

Book reviews

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Kevin Timpe *Free Will in Philosophical Theology*. (New York: Bloomsbury, 2014). Pp. x + 177. £65.00 Hbk. ISBN 978 1 4411 2331 2.

Kevin Timpe brings recent analytic philosophical work on free will and moral responsibility to bear on some perennial questions in Christian theology about goodness, grace, and freedom. He first discusses the relationship between free will and the good (chapters 1 and 2), and asks how it is possible that a completely good, uncorrupted rational agent could nevertheless choose to sin (chapter 3). He next offers an account of redemption, grace, and freedom that aims to avoid both Pelagianism (the heresy on which fallen humans can choose to save themselves without receiving a special infusion of divine grace) and theological determinism (the view on which God alone determines who is saved). He argues that the damned retain their free will even though they cannot cease to sin and so cannot escape hell (chapter 5), and offers a parallel account of the freedom enjoyed by the saints in heaven, who retain their free will even though they cannot sin, and so cannot fall from heaven (chapter 6). Finally, he offers an account of divine freedom, on which God's choices are free, even though God's essentially perfectly good nature ensures that he must do what is best (chapter 7).

Timpe aims to tell a theological story in a philosophical way (3). He explicitly models the book's structure on the traditional *exitus-reditus* pattern of Christian salvation history (creation by God, fall and sin, redemption and eschatology, ending with the final return to God). Philosophical theologians have historically devoted more attention to the tricky metaphysical questions associated with Trinitarian and Christological dogmas than to equally important questions drawn from theological anthropology and Christian moral psychology. In that light, *Free Will in Philosophical Theology* is especially welcome. It is a fine example of the newly emerging field of 'analytic theology'.

Timpe's own account of free will is the engine that drives all his arguments. In brief, Timpe affirms both 'source incompatibilism' and 'virtue libertarianism'. On source incompatibilism, 'what is most important for an agent's free will is the agent being the source of her actions in a certain way' (10). Source incompatibilism

denies both causal and theological determinism, as well as the principle of alternative possibilities: in order for an agent's choice to count as genuinely free at t , it is not the case that the agent must be able to make an alternative choice at t . Rather, a source incompatibilist affirms that an agent's choice is free just in case it is not entirely sufficiently caused by events that are outside the agent's ultimate control. Put otherwise: an agent's choice is free just in case the agent herself is the ultimate source of that choice.

Virtue libertarianism weds source incompatibilism to the further thesis that an agent's choice counts as free at t even when it is causally determined by the agent's own moral character at t – as long as the agent herself formed that character as a result of previous choices that were not entirely sufficiently caused by anything external to the agent. Timpe thus endorses 'the reasons-constraint on free choice: roughly the claim that if at time t an agent sees no reason for doing a particular action, then the agent is unable at t of freely choosing to perform that action'. Moreover, 'what an agent sees as reasons, and how she weighs those reasons, depends upon her moral character. An agent's moral character thus puts constraints on what actions she is capable of freely choosing to perform' (17).

Given his account of free choice, Timpe can show that the saints in heaven and the damned in hell retain their free will, even though they are no longer capable of choosing to sin, or, respectively, choosing not to sin. The glorified have moral characters that prevent them from making sinful choices. Yet the choices they do make still count as free, because they are appropriately sourced to the glorified agents themselves. *Mutatis mutandis*, the same goes for the damned.

In both cases, however, we are left with theological questions about why our moral characters can change before we die, but remain fixed forever at the point of death. As Timpe notes, 'This may be particularly puzzling insofar as it looks like the person may have the same moral character immediately prior to death as she does immediately after death, and yet options that are open to her prior to death are now unavailable to her after it' (76). It does seem unlikely that any human agent, no matter how virtuous, ever dies with such a pristine character that it is psychologically *impossible* for her ever to make an evil choice, for all eternity. Similarly (though the story is slightly more complicated here) it is hard to see why a hardened sinner is still able to repent and stop rejecting grace right up to the moment of death, but never again after death, despite the fact that (on Timpe's account) God continues to offer grace even to the damned in hell.

With respect to the redeemed, Timpe can appeal to the doctrine of purgatory, which offers additional post-mortem opportunities for moral growth (99–101). This appeal only seems to complicate the overall picture, however, since it appears that a person's moral character *can* change after death, as long as he is in purgatory rather than hell. Before death, everyone is capable of moral growth, and after death, those in purgatory are capable of moral growth, but those in hell are not. A damned person who dies at t has a moral character such that he is still capable of accepting grace at t , but not capable of accepting grace

after t , for all eternity. (I here use 'accepting grace' as a shorthand for the more precise 'cease rejecting grace'.) Meanwhile, God continues to offer him grace, even though God knows that it is psychologically impossible that he will accept it. So it appears that accepting grace in this life is a necessary condition for post-mortem moral growth, even though it is not a necessary condition for ante-mortem moral growth (on Timpe's own account, since a sinner can accept grace right up to the moment of death). Why should this be the case? It is here that Timpe most needs to defend his views on grace and freedom, or at least show that other views face problems that are as bad or worse. But, in fact, Timpe is at a loss. He finds the solutions on offer in the literature problematic, and confesses that he has no alternative solution of his own to offer: after all, 'one need not think that every theological truth can be shown to be the case on the basis of reason' (78).

Chapter 3, on the 'primal sin', also ends in aporia. By his own account, neither of Timpe's interlocutors (chiefly Katherin Rogers on Anselm and Scott MacDonald on Augustine) make much progress towards solving the puzzle of how a non-fallen, uncorrupted moral agent could freely choose to sin. Here again, Timpe offers no alternative account, and instead endorses Rogers's view that the primal sin is 'inexplicable and ultimately mysterious' before concluding that 'a Christian account of primal sin cannot avoid all arbitrariness' (48). Timpe's philosophical views again lead him to a point at which he is content to let theological mysteries remain mysterious.

In other chapters, Timpe leads us not into aporia, but also does not deliver us from some unpalatable theological consequences. In his chapter on divine freedom, Timpe seems quite willing to concede that God is not free not to create. At the outset, he agrees that if there is a single best possible world, then God has no choice but to create that world, since 'God's motivational reasons necessarily track the normative reasons' (116). But suppose there is no single best possible world. If it is still better that God creates some world or other, rather than no world at all, then it follows by the same reasoning that God must create some world or other. Of course, even if God creates by necessity, God still counts as free to Timpe, since the necessity in question is the internal necessity imposed by the divine nature itself.

In fact, God did create some world or other – our world. Was God free *not* to create it? In one sense, certainly – provided that he instead created some other world chosen from the set, S , of worlds that 'meet some minimal standard of goodness' (117). But was God free not to create at all? Only if the 'world' in which God alone exists is as good as any world in S . Then God could arbitrarily choose either not to create at all, or to create some world in S . It is tempting to say that there is no worry here – surely any theist will agree that God is so good that a world in which God exists alone still meets the minimum standard of goodness, and is therefore at least as good as any world in S . I'm not sure this line is open to Timpe, however. There is no suggestion that he regards God's goodness as incommensurable with,

or on a different scale from, created goodness, the way some Thomists do. So it seems as if he is committed to the view that the state of affairs in which God creates a world in *S* must be better than the state of affairs in which God exists alone. And if that is right, then since God's motivational reasons necessarily track the normative reasons, God must create. Intuitions may vary here, but it seems to me that if Timpe's preferred account of freedom requires us to say that God must create, then we should question whether it is an adequate account of divine freedom.

Although I am struck by the fact that, at several points throughout the book, Timpe freely confesses that he is unable to solve some of the conceptual problems that he sets for himself, I remain deeply impressed by the – all too rare – combination of philosophical acumen and intellectual humility that he exhibits throughout this work. I wish that more scholars were so forthright about the limitations of their own preferred views. The best analytic philosophy exhibits exactly the kind of epistemic modesty so amply displayed by Timpe here. Moreover, good analytic philosophy frequently advances in small, incremental steps, building heavily on the work of others, while nevertheless making genuine advances on previous thought. Timpe's contribution is solid, workmanlike, and valuable in just this sense.

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Craig Martin *Capitalizing Religion: Ideology and the Opiate of the Bourgeoisie*. (London: Bloomsbury, 2014). Pp. ii + 179. £19.99 (Pbk). ISBN 978 1 4725 3337 1.

If one were to summarize Marxist notions of religion, it would be uncontroversial to say some immediate themes spring to mind. Religion as a phenomenon would be considered socially; religion would not have an independent reality in its own right, but could be explained through social relations. Religion would be economically determined; there would be an economic explanation for why productive forces lead to the formation of religious beliefs and practices. Religion would be ideological in the pejorative sense; religion is the opium of the people. Social manifestations of religion are self-serving tools of the economically secure for perpetuating social inequality. Additionally, we would have to think of religious individualism as false consciousness and alienation, religion as the product of capitalist accumulation, religion as a contributor to commodity fetishism, religion as a