross in the course of time. But these combinations of series -- which in fact did not prove to be different from what they were -- could have been different; there was nothing to prevent their being different either through the intervention of some free agent or because of a difference at the beginning of things, in the initial placements of all the historical series here involved (initial placements, let it be noted, by virtue of which the 'constellation' occurred in a certain way; but no essential

---

32) Jacques Maritain, Reflections on Necessity and Contingency, in Essays in Thomism, p. 27.

structure of these initial placements, and, for that matter, no cause in the universe necessitated the 'constellation's' being the way it was). The fall of the bird and the appearance of the fruit, which actually took place, could therefore not have taken place; they could have been prevented from coming to pass. These events on the supposition of all their antecedents, were necessitated by them. (33)

Pursuing this conception, and excluding by hypothesis, the intervention of free agents, if we take any cosmic event or being, we must say that, in fact, its existence is necessary, although rightly it is contingent because it could have not been. In relation to the active power that brought it into being, it must be said to have been able to be or not to be, since it was not necessary that that exterior potency produce it. It matters little whether that exterior potency be the Divine Will itself, or proximate natural agents. If it were the Divine Will, the cosmic being was not necessary, because God freely creates; if a natural agent, it was not necessary because the natural agent itself was not necessary, and for the reason that its proximate cause was not necessary, etc., in continual regress until we arrive at the initial ingredients of the world. These were freely created by God, and hence were able to be or not to be.

---

33) J. Maritain, op. cit., pp. 29-30.

Obviously, the only kind of contingency Mr. Maritain can have in mind here is extrinsic. Once given the initial conditions in the work of creation, the cosmic event that happens now is a necessary result, although as a question of right it is contingent because it depends on the active indetermination of the Divine Will.

In this explanation it is difficult to recognize any place for a distinction of creatures into necessary and contingent beings. And, in fact, if this is the only way in which natural beings are contingent, there is no foundation for such a distinction. Separated substances and cosmic beings would be equally necessary, equally contingent. If natural beings are contingent solely with reference to the free potency of the Creator, so that once that potency is postulated their existence necessarily follows, we can say: given the Divine decree, separated substances necessarily exist; given the Divine decree that posited the initial constellation of the world, and the whole history of natural events follows.

It is true that Maritain distinguishes between a 'necessity by right' and a 'necessity of fact', a distinction that is based on the essential structure of things. Something exists by a necessity of right when 'by its nature it is determined solely to being'; contingency is

excluded from this. (34) A thing exists by a necessity of fact when its existence is not demanded by its essence, but is nevertheless 'determined or necessitated in actual fact by its antecedents', and this is 'contingent from the moment that its antecedents could have been otherwise'. (35) What is decidedly strange here is that Mr. Maritain distinguishes that which is necessary by right and that which is necessary by fact (and so contingent) by reason of something intrinsic, and yet when he comes to give the reason for contingency, he has recourse to something extrinsic, -- the 'antecedents could have been otherwise'. (36) If the types of necessity are

---

34) Op. cit., p. 28.

35) Op. cit., p. 27.

36) Maritain's definitions of 'necessity' and 'contingency' are interesting: "That is said to be necessary which cannot not be, and that which can not be is said to be contingent (he is actually defining the common contingent here, as we know; which seems to explain his apparent identification of contingent with the extrinsic contingent); in other words a thing is necessary when it cannot be prevented, contingent when it can be prevented. A thing is absolutely necessary when nothing can prevent it from being. Thus the properties of a sphere are absolutely necessary. A thing is hypothetically necessary when nothing can prevent it from being, on the supposition of certain conditions." -- Op. cit., pp. 27-28. Compare with St. Thomas: "Stoici vero distinxerunt haec secundum exteriora prohibentia. Dixerunt enim necessarium esse illud quod non potest prohiberi quin sit verum; ... possibile vero quod potest prohiberi vel non prohiberi... Distinctio videtur esse incompetens ... Est ab exteriori et quasi per accidens: non enim ideo aliquid est necessarium, quia non habet impedi-

founded on essential requirements, and if a thing recedes from absolute necessity to the extent that it is contingent, or if it is contingent to the degree that it is removed from absolute necessity, it seems the reason for contingency ought likewise to be sought in the essential structure.

The author himself appears somewhat aware of this, for, when he distinguishes among contingent things themselves, he classifies them according to the degree of assurance they have in the proximate causes of their production, -- 'contingens ut in omnibus de facto' (always issues in fact from its proximate cause); 'contingens ut in pluribus' (most often results, but sometimes prevented); 'contingens ut in paucioribus' (in no wise assured in any one proximate cause, but results from an ensemble of causes). (37) Yet, here again, when the situation calls for an explanation of contingency according to something intrinsic to beings, Mr. Maritain resorts once more to the

---

mentum, sed quia est necessarium, ideo impedimentum habere non potest. Et ideo alii melius ista distinxerunt secundum naturam rerum, ut scilicet dicatur necessarium, quod in sua natura determinatum est solum ad esse;... possibile autem quod ad neutrum est omnino determinatum, sive se habeat magis ad unum quam ad alterum, sive se habeat aequaliter ad utrumque, quod dicitur contingens ad utrumlibet." -- In I Periherm., lect. 14, n. 8; cf. In II Phys., lect. 8, n. 4.

37) Op. cit., pp. 30-31.

extrinsic. The only reason he gives why effects are more or less assured in their causes, or why they are more or less contingent, is that they can be prevented. (38) Even at first thought it would seem more reasonable to say a thing can be prevented because due to some intrinsic defect it is contingent, rather than vice versa. And it is just this manner of being contingent that we are going to discuss now.

C - INTRINSIC CONTINGENCY -

*Quaedam vero sunt in causis suis et secundum potentiam et secundum causam activam, quae potest tamen impediri a suo effectus; et ista dicuntur contingere ut in pluribus. (39)*

An effect may be so contained in its cause that its actual coming-to-be is highly probable, though not altogether guaranteed. Its cause is more determined to producing it than not, and in fact would infallibly produce it, were it not impeded. But the fact that the cause can be impeded tells us two things: first, that the effect proceeding from it shares in the 'natura possibilitatis', -- not being necessitated, it can be or not be; secondly, that there is a certain indetermination in the cause

---

38) Cf. *ibid.*

39) Q.D. de Malo, q. 16, a. 7; cf. In I Periherm., lect. 13, n. 9.

itself that allows for interference in its causality. That interference may come from some exterior obstacle, or from within the cause itself, but in any case the reason why it can be impeded is an interior disposition of the cause, to wit, its lack of sufficient determination.

Further, we know that the coming-to-be of the effect is more determined in its cause, or more assured, as Mr. Maritain would have it, from the fact that it happens frequently. Generally kittens are born healthy. We call such an effect contingent 'ut in pluribus', for in the greater number of instances it results. But we know it is only 'ut in pluribus' because sometimes it does not happen. Sometimes a diseased kitten is born. This latter, the effect that occurs rarely, is called the contingent 'ut in paucioribus'; it is accidental being, an 'ens per accidens'.

*Contingens autem ut in paucioribus est ens per accidens cuius causa quaeritur. Unde relinquitur, quod causa entis per accidens sit contingens ut in pluribus, quia eius defectus est ut in paucioribus. Et hoc est ens per accidens. (40)*

But the 'ens per accidens' can only have a 'per accidens' cause. "Causa per se est finita et determinata: causa per accidens est infinita et indeterminata." (41)

- 
- 40) In VI Metaph., lect. 2, n. 1183; cf. Contra Gentiles, III, ch. 71, 72, 74.  
 41) In II Phys., lect. 8, n. 8.



The cause that achieves its effect for the most part can on occasion fail because of a negative indetermination within itself; when it does fail, the resultant rare effect has that indetermination as its cause.

These two contingent effects, the frequent and the rare, are linked together, as is plain, for the former is the reason of being of the latter. They are said to be intrinsically contingent, because as pre-contained in their cause they were able to be or not to be by reason of an indetermination by default of actuality. Not all are intrinsically contingent in the same way, however; some properly so, others by an extension of the term.

- 1) Accidental Intrinsic Contingency - owing to the limitation of the finite intellect.

*Contingens autem at utrumlibet, non potest esse causa alicuius inquantum huiusmodi. Secundum enim quod est ad utrumlibet, habet dispositionem materiae, quae est in potentia ad duo opposita; nihil enim agit secundum quod est in potentia. Unde oportet quod causa, quae est ad utrumlibet, ut voluntas, ad hoc quod agit, inclinetur magis ad unam partem, per hoc quod movetur ab appetibili, et sic sit causa ut in pluribus. (42)*

One type of intrinsic contingency, which we may be denominated 'accidental', is reduced to the finiteness of created intellectual appetites. A voluntary agent is

---

42) In VI Metaph., lect. 2, n. 1183.

actively indetermined to produce a particular effect, but as long as it remains in this condition, it can never be a cause. It has to determine itself to one alternative, -- to produce, or not to produce; and this it does under the attractive influence of the appetible object. God (remembering, of course, that He alone can be the final cause of what He creates) necessarily produces what He wills. Created voluntary agents, on the other hand, since their intellects are imperfect, are not capable of perfectly manifesting the desirable object with all the circumstances that may attend its possession. Consequently, once they have determined themselves to one alternative they do not have complete control of all that may befall their action of attaining that goal. They become causes 'ut in pluribus', and the effect that happens 'ut in paucioribus' is what we call the fortuitous. "Licet ea tantum agent a fortuna, quae habent intellectum, tamen quanto aliquid magis subiacet intellectui, tanto minus subiacet fortunae." (43)

The cause of the fortuitous effect is, as is known, fortune, and fortune is the intellectual agent when he acts as an accidental cause. He can be an accidental cause owing to the indefiniteness of his active

---

43) In II Phys., lect. 8, n. 10.

power, which in turn is due to the imperfection of his intellect. (44) The fortuitous effect then is reduced to that indefiniteness as to its cause.

The contingency here is intrinsic because founded on the imperfection of the finite intellect which is wanting in actuality. We avoid the term 'negative indetermination', because, as pointed out, that expression is reserved for natural agents as more proper to them, since in them the indetermination by default of being is intra-essential. Furthermore, that is why we call this instance of intrinsic contingency 'accidentally' such; it can only be a source of accidental mutability, whereas the contingency of cosmic agents, since intra-essential, is also the root of substantial change. Even separated substances are contingent and subject to fortune, since their finite intelligence has a certain 'admixtum possibilitatis'; yet they remain essentially necessary and unchangeable. They are mutable acciden-

---

44) Socrates can go to the market-place, or he can stay home, or he can do a myriad other things. The number is indefinite. Once he actively decides to go to the market-place, the number of things that can happen to him in carrying out this design are equally as indefinite. They are indefinite because his imperfect intellect does not allow him to foresee them all, and thus be able to control them. See In II Phys., lect. 8, nn. 3, 8, lect. 9, n. 2.

tally only. (45)

The difference then between the contingency due to finite intelligence and that owing to intra-essential indetermination is the abyss between accident and substance; hence, the former is intrinsic contingency 'secundum quid' and 'per posterius', the latter, absolutely and 'per prius'. Moreover, it is recognized that what is contingent intrinsically but secundum quid, is more deserving of the analogous predication of the term

- 45) "Si autem dicatur aliquid mutabile per potentiam in ipso existentem, sic etiam aliquo modo omnis creatura est mutabilis. Est enim in creatura duplex potentia, scilicet activa et passiva. Dico autem potentiam passivam, secundum quam aliquid assequi potest suam perfectionem, vel in essendo vel in consequendo finem. Si igitur attendatur mutabilitas rei secundum potentiam ad esse, sic non in omnibus creaturis est mutabilitas: sed in illis solum in quibus illud quod est possibile in eis, potest stare cum non esse. Unde in corporibus inferioribus est mutabilitas et secundum esse substantiale, quia materia eorum potest esse cum privatione formae substantialis ipsorum: et quantum ad esse accidentale, etc. ... Substantiae vero incorporeae, quia sunt ipsae formae subsistentes, quae tamen se habent ad esse ipsarum sicut potentia ad actum, non compatiuntur secum privationem huius actus: quia esse consequitur formam, et nihil corrumpitur nisi per hoc quod amittit formam. Unde in ipsa forma non est potentia ad non esse: et ideo huiusmodi substantiae sunt immutabiles et invariabiles secundum esse. Sed tamen remanet in eis duplex mutabilitas... Sic igitur in omni creatura est potentia ad mutationem: vel secundum esse substantiale, sicut corpora corruptibilia... vel secundum ordinem ad finem et applicationem virtutis ad diversa, sicut in angelis."
- Ia, q. 9, a. 2; cf. In II Sent., d. 1, q. 1, a. 1; Contra Gentiles, III, ch. 74; Ia, q. 63, a. 9, ad 1.

'contingent' than that which is merely extrinsically contingent. The common note of non-necessity is preserved in both analogates; but here the non-necessity, while in the accidental order, is reduced to something intrinsic, whereas the other refers to an exterior potency. Nevertheless both these analogates are secondary in comparison with the natural contingent, the prime analogate, where the non-necessity is essential, as we are now to see.

2) Absolute Intrinsic Contingency, or Contingency Proper, -- owing to the indetermination of matter.

... The expression 'to be contingent' is used in two ways. In one it means to happen generally and fall short of necessity, e.g. man's turning grey or growing or decaying, or generally what naturally belongs to a thing (for this has not its necessity unbroken, since man's existence is not continuous forever, although if a man does exist, it comes about either necessarily or generally). In another sense the expression means the indefinite, which can be both thus and not thus, e.g. an animal's walking or an earthquake's taking place while it is walking, or generally what happens by chance: for none of these inclines by nature in the one way more than in the opposite. (46)

When the effect that occurs frequently issues from a natural agent, as from its cause, we say it is naturally contingent, -- 'Contingens Natum'. And the infrequent result that complements the general success

---

46) Prior Analytics, I, ch. 13, 32a4-14.

of the natural agent is the casual, the chance effect.

The natural effect that occurs for the most part, e.g. a healthy kitten, is said to be intrinsically contingent, not only because its existence was not necessarily contained in its cause, but more rightly because the reason for its non-necessity was something within the essential structure of that cause. Natural agents, as we saw, are so removed from the Uniqueness and Infinite Actuality of the Divine Essence, that the negative indetermination that follows from their finiteness becomes a co-principle of their essence. This principle is matter, and in it principally do we find the source of contingency. "*Est autem unumquodque contingens ex parte materiae, quia contingens est quod potest esse et non esse; potentia autem pertinet ad materiam. Necessitas autem consequitur rationem formae.*" (47) Therefore, all beings that have matter as a principle of their essence will be subject to this contingency, and all such beings are natural beings.

We are now in the realm of genuine contingency. The contingency of the natural being and of the chance effect is not only properly intrinsic, it is also properly contingency, for, as the above citations from Aristotle

---

47) Ia, q. 86, a. 3.

and St. Thomas indicate, this is contingency in its real sense. It is contingency unqualified, and what is meant when we say that being is divided by the necessary and the contingent. "Nam ea quae sunt contingentia ut in pluribus, in hoc solo a necessariis differunt, quod possunt in minori parte deficere." (48) Since it is based on something essential it distinguishes what is essentially non-necessary from what is essentially necessary.

When it is said that matter is the root cause of contingency in things, it is understood that it is matter insofar as it is a subject of privation, as it is 'possibilis ad multa'. Of its very nature matter is in potency to form and when it is actualized by one form, it remains in potency to all other material forms. (49) And since it is susceptible to other forms, the being composed of matter has a real possibility not to be, when it is, and a real possibility to be or not to be, when it is still virtually contained in its proximate cause. (50) It is therefore not necessary. Likewise, the natural being when it is itself a cause, will embrace its effect in an incomplete determination; for matter is always in potency to a form other than, and perhaps contrary to,

---

48) Contra Gentiles, III, ch. 74.

49) Cf. Ia, q. 66, a. 2.

50) Cf. Q.D. de Pot., q. 5, a. 3.

the one the agent is striving to induce in it.

While the possibility of matter is the principal source of contingency, it alone does not explain contingency. There is further required an indetermination on the part of the form which is the active principle of the natural agent.

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. (51)

In the preceding chapter we stated that the form of the natural agent, or, what is the same, nature as the active principle of motion and rest, is completely determined to one, that is, it acts for one end. Now we say the natural form is not altogether determined. But there is no contradiction here. As it is a form, it is a principle of action, for every agent acts through its form; as it is a natural form, it is a principle of a certain kind of action, namely, motion, and of a motion toward one end determined by the Author of Nature. So in the order of operation, the determination of the natural form is complete; its activity is confined to one goal, which it will achieve if not obstructed. It can be impeded because it is a certain grade of a form,

---

51) In I Periherm., lect. 14, n. 9.



a very limited form that is dependent upon matter for its existence, or at least for its operations in the case of the human soul. The degree of its limitation calls for an indetermination in itself. If it were not indeterminate, it would completely dominate matter, that is, it would fulfill all the possibilities of matter. The natural being would then be necessary, since it would have no real potentiality for non-existence.<sup>(52)</sup> It is clear now why we insisted that matter as subject to privation is the principal cause of contingency.

The determination of the natural form being incomplete, there results a certain play between the form and the matter, a certain marginal indetermination that has its repercussions in the activity of the natural agent; it results in a certain incertitude with regard to the attainment of the end.<sup>(53)</sup> The indefinite possibilities of

---

52) Cf. Q.D. de Pot., q. 5, a. 3.

53) Dr C. de Koninek expresses this well: "C'est l'insuffisante détermination de la nature qui rend possible des événements qui débordent les limites mêmes de la nature, limites entre lesquelles il y avait du jeu. De sorte que la contingence propre au hasard présuppose une contingence, une mutabilitas dans la cause naturelle. Quelle que soit la perfection de la forme, il reste toujours dans le composé une marge d'indétermination, qui l'exécède, et qui peut faire manquer, voire réussir, un effet nullement prédéterminé dans la nature, ni particulière, ni universelle, puisque cette marge existe pour l'univers tout entier." -- Op. cit., p. 16.

the matter and the incompleteness of the form make the natural agent susceptible to interference when moving toward its prescribed goal. The interference may come from extrinsic agents, the accidental concurrence of different active causes, or an indisposition of the matter itself. (54) But always the underlying reason for the impediment is the non-necessity of the natural being, the contingency of the natural agent that is essentially indeterminate.

And therein lies the explanation of the casual. "Quum materia sit principium et causa rerum casualium... in eorum factione potest esse casus, quae ex materia generantur." (55) Nature as a contingent cause can only attain its preordained end in the majority of instances. When it does not succeed, or when an effect other than that directly intended by it is brought about, we have

---

54) "Si igitur ea quae hic sunt contingentia, reducamus in causas proximas particulares tantum, inveniuntur multa fieri per accidens, tum propter concursum duarum causarum, quarum una sub altera non continetur, sicut cum praeter intentionem occurrunt mihi latrones. (Hic enim concursus causatur ex duplici virtute motiva, scilicet mea et latronum.) Tum etiam propter defectum agentis, cui accidit debilitas, ut non possit pervenire ad finem intentum; sicut cum aliquis cadit in via propter lassitudinem. Tum etiam propter indispositionem materiae, quae non recipit formam intentam ab agente, sed alterius modi sicut accidit in monstruosis partibus animalium." -- In VI Metaph., lect. 3, n. 1210.

55) Contra Gentiles, II, ch. 32; cf. also ch. 40.

the chance effect.

... 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... ut in paucioribus: causa inquam non necessaria sed contingens. (56)

The presence of indeterminacy in natural causations immediately allows for the production of an effect other than that which is ordinarily achieved. The natural form strives unceasingly to bring to full result the end to which it is naturally inclined, but at every stage it is forced to grapple with the indisposition of matter. (57) Most often it is successful. Sometimes it fails. Its failure is the casual, an 'ens per accidens'. The cause of the casual is chance, and chance is nothing other than nature itself inasmuch as it is an indeterminate cause, 'causa per accidens'. Being an indeterminate cause owing to its matter, the chance effect is reduced to matter as to its cause.

-----

This study of the contingency of natural causes

---

56) In VI Metaph., lect. 2, n. 1186.

57) That is why St. Thomas can speak of a victory of form over matter: "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." -- Contra Gentiles, II, ch. 30.

discloses the type of finality peculiar to nature, a sort of finality impossible to achieve without the indetermination we have discovered.

In omni motu est quaedam generatio et corruptio: nam in eo quod movetur, aliquid incipit et aliquid desinit esse. Si igitur omnis generatio et corruptio subtraheretur, subtracta contingentia rerum, ut ostensum est, consequens est quod etiam motus subtraheretur a rebus, et omnia mobilia. (58)

Through its activity nature generates and perfects substance, and therefore the existence and the perfection of substance represent the terms of nature's operations. These terms are accomplished by alteration and augmentation principally. Now, if we suppose for the sake of argument a complete determination in the natural agent such that the form fully dominates and exhausts the possibility of matter, the processes of alteration and augmentation will then be rendered impossible. If the matter be perfectly subordinated and disposed to the form, its potentiality, except perhaps ad diversa ubi, will be fully realized. There will be no privation of form, no loss of form; hence no becoming, no generation. A condition will obtain similar to that which the ancients placed in the heavenly bodies, which they posited as necessary beings

---

58) Contra Gentiles, III, ch. 72.

capable of locomotion only. (59)

It is only because there always remains a margin of indetermination between the matter and its form that motion is possible. But without motion, without becoming, no substance can be generated and ultimately perfected. (60) Hence not only will nature not realize its end but nature will not even be, for nature is the intrinsic principle of motion. It is essential to nature to be contingent, and because it is contingent it can act for an end.

With this treatment we have disposed of the difficulty presented by chance events to the finalist theory of nature. In view of what we have seen both in our discussion of chance and in this study of contingency, we can state with assurance that not only does the casual not destroy finality in nature, but it absolutely demands it. The chance effect is possible only if nature acts for an end, for it is peculiar to nature to realize its end for the most part. But the frequent permits the possibility of the infrequent. If nature could not be

---

59) Cf. Ia, q. 66, a. 2c and ad 4.

60) Cf. Contra Gentiles, III, ch. 74, where St. Thomas shows that the perfection of things, and of the universe requires the accidental effect. The accidental effect is necessary for the work of nature, namely, the perfection of substance. Also *ibid.*, ch. 71.

impeded, it would always achieve its end and the casual could not be. Moreover, as we saw earlier, the chance effect is that which happens outside the intention of the end; it is that which is accidentally achieved when some per se intended good is pursued. Therefore, if nature does not work for some definite end, it is vain to speak of something happening outside of what is directly intended. "Casual" would become a meaningless term.