

QUESTION 103

The Governance of Things in General

After the preceding treatments of (a) the creation of things (questions 44-49) and of (b) the distinctions among them (questions 50-102), what remains is to consider, in the third place, (c) the governance of things. We will consider this, first, in general (question 103) and then with respect to the specific effects of governance (questions 104-119).

On the first topic there are eight questions: (1) Is the world governed by anyone? (2) What is the end of governance itself? (3) Is the world governed by a single being? (4) What are the effects of governance? (5) Are all things subject to God's governance? (6) Are all things directly governed by God? (7) Are there cases in which God's governance is frustrated (*cassetur*)? (8) Is there anything contrary to (*aliquid contranitur*) God's providence?

Article 1

Is the world governed by anyone?

It seems that the world is not governed by anyone:

Objection 1: Being governed belongs to those things that act or are moved for the sake of an end. But natural things, which are a large part of the world, do not act and are not moved for the sake of an end, since they have no cognition of an end. Therefore, the world is not governed.

Objection 2: Being governed belongs properly to those things that are moved toward something. But the world does not seem to be moved toward anything, but instead has stability within itself. Therefore, it is not governed.

Objection 3: That which has a necessity by which it is determined to a single outcome does not need an exterior governor. But the principal parts of the world are determined by necessity to a single outcome in their acts and movements. Therefore, the world does not need governance.

But contrary to this: Wisdom 14:3 says, "You, Father, govern all things by your providence." And in *De Consolatione Philosophiae* Boethius says, "You who govern the world by your everlasting plan (*perpetua ratione*)."

I respond: Some ancient philosophers denied governance to the world, claiming that everything occurs by chance (*fortuito agi*). But there are two ways to show that this position is impossible:

First, from what is apparent in *the things themselves*. For we see among natural things that what is better occurs either always or for the most part (*semper aut in pluribus*). But this would not happen if natural things were not directed by some sort of providence toward the good as an end (*ad finem boni*)—which is what it is to govern. Hence, the fixed order of things itself clearly demonstrates the governance of the world. As Tully, quoting Aristotle, says in *De Natura Deorum*, if someone entered a well-ordered house, he would, because of the very order within the house, arrive at the idea of someone responsible for the order (*ordinatoris rationem perpenderet*).

Second, the same point is apparent from a consideration of *God's goodness*, through which, as is clear from what was said above (q. 44, a. 4 and q. 65, a. 2), things were brought into being. For since it belongs to the best to produce the best, it would not befit God's surpassing goodness not to bring the things He produced to perfection. But the ultimate perfection of each thing lies in its attaining its end. Hence, it pertains to God's goodness that just as He has brought things into being, so too He will lead them to their end—which is what it is to govern them.

Reply to objection 1: There are two senses in which something acts or is moved for the sake of an end:

In one sense, the thing moves itself to an end, in the way that men and other rational creatures do, and it belongs to such beings to have cognition of the nature of the end and of the means to that end.

However, some things are said to act or to be moved for the sake of an end in the sense that they are acted upon or directed to their end by another, in the way that an arrow moves toward the target because it is directed by the archer, who has a cognition of the end even though the arrow does not. Hence, just as the arrow's motion to a determinate end clearly demonstrates that the arrow is directed by someone who knows the end, so too the fixed course of natural things that lack cognition clearly demonstrates that the world is governed according to some plan (*ratione aliqua gubernari*).

Reply to objection 2: In all created things there is something stable—at least primary matter—and something else that involves movement (*motus*), where we are also including operation under 'movement'. And a thing needs governance in both respects. For the very feature that is stable in things would fall into nothingness (since it comes from nothing) if it were not preserved by the hand of the one who exercises governance. This will become clear below (q. 104, a. 1).

Reply to objection 3: The natural necessity inherent in things that are determined to a single outcome is a certain impression that comes from God insofar as He is directing things to their end—just as the necessity by which an arrow acts in tending toward a fixed target is an impression that comes from the archer and not from the arrow itself. However, the two cases differ in this: What a creature receives from God is its nature, whereas what a man impresses on natural things over and beyond their natures involves violence. Hence, just as the necessity of violence in the arrow's motion demonstrates that an archer is directing the arrow, so the natural necessity that belongs to creatures displays the governance of divine providence.

Article 2

Is the end of the governance of the world something that exists outside the world?

It seems that the end of the governance of the world is not something that exists outside the world:

Objection 1: The end of the governance of a thing is what the thing is led to. But what a thing is led to is some good within the thing itself; for instance, a sick man is led to health, which is a good that exists within him. Therefore, the end of the governance of things is not any extrinsic good, but is instead a good that exists within the things themselves.

Objection 2: In *Ethics* 1 the Philosopher says, "Among ends, some are doings (*operationes*) and some are things that are done (*operata*)." But nothing extrinsic can be something that is done by the whole universe, and a doing exists in the things that are done. Therefore, nothing extrinsic can be the end of the governance of things.

Objection 3: The good of a multitude seems to be order and peace, which is itself "a tranquility of order," as Augustine says in *De Civitate Dei* 19. But the world consists in a certain multitude of things. Therefore, the end of the governance of the world is a peaceful order, which exists among the things themselves. Therefore, the end of the governance of things is not anything extrinsic.

But contrary to this: Proverbs 16:4 says, "The Lord has made all things for Himself." But He Himself exists outside the entire order of the universe. Therefore, the end of things is a certain extrinsic good.

I respond: Since the end corresponds to the source (*principium*), it cannot happen that the end of things remains unknown, given that the source is known. Therefore, since, as is apparent from what was said above (q. 44, aa. 1 and 2), the source of things is something extrinsic to the whole universe, viz.,

God, the end of things must likewise be a certain extrinsic good.

This is clear from reason. For it is manifest that the good has the character of an end. Hence, the end of any given particular thing is a certain particular good, whereas the universal end of all things is a certain universal good. But a universal good is that which is good *per se* and through its essence; that is, it is the very essence of goodness, whereas a particular good is a good by participation (*est participative bonum*). Now it is clear that within the whole universe of creatures there is no good which is not a good by participation. Hence, the good that is the end of the whole universe must be extrinsic to the whole universe.

Reply to objection 1: There are many ways in which we attain a good: (a) as a form that exists within us, such as health or knowledge; (b) as something done by us, in the way that a builder attains his end by making a house; (c) as a good that is had or possessed, in the way that someone who buys a field attains his end by possessing the field. Hence, nothing prevents it from being the case that what the universe is led to is some extrinsic good.

Reply to objection 2: The Philosopher is talking about the ends of crafts, some of which have the doings themselves as their ends, in the way that a harpist's end is the playing of the harp. By contrast, other crafts have something that is done as their end, in the way that a builder's end is not the act of building, but the house.

Now it is possible for something extrinsic to be the end not only as something that is done, but also as something that is possessed or had—or even as something that is represented, as when we say that Hercules is the end of an image that is made in order to represent him. So, then, it can be said that a good that is extrinsic to the whole universe is the end of the governance of things as something that is possessed or represented, since each thing tends toward participating in this good and toward being like it to the extent that it can be.

Reply to objection 3: To be sure, one end of the universe is a good that exists within it, viz., the order of the universe itself. But this good is not the ultimate end; instead, it is itself ordered to an extrinsic good as its ultimate end—in the same way that, as *Metaphysics* 12 says, the order of an army is itself ordered toward the general.

Article 3

Is the world governed by a single being?

It seems that the world is not governed by a single being:

Objection 1: We judge a cause by its effects. But in the governance of things it appears that there is no uniformity in the way that things act and are moved. For some of them act and are moved contingently and others necessarily, and there are other types of differences as well. Therefore, the world is not governed by a single being.

Objection 2: Things that are governed by a single being conflict with one another only because of a lack of knowledge or a lack of power on the part of the governor—both of which are far removed from God. But as is apparent in the case of contraries, created things conflict with one another and struggle against one another. Therefore, the world is not governed by a single being.

Objection 3: In nature one always finds what is for the better. But as Ecclesiastes 4:9 says, “It is better that two should be together than one.” Therefore, the world is governed by many beings and not just one.

But contrary to this: We confess a single God and a single Lord; for as 1 Corinthians 8:6 says,

“To us there is one God, the Father, and one Lord.” But both of these names involve governance, since the governance of subjects pertains to a lord (*dominus*), and, as was explained above (q. 13, a. 8), the name ‘God’ (*Deus*) is taken from providence. Therefore, the world is governed by a single being.

I respond: One must claim that the world is governed by a single being. For since the end of the governance of the world is something that is good through its essence (*essentialiter bonum*), i.e., the very best thing, the governance of the world must be the best. But the best governance is governance carried out by a single governor. The reason for this is that to govern is nothing other than to direct the things governed to their end, which is a good. But oneness (*unitas*) is relevant to the notion of goodness, as Boethius proves in *De Consolatione Philosophiae* 3 by appeal to the fact that just as all things desire the good, so too they desire oneness, without which they cannot exist. For each thing exists to the extent that it is one; hence, we see that things resist being divided as much as they can, and that the dissolution of any given thing stems from some defect in that thing. And so oneness or peace is what the intention of one who governs a multitude aims for. But a *per se* cause of oneness is itself a single thing. For it is clear that unless a plurality of beings are themselves united in some way, they cannot unite a multitude of things and bring them together in harmony. But that which is one *per se* can be a cause of oneness in a better and more fitting way than many united beings can be. Hence, a multitude is better governed by a single being than by many beings. Therefore, it follows that the best sort of governance of the world is governance by a single governor. And this is what the Philosopher asserts in *Metaphysics* 12: “Things refuse to be ill governed; and a multiplicity of authorities is not a good thing; therefore, there should be a single ruler.”

Reply to objection 1: Motion is an act of the thing moved that comes from the mover. Therefore, deformity in the motions stems not from a diversity of governors but instead from the diversity of the things moved—a diversity that, as was explained above (q. 47, aa. 1-2 and q. 48, a. 2), is required for the perfection of the universe.

Reply to objection 2: Even if contraries conflict with one another with respect to certain proximate ends, nonetheless, with respect to the ultimate end they agree with one another in the sense that they are included within the single order of the universe.

Reply to objection 3: Among particular goods two are better than one, but no addition of goodness can be made to that which is good through its essence (*bonum essentialiter*).

Article 4

Is there just a single effect of the governance of the world, or are there many effects?

It seems that there is just a single effect of the governance of the world, and not many effects:

Objection 1: The effect of governance seems to be that which is caused by the governance in the things that are governed. But this is a single thing, viz., the good of order; this is clear in the case of an army. Therefore, there is a single effect of the governance of the world.

Objection 2: Just a single thing is apt to proceed from a single thing. But as has been shown (a. 3), the world is governed by a single being. Therefore, there is likewise just a single effect of governance.

Objection 3: If it is not the case that because of the oneness of the governor there is just a single effect of governance, then the effect will have to be multiplied in accord with the multitude of the things that are governed. But the things are uncountable to us. Therefore, the effects of governance will not be able to be comprehended under any fixed number.

But contrary to this: Dionysius says, “God includes all things and fulfills all things by His perfect providence and goodness.” But governance pertains to providence. Therefore, there are certain determinate effects of divine governance.

I respond: The effect of each action can be gathered from its end, since it is through an operation that the end is attained. Now the end of the one who governs the universe is something that is good through its essence, and all things tend toward participating in this good and being like it. Therefore, ‘effect of governance’ can be understood in three ways:

First, on the part of the end itself, and in this sense there is a single effect of governance, viz., being like the highest good.

Second, the effect of governance can be considered with respect to those things by which a creature is led to be like God. And in this sense there are two general effects of governance. For a creature becomes like God in two respects, viz., (a) with respect to God’s being good, insofar as the creature is good, and (b) with respect to God’s being a cause of goodness for others, insofar as one creature moves another to goodness. Hence, on this score there are two effects of governance, viz., the conservation of things in goodness and the movement of things toward goodness.

Third, the effect of governance can be considered in particular, and in this sense the effects are uncountable to us.

Reply to objection 1: The order of the universe includes within itself both (a) the conservation of the diverse things that have been made by God and also (b) their motion, since it is in these two things that the order among entities is found, viz., insofar as one is better than another and insofar as one is moved by another.

Reply to objection 2 and objection 3: The replies to the other two objections are clear from what has been said.

Article 5

Are all things subject to God’s governance?

It seems that not all things are subject to God’s governance:

Objection 1: Ecclesiastes 9:11 says, “I saw that under the sun the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, nor bread to the wise, nor riches to the learned, nor favor to the skillful, but time and chance in all.” But what is subject to someone’s governance does not occur by chance. Therefore, things under the sun are not subject to God’s governance.

Objection 2: In 1 Corinthians 9:9 the Apostle says, “God has no care for oxen.” But everyone has care for those things that are governed by him. Therefore, not all things are subject to God’s governance.

Objection 3: That which can govern itself does not seem to need the governance of another. But a rational creature is able to govern himself, since he has dominion over his acts and acts on his own (*agat per se*); again, he is not just acted upon by another—a feature that seems to belong to those things that are governed. Therefore, not all things are subject to God’s governance.

But contrary to this: In *De Civitate Dei* 5 Augustine says, “It is not just heaven and earth, or men and angels, but even the bowels of the lowest and most contemptible animal, the wing of the bird, the flower of the plant, and the leaf of the tree, that God has not left without agreement among their parts.” Therefore, all things are subject to His governance.

I respond: The argument for God’s being a governor of things is the same as the argument for His being their cause, since it belongs to the same being to produce a thing and to give it perfection, where

the latter pertains to a governor. But as was shown above (q. 44, aa. 1 and 2), God is a cause not of one particular genus of things, but of the universal whole of being. Hence, just as nothing can exist unless it is created by God, so too nothing can exist which is not subject to His governance.

This same point is also clear from the notion of an end. For the governance of any particular thing extends as far as the end of governance can extend. But as was shown above (a. 2), the end of God's governance is His own goodness itself. So since, as is clear from what was said above (q. 44, a. 4 and q. 65, a.2), there cannot be anything that is not ordered to God's goodness as an end, it is impossible that any beings should be withdrawn from God's governance.

Therefore, it was stupid to hold the opinion of those who claim that lower corruptible things, or even singular things, or even human affairs, are not governed by God. It is into the mouths of such people that Ezechiel 9:9 puts the words, "The Lord has abandoned the earth."

Reply to objection 1: What are said to be "under the sun" are those things that are generated and corrupted in accord with the sun's motion. In all such things there is chance—not in the sense that everything that happens in them occurs by chance, but in the sense that something fortuitous is found in each of them. And the very fact that something fortuitous is found in things of this sort demonstrates that they are subject to some sort of governance. For if corruptible things of this sort were not governed by some superior, then they—especially the ones that lack cognition—would not tend toward anything at all, and so nothing that 'lies outside of their tendencies' (*praeter intentionem*) would occur in them—which is what makes for the notion of chance. Hence, in order that he might show that chance events stem from the order of a higher cause, the author does not say simply that he sees *chance* in all things; rather, he says that he sees *time and chance*, since chance defects are found in these things in accord with some temporal ordering.

Reply to objection 2: Governance is a certain change (*mutatio*) in the things governed that comes from the governor. But as *Physics* 3 says, motion is "an act of the thing moved that comes from the mover." Now every act is proportioned to the thing whose act it is. And so diverse things that are moved must be moved in diverse ways, even in relation to the movement caused by a single mover. So, then, in accord with the single craft of God the governor, things are governed in diverse ways which correspond to their diversity.

For there are some things that act *per se* by their own nature, in the sense of having dominion over their acts, and these things are governed by God not only by being moved by God Himself operating within them, but also by being induced by Him toward what is good and being held back from what is evil, through His precepts and prohibitions and through rewards and punishments.

On the other hand, non-rational creatures, which do not act but are only acted upon, are not governed in this way by God. So, then, when the Apostle says that God does not care about oxen, he is not totally removing oxen from the care of the divine governor; rather, he is removing them only with respect to that mode of governance that belongs properly to rational creatures.

Reply to objection 3: A rational creature governs himself by his intellect and will, both of which need to be guided and perfected by God's intellect and will. And so in addition to the governance by which a rational creature governs himself as the master of his own acts, he needs to be governed by God.

Article 6

Are all things governed directly by God?

It seems that all things are governed directly (*immediate*) by God:

Objection 1: Gregory of Nyssa rejects the opinion of Plato, who divided providence into three

parts: The first providence belongs to the highest God, who provides for all celestial affairs and all universals; the second providence he claimed to belong to the secondary gods, who travel around the heavens, with respect to what occurs in the realm of generation and corruption; and the third providence he claimed to belong to certain daimons, who are the guardians of human actions around the earth. Therefore, it seems that all things are governed directly by God.

Objection 2: As *Physics* 8 says, it is better, if possible, for something to be done by a single agent rather than by many. But God is able to govern all things by Himself and without any mediating causes. Therefore, it seems that He governs all things directly.

Objection 3: There is nothing defective or imperfect in God. But it seems to involve a defect on the part of a governor that he should govern by mediators; for instance, an earthly governor has to have ministers of his governance because he himself is not sufficient to do everything and because he is not present everywhere in his kingdom. Therefore, God governs all things directly.

But contrary to this: In *De Trinitate* 3 Augustine says, “In some sense the crasser lower bodies are ruled with a certain order by the more subtle and powerful bodies; in the same way, all bodies are ruled by the rational spirit of life, and the one who sins and deserts the rational spirit of life is ruled by the pious and just rational spirit of life, and the latter is ruled by God.”

I respond: There are two things to consider in governance, viz., *the plan of governance (ratio gubernationis)*, which is providence itself, and *the execution of the plan (executio)*. Therefore, as regards the plan of governance, God governs all things directly, while as regards the execution of governance, God governs certain things by the mediation of other things.

The reason for this is that since God is the very essence of goodness, everything must be attributed to God in accord with what is best for it. But the best in every type of practical reasoning or practical cognition (which includes plans of governance) consists in having cognition of the particulars that have actuality; for instance, the best physician is not the one who takes only universals into account, but the one who can likewise take into account the minutest particulars. And the same is clear in other cases.

Hence, one must claim that God has a plan for governing all things, even the most minute particulars. But since through governance the things which are governed are led to perfection, the governance will be better to the extent that more perfection is communicated by the governor to the things governed. But it is a greater perfection for something to be good in itself and also to be a cause of goodness for others than if it were only good in itself. And so God governs things in such a way that He sets up certain things as causes of others in governing—just as if a teacher were to make his students not only knowers but also teachers of others.

Reply to objection 1: Plato’s opinion is rejected because he claimed that God did not directly govern all things even with respect to the *plan* of governance. This is clear from the fact that he divided *providence*, which is the plan of governance, into three parts.

Reply to objection 2: If God governed alone, then causal perfection would be denied to things. Hence, it is not the case that everything that is done by many could be done by one.

Reply to objection 3: In the case of an earthly king, having executors of his governance does not bespeak imperfection alone. It also bespeaks the king’s dignity, since his regal power is rendered more excellent (*praeclarior*) by the order of his ministers.

Article 7

Is it possible for anything to occur outside the order of God's governance?

It seems that it is possible for something to occur outside the order of God's governance:

Objection 1: In *De Consolatione Philosophiae* 3 Boethius says, "God disposes all things for the good (*per bonum*).” Therefore, if nothing among the things occurred outside the order of divine governance, then it would follow that there is no evil among things.

Objection 2: Nothing that occurs in accord with a governor's preordination occurs by chance. Therefore, if nothing among the things occurs outside the order of God's governance, then it follows that nothing among the things occurs fortuitously or by chance.

Objection 3: The order of God's governance is fixed and immutable, since it is in keeping with an eternal plan. Therefore, if nothing among the things could occur outside the order of God's governance, it would follow that all things occur by necessity and that there is nothing contingent among the things—which is absurd. Therefore, it is possible that among the things something happens outside the order of God's governance.

But contrary to this: Esther 13:9 says, "O Lord, God, almighty king, for all things are in your power, and there is no one who can resist your will."

I respond: It is possible for an effect to occur outside the order of a particular cause, but not outside the order of the universal cause. The reason for this is that nothing occurs outside the order of a particular cause except because of some other impeding cause that has to be traced back to the first universal cause. For instance, indigestion occurs outside the order of the nutritive power because of some impediment—e.g., the thickness of a piece of food—that has to be traced back to some other cause, and so on back to the first universal cause.

Therefore, since God is the first *universal* cause—not just the first cause within some genus, but the cause in general of *all* being—it is impossible for anything to occur outside the order of God's governance. Instead, by the very fact that something seems in some respect to depart from the order of God's providence when it is considered relative to some particular cause, it must be the case that it falls back under that same order relative to some other cause.

Reply to objection 1: There is nothing in the world that is totally evil, since, as was explained above (q. 48, a. 3), evil is always grounded in what is good. And so a thing is called evil because it departs from the order of some particular good. However, if it totally departed from the order of God's providence, then it would be absolutely nothing.

Reply to objection 2: Some occurrences among things are said to happen by chance because of their relation to particular causes, outside of whose order they occur. But as far as God's providence is concerned, "nothing happens by chance in the world," as Augustine puts it in *83 Quaestiones*.

Reply to objection 3: Some effects are called contingent because of their relation to proximate causes, which are able to fail in their effects—and not because something can happen outside the whole order of God's governance. For the very fact that something happens outside the order of a given proximate cause stems from a cause that is subject to God's governance.

Article 8

Can anything resist the order of God's governance?

It seems that something can resist the order of God's governance:

Objection 1: Isaiah 3:8 says, "Their tongue and their devices are against the Lord."

Objection 2: No king justly punishes those who do not resist his ordinances. Therefore, if there were nothing opposed to God's ordinances, then no one would be justly punished by God.

Objection 3: Each thing is subject to the order of God's governance. But one thing does violence to another. Therefore, some things are opposed to God's governance.

But contrary to this: In *De Consolatione Philosophiae* 3 Boethius says, "There is nothing that wants to or is able to resist this highest good. Therefore, it is the highest good that 'rules over all things with power and disposes things agreeably'"—as Wisdom 8:1 says of God's wisdom.

I respond: There are two ways to think about the order of God's providence: (a) first, *in general*, viz., in accord with what proceeds from the governing cause of the whole, and (b) second, *in its specifics*, viz., in accord with what proceeds from a particular cause that is executing God's providence.

In the first sense, nothing is contrary to the order of God's governance. This is clear from two considerations. First, it is clear from the fact that the order of God's governance tends as a whole toward the good, and each thing, in its operations and inclinations, tends only toward the good, since, as Dionysius puts it, "No one acts with an eye toward evil (*respicens malum*)."² Second, the same point is apparent from the fact that, as was explained above (aa. 1 and 5), every inclination of a natural or voluntary being is nothing other than a certain impression that comes from the first mover, just as an arrow's inclination toward a determinate target is nothing other than a certain impression that comes from the archer. Hence, all things that act, whether naturally or voluntarily, attain to what is divinely ordained as if by their own accord. This is why God is said to "dispose all things agreeably."³

Reply to objection 1: Some are said to think or speak or act against God not because they totally resist the order of God's governance, since even sinners intend some good, but rather because they are opposed to some determinate good that is appropriate for them, given their nature or status. And this is why they are justly punished by God.

Reply to objection 2: From this the reply to the second objection is clear.

Reply to objection 3: The fact that one thing does violence to another shows that something can resist the order that stems from some particular cause, but not the order that depends on the universal cause of the whole.