**Title:** Why All Classical Theists Should Believe in Physical Premotions, But It Doesn't Really Matter (For Freedom)

**Abstract**: "Physical premotions" are a concept associated with Baroque Catholic theological debates concerning grace and freedom. In this paper, I present an argument that the entities identified in this debate, physical premotions, are necessary for any classical theist's account of divine causality. A "classical theist" is a theist who holds both that God is simple, that is, without inhering properties, and that humans and God are both free in the incompatibilist sense. In fact, not only does the acceptance of physical premotions not entail determinism, physical premotions are the only way for classical theists to preserve the aforementioned two commitments. Nevertheless, the theory of premotions (by itself) cannot help theologians resolve questions of how God causes human free acts without violating their freedom.

The subject of this paper is a concept often associated with Baroque-era scholasticism: physical premotions. While the theologians of this era probably were the first to develop an account of such entities, this paper does not offer a historical interpretation of any Baroque theologian’s works, instead focusing on a general argument about the nature of divine causality. I will argue that every “classical theist” – that is, theists who both accept a view of divine simplicity such that God cannot have inhering accidents and that God and human beings are free in an incompatibilist sense of “free” – will be committed to ‘physical premotions’ as part of their explanation of God’s direct causal activity. I will further argue that, even though these entities were controversial among Baroque scholastics because some argued that they necessitated human free choices, the theory of physical premotions does not imply any such problematic necessitation. Thus, even though these entities are required for the coherence of an account of divine causality, they do little to resolve the classical debates on how God’s grace affects human liberty. I will propose that Molinism, for example, is compatible with the existence of physical premotions. The existence of physical premotions will rule out, however, some recent theories of grace that rely on analyses of divine causality incompatible with the existence of premotions.

I consider certain special cases where God intervenes in the world without a causal intermediary to bring about some change in a creature[[1]](#footnote-1): these are what I term God’s “direct causal acts.” Classical theists are among those who accept that these cases (at least possibly) exist. For example, my own Catholic tradition proposes many cases of God directly causing some state of affairs. All these cases involve an effect God brings about which is beyond the causal power of a creature to bring about, whether the effect is in the physical or spiritual order. Thus, notably, such cases of God’s direct intervention include physical miracles, such as raising the dead, and all spiritual changes requiring grace, such as the justification/conversion of sinners.

My argument is a straightforward one. For God to cause some change in a creature brings into existence a causal relation between God, the creature, and whatever initial and resultant state of the creature that is changed by God’s activity. What is the truthmaker for these changes? For the classical theist, nothing intrinsic to God would account for the truth of the proposition about God’s causal act in this particular case, as opposed to worlds where God did not bring about such a change and no causal relation existed. Similarly, neither the creature nor of the initial or resultant states of the creature will account for the truth of the proposition about God’s causal act.

Two options remain. The first is the premotion view: the process of change itself (caused by God), a particularized property of some kind, is the truthmaker for these propositions about God’s direct causal acts. The second is that a fact or relational state of affairs accounts for the truth of these propositions. I will then show that the second view, while not metaphysically impossible, entails determinism. Consequently, a classical theist, who accepts both divine simplicity and incompatibilist free will, will be committed to physical premotions.

I will end by considering objections that such premotions determine human free actions in ways that prejudice free will. Yet premotions are nothing more than the very process of choice *of* the agents that bring about their choices. The doctrine of physical premotion thus carries no commitment as to when or how God causes the premotion to occur. The doctrine only entails that the result of the premotion (what God brings about) is counter-factually dependent on God. Any classical theist will already be committed to this claim, and so it should be uncontroversial. Whether and how God is responsive to the creature in bringing about a premotion requires appeal to principles outside the metaphysics of premotions. Therefore, the theory of premotions (by itself) is orthogonal to questions of how God causes human free acts without violating their freedom.

1. **What are Physical Premotions?**

Physical premotions have been portrayed in some cases as ‘mechanisms’ by which God assists actualizing the powers of created entities, causing created entities to act, *by means of* creating such physical premotions. On this view, God first needs to create a special entity, a ‘premotion,’ and the premotion in turn causes the effect in question. It has been observed: if premotions *were* mechanisms of this sort, we would have a regress on our hands. If God needs intermediate causes like premotions, why does not God need to create another premotion in order to cause the prior premotion, ad infinitum? This would be a good reason to reject such a ‘causal mechanism’ view of premotions.[[2]](#footnote-2)

However, my view is that the above involves a superficial misunderstanding of premotions. The term ‘physical premotion’ involves two parts: ‘Physical’ indicates that God’s causal activity is efficient causality by which He causes the existence of things or causes some change in them; ‘premotion’ indicates that God’s causality is metaphysically prior to the action of the creature and God is required to ‘move’ the creature to act. The idea is this: when God directly acts to bring about some change in a creature, this involves immediate, rather than mediated or indirect, ontological dependence of the change upon God’s power. Physical premotions are what ground the ‘real relations’ of ontological dependence that result from such direct acts. I do not here accept or defend that *all* of God’s acts are direct acts of this kind, so not everything God can be said to do entails a distinct promotion.[[3]](#footnote-3) Similarly, I am not here considering particular issues that might be associated with God’s acts of creation or general Providence.[[4]](#footnote-4)

Call the special sub-class of God’s causal activities where He acts directly to effect some change in a creature “God’s direct causal acts.” These acts prominently arise in cases of physical miracles. Raising the dead, for instance, is an effect that is not within the power of any creature to bring about. Jesus’ bringing Lazarus back from the dead, after three days of decomposition, would be such a physical miracle – something impossible for a mere human being to perform, and so requiring God’s *direct* intervention. Notably, the tradition also holds that God’s causing someone to convert (i.e., justifying a sinner) is such a direct causal act. The theological virtue of love of God, *caritas,* and its exercise is otherwise beyond the power of any human being naturally to elicit. Just as in the case of Lazarus, the sinner cannot come to love God because they cannot *choose* to do so without God directly intervening to enable the sinner to love Him. Thus, God has to act directly upon the soul of the person to move them to love Him, and religious conversion in *every* case can only occur under the influence of God’s grace.[[5]](#footnote-5)

One might think that, as my argument will often appeal to cases where an event occurs in the world over some period of time, that the distinction between God’s direct and indirect acts ignores God’s atemporal nature. All I mean by “direct” here is that God brings about an effect *not* by the intermediate agency of any other entity. God does not act directly to support the computer on my desk, for example, because He has created a world in which certain natural laws hold and where my desk is exercising (in some sense) appropriate agency to keep my computer off the ground and resisting the influence of gravity. We do not in this case need to hold that God is directly intervening, because the causal powers or nature of my desk is sufficient to account for the effect (my computer being so many feet off the ground). By contrast, God would be *directly* intervening if the desk were to be removed and there were no other entity (such as the air) exercising an agential role in causing my computer to levitate other than God Himself.

It makes no difference, then, whether God had so disposed Himself from eternity to intervene at some particular time to cause my computer to levitate; what is relevant is the fact God did not employ another entity as an intermediate causal agent by which He brought that state of affairs about. Any such direct act, on my view, is a direct causal act of God, and, whatever we think about other acts of God’s power, these direct causal acts are what I will argue require us to posit physical premotions. By shorthand: a ‘physical premotion’ is that in virtue of which an effect of God’s direct causal act counts as an effect of God’s power, and so, i.e., as being causally dependent on God as efficient cause. It is essential to my argument, in fact, that premotions are *not* intermediate causal agents through which God exercises causal agency – otherwise, God could never *directly* cause anything, given that a direct act of God is merely one in which there is no intermediate entity through which God brought the effect about.

However, before I can begin my argument, it will be helpful to offer some historical background. This context will prepare us to understand why certain objections have historically been leveled against a theory of physical premotions. I will address these same objections after presenting my own view on physical premotions.

1. **Setting Up An Objection from the Historical Context**

The concept of physical premotions received a great deal of attention in early-modern Catholic theological debates concerning grace, the famous *De Auxiliis* (“Regarding Grace”) controversies. The views that were at the center of this debate were two prominent ways to explain how God’s grace brought about human free actions: Molinism and Banezianism. The latter is often just called “Thomism,” but I prefer ‘Banezianism’ as the view is specifically a development of Thomism enunciated by the Spanish scholastic theologian Domingo Banez.[[6]](#footnote-6)

It is helpful to set up the contrast by noting that they focused on exactly the same set of cases and generally conceived of grace in terms derived from the theology Thomas Aquinas. Molinism and Banezianism were agreed in rejecting determinism generally,[[7]](#footnote-7) and reject cases such as the possibility that God could make the Gospel so appealing to a sinner that they *could not resist* choosing conversion. Both understood graces, for example, to be either particular effects that disposed one to freely accept conversion or act in meritorious ways (“actual” graces) or a state of the soul (“sanctifying” grace) where the individual is united with God by an ontological change that involves, as a consequence, possession of the “infused” virtues and the Gifts of the Holy Spirit. Actual graces could range from an external state of affairs such as walking in front of a church and, by providential circumstance, hearing the Gospel preached, to an enlightenment of the intellect where God makes religious conversion appear particularly reasonable or attractive to a sinner. Both views were concerned to explain how God brings about a religious conversion, and to preserve the creature’s freedom alongside the fact that God’s direct action was *necessary* for the creature to convert.

Nevertheless, the Molinist and Banezian held conflicting explanations of God’s causality in cases of religious conversion. Molinism can be summarized as holding that grace is *extrinsically* efficacious in causing the free acts of a creature. God foreknows what an agent *would* do under the influence of grace and therefore gives grace to creatures when He knows they would accept them. Since nothing intrinsic to the grace causes a creature to perform the good act they do (i.e., determines the creature’s will), God’s grace merely aids the creature to do what they would have decided to do freely (known in some counter-factual domain of truths). This differs from the deterministic case because, for the Molinist, there is nothing about the *way* God’s grace made the choice appear to the creature that conversion was irresistible. To the contrary, God foreknew that the sinner would not resist the grace disposing him or her to conversion in the actual world, even though there were possible worlds where the creature resisted. The idea here is also not that the creature could have done the act without God’s help in some counter-factual world. Instead, Molina holds both that the creature requires God’s help to do anything at all and specifically to do things requiring God’s special graces, such as to come to have faith in or love God. Rather, Molina’s general vision of causality is that God and creatures are both always necessary, but only *jointly* sufficient, causes that bring about such an effect (i.e., the free act of the creature).[[8]](#footnote-8)

The Banezian, by contrast, holds that God can act as an efficient cause upon the creature’s will without violating the free agent’s freedom. Because the Banezians hold a theory that grace is *intrinsically* efficacious, they appeal to a special account of divine action to explain how God’s causality does not undermine human freedom. The Banezian holds that God’s causing a human act in the case of efficacious is merely a specific instance of God’s universal causal activity. God already is causing the existence of every substance, accident, and act that exists, and this universal causality is a necessary condition of *anything at all,* so God can use His same causal influence to bring about that a free agent makes some specific choice without violating his or her freedom. God merely causing something is not the same as God forcing something to act contrary to its nature. As they see it, God’s causing any human act is a necessary condition of the exercise human freedom and so cannot be detrimental to freedom.[[9]](#footnote-9) The Banezian agrees with the Molinist that the cooperation of both creature and God are necessary conditions for a free action. However, the Banezian holds that, because God and creatures occupy different causal orders, it is not strictly true that either the creature or God alone can be considered sufficient causes of the creature’s action. If “sufficient” cause is taken to be a cause that makes it the case that the creature performed an action necessarily, and could not have done otherwise, then the Banezian holds that God’s causal activity does not necessitate the creature’s action.

The Banezians therefore hold that distinct cases, such as those where one person undergoes a conversion and one person does not, will involve graces that differ intrinsically. The distinct graces are held to be properties in virtue of which God brings about that free act of conversion (or does not). These graces are called “efficacious” graces when they have the intrinsic quality that they cannot occur without that person also converting. The Banezians offered a metaphysical account of these efficacious graces that bring about a person’s conversion: these graces involve intrinsically distinct physical premotions.

While I present the views of Molina and Banez, I am explicitly remaining agnostic about many of these theological aspects of the debate over physical premotions. The point of this discussion is to set up a prominent objection that should be kept in mind during my presentation of physical premotions. Physical premotions do *seem* to be like determining causes that necessitate or determine free actions. After all, physical premotions are particular properties distinct not only from God, but also from the initial and resultant states of choice in the human free agent. God causes a thing (the premotion) in me that results in my choice, and I cannot make this resultant choice without that thing. In fact, the Banezian holds that it is *metaphysically* *impossible* for anyone to make certain choices, such as the choice to love or believe in God, without God causing a premotion in that person. Finally, when this premotion exists in me, it will be true, necessarily, that I choose whatever resultant choice the premotion concerns (e.g., if God is causing me to convert, it is true, necessarily, that I convert).

All of these claims make it seem like the Banezian has a very hard showing how a theory of premotions does not entail compatibilism. To the contrary, I will show that this theory is the *only* way for a classical theist to affirm both that we cannot choose some things without divine help and that our freedom is incompatible with determinism.

1. **The Argument from Truthmaking**

The argument for physical premotions has two steps. The first step establishes that the causal relations in direct divine causal acts should involve truthmakers and that the truthmakers for these causal relations cannot be God, the creature changed by God’s act, or the states brought about by that act.[[10]](#footnote-10) In the second step, I argue indirectly that the classical theist will need to hold that these truthmakers for divine direct causal acts are particular properties – physical premotions – because the other option – that these truthmakers are states of affairs or facts – entails determinism.

Theories of truthmaking are often controversial in how they account for negative propositions, or in spelling out the relation that is supposed to hold between the truth-bearers, which are propositions, and the truthmakers (e.g., necessitation, grounding). My account only requires a broad, minimal theory of truthmaking, such that the propositions in question for my argument – those propositions about God’s direct causal acts – are truths requiring entities in virtue of which they are true. I will endorse an account of minimal truthmakers as proposed in O’Conaill and Tahko to fill in the picture surrounding this class of propositions.[[11]](#footnote-11) As with their account, which restricts propositions requiring truthmakers to propositions such as those having to do with fundamental particles,[[12]](#footnote-12) I am only claiming that a narrow sub-class of propositions requires truthmakers: those positive propositions concerning God’s direct acts. These propositions are then such that necessarily, if they are true, there is an entity in virtue of which they are. The necessitation relation I am endorsing for these propositions requires that the existence of a truthmaker for such a proposition will be sufficient for that proposition to be true. It is helpful to point out that such an account does not rule out that there could be multiple truthmakers for any given proposition. For example, the proposition “There are four lights on the wall,” plausibly requires at least as many truthmakers as there are lights on the wall. In light of these restrictions, which rule out as irrelevant many typical objections to truthmaking, I will employ the notion of a truthmaker in this broad, intuitive sense.[[13]](#footnote-13)

I will start with an example of God’s direct causal activity that does *not* involve freedom, to bracket the questions until later. Here is a clear example of God acting directly to bring about a physical change: Moses puts his hand into his cloak and God directly acts to make Moses’ hand leprous (Exodus 4:6).[[14]](#footnote-14) I posit Moses’ hand only acquired the state of being leprous because of God’s power, so that the effect or resultant state was clearly dependent upon God’s power causing it to happen. Further, the change was a *direct* act of God. God did not set up the universe so that Moses’ hand just by chance became leprous at the moment Moses put it into his cloak. Instead, God acted in a direct way, not by any mediate entity or agency (whether an angel or natural laws), to make the hand leprous.

Take, then, the proposition P that “God causes Moses’ hand to become leprous” as a proposition about God’s direct causal acts. It would seem difficult for the classical theist to claim a proposition like this one, P, lacks truthmakers. This is not only true because it seems the classical theist is committed in general to the possibility of God having real causal relations to the world. Consider a ‘Cambridge’ change where a squirrel moves from one side of a birdfeeder to the other. It will be true that the birdfeeder is, at one moment, to the left of the squirrel and, at another, at the right. The ‘change’ in truths involved no change in the birdfeeder. Rather, the change lay in the squirrel. Even in this strange change of truths, there are still truthmakers, entities in the world, in virtue of which those propositions about the birdfeeder were true at one time and not at another. The truthmaker is whatever is different about the world such that these two propositions are true at different times.

Our choices for the truthmakers for propositions about God’s direct causal acts, e.g., P, are limited. The initial options for such a truthmaker are: God, or the creature, or the initial or the resultant state.

The first option, that God is the truthmaker for propositions like P, is a non-starter for a classical theist. A classical theist is, for my purposes, a theist who affirms a view of divine simplicity represented by Thomas Aquinas: the strong thesis that God has no *accidents*.[[15]](#footnote-15) In contemporary parlance, metaphysicians distinguish sparse and abundant properties.[[16]](#footnote-16) An accident, I will hold, is a sparse property. An accident *inheres* in a subject as a distinct entity whereas a merely ‘nominal’ property does not. I propose to cash out this distinction by saying that a sparse property acts as a truthmaker for certain claims, apart from the subject in which that property exists, whereas an abundant property cannot. For example, it is plausible that an electron’s spin is distinct from the electron itself, such that the spin of the electron can act as a truthmaker for the proposition “This electron has a spin.” By contrast, it is not plausible that the truthmaker for “my coffee mug is blue” is a distinct property, “blueness,” because my mug’s parts (particles, etc.) and their particular states can seem to function well as the truthmaker for that proposition involving blueness; “blueness” is then an abundant, not a sparse, property.

On the strong view of divine simplicity presented, God has no such sparse properties. There is one truthmaker, God, which makes true all truths about God, e.g., “God is wise” and so forth.[[17]](#footnote-17) Such a view of simplicity is not uncontroversial.[[18]](#footnote-18) Yet this theory of divine simplicity was readily affirmed by all parties in the *De Auxiliis* debate. Both Molinists and Banezians alike held divine simplicity of this sort to be implicated in various other Christological doctrinal definitions, and it is arguable whether the Catholic Church has also defined directly.[[19]](#footnote-19) Here I remain officially agnostic whether this view is correct, but I mention these historical considerations to justify saying this view of divine simplicity is a commitment of “classical theism.”

The classical theist also holds that, in addition to rational creatures, God Himself has incompatibilist free will, being able to do different things in distinct possible worlds. Classical theists, because of the strong doctrine of divine simplicity, will necessarily hold that the difference among worlds where God acts differently is not a difference in God’s essence (and God has no accidents). God is the same in all possible worlds.[[20]](#footnote-20) The classical theist should have an explanation for how God is the truthmaker for these varying truths, and that such a truthmaker should not be a distinct sparse property or accident in God, but I will not here be offering any defense or account of classical divine simplicity. Regardless whether this conjunction of views held by classical theists, that God is without accidents and He can do otherwise, is consistent or not, what is important for my purposes is what the conjunction entails about truthmakers for God’s causal activity. In sum, the classical theist cannot appeal to God or God’s intrinsic properties as a truthmaker for why God enters into direct causal relations in the actual world, as God could have done otherwise and differences between possible worlds do not involve any differences in God’s essence. It is obvious then that God’s existence alone does not necessitate the truth of P: there are possible worlds where God exists, with the same essence He has in our world, and Moses’ hand remains perfectly healthy.

Our second option for the truthmaker for P is the creature in which the change occurs; e.g., Moses or his hand. This option might seem appealing if we thought something similar to the following: it was essential to Moses that, on a certain day on Mount Horeb, if he were to put his healthy hand into his cloak, that hand would turn leprous. We might think of this as Moses having an “individual essence” so that all Moses’ future changes are somehow essential to him. God, in creating Moses with such an essence, thus brings it about that P would be true, without there being a truthmaker other than Moses for that change. However, this solution clearly violates the stipulation that we are considering cases where God brings about some change *directly*. Moses’ essence in the example ‘naturally’ produces the change without God’s special intervention, and so the case seems to envision Moses being a sort of causal intermediary. Despite the failure of this case, I am unsure there is any way to defend this second option without similarly violating the stipulation that God is acting directly.

If the second option fails, then it should be clear that the third option also fails: neither should we consider the truthmaker for P the initial or resultant states brought about by God in the creature[[21]](#footnote-21). It is not essential to a hand, or leprosy, or Moses that they require a miracle to come into existence. Even if it wereessential to some entity that God had to bring it into existence by a direct causal act,[[22]](#footnote-22) this is not the same as it being essential to that entity that God be directly causing it to exist at every moment it exists. Instead, only those entities that are essentially dependent upon God’s direct action at every moment they exist would function as appropriate truthmakers for propositions like P. This is because the existence of such entities would *necessitate* the truth of propositions like P that “God is directly causing a change in a creature.”

I propose the only thing in the example that is essentially dependent at every moment on a direct causal act of God is the particular token process of change of Moses’ hand from healthy to leprous. I refer to a particular token process and not the type of change: types of change can come about in many ways, as in the natural case where contracting leprosy could have caused Moses’ hand to go from healthy to leprous. For this reason, a type of process of change would not function as the truthmaker we need to account for P.

To be more specific, I consider the process of change to be what John Heil refers to as a “mode,” where modes are “particularized ways objects are.”[[23]](#footnote-23) (Note too that objects, like Moses, are the subject of a mode. Parts and properties, like Moses’ hand, are not subjects for modes.) Such properties are not shared by any two entities. Rather, modes are unrepeatable, non-transferable, and intrinsically particular.[[24]](#footnote-24) For example, Miriam’s hand becoming leprous (Numbers 12:10) would have involved a distinct process of change than that which affected the change in Moses’ hand. If we consider processes of change like those described in P to be modes, then the problem of finding truthmakers for P is resolved. The process of change is a particular that cannot exist without God, the creature, and precisely the states that are associated with that change at the times that these changes happen.[[25]](#footnote-25)

The mode relates these things intrinsically, such that any time the mode exists, it will be the case that a proposition about God’s direct causal acts is true. Thus, when it is the case that Moses is the subject of a process of change and that process of change is the particularized property of a change of Moses’ hand from a state of health to leprosy, and this change is essentially dependent on God at every moment it exists, P will be true – God is directly causing that change in Moses’ hand. When the change is completed, the mode ceases to exist, and P will be false; e.g., after Moses’ hand has become leprous, God is no longer causing Moses’ hand to become leprous.

Traditionally, Banezians describe a premotion as an ‘incomplete entity,’ or ‘motion,’ but without great specificity surrounding the kind of entity the premotion actually is.[[26]](#footnote-26) Plausibly, though, the use of the Aristotelian category of ‘motion’ to classify a physical premotion indicates the same thing as my term ‘process of change.’ And an Aristotelian motion is incomplete because, like a process of change, it is neither a substance, nor a property like a state of a substance (something like a ‘categorical’ property), nor a power or dispositional property of a substance, but rather something that exists in a substance insofar as that substance is undergoing a modification of its states. It then seems reasonable to say properties like ‘processes of change’ are, given their character, incomplete things.

Given this discussion, it seems we can specify in what sense the premotion is a ‘motion’ or ‘incomplete entity’, and then in what sense these motions are required to account for direct causal acts of God.[[27]](#footnote-27) As noted earlier, I am interested in whether my view is true and not in whether it mirrors in all details the historical views of Banez. But, if my interpretation of the metaphysics of premotions has inadvertently leads us to the language used by traditional defenders of the doctrine, my view might have an additional advantage insofar as it accurately clarifies or makes explicit in modern terminology the reasons for the traditional Banezian views.

It is noteworthy that, as a mode, the change God brings about ceases the moment that change is complete. In other words, the physical premotion is only in existence during the occurrence of whatever change it is. After Moses’ hand has become leprous, the premotion ceases to exist. Nevertheless, the process of change of Moses’ hand is essentially dependent on God’s direct causal act at every moment it exists. It is plausible too that this process exists in some sense simultaneously both with the last moment of the previous state of Moses’ hand and the first moment of the subsequent state. I am differentiating the process of change, the motion of the change, from the changing things, the antecedent state, and the resultant state of the change. To illustrate: 

In this picture, we have Moses’ hand going from healthy to leprous. I propose that there is a difference between a process and any of these illustrated states individually or the whole set of hands plus the location in time of each hand at a state. What is missing from that picture is something like a connection between these states. We could imagine a *dotted line*, distinct from the arrow of time, that would illustrate the ‘process of change’ connecting each subsequent state of the hand with the prior state as continuous parts of the same process.

I say this only to draw a quick distinction between processes and the states or results of processes. Nevertheless, it is not obviously necessary for me here to offer a more precise analysis of how processes of change exist. The objections to physical premotions (as far as I can tell) do not rely on any particular, contested account of what processes are. Even if I am not offering a complete account of what a process is, I propose that we can admit such processes into our ontology. It is *prima facie* plausible that there are processes. Further, processes are here conceived of as properties or modes of objects rather than (for example) subsisting entities, which removes considerable controversy.[[28]](#footnote-28) Moreover, finally, if I am correct in what follows that there are no other good candidate truthmakers in the cases of propositions about God’s direct causal acts, we have additional reason to hold that there are such processes.[[29]](#footnote-29)

1. **The Alternative to Premotions: States of Affairs/Facts**

For objectors that do want to follow me down the road toward modes, I can see only one good option: the truthmakers for propositions about God’s direct causal acts is the free act itself or a certain ‘states of affairs’. ‘States of affairs’ here are relational entities, such as “a substance having a property at a time.” A state of affairs is then understood to be a relation between the substance, its property, and some time, and there is no state of affairs apart from these relata (i.e., Armstrong’s states of affairs, identical with ‘facts’).[[30]](#footnote-30) This relational view is the only good alternative to modes because it would be very difficult to imagine a process of change that was not essentially relational. A process of change, Aristotle plausibly argued, constitutively involves three related entities (the property acquired and lost, and the thing in which the change occurred).[[31]](#footnote-31) And I have already noted that the processes of change in question in things like God’s direct causal acts are particulars, not universals. It would therefore be odd to imagine a particular process of change that did not relate some such entities essentially, like either a state of affairs or a mode. Even though I used the word, “substance” to characterize processes above, this argument does not necessarily require acceptance of a substance ontology. We can imagine that, even if the property and the thing in which the change occurs are individual entities of some kind other than “substances” (e.g., processes or events), the process of change will still be necessarily and constitutively related to these two other entities.

There may be a compelling way to decide against state of affairs on solely metaphysical grounds, but my argument against considering states of affairs to be the truthmakers for propositions about God’s direct actions will be indirect. This is because it seems to me that there is a decisive consideration specifically to cause a classical theist to opt for the property view over states of affairs. Even though this move is also controversial among theists, I will propose that the classical theist should hold that humans have free will and that freedom is incompatible with causal determinism. This view of free will is again ‘classical’ because it was held by Banezians/Molinists and is commonly held to be Catholic doctrine. There are, nevertheless, ‘theistic compatibilists,’ for example, who hold that (in some relevant sense) God determining a person’s choices is not prejudicial to that person having free will.[[32]](#footnote-32) I will not directly address them in what follows.[[33]](#footnote-33) Therefore, the assumption about human freedom seems to be a broadly ecumenical position that classical theists should accept.

It is helpful to flag, again, that the families of views causality I will discuss below which account for God’s direct causal acts by appeal to such states of affairs are *novel*. These newer theories of God’s were intended to be *incompatible* with the theory of physical premotions. It is for that reason, I will argue, that they should be rejected by the classical theist. As far as I can tell, however, the parties in the *De Auxiliis* controversies did not propose such entities as states of affairs as part of their explanations of God’s causal activity. The classical positions would instead be compatible with the existence of physical premotions, and so my criticisms of these novel theories would not apply (for example) to Molinism.

* 1. *Bernard Lonergan*

 Here I will turn to the theory of grace proposed by a Catholic theologian from the last century, Bernard Lonergan. Lonergan wanted to overcome the classical Banezian and Molinist positions associated with divine causality of human free acts, and specifically rejected a theory of physical premotions. He proposed, instead, a theory that seems relevantly like a ‘state of affairs’ account of the truthmaking involved in God’s direct actions. Further, the account was developed particularly to analyze the situations I am interested in explaining: miracles, conversion, etc. Finally, Lonergan accepts all of the assumptions of a classical theist. It should be noted, nevertheless, that my reading of Lonergan is selective and not interested in providing extensive textual support. Instead, my reading is largely indebted to RJ Matava, who has done an extensive textual study of Lonergan’s view on grace and causality, and to Lonergan’s commentators. However, the example is helpful, even if I am wrong in some details, because his theories appear to illustrate the problems for freedom that result from the ‘state of affairs’ account of divine causality I outlined earlier.

Lonergan developed a distinct view of divine causality of human free acts, epitomized in his doctoral dissertation eventually published as *Grace and Freedom: Operative Grace in the Thought of St. Thomas Aquinas.* Lonergan attempts to undermine (what he takes to be) the assumptions that make distinct properties, physical premotions, appear metaphysically necessary for God’s direct action. He takes it that, for the theory of premotions to follow, one must hold that there is, e.g., a metaphysical distinction between a causal power and its manifestation (an agent’s ability to act and actual operation), or that God requires causal intermediaries when He acts.[[34]](#footnote-34) I will not focus on Lonergan’s criticisms, as I have already claimed that a premotion is not a causal intermediary and I do not see that my claims require any controversial assumptions about causality. Instead, I will explore Lonergan’s vision of a different way of understanding God’s causality that was intended to overcome the defects of both of these traditional camps.

Lonergan’s position is that nothing further is required to account for a direct causal act of God other than the appropriate situation holding between the agent (God) and the creature in order to bring about God’s desired effect in that creature (whatever resultant state God causes).[[35]](#footnote-35) So Lonergan says, all that is necessary is “to bring mover and moved in the right relation, mutual disposition, spatial proximity for motion [i.e., the change] naturally to ensue.”[[36]](#footnote-36) This relational situation is clearly something like a state of affairs in each of the examples Lonergan gives, as he distinguishes the *set* of related factors that bring about some choice from the constituents of the relation. Yet Lonergan individuates the relevant state of affairs that would be involved in God’s directly causing the free choice of a creature in two different ways. The first is that God brings about a particular creaturely free action by causing a global state of affairs (e.g., the initial state of the universe); the second is that God causes a particular state of affairs for each free agent’s decisions.

In the first set of cases, Lonergan presents a *global* state of affairs, where God causes a state of the universe (or a state of the individual’s life history) such that an individual makes a certain choice. In the follow passage, Lonergan lists all the things he takes to be part of the state of affairs in virtue of which it is true that God directly causes a particular choice:

“The specification of [the choice caused by God’s action] is intelligibly contained in the light in which one deliberates, in the end towards which one deliberates, in one’s love for the end which motivates one’s deliberation and decision, in the exterior and interior circumstances about which one deliberates, and in one’s habits and dispositions of the body, the senses, the intellect, and the will itself; in accordance with all of these, deliberation and decision will spontaneously be made, unless external divine providence or interior divine grace intervenes.”[[37]](#footnote-37)

The factors Lonergan list clearly include factors both internal and external to a human person, and God causes the whole situation, the state of affairs, in which an agent finds itself. It is in virtue of this state that God brings it about that a free agent makes some particular choice freely.

Let us construct a concrete illustration to see Lonergan’s theory in action. Our earlier test case, Moses’ hand, involved a result that was not a choice. Take Paul as an example of a free agent, and his conversion on the road to Damascus on (imagine) January 25th, 31AD as an example of a free choice Paul made that day (Acts 9:1-19).[[38]](#footnote-38) “Paul’s conversion” is shorthand here for the choice Paul made to love God and believe in Him. This choice is stipulated to be a choice that was not in Paul’s power, just like the miraculous change in Moses’ hand, because Paul could not have chosen to convert by himself. Further, as noted earlier, in these cases God needs *directly* to cause Paul to choose to convert (not by intermediary). Take, then, F as the proposition that (on January 25th, 31AD) “God is directly causing Paul to convert.”

What is the truthmaker for this proposition? The global state of affairs, as Lonergan lays it out in the quotation, would be a truthmaker for proposition F as follows. F, that God is directly causing Paul to convert, is true if and only if: God sets up the universe such that Paul’s interior and exterior bodily state (and other extrinsic or intrinsic factors to Paul) are in the appropriate situation on January 25th, 31AD, so that when Paul is on the road to Damascus, Paul will necessarily make a free decision to convert on the afternoon of that same day.

 A first problem with the global state of affairs thus highlighted by Lonergan is that his view entails that God never acts directly, at least in bringing about creaturely free choices. Clearly, if God brings about all particular free choices in Paul and every other free agent merely by creating one particular initial state of the universe, there is one truthmaker for all free acts – that initial state of the universe. Similar, it is likewise clear that all apparent cases of God’s direct causal actions are cases of mediated, rather than direct causality. This is because God brings about the changes in free agents only by means of another thing He created: the universe (or the state of the universe) and its intrinsic properties. Michael Stebbins, a sympathetic commentator, recognizes this implication: “[God] uses the universe of causes as his instruments in applying each cause to its operation and so is the principal cause of each and every event as event' voluntary acts included. … divine cooperation in the causal activity of creatures is an instance of mediate efficient causality….”[[39]](#footnote-39)

The second problem with Lonergan’s account is that, precisely because God acts to cause human choices by means of intermediary states of affairs, the global state of affairs account is clearly compatibilist. Lonergan nevertheless argues that this state of affairs preserves Paul’s freedom for two reasons: “…this nexus, although intelligible and determinate, is not a necessary one. …since, therefore, this nexus is contingent, freedom remains. But since there is causality, causality on the part of God who alone is the proper cause of all the factors that contribute to the specification of the choice.”[[40]](#footnote-40) The reasons the account is not compatibilist are: [1] the state of affairs does not make Paul’s choice necessary because the state of affairs is itself a contingent thing; [2] as none of the particular factors is both necessary and sufficient to bring about Paul’s choice, God alone is the cause of Paul’s choice because the state of affairs is one that is essentially caused only by God (i.e., nothing other than God could have brought about this state of affairs that led to Paul’s choice).

Reason [1] does not seem relevant. A strict determinist likewise could hold that the initial state of the universe was contingent. The problem is twofold. The initial state of the universe is not the sort of thing, to borrow the phrasing of Peter van Inwagen’s Consequence Argument, which was ever “up to us.”

Reason [2] makes clear that Lonergan’s solution that these state of affairs are truthmakers for propositions like F has to grant to a specifically determinist causal principle, which, again in the words of the Consequence argument, is: “our acts are the consequences of the laws of nature and events in the remote past.”[[41]](#footnote-41) Without this principle that the global state of affairs necessitates the resultant choice made by Paul, the global state of affairs that Lonergan lists would *not* necessitate the truth of a proposition such that “God directly brings about Paul’s conversion.” As Robert Matava has argued, if the arrangement of the world is the explanation for how God causes the free action of a creature, it is hard to see how Lonergan’s view does not involve compatibilism.[[42]](#footnote-42)

Lonergan sometimes speaks as if the state of affairs could be individuated more locally. While on the first reading, God causes a certain state in the universe as a whole, Lonergan also sometimes seems to be saying that God causes a particular state of affairs involving only the state of the cognitive and volitional capacities of the agent antecedent to that creature’s choice. But if the initial state of these capacities was not in the creature’s choice, which Lonergan explicitly claims, the more local view is as equally as compatibilist as the first.[[43]](#footnote-43) The problem is that, regardless of the global or local state, these states of affairs in virtue of which it is true that God is causing a free agent to act are *not up to* that agent. Given that the state of affairs makes it such that these states necessarily result in the creature’s acting, the creature has no choice about whether to act in this way. The failure of the Lonerganian account of states of affairs should indicate to us that the truthmaker for divine direct causal acts that affect free agents would have to be “up to” those same agents.

* 1. *Robert Matava*

Robert Matava proposes a way to rescue the Lonerganian proposal by narrowing the scope of the state of affairs to only the immediate constituents of the free agent’s act. Using Matava’s proposal as an illustration, I will show that the states of affairs that could serve as truthmakers for propositions like F can *never* be in the control of the free agent in the right way. Nevertheless, the point in what follows will be to show us that, no matter how much we vary the particular details, the appeal to states of affairs as truthmakers for truths like F will inevitably entail determinism.[[44]](#footnote-44)

Matava’s proposal is that God creates immediately each particular human act that is of such a character that it depends on His power, like Paul’s conversion, without the use either of causal intermediaries or by creating a (determining) state of affairs prior to the act itself. Matava calls this “total personal creation” (TPC).[[45]](#footnote-45) Citing Germain Grisez, Matava proposes that God does not “settle” what is otherwise up to us in making a free choice. Instead, “God creates a whole: one’s being able to choose option A or B and freely choosing B.”[[46]](#footnote-46) God brings into existence a definite choice in Paul – Paul’s conversion. But He does not merely create Paul’s conversion independent of Paul’s past choices or Paul’s power to choose. Rather, Paul retains his power to have chosen not to convert, as that power was a constituent of the act that God brought about in Paul – namely, that Paul actually convert.

It would nevertheless seem that God bringing about this choice of Paul’s, even if the choice is appropriately related to Paul’s power to choose, involves a state of affairs that came about in a way *not up to Paul.* Paul did not choose to bring about this state of affairs where he chose to convert – God did so unilaterally – even though the state of affairs God brought about relates the action back to Paul’s power to choice (as the resultant choice is itself contingent).

Matava utilizes an account of creation developed by James Ross to address this objection. Ross argues that our semantics of “states of affairs” is misleading. States of affairs are not “basic constituents of reality,”[[47]](#footnote-47) or, in current metaphysical jargon, states of affairs are not “fundamental” entities in our ontology. What God actually brings about are the fundamental things: *entities* constitutive of states of affairs, with all their intrinsic properties. These account for the relational features of the state of affairs as a whole which results from the existence of these entities. Thus, God does not create Paul’s act of conversion apart from creating Paul – rather, “God wills the whole reality of Peter, which includes Peter’s freedom and his being through time and so Peter’s exercising his freedom in time.”[[48]](#footnote-48) Consequently, all the states of affairs that have Paul and Paul’s free acts as constituents, such as Paul’s conversion, are *up to Paul*. The state of affairs that results when Paul chooses to convert on the road to Damascus is a state of affairs that necessitates, as a truthmaker, the truth of the proposition F that God is directly causing Paul to convert in that moment, but that truth was up to Paul.

Matava’s TPC account suffers from a serious dilemma. The dilemma is simple: either God’s act of creating Paul makes it that Paul’s intrinsic properties at the moment of his creation are the truthmakers for all Paul’s future choices, i.e., it was *essential* to Paul that Paul convert on January 25th, 31AD; or, God’s act of creating Paul is not a truthmaker, i.e., God’s act of creating Paul did not necessitate the truth of the proposition F that (on January 25th, 31AD) “God is directly causing Paul to convert”.

The first option seems to be what Matava is implicitly choosing, but it is clearly compatibilist. This was an option discussed above with Moses’ hand. The truthmaker for the change in Moses’ hand could have been that God, when He created Moses, created Moses with an “individual essence” such that it was essential to Moses that, when Moses put his hand in his cloak, that hand would turn leprous. Matava’s case seems similar: God creates Paul with an essence such that Paul will convert on January 25th, 31AD. As noted earlier, Matava’s solution involves a case of mediated rather than direct causality – God creates Paul’s decisions by creating Paul, not by bringing into existence each choice individually. Thus, Paul’s acts are brought about by no direct action of God and it would be true *at the time of Paul’s creation* that God was causing Paul to convert on January 25th, 31 AD.[[49]](#footnote-49) But even if we no longer want to account for God’s “direct” causality, the TPC proposal clearly has a parallel problem to that of Lonergan’s account: what Paul was like at his creation, i.e. Paul’s essence, was not *up to Paul*. If all the truths about Paul’s converting on a certain day were necessitated by Paul’s essence, and fixed in a way that these features of Paul’s essence were outside of Paul’s control, it seems the conversion God is causing Paul to perform was not up to Paul.[[50]](#footnote-50)

What about the other route? Consider the proposed metaphysics of a state of affairs Matava borrows from Ross. States of affairs are non-fundamental and constituted by the intrinsic properties of the entities that are their constituents. States of affairs are “no addition to being.” Then it must be that, if a state of affairs occurs, the truthmaker for truths associated with state of affairs will be the entities (and intrinsic properties of those entities) that are the constituents of those states. A truthmaker needs to *necessitate* the truth of the proposition of which it is a truthmaker.

Given that we are assuming Paul’s intrinsic properties are the relevant constituent of the state of affairs described in proposition F, the only way Paul would necessitate the truth of F is that Paul or Paul’s intrinsic properties make it necessary that Paul converts on January 25th, 31AD. Assume that Paul has incompatibilist freedom. Because Paul’s initial state at the time of his creation, and his essence, are not up to Paul, it should not be the case that these things (not up to Paul) necessitate Paul’s consequent actions. Yet if Paul, and his essence or intrinsic properties, are such that they do not necessitate that Paul will convert on January 25th, 31AD, then Paul alone, nor his essence or intrinsic properties, is not the truthmaker for the proposition F that he converts on that date. What you need to add, naturally, for Paul and his intrinsic properties to be an appropriate truthmaker for F is: Paul having a property relevantly like “making the choice to convert” on January 25th, 31AD and (if you accept the terms of this argument) that God is directly causing this property. But this is not what TPC provides.

As shown, Matava’s TPC account cannot overcome this dilemma without either jettisoning incompatibilist freedom or the explanatory value of the account (i.e., a truthmaker for propositions like F). His account, notably, actually rejected relevant parts of a state of affairs account: the states of affairs were non-fundamental, reducible to their constituent entities. If states of affairs are not fundamental entities, then God will bring about the free creature’s act through the fundamental entities God creates as constituents of the state of affairs involving that act. If these fundamental things are distinct from Paul, then Paul’s choices are not up to him (because God brought about these other things without Paul). And, as Matava’s TPC case shows, even if these things God directly causes are Paul, and Paul’s intrinsic properties, the only way that these things intrinsic to Paul could be relevant truthmakers for F would be if they were not up to Paul!

* 1. *The Nuclear Option: Semi-Pelagianism*

But does the lover of states of affairs have any last resort? It seems to me the Matava shows indirectly why any remaining option that would involve states of affairs *as fundamental entities* is also compatibilist: states of affairs would never be “up to” the agent in the right way. This is because states of affairs are *distinct* from the agent, by necessity, and God brings them about without Paul. The lover of states of affairs, however, might have a tricky way out of this: “It is true that Paul cannot convert without God’s help,” the lover of states of affairs could say, “so that the state of affairs of Paul converting is not itself in Paul’s power to bring about by himself. Surely, Paul could bring about a *prior* state of affairs that is up to Paul! Call this prior state ‘Paul getting ready to convert.’ If God brings about Paul’s conversion (the subsequent state of affairs which requires God’s help) if and only if Paul is getting ready to convert, then the occurrence of the subsequent state would be up to Paul because Paul getting ready to convert was clearly up to Paul, not to God.”

The lover of states of affairs has given voice to a classical Christian heresy, “Semi-Pelagianism.”[[51]](#footnote-51) The problem with the semi-Pelagian strategy is a problem with incompatibilism, but a unique one, different from the Lonergan or Matava accounts. Recall that, for the Semi-Pelagian lover of states of affairs, the prior state of affairs is up to Paul (where Paul is getting ready to convert) but is not one where God is (directly) involved in causing Paul to get ready. This prior state is entirely and solely up to Paul. But Paul’s choosing to get ready to convert is then the truthmaker both for the proposition that, on some moment prior to January 25th, “Paul is getting ready to convert,” *and* the proposition that, on January 25th, “God is directly causing Paul to convert.” This is what the semi-Pelagian means by saying that God will bring about the state of affairs described by F if and only if Paul gets ready to convert.

Notice now that God is a constituent of the subsequent state of affairs, as He is a constituent of the proposition F that “God is directly causing Paul to convert.” If God acts if and only if Paul does, we will now need to worry about God having incompatibilist freedom! It was not up to God, for the Semi-Pelagian, that Paul chose to get ready to convert. Then God’s direct causal act in causing Paul to convert was necessitated by the Paul getting ready, because there is a deterministic principle that holds between Paul’s prior act and God’s subsequent act (“if and only if”). If the prior state of affairs (where Paul gets ready) to convert *was* up to God in some sense, then we are back off to the races in finding the right truthmaker for the propositions in question. Either the semi-Pelagian therefore shifts the responsibility or creaturely freedom comes at the cost of God’s freedom. The latter should be an absurd result for the classical theist who holds that God is among those agents with incompatibilist freedom.

Thus, the classical theist who holds both to divine simplicity and to incompatibilism is forced to reject the view that the truthmakers for God’s direct causal acts are states of affairs. I therefore conclude that the only remaining possibility is the correct one for any classical theist: the truthmakers, which make true predications about God’s direct causal acts, are particularized properties, inhering in the creatures so modified by God’s actions, and these properties are the processes of change that God is bringing about. In other words, the classical theist is committed to physical premotions. All other options aside from premotions lead to results unacceptable to the classical theist.

1. **Not Only Do Premotions Not Entail Compatibilism – You Cannot Be Free Without Them!**

In introducing the concept of premotions, I made distinctions that should have already shown why two prominent objections to the doctrine of physical premotions are not compelling. The first is that, if God can only cause things by means of special causal intermediaries, physical premotions, this would entail an infinite regress of causal mechanisms required for God to do anything.[[52]](#footnote-52) I explained that premotions are not a causal mechanism at all, and hence this argument is fallacious. The second is that, if creatures need God to act directly to do anything by moving them to act with special premotions, a doctrine of physical premotions seems equivalent to occasionalism. I rejected that premotions are needed for everything God causes. Instead, physical premotions are truthmakers required only in special case: God’s direct causal acts. So the danger does not arise.[[53]](#footnote-53)

In the case of Paul that I have used, we can see why these objections do not succeed. A premotion is nothing other than a process of change that depends immediately on God’s causality. At the moment Paul converts, Paul’s will undergoes a change from, for example, being opposed to God and loving his own will, so that Paul comes to detest sin and to love God.[[54]](#footnote-54) There might be many subtle ways that God was working on Paul, indirectly, to prepare him for conversion. For example, God might providentially arrange it that Paul would be in the right place and time to hear preaching of the Gospel, or God could even enlighten Paul’s intellect in various ways without acting directly on Paul’s will. But the relevant process of change in this case, i.e., the premotion, is precisely the process by which Paul’s will goes from one state of choice – love of something mutually exclusive with right love of God – to another state of choice – love of God. There is no special causal intermediary involved, only a process of change in Paul’s will from love of self to love of God, which process is distinct from Paul, his will, either his resultant or antecedent state of choice, and the movement of Paul’s will from one choice to another. God does not need to directly act to cause Paul to do ordinary things, such as Paul choosing to mow his lawn; nevertheless, as we reject Pelagianism, we must hold that Paul cannot come to love God and hate sin, which are actions requiring grace, without God directly helping Paul to do so.

It remains to be seen, however, if physical premotions can avoid entailing compatibilism, as I allege the state of affairs view does. I set up the argument in the context of a historical difficulty for the Banezian theory of premotions: do not these special entities, premotions, *determine* or *necessitate* a free choice? Whenever God causes a premotion in Paul that intends to bring Paul to convert, it is necessarily true that Paul converts. Lonergan offers a clear statement of this kind of objection.[[55]](#footnote-55) He first claims, unobjectionably, that: “divine transcendence is [not] a property that can be attributed to any creature....”[[56]](#footnote-56) But the premotion, a created property, seems to be exercising precisely God’s causality over the human will; “if, then, a [premotion]were to produce a contingent effect with irresistible efficacy, it could not be a creature; it would have to be God.”[[57]](#footnote-57) That a creature can necessitate human wills is, however, contrary to the presupposition that human freedom is incompatible with any creaturely causal determinism.

While Lonergan presumes controversially some kind of aforementioned theistic compatibilism, as God can determine wills without affecting their freedom, Lonergan’s point is clear enough: when God acts to determine (e.g.) Paul to convert, and He does this by creating a particular property in Paul which necessarily results in Paul converting, it seems that particular property *itself* seems to determine the creature’s acts. This is because Paul’s conversion was not only impossible without the premotion, but that the occurrence of the premotion necessitated Paul’s conversion.

 Consider by contrast how I set up my account of premotions: truthmakers for propositions about divine direct causal acts, like God causing Moses’ hand to become leprous. Under most theories of truthmaking, truthmakers *necessitate* truths. Then, in any world where God creates a premotion, a process of Moses’ hand becoming leprous, it will be necessary in that world that the proposition that “Moses’ hand becomes leprous” is true. On one hand, it would be a confusion to think that the relation of necessitation between the premotion and the proposition, such that the truthmaker necessitates the truth of the proposition, means that propositions so necessitated by truthmakers are *necessary truths*. Rather, it is clear that God does not create such a premotion in every possible world. The propositions about Moses’ hand are true only in those worlds where God causes a process where Moses’ hand actually becomes leprous. That is to say, whether or not a premotion occurs does not affect whether those propositions it makes true are necessary or contingent truths.

Yet, on the other hand, one might wonder that, in those worlds where God does intervene, how is the creation of the premotion *up to Paul?* Does not the occurrence of a premotion in Paul, necessitating the truth of God causing Paul to convert, make it impossible for Paul *not* to convert? Here it is helpful to turn to a pedestrian example. We could imagine that the truthmaker for the proposition “I chose to go to the store yesterday” was the past act of my choice itself. My choice necessitated the truth of a proposition about my choice. If there was then a time when it was true that “I am choosing to go to the store,” this proposition could not also be false at that same time – this would be to countenance true contradictions. We could therefore express this fact by saying that it was not possible for it to be simultaneously true that I am choosing to go to the store and that I am not choosing to go to the store, and then the impossibility of the latter proposition is because the state of my actually so choosing necessitates the corresponding truth. But it seems wrong to think that the fact that the proposition was necessitated by my choice meant that the truth of that proposition was not in my control, or that the truth about my choice *necessitated* my choice. The truth of the proposition “I chose to go to the store yesterday” was quite obviously a result of my choice, and the choice that necessitated the proposition was up to me. The truthmaker necessitating the truth of a proposition about a state of affairs does not also necessitate the state of affairs. Conversely, even if it is logically entailed that propositions in contradiction to the truths necessitated by a truthmaker are false, this does not make the states of affairs described by such propositions impossible. It is perfectly possible that I not choose to go to the store, even though it would be necessarily false that I am not choosing to go to the store (by logical entailment) on the supposition it is actually true that I am choosing to go there.

In one sense, it is quite true that if a premotion occurs making it true at some time that “Paul is converting because of God’s direct causal activity,” it is impossible that Paul not be actually converting at such a time. But this is merely to say that when “Paul is converting” is true, it is not simultaneously possible that the same proposition be false. I take it that the relevant question concerning premotions is *how* it is up to Paul that God *brings about* a premotion. As a premotion is a truthmaker for a claim about God directly causing some effect, the existence of a premotion tells us nothing about why and how God is causing the effect. In the case of Moses’ hand, it was the case, necessarily, that when Moses’ hand was becoming leprous, God was causing it to do so. Further, it could not be the case that God was causing Moses’ hand to become leprous and Moses’ hand not do so. But neither of these facts would tell us why and how God brought it about that Moses’ hand became leprous when it did. The story makes it clear that God was *responding* to Moses’ having put his hand into his cloak, only bringing about a premotion *in response to* that action. The state when God was directly causing the miraculous state of Moses’ hand, and the occurrent premotion that made it true that God was directly causing that process, were clearly up to Moses. In the same way, Paul’s converting and the premotion that exists in Paul (when he is converting) could both be up to Paul. It all depends on how God was responding to Paul in bringing about the premotion. Facts about premotions *alone* do not decide the question whether Paul’s act was free or not at all.

While the theory of premotions does not settle how Paul’s action is free, the theory does rule out a number of novel contemporary theories that aim to eliminate premotions from their ontology. As far as I can tell, Molinism and other classical theories from the *De Auxiliis* period are compatible with physical premotions, so the theory of physical premotions is of no help in deciding further which of the parties was right. But the theory of physical premotions is nevertheless illuminating in a different way, by showing us that the problem of how divine causality is compatible with human freedom has parallels in action theory. It is very helpful to think of actions performed under grace as cases of joint or shared agency – Paul and God are bringing about some shared act together. And this seems reasonable because the very act of conversion, Paul’s act of loving God, is precisely for Paul and God to engage in a relationship. Neither can be in a relationship with the other without the other’s responsiveness.[[58]](#footnote-58) At no point is it the case that God can bring about Paul converting without Paul, but neither is it that Paul can convert without God helping him. They are individually necessary but only jointly sufficient to bring about Paul’s conversion.[[59]](#footnote-59)

Nevertheless, the point of the condemnation of Semi-Pelagianism can be put in the language of joint agency as follows: the *initiation* of joint action in cases of graced human action is asymmetrical. While the human and God produce C together, God has to initiate the shared agency in cases where C is some choice pertaining to salvation; e.g., Paul’s choosing to convert. If Paul were to initiate the joint agency, Paul would be choosing something pertaining to salvation in a way that was wholly up to Paul (without God’s grace). Yet it is doctrinal that nobody can choose things pertaining to salvation *without God’s grace*. More generally, acts pertaining to salvation are supposed to be things only in God’s power and Paul cannot *choose* things outside of his power (even if Paul could wish for them).[[60]](#footnote-60)

There are parallels here with contemporary theories of joint agency, but the condemnation of semi-Pelagianism can be understood as giving three prerequisites for shared agency between God and Paul that go far beyond an ordinary case of joint agency: [a] God has, first, to manifest His readiness to engage in joint activity with Paul, [b] God needs to cause Paul to understand or otherwise be aware of God’s intending to act with Paul, and [c] God has to cause Paul *to be able* to form the intention to act with God. Notice in condition [c] that God is not settling the outcomes of the capacities He is giving to A. For example, God needs to make it such that Paul can deliberate about forming the right kind of shared intention.[[61]](#footnote-61) God will have to bring about these prerequisites in a way that is not up to Paul.[[62]](#footnote-62) Nevertheless, God’s help here is *not* settling that A will choose C, but causing it that A *can* settle to C. So God does not settle what Paul does. They settle that together. Yet, while the doctrine of physical premotions preserves all these truths about their shared agency, it does not tell us *how* God and Paul settle that they act together.

It is clear that when Paul does respond to God’s offer to engage in joint agency, and so settle the matter of them acting together, Paul will form the appropriate intention to act with God. This is Paul’s decision to love God – to convert. When Paul actually forms this intention to convert, Paul has no intrinsic power to form such intentions; instead, God is helping Paul to form the intention. This act of God helping Paul is the physical premotion that results in Paul actually forming an intention to convert as a resultant state. Nevertheless, the forming of the intention was up to Paul because God simply would not have brought the premotion into existence except in a way that was responsive to Paul. [[63]](#footnote-63) Here we can see why the doctrine of physical premotions says nothing about *how* premotions result in a particular human choice. [[64]](#footnote-64) The premotion is not God settling the matter for Paul, but God causing *Paul*’*s* act, that is, the process in which Paul settles that both Paul and God engage in joint action.

Without God’s grace, Paul would not know that God wanted to engage in joint agency with him, nor could he have been able to form the intention to act with God. When Paul *does* decide to act with God, God will cooperate with Paul by helping Paul to form that decision. This preserves freedom because the counterfactual dependence of Paul’s conversion on God’s premotion seems perfectly compatible with freedom. The premotion is necessary and sufficient for the resultant fact that Paul will convert, because that premotion is just the process in which Paul himself converts. This process is clearly Paul’s in a one sense, as the premotion exists as a property of Paul’s will. Further, Paul had control over the occurrence of the premotion, as God gave Paul that power. If counterfactual dependence of the kind involved in a premotion *was* incompatible with freedom, the classical theist will be in a hard spot. The doctrine does not say that God brings about the premotion in Paul’s will *without Paul* or that Paul *lacks* the ability to bring about that premotion. The doctrine only says that Paul *alone* could not have brought about that premotion in his will, and that Paul *alone* could not have chosen to convert.[[65]](#footnote-65)

Aquinas, citing Aristotle, endorses such reasoning: “What we can do with the Divine assistance is not altogether impossible to us; according to the Philosopher (Ethic. iii, 3): ‘What we can do through our friends, we can do, in some sense, by ourselves.’”[[66]](#footnote-66) The way that premotions are counter-factually dependent on God’s causality is only an implication, then, of the Christian requirement that certain free acts of human beings, like Paul’s conversion, cannot be performed without God’s help, or grace. The classical theist is already committed to counterfactual dependence of certain human actions on God’s causal power. I conclude it does not seem to be problematic to claim that premotions in free agents, processes that have as their results choices otherwise out of the natural ability of the creature to choose, cannot be caused or elicited by that created free agent *alone*.

Perhaps someone disagrees with my view and argues that the problem lies not with my account but entirely with the anti-Pelagian doctrine of grace. The doctrine of grace, they might argue, is inherently determinist. What Paul needs is that he can perform an act *prior* to God causing Paul to convert, such that this prior act is entirely up to Paul, as any act that is not wholly up to Paul is deterministic. The objector could spell this out in terms of counter-factual freedom similar to the condition given by W. Matthews Grant: “Agent S has counterfactual power over event E if S performs some act with respect to which S could have done otherwise all antecedent conditions remaining the same, and without which act E could not have occurred.”[[67]](#footnote-67) Notice however that this cannot translate exactly for a premotion: a premotion just is the process of producing an act – it is not an event or state of affairs.

The objector could modify the condition: any process of coming to act is not under the counter-factual control of an agent unless that agent has made an act, prior to that process, wholly up to them (not an act of shared agency), with respect to which they could have done otherwise all antecedent conditions remaining the same, and without which that process of coming to act could not have occurred. But this modified condition is absurd because it requires that any act can only be in my counter-factual control if preceded by another act also in my counter-factual control. But, obviously, this entails an infinite regress of acts preceding acts. More pertinently, the modified condition would make the *first* act anyone exercises never in his or her counter-factual control. This seems manifestly unreasonable.

Yet the unreasonable modified condition is illuminating: an act produced by a premotion is just like the first act produced by any creature with free will. In the case of a ‘first act’, there is no prior act in virtue of which the agent decided to decide to act – they just did! And, because their will act was up to them (not determined by a prior state of affairs or the essence of their will, etc.); the production of the first act was properly, free. In the same way, God gives the prerequisites to Paul to make a free decision under grace – God metaphysically elevates Paul’s cognitional and volitional powers to be able to will conversion – and God so giving Paul the ability to make a choice otherwise outside of his natural power is like giving Paul a new form of freedom. Then, even though God is acting along with Paul to cause both the ability to act and the act itself, the first act Paul produces in light of the new form of freedom that God has given Paul is properly, basically free (and in Paul’s counter-factual control). There is nothing more to be said.

1. **Conclusion**

Naturally, the million-dollar question is: how is it the case that God can be responsive to Paul when God causes Paul to convert? More specifically, how can God cause Paul’s conversion when Paul *doesn’t want to* convert, where the conversion was plausibly contrary not only to what Paul wanted on the road to Damascus, but his previous character, decisions, and so forth? The doctrine of physical premotions provides no unique resources to answer such a question. Physical premotions are truthmakers that account for propositions about God’s direct causal acts. They have little, if anything, to do with freedom or determinism. If we want to answer questions like the question about Paul’s conversion (which I think theologians should answer), a relevantly explanatory answer will *not* constitutively involve physical premotions.[[68]](#footnote-68) In this way, even though the account of physical premotions is compatible both with Molinism and Banezianism, my argument makes clear that *all* the interesting claims about the compatibility of divine causality and human freedom have nothing much to do with physical premotions. Yet classical theists should believe premotions exist, because premotions are the *only* consistent way to preserve freedom for creatures. Thus, significantly, only those theories compatible with the doctrine of premotions can resolve how human acts can be free even when caused by God’s direct causal activity.

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1. ‘Creature’ is here understood to mean any substance distinct from God. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Bernard Lonergan criticizes Banezian premotions as precisely such a causal mechanism that ursurps God’s transcendent power (2000, p.109). Stebbins clarifies the criticism succinctly (1995, p.267). [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. In fact, a general theory on which God has to cause everything in the universe to act by conferring a special premotion that moves it to act seems to me to be occasionalist. I take this to be distinct from the position taken by Thomas Aquinas that God works in every agent, because Aquinas’ position does not seem to require a special premotion for each creaturely act. My views would therefore be different from the ‘premotionism’, for example, of Oderberg (2016). However, some Banezians held that every human act requires God to “reduce’ the human power of choice from potency to actuality – to bring about an act. I believe this could be compatible with my account as follows: there are general premotions in Aquinas (creation involves premotions) that bring into existence a kind of entity and that entity’s acts, and there are special premotions for particular acts. Grace involves special distinct premotions for every act done under grace, but God’s creation of a human being with a will requires the existence of a premotion that gives actuality to the human will in the first moment of its existence and all its subsequent natural acts. So God causes *indirectly* by means of one premotion all of these acts. Because the natural case is “indirect” divine causality, specific premotions are not required for every human act – only those under grace. I could defend this view at length, but it would make this paper inordinately long. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. God’ general Providence seems to involve intermediaries. While creation is an instance of a direct divine act, in that God does not employ intermediaries to create, creation is not a case of a *change*. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Here I am assuming that these are all cases of true religious conversion to love of God; *merely apparent* religious conversions would not likely require grace. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. For a short overview, see Astrain (1908). [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Even if the Banezian is ultimately committed to a form of compatibilism, as some have energetically argued, the Banezian is at least *nominally* or intending to reject determinism. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. A good overview of these points, followed by Banez’ critique, can be found in RJ Matava (2016, p. 106-113). [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Matava (2016, p. 37-101). [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. I take my argument not to involve any contested views of causality in general. Any classical theist will readily grant that there are causal relations between God and what He causes, whether directly or indirectly. Yet they will not easily admit that these causal relations require the existence of some entities, the properties that are physical premotions, which would be distinct from God or whatever effect He brings about. Instead, the erstwhile classical theist will want to admit such causal relations but try to explain them some other way that does not require positing premotions. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Donnchadh O’Conaill and Tuomas Tahko, “Minimal Truthmakers,” in *Pacific Philosophical Quarterly,* Vol. 9, Is. 2 (June 2016): pp. 228-244. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Ibid., p. 232. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. Questions of negative propositions, for example, are not relevant to these positive propositions concerning God’s direct acts. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. I am not taking any position on whether such a thing historically occurred, as depicted in Exodus. Rather, the point is to have some concrete illustration of a miraculous change. Commitment to divine direct acts was a presupposition, and this change of Moses’ hand is supposed to count as a concrete case where, if it were to occur, would seem a clear example of such a divine direct act. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. C.f., Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae,* I, q. 3, a. 6. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. The distinction is attributed to Lewis (1986). See also Lewis (1979). [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. Brower (2008) and Pawl (2019) have recently defended this view explicitly and I owe my formulation here to their work. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. This view of divine simplicity is denied, for example, by Plantinga (1980, p. 47). [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. E.g., Lateran IV and Vatican I both define that God is ‘simple’; see Tanner (1990, pp. 230-232, 805). For further accounts, see McCall (2014) and Spencer (2017). [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. The problem, to make it clearer, is how the classical theist can account for the apparently contradictory claims that is both true that “God has no properties” (such that God could not have different properties in different possible worlds) *and* that “God could do otherwise” (in different possible worlds). [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. Note that, while my account is similar to W Matthews Grant’s account of Extrinsic Divine Causality, I believe the human act produced by God’s causality will *not* be the truthmaker for God’s causing that act to come into existence. If it were so, it would be essential to that will act that God cause it. For his account, see W Matthews Grant (2010). One can gather from my remarks in the section on compatibilism why his account will also entail compatibilism because it posits that free acts of human beings are essentially dependent on God. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. Catholic theology, for example, thinks that a state of ‘sanctifying grace’ would require a direct causal act essentially – there are no states of grace that come into existence without God’s direct action. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. John Heil (2003, p. 138). [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. Ibid., 139-141. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. Compare a similar view held by Grant (2010). [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. For example, Garrigou-Lagrange (1939, p. 253). [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. Ibid., 258. [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. I am thinking here of controversies surrounding the possibilities of “process ontologies,” where processes are conceived of as fundamental entities akin to classical substances. I take it that processes as properties of objects are less controversial. [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. For a further elaboration of Aquinas’ theory of these processes, see Frost (2018, pp. 1-36). [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. Armstrong (1993). But for a non-Armstrongian account, see Textor (2016). [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. *Physics*, Bk. I, 7. [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
32. Paul Helm uses this term to describe his position (2011). [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
33. Nevertheless, theistic compatibilist will likely also grant that humans would lack freedom if states of the universe or brain states or some other, natural cause determined their actions. The question is spelling out a relevant sense of “determination” which is valid for God’s acts but not for created causes. [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
34. Matava succinctly summarizes Lonergan’s often winding digressions into four objections (2016, p. 216-220). [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
35. Confusingly, Lonergan and Matava both call these situations ‘Aristotelian’ as opposed to ‘Banezian’ premotions. I drop the terminology here. [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
36. Lonergan (2000, p. 91). [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
37. Lonergan (2011, pp. 330-331). [↑](#footnote-ref-37)
38. It can be noted, again, that this is not intended to be a literal reading of the New Testament account as occurring on this day; the example is supposed to be merely concretely illustrative. [↑](#footnote-ref-38)
39. Stebbins (1995, p. 251). [↑](#footnote-ref-39)
40. Lonergan (2011, pp. 330-331). [↑](#footnote-ref-40)
41. Van Inwagen (1986, p. 56). [↑](#footnote-ref-41)
42. Matava (2016, pp. 230-235). [↑](#footnote-ref-42)
43. E.g., “Man is free in his single acts but exercises no free act with respect to the series of acts as a series. Since the series as a series must have a cause, and since God alone operates in the will, it follows that God alone can be the cause of perseverance,” (Lonergan, 2000, p. 382); “The [will as moved, not as moving]is the reception of divine action in the creature antecedent toany operation on the creature's part. So far from being a free act, it liesentirely outside the creature's power. But though not a free act in itself, it isthe first principle of free acts, even internal free acts such as faith, fear,hope, sorrow, and repentance,” (p. 424). See also pp. 432-434. [↑](#footnote-ref-43)
44. For example, Eleonore Stump’s account of conversion is also a variation of the Lonerganian strategy. This is why her theory runs into the following dilemma. A state of affairs comes about in a created free agent: quiescence or non-resistance to God’s grace. Stump says that this state is not an act of will or produced by the will of that agent. Stump describes quiescence as resulting from a division in the self, a sort of failure. Nevertheless, this state apparently necessitates that God causes/infuses the habit of charity into the person, causing that person to love and choose God. If quiescence did not necessitate God giving grace, it would not be the right truthmaker to account for these truths. The dilemma for Stump is that, if the state of affairs was up to the person, the person caused a state that necessitated God’s giving that person grace (i.e., Pelagianism: it would be a good act to quiesce to God, and a person without grace could quiesce); if that state of affairs was not up to the person, God causing a person to choose to love Him in virtue of some state that was not in their control would cause those choices of the person to be determined. (See further Rooney 2015). [↑](#footnote-ref-44)
45. Matava (2016, p. 277). [↑](#footnote-ref-45)
46. Matava (2016, p. 282) refers to a lecture by Germain Grisez, “Human Free Choice and Divine Causality.” [↑](#footnote-ref-46)
47. Matava (2016, p. 284). [↑](#footnote-ref-47)
48. Matava (2016, p. 287). [↑](#footnote-ref-48)
49. The further theological worry here would be that actions performed under grace, like Paul’s conversion, cannot be merely a feature of Paul’s essence. This would make God’s grace essential to Paul individually, and that seems to undermine the coherence of ‘grace’ as conceived in Christian theology to be something not identical with a creature’s ‘nature’ (or essence). [↑](#footnote-ref-49)
50. Here, as earlier, I am appealing to Van Inwagen’s Consequence Argument for incompatibilism. [↑](#footnote-ref-50)
51. C.f., Pohle (1912).  [↑](#footnote-ref-51)
52. Lonergan makes a similar objection in a complicated discussion (2000, pp. 91-93). The arguments are summarized in Stebbins (1995, p. 233). [↑](#footnote-ref-52)
53. As noted earlier, I claimed that these acts were needed for actions requiring grace to perform. Sins, for example, are not such actions, as sins do not require grace to perform, and so God does not directly cause premotions when people sin. [↑](#footnote-ref-53)
54. In Catholic theology, these actions can be logically distinguished, but they all occur simultaneously in the moment of justification when one converts. [↑](#footnote-ref-54)
55. For a summary of these objections, see Stebbins (1995, p. 266-268). [↑](#footnote-ref-55)
56. Lonergan (2000, p. 110). [↑](#footnote-ref-56)
57. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-57)
58. Even though I have classified Eleonore Stump’s view of how conversion comes about as a version of the ‘state of affairs’ theory, my treatment of grace as a case of shared or joint agency is heavily indebted to her (2019). [↑](#footnote-ref-58)
59. As noted in the section on Banez, Banezianism and Molinism agree to the claim that both Paul’s and God’s action are necessary for Paul to convert. The Banezian qualifies the sense in which God’s action, or Paul’s, are also each individually sufficient for Paul to convert, and I am not intending to prejudice the matter with the way I have put the claim here. [↑](#footnote-ref-59)
60. C.f., Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics,* 1112a. [↑](#footnote-ref-60)
61. C.f., the doctrinal declaration of the Council of Orange II. ““If anyone contends that in order that we may be cleansed from sin, God waits for our good will, but does not acknowledge that even the wish to be purged is produced in us through the infusion and operation of the Holy Spirit....” in Denzinger (1954, # 177). [↑](#footnote-ref-61)
62. These prerequisites correspond to what theologians call “prevenient sufficient grace.” [↑](#footnote-ref-62)
63. This is the classical response that God’s causing something to happen does not determine whether that effect is a contingent, free effect or a determined one. Oderberg defends this line of argument, arguing a premotion “is predetermining in the sense that the secondary cause infallibly does what God moves it to do, but its modal status qua secondary cause is not affected. In other words, if the secondary cause necessarily acts, premotion does not affect this. If an effect is contingent, that it is moved by God makes no difference to its contingency. If an action is both contingent and free, as in the case of human or angelic free will, it remains free albeit predetermined infallibly to the act it performs,” (2016, p. 209). [↑](#footnote-ref-63)
64. The problem which physical premotions addresses is *not* the same as offering a “Settling Condition” for shared agents: the conditions under which someone ‘settles’ what we are doing as a group, as it seems plausible I can intend to do what the group does only when it is settled. Premotions are merely that in virtue of it is true *that an agent is settling*. See further: Sesshu Roth (2017, sec. 2). [↑](#footnote-ref-64)
65. It remains to be said how God makes things like conversion or love of God possible objects of choice for Paul, if Paul by himself cannot choose those things, but that too is another question. [↑](#footnote-ref-65)
66. *Summa Theologiae* I-II, q. 109, a. 4, ad. 2. [↑](#footnote-ref-66)
67. See Grant (2010). [↑](#footnote-ref-67)
68. I do not discuss it here, but my proposal wouldshow that classical Molinism was *partially* wrong. Molinia held these two theses. First, in two states of affairs where God gives grace and one person converts but the other does not, God’s grace is qualitatively, metaphysically identical for both people. This cannot be true, because God, on my view, causes a premotion in one person and not in another. But Molinism also held the famous doctrine about divine foreknowledge and God’s causality of free acts. (Molinism generally held that grace was given to all, but the Congruist Molinists like Suarez and Bellarmine held that God chooses to save people before He knows what they would do, and God therefore gives special graces to certain people when He knows infallibly that they will cooperate with such graces. Molina himself rejected this position). The Molinist can accept the existence of premotions and nevertheless still retain something like this appeal to foreknowledge as their explanation of when and how premotions are given. So my account is compatible with modern Molinist explanations of divine causality. [↑](#footnote-ref-68)