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Thomas Aquinas and the Justification of the Contingency of Effects in Nature¹

Abstract

This paper deals with one of the central tenets of Thomas Aquinas' strategy for justifying the presence of contingent effects in nature, namely the principle that, in a series of essentially-ordered causes, the contingency of the final effect depends on the contingency of its proximate cause (M). I discuss the reasons that induced Aquinas initially to justify the contingency of effects in nature only by (M), and later to call this position into question. My analysis is not limited to De Ver, q. 23, a. 5, but also takes into consideration ST, I, q. 19, a. 8, an underrated text, where Aquinas points out the reasons for the inadequacy of the idea that the contingency of effects can be completely justified by the contingency of their own proximate causes.

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