

## Perfect Subjects, Shields, and Retractions: Three Models of Impassibility

**Abstract:** According to theological consensus at least from the thirteenth century, at the End of Times our body will be resurrected and reunited with our soul. The resurrected body, although numerically identical to our present one, will be quite different: it will possess clarity, agility, subtility, and the inability to suffer. It is the last of these characteristics that will be of most concern in the present paper. There are two reasons why impassibility presents a problem in the medieval framework. The first has to do with how to characterize impassibility more precisely; the second arises because at first it may seem that impassibility is not metaphysically possible at all. I am going to look at three attempts to tackle these problems: those of Aquinas, Durand of St.-Pourçain, and Peter of Palude. As I hope to show, looking at how causal powers work on the New Earth may shed some light on how medieval thinkers thought they worked on the present one.

**Key words:** Thomas Aquinas – Durand of St.-Pourçain – Peter of Palude – Resurrection – Impassibility

### Introduction

There has been increasing interest recently in medieval theories of causation and causal powers.<sup>1</sup> Put very simply, one can say that most medieval thinkers take it for granted that

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<sup>1</sup> For recent discussions, see, e.g., J. E. Brower, *Aquinas's Ontology of the Material World: Change, Hylomorphism, and Material Objects* (Oxford, 2014); A. J. Freddoso, "God's General Concurrence with Secondary Causes: Pitfalls and Prospects," *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* 68, no. 2 (1994), 131-156; G. Frost, "Aquinas' Ontology of Transeunt Causal Activity," *Vivarium* 56 (2018), 47-82; Eadem, "Peter Olivi's Rejection of God's Concurrence with Created Causes," *British Journal for the History of Philosophy* 22, no. 4 (2014), 655-679; C. L. Löwe, "Peter Auriol on the Metaphysics of Efficient Causation," *Vivarium* 55 (2017), 239-272; T. D. Miller, "Continuous Creation and Secondary Causation: The Threat of Occasionalism," *Religious Studies* 47 (2011), 3-22; and many others focusing primarily on causation and free will.

things produce their effects by exercising their active powers on things that have the passive powers to undergo their action. Unfortunately, medieval thinkers very rarely discuss these active and passive powers on their own right or detail the way in which the effect is produced. Thus, most of the modern scholarship focuses on making some of the hidden metaphysical assumptions of these theories explicit, primarily by looking at places where the metaphysics of powers does some work — such as discussions of the powers of the soul, or the self-motion of the will. This paper will adopt the same strategy, but consider the seldom discussed causal relations after the Day of Judgment, which presents a special problem for the medieval accounts. Since, however, one may be inclined to think that causal relations after the Day of Judgment are at best irrelevant to metaphysics in the present world, some elaboration on the problem itself is in order.

According to theological consensus at least from the thirteenth century, when we die, our soul and body separate: while our soul continues living, our body does not. At the End of Times, however, our body will be resurrected and reunited with our soul, and following the Last Judgment that separates the righteous from the damned, the whole person will live on the New Earth or in Hell. The resurrection of the body gave rise to a number of philosophical difficulties that I will have to disregard here — such as the numerical identity of the resurrected person or the problem of gappy existence. But even granted that our bodies will be resurrected and will be in some manner numerically identical to our present bodies, the question remains: what will this new body be like?

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I have received many helpful comments on this paper at various venues. I would like to thank especially the participants of the *Morris Colloquium* in Boulder and of the *Theories of Causal Powers* conference in Leuven for their acute observations, Rega Wood for her helpful comments, and the two anonymous reviewers of *Vivarium* for their thoughtful suggestions.

Medieval theologians usually turned to Paul's first letter to the Corinthians for a way to begin understanding the basic characteristics of the resurrected, glorified bodies.<sup>2</sup> As Paul describes it, "[w]hat is sown is perishable; what is raised is imperishable. It is sown in dishonor; it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness; it is raised in power. It is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body."<sup>3</sup> This text was generally thought to imply that the resurrected body, although numerically identical to our present one, will be quite different; in Aquinas's (1225-1274) words (elaborating on the Paul passage), "what you sow is not the body which will be in the future — that is, what you sow now is not as it will be in the future [. . .] the same numerical body will rise, but it will have another quality."<sup>4</sup> In particular, medieval theologians thought that Paul's passage indicated four characteristics or marks of the resurrected body, which were also called the four "dowries" (*dotes*)<sup>5</sup>: clarity, agility, subtlety, and the inability to suffer.

It is the last of these characteristics that will be of most concern in the present paper — that is, the insusceptibility of our bodies on the New Earth to physical suffering. On the New Earth our bodies will not be susceptible to suffering in the same way as they are susceptible to it now, or in other words, our bodies will be *impassible*. As Aquinas explains,

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<sup>2</sup> In what follows, I will mostly disregard the connected but complicated issues concerning the bodies of the damned.

<sup>3</sup> 1 Corinthians 15: 42-44; translation is from the ESV. For a thorough discussion of various aspects of these characteristics, including their interpretation in early Christianity, see C. W. Bynum, *The Resurrection of the Body in Western Christianity, 200-1336* (New York, 1995), especially ch. 6.

<sup>4</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Super primam Epistolam ad Corinthios lectura (In 1 Cor.)*, c. 15, l. 5: "cum dicit et quod seminas, non corpus, quod futurum est, seminas, id est non quale futurum est seminas [. . .] nam surget idem corpus numero, sed habebit aliam qualitatem." Unless otherwise noted, translations from the Latin are mine.

<sup>5</sup> The metaphor of marriage was often used to describe the soul's longing for the body in the afterlife. For an elaboration on this metaphor, see, e.g., Bonaventure, *Commentaria in quattuor libros Sententiarum* IV, d. 44, a. 2, q. 1, resp. 3, in *Doctoris Seraphici S. Bonaventurae Opera Omnia* 2, ed. PP. Collegii A. S. Bonaventura (Quaracchi, 1885), 926b-927a.

again elaborating on Paul's words, such impassibility "exclude[s] death as well as any other harmful suffering, whether from things within or from things without."<sup>6</sup>

There are two reasons why impassibility presents a problem in the medieval framework. The first has to do with how to characterize impassibility more precisely. Impassibility, *prima facie*, seems to mean the inability to be acted on, which, in the medieval framework, means the inability to receive a form; it means, for instance, the inability to receive the form of hotness from the fire when that hotness would otherwise burn. But this clearly cannot be the whole story when characterizing impassibility: If the glorified bodies were impassible by being unable to receive *any* form whatsoever, then they would be unable to perform such basic human functions as sensing or even thinking, which no one in our period wanted to maintain.<sup>7</sup> The question, then, is this: how is it possible that the glorified bodies will be able to sense that the fire is hot, but not be burned by it? How can the fire discriminate so that our bodies receive its form in one case but not in the other one? I will call this first problem the *discrimination problem*.

The second reason why the impassibility of glorified bodies presents a problem, and why it is especially interesting in the context of causal powers, is that, as has been mentioned, according to most medieval authors, causation (action) occurs when a thing's active power comes into contact, in the proper circumstances, with another thing's passive power. Moreover, active and passive powers are supposed to be explanatory because in some sense they necessitate the realization of the effect. That is, at least in the proper

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<sup>6</sup> *In 1 Cor.*, c. 15, l. 6: "[. . .] ad excludendum tam mortem quam quamlibet noxiam passionem, sive ab interiori, sive ab exteriori." For some more background, see T. Jeschke, "Per virtutem divinam assistentem: Scotus and Durandus on the Impassibility of the Glorified Bodies – Aristotelian Philosophy Revisited?," *Philosophia* 1 (2012), 139-165.

<sup>7</sup> See, e.g., Albert the Great, *De sensibus corporis gloriosi*, q. 1, ad 1, in F. M. Henquinet, "Une pièce inédite du commentaire d'Albert le Grand sur le IVe livre des Sentences," *Recherches de théologie ancienne et médiévale* 7 (1935), 276.

circumstances, if fire comes into contact with water and its passive power to be heated, the water will, necessarily, become heated. But of course, if that is the case, then impassibility is puzzling: If a glorified body cannot be affected by fire, that must either be because the circumstances are not proper (i.e., something hinders the fire so that it does not bring about its characteristic effect), or because the active or the passive powers of things have changed. But neither of these possibilities seem *prima facie* plausible, since there is no obvious impediment, and no obvious explanation of why the fire or the bodies would have changed powers without changing essences. I will call this second problem the *impassibility problem*, and since this is the more recalcitrant of the two, it will be our focus.

In this paper, I am going to look at three attempts to tackle these problems. I start with Aquinas's *Perfect Subjects model*, since it provided the basis for the discussion of subsequent authors. Second, I present Durand of St.-Pourçain's (c. 1275 - 1334) and Peter of Palude's (c. 1275-1342) solutions: the *Shields* and the *Retractions models*, respectively. Both of these thinkers were Dominicans in Paris in the years after Aquinas's death. Their cases are especially interesting, since although Peter holds that Durand's solution is insufficient, his own solution seems very similar — so similar, in fact, that he borrows from Durand verbatim. This, I argue, can only be explained by the fact that they hold very different assumptions about causation in general. Thus, as I hope to show, looking at how causal powers work on the New Earth may shed some light on how medieval thinkers thought they worked on the present one.

## **1. The *Perfect Subjects Model***

Aquinas treats the impassibility of glorified bodies in several different places, including his *Sentences* commentary, both of the *Summae*, and, to some extent, the *De potentia* and the *De spiritualibus creaturis*. In order to understand his solution to the problem, two aspects of his general theory of causation must be considered. First, Aquinas thinks — as did, arguably, Aristotle<sup>8</sup> — that every created cause acts by the concurrence of the heavenly bodies. Second, he also thinks that it is the substantial form that endows a substance with its proper powers. These two characteristics of causation are indeed the ones Aquinas utilizes when explaining the impassibility problem;<sup>9</sup> in short, his position is that the cessation of motion of the heavenly bodies is an accidental cause, while the perfect dominion of the soul over the body is the *per se* cause of the impassibility of glorified bodies.

#### a. The Heavenly bodies

Aquinas's references to the motion of the heavenly bodies are often regarded as marginal to his theory of causation, resulting merely from his outdated cosmology.<sup>10</sup> Nevertheless, it is a feature that will play an important role in his explanation of the impassibility problem, so we cannot neglect it here.

Aquinas thinks that causes in nature act by virtue of the heavenly bodies; as he summarizes his position in the *Summa theologiae*, “the motions of bodies here below,

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<sup>8</sup> See *De generatione et corruptione* II, 10; *Meteorology* I, 2, esp. 339a20-32.

<sup>9</sup> Since Aquinas does utilize both of them, it has been suggested that he might have changed his mind about the issue. As will be explained below, however, the two accounts are but two sides of the same coin.

<sup>10</sup> Consequently, this is a topic that is largely omitted in discussions of Aquinas's theory of causation, and is, for instance, not even mentioned by M. Rota, “Causation,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Aquinas*, ed. B. Davies (Oxford, 2012), 104-114.

which are varied and of many forms, are reduced to the motion of the heavenly bodies, as to their cause.”<sup>11</sup> More precisely, he thinks that causes in the sublunar world act as *instruments* of the heavenly bodies.<sup>12</sup> In instrumental causation, as when Bob uses a marker to write on the board, the principal cause (Bob) and the instrumental cause (the marker) both already exist and have their proper causal powers; nevertheless it is only when the principal cause applies the instrument that the effect is produced. Although the principal cause is in some way primary, both are necessary to produce the effect. While Bob can move things, he cannot produce a word on the board without the marker; and while the marker has the power of leaving marks, it cannot move itself to produce words on the board either.<sup>13</sup>

We need not go into the precise details of why Aquinas maintains that secondary causes, including ordinary substances like rocks and cats, as well as the elements, are the instruments of heavenly bodies.<sup>14</sup> It is enough to note that his basic reasoning is similar to Aristotle’s in *De generatione*: Matter, which is itself passive, can only be reduced to action

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<sup>11</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae (ST)* I, q. 115, a. 3, c., in *Sancti Thomae Aquinatis Opera Omnia iussu impensaque Leonis XIII edita* 5 (Rome, 1882–), 542: “[M]otus horum inferiorum corporum qui sunt varii et multiformes, reducuntur in motum corporis caelestis, sicut in causam.” See also *Summa contra Gentiles (ScG)* III, c. 82 (*Opera Omnia* 14, ed. Leonina, 171).

<sup>12</sup> *ST* I, q. 115, a. 3, ad 2 (*Opera Omnia* 5, ed. Leonina, 542): “quidquid in istis inferioribus generat, movet ad speciem sicut instrumentum caelestis corporis.” It should also be noted that Aquinas thinks that created causes act because God wants them to; more precisely, that they act through the divine power in a number of different ways. See *Quaestiones disputatae de potentia (QDP)* q. 3, a. 7. It is an interesting fact that Aquinas — in contrast to the later discussions, as will be seen below — does not make any use of this feature of divine concurrence when discussing the impassibility problem.

<sup>13</sup> Aquinas goes into considerable details regarding the question which aspects of the effect are produced primarily by the principal cause and which by the instrumental cause; he also explains how to distinguish the action of the instrument proper from that of the principal agent. These aspects of his theory will not play a role in his explanation of impassibility and thus can be omitted here.

<sup>14</sup> Aquinas makes an exception for human beings because of the will, which is their primary moving cause; see *ST* I, q. 115, a. 4 (*Opera Omnia* 5, ed. Leonina, 544); and *ScG* III, c. 85 (*Opera Omnia* 14, ed. Leonina, 243-244).

by a principle that is already active, and this principle needs to be changeable in some respects while unchangeable in others.<sup>15</sup>

If this is Aquinas's view, then it seems that he already has a tool to explain the impassibility of glorified bodies. Since the heavenly bodies move the inferior bodies by themselves being in motion, they will stop exercising their principal causality when they stop moving. But if there is no principal causality, that just means that there is nothing to move the instrument to its action, and consequently, nothing to produce the effect; therefore, there will be no action and passion, and hence the glorified bodies will be impassible.

This is indeed the line of reasoning that Aquinas proposes in several places. For instance, when discussing the Last Judgment and life after it in the *Summa contra gentiles*, he says:

And because people will then be incorruptible, the state of generation and corruption will be removed from all corporeal creation [. . .] But generation and corruption in the bodies here below are caused by the motion of the heavens. Therefore, in order for generation and corruption to cease in the bodies here below, it is also necessary that the motion of the heavens should cease. And this is why *Revelations* (10:6) says that time will be no more.<sup>16</sup>

In other words, since the motion of the heavens is the primary cause of the generation, corruption, and more generally, bodily change on earth, these bodies will stop generating, decaying, and changing when the heavens stop moving. But that is precisely what is going to happen at the end of time, since time is also caused by the movement of the heavens.

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<sup>15</sup> See *QDP*, q. 5, a. 8, ad 3.

<sup>16</sup> *ScG* IV, c. 97 (*Opera Omnia* 15, ed. Leonina, 298-299): "Et quia tunc homines incorruptibiles erunt, a tota creatura corporea tolletur generationis et corruptionis status [. . .] Generatio autem et corruptio in inferioribus corporibus ex motu caeli causatur. Ad hoc igitur quod in inferioribus cesset generatio et corruptio, oportet etiam quod motus caeli cesset. Et propter hoc dicitur Apoc. 10-6, quod tempus amplius non erit."



We can observe further details of this account in the *De potentia*, when Aquinas discusses the question whether the elements will remain, and if so in what way, after the Day of Judgment. This question is analogous to the one considered in this paper, and it presents a similar problem. On the one hand, Aquinas intends to maintain that the elements, as essential parts of creation, remain after the Day of Judgment, not only in their substance but also in their powers; but on the other hand, he also intends to maintain that generation and corruption, which is usually explained in terms of these same elements, will cease. The way he solves this difficulty is predictable given the above considerations:

Therefore, just as the celestial body, since it has an extrinsic principle of active motion, can cease its motion while remaining [internally unchanged] without violence, as we indicated above, so similarly, the corruption of the elements can cease while [their] substances remain, when the exterior [principle] of corruption ceases. [For that principle of corruption] must be reduced to the motion of the heaven as the first principle of generation and corruption.<sup>17</sup>

Thus, since in the physical world the elements change because of the motion of heavenly bodies, when this motion ceases, the elements will become immutable even though they will still have the same substance and possess the same powers as they do now. It seems then, that since the glorified bodies will be composed of these same elements, their impassibility has been sufficiently explained. Since the elements will be immutable, anything composed of them must be incorruptible. In other words, if the heavens stop moving, everything in the sublunary world will stop changing, including glorified bodies, which is precisely what it means for these bodies to be impassible.

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<sup>17</sup> *QDP* q. 5, a. 7, resp.: “Sicut ergo quia corpus caeleste principium sui motus activum habet extra, potest esse quod eius motus cesset ipso manente, absque violentia, ut supra dictum est; ita potest esse ut corruptio elementorum cesset eorum substantiis manentibus, exteriori corruptivo cessante, quod oportet reducere in motum caeli sicut in primum generationis et corruptionis principium.”

Interestingly, however, while Aquinas thinks that this is a good starting point to explain the impassibility problem, he does not think it is a sufficient explanation. As he notes when discussing the issue in the *De 43 articulis*,

When they say that when the heavens stop moving the human body will be incorruptible by it, if they [think] 'by' indicates a *per se* cause, that it is false. [. . .] But if they mean a *per accidens* cause, then what they say is true in some manner; since if the universal cause of natural corruption is removed, corruption is removed.<sup>18</sup>

What Aquinas suggests here is that explaining impassibility by a purely extrinsic principle, or even more, a lack thereof, does not quite get to the core of the issue. It is one thing to say that the glorified bodies will *happen to be* unaffected, since the principal cause of their being acted on is removed; it is another thing to say that the glorified bodies will be impassible by their nature. Just as lack of shade is not a *per se* explanation of light, the lack of heavenly motion is not a *per se* explanation of the impassibility of the glorified bodies. We might add that the cessation of the motion of heavenly bodies also cannot explain the discrimination problem, that is, how the blessed will still be capable of sensing, for instance, the hotness of a fire.

Aquinas does give such a *per se* explanation in his *Sentences* commentary and in the *Summae*. This explanation relies on the second feature of Aquinas's theory of causation noted above — that is, it is the substantial form that endows a substance with its powers.

## **b. Dominant forms, perfect subjects**

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<sup>18</sup> *De 43 articulis*, a. 25, ad arg. (*Opera Omnia* 42, ed. Leonina, 331, ll. 336-339): "Cum ergo dicitur cessante motu caeli corpus hominis esse incorruptibile per naturam, si ly per dicit causam per se, falsum est [. . .] Si autem dicit causam per accidens, sic aliquo modo verum est quod dicitur; quia subtracta causa universalis corruptionis naturalis, subtrahitur corruptio."

In order to understand Aquinas's full explanation of the impassibility problem, we must consider what it is, precisely, that is responsible for the active and passive powers of substances. Most commentators are somewhat vague on this question, noting merely that since it is the substantial form that actualizes hylomorphic compounds, such as Socrates or Sophie the cat or a glass vase, with all their properties, it is also the substantial form that endows these hylomorphic compounds with their causal powers.<sup>19</sup> And this, indeed, seems quite plausible in some cases. Socrates has the active power of thinking or desiring because he has a human soul. Sophie the cat has the active power of purring or meowing because she has a soul proper to cats. And so on.

There are also some powers, however, that seem to be the result of the thing's essence, rather than merely of its substantial form. It is by his (immaterial) human soul that Socrates thinks, but he can also run or ride a bicycle, and that is because he is a human being, having a body specific to human beings. It is a material body, which has some powers *as material body* – to run, to ride a bike, or even to break a thin ice by its weight or to block the rays of the sun. Since these powers seem to stem from the kind of matter the things have rather than directly from their substantial form, it seems to be more plausible to say that powers are the result of the things' essences.<sup>20</sup>

However, in order to see that this is still unlikely to be the full picture, it will be helpful to distinguish two kinds of passions a thing can undergo (corresponding to two kinds of

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<sup>19</sup> For a general introductory discussion of Aquinas on causal powers, see Rota, "Causation," who merely notes that "corresponding to each specific nature is a distinctive set of causal powers." See also J. E. Brower, *Aquinas's Ontology of the Material World*. Neither of them discusses the current question in any detail. As is well known, glass vases are not, strictly speaking, substances for Aquinas and others discussed here. But for the sake of simplicity I will disregard the substance vs. artifact distinction in what follows.

<sup>20</sup> For Aquinas, substantial form informs prime matter, so in one sense *everything* stems from the substantial form, even the kind of matter the thing has. Still, Socrates is more than his immortal soul, even essentially, and this is the sense in which a thing's essence is more than its substantial form.

passive powers the thing has). Sophie the cat likes being warmed by the sun, and it is not repugnant to the nature of a glass vase to be seen through. In these cases, it seems indeed plausible to say that Sophie's and the vase's passive powers are the result of their respective essences. But consider the following cases. If Sophie the cat burns herself with fire (actualizing her passive power of being able to be burnt by the fire), she gets hurt, which is not conducive but instead repugnant to flourishing as a cat. If the glass vase gets dropped, it might get chipped (actualizing its passive power of being fragile), which results in it being a less impressive or functional vase.

Thus, it seems that a thing can have passive powers the actualization of which are repugnant to its nature or occasionally even lead to its destruction (for instance, if the vase shatters instead of merely getting chipped). Although Aquinas does not spell out this distinction explicitly, he does assume a distinction between actualizing and destructive forms, as do his successors, Durand of St.-Pourçain and Peter of Palude.<sup>21</sup>

Now the question is this: how can a thing's essence be responsible for passive powers the actualization of which instead of helping, in fact hinder the proper functions of this essence? And if it is not the thing's essence that is responsible for these passive powers, then what is? Aquinas, unfortunately, very rarely (if ever) discusses this issue explicitly, but since it will have a direct bearing on what he says about the impassibility problem, we can at least attempt a plausible reconstruction of his view.<sup>22</sup> According to this reconstruction,

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<sup>21</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Scriptum super IV libros Sententiarum (In Sent) IV*, d. 44, q. 3, a. 1, esp. qc. 1 and qc. 3, in the context of how and why the bodies of the damned suffer. See Durand of St.-Pourçain in the same place (Durand of St.-Pourçain, *Scriptum super IV libros Sententiarum: distinctiones 1-7 libri quarti*, ed. A. Speer (Leuven, 2014), 95-96).

<sup>22</sup> I am not making here the claim that what follows is indeed Aquinas's considered position on this issue. My claim is that *if* what he says about the impassibility of glorified bodies makes sense, and *if* what he says about the impassibility of glorified bodies is consistent with his other metaphysical views, then this is what he probably maintains.

Aquinas holds that the basic metaphysical components of matter and form (and the resulting essence) do not exhaustively explain a substance's behavior, but a third ingredient is needed, namely an account of how these basic metaphysical parts are related.

Traditionally, this relation has been called 'informing,'<sup>23</sup> and it has often been considered in merely functional terms: form *F* is said to inform matter *M* just in case the two result in a composite substance.<sup>24</sup> It seems, however, that there is an additional dimension of the relation between matter and form that is not captured by this minimalist understanding of informing. Aquinas seems to be committed to the view that forms can dominate the matter they inform to different degrees, and *how much* they dominate the matter has explanatory power — namely, it explains some of the composite entity's passive powers. As he says,

Every passion comes about when the agent overcomes the patient. [. . .] But it is impossible that something should dominate the patient, except to the extent that the domination of the patient's own form over its matter is weakened (speaking [here] about a passion concerned with matter, which we are now talking about). For matter cannot be subject to one contrary unless because the domination the other [contrary] is destroyed or at least diminished.<sup>25</sup>

Thus, according to Aquinas, when Sophie the cat gets too close to the fire, the active power of the fire can subject her matter to heat even though this impression (i.e., being burnt) is in some way destructive to her substantial form, felinity. The fire can turn the chunk of matter that makes up Sophie into ash (provided she does not walk away) only because her

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<sup>23</sup> Aquinas also uses the term 'inherence,' and so does Brower, *Aquinas's Ontology of the Material World*.

<sup>24</sup> This is what Brower, *Ontology of the Material World*, 8 calls a 'primitive type of dependency.' An interesting explicit treatment of the question can be found in Suarez's *Metaphysical Disputation XIII*, 9, in *Opera Omnia* 25, ed. C. Berton (Paris, 1866), 428-434.

<sup>25</sup> *In Sent.* IV, d. 44, q. 2, a. 1, qc. 1, c.: "Et ideo aliter dicendum, quod omnis passio fit per victoriam agentis super patiens.... Impossibile est autem quod aliquid dominetur supra patiens nisi in quantum debilitatur dominium formae propriae supra materiam patientis, loquendo de passione quae est circa materiam, de qua nunc loquimur. Non enim potest materia subjici uni contrariorum sine hoc quod tollatur dominium alterius super ipsam, vel saltem diminuatur." I am thankful to one of the reviewers for calling to my attention that Aquinas uses a similar strategy when describing the intellectual soul as (immortal) form in ST I, q. 75, a. 1, co.

substantial form, as it were, loses its grip on the same chunk of matter. And a substantial form can lose its grip on a chunk of matter only because the chunk of matter is not perfectly dominated by it.

Before we turn to how this is relevant to impassibility, it is worth summarizing what kind of powers we have so far encountered. First, a thing has both active and passive powers, but impassibility is relevant only to the latter, and therefore these powers have been the focus of the previous discussion. Among a thing's passive powers some are such that they actualize a thing's nature; some are such as to be destructive or harmful. While the former are conveyed on a thing by its properties and its substantial form, the latter are the result of the substantial form not perfectly dominating the matter.

Regarding impassibility, it is clear that the first kind of passive powers — resulting from the thing's essence — will not explain much for at least two reasons. First, arguably, the essences of things will remain the same after the Day of Judgment. And, indeed, after a somewhat lengthy discussion in the *De potentia*, Aquinas concludes that even the substantial forms of the elements remain the same: "And thus it seems that we must say that the elements will remain substantially the same, even in their natural qualities."<sup>26</sup> Moreover, since the essence of Peter is his humanity, if one supposed that Peter's glorified body will be impassible because he will not be a human being, that would seriously endanger Peter's numerical continuity.

Second, we should recall the discrimination problem pointed out at the beginning: the glorified bodies will not be *completely* impassible, since the blessed will still be able to have sensations. It is indeed only the passive powers the actualizations of which are destructive

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<sup>26</sup> *QDP*, q. 5, a. 7, resp.: "Et ideo videtur dicendum, quod elementa in sua substantia remanebunt, et etiam in suis qualitatibus naturalibus."

or harmful to a thing's nature that one needs to worry about when considering impassibility. As Peter of Palude notes later,

[The word] 'passion' refers in one way, more generally, to the reception of a form convenient to the nature of the thing; a second way, more strictly, [refers to] the loss of the naturally convenient form and the reception of a form inconvenient and contrary to its nature. And similarly, 'passibility' is also said in two ways [. . .] Speaking of the passion or passibility in the first way, the bodies of the saints after the resurrection are not impassible; first, because glorified bodies there will still be able to employ the senses [. . .] But if we are talking about the passion and passibility which is understood as the abandoning of the convenient form and the reception of the inconvenient form, they are impassible.<sup>27</sup>

As was shown above, Aquinas explains the ability to receive forms destructive to a thing's nature by the imperfect dominion of the thing's substantial form over its matter. According to Aquinas, this imperfect dominion of substantial form over matter will change after the Day of Judgment, and this, in turn, sufficiently and *per se* explains the impassibility of the resurrected body. As he summarizes his position in the *Summa contra gentiles*, "therefore, we should understand the incorruptibility of the future state this way: This body, which is now corruptible, will be rendered incorruptible by divine power, so that the soul in it will dominate it perfectly in as much as it animates it."<sup>28</sup> Thus, glorified bodies will be impassible because they will be perfectly subject to the souls of the blessed, "not only with

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<sup>27</sup> *In Sent.* IV, d. 44, q. 3, Madrid, Bib Naz. MS 127, fols. 267vb-268ra: "Passio autem accipitur uno modo large pro receptione forme quantumcunque convenientis nature rei; secundo modo magis stricte pro amissione forme convenientis secundum naturam et receptionem forme disconvenientis et contrarie secundum naturam. Et simili modo passibilitas dicitur dupliciter.... Loquendo ex passione vel passibilitate primo modo dicta, corpora sanctorum post resurrectionem non erunt impassibilia; primo, quia in corporibus glorificatis erit usus sensuum.... Si autem loquamur de passione et passibilitate que attenditur secundum abiectonem forme convenientis et receptionem disconvenientis, sic sunt impassibilia." See Durand of St.-Pourçain in the same place (ed. Speer, 95-96). Aquinas, although not so sharply, makes the same distinction in *ScG* IV, c. 86 (*Opera Omnia* 15, ed. Leonina, 272-273).

<sup>28</sup> *ScG* IV, c. 85 (*Opera Omnia* 15, ed. Leonina, 270-271): "Sic igitur intelligenda est incorruptibilitas futuri status, quia hoc corpus, quod nunc corruptibile est, incorruptibile divina virtute reddetur: ita quod anima in ipsum perfecte dominabitur, quantum ad hoc quod ipsum vivificet."

respect to their being, but also with respect to action, passion, movements, and bodily qualities.”<sup>29</sup>

Since the soul will be able to control all the actions and passions of the body, the body will have just as much passive power (of, for instance, being capable of being heated) as the soul will allow it to have. He summarizes his position once again in his *Sentences* commentary (which is also the text on which both Durand and Peter of Palude principally rely):

The human body, and whatever is in it, will be perfectly subjected to the rational soul, just as the soul will be perfectly subjected to God; and thus, in the glorified body there cannot be any change contrary to the disposition by which the soul perfects it; and therefore, those bodies will be impassible.<sup>30</sup>

Aquinas’s answer to the impassibility problem, then, both in his early *Sentences* commentary and in his later works, is that the *per se* cause of the impassibility of the resurrected bodies will be their complete subjection to the soul. This also enables him to answer the discrimination problem: although the blessed cannot be burnt by fire, they can still sense that fire is hot, since the soul can cancel the passive power of the body for the former while not for the latter.<sup>31</sup> Like many of Aquinas’s views, this explanation came under heavy attack from Aquinas’s later contemporaries.

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<sup>29</sup> *ScG* IV, c. 86 (*Opera Omnia* 15, ed. Leonina, 272-273): “Erit enim totaliter subiectum animae, divina virtute hoc faciente, non solum quantum ad esse, sed etiam quantum ad actiones et passiones, et motus, et corporeas qualitates.”

<sup>30</sup> *In Sent.* IV, d. 44, q. 2, a. 1, qc. 1, c.: “Corpus autem humanum, et quidquid in eo est, perfecte erit subiectum animae rationali, sicut etiam ipsa perfecte subiecta erit Deo; et ideo in corpore glorioso non poterit esse aliqua mutatio contra dispositionem illam qua perficitur ab anima; et ideo corpora illa erunt impassibilia.” A very similar account can be found in the supplement of the *Summa*, *ST* III, suppl., q. 82, a. 2, (*Opera Omnia* 12, ed. Leonina, 261) and in *QDP*, q. 5, a. 10.

<sup>31</sup> Aquinas thinks that this is true even granted that the motion of the heavens is, in some way, the cause of all secondary agents, as was discussed above. He deals with the possibility of sensation in particular in *QDP*, q. 5, a. 8, resp., and a. 10, ad 4.



## 2. Shields and retractions: Durand of St.-Pourçain and Peter of Palude

Durand of St.-Pourçain and Peter of Palude, both Dominicans active around the beginning of the fourteenth century, share many of Aquinas's assumptions about the impassibility problem. Like Aquinas, they both think that glorified bodies will be impassible after the Day of Judgment. They both agree with Aquinas that this kind of impassibility will not prevent the same bodies from having sensations. Moreover, like Aquinas, they both reject the claim that the elements only remain in substance but not in their active and passive powers in the glorified bodies.<sup>32</sup> Despite these shared assumptions, however, they both also think that Aquinas's solution is mistaken. (Although Peter often defends Aquinas against Durand's criticism, he does not do so in this case. And indeed this *quaestio* from his *Sentences* commentary is one in which he takes almost the whole text verbatim from Durand. I will return to their differences below.)

In particular, Durand and Peter think that Aquinas's solution is mistaken because impassibility cannot be explained by an internal principle, such as the dominion of the soul over the body,<sup>33</sup> but must instead be explained by reference to something external, namely divine assistance. However, as we will see below, they disagree about how this divine assistance should be conceived.

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<sup>32</sup> Durand rejects this because he thinks that this explanation assumes that the active and passive powers of bodies supervene on the active and passive powers of their constituting elements, which is, however, false. See *In Sent.* IV, d. 44, q. 4, in Durand of St.-Pourçain, *Scriptum super IV libros Sententiarum: distinctiones 43-50 libri quarti*, ed. T. Jeschke (Leuven, 2012), ll. 127-142.

<sup>33</sup> The same criticism of Aquinas seems to be also found in John Duns Scotus, *Ordinatio* IV, d. 49, p. 1, q. 3, in *B. Ioannis Duns Scoti Opera Omnia* 14, ed. *Commissio Scotistica* (Vatican City: Typis Vaticanis, 1950-), 331, n. 169.

### a. Shields

Durand presents two arguments against Aquinas's position. The first one takes off from the assumption that passion is a kind of motion, or more precisely, a kind of being moved, and hence is analogous to local motion. Passibility, then, can be considered analogous to the capacity for motion; in the case of the passibility relevant here, being able to be moved against one's own will.<sup>34</sup> Consequently, impassibility, the negation of passibility, would mean not being able to be moved against one's own will. Durand maintains that it would be absurd to say that impassibility, understood this way, is due to something inhering in the blessed. As he writes,

For if it were on account of some intrinsic power that the glorified bodies could not be moved by anything against their will, then necessarily there would be as much power in any of the blessed resisting as there was in another [blessed] pushing or compelling it. But this is not true, since on this account the least of the blessed would have as much power [to resist being] moved against his will, as any human being or angel [. . .], which is unacceptable.<sup>35</sup>

Durand's point seems to be the following. Imagine that the least of the blessed, Bob, cannot be moved against his own will, and this is due to something internal to him. Now also imagine that Bob and Michael the archangel are wrestling. Since both of them are impassible, that is, are unable to be moved against their own will, neither Bob nor Michael can win the wrestling game. This, however, according to Durand, is absurd, since it would

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<sup>34</sup> *In Sent.* IV, d. 44, q. 4, (ed. Jeschke, ll. 181-182): "Sicut statui beatorum repugnat passio contra naturam, sic motus localis contra uoluntatem; uterque enim horum importat uiolentiam et displicentiam in cognoscentibus; set quod corpora beata non possint moueri ab alio contra uoluntatem, non contingit eis per aliquam uirtutem inherentem."

<sup>35</sup> *ibid.*, ll. 188-197: "Si enim inesset corporibus beatis per aliquam uirtutem intrinsecam quod non possunt ab alio moueri contra uoluntatem, oporteret quod in quolibet beato esset tanta uirtus in resistendo quanta esset in quocumque alio in pellendo. Istud autem non est uerum, quia secundum hoc oporteret in minimo beato ad hoc quod non posset moueri contra uoluntatem, esse tantam uirtutem quanta est in quocumque homine uel angelo...[quod] est inconueniens."

mean that Bob, the weakest of the blessed, would be just as strong as Michael the archangel. Since the same reasoning can be applied not just to local motion but to impassibility in general, Durand concludes that it is absurd to maintain that impassibility is a result of something internal.<sup>36</sup>

Durand's first argument, then, turns on two things. First, it assumes that the reception of a form harmful to a thing's nature is a result of that thing's being subjected by the agent transmitting the form. Thus, wood is combustible because the fire's active power to burn is stronger than the wood's power to resist that burning. As we saw above, Aquinas seems to share this assumption, even explaining it in terms of the patient's form insufficiently dominating its matter; but he would likely resist Durand's further contention that every action and passion can be considered analogous to local motion.<sup>37</sup>

Second, Durand's argument assumes that however we account for the impassibility of glorified bodies, the same explanation must account for whether one of the blessed can or cannot be affected by another one. This is not an obvious assumption; someone could object that it is one thing to account for Bob's impassibility when faced with a burning fire, and it is quite another thing to account for his impassibility (or the lack thereof) when facing Michael the archangel.

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<sup>36</sup> One might note that Durand's argument is not particularly strong, since the question is about a passive capacity for suffering harm, which, one might think, all spiritual bodies share equally. But it seems that Durand's question would be the following: If Michael the archangel were to inflict some harm on Bob, the least of the blessed, could he do so? If not, his power seems to be diminished since even the least of the blessed could resist him. If yes, Bob's impassibility seems to be compromised.

<sup>37</sup> Although it is not entirely clear how far Durand would go with this analogy either. Robert Pasnau argues that it can be regarded as a defining feature of medieval scholasticism that for instance, *qualitative* change and local motion were different in kind (*Metaphysical themes, 1274-1671* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2011), chapter 19).

Durand's second argument for the same conclusion proceeds from two assumptions. First, Durand thinks that whatever accounts for impassibility must also account for incorruptibility; in fact, he treats this as obvious since corruption seems to be a kind of passion. Second, he also thinks that "a common effect requires a common cause,"<sup>38</sup> and hence whatever accounts for incorruptibility in the blessed must also account for incorruptibility in the damned. If one accepts these two assumptions, the argument is straightforward: since the incorruptibility of the damned is not caused by any inherent power, neither is the impassibility of the blessed. If the incorruptibility of the damned were caused by an inherent power, then this same inherent power would also prohibit their suffering, which is obviously not the case. As Durand concludes, the incorruptibility of the blessed is also not caused by anything inherent, and therefore the blessed must be impassible in virtue of some external principle.

Thus, Durand concludes that "the impassibility of glorified bodies will not be in virtue of some inherent form, but only the divine power assisting the blessed at will and preventing the action of anything external making them suffer."<sup>39</sup> Or, in other words,

It remains, therefore, that glorified bodies will not be unqualifiedly and absolutely impassible on account of lacking a passive principle, since the nature of glorified bodies in the future will be the same as before; but they will be impassible on account of something that presents an impediment lest it actually suffer [harm].<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Durand, *In Sent.* IV, d. 44, q. 4 (ed. Jeschke, l. 204).

<sup>39</sup> Durand, *In Sent.* IV, d. 44, q. 4 (ed. Jeschke, ll. 177-180): "Impassibilitas corporum gloriosum non erit per aliquam formam inherentem, sed solum per virtutem divinam assistentem beatis ad nutum et prohibentem actionem cuiuscumque extrinseci inferentis passionem."

<sup>40</sup> *ibid.*, ll. 156-160: "Restat ergo quod corpora gloriosa [glorioso *corr.*] non erunt impassibilia simpliciter et absolute per priuationes principii passiui, cum natura corporum gloriosorum fit futura eadem que prius; sed erunt impassibilia per aliquid presentans impedimentum actualis passionis ne fiat."

As Durand explains further, we might think of this as being similar to an obstacle, placed in a window that causes a shadow by blocking sunlight, or similar to how the earth placed between the sun and the moon causes an eclipse.<sup>41</sup>

According to Durand, this solves the impassibility problem: Glorified bodies will possess the same active and passive powers as they do now, but God will create some kind of a shield for them whenever they would otherwise undergo a passion harmful to their nature. Since God knows which passions are harmful and thus which actions to block, this account also solves the discrimination problem.

## **b. Retractions**

Peter of Palude agrees with much of what Durand says about the impassibility problem. In fact, in order to understand his position, it must be kept in mind that, as we mentioned earlier, he repeats almost verbatim Durand's arguments. He repeats Durand's two arguments against solving the impassibility problem by positing something internal to the blessed. He also employs Durand's positive explanation of impassibility. As Peter notes, "we should say that the impassibility of the glorified bodies [. . .] is only on account of divine power assisting the blessed."<sup>42</sup> Despite these shared views, however, Peter also thinks that he can, while Durand cannot explain impassibility.

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid., ll. 311–317: "...sicut obstaculum positum in fenestra causat tenebram impediendo illuminationem solis et eodem modo terra interposita inter solem et lunam causat eclipsim; similiter impassibilitas non potest alicui conuenire nisi per naturam ad quam sequitur priuatio principiorum quibus inest alicui passibilitas uel per naturam impediendam passionem, que ab alio posset inferri."

<sup>42</sup> Peter of Palude, *In Sent.* IV, d. 44, q. 4, fol. 248va: "Alius modus dicendum est quod impassibilitas corporum gloriosum [. . .] [est] solum per diuinam virtutem assistentem beatis."

Peter objects against Durand in a slightly different context — namely in his treatment of divine concurrence with secondary causes, which is a question on which Peter and Durand notably differ. Peter, like Aquinas and most of his contemporaries, maintains that God immediately concurs with created causes in every causal interaction; by contrast Durand famously maintains that no such concurrence is needed.<sup>43</sup> Having presented Durand's position on the question of concurrence, Peter considers a common test-case, Nebuchadnezzar's fire and the three young men who escaped burning in it:

In the furnace the young men [were put in] the fire was conserved in its being and in its active power, but it did not act, since God did not act with it; therefore, fire and heat do not suffice to cause heat, because when it is posited the effect does not [always] follow, and the same will be [the case] after the day of judgment. If someone says that fire is a sufficient cause if there is no impediment, I ask how it was impeded: either by acting or by a retracting an action. But not by an action, because there was nothing hindering the heat of fire. [. . .] Therefore, God impeded [the action of the fire] merely by retracting his action.<sup>44</sup>

This passage shows two things. First, Peter assumes that whatever explanation we can give of the three young men not burning in Nebuchadnezzar's fire, the same explanation can solve the impassibility problem. In both cases, Peter thinks the *explanandum* consists of a cause exercising its active power in seemingly favorable circumstances, in the absence of the relevant suffering.

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<sup>43</sup> For Durand's view, see his *Sent.* II, d. 1, q. 4, in Durand of St.-Pourçain, *Scriptum super IV libros Sententiarum: distinctiones 1-5 libri secundi*, ed. F. Retucci (Leuven, 2012). See also J. Stufler, "Bemerkungen zur Konkurslehre des Durandus von St. Pourçain," *Beiträge zur Geschichte der Philosophie und Theologie des Mittelalters* Suppl. 3.2 (1935), 1080-1090; and A. J. Freddoso, "God's General Concurrence with Secondary Causes: Why Conservation is not Enough," *Philosophical Perspectives* 5 (1991), 553-585.

<sup>44</sup> Peter of Palude, *In II Sent.*, d. 1, q. 4, in Z. V. Toth, "Peter of Palude on Divine Concurrence: An Edition of his *In II Sent.*, d.1, q.4," *Recherches de théologie et philosophie médiévales* 83, no. 1 (2016): 49-92: "Primo, quia in camino puerorum conseruabatur ignis in suo esse et in sua uirtute actiua, non tamen agebat quia Deus non coagebat; ergo ignis cum calore non est sufficiens causa calefaciendi, quia posita non sequitur effectus, *et idem erit post diem iudicii*. Si dicatur quod ignis est sufficiens causa nisi impediatur, quero quomodo impediatur: aut agendo, aut actionem subtrahendo. Non agendo, quia nec igni fuit aliquid impressum calorem reprimens [. . .] ergo Deus impediuit solum actionem subtrahendo" The same case can be found in as varied thinkers as Hervaeus Natalis, Ockham, or later Suárez.

Second, the passage also illuminates the difference between Peter's and Durand's explanation of both cases. As Peter says, if one accepts — as both he and Durand do — that the impassibility of the three young men or the glorified bodies is due to some extrinsic principle, namely God, there are two ways to conceive of this. On Durand's account there is a positive impediment, and as we saw above, according to this model, God creates some kind of a shield between agent and patient, so that the impediment occurs, in Peter's words, "by the addition of an action." This is similar to the way in which a screen might prevent the sunlight from reaching an otherwise suitably positioned object. Peter's own view, however, is that the extrinsic principle, God, acts not by adding something but by withholding or retracting his action.

To understand this, we need to recall Peter's view of God's concurrence with created agents. As we mentioned, Peter maintains that God immediately acts with every created cause. And without this divine coaction or concurrence no created cause would be able to perform its operation.<sup>45</sup> Consequently, Peter thinks that this is enough to explain both Nebuchadnezzar's fire and the impassibility problem: If one thinks that every secondary cause needs some divine action if it is to operate, then once this concurring divine action is withdrawn, no secondary agent can efficaciously exercise its active power even though it has this power and the patient is suitably positioned. In other words, according to Peter's view, when a normal fire produces heat in a pot of water, the fire alone is not a sufficient cause of this production. The heat is produced not just by the fire but also by the immediate action of God. Whenever God withdraws his concurring activity, heat is not produced. This

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<sup>45</sup> Medieval thinkers fleshed out what this concurrence precisely amounts to in different ways. These differences need not concern us here.

is precisely what happened, according to Peter, in Nebuchadnezzar's fire, and what will happen after the day of judgment.<sup>46</sup>

Peter's explanation then differs from Durand's, since the latter does not have Peter's tool at hand; Durand cannot explain what fails to happen as the absence of God's concurring action, since he does not think that such concurring action is needed in the first place. Peter's explanation also differs from Aquinas's, although it is worth recalling that Aquinas did consider the absence of the primary cause (in his case, the lack of the movement of the heavens) as a possible explanation, and rejected it as an ultimate explanation on the ground that it only provides an accidental and not a *per se* cause of impassibility. Peter, at least in these texts, does not address this concern. Peter could have replied that impassibility is a privation, not receiving harmful forms, and hence admits of no *per se* explanation. Or he could also have maintained that the absence of divine action as a result of withdrawn concurrence is indeed a *per se* cause of impassibility.

### **3. Conclusion: Some implications**

One of the more interesting questions in the causal powers literature is the cluster related to how these powers pertain to the agents that exercise them and how they relate to their manifestations and the effect they produce. If fire characteristically acts by realizing its heating power, is it metaphysically possible for the same fire *not* to have the same heating power? Or is it possible that the same heating power produces a different effect or none at

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<sup>46</sup> This, again, was the "standard" explanation at least of Nebuchadnezzar's fire — the same can be found in Hervaeus Natalis, Ockham, and many others.



all? I conclude here by pointing out some implications of the views we have considered regarding these questions.

First, as we saw, Aquinas thinks that the impassibility of glorified bodies will be due to their being completely subject to the soul, which soul will be able to control the bodies' acting and being acted on. It seems then that for Aquinas numerically the same individual can have different active and passive powers, or at least different degrees of the same active and passive powers. Now, for example, I have the passive power to be badly burnt by a piece of hot iron; after the day of judgment I will not have this passive power. Active and passive powers do not follow with metaphysical necessity from the thing's nature; they follow from the thing's substantial form *and* from the relationship this form has to the thing's matter. This allows Aquinas to maintain that whenever the relevant active and passive powers are present, and the circumstances are favorable, the agent will operate and this action will affect the patient. Whenever one of the active or passive powers is missing, the effect will not come about.

It is also worth noting that interestingly, Aquinas is the only one in this particular discussion for whom passive powers play an important explanatory role. It is the passive power of the patient — or more precisely the lack thereof, due to the body being perfectly subjected to the soul after the resurrection — that explains impassibility. Thus, it must also be the passive power of the patient (alongside the active power of the agent) that explains the patient's passibility in normal circumstances, or in other words, passive power explains why an effect comes about. The explanatory role of passive powers seems to be greatly reduced if not altogether missing in Durand's and Peter's account.

Second, Durand seems to think that a thing and its active and passive powers are necessarily linked to their natures (at least if we regard powers as first actualities pertaining to a thing's essence). He holds that the nature, and hence the active and passive powers of the glorified bodies will be the very same as of the powers of bodies in this life, which seems to indicate that for Durand, it is *not* possible for the same individual to gain or lose active and passive powers. Fire, just because it is fire, necessarily has the ability to heat; and a human animal, just because s/he is human, necessarily has the ability to be burnt, both in this life and in the next apart from God's impeding action.

For Durand, as for Aquinas, active powers necessarily manifest themselves in the right circumstances. Indeed, Durand goes so far as to say that an active power alone is sufficient for bringing about its effect in the right circumstances, and, as we saw, he takes this sufficiency quite literally. The connection between a power and its manifestation is indeed so strong that even God can only obstruct the latter by a positive action. This might lead to a worry, as perhaps attested by Peter's criticism, that Durand's account seemingly violates some principle of divine omnipotence; but this is an issue that I cannot pursue here.

It should also be noted that Durand seems to be working with a different, more robust notion of action than what Aquinas seems to assume. For Aquinas, action and passion differ only *secundum rationem*; as he often notes, the action is in the patient.<sup>47</sup> For Durand, as we saw, this is not the case. His analogy with the object shielding the sunshine suggests that patients can be shielded from an action: that the agent can perform numerically the same action whether or not that action affects the patient. This might indeed sound plausible to

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<sup>47</sup> Most notably, *Commentaria in octo libros Physicorum Aristotelis* III, lec. 5 (*Opera Omnia* 2, ed. Leonina, 112-116). The issue is more complicated, however, than this passing remark might suggest; for a thorough analysis, see G. Frost, "Aquinas' Ontology of Transeunt Causal Activity," *Vivarium* 56 (2018), 47-82.

our modern ears, but we should note that it was not Aquinas's position; for Aquinas, a fire cannot have numerically the same action when it successfully brings about an effect in Bob, and when it fails to achieve this effect because it encounters a shield. The actions in the two cases cannot be numerically identical since the passions are not numerically the same; in one case, the passion is in Bob, in the other case it is in the shield, and numerically the same accidents cannot inhere in two different subjects.

Finally, Peter agrees with Durand that a thing cannot change its active and passive powers, even though he also thinks that an active power is not entirely sufficient for its effect even in the right circumstances. A thing can perform its operation only if God cooperates with it; thus, whenever God retracts this cooperating activity, the thing's operation ceases even though its active power remains the same. Thus, while for Durand the power and its manifestation are necessarily linked, for Peter they are only conditionally so, provided God's general concurring action. Notably, Peter is the only one in this debate who makes explanatory use of divine concurrence.

All in all, as the above shows, the impassibility problem is a somewhat puzzling test case for medieval thinkers. They have to work out an account that is broadly speaking Aristotelian and explains causation in terms of causal powers and their manifestations, which in normal circumstances are necessarily linked. However, they must also account for the break in this link in the specific but nevertheless metaphysically possible scenario when causal powers, or at least some of them, do not bring about their expected effects. And, as I hope I have shown, we can learn a great deal about what medieval thinkers thought about the causal structure of the present world by looking at the causal structure of the world to come.