DIVINE SOVEREIGNTY AND THE FREEDOM OF THE WILL

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Libertarian treatments of free will face the objection that an uncaused human decision would lack full explanation, and hence violate the principle of sufficient reason. It is argued that this difficulty can be overcome if God, as creator, wills that I decide as I do, since my decision could then be explained in terms of his will, which must be for the best. It is further argued that this view does not make God the author of evil in any damaging sense. Neither does it impugn my freedom. God's creative activity does not put in place any secondary causes that determine my decision; and his will does not stand as an independent determining condition either, since it is fully expressed in my decision alone.

Libertarian treatments of free will are often held to involve a violation of the principle of Sufficient Reason: they purport to explain my choices in terms of my motives and beliefs, but they are ultimately unable to explain why I chose as I did for the reasons I did, rather than making an opposite choice for opposite reasons. One possible solution to this problem is to invoke divine sovereignty. If, as creator, God is responsible for my choices, then even though they are not subject to deterministic law they still have a full explanation. For if my own reasons for choosing as I do are not completely explanatory, God's reasons for ordaining that I shall so choose presumably are. And there are independent theological grounds for thinking God is sovereign in this way. But there are two major objections to be faced. One has to do with the problem of evil. Libertarian theories of freedom are attractive in part because they promise to exonerate God from responsibility for moral evil. But if He creates our choices, then it seems He must be responsible for any evil they involve. The second objection is related: it may be wondered how I can even claim to have libertarian freedom and at the same time hold that God has complete sovereignty over every exercise of my will. I shall spend more time with this objection. I think it can be answered at least in part, and I want to suggest a way in which it might be defused completely.

I. The Libertarian's Problem

Claims of libertarian freedom may be made both for the mental act of

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forming an intention and for the volitional activity by which the intention gets executed, but since the former presents the clearer case, I shall concentrate on it. Paradigmatically, we form intentions through acts of decision, which terminate episodes of practical reasoning. This does not mean every decision must be preceded by lengthy deliberation, but it does mean that decisions are not made blindly. However quick or careless they may be, they are taken in light of considerations that offer at least putative justification for them, and which provide ingredients for explaining both the decision itself and the action that ensues. If, for example, I wish to decide where to take a vacation, I need to be aware of some options, and of the considerations that make them attractive. A trip to Colorado might appeal to me because it affords the chance to go skiing; a visit to New York might present desirable cultural opportunities. Let us suppose I decide on Colorado. The considerations on which my decision is founded may be summarized in a practical syllogism:

> Would that I go skiing.
> I can go skiing if I vacation in Colorado.
> Therefore, I shall vacation in Colorado.

It is important to realize that this is only a summary. There may be numerous aspects to a skiing trip that I find attractive, and I may have in mind a fairly detailed plan for the proposed vacation.[1] In other respects, this sort of practical syllogism seems to me to reflect pretty well the important features of reasoning to a decision. In particular, we should note that this is not a piece of theoretical reasoning, made practical by its content. It is practical through and through. The major premise is optative: it expresses, not a belief on my part that a skiing trip would be desirable, but rather the actual desire with which I experience the prospect of such a trip. The minor premise encapsulates the plan I envision as achieving what I desire. And the conclusion, which is thought in the modality of deciding, records what I decide in light of the premises, which becomes the content of the intention thereby formed.

This view of decision making fits well with libertarian accounts of freedom. Practical reasoning is made practical not by its subject matter or underlying motivation, but by the very nature of the thinking that constitutes it. To reason practically is to *be* a decider, to *be* a settler of issues.[2] And because decisions are not made blindly but rather require premises, a decision is never a completely arbitrary event, bereft of any explanation. For to think of anything in the optative mode is to perceive it as in some way good, and we decide only in light of our optations.[3] The upshot of this is that we form intentions only in light of a perceived good, and the intention formed by our decision is always to pursue the envisioned good that prompted the decision. Hence even if deciding is an act exempt from deterministic laws there will always be some explanation for it: a teleological explanation in terms of the putative good, and the envisioned means of achieving it, that prompted the decision.

But how good an explanation? Proponents of determinist theories offer two major complaints. The first concerns the connection between the

premises of our practical syllogism and its conclusion. In order for the premises to explain my decision to vacation in Colorado, they must constitute the reason *for* which I decided to go. And this is not guaranteed by the mere fact that they accompany my decision. After all, I might have had other reasons for vacationing in Colorado—for example, an obligation to visit a relative—which did not figure in my deliberation at all. If not, then I will have decided on the vacation *for* the sake of the skiing, but not for the sake of satisfying my obligation. And, it is argued, the only way to make sense of the "for" here is to invoke nomic causation. The premises of our practical syllogism can constitute the reasons for which I decided only if the mental states of which they form the content caused me to decide. Otherwise, my decision arises without any relation to my reasons, and so cannot be explained by them.[4]

I cannot argue fully for it here, but I think this objection can be given a satisfactory answer. What makes a set of reasons count as those for which a decision is made is that the plan of action those reasons encapsulate becomes the content of the resultant intention. My decision to vacation in Colorado must, as we have seen, be made in awareness of motives and beliefs that putatively justify it, and which, depending on their complexity, embody a more or less developed plan of action. When I decide *for* these reasons, that plan is conveyed into my intention: that is, the content of my motives and beliefs is transformed into the content of my intention. Furthermore, this occurs in such a way that those elements of the plan that were the focus of my desire become the focus of my intention. If it is the prospect of skiing that prompts me to go to Colorado, then my primary intention in going will be to ski. If I saw other aspects of such a trip as desirable—say, enjoying the mountain landscape—then that too will be intended. Things I did not even think of, like visiting a relative, will not be part of the plan and will not be intended at all. Finally, there will be those elements of the plan I see as necessary to success, and hence voluntarily accept, but which I do not desire, and perhaps even find undesirable, such as driving on icy roads. These too enter the content of my intention, but not as its primary focus. They are, as Bentham would say, obliquely rather than directly intended.[5] In short, the structure of an intention reflects exactly the structure of the reasons for which it is formed. That is why we can always tell an agent's reasons for a decision simply by investigating the content of the resultant intention, and vice versa. To know what I mean to accomplish by visiting Colorado is to know my reasons for deciding to go there, and to know my reasons for I deciding is to know what I intended to achieve. And of course none of this calls for relations of nomic causation.[6]

If this is correct, then we have an account of what it is to decide for a reason that does not run afoul of causal determination. So we can give noncausal explanations of decisions in terms of the agents' reasons without fear of invoking an underlying causal explanation. But the determinist can still claim the explanation is inadequate, and that is the second objection libertarians must face. Even if deciding requires that I be aware of options, to say that my decision is undetermined is to say that my awareness of those options, and the putative good of them, cannot finally explain my decision. If I am free in the libertarian sense, then there is nothing in my

nature or experience, nothing about the setting in which my decision occurs, in terms of which an observer could reach a completely reliable conclusion as to how the decision would go. And, the argument runs, to the extent this is so we get a violation of the principle of sufficient reason. Why should we have a world in which I reached this decision but not another? After all, the cultural opportunities provided by New York gave me good reason for vacationing there instead. Why, then, the decision to go to Colorado? We can point, if we want, to the putative good I saw in going there: the excitement of skiing, the beauty of the mountains, etc. But of course there was putative good on the other side, too. And when the question is why I opted in favor of one good rather than another—why I chose Colorado for the sake of these reasons, rather than New York for the sake of those—we seem to have no truly satisfying answer. I need not have desired one course more than the other, and if I am free then *ex hypothesi* that would not have settled things anyway. Nor can I be relied upon always to do what I take to be best or obligatory, if those turn out to be different from what I desire. In the end, then, the only reason we can give for my settling upon Colorado is that that is what I decided. And that is not enough. It is to say we could as well have had a different world, and to offer no decisive rationale for the one we have.[7]

II. A Theistic Solution

There is no denying the seriousness of this problem. In the physical realm, satisfying explanations tend to be deterministic: they treat nature as determining behavior. But if libertarianism is correct, things are the other way around with us: certain of our actions—that is, our decisions—determine our nature. They set our projects, thereby forming our character and structuring our lives. To surrender this point is to give up libertarianism. But neither should one be satisfied with a situation where rational decisions count irretrievably as violations of Sufficient Reason—a principle which, in the philosophy of religion especially, counts for too much to be lightly set aside.[8] There is, however, a solution which if successful would allow us to have things both ways. Suppose that God, as creator, is directly responsible for each of my decisions. If so, then even though my decision to vacation in Colorado was not determined by the rest of my nature, it still has an accounting—an accounting in terms of God's plans, of the good He sees in my deciding as I do. That is to say, what fully accounts for my decision is not my reasons for it, but God's.

This may seem a desperate solution: dangerous in its theology, whimsical in its view of the world, and faced with decisive objections. But I want to argue it is none of these things. Its theological credentials are actually pretty good. There is scriptural backing in the God who hardens Pharaoh's heart (*Exodus* 10:1), who is said by Isaiah to have wrought all our works in us (*Isaiah* 26:12), and by Paul to work in us both to will and to do of His good pleasure (*Philippians* 2:13). Such passages have often been seen as requiring that God's agency underlie our own. Aquinas, in particular, cites the Isaiah passage as requiring that God cause not just the power of the will, but also its movement.[9] But Aquinas does not see this as under-

mining our freedom; rather, he views God as an agent able to move the will without violence.[10] As first cause, God moves all causes both natural and voluntary.

> And just as by moving natural causes He does not prevent their actions from being natural, so by moving voluntary causes He does not deprive their actions of being voluntary; but rather is He the cause of this very thing in them, for He operates in each thing according to its own nature.[11]

As for whimsicality, that would be a legitimate concern if the aim of this view was to treat human decisions as related to God's creative activity in a way different from other events—to call, that is, for exceptional creative involvement on God's part, as an ad hoc device to make human decisions fully explicable. But that was not Aquinas's position, nor is it mine. Just the opposite: the aim is to place human decisions on a footing equal with the rest of creation, as direct manifestations of the divine *fiat* in which all of the world, in all of its history, is produced. Only such an understanding accords God complete sovereignty as creator, and brings all that occurs under His providence. For to the extent God does not exert active control over my decisions, whether through other events or direct involvement, He does not control them at all. He can therefore achieve His ends only by reacting to what I do, and to that extent His plans are subordinated to mine. In addition to weakening His sovereignty, this situation also threatens God's omniscience. It suggests He can know how I will act in the circumstances in which I am placed only by observing my actions. As creator, He is in the dark. He can know what the possibilities are, but if my freedom makes for more than one, then even His knowledge of the world He is creating appears to depend on my action—an unsatisfactory situation to say the least.[12] These problems can be avoided if God is able to exercise creative control in my actual choice.

So divine sovereignty requires that God be in full control of my decisions. A sound understanding of creation seems to lead to the same outcome. The important thing to realize here is that God's creative activity is as fully involved in the continued existence of the universe as with its beginning, if it had one. That is, God's sustaining the universe is of a piece with His producing it. There is no power of things to sustain themselves in existence. Such a power would have to be a pure disposition, lacking any supervenience base and any mechanism, active or passive, by which it operated. There is no difference, definable or observable, between this sort of power and no power at all. It is the eternal creative act of God which alone is responsible for the existence of things, and the world's surviving another second will be as much owing to God's creative activity as its being here to begin with.[13] It is hard to see, however, how God can be responsible for my existence at every moment without being responsible also for my characteristics. As Malebranche observed, God cannot create a physical object that is in no particular place, that is neither at rest nor in motion, etc. All of these things need to be settled in the production of the object.[14] And in the same way, it would seem, God cannot create me with

an indeterminate will—that is, a will that is neither deciding to A nor not deciding to A, that is neither committed to a given intention nor not so committed, etc. So if my existence at the moment I decide to visit Colorado is directly owing to God as creator, then so is my decision.

This view of creation does not, as far as I can see, undermine scientific explanation. To say that God is entirely responsible for the existence of things is not to say those things have no nature, or that the changes and interactions they undergo cannot be described by scientific law. It does, however, enable us to close the explanatory gap that attends libertarian free choice. As far as its existence is concerned, my decision to vacation in Colorado has the same cause any other event does—namely, God's creative action. What is different about it is that unlike physical events, it cannot be foreseen simply by knowing the nature of its accompanying events or circumstances, even the deliberative events and states that precede and accompany it. Instead, its character is settled only in the very event itself, in the very deciding. My reasons permit a partial account of it, in terms of the good I saw in this scenario of action. But they cannot explain it fully, for as far as my own motives go I could have chosen otherwise. I might have chosen some other course, in pursuit of some other good, with no final justification for the choice. But if my decision is not just a manifestation of my ability to choose, but also of God's creativity, then His goodness and knowledge can be invoked to fill this gap. He has a reason why I should decide to vacation in Colorado, and unlike mine His reason will be sufficient. For in contrast to me, God is fully aware of the ramifications of all the choices I might make, and His perfect goodness ensures that He will create only the best.[15] So His reasons for having me decide as I do, whatever they are, will explain fully the occurrence of my decision, in terms of His perfect goodness.

Admittedly, this does not tell us what *are* God's reasons for producing a world in which I make the decisions I do. And in this life anyway, we may not be optimistic about our ability to discern those reasons. Still less does it provide what the determinist wants, which is a complete naturalistic explanation for my decisions. Nevertheless, I think it provides for a more satisfying version of libertarianism than is usually offered. If libertarian free choice exists, then the sort of explanation the determinist wants for my decisions—that is, a naturalistic explanation—is unavailable. And if the alternative I am suggesting does not actually produce explanations for free choices, it at least assures that there *are* such explanations. It is this assurance, not the actual explanations, that is crucial to answering the objection that libertarian free choice violates Sufficient Reason. Naturally, one can be satisfied with the account only to the extent one accepts a theistic view of the world. But within that context, it is reasonable to expect such an account. The idea that there could exist a being like the Judeo-Christian God, and yet that His existence should be dispensable to our understanding of the phenomena of the world strikes me as implausible, to put it mildly. If the account of freedom I am suggesting works, then God's existence does make a difference: it lays to rest the most important objection to libertarian freedom. That in itself would be an argument for theism.

III. Moral Evil

But does the account work? There are two major objections that have to be faced. One has to do with the problem of evil. Perhaps the most tempting theological reason for endorsing a libertarian view of the will is that this appears to exempt God from blame for the moral evil in the world. If the existence of our acts of will is entirely our doing and none of God's, then He seems exempt from direct responsibility for any evil they involve. He no doubt knew that in creating free beings He was risking moral evil. Perhaps somehow He even foresaw as creator that it would appear. But God's own will is not tainted by moral evil, for He never willed any of it. We did that. The most God is responsible for is permitting us to do so. Now the trouble with making our decisions the direct products of God's creative activity is that it seems to undo this argument. Indeed, on the view of creation I have presented God is directly responsible not just for our forming evil intentions, but also for their execution, and for all the evil consequences that result. How can a God this intimately involved in creation escape guilt for what is wrong in it? Certainly, on this account, He would have to be the creator of sin itself.

Part of the answer to this objection is to realize that even the standard free will defense does not exempt God from as much involvement in the travails of the world as might be supposed. If we think of the category of moral evil as covering not just wrong acts of will but also the harmful consequences that flow from them, we include in it much that involves natural processes, and hence their creator. Suppose, for example, that I decide to set fire to a church, and proceed to do so, causing great harm to those inside. Whatever acts of will occur in this case, they would have no effect without there being natural processes relating them to the ensuing harm. And however we conceive those processes, God is involved. By my account He is directly involved, being solely responsible for the existence of all that is. That places the consequences of my acts of will very much on a par with natural evil, for a lot of which God is presumably responsible in any case. Would another view fare better? Not much. Even if we think of God as only remotely involved in the production of natural events, my evil decision cannot be efficacious without His cooperation. The world has to allow methods by which I can conveniently set a fire; there must be oxygen available so that the church will burn; fire must be harmful to my victims; I have to survive from the moment I make the decision until I execute it, and the acts of will by which I do so must somehow yield the bodily motions through which I set the blaze. In none of these things is human agency heavily involved, and in some it is not involved at all. But God's is: it is He who made the world, and set in place its principles of operation; it is He who sustains natural causes, or allows them to sustain themselves; it is He who made those causes oblivious to my evil intentions, and who refuses to intervene Himself to thwart my designs. On no account, then, does God escape involvement in the consequences of my evil intentions. In fact, by comparison with the degree of His involvement, mine seems relatively puny.

But what about my decision itself? Here, surely, is the true home of

moral evil. Even if I had dropped dead an instant after making the decision moral evil would have occurred, whereas there would have been no moral evil had the church burned because it was struck by lightening. So moral evil lies preeminently in our deciding: in our adopting plans of action that are wrong. Can God be exempt from being morally evil Himself if it is by His creative *fiat* that we decide as we do? Of course He can. In the first place, even though God creates me the person who decides to burn down the church, He does not make my decision. I do. My decision, and any evil that lies with it, are predicated of me. What belongs to God is His willing *that* I shall decide as I do, which is an altogether different matter. The plan God adopts in willing what I shall decide will be infinitely more detailed and extensive than mine, and His project far different. To be sure, His plan will include my decision and, if He means for my plan to succeed, its harmful consequences as well. But these need hardly be the point of His plan. They may only be obliquely intended, as necessary to some superior good God wishes to accomplish. There may in fact be compelling possibilities for the ultimate defeat of evil bound up with my willing wrongly. If so, then God's goodness is no more impugned by His creating me the person who decides as I do than a mother's goodness is impugned by giving her sick child bitter medicine, or an employer is made evil when business reverses force him to reduce his work force.

This approach to the problem of evil seems to me preferable to the standard free will defense. Besides diminishing God's sovereignty, the standard treatment raises difficulties about the extent to which, as creator, God knows what he is about. And it still makes God responsible for creating a world in which moral evil occurs, for allowing immoral choices in that world, and for contributing as creator to their harmful consequences. It seems to me that the same considerations that justify God in this degree of involvement in moral evil would also justify his obliquely intending it, as an inescapable part of a plan of creation the entirety of which is effected by His creative will. If that is correct, then God's being the author of our free choices does not preclude a satisfactory response to the problem of evil, and it avoids the difficulties of the standard treatment.

IV. Sovereignty and Worldly Freedom

The second objection this view must face is that it provides for a full explanation of our decisions only by finally destroying our freedom. The whole point of libertarian freedom is that my actions are supposed to be "up to me," in the sense that I am their author or originator, and I am responsible for their occurrence. The thrust of the present view is that God originates my decisions and actions, simply by creating me the person I am. And it may well be doubted whether these two can be made compatible—whether, to paraphrase Aquinas, God can be the first cause of the operations of my will, while I remain their voluntary agent. If *He* brings about my decision to vacation in Colorado, the argument would run, then surely *I* cannot decide otherwise, and similarly for burning down the church. Hence I am not responsible for these deeds.

There is, of course, a quick answer available here. If what is meant by

"freedom" in this objection is simply that my acts of intention formation should not be subject to nomic determinism, then *ex hypothesi* I am free on the view presented. My motives still influence my decision rather than determining it, and making God the first mover of my will does not (as we shall see more fully below) put in place some further event or mechanism to which my decision is bound by natural law. If, on the other hand, freedom is supposed to include my being able to choose against God's creative will for me, then this is a freedom neither the present view of creation nor any other accords me. Indeed, short of God's action as creator, there is no me to do any deciding, and the same act of His will that is responsible for my being puts in place my decisions as well. Furthermore, this second sort of freedom is surely something no one should ever want anyway. What greater evidence of our fallenness could there be than the desire to be masters of our destinies in the way this sort of freedom implies?

But I do not think the objector would be satisfied. Perhaps there is a possibility, remote as it may seem, that God as creator has no fully settled will regarding our decisions, and so leaves indeterminate the world He creates. If so, then even though our wrong decisions are not what He would like, they do not oppose anything He actively wills for us. And it might be thought that this is necessary, for even if making God the creator of our choices does not raise problems of nomic determination, it could still endanger our autonomy. Libertarian freedom requires more than the absence of nomic determination. I could be involved in all sorts of undetermined events, even psychological ones, without any sense of freedom. I could suddenly remember an old phone number, say, or have an accurate vision of The Hermitage in May. And we can imagine that these events are truly undetermined. It hardly follows that I would have the sense of autonomy and control about them that I have about my decisions. More likely I would feel they had befallen me, in much the way other sudden memories and insights do. The same does not hold of the operations of the will. There is a subjective sense of freedom attending our decisions and actions that does not accompany other experiences, regardless of whether they are nomically determined. The real question is whether that sense of freedom is justified if God, as creator, controls our decisions. To see whether it is, we have to examine some of the elements in which it consists.

One of the most important aspects of the sense of freedom that attends our decisions is intentionality. There is no such thing as an unintentional decision. Rather, whenever we decide we mean to decide, and we mean to decide exactly as we do: that is, we mean to form the very intention thereby formed. So when I decide to vacation in Colorado, I intend in so doing to decide exactly that. A second and related point is that I would not take my decision to be accidental. On the contrary: it is a self-contradiction ever to assert of anyone that they accidentally, or inadvertently, or unintentionally decided to do anything. My decisions cannot befall me, or occur by mistake; they have to be under my direction.[16] Or at least that is how we take it to be, and because we do we are able to view deciding as a locus of voluntary control by agents over their actions. When I decide to vacation in Colorado, I take myself to be exerting such control, to be settling the issue of where, barring the unforeseen, I shall go. Part of this control lies in

a fact noted earlier: that I always decide in cognizance of available options. That is one of the things that prevents my being surprised by my decision.[17] But it is not all. When I decide, I see myself as a center of spontaneity in the world. Rather than being controlled by my circumstances, I see myself as exerting control over them. In particular, I see myself as freely determining which of my motives shall find fulfillment in my behavior. And what makes this freedom libertarian is that in deciding, I see myself as controlling my decision itself: as settling the issue of whether it shall occur at all, and what its content shall be. So when I decide to take my vacation in Colorado, I am determining in that very act not just what I shall do about my vacation, but also what I shall decide about it. That is what is implicit in my decisions being intrinsically intentional and nonaccidental. If they were not so our decisions would be things that befall us, and libertarian freedom would reduce, even from the point of view of the agent, to blind happenstance.

I take these features of deciding to be grounded in the phenomenology of intention—that is, in the way it seems to us. And they are reflected in the concept, in the fact that we never hear of anyone deciding to do something unintentionally or by accident. But of course they may be illusory. For if I am to be the source of my decisions in this way, certain relations between them and other events and states are ruled out, and whether such relations obtain need not at all be phenomenally apparent to me. It is precisely for this reason that causal determinism stands as a threat to libertarian freedom. If the standard determinist account is true, then however things may seem to me, my nature is so constituted that there are nomic relations between my decisions and my motivational and belief states in terms of which the latter explain the former. This is altogether different from the situation with the practical syllogism, where it is the *content* of my motive and belief states that explain my decision, and the explanation is teleological. Here the states themselves do the explaining, and the explanation is nomological. That destroys libertarian freedom, because the motives and beliefs in question antedate my decision, are sufficient for it, and display none of the features of agency that have been described. I could have no direct control over whether and what I decide once these factors are finally in place.[18] Far from my being able to control their influence through my decision, they are in fact controlling me. We might even wish to say that if determinism is true then whatever the phenomenal appearances may be, we never really decide anything.

Can the same sort of claim be made if God creates me the person who decides as I do? I would urge that it cannot. In the first place, God's activity as creator does not antedate anything I do. One reason for this is His eternity. In my understanding, God is a timelessly eternal being, who creates the entire world, including time itself, in a single act. The divine *fiat* is the ontological foundation of my decisions, therefore, it cannot bear any temporal relation whatever to them. Furthermore, the relationship between my decisions and God's activity as creator is too close for there to be temporal differences. Neither our acts of will nor anything else God creates, including we ourselves, can be held to have existence independent of God's act of creating us. God does not create us by engaging in an act of

will which in turn produces us. That would require that there be principles of "laws" of creation governing the relationship between his action and its products. If God were dependent on such laws in creation, His sovereignty would be impugned. If, on the other hand, He produced these principles, or some mechanism of creation whose operation they record, He might as well skip the intervening step and produce us directly. So God does not create us or our works *by means of* commanding our existence, where this is conceived as a kind of causal device. Rather, His commanding our existence *is* our production, and we have our being in His very act of creating us.

One upshot of this is that I cannot be done violence, either directly or indirectly, by the creative act of God that puts my decisions in place. Independently of the *fiat* that determines my decision to visit Colorado, I have no existence whatever; nor is there any process, natural or otherwise, through which the determination occurs. Nomically speaking, therefore, my decision is still as free as it can be, and I am in no way acted upon in reaching it. There is nothing else I would, or even could, have decided had God not exercised His power, no process of practical reasoning with which that power interferes, no duress under which I am placed. On the contrary, because the decision God wills for me is truly mine I really do determine, at least as far as any considerations having to do with this world are concerned, what my course of action shall be. I decide in cognizance of the options before me, and in light of my motives and beliefs about them. It is in my decision that the question which of my motives I will attempt to fulfill is settled. And I have every right to feel spontaneous and controlling in making the decision—again, at least as far as any natural considerations go. For like all decisions, my decision to visit Colorado is intrinsically intentional: in making it I mean to decide, and to decide as I do. In the very occurrence of my decision, I actively and voluntarily commit myself to it. Finally, because my decision is made in light of my reasons, it both reflects and helps further to form my character. Hence there is every reason for myself and others to consider me responsible for it, and the good or evil it may involve, and to try to encourage or discourage similar decisions on my part in the future.[19]

V. Sovereignty and Freedom Before God

The above account may be viewed as a partial gloss on Aquinas' claim that God wills the operation of our practical faculties in accordance with our voluntary nature, and is in fact the cause of our choices being free. By willing that we engage in acts that have the intrinsic features of decision, God enables us to exercise spontaneous and voluntary control over our worldly situation, while at the same time His own involvement prevents the principle of Sufficient Reason from being violated. But it is too soon for the libertarian to declare victory. For even if this account leaves me free and in control of my decisions as far as secondary causes are concerned, it does not place me in control of God's will, and His role in my decision may be such as finally to destroy my responsibility. If, as I have claimed, God is the ground of my entire being, then certainly I could not have made any

decision at all but for His actively willing that I do so. And does this not finally undo me? Even if, in deciding, I intentionally decide as I do, and even if in so doing I settle the issue of my behavior as far as the world is concerned, it seems clear that I do not settle it as far as God is concerned. I am, it appears, nothing but His proxy in the whole business. And this seems to destroy my freedom. However controlling my decision may have been, it did not control God. So, *all* things considered, I could not have done otherwise.

What is demanded here is a kind of absolute metaphysical freedom: a situation in which, even though I am by nature limited in both knowledge and appreciation of my actions and their consequences, I nevertheless stand as their final ontological arbiter.[20] One could argue that this kind of freedom is necessary even for worldly responsibility: that as long as there is a God behind the scenes directing my behavior, I am not accountable for it even on earth. But the demand seems especially appropriate in the religious context, where typically I am viewed as responsible not just to other creatures but to God Himself. We are not, after all, like characters in a novel, whose transactions occur entirely within its boundaries. There, no doubt, the author may make her characters free or determined as she pleases, since in neither case will they offend against her or us. Their freedom will be as real as they are, and the critics will not complain that it is bogus, in that all along it was the author who made the characters do what they did. But with us it is different. When we choose, we transact with our creator. Even in this world He is said to reward or punish our deeds, and in the Christian as well as many other religious contexts we have an eternal destiny for which we are responsible. And we might wonder how this is possible if we are not the ultimate cause of our choices. If we can only decide as God wills we decide, it seems unfair that He should allow us to suffer for our choices. We cannot resist His will. So why, as Paul has the Christians at Rome asking, does He still find fault? (*Romans* 9:19)

I do not know that I can offer a complete solution to this difficulty, but I think it is possible to make real progress with it. It is based, I think, on a misconception of the relationship between our own wills and God's in creating us. Our inclination is to think any exercise of God's will would have to be separate from our own, and hence must stand as an independent condition given which our choices are fixed. And then, whether we choose to call it nomic or not, we still seem to have a brand of determinism. Even though the same *fiat* that puts my choices in place determines my very existence, and even though this precludes violence being done to my will, there is nevertheless an event—namely the exercise of God's own will—given which my decision could not have been other than it was. And whatever we might want to say about the temporal world, this appears to undercut any legitimate claim that we are responsible on the eternal stage. No doubt God, who owes us nothing, may save or condemn as He sees fit. But desert is another matter, and if that requires that we be free, the argument would run, then even divine determination must rule out free will.

I want to urge, however, that God's creative determination of my decisions does not rule out their being free, for in fact the determination and the decision are one and the same. It was remarked above that the *fiat* of cre-

ation cannot be viewed as a separate event from the effects produced in it, since that would simply require a further exercise of divine agency to assure that the supposed effect was produced. But what exactly is the relation between creation and the created? If we take at face value the idea that God's activity as creator can be modeled as a kind of command, then it should be viewed as an exercise of will, not unlike our own exercise of will when we make a decision. The difference is that whereas our willing, taken in itself, has only mental import, the import of God's willing is real. We, that is to say, and all that belongs to us exist not as metaphysical products of God's willing, but as its content. It is here that the analogy of the author and her characters is appropriate: we have our being in God, just as the author's characters have their being in the world of her thoughts. The same is true for our decisions. My decision to vacation in Colorado is not a distinct event caused by God's willing that I so decide. Rather, it is the very thing God wills, the actual content of his act of commanding its existence.

But even this does not fully reflect the closeness between God's will and ours. For we might accept the idea that our own being is enclosed within God's act of creating us, yet still be tempted to think of it as only a part of that act, as though the actual creating were still something apart from us. Even with our own decisions this is not quite right. What makes it seem right is that we often represent mental acts in a way that distinguishes the attitude or modality of the thought from its content. My decision to visit Colorado might be represented thus:

I decide: I go to Colorado.

Here the content of my decision is treated as a part of my thought, but as though it were separated from the act or modality of thought that is my deciding, making it appear as though the modality of the thought were a kind of operation carried out upon the content. And we could try to portray God's role in my decision the same way:

Fiat: my deciding I shall go to Colorado.

Here the content is the real event of my deciding, but it is still represented separately from the modality of the divine command, again suggesting that God's creative activity is independent of my act of deciding, which counts only as a kind of object or product of it.

But that cannot be right. Separating attitude and content in the case of our mental acts has some justification, since the content that enters into a given mental act is at times (and I think always, in the case of decision) conceived in advance. But even this is misrepresentative. Phenomenologically, to decide is not to place a modality of thought in juxtaposition to an otherwise neutral content. It is to think the content *in* the modality in question, so that it is permeated by it. Only when content and modality are united is there a true decision, and the only representation necessary is:

I shall go to Colorado,

where this is understood to be through and through a matter of resolving. And if we want to model God's creative activity after our acts of will, it has to be thought of in the same way. The modality of creating, the *fiat* of God, is held in the very products of creation. Just as my decisive resolve pervades my decision, so the creative power of God pervades what he creates. His *fiat* is our very being, and the being of all that we do, not an activity that occurs independently of its products. So the operation of God's will that is manifested in my deciding I shall go to Colorado is just:

My deciding I shall go to Colorado.

There is nothing here that stands as a determining condition of my decision, short of the decision itself. Even taking the model of mental acts at face value, then, there is reason to think it a mistake to view the divine *fiat* as an element of creation that stands apart from our being, as a determining condition of it. A similar result can be gotten if we realize that even the model of mental acts—albeit the preferred mode in both Scripture and tradition for representing exercises of God's power—has shortcomings. As we have seen, creation cannot be a process. God is responsible for the being of all that is, but He does not produce it by operating to change something else, and He does not produce our decisions by operating on us. Nor is it the case, really, that the thought modalities of command or desire could be useful for God in the world's production. For until creation is a success, God alone is available to fulfill the command or satisfy the desire. So these aspects of the human will cannot be taken literally as representing the creative act. In the end, I would suggest, what truly constitutes God's activity as creator of the world is simply His being eternally given over to serving as the ground of being for the world and all that belongs to it. And the true manifestation of that is not some descriptive condition determining the nature of things, but rather their very existence. So as far as my decision is concerned, God's creative activity does not, even on the eternal level, stand as a determining condition which settles what I shall decide. It is fully manifested simply in my deciding as I do.

Does it follow that God's activity in creating me the person who decides to go to Colorado is identical with my so deciding? Not by standard theories of event identity, for those require that Identical events have the same subject, and that is not so here. I alone am the subject of my decision. It is predicated of me, and its defects are mine. What God does is create the event of my deciding as I do. He is, as it were, the subject of my being the subject of my decision—which is really just an expression of the point that we have our being in Him. Because of this difference, God's intentions and mine can be different, and His reasons can embrace much more. So even if my decision is morally defective, God can view my making it as indispensable to a situation that is finally for the best. Yet none of this puts in place a further event by which my decision is determined. It is true, of course, that God's will in this cannot be opposed: I cannot decide other than God, as creator, has me deciding. But since the only manifestation of His will in this regard *is* my deciding, all that this limitation comes to is that I cannot

decide anything else while at the same time deciding as I do. That, of course, is not a limitation at all, and if libertarianism is true I am not determined by secondary causes either. Paradoxical though it may appear at first, therefore, even though our decisions are set in place by the creative power of God, we *could*, even on the eternal stage, have done otherwise.

VI. Conclusion

My claim, then, is that when He does not create determining secondary causes of things, God's creative will is expressed entirely in the being of what He creates, not in any further, metaphysical conditions that determine its nature. If, therefore, God chooses to create a being who decides freely, in the libertarian sense, to undertake a specific course of action, it will be so. As I have intimated, I am not certain how satisfying this solution will be found to be. But if it is correct, then even though God has complete sovereignty over the universe, we retain complete freedom in our decisions, and full responsibility for them. What this responsibility comes to is, of course, not a simple matter. It depends, among other things, on exactly what the defect of our decisions that constitutes sin is, and how notions of eternal reward and, especially, punishment are to be understood. Those must be issues for another time. But I would hope the view I have tried to defend will discourage simplistic solutions. The pitfall in according God complete sovereignty over creation is that it can leave us thinking we have been short-changed, that our freedom is violated in our very creation. One possible result is a kind of morbid predestinarianism, in which we resentfully admit our sinfulness, accept our salvation with a survivor's guilt, and then assuage both guilt and resentment by tallying the numbers of the damned, condemning most of our fellows before God even gets the chance. Alternatively, we may opt for a Pollyannaish universalism, in which since we were never really to blame to begin with, salvation is more or less automatically extended to all, and everyone from Iscariot to Eichmann is okay. If I am not mistaken, both these alternatives are ways of refusing responsibility for our deeds, and both really make light of our sinfulness. A proper account of human freedom, I think, should acknowledge the complete majesty and providence of God without in itself licensing such results. If it works, the account I have proposed may be a step in that direction.[21]

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NOTES

1. The complexity of plans and its importance for intention is emphasized by Myles Brand in *Intending and Acting* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1984), and by Michael Bratman in *Intention, Plans, and Practical Reason* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1987).

2. The alternative is to treat practical reasoning as issuing in judgments about what should be done, whose practical force is determined by their relation to other states of the agent. See Robert Audi, *Practical Reasoning* (New York: Routledge, 1989), chapter 4.

3. The importance of positive motivation for rational action is emphasized by Peter van Inwagen in "When is the Will Free?" *Philosophical Perspectives, 3*, ed. J.E. Tomberlin (Atascadero, California: Ridgeview Publishing Co., 1989), pp. 399-422.

4. Arguments like this originate with Donald Davidson, "Actions, Reasons and Causes," in *Essays on Actions and Events* (Oxford: Clarendon press, 1980), pp. 3-19, pp. 10-11.

5. Jeremy Bentham, *An Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation* (London: Methuen, 1992), chapter 8.

6. There are affinities, but also significant differences, between this account of deciding for reasons and those of acting for reasons offered by Carl Ginet, *On Action* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990), chapter 6; and George Wilson, *The Intentionality of Human Action* (Stanford California: Stanford University Press, 1989), chapter 5.

7. This objection is at least as old as Hume's complaint that the liberty of indifference reduces to chance. *Treatise*, Bk. II, Pt. III, secs. 1-2. It is often associated with the claim that a free choice would have to be an "accident," for which we could not be responsible.

8. One could, of course, point to quantum mechanics and argue that the principle of Sufficient Reason is outdated, and should be given up—thereby solving the libertarian's problem in one fell swoop. But that would be too convenient. First, it is not obvious that we *can* give up the principle: it is, after all, a kind of belief or expectation, and so is not subject to voluntary dismissal. Second, opponents of libertarianism would not accept this maneuver, and are likely to charge intellectual dishonesty. Finally, even if we could give up the principle, I think most would agree it is better to retain and satisfy it, which is what I hope to do.

9. St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles*, Book III, Ch. 89.

10. *Ibid.*, Ch. 88.

11. Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* I, ques. 83, art. 1, *ad* 3.

12. It might be claimed that there are subjunctive conditionals which correctly describe what I will freely decide in the various situations in which I am placed, and that God's knowledge of these is what guides His creative activity. It is not clear, however, that the truth of such statements is conceptually prior to God's activity as creator, and even if this can be secured it is not clear how God can know them. For discussions of these issues see Robert M. Adams, "Middle Knowledge and the Problem of Evil," *American Philosophical Quarterly* 14 (1997), 109-117; and Alfred J. Freddoso's "Introduction" to Luis de Molina, *On Divine Foreknowledge*, trans. Freddoso (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1988).

13. For a defense of this view of creation see Jonathan L. Kvanvig and Hugh J. McCann, "Divine Conservation and the Persistence of the World," in *Divine and Human Action*, ed. Thomas V. Morris (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1988), pp. 1-37.

14. Nicholas Malebranche, *Dialogues on Metaphysics*, trans. Willis Doney (New York: Aberis Books, 1980), p. 157.

15. Whether God must create the best world may be questioned. See Robert M. Adams, "Must God Create the Best?" *The Philosophical Review* 81 (1972), 317-332; and William Rowe, "The Problem of Divine Perfection and Freedom," in *Reasoned Faith*, ed. Eleonore Stump (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1993), pp. 223-233.

16. Two senses of the term "accident" should be distinguished here. In one, an event is an accident if it is unforeseen and uncontrolled by voluntary

agency. This is the sense in which a decision cannot be accidental. But an undetermined decision might still be accidental in a second sense: it could be a violation of sufficient reason. As far as I can see, these two senses are logically independent. So I see no refutation of the determinist's objection to libertarianism in the fact that we never describe our decisions as accidental.

17. I might, of course, be surprised at my decision to go to Colorado in the sense that I reach it in light of considerations that had not previously occurred to me, and in violation of my prior expectations as to how I would decide. But that does not gainsay the point that my decisions cannot overtake or befall me.

18. Indirect control would of course be possible, since we can decide to take action to try to control our own motivations by various measures. But then the same problem arises with that decision.

19. An excellent defense of a number of the points made in this section can be found in Kathryn Tanner, "Human Freedom, Human Sin, and God the Creator," in *The God Who Acts*, ed. Thomas F. Tracy (University Park, Pennsylvania: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1994), pp. 111-135.

20. Compare the requirement of "ultimate responsibility" defended by Robert Kane in "Free Will: The Elusive Ideal," *Philosophical Studies* 75 (1994), pp. 25-60.

21. I am grateful to Peter van Inwagen for a discussion of these matters, and to Robert Audi, Wesley Baker, Tom Ellis, William Hasker, Robert Kane, Jonathan Kvanvig, Philip Quinn, William Rowe, and Eleonore Stump for comments on earlier versions of this paper.

NOTES AND NEWS

I. Forthcoming Special Issues

Topic: Theological Contributions to Theodicy
Date: October 1996
Advisory Editor: Marilyn McCord Adams
Deadline for submission: January 1, 1996

The problem of evil, which has occupied so dominant a place on standard syllabi in philosophy of religion, finds its theological counter-part in soteriology, the doctrine about how God remedies what ails creation. Increased attention to historical and contemporary theological treatments of human and Divine relations to evil, should enable Christian philosophers to reappropriate our traditions as well as stimulate fresh thinking on these difficult and central problems.

Contributions to this special issue should focus on one or no more than a few past or contemporary theologians, and analyze the bearing of their positions on the problem of evil. It is expected that most authors will be Christian, although materials from other (particularly Jewish or Islamic) traditions can be helpful. Authors may be taken, not only from the ranks of systematic and philosophical theologians, but also from the company of spiritual and devotional writers. Preference will be given to papers on theologians and positions not already receiving wide attention in Society-of-Christian-Philosophers circles.

Topic: Philosophy of Religion and Jewish Religious Thought
Date: October 1997
Advisory Editor: Eleonore Stump
Deadline for submission: January 1, 1997

There was a period when philosophy of religion was focused only on a narrow range of topics thought to be philosophically respectable, such as analysis of religious language. In recent years, however, philosophy of religion has broadened greatly, to include philosophical consideration of any array of issues in theology and biblical studies. As the focus of philosophy of religion has widened, philosophers of religion have explored various periods of Christian tradition, including certain aspects of medieval philosophical theology and Calvinist philosophy. What has not received much attention so far by contemporary philosophers of religion is the rich philosophical and theological tradition of Judaism. Yet even a theologian so unsympathetic to pluralism as Thomas Aquinas thought he had a great deal to learn from the Jewish tradition available in his period. This issue therefore will be devoted to philosophy of religion and Jewish religious thought. Comparisons of Jewish and Christian views are welcomed, but not required. Historical study is encouraged as long as it contributes to consideration of philosophical issues.