

DIVINE KNOWLEDGE AND HUMAN FREEDOM: THE GOD WHO DIALOGUES

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RECENT THEOLOGY, especially as presented by process thinkers, has been challenging us to choose between a timeless, absolute, unrelated God, described as the God of traditional theism, and a temporal, growing, relative God, characterized by perpetual self-surpassing.¹ The choice is said to be between being and becoming; and being, we are told, "can. . . . be no more than an abstraction from becoming."²

The difficulty with this choice is that neither alternative corresponds very well with the God who reveals Himself to us in the Hebrew and Christian Scriptures, the God who dialogues. From the earliest traditions of the Pentateuch a pattern of divine-human interaction emerges that is marked basically by three moments: (1) absolute, free, divine initiative, as in creation and redemption; (2) free human response, in obedience and faith or sin and unbelief; and (3) divine response to human response, in a judgment of blessing or condemnation.³ The God of immutable essence (the so-called traditional view) may well be able to exercise absolute initiative, but it is inconceivable how He could *respond* to a free human response. The God of self-surpassing creativity may well be able to respond to human freedom, but it seems impossible to understand His initiative as absolute and free. In Whitehead's conception of the dipolar deity, the ultimate originating initiative of God is located in His primordial nature. But God in His primordial nature is described as lacking the fulness of actuality and as being devoid of consciousness.⁴ Such a God cannot conceivably be the sovereign, free creator of biblical revelation.

¹ Cf. "God and the World," Part 2 of *Process Theology*, ed. Ewert H. Cousins (New York: Newman, 1971) 85-187. This section contains essays or selections by Alfred North Whitehead, Charles Hartshorne, Schubert M. Ogden, Walter E. Stokes, John B. Cobb, Jr., and Daniel Day Williams. Ogden, e.g., writes: "By this 'analogy of being,' however, God, too, must be conceived as a genuinely temporal and social reality, and therefore as radically different from the wholly timeless and unrelated Absolute of traditional theism" (122; taken from his *Reality of God*).

² Charles Hartshorne, *A Natural Theology for Our Time* (LaSalle, Ill.: Open Court, 1967) 25.

³ Cf. my treatment of this pattern in "Judgment, Divine (in Theology)," *NCE* 8 (1967) 33-34.

⁴ Cf. *Process and Reality* (New York: Harper, 1960) 521-22. Whitehead does indeed describe the unity of conceptual operations of God in His primordial actuality as "a free creative act"; but this is explained by the phrase "untrammelled by reference to any

This, then, is the problem: the God who dialogues is characterized by both initiative and response; the initiative is absolute and free; the response is conditioned by the freedom of the other partner in the dialogue, man. The unrelated, immutable God cannot respond in this way. The becoming, self-surpassing God cannot exercise initiative in this way.

I see a way out of this dilemma, however, if we recognize a third basic conception of God, which shares some characteristics of both those mentioned already, but has its own inherent unity and integrity, and permits us to see in God both absolute free initiative and genuine response to human freedom: *God as the supremely active*. It further seems to me that this is precisely the conception of God given in the writings of Thomas Aquinas. This essay is not, however, an attempt to reconstruct and reinterpret Thomas, but to deal constructively with the problem of divine-human dialogue while seeking guidance and confirmation from his thought. At times the discussion becomes very metaphysical and dense, but in view of the problem it could hardly be otherwise.

What is distinctive about God for Aquinas is that God is His own existence. He does not *have* existence; He *is* existence. And this existence is not mere facticity but supreme activity, knowing, loving, freely creating. This is what God is.

This description, however, does not neatly and easily solve the problem of divine-human dialogue. In fact, a brief reflection seems to con-

particular course of things." There is in fact, for Whitehead, something prior to God, namely, "creative advance." "The primordial nature of God is the acquirement by creativity of a primordial character" (ibid.). Robert C. Neville and Lewis S. Ford exchanged views for and against the viability of Whitehead's conception of God for Christian theology in *Proceedings of the American Catholic Philosophical Association* 44 (1970) 130-51. Ford endeavored to maintain the freedom of God relative to the world by saying that God in creating Himself creates the metaphysical principles according to which this universe embodies creativity. He could have created Himself so that He "would completely exhaust all creativity, permitting him to exist in solitary splendour" (148); but He did not. How far this reflects Whitehead's own view is not clear; in any event, it is difficult to see how the initial self-creative act of God could be free in any intelligible sense if it is unconcious. Whitehead writes: "This side of his [God's] nature is free, complete, primordial, eternal, actually deficient, and unconscious" (*Process and Reality* 524). — If the primary purpose of this essay were to refute the concept of God as given in process thought, much more attention would have to be given to this whole matter. But my primary purpose is rather to present the positive reasons for an alternative conception, one that agrees with process thought in many of its difficulties with so-called traditional theism, but does not accept the view that the divine reality is itself in process of development. Whereas in process thought God acts out of need and grows toward fulfilment, here He acts out of abundance and communicates to creation its fulfilment.

front us with the same choice urged by the process thinkers: this existence and activity must either be infinite and unrelated essence, or else a developing and becoming process. For in saying that God is supremely active, we intend to exclude from Him all genuine passivity, all possibility of dependence on another for perfection, goodness, life, activity. As supremely active, He has all these in and of Himself in the highest possible degree. But how, then, can He respond? Indeed, even more basically, how can He even *know* the free personal choice of the human creature? Let us note carefully the meaning and relevance of this final question. The answer proposed in this study will endeavor to reply to both questions.

Personal response to the free actions of another supposes knowledge of those actions. But knowledge, as we experience it in ourselves, always involves some passivity. For us to know something outside ourselves, we must first be affected by it. Our actual knowing takes place only after we have been passively determined by the thing we are knowing. For us to know, for example, that the wind is blowing, we must be acted upon by such things as the sound, pressure, and temperature of the air in motion. Our knowing is to some degree the effect upon us of what we know. But if God knows as supremely active, then it is the other way around: He knows the wind is blowing because He makes it blow. He knows the truth of things outside Himself by conferring truth on them, not by receiving truth from them. Receiving truth would make him dependent on them for His activity and life.

Now if the case is that of God's knowing another's free choice and activity, the problem becomes so acute as to seem insoluble. If God is supremely active and knows what we do because He is the active source of it all, then it seems there is neither any way in which we can be genuinely free nor any way for Him to *respond* to us even if we are. To all intents and purposes we are confronted by the infinite, unrelated absolute. But if we wish to maintain the genuineness of our freedom, it would seem we must qualify the supreme activity of God by some passivity; and we have then a temporal, growing, relative God. For if the determination of our activity is genuinely in our power in some degree, then God must be dependent on us for the truth of His knowing activity if He is to know what we choose. "Supremely active" seems to mean either "unrelated absolute" and to deprive us of freedom, or "growing, creative process" and to require some real passivity in God. The initial dilemma appears unresolved.

In seeking a way through this problem and an insight into how God as supremely active engages in genuine dialogue with man, we will proceed by dealing with three questions: (1) Is God in His activity of knowing and causing truly related to the world? (2) How is the relation-

ship between God and creatures to be understood in the three aspects of God's activity *ad extra*: creation, conservation, and government? (3) How does God know and respond to human activity, while remaining supremely active Himself and leaving man genuinely free? The first question asks about the nature of God's causality and knowledge of creatures in general. The second directs our attention to God's activity as He makes something begin to exist, continue in existence, and act in some way. The third applies and focuses this general discussion on the particular question of free creaturely activity.

THE RELATEDNESS OF GOD'S CAUSING AND KNOWING

God as supremely active is the ground of all possibility. Whatever can in any way come to be is possible because the goodness, the reality, of God can be communicated by Him and shared in by this possible creature in this way. Whatever belongs to the understanding or conception of any possible creature is found primordially in the supreme intelligibility of the divine reality. As God in the immediacy of total self-presence grasps His own being as communicable, He grasps the full range of all possible events, situations, things, and activities.⁵

But to know something as possible is not to know that it is. God knows things as existing not by seeing them rooted in His power, but by seeing His power actually producing them, actually ordered to communicating goodness to them. Because He is supremely active and the transcendent source of all being, because His power actually reaches to all things in their concreteness, diversity, and totality, His knowledge of all existing reality is completely comprehensive and detailed. Because there is nothing that does not ultimately depend on God for its existence, there is nothing that lies outside His knowledge.⁶

It would be a mistake to think of God's causing power as something other than His knowledge. ("Cause" is used throughout this essay simply to denote the correlative of dependence, the principle of origin for some dependent reality; it carries here no implication of determinism or mechanical necessity, as it sometimes does in current writing. Cause is simply that upon which another depends, in whatever way it is dependent.) It is not that the power of God produces both the finite, dependent reality *and* His knowledge of it. Rather, the divine intelligible goodness as actually being communicated to another is at once both God's causality of that other and His knowledge of it. His knowledge is causative and His causality cognitive. He "knows things into being." In causing them to be, He knows them.

Implied here is a principle of utmost importance, a principle which governs this entire study and the conclusion it arrives at: the conditions

⁵ Cf. *Sum. theol.* 1, q. 14, a. 5 and a. 6.

⁶ Cf. *Sum. theol.* 1, q. 14, a. 11.

of the divine causality of existing creatures and the conditions of the divine knowledge of those creatures are identical.⁷ Whatever holds for one holds for the other. To anticipate somewhat: if God can cause a human thought only in a human mind, or a free human act only in a human will, then the human mind and the human will are equally necessary for His knowing that thought and that free act as existing. It is finally contradictory to affirm that God can know some existing thing as existing apart from what is required for Him to cause that thing to exist.

The initial problem, then, is to explore what properly constitutes divine causality and knowledge, to describe as best we can the "structure" of God's causative knowledge, noting in particular whether and in what way this involves some kind of relationship of God to creatures.

Divine Intellect and Will

Christian theology speaks of God's knowing and willing, and of the divine intellect and will as the principles of these activities. This is not just a transfer of "faculty psychology" to the Divinity, but an endeavor to get some analogical understanding of divine activity. Although we must finally say that God is His intellect and will, just as He is His knowing and willing, still the simplicity of the divine reality involves a richness and diversity known by God Himself and not merely fashioned by our faltering distinctions. God Himself perceives a difference between His knowing and willing. Even for Him, the grasping of an intelligible content (knowing) differs from the intention to communicate that content with another (willing). This is the basic presupposition of God's freedom. We may say that the divine intellect first understands the divine goodness as shareable with a creature in some way. God at this point knows Himself as a possible end or final cause; for He knows His goodness as what He can intend to communicate and what the creature would receive as its goal and perfection and fulfillment. Next (in an intelligible if not temporal order) the divine will freely wills or intends this goodness to be communicated to this creature in this way. At this point God exercises efficient and final causality, and knows Himself as the actual origin and end of this creature. Divine intellect is the principle of final causality as grasping and manifesting the goodness to be shared; divine will is the principle of efficient causality as actually willing to share what has been so grasped.

The Platonic teaching on separate forms or ideas, in which the world of sensible realities participates, was transformed and taken into Christian thought to designate the patterns or forms in the mind of God according to which He creates things. For Aquinas, God's knowledge of

⁷ Cf. *Sum. theol.* 1, q. 57, a. 2.

possible creatures, of the divine goodness as shareable by beings distinct from God, constitutes the divine ideas only in a general and improper sense.⁸ For this knowledge is logically prior to the exercise of divine causality and does not involve any actual reaching out of the divine power to a creature. But this idea in the broad sense is the ultimate reason why God chooses to cause something. For as God contemplates and rejoices in His divine goodness, perceiving it not only as His own proper perfection but as able to be given to others, He discovers the adequate reason for sharing it. It is a gift that deserves to be given. God acts out of the love of His goodness, not out of the desire for something He lacks. It is the gracious will to share, chosen in perfect freedom, not the desire to get and to grow, springing from inner need or necessity, that underlies God's causality.⁹ The idea of a possible universe, with all the ways it has of sharing in God's being and life and goodness, provides the sufficient but noncompelling reason for God's causative action. This general idea, then, is possible final and exemplary causality.

The divine will, by freely choosing to share the goodness manifested in this idea (in the broad sense), exercises efficient causality and thereby constitutes this as an idea in the strict sense, an actual final and exemplary cause. The divine goodness is actually communicated, and a creature exists sharing the divine goodness by a corresponding finite participation. The idea, by the action of the divine will, is ordered to the external effect being produced, and is thus an idea in the full and proper sense.¹⁰

This, then, is the heart of what God's causality radically involves: the union of intellect and will, of knowing and choosing. The intelligible likeness of the creature is a cause of the creature, not simply as an object of understanding, but inasmuch as the divine will establishes an "inclination" or an order of communicating to an effect. The divine knowledge is a cause of things inasmuch as it has the divine will joined to it.¹¹ It is this conjunction of intellect and will, of finality and efficiency, that constitutes God as causing. He is the proper cause of every finite reality inasmuch as He knows and wills it to exist.

Relations in God's Causality

The discussion thus far has involved three classes of relations in the production of a creature.¹² The first is the relation of the divine goodness to a possible creature, a relation of imitability or communicability,

⁸ Cf. *Sum. theol.* 1, q. 15, a. 2; *De pot.* q. 3, a. 16, ad 13m.

⁹ Cf. *De pot.* q. 3, a. 15, ad 14m and ad 5m.

¹⁰ Cf. *De pot.* q. 1, a. 5, ad 11m; q. 3, a. 5, ad 2m.

¹¹ Cf. *Sum. theol.* 1, q. 14, a. 8.

¹² Cf. *De pot.* q. 1, a. 5; *Sum. theol.* 1, q. 25, a. 1, ad 4m.

constituting a divine idea in the general sense. The second is the relation of the divine will to the divine goodness known as communicable, the actual choice and intention of God to share His being, terminating in the union of intellect and will in God. The third is a consequence of this, the relation of God to the creature as cause to effect, of the divine power to something actually dependent on it. This relation constitutes a divine idea in the strict sense, the intelligible likeness of something which is produced by God and participates in this idea. This relationship is the distinguishing feature of God's knowledge of the world existing as distinct from Him, of His "knowledge of vision" in regard to creatures.

It is ordinarily said that these relations, insofar as they regard creatures, are not "real relations."¹³ The sense of this is that the divine reality is not somehow dependent on a creature; it does not exclude the fact that God in His knowing and willing and causing truly regards the creature. The whole of the created universe is really related to God, wholly dependent on Him; He is the absolute term of the order of created beings, in no way dependent on them for His goodness and reality. But because human reason spontaneously thinks in correlative terms, it tends to conceive every relation as mutual. For example, I speak of myself as someone's great-grandson, since a portion of my biological heritage really derives from him. Correlatively, I can speak of him as my great-grandfather, though he derived nothing from me and in his lifetime was in no way influenced or changed by the fact that one day I would appear among his descendants. I designate him as relative to me, though only I am really relative to him. In the same way, since the creature derives its entire reality from God and really depends wholly on Him, we speak of the real relation of effect to cause; and because we think correlatively, we conceive a corresponding relation of God to creatures as cause to effect, though He gains nothing from them by causing them, no increase in goodness, perfection, or reality. This is one sense of "relation of reason."¹⁴

Another Sense of "Relation of Reason"

But this is not the only, or even the most important, meaning of the expression "relation of reason." For relation understood merely as the product of a reflex operation of the human mind is clearly *posterior* to the creature and to its real relation of dependence on God. But God's causality, His knowing and willing creatures to exist, is ontologically prior to the creature. The relations of reason we have been considering as constituting God as cause are all prior to the real relations of creaturely dependence. It is precisely *because* the divine goodness is communicable and known as such, *because* God does actually choose to

¹³ Cf. *Sum theol.* 1, q. 13, a. 7; *De pot.* q. 3, a. 3; q. 8, a. 1, ad 3m.

¹⁴ Cf. *De pot.* q. 1, a. 1, ad 10m.

communicate it in this way and not in that, and *because* this divine idea and not that one actually regards the creature, that this particular creature exists. Hence, to speak of these as relations of reason is to use "reason" not primarily as a reference to the human mind but to the intelligibility or knowableness of these relations themselves. As Aquinas observes, they are knowable and known not merely by the human mind, but by the divine mind.¹⁵ While they do not make the divine reality dependent on anything else, and do not increase, change, or modify its absolute intelligibility, they do introduce an objectively intelligible respect to something else. Something is present that would not be present had God willed otherwise, an intelligible relation to the effects of God's causality.

It will not do to say, as some have said,¹⁶ that given the reality of the created universe and its dependence on God's activity, we are forced to conceive that activity as somehow relative to the creature, but that actually "Creator" is wholly and simply a matter of extrinsic denomination founded on the reality of an extrinsic denominator, that is, of creatures. It will not do because the reality of creatures and of their dependence presupposes, not merely logically but ontologically, the activity of God as determined to produce creatures and to produce these rather than some other possible creatures. We may call this determination what we like, but we cannot reduce it merely to a posterior construction of the human mind. To do so would be to make the actual existence of the world either absurd and independent of God (since then there is objectively nothing in the divine activity, no reason at all why creatures exist rather than not exist, or these creatures rather than some other possible ones) or else to make it the inevitable consequence of necessary divine activity. The actual contingent existence of the created universe is a consequence of divine liberty, not the antecedent condition of its exercise.¹⁷

To understand better the matter of the relations involved in divine liberty, as well as to prepare for an analysis of human liberty, it is necessary to call attention to a pivotal and absolutely central distinction

¹⁵ Cf. *De pot.* q. 3, a. 16, ad 14m; also *Qq. quodl.* 4, a. 1. This use of *ratio* as meaning objective intelligibility is also illustrated from the following passages dealing with things which are distinct *ratione*: (a) the divine willing and the divine existence: *Sum. theol.* 1, q. 19, a. 2, ad 1m; (b) divine operation and divine essence: *De pot.* q. 1, a. 1, ad 1m; (c) Trinitarian relations and the divine essence, the power of creation and the power of generation: *De pot.* q. 2, a. 6; (d) divine will and divine nature: *De pot.* q. 3, a. 15, ad 6m.

¹⁶ Bernard Lonergan speaks this way in *Insight* (London: Longmans, 1961) 661-62.

¹⁷ The theme of God's relatedness to creation is argued at great length by Charles Hartshorne in *The Divine Relativity* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1967); see especially chapter 2, "God as Absolute, Yet Related to All." One need not agree with his entire process outlook to recognize the legitimacy and cogency of his argument on this point.

within being, the distinction between the physical or concrete and the intentional, between the thing existent in itself and the respects, orders, or relations it has toward another or toward others. This is not to affirm two *kinds* of being or existence (*esse*), as sometimes appears to be said, but to recognize this distinction within the world of things which are. We find, for example, that the universe is a multitude of concrete things which are, however, related to one another and interacting in many ways. On another level, an idea in the human mind has its own content and meaning; but in the act of knowing, that meaning is actually referred to some object of knowledge. To put this another way, in the act of judgment I apply a predicate to a particular subject. Apart from this act the predicate has its own intrinsic meaning; I do not change this by affirming it of a subject, but I now grasp it related to this subject, changed in its actual intentionality.

When we consider the supreme activity of God as causing creatures, this causal aspect does not add to or change the concrete perfection and reality of God. He does not gain perfection by communicating it to others. But He does communicate it, and this implies a difference in actual intentionality. As Aquinas observes, while God's knowledge in general is necessary and could not be otherwise, His "knowledge of vision," of the actually existing world, could be otherwise; in terms of this knowledge, He could know more things if we chose to make more things.¹⁸ Thus, God the creator is different from what He would have been had He chosen not to create; the difference is neither just a fiction of the human mind and a matter of extrinsic denomination nor is it an increase or modification of the divine reality in itself, but it is an objective difference in intentionality, in objectively intelligible relations.

It is possible to see in this varied intentionality involved in the activity of creating, a kind of qualitative difference or richness in the divine life, as in the creative joy that Scripture describes.¹⁹ All this, however, comes from giving, from the willingness to share, and not from an increase in divine reality coming from the creatures He makes from nothing and who depend on Him absolutely and totally for all they have. While creation makes God intelligibly different, it does not make Him better. While it involves a host of added interpersonal relations with created persons, it involves no growth in divine personality in any truly constitutive sense. In creation God intends the communication of His goodness, not its increase. If someone chooses to speak of these added relations as an increase, it seems to me that the danger of misleading is far greater than any advantage that could be derived from this way of

¹⁸ Cf. *Sum. theol.* 1, q. 14, a. 15, ad 2m.

¹⁹ Cf. Isa 65:17-19; Ps 104:31; Prov 8:30-31.

speaking; it would not, however, be necessarily false.

Relations Individually Considered

Let us look a little more closely at the objective nature of these three types of relations and their prior intelligibility in God. First of all, the relations of divine imitability, which multiply the divine ideas (in the general or broad sense), are not caused by creatures but by the activity of the divine mind; and they do not exist in creatures but in God as understood by Him.²⁰ For God perceives the shareability of His goodness prior to any created relations of dependence. Thus there is an aspect of possibility in the absolute necessity of God, not with regard to Himself but with regard to creatures, a possibility rooted in active potency.²¹

Secondly, the relation of the divine will to the divine goodness, that is, God's choosing to share His perfection and intelligibility in a particular way, is the ultimate reason for His actually being a cause and a cause of these particular creatures. The divine will here joins itself to the divine idea of a thing to be caused. Thus this intentional union is objectively prior to the existence of the creature. As Thomas observes, when the divine will has a nonnecessary relation to an object, it is the divine will which determines itself with respect to that object.²² This determination, as we observed earlier, cannot be said to be objectively nothing at all, nor merely a human projection in view of the fact that creatures are. For these creatures exist, not those, because God has so freely decided, not because they flow necessarily from His activity, or for no objectively real reason at all.

Finally, the order of the divine power and activity to the production of a creature comes from the act of the divine will, not, as is clear, from the creature which is produced.²³ Thus the order to the effect is prior to the effect, and is not just the backward reflection of human intelligence from the relation of creaturely dependence on God. The divine will being joined to the divine idea (the relation considered in the previous paragraph) gives to the divine idea an inclination or order to the effect.²⁴ It determines the divine power to a particular result.²⁵

In all three cases, we must insist, these relations are founded on the activity of God as prior to and productive of the creature, and hence cannot in their profoundest reality be merely the products of human reason, simply our own conceptualized correlatives of real creaturely dependence.

²⁰ Cf. *Sum. theol.* 1, q. 15, a. 2, ad 4m and ad 3m.

²¹ Cf. *De pot.* q. 3, a. 15, ad 11m.

²² Cf. *Sum. theol.* 1, q. 19, a. 3, ad 5m; *De pot.* q. 3, a. 15, ad 7m.

²³ Cf. *De pot.* q. 5, a. 3, ad 6m.

²⁴ Cf. *Sum. theol.* 1, q. 14, a. 8; also *Qq. quodl.* 8, a. 2.

²⁵ Cf. *De pot.* q. 1, a. 2, ad 3m; also a. 1, ad 8m.

Real Relations?

One may well ask why, with St. Thomas, we decline to call these relations "real," since they are objectively intelligible, are founded on divine action, and in many cases actually regard the creature. One reason we have already indicated, derived from what is true of real relations as they are found in creatures: these divine relations are not conditions for the existence or conservation of God's perfection. God regards creatures only to give, not to maintain or to increase His perfection. They depend on Him for their reality, He does not depend on them. But if this were the only reason for denying that these relations are real, it would largely be a matter of terminology. We could say that there are two types of real relations: one type implies dependence, the other does not.

However, there is a profounder reason for this denial, derived from what is true of a relation as such. A relationship always looks to its ultimate term, to what is in some sense absolute. When, for example, a man looks into a mirror to guide himself as he shaves, his act of seeing, though it is truly directed to the mirror, is really concerned with his face, not with the mirror. He sees his face in the mirror. This illustrates the principle that a relative that is related to another relative as such, is really related to the term of this second relative. Thus, though the man truly looks at the mirror, his act of vision is really directed not to it but to his face reflected there.

Similarly, in the matter of the divine relations which truly regard creatures, creatures are never their ultimate or absolute term. Creatures are wholly relative to God (for they depend completely on Him), and God in truly regarding this relative regards it as relative and hence ultimately and really regards that to which the relative is ordered: Himself. For the divine will regards creatures not as the end but as ordered to God as the end.²⁶ Likewise, the divine mind knows creatures as sharing the truth and intelligibility of God, not as a source and measure of divine truth. He knows them in knowing His own infinite and absolute truth as communicated in a finite and relative manner.²⁷

We may certainly call these relations of God to creatures "true" relations; for the divine knowledge, love, and power are truly extended to creatures, and this creature-regarding activity is prior to the relation of creaturely dependence on God. And if someone prefers to call these relations "real," as opposed to relations that are simply products of the human mind, there seems no compelling reason to quarrel with the terminology. But it should be made clear that such relations of God to creatures do not condition the existence of the divine perfection but only

²⁶ Cf. *Sum theol.* 1, q. 19, a. 2, ad 2m; also a. 3; *De pot.* q. 7, a. 10, ad 6m.

²⁷ Cf. *De pot.* q. 7, a. 10, ad 5m.

its communication, and that their ultimate term is not the creature but God Himself, the divine truth and goodness.

Causal Activity and Trinitarian Relations

At this point the theology of St. Thomas concerning God's causative knowledge enters a trinitarian context; for since we are dealing with divine activity that bespeaks real relations to the divine truth and goodness, we are dealing with that activity which constitutes the processions of the Word and the Holy Spirit, and with those relations which are divine Persons. God by one act knows all that He knows and in that act speaks the Eternal Word, which expresses both the Father and creatures. "Expresses" here means something different as it refers to God or to creatures; for this Word only manifests the intelligibility of God, but It both manifests and causes the intelligibility and reality of creatures.²⁸ The divine ideas also manifest and cause creatures, but there is a difference to be noted between them and the Word. *Idea* designates principally a relation to creatures, and hence is multiple in God and not personal; *Word* designates principally the relation to the one speaking, and is thus unique and personal.²⁹ The Word with regard to mere possibles, that is, nonbeings, is, like the divine idea in a general sense, manifestive and expressive only, and not creative as in the case of real finite beings.³⁰

What is true of divine knowledge is also true of divine love: God loves all that He loves in one single act by which the Holy Spirit eternally proceeds from the Father and the Son. Just as the Father speaks Himself and all creation in the Word which He generates, so He loves Himself and all creation in the Holy Spirit; for the Spirit proceeds as the love of the primal goodness according to which the Father loves Himself and all creation. Thus it is clear that relation to creatures is implied both in the Word and in proceeding Love, though only secondarily, insofar as the divine truth and goodness is the principle of knowing and loving all creation.³¹

Causal Activity and Divine Simplicity

It is this ultimate unity of principle which likewise grounds the simplicity of the divine activity. Even though God's activity regards the divine essence necessarily and created perfection freely, there are not two (or more) concrete acts, but only one, simple, indivisible divine action, since its ultimate term is one and in this term there is no basis

²⁸ Cf. *Sum. theol.* 1, q. 34, a. 3.

²⁹ Cf. *Sum. theol.* 1, q. 34, a. 3, ad 4m; also ad 1m.

³⁰ Cf. *Sum. theol.* 1, q. 34, a. 3, ad 5m.

³¹ Cf. *Sum. theol.* 1, q. 37, a. 2, ad 3m.

for specifying really distinct acts.³² The divine goodness as communicable to creatures is not really distinct from the divine goodness considered absolutely and as communicable to the Son and the Holy Spirit. The divine goodness known as communicable to creatures and willed to be so communicated is not something other than the divine essence known and loved as the very essence of God. But because it is communicable, necessarily to divine Persons and freely to created subjects, the act by which it is communicated can at once be both necessary and free, depending on the subjects in question. There is, of course, an objectively intelligible (a true) distinction within the simplicity of the divine action; otherwise divine liberty becomes a mere fiction of human intelligence. The very contingency of the creature postulates in God a nonnecessary relation to it, which supposes in the divine will a free determination and respect.³³ The ultimate foundation of all these intelligible distinctions in God is the superabundant richness of the divine goodness communicable to beings who are not God. For this grounds the distinction between the divine ideas manifesting possible creatures, a distinction made by the divine mind. And the divine ideas ground the distinction between the free and the necessary in the activity of the divine will and power, a distinction made by the divine will.

Conclusion of First Part: Divine Decrees

From the above general description of divine causal activity it is clear that the most important and decisive element in this activity is the will's choice or intention of a divine idea to be realized *ad extra*; for this intention joins the divine will with the divine knowledge and thus determines the divine power to a definite effect.³⁴ By this union with will, God's knowledge is constituted as knowing and causing a created reality to exist (and is thus not merely contemplating a possible essence); the divine idea has an order of participation to the created reality which shares actuality from God; the divine goodness is ordered to actual communication to a creature. Despite the multiplicity of expressions in the previous sentence, it is concerned with one and the same intelligible reality: God as actually causing, as actually sharing being with creatures distinct from Himself.

The union of intellect and will in God, this actual conjunction of the intention of the divine will with the divine goodness known as shareable, is sometimes called "an eternal divine decree," the infallibly efficacious determination of divine causality to produce a definite effect. Note, however (for this will be critically important in dealing with created causality and human freedom), the divine decree is not simply the

³² Cf. *Sum. theol.* 1, q. 19, a. 2, ad 4m.

³⁴ Cf. *De pot.* q. 1, a. 7, ad ult.

³³ Cf. *Sum. theol.* 1, q. 19, a. 3, ad 4m; also a. 10.

divine intention as proceeding from the divine will, but the union of this intention with the divine idea, with the divine goodness known as shareable in a distinct and definite way.

THREE PARTICULAR MODES OF DIVINE CAUSATIVE KNOWLEDGE

The conception of God as "supremely active" following the metaphysics of Aquinas leads us to affirm that by His knowledge and activity God is truly related to the created world, truly involved in the finite universe. The general description of a divine decree as a union of intellect with will needs, however, to be particularized in regard to the different modes of divine causality. This was the second question introduced at the start: How is the relationship between God and the world to be understood in the three aspects of divine activity *ad extra*: creation, conservation, and government?

Creation

Creation differs from conservation in being the first production of something from nothing, while conservation is the continued sustaining of something in existence. Creation is an absolute beginning, presupposing nothing from which the creature is made, no *terminus a quo* on the finite level. Creation is a divine communication of actuality whereby God both gives existence and produces that which receives it.³⁵ The distinction implied here between existence and the subject receiving it is central for Thomas' metaphysics of finite beings; it is the real distinction between essence and existence in actually existing finite realities. "Essence" is understood here not as a strictly defined specific nature, but as all that differentiates one existing thing from another, all that is made actual in it by existence, all that receives and exercises existence in any way, as a mirror might be said to receive and to reflect light. Essence is related to existence in Thomas' view as potency to act, as real passive capacity to actual fulfilment. While this may be very familiar to most readers, it needs to be recalled and emphasized, since it too will be of critical importance in understanding created causality and human freedom.

Since creation is an absolute beginning, the divine will regards only and immediately the divine goodness to be communicated. The not-yet-existent creature (understood not temporally but according to the natural order of causal dependence) cannot here be an actual object of the divine will. When, therefore, the divine will is thus joined immediately to the divine goodness to be communicated, when the intention to produce this created universe is united to the divine idea, when efficiency actually intends and is united with finality, then the creature

³⁵ Cf. *De pot.* q. 3, a. 1, ad 11m; q. 3, a. 1, ad 17m.

begins to be in dependence on the actual causality of God. The divine causative knowledge here knows and causes the absolute beginning of a created reality.

The dependence of the creature upon God at this moment is the relation of passive creation. Clearly it is a real relation. This relation of actual dependence is the reason in the creature why it is rather than is not; it flows not from the nature of the creature but from the causal action of God.³⁶ It is dependence on both the efficiency and the finality of God; it is both "from-ness" and "to-ness." God in creating acts on account of His divine goodness, intending this goodness to be communicated. The creature comes to be likewise on account of the divine goodness, being ordered or directed to this goodness to be received or participated in. The creature's "on account of" designates in the first place a "to-ness," a relationship to God as final cause to be shared in.³⁷ But this relationship to the end springs from the divine intention of the end, from the exercise of efficient causality by God, and hence it bespeaks a "from-ness" in the creature as well. The goodness which is actually possessed by the creature, its existence, is thus its formal participation in the divine goodness, received by reason of this divinely produced relation of passive creation.³⁸

Conservation

Conservation does not designate a new or different action in God from that of creation. It is simply the divine action continuing to communicate existence to something already produced. It coincides with creation in the first instant of the finite being's existence, for otherwise the creature would at once cease to be.

Still, there is an important difference between creation and conservation, a difference that will ultimately supply a key to the entire problem. In creation the creature is in no way an ontological object of the divine will; it simply does not exist. But in conservation the creature is truly and ontologically an object of God's will, not as an end but as ordered or directed to the end, which is the divine goodness itself. The divine will as efficient cause acts to maintain the order of the creature to the divine goodness as shareable, as final cause. Aquinas writes: "(God) wills both Himself to be and other things also; but Himself as end, other things as (ordered) to the end, inasmuch as it befits the divine goodness that other things participate in it."³⁹ Two things are here affirmed about creatures: (1) they are truly objects of the divine will, and (2) they are willed by God not absolutely as end, but relatively, as ordered to Himself as end. Two things are similarly said about the divine intention: (1) while truly regarding creatures, it ultimately actually regards

³⁶ Cf. *De pot.* q. 3, a. 3, ad 3m.

³⁸ Cf. *C. gent.* 1, 38; *Sum. theol.* 1, q. 65, a. 2.

³⁷ Cf. *Sum. theol.* 1, q. 44, a. 4.

³⁹ *Sum. theol.* 1, q. 19, a. 2.

the divine goodness itself, and (2) it does this precisely in truly regarding the creature. Hence, in this case, the divine will regards the divine goodness by regarding a creature; its ultimate intentionality is mediated by the creature. God wills His goodness *through* the creature in its relatedness to Himself as end. Thus, in this order of intention, the creature, by being truly something willed by God, enters into the union of divine will and divine intellect, the union which constitutes God's causative knowledge of the existing world. The creature itself forms part of the intentional, relational structure through which God causes and knows its continued existence.

We say, then, that the intentional union of intellect and will in God (which constitutes Him as causing and knowing the continued existence of the creature) is accomplished ontologically through the creature. This should not be understood as though the creature were a physical link or medium uniting the efficient and final causality of God, for in God these are physically and really identified. This mediation belongs rather to the same order of intentional and intelligible reality as the causal determinations of God in Himself. The creature is an object of the divine will as *ordered* to the divine goodness, and this order to the end is "intentional." The efficient causality of God (the activity of the divine will) orders the creature to the final causality of God (the divine goodness known as shareable, the divine idea), and by reason of this order to the end, the intention of the divine will is united to the divine mind, God is constituted as knowing and causing the continued existence of the creature. He infallibly and efficaciously decrees its conservation. For this divine decree is not simply the divine intention as proceeding from the divine will, but the union of that intention with the divine goodness through the creature to be conserved.

It is difficult to discover an example from human experience to illustrate this kind of intentional mediation in causing; but some parallel can be found in the relation of the external act to the internal act of choice. When I efficaciously choose to build a table, that choice becomes embodied in and operative through a series of external acts of sawing and hammering and polishing. The end here is the table to be made; my internal act of choice reaches the end, the table, only through the series of external acts. These, then, are not only the physical means of producing the table, they are the intentional means uniting my choice to its goal. Indeed, they derive all their meaning from that choice, and even their particular moral quality is a participation in the goodness or badness of that choice: for gain, or greed, or giving, or gambling. If the external act were somehow impossible, I might intend to acquire a table in some other way, but I could not efficaciously choose to build one. The external acts enter into the intentional structure of the efficacious

choice of an end. In somewhat the same way, God could not efficaciously choose to conserve a creature that did not exist; and when He does so choose, the intention of God is embodied in and operative through the creature being conserved. The divine intention is actually efficacious choice inasmuch as the creature is actually ordered to the divine goodness and thereby unites intention with goodness to be shared.

Government

The same principles apply proportionately to the government of creatures, to the divine cognitive causality of created actions. God wills creatures not only to exist, but to act in accordance with their natures. The acting creature is an object of the divine will in relation to the end, and through it the divine governing decrees are structurally completed and executed.

Two Meanings of Action

To understand in what way God knows and causes the actions of creatures, it will be necessary to say a few words about created activity. To act means always to communicate or share actuality, perfection, in some way. Material action, for example, means the communication of energy from one body to another or from one part of a body to another. In deductive mental activity, the mind's affirmation of premises is communicated to one or more conclusions. Thus, communication may be to a subject distinct from the agent, or it may be an internal communication within the acting subject. The actuality communicated always involves existence, modified or specified in some way; for existence is the actuality of every perfection, "the act of every act." Action as it is in the agent is thus its actually existing perfection, quality, or property, as actually ordered to communication, i.e., being communicated. This is the first meaning of action.

Action, furthermore, has a second meaning, the *effect* of the agent's acting, i.e., the communicated actuality (motion or state of being) as from the agent. Thus, the process of heating in the water is called the action of the fire. Affirming the truth of a conclusion is the action of a thinker doing deduction. Willing a particular means to an end as this comes from a prior willing of the end is also action in this sense (this will be analyzed in more detail below).

Causality of Created Actions

When we say that God causes the actions of creatures, we have in mind both of these meanings of action. Not only does God give to creatures and preserve their powers of acting (this is properly the work of creation and conservation); He also applies them to act, causing

actions in the first sense, and through their acting produces their effects, actions in the second sense.⁴⁰

In saying that God applies a creature to act, to communicate actuality, we do not mean that God gives the creature some further physical or concrete actuality, but that He moves the creature to order its actuality to communication. What is produced is in the order of intentionality and relation.⁴¹ This dynamism of the created agent, its inclination to communicate its actuality, is derived from the dynamism of the divine will which orders all things to participate in the goodness of God as end. This is not to say that this order or inclination is not also from the creature, from its own nature and power of acting; but created dynamism is not ultimate and always depends upon the self-sufficient dynamism of God's will. He produces it in and through the created agent.

Just as conservation coincides with creation in its first instant, but with an important difference, so this divine application to act coincides with conservation, but also with a significant difference. Conservation concerns a creature as receiving and continuing to exercise its own existence. The central relationship here is that of the creature's dependence on God as first efficient and ultimate final cause. Application concerns a creature as giving or sharing what it is receiving. The central relationship here is toward other created capacities to receive. It is not that some of the actuality of the agent is being directed to pass over into the patient, the subject of the passive potency, as water might be poured from one bucket into another, but that the agent is communicating to the patient a relationship of dependence upon God, the relationship in virtue of which the agent has its own perfection and power of acting and the patient by sharing this dependence also receives from God a similar share in the actuality or perfection had by the created agent. The disposition or capacity in a creature for receiving and exercising existence is its "form" and its relationship to God as being from Him and to Him; an agent communicates this disposition in some measure to another (or to itself in a different way) when it acts. God, as first cause, gives the actuality of this disposition, communicates the existence for which this is the capacity. Thus, as Aquinas observes, the proximate created cause determines and specifies the causal influence of God, so that the immediate effect is similar to the created instrument.⁴²

This use of "instrument" should be clearly understood. An instrument or instrumental cause is one that is applied to act, directed to cause, by the principal cause, and, through what is proper to itself, disposes for the proper effect of the principal cause. Thus, when a writer uses a pen to write a book, the pen puts ink on the paper as moved by the writer,

⁴⁰ Cf. *De pot.* q. 3, a. 7.

⁴² Cf. *De pot.* q. 1, a. 4, ad 3m.

⁴¹ Cf. *De pot.* q. 3, a. 7, ad 7m.

and this in view of the words and meaning intended by the writer. A created agent is the instrument of the divine agent, whose proper effect is *esse* or actual existence.⁴³ The created agent through what is proper to itself, its form and dynamic dependence, disposes for this effect of the principal cause.⁴⁴ Thus, in the effect what is proper to the secondary or created cause is naturally prior to what is proper to the primary cause, as disposing for it.⁴⁵ This natural priority is of the utmost importance for the reality of created causality and human liberty.

We may now describe this action from the point of view of God's causative knowledge operating through the secondary cause. This description does not outline a temporal succession, but only an order of nature. God wills a creature to act according to its nature in relation to some passive potency and ultimately in relation to Himself as the ultimate end of all being and acting. This will of God by regarding the creature in this way applies it to act, causes it to direct its active potency to communication. The divine intention is here direct and immediate by regarding the creature in relation to the end; it is the divine intention as proceeding from the divine will toward the creature, but not yet intentionally united with the divine goodness in the divine idea. The created agent in virtue of this impulse communicates perfection or actuality to a subject (either itself or something else) which is immediately present to it, by producing in this subject, through its intention under the influence of the divine efficiency, a similar form and intention to receive a participation in being from God. Through the intentional medium of the creature so acting under the influence of the divine will and impressing its likeness and dependence on what receives its action, the divine will is joined ontologically and intentionally to the divine goodness known in a divine idea, and so constitutes God as knowing and causing the action of the creature. This action comes into being or is maintained in being in dependence on the created agent and upon God. The specification of the action is the proper effect of the created agent, and is dispositive with respect to God's proper effect, existence.⁴⁶

Thus the infallibly efficacious decree of God by which He knows and causes the existing actions of secondary causes presupposes the causality of these causes and follows the intentional medium of their causality. For the conditions of causality and knowledge are the same: God causes and knows the actions of secondary causes through those causes. Their effects exist when their causality has joined intentionally in the existential order the efficient and final causality of God. Aquinas indicates that when the causal influence of God reaches a particular effect through a series of created agents, His knowledge reaches the effect through that series.⁴⁷

⁴³ Cf. *De pot.* q. 3, a. 7; *C. gent.* 3, 66.

⁴⁶ Cf. *De pot.* q. 3, a. 1.

⁴⁴ Cf. *Sum. theol.* 1, q. 45, a. 5.

⁴⁷ Cf. *C. gent.* 1, 50.

⁴⁵ Cf. *C. gent.* 2, 21.

At the moment that the creature acts, we may thus distinguish the following order of natural (not temporal) priority: (a) the causality of God conserving the creature and its power of action in existence; (b) the causality of God applying the creature to act according to its nature; (c) the ordering of the creature's power of acting to a particular action or effect; (d) that in the action or effect which is proper to the created agent, the disposition for the proper effect of God, for *esse*—actual existence; (e) the divine decree, that is, the intentional union of the divine will with the divine goodness, inasmuch as God is willing this creature as acting and as ordered to Himself—actual causative knowledge; (f) the actual extension of the divine power (the respect of the divine idea, the ordination of the divine goodness to actual participation) to this created action; (g) the existence of the created action or effect, *esse*, that which is proper to the first cause.

For purposes of simplification and clarity, this outline has isolated a single agent and patient within the universe. In actual fact, however, everything in the universe is acting in one way or another in relation to everything else and is being acted upon by everything else at the same time, according to the active and passive potencies to be found in each thing. Under the guiding influence of God as beginning and end of the totality, this mutual interaction of all created agents leads to the evolutionary development of the universe and the emergence of enormous variety and richness.

DIVINE CAUSATIVE KNOWLEDGE OF FREE HUMAN ACTS

This general exposition of divine causative knowledge is now to be applied to the particular case of created free acts. This is an attempt to answer directly the third question posed earlier: "How does God know and respond to human activity, while remaining supremely active Himself and leaving man genuinely free?" What follows is not a special theory developed to handle free acts, but a particular instance of the general theory seen here in the case of acts whose determination lies within the power of the created cause. I will present first a description of the free act and then, insofar as this regards our problem, a metaphysical analysis of its structure and its dependence on the created agent and on God.

Description of the Free Act

At the moment of free choice, man by his will and under the influence of the causal activity of God freely moves himself to some definite act. Consider the act of ordering a ham sandwich for lunch, to take a trivial but illustrative example. This act is one among several courses of action that the person has recognized as possible and in some way as desirable. He sees that he can skip lunch, or he can go to any one of a number of

restaurants; here he can order any one of the many items on the menu. His power of action, prior to his choice, is said to regard all of these possible courses "indifferently." This does not mean he is not more drawn to one than to another. Many conflicting forces can be influencing him to choose. There is the need to lose weight or to get some readily available energy; there is the closeness of this restaurant and the fine service at that one; there is the high price of this item and the good flavor of that one, and so on. Fear, desire, anger, habits, the illumination and inspiration of grace—all can be exerting some pull in the direction of one or other of these possible courses of action. But so long as many courses are seen within the power of the man to perform, none of these pulls is decisive. In this sense the will is indifferent, and the man himself as agent by his own determination settles on one of these more or less attractive possibilities.

It should be observed that the will prior to choice possesses both an active and a passive indifference. The active indifference is found in the general will of the man toward the good and in his ability to act in many different ways in accordance with that general will. But as able *to be moved* and intrinsically changed and developed by any one of these, his will has a passive indifference. To put it somewhat differently, the man through his will's general intention of the good is able *to move himself* to any one of several possible actions. Thus the will is both moving and being moved. As moving, it is active; as being moved, it is passive. And since the action to which it can move and be moved is any one of many, there is in the will both active and passive indifference. When the will actually chooses, it determines both its active and its passive indifference, to one act. In the example, before choosing, the man is actively able to particularize his general desire for the good to this choice of ordering a ham sandwich or to something else, and he is passively able to become someone ordering a ham sandwich or something else. When he chooses, he moves himself to become a person ordering a ham sandwich. Ordering the ham sandwich is the realization of that of which he was both actively and passively capable.

Analysis of the Free Act

Let us now examine the structure of this act and its dependence both upon the free agent and upon God's causative knowledge. The elements are presented in a natural order of priority, though they are all temporally simultaneous.

First, there is the activity of God conserving the human agent in being along with his power of acting.

Next, the divine will moves or applies the created agent to act, to choose freely among the various actions that are open to him. It is

important to recall that this applying movement of God designates the divine intention as proceeding from the divine will and ordering the creature to its activity; it does not designate the divine intention as terminating to the divine goodness manifested in the divine mind. This may seem more than a little technical, but it is crucial. To put it another way, this divine intention is not a divine decree definitely and infallibly causing a particular created action; it is God moving the creature to cause its action. There are two special reasons for insisting on this in the case of free acts. First, this divine influence does not determine what the choice of the creature is to be, but only that *some* choice is to be.⁴⁸ The creature *must* indeed choose; but *what* it will choose is not thereby determined. Secondly, the creature in choosing can by sin fall away from the divine order and intention contained in this influence.⁴⁹ But a divine decree, on the other hand, infallibly causes a definite action to exist.

Next (but simultaneously in being), under this influence of the divine will, the creature acts freely in the first sense of action described earlier. It freely orders its perfection (in this case, its general willing of the good) to an internal communication in a definite way. It determines its active indifference to the realization of one definite course of action. This determination implies per se no further or increased perfection in the agent's active power, but only the ordering of the perfection already possessed to communication. This is above all an event within communicable existing actuality and requires no new causal influx of God in addition to that whereby He conserves the creature in being and applies it to act without determining its power of action to one. For an agent as such is not perfected by acting (an agent as such is communicating, not receiving, perfection), and hence precisely as acting requires nothing further.

It is in this free ordering of an active power to a definite action that the liberty of the creature achieves intrinsic analogy with divine liberty. Freedom, like being, is a pure perfection. In both divine and human freedom, actuality is ordered to communication, the agent as such is not perfected, and the agent ultimately determines how its actuality is to be shared. But in attributing this kind of freedom to the creature, we are not withdrawing it from dependence on the divine causality; for in what precedes, accompanies, and follows this acting, the creature falls infinitely short of the perfection of divine liberty; all the actuality the creature has to share is a continual gift of God. And in acting the creature is not a pure agent, but is also a patient, moved and perfected

⁴⁸ Cf. *Sum. theol.* 1-2, q. 10, a. 4; *De pot.* q. 3, a. 7, ad 13m and 12m; *De malo* q. 3, a. 3, ad 5m; *C. gent.* 1, 68.

⁴⁹ This will be considered more at length below, in the section on "Sin."

by the action which results from acting (that is, by action in the second sense). This is the next element in my analysis.

The determination of active indifference to one means that the agent moves itself to a definite action so that its passive indifference is simultaneously determined to one. Here created liberty differs essentially from divine liberty. A free active potency always actuates some passive potency; the passive potency corresponding to the free creature's active potency is in the free creature itself; divine liberty, however, actuates only what is outside of or distinct from God. Although to will a particular good does not per se imply a further perfection over willing the universal good, it does imply this in a creature, since through willing a particular good it is brought nearer the end and possesses an actuation it did not previously have. Man's fundamental relationship to God undergoes some kind of change in each truly free choice, a change that may be simply an intensification. Thus, when the created will (in passive potency) is moved by itself (in act under the divine will) to will a particular good, it is disposed by what is proper to itself as a created agent, by this action in the first sense, to receive and specify what is proper to the divine agent, *esse*, existence.

Then (and this is the heart of the matter), through the created will moving itself to a determined act, the divine will (which has given all the dynamism to the created will by applying it to act freely) terminates to the divine goodness manifested by the divine mind, to the divine idea of the creature choosing in this way. And thus, through the creature freely determining itself under the divine motion, the efficiency and the finality of God are joined. He decrees the existing reality of the creature's free choice. He knows and causes it, without, however, determining it.⁵⁰

Then the causality of God, the divine power, is actually extended to this free act whose specification is from the creature.

Finally, the existence of the free act is received in the creature from God; for what is proper to the first cause is the last thing to be realized in the effect.

We may indicate the following order of elements to be found simultaneously in the one existential event of created free choice: (a) God conserves the free agent and his will in being. (b) God applies the creature to choose without determining him to one. (c) The creature freely orders his active power to one effect. (d) The passive potency of the will is determined to a definite effect. (e) The divine will is united to the divine mind; God knows and causes the free created action. (f) The divine power is extended to this created free choice. (g) The existence of the free action is received.

⁵⁰ Cf. *C. gent.* 1, 68.

Sin

This analysis, and particularly the distinction between the divine will as applying the creature to choose freely and as decreeing the existence of a determined act, is confirmed and illuminated by a consideration of the free act of sin. Sin is by no means the greatest exercise of human liberty—it is indeed a kind of slavery; but it sets in clearest relief the fact that there is something here for which the creature is primarily and fundamentally responsible.

God intends to realize in the universe the order of His wisdom—an intention which ultimately cannot be frustrated. He moves the human will in accordance with the plan of divine reason, but the human will can resist this motion and withdraw itself from this detail of the divine plan.⁵¹ The withdrawal goes contrary to the divine intention of a particular good but does not escape the universal order of God's will. For this divine order is manifold; and when the creature withdraws from one order by sinning, he enters into order again in another way—for example, through repentance or punishment.⁵²

The resulting sinful action of the will depends both on the creature and on God: on the creature for its deformity, on God for its being and actuality.⁵³ God produces the action through the creature in keeping with the dispositions which are found there. When those dispositions are proper, the intention of the first mover is realized in a perfect action. But when the creature falls away from this order of the first mover (as it can and does), a defective action results.⁵⁴ The defect is due to the creature alone and not to God, for He in no way wills sin.⁵⁵

God wills indeed to permit sin. This means, first, that the divine motion leaves it in the creature's power to fail; divine permission in this sense is not a decree, nor is it always realized, nor is it the reason why the creature fails. Divine permission means also that consequent upon the creature's failure, God produces the actuality of a defective act and orders it in some way to the manifestation of His wisdom and goodness. This is the divine permissive decree properly so called, for it infallibly causes the actuality of a sinful act which the creature intends. Thus we may speak of sinful acts as falling within the sphere of God's causative knowledge.⁵⁶

Summary of the Positive Exposition

The whole matter may be briefly summarized as follows:

a) God knows and causes all that exists outside Himself by reason of

⁵¹ Cf. *Sum. theol.* 1, q. 17, a. 1.

⁵⁴ *De malo* q. 3, a. 2.

⁵² Cf. *Sum. theol.* 1, q. 19, a. 6.

⁵⁵ Cf. *Sum. theol.* 1, q. 19, a. 9.

⁵³ Cf. *De pot.* q. 1, a. 6, ad 5m.

⁵⁶ Cf. *Sum. theol.* 1, q. 14, a. 16; see also *Qq. quodl.* 5, a. 2, where, however, his way of speaking is somewhat different.

the intentional union of His will and His intellect manifesting the divine goodness as communicable. This is a divine decree.

b) This cognitive causality implies relations in God which are not conditions for the existence of the divine perfection and whose ultimate term is God Himself, but which are nevertheless objectively intelligible, truly regard the creature, and are the conditions for the communication of divine perfection.

c) In creation, the divine intention to communicate is joined immediately to the divine idea, and the creature begins to be, in complete dependence on God.

d) In conservation, the divine intention to preserve the creature in being regards immediately the creature as ordered to the divine goodness, and through it is joined to the divine idea. The creature itself thus enters into the intentional structure of the decree by which it is conserved.

e) In government, the divine intention that the creature operate applies the creature to act and dispose for the proper effect of the first cause, existence, *esse*, and through the intentional medium of the creature acting is joined to the divine mind. Thus God decrees the existence of the action whose specification is from the creature operating according to its nature.

f) In knowing and causing the free acts of a creature, God by His will moves the creature to choose without determining it to one. Under the influence of this motion, the creature freely determines its power of acting to produce one act. Inasmuch as the divine will thus wills the creature to act freely, it is joined to the divine mind through the creature determining itself freely under the divine influence, and so God is constituted as actually knowing and causing the free actions of creatures. The existence of these actions is His proper effect; their specification is proper to the free creature.

Two Difficulties

Two difficulties or questions in particular seem to rise out of this view of God's knowledge. First, it seems to make God receive His knowledge of free acts from the creature, and hence to make Him passive and dependent upon the creature for some perfection in Himself. Secondly, it seems to destroy the eternity of divine knowledge; for God knows the free action of the creature only through the creature choosing freely at some point in time. To say that God knows this from all eternity seems to make the conditions of truth exceed the conditions of being; for we say that what is *not in existence* can nevertheless be *known infallibly*.

With regard to the first difficulty, I observe in general that God's knowledge of created free actions may be said to depend upon created

free agents in the same way that God's causality of these actions depends upon these agents. As He cannot cause a free act except through a free created agent, so He cannot know a free act of a creature except through the creature acting freely: the conditions of knowing and of causing are identical.

More particularly, it should be observed that in the solution I have proposed God receives no intelligibility from the creature. But it is in the free creature's power to determine, under the divine influence and within the limits of his nature and existential situation, in what way he will receive goodness and intelligibility from God.⁵⁷ God then knows what *is*, because He knows what He has willed to *give* according to the dispositions of the creature.⁵⁸ The creature has given Him nothing.

Finally, I may observe that although the free creature has a decisive part in determining the object of God's knowledge of vision, this does not make God passive to or dependent on the creature for any divine perfection, precisely because God is not perfected by His knowledge of the created world. He is indeed different, but not more or less perfect.

St. Thomas' response to the second difficulty is classic, and nothing that has been proposed here weakens the force of his reasoning.⁵⁹ God knows eternally and infallibly the whole sweep of temporal succession, including free acts, because His knowledge transcends the limitations of time and is immediately present to all events in their presentiality. He knows that events with reference to one another are related as past, present, and future. But with reference to Him they are all present to His nonsuccessive duration. Note that this relationship of presentiality rests upon two facts: (1) God's being and activity are without succession of before and after, and (2) things are present to God by reason of His nonsuccessive activity.

"From all eternity" does not mean an infinitely long time ago. It means in a dimension of being which totally transcends the world of becoming and passive potency and limitation, and in transcending it comprehends it and is perfectly immanent in it. At the very core of created being there is the possibility of succession, of before and after; for its essence is not existence, and each instant bears within it the absolute possibility that it may cease to be, or at least cease to be what it has been. This essential composition makes every created being subject to successive duration of some kind. Divine being at its core excludes every possibility of before and after; for God's nature is self-subsistent existence: to be infinitely, without possibility of nonbeing or increase or limitation. God freely communicates His goodness to creatures; but the divine election to communicate does not mark any designable moment

⁵⁷ Cf. *De malo* q. 3, a. 1, ad 8m.

⁵⁹ Cf. *Sum. theol.* 1, q. 14, a. 13.

⁵⁸ Cf. *De verit.* q. 23, a. 2, ad 4m.

within the divine duration before which such an election was not there. The divine duration is simply not subject to designable moments of before and after any more than is an idea or a definition; for God is His duration. Consequently, the whole world of finite being stretching endlessly onward is within God's eternal duration without bearing any proportion to it of part to whole, of lesser to greater. There is simply no common measure of time and eternity.

To approach it by way of a comparison: It is true on Mars, which is 35,000,000 miles away, that God is present there. But it is not accurate to say that God is therefore 35,000,000 miles away or that He perceives events on earth from that distance; for God transcends the limiting conditions of matter by His immateriality and is immediately present everywhere as the proper cause of existence. Hence there is no distance that can be predicated of God.

Similarly, it was true a million years ago that God's knowledge grasps every point of time, including the one in which we are now living. But it would be inaccurate to say that a million years ago God knew what was going to happen a million years later or that His knowledge reaches events across the interval of years; for God transcends the limiting conditions of time and successive being by His totally self-present actuality and is immediately present to all events past, present, and future as the proper cause of their existence. There is no "ago" that can properly modify divine being or action.

But one might refuse to admit the force of the comparison and say that divine ubiquity has God transcending only the limits of matter, but knowledge of eternal presentiality has Him transcending the limits of being, making Him now actually know something which actually now does not exist, but will exist.

In a measure, that statement is true. Divine being and activity do transcend the limits of that being which is the connatural object of finite intelligence. Our minds and intellectual activity possess an existence that is not absolute, not subsistent, not necessary. And in knowing, we achieve directly and immediately an existence which is subject to the same limitations. Existence, as we thus know it, does not absolutely exclude nonbeing, but only relatively and conditionally—while it endures. And in this "while" is contained the ever-imminent possibility of not enduring. This is what "being" means for us primarily and directly. Through reasoning and analogy we can arrive at knowledge of an existence which is absolute, subsistent, and necessary; but any effort to reduce this knowledge to a kind of immediate experience can lead only to error and delusion.

Thus, when we say God now actually knows what does not now actually exist, the two "nows" are simply and radically different. The

"now" of divine knowledge is a totally comprehensive, unbeginning, unending duration of a being who cannot not be; the "now" of creaturely existence is the indivisible moment joining and distinguishing the past and the future in the duration of a being which has at the center of its reality the constant and inescapable possibility of nonbeing.⁶⁰

The eternal God enters into a dialogue with His frail and sinful creatures. His action so transcends all the limitations of finite being that it penetrates the most intimate and personal of our acts, our free response to the divine invitation, causing all its perfection and actuality, yet leaving it truly our response, an act whose determination is ultimately our own responsibility.⁶¹

⁶⁰ R. Mulligan writes on this point: "But the 'now' which is proper to eternity and to divine knowledge is utterly timeless. The 'now' of time can be used, he [Aquinas] indicates [*Sum. theol.* 1, q. 10, a. 4, ad 2m], only as an analogue of the 'now' of eternity insofar as the 'now' of time reflects in some manner the indivisible unity of a subject" ("Divine Foreknowledge and Freedom: A Problem of Language," *Thomist* 36 [1972] 297-98). He is replying to an essay by Anthony Kenny, who argues against the presentiality of divine knowing: "Divine Foreknowledge and Human Freedom," in *Aquinas: A Collection of Essays* (London: Macmillan, 1969) 266-70.

⁶¹ To understand how this way of viewing God's knowledge of free human acts does not undermine the doctrine of providence, though it does not involve a knowledge of the free conditioned future (or futurible), see my article "The Eternal Plan of Divine Providence," *TS* 27 (1966) 27-57.