

that the author did not spend more time on his own scientific discipline—it would have been very interesting to have heard his insights about the future of cancer research, its impact on humanity, and the role of faith.

Finlay's book principally treats the question of why science needs faith, and that is done quite well. One part that was missing is the misunderstanding of science within the church itself, and the dangers that arise in faith communities when faith is dissociated from science. I would have loved to have heard some of his personal thoughts on this.

The book is highly footnoted, and the sources are quoted heavily. This significantly adds to the book, especially in the areas where Finlay is not an academic expert. Many of the references are not particularly recent, but I have come away with a list of books I want to read. Overall, this is an excellent book that will stimulate thinking in the area of science and faith and touch the reader's heart at the same time. I haven't marked up a book to this extent for a long time.

*Reviewed by Basil D. Favis, Emeritus Professor, Department of Chemical Engineering, Polytechnique Montréal, University of Montréal, QC H3T 1J4.*

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.56315/PSCF3-24Silva>

**PROVIDENCE AND SCIENCE IN A WORLD OF CONTINGENCY: Thomas Aquinas' Metaphysics of Divine Action** by Ignacio Silva. Abingdon, UK: Routledge, 2022. 170 pages. Paperback; \$52.95. ISBN: 9781032002781.

Ignacio Silva (DPhil, Oxford) is an Argentinian theologian who specializes in the dialogue between science and theology. This book is a proposal for fellow scholars and others to reconsider the contribution of Thomas Aquinas's metaphysics as a means of resolving the question of divine action in the light of science. Although Aquinas is the thirteenth century's most famous friar and Catholicism's most renowned theological authority alongside Augustine, he is often viewed today as contributing few insights as regards an allegedly "modern" argument.

Silva argues that Aquinas supplies a way of getting beyond two mistaken views held by people today: (1) on the one hand, that God needs the natural world to be fundamentally open to outside influence; and (2) on the other hand, that God causes things to exist in a way that is similar to the way other natural causes cause things to occur.

Silva's goal is to get beyond the current situation in which "many today find it necessary to search for a lack of natural causation so as to find a space for God to act" (p. 139). According to this way of thinking, God's actions are only localized occasions, hence the school of

thought known as occasionalism. Conversely, another tendency is for believers to argue that God's powers are self-restricted in order to account for natural powers. The latter point of view is sometimes stipulated in terms of the biblical concept of *kenosis* ("Christ ... emptied himself," Phil. 2:7).

Silva's main point concerns a correct notion of causation such that we not restrict divine providence to an inadequate understanding of causation: "the idea of requiring insufficient causation for God to act depends on a deterministic notion of causation that, ultimately, renders God to act as a cause among causes" (p. 49). Silva holds that much causation is subject to chance contingencies. Thus, Silva's strategy is to think of causation in the context of potency and act. This allows a fresh and fuller way of dealing with the four parameters of divine providence: God's omnipotence, God's involvement with nature, nature's autonomy, and the success of science. The scope of the inquiry is enormous and Silva's handling of the thought of Thomas Aquinas is, unsurprisingly, difficult, yet hugely beneficial.

On the one hand, readers must be prepared for a dense tutorial in accounts of causality, powers, natures, and other metaphysical categories in order to appreciate the argument of this book. On the other hand, the argument over the relationship between God as the creating cause of the world and the secondary causes that act to create other effects in the world, is startlingly simple. It is best understood as a form of instrumental causality according to Silva. It is analogized (as so much of Aquinas's theology is) as follows:

The knife is moved by the man to cut, and to do it in such a manner. Without the man's power, the knife could not cut, but without the edge of the knife, the man could not cut in this manner ... the effect is both produced completely by God and by the natural agent ... (p. 129)

Thus, without God, nature would not have the necessary powers to cause the effects it possesses. Without those natural efficient causes, God's power could not be effective. There is no split between divine and natural causation in any given effect; both are completely causal of any given effect. It is analogically helpful, although Silva does not discuss this idea, to invoke here the Incarnation of Jesus Christ: he is both fully divine and fully human, not half of each.

God acts in three ways: through creation itself, through natural (secondary) causes, and through three types of miracles—although, sadly, the latter do not receive much attention in this book. But the threefold action of God is intended to counter, on the one hand, the view that causality is always deterministic and, on the other hand, that God's action in the universe endangers nature's autonomy.

## Book Reviews

For some readers, the most difficult aspect of the argument will be the presentation of natural entities' powers of operation in terms of the four Aristotelian causes. The key is to think of causation in context. From Aristotle, change is a key feature of contingency. Change is organized into potency and act, essence and accident. These categories explain how causation results in real life. Moreover, theologically speaking, for Aquinas, "affirming that natural things do not operate, and that it is only God who does, diminishes the divine power" (p. 98, quoting the *Summa contra Gentiles III*, c 69). This is the counterintuitive power of the Thomist position. It opposes the view that attributes all natural causes to God's intervention. Holding that view would mean, in the end, that God actually does not create anything apart from God. But for God to create a world means to distinguish something apart from God and to allow contingency to exist in the spatio-temporal realm. The key point about the distinction between the eternal and the temporal realms is to ask why God creates in this way. Silva casually mentions that "God acts through natural causes because of the immensity of his goodness ..." (p. 101). So, it is not a matter of metaphysical necessity that lies behind the Thomist view, it is God's goodness that is the key.

The position that created natural things are themselves creative needs to be exactly well laid out; otherwise this position will be perceived as a way of extracting God from the world altogether. Here, Silva stipulates that "God's causality penetrates most intimately the causality of created natural things," while God upholds the creation "in its being" (p. 99). This is uncontroversial, but the provision for miracles is bound to raise questions about why God would act in this way. What Silva could have used are some examples of why some philosophers dissent from Aquinas on miracles, with responses to those dissents.

Silva covers an enormous amount of reflection on the notion of causality, including some original and highly potent insights. He claims that final causality is the "cause of the efficient cause in terms of its causality" (p. 71). This relationship, as well as the relationship between the material and formal cause, as first demarcated by Aristotle, is laid out in dense, logical prose. The book ends with some subtle yet significant comments on the differences between Aquinas's views and those of twentieth-century thinkers such as Austin Farrer, who referred to Aquinas in proposing a double agency account of creation while resorting to fideism. Farrer refused to suggest any explanation for the causal joint between God's creation and the world's operation. This analysis is original and should have been given more prominence. There is, indeed, a great deal of difference between fulsome and evasive double agency accounts of created causality; however, Silva ignores almost completely the medieval development of the theorem of the

"supernatural," which came about because of the theoretical stance taken by Philip the Chancellor (d. 1236). This lapse is not critical, but it does exemplify the lack of a historical dimension to the book's argument.

Another quandary concerns the book's form of exposition. It is largely descriptive. While its argument details Aquinas's metaphysics of causal relations and the universe's created dependency on God, it lacks a dialectical edge. Although the argument is sufficiently sound, it is in need of an engagement with the open theists and others who would contest the account of divine power that Thomas Aquinas developed. There are quite a few references to other contemporary positions on providence and causality, especially in the final chapter. The names of William Carroll, Robert Russell, and Michael Dodds appear, but there could have been a more probing engagement of these contemporary voices. The Copenhagen interpretation of quantum physics is treated in the light of the proposed view of moderate determinism in contrast to the non-interventionist, objective (NIODA) view of divine action in Robert Russell. Here, I'm unsure whether NIODA has been properly interpreted. Although I think Silva's position is correct, is Russell's understanding of God's causality really reducible to natural causality as Silva contends? The textual citations for this allegation are not convincing.

Finally, despite what I take to be a largely satisfying account of God's creative action, the issue of evil and theodicy are not dealt with in this book. Aquinas makes contingency (and accidents in general) central for the notion of creation. Silva sees contingency as a sign of the perfection of divine providence, but this contradiction (between created contingency and the fact of natural "evil") is a real difficulty for God's involvement with evil or deficient effects in creation. Regardless, altogether this is a provocative, dense volume that could easily have been double the length if key problems had received more comprehensive treatment.

*Reviewed by Paul Allen, Academic Dean, Corpus Christi College, University of British Columbia, Vancouver, BC V6T 1J7.*

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