Election and Human Agency
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Introduction

In the first chapter of his letter to the Ephesians, Paul writes of "the God and Father of our Lord
Jesus Christ,"

> ... he chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world to be holy and blameless
> before him in love. He destined us for adoption as his children through Jesus Christ,
> according to the good pleasure of his will, to the praise of his glorious grace that he
> freely bestowed on us in the Beloved…. With all wisdom and insight he has made
> known to us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure that he set forth
> in Christ, as a plan for the fullness of time, to gather up all things in him, things in
> heaven and things on earth. In Christ we have also obtained an inheritance, having
> been destined according to the purpose of him who accomplishes all things
> according to his counsel and will, so that we, who were the first to set our hope on
> Christ, might live for the praise of his glory.[1]

To the philosophical mind, such a passage immediately raises questions of interpretation and
implication: what does it mean to say that God *chose* us to be holy, or that he *destined* us for
adoption? Normally, to the extent that one person accomplishes something *according to his will*,
other peoples' wills are not accomplished—unless they come to an agreement with the first. For
instance, if one child wants to build a tower with some blocks, another who might have something
else in mind to build will have to wait her turn or go along with the first child's plan (unless she is
able to take the blocks by force!). The possibility of one person's agency being restricted by
another seems even more likely when the latter person's plans *involve* the first. The father who
wants his daughter to go to medical school and be a doctor, when the daughter would rather attend
art school and be a painter, may accomplish his will, but in doing so he may need to resort to
coercive measures. Just so, one might worry that if something about us or our lives has been
destined according to the purpose of the One who accomplishes all things according to his will,
then our own agency with respect to that thing might be diminished (or eliminated)—since we
couldn't have agreed to a plan God set in place *before the foundation of the world*. Such a thought
might also suggest a kind of fatalism: since we are powerless to choose against the will of God,
we have no reason even to *try* to do (or not do) what God wills; we must simply resign ourselves
to our "fate." And a further line of questions, and concerns, emerges when we consider who is
included in the "us" chosen by God: does this exclude anyone—are there non-elect? Or are there
those who are elected, but to undesirable ends? If the answer to either question is "yes," then the
former concerns about the implications of divine election for human agency are all the more
pressing. Then again, perhaps these lines of questioning are wrongheaded from the start, assuming
as they do a kind of competition or "zero-sum game" between divine and human agency. Perhaps

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[1] All biblical quotations are from the *New Revised Standard Version* (Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1989).

divine election is unique in ways that make such assumptions unwarranted. Indeed, perhaps we cannot even begin to understand the nature of divine election or say anything meaningful about it.

Questions about the nature of God's election, its relation to human agency, and the limits of our understanding of all things divine are (in part) philosophical questions, and this chapter aims to supply the reader with some background in the answers philosophers have given to them. We think (and hope) that philosophers can uniquely contribute to discussions about divine election, given the set of skills we bring to the table: skills such as distinguishing and defining concepts (e.g. of causation, determination, necessitation, choice, and action) and articulating the connections between them; identifying puzzles and problems related to these concepts and offering novel solutions; and evaluating where we might be making mistakes in our reasoning and what the limits of our knowledge currently (or necessarily) are with respect to a given topic.

In section 1, we begin by asking what, exactly, it might mean for God to "elect" people, and how this relates to their agency and freedom. After getting clearer on what God is supposed to elect people *to* or *for,* we argue against the view that a person's will is not involved in the process by which God elects her, which we identify in part as the person's coming to have faith. But, in section 2, we consider several reasons for thinking that a person's *free* will is not involved in her coming to have faith, as well as a potential problem facing this view. Then, in the next three sections (3, 4, and 5) we examine three views on which one's free will *is* involved in one's coming to faith, corresponding roughly to three systematic views of divine providence. We discuss certain objections to each of these "models of election," as well as how each speaks to the possibility of the *non-elect*. In the sixth and final section, we conclude by addressing the concern that any such philosophizing about God is too anthropomorphic.

Section 1: What has divine election to do with human agency?

Divine election might, at first glance, be thought to have nothing to do with human agency. Suppose, for instance, that God's choice is simply about what afterlife we will be assigned: heaven or hell. And suppose that God makes this choice completely arbitrarily—a kind of divine "eeny meeny miny moe." In such a case, divine election would not affect at all our choices or actions (at least in *this* life). The biblical descriptions of election, however, tell a different story. Of course, God's choosing people "for salvation" (2 Thess. 2:13) or destining them "for eternal life" (Acts 13:48) might superficially suggest such a read; but even *if* the concepts of salvation or eternal life were exclusively about the afterlife—which they clearly are not—other biblical passages evince that divine election has something to do with one's agency here and now. For, first, salvation occurs "through faith" (Ephesians 2:8) or "through belief in the truth" (2 Thess. 2:13)—and one's faith or belief seems to be matters of one's will. And second, the fact that one is elect is supposed to matter to what one does in this life and what kind of person one becomes; the Ephesians passage with which we started, for instance, says that God chose us "to be holy and blameless before him in love," and the 2 Thessalonians passage quoted twice already says, in full, "God chose you as the first fruits for salvation *through sanctification by the Spirit* and through belief in the truth," implying that God's electing someone is related to that person's being sanctified—and becoming holy or sanctified would also seem to be an agential matter. For instance, becoming sanctified involves becoming obedient to Christ (1 Peter 1:2), and being obedient to another means

submitting one's own will to the will of the other. Likewise, Paul describes the elect as "created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand to be our way of life" (Eph. 2:10). So divine election would seem to be connected to what one desires and intends, the kind of character one develops and the way one lives one's life; and these are all agential matters.

Such a focus on human desires and intentions, character and self-development immediately raises questions about the election of those who, whether because of disability or age at the time of death, do not seem to have the sort of agency needed for faith. This is not an issue of which philosophers, ancient or modern, are unaware.[2] However, we will limit our focus to election and human agency in the typical case.

Suppose, for simplicity's sake, we think of divine election primarily in terms of election *to salvific faith*, and secondarily in terms of election to a sanctified life. While faith itself certainly seems to involve one's agency, a question we might ask is whether one *comes to have* such faith by one's own will. This is not (yet) to ask whether one comes to have faith by one's own *free* will—for we distinguish between doing something *willingly*, and doing it *freely.* How exactly we should draw this distinction is a contested matter. But consider the following set of examples: suppose a toddler does not want to take his medicine, but his mother knows he needs it to be well, so she holds him down and forces the medicine down his throat. Clearly, he does not take the medicine willingly. Now contrast this with someone who is manipulated into taking medicine—perhaps she is hypnotized (without knowing it) so that she temporarily comes to like the taste of the medicine, and so takes it because she likes the taste. Because she does not consent to being hypnotized, we would not say she takes the medicine freely; and yet, a case can be made for saying she takes it willingly.[3]

So, a first question to ask is, do the elect come to have faith willingly? One might think not, on the basis of certain key biblical texts. For instance, to return to Ephesians once more, Paul describes his audience—whom he takes to be among the elect—as previously "dead through [their] trespasses and sins." But, Paul says, God made them all "alive together with Christ." He emphasizes, "by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God—not the result of works, so that no one may boast" (Eph. 2:8-9). The contrast of death and life, as well as bondage and freedom, are quite common in Paul's writings (cf. Col. 2:13, Gal. 5, Rom. 6:6-7); and while the latter contrast might be taken to mean only that one does not come to Christ *freely*, the former seems to imply something stronger: that one does not come to Christ *willingly*—any more than a person who has died may will her own revival.

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[2] There is a spectrum of positions on this issue, ranging from thinking, on the one hand, that explicit faith is necessary for salvation, and so such persons would not be elect, to thinking, on the other hand, that all such persons are elect. For some classic Christian texts on this, see Gregory of Nyssa, "On the Premature Death of Infants" and Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, Suppl. Appendix I q1. For a more recent popular text, with references to several other recent texts on this topic, see Ronald Nash, *When A Baby Dies* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1999).

[3] Although more contentious, perhaps another example of a willing but unfree agent is one who is coerced into acting in a certain way. I am willing to hand over my wallet when threatened with severe harm, but I do not freely give up my wallet.

We think, however, that a person's coming to faith is a process, and while the Scriptures make clear that God, and God alone, *initiates* this process, the person whom God saves may participate in the *completion* of the process. This is why Paul, who placed such great emphasis on the role of God's grace in salvation, still counsels his readers to "work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who is at work in you, enabling you both to will and to work for his good pleasure" (Phil. 2:12-13). The idea seems to be that God's activity enables a person to desire and do what is necessary for salvation; but the desiring and doing are real features of her own agency. And not only the *coming to have* faith, but the *keeping of* faith is essential to one's salvation; and Paul describes the keeping of faith in strongly agential terms, likening it to fighting a fight or finishing a race (2 Tim. 4:7). For these reasons we think it is safe to conclude that one's coming to—and maintaining—a saving faith *involves one's own will.*

Section 2: Does one come to have saving faith freely?

To those who (like us) think that a person's will is involved in coming to faith, a further question may be posed: is it by a *free* will that one comes to this faith? We have already considered one example of an action that might be done willingly, but not freely—the taking of medicine (under hypnosis). What would freedom add to this picture? One common way of understanding freedom in philosophy is in terms of *control.* The reason the hypnotized person does not act freely is because her action is not sufficiently under her control; she is controlled by another, to whose agency she has not consented. The concept of free will is often tied to that of responsibility: it is only when one's action is free that one can properly be held responsible for it. The responsibility at stake here is often called "moral" responsibility, to distinguish it from other forms of responsibility, such causal responsibility: while the tornado may be causally responsible for damaging the roof, and we might "blame" it in the sense of pointing to it as the cause of what we take to be a bad outcome, we do not take the tornado to be an agent, one that can regulate its behavior according to reasons. And so, we would not have the sort of responses to the behavior of a tornado that we ordinarily take to be appropriate in response to the behavior of moral agents: responses like (moral) praise and blame, reward and punishment. We would not, for instance, feel resentful or indignant about the behavior of the tornado, or stage a protest in response. But such reactions are common in response to the (mis)behavior of people we take to be in control of their actions.[4]

So, in asking whether a person comes to have faith freely, we are asking whether, or to what extent, this process is under the person's control. One might argue that in fact no human being exercises control over coming to faith on the grounds that humans don't regulate their behavior according to reasons when coming to faith. On John Martin Fischer and Mark Ravizza's influential account of reasons-responsiveness,[5] the sense of control relevant to moral responsibility requires (among other things) that a person sees and would respond to some sufficient reason to do otherwise in some other possible scenario. For example, suppose that Hans is a compulsive hand-washer, and

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[4] Following P. F. Strawson, many philosophers have understood being morally responsible in terms of being the appropriate target of "reactive" attitudes such as resentment and gratitude. See his "Freedom and Resentment," *Proceedings of the British Academy*, 48 (1962), 1–25.

[5] John Martin Fischer and Mark Ravizza, *Responsibility and Control: A Theory of Moral Responsibility* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

that given his compulsion, there is no scenario in which he would refrain from washing his hands, even if there were a good reason to do so. When Hans washes his hands, he may do so willingly (he isn't being held down and forced to wash his hands, for example), but he is not reasons-responsive, and so he does not freely wash his hands.

Likewise, one might think that people are not reasons-responsive when coming to faith, since there are no possible scenarios in which those who do come to faith take there to be sufficient reason not to respond in faith, given the goodness of coming to faith. If that is the case, then although people could be said to come to faith willingly, and even if they are responsive to reasons in other contexts (outside the context of coming to faith), they would not come to faith freely. And while it is typically a good thing to be responsive to reasons, in the case of coming to faith it is at least plausible that it would not be bad for an agent to be so drawn to God that she does not count as reasons-responsive. As far as we know, no one has defended exactly this view, but it merits further exploration, especially since it seems to accommodate the biblical texts referenced above in support of the view that the elect do not willingly come to faith (since another interpretation of those passages is that no one can come to faith by one's own free will).

A distinct set of reasons one might think that a person does not come to faith freely, even if she does come willingly, is that (1) God *determines* a person's coming to faith and (2) God's determining someone to do something is *incompatible* with that person's doing it freely.[6] What, exactly, does each of these propositions mean, and why might one think it true? Let's start with the first claim. While there are many definitions of "determinism" on offer, one way of understanding this idea which helps to distinguish it from the other conceptions of divine election is as follows: God determines some event (or process) *e* to occur if, given that God wills *e* to occur, it does occur, and there are no more fundamental contingent facts that explain why *e* occurs than that God wills it. In other words, nothing "outside" of God moves or motivates him to choose as he does.[7] Some who think that God determines a person's coming to faith affirm that God determines *every* contingent fact. This would be to hold a view called *theological determinism*. But one need not be a thoroughgoing theological determinist to think that God determines certain aspects of the world, including whether someone comes to faith. One might hold a deterministic model of election, in particular, in order to reflect the emphasis biblical texts place on God's agency in the process of individuals' coming to faith, or to make sense of how God could guarantee the salvation of the individuals whom he elects—a guarantee which such texts seem to imply.

Moving on to the second proposition mentioned above, the idea that one's acting freely is incompatible with one's action being determined by something or someone other than oneself is a philosophical position known as *incompatibilism*; and a number of distinct arguments have been offered in its favor. For instance, one argument (or family of arguments, often called the "Consequence Argument") focuses on the fact that if an action is determined by something other than the person acting, then what ultimately determines the person's action is not under the person's control; and (it is asserted) if what ultimately determines a person's action is not under

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[6] This reason is distinct since a person can fail to be reasons-responsive without being determined.

[7] See Leigh Vicens, "Theological Determinism," *The Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ISSN 2161-0002, https://www.iep.utm.edu/, May 18, 2020, and Peter Furlong, *The Challenges of Divine Determinism* (Cambridge University Press, 2019), for comparison.

the person's control, then neither is the action itself.[8] A distinct form of reasoning for the same incompatibilist conclusion depends on the premise that there is no relevant difference between factors that apparently preclude a person's acting freely—such as manipulation by another agent— and determination of the person's action by anything or anyone besides the person herself.[9] Indeed, most forms of this latter line of reasoning (commonly called the "Manipulation Argument") are aimed at showing that *physical* or *natural determinism*—that is, determinism by natural causes and the laws of nature that govern their behaviors—is no different, in its undermining of human freedom, than manipulation by other agents. But one might think that even if there are some relevant differences between physical determinism and agential manipulation that call into question the conclusion of this argument for *physical* or *natural incompatibilism* (the incompatibility of physical or natural determinism and human freedom), God's determination of human action is *more* similar to manipulation by another agent than physical determinism is. For God is himself a kind of agent, with intentions and a will.[10] Any such line of reasoning in favor of (divine or theological) incompatibilism, in combination with a deterministic model of election, entails that humans do not freely come to faith.

As mentioned above, one need not be a thoroughgoing theological determinist to think that God determines people's coming to faith. And so one might hold that while an individual's coming to faith is not free (because determined), the individual is free in other aspects of her life. The view that free choice or action is incompatible with determinism, but at least some of our choices or actions are free, is called *libertarianism.* Philosophers who hold a libertarian view of free will primarily think of human freedom as a matter of self-determination: choosing from multiple open alternatives what one will do and be in such a way that the "ultimate sources" of our actions are found within us and not in any factors beyond our control.[11] Oliver Crisp has recently argued that a libertarian view of free will may be combined with a deterministic model of election. According

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[8] Peter van Inwagen's "Consequence Argument" features this sort of reasoning but in a discussion of natural determinism (i.e., determinism by the laws of nature and total state of the world)—see his *An Essay on Free Will* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983). A similar line of reasoning may be employed to call into question the compatibility of divine determinism and human free action—see Leigh Vicens, "Divine Determinism, Human Freedom, and the Consequence Argument," *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 71 (2012), 145-155.

[9] Derk Pereboom, *Living Without Free Will* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 110-117; Alfred Mele, *Free Will and Luck* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 184-195.

[10] C. P. Ragland, "Softening Fischer's Hard Compatibilism," *The Modern Schoolman* 88 (2011), 51-71. For discussion see Taylor Cyr, "Compatibilists about Moral Responsibility and (Natural) Determinism Should Be Compatibilists about Moral Responsibility and Theological Determinism," in L. Vicens and P. Furlong (eds.), *New Essays on Theological Determinism* (Cambridge University Press, forthcoming).

[11] Robert Kane, *A Contemporary Introduction to Free Will* (Oxford University Press, 2005), 6. The point at issue between libertarians and compatibilists is orthogonal to that in theological discussions of formal and material freedom, which track instead the philosophical distinction between freedom of action and freedom of will. One may have so-called formal freedom, or the ability to will what one wants to will, without having libertarian freedom, if what one wants to will is determined by something outside of one's control, such as social conditioning or genetics—just as one may have so-called material freedom, or the ability to carry out one's will, without libertarian freedom, in case one's will is itself determined by factor's outside one's control.

to "Libertarian Calvinism," as Crisp describes it, fallen human beings cannot freely choose to be saved, or freely do anything that would contribute in any way to their salvation, because this is a matter determined by God; but in "areas of their lives other than those that have to do directly with their own eternal destiny," they retain libertarian freedom.[12]

Crisp's main aim is to show that libertarian Calvinism is consistent with the Westminster Confession of Faith, a statement of belief which has significant authority in certain Reformed Churches. However, we think that libertarian Calvinism is an unstable position.[13] For Crisp seems to want to partition off peoples' choices and actions that do not "pertain to their salvation."[14] But, as noted already, one's election is supposed to relate to virtually everything one is and does; and so on a deterministic model of election there doesn't seem room for libertarian freedom. Perhaps we are to suppose that the elect have libertarian freedom *before* coming to faith, but this idea is problematic for at least two reasons. First, libertarians normally take free will to be both intrinsically and instrumentally *good*; but on this view, one is free only until (or unless) one comes to have faith—so there is no freedom for the elect. And second, if, as the Westminster Confession says, we are in "bondage under sin" so that without God's grace we are unable "freely to will and to do that which is spiritually good,"[15] this would seem to mean that we do *not* have morally significant freedom (i.e. freedom to choose between good and evil) apart from God's (saving, determining) grace, so it is unclear what one's libertarian freedom would amount to.[16] A libertarian

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[12] Oliver Crisp, "Libertarian Calvinism," in H. McCann (ed), *Free Will and Classical Theism: The Significance of Freedom in Perfect Being Theology* (Oxford University Press, 2017), 121.

[13] Though Crisp does not attend to the different views of providence in his essay, and what he says seems compatible with multiple views, here we assume that Libertarian Calvinism is what we will below call the "open" view of providence combined with a deterministic model of election. Later we will consider another interpretation, which we will call "Molinist Calvinism." We think that Molinist Calvinism avoids the problems we have enumerated with Libertarian Calvinism, though it may face other difficulties unique to Molinism. A separate worry for Crisp, given his aim of showing Libertarian Calvinism to be consistent with the Westminster Confession of Faith (WCF), concerns God's decrees. Crisp says that, on Libertarian Calvinism, God ordains but does not determine or cause all that comes to pass. God determines the salvation of the elect, but the majority of human actions are foreseen and permitted by God but not determined. According to WCF, however, "Although God knows whatsoever may or can come to pass upon all supposed conditions, yet hath he not decreed anything because he foresaw it as future, or as that which would come to pass upon such conditions" (WCF 3.2). This is clearly inconsistent with the open model of providence, and, as we note below, it is inconsistent with Molinist Calvinism too.

[14] Crisp, "Libertarian Calvinism," 121.

[15] Ibid., 113.

[16] The above discussion suggests that morally significant freedom is a valuable thing. But, one might immediately object that it cannot be good to have the ability to choose evil, since a necessarily perfect God does not have this ability. Libertarians might reply in either of two ways. First, some have maintained that in fact God *does* have this ability, though he does not exercise it. See for instance Stephen Davis, *Logic and the Nature of God* (Eerdmans Publishing, 1983), 93-96. Others have argued that the ability to choose evil is only good for *created* persons who are self-determining. See Katherine Rogers, "Anselm on God's Perfect Freedom," *The Saint Anselm Journal* 1.1 (2003). As she explains Anselm's view, "Created agents do need the sort of 'morally significant' freedom that involves being able to choose between good and evil. This is the only way in which the creature, which exists entirely *per aliud*, can make a choice on its own.

Calvinist might instead try to maintain that one is given libertarian freedom *after* one comes to have faith—perhaps this is the freedom we have in Christ (cf. Galatians 5:1, John 8:36). But this would be an odd view as well: the elect would not be free before coming to faith, then would be free until death, and then would no longer have at least morally significant freedom (since, we presume, following Augustine, the elect are no longer able to sin after death). More troubling, this view would deny free will to the non-elect, which is inconsistent not only with the Westminster Confession but with the majority of the Christian tradition. Thus we think that on a deterministic model of election, very little room, if any, is left for the human freedom envisioned by most libertarians.[17]

So far we have considered the position of those who think that the coming to faith does not involve human freedom because it is determined by God and such determinism is incompatible with free will, as well as those who think that the coming to faith does not involve human freedom for other reasons—for instance, because it is not a reasons-responsive process. Regardless of why one denies that the coming to faith is free, we can ask what advantages this position enjoys and challenges it faces. One advantage is that this view would avoid what we might call the "praiseworthiness problem." Christians have wanted to maintain that God alone is praiseworthy for human salvation and that no human being does anything to merit God's grace—for it is a contradiction in terms to say that grace could be merited. But if the elect come to faith freely, and if coming to faith is good, it would seem that the elect are praiseworthy for their salvation and that their free response to God does merit grace.[18]

How might a defender of the view that one comes to faith freely respond? One option is to maintain that coming to faith is morally obligatory and that no one is praiseworthy for doing what is morally obligatory.[19] Suppose a parent has a moral obligation to feed her child, and she does so. In ordinary

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In Anselm's view, in order to be free and praiseworthy a being must be able to choose *a se*, from itself. But God exists entirely *a se*, and so, while open options are very important in creaturely free choice, they are completely irrelevant for God" (ibid., 3).

[17] Unsurprisingly, then, many who hold a deterministic model of election are thoroughgoing theological determinists. For a discussion of other reasons for accepting theological determinism, see Paul Helm, *The Providence of God* (IVP Academic, 1994), and Vicens, "Theological Determinism." If one is a thoroughgoing (theological) determinist and an incompatibilist, then one holds the view called hard (theological) determinism, which means that no one is ever free—and so, if free will is necessary for moral responsibility, no one is ever morally responsible, either. Hard determinism is a minority position in the free will debate, and even less common among theists, presumably because it undermines human culpability for sin—though some who hold this position have tried to moderate the view and argue that many attitudes and practices associated with moral responsibility can be retained even if no one really deserves blame or praise for anything. See Derk Pereboom, "Determinism al Dente," *Nous*. 29:1 (1995), 21-45, and *Free Will, Agency, and Meaning in Life* (Oxford University Press: 2016); and for discussion, Leigh Vicens, "Sin and the Faces of Responsibility," in J. A. Knight and I. Markham, *Thinking Creatively in Theology* (Wiley Blackwell, forthcoming). But, as we will discuss in the next section, one might also be a theological determinist and a compatibilist.

[18] Taylor Cyr and Matthew Flummer, "Free Will, Grace, and Anti-Pelagianism," *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 83 (2018), 183–199.

[19] This is the third option Cyr and Flummer (ibid.) consider for responding to the praiseworthiness problem. They mention Luke 17:10 as potential support for this option: "So you too, when you do all the things

circumstances we would not say the parent is praiseworthy for not letting her child starve.[20] Another way of responding, possibly complementary to the first, would be to emphasize the *blameworthy* things individuals have done that have made them in need of God's salvation. Consider an analogy: an individual recklessly decides to go swimming at a beach where he knows there is a strong undertow, putting himself at risk of drowning. He then gets pulled underwater, and the watchful lifeguard jumps in to save him. Now suppose that the drowning man must make considerable effort to grasp and hold on to the lifeguard's buoy to be pulled back to shore—and he does so freely. While this is a good thing and in different circumstances (say, if he only went into the water himself to save a stranger) we might praise him for his efforts, in the case at hand we might not find his actions worthy of praise.

While denying that one comes to faith freely would avoid the praiseworthiness problem, the flip side of this advantage is a challenge: many biblical passages seem to imply that one is *culpable* for *not* having faith. For instance, in Mark's Gospel, Jesus says to his disciples, "The one who believes and is baptized will be saved; but the one who does not believe will be condemned" (Mark 16:16); and likewise in John's Gospel Jesus says, "Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life; whoever disobeys the Son will not see life, but must endure God's wrath" (John 3:36; cf. 2 Thess. 2:9-12). That one will be condemned, and subjected to God's wrath, for one's unbelief strongly suggests that one is responsible for it. But, if free will is required for moral responsibility, then one cannot be responsible for the failure to have saving faith if one does not come to faith freely.

How might those who deny that one comes to faith freely respond to this challenge? They might be tempted to respond by saying that while one does not come—or fail to come—to a saving faith freely, still one is responsible, and culpable, if one fails to do so, since free will is not required for culpability. Some of Luther's writings suggest such a position.[21] The problem with this response is that we have defined free will in terms of the control necessary for moral responsibility. Of course, one may define free will differently—and some philosophers do, preferring to think of free will as the ability to do otherwise than one does, and leaving it an open question whether such an ability is required to be responsible for what one actually does.[22] But suppose we accept this "ability-to-do-otherwise" definition of free will. If it turns out that the ability to do otherwise is necessary for moral responsibility, then we are back where we started. And if it is not, we might further ask, what sort of freedom or control *is* essential to being a responsible agent? Then the view under consideration in this section can be reframed in terms of *that* kind of freedom not being

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which are commanded you, say, 'We are unworthy slaves; we have done only that which we ought to have done.'"

[20] However, coming to faith is presumably the best a person can do, whereas a parent can ordinarily do better by her child than merely keeping him from starving; and it may be that if a person not only freely does what is right but could not have done better, she is praiseworthy. Then again, there may be cases where the best a person can do is not praiseworthy because it does not reach a certain threshold of goodness. For this sort of proposal, see Eleonore Stump, *Aquinas* (New York: Routledge, 2003), 401-402, and for discussion see Cyr and Flummer, "Free Will," 196-197.

[21] Aku Visala and Olli-Pekka Vainio, "Erasmus versus Luther: A Contemporary Analysis of the Debate on Free Will" *Neue Zeitschrift fur Systematische Theologie und Religionsphilosophie* 62:3 (2020), 311-335.

[22] Van Inwagen, *An Essay on Free Will*.

involved in a person's coming to faith. So the attempt to divorce free will from moral responsibility is a non-starter.

But there are still several possible avenues of response available to one who denies that a person is in control of her coming, or not coming, to have faith. One would be to accept that since individuals are not in control of this, those who fail to have faith are not culpable for their failure. How might this square with the various biblical passages—some cited above—that those who do not believe in the Son will be condemned, and endure God's wrath? Here there seem to be two further options for response. One is to say that the category "those who do not believe" will ultimately be an empty one; in other words, no one will end up failing to come to faith. This is the position called "universalism," which has been represented in the Christian tradition since at least the time of Origen.[23] A number of biblical texts and theological arguments support universalism, from passages in Paul's letters stressing the universal scope of God's mercy, justification, reconciliation, and eternal life (cf. Romans 5:18 and 11:32, and Col. 1:20)[24] to considerations regarding the corruptibility of human agency, the incommensurability between the horror of hell and human responsibility for evil, God's justice and goodness, and his power and effectiveness in bringing about his purposes.[25]

Or, rather than saying that no one will ultimately be subject to divine condemnation and wrath, one might say that the biblical language of "condemnation" and "wrath" do not entail culpability. The idea here would be that if some human beings are eternally excluded from the presence of God, which is their only hope of happiness, this exclusion is not a *punishment* from God, but simply the *natural consequence* of their own actions. If individuals become hardened in their sins and unable to have faith, they simply cannot enjoy the presence of God. While such a "natural consequence" view of hell (as eternal suffering, or ultimate annihilation) has a number of contemporary proponents, the problem with this view for our purposes is that it seems defensible, if at all, only if the individuals who end up in hell are responsible for the actions that led to their being hardened sinners. (And, indeed, contemporary defenders of this view do take people to be responsible for their eternal fates. In fact, the view we have labeled "natural consequence" is usually referred to as a "free will" account of hell.[26]) Otherwise, it would seem profoundly unjust of God to allow people to suffer eternally for their lack of faith—not to mention unclear why God would allow such an evil, if not out of respect for people's free choices.

This brings us to another way of responding to the challenge, which would be to say that while individuals do not freely come to faith, they are still responsible if they fail to do so, because they

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[23] Ioanna-Maria Patsalidou, "Universalism and the Problem of Hell," *Philosophy Compass* 7:11 (2012), 808-820.

[24] Keith DeRose, "Universalism and the Bible" http://campuspress.yale.edu/keithderose/1129-2/

[25] Marilyn McCord Adams, "The Problem of Hell: A Problem of Evil for Christians," in E. Stump (ed), *Reasoned Faith: Essays in Philosophical Theology in Honor of Norman Kretzmann* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993), 301-327.

[26] Thomas Talbott, "Heaven and Hell in Christian Thought", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Fall 2017 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2017/entries/heaven-hell/>.

are responsible for being in a state of sin which makes them unable to freely come to faith. In other words, a person may not be *directly* responsible for failing to come to faith, but *indirectly* responsible for this, in the sense that her responsibility for this failure "traces back" to earlier behavior for which she was responsible.[27] A common example of such tracing is the case of a drunk driver who crashes into another vehicle. At the time of the crash, the driver may be so inebriated that she lacks control over her vehicle, and yet the driver may be morally responsible for the crash, if she was responsible for becoming inebriated, failing to take precautions (like designating a driver), etc. Not everyone agrees that a satisfactory account of tracing will be forthcoming,[28] but we can set aside this worry here. A distinctly theological challenge for this view arises from the following question: is it *guaranteed* that everyone will be in such a state of sin (a "hardened" state, say) that they are unable to come freely to faith? If not, then it would seem that election is outside of God's hands, for it would be possible for a person never to become hardened, in which case the person could freely come to faith. But if it *is* guaranteed that everyone will be in a hardened state, it is natural to ask how that could be. If a person's freedom is incompatible with her being determined, then it is unclear how God could guarantee that everyone becomes hardened without undermining their freedom.[29]

Section 3: Can one's free choice be determined by God?

So far we have considered the "no" response to the question, does one come to have faith freely? And we have seen multiple reasons for thinking not, as well as a challenge for the "no" response, and some further responses to the challenge. The only other answer to the question, of course, is "yes": it is by one's own free will that one comes to faith. This would easily resolve the problem of how one could be culpable for *failing* to come to faith. So suppose that one's free will *is* involved in one's coming to faith. A further question we might ask is whether this coming to faith is determined by God. We have already discussed those—incompatibilists—who think that God's determination would rule out human freedom. Others, however, think that being determined is compatible with being free. This is the philosophical position known as *compatibilism*. We have mentioned some of the most common arguments against compatibilism: one (the "Consequence Argument") based on the idea that, if what ultimately determines a person's action is not under the person's control, then neither is the action under her control; and another (the "Manipulation Argument") based on the idea that determined agents are similar to manipulated agents, who apparently lack free will. Many find these arguments persuasive, so why would anyone be a compatibilist?

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[27] A "realist" view of original sin according to which all human beings somehow participated in Adam's sin is one way of accounting for this responsibility. Such a view may also deal with the problem discussed below, of how it could be guaranteed that everyone will be in a hardened state. Of course, such a view also comes with some significant metaphysical baggage. For a discussion of a realist view of original sin, see Oliver Crisp, "Original Sin and Atonement," in T. Flint and M. Rea (eds), *The Oxford Handbook of Philosophical Theology* (Oxford University Press, 2009), 430-51.

[28] Manuel Vargas, "The Trouble with Tracing," *Midwest Studies in Philosophy*, 29 (2005), 269–291.

[29] The Molinist view we consider later attempts to address this question.

First, many philosophers have developed and endorsed accounts of free will that seem to get the "right results" (not counting someone who is under compulsion as free, say) and yet imply compatibilism about free will and determinism. During the modern era, for example, Thomas Hobbes, David Hume, and Jonathan Edwards, among others, took free will to be the ability to do what one most wants to do.[30] While this would seem to imply that animals and addicts are free, not to mention those who act on compulsive desires—which many find problematic—more sophisticated accounts have been developed. For instance, according to Harry Frankfurt, a person is free when she acts according to the desire that she wants to be her will.[31] This "hierarchical" account (involving second-order desires) rules out a number of problematic cases. But on Frankfurt's view one might be free and yet determined.

Second, not everyone is convinced by the arguments for incompatibilism (and some find compatibilism to be the more intuitive position, arguments aside). In response to the Manipulation Argument, some compatibilists argue that there is a principled difference between ordinary determined agents, on the one hand, and manipulated agents, on the other. If so, then we can accept our initial judgment about manipulated agents not being morally responsible without giving up compatibilism.[32] Others do not see a principled difference here, but instead maintain that even (certain) manipulated agents can be free and responsible.[33] And while we cannot do justice to the vast literature on the Consequence Argument, some have argued that even if our behavior is determined by factors that are themselves out of our control, nevertheless we retain control over our actions themselves.[34] Moreover, even if determinism by *physical* or *natural* causes undermines human freedom, some have argued that *God's* determination of human action does not. For, they note, divine determination is unique in various respects—for instance, unlike natural determination, God's determination of human action does not occur temporally prior to the action itself, as typical event causation is thought to do.[35]

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[30] Michael McKenna and Derk Pereboom, *Free Will: A Contemporary Introduction* (New York: Routledge, 2016), chapter 3.

[31] Frankfurt, "Freedom of the Will and the Concept of a Person," *Journal of Philosophy* 68 (1971), 5-20.

[32] Kristen Demetriou, "The Soft-Line Solution to Pereboom's Four-Case Argument," *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* 88 (2010), 595–617; Robyn Repko Waller, "The Threat of Effective Intentions to Moral Responsibility in the Zygote Argument," *Philosophia* 42 (2014), 209-222; and Oisín Deery and Eddy Nahmias, "Defeating Manipulation Arguments: Interventionist Causation and Compatibilist Sourcehood," *Philosophical Studies* 174 (2017), 1255–1276.

[33] Michael McKenna, "A Hard-line Reply to Pereboom's Four-Case Manipulation Argument," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 77 (2008), 142-159; John Martin Fischer, "The Zygote Argument Remixed," *Analysis* 71 (2011), 267-272; and Carolina Sartorio, *Causation and Free Will* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), chapter 5.

[34] For discussion of the debate about the Consequence Argument, see McKenna and Pereboom, *Free Will*, chapter 4. See also John Martin Fischer, *The Metaphysics of Free Will: An Essay on Control* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994).

[35] Hugh McCann, "Divine Sovereignty and the Freedom of the Will," *Faith and Philosophy* 12:4 (1995), 582-98; Hugh McCann and Daniel Johnson, "Divine Providence" in E. N. Zalta (ed.), Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy. For a rebuttal of this position, see Leigh Vicens and Simon Kittle, *God and Human Freedom* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2019).

In addition, some compatibilists argue that we can be responsible for what we do even if we lack the ability to do otherwise. Inspired by a paper by Harry Frankfurt, these compatibilists attempt to provide cases in which certain factors make it inevitable that an agent performs a certain action and yet, because those factors play no role in producing the agent's action, the agent seems morally responsible nonetheless.[36] This calls into question the idea that moral responsibility requires the ability to do otherwise.[37] Even if the Consequence Argument is sound, which would imply that determinism precludes the ability to do otherwise, compatibilists may use Frankfurt-style cases to argue that determinism does not preclude the sort of control required for moral responsibility.[38]

A further reason to endorse compatibilism has been defended in various places by John Martin Fischer. The idea is that we don't know whether our world is physically deterministic—that is, whether everything is determined by the laws of nature and initial state of the universe—and this is something we could possibly discover in the future. So, according to Fischer, it would be a mistake for one's theory of freedom and responsibility to imply that aspects of our view of ourselves as responsible agents depend on whether physical determinism is true. As Fischer puts the point, "our basic status as distinctively free and morally responsible agents should not depend on the arcane ruminations—and deliverances—of the theoretical physicists and cosmologists."[39] If we want our view of ourselves as free and responsible to be resilient to the discoveries of science, then perhaps this provides us a reason to accept the compatibility of physical determinism and human freedom. But if the world is physically deterministic, then it would seem a Christian ought to believe that it is determined by God;[40] and so the concern that our self-conception not hang by a thread would also give us reason to accept the compatibility of *divine* determinism and human freedom.

There is another, distinctly theological, reason for endorsing compatibilism. Compatibilism seems to follow for those who accept that God determines the elect to come to faith *and* who think that we are free and responsible with respect to coming to faith. More generally, if one takes God to determine whatsoever comes to pass (as many Reformed theologians have said, and if one thinks that human agents are nevertheless free and responsible, then one has reason to accept the compatibility of divine determinism with freedom and responsibility. So any considerations in favor of a deterministic account of election (or theological determinism more generally), combined

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[36] Frankfurt, "Alternate Possibilities and Moral Responsibility," *Journal of Philosophy* 66 (1969), 829-839.

[37] As John Martin Fischer points out, though, even if Frankfurt cases succeed, it does not necessarily follow that compatibilism is true, for determinism could preclude moral responsibility for some other reason besides its precluding alternative possibilities. See his "Responsibility and Control," *Journal of Philosophy* 79 (1982), 24-40.

[38] Compatibilists disagree about whether "Frankfurt cases" succeed. And some think that free will requires the freedom to do otherwise, while others reject this requirement. For an accessible yet detailed summary of the different types of compatibilist theories, see McKenna and Pereboom, *Free Will*, chapters 3, 5, 8, and 9.

[39] Fischer, *My Way: Essays on Moral Responsibility* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 5; cf. Fischer and Ravizza (1998), 16.

[40] Cf. Furlong, *The Challenges of Divine Determinism*, 6.

with the view that humans are free and responsible for their (lack of) faith (or anything they do), are considerations in favor of compatibilism—even in the absence of decisive responses to arguments for incompatibilism or a satisfactory compatibilist account of human freedom.

While the truth of compatibilism would secure God's control over election as well as human culpability for a lack of faith, one concern for such a model—and for any model according to which the elect come to faith freely—is what we called above the "praiseworthiness problem." A further problem for compatibilist models is the problem of hell. Compatibilists who accept the traditional doctrine of hell as God's unending punishment of the non-elect would seem forced to admit that God *could* have determined everyone to come to faith freely. The idea that God would nevertheless determine some to be condemned raises a potential challenge to God's goodness, or at least to God's love for all people.[41] Compatibilists are not without rejoinder to this objection. Some have tried to maintain that, while everything is *determined* by God, including the damnation of unrepentant sinners, it is nevertheless true that God wills (in a certain sense) that everyone be saved. For instance, following Aquinas, one might distinguish between God's antecedent and consequent will, where the former concerns anything good that God may will to bring about but the latter additionally takes into account the circumstances into which the good would be brought about.[42] On this view, God antecedently wills that all people be saved, but consequently wills the damnation of some. One might also follow John Calvin and the Westminster Confession and contend that God's condemning some people manifests the glory of his justice just as God's electing others manifests the glory of his mercy—and even that God's determining some to be condemned is compatible with a certain form of love for them.[43] Of course, another option for compatibilists is to embrace universalism, and the compatibilist model can easily account for God's ability to guarantee that everyone freely comes to faith.

Section 4: If one's coming to faith is not determined by God, is election under God's control?

One way to avoid the problem of hell that arises for compatibilists is to give up compatibilism. As we have seen, there are independent arguments for incompatibilism about free will and determinism; and not everyone finds compatibilist replies to these arguments plausible. One could accept incompatibilism, then, and nevertheless maintain that we (at least sometimes) act with free will, and in particular that the elect are free in coming to faith.

Even setting aside the particular issue of hell, many in the Christian tradition have thought that answering the argument from evil requires an appeal to libertarian (incompatibilist) free will. Very roughly, the argument from evil says that if God is all-powerful and morally perfect, he would want to, and have the power to, eliminate all evil—and yet there is evil; so God (taken as all-

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[41] Jerry Walls, "One Hell of a Problem for Christian Compatibilists," in K. Timpe and D. Speak (eds.) *Free Will and Theism: Connections, Contingencies, and Concerns* (Oxford University Press, 2016).

[42] *Summa Theologica* q19a6.

[43] Matthew Hart, "Calvinism and the Problem of Hell," in D. Alexander and D. Johnson (eds), *Calvinism and the Problem of Evil*, (Pickwick Publications 2016), 248-272.

powerful and morally perfect) must not exist.[44] A common response is that there might be certain goods, such as the morally significant free will of created beings, that God cannot bring about without allowing the possibility of evil. Now, if free will is compatible with determinism, then God could determine everyone always to freely do what is good; but if free will is *incompatible* with determinism, then God could not determine this.[45]

Given its role in responding to the argument from evil, Christians may be especially attracted to incompatibilism.[46] Even among those who agree about the incompatibility of free will and determinism, however, there is disagreement about whether free will is compatible with God's knowledge of what people will or would do in various possible situations[47]; and there are two models of divine providence that track this disagreement.[48] On the one hand, *open theists* say that God's foreknowledge of our actions would undermine our freedom; *Molinists*, on the other hand, are compatibilists about foreknowledge and freedom—but they are *incompatibilists* about free will and determinism. In the remainder of this section, our focus will be on open theism, and we'll turn to Molinism in the next section.

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[44] J. L. Mackie, "Evil and Omnipotence," *Mind* 64 (1955), 200-212. Mackie's argument is called the *logical* argument from evil because it attempts to establish a logical contradiction between the existence of God (traditionally conceived) and the existence of any evil whatsoever. An alternative is the *evidential* argument from evil, according to which God's existence may be compatible with some evil, but evils of the amount or kind we see in the actual world are evidence against the existence of God. See the essays in Daniel Howard-Snyder (ed.). *The Evidential Argument from Evil* (Indiana University Press, 1996) for discussion of this version of the argument from evil.

[45] Alvin Plantinga, *God, Freedom, and Evil* (New York: Harper & Row, 1974).

[46] However, a number of philosophers have questioned whether the appeal to libertarian freedom is especially helpful in resolving the problem of evil, because they doubt that such freedom is as valuable as its defenders claim. See Marilyn McCord Adams, *Christ and Horrors: The Coherence of Christology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006); Kenneth Himma, "The Free Will Defence: Evil and the Moral Value of FreeWill" *Religious Studies*, 45:4 (2009), 395–415; Laura Ekstrom, "The Cost of Freedom," in K. Timpe & D. Speak (eds.), *Free Will and Theism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press), 62–78; Derk Pereboom, "Libertarianism and Theological Determinism," in K. Timpe & D. Speak (eds.), Free Will and Theism (Oxford: Oxford University Press), 112–31. Others think that compatibilists can offer their own version of the free will defense. See Jason Turner, "Compatibilism and the Free Will Defense," *Faith and Philosophy* 30 (2013), 125-137; T. Ryan Byerly, "Free Will Theodicies for Theological Determinists," *Sophia*, 56:2 (2017), 289–310.

[47] For influential presentations of the argument for incompatibilism about divine foreknowledge and free will, see Nelson Pike, "Divine Omniscience and Voluntary Action," *Philosophical Review* 74 (1965), 27-46 and Linda Zagzebski, *The Dilemma of Freedom and Foreknowledge* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991).

[48] There is one further view, sometimes called the *simple foreknowledge view*, that agrees with Molinism about the compatibility of freedom and foreknowledge but does not endorse the Molinist's account of "middle knowledge," which we will discuss in the next section. We will set the simple foreknowledge model aside, but see David Hunt, "Simple Foreknowledge and Divine Providence," *Faith and Philosophy* 10 (1993), 394–414, and Dean Zimmerman, "The Providential Usefulness of "Simple Foreknowledge," in K. J. Clark and M. Rea (eds.), *Reason, Metaphysics, and Mind: New Essays on the Philosophy of Alvin Plantinga* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012) for discussion.

Open theism maintains that God does not have exhaustive foreknowledge of the future, either because there aren't truths about the (undetermined) future,[49] or because God has "shielded his eyes" from certain truths in order to leave room for human free will.[50] An "open" account of election, then, would imply that God not only does not determine the elect to come to faith but also does not know in advance, for any given person, whether he or she will come to faith. It would be natural to accept an open view both of God's providence in general and of election in particular, but one could also adopt the open account of providence while maintaining that God determined the elect to come to faith, albeit unfreely. This is the "libertarian Calvinist" position we considered in section 2, and we have already seen that it is subject to several worries.

While some have argued that the open view of God fits better with biblical passages suggesting that God is responsive to his creatures,[51] a major worry for the open model of election is that it appears to leave election outside of God's sovereign control. Most open theists are happy to accept that God is a "risk-taker" and see this as a feature, rather than a bug, of their view, though some try to downplay the risk. Richard Rice argues for a corporate, rather than individual, conception of election,[52] and Gregory Boyd attempts to show that, while God cannot guarantee that any individual comes to faith, and so God takes the risk that any given individual will reject him, he can "be certain that this rejection would never be universal."[53] However, on the open model, since there is no way for God to guarantee that any particular person comes to faith freely, it must be possible for them *all* to refuse to come to faith.[54] The only option for the open theist is to bite the bullet and accept this consequence.

An open theist might try to minimize the damage of this objection by arguing that it is overwhelmingly improbable that all human beings will refuse to come to faith. William Hasker defends such a view, comparing this probability with the "probability that all of the oxygen in a room should concentrate itself in a small volume, leaving the rest of the room devoid of oxygen,"[55] a probability that is so minute that rational agents can ignore it. We might suppose that God will do everything possible (without taking away anyone's free will) to increase the probability that

[49] A. N. Prior, "The Formalities of Omniscience," *Philosophy* 37 (1962), 114-129; Alan R. Rhoda, Gregory A. Boyd, Thomas G. Belt, "Open theism, Omniscience, and the Nature of the Future," *Faith and Philosophy* 23 (2006), 432–459; and Patrick Todd, "Against Limited Foreknowledge," *Philosophia* 42 (2014), 523–538.

[50] Richard Swinburne, *The Coherence of Theism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977); William Hasker, *God, Time, and Knowledge* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989); and Peter van Inwagen, "What Does an Omniscient Being Know About the Future?" in J. Kvanvig (ed.), *Oxford Studies in Philosophy of Religion* (vol. 1) (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

[51] See essays in C. H. Pinnock (ed.), *The Openness of God* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1994), 11–58.

[52] Richard Rice, "Biblical Support for a New Perspective," in Pinnock (ed.), *The Openness of God*.

[53] Boyd, *Satan and the Problem of Evil: Constructing a Trinitarian Warfare Theodicy* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2001), 177.

[54] Johannes Grössl and Leigh Vicens, "Closing the Door on Limited-Risk Open Theism," *Faith and Philosophy* 31:4 (2014), 475–85.

[55] Hasker, "A Philosophical Perspective," in Pinnock (ed.), *The Openness of God*, 153.

some will come to faith—perhaps by continuously putting individuals into circumstances that make it likely that they'll freely come to faith[56]—with the result that the risk of an outcome in which no one comes to faith is "negligible."[57]

However, while Hasker is not focused on the doctrine of election, we think that, from the perspective of that doctrine, what he says is problematic. For those who accept the idea of election are not likely to be satisfied with saying that there is a non-zero but negligible probability that no one is saved. In addition, it is natural to take the doctrine of election to require that God *chooses* a *particular* people—a particular number of particular individuals—not simply that God gets *some* people for himself. So if God's control over election is limited to his making it probable that some people or other are saved, it would seem that we have given up the doctrine of election.

Beyond the concern that God cannot guarantee that anyone is saved, how does the open model of election handle some of the other issues we have considered for alternative views? First, the open model may at first seem to solve the problem of hell, since its commitment to incompatibilism implies that God could not determine that anyone freely to come to faith. Still, one might worry that eternal suffering would be an unfair punishment for the failure to come to faith, especially if, as some open theists want to maintain in response to the objection raised above, God can *virtually* guarantee whether or not individuals freely choose to come to faith. In addition, some open theists may want to accept universalism and maintain that everyone is elect, but here the worry about God's inability to guarantee that anyone (let alone everyone) comes to faith resurfaces. Even if one allowed for post-mortem repentance, on the open model God still cannot guarantee that everyone will eventually come to faith.

Section 5: Does middle knowledge give God ultimate control over election?

We have seen one problem with an open model of election: it is unclear, on that model, how God could guarantee that any particular person—or even any people at all—come to faith freely. But another stripe of libertarians who think that coming to faith involves a free choice maintain that God could indeed guarantee this. They suppose that God knew, "before the foundation of the world," how all of the (infinitely many) possible people he could create would freely behave, in all of the (infinitely many) possible circumstances in which he could place them; and God elected on the basis of this knowledge. For instance, if God intended that the news of Christ's resurrection be spread—and people believe it—then God could have made sure that some of those who encountered the risen Christ would become evangelists—and that some of those who encountered them would believe. And God could have ensured that *specific* people would do specific things— for instance, that Paul would convert—by consulting his knowledge of how they would freely behave in various possible situations, and then creating them in the situations in which he knew they would act according to his plan. Such knowledge the medieval philosopher Luis de Molina termed "middle knowledge," since it is "in between" (distinct from, but sharing something in common with) both God's knowledge of *necessary* truths which he does *not* determine (e.g. mathematical necessities) and God's knowledge of *contingent* facts which he *does* determine (such

[56] Vicens and Kittle *God and Human Freedom*, 47.

[57] Hasker, "A Philosophical Perspective," 153.

as whether Paul would exist at all, and if so, in what circumstances). The propositions God knows via his middle knowledge regarding how possible people would freely behave are called "counterfactuals of freedom" (*counterfactual* since some of the people, situations, and behaviors that God knows are never realized). What distinguishes Molina's view from that of theological determinists is that these counterfactuals are, though contingent, not determined by God, leaving room for libertarian freedom to which Molinists are committed.[58] And yet, "Molinists" (those who follow Molina in this view) would seem able to affirm, with theological determinists, that on the basis of his knowledge God can guarantee the election of individuals.

Of course, Molinism is a view about the nature of God's knowledge and power, and the nature of human freedom, in general. So one could be a Molinist and still hold a deterministic view of divine election, denying that one comes to faith freely. This possibility will be considered below. First, however, we will consider a Molinist view of election, according to which the elect come to faith freely. We have already seen one attractive set of features of this view: while it maintains that coming to faith involves a free choice—which some think is essential to explaining culpability for a lack of faith—and rejects compatibilism about free choice and determinism—which some find hard to swallow—it seems able to secure something important that the open view cannot: that God can guarantee that the individuals he elects will come to faith. So why *wouldn't* anyone be a Molinist? Well, Molinism depends on certain metaphysical assumptions that some philosophers find implausible—central of which is that there could be any facts for God to know, about how people who *never actually exist* would freely behave, if they were to exist. We cannot begin to get into the controversy surrounding these assumptions here.[59] But besides such general *metaphysical* issues, there are also *theological* objections to Molinism, some of which directly pertain to the doctrine of election. Thomas Flint has discussed a number of theological objections in his influential book *Divine Providence: The Molinist Account*, and finds responding to them to provide "easy victories" for the Molinist, in contrast to the "more challenging battles" fought over metaphysical issues.[60] However, we think that for one who takes seriously the doctrine of election, at least one of these objections should give pause.

The concern is that a Molinist view of election is semi-Pelagian, meaning that it implies that a human being, rather than God, initiates the process of salvation. Semi-Pelagianism has been condemned by the Church, both because of the worry that we have called *the praiseworthiness problem* (since if human beings take the first steps toward salvation without God's help then they may seem praiseworthy for their efforts) and because the Church has denied that we (fallen humans) can cause any good apart from God's grace.[61] The worry for the Molinist view of election is that God's election of an individual seems to depend on the individual's choice. For, Flint explains, "two people can be in identical situations with respect to the grace they receive, yet one

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[58] For more background on Molina's view, see Alfred Freddoso, "Introduction," in Luis de Molina (A. Freddoso, trans.), *On Divine Foreknowledge* (Part IV of *Concordia*) (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1988), 1-81.

[59] For an overview, see Ken Perszyk (ed.), *Molinism: The Contemporary Debate* (Oxford University Press, 2011) and "Recent Work on Molinism," *Philosophy Compass* 8 (2013), 755-770.

[60] Thomas Flint, *Divine Providence: The Molinist Account* Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998), 109.

[61] Cyr and Flummer, "Free Will."

respond negatively to this grace while the other responds positively." Quoting Garrigou-Lagrange, Flint continues, "Thus… 'the true beginning of salvation appears to be only in the one who is converted' rather than, as orthodox Christians must maintain, in the One who is doing the converting."[62] Flint responds by emphasizing "the necessity of prevenient grace—that gratuitous activity on God's part which precedes and prepares the way for any salutary act we may perform"—and by offering an analogy:

> Consider the woman who throws a rope to a drowning man. Suppose that no further activity on her part determines either that he grasp or that he reject the rope. Should he grasp it, we might well say that his doing so was a free action. But it would be preposterous to say that the process of his being saved from drowning began with his grasping the rope. Clearly, it began with her offering him the rope in the first place.[63]

Likewise, Flint suggests, it is clear on the Molinist view that the process of salvation begins with God's offer of grace.

We find this analogy problematic, however, and the appeal to the necessity of prevenient grace potentially misleading. For in the drowning case, the woman clearly takes the initiative in throwing the rope—she undoubtedly begins the process of saving the drowning man. But if the situation were analogous to the Molinist case in the relevant respects, she would need to consult her knowledge of whether the man would grasp the rope before deciding whether to throw it. In answering the question of who "begins" the process, Flint is focused on the temporal sequence of the individual's life; and in that sequence, God's grace does indeed come before the individual's response. But in terms of explanatory priority, facts about the individual's response comes first, since God needs to know how a possible individual would behave in various possible circumstances—including how the individual would respond to grace—before deciding whether to create that individual and offer her that grace.

Of course, God could decide to create an individual and offer her grace without first consulting his middle knowledge—in which case, God would certainly be the one to "begin" the process, in terms of both temporal and explanatory priority. However, if there is some chance that the individual would not accept the grace offered, then God's intention to elect would be thwarted—as is the case on the open model of election. So we must ask: is God able to convert every possible individual, with enough grace? Not necessarily, according to Flint. In response to a related theological objection discussed later in his book, Flint writes, "since God has absolutely no control over which counterfactuals of creaturely freedom are true and which are false, it surely is possible…. that there be a creaturely essence which is such that there is simply no set of circumstances in which God could instantiate it such that its instantiation would freely accept God's offer of salvation." Flint calls this the possibility of "transworld damnation," and makes a similar point about the possibility of transworld salvation ("that there be a creaturely essence which is such that there is simply no set of circumstances in which God could instantiate it such that its instantiation would freely reject

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[62] Flint, *Divine Providence*, 111.

[63] Ibid., 112

God's offer of salvation").[64] Flint is unbothered by God's lack of control here, since he thinks that the idea that God has such control is not justified by Scripture or tradition.[65] However, for one like Garrigou-Lagrange who adamantly defends God's *aseity*, or absolute independence from anything distinct from himself, even the possibility of God's needing to consult his middle knowledge of how free creatures will behave before deciding whether to create them or in what circumstances to do so (regardless of the possibility of transworld damnation/salvation) will be an unacceptable diminution of divine independence.[66] Thus, even if the Molinist model of election does not count as semi-Pelagian, strictly defined by Flint (in terms of the temporal priority of human effort over divine election), we think that concerns about the explanatory priority of human responses to divine grace, over God's offer of that grace, are legitimate.

Moreover, it is debatable whether the Molinist model of election fares better than the determinist model—and if so, how much—with respect to the doctrine of hell. Recall, above, we noted that determinists may have trouble answering why, if God could determine everyone to come freely to a saving faith, he did not do so. While on the Molinist view, God cannot freely determine anyone to do anything, still it would seem that God could select only those possible people who would, under some circumstances or other, freely choose faith—and then put them in such conducive circumstances. But unless Molinists embrace universalism, they must admit that God puts some individuals in circumstances in which he knows they will fail to come to a saving faith, and then condemns them for this failure.[67] Of course, some think such a divine set-up is an essential part of the doctrine of election, and that any view which does *not* have God choosing to help some and not others come to a saving faith is problematic.[68]

We mentioned above that one might combine a Molinist view of providence with a deterministic model of election. Since Molinists are libertarians, this would result in denying that one comes to a saving faith freely, as with Libertarian Calvinism.[69] The resulting view, which we might call "Molinist Calvinism," would avoid the problems that we discussed with Libertarian Calvinism.[70]

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[64] Ibid, 119.

[65] Ibid.

[66] Vicens, "Theological Determinism."

[67] For a discussion of this concern, see Jerry Walls, "Is Molinism as Bad as Calvinism?" *Faith and Philosophy* 7:1 (1990), 85-98.

[68] Garrigou-Lagrange has criticized Molinism for its failure to accommodate the idea that "no one would be better than another unless he were loved more and helped more by God" (quoted in Flint, *Divine Providence*, 117), and Flint has noted that while some might "recoil" at this idea, it has "grounding….in Scripture and tradition" and is "part of the Christian message"—and so he goes on to argue that Molinism can indeed accommodate it (ibid., 118).

[69] Although "Arminianism" is typically pitted against Calvinism, Jacobus Arminius himself (after whom Arminianism is named) attempted to combine a Molinist view of providence with his own Calvinist tradition (including soteriology). For more on Arminius see Keith Stanglin's essay in this volume.

[70] We did note one worry for Libertarian Calvinism that would apply to Molinist Calvinism as well, namely that it appears inconsistent with the WCF (and Crisp aims to establish consistency). According to the WCF, not only does God ordain whatsoever comes to pass, but God has "not decreed anything because he foresaw

For, first, we noted that a challenge for Libertarian Calvinists is to explain how it could be guaranteed that every individual *freely* comes to be in such a state of sin that they are unable to freely come to faith—given that, on libertarianism, freedom is incompatible with being determined. But a Molinist could say that God knew via his middle knowledge that the individuals he would create would all come to be in such a state of sin. Similarly, we suggested that a Libertarian Calvinist would have trouble accounting for how the elect could have (morally significant) free will in heaven, where they do not sin; but a Molinist could say that God consults his middle knowledge and elects only those individuals who will not sin post-mortem. Molinist Calvinism can also avoid any scent of semi-Pelagianism, since the view assumes that one's coming to faith is determined, and not just foreknown, by God (and the explanation of God's determining a person to come to faith does not trace back to God's knowledge of how the person would freely respond). Of course, a Molinist view of providence still depends on a number of metaphysical assumptions that many have found implausible or theologically problematic (e.g. the concern mentioned above about divine aseity). As with each of the other possible sets of views we have considered in this chapter, whether one ultimately finds Molinist Calvinism to be tenable will depend on one's other theological and philosophical (including metaphysical and moral) commitments.

Section 6: Is such philosophizing about God too anthropomorphic?

We have considered a number of questions regarding divine election and human agency in this chapter: whether coming to a saving faith—the process through which individuals become God's people—involves their wills, and if so, whether it is a free choice; whether God determines the movement of the human will in this process, and if not, whether God can have ultimate control over election. We have discussed difficulties that certain answers to these questions raise, and how defenders of the different views of election attempt to resolve them. Perhaps to some, however, the whole discussion thus far will seem to have an air of anthropomorphism and so indecency. Some have argued, for instance, that the question of whether God deterministically or non-deterministically influences people's behaviors and other events in the world is a category mistake: the categories of determination or (causal) influence simply do not apply to divine activity.[71] Others have maintained that philosophical puzzling about divine foreknowledge and human freedom is similarly misguided: for God's knowledge (they reason) is not like human knowledge, and (some or all of) the various "models" of divine knowledge we have discussed fail to take the uniqueness of God's nature into account.[72] Philosophers are not unaware of these theological

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it as future, *or as that which would come to pass upon such conditions*" (WCF 3.2, emphasis added), which is inconsistent with the Molinist component of Molinist Calvinism.

[71] See David Burrell, "Response to Cross and Hasker," *Faith and Philosophy* 25:2 (2008), 210-211: "The reason we (Kathryn Tanner and I) do not like to describe creation as "determining" is precisely because "determine" presumes a flat field of competing forces, but a God who would be the "ultimate" force in a flat field of like forces, differing only in power, would be the 'biggest thing around'; not the creator."

[72] For instance, Craig complains that a perceptualist model of divine foreknowledge on which God "looks ahead" to "see" what lies in the future (as opposed to a conceptualist model of divine middle knowledge) is "a terribly anthropomorphic notion" (William Lane Craig, "God Directs All Things," in D. Jowers (ed.),

concerns, and in fact have devoted much energy to thinking through the implications of various doctrines about the divine attributes on issues pertaining to election and human agency. Here we can only very briefly summarize some of the highlights of these philosophical discussions.

When we ask whether God *determines* some (or every) event in the world, the question may suggest a crude picture of God as a kind of natural cause, exerting influence the way natural causes do: a billiard ball, say, bumping into another ball and transferring its momentum, or the earth's gravitation pulling the dropped apple to the ground. But there are many reasons why divine activity cannot be like this, beginning with the fact that God is not a physical body, and so does not have momentum to transfer or a gravitational pull to exert! Those who affirm that God determines all— or even some—events in the world have a lot to say about this concern.[73] One response we take to be especially promising is inspired by Thomas Aquinas's doctrine of analogy. The idea here is, first, that we cannot predicate terms (e.g. "desires" or "creates") of creatures and God *univocally*, i.e. use language that has the same meaning in both cases, for a number of reasons, including that God is simple—that is, there is no composition or complexity in God, and so God is identical to each of his attributes, and his existence *is* his essence or nature. But neither do we predicate terms *equivocally* of God and creatures—i.e. in a way that they have completely different meanings— because this would imply that we do not know at all what we are saying when we speak of God (and surely we mean *something* when we say, for instance, that God created the world, or desires the salvation of all people—and we know what we mean!). Thus Aquinas supposed that our language is used *analogically* of God and creatures. The upshot of the Thomistic doctrine of analogy is that since God is the source of all good things, and in God "the perfections of all things must pre-exist in God in a more eminent way,"[74] when we use a term to speak of some attribute or activity of God, we "are not straying outside its normal meaning but trying to enter more deeply into it."[75]

What does this mean, in particular, for our saying that God *determines* some event to come to pass? We have seen that likening God's determination to that of a determining physical cause raises difficulties. But in order for analogical predication to avoid slipping into complete equivocation, there must be *some* univocal or shared core meaning between physical and divine determination.[76] We think that the most promising candidates for shared meaning are *modal* concepts, e.g. necessity and sufficiency. In other words, if God determines some event to occur, then whatever God does to determine it (will it, say) is *sufficient* for that event's occurrence; the event's occurrence is *conditionally necessary* (its necessity is conditional upon what God does—

Four Views on Divine Providence (Zondervan, 2011), 85). Others, as we will see, are critical of the Molinist view of divine knowledge.

[73] It should be noted that even those who would shy away from the language of determination must, if they are orthodox Christians, affirm that God *does* things. So non-determinists, too, must confront the issue of how to understand divine agency in the world, and may make use of the response we outline here.

[74] *The Summa Theologiae of St. Thomas Aquinas*, 2nd ed., trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province (1920/2017), q4a2, https://www.newadvent.org/summa/1004.htm.

[75] Hebert McCabe, "Appendix 4: Analogy," H. McCabe (ed), St. Thomas Aquinas's *Summa Theologiae: Volume 3, Knowing and Naming God* (Blackfriars, 1964).

[76] Thomas Tracy, "Divine Action, Created Causes, and Human Freedom," in T. Tracy (ed.) *The God Who Acts* (Pennsylvania State University Press, 1994), footnote 20.

his willing it). One may affirm that God's willing something is sufficient for its occurrence while leaving the "mechanism" of divine causation or action a mystery.[77] Such a modal rendering avoids anthropomorphism while making debates about the compatibility of divine and human agency more tractable.

Another aspect of our discussion in this chapter that might raise the specter of anthropomorphism are claims made about God's knowledge, and how God uses his knowledge in making choices; here we will focus on Molinism, which has perhaps the most to say about this divine attribute. Divine middle knowledge is often explicated, in contemporary philosophy, in terms of possible worlds: God knows every possible maximally complete state of affairs, or way the world could be.[78] Some facts about these worlds are necessary; others are contingent and, if the world were to be actual, would depend on God's choice, while others are contingent but depend on the choices of free creatures. Some worlds are not "feasible" for God, meaning that God could not make them actual, since even though some event in the world might be possible for a created person to bring about, the person would not actually bring the event about if given a free choice.[79] So Molinists understand creation to be the process of God choosing to "actualize" one of the infinitely many possible worlds which are feasible to God. This picture of divine creation might raise theological concerns for a number of reasons. One concern, which is perhaps the easiest for Molinists to address, is that it seems to portray creation as a one-time event, "in the beginning." This concern might be leveled against other views of providence as well—for instance, deterministic views according to which God selects from among possible worlds (which are *all* feasible to him). Traditional theists might respond in a number of ways: first, by maintaining that God's eternity should not be understood as *everlastingness* (existing at all times, without beginning or end) but as *timelessness* (outside of time altogether), and so God does not act from a distant past, but something like an eternal "present."[80] Second, God's activity vis-á-vis creation is not relegated to an "initial" act of selection, but also includes his sustaining everything and upholding their powers, without which the whole world would immediately go out of existence. And finally, the model of selecting among possible worlds does not preclude more "direct" divine action, such as granting special grace to individuals not by way of their circumstances, but "immediately."[81]

Yet a second concern, more particular to the Molinist view, seems more challenging. The concern is that God's selection from among feasible worlds may not look very much like creation *ex nihilo*, the traditional Christian view of God's creation by fiat. For there seems to be something which

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[77] Even those writing about physical determinism sometimes employ modal language while avoiding causal terminology; van Inwagen, for instance, defines "determinism" in terms of propositional entailment, writing: "Causation is a morass in which I for one refuse to set foot" (*An Essay on Free Will*, 65).

[78] Plantinga, *God, Freedom, and Evil*, 45.

[79] Ibid., 180-4.

[80] For an influential contemporary discussion, see Eleonore Stump and Norman Kretzmann, "Eternity," *Journal of Philosophy* 78 (1981), 429-458, which builds on Boethius's classic formulation of the doctrine.

[81] For a discussion of the possibilities of special divine action in a deterministic world, see Leigh Vicens, "On the Possibility of Special Divine Action in a Deterministic World" *Religious Studies* 48:3 (2012), 315-336.

preexists creation.[82] Of course, "possible worlds" are not any kind of material being, but simply abstract *possibilities* which God knows; and his knowledge is not really external to him. Perhaps the concern may be put in terms of divine activity vs. passivity, or the concept of aseity, which we touched on above in our discussion of Molinism. But another way of understanding the concern is as focused on the concept of *selection* itself. In a somewhat enigmatic passage in his book *Love Almighty and Evils Unlimited*, Austin Farrer writes,

> God's mind…does not labour, like ours, through a multitude of suggestions; he goes straight to the goal of his choice. He does not start with shadowy might-have-beens, and fill one of them out with the substance of being. He simply decrees what is; the might-have-beens are accompanying shadows of the actual, the other ways in which God knows he could have created, and did not.[83]

Of course, Farrer also says, "We may say such things; we cannot think them," and insists that "All human analogy fails us." Yet in this passage he seems to offer both a critique of the Molinist view of creation, and an alternative picture.[84] The idea seems to be that it is not worthy of God's greatness to imagine him first (in the sense of logical priority) consulting his knowledge of possibilities and then selecting the best to actualize. Instead, God "goes straight to…his choice," creating from nothing what he (simultaneously?) knows to be good. Then again, perhaps Molinists can accommodate this idea. Earlier we suggested that determinists need not have any grasp of the "mechanism" of divine agency to affirm that God *determines* events in the world; likewise, Molinists might say that the language of God *selecting* from among possibilities is similarly analogical, and neither do they have much grasp on what this "concretely" looks like.

We have so far discussed how theological determinists and Molinists respond to challenges regarding the potential anthropomorphic implications of the concepts they employ to explicate their views of election. We have said nothing about open theism, though this is the view of election perhaps most commonly charged with anthropomorphism, in its understanding of both God's knowledge (limited by either lack of facts about the future or God's self-imposition) and God's agency in the world (not determining, and therefore not in complete control of election, as we have argued). Open theists frequently make appeal, in defending their view, to biblical passages that critics say are anthropomorphic images of God, such as God's learning new information or changing his mind.[85] Moreover, they generally deny theological doctrine that others appeal to in

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[82] Rogers seems to have this concern in mind when she describes the Molinists' view of God as "something like Plato's demiurge who is confronted by a set of independently existing propositions which function as a framework constraining his creation" (Katherin Rogers, "God is Not the Author of Sin: An Anselmian Response to McCann," *Faith and Philosophy* 24 (2007), 300-310, 301).

[83] Austin Farrer, *Love Almighty and Ills Unlimited* (London: Wm. Collins Sons & Co., 1962), 64.

[84] Leigh Vicens, "Providence and the Problem of Evil in Farrer's *Love Almighty and Ills Unlimited,*" in R. Harries and S. Platten (eds.), *Austin Farrer: A Prophetic Legacy* (SCM Press, forthcoming).

[85] James Rissler,"Open Theism." *The Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ISSN 2161-0002, https://www.iep.utm.edu/, May 21, 2020.

resolving the challenges we have discussed above, such as divine simplicity and atemporality.[86] For this and other reasons (including the challenge of guaranteeing election, discussed above) we find the open model of election the most problematic.[87]

While our focus has been on responding to the concern that philosophical models of election have a tendency to anthropomorphism, we think that to take the doctrine of election seriously one must resist the temptation of apophatism (affirming only "negative" or denial statements about God, e.g. God is not physical) or theological views on which God lacks personal characteristics such as desires or a will. For the doctrine of election is itself a set of positive claims about what God has done, is doing, and will do with his creation, and necessarily involves such personal characteristics. To return to the Ephesians passage with which we began, God—the One who *accomplishes* all things according to his *will—chose* individuals according to a *plan* and *destined* them according to a *purpose*, so that they might live for the praise of his glory. These italicized terms are all agential ones, and if they are to have any meaning for us whatsoever, we must affirm that God is in some respect a person, one to whose choice and will ours might be aligned, and whose glory we might praise.

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[86] See for instance, the essays in Clark Pinnock (ed.), *The Openness of God* (Downers Grove: Intervarsity Press, 1994).

[87] Of course, open theists may be fine with rejecting the doctrine of election, or at least replacing our conception of it with an alternative, such as the view that election is a "corporate call to service" rather than God's choosing some people to come to faith. (Rice, "Biblical Support," 56.)