

Cybernation, Responsibility and Providential Design

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To know anything at all about divine providence, Augustine and Thomas Aquinas both insisted, we must first understand human providence. Human governance is the clue to understanding divine governance.¹ This is also the tradition of the Greek Fathers, whose concept of divine government, moving creatures toward the realization of cosmic order and redemption, was called *dioikēsis* and *oikonomia*, words used more broadly for the government of a republic and more narrowly for the administration of a household. The crucial issue is thus not the abstract question of whether or not God is provident, but the very concrete question of what it means to say that God is provident. What might we expect a provident God to be doing in the human sphere, and how might we go about knowing what God does?

The answer is inseparable from a study of human history and an analysis of the dynamics of human freedom, responsibility, and choice. It is also inseparable from what modern science has discovered about the energies inherent in matter and the structures inherent in life, all those complex phenomena traditionally grouped together in former times under the theological rubric of "creation." Hence, to discover what God's providence is seeking to achieve for the human species, we must first ask what that species is seeking to achieve for itself, for it is in and through what the species is doing that divine providence works to accomplish its purpose and plan.

This classic interrelationship between God's providential design and human prudential decision has been severely strained in our modern age. The Judeo-Christian concept of human persons continually being drawn into coactivity with God has ceased to capture our imaginations, because human freedom has come to be equated with autonomy. Autonomy and self-sufficiency tend to be revered as absolutes. We moderns desperately want to eliminate the element of surprise in our lives, to receive no gifts, and to determine everything for ourselves. As we shall see, however, the malaise of contemporary culture is due in no small part to the general awareness that as a species we can no longer