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Aquinas and Scotus on the Source of Contingency

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Abstract and Keywords

Both Thomas Aquinas and John Duns Scotus were committed to the view that effects with a contingent modality exist in the created world. This is to say that there are things that could have been otherwise. This chapter explores their respective accounts of the ontological reason for why there are effects with a contingent modality. Leibniz considered Aquinas's and Scotus's views on this issue, concluding that they were in fundamental disagreement about the 'root of contingency.' This chapter first makes a distinction between two different senses in which an object can have a contingent modality, one having to do with causation and the other with modes of existence. Then it applies this distinction to Aquinas's and Scotus's texts to show that their views on why there is contingency in creation are in fact quite similar.

Keywords: Aquinas, Duns Scotus, Leibniz, contingency, modality, causation

Later medieval Christian thinkers were committed to the view that there were aspects of the created world that could have been otherwise. They believed that if everything in the world were necessary, the absurd consequence would follow that it is useless to deliberate about action. Their belief that certain aspects of the created world could have possibly not been, however, seemed to pose a difficulty for some of their deeply held theological beliefs: namely, that God has knowledge of all future states of the created world and that God's infallible causality extends to all things which exist. The first thesis implies that if God believes that an event *e* will happen at a future time *t*, then it is not possible for *e* not to obtain at *t*. The second thesis implies that if God wills some state of affairs *x*, then it is not possible for *x* not to obtain. Accordingly, the question arose of whether any created effects could have a contingent modality given that all created effects are known and willed by God and contingency requires the possibility of non-existence. The prominent thinkers of the later medieval period addressed this difficulty head on by developing various accounts of how God's foreknowledge and infallible causation could be rendered compatible with the existence of contingent effects in creation. In the context of developing such accounts, two very influential medieval thinkers, Thomas Aquinas and John Duns Scotus, each discussed a separate question, which is deserving of attention in its own right: namely, the question of what is the ultimate cause for why a created effect is contingent. Put differently the question can be phrased as: What explains why aspects of the created world are such that they could have not existed? Both thought that identifying the ontological source of contingency would help in understanding how God's infallible knowledge and willing could be reconciled with the contingent existence of that which is known and willed. Although contemporary scholarship has given much attention to their (p.47) respective accounts of how God's infallible beliefs and causation can be rendered compatible with contingency,[1] as well as their respective thought on the nature of contingency itself,[2] there has yet to be a contemporary exploration and comparison of Aquinas's and Scotus's views regarding the source of contingency. The main purpose of this paper is to fill this gap.

Thinkers in the late scholastic and early modern period considered the question of the "root of contingency" to be an important and interesting philosophical issue, as well as a point of fundamental disagreement between Aquinas and Scotus. According to Leibniz, "The root of contingency for Scotus is in the will of God as free … but for Thomas it is in the will of God as efficacious."[3] The later scholastic thinker Cajetan similarly claimed that Aquinas traces contingency in creation back to the efficacy of God's will, (p.48) while Scotus traces it to the divine will's free or contingent mode of causation.[4] This is to say that for Scotus, created objects are such that they could have possibly not existed because their cause, which is God's will, could have possibly not caused them, whereas for Aquinas, objects have this modality because God wills them to have it and nothing that God wills can fail to be as he wills it. There are passages in both Aquinas's and Scotus's works that appear to support straightforwardly this reading of their respective views. In his *Summa theologiae*, Aquinas claims explicitly that effects are contingent *because* God wills them to be contingent when he writes the following:

> And therefore it must be said that this happens [that there are contingent effects] on account of the efficacy of the divine will … Since therefore the divine will is the most efficacious cause, it not only follows that the things which God wills happen, but also that they happen in the manner that God wills them to happen. God wills certain things to happen necessarily and certain things to happen contingently, so that there is an order in things for the perfection of the universe.[5]

Scotus appears to support the view that he thinks contingency arises in created effects from the contingent mode of God's causation when he writes in his *Lectura*: "From this it appears why there is contingency in the effect … the divine will … is capable, in the same instant of eternity and at that very same instant of eternity, of willing and of not willing something, and so it is able to produce and able not to produce it."[6]

Not only did Cajetan and Leibniz note the fundamental incompatibility between Aquinas's and Scotus's apparent positions on how contingency arises in creation, but they also

raised various objections to the views themselves. Against Scotus, for example, Cajetan charged that if the contingent modality of created effects originates in God's mode of causation, it simply follows from God's willing of an effect that it is contingent, and thus contingency cannot be considered as an aspect of creation that is intentionally chosen by God.[7] Against Aquinas, however, Leibniz charged that the efficacy of the divine will cannot be the origin of an object's contingent modality since contingency is a necessary property of that which contingently exists. Since God's will is contingently related to that (p.49) which it wills, God's willing cannot be the explanation for why an object has its necessary features.[8]

My main aims in this paper are to reconstruct and compare Aquinas's and Scotus's thinking on the ontological cause of contingency in creation and to respond to these objections. My reconstruction will challenge Cajetan and Leibniz's analysis of their positions. While their interpretation of Aquinas's and Scotus's views appears to rest on firm textual grounds, it fails because it does not take into account the fact that both thinkers are not addressing the same type of contingency when they make claims about its source. When the passages in which Aquinas and Scotus explicitly discuss the origin of contingency in creation are read in context with attention to the *kind* of contingency each is discussing, similarities between their views can be identified and the objections raised against their respective views can be solved. In the first section of the paper I will introduce a distinction between two senses of contingency and then in the subsequent section, I will apply it to Aquinas's texts to clarify his position and address Leibniz's objection to his view. Next, I will turn to Scotus's texts. I will clarify his position and show how it compares with Aquinas's view. Finally, I will address the difficulty that Cajetan raises to his view.

1. Contingently Existing Versus Contingently Caused Effects and Their Accompanying Theological Difficulties

The core meaning of the modal term "contingent" is "able to be otherwise" or "possible not to be." Since there are a variety of ways in which something can be "otherwise," there are

several analogous meanings that are signified by the term "contingent."[9] I will focus on two senses of this modal predicate that are particularly relevant to interpreting Aquinas's and Scotus's views on the origins of contingency.

An effect is contingent with respect to existence, or *contingently existing*, if it is such that the effect considered in itself could have possibly not existed. An effect is *contingently caused* if it is such that its proximate cause has the power to elicit or to not elicit the operation through which the effect is caused. *Contingently caused* effects are contrasted with the effects of necessarily operating causes—that is, natural causes—which are such that they lack the power to refrain from causing their operations. Accordingly, (p.50) the predicate of being *contingently caused* characterizes an effect in virtue of its being produced by a cause with a particular kind of nature.[10] It is not said of an effect in virtue of its own nature. All *contingently caused* effects *exist contingently*. If an effect's proximate cause has the power not to cause the operation through which the effect is caused, then it is possible for the effect not be caused, and thus, not to exist.

Not all *contingently existing* effects are *contingently caused*. There are many effects brought about by causes that operate according to natural necessity—that is, causes that lack the power to refrain from producing their operations—which nevertheless *exist contingently*. Although the naturally operating cause itself lacks the power to refrain from producing its operation, it might be such that an external cause can impede its operation. Fire, for instance, lacks the power to refrain from burning flammable objects, but it might not cause burning in a flammable object if a person removes the object from its proximity. The possible impediment of the necessarily operating cause's operation makes it possible for its effect not to exist.[11] Some necessarily operating causes are such that their operations cannot be impeded by other causes, but the effects of these operations are *contingently existing* because the cause *itself* could have possibly not existed. There are some theists, for example, who hold that God freely created a physically determined universe, which is to say that every physical event is entailed by the laws of nature and the

physical state of the world. On this view, although physical events necessarily follow from their proximate causes, they *exist contingently* because God could have created no world at all or perhaps a world with different initial conditions and so, any particular physical event could have not been *simpliciter*.

Later medieval Christians were committed to the view that the entire set of created objects was *contingently existing*, as well as to the view that a subset of these objects, containing the voluntary actions of intellectual creatures, were *contingently caused*. This sub-set was distinguished from another sub-set of objects that were *necessarily caused*; that is, caused by causes that operate according to natural necessity.[12] The medievals recognized that (p.51) maintaining the existence of *contingently existing* effects and the existence of *contingently caused* effects each presented unique challenges to upholding God's infallibility. Regarding *contingently caused* effects, the thesis that some effects had causes with the power to refrain from causing their operations seemed to be incompatible with the thesis that these very same effects were infallibly willed to exist by God. If, for instance, God infallibly wills that I choose *y* in circumstance *x* how can it be in my power to not cause *y* in *x*? Regarding contingency with respect to existence, which characterizes all created effects, the worry arose of how God could derive infallible beliefs about whether a *contingently existing* object actually exists. Knowledge of this sort could not be derived from knowing the essence of the object because the object considered in itself does not include existence or non-existence. Moreover, God could not derive this knowledge from knowing his own essence. God's essence was thought to be unchangeable, and so the content of God's essence did not vary according to which contingently existing objects were actually willed to exist by God. Because of their strong view of God's aseity, later medieval thinkers held that God's intellect could not depend on actual created objects to acquire knowledge about creation. So God could not know which contingently existing objects actually existed in virtue of his acquaintance with the objects themselves.

It was in the context of addressing worries such as these that Aquinas and Scotus discussed the question of what was the

ultimate source for why created effects were contingent. Both appeared to think that a preliminary step to reconciling the contingency of created effects with God's infallible willing and knowing of these objects was identifying the ontological cause in virtue of which created objects were contingent. In their discussions of this matter, however, they do not explicitly specify whether they are discussing the *contingent mode of existence* that belongs to all created effects or the property of being *contingently caused* that belongs to a relatively small subset of created effects. We are only able to know which sense of contingency was under discussion by giving attention to the context in which these discussions occur.

2. Aquinas on the Cause of Contingency in Creation

Aquinas's explicit claims about the ultimate foundation for why created objects are contingent occur in the context of addressing the question of *whether God's will imposes necessity on the objects which it wills*. It is in answering this question that Aquinas makes the claim that objects are contingent because God infallibly wills them to be such. Examining the (p.52) context which precedes Aquinas's treatment of this question will help to clarify whether Aquinas understood God's infallible willing of an object's contingency to explain why the object was such that, considered in itself, it had a *contingent mode of existence* or whether God's infallible willing explained why an object was such that it was *contingently caused* by its proximate cause.

Aquinas devotes a separate article to the question of *whether God's will imposes necessity on the objects which it wills* in both his *De veritate* and his *Summa Theologiae*. The article occurs in both works within the question on the divine will, and in both it is preceded by the question of *whether God necessarily wills whatever he wills*.[13] The main points that Aquinas makes in this earlier article provide an important context for interpreting the claims he subsequently makes about the source of contingency in creation in the later article on whether God's will imposes necessity on the objects which it wills.

For Aquinas, the question of whether God necessarily wills whatever he wills pertains to God's willing of particular objects, asking whether God's will is necessarily related to any of the particular objects which it wills. The main conclusion that Aquinas tries to establish is that God's will is only contingently related to each of the created objects that God wills. Aquinas claims that the divine will is naturally ordered to willing God's own goodness, just as the human will is naturally ordered to willing the human being's happiness.[14] The natural order of God's will to the willing of God's goodness implies two conditions on divine willing: first, God cannot possibly will himself not to be good or to lack any absolute perfection, and second, everything that God wills is willed insofar as it is ordered to God's goodness. Aquinas reasons that "since the goodness of God is perfect, and can exist without other things, since no perfection can be added to it by other things, it follows that his willing of things other than himself is not absolutely necessary."[15] Aquinas's point is that since the particular objects that God wills are only willed insofar as they are related to God's goodness and no created object is necessary for God's goodness, no created object is necessarily willed.

(p.53) From Aquinas's discussion of the modal relationship between the divine will and created objects two points follow regarding the causal origin of the *contingent mode of existence* that belongs to all created objects. First, the proximate reason for why every created object is such that it could have possibly not existed is the *contingent mode of the divine will's causation* with regard to created objects; that is, the fact that the divine will can possibly not cause every possible created object.[16] Second, the reason for why God is able to refrain from causing any possible creature is the fact that creatures are only contingently related to God's goodness, and it is only the divine goodness (and whatever is necessary for it) that God must will of necessity. Thus, the ultimate reason for why creatures have a *contingent mode of existence* is their contingent relation to the divine goodness which arises because of the divine goodness's completeness. The freedom of God's will to not will created objects depends

on the divine goodness's being such that it does not require any created object for its perfection.

This preceding context is important for interpreting Aquinas's explicit claims about the ultimate foundation for why created objects are contingent which occur in the later article on *whether the divine will imposes necessity on whatever it wills*. In this later article, when Aquinas asks whether the divine will imposes necessity on willed objects and in response gives an account of what the ontological source for why created objects are contingent, he takes himself to have already demonstrated in the preceding article on *whether God necessarily wills whatever he wills*, that no created object is necessarily willed by God. Since he has already established that every created object *exists contingently*, it follows that in this later article on the issue of whether God's will imposes necessity, he must be talking about a sense of necessity and contingency other than necessity and contingency with respect to existence.

The objections that lead up to the body of the article make clear that Aquinas is worried about the difficulty of maintaining that there is a secondary distinction between *necessarily and contingently caused* effects within the world of *contingently existing* effects. The objections suggest (p.54) that it follows from the fact that 'God's will cannot be impeded from realizing its effect' that every created effect follows necessarily from its proximate causes, i.e. that every effect is *necessarily caused*. To the objectors it seems that God's infallible willing of an effect *x* implies that it is not possible for *x*'s proximate cause *not* to elicit the operation that causes *x* since *x* is unable not to be if God wills it.

In the body of the text, Aquinas responds to this worry by claiming that the *mode of the operation* which brings about the effect is itself willed by God. Accordingly, God's infallible causation of every effect does not threaten *contingent causation because an effect's coming to be through a contingent mode of causation* is itself infallibly willed by God. In the *De veritate*, Aquinas writes:

> It is accordingly necessary to assign a different principal reason for the contingency in things, to which the previously assigned cause [secondary causes] will be subordinated … Now the divine will is a most powerful agent. Hence its effect must be made like it in all respects. Not only that which God wills happens, but it also happens in the mode in which God wills it, as necessarily or contingently … And the divine will preordains the mode of things from the order of his wisdom. According to how it disposes some things to happen in this way or that way, it adapts causes for them in the mode which it disposes. It is able to nevertheless introduce the mode in things even without the mediating causes. And so we do not say that some of God's effects are contingent only on account of the contingency of secondary causes, but rather on account of the disposition of the divine will which provides such an order for things.[17]

In this passage, Aquinas explains that the fact that an object has a contingently operating secondary cause is not the ultimate reason for why that object is *contingently caused*. The ultimate reason for why it has this modality is because God infallibly willed for it to have it. Aquinas explains that since God wills for particular objects to be *contingently caused*, he chooses contingently operating secondary causes to cause them.[18] Thus, (p.55) the ultimate reason for why an effect is contingently caused is not the fact that it has a contingently operating secondary cause. Rather, the ultimate cause for why it is contingently caused is God's willing that it is contingently caused and consequently choosing a contingently operating secondary cause for it.

In the penultimate line of the text quoted previously, Aquinas adds a very interesting qualification to this account. He states that God need not rely on mediating secondary causes to bring it about that an effect in creation is caused according to the mode that God wills for it. It is difficult to interpret what Aquinas might have meant by this. It seems that he is saying that God could immediately produce effects that are both necessarily and contingently caused without producing these effects through mediating created causes. It is clear that God

could immediately produce a *contingently caused* effect since God is himself a contingently operating cause. It does not seem possible, however, for God to immediately produce a *necessarily caused* effect, since we have seen that Aquinas thinks that any created effect that God wills is willed by God contingently. Thus, it seems that God *himself* could not necessarily cause a creature to exist if necessarily causing an effect entails causing it by an operation which is not in one's power not to elicit.[19] Aquinas did not seem to be very committed to the idea that God could immediately produce effects *caused* according to both modalities, since he does not mention this idea in his other discussions of the origin of contingent causation in creation.[20]

The preceding and immediate context make clear that when Aquinas claims that the efficacy of God's will is the ultimate foundation for why created effects are contingent, he is referring to the property of being *contingently caused* that applies to a subset of created effects. As we have (p.56) seen, in the article preceding this claim, Aquinas established that no creature is necessarily willed by God, and thus, all creatures *exist contingently*. Accordingly, it would be redundant, as well as contradictory, to then subsequently invoke the efficacy of the divine will to explain creature's *contingent mode of existence*. Moreover, when Aquinas claims that effects are contingent because God efficaciously wills them to be such, he explains further that in most cases God executes his will that there is contingency in an effect by willing a contingently operating cause for the effect. This makes clear that Aquinas was referring to the *contingent mode of causation* through which some created effects are brought about when he claimed that the divine will's efficacy is the source of contingency in created effects.

Now that Aquinas's claim that 'the efficacy of God's will is the ultimate foundation for contingency' has been examined in its context, we can move on to consider Leibniz's objection to Aquinas's position. Leibniz argued that God's efficacious will cannot explain why a particular object is necessary or contingent because an object's particular modality is essential to it. God's will cannot be the explanation for why an object

possesses an essential feature because whatever God wills is willed by God contingently and essential features are necessary features of objects. Applied to the case of an object's contingency, Leibniz's point is this: God's willing *that a created object is contingent* cannot be the reason for why it is contingent because this has the problematic implication that the created object could have possibly not been contingent since God could have possibly not willed this proposition given his freedom.

It is clear from this objection that the sense of contingency that Leibniz has in mind is contingency with respect to *existence*. The mode of existence that an object has is essential to it. If a being exists necessarily its essence implies that it exists, and if an object exists contingently it is such that its essence does not imply existence. Although Aquinas would have agreed with the premises of Leibniz's argument, the argument fails as an objection *to Aquinas*. We have seen when Aquinas claims that contingency in creation is ultimately caused by the efficacy of God's will, he is referring to the fact that certain created effects are *contingently caused*, and *not* the fact that all created objects have a *contingent mode of existence*. While the *contingent mode of existence* that belongs to created objects is quite clearly an essential feature of these objects, it is not obviously the case that the property of being produced by a contingently operating proximate cause is essential to the effects that are brought about by such causes. The medievals thought that being caused by necessarily operating cause was not essential to any created effect, since they held that God was able to cause immediately any effect that could be caused by a creature; for example, God could produce (p.57) burning in cotton without relying on fire.[21] Thus, any effect of a necessarily operating cause could have possibly been caused by a contingently operating cause: that is, God alone. Regarding contingently produced created effects, it seems that many of these effects could have possibly been produced by necessarily operating causes. Many movements of the human body, for instance, which are brought about by the command of the will could possibly be brought about by necessarily operating causes within the body itself. The acts of the will itself, as opposed to the acts of other

powers that are commanded by the will, raise a difficult case. It seems that it might be essential to acts of will that they are contingently caused, and thus God's willing that they come about contingently could not explain why there are contingently caused. Even if there are some created effects that are exceptional in being such that it belongs to their essence to be brought about by a contingently operating cause, the efficacy of God's will provides an adequate account for why the effects that are indifferent to originating from a contingently or necessarily operating cause arise from a particular mode of causation. Thus, Leibniz's objection does not prevail against Aquinas's position on the origin of contingency when the sense of contingency that is at stake is correctly interpreted and it is understood as a general theory, which applies for the most part.

In sum, for Aquinas the proximate reason for why an effect is *contingently caused* is the fact that it was produced by a contingently operating secondary cause. The ultimate reason, however, for why the effect was contingently caused is the efficacy of God's will which willed for the effect to come about through a contingent mode of causation, and thus willed a contingent cause for it. Regarding the *contingent mode of existence* that belongs to all created effects, Aquinas says that the proximate reason for why every created effect is *contingently existing* is the fact that God freely causes every created effect. The reason for why God has the power to not will the existence of any possible creature that God can cause, is the fact that the existence of no creature is necessary for God's perfect goodness. Accordingly, for Aquinas the ultimate reason for why every creature *exists contingently* is the self-sufficiency and complete perfection of God's goodness. We can now analyze Scotus's position and go on to compare it with Aquinas's to see if the two are in fact in fundamental disagreement about the origin of contingency in creation.

(p.58) 3. Scotus on the Cause Of Contingency in Creation

Scotus explicitly discusses the question of the source of contingency in creation in each of his discussions of God's

knowledge of contingents, and his answer to this question is straightforward and unwavering throughout his career.[22] In the early *Lectura* discussion he wrote:

> From this it appears why there is contingency in the effect … the divine will … is capable, in the same instant of eternity and at that very same instant of eternity, of willing and of not willing something, and so it is able to produce and able not to produce it.[23]

In the later *Reportatio* IA, the same basic answer is given, though it is expressed differently:

> [I]t is manifest that the divine will is contingently related to whatever it is immediately related, and in this very relation is the ultimate source of contingency.[24]

For Scotus the cause that explains why created effects are contingent is the divine will's capacity to refrain from causing whatever it causes. It is clear that Scotus is here giving an account of why created effects have a *contingent mode of existence*, rather than an account of why some effects are *contingently caused* by their proximate causes. He believed that God was an immediate productive cause of all existing things, so it would follow that the contingency caused by God's will is the contingency that belongs to all created objects: that is, a *contingent mode of existence*. For Scotus, all created objects *exist contingently* because all created objects are brought about through the divine will's contingent mode of causation.

(p.59) Scotus goes on to explain that God is able to know which *contingently existing* effects obtain in the actual world in virtue of knowing the causal determinations of the divine will.[25] The question with which Scotus was preoccupied was how God is able to derive knowledge of whether objects with *a contingent mode of existence* actually exist if God cannot derive this knowledge in virtue of knowing his own essence and ideas or actual created objects. This is different from the problem in which Aquinas was interested when he discussed the origins of contingency. Recall that Aquinas was interested in giving an account of how God's infallible willing of an effect

was compatible with the effect's being *contingently caused* by its proximate causes. Thus, Aquinas and Scotus were addressing problems that pertained to different senses of contingency in created objects, when they each explicitly made claims about the causal origin of contingency.

In his *Reportatio* discussion of the origins of contingency, there is further evidence that Scotus did not think that the divine will's contingent mode of causation was the source of the distinction between *necessarily and contingently caused* created effects. Scotus explicitly notes that a subset of created effects have a secondary contingency *in virtue of* being *contingently caused* by their *proximate causes*. Scotus writes:

> But something is able to be said contingent in two respects on account of its causes, just as the act of my will has a two-fold cause of contingency, one from the part of the divine will as first cause and another from my will as from its second cause. Another thing is contingent only with respect to the first cause and necessary insofar as it is from the second and proximate cause, as those things which are able to be impeded by the divine will, such as those which happen from their causes in the natural world.[26]

Here Scotus notes that all created effects are *contingently caused* by God— even the effects of natural causes. However, God's *contingent mode of causation* does not account for why some effects are *contingently*, rather than *necessarily, caused* by their *proximate causes*. According to Scotus, (p.60) contingently operating secondary causes are themselves the sources of the secondary contingency in their effects.[27]

Unlike Aquinas, Scotus does not explicitly offer an account of the ultimate reason for why a particular effect is produced by a contingently operating secondary cause. Recall that for Aquinas the efficacy of the divine will was the ultimate explanation for why a created effect was *contingently caused* by its proximate cause because God efficaciously willed for the effect to be contingent and therefore, to have a particular kind of cause. Although Scotus does not explicitly make such a

claim, I think he would have agreed with Aquinas's position on this matter. In his discussion of God's knowledge of contingents, Scotus asserts that God infallibly wills the truth-value of every contingent proposition about creation. Insofar as it is a contingent fact that an effect *x* is produced by a contingently operating secondary cause *y*, Scotus would similarly trace the fact that *x* was caused by a contingently operating secondary cause back to the efficacy of the divine will in willing that *x is caused by a contingently operating secondary cause* and more specifically that *y causes x*.[28]

(p.61) In contrast with Aquinas, Scotus would have rejected the further idea that God is able to bring about the modal differences between created effects that are *necessarily and contingently caused* by created causes without relying on created causes. Recall that Aquinas claimed in the *De veritate* that God could bring about these modes in effects without mediating causes. For Scotus, God alone could not even introduce the contingency that contingently operating secondary causes introduce into their effects. We saw above that Scotus notes that the effects of contingently operating secondary causes differ from those of necessarily operating secondary causes because they are caused by *two* contingently operating causes. Thus, these effects have a two-fold possibility for non-existence in virtue of the fact that both the divine and created cause of their existence have the power to refrain from causing them. Accordingly, God *alone* cannot bring about an effect that has the modal properties of those effects that are caused by contingently operating secondary causes. Any effect that is produced by God alone will have merely a single possibility for non-existence based on God's single power to not cause that effect. Perhaps Aquinas was led to assert that God alone can cause the modal properties that secondary causes introduce into their effects because he was thinking that the distinguishing feature of the effects of contingently operating secondary causes was the fact that they follow from a contingently operating proximate cause. Thus, since God operates contingently, it seems that he can alone produce an effect that follows from a contingently operating proximate cause. Scotus, however, thinks that although the effects produced by God alone and those

produced by both God and contingently operating secondary causes both follow from contingently operating proximate causes, they are fundamentally different in their modal features. The former effects have a single potency for non-existence, while the latter have double possibility for non-existence. Thus, in Scotus's view, contingently operating secondary causes are a necessary condition for God to introduce into creation a secondary contingency, which adds an additional layer of indeterminacy to the contingent mode of existence which all creatures enjoy.

Regarding the ultimate origin of the contingent mode of existence that belongs to all creatures, there is agreement in Aquinas's and Scotus's thinking. We saw that Scotus identified the divine will's power to cause or to not cause the existence of any possible creature as the reason for why creatures have a *contingent mode of existence*. Aquinas's discussion of the question of *whether God wills whatever he wills necessarily* revealed that he thought that there was a further cause for why God's causation with respect to creatures is through a contingent mode, and thus a further cause for why creatures *exist contingently*. For Aquinas the further cause was the self-sufficiency and complete perfection of the divine goodness. Because God (p.62) necessarily wills only his own goodness and no creature is necessary for God's goodness, God does not necessarily will any creature. Scotus does not provide any further account in his discussion of the origin of contingency for why God's causation of creatures occurs according to a contingent mode, and thus, creatures *exist contingently*. Yet, there is evidence that he would have agreed with Aquinas's further points. In his *De primo principio*, Scotus writes:

> Nothing is willed necessarily except that which is necessary for the existence of that which is willed regarding the end. God loves Himself as end and whatever about Himself as end He loves can exist, even if nothing other than Him exists, because what is necessary of itself depends on no other. Therefore by his volition, he wills nothing else necessarily. Accordingly, he causes nothing necessarily.[29]

Scotus's point is that God necessarily wills only those things that are necessary for what God loves in himself (that is, his goodness). Thus, no creature is willed necessarily, since what is lovable in God does not require any creature for its existence. Like Aquinas, Scotus thought that God's freedom not to create stemmed from the self-sufficiency and completeness of what is good, and therefore lovable, in God himself. If God's contingent mode of causation with respect to creatures is traced to the self-sufficiency of the divine goodness, then the *contingent mode of existence* that belongs to creatures will similarly have this as its ultimate foundation.

In sum, when Scotus identified God's contingent mode of causation as the source of the contingency of creatures, he was referring to the *contingent mode of existence* that belongs to all creatures. Like Aquinas, he thought that the capacity of the divine will to cause creatures contingently was founded on the fact that the divine will only necessarily wills the divine goodness, which is complete and self-sufficient. Similarly, Scotus would have agreed with Aquinas's position that effects are contingently caused by their proximate causes because of the efficacy of the divine will which chooses which kind of causes exist in creation. Although Scotus does not explicitly make this claim, it follows from his view that the divine will efficaciously determines the truth-values of contingent propositions about creation.

Now we can consider how Scotus's thought stands up to the objection that Cajetan raised to his position. Recall that Cajetan argued that Scotus's view that the contingency of created objects followed from the divine will's contingent mode of causation implied that contingency in creation is not intentionally chosen by God. Since the divine will does not freely choose to operate according to a contingent mode of causation with respect to (p.63) creatures, the properties that follow from this mode of causation would not be intentionally chosen by God. Cajetan finds it problematic that contingency in creation would not be something that was freely and intentionally willed by God, since God is supposed to have complete sovereignty and providence over creation. This requires that every aspect of creation is intentional and chosen by God.

It is clear that Cajetan's objection raises a genuine problem if the contingency in question is the *contingent causation* of certain effects by their proximate causes. If it followed from God's contingent mode of causation that effects in creation were contingently caused by their proximate causes, then it would follow that it is a necessary fact that created effects are caused by contingently operating secondary causes. Thus, the world's being such that effects are brought about by contingently operating causes would not be an aspect of the creation that is intentionally willed by God because it would be a necessary feature of any world that included secondary causes. Cajetan seems to find this view problematic because it limits the scope of God's freedom in creation. But the view also seems problematic because it makes necessarily operating created causes impossible. If God's contingent mode of causation is necessary and it entails that creatures cause contingently, then it would follow that necessarily creatures cause contingently.

We have seen, however, that Scotus does not identify God's contingent mode of causation as the causal source for why created effects are *contingently caused* by their *proximate causes*. For Scotus, God's contingent mode of causation is the proximate reason for why creatures *exist contingently*. God's contingent causation explains the *contingent mode of existence* that belongs to creatures that are produced by both contingently and necessarily operating created causes. We have already seen in analyzing Leibniz's objection to Aquinas that it is a necessary feature of creatures that they have a *contingent mode of existence*. It is essential to creatures that they do not exist in virtue of their own essences. Thus, there is no difficulty if the *contingent mode of creatures existence* follows from a necessary feature of God; that is, God's contingent mode of causation. Cajetan's objection to Scotus rests on the assumption that Scotus was referring to the contingent operation of secondary causes when he argued that God's contingent mode of causation was the source of this contingency. In fact, Cajetan raises this objection to Scotus in the context of commenting on Aquinas's claim that the efficacy of God's will is the source of contingency, and we have seen that Aquinas was here referring to contingent secondary

causation. Cajetan's mistake was to assume that Scotus was referring to the same kind of contingency when stating that God's contingent mode of causation was the source of contingency.

(p.64) 4. Conclusion

Both Cajetan and Leibniz held that Aquinas and Scotus were in fundamental disagreement about what gives rise to contingency in creation, each positing a different aspect of the divine will; that is, its contingent mode of causation versus its efficacy. In this paper I have shown that this assessment of their views fails to take into account the distinction between two different kinds of contingency in creation and the fact that each thinker was not talking about the same one when making explicit assertions about how contingency is caused in creation. When Aquinas claimed that the efficacy of God's will is the source of contingency, he was referring to the *contingent causation* through which some created effects are produced. When Scotus identified the contingent causality of the divine will as the source of contingency, he was referring to the *contingent mode of existence* that belongs to all created objects. Although Aquinas and Scotus each explicitly discussed the question of the origin of contingency with different senses of contingency in mind, I have reconstructed their respective views regarding both types of contingency to highlight the similarities between their positions. Both thinkers would agree that the *efficacy of God's will* explains why there are effects in creation that are *contingently caused* by secondary causes and that the *contingent mode of God's causation* explains why all created effects have a *contingent mode of existence*. Not only did Cajetan and Leibniz err in thinking that Aquinas's and Scotus's views were in opposition, but they also failed to refute these views because their objections presupposed misinterpretations. *Contra* Cajetan's objection to Scotus: since a *contingent mode of existence* is necessary to creatures, there is no difficulty in claiming that this mode originates from a necessary feature about the divine will; namely, its contingent mode of causation. *Contra* Leibniz's objection to Aquinas: since being *contingently caused* by its proximate cause is a contingent property of created effects, there is no difficulty in

locating the ultimate explanation for why some effects have this property in God's efficacious, but contingent, willing of it.[30]

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Notes:

([1]) In addition to many articles, there have been fairly recent monographs on this topic in both Aquinas's and Scotus's thought. See, for example, Harm J. M. J. Goris, *Free Creatures of an Eternal God: Thomas Aquinas on God's Infallible Foreknowledge and Irresistible Will* (Leuven: Peeters, 1996); and Joachim Roland Söder, *Kontingenz und Wissen: Die Lehre von den futura contingentia bei Johannes Duns Scotus* (Münster: Aschendorff, 1999).

([2]) Discussion of Aquinas's theory of contingency has revolved around the question of whether he held a synchronic or diachronic conception of contingency. For an argument that he held a diachronic model of modality, see Simo Knuuttila, "The 'Statistical' Interpretation of Modality in Averroes and Thomas Aquinas," *Ajatus* 37 (1978), 79–98. Knuutila's thesis has been challenged by Klaus Jacobi in his "Statements about Events: Modal and Tense Analysis in Medieval Logic," *Vivarium* 21 (1983), 85–107. Discussions of Scotus's modal theory have focused on the historical and conceptual importance of his synchronic conception of contingency. See Calvin Normore's "Scotus, Modality, Instants of Nature," in M. Dreyer and R. Wood (eds.), *John Duns Scotus: Metaphysics*

and Ethics (Leiden: Brill, 1996), 161–74, and “Duns Scotus’s Modal Theory,” in T. Williams (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Duns Scotus* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 129–60; and Simo Knuuttila’s “Duns Scotus’ Criticism of the ‘Statistical’ Interpretation of Modality,” in J. Beckmann *et al.* (eds.), *Sprache und Erkenntnis im Mittelalter* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1981), 441–50,“Interpreting Scotus’s Theory of Modality: Three Critical Remarks,” in L. Sileo (ed.), *Via Scoti: Methodologia ad Mentem Joannis Duns Scoti*, (Rome: Edizioni Antonianum, 1995), 1:295–303, and“Duns Scotus the Foundations of Logical Modalities,” in *John Duns Scotus: Metaphysics and Ethics*, 127–43. On the historical origin of Scotus’s theory, see Stephen D. Dumont, “The Origin of Scotus’s Theory of Synchronic Contingency,” *Modern Schoolman* 72 (1994), 149–67. For an argument that Scotus’s notion of contingency has a central role in his philosophy, see Antonie Vos, *The Philosophy of John Duns Scotus* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2006).

([3]) Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, *Textes inédits*, ed. G. Grua, (New York, Garland: 1985), 348: “Radix contingentiae apud Scotum in voluntate Dei quatenus libera (+ *sed hoc circulus* +), sed in voluntate Dei quatenus efficax Thomas+ *Contingentia in ipsa natura veritatis, seu objiecti, ut possibilitatis, ut existentiae*.” See also p. 353: “Scotus quaerit radicem contingentiae in divinae voluntatis libertate + *Est circulus* + Thomas in divinae voluntatis efficacia + Non est ratio formalis. + ” For discussion of the interpretive debates surrounding Leibniz’s own views, see Robert Merrihew Adams, “Leibniz’s Theories of Contingency,” in M. Hooker (ed.), *Leibniz: Critical and Interpretive Essays* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1982), 243–83.

([4]) See Cajetan, *Commentaria in Summam theologiae St Thomae, ST* Ia.19.8, n. 11 (ed. Leonina 4: 246): “Credit enim quod prima radix contingentiae sit quidem con- ditione divinae voluntatis, et in hoc concordat nobiscum: sed nos dicimus quod illa condition est summa efficacia illius; ipse autem dicit quod est contingentia illius. Et quantum ad propositum spectat, nomine *contingentiae* in divina voluntate, intendit

libertatem illius: ita quod imaginatur quod, quia Deus libere vult et causat, ideo est contingentia in universe."

([5]) Aquinas, ST Ia.19.8, co. (ed. Leonina 4: 246). Translations are my own.

([6]) Scotus, *Lectura*, I. 39, q. 1–5, n. 54 (ed. Vat. 17: 497).

([7]) Cajetan, *Commentaria in Summam theologiae, ST* Ia.19.8, n.14 (ed. Leonina 4: 246).

([8]) Leibniz, *Textes inédits*, 348, 353. These texts are quoted in note 3.

([9]) Aquinas explicitly claims that "necessity" is said in many ways since there are a variety of ways in which something "must be." See *ST* Ia.82.1 co.

([10]) On Aquinas's and Scotus's views on the distinction between necessarily and contingently operating causes, as well as the historical and conceptual background to their views, see Timothy Noone, "Nature, Freedom, and Will: Sources of Philosophical Reflection," *Proceedings of the American Catholic Philosophical Association* 81 (2007), 1–23. On Scotus, see also Tobias Hoffmann, "The Distinction between Nature and Will in Duns Scotus," *Archives d'histoire doctrinale et littéraire du Moyen Âge* 66 (1999), 189–224.

([11]) For Aquinas's discussion of this point, see for instance, *ScG* II.30.

([12]) Effects that followed from their causes with *absolute* necessity comprise an even smaller sub-set within the set of effects that were caused by necessarily operating secondary causes. As noted previously, the operations of many naturally operating causes could fail to obtain based on circumstances external to the cause.

([13]) *De ver*. 23.4 (ed. Leonina 22.3: 660): "utrum Deus de necessitate velit quidquid vult" and *De ver*. 23.5 (ed. Leonina 22.3: 665): "utrum divina voluntas rebus volitis necessitatem imponat"; *ST* I.19.3 (ed. Leonina 4: 234): "utrum quidquid

Deus vult, ex necessitate velit" and *ST* I.19.8 (ed. Leonina 4: 244): "utrum voluntas Dei necessitatem rebus volitis imponat."

([14]) For this claim on the human will and its relation to happiness, see, for example, *ST* I-II.10.2 co.

([15]) *ST* I.19.3 co. (ed. Leonina 4: 235).

([16]) Norman Kretzmann has argued that Aquinas fails in establishing that God has the freedom not to create. See his *The Metaphysics of Theism: Aquinas's Natural Theology in Summa Contra Gentiles I* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), chs. 6–7. For a response, see John F. Wippel, "Norman Kretzmann on Aquinas's Attribution of Will and of Freedom to Create to God," *Religious Studies* 39 (2003), 287–98. Kretzmann thinks that Aquinas, based on his thoughts about God's goodness, should have concluded that God must necessarily create something. The view that God must necessarily create *something* can be consistently held with the view that the freedom of God's will grounds the absolute contingency of every creature. Even if God must necessarily create something, God's freedom to choose *which* creatures to create would explain why any particular creature is absolutely contingent.

([17]) *De ver*. 23.5, co. (ed. Leonina 22.3: 666). See also *ST* I. 19.8, co.; *De Int.* I.14. For a discussion of chronological development in Aquinas's thought in the texts cited, see Bernard McGinn, "The Development of the Thought of Thomas Aquinas on the Reconciliation of Divine Providence and Contingent Action," *The Thomist* 39 (1975), 741–52.

([18]) It is outside the scope of this paper to evaluate whether Aquinas's solution adequately addresses the difficulty of reconciling God's infallible causation of an effect with its proximate cause's contingent production of it. None of what Aquinas says in the quoted passage explains how it is possible for a secondary cause to *retain* the power not to cause *x* on the condition that God infallibly wills *x*. If God infallibly wills x, then it is not possible for *x* not to obtain. So it is difficult to see how it would be logically possible for the cause of *x* to retain

the power not to produce *x* on the condition that God willed *x* if it were not possible for *x* not to obtain on this condition. It seems that Aquinas thinks that the fact that the cause has the power not to produce *x* absolutely–that is, abstracting from the condition of God's willing *x*—is sufficient to secure that the cause produces *x* contingently.

([19]) Aquinas did think that necessity of supposition applied to some of God's effects. This is to say that if God freely willed to cause a certain kind of being, this free choice would entail the production of that which is necessary for that being to exist. See, for instance, *De pot.* 3.16 co.

([20]) See *ST* Ia.19.8 co. and *De Int.* I.14. In *ScG* II. 30, Aquinas addresses the worry of how there can be necessary things in creation if all created objects proceed from God's contingent causality. Aquinas explains that God is able to produce two kinds of creature: ones that have an inherent potency for non-being, and those which lack such a potency. He refers to the latter as 'necessary beings.' This discussion, however, is not ultimately helpful for allowing us to see how God could immediately produce a necessarily caused being, since those which lack a potency for non-being would still be contingently caused beings given that they are freely produced by God.

([21]) The 1277 Parisian condemnations, for instance, censured the position that God was unable to produce the effects of secondary causes himself. See David Piché, *La condamnation parisienne de 1277: Texte latin, traduction, introduction et commentaire* (Paris: Vrin, 1999), 100: prop. 63 (69): "Quod deus non potest in efectum cause secundarie sine ipsa causa secundaria."

([22]) For the *Lectura* account, see the Vatican edition 17: 481–510. The *Ordinatio* account can be found in Appendix A of Vatican edition 6: 410–44. This text has been relegated to the appendix because of questions surrounding its authenticity. The Vatican edition editors think that the text that we have is a compilation inserted by later followers of Scotus to fill the lacuna that he left (see ed. Vat. 6: 26*–30*). Against this view, Timothy Noone claims that while the manuscript evidence shows that Scotus intended to strike this text from the final

publication version of the *Ordinatio*, the text should still be considered as authored by him at an earlier date. Noone holds this position on the basis of citations of this text he has found in William Alnwick's *Determinationes*, as well as the fact that all manuscripts used to reconstruct the *Ordinatio* copy it. Noone has not yet published on this issue, but Joachim Roland Söder prints Noone's findings in *Kontingenz und Wissen*, 8–10. A critical edition of the *Reportatio* text on God's knowledge of contingents can be found in the appendix to Söder, 225–65. I cite the *Reportatio* from this text.

([23]) *Lec.* I.39.1–5, n. 54 (ed. Vat. 17: 497).

([24]) *Rep.* IA, d. 39–40, n. 35 (Söder, p. 249).

([25]) *Rep.* IA, d. 38, q. 1–2, n. 37 (Söder, 234): "Et ideo veritate causata in complexione talium terminorum determinata per actum voluntatis, intellectus divinus tunc primo novit unam partem contradictionis contingentium esse veram." See also *Lec.* I, d. 39, q. 1–5, n. 62 (ed. Vat. 17:500), and *Ord.* I, d. 38–9, q. 1–5, n. 23–4 (ed. Vat. 6:428–9).

([26]) *Rep.* IA, d. 39–40, n. 36–7, (Soder, 249). Scotus explains further how certain natural effects are contingently caused by God and necessarily caused by their proximate causes in *Ord.* I.8 pars 2 q. unica, n. 306 (ed. Vat. 4: 328): "Secunda pars, scilicet de necessitate secundum quid, patet, quia multae causae naturales, quantum est ex parte earum, non possunt non causare effectus, et ideo necessitas est secundum quid—quantum scilicet est ex parte earum—et non simpliciter: sicut ignis, quantum est ex parte sui, non potest non calefacere, tamen potest absolute non calefacere, Deo non cooperante, sicut apparet, et apparuit de tribus pueris in camino."

([27]) While Scotus does not think that the contingent mode of God's causation entails that secondary causes operate contingently, he does think that the contingent operation of any secondary cause entails that God causes contingently. Throughout Scotus's works, he argues that it would not be possible for any secondary cause to operate contingently if God did not also operate contingently. See, for example, *De primo principio* 4.3 (ed. Roche, 82): "Aliquid causatur

contingenter; ergo Prima Causa contingenter causat … Probatio prima consequentiae: Quaelibet causa secunda causat inquantum movetur a Prima; ergo si Prima necessario movet, quaelibet necessario movetur et quidlibet necessario causatur." This argument also occurs in *Lec.* I.39.1–5 n. 35 (ed. Vat. 17: 489); *Ord.* I.39 1–5 n. 12 (ed. Vat. 6: 412–13); *Ord.* I.8 pars 2, q. unica, n. 281 (ed. Vat. 4: 313).

([28]) Toward the end of his career, Scotus's thoughts regarding God's willing of the truth-values of all contingent propositions about the created world began to waiver. There are texts in which he claims that there are some contingently true propositions that did not have their truth-values in virtue of the divine will. See, for instance, *Reportatio* IA, d. 46, q. 2 (MS Vienna, Österreichische Nationalbibliothek 1453, f. 125rb–va) and *Reportatio* IB, d. 46, q. 2 (MS Worcester, Cathedral Library F.69, f. 63rb–63v). I quote and discuss these passages in Gloria Frost, "John Duns Scotus on God's Knowledge of Sins: A Test-Case for God's Knowledge of Contingents," *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 48 (2010), 15–34. The most important among these propositions that did not have their truth-value in virtue of God's willing were those about creaturely sins; for example, *creature x causes sin y*. Even if God does not will the truth of *creature x causes sin y*, it still seems that Scotus could think that the ultimate cause of why sin *y* was *caused contingently* (rather than necessarily) is the efficacy of the divine will. Even if it is denied that God wills that sin *y comes about contingently* (since this would imply that God wills that sin *y* obtains), it is still the case that God wills that creature *x*, with its contingent mode of causation, exists, and that creature *x* has what is necessary for its operation. God's willing of creatures with contingent modes of causation (and the conditions necessary for their operation) implies that there will be contingently caused effects. Had God willed the existence of only necessarily operating causes, there would be no contingent secondary causation in creation.

([29]) *De primo principio* (ed. Roche, 88–90). I have modified Roche's translation.

([30]) Earlier versions of this paper were presented at the University of Western Ontario's 2012 Colloquium on 'Modality and Modal Logic in Medieval Philosophy' and at the Society for Medieval and Renaissance Philosophy's 2012 Eastern *APA* session. I am grateful to both audiences for helpful discussions, and to Tobias Hoffmann and an anonymous referee for insightful written comments on earlier drafts. I would also like to thank the John Templeton Foundation and the Notre Dame Center for Philosophy of Religion for a research fellowship that supported me during work on this paper.