
GOD, NATURE AND EVOLUTIONARY EVIL

REVISITING THE DUAL CAUSALITY APPROACH

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Abstract

In the ongoing discussion on the model of dual causality proposed by Thomas Aquinas, two elements are usually overlooked: the understanding of the operation of Nature itself and the eschatological orientation of God's action. This article proposes to relate this discussion of the first and secondary causes to the question of original justice, that is, the existence of the world before original sin. After describing the theological challenges associated with the image of a merciful God in the context of natural selection, we will discuss the usefulness of this dual causality model in perspective of theories of modern Biology.

Keywords: evolution, divine, action, eschatology, original sin

1. The disenchantment of Nature (after Darwin) and the trouble with the image of a merciful God

One of the challenges that theodicy faces today is not so much to justify the existence of evil as such as it is to justify its special evolutionary form. In other words, the question is not why there is evil at all but rather why there is *such evil* in created nature that seems to contradict God's goodness and charity. If there indeed has to be evil, as the argument in classic reflection on evil appears to be, then why is it so cruel and gory? Why are there predators, for instance, and why is there a "struggle for survival" [1, 2] in a world which is described as "good" in the book of Genesis (Genesis 1.25, RSVCE)?

The existence of this theological problem is, in a way, confirmed by the titles of some publications, such as *Finding Ourselves after Darwin* [3], *God After Darwin: A Theology of Evolution* [4], *Ask the Beasts: Darwin and the God of Love* [5] or *God and Evolutionary Evil* [6], suggesting that there has been a fracturing of the existing view of Nature by new discoveries in biological sciences which requires a theological intervention [7]. These publications paint a picture of nature as a place of struggle and natural selection, of the survival of the strongest or best adapted, with the resulting expansion of Darwinism and its transposition to other areas of society [8]. This can be described as a

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‘disenchantment’ of Nature - previously perceived as ordered and harmonious: a reflection of the Creator. Darwinism brings a different outlook on Nature, although it is only part of a broader process of building a new view of Nature that has been slowly - too slowly - penetrating into theological reflection [9].

1.1. The problems with ‘original justice’

The classical solution - which consists in assuming that predators and suffering only appeared after original sin - does not seem to solve the problem in its entirety, and it has been noted in the history of Theology that pain and predators may have also existed in the state of original justice as Thomas Aquinas maintained [10, 11]. Moreover, the above vision does not correspond to the scientific worldview about the pre-human (and thus pre-sin) period, which proves the existence of predatory relations, death and suffering in Creation. As John Haught argues, “evolutionary science now envisages suffering and death as constitutive of Creation; so how can the wider panorama of life’s undeserved suffering make theological sense?” [12] Is this an opportunity for or a threat to science-engaged theology?

The aforementioned aporias are formulated on the basis of a specific reading of original justice in a certain ahistorical approach that runs counter to the long-standing tradition of perceiving Creation as a process (even *creatio continua*) whereby things remain *in via* in pursuit of perfection. This approach was represented by Saint Irenaeus, who saw the perfection of the original creation as a “perfection according to the measure of a particular stage” [13] rather than absolute perfection, just as a child is perfect at a given stage of his or her existence. Nevertheless, many still find it difficult to reconcile the biblical image of God as the father of Creation - guiding it towards a destination where all will be reconciled (with the wolf and lamb standing together as in Isaiah’s prophecy, which has wrongly been transposed to Paradise) - with the cruelty of some of Nature’s behaviour [14].

1.2. Attempts to provide an answer

So far, the attempts to provide an answer to the above question have come in two variants. One view is that a world founded on rivalry and suffering is the only world that could have possibly come into existence, the price thus being real existence [15, 16], whereas the other focuses on the perspective of freedom that appears where real threats exist [17, 18]. There have also been answers that emphasize man’s inability to perceive all dimensions of sense and meaning, while other authors have pointed out that only by looking at the world as being unfinished and anticipating perfection can one comprehend the presence of imperfection, and therefore also suffering [12, p. 188]. Another perspective has been provided by Eleonore Stump, who maintains that involuntary evil should be perceived as medicinal on account of the fact that God acts for the sake of good [19]. The problem with seeing something as evil stems from cognitive

limitations, as would be the case with an alien - to use E. Stump's example [20] - who thinks that a hospital is a place for inflicting suffering when he sees people walk in on their own feet and out on crutches, even though it is the treatments at the hospital that are supposed to lead to healing. This is a classic version of the Thomistic argument which suggests that a narrowed perspective of judgement - resulting from a lack of knowledge of the order of all Creation - leads one to trust in the goodness of God instead of relying on simple judgement based on superficial descriptions.

Contemporary Theology asks questions that concern not only various aspects of Evolution (such as religion as a by-product, which is a reductionist approach [21-23], the origin of man or the meaning of life) but also the meaning of evolution as a paradigm ('evolutionary theology'). Explanations that invoke the anticipatory dimension of the Universe, such as those given by Haught [12, p. 184-186], Edwards [24] or Ayala [25], attempt to demonstrate the compatibility of the evolutionary and Christian approaches, although - as J. Ratzinger and others have warned - certain interpretations of the Theory of Evolution that undermine the meaningfulness of life are contradictory to Christian ideas [26, 27].

In all these disputes, frequent references are made to the classical model of dual causality developed by Thomas Aquinas. This model seems to make a substantial contribution to our understanding of God's action in the world, protecting us against any misconceived notions of God as a cause among created causes (as discussed by Silva [28]), and thus against the temptation of adopting a 'God of the Gaps' view. At the same time, it has sometimes been challenged for failing to provide a viable answer to questions concerning God and His presence in the world. To what extent can this model be useful in theodicy, especially in the context of questions about Nature's activities (*operatio naturae*)?

In order to answer the above question, this article begins by analysing Thomas's idea of how God acts in and through the operation of Nature, because many concepts of theodicy rely on our ability to grasp these relationships. How else could one interpret Aquinas's statement that "God is the cause of the entire good done by me" (*Deus est causa totius boni operis per homines facti*)? [29]. Next, the authors will evaluate the contemporary debate on the applicability of the Thomistic model, pointing to its usefulness and importance as well as addressing another useful distinction, that is, the distinction between universal cause and particular cause. Finally, the above reflections will be applied to the evolutionary doctrine and to the possibility of any further use of Thomas's model in theodicy.

2. God acting in Nature - the Thomistic approach reconsidered

The classical answer to the question of God's action in Nature invokes the framework of the primary cause and secondary causes, which is aptly illustrated by the manner in which Thomas portrays the operation of Nature as well as

God's action in and through Nature. These concepts are relevant to the issues of attributing evil to God and of His possible responsibility for evil in Nature.

2.1. How does Nature work? Or, Aquinas on *Operatio Naturae*

Although the notion of nature is most often invoked in the context of the nature-grace debate, for Thomas this does not mean pointing to the passivity of nature but rather perceiving it as an art (*ars*) by which - as part of the divine plan - things are moved towards an end [30, 31]. Therefore, the basic observation of how nature operates is that, like art, it operates on account of something (*propter aliquid operetur*). In consequence, it is characterized by a reference to the *recta operatio naturae*, that is, by the identification of a normal course of events a departure from which may result in the emergence of monstrosities (*monstra*) [31, p. 302; 32].

At the same time, the reference to *ars* entails the need to accept nature as something on which art can operate to achieve its goal; in other words, nature prepares the 'matter' for art. On that basis, Thomas notes that the existence of God as the first cause is essential for the existence of the matter out of which forms can be distinguished [33]. Therefore, every action of Nature presupposes the existence of some matter, which means that the substance which emerges from that matter cannot freely change identity so that, to use Saint Thomas's metaphor, one finger suddenly becomes another. Nature does not change things in that manner [34].

Progress in Nature is characterized by a transition from imperfection to perfection, from incompleteness to completeness. This dynamic entails a dual kind of order: substance and completeness versus generation and time. Perfection in terms of substance and completeness is prior, and imperfection emerges in the order of their occurrence [35]. This, however, means that the above desire for fulfilment is inscribed in Nature and, thus, that Nature is not a passive reservoir but a plan to achieve perfection [36]. A characteristic feature of Nature is that it constantly strives for improvement - like a young man strives for maturity. This, in essence, is Thomas's view of the action of Nature, which constantly generates new forms and is characterized by dynamism [33, lib. 1, d. 44, q. 1, a. 1, s.c. 2].

The above transition from imperfection takes place thanks to something perfect. This stems from the fact that, as Thomas notes in his *De potentia*, the action of Nature imitates - as far as it can - God's action, a process which follows from the fact that secondary causes 'mimic' the primary cause according to their measure [37]. This is why for Saint Thomas, the action of Nature is also important in the sense that it allows one to know the future action of grace, since the latter differs from the former inasmuch as the imperfect differs from the perfect [32, lib. 2, d. 6, q. 1, a. 3, co].

2.2. How does God act in Nature?

Thomas often uses expressions such as “God [himself] working in Nature” (*ipse Deus in natura operans*) or “God works in the very working of Nature” (*in ipsa operatione naturae operatur Deus*) [33, lib. 2, d. 18, q. 2, a. 1, ad 5]. At the same time, he distinguishes between two types of divine action: *immediate*, that is, taking place - for example - through miracles, and *mediate*, that is, mediated by secondary causes, such as works of Nature [38]. This distinction makes it possible to understand a certain manner of speaking (*modus dicendi*) used in the Bible, which attributes natural effects to God “because it is he who works in every agent, natural or voluntary” [34, lib. 3, cap. 67], as supported by biblical quotations from Job 10.10-11 and Psalm 18.13. This manner of speaking shows how one should interpret certain expressions about God that appear anthropomorphic at the first glance. The question remains, however, how one should perceive the way in which God acts in nature if He “inspires . . . all in every one” (1 Corinthians 12.6, RSVCE). On what basis can acts of Nature be attributed to God as if they were acts of God?

In many of Aquinas’s statements, there is a conviction that God acts perfectly and intimately as the primary cause, since “the form of a thing is within the thing, and all the more, as it approaches nearer to the First and Universal Cause; and because in all things God Himself is properly the cause of universal being which is innermost in all things; it follows that **in all things God works intimately**. For this reason **in Holy Scripture the operations of Nature are attributed to God as operating in Nature**, according to Job 10:11: *Thou hast clothed me with skin and flesh: Thou hast put me together with bones and sinews.*” [39]

For that reason, Thomas believes that the operation of Nature takes place under the divine operation (*sub operatione divina*), by analogy with how a lower art acts under the control of a higher art. A lower art anticipates the attainment of an end which it itself is not capable of attaining without the action of a higher art that moulds things into form [33, lib. 4, d. 43, q. 1, a. 1, qc. 3, ad 4]. From this, Thomas draws the conclusion that Nature alone cannot attain what it itself desires and that it is therefore God who injects a purpose into Nature and guides Nature towards that purpose.

Since God is the cause of *existence* in all beings, He is closest to them and can act at their level [40]. Therefore, in his description of God’s action in Nature, Thomas uses the expression *secundum virtutem*, since God is the first agent who enables the operation of secondary causes, and the whole activity of Nature is attributed to divine power (*tota naturae operatio attribuitur virtuti divinae*) [41, 42]. The image used by Thomas is that of an operation of Nature whereby a plant produces another plant, even though this happens thanks to the power of the Sun. Likewise, God is the cause, and He is so directly by reason of the significance of that effect [33, lib. 1, d. 12, q. 1, a. 3, ad 4]. Thus, it is possible to interpret Paul’s statement that God inspires all works in everyone (1 Corinthians 12.6, RSVCE) [43] in the above sense rather than in an

occasionalist sense which suggests that God replaces Nature [37, q. 3, a. 7, co]. It is God's will that constitutes the root of all natural movement, therefore "there is no natural work except in God" [37, q. 3, a. 7, ad 9]. In fact, Thomas even speaks in terms of 'upholding', saying that as God acts in Nature, He holds the power of Nature, hence every natural work is upheld by God [33, lib. 2, d. 28, q. 1, a. 5, ad 1].

In addition to the above, Thomas also considers God's action in Nature from a number of other points of view which are worth noting.

Firstly, he says that God's work takes place in Nature in a manner similar to the relationship between Nature and art. Here, the operation of art presupposes the operation of Nature, and it is through that operation that Nature manifests itself. The example given by Thomas in *De potentia* describes how fire softens the iron so that it can be formed into different shapes [37, q. 3, a. 7, s.c. 2]. The first cause operates (*operatur*) through the action of secondary causes by analogy with the manner in which art operates thanks to Nature: the former cannot function without the latter; what is more, it attempts to imitate it. In the same manner, secondary causes imitate the first cause.

Another way in which the first cause operates is manifested in the fact that it excites Nature to act, which is why the action that results from such excitation is attributed to the first cause [44]. Thomas uses the verb *excitare* and employs an analogy which reflects the convictions of his time (and those of antiquity) with regard to medicine, namely that nature itself cures illnesses and that the role of a physician is to remove the obstacles that inhibit Nature's action [45]. Since the principles of life are found in Nature, the role of any agents acting from without is to release Nature's power [34, lib. 2, cap. 75, n. 15; lib. 4, cap. 72, n. 2]. Thomas sees the application of this formula in acting under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit as the one to whom primary action is attributed. In fact, this is how he explains Paul's conviction that Christ speaks in him: "Therefore, whatever a man says under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, the Holy Spirit is said to do. Therefore, the Apostle, because he was moved by Christ to say this, attributed it to Christ as to the principal cause, saying, **Christ who speaks in me.**" [29, c. 13, l. 1, n. 520]

The first cause operates by **moving** the **secondary causes**. Consequently, in the very operation of Nature, the operation of divine power also takes place "just as the operation of an instrument is effected by the power of the principal agent" [37, q. 3, a. 7, ad 3]. For that reason, it comes as no surprise that both Nature and God work towards the same end on account of that very order of reference of the first cause and secondary causes. At the same time, God is the first object of appetite and the first willer [34, lib. 3, cap. 67, n. 5], which is why subsequent causes act by the power of those 'prior' to them - as exemplified by both Nature (i.e. the dependence of natural phenomena on the movement of heavenly bodies) and human activity (i.e. the relationship between an architect and a craftsman working under his direction) in Thomas's view of the world. Hence, Thomas believes that the principal mover is more of a cause than the instrument that fulfils the former's purpose.

While the action of God as the first cause demands secondary causes, it may sometimes produce the same effect without involving the latter (as in the case of miracles *praeter naturam*) [46]. Such acts are “things according to Nature, [but] not performed in the way Nature does, as for a sick man to be healed immediately, when one’s hands are placed on him; for Nature produces the same effect step by step” [29, cap. 12, l. 4]. While such things are possible, as Thomas observed, God nevertheless prefers to act by means of Nature so as to preserve order in things [37, q. 3, a. 7, ad 16]. The fact that God acts as the first cause, omitting secondary causes, does not mean that ‘order’ is ignored; this takes place with regard to a specific nature rather than Nature as such. *Praeter naturam* is the most characteristic manner of God’s ‘miraculous’ activity.

However, this relationship between the first cause and secondary causes must not lead to us judging God’s power through the lens of what a secondary cause can or cannot accomplish [33, lib. 1, d. 42, q. 2, a. 3, co]. Among the things that should only be judged in reference to direct divine action, Thomas mentions the creation of the world, the creation of the soul and the glorification of the soul. In this context, he also introduces the terms ‘divine superior cause’ (*causa superior divina*) and ‘intermediate secondary cause’ (*causa secunda media*).

As it emerges from the above description, the first cause does not compete with secondary causes in its action; on the contrary, it is an intimate relationship that empowers secondary causes to act. While it normally operates through secondary causes [47], the first cause can also produce certain effects without their involvement [48]. Such operation, however, is not an interventionist action that presupposes a prior absence; instead, it is miraculous in character and, as such, involves a different manner of producing an outcome [49]. In this sense, as Ignacio Silva explains, God as the first cause “is said to be the cause of everything’s action inasmuch as He gives everything the power to act and preserves that power in being . . . , and applies it to action inasmuch as by His power every other causal power acts” [50].

2.3. “Groaning in travail” (Romans 8.22) and God’s merciful action in Nature

Among his attempts to explain the existence of physical evil in the context of original justice, Saint Thomas also proposes an eschatological perspective developed around Paul’s view of a creation that groans in travail (cf. Romans 8.22, RSVCE). The first cause guides the entire created world towards an end that takes into account the nature of every being. Therefore, in his commentary on the Letter to the Romans, Aquinas considers different types of ‘creation’ (the just man, sensible creation, insensible creation) and ponders on what it means for Creation to be subjected to vanity. In his view, God wishes to guide Creation to the freedom of glory, and thus to glorious renewal, and the way towards that end is precisely by being subjected to vanity. Thomas understands this as ‘changeability’, as passing, and recognizes the associated suffering that comes from the tension between the general nature of things and

the particular nature of a being. ‘Groaning in travail’ is meant to express something that is contrary to one’s will [51]. This refers to all Creation, including heavenly bodies, and travail means turning towards renewal. The pain comes from the postponement of glory rather than from evil as punishment alone, the reason for such postponement being the fact “that it is necessary for us to suffer with Christ in order to reach the fellowship of his glory” [51, n. 652].

This eschatological view allows Thomas to understand the perfection of the originally created world not in an absolute sense (*ad omnia individua*) but with respect to a particular stage (*ad species*). One must not expect, says Thomas in *De potentia*, that all effects of natural causes were perfect; instead, perfection was inherent in the causes from which perfect things could later come to be [37, q. 3, a. 10. ad 2]. This view is very similar to that represented by Saint Irenaeus.

God’s action is evident in an ordination towards an end that is proper to Nature and stems from being ordered by the One who shaped it so that, instinctively as it were, things are spontaneously moved towards that end [33, lib. 1, d. 43, q. 2, a. 1, co]. It is therefore not surprising that, as Thomas argues, Nature intends good in all its works [52]. Moreover, since the primary effect of an action is attributed to a greater extent to the first mover towards that end than to the instruments [41, cap. 10], the operation of Nature is attributed to the first cause [34, lib. 3, cap. 24, n. 5]. For Thomas, this divine action that guides creation towards an end - by subjecting it to vanity - is a work of mercy because it is directed towards the good of all, saving creation from evil and endowing it with ‘greater’ good than before the Fall.

Here, however, the question arises: if God is omnipotent, why can He not do the same without subjecting creation to vanity? It seems that for Aquinas, the key to answering this question is the prospect of a good that would not exist in the absence of a certain evil: if there was no danger, then there would be no virtue of valour, either. Therefore, if God allows a creature to be subjected to futility, it is for the sake of the greater good, not because there is no other way. In the *Summa Contra Gentiles*, Thomas emphasizes that since there are reasons behind God’s will and since God’s willing is therefore not a matter of arbitrary decision (as late medieval voluntarism would have it), the good must be accepted as the motive for God’s action, even if epistemologically man does not have a full view of the good of the whole (*bonum ordinis*) at this stage of life.

Still, does the concept of the first cause and its importance to secondary causes not entail God’s responsibility for the wrongdoings of created causes? By introducing the distinction between *potestas* and *voluntas*, Thomas explains how the first cause is present in evil deeds: the desire to hurt comes from Creation, whereas the power to hurt - even if such action is detrimental to Creation - comes from the first cause. God puts a limit on the will or desire to inflict harm, but He does not revoke the capacity to act, which is in itself good but can be deformed by creatures. This applies to both moral and physical evil: although the manner in which evil takes place is obviously different in the two cases, Thomas analyses them in metaphysical terms. This is why God is said to ‘permit’ harm rather than inflict it [38, cap. 3, lect. 2]. For Aquinas, therefore, God is not the

cause of any evil suffered; on the contrary, evil is a by-product of the action of the good God. As Brian Davies notes, “God can make a world that contains no evil suffered. But . . . God cannot make a material world such as ours without material agents interacting and causing damage to each other.” [48, p. 70] In that manner, God is ‘causally constrained’ as a result of the distinction between *potentia Dei absoluta* and *potentia Dei ordinata*: this is not a weakness in God’s omnipotence but a consequence of God’s prior free action whereby He chooses the path towards an end.

2.4. The first cause as the universal cause

In order to understand the dual causality model in all its aspects, it is worth referring to the *Summa Contra Gentiles* (book 2, chapter 15), where Saint Thomas describes God’s action as the universal cause. From this, Aquinas draws a conclusion about God’s omnipresence (*ubiquitas*), for as an individual cause is to an individual effect, so is the universal cause to its effect, and thus the universal cause must be present with every being. Nonetheless, this is not a premise for Thomas to accept deism, which could be implied by some passages that speak of Heaven as God’s abode [34, lib. 3, cap. 68], such as Isaiah 66.1 or Psalm 115.16. God does not merely act upon the most proximate beings, His power waning at each subsequent level; on the contrary, His power reaches all, even the smallest beings. He is directly present in them, but He does not deprive the causes of being true causes. Being the ‘beginning’ of movement does not limit His presence to a certain class of beings but shows Him as the universal cause of every being. This has its metaphysical justification: since God has no parts and cannot be divided, He is whole everywhere.

Thomas observes that effects share some general characteristics and that since the order of effects corresponds to the order of causes, there must be a reference to the universal cause. He invokes the image of a king as the universal cause of governance in his kingdom, sitting above the ministers who act in the different regions of his territory, and that of the sun as the universal cause of creation and growth in things: “As the end of a thing corresponds to its beginning, it is not possible to be ignorant of the end of things if we know their beginning. Therefore, since the beginning of all things is something outside the Universe, namely, God, it is clear from what has been expounded above (Q. 44, AA. 1, 2), that we must conclude that the end of all things is some extrinsic good. This can be proved by reason. For it is clear that good has the nature of an end; wherefore, a particular end of anything consists in some particular good; while the universal end of all things is the Universal Good; Which is good of Itself by virtue of Its Essence, Which is the very essence of goodness; whereas a particular good is good by participation. Now it is manifest that in the whole created Universe there is not a good which is not such by participation. Wherefore that good which is the end of the whole universe must be a good outside the Universe.” [39, q. 103, a. 2]

3. The advantages and shortcomings of the thomistic distinction

The understanding of the relationship between the first cause and secondary causes that we have outlined above has been the subject of some controversy. Therefore, it is worth analyzing briefly both the advantages that it brings to the religion-Science dialogue, especially as regard the question of the existence of evil in Creation, and the reservations - the most recent ones in particular - that stem from the juxtaposition of Thomas's view with the Theory of Evolution.

3.1. The advantages

Some authors have emphasized the benefits of the distinction between the first cause and secondary causes in that it establishes a clear framework for the debate on the relationship between God and Creation, showing that God is not merely one of the many causes that exist in the world. However, this division between the planes on which the first cause and secondary causes operate was, as in the Christological dogma, introduced in order to merge them 'without mixing and without separating'. The dual causality model makes it easier to pose questions regarding the meaning of, for instance, Creation in a correct manner that does not involve searching for what happened at the beginning of time. God does not contend with created causes but is their ontological root. This means that in any act of 'learning', there is a hidden theological and metaphysical dimension, irrespective of any declared methodological naturalism.

Another benefit of adopting the dual causality model is the ability to break free from the extrinsicist view. The relationship between the first cause and secondary causes is not physical but metaphysical, which invalidates the 'God of the gap' argument - an entirely modern invention that, notably, did not emerge among the Scholastics.

At the same time, however, Aquinas's model is not deistic, either, since it presupposes an active presence of God: an intimate and non-competitive relationship between the two types of causes [53].

The model in question also makes it easier to grasp the rectitude (*rectitudo*) of the state of original justice versus sin by helping us depart from a certain (Platonist) framework according to which in the state of perfection - conceived of as completeness - natural processes relied on the correct atonement of secondary causes with the first cause, on the subordination of secondary causes to the first cause as a way of bringing order to things.

In his reflection on Aquinas's philosophy, Davies also points to other consequences of accepting the notion of the first cause [48, p. 181]. He observes that with God being the first cause, the perspective of moral judgment is put aside: one cannot blame God for evil because He is not a moral subject and instead gives meaning to action. The perception that the first cause acts on the same terms as created causes (as opposed to the view that God is His action)

brings with itself the temptation to make moral judgments about God and to interpret His decisions in such terms.

The usefulness of the model in question was also recognized by Denis Edwards, who considered this distinction to be the foundation of the relationship between Science and religion [54], although he believed that God can only act through secondary causes. In that manner, he was trying to exclude an interventionist perception of God's action, although he also narrowed Aquinas's model in doing so.

3.2. *The shortcomings*

Critics of the dual causality model can be divided into two groups. The first group are those who are dissatisfied with the fact that the metaphysical view of the relationship says little - in a positive sense - about the nature of God's action in the world. While it divides the spheres of activity and avoids clashes between them, this view fails to explain what it essentially means to be the first cause. This is the price to be paid for separating God's causation from that of Creation, and Thomas's model appears to shed little light on God's life as a person. This is the position taken by Thomas Tracy, who believes that the dual causality model does not show God as being personally involved in the lives of human beings and thus responding to human dramas in history [55].

Those in the second group focus their criticism on the search for a causal joint and reference to God's transcendence, raising questions about the rationale for the use of analogy by advocates of the dual causality model and the resulting aporias. The critics' argument is not about rejecting analogy as such but about the arbitrary - as they believe - use of analogy in thinking about the first cause. It is also argued, as Philip Clayton [56] or Keith Ward [57] do, that viewing God's action in terms of a first cause inevitably leads to some form of occasionalism or excludes special divine action, as emphasized by N. Murphy [58]. These objections, however, fail to take into account the analogical and univocal character of the adjudication of God's causality by juxtaposing them on one plane.

The challenges of this kind of argumentation against dual causality have been analysed by Simon Kittle [59], who notes that "while the primary/secondary causation distinction may help us to understand how God could be *intimately involved with* every aspect of the unfolding creation, it provides no help in understanding **how God might guide the unfolding of Creation**, nor how God could be **responsive to** creation" [59, p. 248]. This appears to show that while the distinction is useful when one attempts to understand God's action, it nevertheless reinforces the rigid and fixed view that underlines the integrity of the world but is not conducive to a better understanding of the implementation of the divine purpose, which is important in the context of Evolution. As Kittle argues, the extent of possible divine action changes in a deterministic scenario (where God only changes the initial conditions), whereas in an indeterministic scenario, there appears a causal joint

in the form of a ‘chancy’ event [59]. Again, however, this happens at the expense of reducing the first (or primary) cause to one of the many causes in the world, limited by the freedom of secondary causes. Thomas’s distinction between these two types of causes in the emergence of evil - whereby the privation of good comes from Creation - shows that the way for the first cause to act is to increase goodness.

In the application of the dual causality model, there have also been far-reaching reinterpretations of the Thomistic doctrine motivated by the desire to avoid the idea of the intervening God. This is particularly evident in those theories of divine action which attempt to demonstrate that God cannot act without secondary causes, as shown in Denis Edwards’s approach. The problem, however, is that these causes are often equated with laws of Nature, as William R. Stoeger [60] suggested, rather than with the created world at large [61].

Another criticism of this model is based on the conviction that it makes the operation of the primary cause redundant by arguing that everything can be explained by created causes. This problem stems not only from the very notion of ‘cause’ but also from the manner in which one effect can be caused by two causes in all fullness.

What is often forgotten, as Alfred J. Freddoso has pointed out in the past, is the fact that “efficient cause is a principle that directly (*per se*) communicates being (*esse*) - either substantial being or accidental being - by means of action on a patient” [62]. Being a principle does not mean physically controlling processes; instead, it means acting in a manner that can be rejected by secondary causes, in which case any resulting failures cannot be blamed on the primary cause. Therefore, God is not merely a curler, as Clark and Koperski put it [63], that is, someone who helps creation from without by clearing the path ahead, but rather someone who empowers Creation to act.

4. Conclusions

The distinction between the primary cause and secondary causes entails certain difficulties at the level of imagination since it challenges the conviction that God exists beside Nature or as part of it and, consequently, that He intervenes in the natural order. Thomas proposes a different view: a view that differentiates to combine, showing God’s transcendence as a transcendence that justifies the immanent action of Creation. The order of secondary causes alone cannot explain phenomena, because it does not offer a complete picture. What it provides is merely a ‘slice’ of the chain of causes: according to the principle of ‘sufficient reason’, it focuses on the piece that is key to explaining the phenomenon, leaving out other pieces without which that key piece would not exist. One can explain the operation of a TV set and the interrelation of its parts only by assuming that it is connected to a mains outlet, an external power source, even though the explanation need not mention that fact to be functionally intelligible. Therefore, the order of secondary causes needs God in order to exist

and operate, which is why modern attempts to 'reduce' and ignore God are highly reductionist and hasty.

The problem is that we imagine a secondary cause as existing 'beside' the first cause, whereas for Aquinas, the first cause acts 'through' secondary causes rather than 'beside' them. As a result, methodological naturalism, which only relies on the operation of secondary causes in its explanations, does not have an absolute character that would exclude the existence of a first cause; quite the contrary, it demands the inclusion of a metaphysical approach [64]. Hence, reducing God to a 'natural mechanism' gives rise to questions that stem from the incorrect formulation of the problem due to the error of metaphysical reductionism.

The question is whether Thomas's distinction can be helpful in contemporary debates about physical evil in evolution and about the manner in which the world has been developing. This distinction avoids occasionalism on the one hand and metaphysical naturalism on the other, outlining a framework for a proper account of divine action in Nature. In order to realize the freedom of creatures, God does not have to relinquish His providential care for the world or be surprised by accidental events that would be beyond His control [65]. In pointing out that the first cause not only gives and sustains power but also applies it to the cause and achieves effects which go beyond that natural power, Thomas does not relinquish any metaphysical element of the doctrine of God. On the contrary, he points not only to the fact that God is the ground of being but also to His active guidance in the history of creation. The presence of evil - especially physical evil - in Evolution can be understood not only in terms of freedom (which has a price that consists in allowing evil as its logical consequence, although without undermining God's power as kenotic theologies do) but also, from an eschatological perspective, in terms of the implementation of a broader design that leads to the fulfilment of God's plan of salvation [66, 67].

Our primary aim in this article, besides offering a comprehensive summary of the existing debate on the usefulness of the dual causality model, which has been questioned by some thinkers, is to propose a new interpretation of Thomas's distinction between the first cause and secondary causes. We believe that the richness of the interplay between primary and secondary causes may be expressed, on the one hand, by demonstrating that the first cause is necessary so that contingent beings can be determined or actualized, and on the other, by referring to the purpose behind the first cause [68]. Thus, if the teleological perspective is key to understanding God's action in Nature, then theodicies that stop at the 'here and now' are incapable of capturing the full picture. In other words, if God is the final cause and ultimate end of Creation, then Creation remains indeterministic at this stage of its development and thus incomplete in relation to that full picture. In consequence, what matters is not the distinction between the first cause and secondary causes but the scale in which we look at things: large or small. If, as we have proposed in this article, we interpret the dual causality model from the eschatological perspective, that is, the

perspective that looks at ‘why’ creation exists, then it becomes necessary not so much to detect the first cause among secondary causes as to take into consideration the question of divine providence. It is providence that leads created things to their end, although it does so while respecting their freedom, manifesting itself through that freedom rather than in opposition to it. These are not two separate worlds - that of the first cause and that of the secondary causes; instead, one presupposes the other. In light of the above, the first cause has temporal effects that point back to it, but their full meaning - and thus the meaning of, for example, evolutionary evil - may only be fully explicated from the perspective of the attainment of the ultimate end of Creation. The most important thing, as we have tried to demonstrate, is not the theory of causality itself but rather the manner in which God acts in Nature.

In addition to the above, while the Thomistic answer to the ‘evolutionary’ suffering takes into consideration the freedom of Creation, it also encourages a broader look at all the manifestations of good [69]. There would have been no courage if there had been no threat, and many advances in intelligence, strength or sensitivity would not have been achieved if there had been no evolutionary costs - such as the presence of predators. God guides creation towards an end, so the presence of adversity or evil has its justification on account of ‘good’ [70]. This was the case in the time of original justice, when the presence of physical evil did no harm; in fact, overcoming evil with rectitude (*rectitudo*) was a means of reaching the beatific vision. The path towards that end, which also leads through suffering and through the presence of physical evil, is part of the *ordo* of Creation, and the aporias that emerge are often rooted in the fact that we confuse mercy with pity, since the former is associated with a greater good that stems from evil being permitted [71]. According to Aquinas’s logic, “it is proper for a governor with foresight to neglect some lack of goodness in a part, so that there may be an increase of goodness in the whole” [72].

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