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The Necessity of Primary Causes: A Critique of Denis Edwards

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Abstract

In this paper I will investigate a recent development on St Thomas Aquinas' definition of dual causality and see if it truly develops Aquinas' thinking or departs from it. Denis Edwards made significant contributions to contemporary Catholic theology especially as it concerns the relationship between science and Christian theology. In one very interesting publication, 'Toward a Theology of Divine Action', Edwards employs the developments of William R Stoeger, a Jesuit theologian who has also contributed a great deal to Catholic thought on science, to reconcile Stoeger's work with the Thomist tradition. Edwards argued that Stoeger's account of the laws of nature creates a space for the development which is built on Aquinas' account of divine causality and miracles. However, I hope to show that Edwards' account of divine causality does not actually offer anything new and opposes key features of Thomist thought. This paper will investigate Edward's understanding of the Thomist position and the consequences of departing from it.

Keywords

Dual Causality, Science, Miracles, Denis Edwards, William Stoeger

1. Introduction

Edwards' theological thought, although diverse, generally focusses on ecotheology and God's identification with nature's suffering.[1]

[1] See Denis Edwards, *The Natural World and God: Theological Explorations* (Adelaide: ATF, 2017); Denis Edwards, *The God of Evolution: A Trinitarian Theology* (Paulist Press, 1999) and Piotr Roszak, 'Edwards on God's Presence in Natural World', *HTS Teologiese Studies (Theological Studies),* 77 (2021), pp. 1-6 for examples of Edwards' work on these issues specifically.

However, Edwards also based much of his work on Aquinas' thought on nature.[2] Edwards proposes a development on Aquinas' theology of causality in which God exclusively works through an expanded definition of secondary causes. I intend to investigate the extent to which this development upholds key components of Aquinas' understanding of God and the consequences of dispensing with them. To conduct this investigation, I will pose two key questions to both Edwards and Aquinas. I will ask: What are the laws of nature? What is your understanding of divine causality? Once these questions have been sufficiently answered, I will investigate the extent to which Edwards presents a reconciliation or a departure.

2. Edwards' Account of Laws of Nature

To begin our inquiry, I ask Edwards how he defines the laws of nature in his paper. Edwards bases his understanding of the laws of nature on Stoeger's work. Edwards argues that Stoeger defines the laws of nature, known through the sciences, as constructed models of what occurs in nature.[3] These laws are not isomorphic with the natural world, meaning they are not of the same form as the natural world. This implies the reality of the natural world exceeds our ability to model and describe it. Stoeger believes that the laws of nature are approximate models and 'idealized constructions of nature'.[4] Clearly, Stoeger resists more materialistic accounts of the universe in which the laws of nature can be taken as verifiable and binding accounts of how nature actually behaves. Indeed, Stoeger states, 'But there seems to be little support for the position that the law is the cause of the regularity observed or that it forces physical, chemical or biological entities to behave in the way they do'.[5] He understands the laws of nature as fundamentally descriptive rather than prescriptive. They do not have coercive or causative powers causing nature to behave as they dictate.

Additionally, Stoeger does not think that the laws of nature have an independent existence from the reality they describe. He also makes the Kuhnian observation that the sciences are almost constantly, 'replacing or subsuming laws and well-confirmed theories by more comprehensive ones, which more adequately describe the relevant aspects of

[2] Piotr Roszak, 'Edwards on God's Presence in Natural World', *HTS Teologiese Studies (Theological Studies)* 77 (2021), pp. 1-6.

[3] Denis Edwards, 'Toward a Theology of Divine Action: William R Stoeger SJ on the Laws of Nature', *Journal of Theological Studies* 76:3 (2015), p. 487.

[4] Ibid.

[5] William R. Stoeger, 'Contemporary Physics and the Ontological Status of the Laws of Nature', Robert John Russell and Nancey Murphey, ed., *Quantum Cosmology and the Laws of Nature* (Vatican: Vatican Observatory, 1993), p. 225.

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phenomena under a wide range of conditions.[6] Edwards is satisfied with this understanding of laws of nature. They are approximate descriptions of a much more complex world.[7]

3. Edward's Account of Divine Causality

This brings me to my second question for Edwards: how does he understand divine causality? In this section I will examine Edwards' answer. Edwards' intentions are twofold. First, he wishes to show that Stoeger's argument, that secondary causes include the natural mechanisms we know about and those we do not know about, offers an 'important breakthrough in the theology of divine action'.[8] Second, Edwards argues that this breakthrough results in a 'renewed theology of divine action', building on the Thomist position, in which God exclusively works through secondary causes.[9]

Edwards asserts that divine causality can be understood as God acting to bring about an effect exclusively through secondary causes.[10] He states: 'In my view, Aquinas's thought is indispensable in the dialogue between science and theology, with his concept of primary and secondary causality and his view of God's profound respect for secondary causes. But what if God works through secondary causes even in the case of many of the events in the Gospels and in our lives that we rightly see as miracles, as marvelous gifts of God?'[11] Edwards is surely aware that Aquinas held that God always worked through both primary and secondary causality unless he was performing a miracle.[12] So in arguing that even miracles are performed using both primary and secondary causality, Edwards seems to be arguing that there are no instances in which God acts through primary causality alone. He confirms his position saying that Stoeger's work allows us to think that secondary causes are always present, which prevents us from necessarily concluding that God intervenes in nature or overturns its laws. Edwards states:

> Stoeger's distinction [between the laws of nature as they are and the laws of nature as we know them] enables us to see more clearly that, in thinking about God's action, we are not limited to the two alternatives: divine action that is either in conformity with our laws of nature or not. It is not

[6] Ibid, pp. 209–34.
[7] Edwards, 'Toward a Theology of Divine Action', p. 487.
[8] Ibid.
[9] Ibid.
[10] Ibid.,p. 500.
[11] Ibid.
[12] See Aquinas, *ST,* I 105, a 6., Aquinas, *Quaestiones disputatae de potentia Dei* q. 3, a. 7.

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> simply a choice between God's working through our laws of nature or God's overturning or bypassing them. God might be working through all the unknown or partly known possibilities of the natural world that far surpass what we already know and model.[13]

He defines secondary cause as the complex interrelationship of cause-and-effect relationships in nature. He asserts that there are a great deal of weird and wonderful relations and causative forces in the natural world, which may be hidden from the tools of human investigation. Thus, of course it is appropriate to think of God working through the laws of nature, but it is also possible to think of God working through this unknown web of relationships and mechanisms in the natural world. Edwards argues that this is a significant development in our understanding of secondary causes.[14] For Edwards, divine causality is the very crux of the debate between science and theology. He explains:

> The question, central for the discussion between science and theology, is how God's actions are to be understood. Are they to be understood in an interventionist sense as God overturning laws of nature, or as putting them aside, in order to accomplish God's purposes? Or may we think of God acting in a way that fully respects the laws of nature, acting lovingly and effectively, but in a noninterventionist way?[15]

Here, I wonder what it would mean for God to respect a description of a regularity in nature. If we take Stoeger's definition of the laws of nature, we may not have a reason to think that the laws of nature must be followed or that they create any constraint on nature or on God. Indeed, if the laws of nature are descriptions of the world God is making, how could it be possible for Him to disrespect them? Not only do these alternatives hint at a prescriptive or irrefutable quality to the laws of nature, but they also begin to make statements about God that are not fully explained. One could wonder what it would mean for God to intervene or overturn something in nature. However, Edwards does not address these questions in this instance. Edwards argues that his definition builds on the Thomist doctrine by engaging some of Aquinas' arguments.

He describes Aquinas' definition of secondary causes. God can act in secondary causes because, 'the presence of God in each entity constitutes the direct, the immediate, relationship of the entity with God,

[13] Edwards, 'Toward a Theology of Divine Action', pp. 500-501.

[14] See Brian Davies, *The Thought of Thomas Aquinas* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), p. 163 for a detailed description of the definition of a secondary cause, 'But Aquinas also thinks that God sometimes brings about events by arranging for them to be the effects of causes distinct from himself (though not independent of his causal activity). These causes are what Aquinas calls *secondary* causes. And for him, they are genuine causes'.

[15] Edwards, 'Toward A Theology of Divine Action', pp. 498-499.

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and therefore is the channel of divine influence in secondary causes'.[16] Edwards accepts this as part of his own account of divine causality. He cites Aquinas' description of God as the source of being of all things. One could say that things exist by virtue of their participation in God, which creates this indwelling relationship with God as the source or centre of being in all things.[17] This relationship constitutes a causal nexus whereby God can act in the acts of created things. He explains that God's very nature is to exist, and God causes existence in all other beings. God is then the primary cause who is always acting providentially in and through created acts.[18]

Edwards goes on to say that Aquinas opposed those who would say that God acts alone and without intermediaries. God desires that creaturely causes have their own integrity and autonomy.[19] Despite saying that Aquinas opposed the idea that God acts alone, Edwards then pays attention to Aquinas' argument that a miracle occurs when God does act alone. Here Edwards highlights his development. He states that Aquinas held that in a miracle God replaces secondary causes, 'In the context of this deep respect for creaturely causes, how does Aquinas think about miracles? In a miracle, he says, the action of God *replaces* secondary causes'. This means that miracles are 'exceptions to the pattern in nature', which occur in a manner that 'surpasses the capabilities of nature'.[20]

He then uses this concept of God replacing secondary causes to suggest that Aquinas' position can be developed. Perhaps God does not need to replace secondary causes. Rather he could be working through unknown secondary causes which could explain the more unusual events that we see described in the Gospels. For Edwards, this means that God no longer needs to overturn his own laws to perform a miracle because He exclusively acts through secondary causes.

However, before moving on to Aquinas' understanding of causality, it is necessary to review some of the issues in Edwards' argument more thoroughly. There are two primary weaknesses in Edwards' account of divine causality. The first issue is that expanding the definition of secondary cause may not be all that novel. Edwards bases his argument, in part, on the idea that Stoeger's definition of secondary cause as all the causes in nature rather than the laws of nature as we know them offers an opportunity to develop on Aquinas' understanding. Edwards clearly states:

[16] Edwards, 'Toward a Theology of Divine Action', p. 498.
[17] Aquinas, *ST* I Q 8 a I.
[18] Edwards, 'Toward a Theology of Divine Action', p. 499.
[19] Ibid.
[20] Edwards, 'Toward a Theology of Divine Action', p. 500.

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> While this is true, it is precisely at this point that Stoeger's insights into the laws of nature enable us to go further than Aquinas…. Stoeger's distinction between the laws of nature as we know them and model them and the laws of nature understood as the regularities, potentialities, and processes of the natural world itself greatly expands our understanding of the ways God works through the natural world. Stoeger's distinction enables us to see more clearly that, in thinking about God's action, we are not limited to the two alternatives: divine action that is either in conformity with our laws of nature or not.[21]

Stoeger, in Edward's interpretation, equates the classical definition of secondary cause with the laws of nature. Thus, if we expand the definition of secondary cause then we have expanded the causative relationships available to God. But of course, according to Stoeger, laws of nature are the approximate descriptions of an idealized model of the world. Edwards describes this himself stating Aquinas' definition as, 'secondary causes include all the interacting causes found in empirical reality, absolutely all the patterns of relationship found in the natural world, everything studied by the sciences, and everything that could ever be studied by the sciences in the future'.[22]

The second issue with Edwards' argument is his treatment of Aquinas' theology of miracles. This will be addressed in greater detail later in this paper. For now, it is enough to point out that Edwards states that God replaces secondary causality for primary causality to cause a miracle. This is simply not in keeping with Aquinas' own words on the subject:

> The second cause, since it is the effect of the first cause, has its substance from the first cause. But from that from which something has substance, it also has the potency or power, to act. Therefore, the second cause has its potency or power to act from the first cause. But the second cause is the cause of the effect through its potency, or power. Therefore, that the second cause is the cause of its effect is due to the first cause. To be the cause of the effect, therefore, lies primarily in the first cause and only secondarily in the second cause. Now what is prior in all things is greater, since more perfect things are prior by nature. The first cause, therefore, is more the cause of the effect than the second cause. He proves the second point, that the impression of the first cause recedes later from the effect, at: *When the second cause is removed* etc. He puts forward this argument: What is more powerfully in a thing inheres more profoundly. But the first cause impresses more powerfully upon the effect than does the second cause as was proved. Therefore its impression inheres more [profoundly]. Consequently, it recedes later.[23]

[21] Ibid

[22] Ibid, p. 499.

[23] Aquinas, *Super Librum de Causes* , Proposition 1.

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Thus, it cannot be that the primary cause replaces the secondary cause but that the secondary cause can be removed while the primary cause, which provides the secondary cause with its substance and its potency, remains as the cause which impresses more powerfully on any effect.

4. St Thomas' Account of Divine Causality

The inquiry turns to our next series of questions: I ask how did Aquinas understand divine causality? Does Aquinas' understanding mean that God must overturn his own laws to perform a miracle? Here I note that I have not asked how Aquinas defines the laws of nature. This is because St Thomas predated the term. Thus, in this section, I will discuss Aquinas' definition of divine causality and defend some of its weak points to argue both that it represents a coherent account and Edwards offers a faulty interpretation of Aquinas' position.

Edwards explains that Aquinas argued that God worked through both primary and secondary causality.[24] These causes are essential to how Aquinas understands God's action. Thus, I will define each one in turn. We know from Aquinas' own words that created causes, or natural causes, are discrete instances of secondary causes:

> Indeed, **all things created would seem, in a way, to be purposeless, if they lacked an operation proper to them;** since the purpose of everything is its operation. For the less perfect is always for the sake of the more perfect: and consequently, as the matter is for the sake of the form, so the form which is the first act, is for the sake of its operation, which is the second act; and thus operation is the end of the creature. We must therefore understand that God works in things in such a manner that things have their proper operation.[25]

The laws of nature are an unnecessary concept for Aquinas because he has already accepted that a secondary cause is a created natural cause which causes by the power of God acting through it. The primary cause on the other hand is the entirely uncreated agent, God. It should be noted that Aquinas does have a wider scope for how the term primary causality can be used analogically in the case of the causative agency of creatures.[26] However, in this paper I limit my investigation to

[24] Edwards, 'Toward a Theology of Divine Action', p. 499.

[25] Aquinas *ST* I Q 105, a.5, emphasis added.

[26] Aquinas, *SCG* 3 c. 67, no 4 'Moreover, whatever agent applies active power to the doing of something, it is said to be the cause of that action. Thus, an artisan who applies the power of a natural thing to some action is said to be the cause of the action; for instance, a cook of the cooking which is done by means of fire. But every application of power to operation is originally and primarily made by God. For operative powers are applied to their proper operations by some movement of body or of soul. Now, the first principle of both

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Aquinas' use of primary and secondary causality as it applies to God. Within this investigation then, Aquinas' primary cause must always be present in an act as God is always present in every act. He describes primary causality as:

> The power of God is in every natural thing, since he is said to be in everything by his essence, power and presence. But it cannot be said that the divine power is idle insofar as it is in things. Therefore, it operates insofar as it is in nature. Nor can it be said that it operates on something other than what nature operates on, since there is apparently only one operation. Therefore, God operates in every operation of nature.[27]

These definitions are essential to Aquinas' theology of divine causality. Thomistic virtue is to see the value in the distinction. This is true for primary and secondary causality especially. God is the cause of the existence of creatures, but this relationship is not the same as the cause-and-effect relationships that exist in nature. Rather, for Aquinas then primary causality is not a causative mechanism but the causative expression of the personal divine agent. Additionally, although God **usually** acts through secondary causes, God can and does act without them.[28]

Here it should be noted that Edwards wants to maintain creaturely autonomy. Edwards is certainly not the first to suggest that Aquinas' understanding of God as the primary cause undermines creaturely autonomy.[29] The argument proceeds as follows. We know already that Aquinas defines secondary causes as created causes which function as efficient causes, causing by the power of God acting through each one. However, secondary causes only exist at all because they are entirely indebted to God's existence. To be created means there is no being in the creature except that which comes from the Creator. For example, coffee beans do not exist of their own accord but because God has created them. Thus, in creatures there is nothing other than the relationship to the Creator. Additionally, because God's creative act is nothing other than God with a relationship to what He has created, the relationship between God and creature is not a real relationship in God, but it is a real relationship in the creature.

If this argument causes us to conclude that creaturely autonomy is violated and there is no real relation in God, it sounds as if God is

types of movement is God. Indeed, He is the first mover and is altogether incapable of being moved, as we shown above. Similarly, also, every movement of a will whereby Powers are applied to operation is reduced to God, as a first object of appetite and a first agent of willing. Therefore; every operation should be attributed to God, as to a first and principal agent'.

[27] Aquinas, *Quaestiones disputatae de potentia Dei* q. 3, a. 7.

[28] Aquinas, *ST*, I, Q. 105, aa. 6-8.

[29] Fergus Kerr, *After Aquinas: Versions of Thomism (*Oxford: Oxford Univeristy Press, 2002), p. 38-43.

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not connected to us at all. Colin Gunton points this out in his reading of Aquinas. He states that Aquinas detracts from the creature's value and ties it so closely to God that it seems to deny its causality and autonomy.[30] However, Fergus Kerr encourages that we first consider why Aquinas made this argument before rejecting it. Aquinas was very aware of a tendency to think of God as a creature on a larger scale. He wants to deny this absolutely by arguing that God in no way depends on creatures while they depend entirely on Him. Aquinas sees no conflict between God's sovereign freedom and human autonomy.[31] He distinguishes between omnicausality, where God does everything, and monocausality, where God does everything on His own. The first, he embraces.[32] Aquinas holds that God does act in everything, but this does not mean that He does it all by Himself. Thus, Aquinas rejects monocausality because God can, and often does, act through secondary causes.[33]

Thus, only the combination of primary and secondary causality accounts for God's non-creatureliness while also allowing secondary causes their own autonomy. For Aquinas, when God causes something, this does not mean autonomy has been transgressed.[34] As creatures become more like God, the more God acts and the freer the creature is. God is not forcing something upon a creature. The creature is becoming more and more free as it conforms to the purpose God has created for it. This is the essence of Aquinas' understanding of primary causality. God is the source of creaturely existence.[35] God has a causative relationship with the created world which usually takes places via created causes, but it does not have to take place via created causes. This is fundamental to Aquinas' understanding of miracles, which is a key focus for Edwards.

Now that we have addressed Aquinas' understanding of divine causality it is worthwhile to look at miracles specifically because Edwards highlights them. Edwards expressed Aquinas' doctrine of miracles as God replaces secondary causes with primary causes to perform a miracle. As we have seen, this argument does not make much sense if we are assuming Aquinas' definition of primary cause as God Himself. He argued that a miracle occurs when God does not act through a secondary cause but only through the primary cause. Although Aquinas' definition of miracles may have some

[30] Ibid.
[31] Ibid.
[32] Ibid.
[33] Ibid.
[34] See Aquinas, *ST*, I, Q. 105, a. 6, 'The order of justice exists on the basis of its relation to the first cause who is the measure of all justice, and this is why God can do nothing that transgresses this order'.
[35] Aquinas, *SCG* III, c. 67.

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of its own areas of dispute, Edwards seems to have misunderstood what Aquinas was arguing in the first place by stating that a primary cause could replace a secondary cause. It would be akin to saying that God as the primary cause was not present while Jesus was in the tomb and then He presented Himself causing Jesus to rise from the dead. God cannot turn on and off His own agency. It exists constantly as He exists. Clearly there are points of disagreement between Edwards' account of causality and St Thomas' account. However, most developments in doctrine do have points of conflict. The question in which I am interested is whether the conflict amounts to a development that builds on Aquinas' position or if it is a departure representing an opposing account of God's causative relationship with the world.

5. Departure or Development?

I argue the answer to this question is found in Edwards' understanding of Aquinas' original distinction between primary and secondary causality. In this section I will first argue that Edwards is offering a departure rather than a development. Following from this, I will discuss the implications that Edwards' view has for the classical Christian position on divine causality. It is important to note that Edwards understands a miracle to be a replacement of causality. Of course, if we take Aquinas' definition of primary causality as God Himself,who accounts for the existence of secondary causes, including created causes, this cannot be dispensed with or replaced. If primary causality stopped there would be nothing to account for the existence of secondary causes. Additionally, doing away with primary causes requires that something of the divine being ceases to exist or ceases to matter to creatures. A primary cause is simply the causative expression of the divine being, and if it were not present, then one could argue this means there is no divine being or that divine being does not have a causative expression. This is a clear departure from Aquinas. Aquinas' view is that God,who is existence itself, must be present in everything that happens. Herbert McCabe makes it clear that creation's complete dependence on the existence of God is fundamental to Aquinas' understanding of what it means to be God:

> It is therefore necessary to stress that God must be in everything that happens and everything that exists in the universe. If Fido's parents make Fido exist instead of nothing, it is because in their action God is acting. Just as if a pen writes it is because in its action a writer is acting. It is because it is God that wields every agent in the universe that agents bring things into existence, make things new. Every action in the world is an action of God; not because it is not an action of a creature but

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> because it is by God's action that the creature is itself and has its own activity.[36]

It is the divine activity which makes possible creaturely activity. To remove primary causality would be to make causality of any kind unintelligible.

Additionally, Aquinas himself warns against the idea that causality can be explained with secondary causes alone. He first states the objection that secondary causes have the potency to act alone:

> But it is essential to power that it be the principle of action, since power is the ultimate potency and potency is the principle of acting on another insofar as it is other, as is maintained in Metaphysics. Therefore, from the very fact that he implants natural powers in things, he gives them the ability to complete their natural operations. Therefore, there is no need for anything else to operate in natural things.[37]

Aquinas comes back to the objection stating:

> In an operation which God effects by moving nature, nature does not operate but the very operation of nature is an operation of the divine power, just as the operation of an instrument is through the power of the principal agent. Nor does this prevent nature and God from operating to the same [effect] because of the order between God and nature.[38]

According to Aquinas' position, Edwards has made a category error. Primary causality is simply not the kind of thing that can be suspended or replaced. There simply is no such thing as secondary causes operating on their own.[39] God is always acting and is therefore always present as the primary cause. It is secondary causality that can be used or not. Edwards' argument for God exclusively operating through secondary causes seems to reveal a misunderstanding of primary causality. If this is so, then it seems his objection to Aquinas' original stance is based on a misunderstanding.

Of course, Edwards states that Stoeger's expanded definition of the secondary cause offers a reason to think Aquinas' expression of divine causality is deficient. I argue that Stoeger's secondary cause expanded from *the laws of nature described in science* to *nature as it actually exists* does not offer a significant avenue for development upon Aquinas' doctrine of divine causality. The reason is quite simple. Aquinas never equated secondary causes and the laws of nature as they are defined by the natural sciences. Rather, he included natural or created causes

[36] Herbert McCabe, 'God I: Creation', *New Blackfriars* 61 (1980), p. 412-413.

[37] Aquinas *Quaestiones Disputatae de Potentia Dei, Q. 3*, Article 7,Obj: 3.

[38] Aquinas, *On Creation*, Article 7: Ad 3.

[39] See Aquinas, *SCG* III, c. 67, *On Creation,* Article 7:Ad 3 and McCabe, 'God I: - Creation', p. 412-413.

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as discrete instances of secondary causes. Edwards has simply shown that Stoeger wants to expand the definition of law of nature, as it exists in the philosophy of science, to include the full gamut of secondary causes. Secondary cause has not undergone any change in definition. Thus, if secondary cause has the same definition that Aquinas gave, then Edwards has presented us with an opposing account of causality in which God never works independently of secondary causes.

In arguing that Edwards has presented us with a departure rather than a development, it is now proper to ask if this departure is problematic for Aquinas' position. Does it make a difference to our understanding of God if the primary cause must always act through a secondary cause? In other words, what are we losing or risking if we embrace this departure? I argue that this departure implies both that secondary causes are the kind of thing that account for their own existence and that God is the kind of being who could 'intervene' in nature, which ultimately advocates a version of God that is different from Aquinas' view. I will first address the consequences of Edwards' position for secondary causes.

Secondary causes are created causes.[40] Additionally, they are causes which get their substance and potency from the primary cause, God Himself. If this is so, in an account of causality where God always acts through secondary causes, God would need to use said created secondary causes to create natural causes in the first place, which is potentially opposed to Aquinas' view that God created from nothing.[41] According to Aquinas, God created secondary causes from nothing. How could this be possible if God must always work through secondary causes? Even if we accept the expanded definition of laws of nature to nature itself, one still finds that God would need to have brought secondary causes into being by using secondary causes, which departs from Aquinas' position that God created from nothing.

So, what if one did accept that God did not bring about existence from nothing? We would have to accept that these secondary causes account for their own existence or are created by some other being; that their being is not dependent on God. Here I note that Edwards does not argue that secondary causes are self-existent or that there is no First Cause to bring them about. However, I am pointing out that in Edward's argument God must always act through secondary causes, making it difficult to understand how God can act through a created cause to bring a created cause into existence. Must we conclude that God created secondary causes by using secondary causes? If this is true, then 'god' is not the source of being itself upon which all existence depends. Rather, he is a self-existent being among other self-existent beings; in this case

[40] Aquinas, *SCG* III, c. 67, *On Creation,* Article 7:Ad 3 and McCabe, 'God I: - Creation', p. 412-413.

[41] Aquinas, ST I Q 3 a 4.

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the natural causes which function as individual secondary causes. I argue that losing the clear differentiation between beings and being itself makes the Christian God more susceptible to arguments which accuse the Christian of positing god as an unnecessary addition to an already complete ontology.

Aquinas' original account of divine primary and secondary causality avoids this problem. God is the divine primary cause who is being and act. Thus, the divine primary cause does not need to be brought into existence. It exists as God exists because God and the primary cause are one and the same. Secondary causes, even as Edwards defines them, include the causes in the created world. How could they cause themselves? If we are arguing for such a causative power, then we have departed far and away from Aquinas' understanding of God and His relationship to the created world and its causes. The Primary cause is not some magical finger snap or a 'special intervention'. It is the source from which all other causes get their existence and are differentiated into specific kinds of causality. Without it, secondary causes must account for their own existence and kind.

The second concern is how Edwards' causality conceives of God. Edwards reveals a significant misunderstanding of what classical Christian thought means by the word 'God'. He argues:

> The question, central for the discussion between science and theology, is how God's actions are to be understood. Are they to be understood in an interventionist sense as God overturning laws of nature, or as putting them aside, in order to accomplish God's purposes? Or may we think of God acting in a way that fully respects the laws of nature, acting lovingly and effectively, but in a noninterventionist way?[42]

Edwards thinks that interventionist and noninterventionist are categories that could be applied to God's action; that when God acts, he either acts in accordance or within the laws of nature which prevents intervention or He overturns them or 'breaks' them thereby intervening in the natural world. He assumes that breaking a law of nature is the kind of thing that God could do. The issue here is best highlighted by Herbert McCabe:

> Again, it is clear that God cannot interfere in the universe, not because he has not the power but because, so to speak he has too much; to interfere you have to be an alternative to, or alongside, what you are interfering with. If God is the cause of everything, there is nothing that he is alongside.[43]

It seems that Edwards has been influenced by the idea that God is somehow part of the causality of the natural world. God transcends

[42] Edwards, 'Toward a Theology of Divine Action', pp. 498-499.
[43] McCabe, 'On Creation', p. 412.

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nature which is not to say that He exists outside of it. Nature is not a boxed in entity where God stands a few inches away from the border. Rather, borders, lines, or descriptions of natural mechanism do not exist as limits on God. God cannot interfere or intervene because He does not exist alongside or as part of nature. This understanding of intervention has been identified in the philosophies of enlightenment figures such as Isaac Newton.[44] Indeed, Alasdair MacIntyre argues that this conception of God is not classically Christian, and it is much more philosophically problematic. The intervening god is one whose existence is synonymous with natural mechanism. Thus, as science progresses in understanding how natural mechanism operates, the role god plays becomes smaller and smaller. The reason for this is the philosophical objection to a proliferation of metaphysically distinct causes accounting for the same effect. For example, MacIntyre argues that if one advocates that God and the secondary cause are responsible for the rain then this is an ontologically objectionable account of causality wherein one effect has multiple causes.[45] Indeed, he goes so far as to say it is this development of the 17th century which led to widespread disbelief in God.[46] Simply put, why posit god when you have no need and the natural mechanism is much more visible?[47] Aquinas avoids this problem and maintains the necessity of god's causality by positing God as the primary cause that operates through secondary causality. Although one may object, stating that here we have two causes for one effect. This misunderstands primary causality. One cannot count God alongside a secondary cause and find two causes. Rather, divine primary causality is a mode of causality which belongs to, and indeed is, the divine being Himself. Thus, Edwards is ultimately advocating an account of God which risks His necessity and, MacIntyre and Michael J. Buckley argue, led to widespread disbelief in the Christian God during the 18th and 19th centuries.[48]

An additional concern for Edwards' position requires that we return to the statement that Edwards makes about replacing secondary causes for primary causes. He said, 'In the context of this deep respect for creaturely causes, how does Aquinas think about miracles? In a miracle, he says, the action of God *replaces* secondary causes'. This means that miracles are 'exceptions to the pattern in nature', which occur in a

[44] Alasdair MacIntyre and P. Ricoeur, *The Religious Significance of Atheism,* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1969), pp. 14-20.

[45] Ibid.

[46] Ibid p. 14.

[47] For further discussion on the role of 'interventionist' or scientific theologies played in modern atheism, see M. Buckley, *At the Origins of Modern Atheism,* (New Haven, CT, Yale University Press, 1987) or M Buckley, *Denying and Disclosing God: The Ambiguous Progress of Modern Atheism,* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004).

[48] MacIntyre and Ricoeur, p. 14 and Buckley (1987), p. 363.

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manner that 'surpasses the capabilities of nature'.[49] As God is the primary cause, replacing a secondary cause for the primary cause implies that God is the kind of thing that can change; that can be supplanted by one thing or another. Aquinas strongly argued that God is changeless, pure act itself.[50] Now why does this matter for the theologian imagining God? Because immutability and changelessness are necessary for the divine being to be the first cause which is referenced by Aquinas' First Way.[51] If God also changes, if God is in motion, then we have an infinite regress of things causing motion or change in others. If we have an infinite regress, then we cannot say anything changes at all for nothing has caused the change, and we know from experience that this is nonsensical. I do note that the First Way has been subject to criticism.[52] The objections to the argument are varied and the immensity of the scholarship is outwith the purview of this piece. My point is not that this argument is certainly valid or irrefutable but that it suggests Aquinas thought changelessness was an essential quality of the kind of being He called God.

God as primary cause accounts for why there is something rather than nothing at all – a task which cannot be accomplished if the primary cause must always work through, already existing, secondary causes. It seems Edwards has made a very old error, in seeking to imagine and understand God, he has imaged God after humanity. As McCabe has pointed out:

> One of my worries is that by contrast with the biblical God, the God spoken of by those who insist on God's participation in the history of his people, sharing their experiences, their sufferings and triumphs, is perilously like one of the gods.[53]

Could it be that in trying to develop Aquinas' causality, Edwards has brought God down once more to exist as a being among beings? Although some have argued that this 'god' resembles the God of the bible more than Aquinas' philosophical vision of God, here I have shown that this depiction creates fundamental problems for the Christian's account of existence. Here I have argued that Edwards' proposed

[49] Edwards, 'Toward a Theology of Divine Action', p. 500.

[50] Aquinas, ST, I Q 2, a 3.

[51] See ST I Q2, a 3 for Aquinas' argument.

[52] See challenges to St Thomas' arguments including Scott MacDonald, 'Aquinas's Parasitic Cosmological Argument' *Medieval Philosophy and Theology*, 1 (University of Notre Dame Press, 1991) in which MacDonald argues that proving motion must be started by an unmoved mover only proves the existence of stationary objects; in Patterson Brown, 'Infinite Causal Regression', in Anthony Kenny ,ed, *Aquinas: A Collection of Critical Essays,*(Indiana, University of Notre Dame Press, 1976) in which the concept of an infinite causal regress is criticized; and in Christopher Hughes, *On a Complex Theory of a Simple God* (Ithaca, NY, Cornell University Press, 1989) where the concept of divine simplicity is criticized.

[53] Herbert McCabe, 'The Involvement of God', *New Blackfriars* 66 (1985), p. 467.

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development on Aquinas' dual causality is a departure with problematic consequences. Edwards presents a misunderstanding of dual causality in the first place, resulting in a potentially redundant account of the existence of secondary causes. This limits divine causality to created causes. It seems that this account of causality is not so much a novel development but a return to an old position. In this view God is simply a cause among causes. The merits or accuracies of such a position may be debated, but this paper has simply sought to show that this position is a departure from a classical view of Aquinas' God to a god who intervenes and exists alongside other beings. It is this god which, some allege, led to widespread atheism in the modern period. It is this god who modern humanity cast off. However, the classically Christian God, whom Aquinas worshipped, is not a cause among causes but the transcendent mystery before whom humanity is lost in wonder.

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