

## CHAPTER 4

# HUMAN FREEDOM, HUMAN SIN, AND GOD THE CREATOR

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In this chapter I hope to clarify what a Christian belief in God as the creator of the world implies about human freedom and sin. The essay is a thought experiment: *if* one takes seriously the idea that God is the creator of all that is, what must one say about human freedom and human failing?

On the question of human freedom, I conclude that the idea of God as creator is compatible with *any* philosophical account of the nature of human freedom short of the theological judgment that human freedom requires freedom from or with respect to God. God's creative calling forth of the world does not conflict with human freedom, however one defines it. Whatever one's account of the natural and psychological conditions for human choice—however strongly one maintains the freedom of human choice from determination by psychological preconditions, natural circumstances, and so forth—human beings in the exercise of such

freedom can still be considered the creatures of God, a part of what God's creative will for the world brings forth.

When thoughts turn to questions of human failing, here, I conclude, the idea of God the creator sets its own limits on intelligibility. The origination of sin is properly a mystery, properly inexplicable in a scheme of thought where God is the ultimate principle of explanation. Human beings must be the ones responsible for their own moral failing since God by definition brings to be only the good; but the *how* of that human-originated sin is as Karl Barth says an impossible possibility, the surd of a creature turning against its own being given by God, as Bernard Lonergan avers, an inconceivable breaking off of the very relation to God that makes the creature all that it is. What power or act could that turning against or that breaking off be when all that one is comes from God and all that comes from God is good?

Neither question of human freedom or human failing as I have posed it will appear to have much force—and therefore the conclusions will not seem to matter very much—without some sense of what I mean by serious consideration of belief in God as the creator of the world. It is this belief in its extremity, in its almost wild implications when taken seriously, when ridden consistently through to its logical end, that makes the question of human freedom and sin in a world that God creates interesting.

The claim that God is the creator of the world is a distinguishing affirmation of the Christian tradition: one would be hard-pressed to maintain one's identity as a Christian without it. In a certain strand of the Christian theological tradition, however, this claim is made the abiding presupposition for all discussion of God's relation to the world; for example, in discussing God's providential guiding of human affairs, forgiveness of sins and elevation of human beings to glory in Christ, gifts of grace and so forth.<sup>1</sup> In a narrow sense God is the creator as the giver of existence, where the fact of being is contrasted with what one is or does or becomes. But in a broader sense, God acts in the mode of creator whatever the aspect of created existence at issue: existing, acting, relating to others, finding a new life in Christ. From the most general to the most specific features of existence, all that the creature

1. In *God and Creation in Christian Theology* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1988) I argue that this is a quite pervasive strand of the Christian theological tradition, spanning a number of historical periods, theological schools, and denominational affiliations.

is it owes to God as the creator of the world. This is a vision of a God supremely beneficent, a giver of gifts beyond any human giver's capacities to comprehend, to whom it is fitting to raise one's voice in joyful thanksgiving and without whom, it is appropriate to confess in utmost humility, one is literally nothing.<sup>2</sup>

What does it mean to take the claim that God is the creator of the world this seriously? What does it mean to push the implications of such a claim this far?

One can say, first of all, that God's creation of the world loses any specific reference to a beginning time or initiating moment: to be created is to be in a relation of dependence upon God that holds whenever and for however long one exists. This relation of dependence upon God is absolute, moreover, in three distinct senses—in its range, manner, and efficacy.

The relation must be said to be all inclusive or universally extensive: everything nondivine, in every respect that it is, is dependent upon God's creative activity, which brings it forth. God's creative activity calls forth or holds up into being throughout the time of its existence what has its own integrity as a nondivine existence, and this nondivine existence has to be considered the consequence of God's creative calling forth and holding up *as a whole*, in its order and in its entirety, in every detail and aspect. Nondivine existence maintained by God's creative power constitutes, therefore, a *whole plane or level* of nondivine existence, inclusive of every item or order that is or happens or becomes in the world as we know it. Such a claim of universal scope holds, it is important to note, insofar as existence and its aspects are good. Existence and goodness are convertible according to this account, since God is by definition a supremely good God who brings forth, therefore, only the good as creator.

This relation of dependence upon God is, furthermore, always and in every respect a *direct* or immediate relation of dependence upon God. Picture the plane of nondivine existence (which is the whole of the world as we know it) suspended in existence at each and every one of its points, and therefore in its entirety, by God's creative action. In such a picture every nondivine being in every respect owes all that it is directly to God *whatever* its relations with other nondivine beings,

2. Which of these two attitudes—thanksgiving or humility—a theologian emphasizes depends upon his or her theological priorities and the perceived needs of a particular situation.

the specific natures of those relations, their presence or absence, etc. The relation of dependence upon God, which suspends any and every nondivine being or aspect of being into existence, is not affected by the relations (causal, temporal, spatial, etc.) among nondivine beings, by relations *within* the plane of nondivine existence. God does not call forth or hold up into being any creature as the existing, acting, interacting being it is *by way of* other creatures, by way of their existence, actions, or interactions with it. Actions, mutual influences, causal relations, and so forth among the nondivine may be a part of the world God calls forth, but they are the *results* of God's creative action (if it is indeed universal in scope) and not the *conditions or means* of that creative calling forth.

Because all that is nondivine is the consequence and not the condition of God's creative calling forth or holding up, one should say, finally, that God's creative intention for the world cannot be hindered, diverted or otherwise redirected by creatures. Lacking any defect or internal principle of corruption, moreover, God's creative calling forth is indeed unconditionally and necessarily efficacious. Expressing the idea in the oft-used terms of "willing" and "intending," a theologian of our ilk asserts that what God wills for the world as its creator must happen in just the way God wills. The point of such an assertion is not at bottom to stress God's irrepressible or tyrannical *control*—although something close to that may sometimes be pertinent as a rhetorical device to meet the needs of a particular audience, say, to pull up short those who thanklessly elevate themselves to an existence independent of God. The point is the same as always: to make clear the implications of God's supreme beneficence as creator. Such an assertion is a simple consequence of the other conclusions we have drawn from that beneficence: God creates immediately, without any process in which creatures might figure, so there is nothing to get in the way; God creates without any exception so there is nothing besides the effects of God's own creative calling forth to complicate it.<sup>3</sup>

### Human Freedom under God

What does this account, or picture, of God the creator imply about human freedom under God? Theologians who assume the above picture or ac-

3. See my *God and Creation* for a fuller exposition and defence of this picture.

count will want to say that any power or free action attributed to human beings exists in an absolute relation of dependence upon God. According to the account given above it makes no sense to claim that human beings have attributes that are good but that are not dependent upon God in that way: this would just be to say that human beings in those respects are not created. The premise that all nondivine beings exist in an absolute relation of dependence upon God would have in that case an exception.

Theologians holding the picture of God the creator I have outlined would be especially reluctant to make such an exception of human power and free action since what is at stake here is a proper recognition of God's beneficence. All that we have for good we have received from God. The more valuable the attribute of free agency the more the concern to claim that it is a created gift. The greater the good of free choice the greater the love for God that is appropriate. The greater the good the greater the need for humility, for thankfulness in recognition that one has received from God even that of which one is most proud.

Any attempt to exempt human powers from an absolute relation of dependence upon God can only be suspected, from this point of view, of Titanism. What is it that motivates the desire to exempt the greatest attributes of a specifically human existence from dependence upon God, if not the desire to be un beholden to God in some way for the greatness of what one is? In the most important respects one would be able to say that one is not God's creature. (Or perhaps that one *is* a creature of God in those respects but at some remove that lessens one's dependence upon God's gracious giving.)<sup>4</sup>

4. The theologian inclined to exempt human agency from the sort of relation of dependence upon God I have specified will have, of course, his or her own reasons for doing so: for example, in order to render sin more easily explicable, in order to stress human responsibility for good and evil and therefore encourage moral striving, in order to protect God's justice. The theologian holding the picture of God the creator I have outlined can respond that some of these concerns (e.g., the concern for human responsibility) can finally be assured just as well without the exception of human agency from an absolute relation of dependence upon God. (I shall in fact be arguing this later.) Or, the theologian can claim that some concerns (e.g., the concern to protect God's justice) are served no better with such an exception. (If God has the simple power to prevent or block the harmful consequences of human sin, the independence of human agency from God's creative working hardly lessens God's responsibility for the suffering of innocents brought about by human malfeasance.) Finally, our theologian can admit that some of these concerns (e.g., concern for the intelligibility of sin) may in fact be better addressed by exempting human agency from an absolute relation of dependence upon God. This advance just comes, the theologian can argue, at too great a price. Sin may be more easily explicable when human acts are not thought to be called forth by a good God, but the same sort of account of meritorious human acts suggests that human beings in some essential respect save themselves. Fundamental differences of theological priority are what ultimately distinguish,

Although the theologians holding the picture of God as creator I have been talking about may not *want* to exempt human agents from an absolute relation of dependence upon God, it is another question whether there can be any free human agency when God's agency is understood that way. Should free human agency exist, it must exist in an absolute relation of dependence upon God if the premises about creation that we have been looking at are assumed. But this does not say anything about whether any notion of human freedom worth its salt is compatible with that relation to God to begin with. Exactly what sort of power or freedom can be attributed to human beings if one assumes the picture of creation sketched above? At what point, if any, will the attribution of freedom and power to human beings conflict with that account?

There are two possible sources of conflict. The characteristic shape of human action may be incompatible with the very notion of an absolute relation to God as creator that we have outlined. Or, the character of human action may not obviously conflict with that notion but with its implication, God's sovereignty as we have expressed it, the infallible efficacy of God's calling forth, which was predicated on the idea that no creature's power of influence extends to God's creative working.

To explore these two possible sources of conflict, the characteristics of human action at issue have to be specified and considered separately. We shall first consider human agency at its bare minimum, as a power to bring about effects within the world, human agency considered, that is, under the generic notion of a cause of effects. Then we shall look at human action as a specifically human form of free agency, dividing the notion of freedom into two—freedom in the sense of having one's choices in one's own power, and in the sense of freedom of choice. There are many different notions of human freedom in the Western philosophical tradition; the ones I discuss are chosen to maximize the possibility of conflict with our picture of God as creator.<sup>5</sup> If such conflicts are avoidable, presumably conflicts with *any* account of human freedom are avoidable.

Should conflicts with our picture of God the creator arise on any of

therefore, theologians who are from those who are not willing to exempt human agency from an absolute relation of dependence upon God.

5. E.g., they are accounts of human freedom from a libertarian rather than a compatibilist point of view. If human freedom is generally consistent with determinism, as compatibilists hold, the existence of a God who creates according to our picture is unlikely to pose any additional problems.

these scores, the theologian holding onto that picture has several options: (1) deny that human power or freedom has to be characterized in that way in order to be genuine; (2) agree that human power or freedom must be of that sort to be worthy of the name and accept the consequence that human beings do not have any; (3) permit such characterizations but limit their scope so that they appropriately hold for relations *within* the created plane of existence but not for the creature's relation of dependence upon God. This restriction on its sphere of applicability, the theologian insists, does nothing to take away from any genuine sense of human power or freedom.<sup>6</sup> This third option is the one we shall follow.

Let us begin with the question of human power to effect things within the world, a power we would like to attribute, presumably, to any number of created beings, animate and inanimate, human or nonhuman. Can a creature have genuine power *of its own* if that power exists in virtue of an absolute relation of dependence upon God? Can a power of creatures to bring about effects within the created order or plane of existence be real if it is received from God, brought about by God's creative calling forth?

The response to this line of questioning is implicit in the account of God as creator we have already outlined. If it makes sense to say that God can call forth a nondivine being with an integrity of existence of its own, then it makes sense to say that God can call forth nondivine beings with real powers of their own to influence other creatures. The cases are exactly parallel according to the picture of God as creator I have outlined. God creatively evokes not just the fact that the creature exists (in a narrow sense) but the existing of the creature as all that it is—including powers of operation on its part. The powers of creatures would just be a part, therefore, of the whole plane of nondivine existence that God calls forth and suspends in being. According to our picture, a creature can have a real power to bring about effects in the created order but without God's holding in being of that creature and its capacities, such powers are nothing.

Someone disputing the possibility that genuine powers are part of a God-given plane of nondivine existence has the burden of proving *either* that the idea of God the creator is incoherent altogether—incoherent

6. Insofar as he or she is simply an upholder of the picture of God the creator we have outlined, the theologian need not form any judgment on the matter of whether a libertarian account, say, is the proper way to describe the human power or freedom that is exercised within and with respect to the nondivine plane of existence.

where existence (in a narrow sense) is the putative result of God's creative working as well as where created powers are—or that something about the idea of creatures with real power simply prevents an otherwise coherent account of God the creator of all from being extended specifically to it. The former option threatens to push the theologian out of a Christian orbit. The second option is just that—an option, a possibility without material force—until actual arguments are supplied.

One such argument might be that created powers cannot be real if, as we have implied above, God as the creator of all directly brings about the created effects that the exercise of those created powers are themselves supposed to produce. If God on God's own is bringing about the effect in those respects, then the creature is not exercising any real power; it is just going through the motions. If the creature's own operations are to make any real contributions to the effect produced, then God's creative working must be superfluous to just that extent. God's creative working simply should not be said to extend, therefore, to what creatures themselves produce.

This argument operates, however, with a fundamentally different picture of God's creative working than the one we started with, and so fails to prove what it sets out to prove. This argument does not, as billed, assume our picture of God's creative working and show the impossibility of its covering the specific case of nondivine powers. Its fundamental premises about God's creative working are simply not ours. This argument does not think of God's creative action as what holds up into existence a whole nondivine plane of being but assumes from the start, without argument, that God is one actor among other possible actors within a single plane of cooperating and/or competing causes of a comparable sort. Only on that assumption would it make sense to think that God's bringing about of a created effect must render superfluous a creature's own bringing about of that effect, and vice versa.

According to our picture, if a creature exercises any power at all, it does so on a different plane or axis, so to speak, from that along which God's creative agency is exercised. God works to hold the whole of that created plane in existence and does not work within it. If a nondivine cause works to produce an effect, it does so only insofar as it is held up into existence in those respects by God. No matter how genuine the creature's power, that does not render superfluous, therefore, God's own working.

The same sort of defect affects the other side of the argument—the

crucial side for the question at hand, the question whether, given our account of God's creative working, creatures can have any real power at all. The argument of our opponent pictures God bringing about a created effect, not by suspending into existence that created effect along with everything else, but by some sort of special, individual activity of God himself within the created order that brings God into possible competition with a creature's own actions for that effect. God's working as creator renders the idea of the creature's own working otiose, as our opponents argue, only when God's direct calling forth of the effect of that creature's action is considered in isolation from all the rest of what God as creator calls forth, as if God brings about that effect directly and not also and equally directly any creature acting within the plane of nondivine existence to bring it about, and therefore as if God were to bring about that created effect by some other act than the creative act by which God holds up into existence the whole plane of nondivine being. None of these assumptions comport with our original picture of God's creative working. They are not, moreover, conclusions drawn from that picture's critique, but unexamined premises. Why must we accept them?

Let us suppose we have answered satisfactorily questions about the compatibility of nondivine power with the idea of creatures existing in an absolute relation of dependence upon God. At the least, there are no obvious grounds for conflict. The conclusions about God's sovereignty that we drew from our picture of God as creator might still supply other grounds for thinking that the genuine power of creatures presents problems. Let us try to resolve possible conflicts on these grounds now.

It would surely seem, first of all, that a creature's powers could be genuine even if it is a part of our account of God's sovereignty that such powers are not exercised with respect to God. It would be enough for those powers to operate with respect to things within the created order, that is, to have a range of exercise within the plane of nondivine reality. Such a range of exercise would not imply power with respect to God and therefore conflict with our claims for God's sovereignty, since, according to our account of God's creative action, the creature's powers to make things happen within the world are always the result of God's creative working and never its condition. If this is the reason creatures lack power vis-à-vis God, such a lack of power would not vitiate human power with respect to creatures. On the contrary, a lack of power vis-à-vis God is a *precondition* for it: the creature's absolute relation of dependence upon God is what brings it about that the creature has any of the powers it does.

Claims for the power of human beings within the created order need not conflict, then, with the *efficacy* of God's creative working as we have presented it. Created causes, if they exist, are simply a part of what God calls forth as creator; as the result of God's creative working rather than its condition, the powers of creatures are not in any position to stand in the way of what God wants to create. To the extent God intends to bring forth a world in which things happen by way of created causes, those causes, far from being in potential conflict with the efficacy of God's will, are its executors. Though not the means by which God holds up into being a world of causally related beings, such causes are bringing about along the plane of nondivine existence just the sort of world God is working to suspend into being.

The *manner in which* the efficacy of God's creative working is assured on our account, moreover, does not conflict with the dignity or integrity of human power. The infallibility of God's creative working need not take away from the power of creatures or the efficacy of such powers, should they exist. God does not have to do without a world in which creatures have their own power in order for God's creative working to be infallibly efficacious. It is the universal scope of God's creative working—its reference to the powers and operations of creatures as well as everything else, that makes it so. Indeed, far from being incompatible with God's power, God's gift of power to creatures is a clearer indication of the greatness of God's power, of its might, one could say, than the withholding of that gift: the supremacy of the giver is measured by the gifts.

In virtue of the same universality of scope we just mentioned, the infallibility of God's creative working need not be ensured, either, by *hindering* the operations of created beings, thereby conflicting with the dignity of their status as genuine causes. God *could* get God's way, so to speak, by a general policy of blocking the operations of created causes whenever they run contrary to what God wills. But according to our picture of God as creator there is no need for this recourse. Without jeopardizing God's infallible efficacy, human beings can retain a kind of Lockean freedom "to do whatever they choose to do"; they can in fact execute what they intend. Like other created causes of effects within the world, human beings are generally able to operate and effect those things within the created order that accord with their own powers of operation.

Let us turn now to the distinguishing features of human action and leave behind these generic aspects of action shared with other sorts of created causes. There are two distinct clusters of notions specifying the

sort of powers one would like to claim for human beings. Questions about the compatibility of human powers with the account of God and creation I have given tend to focus around these two ideas.

The first cluster of notions concerns what might be called freedom of spontaneity or freedom of self-origination, terms that indicate the voluntary character of human choosing and the freedom of human beings to move themselves to choose. Choice is within our power; we have power over our choices—that is what is at issue here.

This kind of claim is understood in a number of different ways in the history of speculation on the topic. It means at least some of the following to some people: (1) If one moves oneself to choose, that choice follows of necessity; that is, that choice *has* to come about. My will is always in my power in the sense that the immediate efficacy of moving myself to choose cannot be impeded. (2) Choice is in my power in the sense that I choose to do only what I want to do. My choosing is always a matter of my own inclination, my own tending. (3) My choosing is therefore always voluntary. I cannot be brought to choose something against my will. I can be made to *do* something against my will but I cannot be forced to *choose* to do that against my will. Threat of harm, for example, can make me choose to do what, all things being equal, I would rather not, but I still make the choice in such circumstances for what I view to be a greater good. (For example, I choose to cooperate with my captors because that seems better than being killed for my resistance.) (4) Power over my choosing, if it exists at all, cannot be alienated. Human beings cannot be brought to choose *apart from their own choosing*; no one can choose *for me*. (5) The determination of choice and its specifications end with the human agent in the sense that none of the following factors constrains or necessitates a particular choice: (a) the natural and situationally determined constitution of a human agent (its natural inclinations, transient feelings, bodily state) does not determine choice, although it does make certain objects of choice desirable. Human beings retain power over their choices insofar as they retain the capacity to assess whether, say, such desires are good ones to have or appropriate to act upon in the particular circumstances. Some assessment of this sort is at work where, say, my hunger makes my neighbor's food desirable but I do not choose to take it since that would involve an act of theft. (b) The *objects of choice* that a situation presents do not constrain choice for the same reason. Finding, for example, \$100,000 in unmarked bills does not constrain my choice to keep and spend them. None of this is to say that passions, physical torture, and so

forth, cannot necessitate choice by distracting one from due consideration or by literally driving one out of one's mind in a way that precludes rational assessment of desires and available objects of choice. It is just to say that in those instances one has *lost* power over one's choices. (c) The rational assessment of the greater good in a particular situation does not necessitate one's choosing it. Unless that proposed object of choice is apprehended as good in every conceivable respect, human beings retain the power to choose neither the greater nor the lesser good. (The will, in other words, has the power not to choose between them at all.) One can also move for the *reassessment* of what has been perceived to be the greater good, under some other aspect. (For example, it may be better to burn cheap oil than invest in solar energy if one considers immediate expenditures, but one might also go on to consider the prospects for environmental damage.)

These last considerations of freedom from constraint lead to a second cluster of notions regarding human agency, about which we can be much briefer. Human beings are free insofar as they have *free choice*: the freedom to choose to do something or not, and the freedom to choose one thing or another.

Let us begin our discussion of possible conflicts with our picture of God as creator by looking at the first cluster of notions. (We will assume here the goodness of the human agent and its choices.) Are any of these notions of freedom of spontaneity or self-origination incompatible with a human agent's absolute relation of dependence upon God? In other words, do my choices remain within my own power in the senses specified if these very choices exist in virtue of God's creative action for them?

Would, for example, the necessity with which my choice follows upon my moving myself so to choose (that is, the immediate efficacy of the will for its own choice) lessen the dependence of that choice upon God's creative working for it, and therefore conflict with our premises regarding creation? No: the dependence of my choice upon my moving myself so to choose does not have any such effect since, according to our premises, God's creative calling forth must be directly behind the choice *and* my moving myself so to choose *and* the character of the relation between the two as one of necessary consequence. The dependence of my choice upon God's calling it forth is not affected in any way—it is not lessened (or strengthened)—by the fact my choice is dependent upon my moving myself so to choose within the created plane of existence, since that whole plane of existence is held in being by God.

Would not the necessary efficacy of my moving myself to choose conflict, however, with the *freedom* of God's creative intention for the world? Given the necessary efficacy of my moving myself to choose, would not God's creative calling forth of my moving myself to choose constrain God to call forth that *choice* as well? No: according to our picture of God as creator, if my moving myself to choose has a necessary efficacy, God has simply called forth a world in which choices necessarily follow upon human beings moving themselves to choose. According to our picture, God does not first call forth my moving myself to choose and then, because of that fact, creatively call forth those choices that must follow upon my so moving given its necessary efficacy. God's creative calling forth, in a single act so to speak, simply holds up into being the whole of the world in which human beings' moving themselves to choose has a necessary efficacy.

In general, necessary relations between created causes and effects do not conflict with the freedom of God's creative intention. If God's creative calling forth is free and not necessitated, God does not have to bring about a world in which such necessary relations occur to begin with. Even if the sort of power over choices that we have been talking about is part of what it *means* to be human, so that God could not choose to create *human* beings without granting them that power, God still retains the freedom to choose to create such beings or not. Given the existence of such beings, and that means given the fact of God's will for them, the necessity with which a particular choice follows upon my moving my will to choose it does not make that choice (absolutely) necessary in any way that would require that such a choice be a part of God's creative intention for the world. That choice necessarily follows upon my so moving myself, but only insofar as I exist long enough in so moving myself to effect my choice.<sup>7</sup> In other words, my necessity of efficacy assumes the existence of myself moving. If a part of what God calls forth is a world in which my existence in the process of self-moving terminates before being efficacious, the necessary efficacy that characterizes my self-moving becomes a moot point—such a choice will not occur.

As a matter of fact, human beings do not generally suffer this sort of annihilation in the process of choosing. According to our premises, this

7. We have been assuming all along that one's moving oneself to choose and the choice itself are really distinct, a process and its term, and therefore that the necessary efficacy of the former is not the result of any immediate identity between the two.



fact does not indicate that God *could not* call forth a world of that sort. It is simply an indication that, in keeping with our picture of God as a gracious giver, God's actual creative intention includes a respect for the integrity of human operations.

Even if these arguments convince, a critic might charge that the *rest* of what freedom of spontaneity or self-origination implies conflicts with God's creative calling forth of human agency. For example: (1) If God brings me to choose, the choice is no longer a matter of my own choosing. (2) If God brings me to choose, God can make me choose against my will. That is, God can do violence to my will by making me choose what I am not inclined myself to choose. (More strongly, God can make me choose what I am inclined *not* to choose.) (3) If God brings me to choose, I do not choose but God chooses for me.

A theologian holding our picture of God as creator has the same basic response (with minor variations) to this cluster of charges. Taking each charge in turn, he or she can say: (1) If God creatively calls forth someone's choosing, God's creative action is not *replacing* that human being's choosing. Indeed, the human agent itself choosing is what God holds up into being. God's calling forth of the human being's choosing does not alienate the human being's power to choose. On the contrary, according to our picture it brings it about as something that is the human being's own. (2) Since according to our premises God's creative calling forth extends to the whole of what happens, it is a mistake to isolate a human being's *choice* as what God brings about so as to suggest that God is not also bringing about the human agent in its very moving of itself so to choose. When God brings about a human being in its choosing, the choice remains, therefore, a matter of the human being's own inclinations so to choose. (3) If human choosing is always dependent in this way upon God's will for it, it no longer makes sense to talk about God forcing someone to choose what he or she would otherwise not choose. The creature *has* no inclinations to choose except for the ones God gives. The human being may have had inclinations to the contrary a moment before, but given God's calling forth of a change in them, the creature has just those inclinations, which God intends, in the next moment, and no others.

One final possibility of conflict remains within this cluster of notions concerning human freedom of spontaneity or self-origination. Can choice end with the human agent (in the sense that a human being is not constrained to choose or to choose one thing rather than another by its own physical constitution, apprehended objects or evaluative judgments) if

human choosing exists in an absolute relation of dependence upon God? A suspicion that it cannot may be based on an argument that God's calling forth of that choosing could not be *infallible* (as we have said) without some constraints of those sorts. How can God's calling forth of a human agent's choice be infallible, if the human being's so choosing is not necessitated by any created conditions?

The theologian holding to our picture can answer that the infallibility of God's creative working would require human choosing to be necessitated by created conditions only if God's creative working were not *itself* directly efficacious of that result. If God's creative working brought a person to make a particular choice *by way of* certain created conditions—by way of his/her situation or physical states or thoughts of desirable courses of action—then indeed, God's creative calling forth of that person's choice would be infallibly effective only if those created conditions were. According to our premises, however, God's creative intention is directly behind both the choosing and the created influences on it. God's will for a person's choice remains direct and directly efficacious, therefore, irrespective of the existence of created influences for such a choice. The human being's choosing in the way he or she does *has* to come about simply because God's creative working extends to a choice of that sort, and not because created conditions *constrain* such a choice.

The critic of our picture will no doubt charge that it is just *God's creative working* that is the problem. One problem might be this: even if the necessary infallibility of God's working does not require other created causes to necessitate the human agent's choice, choice does not end with the human agent. *God* brings the human agent to choose and therefore a human being cannot be the agent-cause of its own choice.

One can respond to this objection in two ways. First, God does not bring about the human agent's choice by intervening in the created order as some sort of supernatural cause, so as to make up the difference between created conditions and the human being's choice and to supply that otherwise missing factor or impetus that takes away the indifference of the human will and brings about choice in a particular direction. God simply brings about, by that selfsame act of holding up into existence, the whole of a world in which human choices occur *without* any sufficient causes for them within the happenings of the world. If a picture of divine intervention is behind the idea that choice does not end with the human agent but is necessitated by the influence of God, then such a conclusion is mistaken.



Second, choice ends with the human agent within the plane of non-divine existence, even if God is the creator of that world, and it is with reference to that nondivine plane that the idea of choice ending with the human agent was originally defined. If God is the creator of the world, one can still affirm a very strong libertarian version of the human being's freedom from constraint by physical impulse, situation, apprehended goods, and so forth. A theologian holding to our picture will argue that that is enough to make the idea of agent-causation meaningful. If the critic insists that human choice can genuinely end with the human agent only if *God* is not also bringing about the agent choosing, is that not finally to push a theological claim? One insists that the nonnecessitated character of human choice be taken so far that human beings are no longer creatures.

If the claim that human choice is not necessitated by any given conditions must be taken in an absolute sense, with a universal reference that includes God's creative working among those conditions, then the theologian can only say that such a thing does not exist. In defense, he or she can say, however, that the conditions failing to necessitate choice may include anything and everything *short* of God's will; he or she is merely insisting on theological grounds that the human being is still the creature of God.

It makes sense according to our picture of God as creator to restrict in this way the sort of conditions relevant for determining whether choices end with the human agent—to restrict them to created conditions—since God according to that picture is not positioned along with the created conditions of choice and human agents within a single plane or arena of cause-effect operations. As we have said before, God is not a factor among factors that are together sufficient to bring about human choices; God is instead the one who brings to be the whole of the created order in all its aspects where some happenings are necessitated by others and some (a person's choices) are not.

A second objection to God's bringing about of a human being's choices would be that God's infallible working *necessitates* human choice even if no created happenings do. The human being cannot choose to do other than as God intends. This brings us to the second cluster of notions of human freedom: the freedom to choose or not to choose, to choose one thing or another. If God's creative working for a particular person's choice is infallible, then that person must choose and choose as God

wants that person to choose. Human beings cannot be said, therefore, to have freedom of choice.

A theologian holding our picture cannot deny that, given God's infallible working, human beings *must* choose when and what God wills. This theologian can simply try to take away from the critic the senses of this "must" that make it objectionable.

First, he or she can argue that, if one limits the relevant conditions for a determination of free choice to *created* conditions, this "must" does not mean that a human agent loses freedom of choice. Even if a human being must choose what God wants him or her to choose, there may be nothing about the physical constitution of this human agent or what has happened in the world up until now or the laws of nature or the desirability of available objects of choice or any other created condition of choice, in any combination, that necessitates a choice or a choice of any particular sort by that agent. The same arguments we considered on the question of agent-causation return here.

Second, if the human being's *capacity* to do otherwise is understood in terms of this failure of any combination of given created causes to constrain choice, one can meaningfully say that a human being is *able* (given the same created conditions) to choose otherwise than the agent does, even if the agent never chooses anything other than what God wills that agent to choose.

It is true that if the necessary infallibility that characterizes God's calling forth of a human choice were to necessitate that choice *absolutely*, it would not be possible to say that the creature has the ability to choose otherwise vis-à-vis the created conditions of choice. A theologian holding to our picture has to deny that the necessity with which a human being's choice follows from God's will for it makes that choice simply and in all respects necessary. It is usual to appeal here to an analogy with modal operators of logical necessity. "If *q* follows necessarily from *p*, then *q* is necessary" is a false proposition of modal logic, where *p* is "God's calling forth of a human choice" (or will that a human choice occur) and *q* is "that human choice occurs." If *p* were necessary then *q* would be too but, on our premises, *p* is not necessary (God does not *have* to create anything).<sup>8</sup>

8. The necessity of immutability of God's creative will for *q* on the supposition God does so will (i.e., the fact that given such a will for *q* it cannot be changed) is also not enough to make *q* itself necessary, unless in analogous cases (e.g., *p* is a statement about the past) one is willing to say the same. I do not think one *should* be so willing for cases of past fact. If, for example,

What then does the inability of a human agent to do otherwise than God wills *mean* if the human agent's choice is not necessitated by any created conditions? A theologian who holds to our picture of God as creator might claim that this is an inability like that whereby I say that insofar as I *am* choosing to do something I cannot choose *not* to so choose. This inability to do otherwise would be like the creature's inability to do other than what *God* wills in that it would hold even under the most libertarian of circumstances. All it means is that I cannot choose and not choose to do the same thing at the same time. If I *am* choosing to do it at *T*, I *cannot* choose *not to* at *T*. But this sort of inability does not indicate any real inability not to choose at *T* what I *do* choose. If the analogy holds, I am not free to choose to do anything at *T* other than what God wills that I choose to do at *T*, but this also says nothing about any real inability of mine at *T* to do something else.

Whether or not, however, one accepts the conclusion of this argument that human beings have a real ability to do otherwise, this analogy suggests that my choosing as God wills me to choose follows with the same necessity as my choosing as I do when I am so choosing; and that is a very strong necessity indeed. I may have a real ability to do otherwise in a certain situation, but given God's will for my making a particular choice that ability is not exercised: I make that choice and no other. In a similar sense, my real ability to choose *A* is not (and in the sense specified above cannot be) exercised in case I actually choose *B*. We may have the real ability at *T* to choose in a way that diverges from the choice God wills that we make at *T*, but, given the will of God, we never actually choose anything but what God wills us to choose; what's more, if the argument we made regarding our first cluster of notions about human freedom holds, we never *want* to choose anything else.

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at *T*<sub>1</sub> in Athens Socrates' running necessitates Socrates' moving, the fact that Socrates' running at that time in Athens is a matter of past fact at *T*<sub>2</sub> and so cannot be changed (it has a kind of necessity of immutability), does not make Socrates' moving at *T*<sub>1</sub> any *more* necessary than it was at *T*<sub>1</sub>. It was at *T*<sub>1</sub>, and in retrospect remains at *T*<sub>2</sub>, a contingent matter of fact.

A critic could also claim that the original analogy with modal operators of necessity is no good: the necessity with which a human person's choice follows from God's will for it is not a mere logical necessity but some sort of causal necessity. I fail to see, however, how that changes the falsity of the relevant modal formula. Again, to take a more ordinary example: "If I move myself to choose to do something, it follows of necessity that I choose to do it." This necessity of consequence is based upon the necessity of efficacy by which one brings about one's own choice. No one would conclude, I think, from this relation of necessity that a particular choice is itself necessary and that freedom of choice with respect to it is thereby eliminated.

Is this sort of freedom of choice under God a freedom of choice worthy of the name? Whatever the case, I believe it is the only sense of human freedom of choice compatible with a consistent application of the notion of creation we are working with. Were one to *drop* the attribution of freedom of choice to human beings, it is not clear in this era of Frankfurt cases what exactly would be lost. Human beings would still remain *responsible* for the choices they make (the good ones at least, since that is all we have been talking about so far), in virtue of the fact that the first cluster of notions regarding human freedom would still hold: human beings would remain the agent-causes of choices they make willingly.

### Human Sin under God

Christians affirm the existence of human sin, however, and this would seem to suggest that human beings *are* able *not* to choose what God wills them to choose, in a stronger sense than we have admitted so far. It would seem that the human being who sins *actually chooses* other than God wills. If God is good, God's will is never for the sinful aspects of human life per se, and therefore the existence of sin must run contrary in fact to God's creative intentions for the world. Given the existence of sin, human freedom of choice must include the freedom to make a choice that is contrary to the choice God wills a person to make.

It would seem, then, that a theologian who holds our picture of God as creator and who acknowledges the existence of sin should follow through on the implications of this sort of freedom to sin, and admit: (1) Sinful choices present an exception to our premises about creation. Some aspect of nondivine being exists without being in an absolute relation of dependence upon God's will for it. (2) Human beings in making sinful choices exercise a freedom from God. (3) God's creative will for the world cannot, therefore, be infallible of itself with respect to anything that happens in the world that is influenced by the sinful choices human beings make.

The familiar response to the first objection is to say that sin is essentially a defect, a lack, something missing. Sin does not exist per se but as a defect "exists," parasitic upon what does exist, an absence with a horrible enough sort of presence insofar as what is missing is essential or proper to what does exist. Because sin is not an "existing" aspect of

created being, God's creative will should not extend to it on our premises: it is not therefore an exception to them. As a lack parasitic upon what is, sin does, however, remain in a sense absolutely dependent upon God, for without the created being that a defect affects, a defect would not be a defect but absolutely nothing, and *that* created being *is* in the usual absolute relation of dependence upon God.

Assuming the adequacy of this response, the hard part, however, is to account for how a sinful defect comes about without God's direct creative will for the activity of whatever it is that brings it about. Such activity, insofar as it is itself something, must be called forth by God in its operation and efficacy or our premise about God as a creator would be violated. If God does so, God directly effects the created activity that brings about sin, stopping short only of the defect of sin itself, which is small comfort. One might try to say that the activity that brings about the defect of sin does so in virtue of its own defect and that God does not directly will the activity in that respect. But this simply pushes the question of the origin of sin back to the question of what brought about the first defect. The question has to stop somewhere since, according to our premises, God does not create a world of sin. But wherever one stops, God's will would seem to be behind whatever created activity brings sin about.

Perhaps the defect of sin is not the result of a creature's action but of its *inaction*. The defect of sin is not brought about by any real *activity*, in the way a defect in a work of art might come about by taking a sledgehammer to it, but simply by a failure (the way, say, the gears of a mechanism might fail to catch, sending everyone on a ski lift plummeting to their deaths). The human being does not take into account everything that needs to be taken into account in order to make a proper judgment and so makes a bad choice. What brings about the sinful choice is a failure of attention.<sup>9</sup> Perhaps there is a failure to think about the other relevant aspects under which the object of my choice is no longer a good thing to do. (Something would satisfy a desire of mine and I fail to consider the irreparable harm my satisfaction of that desire would bring to a great many other people.) Or, perhaps there is a failure properly to apply my more general evaluative judgments to the case at hand. (I know that

satisfying a desire of mine at the expense of a great many other people's welfare is improper but I fail to attend to this principle when considering the case at hand.)

What accounts, however, for these forms of inattention that lead to sinful choices?

A prerequisite for such inattention is that the human intellect is not always actively knowing in either of the two ways mentioned. For the human intellect to know anything, it has to be brought to know by an inclination to consider or inquire. If the human intellect does already know something, it need not consider such knowledge at all times. The more direct causal condition for the inattention that produces a mistaken judgment is the corruptibility of human faculties: it is of the very nature of human faculties to be capable of failure, error, and mistake. The proximal occasioning causes of a failure of attention may be some source of distraction—anger, lust, irritability, physical irritants, sleepiness, and so on.

But now if human beings are brought to be by God with faculties that are inactive in this way and prone to fail (and what is prone to fail, will fail at some time or other), is not the very world God creates one of sin? One can respond that the inattention that brings about sinful choices is not itself a sin. Human beings simply do not attend to everything they know and do not always act to find out about what they do not know, and there is no sin in any of that. Should one's intellect be inactive when one is deciding on the best course of action, that is what leads to sin. There is no sin in an evaluative judgment that is mistaken because of inattention (the judgment "this is the best thing for me to do" when it is not). The sin comes in *choosing* to do that rather than directing oneself to reconsider those general principles or aspects of the situation that one could have attended to but did not. The kind of inactivity that characterizes human knowers and the corruptibility (and corruption) of human faculties can therefore be said to be a part of the world God's creative will is behind; that does not mean, however, that God is behind the sin.

It is the conjunction, then, of a failure of attention and an act of choosing that makes for a sinful choice. But what is the cause of this? Is it simply an accident that persons fail to attend properly when in the act of choosing? It is clear it is the human being who of his or her own free choice fails to attend properly in choosing; but one could say that the sinful result is accidental from the side of the human agent in that he or she does not actively intend a failure of attention to issue in a bad choice.

9. For other discussions of failings of attention as morally culpable, see Iris Murdoch, *The Sovereignty of Good* (New York: Schocken Books, 1971); Bernard Lonergan, *Grace and Freedom* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1971); Yves Simon, *Freedom of Choice*, ed. Peter Wolff (New York: Fordham University Press, 1969).

But is it accidental from the side of God as a creative agent? Must not God's creative will for the world include that conjunction with the knowledge that it will issue in a sinful choice? The theologian could say that failure of attention in choosing is a not-attending; it does not exist and therefore cannot be a part of what God wills as creator. But cannot God prevent a failure of that sort at the relevant time by making the human being's *attention* at that moment part of the world God calls forth? Our premises about creation give us no reason to deny this.

The theologian holding onto our picture can respond, however. Let us say that, even though human beings have corruptible faculties, God prevents their actual corruption. In that case human beings always properly attend when choosing what it is they want to do, although the nature of human faculties themselves gives one no reason to expect this. Does not this violate the integrity of human beings, and therefore the gracious, generous quality of God's giving that is so fundamental to our picture? Human beings are not permitted by God to be what they are—fallible beings, who tend of themselves to make mistakes.

This does not seem to me an adequate response. Why cannot God restrict the errors in judgment human beings make to those occasions when human beings are not trying to decide what to do or occasions when they simply do not choose to act on them? This would be a rather odd world but it is a possible one in which human beings would be able to demonstrate the fallibility of their own natures without sinning. If the world is not that way (and as a matter of fact it is not), God must be directly behind the conjunctions of inattention and acts of choice that make for sinful choices.

This result conflicts with the premise of God's goodness, and here I believe the theologian holding onto our picture must simply admit the limits that picture places on the intelligibility of sin. The theologian is left saying that human beings fail of their own free will to attend properly when choosing to act and this is not God's will—*whatever* the account of what specifically makes for their sinful choices, that is not God's will.

In sum, one can give an account of what sin is (a defect) that is intelligible according to our premises about God as creator. One can also give an intelligible account of what makes sinful human choices possible, say: (1) human beings are not God; (2) their faculties are not always in act and are corruptible; (3) human beings act freely (so that they sin by their own choice). But one can offer no account of how sin actually arises

that does not imply that God's creative will is directly behind such an eventuality.

Can a theologian who abides by our premises give any justification for such an exception at this point? Only this I think, that what our premises about God as the creator mean is that God is the ultimate *explanation* for all that is. To say that sin is an exception to the premise of God as creator is therefore to say that sin is ultimately *without* explanation; it is what, by all rights, should not exist in a world that God creates. If a good God is the ultimate explanatory principle according to our picture, is not this inexplicable character of the coming to be of sin what one should expect?

So far we have only explored responses to the first charge mentioned above, the charge that sin conflicts with the claim of an absolute relation of dependence of all things upon God. We still need to address the other two objections mentioned, the one claiming that sin implies freedom from God, the other that, given that freedom, the infallible efficacy of God's creative working is destroyed. Let us concentrate on the last charge, that God's creative calling forth becomes fallible in a world of sin, since that charge presupposes the other, that sin involves freedom from God.

One possible strategy for maintaining God's infallibility assumes that sin can somehow exist without being called forth by God and complicates the account of God's creative intention for the world to make up for that fact. Although sin is not called forth by God, the possibility of sin's existence is *taken into account* in God's creative intention for the world, and therefore that intention remains infallible: the world happens just the way God intends it to, even should sin exist.

Here is how the argument works. God's intention for the world, the creative intention that holds up into being the whole of the world, includes sets of pseudosubjunctive propositions; propositions, that is, about what else will happen in the world should the creature sin, and what will happen within the world should the creature not. These are *pseudosubjunctive* propositions in that God knows from all eternity whether or not the creature *does* sin. Let us say God intends the salvation of all persons, then with infinite detail what God intends includes the saving of  $x$  in such and such a way  $y$  if  $x$  does not sin, and the saving of  $x$  in such and such a way  $z$  if  $x$  does sin, with the knowledge of whether or not and, if so, when,  $x$  sins. If the creature sins, that is contrary to God's will in that God's will does not extend to the bringing to be of sin. If the creature sins, what happens in the world will be different (subsequent events will be different), but *God's will* for the world will not be.

How does God know whether and when sin occurs? The only crucial point to make here (if the premises we have given above are not to be violated) is that this knowledge of the existence of sin is not a *condition* of God's forming God's very complicated intentions with respect to the world. God's knowledge of sin is dependent upon, and is logically subsequent to, God's creative intention for the world. It is therefore part of what could be called God's *practical* knowledge, or knowledge of what the created world is like in God's will for it. God does not directly will sin but sin (insofar as it is a defect) presupposes God's will for the world in which it occurs.<sup>10</sup>

The argument I have been making depends on multiplying, perhaps indefinitely, the outcomes that may conform to God's will for the world. But is there not a specific sort of outcome, or quite limited set of outcomes that Christians believe God wills for the world? For example, Christians claim that God wills the salvation of at least some, perhaps all, human beings. If unrepentant sinners cannot be saved, is not the possibility that all human beings are unrepentant sinners a condition upon an intention to save of that sort? In other words, God would have to know that not all human beings become unrepentant sinners *in order to form* an infallible intention to save at least some of them.

A theologian holding our picture of God as creator can respond that if God intends to save at least some people then God can assure the efficacy of that intention simply by including within it the intention to convert those people at the very moment of their deaths, should they be otherwise in an unrepentant state. If God wills that a hitherto unrepentant sinner turn himself or herself to God at the very moment of death, that conversion follows of necessity, and there are no more moments of that person's life to allow for a subsequent lapse, to allow for the renewal of that inexplicable entrance of sin. This extreme recourse of God is not of course necessary in every case; it is only necessary for those persons that God

10. This knowledge of whether or not a creature sins is therefore not by way of a so-called middle knowledge. God does not know about this sin, in other words, by knowing that *were* God to choose to create the world under certain specific initial conditions, the creature would sin in this way. If sin is freely chosen, given the same initial conditions, the creature may or may not sin, and therefore not even God can know in this way whether sin occurs. God knows that sin exists (without directly willing it) simply because it *does exist* in the world God brings about. God's omniscience means that God knows everything there is to know. God knows sin simply because sin happens.

wants to save whom God knows remain unrepentant the second before their deaths.

The bottom line here on the question of sin's interference with a claim of God's necessary efficacy is that God can prevent a lapse into sin by bringing forth at the crucial moment human choices that are not sinful. We can affirm therefore that the existence of sin cannot frustrate God's intention for the world. At most, the existence of sin brings about a different way of getting to the ends God wills, without altering God's intention about what is to happen on that supposition. With or without sin, or whatever the particular sinful choices made, the *same* end that God wants will happen. The sinners' intentions are taken up within the intention of God for the world and are inevitably redirected to the end God wills, in virtue of the fact that God's will is directly efficacious of everything else in the world besides sin and the fact that God can always will with the same necessary efficacy that a sinner's heart be transformed. The will of God for the world remains infallible, therefore, in a form much like the fate of the classical Greek tragedies—in whichever way one strikes out one will be brought back to the same point. But, now, what is fated, if one believes in the benevolence and mercy of God, is the good.