

A puzzle about Aquinas' views

Aquinas evidently wants to endorse both of the following claims:

Control: God has complete control over every aspect of the future of the universe.

So he says, for example:

“He orders all things, no matter how detailed they may appear; and whatever things perform any action, they act instrumentally, as moved by Him. And they obediently serve as His ministers in order to unfold in things the order of providence, which has been thought out ... from eternity. But, if all things able to act must serve as ministers to Him in their actions, it is impossible for any agent to block the execution of divine providence by acting in opposition to it. Nor is it possible for divine providence to be hindered by the defect of any agent or patient.” (§94)

But he also wants to endorse:

Freedom: People have genuine free will, and genuine responsibility for their actions.

So, for example:

“Moreover, every sin stems from a defect in the proximate agent, and not from the influence of the primary agent ... But the proximate agent of human sin is the will. Therefore, the defect of sin comes from the will of man and not from God Who is the primary agent; from Him, however, comes whatever pertains to perfection of action in the sinful act.” (§162)

The puzzle is: how could the sin be “not from God” if God “orders all things, no matter how detailed they may appear”?

Three responses to the puzzle:

- (1) Deny *Freedom*. This is the response of Edwards, and of Calvinists.
- (2) Deny *Control*. This is the response of 'open theists.'
- (3) A middle ground: Molinism.

Molinism is named after a 16th century Spanish Jesuit, Luis de Molina. Molina thought that all of the facts about the world could be split into three categories:

- (a) Necessary truths (which God knows by natural knowledge)
- (b) Contingent truths which God brings about (which God knows by free knowledge)
- (c) Counterfactuals of freedom, which are contingent, and which God knows, but which God does not make true (which God knows by 'middle knowledge')

An example of a counterfactual of freedom:

Were I to go to a pub after class, I would order a real ale.

Molina thought that many truths of this sort are true independently of God's will; but they are genuinely true and God does know them. So, knowing them, God can arrange the world in the best possible way given these counterfactuals of freedom.

Is this a middle ground of the sort that Aquinas seemed to want?