

AT-LEAST-POTENTIALLY-NON- CONTRASTIVE TRANSCENDENCE IN TANNER'S *GOD AND CREATION IN CHRISTIAN THEOLOGY*

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Abstract

Kathryn Tanner's *God and Creation in Christian Theology* is a foundational text in the expression of a 'non-contrastive' Christian account of God and creation: that God is so fundamentally incommensurable with the world as not to be in a relation of contrast or competition, nor distant from it. In recent years, theologians have celebrated and drawn upon Tanner's work for its robust account of creaturely agency. While that is indeed found in her book, her primary emphasis is that God is not positioned or circumscribed by creation. Thus, while creaturely agency and freedom are compatible with divine agency and freedom, they are not enjoined, demanded, or necessary. Championing Tanner's non-competitive account of the agency of creatures is valuable, but it will not reflect that book's argument if taken in isolation or elevated to first place. In concluding this essay, I argue that while the freedom and causal powers of creatures should be seen as more than a matter of divine whim, that is best argued in terms of suitability or fittingness, and not—as Tanner recognises—of necessity.

Introduction

Kathryn Tanner's *God and Creation in Christian Theology* (1988) is rightly fêted, not least for its exposition of what has come to be called 'non-contrastive' transcendence (NCT).¹ According to this theological perspective, God is so incommensurable with the world, as God, and so totally present to it, as creator, that we cannot talk of a relationship of contrast (or competition) between creature and creator: 'God transcends the world as a whole in a manner that cannot properly be talked about in terms of a

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¹ Kathryn Tanner, *God and Creation in Christian Theology: Tyranny or Empowerment* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1988).

simple opposition within the same universe of discourse.² As a consequence, 'if divinity is not characterized by contrast with any sort of being, it may be the immediate source of being of every sort.'³ NCT stresses both the transcendence of God and the integrity of created things (or it can, as we will see). It grounds the latter in the former, since God is not comparable to creatures in any way that might crowd them out.

From this combination of ideas, the integrity of creation and reality of its causal powers has come to prominence in recent discussions of NCT.⁴ Turning back to *God and Creation*, however, we find that Tanner's emphasis is on the transcendence and primacy of God. The integrity of creatures, and the reality of their causal powers, can follow from that, but need not. For Tanner, NCT means that God can create creatures with causal powers, not that God will give any creature such powers. That might surprise today's writers on NCT, who have tended to stress the place of creaturely agency. For them, Tanner's version might even look rather more like 'at-least-not-necessarily-contrastive transcendence'.

Tanner's Two Rules

Turning to some detail, Tanner set out her perspective distinctively in terms of 'rules' which specify how Christian theology has spoken historically about God, creatures, and their agency.⁵ These rules fall into two categories: some stress 'God's sovereignty' (rules Tanner calls 'negative') and some focus on 'the integrity of the creature's

² *Ibid.*, 42. Tanner is writing about an aspect of Hellenistic thought that she takes to have been useful in the development of Christian thought.

³ *Ibid.*, 46.

⁴ For instance, in a recent Festschrift on Tanner's work (*The Gift of Theology: The Contribution of Kathryn Tanner*, ed. Rosemary P. Carbine and Hilda P. Koster (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2015)), Eugene Rogers picks up on the non-denial of creaturely action and reality ('Tanner's Non-Competitive Account and the Blood of Christ: Where Eucharistic Theology Meets the Evolution of Ritual', 141), Joy Ann McDougall writes that 'the more the creature depends on God, the more empowerment she receives for her good' ('Closed Eyes and Blocked Vision: Gendering Tanner's Theology of Sin and Grace', 245), and Hilda P. Koster writes that 'the closer to God, the more the world can come into its own' ('Creation as Gift: Tanner's Theology of God's Ongoing Gift-Giving as an Ecological Theology', 278). Outside that volume, Jeanette Hagen Pifer draws from NCT the principle that 'divine and human agencies are in direct, rather than inverse proportion' ('Faith as Participation: An Exegetical Study of Some Key Pauline Texts' [Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2019], 208). Johanna Leidenhag writes about the Spirit working 'in and through' human beings and other creatures, rather than against them, and that 'God creates freedom and genuine agency in creatures' (*Minding Creation: Theological Panpsychism and the Doctrine of Creation* [London: T&T Clark, 2021], 124, 126). The integrity of created causes featured as the central theme at a panel on Tanner and NCT at the 2023 American Academy of Religion meeting.

⁵ Significant here is how Tanner's presentation of her insights as 'rules' or 'grammar' for speaking about God and creatures relates to metaphysics. Her contention is that the rules are more general than any given metaphysics, since theologians with a variety of philosophical outlooks can nonetheless endorse those rules. The alignment of her vision in *God and Creation* with philosophical pragmatism and functionalism, which tend to be distrustful of metaphysics, is also a notable part of this picture. My principal arguments for giving metaphysics a more prominent place in NCT is largely historical, on two fronts. First, a distinctive, broadly shared Christian metaphysical vision, which might be described as a participatory Platonism moulded into Christian form, was integral to formulating these ways of talking about God and creation. In that respect, metaphysics has not been either optional or radically underdetermined in the development of an NCT perspective. The other, allied observation is that the story Tanner tells in chapter four about the breakdown of adherence to this grammar within Christian theology did not accidentally take place at precisely the time when that Christian Platonism was eclipsed, and indeed particularly in those traditions that most let those rules go.

capacities' (rules Tanner calls 'positive').⁶ The negative rules prohibit univocal language, or simple contrast, when talking about God and creatures. They also forbid ascription of limits to God's creative agency, and stress that God's action and involvement in creation is 'immediate and universally extensive'.⁷ I will refer to this as a single 'negative' rule, about divine priority and transcendence. From that, a positive rule follows for talking about creatures and their agency: 'that creatures be said to gain [power and efficacy], not in the degree that God's agency is restricted, but in the degree that God's creative agency is extended to them ... divinity is said to exercise its power in founding rather than suppressing created being'.⁸

While this positive rule might seem as binding or extensive as the first,⁹ the situation becomes more complicated, or subtle: the 'rules do not forbid talk of created beings with their own powers and efficacy', but they 'also do not require such talk: God may be said to create a world in which created efficacy is partially or totally absent'.¹⁰ The negative rule is necessary; it cannot be gainsaid. The positive rule recognises (as a consequence of the negative rule) that God can confer created agency, not that he must. As Tanner sees it, God's transcendence as creator allows for creaturely agency, but does not necessitate it.

The Two Rules Across a Range of Doctrines

The title *God and Creation* promises attention to two prominent doctrines. Interest in divine and creaturely agency then obviously also brings in providence. However, the doctrinal range of *God and Creation* extends further, with significant discussions of salvation, grace and works, and sin and merit. Those themes mainly come in chapter three, and the two case studies of chapter four. Those studies address two disputes in scholastic theology around grace and works, salvation and merit: one in the work of Gabriel Biel (1410-1495), the other in the Catholic Church's centuries long '*De Auxiliis*' controversies on grace and nature (starting in the second half of the sixteenth century). Since those arguments are complex, and rest heavily on scholastic terminology which may be unfamiliar, I will concentrate on chapter three. There, Tanner's discussion of these themes starts with the idea (presented from Aquinas) that 'the same effect "is wholly done by both [a natural cause and divine power], according to a different way, just as the same effect is wholly

⁶ Tanner, *God and Creation*, 113.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 47. Tanner's stress that God's action is always 'immediate' raises important questions about mediation. NCT denies that any creature or creaturely action can stand between God and another creature. That, however, does not preclude God's involvement of creatures in what he does and bestows. The act or role of any mediating person or thing is directly God's act and bestowal, and not an intermediary between God and the recipient. That is the determinative point. Water can be God's instrument for washing away sin because God acts in the act of the water. Mary Magdalene can be God's herald of the Resurrection because God acts in her proclamation. There can also be chains of mediation, for instance, in the transmission of the Gospel, or in the contagion of the good, not because God is isolated at one end of the chain, increasingly distant, but because God acts at each point along the way. To this we should add (see below) that the rules of NCT suggest that God can also work directly, without the involvement of a creaturely agent.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 85. Tanner expands this to a 'most general rule' (that 'created efficacy' is 'immediately and entirely grounded in the creative agency of God') and 'a more specific' rule (that 'the whole of a created effect must be said, therefore, to depend both on divine agency and its created cause', the latter 'subordinated' to the first) (*Ibid.*, 91-92).

⁹ Tanner, *God and Creation*, 84-98.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 98.

attributed to the instrument and also wholly to the principal agent”'.¹¹ Tanner then turns to Bernard of Clairvaux, and his application of this idea to grace and free will: ‘Not grace separately, nor free will separately, but rather both, each according to its own activity, accomplish the entire work’.¹² As Tanner has wished to show, this is not a matter of parity: ‘Free will accomplishes the entire work and grace performs the entire work; in such a way, however, that the entire work is in the will precisely because the entire work is from grace.’¹³ We have the necessary ‘negative’ rule (the priority of God), then extended to what the ‘positive’ rule allows but does not require (the integrity and involvement of the creature). In contrast, elsewhere in this chapter Tanner makes room to a more unilateral view of God’s action in salvation: the theologian can also say that ‘God effects what is discontinuous with our prior sinful inclinations or what exceeds altogether the created capabilities of human beings.’¹⁴ Here, what the positive rule allows is not embraced.

Tanner goes on to recall the difference between Aquinas and Peter Lombard as to whether charity—the supreme theological virtue and central to salvation—takes human shape in the redeemed person, or whether charity is the Holy Spirit in the soul, being charitable for (or instead) of her. Again, both authors uphold the negative rule: that charity is the gift and work of God.¹⁵ Lombard did not then press for what the positive rule will allow. For him, charity is the gift and work of God, so as not to be our own: ‘the Holy Spirit is the charity by which we love God and neighbour’.¹⁶ As Aquinas accurately summarises Lombard’s position, ‘charity is not something created in the soul, but is the Holy Spirit Himself dwelling in the mind’, such that the Holy Spirit moves the human will, independent of any human principle of movement.¹⁷ In contrast, Aquinas held that the redemption and perfection of the human being involves the growth of genuinely human charity. By grace, God forms us in charity rather than being charitable for us, such that our loving

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 92 Here Tanner is quoting Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles*, III.70.8, trans. Anton C. Pegis et al., 5 vols (New York, NY: Hanover House, 1955).

¹² Bernard of Clairvaux, *De Gratia et Libero Arbitrio*, ch. 4, n. 47. Tanner’s translation (92) come from Hans Küng, *Justification* (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster, 1964), 266, translated by Thomas Collins, Edmund E. Tolk, and David Granskou. Daniel O’Donovan’s English translation gives ‘It is not as if grace did one half of the work and free choice the other; but each does the whole work, according to its own peculiar contribution’, published as *On Grace and Free Choice* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1988, 106).

¹³ Tanner, *God and Creation*, 92. O’Donovan has ‘Grace does the whole work, and so does free choice—with this one qualification: that whereas the whole is done *in* free choice, so is the whole work done *of* grace’ (*Grace and Free Choice*, 106).

¹⁴ Tanner, *God and Creation*, 100.

¹⁵ This is no less affirmed by Aquinas than Lombard. See *Summa Theologiae* II-II.23.2, conclusion of the *responsio*, trans. English Dominican Fathers, second edition, 22 vols (London: Burns, Oates & Washbourne, 1912).

¹⁶ Peter Lombard, *The Sentences: Book One*, trans. Becket Soule (Ave Maria, FL: Sapientia Press, 2016), dist. 17, ch. 3, p. 114. Lombard quotes Augustine both in favour and against his view. His position was common, even dominant, in his own time. Philipp Rosemann lists ‘Alcuin, Paschasius Radbertus, Rabanus Maurus, Sedulius Scottus, and William of St Thierry as advocates, and Abelard and Gilbert de la Porrée among those who rejected it, in the direction taken by Aquinas (*Peter Lombard* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004], 89). On the positions taken by commentators on the *Sentences*, see Rosemann, *The Story of a Great Medieval Book: Peter Lombard’s Sentences* (North York: University of Toronto Press, 2013), 59, 63, 71, 99, 112, 130–31, 146, 158–61, 180–83.

¹⁷ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* II-II.23.2.

actions flow from an 'intrinsic' principle of action, not from the Spirit manipulating us extraneously.¹⁸ The Spirit creates a charity within us that is truly ours.¹⁹

Tanner aligns Lombard's position with 'much of the Protestant tradition and theologies which stress sanctification as an immediate union with God'.²⁰ Martin Luther then comes into view, Tanner turning to his 'concentration on God's gracious justification of the sinner in Christ as his choice for the central topic of theology'.

If God's own agency as the justifier of the sinner is under consideration, there are no created causes for this; negative rules apply that prohibit talk of the creature's conditioning God's agency. The creature's capacities must be said to have no efficacy in this regard ... [More generally] in every case, a direct reference to divine agency is a part of the account of created being and activity; in every case the creature's own power, value and efficacy are played down. These [Protestant] theologians ... shy away, in particular, from saying that God's grace issues in new created powers which are themselves evocative of a transformed life of reconciliation with God.²¹

Tanner contrasts this with more typically Catholic doctrines of salvation, with its talk of 'created grace', of grace that takes shape within the stories and constitution of the redeemed.²² Like Lombard, Luther followed the negative rule and chose not to take up what the positive rule allows. Aquinas took up both, holding—as Tanner puts it—that 'Human beings must not be said to be responsible for their salvation—there are no created causes for God's own agency [negative rule]—but this does not take away from a stress on God's agency as an agency that bestows [positive rule fully embraced].'²³

A final contrast concerns sin. The negative rule would cast sin as pride and 'self-referential isolation over against God'.²⁴ God is the source and giver, the beginning and the end. We sin by hubris in not recognising our total dependence on our maker. In contrast, the positive rule might approach sin as 'moral torpor' or 'lack of love and gratitude toward God ... [for] the creature's God-given capacities'.²⁵ In view now are the creaturely powers and responsibilities that God chose to give to creatures, and therefore so is our failure to fulfil them. In navigating these two approaches to sin, Tanner advises pastoral wisdom and flexibility. All other things being equal, our emphasis might be on sin as hubris and dreams of independence. However, in face of

¹⁸ For Aquinas, God does not work contrastively, in a fashion extrinsic (*exteriori*) to us. To pick up a term from Tanner, God and God's action do not enter into 'composition' with the creature (*God and Creation*, 94).

¹⁹ Aquinas does talk about the gifts of the Spirit uniting someone to the Holy Spirit 'as his mover' (*Summa Theologiae* II-II.68.6). However, even this involves the redeemed person, making her truly 'disposed to become amenable to the Divine inspiration' (I-II.68.1).

²⁰ Tanner, *God and Creation*, 108, with citations in note 48.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 111-12.

²² *Ibid.*, 112.

²³ *Ibid.* In an intriguing 'relation of doctrines' point, Tanner writes that having place for a developed doctrine of creation within one's theology makes this perspective more likely (112). She had written a couple of pages back that such an attention to creation is more likely when a theology seeks to be systematic 'according to an abstract ordering', rather than that being closely associated only with the story of salvation (109-111).

²⁴ Tanner, *God and Creation*, 116, with 117 for pride, and see 114.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 114, 116.

'quietistic or antinomian shirking of responsibility' or a need to gather people together around a shared sense of agency, a preacher or pastor who is otherwise less willing to take up what the positive rule allows might usefully press it into service.²⁶

The Non-Necessity of Created Causes for Created Effects

For Tanner, then, it follows as a requirement of the first, negative rule that God can create creatures with agency, and that this represents no challenge to, or conflict, with divine power. However, while that always forbids a denial, it does not require the affirmation that God does endow creatures with agency. God certainly *can* do so.²⁷ Indeed, 'it makes as much sense to deny that there are created powers and efficacy because God brings about all there is, as to deny there is a creation because there is a creator.'²⁸ If occasionalism is the proposition that God acts instead of creatures in producing the effects we associate with them (that 'fire does not give heat, but God causes heat in the presence of fire, and ... like things ... [for] other natural effects'),²⁹ then this rule forbids us to say that the world *must* be occasionalist: that God *could not* create creatures with 'powers and efficacy' (or could only do so at the expense of divine power). However, the possibility remains that that God *could* produce the world in an occasionalist fashion:³⁰ 'if God is said to have power and be efficacious, that does not *require* the conclusion that God communicates to creatures a power and efficacy appropriate to them.'³¹

In talking about the moment-by-moment unfolding of the created order as we know it, there is little doubt in *God and Creation* that creatures are causally responsible for created effects. The 'but maybe not' aspect of the positive rule generally looks like a theological counterfactual, stressing that while God has created a world in which created effects have adequate created causes, he need not have. However, even within the created order as we know it, Tanner can point to rare but significant examples of created effects 'without sufficient created causes', namely miracles.³² She again quotes Aquinas: 'without any doubt God can work in creatures independently of created causes, just as he works in all created causes ... [and] can produce the same effects and in the same order as he produces them by their means: or even other effects and in a different order.'³³ God's total creative action is not threatened by investing creatures with causal efficacy, but neither, for Tanner nor Aquinas, does that prevent God from working beyond that created order, miraculously.³⁴ Here, the sense that the positive rule allows but does not require the full integrity or

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 117, where Tanner cites examples from both Augustine and John Calvin.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 86.

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles* III.69.1.

³⁰ Tanner, *God and Creation*, 86-87.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 87. Recall Tanner's 'more specific' formulation of the positive rule, that 'God's creative agency must be said to found a created cause in the very operations by which it proves sufficient to produce an effect within the created order' (*Ibid.*, 92). This does not contradict the sense that this rule allows rather than requires. The point is more that any creaturely agency 'must be said' to be founded in God's agency, rather than that God's agency must create creatures with agency.

³² Tanner, *God and Creation*, 100.

³³ Thomas Aquinas, *Disputed Questions on the Power of God*, trans. English Dominican Fathers (Westminster, MD: Newman Press, 1952), VI.1. In *ST*, this is discussed in I.105.6, 8.

³⁴ Tanner, *God and Creation*, 100-4.

involvement of created causes in created effects turns out to be more than a counterfactual.³⁵

In the domain of sin and salvation—of grace, works, and merit—the balance between positive and negative rules is less about addressing what God might have done differently as about accommodating the breadth of Christian tradition. Christian theology has a foundational principle that salvation is by grace. In salvation, that is the (necessary) negative rule. While upholding that principle, some traditions then also make something of the idea that grace elicits and involves the agency of the redeemed person, as part of how they are transformed. That is the optional second, positive rule.

Taking stock, not least as simply a matter of textual clarification of recent theological history, it is useful to note that the association today of Tanner's *God and Creation* with the defence, even celebration, of created agency is justified, but also not the whole story. Indeed, given Tanner's emphasis in that book on the priority of God, and her sense that created agency can but need not follow from it, we might even say that what is today most recalled from her book is rather less than half the story. In what remains of this essay, I will explore why someone might want to see divine investiture of creatures with causal powers as more than simply a possibility: not because Tanner's rules are wrong, but because rules may not have the last word.

What Rules Do and Do not Express: Necessity, Possibility, and Suitability

God and Creation offers rules. Judged by the historical tradition, they are good ones. The cardinal theological mistake would be to deny the priority of God in creation or salvation (the negative rule), or to suppose that creation is or could be either independent, in contrast to, or over against God.³⁶ That is the negative rule, and it holds first place. As for the sense that the positive rule presents only what God could do, not what God has to, or must, that is also highly defensible, *as a rule*, addressing what is necessary or possible. If a portion of the Christian tradition has an aversion to anything less than a fulsome attribution of causal efficacy to creatures, that concerns not so much what God *could or could not do*, as what God *would or would not do*. A world where creatures are not involved in the unfolding of creation or salvation would not be impossible, but it might be unfitting, unsuitable, or inappropriate.³⁷

Since Aquinas features prominently in Tanner's book, I will take him as our example of a critic of unsuitability, and revisit themes from above. Responding to Lombard, we have seen that Aquinas wants to uphold the reality of creaturely agency and

³⁵ Bethany Sollereeder has noted a tendency among some theologians influenced by Aquinas (she lists Denis Edwards, Elizabeth Johnson, and David Burrell) so to stress a non-contrastive, non-competitive paradigm as to rule out, or strongly downplay, any idea of God working beyond, or interrupting, the created causal order. Sollereeder calls them 'more Thomist than Thomas' ('A Modest Objection: Neo-Thomism and God as a Cause Among Causes', *Theology and Science* 13, no. 3 [July 2015]: 346). We might call them 'more Tannerian than Tanner'. An equivocation over the word 'intervention' seems to be at play among the theologians that Sollereeder discusses. NCT (and ideas of primary and secondary causation) stands opposed to 'intervention' in the sense of God becoming newly involved (like Tony Blair or Bill Clinton 'intervening' in Kosovo). On the other hand, 'intervention' can also mean that God causes something to happen that would not have come about on the basis of creaturely causes, unfolding naturally. Tanner does not think that NCT rules that out, and neither does Aquinas, who wrote of miracles bringing about created effects 'by Divine power without a natural cause' (*Summa Theologiae* I.105.8).

³⁶ As Aquinas put it, 'God cannot make a thing to be preserved in being without Himself' (*Summa Contra Gentiles*, II.25.19).

³⁷ Aquinas, writing on this topic, calls it *inconvenientia* (*Summa Contra Gentiles*, III.69.12).

transformation in the process of redemption. Indeed, he wrote that it would be 'detrimental to charity' for the negative rule (putting it in Tanner's terms) not to follow through to what the positive rule will allow.³⁸ (Note, as we have seen, the priority of the negative rule: Aquinas does not deny that this love is formed by God. His point of contention is only that it should not remain 'extrinsic' to what we are.) Elsewhere, Aquinas found it difficult to imagine that acts of God in redemption would not change us—would not take shape concretely in terms of elicited human agency—since God's love is inherently *causative*.³⁹ Elsewhere, his argument was that while a human being might behave graciously towards another as a *response* to some good already present, God's grace does not respond to anything already present and perceived; it *produces* what it loves (first in creation, and then in redemption). 'Every love of God is followed at some time by a good caused in the creature'.⁴⁰ Again, Aquinas upholds the negative rule (God's grace is prevenient) but cannot countenance that this would not be accompanied by the sort of creaturely story that the positive rule allows. As a final example concerning salvation, consider forgiveness, and the idea that while we should pardon the impenitent, God will not: 'it is impossible that God pardon a man for an offense, without his will being changed'.⁴¹ As Aquinas saw it, there cannot be grace without repentance because there cannot be repentance without grace, which always prepares the way. Grace is primary (the negative rule); grace is productive (the positive rule). To that, I would add that contrition and a change of life is part of what God wishes to give. If God will therefore not forgive without repentance, and an act of genuinely human (divinely elicited) agency, that is because redemption heals, and part of that healing is the transformation represented and effected by real contrition and turning back to God.

Writing more generally about divine and creaturely agency, Aquinas offered a variety of arguments. Central among them is the concern that 'if created things could in no way operate to produce their effects, and if God alone worked all operations immediately, these other things would be employed in a useless way by Him', which offends against the disposition of all things by divine wisdom.⁴² Creatures would also be denied the perfection (as an imitation of God) of being able to act so as to communicate good to others.⁴³ A genuine, active communication of goodness by creatures also seems more fittingly to express the diffusiveness of the divine good.

Nor is it superfluous, even if God can by Himself produce all natural effects, for them to be produced by certain other causes. For this is not a result of the inadequacy of divine power, but of the immensity of His goodness, whereby He has willed to communicate His likeness to things, not only so that they might exist, but also that they might be causes for other things. Indeed, all creatures generally

³⁸ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* II-II.23.2.

³⁹ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles* III.150.4, on redemptive grace.

⁴⁰ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* II-I.110.1.

⁴¹ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, III.86.2.

⁴² Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles*, III.69.13.

⁴³ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles*, III.69.15.

attain the divine likeness in these two ways, as we showed above. By this, in fact, the beauty of order in created things is evident.⁴⁴

Finally, we have the idea that God gives fulsomely as a matter of consistency: first to himself and, on that basis, also to what he has created.

It is due to God that there should be fulfilled in creatures what His will and wisdom require, and what manifests His goodness. In this respect, God's justice regards what befits Him; inasmuch as He renders to Himself what is due to Himself. It is also due to a created thing that it should possess what is ordered to it; thus it is due to man to have hands, and that other animals should serve him. Thus also God exercises justice, when He gives to each thing what is due to it by its nature and condition. This debt however is derived from the former; since what is due to each thing is due to it as ordered to it according to the divine wisdom. And although God in this way pays each thing its due, yet He Himself is not the debtor, since He is not directed to other things, but rather other things to Him.⁴⁵

For Aquinas, then, the ultimate reason why God would not create an occasionalist universe lies in the unsuitability of anything less than a full flowering of all it could mean for God to create creatures that can act.

That is to set out some aspects of why a theologian sharing Aquinas's outlook might be unlikely to see the bestowal of created powers (as the positive rule allows) as a matter of 'maybe so, maybe not'. It is not to say that every outcome in creation has a created cause. Aquinas and Tanner uphold the possibility of miracles. But, generally, outside the miraculous, it does not simply so happen that God invests creatures with agency. What the positive rule allows is more than simply allowed; it is the norm.

That is not to fault Tanner's rules as rules. If we are looking for rules, Tanner offers a compelling account in *God and Creation*. It is simply that rules may not tell the whole story. There is also the question of suitability.⁴⁶ The rules or grammar are justified,

⁴⁴ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles*, III.70.7. In a later work, Tanner wrote that 'the fuller the giver the greater the bounty to others' (*Jesus, Humanity and the Trinity: A Brief Systematic Theology* [Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2001], 3).

⁴⁵ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* I.21.1 ad 3. Even the far more voluntarist John Duns Scotus (c. 1266-1308) agreed: 'where creatures are concerned [God] is debtor ... to his generosity, in the sense that he gives creatures what their nature demands' (*Ordinatio*, IV, dist. 46, translation from *Duns Scotus on the Will and Morality*, trans. Allan Bernard Wolter [Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1986], 190). This stands in contrast to Tanner's statement that 'if God is said to have power and be efficacious, that does not require the conclusion that God communicates to creatures a power and efficacy appropriate to them' (*God and Creation*, 87, emphasis in the original).

⁴⁶ Relevant here is the perspective of Italian theologian Mauro Gagliardi, and his '*et-et*' (both/and) approach to doctrine (*Truth Is a Synthesis: Catholic Dogmatic Theology* [Steubenville, OH: Emmaus Academic, 2020], 22). He presents theology as full of pairings, such as 'Spirit-matter, invisible-visible, grace-nature, freedom-law, subjective-objective, intention-action' (90). He calls this a 'bipolar' view (90-92): simply, that we are talking about combinations with two poles. These poles, however, will not have equal priority: 'there is always an element that has more value than the others, but this does not change the existence or importance of other factors' (92). Gagliardi sets this out in NCT terms, with the Incarnation as his example: it is not that 'the human nature has the same value as the divine, but that the superiority of the divine does not exclude the human' (92-93). So also, 'grace is a higher reality, but nature is called to participate in grace, and is not cancelled out by it' (93).

upholding divine power and freedom, but in terms of what accords fittingly with God's nature, we may expect more. I will leave the last word to Tanner: 'divinity is said to exercise its power in founding rather than suppressing created being'.⁴⁷

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

Data sharing not applicable to this article as no datasets were generated or analysed during the current study.

⁴⁷ Tanner, *God and Creation*, 85.