

Maritain and Marin-Sola on Predestination: A Reply to Michael Torre

John C. Cahalan

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Our colleague Michael Torre has written an extremely well researched article arguing that Maritain basically got his solution to the problem of God and the permission of evil from Francisco Marin-Sola, O.P., even though he did not credit Marin-Sola. See "Francisco Marin-Sola, O.P., and the Origin of Jacques Maritain's Doctrine on God's Permission of Evil," Nova et Vetera (English edition) vol. 4, 2006, 55-94.

Michael kindly sent me a copy. After exchanging some e-mails with him, I have written the attached reply, which you may be interested in.

Dear Michael,

I enjoyed reading your extraordinarily well researched article. What is at stake is not just JM's reputation for scholarly justice and originality but the correct understanding of the solution to the most difficult of metaphysical problems. Since I only know MS from you, the comments below make the assumption that your article contains all of his points that are relevant to them.

You say "Given the extraordinary degree to which Maritain follows Marin-Sola, it is remarkable that he (JM) does not mention him (MS) further . . .". (p. 90) Then, "Perhaps he (JM) felt that certain of his distinctions importantly distinguished his views from those of MS. For he suggests that he may have made an "effective contribution" to philosophy more on this matter than anywhere else in his work" (p. 92) Then, "Perhaps JM felt that his own speculations helped explicate and defend a theory he had come to regard as deeply important, and that his 'effective contribution' lay chiefly in its defense" (p. 93). But to be fair to JM it is not enough to say "Perhaps he felt that certain of his distinctions importantly distinguished his views from those of MS." "Perhaps"? "Certain of his distinctions"? You talk as though we did not know what JM thought his specific contribution was. But we do. Since we do and since you are, intentionally or unintentionally, creating the suspicion that JM did not properly acknowledge his scholarly debt to MS, you should have (1) acknowledged what JM thought his contribution was and (2) shown that he is not as original as he claims or at the least (3) shown that if he is original, his contribution is not as important as he thinks. Your otherwise fine article does not do any of these things, although that may partly (at the very least) be JM's fault as I will explain.

Before getting into details I should point out a problem with your conclusion that anyone familiar with the history of the JM/MS relation as you present it would have both before and after reading your arguments. According to that history, JM would have known that if he borrowed from MS without properly crediting him, the OPs, at the very least Journet and Garrigou-Lagrange whom JM knew to be familiar with MS's position, would see that JM was not giving credit where credit was due. Why would JM expose himself to the possibility of such just criticism? Because he thought his friendship with Journet and Garrigou would keep them silent? Then he was not only plagiarizing (I know that you do not use that word); he was abusing friendships by putting friends in a compromising position. And why would he think they would value their relationship with him more than with a fellow OP, especially since he had every reason to believe MS's views had been, and his own views would be, hot topics at Fribourg? And what about the OPs you say (p. 91) expressed support of JM's positions in the Revue

Thomiste? Maybe the difficulty of getting MS's articles made them unaware of his position. But could JM have assumed that none of the OPs except his friends Journet and Garrigou knew MS's views? There is a violation of the principle of sufficient reason in here somewhere — and it is not the only one (see Sections 2 and 5).

1.

What did JM think was the contribution (as an interpretation of Aquinas) that he and nobody else had made? In St. Thomas and the Problem of Evil (STPE), he makes it clear that the problem he is focusing on concerns the causality responsible, not for the moral privation in the final act of choice, but for the prior defect, an absence of attention to the moral rule, from which the moral privation will come: “The cause of this defect must be the will itself” (p. 23). And “an absence of attention of which freedom alone is the cause” (p. 28). And

St. Thomas breaks up so to speak into two moments not chronological but ontological, the movement of the will in the evil act of choice. In the first moment (the moment prior to the final choice that will be made without considering the rule) there is an absence of consideration of the rule: and that, by virtue of the pure initiative of the created will as a defective primary cause, — I do not mean by the action of the created will, since at the moment there is still nothing positive, there is as yet no action. . . . At the first moment the will has introduced an absence . . . (p. 29).

And

The first moment, and this is what is so extremely important especially for the problems touching upon the connection between uncreated freedom and created freedom — the first moment is voluntary, it is free, and it is not yet sin but the root of sin . . . . We say then that it is a mere absence (as opposed to a privation) and we say in the same breath that man has need of himself alone to propound the negation, to introduce the nothingness (p. 31-2; his emphases throughout the preceding quotations).

What is it that is “extremely important” about the first moment? The last quotation calls two aspects of that moment extremely important: that it is only a negation, as opposed to a sin, AND that it has man alone as its CAUSE, since it is voluntary and free. But the question has always been HOW can man alone be its cause if God is the first cause of everything that the creature does? That question concerns the second of the two aspects JM calls “extremely important” about the first moment, and he will spend the rest of the paragraph and the next seven pages dwelling on that aspect, the aspect of how the negation is “propounded,” “introduced,” rather than on the aspect that the negation is not a privation. What do those pages say about that question? I will quote from them in a moment. But on p. 25-6, he has already said

The lack or defect we are discussing (the defect at the first moment) has as its primary cause freedom itself, which can act or not act and which does not act (my emphasis), does not pay attention to the rule . . . . Here we are at the very beginning; impossible to go any further back: a free defect, a defect of which freedom itself is the negative and deficient primary cause.

He does not merely say that the primary cause is freedom itself; he says that the primary cause is the fact that we are free to not act. And he gets that phrase from De Malo (DM) 1, 3, which he has just quoted; there Aquinas refers to “the freedom of the will whereby it can act or not act” (my emphasis).

Returning to the quotation from p. 32, the paragraph continues:

As concerns this lack, the very freedom of the will is enough. It is a sort of nothing, it is a mere absence, an absence of an act of which created freedom has the initiative: therefore

we must join in our minds these two notions, to have the initiative not of an act, but of an absence, of a negation, of the non-consideration in act of the rule.

He does not say we must join in our minds the notion of an initiative and of something that is not yet a moral privation (the first aspect mentioned above); he says that we must join in our minds the notion of an initiative and of the absence of an act, the act of considering the rule, not the initiative of an act (the second aspect).

What then does JM think his contribution is? Immediately after emphasizing that the concept of nihilation is a non-act of considering in distinction from an act of not considering, he says

It is there, in that region proper to freedom, that is manifest in the sharpest way, because in a free manner, the particular condition of the creature which St. Thomas pointed to when he said that what comes from nothingness tends by its nature toward nothingness. That is the metaphysical grandeur of the universe of freedom: there, and only there can the creature do something by itself alone but that something consists in non-being, and that 'doing' is an absence of action (p. 34).

By calling the fact that the non-consideration is the absence of a causal activity "the metaphysical grandeur of the universe of freedom," JM clearly implies that this is the metaphysical profundity that you quote JM as thinking that MS did not achieve. The grandeur is that the creature can do "something" by itself alone, but as JM had just said and immediately goes on to say again, what is owed to the creature by itself alone is not-acting, not-doing, etc.

Without using the words, he applies the Thomistic doctrine that the will has "freedom of exercise," the freedom not only to choose not-A but to not choose A, to the first stage in the will's act of choice, while it is usually applied only to the ultimate choice (see STPE p. 43, n. 9). The fact that JM considers this to be the crucial idea, and therefore the reason that he can call this insight his contribution to understanding Aquinas's solution to the problem of causing sin, is confirmed by the continuation of the above quotation from p. 32:

This (joining the two notions of an initiative but of the absence of an act) requires a particularly difficult mental effort, for the words we use can mean everything — even things that do not exist — only ad instar entis (after the pattern of being) and because we have as a result a great deal of difficulty in conceiving of a free initiative which is not an action, but an initiative to not act, to not consider the rule, the initiative of an absence.

Here, we might ask whether in his correspondence with Journet JM ever makes similar remarks about the solution that MS put forward. Does JM ever say that to understand MS's solution requires a particularly difficult mental effort because we have a great deal of difficulty in conceiving of a free initiative that is not an action but an initiative to not act?

He makes the same point on p. 33: "Were we to put this into picturesque present day language, we should say, in trying to express this initiative of non-being, this initiative of absence on which I have placed so much emphasis, — we should say that the will nihilates, that it noughts; it has an initiative yet we can only translate that initiative by words which express action. But, it is an initiative of non-action: we must therefore necessarily have recourse to a paradoxical language and say that the created will then 'does nothingness,' 'makes non-being'; and this is all it can do by itself . . . It 'makes' not being, that is to say that in all freedom it undoes, or it not-does, or it noughts; the creature slinks, not by an action but by a free non-action or dis-action, — from the influx of the first cause."

In this last quotation, notice the phrase "on which I have placed so much emphasis." What is it that he is placing so much emphasis on? On the idea that he thinks is crucial to solving

the problem. That idea is not just that a non-consideration of the rule is a pura negatio as opposed to a moral privation (the first aspect from the p. 32 text) not even that it is something negative in the sense of an absence. JM considered his discovery concerning Aquinas's solution to the problem of God and free will to be the fact that the non-consideration of the rule that precedes the moral evil is a non-act, that is, a non-activity, a non-action. Act here does not just refer to a state of fulfillment as opposed to a state of potency; it refers to action, causal activity, a cause's bringing of something into existence. The crucial idea is that the prior negation is caused negatively, "caused" by a non-act of causality on our part; the crucial idea is that the prior absence of the consideration of the rule amounts to the prior absence of causal activity on our part.

2.

I need to make two important clarifications before going on. First, a very learned and intelligent friend with whom I had a lengthy correspondence on JM's position over a number of years sometimes seemed to speak of "negative causality" only with respect to the prior non-consideration's causing (negatively) of the moral privation in the subsequent sinful choice. When JM talks about nihilating, not-acting, etc. he is speaking of the (negative) "causing" of the prior non-consideration itself. To understand what he means, we have to start with the positive cases of causality, first the causing of an actual consideration of a rule and second the causing of the subsequent choice made with consideration of the rule; only when we understand the positive cases can we understand what is being negated.

When we consider a rule, we actively cause the state of considering (call this "causality 1"). We actively cause a state of considering even if the reason we are considering the rule is not for the sake of then making a decision directed by the rule. For example, I may be considering the rule against stealing because an interesting thought about it just popped into my mind that made me want to consider the rule. If so, I am causing (producing) my state of actually considering the rule even though there is no current question of actually causing a decision (call this "causality 2") about stealing something. Causality 2, on the other hand, refers to the active transition from the state of just considering a rule to making a decision in accordance with the rule. By "nihilation" and his other neologisms, JM is referring to the absence of causality 1; when we do not consider the rule, we refrain from actively causing a state of considering, whether or not there is a question of actively causing (causality 2) a subsequent decision about whether to steal something. It is of that prior non-consideration itself that JM says

Here we are at the very beginning; impossible to go any further back: a free defect of which freedom itself is the negative and deficient primary cause (causality 1); — and it is the will thus in default which, acting with this defect, is the cause (causality 2) — in quantum deficiens — of moral evil (p. 26).

Causality 1 is the negative causality that solves the problem. JM considered his contribution to be the realization that the "cause" from which moral evil in a choice comes is not just something negative and not just a prior absence of consideration but is a non-act of causing (causality 1) that is prior to the non-causing (causality 2) of moral goodness in the subsequent choice.

Secondly, in our exchange of e-mails I think the phrases "negative causality" and "causality by defect or deficiency" were each used to refer to situations that are so different, from the point of view of the issues we are discussing, that the phrases have different meanings in each case. At least I think I may have been guilty of that (and apologize for any confusion) and I know that JM was. I have just quoted him as referring to "the negative and DEFICIENT primary cause," where he is talking about causality 1, and so means the absence, the non-being,

of the activity of causing a state of considering the rule. He then describes the will affected by the absence resulting from that non-being of a causal act as the cause (causality 2) “in quantum DEFICIENS” of moral evil in the subsequent decision. But deficiency, and so negativity, have different meanings in the cases of causality 1 and 2.

In Aquinas, for example, and sometimes in our e-mails, these or equivalent phrases are used for causality 2, and so they mean the negative derivation of a second absence, a defect in operation such as the privation of moral goodness in a subsequent choice or a limp in the action of a leg, from a prior absence that has already occurred to the agent of the action. To my knowledge, Aquinas does not describe the “causing” of the prior absence (causality 1) as negative causality or causality by defect. In natural occurrences Aquinas says the prior defect results from (the physical counterpart of free causality 1) the per accidens causality of something acting positively. In voluntary and free occurrences, however, Aquinas says that the prior defect has and needs NO cause (causality 1), rather than saying that it has a negative or deficient cause (see Appendices A and E). For example, the absence of food that constitutes a famine can derive (the physical counterpart of causality 2) from the absence of water that constitutes a drought. If the causing of the prior absence of water is also natural, the absence is ultimately traced to the per accidens causality of something acting positively. If the causing of the absence of water is deliberate and morally evil, the absence of water is ultimately traced to an absence of ANY causality (causality 1) that would have produced the consideration of the rule necessary to avoid the moral evil.

But negative and defective causality had both senses in our e-mails and also, unfortunately for the rest of us, in JM. When negative causality is the causing of a subsequent sin by a prior non-consideration, it is a case of what Aquinas means by causality by deficiency, or by a defect. That is, evil in a causal operation, as opposed to evil in a being, presupposes a prior defect in the agent doing the operating; the prior defect, the absence of something, is the negative cause of the evil in the operation of the agent because it is the (proximate) reason for, the (proximate) source of, the absence of something in the operation itself. “Negative” causality in this case means that a subsequent absence is derived from (causality 2) a prior absence.

But when “negative” causality is the causing of the prior non-consideration of a moral rule, the causing (causality 1) of the prior defect by which the moral defect in the will’s operation is subsequently caused (causality 2), it does not refer to causality by a prior deficiency or defect. Negative causality in that case means the absence of any causal act from which the consideration of the rule would come; it is the absence of any causal activity, of any making, of any doing, PERIOD. It is nihilating, dis-acting, de-efficiency and so on. For to understand JM’s claim of originality, we have to use these neologisms for causality 1 specifically, regardless of whether JM is consistent in using “negative” and “deficient” causality.

Except when I am quoting someone else, I will try to use “negative causality” only in the case of causality 1, and causality by defect” or “deficient causality” only in the case of causality 2. The difference, again, is that in causality 1 there is no causal activity (at least none of a certain kind) on the part of the agent, while in causality 2 there is a positive causal activity that lacks something it should have as a result of a prior defect of a certain kind in the agent. In both cases efficient causality is meant, in the first case the absence of efficient causality, in the second case the presence of efficient causality from which something is absent in the action because something prior is absent in the agent. (Another unavoidable subtlety that can add confusion is that the act of causing, producing, a state of consideration is not really distinct from the state of consideration itself; a state of considering is a causal activity on our part. But that state’s aspect

of being a causal action [causality 1], not its aspect of being the defect in the agent of the subsequent act that causes [causality 2] the subsequent act to be morally evil, is what JM — and Aquinas in DM 1, 3, when he says that the prior defect has and needs no cause — is focusing on.)

Returning to the quotation from p. 33 of STPE, the rest of it provides further evidence that JM thinks this is the crucial idea: not just that the non-consideration is something negative but that it is the absence of causal activity (causality 1). For he goes on to talk about how you almost have to use language backwards to express the thought, and understand the thought, he is trying to put forward. But we do not have to go to such extremes to talk about mere negations, mere absences; we do it all the time in everyday speech. We could hardly get through a paragraph without doing it. (Just consider the phrase "without doing it" in the preceding sentence.) It is not the fact that the prior non-consideration is something negative that makes the causing of the prior negation, the prior absence, something that requires paradoxical language and which requires "a great deal of difficulty in conceiving." It is the fact that "we can only translate that initiative by words which express action. But, it is an initiative of non-action" (p. 33).

So when you cite the above passage from p. 33 of STPE in your article (p. 87, n. 150) and characterize what JM is doing by putting the words "merely describes this initial defect" before his phrase "in picturesque present day language", you are failing to understand, perhaps due to JM's ambiguous language, what JM is trying to say there. You may not think the fact that the concept of an absence of consideration (the "initial defect"), which MS uses, is not identical with the concept of the absence of a causal activity, which JM is referring to, is very important (though distinct in concept they are identical in subject). But JM obviously did think it was very important. And each time he talks about this question (next in Existence and the Existent [EE] and then in God and the Permission of Evil [GPE]) he emphasizes the problem of the backward thinking we have to do to appreciate what he is trying to say about, and so what he is trying to contribute to, this most difficult of dilemmas.

MS does not say anything like that in the passages that you quote. MS indicates that there is more to God's knowledge of moral evil than he can say, but he nowhere says that his position on how we cause moral evil is particularly difficult for us to understand because it requires us to go beyond our ordinary ways of talking about the negative. The problem is not and has never been just God's knowledge. It has been how God can escape being the cause of moral evil, or, to put it conversely, how a creature can be the first cause of anything if God truly makes us out of nothing. As JM says on pp. 36-37 of STPE

"If I have dwelt at great length upon the thomistic doctrine of non-consideration of the rule as the cause (causality 2) of the evil in free action, it is because that doctrine seems to me to allow us to catch a glimpse of how (my emphasis) the *first initiative* (causality 1) of evil — permitted by God to the extent that divine motion or grace is merely "sufficient" or *breakable* — comes from the creature alone.

As this quotation illustrates, JM's solution for the causing of moral evil includes more ideas, for example, that divine motion can be "breakable," than the idea of the creature's having the initiative of the absence of a causal act. But those other ideas are subordinate to and depend on that idea. From the last quotation it might seem that the idea they are subordinate to is the non-consideration's causing (deficient causality 2) of the subsequent privation, since that is the idea JM has "dwelt at great length upon." But why has he dwelt on that idea at great length? "Because that doctrine seems to me to allow us to catch a glimpse of HOW (my emphasis) the

first initiative (negative causality 1) of evil . . . comes from the creature alone.”

Further evidence that the other ideas in his solution are subordinate to that of nihilation, negative causality 1, is found on p. 40 of GPE. While discussing the idea of shatterable divine motion and leading up to discussing the idea of the consequent permissive decree, he says

The decision to enter frankly, when one treats of evil, into the perspective of non-being and of the initiatives of nothingness taken by the creature, breaks the iron collar of logical impossibility in which the human mind seems imprisoned with the problem of the relations between God and man according as the latter does good or does evil.

Under the general heading of “the perspective of non-being” he specifically names “the initiatives of non-being taken by the creature” as idea that “breaks the iron collar of logical impossibility.” Don’t let the plural form “initiatives” mislead you into thinking that he has both the prior nihilation and the subsequent privation (causality 1 and causality 2, respectively) in mind. The whole context shows that he is thinking about causality 1, and a few lines later in the same discussion he says

All that I do which is good comes from God and all that I do which is evil comes from me, because God has the first initiative in the line of being and because I have the first initiative in the line of non-being. . . . If I do evil, it is because I have myself taken a first initiative to shatter, by nihilating, the shatterable motion by which God inclined me to the good, and to introduce into my acts the nothingness which vitiates them. (p. 41; my emphases)

Also, from your e-mails I draw the conclusion (I know you don’t say this) that JM must have known that many prior Thomists saw that moral privation was preceded by a prior non-consideration that was not itself a sin. So that aspect from the p. 32 text, the first aspect, could not be what JM claims his contribution to be. If it was, there could be no sufficient reason for JM’s believing that other Thomists would think his views were original.

Apart from JM’s ambiguous use of “deficient,” there can be no doubt about what he thought the core of his contribution to understanding Aquinas’s doctrine of the causing of moral evil was. But no one would know what it was from reading your article — although that may not be your fault — nor could they judge how original or important it is.

3.

My friend, however, seemed to think that what JM considered hard to express was simply that what precedes the final choice is something negative:

There are two issues raised by Aquinas (in DM 1, 3). The first is exactly what he is talking about regarding the negative cause of sin. The second is how to explain how it got there. . . Thomas is clear about the first: he is speaking of a non-consideration of the rule that precedes final choice, and it is a negation. Contrary to what you seem to imply, saying this was not hard and was said by numerous theologians.

This distinguishes “what he (Aquinas) is talking about regarding the negative cause of sin” from the issue of causality 1, “how it (the negative cause of sin) got there.” And it implies that “the first” (which is causality 2) is what I said JM found hard to express.

But by what is hard to express JM means causality 1, the negative causing of the non-consideration itself; he does not mean the non-consideration’s deficient causing of the subsequent sin, causality 2; what is hard to express is not deficient causality 2 but negative causality 1. And before JM NO Thomist, including MS, had said what JM said about Aquinas’s doctrine concerning causality 1. (My friend knew much more about the history of this dispute than I do; he just didn’t grasp the admittedly, by JM, subtle but crucial point that JM saw. And

JM may have been partly, at the very least, to blame for that, but being guilty of that is different from being guilty of not giving MS the credit that he was due.)

JM very probably got his idea from the following statement of Aquinas in DM 1, 3:

There is no need to seek a cause of this non-use of the aforesaid rule because the liberty of the will itself, thanks to which it can act or not-act (my emphasis), suffices for this. (I give an exegesis of the argument in the body of the article leading up to this statement in Appendix A).

I recall your article stating that the liberty of the will itself is a sufficient cause of the non-consideration of the will. But it is not enough to say that the liberty of the will is sufficient without specifying, as Aquinas and JM do, that the reason the will is a (negatively) sufficient cause is that, since the will has the power to not-act, to not be a cause, there is no need to seek any cause.

Does MS talk about there "not being ANY cause" due to the freedom of the will, as opposed to talking about there "not being a cause OTHER than the freedom of the will?" On p. 73, you include the DM 1, 3 text among "a few key examples" of "a number of important texts in Aquinas" that MS uses to support his position and which you claim JM borrows from MS to support his own position. Two important differences distinguish MS's loose quotation, on p. 73, of the DM 1, 3 text from Aquinas's original. The former adds NISI and so denies "any cause EXCEPT the freedom of the will," rather than "any cause." (Your allusion to this text on p. 88 makes the same modification.) And MS's quotation replaces "agere or non agere" with "sinat moveri a ratione vel non sinat," the significance of which in this context is that had MS quoted Aquinas as using agere vel non agere, this phrase would have been the only one in the entire paragraph that unambiguously excludes the misleading interpretation that the prior deficiency is based on a positive act. By default, "impeding" and "resisting" refer to positive acts, and even though "ceasing" and "permitting" can refer to non-acts, they do not have to. And without further clarification "vel non impedire" can make it seem that impeding is the positive case, since the grammar makes not impeding seem to be a negative act. Only "non agere" expresses why the prior defect requires NO cause.

So NONE of MS's Aquinas texts, as quoted on p. 73, actually supports, rather than just being consistent with, JM's position. Since you think they do, you either do not understand JM's position or do not understand those texts. But you say they do support MS's position. If so, MS's position is not JM's. A detail like the addition of nisi might be minute in other contexts, but not regarding the issue we are discussing. If MS had grasped that the DM 1, 3 text had ruled out ANY causality, and precisely because of the will's ability to non-act, he absolutely should have noted that this text rules out an incorrect interpretation that all the other texts he cites as supporting HIS position are subject to.

And on p. 72, you refer back to "three central points" on p. 65 that JM supposedly got from MS. Which of them, or which combination of them, is the point that the non-consideration does not require ANY causality? In fact, the statement you put in italics on p. 65 says there is no OTHER cause of "this impediment" than the creature's own will. You immediately identify the impediment with something negative, a non-consideration. But you have just implied that the impediment, and hence the non-consideration, has a cause. MS certainly knew that the creature becomes the first cause of moral evil by not considering the rule prior to completing the choice and that the non-consideration of the rule is something negative, and he thought that there was no explanation needed for the non-consideration other than the free will of the creature. But that is NOT the same thing as sharing the insight JM expresses about HOW creatures are able to be



the first causes of evil by having the freedom not to cause rather than to cause; for the problem is how to justify the statement that there is no cause needed for the non-consideration but the free will of the creature.

Where you summarize MS's points on p. 65 and elsewhere, you do say that the creature is responsible for voluntarily not considering the rule. But MS uses language and examples that without further qualification would imply an act of non-consideration rather than a non-act of consideration. For example, he talks about placing an impediment to the causality by which God moves the will toward good. He says that the will can "paralyze or deviate the course of the motion" (bottom of p. 67; my emphasis). On p. 71 you quote his example of the child in his arms offering resistance, but this is another place where, whatever his unexpressed intentions, his words support the interpretation that the non-consideration he relies on can result from acts of non-considering rather than non-acts of considering. For such resistance on the part of the child consists of positive acts. (Concerning the next example you cite on p. 71, seeing a statute that has no head, see Appendix D.)

My point is NOT that this is what MS intended. My point is not that MS was saying that the non-consideration resulted from an act of non-consideration. My point is that he doesn't say the opposite (and not because he has made an act of deciding not to state the opposite but because he has made a non-act of deciding to state the opposite as a result of an [inculpable] non-act of even considering the opposite). He doesn't state that the REASON the non-consideration of the rule solves the problem is not just that it is something negative but that it is the non-existence of a causal activity (causality 1). So the opposite that he fails to state is not something that merely makes the role of the negative in the causing of moral evil more explicit; what he fails to state is the crucial point in the explanation of how the creature is the first cause of evil without which there is no explanation, no answer to the real question, but at most an answer to some substitute for the real question.

If MS saw JM's point in the sense of knowing how it and only it solves the problem of the causing of moral evil, he would have taken care to state how the metaphors limp, and taken care not to use misleading language. We can use metaphors and language like that, but ONLY if we bend over backwards to point out how misleading they are relative to the real problem and solution. If we don't see the need to qualify the metaphors and the language, we are not aware of the real problem and/or the real solution, or we are not trying to solve the real problem. JM often qualified such language and metaphors when he used them. STPE, p. 34: "The creature slinks, not by an action but by a free non-action or dis-action) — from the influx of the first cause. EE, p. 91: "The first cause (which is not an acting or efficient cause, but is dis-acting and de-efficient), the first cause of the non-consideration of the rule, and consequently of the evil of the free act that will come from it, is purely and simply the liberty of the created existent." EE, p. 93: "The existent frustrates, nihilates, renders sterile — not actively, but by way of non-acting — the divine activations which it has received." (Emphases supplied.) GPE, p. 35: "This free failure which is the cause of moral evil without being itself evil is the non-consideration of the rule — WHICH IS NOT, NOTE WELL, AN ACT OF NON-CONSIDERATION, BUT A NON-ACT OF CONSIDERATION (capitals supplied).

Another very misleading metaphor is the example of using keys to turn off a light on p. 79. The person cannot light the house positively but can darken it, can cause the absence of light. "All that is in his hand as first cause, is something negative: to turn off the light". But in the metaphor to turn off the light requires a positive action, turning the key, an act of non-lighting rather than a non-act of lighting. The problem is not helped by the following remark modifying

the idea that all that is in his hand as first cause is something negative, "that is, not to use the power that is in his hand, not to use his intellect to consider the rule that he could consider." Not to use the power that is in his hand would be not to turn the key. Turning the key would be a positive act; likewise, considering the rule would be a positive act. But in the metaphor the result of not turning the key, a negative act, would be something positive, that the house continues to be lit, not something negative like the sin that results from not considering the rule.

The misleadingness is compounded by the metaphor of Aquinas cited next, that we close our eyes to the light or close the shutters of our house to the sun. Both of these are positive acts. We certainly can use metaphors like that. But if we do, we have to bend over backwards to point out that they fail precisely with respect to the causing of evil's being a non-act, like not opening our eyes or the shutters, or not turning keys to shut off lights, rather than an act. If we don't bother to point that out, we must not have achieved the same insight that JM achieved.

In one of your e-mails you mention that someplace MS talks about our not being able to achieve any more, but only less, than what God moves us to. It would be interesting to see that whole passage, because the only quotation I find in your article in which MS speaks about having "neither more nor less than that to which God moves him" (p. 70) is one in which he uses the kind of misleading language I am talking about:

If Peter is moved by God most determinately to act well, he is thereby moved not to place an impediment to the divine motion, since in this precisely consists to act well (his emphases throughout).

Without further qualification, these words make acting well consist of a non-act of causality, "not to place an impediment," and so make not acting well consist of a positive causal act, placing an impediment. (In Appendix B I analyze another text of MS's that seems to be the closest you come to evidence that JM got his position from MS.)

I know that Scripture and Aquinas use language and metaphors like MS's. But Scripture is not trying to break "the iron collar of (apparent) logical impossibilities" (GPE p.40). In fact, language and metaphors like those Scripture uses are main sources of the appearance of logical impossibilities. And Aquinas makes up, from the point of view of the logical impossibilities, for using language and metaphors like that by also stating the way out of the impossibilities, explicitly in DM 1, 3 and implicitly elsewhere. And where Aquinas does state the way out explicitly his metaphor, the craftsman's not holding the ruler in his hand, is a perfectly apt metaphor, not a misleading one. My point still stands: If you use language and examples like MS's without the NECESSARY qualifications either you don't understand what it takes to dissolve the apparent impossibilities or you are not trying to dissolve them.

I can well imagine JM's achieving his insight as a result of reading a phrase like "not to use the power that is in his hand" (p. 79). (You do not attribute the phrase to MS, but let's assume it was MS's rather than someone's who, like yourself, had already read JM and so could unintentionally read JM's thought into MS's). But it in no way follows that JM should believe that the author of the phrase — who uses it in the midst of such misleading metaphors without bothering to note, here or anywhere else, their misleadingness — had the very same insight. (I think it more likely that JM got the insight from reading DM 1, 3.)

4.

At this point, a defender of MS might ask something my friend asked:

As I understand you, you then want to say that this non-consideration is also a non-agere. That seems fine to me. But my problem is understanding why you think it could be anything else. How can a negation be a being or action (or agere), such that we need to be

sure to exclude this?

First, a negation can result from a positive act, for example, by per accidens causality. Second, we can recognize that what is absent is (A) a state of considering without recognizing that what is absent is also (B) the causal act (causality 1) of producing a state of considering, and we can even recognize that a causal act is absent without recognizing that it is the causal aspect of what is absent that ultimately solves the problem (see Appendix C). Only when we recognize that can we adequately answer the question of how the will can be the first cause of evil because only then can we answer the question of how a created will can be the first cause of “anything,” namely, by non-causing, by dis-acting, by a de-efficiency (as opposed to an efficiency that is defective, as in causality 2).

A defender of MS might also ask, however, what alternative could there be to thinking that our not considering the rule must be explained by the will’s ability to deliberately not be a cause, to deliberately refrain from causing an act of consideration. If MS didn’t think that, how could he have thought that he had solved the problem? Concerning the causing of the non-consideration my friend offered an explanation that did not explicitly invoke the will’s ability to deliberately not be a cause:

To say that the creature is the "cause" of this non-being, however, requires careful exegesis. All that is meant is that it fails when it need not.

And

Thomas thinks that physical things can fail from within, due to the limitation of their matter. To explain failure in being, one does not need an extrinsic cause that does not uphold a being. An intrinsic cause is sufficient. Moral evil is like physical corruption, not annihilation: the thing fails from within, due to nothing else but itself. However, unlike physical corruption, the moral agent fails when it need not.

And

The free and fallible will of the creature is sufficient: it fails. However, it fails when it need not fail. It could do otherwise when it fails.

And

A thing fails from within. That’s all one can say and need say.

But how can the will not need to fail (or not need to do anything it actually does) if everything is in God’s causality? If any other creature fails, it has to fail because God causes the failure (though per accidens). If we answer that the will can fail when it need not because, unlike other created causes, the will is free, we have left unexplained how it can be free, that is, how it can fail when it need not. Stopping the explanation where my friend (at one time) thought he could stop it begs the whole question of HOW we can be free to fail. (Nor is the absence of a per accidens cause the answer; we know there is no per accidens cause since we know the will is free, not vice versa — see Appendices A and E — which assumes the point at issue, that the will is free to sin though it is caused by God. The question is why does the non-consideration need no cause, per accidens or otherwise. The answer is that the will has the power to not-act.)

My friend thought that the statements I have just quoted were at least consistent with JM’s view. But JM holds that this is NOT all we can and all we need say. (So if the view my friend was expressing was also MS’s, which is a possibility at least left open, even if not stated explicitly, by your article and e-mails, MS’s view clearly differed from JM’s.)

The ability (or tendency) of any creature to fail in being is the general background to the problem of moral evil. But since that tendency is true of non-free beings and operations, it is not enough to explain evil of a specifically moral kind. In STPE, in the midst of discussing negative

causality (1) as an absence of causal action, rather than just as an absence presupposed by a defect in a subsequent causal action (causality 2), JM says:

It is there, in the region proper to freedom, that is manifest in the sharpest way, because in a free manner, the particular condition of the creature which St. Thomas pointed to when he said (*De Veritate*, 5, 2) that what comes from nothingness tends by its nature toward nothingness (p. 34).

In morally evil choices, the creature's general tendency to nothingness is manifested in a uniquely sharp manner, a manner that is characteristic only of free beings, not shared with all creatures. And the ability to deliberately not act is not a creaturely "mixed perfection," a perfection that intrinsically includes and necessarily presupposes the limitations of passive potency. The ability by which we refrain from acting is a PURE PERFECTION that can exist in an infinite state. It is a POWER that all creatures do not have but that those who have it share with God. Only those created in the image and likeness of God have the ability to refrain from acting when sufficient causes for their acting exist (see my "Making Something Out of Nihilation," MSON). Nor is that ability only an ability to cause an absence in a way that leads to a further absence of a moral kind. The ability to refrain from causing is essential to the perfection we call free will wherever that perfection is found, even in God.

JM's disciple Sikora pointed out that (a) freedom of exercise, the freedom to refrain from acting, is universally connected with free will because freedom of specification can be no more than freedom of exercise in series, and (b) deciding not to create would not have constituted a difference between what God is and what he would have been had he not created. The "decision" not to create would have been a non-act that posits nothing in God, and deciding to create, while an act, only posits something in the creature, not the creator (see MSON). And JM argues in the last pages of GPE that the fact that a non-consideration of something is an absence of a causal activity (1), can allow creatures to be first causes even outside the order of moral evil, first causes in the line of good! So JM's insight that the freedom to refrain from causing is at the root (causality 1) of moral evil is hardly consistent with holding that "all one can and need say" about causality 1 is that a creature fails from within. While the ability to refrain from acting is the ability that allows us to sin, that ability in itself is a perfection that need not be used for sin.

And JM spends a whole book, *The Sin of the Angel* (SOA), tracing moral evil not to the general tendency of creatures to fail but to a specific kind of creature's misuse of an ability, the ability to refrain from acting, that all creatures do not share and whose use need not be a failure, a misuse. JM does say that the possibility of non-acting (causality 1) in a way that can result (causality 2) in sin is natural to created persons, but that possibility still requires a perfection, the ability to deliberately refrain from acting, not shared with all creatures but shared with God. JM and the tradition hold that freedom to do evil is not essential to freedom per se. But JM is original in pointing out how moral evil can result from an ability, the ability to non-act, that is essential to freedom and is not necessarily connected with moral evil.

My friend later admitted that "The fact of being created from nothing in itself is no final explanation for the non-being (of a state of considering the rule) at issue." He added that the presence of matter in our nature "helps avoid the interpretation that we need God's non-conservation (read: negative permissive decree) to explain the non-being at issue." But noting that even matter does not rule out the possibility of the latter, he then added that "Given that JM argued against explaining non-consideration by God's negative permissive decree, it would have been helpful for him to indicate why that is not necessary." But if he had understood JM's

solution, he would have seen that this is precisely what JM does, namely, show why the whole business of non-conservation and negative permissive decrees is not necessary. JM explains that at length in GPE. Why is it not necessary? Because nihilation (negative causality 1), non-causality on the creature's part, does not require any causality on God's part.

5.

Asking how MS thought his position solved the problem of God and the causing of sin is the same as asking how he thought Aquinas's views solved the problem, since MS like JM claims to be interpreting Aquinas. And MS would not be the first Thomist to think he understands how Aquinas's views solve the problem. Yet for centuries thousands of intelligent people have been reading Aquinas and been unable to understand how what he says justifies the statement that our free will is sufficient to solve the problem of God and moral evil; for the problem is HOW can we be free if we are nothing more than creatures of God, and the general ability of creatures to fail does not solve the problem. But those people could see that Aquinas says that moral privation is preceded by a non-consideration and so is preceded by something negative. And they could see that this absence is the cause (causality 2 by deficiency) of the subsequent moral privation. We know that because many past Thomists saw that much in Aquinas and pointed it out to others. Still no one before JM saw how the occurrence of a non-consideration prior to the sin made free will sufficient by itself to be the cause of sin. They didn't see that because it did not occur to them that no cause was needed for the non-consideration of the rule preceding sin since the power of free choice includes the power to deliberately not be a cause of, to deliberately refrain from causing, a consideration of the rule.

Unlike other past Thomists, in addition to seeing that Aquinas said a negative non-consideration causally (causality 2) precedes a moral privation, MS apparently saw that Aquinas says the liberty of the will suffices for that prior non-consideration. But MS didn't bother to tell us why it is sufficient, namely, because it has the power of not acting. So it is not enough that MS recognized that what preceded moral evil was something negative, or that it was an absence, or that it was a non-consideration, or that it was not a moral evil, or that it was the cause (causality 2) of the moral absence in the subsequent action of the agent. For earlier Thomists had seen that much and pointed it out to others who still could not see how it justified the claim that our free will can be the sufficient cause of sin.

As my friend said:

Because Thomas is seeking the efficient/deficient causes of sin, it is common to the entire OP tradition to name the non-consideration a defective cause and to think of it in terms of an absence of causal activity; that is, the OPs will all say that, should a person actively consider the rule when proceeding to election, then this intellectual activity will cause the will to choose well (just as a carpenter's use of the rule causes him to cut straight). And they will concede that a person's non-consideration when proceeding to act is an absence of this causal activity, which absence entails that the act will be defective and sinful.

And he said

They (the OP tradition) do think a non-act of causality is involved. (That is, they think the non-consideration of the rule is the negative cause of sin.)

The position my friend attributes to the entire OP tradition seems to be the one that you claim JM got from MS. This suspicion seems confirmed by your remark, p. 83, that "MS is intent on showing that his theory (and so the one JM supposedly got from him) accords in its essentials with the solid 'Thomistic edifice' of Banez."

But notice that my friend is talking about causality 2, not causality 1. Why did the OPs think that not just a non-consideration but “a non-act of causality was involved”? Not because the state of non-consideration was (negatively) caused by the will, or because the absence of the consideration was identical with the absence of a causal act of which the consideration itself would be an effect. No, a non-act of causality is involved because “the non-consideration of the rule is the negative cause of sin,” because, in other words, the sin is an effect related to the prior non-consideration as its defective “cause” (as the prior defect in its efficient cause). A non-act of causality is involved because the sin is the effect of the non-consideration, not because the non-consideration itself is a (negative) effect of the will’s not acting. To make this as clear as possible, let us describe the positive case, as my friend does in the first of the two previous quotations. Why do the OPs think of “the non-consideration . . . in terms of an absence of causal activity? He says “This intellectual activity (actively considering the rule) will cause the will to choose well.” So “cause” in that sentence refers to causality 2. The OPs think of the non-consideration of the rule in terms of the absence of causal activity because choosing well will be the effect of considering the rule, not because considering the rule will itself be an effect caused by the will. Then he adds that a “Non-consideration when proceeding to act is an absence of this (my emphasis) causal activity (and so causality 2), which absence entails that the act will be defective and sinful.” So the insight attributed by my friend (and by MS?) to the OP tradition is NOT JM’s.

And it would violate the principle of sufficient reason if Banez and/or other traditional Thomists had seen JM’s point about the absence of causality 1 being due to the will’s freedom to deliberately not cause, to not be a cause of, an act of considering the rule. For if they had seen that there would have been no reason for 400 years of acrimony, accusations and suspicion. If they had seen that the prior non-consideration of the rule needs NO cause since it is accounted for by the will’s ability to deliberately not cause an act of considering the rule, then they would have seen that the non-consideration of the rule does not have to come from a divine negative permissive decree. In natural events, there is need of per accidens creaturely causality for non-being, and so there is need of divine per accidens causality of the creaturely per accidens causality. Where creaturely non-being does not need any creaturely causality, it does not need any divine causality of the absent creaturely causality. So if the “essentials” of MS’s position were the same as JM’s and those essential were present in Banez or any other traditional Thomist, we would not be having this discussion, and the Church would have been spared 400 years of grief and confusion. Or if they had just seen that Aquinas claims that no cause is needed for the reason that the will is free to not act, they would have seen the need to defend their position(s) against that claim.

But sufficient reason for 400 years of acrimony or no sufficient reason, the fact remains that until JM none of the people, including MS, who claim to understand how Aquinas solves the problem of God and moral evil bother to mention that the prior non-consideration requires NO cause because our freedom to deliberately NOT ACT is sufficient for the non- occurrence of the consideration.

My friend also said

You may think it odd that someone could concede that the non-consideration not merely was not sinful, and a negation from which sin came, but was also an absence of "a causal activity of considering," and yet not conclude that, for such an absence, the free and defectible creature was the sufficient cause; nevertheless, OPs did not draw this conclusion . . .

I do not think it odd that someone would not conclude that the free creature was a sufficient cause of the prior absence if the reason they described the non-consideration as the absence of “a causal activity” was that they were thinking of causality 2, the causal activity, or lack thereof, whereby the non-consideration becomes the cause of the subsequent privation, not thinking of causality 1, the causal activity, or lack thereof, of which the non-consideration itself is the effect.

So my friend, perhaps misled by JM’s ambiguous use of “deficient” causality, didn’t understand JM’s contribution, and if his position is the one that MS credits Banez with, MS did not see JM’s solution either. But if you were not misled and did understand JM’s solution, you may have been projecting what you learned from JM into the language of MS which, by the very fact of being even more ambiguous and less precise concerning the negative character of the solution than JM’s, leaves room for an excessively broad interpretation. If so, the evidence establishing your interpretation of MS in your mind would be a deduction rather than a simple reading of MS’s texts, but a deduction so immediate and apparently obvious, for someone who has first read JM, that you wouldn’t notice that you are going beyond the text. The deduction would be something like “MS must see that what is important about the prior non-consideration is that it is a non-act of causing (in JM’s sense, causality 1) because the presence of the prior non-consideration wouldn’t solve the problem otherwise; and MS must see that it wouldn’t solve the problem otherwise.” In other words, having read JM before MS, you could see that MS’s theory wouldn’t work unless it were JM’s and so conclude that it must be the same as JM’s; for how could MS have thought his theory works unless it is the same as JM’s?

JM’s solution IS obvious once you think of it, but that’s probably why no one thought of it since DM 1, 3: It’s TOO obvious to see because of a combination of it’s being so fundamental and its being something that isn’t there rather than something that is there. The more fundamental principles of actual being are, the more difficult they are to see; when the fundamental principles are principles of non-being because they are not there, they are very much more difficult to see. The identity between non-considering and non-acting (in the sense of causality 1) is obvious, even glaringly obvious, but we can see its obviousness only AFTER it has been pointed out (see Appendix C). My very learned and intelligent friend did not see the identity even though he had read JM and done a lot of deep thinking about these matters. For all readers of Aquinas but JM, the glaringly obvious identity had to be pointed out by someone else; only then could we say "How could I have missed this before?" The answer is: Easily! JM was the first to point it out following centuries of overlooking it (not denying it, just overlooking it). There is not a shred of evidence that anyone else saw the point.

Maybe MS did and did not tell us about it, but the evidence, what he actually says, the metaphors he uses, and what he does NOT say, argues the opposite. But if we have deduced, after first reading JM, that MS did see it, even his silence about a non-considering being a non-act of causality 1 can be taken as evidence that his seeing their identity wasn’t just a deduction on our part. The reason he didn’t say anything about it was that it was too self-evident for him to bother; he must have thought "I don't have to point this out, because any intelligent person will see it." But 400 years of acrimony and suspicion prove otherwise.

As JM says in GPE, the tradition is bound by an iron collar of impossible alternatives that only the intuition that freedom consists in not-acting causally or not not-acting causally can break. Everyone but the OPs admitted the existence of the iron collar. If the OPs had wanted to put an end to the dispute with the SJs (and vice versa), all they had to do was to talk about the initiative of not-causing as JM does. The existence of 400+ years of acrimony and suspicion would violate the principle of sufficient reason, if everyone, or even someone, had seen JM's

point.

A contributor to the confusion about MS and JM may have been that JM did not want to offend OPs by saying from the start that the problem of the causing of moral evil was at least as big as the problem of God's knowledge of moral evil. For why does he wait until GPE to admit how big that problem is? Probably because he is then under OP attack that he has to respond to. In his letters to Journet he covers himself by hinting, but only hinting, that the problem exists by, for example, indicating that how God does not cause sin calls for a "marvelous" (p. 61) answer and that MS's position, OK as far as it goes, does not have enough "metaphysical profundity" (p. 69).

If I had been JM, I would have considered it just not to cite MS. That would even be the kind thing to do, since had I cited him, I would have had to point out that he did not get to the core or, if he did get to the core, that he forgot to tell us about it.

#### Appendix A: Why Aquinas Says the Non-Consideration Needs NO Cause

In DM 1, 3, Aquinas says that "there is no need to seek a cause of this non-use of the aforesaid rule because the liberty of the will itself, thanks to which it can act or not-act (my emphasis), suffices for this." Aquinas there states that the freedom of the will to non-act means "there is no need to seek a CAUSE (aliquam causam) of this non-use of the rule." Previously, I have been reading into his thought "no need to seek ANOTHER cause" than the freedom of the will. No, he here says that there is no need to seek ANY cause whatsoever, that there is no causing of the non-use of the rule or that the "causing" (causality 1) of the prior deficiency is a non-causing, a de-efficiency. In other words, BY IMPLICATION but not explicitly, he says that the non-use of the rule referred to earlier in the sentence is a case of the will's freedom to not act, referred to later, rather than its freedom to act, and this implied identity is why he EXPLICITLY says that the non-use of the rule does not require a cause (causality 1). This, not at the later solā and pura negatio passages, is where Aquinas states the solution that JM found in him. And Aquinas may not state it explicitly anywhere else in his works.

There is no doubt that "aliquam causam" refers to causality (1) not (2). For the hypothesis is that the evil in an agent's act IS caused (causality 2) by the prior defect; so the problem concerns the cause (causality 1) of the prior defect. Aquinas has just argued that in all cases but sin the prior deficiency that causes (causality 2) the evil in the ultimate act is itself caused (causality 1) by the per accidens causality of another non-defective agent:

Every evil has some cause, but accidentally. . . Now everything which is accidental is reduced, that is, is traced back to that which is per se; but . . . only good has a per se cause. . . . Evil, which is a defective good, may also be the cause of evil; nevertheless it always come back to this that the first cause of evil is not evil, but good. . . . If we seek the cause of this defect, the evil of the seed, we will arrive at some good which is the cause of this evil accidentally and not inasmuch as it is deficient.

So the question now concerns HOW THE DEFICIENCY PRIOR TO SIN is itself caused (causality 1), how does that prior deficiency come about, how does it get there.

And notice that nowhere in the body of this DM article does Aquinas refer to the problem of an infinite regress of morally evil absences causally preceding other morally evil absences. So by not "aliquam causam" he is not just alluding to the fact that the regress in causes is not infinite. He illustrates, using the seed example, that if a deficiency prior to moral evil requires a cause, that cause would be a per accidens cause. Per accidens causality is the only kind of causality that can produce a deficient cause (that can cause [causality 1] a deficiency that in turn becomes the cause [causality 2] of the evil in the subsequent action of the deficient cause). But a



per accidens cause of the deficiency would eliminate “moral fault in us, since chance events are not premeditated and are beyond the control of reason,” as Aquinas says in SCG III, I, 10. So tracing the prior defect to a per accidens cause, and there is no other kind of cause to trace it to if you are going to trace it to a cause, would eliminate freedom. In DM 1, 3 he makes this point conversely with the example of pleasure as the cause of adultery. Perception of pleasure cannot be a per accidens cause of the moral evil the way physical causes are per accidens causes of physical evil, because the will is free to accept or not accept what it receives from the senses. In other words, if the evil in an act of the will were traced wholly to per accidens causality, the will would not be free with respect to the evil. Since the will is free, morally evil decisions cannot be ultimately explained by per accidens causality.

Aquinas goes on to say that the will does become the per accidens cause of a moral evil in pursuit of the good of sensible pleasure; thus the principle that “Every evil has some cause, but accidentally” is preserved. But since per accidens causality cannot be a sufficient cause of the moral evil, the per accidens causality of moral evil does not eliminate the need for a deficiency in the will prior to the moral evil to also be a cause of it. But if that prior deficiency required a cause, the cause would have to be a per accidens cause, since there is no other kind of causality to which to trace a defect prior to moral evil. The possibility of the prior defect’s being caused per accidens is ruled out by the freedom of the will. Therefore the prior defect must not require any cause. Rather than an infinite regress argument, the implied reasoning here is a process of elimination. There are only two possibilities, per accidens causality or defective causality, and both possibilities are ruled out.

Is there any way out of this dilemma? Yes, the ruling out of the only possible kinds of causality is not a problem because there need be NO cause of the prior deficiency. In the case of the will the prior deficiency does not require a cause per accidens but only because it does not require ANY cause. That is the implied structure of Aquinas’s argument in the body of the article. He might have offered an infinite regress argument (though he could not rely an infinite regress argument alone; see Appendix E), but he doesn’t have to. Evil by a deficient cause is always traceable to evil by a per accidens cause except in one case, sin. And for that case he adds that in evil by a deficient cause, the prior deficiency itself does not require ANY cause.

But why does the deficiency not require any cause in the case of the will? My friend thinks that at this point Aquinas might have answered “because the only kind of absences that require causes are absences that are evil, and the prior absence of a consideration of the rule is not an evil.” And it is true that if the absence were an evil, it would have required a cause, according to the principle that every evil must have a cause. But Aquinas does not say, nor should he have said, that privations are the only kind of absences that require causes. The wall I am looking at has never had any pictures hanging on it; so there are an infinite number of pictures absent from it whose absence does not require any cause. But the wall behind me has a picture hanging on it; so if that picture were absent tomorrow, a cause would be required for the absence of that picture. Still, the absence of that picture would not be a privation for the wall, much less a moral privation.

There would be, however, a more basic problem with this explanation of why the prior absence needs no cause. That explanation would leave unanswered the question of how we can be responsible for the prior defect, and hence for the subsequent sin, if the reason why the prior defect has no cause is simply that it is not a moral evil. Before every choice we make, there are an infinite number of things absent from our consideration, but we are not responsible for all of them not being there anymore than we are responsible for the absence of extra fingers our hand.

There is no evil in there not being extra fingers on our hand or baseball parks on the moon, but those absences are not in any way under our free control. Rather than giving the non-evil character of the non-consideration as the reason it needs no cause, Aquinas says it needs no cause “because the liberty of the will itself, thanks to which it can act or not act (my emphasis), suffices for this.” The reason is that the will has the freedom “non agere,” to not act, to not be a cause.

So Aquinas is not just saying that there is a last cause, a cause after which there is no other cause. He is saying there is no cause. And where Aquinas does address the infinite regress question, in reply 6, he distinguishes the question of whether the prior defect has the nature of a moral fault from the question of whether “we need to seek a further cause of such a defect.” So he there says there are TWO reasons why there is no infinite regress of moral evils: one is that the prior defect is not a moral evil; the other is that the prior defect requires no cause. In the body of the article, however, he does not link either reason to the infinite regress problem, does not link the first reason to the prior defect’s needing no cause, and leads up to the second reason by process of elimination. Also, in the body it is only after he has informed us that the non-use of the rule needs no cause for the reason that the will has the ability to non-act that he brings up the fact that “the very fact of not actually giving heed to such a rule considered in itself is not evil.”

But the body of DM 1, 3 also makes no reference to God; so there is still a question regarding divine causality and sin: How can the first cause of everything create a secondary cause that can sin; doesn’t that either make God the first cause of sin (the OP position, whether they admit it or not, as GPE says) or allow something to exist that is independent of the creator’s first causality (the SJ position)? To answer that question it is not enough to say that the freedom of the will, given by God, is sufficient to cause sin. The whole question concerns the iron collar of logical impossibilities around the thesis that God can create a secondary cause that genuinely has the FREEDOM to sin; how could God give anything such freedom without his either being the first cause of sin or ceasing to be the first cause of EVERYTHING in creation?

Aquinas’s answer, which JM correctly saw to be the only logically possible answer, is that the freedom of the will is sufficient for the will to become (negative causality 1) the deficient cause (causality 2) of sin because and only because the will has the freedom not to act, not to be a cause of (causality 1) an act of consideration. And God can give us the freedom to cause (causality 2) sin without his ceasing to be the first cause of EVERYTHING in creation because he creates a causal power that can consciously and deliberately refrain from causing (causality 1), not cause, the existence of the prior consideration necessary to cause (causality 2) a morally good act. (Appendix E discusses an alternative reading of Aquinas and JM on the prior non-consideration’s needing no cause.)

#### Appendix B: Is MS’s “Not Making Use of Grace” JM’s “Nihilating”?

On p. 70 MS says

The making use of grace comes from the grace itself; but the not making use or abuse comes from our own fault, in which we, and not God, are the first cause.

This is the closest you come to a quotation that would show that JM got his position from MS, and it might be well worth your effort to go back and see if its context provides more evidence of similarity between them. But this statement adds its own ambiguities. Does the context show, for example, that by “comes from our own fault” MS consciously means something other than the moral fault in the ultimate choice; he should if he is talking about where the latter fault comes from. In that case, “coming from our fault” should just refer to our being responsible (causality 1) for that non-use of grace which is not yet a moral fault.

And based on other quotations and statements concerning MS's position in your article and e-mails, my default interpretation (the interpretation I conclude to until I have reason to believe otherwise) of "making use of grace" would read it as describing causality 2, the transition from the consideration of the rule to the morally good choice (or from the non-consideration of the rule to the morally privated choice in the defective case); for that seems to be the default interpretation of "negative causality," "an absence of causal activity," etc. If so, "comes from our fault" could be just a loose way of saying that we are responsible (causality 2) for the moral fault by the fact that we do not consider the rule. Then the phrase "in which we are the first cause" would mean that by being in the state of non-consideration we are the first cause of the moral privation, and the "not making use of grace" could be either the transition from the non-consideration to the moral privation (causality 2) or the moral privation, the effect of the non-consideration, the effect of causality 2, itself. This text would still not tell us that MS realized that the reason not making use of grace made freedom a sufficient cause of evil, without either making God the cause or making us a cause of something independently of God, is that "not making use of grace" consists of a non-causing (causality 1) of an act of consideration.

But if "not making use of grace" did refer to causality 1, the causing of the prior non-consideration, there is another ambiguity that would have to be resolved. The act of causing a state of consideration is not really distinct from the state of consideration itself; likewise a non-act of causing a state of consideration is really the same as the state of non-consideration. So strictly speaking the not making use of grace would not "come from" our own fault; the not making use of grace is that in which our fault consists. (And again, a benign reading of MS has to make the assumption that "fault" here does not mean moral fault.) But without further qualification, MS's words here would make it appear that the "coming from" is a causality really distinct from the "not making use of grace" that is the effect of the "coming from." Would the context show that MS adverts to the fact that the ability to "not make use" of the rule consists in our ability to deliberately not be a cause of a consideration which, if it existed, would not strictly "come from" the act by which we cause it but would be identical with that act? If not, he is not expressing JM's insight (although it is possible that JM got his insight by reading a phrase like "not making use of grace" and grasping a significance that the author himself gives no indication of grasping).

And there is yet another ambiguity that would have to be resolved. Assuming for the sake of argument that MS did see that the ability to "not make use" of grace is the ability to refrain from a making a causal act (causality 1) of considering the rule, would the context show that he noticed that the (non-moral) fault he is talking about consists in our not-acting in the sense of deliberately not being such a cause? In other words, is there evidence that he knew that it was this, and not any subsequent, non-causal aspect of not considering the rule and so of not making use of grace that was the crucial aspect for solving the problem (see Appendix C)? If not, then whether or not he noticed that a state of non-consideration was also a non-act of causality 1, he was not focusing on the same aspect of a non-consideration of the rule that JM — and Aquinas in DM 1, 3, when he says that the way out is that the prior defect has and needs no cause — focus on as the core of the solution.

#### Appendix C: Seeing the Identity of the Non-Consideration and an Absence of Causality 1

Whatever we can accurately describe as

(A) a non-consideration of a rule from which the evil in a morally evil decision comes, we can describe in indefinitely many other ways that must necessarily also be accurate. E.g., a non-consideration of a rule is an absence, a lack; it is an absence of something intellectual as

opposed to sensible; of something immaterial as opposed to material; of something moral as opposed, e.g., to something mathematical, aesthetic or historical; of something practical as opposed to something speculative; of an accident as opposed to a substance; of something belonging to the category of quality as opposed to the categories of quantity, relation, etc.; of something necessarily connected to our happiness as opposed to something trivial; of something natural as opposed to artificial; of a state of the intellect as opposed to a state of the will; and so on, and so on. These descriptions are all DIFFERENT FROM the description of something as a non-consideration of a rule even though their accuracy follows necessarily from the accuracy of that description.

I can recognize that a situation can be accurately described as being or including a state of non-consideration of a rule without automatically recognizing that it can be described in any of these other ways or any of the indefinitely many ways of describing the same situation that I have not listed. I can recognize that a situation can be accurately described as a state of non-consideration of a rule without automatically recognizing that it can also be described in any of these other ways even though the accuracy of these other descriptions is a NECESSARY implication of the accuracy of describing the situation as a non-consideration of a rule. For example, I can recognize the accuracy of the latter without even having heard of the distinction between substance and accident, the immaterial and the material, etc.

But let's say I am aware of all the concepts that could be used in the other POSSIBLE ways of accurately describing a non-consideration of a rule; I am aware of the substance/accident distinction, of the categories, of the immaterial/material distinction, etc. It does not follow that I must NECESSARILY advert to them when I grasp that a situation can be accurately described as a non-consideration of a rule. And if I need not advert to those other ways of describing the situation, it is not necessary that I automatically recognize their accuracy when I recognize the accuracy of "a non-consideration of the rule." For example, when I know the truth of "The morally evil decision was preceded by a non-consideration of the moral rule," I need not automatically know the truth of "The morally evil decision was preceded by the absence of a certain accident, or a certain quality, or something immaterial, or something practical. I do not automatically know the truth of the former even if I have previously learned the truth of all of the latter. For when I know the truth of the former, I do not have to advert to any of the latter.

Another additional description of a non-consideration of the rule that I have not included in the above list is this:

(B) the absence of a causal activity (causality 1) from which the consideration of the rule itself comes (since an act of considering is identical with a causal activity by which we produce an act of considering)

If someone can know the accuracy of "a non-consideration of the rule" without automatically adverting to the accuracy of any of the other examples I have given, even though their accuracy is necessarily linked to the accuracy of "a non-consideration . . .", they can know the accuracy of the latter without adverting to the accuracy of "the absence of a causal activity from which the consideration of the rule comes", even though the former's being accurate necessarily makes the latter accurate. (Thank you for pointing out Aquinas's use of "dis-act" in DM 1, 1; but he is referring there to causality 2, not to causality 1 as (B) does.)

Now, one of the questions we are discussing is

(I) Did MS advert to the accuracy of (B) when he recognized the accuracy of (A) as describing something that must precede a morally evil decision?

Assuming that MS did and assuming that he says something to make clear that he did, this could constitute a fair argument against part of JM's claim of originality. We know that JM did recognize the connection between (A) and (B) because he tells us so. And you may have, at least AFTER reading JM. But did MS advert to the accuracy of (B), and if so, how do we know that he did?

For the moment, however, assume that MS did see the accuracy of (B) when he saw that of (A). We would still have another question to discuss:

(II) If MS saw the co-accuracy of (A) and (B), did he recognize that (B), not (A), is the description that is crucial for solving the problem of the causing of something of which God is not the first cause? Did he recognize that being the absence of the causal activity that produces the non-consideration itself (causality 1), not just being an absence that causes (causality 2) the subsequent privation, or the absence of a consideration, or the absence of an accident, or the absence of something immaterial, etc. is the crucial aspect of the non-consideration for the problem of the causing of moral evil?

Even if MS recognized the connection between (A) and (B) [that is, even if the answer to (I) is yes and JM's recognition of the connection was not original], it does not follow that the answer to (II) is yes, that MS recognized as JM did that (B) is the description that is crucial to solving the problem.

Another necessarily accurate description of an (A) is  
(C) a state that is not itself a moral evil.

The accuracy of (C) is crucial for solving the problem of an infinite regress of moral evils causing moral evils. But JM saw that the accuracy of (B) is the crucial one for solving how a creature can be the cause of something, like moral evil, of which God is not the first cause. For example, as JM argues in the last pages of GPE, the fact that a non-consideration of something is ALSO a (B), an absence of a causal activity (1), can allow creatures to be first causes even outside the order of moral evil. Moral evil is one example of something of which the creature can be the first cause, if it is possible at all for the creature to be the first cause of something. And if it is possible for the creature to be the first cause of something, © would have to be an accurate description for (A) to be one. And (B) would also have to be an accurate description for (A) to be one. But for the creature to be the first cause of something, (B) would have to be an accurate description even if moral evil were not that of which we are the cause, and so even if (A) was not an accurate description. Therefore, (B) is the crucial description for the problem of creaturely causality.

So even if MS saw the accuracy of (B), we would still have to ask (II); for even if he saw the accuracy of (B), it would not follow that he ALSO saw that (B) was the crucial distinction for creaturely causality.

But returning to question (I), I have already presented evidence, MS's language and examples, that MS did not see (advert to) the accuracy of (B), even though he saw the accuracy of (A) and even though the accuracy of (B) is connected necessarily to that of (A). For the sake of argument, however, let's assume MS saw the necessary connection between (A) and (B), saw that an absence of considering the rule is an absence of a causal activity producing a consideration of the rule. That would still not show that the answer to (II) is yes. There is no evidence that MS saw that the crucial aspect of the non-consideration was its not being a causal act by which we would have caused a consideration, and there is strong evidence that he did not. For his silence about the misleadingness of his language and examples screams for attention. If he had seen that the absence-of-causality-1 aspect was the crucial aspect, he should have alerted

us to that fact and to that misleadingness, and he should have explained both what the misleadingness consisted in, the positive rather than negative character of the language and examples, and why it was in an important sense inevitable, because our concepts, even our concepts about non-being, are based on being, not on non-being. JM does all of this, but MS does not. What evidence, then, is there that MS knew that the answer to (II), the key question, is yes?

Perhaps MS knew that the fact that the absence of a consideration is the absence of causality 1 has the importance in the explanation of how second causes can be first causes of evil that JM gives it. But MS nowhere says that, and without further qualification, what he does say can lead us to believe the opposite.

Nor is there any evidence that any of the earlier Thomists would have answered (II) correctly. For if they had, 400 years of acrimony and suspicion would have been unnecessary. For to answer (II) correctly is to see that the absence of consideration's aspect of being the absence of causality 1 is what solves the problem of creation and the causing of evil. Not to see the latter is not to understand the answer to (II).

#### Appendix D: Dissymmetry Between the Lines of Good and Evil

With reference to the concept of the "dissymmetry between the line of good and the line of evil," although JM gets those phrases from MS and perhaps should have cited MS as the source, JM's first discussion of the subject in a letter to Journet already distinguishes the problem of the causing of good acts from the causing of morally evil acts, as you point out on p. 58. So the thought is there if not the terminology. But what I would like now to point out, on the basis of the passages of MS that you cite, is that JM makes much more of the fact that, and of the way that, non-being, nothingness, is crucial to the explanation of the causing of moral evil than MS apparently does.

For example, on p. 59 you quote the pre-MS JM as holding that Garrigou-Lagrange says that we cause non-being by an inconsideration "more in the conclusions than in the principles." What JM means by wanting it to be "in the principles" is perhaps fulfilled when he later talks about, not the line of good versus the line of evil, but the line of being versus the line of non-being and says that in order to solve the problem of the causing of moral evil we have to approach the problem from a point of view of the line of non-being rather than the line of being. He uses that terminology in a number of places, for example, in GPE p. 41.

That nothingness has to enter into the principles of the explanation goes back to the part of JM's pre-MS letter that you quote on p. 58 "because he is created from nothing, because nothingness is in the very entrails of the creature, he is constantly tending toward nothingness." The importance of non-being, nothingness, as opposed to being is consistent throughout JM's discussions of the causing of moral evil both before and after he has read MS. He doesn't use the phrase "dissymmetry between the lines of being and non-being" until he has seen MS's "dissymmetry between the lines of good and evil." But after he reads MS, he uses the former phrase to express a thought that has been present since that first pre-MS letter, not only that there is a difference between explaining the causing of good and the causing of evil, but that nothingness is crucially involved in explaining the latter.

And on p. 40 of GPE he importantly says that what breaks the iron collar of logical impossibility in which the human mind seems imprisoned with the problem of the relations between God and man according as the latter does good or does evil

is

the decision to enter frankly, when one treats of evil, into the perspective of non-being and of the initiatives of nothingness taken by the creature.

In fact, on p. 89 of EE JM says that the dissymmetry between the line of good and the line of evil "consists in the fact that whatever concerns the line of good is presented in terms of being, whereas whatever concerns the line of evil as such is presented in terms of non-being, of nothingness or of nihilation" (my emphasis). Your quotations from MS do not identify the "lines of good and evil" with "the lines of being and non-being," respectively. Nor do they give that latter distinction anything like the emphasis as being crucial to the question that JM does. For example, in the three points that MS replies to Journet's first letter with (your article, p. 60) the idea of relying on non-being to explain the causing of evil is not mentioned. MS mentions the difference between explaining good and evil. Fine. He mentions that the causing of evil starts with a secondary cause. Fine. But the question is and has always been HOW can a secondary cause explain it. JM discovered the answer: only by a non-causing, a non-action.

On the bottom of p. 64 you mention that MS's first article distinguishes the line of good from the line of evil, but you say nothing about whether that distinction is the same as or is related to the distinction between the line of being and the line of non-being. And in the places where you summarize MS's points there is likewise no reference to the idea that the line of evil is the line of non-being. On p. 70 you say, explaining how MS deals with the three points mentioned on p. 65, that MS is at pains to indicate that his doctrine does not entail any first causality of the creature in the line of good. But neither in your statements presenting MS's position nor in the two quotations from MS that follow on p. 70 is there any reference to the idea that the line of evil's being the line of non-being is what is crucial to solving the problem.

The example of seeing the statue with no head that you cite on p. 71 directly concerns divine knowledge rather than divine causality. Still, it is a case where MS states that the lack of something is what he wants to illustrate and that the illustrated defects are lacks (his emphasis). But in the very next quotation, which you say is your final quotation on this point, MS refers to God's causality and knowledge as encompassing "all of it: whether positive or negative, whether good or defective, whether infallibly or fallibly caused: absolutely all." He mentions negation and no doubt expects the reader to associate the "negative" with the "defective." But he mentions negation and its connection with the defective in passing and in no way gives the fact that non-consideration is non-being and non-causality-1 the importance in the explanation of how second causes can be first causes of evil that JM does.

So given what JM means by the differing roles of being and non-being in the causal explanation of moral good and evil, respectively, it was not unfair of him to implicitly include MS among the Dominicans who failed to solve the problem by not "recognizing squarely the dissymmetry between the line of good and the line of evil"

#### Appendix E: Reply to an Alternative Reading of Aquinas

My friend offered a different theory about why Aquinas says the prior non-consideration of the rule requires no cause (see Appendix A). Examining that theory is relevant to understanding JM and, given that other of my friend's views are similar to views of MS, perhaps to understanding how JM differs from MS.

In my friend's correspondence he repeatedly seemed to indicate that the reason the causing of the prior non-consideration enters the discussion is that the occurrence of the non-consideration is something contingent. Now the non-consideration is identical with JM's nihilation. So my friend was implying that causality 1 comes up because, having explained the defect in causality 2 by the prior nihilation, we still have a further causal issue BECAUSE the

nihilation itself is contingent. In other words, for him the fact that moral evil was explained by “nihilating” meant that it was explained by the presence of the non-consideration that makes the agent defective and so makes causality 2, the agent’s causing of the choice, defective, makes causality 2 the act of a defective cause. But the causing of the nihilation itself, the causing of the non-consideration, was an ADDITIONAL — though crucial — causal question.

So my friend was speaking as if the nihilation was not identical with (negative) causality 1 but is the (negative) effect of negative causality 1 (for if they are identical, calling the non-consideration a nihilation is ipso facto the relevant description of how the non-consideration is caused). And the reason why the nihilation needed to be caused was that the occurrence of the nihilation was contingent. My friend also thought that this was JM’s reason, or at least was consistent with JM’s reason, for focusing on causality 1: Causality 1 was not the nihilation, the non-consideration, but was the causing of the nihilation and was needed because the nihilation was a contingent event.

But that would imply that when we are talking about a consideration of the rule (and we have to start with the positive case to understand the negative), the reason we would look for a cause would be that the consideration was a contingent event. It is true that the consideration would be a contingent event, and that would be enough to make it require a cause. But my friend was ignoring two reasons JM has for making (negative) causality 1 his focus that are more basic and more relevant to the problem of how moral evil is caused and to its solution (JM’s solution). First, a state of considering is something produced by us, in fact something identical with the causal act that produces it, and ipso facto is something caused. Second, a consideration of the rule is something created and ipso facto something caused. For JM the causality issue comes up at the level of the nihilation itself, not just at the level of the nihilation’s causing (causality 2) of the subsequent privation, not only because the nihilation is contingent but because it is in itself the absence of a causal act (causality 1), and its being the absence of causality 1 is why it can solve the problem of God and moral evil.

(An act of consideration has the intellect as its proximate cause. The intellect causes an act of considering under the direction of the will’s causality; that is, the will produces an act causing the intellect to produce an act of consideration. But the fact that a consideration is an act of the intellect is not in dispute here. So if we want, we can simplify and use “causality 1” to refer only to the will’s prior causing of the act directing the intellect to consider the rule. Then, the causality JM is focusing on is the “causing” [causality 1 but negative] of the prior absence of an act of the will directing the intellect to consider the rule in the circumstance where the will also causes [causality 2 but by defect] its subsequent act of directing the intellect to produce a practical judgment not in conformity with the rule. For that is what the will is by nature, a cause of — or most strictly, a causal power through which the will-er causes — actions.)

And we would know that moral evil needs a cause even if we didn’t know that the evil was contingent. Even necessary accidents require efficient causes. And some acts of complacent love on the part of the will are elicited necessarily at the apprehension of a good, but as elicited acts they are ipso facto causal acts of the will (see SOA). Such elicited acts are contingent in the sense that the will would not have caused them if certain contingent circumstances had not occurred, but they are not contingent in the sense that the will’s free acts are contingent, namely, that when all the relevant circumstances are in place, the will can still act or not act.

My friend’s theory that contingency was the reason for the focus on causality 1 was closely associated with an alternative reading Aquinas. Discussing SCG III, 2, 10, he said

Thomas is speaking of the cause of moral evil. It needs one, because we need to explain



why an act (moral evil) occurs that is not in accord with its (the agent's) nature. Now, its cause cannot itself be a moral evil, since we end with an infinite regress. Thomas then introduces his capital distinction: there is a defect in the will and intellect prior to choice, which defect is a simple negation, rather than a privation. Since it is, it does not require any efficient cause at all, thus answering the infinite regress. . . . Nevertheless, this actual non-consideration is contingent, not necessary. It is really possible for us to consider the rule, when we do not. If we act without doing so, we can tell ourselves: "I could have considered the rule, and it was my fault that I did not; therefore, my disordered choice is likewise my fault." Thus, while there is no need to posit an accidental efficient cause of this negation (since it is not a privation and thus does not need any efficient cause), we do have a right to advert (a term my friend got from me) and should advert to the agent itself. That is, we should say "for this failure, for this non-consideration of the rule or this voluntary non-use of the intellect to consider the rule, the agent itself is the sufficient cause" or "there is no cause of this non-act other than the free and fallible agent itself." We need to say this, because the actual failure in question is contingent. Fallible moral agents do not need to fail when they do (at least not regarding a first failure or a first fall from grace). They could do otherwise when they don't. That's why it is their fault, not God's.

But in neither SCG nor anywhere else does Aquinas argue, nor should he, that "there is no need to posit an accidental cause of this negation (since it is not a privation and does not need any efficient cause)." He says morally evil absences require causes, but he does not say and should not say that the only absences that require causes are morally evil absences (see Appendix A). Instead, SCG gives the following as the reason the prior, non-moral negation does not have a per accidens cause.

Nor can we attribute the defect to chance or accident, for then there would be no moral fault in us, since chance events are not premeditated and are beyond the control of reason.

What rules out a cause per accidens is that per accidens causality would make the defect beyond our free control.

Nor does Aquinas argue "Since it (the prior defect) is (a simple negation, not a privation), it does not require any efficient cause at all, thus answering the infinite regress." Aquinas does use an infinite regress argument in SCG and elsewhere to show that the defect preceding sin cannot itself be a moral evil. But he does not and cannot rely on an infinite regress argument alone in SCG, and in DM he does not rely on it at all, to reach the conclusion that the prior defect needs no cause. He cannot rely on an infinite regress argument alone because the regress is not enough to rule out a cause for the prior absence. The regress only occurs if the cause of the prior absence is another defective cause. The regress would not occur if the prior absence were the result of a per accidens cause. So to show that the prior absence has no cause, we must rule out a per accidens cause. Aquinas does not rule out a per accidens cause because it would generate an infinite regress; it wouldn't. Nor does he rule out a per accidens cause, in either SCG or DM, on my friend's grounds that a non-moral absence does not need a cause. (So the prior defect's needing no cause cannot mean either that it does not need a per accidens cause since it is not a privation or just that there is no infinite regress of causes.) In fact, Aquinas rules out a per accidens cause before bringing up the idea of the absence's needing no cause. What rules out a per accidens cause is that it would eliminate freedom. And how there can be an agent with the freedom to cause sin is what has to be explained.

