**Freedom, Even If God Decrees It**

*Abstract (150):* W. Matthews Grant has argued that it is possible to reconcile a strong theory of God’s causal sovereignty with libertarian freedom by denying that God causes the acts of free creatures by means ofsome factor intrinsic to Himself. Grant argues that the accounts on which God causes those actions of His creatures in virtue of His decrees cannot be libertarian. I will argue that two classical theories of grace, despite holding that God causes creaturely acts in virtue of a divine decree or intention, remain libertarian in just the same sense Grant’s account is. I controversially propose that this is true even of Banezian theories of grace, on which God causes free actions directly. Instead, I suggest that we can characterize what it is for a theory to be theological determinist according to a distinction proposed by Eleonore Stump.

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W. Matthews Grant[[1]](#endnote-1) holds that “there is no incompatibility between our acts being caused by God and their being free in the libertarian sense.”[[2]](#endnote-2) A typical view of that incompatibility between freedom and ‘divine causality’ comes from Plantinga: “If I am free with respect to an action *A,* then God does not *bring it about* or *cause it to be the case* either that I take or that I refrain from this action...For [if He does] then I am not free to *refrain* from A, in which case I am not free with respect to A.”[[3]](#endnote-3) Grant argues, instead, that it is possible to reconcile God’s causal sovereignty with libertarian freedom by denying an assumption that God causes *by means of* some factor, property, or decree intrinsic to Himself (I will refer these as ‘divine decrees’). Grant calls this assumption the Intrinsic Model of divine agency (IM).[[4]](#endnote-4)

IM will (Grant claims) inevitably lead to God’s causality determining an action because IM introduces factors (decrees) that are ‘logically sufficient’ to cause the creature’s act. Grant proposes that a model of divine agency on which God causes the free actions of His creatures in virtue of no intrinsic property or decree, the Extrinsic Model (EM), avoids this problem. On EM, since there are *no* intrinsic properties or divine decrees involved in the process, God’s causality does not introduce some factor that is both prior to and logically sufficient for bringing about the creature’s action. Further, God’s act and the creature’s are “simultaneous necessary conditions” for each other.[[5]](#endnote-5) Grant holds that this relationship between God’s causing the act and the act’s occurrence preserves created agents’ ability to do otherwise and ultimate responsibility for their acts, given that the creature has ‘counterfactual control’ over what God does (i.e., if the creature did not choose to act, God would not cause the act).[[6]](#endnote-6) EM is thus compatible with libertarian freedom, Grant proposes, as it gives creatures full counter-factual control over God’s causal activity.

*Pace* Grant, I take two classical theories of grace associated with Domingo Banez and Luis de Molina and argue that these are exempt from Grant’s attack on intrinsic models of divine causality. The classical theories of grace can remain libertarian in just the same sense Grant’s account is. Grant proposes that God’s causal activity and the free act of the creature are mutually necessary and sufficient for each other’s occurrence. Yet a divine decree can be understood to bring about a creaturely act under the same conditions. Further, on both Banezian and Molinist accounts of God’s causality, God is able to give counterfactual control to creatures regarding their response to God’s grace. These accounts illustrate that the problems for libertarian freedom do not reside in the mere fact that God causes an action, but in giving grounds for *how* God’s causality brings about human free acts. In fact, I argue that Molinism and Banezianism offer responses to that grounding problem, whereas Grant does not. I conclude by comparing the theoretical virtues of each of these approaches in order to provide a better account of what it is to embrace theological compatibilism.

1. **The Extrinsic Model**

Drawing on Robert Kane,[[7]](#endnote-7) Grant argues a free act has two necessary conditions: a free act is one where “there is no factor both prior to and logically sufficient for the act.”[[8]](#endnote-8)

[1] “Prior to” is a logical or causal priority; a relation whereby “*b* asymmetrically depends on *a,* whether or not *a* temporally precedes *b.*”[[9]](#endnote-9)

[2] “*A* is logically sufficient for *b* just in case it is not possible for *a* to exist (or occur, or obtain) without *b*’s existing (or occurring, or obtaining).”[[10]](#endnote-10)

The first condition is intended to make clear that some factor could be logically, even if not temporally, prior to what is caused: e.g., my espresso mug is logically, not temporally, prior to it being colored. The second condition is to be distinguished from cases where a factor *a* is necessary for *b,* but does not entail the existence of *b* necessarily. My espresso mug is a necessary, but not sufficient, condition for the mug’s whiteness; whereas my mug’s being white is a (trivially) sufficient condition that the mug is colored.

Grant presupposes a ‘strong’ view of divine causal sovereignty: God causes the being of all entities and does so continuously.[[11]](#endnote-11) Citing Aquinas, Grant takes this notion of God’s causality to extend even to free *acts*.[[12]](#endnote-12) This is to say that free creatures *and* their acts are both immediately/directly caused by and dependent upon God.[[13]](#endnote-13) Grant argues that God’s causality, while *prior* to free actions, is necessary but not logically sufficient for the occurrence of those acts. It can nevertheless appear that God’s causality is logically sufficient only because of a problematic assumption. This assumption is that God causes free acts (e.g., the free act E) by means of “some real, intrinsic property, feature, or state of God in virtue of which God causes E, and which state would not exist were God not causing E.”[[14]](#endnote-14) This is the “Intrinsic Model” of divine agency (IM). IM is problematic because it introduces a factor that is not only prior to free acts, but also logically sufficient to cause their occurrence: the divine decree (i.e., the property, feature, or state of God) which decree cannot exist without the caused entity also obtaining. Grant argues that this latter fact means that IM is incompatible with libertarian freedom, because IM introduces both a prior and logically sufficient factor that necessitates a free action (the decree), and so entails determinism.

Grant therefore proposes an Extrinsic Model of divine agency (EM) which holds there is “nothing in virtue of which God causes” a free act.[[15]](#endnote-15) God causing the free act E only involves: God, E, God’s reason for causing E, and the causal relation between them.[[16]](#endnote-16) Grant goes through all of these ingredients and argues none is a factor that would be both prior and logically sufficient for E’s occurrence, thus showing that no factor entails determinism. E is (trivially) logically sufficient for itself, but not prior to itself. God’s reason for causing E is prior to, but not logically sufficient to cause E because God is free. Despite having reasons to cause E, God is “free to refrain from bringing E about.”[[17]](#endnote-17) The core of Grant’s analysis is that God’s *act* of causing E is logically sufficient for E, but it is not *prior* to E. This is because God’s act has E as a ‘constituent,’ and so cannot be prior to E to act as a cause; God, not God’s act, is the cause of E. If we consider that act, or causal relation, without E as a constituent, then (Grant notes), this relation is neither causally prior nor sufficient for the occurrence of E.[[18]](#endnote-18)

Grant claims that God’s act of causing E and E are then “logically necessary and logically sufficient for each other.”[[19]](#endnote-19) This is because God’s act of causing E is a *relation,* and “relations are not prior to their relata.”[[20]](#endnote-20) Further, “God’s act of causing my act depends on my act as on an essential constituent”[[21]](#endnote-21), so that God’s act to bring about E is logically simultaneous with or dependent on E. Thus, God’s act and E are “simultaneous (or concurrent) necessary conditions for each other” because “neither God’s act nor the creature’s act can be prior to the other.”[[22]](#endnote-22) Grant believes this logical co-determination means that a created agent has “counterfactual power” over what God causes with respect to their free acts.[[23]](#endnote-23) Because neither God nor His reasons differ in worlds with or without E, all antecedent factors to the agent’s choice remain the same; “were I to do otherwise, God’s act of causing my act would not occur.”[[24]](#endnote-24) Grant argues that I have control over God’s causing my act: “My act is an ontologically necessary condition for God’s causing my act. Without my concurrent co-operation in performing my act, God’s act of causing my act does not occur.” [[25]](#endnote-25) What leads to E actually occurring (and God causing E) is thus that *creatures* decide to E. If this is true, Grant concludes, EM is compatible with libertarian freedom.

1. **Throwing a Wrench into the Works**

Bracketing concerns about God’s universal causal sovereignty and whether the construal of libertarian freedom is sufficient, there is something else missing in Grant’s account. Michael Almeida argues that what has gone wrong is that Grant’s position involves an equivocation on whether God’s act of causing E is prior to E; “The relation, God causes E, is not prior to God and E only in the sense that God causes E is not *temporally prior* to the relata, God and E. The relation obtains only when the relata exist. But Grant has already concluded that explanatory priority does not require temporal priority, so God’s causing E can be prior to E in the relevant explanatory sense despite the fact that the relation is not prior to E in the irrelevant temporal sense.”[[26]](#endnote-26) However, I do not think this is quite accurate. Grant’s position is that God’s act of causing the creature’s free act E cannot be prior to E because it has E as a constituent. In light of this distinction, he holds that “my act is an ontologically necessary condition for God’s causing my act. Without my concurrent co-operation in performing my act, God’s act of causing my act does not occur.” [[27]](#endnote-27) God’s act of causing E and E are then “logically necessary and logically sufficient for each other.”[[28]](#endnote-28)

The point about priority then seems to be that only the *joint* decision of both God and the free created agent *together* are sufficient to determine their action. Despite Grant’s claim that this means that God’s causing an act E is logically sufficient but not prior to the action, what seems to be at issue is that God’s causal activity is necessary but not *individually* sufficient to bring about E. I take it that this is a fair way to put the point that, because the creature’s action E is a constituent of God’s causal relation to it, the causal relation does not come into existence without the creature choosing to bring about E and the creature’s decision to E is (consequently) logically or explanatorily prior to God causing E. While the causal relation by which God is causing E is logically sufficient for the occurrence of E, as it cannot be the case that God is causing E and E doesn’t occur, it is the creature that is explanatorily prior for determining whether E will occur and thus whether God causes E.

It seems to me that what is doing the critical explanatory work on Grant’s account is then that, when God causes a free human action, God’s causality is ultimately necessary but not sufficient for bringing about that action. This seems to me another way to express Grant’s claim that the creature’s action has explanatory priority over God’s causal relation to that action. Notice, however, that such a response is available to two traditional accounts of God’s causality of free acts which do involve divine decrees. Take two very simple characterizations of such theories as follows:

1. Molinism: “God possesses and makes providential use of comprehensive knowledge of what creatures would freely choose in any possible situation, but God has no control over the facts about what free creatures would choose.”[[29]](#endnote-29)
2. Banezianism: there are no truths about what a creature would do independent of God’s causal decisions; “God knows what someone will do in the future because he eternally decrees either to cause or permit the human action.”[[30]](#endnote-30)

In both theories, God actualizes a world in which humans freely perform their intentional actions. On the Molinist view, God has no direct control to actualize one set of free decisions rather than another – He can only use knowledge of what an agent would do to actualize a world in which the free decisions of that agent figures. On the Banezian view, God does have direct control over whether to actualize some set of free decisions of an agent. Historical defenders of both views adopted a classical view of divine simplicity, where divine decrees, i.e., God’s decisions what possible worlds to actualize, are identical with God.[[31]](#endnote-31) Thus, strictly speaking, neither are ‘intrinsic models’ of divine causality, even though they use the notion of a divine decree to model whatever is happening when God freely chooses to actualize one world rather than another.[[32]](#endnote-32)

Nevertheless, on neither theory is there a requirement that God’s causality and His decrees must be logically sufficient for the occurrence of the creaturely decision that they cause, in the sense of being explanatorily prior to and causally sufficient for their occurrence. In fact, simply put the ‘divine decree’ of either theory in the place of how Grant treats ‘God causing E’ on his own extrinsic model. On either view, God does not choose to actualize a world in which I choose to E unless I also choose to E in that world. Similarly, God’s causing me to E clearly has E as a constituent, where neither God’s causing me to E nor me E-ing will occur without the other. Even for the Banezian, who holds that there are no truths about whether I would E independent of God’s decision to cause me to E, does not require that God’s decision *be both prior to and logically sufficient for* me E-ing. God’s decision to cause me to E could have been, for example, a joint decision of both me and God, where (while it would not be true that my action is logically prior to God’s causal relation) their relation does not involve *either* being logically or explanatorily prior to the other.

Where Grant’s theory limps is that it provides no account of *how* God’s causality is not sufficient for the occurrence of E. Generally, it seems problematic how God’s causing an action is an intentional act on God’s part if God’s action is not informed by something like an intention. In the classical tradition, these are of course the role of ‘divine decrees.’ But, more specifically, Grant claims that God and the creature are concurrent in producing the whole of their effect where both are sufficient and necessary – e.g., God is the sufficient cause of my choosing to become a friar, and I am the sufficient cause of my choosing to become a friar.[[33]](#endnote-33) What seems envisioned is that both of these are not contradictory claims because we are only *jointly* sufficient, not individually so, for my decision. But the very question is how these two things are jointly and not individually sufficient. This is because, for instance, my action is a constituent of God’s action – if God is sufficient to bring about my E-ing, then it looks like any way in which I am a sufficient cause of my action would be subsumed under God’s causing. Either God is a sufficient cause or not.[[34]](#endnote-34) It would be problematic for the classical theist, for example, if the account requires that I am able to exercise causal influence on God, given the way in which my choice to freely E seems to be explanatorily prior in the account. There would otherwise appear to be an overdetermination problem, which is precisely the question at issue in reconciling God’s causality with my free agency. What we need is an answer for how God is causing the action *with me.*

1. **Conclusion: Avoiding Determinism**

Consider by analogy how God can know truths about what a creature freely does, despite being impassible and eternal. Garrigou-Lagrange famously claimed, in regard to God’s knowledge of free actions, that “God is either determining or determined, there is no other alternative.”[[35]](#endnote-35) Eleonore Stump responded to this claim about God’s knowledge by denying that knowledge of some fact about what a creature freely does requires that God be causally acted upon by the creature – God can be eternal and know the free actions of creatures, then, without causing them or without being causally affected by those actions.[[36]](#endnote-36) Kevin Timpe develops the suggestion by pointing out that contemporary accounts of truth-making, the relation holding between a true proposition and whatever that makes or necessitates the truth of that proposition, is not a causal relation.[[37]](#endnote-37) Consequently, the fact some creature’s action would make a proposition (that God knows) true does not require that God is causally affected by that creature.

And this way of understanding God’s knowledge permits God to be providentially responsive to creatures in time insofar as God’s action is responsive not in being metaphysically dependent on creatures, but rather that, whatever God did, He did *because* of the creature’s free decision; “God is responsive in that had the human agent done otherwise, then God would also have done otherwise.”[[38]](#endnote-38) We can in fact characterize what it is to be a theological determinist in light of the claims about God’s knowledge: theological determinism is the view that God’s decisions are individually and totally sufficient to account for all the contingent truths about creaturely actions.[[39]](#endnote-39) Yet an account of how God’s decision-making is responsive to the free agency of a creature, and how it relates to what God brings about, is precisely what Grant rules out on his extrinsic model. By contrast, the classical theories can each offer a vision of how God’s intention to be responsive to creatures is what ensures or accounts for how God’s causality is not (individually) sufficient for the occurrence of my free action, and then, consequently, in virtue of which I might have counterfactual control over my free actions despite God causing them. These theories propose models of God’s decrees or decision-making process in order to highlight facts about God’s intentions that are supposed to explain how God’s actualizing or causing some set of my free decisions (directly or indirectly) nevertheless is not sufficient to determine my decision.

For the Molinist, God intends to respect a creature’s free decisions in His providential plan, and so the model of divine decision incorporates God’s making decisions on the basis of knowledge about creaturely free decisions. Even when God is necessary to cause my decisions, i.e., actualizing the worlds in which I make them, He does not determine the truths in light of which He made the decision to actualize that world. For the Banezian, too, God’s decision-making process in bringing about my free action is supposed to explain how that act is free. God’s intention, for the Banezian, is to *help* creatures produce a free act, perfecting their freedom – it is this fact about how God has caused my action that explains why it remains free.[[40]](#endnote-40) Further, God’s readiness to assist me in bringing about decisions provides me with alternative possibilities for action; thus, Aquinas notes: “What we can do with the Divine assistance is not altogether impossible to us. ‘What we can do through our friends, we can do, in some sense, by ourselves.’”[[41]](#endnote-41)

1. Grant’s position was laid out in two related papers: W. Matthews Grant, “Divine Universal Causality and Libertarian Freedom,” in *Free Will and Theism,* edited by Kevin Timpe and Daniel Speak (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016): 214–233; “Can a Libertarian Hold That Our Free Acts Are Caused By God?” in *Faith and Philosophy* Vol. 27, No. 1 (Jan. 2010): 22 – 44. He has since collected the papers into a book, but I will freely refer to the papers as the views are the same; W. Matthews Grant, *Free Will and God’s Universal Causality: The Dual Sources Account* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2019). [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. Grant, “Divine Universal Causality,” 215. See *Free Will and God’s Universal Causality*, 1–10. [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. Alvin Plantinga, *The Nature of Necessity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1974), 171. Cited in Grant, “Divine Universal Causality,” 215. [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. Grant refers to this in “Divine Universal Causality,” as the ‘Popular Model’ or PM, but in later writing it is called the ‘Intrinsic Model’. The latter terminology is clearer for our purposes. [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
5. Grant, “Divine Universal Causality,” 222. [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
6. Grant, “Divine Universal Causality,” 229. [↑](#endnote-ref-6)
7. C.f., Robert Kane, *A Contemporary Introduction to Free Will* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 5–6. [↑](#endnote-ref-7)
8. Grant, “Divine Universal Causality,” 218. [↑](#endnote-ref-8)
9. Grant, “Divine Universal Causality,” 217. [↑](#endnote-ref-9)
10. Grant, “Divine Universal Causality,” 217. [↑](#endnote-ref-10)
11. Grant, “Divine Universal Causality,” 214; “necessarily God directly causes all entities distinct from himself for as long as such entities exist.” God’s causality involves two aspects: ontological dependence (Grant, “Divine Universal Causality,” 215: “[all entities] are conserved by God...”) and ‘causal sovereignty’ (Grant, “Divine Universal Causality,” 214: “[God] is immediately present to all as an agent....”). [↑](#endnote-ref-11)
12. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa contra gentiles*, trans. James F. Anderson (Notre Dame: Notre Dame University Press, 1975), Bk. II, Ch. 15 (6): “Everything other than God . . . must be referred to Him as the cause of its being.” [↑](#endnote-ref-12)
13. Grant, “Divine Universal Causality,” 214. Grant makes no distinction, for example, between an act ‘having being’ and ‘existing as’ an act. [↑](#endnote-ref-13)
14. Grant, “Divine Universal Causality,” 219. [↑](#endnote-ref-14)
15. Grant, “Divine Universal Causality,” 220. [↑](#endnote-ref-15)
16. Grant, “Divine Universal Causality,” 220. [↑](#endnote-ref-16)
17. Grant, “Divine Universal Causality,” 220. [↑](#endnote-ref-17)
18. Grant, “Can a Libertarian,” 34. [↑](#endnote-ref-18)
19. Grant, “Divine Universal Causality,” 222. [↑](#endnote-ref-19)
20. Grant, “Divine Universal Causality,” 221. [↑](#endnote-ref-20)
21. Grant, “Divine Universal Causality,” 228. [↑](#endnote-ref-21)
22. Grant, “Divine Universal Causality,” 222. [↑](#endnote-ref-22)
23. Grant, “Divine Universal Causality,” 229. [↑](#endnote-ref-23)
24. Grant, “Divine Universal Causality,” 229. [↑](#endnote-ref-24)
25. Grant, “Can a Libertarian,” 43. [↑](#endnote-ref-25)
26. Michael Almeida, “Review of: W. Matthews Grant, Free Will and God’s Universal Causality: The Dual Sources Account*,”* in *European Journal for Philosophy of Religion,* Vol. 12, No. 4(2020): 242. (Referencing Grant, *Free Will and God’s Universal Causality*, 6). [↑](#endnote-ref-26)
27. Grant, “Can a Libertarian,” 43. [↑](#endnote-ref-27)
28. Grant, “Divine Universal Causality,” 222. [↑](#endnote-ref-28)
29. Kenneth Pearce, “Are We Free to Break the Laws of Providence?” in *Faith and Philosophy,* Vol. 37, Is. 2 (2020): 159. [↑](#endnote-ref-29)
30. Thomas Osborne, “Thomist Premotion and Contemporary Philosophy of Religion,” in *Nova et Vetera,* English Edition, Vol. 4, No. 3 (2006): 607–608. [↑](#endnote-ref-30)
31. Classical proponents held that divine decrees would be identical with God’s essence. Mark Spencer lists some prominent defenders of the identity of God’s essence and decrees in his “Divine Causality and Created Freedom,” in *Nova et Vetera,* English Edition, Vol. 14, No. 3 (2016): 932; [I reproduce his list exactly] John Capreolus, *In I Sent*, d. 45, q. 1, sC. 2, ad 1 and 4 Aureoli (vol. 2, 587–89); Bañez, *In I ST*, q. 19, a. 2–3, 10, 604, 607–08, and 644–46; John of St. Thomas, *CP, Logica*, q. 23, a. 1 (vol. 1, 635–36); *In I ST,* q. 19, d. 5, aa. 4–5 (117–29); Salmanticenses, *In I ST, De voluntate Dei,* d. 7, dub. 7, ss. 4–5 (vol. 2, 119–23). [↑](#endnote-ref-31)
32. And, even assuming, contrary to classical theism, that the divine decree is a separate entity from God, Grant claims that the causal relation of God causing me to E is *also* distinct from God. See Grant, *Free Will and God’s Universal Causality*, 58–59. [↑](#endnote-ref-32)
33. Grant, *Free Will and God’s Universal Causality*, 38–39. [↑](#endnote-ref-33)
34. See a similar objection by Simon Kittle, “W. Matthews Grant, Free Will and God’s Universal Causality: The Dual Sources Account,” in *Faith and Philosophy*, Vol. 37, Is. 3 (July 2020): 377. [↑](#endnote-ref-34)
35. Reginald Garrigou-Lagrange, *God, His Existence and His Nature: A Thomistic Solution of Certain Agnostic Antinomies*, Vol. 2. Trans. Dom Bebe Rose (London: B. Herder Book Co., 1936), 546. [↑](#endnote-ref-35)
36. Eleonore Stump, *Aquinas* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2003), 120–122. [↑](#endnote-ref-36)
37. Kevin Timpe, “Truth-making and Divine Eternity,” in *Religious Studies,* 43 (2007): 305–307. [↑](#endnote-ref-37)
38. Timpe, “Truth-making and Divine Eternity 310. [↑](#endnote-ref-38)
39. Pearce, “Are We Free to Break,” 158. [↑](#endnote-ref-39)
40. See Reginald Garrigou-Lagrange, *Grace,* trans. Dominican Nuns of Corpus Christi Monastery (St. Louis, MO: B. Herder Books, 1952), 248–249; David Oderberg, “Divine Premotion,” in *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion,* 79 (2016): 218–220. [↑](#endnote-ref-40)
41. Both from *Summa Theologiae* (translation English Dominican Fathers, Benzinger Bros., 1920), I-II, q. 109, a. 4, ad. 2. The quotation from Aristotle is from the *Nicomachean Ethics* III, 3. [↑](#endnote-ref-41)