

QUESTION 110

How Angels Preside over Corporeal Creatures

The next thing we have to consider is how angels preside over corporeal creatures. On this topic there are four questions: (1) Are corporeal creatures administered by the angels? (2) Does a corporeal creature obey angels at will? (3) Can angels by their power directly move bodies with respect to place? (4) Are good or bad angels able to work miracles?

Article 1

Are corporeal creatures administered by the angels?

It seems that corporeal creatures are not administered by the angels:

Objection 1: An entity that has a determinate mode of operating does not need to be governed by someone presiding over it, since the reason why we ourselves need to be governed is in order that we not act otherwise than we should. But corporeal entities have determinate actions that stem from the natures given them by God. Therefore, they do not need the governance of the angels.

Objection 2: Lower entities are governed by higher entities. But among corporeal entities some are called lower and some higher. Therefore, the lower ones are governed by the higher ones. Therefore, it is not necessary for the lower bodies to be governed by the angels.

Objection 3: The different orders of angels are distinguished by their different roles. But if corporeal creatures are administered by the angels, then there are as many angelic roles as there are species of things. Therefore, there are likewise as many orders of angels as there are species of things. But this is contrary to what was asserted above (q. 108, a. 2). Therefore, corporeal creatures are not administered by the angels.

But contrary to this: In *De Trinitate* 3 Augustine says, “All bodies are ruled by reasonable spirits of life.” And in *Dialogi* 4 Gregory says, “Nothing can take place in this visible world except through invisible creatures.”

I respond: In the case of both human affairs and natural entities one generally finds that a particularized power is governed and ruled by a universal power. For instance, the power of the magistrate (*ballivus*) is governed by the power of the king. In addition, it has already been explained (q. 55, a. 3 and q. 108, a. 1) that among the angels the higher angels, who preside over the lower angels, have a more universal knowledge.

Now it is clear that a body’s power is more particularized than a spiritual substance’s power, since every corporeal form is individuated by matter and is determined to the here and now, whereas immaterial forms are absolute and intelligible. And so just as the lower angels, who have forms that are less universal, are ruled by the higher angels, so too all corporeal entities are ruled by the angels. This claim is made not only by the holy doctors, but also by all those philosophers who have posited incorporeal substances.

Reply to objection 1: Corporeal entities have determinate actions but they do not exercise these actions except insofar as they are moved, since it is proper to a body not to act unless it is moved. And so it is necessary for corporeal creatures to be moved by spiritual creatures.

Reply to objection 2: This argument presupposes the opinion of Aristotle, who claimed that the celestial bodies are moved by spiritual substances, and who ventured to assign a number to the spiritual substances that corresponds to the number of movements that appear among the celestial bodies. But he did not claim that there are spiritual substances—except, perhaps, human souls—who preside directly over lower bodies. The reason for this is that the only operations exercised by lower bodies that he took

into account were natural operations, for which the movement of the celestial bodies was sufficient.

But since we ourselves claim that many things are effected among the lower bodies besides their natural actions and that the powers of the celestial bodies are not sufficient for these things, it is necessary from our perspective to hold that the angels preside directly not only over the celestial bodies but over lower bodies as well.

Reply to objection 3: Philosophers have spoken in diverse ways about immaterial substances.

Plato held that immaterial substances are the ideas and species of sensible bodies, and that some are more universal than others. And so he claimed that immaterial substances preside directly over all sensible bodies, and that different immaterial substances preside over different sensible bodies.

Aristotle, by contrast, claimed that immaterial substances are not the species of sensible bodies but are instead something higher and more universal. And so he attributed to them a direct governance not over individual bodies, but only over the universal agents, viz., the celestial bodies.

Avicenna, on the other hand, followed a middle way. For with Plato he claimed that some spiritual substances preside directly over the sphere of active and passive things—in that, just as Plato claimed that the forms of sensible things are derived from immaterial substances, so Avicenna also made this claim. But he differs from Plato in holding that there is just a single immaterial substance that presides over all the lower bodies, and he called this substance the Agent Intelligence.

Now the holy doctors held, with the Platonists, that different spiritual substances have been put in charge of different corporeal entities. For instance, in *83 Quaestiones* Augustine says, “Each visible entity in this world has an angelic power in charge of it.” And Damascene says, “The devil came from among those angelic powers that were in charge of the earthly order.” And in commenting on Numbers 22:23 (“When the donkey saw the angel ...”), Origen says, “The world needs angels to preside over the beasts and to preside over the birth of animals and trees and plants and over the increase of other things.”

However, the reason for making this claim should not be that a given angel is by his very nature more fit to preside over animals than over plants; for each angel, even the least one, has a higher and more universal power than does any genus of corporeal things. Rather, the reason has to do with the order of God’s wisdom, which places different rulers over different things.

Nor does it follow from this that there are more than nine orders of angels; for, as was explained above (q. 108, a. 2), the orders are distinguished by their general roles. Hence, just as, according to Gregory, the order of Powers includes all the angels who properly preside over the demons, so too the order of Virtues includes all the angels who preside over purely corporeal entities, since sometimes miracles are worked in connection with their ministry.

Article 2

Is corporeal matter obedient to the angels at will?

It seems that corporeal matter is obedient to the angels at will (*obediat angelis ad nutum*):

Objection 1: An angel’s power is greater than a soul’s power. But corporeal matter obeys the soul’s conception, since a man’s body changes to being hot or cold, and sometimes even to being healthy or sick, because of the soul’s conception. Therefore, *a fortiori*, corporeal matter is transformed in accord with an angel’s conception.

Objection 2: A higher power can do whatever a lower power can do, and an angel’s power is higher than a corporeal power. But a body is able by its power to change corporeal matter with respect to its [substantial] form, as when a fire generates a fire. Therefore, *a fortiori*, angels are able by their power

to transmute corporeal matter with respect to its [substantial] form.

Objection 3: As has been explained (a. 1), all of corporeal nature is administered by the angels, and so it seems that bodies are related to the angels as instruments; for it is the nature of an instrument to be a moved mover. But within a given effect we find something which both (a) stems from the principal agent's power and (b) cannot stem from the instrument's power; and this is the most important aspect of the effect. For instance, the digestion of food occurs by means of the power of natural heat, which is the nutritive soul's instrument, but the fact that living flesh is generated from that food stems from the soul's power. Similarly, the fact that this wood is cut pertains to the saw, but the fact that this wood ends up shaped into a bed stems from the nature of the [carpenter's] craft. Therefore, a substantial form, which is the most important aspect within corporeal effects, stems from the power of the angels. Therefore, matter obeys the angels as far as its being formed is concerned.

But contrary to this: In *De Trinitate* 3 Augustine says, "One should not think that this matter of visible things serves the sinful angels at will; rather, it serves God alone."

I respond: The Platonists claimed that the forms which exist in matter are caused by immaterial forms, since they held that material forms are certain participations in immaterial forms. And in some respects their position was adopted by Avicenna, who held that (a) all the forms which exist in matter proceed from the conception of an intelligence and that (b) corporeal agents merely dispose matter for the forms. They made this mistake, it seems, because they believed that a form is something which is made in its own right (*per se*) and that, as such, it proceeds from a formal principle. However, as the Philosopher proves in *Metaphysics* 7, it is the *composite* which is made, properly speaking, because it is the composite which subsists, properly speaking. By contrast, the form is called a being not in the sense that it itself exists, but in the sense that it is that *by which* something exists; and, as a result, the form is not made, properly speaking. For *being-made* belongs to that which exists, since *being-made* is nothing other than a path to existing.

Now it is clear that what is made is similar to what makes it, since every agent effects what is similar to itself. And so the agent which makes natural things bears a likeness to the composite, either because (a) the agent itself is a composite, as when a fire generates a fire, or (b) because the whole composite, both matter and form, lies within power of the agent—and this is proper to God alone.

So, then, every instance of matter's being formed comes directly either from God or from some corporeal agent, and it does not come directly from an angel.

Reply to objection 1: Our soul is united to the body as the form of the body, and so it is no wonder that the body is changed formally as a result of the soul's conception—especially since the movement of the sentient appetite, which is effected along with a certain corporeal change, is subject to the command of reason.

By contrast, an angel is not related in this way to natural bodies. Hence, the argument does not go through.

Reply to objection 2: That which a lower power can effect is such that a higher power can effect it in a more excellent way, but not in exactly the same way. For instance, the intellect knows sensible things in a more excellent way than the senses do. So, too, an angel changes corporeal matter in a more excellent way than corporeal agents do, viz., by moving the corporeal agents themselves as a higher cause.

Reply to objection 3: Nothing prevents it from being the case that certain effects in natural things that stem from the power of angels are such that corporeal agents are not sufficient for them. But this is not what it is for matter to obey the angels at will—just as it is not the case that matter obeys chefs at will merely because, by using fire in the way prescribed by their craft, they concoct a dish that the fire would not make on its own.

Now it does not exceed the power of a corporeal agent to lead matter to the act of a substantial form, since a corporeal agent is apt by its nature to effect what is similar to itself.

Article 3

Do bodies obey angels with respect to local motion?

It seems that bodies do not obey angels with respect to local motion:

Objection 1: The local motion of natural bodies follows upon their [substantial] forms. But as has been explained (a. 2), angels do not effect the [substantial] forms of natural bodies. Therefore, neither can they cause local motion in those bodies.

Objection 2: *Physics* 8 proves that local motion is the first among movements. But angels cannot cause the other sorts of movements by transmuting matter with respect to its [substantial] form. Therefore, neither can they cause local motion.

Objection 3: The members of the body obey the soul's conception with respect to local motion insofar as they have a principle of life within themselves. But in natural bodies there is no principle of life. Therefore, natural bodies do not obey the angels with respect to local motion.

But contrary to this: In *De Trinitate* 3 Augustine says that the angels use 'corporeal seeds' (*semina coporalia*) to produce effects. But they cannot do this except by moving them with respect to place. Therefore, bodies obey the angels with respect to local motion.

I respond: As Dionysius says in *De Divinis Nominibus*, chap. 7, "God's wisdom joins the ends of the primary things to the beginnings of the secondary things." From this it is clear that a lower nature is touched at its highest point by a higher nature. Now corporeal nature stands below spiritual nature and, as *Physics* 8 proves, local motion is the most perfect of all corporeal movements. The reason is that something that is movable with respect to place is not, as such, in potentiality with respect to anything intrinsic, but is in potentiality only with respect to something extrinsic, viz., place. And so a corporeal natural is apt to be moved directly by a spiritual nature with respect to place.

Thus, the philosophers, too, have held that the highest bodies are moved with respect to place by spiritual substances. And we ourselves see that the soul moves the body primarily and principally by local motion.

Reply to objection 1: In bodies there are local motions other than those that follow upon their [substantial] forms. For instance, the ebb and flow of the sea does not follow upon the substantial form of water, but instead follows from the power of the moon. *A fortiori*, certain local motions can follow upon the power of spiritual substances.

Reply to objection 2: By causing local motion in the first instance, angels can cause other movements through this local motion, viz., by applying corporeal agents to the production of their own effects—in the way that a blacksmith uses fire to soften iron.

Reply to objection 3: Angels have a power that is less restricted than the power had by souls. Hence, the moving power of a soul is limited to the body that is united to it and made alive by it, and it is through this movement that it can move other things. By contrast, an angel's power is not limited to a particular body. Hence, an angel can move a non-conjoined body with respect to place.

Article 4

Can angels work miracles?

It seems that angels can work miracles:

Objection 1: Gregory says, “The spirits called Virtues are those through whom signs and miracles are most often worked.”

Objection 2: In *83 Quaestiones* Augustine says, “Magicians work miracles through private contracts (*per privatos contractus*), good Christians work them through public justice, and bad Christians work them through the signs of public justice.” But magicians work miracles “because they are listened to by demons,” as Augustine says in another place in the same book. Therefore, demons are able to work miracles. Therefore, *a fortiori*, the good angels are able to work miracles.

Objection 3: In the same book Augustine says, “All things that are made visibly are plausibly believed to be such that they can also be made by the lower powers of this part of the air.” But when an effect of natural causes is produced outside the order of natural causes, we say that this is a miracle—as, for instance, when someone is cured of a fever but not through any operation of nature. Therefore, angels and demons can work miracles.

Objection 4: A higher power is not subordinated to the order of a lower cause. But a natural body is lower than an angel. Therefore, an angel can operate outside the order of corporeal agents—which is what it is to work a miracle.

But contrary to this: Psalm 135:4 says of God that “He alone works great wonders.”

I respond: Properly speaking, a miracle occurs when something is done outside the order of nature. However, it is not sufficient for the notion of a miracle that something should be done outside the order of the nature of some *particular* thing; for, otherwise, when someone threw a rock up in the air, he would be working a miracle, since this lies beyond the order of a rock’s nature. Something is called a miracle, then, from the fact that it is done outside the order of the *whole* of created nature.

No one except God can work a miracle, since whatever an angel (or any other creature) does by his own power is done within the order of created nature and so is not a miracle. Hence, it follows that only God is able to work miracles.

Reply to objection 1: Certain angels are said to work miracles either because (a) God works a miracle when they desire it, in the same way that holy men are said to work miracles, or because (b) they play some role in the miracles that are being worked, such as gathering up dust at the time of the general resurrection or doing something of this sort.

Reply to objection 2: As has been explained, miracles occur, simply speaking, when something is done outside the order of the whole of created nature. But since not every power in created nature is known to us, when something is done outside the order of created nature as it is known to us and through a created power that is unknown to us, then there is a miracle as far as we are concerned (*miraculum quoad nos*). So, then, when demons do something by their own natural power, these are not called miracles simply speaking, but are instead called miracles as far as we are concerned. This is the sense in which magicians work miracles through demons.

These miracles are said to be worked “through private contracts” because every created power in the universe is like the power of a private person in a city. Hence, when a magician does something through a pact entered into with a demon, the deed is done, as it were, through a sort of private contract.

By contrast, God’s justice is to the whole universe what public law is to a city, and so insofar as good Christians are said to work miracles through God’s justice, they are said to work the miracles “through public justice.”

On the other hand, bad Christians work miracles “through the signs of public justice”—for instance, by invoking the name of Christ or by making use of certain sacred signs (*sacramenta*).

Reply to objection 3: Things which are done visibly in this world are such that spiritual powers can do them by employing ‘corporeal seeds’ via local motion.

Reply to objection 4: Even though angels can do something outside the order of corporeal nature, they nonetheless cannot do anything outside the order of the whole of creation—which, as has been explained, is what is required by the notion of a miracle.