

Review of the dissertation thesis by Petr Dvorský

Petr Dvorský's thesis is a considerable work marked by an often comprehensive understanding of St. Thomas, evidenced with copious texts of the Angelic Doctor, and an admirable engagement with numerous contemporary scholars. Dvorský's analysis is metaphysically robust and sufficiently nuanced to zero in on precisely what St. Thomas says (and which is so often missed) regarding maintaining creaturely freedom in the face of exhaustive and infallible providence. The work argues well that the contingency/freedom in free acts is opposed by natural necessity and coercion. Dvorský argues well that both of these are missing in the case of God's infallible providential ordering of free human acts precisely because the human will is naturally indeterminate in regard to particular goods and can be moved interiorly by God in a way in which no other exterior agent or influence can move the will.

The application of the above to the particularly difficult question of the permission of evil is done effectively. In fact, the final line of the dissertation ("For the good ones, this is good enough - because the Good is enough") is, I think, entirely on point and is a poignant, even mystical, way to end the manuscript. This is supremely fitting for a theological work of such profound mysteries, and it illustrates a properly speculative and contemplative *habitus* in the author.

Dvorský's thesis moves through a collection of distinct questions but without ever deviating or meandering away from the main thread. This makes the work clear and enjoyable to read. As a minor criticism, I will note that there are several places within the text in which informalities, in my estimation, detract from the clarity and force of the text. I would recommend that the author rectify before pursuing publication (e.g. on pg. 88: "The Father does everything for The Son and The Son does everything for The Father; The Holy Ghost is turned to the both of them – *or something like that*"). Emphasis is my own.

More specifically, Dvorský's analysis of Maritain's position is noteworthy. He is correct, I think, in noting that no one else (at least not that I am familiar with) has critiqued Maritain's starting point, i.e. an understanding of divine innocence which itself ought to be questioned. Those who have critiqued Maritain's view (including myself) tend to begin by ceding at least some significant portions of Maritain's understanding of the divine innocence. Dvorský's ensuing analysis of sin, evil, and badness in St. Thomas is thorough and an important contribution. The author may wish at some point to refer to Brian Davies (himself influenced by Herbert McCabe on this point) especially from *The Reality of God and the Problem of Evil*, wherein Davies makes a more general but complementary argument regarding the inability of creatures to judge as if He were a moral creature. To that effect, the argument at the culmination of the work regarding the gratuity of salvation is convincing and, I think, quite correct. The examples used by Maritain in an attempt to prove his point always fail when applied to God precisely because they assume an indebtedness on behalf of the preserving cause to the abandoned patient.

Of *particular* contribution to the state of the question is the second chapter of the work, which disentangles the term "possible" in the thought of St. Thomas, making clear and well-evidenced distinctions for Thomas' different uses of the term. These different uses are, I believe, clearly implied by St. Thomas but are largely ignored by less speculative and overly textual analyses. I am not aware of another work which explicitly disambiguates the various senses in which St. Thomas uses the term.

For all of the reasons above, it is my judgment that the work succeeds in fulfilling the criteria necessary for the conferral of the doctoral degree.

I *would* like to present three questions on a few of the other particulars of the work.

1: The application of the “statistical approach” to what is possible for God (or possible in any sense). It is unclear to me why it would be the case that the lack of a singular historical occasion, as it were, of a thing or state of affairs would demonstrate its impossibility, especially according to St. Thomas. St. Thomas’ understanding of what is possible is clearly (as I think Dvorský has argued well) rooted not so much (or at all) in actual worlds but rather in metaphysical potencies and ontological/logical compossibility. As such, St. Thomas will argue that an event which was pre-ordained from all time according to divine providence does not *by that fact alone* lose its modality as contingent. This would mean that plenty (indeed, an almost infinite number) of never existing (and never going to exist) phenomena are, nonetheless, possible in a metaphysically significant sense of the term. They are surely not *impossible*, which Dvorský seems to imply. I wonder how he would understand ST I, q 25, a. 5, especially: “But the divine goodness is an end exceeding beyond all proportion things created. Whence the divine wisdom is not so restricted to any particular order that no other course of events could happen. Wherefore we must simply say that God can do other things than those He has done.”

It *seems* to me that the above argument flows from Dvorský’s understanding of what St. Thomas holds regarding the simplicity of the divine will and the act of creation. For example, he says “God’s choice is just another name for God’s essence” (411). I’m interested in more clarification as to precisely what Dvorský means here. Is the act of creation not *ad extra*? On its face, this would seem to run afoul of one of St. Thomas’ most foundational principles: that God has no real relation to His creation.

2: On pg. 393 (and this same idea occurs elsewhere), Dvorský states: “According to Aquinas, one hundred percent providential protection against failure would make the failure impossible in an important sense of the term (as it actually did in the case of moral infallibility of Virgin Mary, or immortality of prelapsarian Adam), transferring the creature to a higher grade of nature and emptying the lower grade then: in this sense of modal terms, the contingency of creaturely success would be eliminated, which is, in general, undesirable.” (393)

I am confused as to how this squares with what I take to be the view of St. Thomas advocated for throughout the rest of the work, i.e. that it is sufficient for an act to be considered free (contingent and morally significant, etc.) if the effect is not determined by nature and is not coerced. But it seems that there is no reason why we cannot maintain that the infallibility of divine motion/grace does not negate the contingent mode by which some act comes forth from a free, secondary cause. St. Thomas says this in many places, e.g. ST I, q. 19, a. 8, ad 2; ST I, q. 103, a. 7, ad 3; and ScG III, Ch. 73. If this is so, why would extrinsic protection via grace, just as Mary receives, have any effect on the freedom of actions? Why would the extension of that special grace (to all rather than just to Mary) affect the contingency with which it produces salutary acts? If Dvorský means simply that something would be lost if the created nature were rendered *naturally* unable to sin, then the point certainly seems true (human nature itself would be lost!), but the moral infallibility of Mary and the immortality of prelapsarian Adam are the results of supernatural graces, not anything *in* the patients.

3: From pg 407 and 408, respectively: “God has not predestined them to anything at all, but foreknows their demerits and wants to reprobate them then.” “In contrast, God has no parallel will to damn concerning the (other) foreknown persons. Aquinas does not say that God does not want to damn them at all: he wants it because it is just – but he wants it only on the basis of the foreknowledge of their sins.” Does this mean that, upon Dvorský’s reading of St. Thomas, predestination is *ante praevisa merita* but that reprobation is *post praevisa demerita*? What of St. Thomas in ST I, q. 23, a. 5, ad 3 which, in responding to the objection(s) that God predestines according to foreknown merit *and* reprobates according to foreknown demerit, states that the reason for reprobation is not in foreknowledge but rather based in God’s simple will (*simplici voluntate*). Moreover, this simple will aims at manifesting in reprobation (principally) the divine justice, such that “God’s goodness, which in itself is one and undivided, should be manifested in many ways in His creation”? Dvorsy states that “only on the basis of this foreknowledge of sin he wants to damn them,” which I would certainly grant, but this seems to conflate reprobation and damnation. Reprobation, it seems to me, is an antecedent non-election whereas damnation, for St. Thomas, is a judgment posterior to the sins permitted by God. Election and reprobation are not merited/demerited whereas damnation certainly is. Of course, this particular judgment is in some way willed permissively by the reprobation in the first place, but the distinction seems real and significant nonetheless. What, on Dvorský’s analysis, is the relation of reprobation and damnation? Is reprobation *post praevisa demerita*?

These questions, of course, do not in any way detract from my recommendation that the work meets the expectations for the awarding of the Ph.D, and I look forward to hearing Dvorský defend this thesis.

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A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'T. O'Neill', with a stylized flourish at the end.