

PHYSICAL PREMOTION AND HUMAN FREEDOM

DAVID SVOBODA

Charles University Prague
Catholic Theological Faculty
Thakurova 3
Praha 6, 160 00
Czech Republic
davidsvoboda@sovice.net

The paper shows how two outstanding Thomists solved the problem of the Divine previous *concursum* in relation to human freedom. First, the paper explains what the Physical premotion according to Thomists is, and then it turns to the Thomistic definition of self-determination in order to follow the Thomistic explanation that the infallible outgoing of the act of willing is compatible with human freedom. The author tries to analyse some key Thomistic claims with the help of possible world semantics.

The Scripture presents God as the Creator of the whole reality, who constantly conserves his Work in being (comp. 2 Cor 4,6 and Hebr 1, 3). Beside these two Divine activities (*creatio et conservatio*), the Scripture also speaks about the Divine influence upon all changes, free human behaviour included. “Therefore, my beloved, [...] work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for God is at work in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure” (Phil 2, 12–13). So, the Scripture describes God as the sovereign Lord of all changes, who also influences a man and his free behaviour. At the same time, the Scripture does not deny the human ability of self-determination: “It was he who created man in the beginning, and he left him in the power of his own inclination” (Sir 15, 14).

The above-mentioned quotations seem to hint at some discrepancy, as if there were a certain tension between the Divine sovereign power and agency, on the one hand, and the necessary independence of human self-determination, on the other hand. I try to express that difficulty by these questions: Is it possible to get a consistent explanation

of God's immediate production of human free behavior without constraining the free nature of those activities? If so, how?

In this paper, I would like to present a Thomistic answer to those questions. I will proceed in three steps. First, I explain "Divine concurrence" (*concursus divinus*), according to Thomists. Secondly, I will mention the Thomistic definition of self-determination. Finally, I will envisage how some Thomists defend the human self-determination in connection with the doctrine of the Divine concurrence. I will focus mainly on the Divine production of free human activity in the natural order, and then I will try to specify some key Thomistic claims, and I will analyse them with the help of possible world semantics. I will use two sources: on the one hand, it will be the work of the Spanish Thomist, Domingo Bañez (1528–1604), on the other hand, it will be the work of the German Thomist, Ludwig Babenstuber (1660–1726). Both are regarded to be the authors of the Second Scholasticism.¹

I.

The schoolmen characterize the Divine influence upon the activity of the second causes as "the concurrence".² Thomists distinguish two types of concurrence: simultaneous (*simultaneous*) and previous (*praevius*). The simultaneous concurrence is the Divine influence upon the activity of the second cause. By that concurrence God causes the entity (*entitatem*) of the activity of the second cause. The previous concurrence, or *physical premotion* is the Divine action on the second cause or, more precisely, on its relevant active potency, by which God moves that cause to action. Physical premotion is the Divine influence upon the potency of the second cause, which precedes the own activity of the second cause and moves that cause to action. Both simultaneous concurrence and physical premotion can be considered *ex parte Dei* and *ex parte causae secundae*. Those considerations are put aside here. The Divine concurrence does not take away second causes, their ability to produce effects.

¹ D. Bañez: *Scholastica commentaria in primam partem Summae Theologicae Divi Thomae Aquinatis*, Lugdunum, 1588; L. Babenstuber: *Philosophia thomistica salisburgensis sive Cursus philosophicus secundum doctrinam Divi Thomae Aquinatis*, Salisburgum, 1706.

² Cf. J. Gredt: *Elementa philosophiae aristotelico-thomisticae*, n. 835, Barcinone, 1961.

I try to illustrate the given characterization of the Divine concurrence by the means of an example.³ Take the human will, which is the aptitude to desire various good things. It is possible to distinguish three moments of the will in relation to each its activity: (1) *The will has not been active yet, it is in potency to the act of willing.* At the moment there is nothing in common between the Divine concurrence and the will. (2) *The will is before the performance of its own activity moved by physical premotion from the potency of the act of willing to the act of willing.* At that moment the physical premotion is the efficient cause and the necessary condition of the realization of the act of willing. (3) *The will is active.* At that moment God influences the act of willing by the simultaneous concurrence, the simultaneous concurrence is the necessary condition of the activity of the second cause. The effect of the physical premotion is the second cause *qua* an active cause, the effect of the simultaneous concurrence is the activity of the second cause.

Let us put aside the divine simultaneous concurrence and concentrate only on the physical premotion. In the following I would like to specify what the physical premotion is and then look at the relationship between the premotion and its effect.

The physical premotion is the Divine action on the potency of the second cause by which the second cause is moved to the activity. The premotion is labeled as “physical”, for it is efficiently causal production—premotion is not being active *qua* final cause. The term “premotion” (*prae-motio*) does not express temporal priority. Premotion to an act and that act itself occur at the same moment. The premotion signifies the natural priority of the Divine action, for thanks to it, God moves the second cause to the activity. The second cause is given that entity by God only for the activity *hic et nunc*. It is the transitory entity (*entitas vialis*), which disappears at the very moment of the completion of that activity.

The following Thomistic statement is crucial: if the physical premotion is given, then infallibly the activity of second cause occurs. The question is what Thomists understand by the term “infallibility”. For the time being, I have not found the definition of that key term in any Thomistic work accessible to me. Nevertheless, according to Thomists, the infallible outgoing of the act of willing neither jeopardizes nor destroys human freedom. Therefore, we can assume that “an infallible

³ Cf. G. M. Manser: *Das Wesen des Thomismus*, Freiburg, 1935:607; R. Garrigou-Lagrange: ‘Prémotion physique’, in: A. Vacant & E. Mangenot (eds.): *Dictionnaire Théologie Catholique*, vol. XIII-1, Paris, 1936: 31–77.

act” is the act which is not produced necessarily and its nature is contingent. However, Thomists specify the contingency of that act and they claim that although the infallible act may not occur, it still *de facto* occurs.

2.

Let us look at the Thomistic definition of the self-determination in order to follow the Thomistic explanation that the infallible outgoing of the act of willing is compatible with human freedom. The self-determination is defined by Thomists as “an active indeterminacy by whose power the will reign over its acts in the way that if all necessary for the activity is given, the will may be active or not.”⁴ In other terms, we act freely if and only if everything necessary for our action is given and still it is possible for us to act or not to act. We should keep in mind that the physical premotion is a necessary condition of each free act.

To understand more clearly and more precisely what the free act is and what the conditions of its realization are, logical semantics offers us the apparatus of so called possible worlds, which I want to use in the following way. In the terminology of possible worlds, the human freedom can be defined as follows:

there is no possible world, in which the will (v) produces two incompatible acts, but there is such a world w_a , in which the will (v) produces an act p and at the same time there is another possible world w_i , in which the will (v) under the same conditions and at the same (absolute) moment produces an act non- p .

3.

Let us return to the relationship between physical premotion and human free act. I have said that God moves by physical premotion the second free cause to activity and moreover, if premotion is given, there infallibly occurs, the activity of the second cause. On the other hand, it is a necessary condition that if all appropriate conditions of a free act are satisfied (which also include premotion), the given subject could both act and not act. Thus the question is: can the second free cause resist the Divine premotion? Let us look gradually at how two outstanding Thomists—D. Bañez and L. Babenstuber—answer the question.

⁴ Cf. Gredt (1961 : n. 593).

Bañez answers that question in a positive manner, but his answer is differentiated:

[...] dicendum est, quod liberum arbitrium simpliciter et in sensu diviso potest dissentire si vellit [cum concursu—D.S.], non autem in sensu composito.⁵

So, Bañez holds that one can resist premotion *in sensu diviso*, not *in sensu composito*. I will try to show that we can read Bañez's statement in various ways.

At first, let us take a look at the possible meanings of *sensus divisus*. I read Bañez's statement in this way:

- (1) The will (v) produces an act p and at the same time it can produce non- p .⁶ The same can be formulated as follows: the will (v) produces an act p in the world w_a and at the same time there is a possible world w_p , in which the will (v) under the same conditions and at the same (absolute) moment produces an act non- p .

That interpretation of *sensus divisus* is fully in agreement with the given definition of self-determination. But Bañez's usage of *sensus divisus* can also be read differently. Those readings however are in contradiction either with Thomistic theory of physical premotion or with the definition of self-determination. Let us look at these interpretations:

- (2) The will (v) produces an act p in the world w_a and at the same time there is a possible world w_p , in which the will (v) produces an act p if and only if there occurs no premotion.

We know that physical premotion is the necessary condition of any free act and that is why we have to assert that such a reading of *sensus divisus* is in contradiction with the Thomistic doctrine of the Divine concurrence.

- (3) The will (v) produces an act p in the world w_a and the same time there is a possible world w_p , in which the will (v) produces an act non- p if and only if it is acted upon by numerically different premotion from that one, which de facto—in the world w_a —produces an act p .

⁵ D. Bañez: *Scholastica...*, p. 495, marginale *b-c*.

⁶ $a \ \& \ \diamond \sim a$, where " a " means a statement "the will (v) produces an act p ".

The consequence of that interpretation is the denial of self-determination, for it implies that if the will is acted upon by some premotion, the will then cannot resist that Divine action.

Let us look at possible meanings of Bañez's *sensus compositus*. Bañez says that will cannot resist the physical premotion in *sensus compositus*. I read that statement as follows:

- (4) It is not possible that the will (v) produces an act p and at the same moment produces an act non- p .⁷ So, there is no such possible world, in which the will (v) produces an act p and at the same moment it produces an act non- p .

The validity of that thesis is based on the validity of the principle of contradiction. So it is trivially true.

But the opponents of the Thomistic theory of the Divine concurrence present the second possible meaning of *sensus compositus* and they interpret Bañez's thesis as follows:

- (5) It is not possible that the will (v) is given the premotion to an act p and at the same time the will produces an act non- p .⁸ So, there is no such a possible world, in which the will (v) is given the premotion to an act p but the will produces an act non- p .

If Bañez accepted that reading of *sensus compositus* (5), then it seems that it is not possible to defend self-determination. If it is not possible for the will with the premotion to an act p not to produce an act non- p then the necessary condition of self-determination is not satisfied. Let us have a look at how Bañez's interprets the meaning of *sensus compositus*:

Haec propositio liberum arbitrium potest dissentire si velit, debet intelligi simpliciter loquendo, non autem in sensu composito, ita **ut possint stare simul** haec duo, scilicet hoc auxilium efficax existit in homine, & homo resistit dissentiendo. Ratio autem est evidens, voluntati enim eius quis resistit?⁹

From that quotation, it is clear that Bañez agrees with the second reading of *sensus compositus*, i.e., with (5). As a reason for his claim he presents

⁷ $\sim \diamond (a \ \& \ \sim a)$, where “ a ” means a statement “the will (v) produces an act p ”.

⁸ Cf. R. Garrigou-Lagrange: *God: His Existence and His Nature* (tr. B. Rose), St. Louis, 1934–1936: 361. $\diamond (r \ \& \ \sim a)$, where “ r ” means a statement “the will (v) is given premotion to an act p ” and “ a ” means a statement “the will (v) produces an act p ”.

⁹ D. Bañez: *Scholastica* . . . , p. 634, marginale *e*.

the quotation from the St. Paul's Epistle (Romans 9, 19), where the following Latin translation can be found: "Voluntati enim eius quis resistit?". I assume that Bañez's exposition of *sensus compositus* leads in its consequences to the denial of self-determination. Further, it is also apparent that it is necessary even to revise the presupposed meaning of Bañez's *sensus divisus*. If it is not possible that there is the premotion to an act p and at the same time there is an act non- p , in other terms, there is no such a possible world in which the will (v) is given the premotion to an act p and the will produces an act non- p , then the first reading of the *sensus divisus* cannot be valid. To see the reasoning more clearly, let us present the given interpretation of *sensus divisus*:

The will (v) produces an act p and at the same time it can produce non- p .¹⁰
The will (v) produces an act p in the world w_a and at the same time there is a possible world w_p , in which the will (v) under the same conditions and at the same (absolute) moment produces an act non- p .

We can see that this interpretation permits the existence of such a possible world in which there is the premotion to an act p and at the same time there is an act non- p . But that is just what is denied by the presented second reading of *sensus compositus* (5). Theses (1) and (5) are mutually incompatible. From that we can infer that Bañez might not have accepted that interpretation of *sensus divisus*, which we have just presented (1), and which, as the only one, preserves self-determination.

Let us turn to Babenstuber's exposition. The question is whether the free second cause can resist God's previous concurrence.

[. . .] I agree that the will can resist and disagrees with the pre-determination in *sensu diviso*, I disagree that it can be so in *sensus compositus*. To be able to resist pre-determination to the assent in *sensu composito* means: there is given premotion to the assent and at the same there is the dissent. To be able to resist pre-determination to the assent in *sensu diviso* means: the predetermination to the assent is given and the will has the possibility to produce **absolutely** either dissent or the omitting of assent. And in that second way the will can resist physical pre-determination, but not in the first way. And it is sufficient for the preserving of the freedom of the will.¹¹

¹⁰ $a \ \& \ \diamond \ \sim a$, where " a " means a statement "the will (v) produces an act p ".

¹¹ L. Babenstuber: *Philosophia* . . . , p. 270, argument 65: "[. . .] debet posse resistere et dissentire praedeterminationi in sensu diviso, conc. in sensu composito, nego. Posse resistere praedeterminationi ad consensum in sensu composito est posse facere, ut praedeterminationi ad consensum coexistat vel dissensus, vel negatio consensus; posse resistere praedeterminationi ad consensum in sensu diviso est stante praedetermina-

So, Babenstuber states that will can resist God's concurrence in *sensu diviso*, not in *sensu composito*. At first I will mention how I read Babenstuber's exposition of *sensus compositus*. I assume that we have already been familiar with it (see (5)).

It is possible that the will (v) is given the premotion to an act p and at the same time the will produces an act non- p . So, there is such a possible world, in which the will (v) is given the premotion to an act p but the will produces an act non- p .

In that way, according to Babenstuber, the will cannot resist the Divine premotion. Nevertheless we have already known that the necessary condition of a free act is that will could in this way resist the Divine action.

Let us recall how Babenstuber explains the usage of *sensus divisus*: "the predetermination to the assent is given and the will has the possibility to produce absolutely either dissent or the omitting of assent." So, according to Babenstuber, it holds that even if the premotion to some act is given, still the will has the possibility to resist that premotion. I read that in following way:

The will (v) which is acted upon by the premotion (P) in the world w_a , produces an act p and at the same time there is a possible world w_p , in which the will (v) which is acted upon by the premotion (P), under the same conditions and at the same (absolute) moment produces an act non- p .

That meaning of *sensus divisus* is fully in agreement with the given definition of the self-determination. Unfortunately it is not in agreement with the exposition of *sensus compositus*. That situation is *de facto* the same as that one we have seen above, i.e., the incompatibility between the interpretation (1) and (5). Therefore, I think that Babenstuber's solution is confused.

4.

I have tried to show how two outstanding Thomists solved the problem of the Divine previous *concursum* in relation to human freedom. I have

tione ad consensum habere potentiam proxime expeditam eliciendi **absolute** vel dissentium, vel omittendi consensum. Atque hoc secundo modo potest voluntas dissentire praedeterminationi physicae, non autem primo; idque sufficit ad salvandam ejus libertatem actualem."

explained what the Physical premotion according to Thomists is and I have mentioned the Thomistic definition of the self-determination in order to follow the Thomistic explanation that the infallible outgoing of the act of willing is compatible with human freedom. I have also tried to analyse some key Thomistic claims with the help of possible world semantics.

In my opinion, both Bañez's solution and that of Babenstuber's are not satisfactory and I have tried to prove that statement above. If the given Thomistic solutions are not consistent, it does not mean that there can be no consistent solution at all. But it remains a task for us to put forth such a solution.