

CHAPTER 2

PROVIDENCE AND CAUSALITY: ON DIVINE INNOCENCE

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I

I shall begin with Heidegger at his most, if not oracular, at least plangently ominous:

So kann, wo alles Anwesende sich im Lichte des Ursache-Wirkung-Zusammenhangs darstellt, sogar Gott für das Vorstellen alles Heilige und Hohe, das Geheimnisvolle seiner Ferne verlieren. Gott kann im Lichte der Kausalität zu einer Ursache, zur *causa efficiens*, herabsinken. Er wird dann sogar innerhalb der Theologie zum Gott der Philosophen, jener nämlich, die das Unverborgene und Verborgene nach der Kausalität des Machens bestimmen, ohne dabei jemals die Wesensherkunft dieser Kausalität zu bedenken.¹

There is a profound and disturbing truth in these lines, one in fact of almost inexhaustible relevance for the theologian, but one of which far too few theologians typically take heed. This is hardly surprising, really. Perhaps the most difficult discipline the Christian metaphysical tradition requires of its students is the preservation of a consistent and adequate sense of the difference between primary and secondary causality, or between the transcendent and the contingent, or even between – to use Heidegger’s idiom in a setting to which he would think it inappropriate – the ontological and the ontic. It is a distinction so elementary to any metaphysics of creation that no philosophical theologian consciously ignores it; and yet its full implications often elude even the most scrupulous among us. This is no small matter; for the theological consequences of failing to observe the proper logic of divine transcendence are invariably unhappy, and in some cases even disastrous. Consider, for instance, that most cherished axiom of Reginald Garrigou-Lagrange: ‘God determining or determined: there is no other alternative.’² This is a logical error whose gravity it would be difficult to exaggerate. It is a venerable error, admittedly, adumbrated or explicit in the arguments of even some of the greatest theologians of the Western Church (certain of Augustine’s anti-Pelagian writings come troublingly to mind); but an error it remains. Applied to two terms within any shared frame of causal operation, between which some reciprocal real relation obtains, such a formula is perfectly cogent; but as soon as ‘God’ is introduced as one of its terms, it is immediately rendered

vacuous. If divine transcendence is an intelligible idea, it must be understood according to a rule enunciated by Maximus the Confessor: whereas the being of finite things has non-being as its opposite, God’s being is entirely beyond any such opposition.³ God’s being is necessary, that is, not simply because it is inextinguishable or eternally immune to nothingness, but because it transcends the dialectic of existence and non-existence altogether; it is simple and infinite actuality, utterly pure of ontic determination, the ‘is’ both of the ‘it is’ and of the ‘it is not’. It transcends even the distinction between finite act and finite potency, since both exist by virtue of their participation in God’s infinite actuality, in which all that might be always supereminently *is*. God is absolute, that is to say, in the most proper sense: he is eternally ‘absolved’ of finite causality, so much so that he need not – in any simple univocal sense – determine in order to avoid being determined. His transcendence is not something achieved by the negation of its ‘opposite’.

It could, in fact, be argued that the great ‘discovery’ of the Christian metaphysical tradition was just this: the true nature of transcendence. When, in the fourth century, theology took its final leave of all subordinationist schemes of Trinitarian reflection, it thereby broke irrevocably with all those older metaphysical systems that had attempted to connect this world to its highest principle by populating the interval between them with various intermediate degrees of spiritual reality. In affirming that the Persons of the Trinity are coequal and of one essence, Christian thought was led also to the recognition that it is the transcendent God alone who gives being to creation; that he is able to be at once both *superior summo meo* and *interior intimo meo*; and that he is not merely the supreme being set atop the summit of beings, but is instead the one who is transcendentally present in all beings, the ever more inward act within each finite act. And it is precisely *because* God is not situated within any kind of ontic continuum with the creature that we can recognize him as the ontological cause of the creature, who freely gives being to beings. True divine transcendence, it turns out, is a transcendence of even the traditional metaphysical demarcations between the transcendent and the immanent. At the same time, the realization that the creature is not, simply by virtue of its finitude and mutability, alienated from God – at a tragic distance from God that the creature can traverse only to the degree that everything distinctively creaturely within it is negated – was also a realization of the true ontological liberty of created nature. If God himself is the immediate actuality of the creature’s emergence from nothingness, and of both the essence and the existence of the creature, then it is precisely through becoming what it is – rather than through overcoming those finite

'*idiomata*' that distinguish it from God – that the creature truly reflects the goodness and transcendent power of God.

This logic should always be kept prominently, even obtrusively in mind whenever we attempt to speak intelligibly of divine providence (to arrive at last at my topic); for if providence is in any way a meaningful concept – if, that is, it means something more than simple determinism – it must concern a species of divine action towards creatures that truly remains a work of primary causality while also truly permitting secondary causality a real (if utterly contingent) autonomy. If in any measure this boundary is breached, however – if in any way the autonomy of contingent causes must be denied, qualified, evaded or mitigated, in order to avoid any 'conflict' with the infinite sufficiency or absolute sovereignty of the primary cause – then all talk of providence is rendered perfectly otiose. The minimal – if not yet sufficient – condition for any coherent account of God's providential activity in time must be something like Thomas's distinction between what God directly and of his nature wills, on the one hand, and what he does not will but nevertheless permits, on the other. Without such a distinction, one is forced to imagine the drama of divine grace and creaturely freedom as in some sense a competition or rivalry between divine and human wills – though, of course, a competition that, through the sheer mathematics of the infinite and the finite, God has always already won. Thus, for instance, one cannot grant that John Calvin had any authentic doctrine of divine providence, however often he may have spoken of it; for he quite explicitly and peremptorily denied the distinction between divine will and permission,⁴ and so cannot be said to have understood by 'providence' anything other than absolute divine determinism. It is therefore a matter of indifference, really, that Calvin and his Reformed colleagues were able and willing to draw some kind of distinction between primary and secondary causality; for apart from any proper doctrine of divine permission, secondary causality appears as nothing but a modality of primary causality, by which the sole determining cause of all events works out its *positive* decrees among creatures.

It would be far too easy, however, to hold up Calvin as a cautionary epitome here: in part because of the luminous clarity of his prose (which leaves little room for the cloudier kinds of ambiguity) and in part because of the guileless crudity of his understanding of divine sovereignty. He was hardly unique for his time, though; he was simply the most pitilessly consistent of the theologians of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries – a period when metaphysical subtlety seems to have been at its lowest ebb throughout the Christian world – and the one least susceptible to any tendency towards decent embarrassment at the rather ghastly implications

of his own thought. A more interesting example of the decline of any meaningful doctrine of providence in early modern theology, it seems to me, can be found in the Baroque 'commentary Thomism' of Domingo Bañez, Diego Alvarez, John of St Thomas, and others – a tradition that continued, principally among the Dominicans, into the twentieth century, in the writings of Garrigou-Lagrange and Jean-Hervé Nicolas, and that is currently enjoying a minor (if undoubtedly transient) revival in the thought of a small number of contemporary Thomists. The particular fascination this line of Catholic thought has for me lies in the irreconcilable tensions it comprised within itself. For the Dominicans, unlike the Calvinists, remained committed to maintaining a genuine qualitative distinction between primary and secondary causes, of a sort that would allow no conflict between the two; and their total failure in this regard, as well as their almost poignant inability to recognize that they had failed, reveals a very great deal about the state of Christian metaphysics at the dawn of modernity. It also demonstrates, moreover, just how difficult it is, even for those who adhere most fiercely to the traditional metaphysical *language* of divine transcendence, to master the metaphysical *logic* of divine transcendence. And nowhere was this 'traditional Thomist' failure more resplendently obvious than in the 'Bañezian' concept of the *praemotio physica*: an irresistible divine movement of the creature's will that in no way violates the creature's own freedom. I do not have any interest, I should say, in wandering through the labyrinth of the '*de auxiliis*' controversies, and I am perfectly indifferent to the question of whether there is any actual warrant for the idea of the *praemotio* in Thomas's writings.⁵ My interest in the matter is bloodlessly clinical. To me, the *praemotio* is a perfect specimen of a deformation of theological reason that seems especially characteristic of the modern age, both early and late: not necessarily a conscious denial of any of classical Christianity's claims regarding God's nature, but rather a far more general and destructive forgetfulness of the true meaning of those claims – one that renders either their denial or their affirmation largely irrelevant.

II

The concept of physical premotion is not terribly difficult to grasp.⁶ It is a device intended, in principle, to safeguard a proper understanding of divine transcendence and omnipotence (though, in fact, it accomplishes precisely the opposite). It is called 'physical' in order to make clear that it is not merely a moral premotion, which would act only as a final cause upon the

rational will; it is a work of real efficient agency on God's part.⁷ As a *pre-motion*, its priority is one not of time, but only of causal order. As God is the primary cause of all causing – so the argument goes – he must be the first efficient cause of all actions, even those that are sinful;⁸ and yet, as he operates in a mode radically transcendent of the mode of the creature's actions, he can do this without violating the creature's freedom. From eternity, God has infallibly decreed which actions will occur in time, and he brings them to pass either by directly willing them or by directly permitting them. Nor is divine permission in any way indeterminate, such that God would have to 'wait upon' the creature's decisions, for then God's power would be susceptible of a moral or epistemic pathos;⁹ rather, his is an eternal and irresistible 'permissive decree', which predetermines even the evil actions of creatures.¹⁰ God, however, is not the cause of evil; such is the natural defectibility – the inherent nothingness – of finite spirits that they cannot help but err if not upheld in the good by an extraordinary grace, and so if God withholds this grace they will, of their own nature, infallibly gravitate towards sin; and the will towards evil must, then, be ascribed entirely to the creature.¹¹ There is no injustice in this, moreover, inasmuch as God is not obliged to supply the creature with any grace at all; and so God remains innocent of any implication in the creature's sin, even though he has irresistibly predetermined in every instance that the creature will commit *this* sin.¹²

As for human freedom, the argument continues, it is in no wise abrogated by the *praemotio*. The proper definition of a free act is one that is not *contingently* determined, for an effect is deemed necessary or contingent only in regard to its proximate cause; hence, even if an act is determinately present in its primary cause, so long as it is contingent as regards its antecedent secondary causes, it is by definition free. Logically the creature could act otherwise, though in fact this possibility will never – can never – be realized; for though the creature's act is contingent in its own mode, it is necessary as eternally decreed by God. That is, it is not necessary in a 'divided sense' (which would be the case only if the creature's potentiality for doing otherwise simply did not exist), but is necessary only in a 'composed sense' (which is to say, necessary only in the sense that the creature cannot actually do otherwise than it is doing – which God has irresistibly predetermined).¹³ It is not a physical necessity, therefore, but a necessity of 'supposition'; for it lies within God's omnipotence irresistibly to predetermine an effect *as* a contingent effect. In the case of the rational creature, God infallibly causes him to act through his own intellect and will.¹⁴ Nor are God and the creature competing causes within the act; so radically different are their proper modes of causality, and so radically distinct the

orders to which they belong, that each can be said entirely to cause the act, though as superior and inferior agents.¹⁵ Indeed, God does not even really *determine* the will; this he could do only by way of secondary causes, which would make the creature's act logically necessary; rather he directly and, so to speak, vertically *predetermines* the will, creating its power to choose and then efficiently causing the entire act he intends:¹⁶ thus the will remains free.¹⁷

Thomists of this persuasion sometimes argue that one cannot deny the reality of the *praemotio* without simultaneously denying the omnipotence and primary causality of God. To suggest that human beings are free either to resist God's grace, or even to act at all without God directly 'applying' them to their actions, is both morally and metaphysically incoherent. To suggest that God's 'permissive will' might actually liberate the creature to an indeterminate diversity of possible free acts would be to imply that human liberty escapes divine providence and that the human will enjoys an absolute libertarian autonomy that places it beyond divine causality.¹⁸ God then could know the creature only by way of a pathos, to which he would then reactively respond.¹⁹ But, as Bañez says, 'God knows sin by an intuitive cognition, insofar as the will of God is the cause of the entity of the sinful act (*causa entitatis actus peccati*)' – though, he adds, God *permits* free will to fail to observe the proper law of action, and thus to 'concur with this act (*ad eundem actum concurrat*)'.²⁰ Moreover, these Thomists contend, every act of the will is a movement from potency to act, a new actuality, which can be supplied only by the first cause of all being;²¹ creatures are not able to bring about a new effect *ex nihilo*, but must be 'applied' to action by a divine act; thus, in addition to his act of creation, God must always supply an additional movement of the will, directing it towards one end or another.²² That God elects to predetermine good acts in some and evil acts in others belongs, of course, to his predilective predestination of a few to salvation and his reprobation of the rest to damnation. As for the scriptural assurance that God wills that all men be saved, it would impugn God's causal omnipotence to suggest that what he 'efficaciously' wills could possibly fail to occur;²³ thus his 'universal will to salvation' applies only to the order of grace, where he supplies what is 'sufficient' for the redemption of all; in the order of nature, however, he generally declines to provide the *praemotio* of the creature's will necessary to make that grace 'efficacious'. And God's purpose in infallibly permissively decreeing the evil that men do is to make both his mercy and his justice known: through the gratuitous rescue of the elect and the condign damnation of the derelict. After all, any world that God might create would still be composed of finite beings, inherently prone to defect, moved by competing

and contrary goods, and every possible world falls infinitely short of the goodness of God; thus the permission of evil is intrinsic to the act of creation. But – by God’s providence – evil will always serve a greater good: the final knowledge of God’s goodness in the variety of its effects.²⁴

III

What is one to make of a theology quite this degenerate? It obviously falls in that special category of discourse that can be credible only to someone so fanatically devoted to a particular school of thought that he is willing to abide any degree of absurdity rather than modify his intellectual allegiances. From the outside, however, one can only marvel at the repellent involutions of logic, the moral idiocy, the equivocations, the innumerable departures from sense, the sterile formalism. It is one thing, after all, for a theologian simply to assert that God’s ‘mode of causality’ is utterly different from that of the creature, and that therefore God may act within the act of the creature without despoiling the latter of his liberty; but such an assertion is meaningful only if all the conclusions that follow from it genuinely obey the logic of transcendence. For, as primary cause of all things, God is first and foremost their *ontological* cause. He imparts being to what, in itself, is nothing at all; out of the infinite plenitude of his actuality, he gives being to both potency and act; and yet what he creates, as the effect of a truly transcendent causality, possesses its own being, and truly exists as other than God (though God is not some ‘other thing’ set alongside it). This donation of being is so utterly beyond any species of causality we can conceive that the very word ‘cause’ has only the most remotely analogous value in regard to it. And, whatever warrant Thomists might find in Thomas for speaking of God as the first efficient cause of creation (which I believe to be in principle wrong), such language is misleading unless the analogical scope of the concept of efficiency has been extended almost to the point of apophasis.

Easily the weakest traditional argument in favour of the idea of the *praemotio* is that God must supply the ‘effect of being’ for each movement of the will from potency to act. For one thing, this line of reasoning simply assumes the identity of ontological causation and efficient predetermination, which is the very issue in dispute. More to the point, it divides primary causality into two distinct moments: creation and an ‘additional’ predetermining impulse of the will. This is simply banal. Obviously the act of creation is not simply the act of giving bare existence to static essences, which then must be further animated by some other kind of act. As the transcend-

ent cause of being, God imparts to the creature its own dependent actuality, while also creating the potentialities to which that actuality is adequate; and, inasmuch as both act and potency are ontologically reducible to, and sustained by, their primary cause, and inasmuch as the will is always moved by its primordial inclination towards the good, it is absurd to speak of the need for something in addition to creation to ‘cause’ the movement of the spiritual will. What God gives in creation is the entire actuality of the world, in all of its secondary causes; and, as those causes possess actual being, they are able to impart actuality to potentialities proportionate to their powers. It certainly, at any rate, makes no sense to say that every particular act is a unique creation *ex nihilo*, of which the distinction between act and potency in creation is a purely formal condition. This would be no better than a straightforward occasionalism – which is surely not what it means to say that all causes are reducible to the first cause.²⁵

All of this, however, merely points to the more pervasive problem bedevilling physical preemption. Champions of the concept clearly believe that it serves to protect a proper understanding of the qualitative difference between divine and human action; and yet this is precisely what it can never do. For, if the *praemotio* works as its defenders say it does, as the direct and infallible efficient predetermination of *this* rather than *that* act, then God and the creature most definitely operate within the same order; and, though the neo-Bañezian may claim otherwise, God acts as a rival – indeed, even in a kind of ‘negative real relation’ – to the creature (though this is, again, a rivalry God has always already won). The God of physical preemption is not fully transcendent, but merely supreme; he is not a fully primary cause, but merely a kind of ‘infinite’ secondary cause; he is not fully the *causa in esse* of all things, but merely the *causa in fieri* that reigns over all other motive forces. Rather than causing all causes as causes, he is that absolute immanent power that all other immanent causes at once dissemble and express. Thus, when the ‘classical Thomist’ attempts to explain how God can create dependent freedom, the best he seems able to manage is to talk of a direct and irresistible predetermination of the will, and then – to avoid the contradiction this entails – to attempt to reduce the question of freedom to one of mere logical contingency. But freedom lies not in an action’s logical conditions, but in the action itself; and if an action is causally necessitated or infallibly predetermined, its indeterminacy with regard to its proximate cause in no way makes it free. Of course, it may well have been that, in the late sixteenth century – due to certain drastic changes within the idea of causality – the very concept of a created freedom had become all but unintelligible. It is, at least, tempting to see the notion of physical preemption as a kind of invasion of theology by the mechanical

philosophy. Certainly at this point in intellectual history, any concept of ontological causality could not help but seem rather vague and fabulous; and to speak of the infinite plenitude and transcendence of God's creative act somehow no longer seemed an adequate way of affirming his omnipotence. In the age of mechanism, the only fully credible kind of causality – the cause *par excellence* – was efficient causality. Whereas once it might have sufficed to assert that, within the fourfold causality of finite reality, there dwelled another, mysterious, and transcendent cause, acting in an entirely different manner, it now became necessary to ground God's transcendence in a more respectable kind of causality: efficient supremacy. And even spiritual freedom was reduced to the physical effect of a prior external force.

One unavoidable result of this general impoverishment of metaphysics was that God had to be conceived as the author of evil – whether directly and explicitly, as with the Calvinists, or elliptically and self-deludingly, as with the Bañezians. And the 'classical Thomist' evasion of this conclusion scarcely rises to the level of the risible. Neither the theologically dubious notion that the 'natural' tendency of any defectible rational creature not upheld by extraordinary grace is towards sin, nor the related claim that when God permits evil he does no more than abandon the creature to its own inevitable operations, exculpates the creator of complicity in the creature's sins. To begin with, if God's relation to creation really is efficiently causal in the way Bañezian thought suggests, then the very distinction between nature and grace within God's creative act is largely specious; the question becomes simply at what stage of gratuitously imparted blessings – being, will, reason, adherence in the good – he elects to halt in his creative activity towards the creature. And if he has elected to relinquish his gracious 'restraint' of the creature's 'naturally defectible' will while yet sustaining the creature in being; and if he has eternally, infallibly, irresistibly, 'permissively' decreed that the creature will commit *this* sin and suffer *this* damnation, not on account of any prevision of the creature's sins, but solely on account of his own predetermining act of reprobation; and if this irresistible 'antecedent permissive decree' applies even to the creature's intention of evil (as logically it must); and if the creature is incapable of availing himself of 'sufficient' grace – or indeed incapable of any motion of the will at all – without being applied to its act by God's physical premotion; then moral evil is as much God's work as is any other act of the will.²⁶ Only if providence is as transcendent as the ontological cause it manifests – if, that is, it is the way in which God, to whom all time is present, permits and fully 'accounts for' and 'answers' acts that he does not

directly determine, but that also cannot determine him – is God's permission of evil indeed *permission*. But if instead it is an irresistible predetermination of every action, then it neither preserves creaturely freedom nor wrests good from evil, but merely accomplishes the only action within creation that is truly undetermined: God's positive intention – for the purpose of a 'greater good' – towards evil.

In fact, it can plausibly be argued that, in a very real sense, the Bañezian God does not create a world at all, and that this species of 'classical' Thomism amounts only to what the greatest Catholic philosopher of the twentieth century, Erich Przywara, called 'theopanism'.²⁷ After all, the *praemotio* is not a qualitatively different act on God's part within the creature's act, but merely a quantitatively more coercive variety of the same kind of act. To speak of a superior and inferior agent within a single free operation is perfectly coherent, so long as the infinite analogical interval between ontological and ontic causality is observed; but to speak of a superior and inferior determining efficient cause within a single free operation is gibberish. If there were such a physical premotion, all created actions would be merely diverse modalities of God's will. And inasmuch as God is not some distinct object or physical force set over against the world, but is the supereminent source of all being, then – apart from some kind of *effective* divine indetermination of the creature's freedom in regard to specific goods – there is no ontological distinction between God and the world worth noting. It is true that *agere sequitur esse*, but also true that each essence *is* only insofar as it discloses itself in its act; and if all acts are expressions of the divine predetermination of *these* particular acts, then all essences are merely modes – or phenomenal masks – of the divine will. What is absent from this picture of divine causality is that ancient metaphysical vision that Przywara chose to call the '*analogia entis*'. In this 'analogical ontology', the infinite dependency of created being upon divine being is understood strictly in terms of the ever-greater difference between them; and, under the rule of this ontology, it is possible to affirm the real participation of the creature's freedom in God's free creative act without asserting any ontic continuity of kind between created and divine acts. When, however, the rule of analogy declines – as it did at the threshold of modernity – then invariably the words we attempt to apply both to creatures and to God (goodness, justice, mercy, love, freedom) dissolve into equivocality, and theology can recover its coherence only by choosing a single 'attribute' to treat as univocal, in order that God and world might be united again. In the early modern period, the attribute most generally preferred was 'power' or 'sovereignty' – or, more abstractly, 'cause'.

IV

Can God really create freedom? Is his so transcendent an act that he can – without suffering any pathos – create wills capable of resisting him? Certainly no answer can be provided in the terms of the early modern debates between Bañezians and Molinists. And, anyway, the two positions are effectively the same. The logic of Molina's position, after all, was that God – in knowing all possible worlds and states of affairs – chooses one reality to make actual and thereby infallibly destines all real actions. This meant that it is secondary causes which determine free choices, but also (in consequence) that God's election of one world out of an infinity of impossible alternatives is an act of divine predetermination; thus, though this divine act of election might in one sense be portrayed as a passive divine 'response' to the creature, in another, more important sense it must be recognized as an act of absolute determining power. Bañez, being more rigorous, denied that there was any such response; but for him, still, God's 'vertical' predetermination of the creature's 'free' act nevertheless aborts all other possible courses of action. In either case, God elects this world out of an infinity of possibilities and thereby infallibly decrees what shall be. Molina was perhaps the more amiable figure of the two, insofar as he hoped to preserve some sense of the innocence of God; but that was an impossible ambition given the narrowly mechanistic concepts available in his time. On either side of the debate, theologians were attempting to remedy the ontological deficiency of their theory by way of an ontic supplement: either *praemotio physica* (a solution conceived from the perspective of act) or *scientia media* (a solution conceived from the perspective of potency).

Of course, the very notion of God choosing among possible worlds – especially if, as the classical Thomist position holds, there is by definition no 'best' world among them – is already haunted by the spectre of divine voluntarism, an arbitrariness that would make God that much more complicit in each particular evil within creation. But, more importantly, it is a view of creation utterly uninformed by revelation. At the very least, one must start from the assumption that this world – as the world that belongs to the event of Christ – is the world (fallen or unfallen) in which God most fully reveals himself; and, unless one thinks Christ was merely an avatar of God, and that his human identity was somehow accidental to his divine identity, one must then also grant that the world to which the human identity of Christ naturally belongs is one uniquely and eternally fitted to that revelation. Creation is not simply a multifarious demonstration of God's power and goodness, which might equally well be expressed by some other

contingent cosmic order, but is the event within God's Logos of beings uniquely – and appropriately – called to union with him. And within this world – within God's manifestation of himself in the Son – freedom necessarily exists, as the way by which created being can be assumed into the eternal love of the Trinity.

To say, moreover, that this freedom is not causally predetermined by God does not imply that it is somehow 'absolute' or that it occupies a region independent of God's power (as one strain of neo-Bañezian apologetics contends). It is in his power to create such autonomy that God's omnipotence is most abundantly revealed; for everything therein comes from him: the real being of agent, act and potency, the primordial movement of the soul towards the good,²⁸ the natural law inscribed in the creature's intellect and will, the sustained permission of finite autonomy; even the indetermination of the creature's freedom is an utterly dependent and unmerited participation in the mystery of God's infinite freedom; and, in his eternal presence to all of time, God never ceases to exercise his providential care or to make all free acts the occasions of the greater good he intends in creating. The purpose of created autonomy is, as Maximus the Confessor says, its ultimate surrender in love to God, whereby alone rational nature finds its true fulfilment.²⁹ But, whereas in God perfect freedom and 'theonomy' coincide in the infinite simplicity of his essence, in us the free movement of the will towards God is one that passes from potency to act, and as such is dynamic and synthetic in form. Thus God works within the participated autonomy of the creature as an act of boundless freedom, a sort of immanent transcendence, an echo within the soul of that divine abyss of love that calls all things to itself, ever setting the soul free to work out her salvation in fear and trembling. And, in the end, it is no more contradictory to say that God can create – out of the infinite well-spring of his own freedom – dependent freedoms that he does not determine, than it is to say that he can create – out of the infinite well-spring of his being – dependent beings that are genuinely somehow other than God. In neither case, however, is it possible to describe the 'mechanism' by which he does this. This aporia is simply inseparable from the doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo* – which, no matter how we may attempt to translate it into causal terms we can understand, remains forever imponderable. There is no process by which creation happens, no intermediate operation or *tertium quid* between God and what he calls into being. As for those who fear that, in knowing actions he does not predetermine, God proves susceptible of pathos, one can only exhort them always to consider the logic of transcendence. God knows in creating, which is an action simply *beyond* the realm of the determined and the determining. Nothing the creature

does exceeds those potentialities God has created, or draws upon any actuality but that which God imparts, or escapes God's eternal knowledge of the world of Christ. Just as – according to Thomas – God can know evil by way of his positive act of the good, as a privation thereof,³⁰ even so can he know the free transgressions of his creatures by way of the good acts he positively wills through the freedom of the rational souls he creates. Just as the incarnate Logos really suffers torment and death not through a passive modification of his nature, imposed by some exterior force, but by a free act, so God can 'suffer' the perfect knowledge of the free acts of his creatures not as a passive reaction to some objective force set over against himself, but as the free, transcendent act of giving being to the world of Christ – an act to whose sufficiency there need attach no mediating 'premotion' to assure its omnipotence. And that eternal act of knowledge is entirely convertible with God's free intention to reveal himself in Christ.

V

This entire issue, of course, becomes far less involved if one does not presume real differentiations within God's intention towards his creatures. For, surely, scripture is quite explicit on this point: God positively 'wills' the salvation of 'all human beings' (1 Tim. 2.4). That is, he does not merely generically desire that salvation, or formally allow it as a logical possibility, or will it antecedently but not consequentially, or (most ridiculous of all) enable it 'sufficiently' but not 'efficaciously'. If God were really to supply saving grace sufficient for all, but to refuse to supply most persons with the necessary natural means of attaining that grace, it would mean that God does not will the salvation of all. If God's will to save is truly universal, as the epistle proclaims, one simply cannot start from the assumption that God causes some to rise while willingly permitting others to fall; even if one dreads the spectre of universalism, one can at most affirm that God causes all to rise, and permits all to fall, and imparts to all – out of his own abyssal freedom – the ability to consent to or to resist the grace he extends, while providentially ordering all things according to his universal will to salvation. Or, rather, perhaps one should say that God causes all to rise, but the nature of that cause necessarily involves a permission of the will. God's good will and his permission of evil, then, are simply two aspects of a single creative act, one that does not differ in intention from soul to soul: God's one vocation of all rational creation to a free union in love with himself; his one gracious permission that spiritual freedom in some way determine itself in relation to the eternal good towards which it is irresisti-

bly drawn; his one gift of sufficient aid, both in conferring saving grace on all and in sustaining human nature in its power to respond; his one refusal to coerce the will as some kind of determining cause; his one providence; his one upholding of all in being. Indeed, in this sense it almost makes sense to speak of God's infallible permissive decree for his creatures *ante praevisa merita*: in God's one act of self-outpouring love, he decrees that the creature will always be moved by its primordial impulse towards the good, and will always act under permission towards various ends; and that permission infallibly sets the creature free – within its irresistible natural impulse towards the good – to whatever end the creature elects. God and the creature do indeed act within utterly different orders.

This double movement of the will is what Maximus the Confessor describes as the relation between the 'natural' and 'gnomic' wills within us.³¹ The former is that dynamic orientation towards the infinite goodness of God that is the source of all rational life and of all desire within us; the latter is that deliberative power by which we obey or defy the deep promptings of our nature and the rule of the final good beyond us. It is the movement of the natural will towards God, moreover, whose primordial motion allows the gnomic will its liberty and its power of assent to or rejection of God. In the interval between these two movements – both of which are rational – the rational soul becomes who God intends her to be or, through apostasy from her own nature, fabricates a distance between herself and God that is nothing less than the distance of dereliction. For, whatever we do, the desire of our natural will for God will be consummated; it will return to God, whether the gnomic will consents or not, and will be glorified with that glory the Son shares with the Father from eternity. And, if the gnomic will within us has not surrendered to its natural supernatural end, our own glorified nature becomes hell to us, that holy thing we cannot touch. Rejection of God becomes estrangement from ourselves, the Kingdom of God within us becomes our exile, and the transfiguring glory of God within us – through our refusal to submit to love – becomes the unnatural experience of reprobation.³² God fashions all rational natures for free union with himself, and all of creation as the deathless vessel of his eternal glory. To this end, he wills that the dependent freedom of the creature be joined to his absolute freedom; but an indispensable condition of what he wills is the real power of the creature's deliberative will to resist the irresistible work of grace. And God both wills the ultimate good of all things and accomplishes that good, and knows the good and evil acts of his creatures, and *reacts* to neither. This is the true sublimity of divine *apatheia*: an infinite innocence that wills to the last the glorification of the creature, in the depths of its nature, and that never ceases to

sustain the rational will in its power to seek its end either in God or in itself.

One reason, I would think, for preferring this vision of God's will for the creature to the Bañezian – quite apart from its closer conformity to revelation – is the not insignificant concern that the God described by the latter happens to be evil. This seems to me as if it should be a problem. I hasten to add, moreover, that I do not think I am guilty, in using the word 'evil', of the querulous vessel's impertinent reproaches of its maker. For one thing, the Bañezian God is a monstrous and depraved fantasy, who has no real being and whom consequently it is impossible to blaspheme; for another, the use of the word 'evil' here is nothing more than an exercise in sober precision. In the 'classical Thomist' understanding of God, the word 'good' has been rendered utterly equivocal between creatures and God; it has become simply a metaphysical name for the divine essence, to which no moral analogy attaches, and so – as far as common usage is concerned – has been rendered vacuous. If, though, God acts as the Bañezian position claims, and if indeed his 'justice' is expressed in his arbitrary decision to inflict eternal torment on creatures whom he has purposely crafted to be vessels of his eternal wrath, then it is possible to construct an *analogia mali* between human cruelty and God's magnificent 'transcendence' of the difference between good and evil, without doing the least violence to language or reason. And, as for the ancient argument that such actions constitute no injustice on God's part, because the creature cannot *merit* grace, this should be dismissed as the fatuous *non sequitur* it has always been. The issue has never been one of merit – for, indeed, the creature 'merits' nothing at all, not even its existence; the issue is, rather, the moral nature of God, as revealed in his acts towards those he creates. And the God of this theology is merely an infinite engine of pure, self-expressive, amoral power, who creates untold multitudes for everlasting misery, and whom – were he really to exist – it would be an act of supreme condescension on our parts to view with contempt.

No less distasteful – but even less intellectually respectable – is the equally ancient argument that God requires the dereliction of the reprobate in order to make his 'goodness' more fully known, through a display of both his justice and his mercy. If ever there were a purely *ad hoc* attempt to justify a morally incoherent position, this is it. It is sheer nonsense to suggest that anything meaningfully called 'goodness' could be revealed in God's wilful, eternal and predetermining reprobation of souls to endless suffering, simply as 'demonstration cases', so to speak. The full nature of God's justice was revealed on the cross, where God took the penalty of sin upon himself so that he might offer forgiveness freely to all. The image of

beatitude that this entire line of reasoning summons up is at best coarsely mythological: nothing could be cruder than the notion that final knowledge of God is like knowledge of some external object set before the intellect, which needs to be grasped by an extrinsic, calculative cognition of its 'attributes', and by an accumulation of 'information' about the divine essence, and by edifying displays of God's power to torture and destroy. The beauty and variety of creation declares God's glory, but God, being infinite, could never be an extrinsic 'object' for the finite mind. True knowledge of God comes, rather, through an immediate and deifying communication of divine goodness to the created intellect, by which the created soul is in some way admitted into a remote, created participation in God's knowledge of himself. And that goodness – since all real possibility is supereminently present in it – is sufficient to communicate itself without the 'clarifying' supplement of evil; even if the finite mind cannot grasp God's goodness in its infinite simplicity, the infinite diversity of goods of which the divine essence is capable nowhere requires the shadow of evil to make the lineaments of those goods more evident.³³ And created reason, if it is indeed naturally fitted to the good, would suffer no deficiency of knowledge in being 'deprived' of the vision of damnation – which, as I have argued above, is nothing but an internal and utterly invisible absurdity, the 'impossible' experience of exile in the very midst of an infinite glory. Simply said, if God required evil to accomplish his good ends – the revelation of his nature to finite minds – then not only would evil possess a real existence over against the good, but God himself would be dependent upon evil: to the point of it constituting a dimension of his identity (even if only as a 'contrast'). And one cannot circumvent this difficulty by saying that the necessity involved applies only to finite creatures and not to God in himself; for if God needs the supplement of evil to accomplish any good he intends – even a contingent good – then he is dependent upon evil in an absolute sense. There would be goods of which the good as such is impotent apart from evil's 'contribution'. And, if in any way evil is necessary to define or increase knowledge of the good, then the good is not ontological – is not, that is, convertible with real being itself – but is at most an evaluation.

I should note, however, that the defects within the Bañezian position are the result not of too strict a fidelity to the principle of divine impassibility, but of an absolute betrayal of that principle: one that robs it of its true meaning, and thereby reduces God to a being among lesser beings, a force among lesser forces, whose infinite greatness is rendered possible only by the absolute passivity of finite reality before his absolute supremacy. It is the failure to understand omnipotence as transcendence that renders every

attempt to speak coherently of God's innocence futile. It is the failure to place divine causality altogether beyond the finite economy of created causes that produces a God who is merely beyond good and evil.

VI

The great irony of the enthusiasm that a few reactionary Catholic scholars today harbour for Bañezian or 'classical' Thomism is their curious belief that such a theology offers a solution to the pathologies of modernity – voluntarism, antinomianism, atheism, disregard of 'natural law', nihilism (the usual catalogue). Nothing could be farther from the truth. Far from constituting an alternative to the intellectual ethos of modernity, Baroque Thomism is the most quintessentially *modern* theology imaginable. One cannot defeat the pathogens of human voluntarism by retreating to what is in effect a limitless divine voluntarism. And the mere formal assertion by the Bañezian party that, in their system, God's will follows his intellect – which is the very opposite of the voluntarist view – simply bears no scrutiny. No less than in any of his other variants – Lutheran, Calvinist or Jansenist, for example – the modern God of the Bañezians is one whose will is defined by an ultimate spontaneity, and a quite insidious arbitrariness. A God whose predestining and reprobative determinations are both utterly pure of prevision and irresistible – who creates a world that bears no more proper relation to his nature than any among an infinite number of other possible worlds, who requires a justice of his creatures that he himself does not exhibit, who condemns whom he chooses to condemn, and who is himself an efficient cause of the sinful actions he punishes – is a God whose will is sheer power, not love, and certainly not governed by reason. This is the God of early modernity in his full majesty: the God who either determines or is determined, and who therefore must absolutely determine all things – a pure abyss of sovereignty justifying itself through its own exercise. He may be a God of eternal law, but behind his legislations lies a more original lawlessness. He is merely the God of the higher nihilism, and to turn in desperation to his comforting embrace is merely to return to the dawn of a history that we would do better to recall and to repudiate in its entirety. Voluntarism, after all, began as a doctrine regarding God, and only gradually (if inevitably) migrated to the human subject. The God of absolute will who was born in the late Middle Ages had by the late sixteenth century so successfully usurped the place of the true God that few theologians could recognize him for the imposter he was. And the piety he inspired was, in some measure, a kind of blasphemous piety: a ser-

vile and fatalistic adoration of boundless power masquerading as a love of righteousness. More importantly, this theology – through the miraculous technology of the printing press – entered into common Christian consciousness as the theology of previous ages never could, and in so doing provided Western humanity at once both with a new model of freedom and with a God whom it would be necessary, in the fullness of time, to kill. It was from this God that we first learned to think of freedom as a perfect spontaneity of the will, and from him we learned the irreducible prerogatives that accrue to all sovereign power, whether that of the absolute monarch, or that of the nation-state, or that of the individual. But, if this is indeed what freedom is, and God's is the supreme instance of such freedom, then he is not – as he was in ages past – the transcendent good who sets the created will free to realize its nature in its ultimate end, but is merely the one intolerable rival to every other freedom, who therefore invites creatures to rebel against him and to attempt to steal fire from heaven. If this is God, then Feuerbach and Nietzsche were both perfectly correct to see his exaltation as an impoverishment and abasement of the human at the hands of a celestial despot. For such freedom – such pure *arbitrium* – must always enter into a contest of wills; it could never exist within a peaceful order of analogical participation, in which one freedom could draw its being from a higher freedom. Freedom of this sort is one and indivisible, and has no source but itself.

So terrible, surely, was the burden that this cruel predestining God laid upon the conscience of believers that it could not be borne indefinitely. It was this God who, having first deprived us of any true knowledge of the transcendent good, died for modern culture, and left us to believe that the true God had perished. The explicit nihilism of late modernity is not even really a *rejection* of the modern God; it is merely the inevitable result of his presence in history, and of the implicit nihilism of the theology that invented him. Indeed, worship of this god is the first and most inexcusable nihilism, for it can have no real motives other than craven obsequiousness or sadistic delight. Modern atheism is merely the consummation of the forgetfulness of the transcendent God that this theology made perfect. Moreover, it may be that, in an age in which the only choice available to human thought was between faith in the modern God of pure sovereignty and simple unbelief, the latter was the holier – the more Christian – path. For, at some level, faith in the God of absolute will always required a certain extirpation of conscience from the soul, or at least its pacification; and so perhaps it is better that the natural longing of each soul for God – even if only in the reduced form of moral alarm, or an inchoate impulse towards natural goodness, or of a longing for a *deus ignotus* – refuse to surrender its

worship to a god so unworthy of adoration. Perhaps it was the last living trace of Christian conscience in Western men and women that moved them – like the Christian ‘atheists’ of the first few centuries of the Church – to reject any God but a God of infinite love. Late modernity might even be thought of as a time of purgatorial probation, a harsh but necessary hygiene of the spirit, by enduring which we might once again be made able to lift up our minds to the truly transcendent, eternally absolved of all evil, in whom there is no darkness at all.

I began with Heidegger and shall end with him as well. Speaking at one point of how God enters into philosophy – specifically, modern metaphysics, which understands ‘being’ solely as the causal ground of beings – Heidegger writes:

[der] Grund selbst aus dem von ihm Begründeten her der ihm gemäßen Begründung, d.h. der Verursachung durch die ursprünglichste Sache bedarf. Dies ist die Ursache als die Causa sui. So lautet der sachgerechte Name für den Gott in der Philosophie. Zu diesem Gott kann der Mensch weder beten, noch kann er ihm opfern. Vor der Causa sui kann der Mensch weder aus Scheu ins Knie fallen, noch kann er vor diesem Gott musizieren und tanzen.

Demgemäß ist das gott-lose Denken, das den Gott der Philosophie, den Gott als Causa sui preisgeben muß, dem göttlichen Gott vielleicht näher. Dies sagt hier: Es ist freier für ihn, als es die Onto-Theo-Logik wahrheben möchte.³⁴

Such, at least, is Heidegger’s verdict upon the god of ‘onto-theo-logy’, the god of the metaphysics of the ‘double founding’ – the grounding of beings in being and of being in a supreme being – which reduces all of reality (including divine reality) to a closed totality, an economy of causal power, from which the mystery of being has been fully exorcized. I confess that, in more than twenty years of reading Heidegger, I have never before allowed myself to feel the full force of these words: ‘freier für ihn’. There are some things that I simply have not cared to be told by Heidegger – whereof I here repent. One need not accept all of Heidegger’s history of metaphysics, or despair as he did of the possibility of speaking analogically of God, to value his thought as a solvent of the decadent traditions of early modern metaphysics. When all that is high and holy in God has been forgotten, and God has been reduced to sheer irresistible causal power, the old names for God have lost their true meaning, and the death of God has already been accomplished, even if we have not yet consciously ceased to believe. When atheism becomes explicit, however, it also becomes possible to recognize the logic that informs it, to trace it back to its remoter origins, perhaps even to begin to reverse its effects. It may be that a certain grace operates

through disbelief: perhaps we shall be ready again to receive the truly ‘divine God’ (as Heidegger phrases it) only when certain gods of our own making have vanished. This is the moment (as Heidegger also says) of highest risk, a moment in which an absolute nihilism threatens; but it is also then a moment in which it may become possible once again to recall the God who is beyond every nihilism. It is certainly not a moment for lamentation or misguided nostalgias. In the words of Meister Eckhart, ‘I pray that God deliver me from god.’³⁵ It is principally the god of modernity – the god of pure sovereignty, the voluntarist god of ‘permissive decrees’ and the *praemotio physica* – who has died for modern humanity, and perhaps theology has no nobler calling for now than to see that he remains dead, and that every attempt to revive him is thwarted: in the hope that, in becoming willing accomplices in his death, Christians may help to prepare their world for the return of the true God revealed in Christ, in all the mystery of his transcendent and provident love.

Notes

- 1 Martin Heidegger, ‘Die Frage nach der Technik’, in *Die Technik und die Kehre*, 7th edition (Stuttgart: Verlag Günther Neske, 1988), 26. [Thus, when all that comes to presence presents itself in the light of the connection between cause and effect, even God – as far as representation is concerned – can lose all that is high and holy, the very mysteriousness of his distance. God, seen in the light of causality, can sink to the level of a cause, to the level of the *causa efficiens*. Even in theology, then, he is thus transformed into the God of the philosophers, which is to say, of those who define the unhidden and the hidden according to the causality of making, without ever also considering the essential origin of this causality.]
- 2 This is far and away the most tiresome refrain in his ‘classic’ work on predestination (a book that often seems to consist almost exclusively in tiresome refrains). See Reginald Garrigou-Lagrange, *Predestination: The Meaning of Predestination in Scripture and the Church*, trans. Dom Bede Rose (St. Louis: B. Harder Book, 1939).
- 3 Maximus the Confessor, *Chapters on Love*, III.65.
- 4 John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1977), III, 23, 8.
- 5 Being merely a selective reader of Thomas, whose interest in Thomas’s thought begins and ends with his metaphysics of *esse* and of *actus*, I lack the authority necessary to pronounce upon the degree to which Bañez or the larger Baroque commentary tradition ‘got Thomas right’ on this matter. I tend to think that it was a vanishingly small degree, however, and find the expositions of a number of scholars of Thomas entirely persuasive on this score. The now classic ‘refutation’ of the older reading of Thomas on divine causality is, of course, Bernard Lonergan’s *Grace and Freedom: Operative Grace in the Thought of*

St Thomas Aquinas (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2000). If nothing else, Lonergan demonstrates the sheer anachronism of reading Thomas's texts through the filter of a later and alien concept of causality.

- 6 In fact, most of what one needs to know about the concept – if one is not interested in its precise history – can be extracted from certain recent attempts to rehabilitate the Baroque Thomist position. Two articles that appeared in 2006, side by side in a single issue of the English language version of *Nova et Vetera*, are particularly convenient in this regard: Thomas M. Osborne, Jr, 'Thomist Premotion and Contemporary Philosophy of Religion', *Nova et Vetera* 4:3 (2006), 607–31; Steven A. Long, 'Providence, Freedom, and Natural Law', *Nova et Vetera* 4:3 (2006), 557–605. Both essays are quite accurate as regards the fundamental ideas and concerns of the tradition they defend, as far as I can tell from my sporadic readings in classical Thomism, and most of the defects in their arguments are directly attributable to that tradition. Neither essay makes a convincing case for the Baroque position, but both in their different ways serve, if nothing else, to clarify the failings of that position. Bañez himself – for all his considerable limitations as a theologian or philosopher – was an exceedingly clear and careful writer and is, in that respect, preferable to many of his later expositors; but I – in my admittedly limited survey of his works – have failed to find a single comprehensive summary of his understanding of the *praemotio physica* that is easily extractable from its context. Perhaps the best treatment of the theme in the Dominican literature written during the early disputes with the Molinists is that of Diego Alvarez in his *De auxiliis gratiae et humani arbitrii viribus* (Rome, 1610); see especially disps 28 and 83. The most thorough later defence of the position can be found in A. M. Dummermuth, *Defensio doctrinae S. Thomae Aq. de praemotione physica* (Paris, 1895) – a title that somewhat obscures the not insignificant point that Thomas himself never anywhere enunciates a doctrine of *praemotio physica*. See also Dummermuth's *S. Thomas et doctrina praemotio nis physicae* (Paris, 1886).
- 7 See Thomas de Lemos, *Acta omnia congregationum et disputationum . . . de auxiliis divinae gratiae* (Louvain, 1702), 1065.
- 8 Domingo Bañez, *Commentaria in Summa Th. S. Thomae*, part I (Salamanca, 1584), I, q. 14, art. 13.
- 9 See Alvarez, *De auxiliis*, disp. 24: 15.
- 10 *Ibid.*, disp. 83: 9.
- 11 Charles René Billuart, *Summa summae S. Thomae sive compendium theologiae* (Liège, 1754), *Tractatus de Deo et eius attributis*, dissertatio VIII, art. 5.
- 12 Alvarez, *De auxiliis*, disp. 19: 7. See 'Thomist Premotion and Contemporary Philosophy of Religion', 608–13; and Steven A. Long, 'Providence, Freedom, and Natural Law', 569, 572, 584, 588, 594, 595, etc.
- 13 Billuart, *Summa summae: de Deo*, dissertatio VIII, art. 4.
- 14 See Alvarez, *De auxiliis*, disp. 22: 19.
- 15 *Ibid.*, disp. 22: 39.
- 16 See *ibid.*, disp. 28; see also Jean Baptiste Gonet, *Chlypeus theologiae thomisticae contra novos eius impugnatores* (Bordeaux, 1659–69), disp. 11: 5.
- 17 See Thomas M. Osborne, Jr, 'Thomist Premotion and Contemporary Philosophy of Religion', 611–19, 623–9, 630; see especially 625: 'If God physically

predetermined the will through intermediate causes, then in Thomist language such motion would not be predetermination but determination, and consequently incompatible with free choice.'

- 18 Alvarez, *De auxiliis*, disp. 122: 16. Long is especially – and especially crudely – insistent upon this point: Steven A. Long, 'Providence, Freedom, and Natural Law', 558, 559, 562, 564, 591, 601, 603, etc. See also Osborne, 'Thomist Premotion and Contemporary Philosophy of Religion', 611, 627.
- 19 John Paul Nazarius, *Commentaria et controversiae in Summa Th. S. Thomae*, 1st part (Bologna, 1620), I, q. 22, art. 4.
- 20 Bañez, *Commentaria in Summa Th.*, I, q. 23, art. 3, d. 2, c. 2.
- 21 See de Lemos, *Acta*, 1065.
- 22 Gonet, *Chlypeus*, disp. 9: 5; Osborne 612, 626; Long, 559, 562–3, 567, 569, 573, etc.
- 23 Alvarez, *De auxiliis*, disp. 92: 6.
- 24 See Long, 'Providence, Freedom, and Natural Law', 572–7.
- 25 For an especially enlightening treatment of the issue of God's causation of freedom as occurring within the act of creation, see David B. Burrell, *Freedom and Creation in Three Traditions* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1993); see especially 95–139.
- 26 See Jacques Maritain, *God and the Permission of Evil*, trans. Joseph W. Evans (Milwaukee: Bruce Publishing Co., 1966), 30–1: 'In the theory of the antecedent permissive decrees, God, under the relation of efficiency, is not the cause, not even (that which I do not concede) the indirect cause, of moral evil. But he is the one primarily responsible for its presence here on earth. It is He who has invented it in the drama or novel of which He is the author. He refuses His efficacious grace to a creature because it has already failed culpably, but this culpable failure occurred only in virtue of the permissive decree which preceded it. God manages to be nowise the cause of evil, while seeing to it that evil occurs infallibly. The antecedent permissive decrees, be they presented by the most saintly of theologians – I cannot see in them, taken in themselves, anything but an insult to the *absolute innocence of God*.'
- 27 See Erich Przywara, *Analogia Entis: Metaphysik: Ur-Struktur und All-Rhythmus* (Einsiedeln: Johannes Verlag, 1962), 70–8, 128–35, 247–301.
- 28 See Shanley, 'Divine Causation and Human Freedom in Aquinas', 112–14.
- 29 See Maximus, *Ambiguum* 7, PG 91:107B.
- 30 Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, I, q. 14, a. 10.
- 31 See, for instance, Maximus, *Opusculum* 14, PG 91:153A–B.
- 32 See Maximus, *Quaestiones ad Thalassium* 59, PG 90:609A–B.
- 33 Thomas's notorious argument to the contrary, in *Summa Theologiae*, I, q. 23, a. 5, ad 3, is unobjectionable in suggesting that it is through the variety of created goods that finite minds conceive some knowledge of the plenitude of God's goodness; but, in trying to integrate the theology of predilective predestination *ante praevisa merita* into this vision of things, he attempts to import an impossible alloy into his reasoning. Indeed, the entirety of I, q. 23, inasmuch as it merely attempts to justify a late Augustinian reading of Paul that is objectively wrong, can largely be ignored as a set of forced answers to false questions.
- 34 Martin Heidegger, 'Die Onto-Theo-Logische Verfassung der Metaphysik', in *Identität und Differenz*, 10th edition (Stuttgart: Verlag Günther Neske, 1996),

64–5. [. . . (the) ground itself must in due measure be grounded: that is, must be caused by the most primordially causative thing. This is the cause understood as *causa sui*. This is how the name of God appropriate to philosophy is inscribed. To this god can man neither pray nor make offering. Neither can man fall to his knees in awe before the *causa sui*, nor before this god can he make music and dance. Perhaps, then, that godless thinking that must abandon the god of philosophy – God, that is, understood as *causa sui* – is nearer to the divine God. That is to say, it is freer for him than onto-theo-logy would wish to grant.]

35 Meister Eckhart, *Sermon 52*: ‘Beati pauperes spiritu.’

CHAPTER 3

PROVIDENCE IN 1 SAMUEL

Francesca Aran Murphy

I. The Patristic and Medieval Church was Not Especially Interested in 1 Samuel

As Joyce Grenville picks up a tome and says to her pupils, ‘Shakespeare! This is bound to be full of good quotations’, so one might open 1 Samuel expecting to find lots of examples of providential events. It begins with Hannah’s prayer for a son. After Samuel is born to her and handed over to Eli the priests at Shiloh, prophecies of doom on the house of Eli are broadcast. The Philistines attack Shiloh, Eli’s sons are killed defending the Ark, and Eli dies of grief. The Ark is kidnapped and taken to Philistia, where it has a wild time of it, firing deadly bum warts at all who affront its majesty, carted from Ashdod to Gath, until it is repatriated to Kirjathjirim. Samuel receives a delegation asking that he appoint a king, God tells him to comply, and Saul sleepwalks by remote control to the seer’s house, where he is privately anointed. After a Judge-type military success against the odds, Saul is publically acclaimed king. But then, surrounded by Philistine armies which are hyped up like an eschatological peril, like the hosts of Mordor, King Saul fails to rely on Samuel’s instructions: the Wizard prophecies that the kingship will be removed from his house. At Michmass Pass, his son Jonathan proves himself a biblical epic hero. Saul is ordered to fight the Amalekites, but fails, again, to follow the prescriptions for warfare as laid down by God through his prophet Samuel, and the kingship is stripped from Saul and his heirs. David is secretly anointed king by Samuel: David slays Goliath, bonds with Jonathan, and marries Saul’s daughter Michal. Smitten with an ‘evil spirit’ sent to him by God, Saul tries to get David killed by devious and by overt means. After many lucky ‘escapes with comic effects’, David goes for protection to the king of Gath, where he avoids death yet again by feigning madness. David’s ‘deceptions . . . unwittingly unleash terrible consequences . . . and yet in the end turn to the advantage of this eternally happy go lucky man’: David is hiding in a cave at Engedi, when Saul happens by: David stands aside from this opportunity to seize the kingship. There follows the ‘burlesque interlude with Nabal (i.e. ‘fool’) and the sly Abigail, whom David in the end marries along with her considerable dowry’,¹ and a foothold in Judah.