

EARLY CHRISTIANITY IN THE CONTEXT OF ANTIQUITY

Edited by Anders-Christian Jacobsen, Christine Shepardson, Peter Gemeinhardt

Gaetano Lettieri / Maria Fallica /
Anders-Christian Jacobsen (eds.)

Progress in Origen and the Origenian Tradition

25



PETER LANG

Progress is a structural and systematic concept in the thought of Origen of Alexandria, which represents one of the most advanced syntheses of the Christian reading of the Old and the New Testaments' legacy and the classical paideia, as well as a rational critique towards every kind of static objectification of the religious. Origen's legacy was capable of radiating its influence through Western theology and philosophy, thus shaping its idea of theological, moral, intellectual, social and political progress. The volume follows the intellectual dynamism generated by the reception of Origen's thought through seventeen articles, which span through the centuries, from the analysis of Origen's thought to its reception history in the Middle Ages, the Renaissance, and the Modern Age, up until the 20th century.

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Volume 25

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der vorliegenden Publikation*

Die Qualität der in dieser Reihe
erscheinenden Arbeiten wird vor der
Publikation durch die Herausgeber der
Reihe sowie durch Mitglieder des
Wissenschaftlichen Beirates geprüft.

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peer review of this publication*

Prior to publication, the quality
of the work published in this
series is reviewed by the editors
of the series and by members of
the academic advisory board.

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Bibliographic Information published by the Deutsche Nationalbibliothek

The Deutsche Nationalbibliothek lists this publication in the Deutsche Nationalbibliografie; detailed bibliographic data is available online at <http://dnb.d-nb.de>.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

A CIP catalog record for this book has been applied for at the Library of Congress.

The conference and the publication of this book have been supported by The European Union, Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme Marie Skłodowska-Curie program, ITN-HHFDWC-676258 and by Gruppo Italiano di Ricerca su Origine e la Tradizione Alessandrina (GIROTA)



ISSN 1862-197X

ISBN 978-3-631-86459-3 (Print)

E-ISBN 978-3-631-89121-6 (E-PDF)

E-ISBN 978-3-631-89122-3 (E-PUB)

DOI 10.3726/b20250

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Anders-Christian Jacobsen (eds.), 2023

Peter Lang – Berlin · Bruxelles · Lausanne · New York · Oxford

This publication has been peer reviewed.

www.peterlang.com

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Reason, Free Will, and Predestination: Origen in Aquinas' Theological Thought*

Abstract: The aim of this paper is to show that Aquinas develops a theology of predestined grace, by challenging the Origenian metaphysical and eschatological application of the principle of distributive justice. According to Thomas, the general reason why some are saved and others damned is to be related, just as in the case of creation, to divine goodness, which demands a multiformity of grades in order to be adequately represented by creatures.

Keywords: Predestination, Grace, Mediaeval theology, Distributive justice

Looking at the reception of the Patristic tradition in medieval thought, Origen stands out as a well-known author as well as a problematic figure, particularly for Thomas Aquinas. One cannot be surprised to find, in Aquinas' works, a large number of quotations from the Alexandrian writer (there are more than one thousand occurrences of the term "Origen" in its different grammatical inflections); on the other hand, the disparity of judgement that emerges about them is also not surprising.¹ The image of Origen arising from those quotations is that of an undisputed teacher of exegesis and spirituality, but also that of a dangerous theologian, whose protological, Christological and eschatological mistakes are above all a consequence of his "abuse" (*corruptio vel abusus*) of philosophy.²

* I wish to thank Frosty Loechel, Maurizio Mottolese and Catherine Roberts for deeply revising my English and offering several helpful suggestions.

1 See G. Bendinelli, *Tommaso d'Aquino lettore di Origene: un'introduzione*, in: *Adamantius* 15 (2009), 103–120 (103). I borrow here some of his wording. Bendinelli proposes some examples of this disparity in judgment, distinguishing the reception of Origen as a "heresiarch" (105–112) from that as an "exegete" (112–120).

2 Thomas Aquinas, *Super Boetium De Trinitate* 2.3 (*Sancti Thomae de Aquino Opera omnia iussu Leonis XIII P. M. edita cura et studio Fratrum Praedicatorum*, t. 50, Roma-Paris 1992). Aquinas refers to Origen's adherence to Platonism and, more generally, to "the views of the ancient philosophers", which would have led Origen to develop the doctrines of subordinationism (see id., *Super Boetium De Trinitate* 3,4, as well id., *Summa theologiae* 1.32,1, ad 1 (*Sancti Thomae Aquinatis Opera omnia iussu impensaue Leonis XIII P. M. edita cura et studio Fratrum Praedicatorum*, t. 4, Rome 1888)), pre-existence of the soul (see id., *Summa contra*

According to Aquinas, the connaturality of faith and reason, which are both divine gifts, rules out the possibility of a conflict between philosophy and revelation: the condition being, that the practice of philosophy would depend on straight reason (we shall see below that such straightness, as a specific feature of natural integrity, must be thought of as a determination of divine grace).³

Indeed – this will be my crucial claim – Aquinas believes that Origen has neglected precisely the primacy of grace, bringing forth in this way a systematic and extreme rationalisation of the Christian message.⁴ This emerges, first of all, from Aquinas’ criticism against the Platonizing doctrine of the pre-existence of the *vóες* – a basic pillar of the Origenian theological system, which preserves the free self-determination of intellectual beings. Aquinas not only rejects this doctrine from a dogmatic point of view, he also criticises its theoretical implications and its conceptual assumptions. In his opinion, the Origenian doctrine reveals a deep misunderstanding of the gratuitous and projectual character of creation, and above all of the specific diversification of creatures, which can not be reduced to a “penal” reason.⁵ Most importantly the Origenian doctrine disregards the equally undue and projectual character of redemption, which Aquinas seems to consider (in line

Gentiles 2.83 (*Sancti Thomae Aquinatis Opera omnia iussu edita Leonis XIII P. M. cura et studio Fratrum Praedicatorum*, t. 13, Rome 1918)), and corporeity of all creatures (see id., *Quaestio disputata de spiritualibus creaturis* 5, ad 1 (J. Cos (ed.), *Opera omnia iussu Leonis XIII P. M. edita*, t. 24/2, Rome 1992), and id., *Quaestiones disputatae de potentia* 6,6, ad 2 (P. Bazzi et alii (ed.), *Quaestiones disputatae*, vol. 2, Turin 1965)).

- 3 About grace as a condition of the natural perfection of reason, see my *Fede e grazia. Tommaso d’Aquino e il naturale esercizio della ragione*, in: *Filosofia e teologia* 32 (2018), 223–230. In Aquinas’ concordism, it is impossible that the right reason might be contrary to faith, simply because it is impossible to prove the opposite of truth (see Thomas Aquinas, *Super Boetium De Trinitate* 2,3). In order to not contradict faith, all that philosophy has to do is to conform to its own rational nature. Therefore, the primacy of theology – the duty of which, according to Aquinas, is to judge the conclusions of reason and to condemn as false those contrary to revelation (*Summa theologiae* 1.1,6, ad 2) – paradoxically turns out to be a guarantee of the “autonomy” of philosophy.
- 4 Aquinas captures here an undoubtedly authentic aspect of the systematic and speculative method of Origen’s thought. See G. Lettieri, *Dies una. L’allegoria di «coelum et terra in Principio» ricapitolazione del sistema mistico-speculativo di Origene*, in: *Adamantius* 23 (2017), 36–76 (37–43).
- 5 See here and after Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* 1.118,3 (*Sancti Thomae Aquinatis Opera omnia*, t. 5, Rome 1889).

with Augustine) as an authentic and predestined moral re-creation from the nothingness of sin.⁶

Roughly put, one may say that in Aquinas' perspective the abuse of reason has brought Origen to an erroneous rationalisation of divine omnipotence. Such a claim might appear surprising and paradoxical, given that the Aristotelian Aquinas is usually considered a promoter of philosophical sciences and autonomy of reason, as well as the interpreter of an authentic emancipation of human being and nature from divine causal absolutism – a kind of absolutism that is traditionally related to Augustinism. But I believe that matters should be seen differently. In Aquinas' thought, concerning the autonomy of reason, Aristotle plays a functional role but in a substantially theological context. With regard to human emancipation, Aquinas undoubtedly endows human will with an irreducible causal efficacy, but the subordinated and conditioned feature of that will remains equally undisputable. Human efficacy, just as the causal efficacy of any creature, is the efficacy of the secondary cause, subjected as such to the infallibility and immutability of divine government. Hence, any conclusion about the individual's capacity of self-determination, in order to be critically inferred, should consider to what extent that capacity fits in with the irresistible and fatal character of the divine purpose.

In the following pages, therefore, I wish to show how indeed the Aristotle of Aquinas, by means of a systematic and never neutral exegetical appropriation, turns out to be completely suitable to a theology of the predestined grace – a theology that is substantially Augustinian and, consequently, anti-Origenian.

1. Let me start with a few remarks about the Platonizing doctrine of the pre-existence of the *vóες* and their diversification on the basis of merit. My intention here will be to show that Aquinas challenges exactly the rational principle that, in his opinion, Origen invokes, equally improperly, regarding the issue of predestination.

In chapter forty-four of the second book of his *Summa contra Gentiles*, Aquinas writes that Origen, in his *Peri Archon*,

6 I have dealt with creation and redemption in Augustine's and Aquinas' thought respectively in *Il nulla nelle Confessioni di Agostino tra creazione e conversione*, in: M. Lenzi / A. Maierù (eds.), *Discussioni sul nulla tra medioevo ed età moderna*, Florence 2009, 21–35 and in *In nihilum decidere. "Negatività" della creatura e nichilismo del peccato in Tommaso d'Aquino*, in: *Consecutio Rerum. Rivista critica della Postmodernità* 1 (2017), 65–87, available on-line (www.consecutio.org); reprint in: M. Aiello / L. Micaloni / G. Rughetti (eds.), *Declinazioni del nulla. Non essere e negazione tra ontologia e politica*, Roma 2017, 67–89.

wished to oppose the objections and errors of the early heretics who endeavoured to prove that the heterogeneous character of good and evil in things has its origin in contrary agents. Now, there are, as Origen saw, great differences (*multam distantiam*) in natural as well as human things which seemingly are not preceded by any merits (*nulla merita praecessisse videntur*); some bodies are luminous, some dark, some men are born of pagans, others of Christians, etc. And having observed this fact, Origen was impelled to assert that all diversity found in things resulted from a diversity of merits, in accordance with the justice of God (*omnem diversitatem in rebus inventam ex diversitate meritorum, secundum Dei iustitiam, processisse*). For he says that God, of His goodness alone, first made all creatures equal (*aequales*), and all of them spiritual and rational; and these by their free choice (*per liberum arbitrium*) were moved in various ways, some adhering to God more, and some less, some withdrawing from Him more, and some less; and as a result of this, diverse grades in spiritual substances were established by the divine justice (*diversi gradus in substantiis spiritualibus ex divina iustitia sunt subsecuti*), so that some were angels of diverse orders, some human souls in various conditions, some demons in their differing states.⁷

Whether Aquinas would here depend on Origen directly (as I suppose) or not, there is no doubt that he captures, in this rigorous albeit compendious exposition, some authentic elements of the *Peri Archon*. According to Origen, indeed, the pre-existence of souls is the assumption itself that, against the Gnostics, allows the equity of God to be safeguarded, by tracing back the diversity of creatures to their earlier free choice rather than to an unmotivated and thus unequal diversity of nature. Given the biblical and Pauline presupposition that on God's part there is no injustice (Rom 9:14) nor partiality (Rom 2:11), Origen assumes that in the beginning God created perfectly equal beings, since there was no reason to differentiate the distribution of the conditions, and that subsequently He "dispenses everything in accordance with the merit and progress of each (*omnia pro meritis singulorum profectibusque dispensat*)".⁸ But this is precisely the point that Aquinas

7 Thomas Aquinas, *Summa contra Gentiles* 2.44 (J.F. Anderson (transl.), *St. Thomas Aquinas, On the Truth of the Catholic Faith. Book two: Creation*, New York 1956). See also id., *Quaestiones disputatae de potentia* 3,16; 3,18; id., *De substantiis separatis* 12 (*Sancti Thomae de Aquino Opera omnia iussu Leonis XIII P. M. edita cura et studio Fratrum Praedicatorum*, t. XL/D-E, Rome 1968); id., *Summa theologiae* 1.47,2; 1.65,2; id., *Quaestiones disputatae de malo* 5,4 (*Sancti Thomae de Aquino Opera omnia iussu Leonis XIII P. M. edita cura et studio Fratrum Praedicatorum*, t. 23, Roma-Paris 1982), and id., *Super Epistolam ad Romanos lectura* 9,3, § 767 (R. Cai (ed.), *S. Thomae Aquinatis Super Epistolas S. Pauli lectura*, vol. I, Turin 1953).

8 So Or., princ. 1.8,4 (J. Behr (ed. and transl.), *Origen, On First Principles*, OECT, 2 vols., Oxford 2017). Yet, Aquinas seems to summarise here princ 2.9,5–7 (but see also princ. 1.7,4).

calls into question: the view that the criterion of justice that determines the diversity of creatures would be a principle of due distribution. Against this idea, Aquinas concludes:

Now, Origen seems not to have taken into consideration the fact that when we give something, not in payment of a debt, but as a free gift, it is not contrary to justice if we give unequal things, without having weighed the difference of merits; although payment is due to those who merit. But, as we have shown above, God brought things into being, not because He was in any way obliged to do so, but out of pure generosity. Therefore, the diversity of creatures does not presuppose a diversity of merits. And again, since the good of the whole is better than the good of each part, the best maker is not he who diminishes the good of the whole in order to increase the goodness of some of the parts; a builder does not give the same relative value to the foundation that he gives to the roof, lest he ruin the house. Therefore, God, the maker of all things, would not make the whole universe the best of its kind, if He made all the parts equal, because many grades of goodness would then be lacking in the universe, and thus it would be imperfect.⁹

Briefly, Aquinas seems to argue here that, since creation presupposes absolutely nothing (except its very reason, i.e. divine goodness), there is nothing, apart from His own goodness, to which God owes something. Consequently, it is not because of a debt of justice that God made the universe. As Augustine had claimed, God brought things into being by pure generosity, in order that His goodness might be manifested through creation.¹⁰ And when something

9 *Videtur autem Origenes non perpensisisse quod, cum aliquid non ex debito sed liberaliter damus, non est contra iustitiam si inaequalia damus, nulla diversitate meritorum pensata, cum retributio merentibus debeatur. Deus autem, ut supra ostensum est, ex nullo debito, sed ex mera liberalitate res in esse produxit. Unde diversitas creaturarum diversitatem meritorum non praesupponit. Item, cum bonum totius sit melius quam bonum partium singularium, non est optimi factoris diminuere bonum totius ut aliquarum partium augeat bonitatem: non enim aedificator fundamento tribuit eam bonitatem quam tribuit tecto, ne domum faciat ruinosam. Factor igitur omnium, Deus, non faceret totum universum in suo genere optimum, si faceret omnes partes aequales, quia multi gradus bonitatis in universo deessent, et sic esset imperfectum* (Thomas Aquinas, *Summa contra Gentiles* 2.44; transl. Anderson).

10 *Hanc autem positionem [scil. the Origen's opinion, according to which the diversity of creatures was preceded by and depends upon the diversity of merit and demerit] Augustinus reprobatur. Causam enim creaturarum condendarum, tam spiritualium quam corporalium, constat nihil aliud esse quam Dei bonitatem, in quantum creaturae suae, sua bonitate creatae, bonitatem increatae secundum suum modum repraesentant* (Thomas Aquinas, *Quaestiones disputatae de potentia* 3,18), referring to August., civ. 11.23 (B. Dombart / A. Kalb (eds.), *Augustinus, De civitate Dei*, books 11–22, CCSL 48, Turnhout 1955). Cf. analogously Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* 1.47,2.

is given out of pure liberality, “there is no injustice in dealing unequally with equal persons”, since the gift is undue and it depends on the giver, not on the receiver.¹¹ On the other hand, if God creates the world in order to manifest His goodness, some degree of multiplicity and inequality appears to be inherent. Divine goodness could not be displayed in the universe with the same uniformity and simplicity featuring God.¹² It has to be shown through many different forms and grades, all arranged “for the perfection of the whole (*propter perfectionem totius*)”.¹³ Hence, the difference in status among the creatures in this world depends on God’s wisdom and on His plan of creation – what makes God like a very skilful architect, who subordinates matter to form, adapting every single part to the completeness of the whole. The point I wish to make here, then, is that the same anti-Origenian position that Aquinas asserts at the ontological and cosmological level (about creation), works also at the soteriological level (about predestination), where it takes on a further and consistent anti-Pelagian connotation – which would deserve special attention.

2. In the question twenty-three of the first part of the *Summa*, asking “whether the foreknowledge of merits is the cause of predestination (*utrum*

11 These words seem to hint at the Aristotelian concept of analogy as principle of equal distribution. See Arist., EN 5.3, 1131a18–26 (L. Bywater (ed.), *Aristotelis Ethica Nicomachea*, Oxford 21991), about which Thomas Aquinas, *Sententia libri Ethicorum 5.4 (Sancti Thomae de Aquino Opera omnia iussu Leonis XIII P. M. edita cura et studio Fratrum Praedicatorum*, t. 47/2, Rome 1969): when the principle of liberality prevails, the giving does not appear as a payment or a reward (see id., *Sententia libri Ethicorum* 8.6), but rather as an undue and free act. Cf. id., *Quaestiones disputate de potentia* 3,16, ad 19: *Non [...] est contra iustitiam quod inaequalia aequalibus dentur nisi quando alicui redditur debitum; quod in prima rerum creatione non potest dici. Quod enim ex propria liberalitate datur, potest dari plus vel minus secundum arbitrium dantis et secundum quod eius sapientia requiritur.*

12 See Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* 1.47,1: *Unde dicendum est quod distinctio rerum et multitudo est ex intentione primi agentis, quod est Deus. Produxit enim res in esse propter suam bonitatem communicandam creaturis et per eas repraesentandam. Et quia per unam creaturam sufficienter repraesentari non potest, produxit multas creaturas et diversas [...]: nam bonitas quae in Deo est simpliciter et uniformiter, in creaturis est multipliciter et divisam.*

13 *In constitutione rerum non est inaequalitas partium per quamcumque inaequalitatem praecedentem vel meritorum vel etiam dispositionis materiae; sed propter perfectionem totius. Ut patet etiam in operibus artis: non enim propter hoc differt tectum a fundamento, quia habet diversa materiam; sed ut sit domus perfecta ex diversis partibus, quaerit artifex diversam materiam, et faceret eam si posset* (Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* 1.47,2, ad 3).

praescientia meritorum sit causa praedestinationis)”, Aquinas – who, as we will see rejects this hypothesis in the wake of Augustine – preliminarily formulates an argument in favour, which is clearly based on the aforementioned Origenian principle – *ratio Origenis*¹⁴ – of distributive justice.

Given that – Aquinas relates – “there is no injustice in God” (Rom 9:14), that “it would seem unjust that unequal things be given to equals”, and that “all men are equal as regards both nature and original sin, and inequality in them arises from the merits or demerits of their actions”, the conclusion can be reached that “God does not prepare unequal things for men by predestinating and reprobating, unless through the foreknowledge of their merits and demerits”.¹⁵ It has to be maintained that such a humanistic idea, according to which predestination – with particular reference to Rom 8:28–30 and 9:10–18 – consists in a foreknowledge of the free self-determination of the creature (or, knowledge of the merits earned by the souls in their previous life), is really Origenian in character and considered as such by Aquinas. It is therefore in a consistent and legitimised way that Aquinas formulates this argument here by implicitly employing an Origenian reasoning.¹⁶

14 So Thomas Aquinas, *Quaestiones disputatae de potentia* 3.16, ad 19. Cf. analogously id., *Summa theologiae*, 1.47,2, ad 3: *ratio [...] quae movit Origenem*.

15 *Praeterea, non est iniquitas apud Deum, ut dicitur Rom 9, 14. Iniquum autem esse videtur, ut aequalibus inaequalia dentur. Omnes autem homines sunt aequales et secundum naturam et secundum peccatum originale: attenditur autem in eis inaequalitas secundum merita vel demerita priorum actuum. Non igitur inaequalia praeparat Deus hominibus, praedestinando et reprobando, nisi propter differentium meritorum praescientiam* (Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* 1.23,5, ar. 3; transl.: *The “Summa Theologica” of St. Thomas Aquinas*. Literally translated by Fathers of the English Dominican Province, vol. 1, London 1911). See also id., *Scriptum super libros Sententiarum* 1.41,1,3, ar. 2 (P. Mandonnet (ed.), *S. Thomae Aquinatis Scriptum super libros Sententiarum*, t. I, Parisiis 1929), e id., *Quaestiones disputatae de veritate* 6,2, ar. 8 (*Sancti Thomae de Aquino Opera omnia iussu Leonis XIII P. M. edita cura et studio Fratrum Praedicatorum*, t. 22/1.2, Rome 1970).

16 On the predestination as foreknowledge of future merits (i.e., the merits of the post-Adamic man) in Origen’s thought, see Or., comRom 1.5; 7.6 (C.P. Hammond Bammel (ed.), *Der Römerbriefkommentar des Origenes. Kritische Ausgabe der Übersetzung Rufins*, Vetus Latina 16; 33–34, Freiburg 1990–1998); id., phil. 25.1–2 (É. Junod, (ed.), *Origène, Philocalie 21–27. Sur le libre arbitre*, SC 226, Paris 1976), and id., homNum 3.2,2 (L. Doutreleau (ed.), *Origène, Homelies sur les Nombres I*, SC 415, Paris 1996), about which cf. Thomas Aquinas, *De veritate* 6,2, ar. 7, and M. Belcastro, *La predestinazione nel Commento alla Lettera ai Romani di Origene. Trasformazione e normalizzazione di un paradosso*, in: Adamantius 21 (2015), 211–243. About the idea that God separates the creatures (with reference

In his answer Aquinas appeals, first of all, to the creation of the world, since the general reason why some are saved and others damned is to be related, just as in the case of creation, to divine goodness, which demands a multiformity of grades in order to be adequately expressed and represented by creatures. Thomas' major claim is that God does not save everyone, even though He could do that, for the sake of an adequate manifestation of his goodness. If the "moral order" – considered here correspondent to the "metaphysical" one – consisted entirely of the saved, i.e. those who have benefited from God's mercy, it would be imperfect.¹⁷ Such order, in effect, would not adequately represent the divine goodness, which has to be expressed also in the form of justice, through the just condemnation of sinners. This is the reason why – Aquinas insists, resorting to quotations from Augustine and Paul – God elects some and damns others, although the fact that He saves this one and reproves that one "has no reason, except the divine will".

Let us directly examine Aquinas' text, which deserves to be quoted in full for its impressive radical coherence.

The reason for the predestination of some, and reprobation of others, must be sought for in the goodness of God. Thus He is said to have made all things through His goodness, so that the divine goodness might be represented in things. It is necessary that the divine goodness, which in itself is one and undivided, should be manifested in many ways in His creation; because creatures in themselves cannot attain to the simplicity of God. Thus it is that for the completion of the universe there are required different grades of being; some of which hold a high and some a low place in the universe. That this multiformity of grades may be preserved in things, God allows some evils, lest many good things should never happen, as was said above [scil. q. 22, a. 2]. Let us now consider the whole of the human race, as we consider the whole universe. God wills to manifest His goodness in men; in respect to those whom He predestines, by means of His mercy, in sparing them; and in respect of others, whom he reprobates, by means of His justice, in punishing them. This is

to 2 Tim 2:20–21) "not from the beginning, according to his foreknowledge", but as a consequence of the previous acts of the souls, see instead Or., princ. 3.1,21–22 (transl. Behr), about which Thomas Aquinas, *Summa contra Gentiles* 3.161 (*Sancti Thomae Aquinatis Opera omnia*, t. 14, Rome 1926), and id., *Summa theologiae* 1.23,5, and A. Monaci Castagno, *L'idea della preesistenza delle anime e l'esegesi di Rm 9, 9–21*, in: H. Crouzel / A. Quacquarelli (eds.), *Origeniana secunda*, Roma 1980, 69–78, according to which Origen shifted his thought from the pre-existence of the souls to the divine foreknowledge. See also M. Harz, *La préexistence des âmes dans l'oeuvre d'Origène*, in: L. Lies (ed.), *Origeniana quarta*, Innsbruck 1987, 238–258 (251–252).

17 See also P. Porro, *Thomas Aquinas. A Historical and Philosophical Profile*, Washington 2015, 390, from which the quotations are taken.

the reason why God elects some and rejects others. To this the Apostle refers, saying: *What if God, willing to show His wrath* (that is, the vengeance of His justice), *and to make His power known, endured* (that is, permitted) *with much patience vessels of wrath, fitted for destruction; that He might show the riches of His glory on the vessels of mercy, which He hath prepared unto glory* (Rom ix. 22, 23). He also says: *But in a great house there are not only vessels of gold and silver; but also of wood and of earth; and some, indeed, unto honor, but some unto dishonor* (2 Tim ii. 20). Why He chooses some for glory, and reprobates others, has no reason; except the Divine Will. Whence Augustine [On John 26:2], says: “Why He draws one, and another He does not draw, seek not to judge, if thou dost not wish to fall into error”.¹⁸

This way of looking at the eschatological order implies that, just as in the case of any teleological explanation, the final condition has to be understood from the point of view of the final cause. This is to say that we understand why elects and rejects have the characteristics they have by grasping their contribution to the realisation of the divine plan, i.e. the representation of

18 *Ad tertium dicendum quod ex ipsa bonitate divina ratio sumi potest praedestinationis aliquorum, et reprobationis aliorum. Sic enim Deus dicitur omnia propter suam bonitatem fecisse, ut in rebus divina bonitas repraesentetur. Necesse est autem quod divina bonitas, quae in se est una et simplex, multiformiter repraesentetur in rebus; propter hoc quod res creatae ad simplicitatem divinam attingere non possunt. Et inde est quod ad completionem universi requiruntur diversi gradus rerum, quarum quaedam altum, et quaedam infimum locum teneant in universo. Et ut multiformitas graduum conservetur in rebus, Deus permittit aliqua mala fieri, ne multa bona impediuntur, ut supra dictum est. Sic igitur consideremus totum genus humanum, sicut totam rerum universitatem. Voluit igitur Deus in hominibus, quantum ad aliquos, quos praedestinat, suam repraesentare bonitatem per modum misericordiae, parcendo; et quantum ad aliquos, quos reprobat, per modum iustitiae, puniendo. Et haec est ratio quare Deus quosdam eligit, et quosdam reprobat. Et hanc causam assignat apostolus, ad Rom. 9 [22–23], dicens: volens Deus ostendere iram (idest vindictam iustitiae), et notam facere potentiam suam, sustinuit (idest permisit) in multa patientia, vasa irae apta in interitum, ut ostenderet divitias gloriae suae in vasa misericordiae, quae praeparavit in gloriam. Et 2 Tim. 2 [20] dicit: in magna autem domo non solum sunt vasa aurea et argentea, sed etiam lignea et fictilia; et quaedam quidem in honorem, quaedam in contumeliam. Sed quare hos elegit in gloriam, et illos reprobat, non habet rationem nisi divinam voluntatem. Unde Augustinus dicit, super Ioannem [XXVI, 2]: ‘quare hunc trahat, et illum non trahat, noli velle diiudicare, si non vis errare’ (Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* 1.23,5, ad 3; translated by Fathers of the English Dominican Province). Differently id. *Scriptum super libros Sententiarum* 1.41,1,3, ad 2, where, in spite of reaffirming that *gratia datur gratis et non redditur meritis*, he treats the different ways employed by human beings in order to receive grace as those dispositions that are able to explain predestination with regard to its effect.*

divine goodness. If this representation must be displayed, then the order has to be such and such. Briefly, it is hypothetically necessary. Indeed, the achievement of the purpose is never unconditional as such, but it is obtained by adapting the means to the end. According to Aquinas, nonetheless, an inscrutable element of arbitrariness has to be added, insofar as nothing does really determine the whole process, except God's own will. Aquinas himself makes this clear in the subsequent lines. First, he extends the analogy with the order of creation, comparing the indifference of the sinner to the uniformity of the primary matter, which has been arranged and distinguished by God into different forms in order to achieve the perfection of the universe. Secondly, he develops a further analogy with the artificer, comparing the indifference of the sinner to the uniformity of building materials, such as stones, explaining that it is only for technical reasons that the architect assigns different functions to each of them:

Also in the things of nature, a reason can be assigned, since primary matter is altogether uniform, why one part of it was fashioned by God from the beginning under the form of fire, another under the form of earth, that there might be a diversity of species in things of nature. Why this particular part of matter is under this particular form, and that under another, depends upon the simple Will of God; as from the simple will of the artificer it depends that this stone is in this part of the wall, and that in another; although the plan requires that some stones should be in this place, and some in that place. Neither on this account can there be said to be injustice in God, if He prepares unequal lots for not unequal things. This would be altogether contrary to the notion of justice, if the effect of predestination was granted as a debt, and not gratuitously. In things which are given gratuitously, a person can give more or less, just as he pleases (provided he deprives nobody of his due), without any infringement of justice. This is what the master of the house said: *Take what is thine, and go thy way. Is it not lawful for me to do what I will?* (Matt 20:14, 15).¹⁹

19 *Sicut etiam in rebus naturalibus potest assignari ratio, cum prima materia tota sit in se uniformis, quare una pars eius est sub forma ignis, et alia sub forma terrae, a Deo in principio condita, ut scilicet sit diversitas specierum in rebus naturalibus. Sed quare haec pars materiae est sub ista forma, et illa sub alia, dependet ex simplici divina voluntate. Sicut ex simplici voluntate artificis dependet, quod ille lapis est in ista parte parietis, et ille in alia, quamvis ratio artis habeat quod aliqui sint in hac, et aliqui sint in illa. Neque tamen propter hoc est iniquitas apud Deum, si inaequalia non inaequalibus praeparat. Hoc enim esset contra iustitiae rationem, si praedestinationis effectus ex debito redderetur, et non daretur ex gratia. In his enim quae ex gratia dantur, potest aliquis pro libito suo dare cui vult, plus vel minus, dummodo nulli subtrahat debitum, absque praeiudicio iustitiae. Et hoc est quod dicit paterfamilias, Matth. 20 [14–15]: tolle quod tuum est, et vade. An non licet mihi quod volo facere?* (Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* 1.23,5, ad 3; transl. by Fathers of the English Dominican Province). The same example

Briefly, the fact that one is saved and another lost depends – just as in the case of the original distinction of beings – on the principle of the proper manifestation of divine goodness, namely, that every difference among creatures is required not per se, but only on account of the perfection of the whole.²⁰ Hence, it is better, and as such pre-ordained by God, that someone is condemned rather than all are saved, so that the good of justice is manifested and appreciated. For the same reason, God permits certain evils or defects (for example, the slaying of animals, or tyrannical persecution), in order that the pertinent goods may not be hindered (the life of the lion, or the patience of martyrs).²¹ However, the fact that specifically this one would be saved and that one would not, depends on the unfathomable will of God, with no implication of any form of injustice or partiality. We know indeed that when something is given out without being due – as occurs in the case of the gift of grace, which depends exclusively on God’s liberality and mercy –, no partiality (*personarum acceptio*) takes place. For, as Aquinas writes elsewhere once more invoking Matt 20:14–15, “anyone may, without injustice, give of his own as much as he will, and to whom he will”²² –

of the stones, and their different placement according to art, again recurs in id., *Super Evangelium S. Ioannis lectura* 6,5, § 938 (R. Cai (ed.), *S. Thomae Aquinatis Super Evangelium S. Ioannis lectura*, Turin 1972), and in id., *Super Epistolam ad Romanos lectura* 9,4, § 788. As Henry of Ghent (cf. *Quodlibeta* 8,5 (J. Badius (ed.), *Henrici de Gandavo Quodlibeta*, Paris 1518, 309rK)) seems to suggest (see also Ioannes Duns Scotus, *Ordinatio* 1.41, 19 (*Ioannis Duns Scoti Opera Omnia studio et cura Commissionis Scotisticae ad fidem codicum edita*, VI, *Liber primus. Distinctiones* 26–48, Civitas Vaticana 1963)), Aquinas could have in mind here Arist., ph. 2.6, 197b9–11 (D. Ross (ed.), *Aristotelis Physica*, Oxford 1992), on Protarchus’ dictum, according to which the stones of which altars are made, are more fortunate than those that are trodden under foot. Cf. furthermore Thomas Aquinas, *Summa contra Gentiles* 3.161, where the analogy is with the potter (*et sicut ex simplici voluntate procedit artificis ut ex eadem materia, similiter disposita, quaedam vasa format ad nobiles usus et quaedam ad ignobiles*), and contains an overt anti-Origenian purpose (*per hoc autem excluditur error Origenis, qui dicebat hos ad Deum converti et non alios, propter aliqua opera quae animae eorum fecerant antequam corporibus unirentur*).

20 See analogously Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* 1.23,7.

21 *Si enim omnia mala impedirentur, multa bona deessent universo: non enim esset vita leonis, si non esset occisio animalium; nec esset patientia martyrum, si non esset persecutio tyrannorum* (*Summa theologiae* 1.22,2, ad 2).

22 *Alia est datio ad liberalitatem pertinens, qua scilicet gratis datur alicui quod ei non debetur. Et talis est collatio munerum gratiae, per quae peccatores assumuntur a Deo. Et in hac donatione non habet locum personarum acceptio, quia quilibet potest absque iniustitia de suo dare quantum vult et cui vult, secundum illud*

which is properly, in its evangelical foundation, an Augustinian claim.²³

3. As has emerged, within his anti-Origenian polemic, Aquinas establishes a deep correspondence between creation and redemption, two events that

Matth. 20 [14–15]: “an non licet mihi quod volo facere? Tolle quod tuum est, et vade” (Summa theologiae 2–2.63,1, ad 3 (Sancti Thomae Aquinatis Opera omnia, t. IX, Rome 1897); transl.: The “Summa Theologica” of St. Thomas Aquinas. Literally translated by Fathers of the English Dominican Province, vol. 10, London / New York 1918).

- 23 Cf. Aug., persev. 8,17 (M.A. Lesousky (ed. and transl.), *The De dono perseverantiae of Saint Augustine*, Washington 1956). About the consistent Augustinianism manifested here by Aquinas, see also P. Porro, «Rien de personnel». *Notes sur la question de l’acceptio personarum dans la théologie scholastique*, in: *Revue de sciences philosophiques et théologiques*, 94 (2010), 481–509 (507), and id., *Divine Predestination, Human Merit and Moral Responsibility. The reception of Augustine’s Doctrine of Irresistible Grace in Thomas Aquinas, Henry of Ghent and John Duns Scotus*, in: P. D’Hoine / G. Van Riel (eds.), *Fate, Providence and Moral Responsibility in Ancient, Medieval and Early Modern Thought. Studies in Honour of Carlos Steel*, Leuven 2014, 553–570 (569–570). In this regard, Porro suggests an interesting comparison with Henry of Ghent, according to whom God cannot intentionally will the sin, but He just punishes those who sin, and this is the reason why the analogy between moral and metaphysical order has to be rejected (cf. *Quodlibeta* 8,5, 309vM-310rM). In the same direction, see also Guillelmus de Ockham, *Scriptum in librum primum Sententiarum* 41 (G.I. Etzkorn / F.E. Kelley (eds.), *Guillelmi de Ockham Opera theologica*, 4, St Bonaventure, New York 2000, 601) and notably Petrus Aureolus, *In primum librum Sententiarum* 41,1, Rome 1596, 939–940: *Secundo vero deficit in eo quod ait non esse aliquam causam in speciali, quare iste praedestinatus sit et ille reprobatus; sed hoc esse solum ex simplici voluntate divina et pro libito eius: omnis enim qui pro libito voluntatis aliquem affligit et punit et in peccatum labi permittit ad hoc solum ut puniat et affligat crudelis est et iniustus; delectatur enim per se in poenis [...]. Praeterea: licet [...] possit artifex disponere pro libito voluntatis absque nota crudelitatis & iniustitia, utpote aedificator potest lapides ponere istum inferius & illum superius [...] absque nota iniuriae [...] et similiter figulus ex eadem massa potest facere vas in honorem & vas in contumeliam absque hoc, quod isti iniurietur; et similiter Deus absque iniuria potest ponere unam partem materiae sub forma ignis & aliam sub formam terrae; nihilominus in habentibus experientiam boni & mali, honoris & contumeliae, illud fieri non potest absque iniuria; quia debitum est naturae ut fiat sub factione quae apta nata est sibi inesse: et ideo non est absque iniuria facere hominem in sempiterna tristitia & miseria, absque eius demerito pro solo libito facientis [...]. Praeterea: licet in gratuitis possit tribuere plus vel minus cui vult distributor absque ullo praeiudicio iustitiae, non tamen verum est quod possit cui vult poenam infligere absque iniuria et sic intelligitur verbum patrisfamilias [...]; ergo non potest esse absque iniuria, quod fiat reprobatio absque causa pro solo libito voluntatis.*

are utterly free and unconditional from the viewpoint of the ontological and moral nothingness of the creature, but are provided of an intrinsic finality which justifies the recurrent analogy with art. In this regard, it should be noted that the image of God as craftsman – and therefore the image of a God that is not only Creator (*creator*), but also Maker (*factor*) –²⁴ is not an accessory or merely metaphorical, but represents a structural theoretical pivot, which intersects the biblical theme of the “potter”, and at once actively appropriates an Aristotelian teleological view of nature, resorting to the analogy with art and technology in a continuous manner.²⁵ The result is that Aquinas, by extending the Pauline theological perspective through the Aristotelian teleology, feels himself theoretically and exegetically legitimised to consider the creature as an instrument of divine purpose, and to attribute to God, as craftsman, the task to use it in accordance with His own purpose.

I shall return below to the “anti-Origenian” motif of the Creator employing the human being as a tool. Before that, however, in order to evaluate such instrumental condition of the creature correctly, avoiding any attempt of neutralisation,²⁶ it is worth pointing out that in the *Commentary on the*

24 *Inde est quod fides catholica Deum omnipotentem non solum creatorem sed etiam ‘factorem’ nominat, nam facere proprie est artificis qui per voluntatem operatur* (Thomas Aquinas, *Compendium theologiae* I.96 (*Sancti Thomae Aquinatis Opera omnia iussu Leonis XIII P. M. edita cura et studio Fratrum Praedicatorum*, t. 42, Roma 1979). It seems to me extremely significant, then, that in at least one case Aquinas defines the Aristotelian God as “maker” too: *Est autem attendendum quod Aristoteles hic ponit Deum esse factorem caelestium corporum et non solum causam per modum finis, ut quidam dixerunt* (id., *In libros Aristotelis De caelo et mundo expositio* I.8 (*Sancti Thomae Aquinatis Opera omnia iussu impensaue Leonis XIII P. M. edita cura et studio Fratrum Praedicatorum*, t. 3, Rome 1886)). Cf. M.F. Johnson, *Did St. Thomas Attribute a Doctrine of Creation to Aristotle?*, in: *New Scholasticism* 63 (1989), 129–155.

25 See w. Wieland, *Die aristotelische Physik*, Göttingen ³1992, 254–277.

26 I refer to B. Shanley, *Divine Causation and Human Freedom in Aquinas*, in: *American Catholic Philological Quarterly* 72 (1998), 99–122 (106–108), who quotes Thomas Aquinas, *Quaestiones de veritate* 24,1, ad 5, as an argument for restricting the category of instrumental causation. Yet, here and elsewhere (cf. id., *Summa theologiae* 1–2.68.3, ad 2 (*Sancti Thomae Aquinatis Opera omnia*, t. 6, Rome 1891), cited *infra*, note 33, and *ibid.* 2–2.23,2), Aquinas does not properly exclude that the human being, as a creature, would be an instrument of God, under the full and unconditional control of His providential design. He rather excludes that this condition would be similar to that of a tool which has no faculty of action. On this topic, see also S.A. Long, *St. Thomas Aquinas, Divine Causality, and the Mystery of Predestination*, in: S.A. Long / E. W. Nutt / T.J. White (eds.), *Thomism*

Sentences, Aquinas displays the same technical scheme, with its strong teleological commitment, in a very different manner: the material suited to buildings here appears given by nature, and the task of the builder would only be that of choosing the stones according to their natural predispositions.²⁷ This is, I believe, a synergical interpretation – not by chance shared by Origen.²⁸ It is fitting to a synergistic model of predestination, whereby, although God gives grace only out of His goodness, He nonetheless predestines those receiving it, on the ground of His foreknowledge about their autonomous and meritorious preparation to receive it.²⁹

It seems then to me extremely significant that in the *Summa theologiae* – in the light of an evident theological shift, although without an explicit retraction –, Aquinas judges this early position as basically Pelagian (or, one might say, Semi-Pelagian³⁰), joining it to the Origenian doctrine of the previous

and Predestination: Principles and Disputations, Ave Maria, Florida 2016, 51–76 (53–62).

- 27 See Thomas Aquinas, *Scriptum super libros Sententiarum* 1.47,1,3: *Verbi gratia, aedificator in constitutione domus habet duos motus voluntatis. Unum quo vult formam domus inducere in materiam sine hoc quod aliquid consideret determinate de partibus domus. Alium motum habet quo, considerato quod lapis iste est aptus ad fundamentum, vult ipsum in fundamento collocare* (cf. also *ibid.* 46,1,1, ad 4). Analogously, as regards the natural model of the prime matter: *Diversitas autem recipientium attenditur, secundum quod aliquid est magis aptum et paratum ad recipiendum. Sicut autem videmus in formis naturalibus, quod per dispositiones accidentales, sicut calorem et frigus et huiusmodi, materia efficitur magis vel minus disposita ad suscipiendum formam; ita etiam in perfectionibus animae ex ipsis operibus animae anima efficitur habilior vel minus habilis ad consequendum perfectionem suam* (*ibid.* 17.1,3).
- 28 Compare Or., princ. 3.1,24: [...] *cum Deus fingit vasa, alia quidem ad honorem, alia vero ad contumeliam, putandum est quod honoris vel contumeliae causas tamquam materiam quandam nostras vel voluntates vel proposita vel merita habet, ex quibus singulos nostrum vel ad honorem vel ad contumeliam fingat, dum motus ipsae animae et propositum mentis de se ipso suggerat illi, quem non latet cor et cogitatio animi, utrum ad honorem fingi vas eius, an ad contumeliam debeat* (and analogously *id.*, comRom 7.15,5). According to Origen, just like the young Aquinas, the freely self-determined human wills are similar to diversely prepared matters, from which God draws correspondingly some vessels *unto honour* and others *unto dishonour* (see also R. Penna, *Interpretazione origeniana ed esegesi odierna di Rm 9, 6–29*, in: L. Perrone (ed.), *Il cuore indurito del Faraone. Origene e il problema del libero arbitrio*, Genova 1992, 119–140 [133–139]).
- 29 *Illi enim Deus proponit gratiam infundere quem praescit se ad gratiam preparaturum* (Thomas Aquinas, *Scriptum super libros Sententiarum* 1.41,1,3, ad 1).
- 30 See also J.P. Wawrykow, *God's Grace & Human Action. 'Merit' in the Theology of Thomas Aquinas*, Notre Dame 1995, 38, note 84; 187, note 87, and Porro, 2014, 560. On the Semi-Pelagian doctrine of the *initium fidei* as human “merit”

merits of souls.³¹ The mistake now imputed to that opinion is that it takes human free desire – being the *initium fidei*, or any other kind of preparation

and condition of grace, compare D. Ogliari, *Gratia et Certamen. The Relationship between Grace and Free Will in the Discussion of Augustine with the so-called Semipelagians*, Leuven / Paris / Dudley (Ma) 2003.

- 31 *Fuerunt igitur quidam, qui dixerunt quod effectus praedestinationis praeordinatur alicui propter merita praeexistencia in alia vita. Et haec fuit positio Origenis, qui posuit animas humanas ab initio creatas, et secundum diversitatem suorum operum, diversos status eas sortiri in hoc mundo corporibus unitas [...]. Fuerunt ergo alii, qui dixerunt quod merita praeexistencia in hac vita sunt ratio et causa effectus praedestinationis. Posuerunt enim Pelagiani quod initium beneficiendi sit ex nobis, consummatio autem a Deo. Et sic, ex hoc contingit quod alicui datur praedestinationis effectus, et non alteri, quia unus initium dedit se praeparando, et non alius* (Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* 1.23,5). On the historical relationship between Origenism and Pelagianism, see: G. Bostock, *The Influence of Origen on Pelagius and Western Monasticism*, in: W. A. Bienert / U. Kühneweg (eds.), *Origeniana septima*, Leuven 1999, 381–396. According to Aquinas, Pelagius was not only the theorist of human self-sufficiency (compare for example *Scriptum super libros Sententiarum* 1.17,1,1, ar. 8; ad 8, and *ibid.* 26,1,4), but also that of the more subtle synergy between human free preparation and gift of grace, previously shared by Aquinas: cf. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa contra Gentiles* 3.149; 152; *id.*, *Quaestiones de quolibet*, 4,3 (R.-A. Gauthier (ed.), *Sancti Thomae de Aquino Opera omnia iussu Leonis XIII P. M. edita*, t. 25/1–2, Rome 1996); *id.*, *Summa theologiae* 1–2.114,5, ad 1 (*Sancti Thomae Aquinatis Opera omnia*, t. VII, Rome 1892); *ibid.* 2–2.6,1 (*Sancti Thomae Aquinatis Opera omnia*, t. VIII, Rome 1895); *id.*, *Super Epistolam ad Romanos lectura* 3,3, § 302; 7,3, § 579; 9,2, § 758; 9,3, § 771; *id.*, *Super secundam Epistolam ad Corinthios lectura*, 3, lect. 1, § 86 (Cai (ed.), *S. Thomae Aquinatis Super Epistolas S. Pauli lectura*, vol. I); *id.*, *Super Epistolam ad Ephesios lectura* 1,1, § 12 (Cai (ed.), *S. Thomae Aquinatis Super Epistolas S. Pauli lectura*, vol. II, Turin 1953); *id.*, *Super Epistolam ad Philipenses lectura* 1,1, § 12; 2,3, § 76 (Cai (ed.), vol. II); *id.*, *Super secundam Epistolam ad Timotheum lectura* 2,4, § 86 (Cai (ed.), vol. II); *id.*, *Expositio in Matthaeum* 6,6 (A. Guarenti (ed.), *S. Thomae Aquinatis Catena aurea in quatuor Evangelia*, vol. I, Turin 1953). The discovery of Semi-Pelagianism is traced back to the reading of the *De predestinatione sanctorum* by H. Bouillard, *Conversion et grâce chez s. Thomas d'Aquin*, Paris 1941, 92–122, followed by H. Pesch / A. Peters, *Einführung in die Lehre von Gnade und Rechtfertigung*, Darmstadt 1981, 64–68 and, with some adjustment, by Wawrykow, *God's Grace & Human Action*, 266–276. See also M. Paluch, *Saint Augustine et saint Thomas. Le De praedestinatione sanctorum dans l'œuvre de Thomas d'Aquin*, in: *Revue de sciences philosophiques et théologiques* 87 (2003), 641–647. I would, however, underline here the deep conceptual consistence of Aquinas' perspective, matured in a theoretical context that was no less Aristotelian than Augustinian (cf. M. Lenzi, *Tra Aristotele e Agostino. Forma, materia e predestinazione in Tommaso d'Aquino*, in: M. Lenzi / C.A. Musatti / L. Valente (eds.), *Medioevo e filosofia. Per Alfonso Maierù*, Rome 2013, 151–172).

for grace – as the cause (of the things willed) rather than the effect of predestination. So doing – this is the point that Aquinas wishes to make here – the free will of the creature comes to be separated from the unique condition of possibility of its action, i.e. the potency of the First Cause, by virtue of which any secondary cause can act (and correctly act):

there is no distinction – Aquinas writes – between what flows from free will, and what is of predestination; as there is not distinction between what flows from a secondary cause and a first cause. For providence of God produces effects through the operation of secondary causes, as was above shown [scil. 22,3]. Whence, that which flows from free will is also of predestination [...], even the preparation for grace. For neither does this happen otherwise than by divine help, according to the prophet Jeremias [5:21]: *Convert us, O Lord, to Thee, and we shall be converted.*³²

In the process of justification, too, the creature seems to play an instrumental and material role. To be ordered to the final end, i.e. to the goodness of the divine purpose of salvation, means for the human being to be moved and informed by God, in accordance with His intention to manifest His own mercy.³³ And just as the instrument performs his function by virtue of

32 *Non est autem distinctum quod est ex libero arbitrio et ex praedestinatione; sicut nec est distinctum quod est ex causa secunda et causa prima, divina enim providentia producit effectus per operationes causarum secundarum, ut supra dictum est. Unde et id quod est per liberum arbitrium est ex praedestinatione [...], etiam ipsa praeparatio ad gratiam, neque enim hoc fit nisi per auxilium divinum, secundum illud Thren. ultimi: converte nos, domine, ad te, et convertemur* (Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* 1.23,5; transl. by Fathers of the English Dominican Province). Compare also id, *Summa contra Gentiles* 3.70 and especially id., *Ad Romanos lectura* 8,6, § 703: *sub praedestinatione cadit omne beneficium salutare, quod est homini ab aeterno divinitus praeparatum [...]. Unde ponere quod aliquod meritum ex parte nostra praesupponatur, cuius praescientia sit ratio praedestinationis, nihil est aliud quam gratiam ponere dari ex meritis nostris, et quod principium bonorum operum est ex nobis et consummatio est ex Deo.*

33 Still in a polemic context against Origen, see Thomas Aquinas, *Super Evangelium S. Ioannis lectura* 15.3, §§ 2022–2024: *Fuerunt tamen aliqui qui dicerent, quod merita nostra praecedentia sunt causa illius electionis: et hic fuit error Origenis [...]. Sed contra hoc est, quod dominus dicit: non vos me elegistis. Alii autem dicunt quod verum est quod merita in actu existentia non sunt causa praedestinationis, sed praesistentia in praescientia Dei; dicentes quod quia Deus scivit aliquos bonos futuros et bene usuros gratia, ideo proposuit eis gratiam se daturum. Sed si hoc esset, sequeretur quod ideo elegit nos, quia praescivit nos ipsum electuros. Et sic electio nostra praevia esset electioni divinae, quod est contra sententiam domini [...]; sed electio divina est causa influentiae maioris boni in uno quam in alio [...]. Ideo autem Deus uni magis quam alteri bonum influit, ut reluceat ordo in rebus: sicut apparet in rebus materialibus, quod materia prima quantum est de*

the agent, so it is by virtue of God – who establishes the aims and rules of the action – that the human being accomplishes all her acts. The latter are indeed pre-ordered to redemption, that is to say, they are hypothetically necessary. In sum, Aquinas does not deny human agency, but rather human autonomy, excluding that the human being would be the primary cause of her action and, as such, unconditioned author of her own initiative. My assumption is that this view – according to which the human being acts only inasmuch as she is acted upon, and is acted upon in order that he act³⁴ – is purely Augustinian, although it is expressed in the language and through the conceptual structures of medieval Aristotelianism, with its own metaphorical strategies.

4. Indeed, in order to understand the reason for and significance of such an instrumental role, it is necessary to assume the creatural constitution of the human being, in accordance with the underlying metaphysical pattern shaping Aquinas' thought. Although this is not the place to adequately investigate that matter, we may notice that for Aquinas the origin of the creature from nothing does not represent – as some scholars misleadingly argue – an extrinsic and ultimately indifferent way to bring the world into existence. In other words, the creation from nothing is far from a mere deist hypothesis about nature, where the latter appears to be autonomous and self-sustaining. Rather, the making of the world *ex nihilo* constitutes the principle itself – in the dual meaning of “beginning” and “cause” – of an intrinsic and finalised dependence, and – consequently – a fundamental factor of intelligibility, which explains why the world is how it is, what is its nature, its functioning and its destiny.³⁵

When Thomas claims that the human creature, considered in itself (*sibi autem relicta in se considerata*), is simply “nothing” (*nichil est*),³⁶ pure lack of being, therefore senseless and powerless, he means that this “negativity” represents the creature as regards its perseeity, i.e. from the viewpoint of

se, est uniformiter disposita ad omnes formas. Ipsae etiam res antequam sint, non sunt dispositae ad hoc vel illud esse; sed ut servetur ordo in eis, diversas formas et diversum esse sortiuntur a Deo. Et similiter in creatura rationali quidam eliguntur ad gloriam, quidam reprobantur.

34 *Ratio illa procedit de instrumento cuius non est agere sed solum agi. Tale autem instrumentum non est homo; sed sic agitur a Spiritu sancto, quod etiam agit, in quantum est liberi arbitrii* (id, *Summa theologiae* 1–2.68,3, ad 2).

35 I work here on some themes developed in Lenzi, *In nihilum decidere*, 2017.

36 Thomas Aquinas, *De aeternitate mundi*, (*Sancti Thomae Aquinatis Opera omnia iussu Leonis XIII P. M. edita cura et studio Fratrum Praedicatorum*, t. 43, Rome 1976, 88).

properly understood autonomy and independence. “All things would fall into nothingness (*omnia in nihilum deciderent*)”, Thomas writes, “were they not upheld by the hand of the Almighty (*nisi ea manus omnipotentis contineret*)”.³⁷ Made in its groundlessness to be embraced and sustained by divine government, any creature finds in the power of God its natural and constitutive place. This explains, among other things, why the first human being was created in grace, and why nature, albeit distinct from grace, cannot be separated from the latter if not with laceration.³⁸ Given such a peculiar condition of union without confusion, as a remarkable article by Jean-Pierre Torrell showed, it is only by grace that nature, as creature, is preserved in its complete and perfect integrity, namely in its full functionality.³⁹

The relationship that, as we have observed before, exists between God as primary cause and the human being as secondary or instrumental cause, expresses exactly this condition of causal implication and containment. This occurs through a creative theologisation of the flux metaphysics found in the *De causis*, where the action of the secondary cause is always rooted in and overdetermined by the power of the primary cause. Therefore, Aquinas constantly states that God “is the cause enabling all operating agents to operate”, adding that “if divine influence were to cease, every operation would cease”.⁴⁰

By applying the Proclian causal hierarchy to the teleological structure featuring the natural and artificial processes described by Aristotle, Aquinas makes the secondary causes of Neoplatonic emanationism akin to the instrumental causes of Aristotelian finalism. The result is that of a strict cosmological and “providential determinism”, according to which – as Thomas writes in compliance with the medieval adage *opus naturae est opus intelligentiae* – “the intention of the primary cause aims down to the last effect

37 Thomas Aquinas, *Quaestiones disputatae de potentia*. 5,1, sc 3 (transl.: *On the power of God by Saint Thomas Aquinas*, literally translated by the English Dominican Fathers, vol. 2, London 1933), quoting Gregorius Magnus, mor. 16.37 (M. Adriaen (ed.), *S. Gregorii Magni Moralia in Iob*. Libri XI-XXII, CCSL 143A, Turnholti 1979). But see also Aug., Gen litt 4.12 (I. Zycha (ed.), *S. Aureli Augustini De Genesi ad litteram*, CSEL 28, Prague 1894)

38 Compare Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* 1.95,1.

39 See J.-P. Torrell, *Nature et grâce chez Thomas d'Aquin*, in: *Revue thomiste* 101 (2001), 167–202.

40 Thomas Aquinas, *Summa contra Gentiles* 3.67 (V.J. Bourke (transl.), *St. Thomas Aquinas, On the Truth of the Catholic Faith. Book three: Providence*, New York 1956). Aquinas expresses the same perspective, as he argues that “in all agent causes arranged in an orderly way the subsequent causes must act through the power of the first cause” (*ibid.*).

through all intermediate causes”.⁴¹ In fact, when one does not understand that the instrumental constitution of the creature has an eminently theological and providential value, he shall fail to comprehend the sense itself of the divine causality. Most importantly, however, he shall not understand how Thomas, explaining predestination, could adopt on a philosophical level all those biblical *auctoritates* – like Prov 21:1 (*The heart of the king is in the hand of the Lord; whithersoever He will, He shall turn it*) or Phil 2:13 (*It is God Who worketh in us, both to will and to accomplish, according to His good will*) –, which incontrovertibly testify the unconditioned availability of human desires, fully inspired and used by God. This is indeed a very significant point, because it is precisely about the correct interpretation and understanding of these Scriptural verses that Aquinas returns to in his argument with Origen, with much theoretical and critical coherence:

Some people – Thomas writes –, as a matter of fact, not understanding how God could cause a movement of the will in us without prejudice to freedom of will, have tried to explain these texts in a wrong way. That is, they would say that God causes willing and accomplishing within us in the sense that He causes in us the power of willing, but not in such a way that He makes us will this or that. Thus does Origen, in his *Principles*, explain free choice, defending it against the texts above.⁴²

41 *Intentio primae causae respicit usque ad ultimum effectum per omnes causas medias* (Thomas Aquinas, *Super Librum de causis expositio* 1,1 (H.D. Saffrey (ed.), Fribourg 1954)), that should be read in concert with id., *Quaestiones disputatae de veritate*, 3.1 (R.W. Mulligan (transl.), *Truth by St. Thomas Aquinas*, Vol. 1, Questions 1–9, Chicago 1952): “We see also that a thing acts because of an end (*propter finem*) in two ways. The agent himself may determine his end – and this is true of all intellectual agents – or the end of the agent may be determined by another principal agent (*ab alio principali agente*). For example, the flight of an arrow is toward a definite end, but this end is determined by the archer. Similarly, an operation of a nature (*operatio naturae*) which is for a definite end (*ad determinatum finem*) presupposes an intellect that has pre-established the end of the nature and ordered it to that end (*praesupponit intellectum praestituentem finem naturae et ordinantem ad finem illum naturam*). For this reason, every work of nature is said to be a work of intelligence (*ratione cuius omne opus naturae dicitur esse opus intelligentiae*)”. I owe the expression “providential determinism” (“determinismo provvidenziale”) to P. Porro, *Lex necessitatis vel contingentiae. Necessità, contingenza e provvidenza nell’universo di Tommaso d’Aquino*, in: *Revue des sciences philosophiques et théologiques* 96 (2012), 401–450 (430).

42 *Quidam vero non intelligentes qualiter motum voluntatis Deus in nobis causare possit absque preiudicio libertatis voluntatis, coacti sunt has auctoritates male exponere: ut scilicet dicerent quod Deus causat in nobis velle et perficere, in quantum causat nobis virtutem volendi, non autem sic quod faciat nos velle hoc vel illud, sicut Origenes exponit in III Periarchon, liberum arbitrium defendens contra auctoritates praedictas* (Thomas Aquinas, *Summa contra Gentiles* 3.89; transl. Bourke). The reference is to Or., princ., 3.1,20: “To this we must answer

Origen appears indeed to share the opinion according to which if will and action really depend on God then “it is not we who have done the more excellent deeds, but we seemed to do so, while it was God who bestowed them”.⁴³ Instead, according to Aquinas, even if our activity is determined by God, we are the ones who have undoubtedly acted by our power, yet as a creature can do, namely as a secondary cause, which acts by virtue of the power of the first cause, just as a tool acts by virtue of the power of the craftsman.⁴⁴

The idea that even human will would be a tool in God’s hands, and that God could change its inclination as He pleases,⁴⁵ fits in well with Aquinas’ theory of providence. He is convinced that, insofar as God is the cause of being as being, also the accidents of being – “among which are found *necessity* and *contingency*” – are subject to divine providence. The power of God is not only that of producing, in accordance with His own intentions, certain effects rather than others, but also that of establishing the modality – either necessary or contingent – of their realisation.⁴⁶ Thus, as He wants

that the statement of the Apostle [scil. Phil 2:13] does not say that to will evil things is of God or that to will good things is of God, nor that to do good things or evil things is of God, but he speaks generally, that to will and to do are of God” (transl. Behr).

43 οὐχ ἡμεῖς τὰ διαφέροντα πεποιήκαμεν, ἀλλ’ ἡμεῖς μὲν ἐδόξαμεν, ὁ δὲ θεὸς ταῦτα ἐδώρησατο (Or., phil., 21.19; transl. Behr). See also id., princ. 3.1,20.

44 *Illud autem in cuius virtute agens agit, est causa non solum virtutis, sed etiam actus. Quod in artifice apparet, in cuius virtute agit instrumentum, etiam quod ab hoc artifice propriam formam non accepit, sed solum ab ipso applicatur ad actum. Deus igitur est causa nobis non solum voluntatis sed etiam volendi* (Thomas Aquinas, *Summa contra Gentiles* 3.89).

45 See for example Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* 1–2.9,6, ad 3: *Ad tertium dicendum quod Deus movet voluntatem hominis sicut universalis motor ad universale obiectum voluntatis, quod est bonum. Et sine hac universali motione homo non potest aliquid velle. Sed homo per rationem determinat se ad volendum hoc vel illud, quod est vere bonum vel apparens bonum. Sed tamen interdum specialiter Deus movet aliquos ad aliquid determinate volendum, quod est bonum: sicut in his quos movet per gratiam.*

46 *Sicut autem dictum est, ens in quantum ens est, habet causam ipsum Deum: unde sicut divinae providentiae subditur ipsum ens, ita etiam omnia accidentia entis in quantum est ens, inter quae sunt necessarium et contingens. Ad divinam igitur providentiam pertinet non solum quod faciat hoc ens, sed quod det ei contingentiam vel necessitatem. Secundum enim quod unicuique dare voluit contingentiam vel necessitatem, praeparavit ei causas medias, ex quibus de necessitate sequatur, vel contingenter. Invenitur igitur uniuscuiusque effectus secundum quod est sub ordine divinae providentiae necessitatem habere. Ex quo contingit quod haec conditionalis est vera: si aliquid est a Deo provisum, hoc erit* (Thomas Aquinas, *In Metaphysicam Aristotelis commentaria*, 6.3, § 1220 (M.-R. Cathala (ed.), Turin

that the human being would be saved freely, God prepares, in order for this to be done, a contingent cause such as human will. But this does not mean that the predestined could, as such, not be saved. Any effect that would be under the infallible control of divine providence, although determined by contingent proximate causes, is ineluctably necessary; nevertheless, it happens – as Aquinas emphasises – in the hypothetical manner of conditional necessity:

The fact that the one who has been predestined, will be saved without fail, depends on the certainty of predestination; yet, the issue here is not an absolute necessity, but a conditional one, since – necessarily – if that one has been predestined, he will be saved; but this is not absolutely necessary.⁴⁷

In fact, one may well be perplexed facing this conclusion.⁴⁸ *Prima facie*, it is not clear what allows one to exclude that the good will of the predestined, without being absolutely necessary, would be causally determined and therefore necessitated by divine action. Aquinas nevertheless, excludes it. And as far as I can see, he comes to this stance on the basis of the absolute and unconditional character of the divine power, which drives intimately and appropriately, being the “intimate” cause of any creatural force.⁴⁹ It follows then that God can move human will in full conformity with its nature, that is to say, with the same natural spontaneity by which it moves itself, having created its power from nothing.⁵⁰

1935); transl. J.P. Rowan, *St. Thomas Aquinas Commentary on the Metaphysics of Aristotle*, vol. 1, Chicago 1961). On this topic, in addition to the already mentioned Porro, *Lex necessitatis vel contingentiae*, see also my *Si aliquid est a Deo provisum. Aristotele, il caso e il futuro contingente in Tommaso d'Aquino*, in: M. Leone / L. Valente (eds.), *Libertà e determinismo. Riflessioni medievali*, Roma 2017, 197–233 (218–233).

47 *Ad primum ergo dicendum quod hic praedestinatus omnino salvatur ex certitudine divinae praedestinationis: non tamen est ibi necessitas absoluta, sed conditionalis; quia si talis est praedestinatus, necessario salvatur: non autem est necessarium simpliciter* (Thomas Aquinas, *Quaestiones de quolibet* 11.3, ad 1).

48 Cf. also Petrus Aureolus, *In primum librum Sententiarum* 40,4, 934: *Sed nec iste modus evadit, quia cum replicatio ista & conditio immutabilis sit, frustratorium est conari in oppositum consequentis*.

49 Compare Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* 1.105,5 (transl. by Fathers of the English Dominican Province, vol. 5, London 1922): “And because in all things God Himself is properly the cause of universal being which is innermost in all things (*magis intimum in rebus*); it follows that in all things God works intimately (*in omnibus intime operetur*). For this reason in Holy Scripture the operations of nature are attributed to God as operating in nature (*quasi operanti in natura*)”.

50 For example, cf. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* 1.106,2 (transl. by Fathers of the English Dominican Province, vol. 5): “The operation of the will is a certain inclination of the willer to the thing willed. And He alone can change this

To summarise, the doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo*, framed within a universal teleological scheme, allows one to account for and support a strong anti-Origenian and anti-Pelagian interpretation of all those biblical *auctoritates* that, as we have seen, put human desires in the hands of God. Such an interpretation, making the agentiality of the human being subjected to the divine purpose of salvation and the unconditional power of creation, assumes that God is able to cause good will without forcing it – that means, according to Thomas and his theoretical but somewhat anodyne imagery, that God moves it spontaneously, or without prejudice to its freedom of will.

In this perspective, the human being can be regarded as free not only and not so much – as Origen leaned to stating polemically⁵¹ – because he considers himself free (for he is unaware of being an actor and performer of a predetermined process), but rather because he is involved in an intrinsically causal relationship, where the creature cannot be nor act out of the divine power sustaining it. Here, there is no place for freedom if the latter is taken as an absolutely autonomous activity. Outside God there is not freedom, just because there is no condition of possibility. Outside God there is only “nothingness”, and whatever form of freedom regarded as “une totale indépendance libertaire vis-à-vis de Dieu”⁵² – i.e. vis-à-vis the only condition of sense and existence for creatures – would necessarily imply a tragic and impossible nihilistic act of annulment and degradation. Hence, only God appears to be the measure and condition of freedom, and authentic human freedom – namely, the possibility to act in accordance with the integrity of rational nature – appears to be caused, restored and contained by divine grace. After all, even according to Origen – let us think of the doctrine of the final apocatastasis, i.e. the unavoidable and infallible progress towards good –, the autonomy of the creature is certainly not absolute, nor to the detriment of God’s providence.⁵³ Excluding that God could move good will for the fear

inclination, Who bestowed on the creature the power to will (*virtutem volendi*): just as that agent alone can change (*potest mutare*) the natural inclination, which can give the power to which follows that natural inclination. Now God alone gave to the creature the power to will (*solus autem Deus est qui potentiam volendi tribuit creaturae*), because He alone is the author of the intellectual nature (*quia ipse solus est auctor intellectualis naturae*)”. See however also *ibid.* 105,4, ad 1; 111,2; 1–2.9,6 and *id.*, *Summa contra Gentiles* 3.88.

51 Compare above, note 43.

52 S. A. Long, *Providence, liberté et loi naturelle*, in: *Revue thomiste* 102 (2002), 355–406 (362).

53 With regard to the doctrine of the final apocatastasis, Gaetano Lettieri has spoken of a “paradossale prevalere nel sistema origeniano di un determinismo della grazia a scapito della capacità di autonomia (quindi di perdizione finale) della libertà, ma in senso del tutto opposto” with respect to the irresistibility of the Augustinian

of undesirable deterministic effects, would mean ruling out the possibility of considering human freedom in the only way that is theologically consistent: the paradoxical way of a “given freedom”, an undue and free release of the capacity to will the good. Insofar as Thomas claims that this redemption occurs through an intrinsic movement of the will, accomplishing its intimate and natural desire of conversion, the metaphysical consistency of a theory of freedom eminently theological and Christian, cannot be denied.⁵⁴

grace (G. Lettieri, *Il nodo cristiano. Dono e libertà dal Nuovo Testamento all’VIII secolo*, Rome 2009). See analogously id., *Apocatastasi logica o apocalisse della carne? Origene e Agostino paradigmi divergenti d’identificazione storico-sociale cristiana*, in: E. Canone (ed.), *Anima-corpo alla luce dell’Etica. Antichi e moderni*, Florence 2015, 133–146, and compare the historical remark by V. Grossi, *La presenza di Origene nell’ultimo Agostino (426–430)*, in: R. J. Daly (ed.), *Origeniana quinta*, Leuven 1992, 558–564 (561).

54 See also O. H. Pesch, *Thomas von Aquin. Grenze und Größe mittelalterlicher Theologie. Eine Einführung*, Mainz 1989², 177–178.