

FREEDOM TO CHOOSE BETWEEN GOOD AND EVIL: THEOLOGICAL ANTHROPOLOGY IN DISCUSSION WITH PHILOSOPHY

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Abstract. After a brief discussion of the terms determinism and free will, the paper sets out to compare some recent philosophical approaches to the problem of free will with a theological anthropology account of the notion. It aims to defend the claim, that even though different kind of questions are asked on both sides, they tackle similar issues and a complementary approach is needed. Recent philosophy considers the problem mostly from the standpoint of logic, naturalist evolutionary ontology and cognitive science. In the Christian theological tradition, the idea of free will has been discussed mostly from the perspective of the problem of sin and grace, thus on the grounds of soteriology, hamartiology and theological ethics. The paper shows similarities between the approaches, mainly between the problem of physical determinism and theological determinism and also divine foreknowledge.

I. THE NATURE OF THE ISSUE¹

To introduce the problematic, we will borrow some ideas from a classic text of Augustine. In his polemic, we see Augustine walking a fine line to retain the sovereignty of God's will and grace, but also the freedom of humans to choose between good and evil: "For the Almighty sets in motion even in the innermost hearts of men the movement of their will, so that He does through their agency whatsoever He wishes to perform through them,"² admitting, that God applies his power also in the places, which, if any, we would wish to understand as the seat of the free human agency. The will of the human agent is there and working, but God is nonetheless free to do whatever he wishes

1 This work has been supported by Charles University Research Centre program No. 204052.

2 Aurelius Augustinus, *Anti-Pelagian Writings* (Clark, 1887), 1277.

through them. Even so, just before making this claim, Augustine seems it fitting to give an assurance, that: “The Lord both stirred up their spirit, and yet they came of their own will.”³

The problematic nature of such a claim is quite clear and not accidental. It will be arguably present in the heart of all free will debates, both non-theological and theological. This passage in Augustine seems to capture the key feature of these debates. There appears to be a strong case for determinism of some kind or another, yet there are also strong reasons to assert that we are the ultimate causes of our choices. This proceeds from two, probably equally strong intuitions. The first one is one of an orderly nature of reality. An idea that on the grand scheme of things, the governing powers (be it God, or forces of nature) are not subject to pure randomness and contingency and so the course of events must be determined by them in some orderly fashion. The opposite intuition, which would be at least as hard to get rid of, is the idea of people making free choices. This intuition is so firmly grounded in everyday experience, that any such claim as “free will is an illusion” must inevitably, for good reasons, raise suspicion. However strong the evidence might be, it necessarily leads to obviously problematic outcomes. This can be shown on the awkwardness of the language of a possible response. Suppose that under the weight of evidence, one should *choose* to believe that they have no free will. But what else should they call such action, if not a *choice*? What about even such words as *action* or *should*?

Last but not least comes the question of good and evil, i.e. moral responsibility. Getting back to Augustine, still in the same document, we find this argument:

Now, do the many precepts which are written in the law of God, forbidding all fornication and adultery, indicate anything else than free will? Surely such precepts would not be given unless a man had a will of his own, wherewith to obey the divine commandments.⁴

3 The reference Augustine is making here is to the text of 2Ch 21:16, which reads: “The LORD aroused against Jehoram the anger of the Philistines and of the Arabs who are near the Ethiopians.” This comes from his *On Grace and Free Will*. Augustine goes further here, than just to assert, that every good people do, comes from God’s grace. He makes a stronger claim, for both God’s ultimate agency and human’s moral responsibility at the same time: “Who can help trembling at those judgments of God by which He does in the hearts of even wicked men whatsoever He wills, at the same time rendering to them according to their deeds?” Augustine, *ibid.*, XXI (Ch. 42), 1277.

4 Augustinus, *Anti-Pelagian Writings*, IV (Ch 8), 1231.

It is, to a large extent, this practical application, which has kept the debates on will alive and thriving. Whether it's in respect to the commandments of God, or laws of a modern state, the implication is clear. Would it make any sense to establish such principles and expect people to keep them if it was beyond anyone's power to make a choice?

So, already in Augustine, we see the basic outline of the problem. And at the same time, we can see, how even the best thoroughly thought conclusions might seem paradoxical and unsatisfying. We are not trying to claim, that Augustine is inconsistent, rather somewhat ambivalent. This is just an example to show that some extent of ambivalence is perhaps inherent to the theme of free will and to give both mentioned intuitions can be seen already in this classical author. We will now try to follow some of the arguments in more detail and then try to draw some similarities between the various modes of the debate.

II. TERMINOLOGY

First, we must clarify some of the terms which will be used. For the most important term of this essay, free will (or freedom of will), we can't put forward a satisfying definition at this point. Reason for this is not only that it is a point of dispute among scholars⁵ (this would also apply for some of the other terms here), but also that search for such definition will be, to some extent, the theme of this paper. Still, at least some working definition must be given. This simplified proposition will suffice now: Free will is the ability⁶ of a conscious agent to act according to her choice. Notice, that this doesn't necessarily imply the ability to discern between good and evil and to choose, for example, to

5 In one of his recent essay, Peter van Inwagen introduces the problem by maintaining that there is no such definition, not even one, that would be in the center of a rational dispute: "I think is false— namely, that there's some reasonably well- defined thing called "free will" and that specialists in various studies or sciences or disciplines have, or might be expected to have, different "perspectives" on it. (...) And I don't mean that there are rival definitions of "free will" in the way that there are rival definitions of "life" or "intelligence." The case of "free will" is much worse than that. (...) no one has any idea, any idea at all, what "free will" means. Peter van Inwagen, "The Problem of Fr** W*I", in *Free Will and Classical Theism: The Significance of Freedom in Perfect Being Theology*, ed. Hugh J. McCann (Oxford Univ. Press, 2017), 3–4.

6 In the free will debates, a distinction has been often made between such concepts as ability, power. For the purposes of this essay we will not distinguish between these.

do good rather than evil. This kind of choice will be a part of our discussion but is not a part of our basic working definition.

Another term, which will be crucial for us, is determinism. There is more than one kind of determinism, and we will go to some more detail about these below. For now, it should suffice to say, that by determinism, in general, we mean something along these lines: At any given moment in time, there is (in one way or another) a fixed sequence of future events, including the actions of conscious agents.⁷ In the contemporary free will debate, three basic standpoints are recognised (each having several variations, depending on the author and the focus of the discussion). Their approach concerning determinism defines the perspectives:

- a) Hard Determinism. The view that everything is determined, and there is thus no free will.
- b) Compatibilism. The view that everything is determined, but this is compatible with the idea of free will.
- c) Libertarianism. The view that the ideas of free will and determinism are not compatible, but there is free will. Therefore determinism is false.

The order, in which these standpoints are presented here is from the most to the least deterministic. But the continuity between them is not linear. They share some presuppositions while discarding others. For clarity, it can be shown that 1 and 3 are connected by the premise that determinism is incompatible with free will and can thus be put in a single bracket of *incompatibilism*, as opposed to 2. Because hard determinism is now a marginal standpoint,⁸ most of the debate occurs between 2 and 3. The debate between libertarianism and compatibilism is thus most of the time synonymous with the debate between incompatibilism and compatibilism. For this reason, we will not try to deal with hard determinism in this work. But it is useful to keep the former taxonomy.

7 As various forms of determinism will be shown, the reader should feel free to compare, if this definition is fitting for all of them. In the first pages of his famous essay, Peter van Inwagen states that: "Determinism is quite simply the thesis that the past *determines* a unique future." Peter van Inwagen, *An Essay on Free Will* (Clarendon, 1983), . 2. This is probably not contradictory with any major view on free will. Van Inwagen the proceeds to give a more precise definition, which we will use as a basis of our thinking about physical determinism (see below).

8 For an example of a contemporary account of hard determinism (or hard incompatibilism), see Derk Pereboom, *Living without Free Will* (Cambridge Univ. Press, 2006).

Finally, the next paragraphs are structured to speak of the non-theological and theological debates. This terminology is chosen here to give some names to two different kinds of sets of discussions, to be able to compare them side by side. It is not (as used here) a widely used and recognised terminology and should be understood just as a helpful tool for this occasion. What we call “non-theological” here covers what would be otherwise just called the philosophical debate, in the sense that it happens on the grounds of contemporary academic philosophy. The choice to use the term non-theological rather than simply philosophical is made to avoid confusion (theological debates are often lead in a philosophical manner; philosophical debates can take religious views into account) and to make the intention of the author clear. In short, the theological debates ask the question of free will in connection with the concept of God; the non-theological debates don’t. To put it simply, the non-theological debates ask: (How) can we have free will?; the theological debates ask: (How) can we have free will if there is a God?

III. THE NON-THEOLOGICAL DEBATE

In the contemporary non-theological debate, there are a few kinds of determinism, which we can divide into two brackets. First is physical and logical determinism. The second bracket encompasses a variety of other, say weaker,⁹ forms of determinism, based on genetics, habit making, social structures, etc. These do not concern us in this essay.

Logical determinism is a position that argues, that determinism is true by the essential nature of propositions (including propositions about future), that is that they are always either true or false. When this is applied to propositions about the future states of events, it follows that there was always a true or untrue proposition about the future and thus a fixed future. To borrow a more technical definition: “Roughly speaking, radical determinism (fatalism) is the view that the future is uniquely determined by the past or all future

9 We call some determinism (such as the physicalist one) stronger, because they assert, that the future is completely determined. Weaker determinisms claim, that a great part of choice making by conscious agents is determined by factors out of their reach and often also outside of their knowledge.

events are necessitated by the past. The view that classical logic deductively implies radical determinism is called logical determinism.”¹⁰

For physical determinism, we will borrow the simple definition from Peter van Inwagen: “it is the thesis that there is at any instant exactly one physically possible future.”¹¹ Such a thesis is neither surprising nor controversial if applied to the vast majority of what we perceive as (physical)¹² reality, with a few exceptions. These exceptions consist exclusively of those entities, of which we think of as conscious rational agents. Obvious examples are humans, but depending on your worldview, they might include other beings such as gods, but also some species of animals, or very complex AI systems. In this text, we will focus only on human beings. For physical determinism to be an issue concerning human beings, one must look at human beings as being somehow essentially part of the physical world. This view has also not been very controversial. Even philosophers, who make a point of rejecting physicalism, rarely wish to argue for the existence of another, extra-physical part or essence or human minds.¹³ Though many would not put this as emphatically and dramatically as Daniel Dennet, it is (in the non-theological debate) quite agreed, that:

10 Jan Woleński, “An Analysis of Logical Determinism,” *Grazer Philosophische Studien* 91, no. 1 (2015). If we want to make a divide on the basis of stronger and weaker determinisms, it has to be noted, that logical determinism would fit to the stronger bracket. In most contemporary debates, the truthmaker would consist of the present state of affairs combined with the laws of physics. It is thus, for our purposes, covering a similar ground as physical determinism. Logical determinism will, however, provide an interesting comparison with the idea of the divine foreknowledge later in this essay.

11 van Inwagen, *An Essay on Free Will*, 3.

12 The bracketed word “physical” was added, because in some forms of theism, it could be argued, that the vast majority of reality as such is not physical. We will not try to deny or pursue such a claim here. This problem would be connected to the problem of the ultimate freedom of God, which will be mentioned below. It is, however, also not the focus of this essay.

13 This is limited to contemporary western philosophers (given the scope of this essay). For an example of such contemporary philosopher, see John R. Searle, *Mind: A Brief Introduction* (Oxford Univ. Press, 2004). Searle makes it quite clear right at the beginning of his book, that he believes physicalism (along with any other major view on mind) to be false: “... the philosophy of mind is unique among contemporary philosophical subjects, in that most famous and influential theories are false. By such theories I mean just about anything, that has “ism” in its name. I am thinking of dualism, both property dualism and substance dualism, materialism, physicalism, computationalism, functionalism, behaviorism, ...” (1). But for Searle, dualism is just as false as materialism/physicalism: “... I think (it is) extremely unlikely, that when our bodies are destroyed, our souls will go marching on. I have not tried to show that this is an impossibility (indeed, I wish it were true), but rather that it is inconsistent with just about everything else we know about how the universe works...” (92).

... we are each made of mindless robots and nothing else, no non-physical, non-robotic ingredients at all. The differences among people are all due to the way their particular robotic teams are put together, over a lifetime of growth and experience.¹⁴

For the non-theological debate, the issue is not (at least not in a significant way) one of the human beings having a non-physical essence.

If this is the case, then all laws of nature apply to people just as well as they apply to any other part of the universe. In classical physics, these laws work in a deterministic fashion, quoting David Hugson:

What happens at any location in space-time is considered as determined either by matter coming to that location by passing through adjacent regions of its past light cone, or else by force or energy fields the state of which at any location in space-time depends on its state in adjacent regions of its past light cone.¹⁵

That means that the future place of every particle is perfectly determined by its position and the physical forces currently at work. This picture of the universe gave birth to the concept of a “Laplacian demon”, named after its originator, mathematician Pierre Simone de Laplace (died 1827). This demon is a hypothetical intelligent entity, which has a complete picture of all the forces of nature at work as well as the position of all things in it. If such a being is intelligent enough, it can predict all future positions of these objects:

Give this all-knowing intellect, often known as Laplace’s demon, a complete snapshot of “the state of the universe”, showing the exact location (and trajectory and mass and velocity) of every particle at that instant, and the demon, using the laws of physics, will be able to plot every collision, every rebound, every near-miss in the next instant, updating the snapshot to yield a new state description of the universe, and so on, for eternity.¹⁶

If there is or could ever be such a being is now beside the point. The implication is important: The future of everything in the world is perfectly given at any given point and can’t be any different.

The main trajectory of arguments against this view in recent years has been based on ideas derived from quantum mechanics. The most famous of

14 Daniel Dennett, *Freedom Evolves* (Penguin, 2007), 3.

15 David Hogson, “Quantum Physics, Consciousness, and Free”, in *The Oxford Handbook of Free Will*, ed. Robert Kane (Oxford Univ. Press, 2002), 86.

16 Dennett, *Freedom Evolves*, 28.

these ideas is called Heisenberg's uncertainty principle. Without claiming to understand this principle, we can state its implication, which found its place in the argumentation of many philosophers. Quoting Peter Clarke: "there is a fundamental limit to the precision with which certain pairs of physical quantities can be measured. (...) Quantum libertarians propose that mind-directed changes occur hidden within the cloud of Heisenbergian uncertainty."¹⁷ This principle thus seems to offer some variety of randomness on the lowest levels of physics. In this unpredictability, we could find some space for non-determined human decisions. But this claim is far from widely accepted, for at least a few reasons. Some argue that this implication is just a confusion between determinism and predictability. There is another, possibly stronger claim, that randomness doesn't in any way entail neither freedom of choice, nor agency. Dennett makes this point: "if the decision is undetermined – the defining requirement of libertarianism – it isn't determined by you, whatever you are, because it isn't determined by anything."¹⁸

On the other hand, the libertarian critique of compatibilists like Dennett is that the kind of free will they propose is not good enough; it is not a real free will.¹⁹ And the compatibilist idea of free will indeed seems to be quite far from the common-sense idea. It is always based on a redefinition of free will from something like: "being able to freely choose an action" to something like: "being able to act according to one's beliefs". It is then claimed, that only

17 Peter Clarke, "Determinism, Brain Function and Free Will", in *T&T Clark Reader in Theological Anthropology*, ed. Marc Cortez and Michael P. Jensen (Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2018), 253.

18 Dennett, *Freedom Evolves*, 123.

19 This is most cases argued in the terms of the so-called principle of alternative possibilities, which will be discussed below.

20 And the notion can also be criticized in a different way, from the standpoint of a different philosophical tradition. See e.g. David E. Rose, *Free Will and Continental Philosophy: The Death Without Meaning* (Continuum, 2009), 21.: "The meaningful existence of the many discourses of human endeavour support the claim that the best explanation is articulable only if human beings are free agents. These discourses and explanations exist as considerations which support our assent to the concept of freewill as an a priori ground. The scientific drive to reduce these discourses and to give a standard set of concepts that are to applied across the board is, of course, the drive of Enlightenment thought that believes there is but one description of reality and but one rationality. Such a commitment loses what is powerful in our explanations of human behaviour and is not appropriate to the sort of descriptions and explanations we seek when we try to make agents intelligible."

in a world where free decisions can be made, moral responsibility and even human dignity can be preserved: “Deciding and acting freely is, many think, partly constitutive of human dignity. Only when an agent acts with a certain variety of active control are her actions attributable to her in such a way that she may be morally responsible for what she does, deserving of praise or blame, reward or punishment.”²¹

Dennett’s account of freedom compatible with determinism can be traced to his description of everything in the world as more or less complex systems. And with rising complexity (although this is not a sufficient condition) we can observe various degrees of freedom. A bird can be said to have a degree of freedom which a rock does not have (for example to move around or to fly), a human being can in a similar fashion. In a similar manner, in a human being, we can observe a degree of freedom which neither of the former can be said to possess (for example, to act according to her own beliefs).²² This is a clearly observable phenomenon, independent of what we learned about the “behaviour” of physical particles. This can also be put in other words: While we can observe entirely deterministic patterns on a very low level of description (and maybe even randomness on a yet lower level), on a higher level – one which is important for all our practical purposes – we observe and experience various degrees of freedom. It is only by confusing the various levels of description that we arrive to see this ideas as contradictory. What is essential for Dennett is that in his view, all kinds of free will, which are “worth wanting” are those compatible with determinism: “I claim that the varieties of free will I am defending are worth wanting precisely because they play all the *valuable* roles free will has been traditionally invoked to play.”²³ The idea is that any account of freedom, which is not compatible with determinism either doesn’t bring anything of comparably higher value, or it’s just an inconsistent notion anyway. At this point, an incompatibilist – from both the hard determinist

21 Randolph Clarke, “Libertarian Views”, in *The Oxford Handbook of Free Will*, ed. Robert Kane (Oxford Univ. Press, 2002), 374.

22 Physical determinism should not be confused with genetic determinism, the idea that our lives, choices etc. are determined by our genetic makeup. In fact, Dennett makes a point of showing that it is one of the differences between the degree of human and (other) animal freedom, that humans are able to overcome the blind force of genetic influences: “It is only we human beings who have the long-range knowledge capable of identifying and then avoiding the pitfalls on the paths projected by our foresightless genes.” Dennett, *Freedom Evolves*, 166.

23 Ibid., 225.

and libertarian teams – would disagree. In most cases, the argument is built around the principle of alternative possibilities. We will see an example of such a discussion in the next chapter.

IV. THE THEOLOGICAL DEBATE

While non-theological debates often have the problem of moral responsibility entailed in them, for theological debates, this problem is much more crucial. In other words, in theology, the problem of will is always connected to the ideas of good and evil. In the Christian tradition, human action is always viewed from the perspective of responsibility before God. What are the key aspects of the theological debate can be shown by quoting the student in the dialogue by Anselm of Canterbury, sometimes called the father of scholasticism: “Since free will seems repugnant to grace, predestination and God’s foreknowledge, I want to understand freedom of will and know whether we always have it.”²⁴ This formulation works well as an explanation of the theological motivation behind the problem. Anselm himself is approaching the problem with Augustinian background: “in trying to solve the problems he had inherited while remaining within the basic outlines of Augustinian Christianity, Anselm develops a view very different from Augustine’s on free will and the relationship of creature to Creator.”²⁵

In the introductory passage of this essay, we have not only seen some examples of how Augustine works with these problems, but also that he has a great source of material for his claims in the texts of the Bible, both in Old and New Testament. Probably the most prevalent of the biblical voices Augustine uses is that of Pauline letters. It is not surprising, given that the motivation behind this (and not only this one) Augustine’s work is the defence of the idea of God’s grace. Lenka Karfikova shows, in what way is Paul’s idea of grace an antidote to Manicheism for Augustine:

The necessity of our habit, which binds mankind as a punishment for his transgression, is the reason why men do “not do” what they want to do (cf. Rom. 7:15). It is nevertheless a conflict of two contrary wills (*voluntates*), not two contrary natures (*naturae*), as the Manichaeans would have it (...)

24 Anselm, “On Free Will”, in *T&T Clark Reader in Theological Anthropology*, ed. Marc Cortez and Michael P. Jensen (Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2018), 213.

25 Katherin A. Rogers, *Anselm on Freedom* (Oxford Univ. Press, 2008), 31.

From the apostle's account it follows that the split of the will can only be overcome by God's grace (*gratia*), which inspires man with God's love and thus subjects the human will to God himself.²⁶

According to Katherin Rogers, the problem, which Anselm finds and must face in Augustine, is the latter's compatibilism (thus, determinism):

...on Augustine's understanding, God is not only the architect of the original situation in which the created agent finds himself, He also controls the outcome. (...) Anselm does not express the problem in these modern terms, but, as I shall argue, the underlying difficulty is that Augustine is a compatibilist.²⁷

Anselm understands the concept of determined passivity, but he contrasts it to an impossible concept of willing unwillingly:

a man can be bound unwillingly, because he does not wish to be bound, and is tied up unwillingly; he can be killed unwillingly, because he can will not to be killed; but he cannot will unwillingly, because one cannot will to will against his will.²⁸

This seems to be an expression of what we introduced as the second major intuition behind the problem of free will – the denial of free will seems to always lead to a contradiction. Rogers also summarises this argument of Anselm: “it is impossible for God to make someone sin. It is logically impossible. To sin is to will other than what God wills you to will. God cannot will that you should will other than He wills you to will.”²⁹ This is another contradiction based on the same set of presuppositions, in combination with the idea that to sin is to will other than what God wills for you. If this is the

26 Lenka Karfíková, *Grace and the Will According to Augustine* (Brill, 2012), 38.

27 Rogers, *Anselm on Freedom*, 25. Another problem with Augustine's compatibilism is, that it only seems to allow humans a capacity of freedom towards evil, while everything good comes from God's grace. Cf. Karfíková's conclusion: “What Augustine bequeaths to European thinking is not only the notion of man as a being defined by the self-reflection of understanding and the will, but also the conviction that in his historical condition man is a being with an enslaved will, inevitably succumbing to evil, who, nevertheless, is responsible for the evil and who can only be persuaded to good deeds by the “sweetness” of divine love.” Karfíková, *Grace and the Will According to Augustine*, 350–51.

28 Anselm, “*On Free Will*”, 217.

29 Katherin A. Rogers, “Anselm of Canterbury on Freedom and Truth”, *The Saint Anselm Journal* 10, no. 1 (2014), 2.

case, theological determinism³⁰ can not be true, because combined with these accounts of will and sin, it creates a logically impossible outcome. Augustine and Anselm have not been chosen as examples of the theological debate randomly. While Augustine could be called the most influential compatibilist (determinist), Anselm could perhaps be, in the same fashion, called the most influential libertarian.³¹

Now we will give an example of contemporary debate, on the grounds of a typically determinist tradition. The problem of predestination is most often associated with Calvinism. Calvinism, together with the other major reformation streams, was heavily influenced by a new emphasis on Augustine. Recently, theologian Oliver Crisp has proposed a way of understanding Calvinism as possibly libertarian, in the light of the Westminster Confession. He does this by distinguishing between God *ordering* and *determining* all that comes to pass. (Arguing that God does the former and not the latter.) He then proceeds to discern between two types of human action: a) “those that are determined by God, the supreme example of which is human salvation”³² and b) “those actions that are not determined by God, but are foreseen and permitted by him.”³³ Another Calvinist theologian, James Anderson, responds in a paper titled: “Determined to Come Most Freely”.³⁴ Anderson’s paper criticises not only Crisp’s arguments but also the propositions behind libertarianism as such. On the idea of libertarian Calvinism, he claims that it is inconsistent

30 Theological determinism understood as the idea that God determines all events in the world.

31 Cf. Katherin A. Rogers, “Anselmian Alternatives and Frankfurt-Style Counterexamples”, in *The Oxford Handbook of Free Will*, ed. Robert Kane (Oxford Univ. Press, 2002), 93: “Anselm of Canterbury proposes a libertarian analysis of freedom. (...) A choice that is the determined result of antecedent causes cannot be properly up to the agent himself.” Rogers is aware that this is an anachronistic term to use in connection with Anselm. In the same fashion, calling Augustine a compatibilist is to apply a foreign category. It’s hard to say what would the classic authors think of the modern attitudes which these terms refer to and if they would be willing to subscribe to them. The point was to show that both general trajectories are present within the ranks of the most prominent figures of the Christian intellectual tradition. For a thorough account of the development of Augustine’s ideas on this topic through his life and works, see Karfíková, *Grace and the Will According to Augustine*.

32 Oliver Crisp, “Libertarian Calvinism”, in *Free Will and Classical Theism: The Significance of Freedom in Perfect Being Theology*, ed. Hugh J. McCann (Oxford Univ. Press, 2017), 123.

33 Ibid., 123.

34 James N. Anderson and Paul Manata, “Determined to Come Most Freely”, *Journal of Reformed Theology* 11, no. 3 (2017).

with the Westminster Confession. In his opinion, the Confession confirms theological determinism, and even if this claim was found false, it certainly contradicts libertarianism.³⁵

With such strong claims made, it seems to prove helpful for us to look at what the author means by theological determinism and how should we understand the term. The simple definition of theological determinism he gives goes as follows: “the view that God determines all (not just some) events in the world, including human choices and actions.”³⁶ While it may be in some cases compatible with physical determinism, theological determinism is not the same as physical determinism, neither does theological determinism entail the physical one. For this reason, arguments against physical determinism, such as quantum uncertainty do not apply against the theological one. Theological determinism thus doesn’t depend on a particular account of the world (such as physicalism), rather on a theological assertion of the kind which can be found in creeds and similar materials. In the end, Anderson’s criticism of Crisp is based on his criticism of the principle of alternative possibilities (PAP)³⁷. Crisp must either affirm the PAP, which is in Anderson’s view both rejected by Calvinism³⁸ and simply internally incoherent, or he must restrict it to non-salvific choices while maintaining moral responsibility for salvific choices,³⁹ which makes him, in fact, a compatibilist⁴⁰. This shows

35 See *ibid.*

36 *Ibid.*, 275–76.

37 Principle of alternative possibilities claims, that saying a person is free in her choices and morally responsible makes sense if and only if there were different possible outcomes, i.e. if she actually could have done otherwise. This principle is the basis of most of the libertarian views and it is often rejected by compatibilists.

38 To confirm this he quotes passages from the Westminster Confession such as: “There is but one only, living, and true God, who is infinite in being and perfection, a most pure spirit, invisible, without body, parts, or passions; immutable, immense, eternal, incomprehensible, almighty, most wise, most holy, most free, most absolute; working all things according to the counsel of his own immutable and most righteous will, for his own glory” quoted from *Ibid.*, 286–87.

39 Anderson actually claims that in various stages of his work, Crisp does both. (Cf. *ibid.*, 62n.). The most influential criticism of PAP are the so called Frankfurt counterexamples, named by the philosopher Harry Frankfurt. Since then, many other versions have been produced. For more on Frankfurt counterexamples, see John M. Fischer, “Frankfurt-Type Examples and Semi-Compatibilism”, in *The Oxford Handbook of Free Will*, ed. Robert Kane (Oxford Univ. Press, 2002), 281n.

40 Although a different kind than Augustine.

us, the difficulty of the issue, especially in theological systems, which stress the divine sovereignty over everything that comes to pass.

Another inherently theological problem is the problem of God's foreknowledge.⁴¹ If God is a being having a belief about the future and at the same time a being, that can not be wrong in their beliefs, then there is at any moment only one possible future. The statement for this can be found in Linda Zagzebski: "There is no possible world with our causal laws in which God's belief at t1 occurs and in which my act at t3 does not occur."⁴² The time references are made in respect to the idea: God's believing at t1 that I will do S at t3; t2 can then be or not be filled by accidental events, which are not directly ordained by God. Either way, the proposition remains true. That means that the problem of divine foreknowledge is not dependent on the idea of divine determinism.⁴³ In this sense, it is a more theologically important problem, because it remains in more versions of Christian theology, namely all those, which retain the idea of God's omniscience. The same author has elsewhere written a short overview of the possible solutions.

Here, we will focus on one of them, which is called the "Open God" view. This view differs from the others in the way that it's the base is the picture of God in Scripture rather than purely logical argumentation (That is not to say, that those maintaining this view do not strive for logical coherence, nor that the authors of other views have no regard for Scripture). Their way of dealing with the problem is then to deny the infallible knowledge of God:

The philosophical motive for their position is the view that infallible foreknowledge is inconsistent with human free will, but they also maintain that a God who "takes risks," who enters into genuine give-and-take relationships with human persons, is better supported in Scripture than the God of classical Christian theology."⁴⁴

41 As before, we will look at this problem only in respect to the freedom of humans. But there is also a debate (quite complicated and abstract) about the idea of God's own choice making freedom, vis a vis God's omniscience. For more on this theme, see T. J. Mawson, *Belief in God* (Clarendon, 2005), 53–69.

42 Linda T. Zagzebski, *The Dilemma of Freedom and Foreknowledge* (Oxford Univ. Press, 1996), 31.

43 Cf. *Ibid.* 30.

44 Linda T. Zagzebski, "Recent Work on Divine Foreknowledge and Free Will", in *The Oxford Handbook of Free Will*, ed. Robert Kane (Oxford Univ. Press, 2002), 60.

In a way, it could be argued, that this view does not give a good solution to the problem, because it abandons the notion of God's omniscience, which is crucial to most forms of Christian theology. On the other hand, this view resonates well with some recent influential theological ideas about God, who freely chooses to restrict his power, and is thus capable of suffering, etc. As for the Scripture, it doesn't give us one single coherent view on how the divine foreknowledge functions, but the picture of this "open God" is certainly present and perhaps prevailing. Still, the problem of divine foreknowledge cannot be easily dismissed, because the idea has been present in most of the Christian tradition. Other solutions may include some (semi)compatibilist views, dependent on the rejection of PAP in a similar way, as we have seen in the former case.

V. SIMILARITIES AND THE PROBLEM OF GOOD AND EVIL

We have seen, that while the theological discussion begins with the interpretation of some scriptural motives (mainly Pauline) concerning almost exclusively the moral responsibility in the context of salvation and God's grace, the issues often revolve around similar arguments or presuppositions, while dealing with them in a different context.

While there is an essential difference between physical and theological determinism, both the way to a solution and the motivation for it seem to go in the same direction. If we look at the debate between the Calvinist theologians Crisp and Andersen, in the work of both authors we can see the matters discussed have to do with moral responsibility before God and the theme of salvation, but they are discussed almost exclusively on the grounds of libertarianism – compatibilism debates, very similar to those we can see in the physical determinism debate. As Kadri Vivhelin points out:

Determinism is not an ontological thesis. Determinism neither entails physicalism nor is entailed by it. There are possible worlds where determinism is true and physicalism false; e.g., worlds where minds are non-physical things that nevertheless obey strict deterministic laws. And there are possible worlds (perhaps our own) where physicalism is true, and determinism is false.⁴⁵

45 Kadri Vivhelin, *Causes, Laws and Free Will: Why Determinism Doesn't Matter* (2013), 4.

Thus, in both physical and theological determinism, all the sufficient causal conditions leading to a future event are met by the works of an outside (higher) power.

Then there is the idea of Laplace's demon. While coming from a different perspective, it raises the same issue as the idea of divine foreknowledge. The hypothetical demon is a being that has all existing information at hand, while also having high enough intelligence to process this information and draw conclusions about the future course of events. Basically, the same proposition is true about the idea of an omniscient God of classical theism. There are, of course, differences. For the idea of Laplace's demon to be coherent, the physicalist concept of the universe in its mechanistic version must be true. The idea of divine foreknowledge does not need such a rigid version of natural causation; it simply needs God to be able to draw clear conclusions from the information he has about the principles at work. These principles entail but do not necessarily consist only of laws of physics. If physicalism is false, and there are other forces at hand, there is no necessary reason to think that God's knowledge of these forces is imperfect (or that God is the perpetual driving force behind all of them, as is the case in theological determinism). In this way, God's foreknowledge seems to threaten the idea of free will in the same way the L. demon does. Another similar And in both cases, the libertarian and compatibilist solutions are drawn similarly. The affirmation or rejection of the PAP works the same way in both cases.

In short, there is a similar line of reasoning between the problem of logical determinism and divine foreknowledge, as they both deal with the problem of the timelessness of the truth values of propositions. Through the idea of the Laplacian demon, divine foreknowledge is also on some common grounds with the idea of physical determinism – and in this case, the idea of divine foreknowledge is not necessarily dependent on logical determinism, because we only need to postulate a perfect predictive power of a deity. The similarity between physical and theological determinism is in the idea that a sufficient cause for all events already exists before the choice making of human agents, namely physical laws, or God's will, or both. Finally, both theological and non-theological debates can take various other factors, which have some, not absolute, power in determining the choices and actions of humans, for example, genetics, social conditions, etc. – these were not discussed in this essay.

A figure should help illustrate the point. The concepts mentioned above are here put side to side in the order, in which lines of similarity could be drawn:

Non-theological terms	Theological terms
Logical determinism	Divine foreknowledge
Physical determinism	Theological determinism, Divine foreknowledge
Weaker determinisms	Partial determinism (towards either good or evil)

Lastly, we can see, that the big issue behind both sides of the problem is the same: the need for a coherent account of moral responsibility; i.e. the ability to choose between good and evil. Theoretically, the issue of free will concerns any kind of choice. But the choices we really care about are those that bring about consequences, for which we need to take responsibility. This remains the case in front of the legal system as well as God's final judgement. We have seen that maintaining the case for us being responsible for our actions is just as crucial, as it is difficult. We cannot dismiss moral responsibility in society for practical purposes, just as we can't deny it in moral responsibility before God for theological purposes (and the practical purposes seem to apply in this case as well).

On the other hand, it is also very hard not to maintain at least some idea of determinism. The arguments against physical determinism seem to fall short because the only value they can present is randomness, which is simply not the same as freedom. With theological determinism, the spectrum is much broader, and we might argue together with the "open God" theologians, that it is not very well based on Scripture. But we also mustn't do away with the idea of divine providence, and without at least some version of divine foreknowledge, we would no longer be in the area of the Christian tradition.

The unsatisfactory, but also perhaps inevitable implications come from the modern non-theological debate just as well as from the passages of Augustine we quoted at the beginning. Compatibilist theologians, such as Nancey Murphy⁴⁶ point us to a similar direction as compatibilist non-theological (and in this case emphatically atheist) philosophers like Dennett. Even with

46 It could be argued if Murphy is a compatibilist and in what sense. There is however no doubt, that she tries to present an account of free will, morality and spirituality, which is compatible with physicalism.

the possible exclusion of PAP, there is still a version of free will worth having, for all practical reasons. Murphy draws (influenced by Alasdair MacIntyre) a list of cognitive capacities, which are necessary for a being to act in a morally responsible way, of which we will quote two:

4. The ability to evaluate predicted outcomes in light of goals.
5. The ability to evaluate the goals themselves.⁴⁷

These abilities are compatible with both the physicalist worldview and the Christian tradition. When compared to the non-theological physicalist ideas shown above (on the example of Dennett), similar outcomes come to mind. On one side, this deals with the problem of determinism without denying it. On the other, it could be criticised for only pushing the question aside through redefining the problematic terms, therefore not really dealing with it in the end. This short summary of examples wants to show, that if a compatibilist account could be successfully applied in respect to physical determinism, it could be similarly applied to the problem of theological determinism and divine foreknowledge. However, the compatibilist idea is by far not controversial, mainly because it depends on the rejection of the principle of alternative possibilities, which itself is neither trivial nor unanimously accepted – not in non-theological debates and to even lesser extent in the theological ones.

We have shown similarities in some of the trajectories in what we called the theological and non-theological debates. Some of these similarities are quite obvious, especially when the same line of reasoning, similar language and similar arguments are used on both sides. Also, these brackets were constructed for the sake of this essay and can be applied to the real debates only to an extent – especially in the case of theological debates, which often have to include all of what we called non-theological in this paper. Religious questions can also be taken into account in works, which might have no theological motivation, such as some in the philosophy of religion. However, while the trajectories can be seen as similar, they are not the same – for example an argument with the same structure may not have the same persuasive force in both debates.

⁴⁷ Nancey C. Murphy and Warren S. Brown, *Did My Neurons Make Me Do It? Philosophical and Neurobiological Perspectives on Moral Responsibility and Free Will* (Oxford Univ. Press, 2007), 244.

We do not try to postulate a historical or logical dependence of one set of debates to the other. Historically, some religious traditions predate the birth of western philosophy, the latter however provides vocabularies and conceptual schemes which prove helpful for the religious traditions in newly expressing their contents, religious traditions proceed to have a profound impact on the shape of society, which then provides context to formulations of both theological and non-theological intellectual problems, and so on. To create an outline or show a pattern of such a process was not the goal of this essay. Such attempts have been made. For example, Pakistani scholars Muhammad Shafique and Umar Azhar Wyne⁴⁸ offer a historical discourse in various types of determinism, from the theological determinism, which they see as an inherent part of all major religions⁴⁹, through philosophical theories to the scientific revolutions, with an emphasis on genetic determinism. They see this as a process of accumulating new perspectives on the same question, in which the later developments both confirm and clarify the basic theological idea. This is not the conclusion we wish to draw. Theological and non-theological debates don't seem to point to a common unified theory. We also don't see either of them as a next evolutionary step from the other in intellectual history. But they share a similar structure and in this way they can perhaps be thought as complementary to each other.

What we have tried to show is, that the two intuitions introduced in the beginning – an order in the succession of events, in the way things happen; and the observed and experienced agency of human beings, are in the same way present in both theological and non-theological debates. For this reason, their goals and structures are similar, while they vary in motivations and particular problems. As Searle says: “We really do not know how free will exists in the brain, if it exists at all. (...) But we also know that the conviction of our own freedom is inescapable. We cannot act except under the presupposition

48 Muhammad Shafique and Umar A. Wyne, “Beyond Theology into Biological Sciences? Historical Discourse on the Concept of Determinism”, *Pakistan Journal of Social Sciences* 35, no. 1 (2015).

49 “Even in much ancient times, when polytheism was mostly in practice all the gods were considered as determining factors of each happening. That can be considered as early rationality where human intellect became able to connect happenings with causes through their ability to imagine and symbolize. Later on with evolution in human intellect, God introduced more refined religions. Most of these religions differ from each other in practices but introduction of God as Omni determining is almost same.” *Ibid.*, 364–65.

of freedom.”⁵⁰ This applies both to a person pondering the laws of nature and one contemplating God’s will.

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50 Searle, *Mind*, 164.

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