

Theological Determinism and the Relationship with God

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Penultimate Draft

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I. Introduction

Whether one is a theological determinist or a libertarian about free will stands to make a difference in how one conceives of one's relationship with God. According to libertarianism, we human agents have the capacity to freely will actions, and an action's being freely willed requires that it not be causally determined by factors beyond the agent's control. Theological determinism is the view that God is the sufficient active cause of everything in the created world, either directly or by secondary causes such as human agents. Libertarianism is currently well represented among monotheists, and it has always been widely held among Christians in particular, although not always with the majority status it enjoys today among conservative to moderate Christians. Theological determinism appears to have been in a steady decline since the eighteenth century, at least among Christians. Why this change? An intriguing hypothesis is that it matches an alteration in how people conceive of their relationship with God. The eighteenth and nineteenth centuries featured a trend toward viewing one's relationship with God as an intimate personal relationship, on analogy with the interpersonal human paradigm. Arguably, this model requires conceiving of the participants as freely responding to each other. This replaces viewing one's relationship with God on analogy with a

relationship with an authority, such as a king or a lord, which is compatible with theological determination and a delimited variety of free will.

The issue isn't this simple, as I argue here. I assume, with Robert Adams (1980), that a good relationship with God involves both parties wanting the best for the other—benevolence—and also each valuing the relationship for its own sake. In these two respects, a good relationship with God is similar to a good relationship with another human being. What I aim to show is that, given a belief that some are eternally damned and perhaps a belief in divine retributive justice more generally, a good relationship with God requires a belief in libertarian free will. But given a denial of divine retributive justice and the conviction of universal salvation, both libertarianism and theological determinism accommodate a good relationship with God.

As significant numbers of theists see it, the truth of libertarianism is necessary for two features of the religious views theists profess (Speak 2004; Timpe 2014), and each is relevant to how one conceives of one's relationship with God. First, the notion of moral responsibility in the basic desert sense applies to us. For an agent to be morally responsible for an action in this sense is for it to be hers in such a way that she would deserve to be blamed if she understood that it was morally wrong, and she would deserve to be praised if she understood that it was morally exemplary. The desert at issue here is basic in the sense that the agent would deserve to be blamed or praised just because she has performed the action, given an understanding of its moral status, and not, for example, merely by virtue of consequentialist or contractualist considerations (Pereboom 2001, 2014). The basic

desert notion isn't the only sense of moral responsibility at play in our practice, and this will become important in what follows. But it is a sense clearly invoked by the major monotheisms—in particular, in their retributive conceptions of ultimate punishment and reward.

It is difficult to see how the doctrine of eternal damnation in hell, for example, can be justified without invoking this sense of moral responsibility. There are conceptions of punishment after death that are forward looking and do not invoke basic desert, but such views would need to allow for the possibility of release from hell if the forward-looking goals, such as moral reform, are achieved. The common view of hell does not countenance such a possibility, and this view would thus appear to require basic desert in its moral justification. For example, many Christians today maintain that causal determination—in particular, causal determination by God—is incompatible with our being morally responsible in this sense, and that therefore the truth of libertarianism is required by the doctrine of eternal damnation (Timpe 2014, chap. 5). On this conception, if theological determinism were true, the supposition that we are morally responsible in the sense that damnation requires would be undercut. Damnation would thus be massively unfair. The compatibilist alternative—that theological determinism and basic desert are compatible—was at one time more widely held, but this gives rise to a way in which one's relationship with God is compromised, as we will explore in the next section.

A second important motivation for accepting libertarianism is that it yields a promising response to the problem of evil. This response begins with the proposal

that God is justified in creating beings that are free in a way that requires they not be causally determined by factors beyond their control to act as they do. If a being is free in this sense in a decision to perform an action, then, holding fixed the entire history of the universe up to the time of the decision, it is causally possible that she makes this decision and causally possible that she refrains from making it. Because such freedom is valuable, God is justified in creating beings with this kind of free will. But creating beings with this power risks introducing moral evil into the world. However, the value of the existence of such free creatures outweighs the risk of their choosing immorally, and it might be proposed that this value even outweighs the disvalue of all the bad actions they actually freely perform together with their consequences.

Believing this account is apt to have a profound impact on one's relationship with God. A good relationship with God requires that we're confident that God wills what is good for us, and unprevented evil threatens this confidence on the supposition of divine omnipotence. To have available a promising response to the problem of evil is of great value in this respect. Given that theological determinism precludes the free will response, this position requires a similarly promising alternative for it to match the way in which libertarianism supports a good relationship with God.

A motivation for endorsing theological determinism is that it provides an uncontested way to secure a strong notion of divine providence—one according to which everything that happens, including human decision, is exactly in accord with God's providential will. Belief in providence is highly significant for one's

relationship with God, for it allows us to believe that, due to God's care for us, all harm is redeemed for the good, and thus we trust God thoroughly in the face of evils that befall us. If we believed that harms occurred that were not in accord with God's providential will, then we could not believe that all harm is redeemed in this way, and we could not trust that God has made it so. It would be attractive to retain this notion of divine providence while at the same time accepting a conception of human beings as having free will as specified by the libertarian, and this is what Molinism aims to secure. But Molinism is very controversial. Consequently, those who value an uncontroversial way to secure a strong notion of divine providence have a reason to take theological determinism seriously (Pereboom 2005, 2012, 2016). In the next three sections I examine each of these motivations in greater detail.

II. Divine Punishment

Let us first consider the proposal that theological determinism coupled with the claim that we basically deserve divine punishment for sin undermines a good relationship with God. In Christianity, the compatibility of theological determination and divine punishment immediately suggests Calvinism—in the American context, the Calvinism of the New England Puritans. One of the core ideas in historic Calvinism is the sovereignty of God in the process of salvation. Accordingly, Calvinists have historically been predestinarians about salvation, contending that salvation is not conditional on any response, such as faith or belief, on the part of the saved. Instead, God's election of the saved is unconditional, and responses such as faith are a consequence and not an occasion for divine grace. This account gives rise to a specific anxiety about the nature of God. If election to salvation is not

conditional on a human response, and God is loving and good, why does God not predestine every human being to salvation? Some Calvinists, such as Friedrich Schleiermacher (1830–31/1928), endorse such a universalism, but only a small minority of Calvinists have endorsed this option. But the doctrine that God either passes certain people over in the process of election, whereupon God damns them for eternity, or that God actually positively predestines people to damnation gives rise to what Paul Tillich (1950/1973) calls the sense of the demonic in the divine. We can provisionally characterize the demonic as a disposition to evil treatment of conscious beings. A conception of the divine as demonic is bound to have a profound effect on the nature of one's relationship with God. It stands to preclude a good relationship with God, even if conceiving of God in this way is attractive to some by, for example, expressing an especially uncompromising attitude toward wrongdoers or by providing a sense that one's own demonic behavior is justified on account of God's behaving similarly.

Calvinists nonetheless affirm that God is just and good in damning the reprobate. One objection to this is that God plays favorites in saving some and damning others independently of any response on their part, and doing so is unfair and compromises divine goodness. Another stems from the theological determinism that some, but not all, Calvinists endorse. We've seen that a motivation for endorsing theological determinism is that it yields an uncontested way to secure a strong notion of divine providence. But if theological determinism is true, God would causally determine our sinful actions, and this would raise a challenge to the justice of eternal damnation. The division of renown in Calvinism between

infralapsarianism and the supralapsarianism yields two responses to these concerns (Berkhof 1932). The first attempts to eliminate the threat of the demonic in the divine, while the other arguably embraces it. The salient difference is in the logical or explanatory order of the divine decrees. For infralapsarians, the decree to save some humans and consign others to damnation is logically or explanatorily subsequent to the decree to permit the Fall. On this view, it's open that humans sin of their own free will, and God's election of some of the sinful to manifest divine mercy and damn others to manifest divine retributive justice is explained as a response to the fall into sin. On the supralapsarian view, by contrast, the order of these decrees is reversed. The first degree in the logical and explanatory order is to manifest divine mercy through salvation of sinners and divine retributive justice through their damnation. The subsequent decrees are explained as setting up the occasions for this divine self-manifestation: creating morally responsible beings, permitting or causing them to sin, electing some to salvation, and damning others.

The core objection to the supralapsarian position concerns the proposal that damnation of the reprobate is orchestrated by God to secure self-revelation. This occasions the Kantian concern that God is treating the damned merely as a means; in fact, damnation would then constitute the worst possible treatment merely as a means imaginable for a person, and this therefore gives rise to the threat of a maximally demonic God. The danger for supralapsarianism is enhanced when the theological determinism that most supralapsarians affirm is brought to the fore, as it is by Nathaniel Emmons, New England Calvinist minister and seminary professor, in his sermon on the reprobation of Pharaoh:

It is often thought and said that nothing more was necessary on God's part, in order to fit Pharaoh for destruction, than barely to leave him to himself. But God knew that no external means and motives would be sufficient of themselves to form his moral character. He was determined, therefore, to operate on his heart itself, and cause him to put forth certain evil exercises in the view of certain external motives. When Moses called upon him to let the people go, God stood by him and moved him to refuse. When Moses interceded for him and procured him respite, God stood by him and moved him to exult in his obstinacy. When the people departed from his kingdom, God stood by him and moved him to pursue after them with increased malice and revenge. And what God did on such particular occasions, he did at all times. He continually hardened his heart, and governed all the exercises of his mind, from the day of his birth to the day of his death. This was absolutely necessary to prepare him for his final state. All other methods, without this, would have failed of fitting him for his destruction. . . . Pharaoh was a reprobate. God determined him from eternity to make him finally miserable. This determination he eventually carried into effect. He brought him into being, formed him a rational and accountable creature, tried him with mercies and judgments, hardened his heart under both, caused him to fill up the measure of his iniquity, and finally cut him off by an act of justice. (Emmons 1860, 2:327, 330/1987, 2:391-92, 395)

On Emmons account, God causally determines Pharaoh at various moments in his life history in order to realize the self-revelatory plan. Crucially, Emmons maintains that Pharaoh is morally responsible, and that God justly damns him to hell for his actions. How could Pharaoh have been morally responsible, one might wonder, when God determines his actions in the way Emmons describes? Emmons replies: “but it appears from the whole history of his life that he acted as freely and voluntarily as any other man in the world” (1860, 2:332/1987, 2:397). Here, the demonic in the divine has one of its strongest expressions.

Tellingly, Calvinists themselves often recoil from this vision of God. Horace Mann, the great American instigator of educational reform, was raised in the Congregational Church in Franklin, Massachusetts, when Emmons was minister there (Ritchie 2000). On Mann’s account, Emmons “expounded all the doctrines of total depravity, election, and reprobation, and not only the eternity but the extremity of hell torments, unflinchingly and in their most terrible significance, while he rarely if ever descanted on the joys of heaven, and never, in my recollection upon the essential and necessary happiness of a virtuous life.” Mann did not contest this view until, when he was fourteen, his older brother Stephen drowned. Emmons used the occasion of Stephen’s funeral to preach of the hell that awaited those who died in an unconverted state. Hearing his mother’s agonized reaction, Mann abandoned his belief in a God with such a demonic aspect, became a Unitarian Universalist, and for the rest of his life affirmed the kindness and ethical integrity of God.

There are various ways in which a view like Emmons’s threatens to undermine a good relationship with God. The professed conception of a loving and

providential God is replaced by a vortex of arbitrary viciousness motivated by an incredible tale of self-revelation. The resulting image might answer to a conception of authority and power that may reflect perverse human fantasies, but it is apt to replace trust and love with sheer terror—in particular, if the view is coupled with lack of knowledge of one's own status as elect or reprobate. Or else, it may reflect aspirations for one's own power and authorist that reflect this conception of the divine, as it may well have in Emmons case, whereupon one's relationship with the divine would feature mutually reinforcing pathology and ideal.

The solution, on the supposition of retaining divine retributive punishment, would be to affirm libertarian free will. Infralapsarians are open to deleting from this picture a causal determination to sin, instead allowing sin to arise from libertarian free will. The decree to save some out of mercy is an act of divine grace. The reprobate have no legitimate complaint, since their punishment is just. Why does God not elect all humans to salvation? One response is that we do not know why. Another parallels the supralapsarian answer: manifesting both mercy and retributive justice advances divine self-revelation. But the thought that some of us might be passed over for either an unknown reason or to facilitate divine self-revelation also threatens to undermine a good relationship with God, since such a disposition would seem inconsistent with the idea that God genuinely loves all of us. There are some that God could effortlessly save but doesn't. And here again, fear and a sense of arbitrary unfairness threatens to compete with love and trust.

The libertarian position of Molina and Arminius aims to solve this problem. We freely sin, and saving grace is conditional on our response. Our response is free,

yet assisted by divine grace. God's choice as to who is damned is not arbitrary, but it is decided by that free response. This proposal is supported by the intuition that the response—faith, gratitude, and love—are themselves genuinely valuable only if they are freely willed. Consider the following excerpt from John Milton's *Paradise Lost*.

God is speaking, and this Arminian theme is forcefully represented:

So will fall

He and his faithless Progeny: whose fault?

Whose but his own? ingrate, he had of me

All he could have; I made him just and right,

Sufficient to have stood, though free to fall . . .

Not free, what proof could they have given sincere

Of true allegiance, constant Faith or Love,

Where only what they needs must do, appeared,

Not what they would? what praise could they receive?

What pleasure I from such obedience paid,

When Will and Reason (Reason also is choice)

Useless and vain, of freedom both despoiled,

Made passive both, had served necessity,

Not me. They therefore as to right belonged,

So were created, nor can justly accuse

Their maker, or their making, or their Fate;

As if Predestination over-ruled

Their will, disposed by absolute Decree

Or high foreknowledge; they themselves decreed
Their own revolt, not I: if I foreknew,
Foreknowledge had no influence on their fault,
Which had no less proved certain unforeknown.
So without least impulse or shadow of Fate,
Or aught by me immutably foreseen,
They trespass, Authors to themselves in all
Both what they judge and what they choose; for so
I formed them free, and free they must remain,
Till they enthrall themselves. (Milton 1667/2005, Book III, 95–125)

On Milton's conception, human beings have the opportunity to freely respond to God, and these free responses are incompatible with theological determination. If divine grace were to causally determine our responses of gratitude and love, they would have little value; "Of true allegiance, constant Faith or Love / Where only what they needs must do, appeared / Not what they would? what praise could they receive? / What pleasure I from such obedience paid / When Will and Reason (Reason also is choice) / Useless and vain, of freedom both despoiled / Made passive both, had served necessity / Not me." On the supposition that some are damned to hell on account of their sins, I agree that on the measure of securing a good relationship with God, it fares best, by far. On the issue of salvation and damnation, every version of theological determination for salvation and reprobation compromises our trust in God and threatens to introduce the demonic into the divine. On Milton's conception, one might be concerned that God could have done

more to rescue some, and that he gave some an unfair endowment. These difficulties, although potentially substantial, do not seem nearly as severe as those that result from theological determination.

In my own view, the theological determinist cannot accept, for moral reasons, the doctrine of eternal damnation and, more generally, punishment justified on the ground of basic desert (Pereboom 2001, chap. 4; 2014, chap. 4). The viable alternative for the theological determinist is Schleiermacher's position—theological determination paired with the doctrine of universal salvation (Schleiermacher 1831--32/1928).⁷ The most reasonable reading of the texts of the Christian scriptures might well be on the side of universalism.¹ The libertarian can also affirm universal salvation, and this will assuage the concerns that God could have done more to rescue some and that he gave some an unfair endowment. In any event, my

¹ Here are a number of passages in the Christian New Testament that count in favor of universal salvation:

1. Rom. 5:18. "Therefore just as one man's trespass led to condemnation for all, so one man's act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all."
2. Rom. 11:32. "For God has imprisoned all in disobedience so that he may be merciful to all."
3. 1 Cor. 15:22. "For as all die in Adam, so all will be made alive in Christ."
4. Col. 1:19–20. "For in him [Christ] all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, by making peace through the blood of his cross."

See also Keith DeRose 1999.

sense is that for those who accept eternal damnation, a good relationship with God requires affirmation of libertarian free will. For those who accept universal salvation, so far we've encountered no difference relevant to this relationship.

III. The Problem of Evil

A good relationship with God requires that we are confident that God wills what is good for us, and evil threatens this confidence on the supposition of divine omnipotence. The reason for this is that such a relationship involves trust, and if we were to suspect that God fails to prevent or even causes evils that befall us without a justifying reason, trust in God would be imperiled. Most philosophers who in recent times have written about the problem of evil from a theistic perspective have agreed that we lack sufficient insight to be justified in believing a genuine theodicy, which can be understood as an account that shows how the existence of God given the evils of this world is more likely than not. In accord with this assessment, many prefer siding with skeptical theism, proposed in recent times by Stephen Wykstra and William Alston, among others.² The skeptical theist contends that because of the limitations of our cognitive capacities, the nature of the good might well be beyond our comprehension to such a degree that it wouldn't be reasonable for us to expect to understand how God's governance of the world accords with perfect goodness. As I've argued elsewhere (Pereboom 2005, 2015), skeptical theism nonetheless benefits from and perhaps even requires positive hypotheses as to why God might permit evil—accounts that don't amount to theodicies but yet can't be ruled out as

² See, for example, Stephen J. Wykstra 1984, 1996; also William Alston 1991. These skeptical theist accounts were occasioned by William Rowe 1979.

implausible. When evils befall us and there is available some such hypothesis for us to entertain, trust in God can thereby be sustained.

Some hypotheses of this sort are ruled out by theological determinism while others are not. If the best hypotheses for encouraging trust are incompatible with theological determinism, this would count against this position's facilitating a good relationship with God. The free will theodicy is perhaps the most widely accepted explanation for how a good and omnipotent God can coexist with evil. On the most common contemporary version of the free will theodicy, God had the option of creating or refraining from creating what Alvin Plantinga calls *significantly free* beings (1974, 165–67).³ On Plantinga's account, a being is *free* with respect to a decision to perform an action if, holding fixed the entire history of the universe up to the time of the decision, it is causally possible both that she make or else refrain from making this decision. Here, Plantinga is assuming free will as characterized by the libertarian, on which causal determination rules out free will. (On a notion of free will compatible with causal determination, God could causally determine all free actions to be good, and thus the compatibilist notion wouldn't yield a theodicy or a cognate hypothesis.) An action is *morally significant* for a person at a time if it would be morally wrong for her to perform the action then and morally right to refrain, or vice versa. An agent is *significantly free* at a time if she is free with respect to an action that is morally significant for her. A risk incurred by creating such

³ Note that Plantinga does not advocate a free will theodicy but, rather, provides a less ambitious free will defense, designed only to show that the existence of God is logically compatible with the existence of some evil.

beings is that they might freely choose evil and the choice be unpreventable by God. However, benefits include creatures having moral responsibility for their actions and being creators in their own right. Because the benefits outweigh the risks, God is morally justified in creating such significantly free beings, and God is not to blame when they make immoral decisions.

How does the free will account address potential problems for one's relationship with God, given our experience of evil in the world? Does it facilitate trust in God in the face of evil? One problem with the free will account is that many of the more horrible evils would not seem to be freely willed decisions or to result from them. When people are harmed due to earthquakes, volcanic eruptions, and diseases, their suffering is not credibly a consequence of evil free choices, and thus such evils would not appear to be addressed by the free will hypothesis. Evils of this kind are usually classified as natural by contrast with moral evils. Sometimes evil decisions result from mental illnesses and are not free decisions as a result, and the free will account would not seem to speak to these, either. Thus, it appears that the free will account can only be partial, and that it would need to be supplemented by other considerations—and most of its advocates agree. The free will account alone does not provide reassurance as to how we might trust God in the face of natural evil.

But an aspiration engendered by the free will theodicy is that it can facilitate trust in God in the face of evil perpetrated by morally responsible human beings. For example, when sane people cheat the elderly out of their life savings, or advance the slave trade for economic gain, or commit genocide for the sake of racial uniformity,

the hope is that we can trust God despite not preventing these evils. Against this, we ask God to deliver us from evil, and by this we mean to include evil due to free will. In accord with such a concern, an objection raised by J. L. Mackie and developed in detail by David Lewis is that even if we have free will of the libertarian sort, and our having this kind of free will is highly valuable, God could nevertheless have prevented the evil consequences of those decisions (Mackie 1955; Lewis 1993). So, one possibility is that after the Nazis freely decided to commit genocide, God might have miraculously caused the means they devised—for example, the rail transport or the gas chambers—to fail. Or, God might justifiably arrange for such people to be incapacitated before acting on their evil decisions. God might have prevented Nazi genocide by having key leaders be disabled by illnesses before being able to act on their decisions, or by arranging circumstances differently so that would-be assassins succeeded rather than failed.

If the free will account is to answer this type of objection, it must be not only that the capacity for freely willed decisions and free decisions themselves have great intrinsic value, but also that such free decisions being successfully carried out in action are highly intrinsically valuable. Richard Swinburne (1999) sets out a free will account of evil that develops this idea in detail. He contends that two features of free action in addition to the decision have high intrinsic value: the freely willed decision's accomplishing what the agent intended—that is, *efficacious* free will—and the freely willed decision's adjudicating between good and evil alternatives each of which motivate the agent, or *serious* free will. Swinburne argues that serious and efficacious free will indeed have value high enough to justify God in sometimes not

preventing the very bad consequences of immoral decisions. For “the very fact of the agent having a free choice is a great good for the agent; and a greater good the more serious the kind of free will, even if it is incorrectly used” (1999, 87). Furthermore, an agent “is an ultimate source in an even fuller way if the choices open to him cover the whole moral range, from the very good to the very wrong” (85). Moreover, “an agent who has serious efficacious free will is in a much fuller way an ultimate source of the direction of things in the world” than one who does not.

In developing this account, Swinburne proposes:

It is a good for us if our experiences are not wasted but are used for the good of others, if they are the means of a benefit which would not have come to others without them, which will at least in part compensate for those experiences. It follows from this insight that it is a blessing for a person if the possibility of his suffering makes possible the good for others of having the free choice of hurting or harming them . . . and of choosing to show or not show sympathy. (103)

He then illustrates this proposal by reference to the slave trade from Africa:

But God allowing this to occur made possible innumerable opportunities for very large numbers of people to contribute or not to contribute to the development of this culture; for slavers to choose to enslave or not; for plantation-owners to choose to buy slaves or not and to treat them well or ill; for ordinary white people and politicians to campaign for its abolition or not to bother, and to campaign for compensation for the victims or not to bother; and so on. (245)

An objection to this proposal is that it conflicts with central features of our moral practice when horrendous evil threatens (cf. Pereboom 2004, 2016). First, as Lewis argues, for us the wrongdoer's freedom is a weightless consideration, and not just a consideration that is outweighed; that is, when one is deliberating about whether to prevent or allow evil, a wrongdoer's free will has no value that we take into consideration (1993, 155). If the residents of a village choose to resist soldiers who threaten them with torture and death, we would not expect these villagers to consider any value that might be attached to the soldiers' freely willed actions successfully executed. But this sort of value would need to be very high if this kind of consideration were sufficient to justify God's allowing rather than preventing great evils such as slave trade or genocide. Moreover, if Swinburne were right, then when 200 soldiers freely choose to commit mass murder, twice as much value of this sort is at stake as when there are just 100 soldiers involved. In addition, there would then be much less reason to harm in self-defense an attacker who has free will than someone who is mentally ill and not capable of free choice.⁴ In view of these considerations, the free will account will not be especially effective in securing trust in God in the face of the evils that befall us.

Both the libertarian and the theological determinist can instead invoke the value of developmental process (Pereboom 2016). For many participants in the discussion, such value is at least part of the story (Swinburne 1999, for example, agrees), but in recent times John Hick (1978) has most prominently foregrounded this consideration. According to Hick's soul-building account, evil is required for the

⁴ Thanks to Mark Moyer for this point.

best kinds of human spiritual, moral, intellectual, and technological development. Evil is instrumentally valuable because it occasions freely chosen efforts whereby it stands to be overcome, and because improvement of character—both within an individual and throughout human history—is often the consequence of such efforts. Without evil there would be no opportunity for care for others, devotion to the public good, courage, self-sacrifice, for the kind of love that involves a willingness to bear one another's burdens, or for the character that is built through these qualities. And without evil there would be no occasion for the development of economic, technological, and social structures, which characterize human civilization.

The theological determinist can take such a developmental account on board. While our wills arguably must have a role in the soul-building process Hick describes, free will in the libertarian sense need not. The process of educating and developing our characters, sensitivities, and abilities—even conceived without such free will—is a great good. The development from cowardice to courage, from immorality to morality, from ignorance to enlightenment are highly valuable, even if that development were wholly causally determined by God. Hick himself maintains that such processes are more valuable if they involve libertarian free will. But this is consistent with what seems plausible, that they would still have great value even if they were causally determined.

A difficulty for this proposal is that evils often do not yield the specified goods, and indeed sometimes they destroy people rather than contributing to their constructive development. Hick's response is that evils of this kind are not genuinely without purpose. For without such evils,

human misery would not evoke deep personal sympathy or call forth organized relief and sacrificial help and service. For it is presupposed in these compassionate reactions both that the suffering is not deserved and that it is bad for the sufferer. . . in a world that is to be the scene of compassionate love and self-giving for others, suffering must fall upon mankind with something of the haphazardness and inequity that we now experience. It must be apparently unmerited, pointless, and incapable of being morally rationalized, (1978, 334)

One might object that horrendous evils on the order of genocide and plague are not required to occasion virtuous responses of these kinds or personal development. But still, it might be argued that they did provide challenging opportunities for virtuous responses, and that they did in fact issue in especially valuable instances of such responses. One might nevertheless doubt whether refraining from preventing the particular horrors could in each case be justified by the expected benefit.

Marilyn Adams (1999) takes on this issue in her version of a developmental account (cf. Pereboom 2004, 2016). Adams begins by proposing that God provides each person with a life that is a great good to that person (55). In the case of someone who suffers horrendous evils, this involves not just balancing off but also *defeating* her participation in those evils. On Roderick Chisholm's (1968–69) characterization, an evil is balanced off within a larger whole just in case that whole includes goods that equal or outweigh it; and an evil is defeated within a larger whole just in case it actually contributes to a greater good within that whole. Adams argues that balancing off horrendous evil might be guaranteed by an afterlife in an

environment in which we live in beatific intimacy with God. This would not, all by itself, defeat that evil. But it's possible that God defeat horrendous evil by empathetically identifying with those who experience it, given that this would allow them to re-envision their suffering as an occasion for identifying with God: "by virtue of endowing horrors with a good aspect, Divine identification makes the victim's experience of horrors so meaningful that she would not retrospectively wish it away" (Adams 1999, 167). This account of the defeat of evil also does not invoke libertarian free will, and it is thus available to the theological determinist as well as to the libertarian as a way of securing trust in God in the face of the evils that befall us. As Adams emphasizes, this account will be attractive only to those who already take theistic religion and some of the values it invokes seriously. But in her view, accounting for horrendous evils is unlikely absent appeal to such values.

IV. Divine Providence

On many monotheistic religious views, the understanding that everything that happens is causally determined by God in accord with a divine plan for the world is held to be a great comfort for us. We find this view expressed in ancient Stoicism, in Islam, and in much of historical Christianity. Our lives are subject to pain, deprivation, failure, and death. How might we deal with these evils? To affirm a strong notion of divine providence is to accept everything that happens to us, to the last detail, is in accord with God's wholly benevolent will. The aspiration is that this belief will result in great comfort in the face of evil.

In the Stoic view, we should align our will and judgment with God's perspective so that we would enjoy equanimity no matter what happens to us, even

if it conflicts with ordinary personal aspirations for survival, happiness, and success (Inwood 1985; Pereboom 1994, 2012). Maintaining this attitude requires that we identify with a notion of the good that might well diverge from such personal aspirations. Such an attitude may be too demanding, given limited human abilities. Suppose that one's role in the divine plan involves suffering miserably up to a final end to one's existence. As Thomas Nagel (1979, 16) remarks, normally "one is supposed to behold and partake of the glory of God, for example, in a way in which chickens do not share in the glory of *coq au vin*." Many theists specify instead that the divine plan not only aims at the good of the whole, as in the Stoic view, but also at the good of each individual. In this vein, Adams proposes that God is good to every person by ensuring each a life in which all suffering contributes to a great good within that very life.

Is the strong doctrine of divine providence compatible with our having libertarian free will? Molinism proposes a positive answer (Molina 1596/1988; Flint 1998). On this conception, God can know from eternity what every possible libertarian free creature would choose in every possible circumstance, and with this knowledge, God is able to direct the course of history with precision. But Molinism is controversial, in particular because it is not evident how there could be truths about what nonactual free creatures would freely decide on which God could base decisions as to which to actualize (Adams 1977). Truths about what creatures would freely decide would presumably be grounded in what they in fact freely decide, or at least in what they will freely decide, but if they don't exist and never will, such grounding is unavailable.

In recent decades, many theistic libertarians have reject Molinism in favor of Open Theism (e.g., Hasker 1989, 2004). Open Theists affirm that often God does not know what actual or possible libertarian free creatures would decide, typically because there is no truth about such free decisions for God to know. Open Theism does not aspire to securing the strong notion of divine providence that the theological determinist can endorse. Instead, when it comes to evil that results from human free decisions, we can be confident that God's power and goodness will bring to bear massive resourcefulness in righting the wrongs done. It's not the case that everything that happens accords with a preconceived divine plan, but we can be confident that God's goodness and omnipotence will nevertheless yield impressive responses to evil. We can't trust that everything that happens is in accord with a divine plan conceived prior to creation, but we can trust that God will respond to the evils of this world, and that they will be successful in the long run. Thus, what we trust God for is different on these views, but yet in each case the relationship with God features an extraordinary sort of trust.

V. Theological Determinism and the Value of our Responses to God

A concern for theological determinism is that our responses to God will not have the sort of value that a good relationship with God requires. An idea suggested by Milton in the passage from *Paradise Lost* quoted earlier is that it is valuable to be loved by another as a result of her free will, and that without free will having this role, love loses much of its value: "What pleasure I from such obedience paid / When Will and Reason (Reason also is choice) / Useless and vain, of freedom both despoiled / Made passive both, had served necessity / Not me." However, against this, parents' love

for their children is almost always produced independently of the parents' will, and this is a kind of love we highly value. Paradigmatic romantic love is also produced involuntarily, and we would in fact regard a voluntarily produced version as inferior. Robert Kane agrees, but contends that one type of love would be less valuable if we viewed it as causally determined by factors beyond our control:

There is a *kind* of love we desire from others—parents, children (when they are old enough), spouses, lovers and friends—whose significance is diminished . . . by the thought that they are determined to love us entirely by instinct or circumstances beyond their control or not entirely up to them. . . . To be loved by others in this desired sense requires that the ultimate source of others' love lies in their own wills. (1996, 88)

But setting aside *free* will for a moment, by contrast with voluntariness considered independently of freedom, in which types of cases does the will intuitively play a role in generating love for another at all? When the intensity of an intimate relationship is waning, people sometimes make a decision to try to make it succeed, and to attempt to regain the type of relationship they once had. In such situations, we might desire that another person make a decision to love, but it is far from clear that we have reason to want the decision to be *freely* willed in the libertarian sense. A decision to love on the part of another might redeem one's personal life, but it is not clear what value the decision's being undetermined would add. Moreover, while in circumstances of these kinds we might desire that someone else make a decision to love, we would typically prefer love that is not mediated by a

decision. This is so not only for romantic attachments but also for friendships and for relationships between parents and children (cf. Pereboom 2001, chap. 7; 2014, chap. 8).

A concern might arise if the proposal to be evaluated is that the love causally determined by factors beyond one's control—for example, as in Milton's imagined scenario, by the one who is loved. In the case at issue, one that Milton has in mind, would our love for God be valuable God causally determined that love? Much theistic sensibility diverges from Milton's negative answer. An opposing view is represented in the well-known nineteenth-century American hymn: "I sought the Lord and afterward I knew / He moved my soul to seek him, seeking me." And we don't think that there is anything wrong with causally determining someone to love you by showing off your good qualities, or even by enhancing them somewhat.

But still, Kane's worry about causal determination may have more to be said for it. Perhaps it's that we're concerned about certain ways in which love might be causally determined by another agent—in particular, by the person to be loved. Imagine that Maddy causally determines you to love her by manipulating your brain so that you are oblivious to her flaws of character. That would be objectionable. But suppose you have a self-destructive tendency to love people who want to hurt you, and not to love those who would benefit you, and as a result you overlook the valuable characteristics of potential partners. Imagine that Sophie slips a drug into your coffee that eliminates this tendency, as a result of which you are able to fully appreciate her valuable characteristics, with the consequence that you are now causally determined to love her. It would seem that what is unacceptable is not

being causally determined to love by the other party per se but, rather, how one is causally determined, and that there are varieties of determination by the other party that are not objectionable.

VI. Final Words

Increasingly, people have come to see their relationships with God on analogy with an exemplary human relationship. Seeing it this way would be difficult supposing a traditional theological determinist view in which God arbitrarily elects some to heaven and others to eternal damnation. But if one accepts universal salvation and denies divine retribution, both libertarianism and theological determinism accommodate a good relationship with God. Each of these positions can secure trust in God by a developmental account for why God permits evil, and by a sufficiently strong notion of divine providence. Finally, the challenge that valuable loving responses to God are not possible given theological determinism can be answered by reflecting on what sorts of loving responses we ordinarily cherish.

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