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Book Review

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Heath White *Fate and Free Will*. (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2020). Pp. xii + 396. £54.00/\$65.00 (Hbk). ISBN 9780268106294.

Theological Determinism (TD) is the most attractive and credible theistic option for questions regarding free-will and God's power, according to Heath White. He believes that it stands up and fares better than free-will libertarianism and deserves more credit and respect than its critics realize. This unpopular theory is defended with a myriad of arguments and a large variety of examples, weak, strong, and irrelevant. At the outset, he informs readers that towards the end of writing he changed his mind about his entire position. He now considers himself a hopeful agnostic, a radical turn from this book that is devoted to the all perfect God. Ironically, this clearly written provocative position no longer represents his current thought, and ostensibly belongs to no particular philosopher or theologian. It is like a reverse yet unfallacious strawman that argues *for* a position no one holds – even early on, he did not totally believe it. Nevertheless, this disclosure and admonition should not dissuade readers from studying this original work from a theistic perspective in order to discover its advantages, which are the culmination of years of research. White notes that different versions of TD have been argued by Luther, Aquinas (though disputed), Jonathan Edwards, and Calvin. The theories of Alvin Plantinga and other prominent philosophers of religion are discussed.

A more apt title would have been 'Determinism and Free-Will' as White scarcely discusses fate or fatalism. The common terms 'compatibilism' and 'incompatibilism' are used throughout. Fatalism must be distinguished from TD. The former claims that events happen no matter what, inevitably, and the latter provides less causal necessity.

Against the libertarians who claim that divine power is less controlling, White defends the position that God's power is not limited by anything contingent, and His will determines everything that occurs, including every detail. The facts about God's will entail every other contingent fact, and are explanatorily prior to them. Most importantly, he argues that TD 'does *not say* that God intends to happen all that happens' (7). This distinction is between intended and merely


44 foreseen consequences of God's will. Innumerable events happen that God *did not*
45 intend, yet He knew they would occur and were foreseen. Surprisingly, he rewrites
46 the same example of Pierre's absence in a café that Sartre used in *Being and*
47 *Nothingness*, but for a different reason – to show that only positive and not negative
48 realities matter. The remainder of the book includes four chapters on whether TD
49 undermines moral responsibility and justice, the meaning of life, human freedom,
50 problem of evil, and Hell.

51 One challenging objection to TD is that it minimizes or eliminates the moral
52 responsibility of agents for their actions, especially crimes; punishment would be
53 unjust if all choices are determined. However, the intent of punishing wrongdoers
54 should be for purposes of rehabilitation and educational – pedagogical, not basic
55 retributivism. In theory, the Social Contract provides justification for punishment
56 (88). The claim that agents are determined by God does not matter if the punish-
57 ment is for re-education and moral rehabilitation. Punishment also serves as a
58 deterrence for future crimes in society, but some criminals are so dangerous that
59 incapacitation or capital punishment are necessary. In practice, though, judges,
60 juries and prosecutors commonly maintain some version of free will – not strong
61 or divine determinism. This review sketches only the basics of this position.

62 Advocates of free will also argue that determinism represents a threat to, and
63 defeats, human autonomy and the meaningfulness of life. Critics say that
64 because we are controlled by God's will and purpose, then agents are merely
65 cogs or puppets. However, White holds that we need to believe that our rational
66 lives are going *somewhere valuable* and meaningful and that determinism is no
67 threat. Agents must still make choices every conscious moment, and have no
68 knowledge of God's intentions.

69 White's analysis of the problem of evil is more troubling and admittedly does not
70 begin to resolve the question, as it offers a weak alternative to free-will defences
71 and explanations of non-moral evils. He agrees with the classic theist view that
72 God does *not intend* or cause evils, and for divine reasons only permits them.
73 White acknowledges that horrendous evils are very problematic yet develops no
74 new theodicy here. At the minimum, TD is no worse than inadequate free-will
75 theories, he claims.

76 This reviewer is sceptical regarding the major points in White's position.
77 In general, TD is less credible than White contends, and his arguments are unlikely
78 to persuade free-will advocates and agnostics. In the end, he emphasizes that it
79 fares well against libertarianism and is a better answer for theism than critics
80 realize. This review cannot do justice to the depth and multitude of arguments
81 in this original and refreshing work. Over twenty pages of detailed endnotes,
82 a lengthy bibliography and two indices are included. Recommended.

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