Freedom, Mystery and "Kinds of Desire": The Doctrine of *Theosis* and Free Will's Intelligibility Problem

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Abstract

The problem of free will stands among the most intellectually fascinating, and practically concerning, problems of philosophy. It also remains, after centuries of rich discussion and sharp division, a locus of tremendous philosophical polarization— citing strong, often incongruous intuitions, philosophers today disagree over the nature, possibility, existence, and implications of human free agency. One route which might help penetrate this apparent stalemate is the application of resources from theism— in particular, Christian theism— to the philosophical free will conversation. In this paper, I review past contributions of Christian theism to the philosophical free will debate, arguing that these contributions, while illuminating, largely overlook what philosopher Robert Kane has termed free will's "intelligibility question": the charge that the very notion of libertarian free will is finally and indecipherably mysterious. I then address Kane's intelligibility question by investigating the Eastern Orthodox Christian doctrine of salvation as *theosis*, or "participation with the divine nature." I contend that a *theotic* understanding of morality and freedom raises the plausibility of libertarian models of free will, as opposed to compatibilistic models, by situating human choice within a context that is already inherently and irreducibly mysterious. Thus, in this paper, I identify a novel pathway by which ideas from within Christian doctrine might help make sense of the strictly philosophical free will dialogue.

Contents

Freedom, Mystery, and "Kinds of Desire":

The Doctrine of *Theosis* and Free Will's Intelligibility Problem

For centuries, the problem of free will has posed one of the most intractable— and most significant— controversies in philosophy. Questions about whether, when, and how we act as free agents present far-reaching implications. As Timothy O'Connor puts it, "Freedom of will is directly connected to the possibility or significance of moral responsibility, autonomy, the uniqueness of persons (involving creativity, originality, and their life histories in general), dignity, love, and friendship. In short, it is connected to everything that fundamentally matters to us in our relationships to one another."[1] Indeed, freedom of the will is a matter of immense practical interest, not merely a recondite dilemma for philosophers to sort out at a distance. Virtually every meaningful aspect of human life is bound up with the notion that we are, in some significant sense, free beings— that the course of our behavior, and the content of our character, are at least some of the time "up to us."

One intriguing aspect of the philosophical free will debate is its intersection with theism— particularly Christian theism. Often, the implications of theism for the strictly *philosophical* free will conversation are not squarely confronted. The reasons for this are several. For one thing, Christian theists already have, so to speak, their hands full— the traditional doctrines of sovereignty and divine omniscience present *theological* challenges to human freedom that are thorny in their own right.[2] Also, there are worries associated with bringing religious considerations to bear on the "shared space" of philosophical discussion. Such a move,

[1] Timothy O'Connor, *Persons and Causes: The Metaphysics of Free Will* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2002), xii.
[2] William Hasker, *Metaphysics: Constructing a Worldview* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1989), 50-51.

it is thought, might strain the conversation, vitiating meaningful dialogue between philosophers with divergent religious commitments.[3] Some have expressed qualms, moreover, that the intentions of Christian thinkers are so alloyed by religious motives that any theistically-minded contribution to the philosophical free will debate would inevitably sidetrack the conversation.[4] As a result, discussions of the philosophical problem of free will are often insulated from religious considerations.

Despite these misgivings, numerous scholars, especially in recent work, have demonstrated that the intersection between Christian theism and philosophical free will presents a fecund territory for new approaches, arguments, and insights.[5] In this paper, I seek to contribute to that intersection by identifying a relevant application of Christian doctrine to the philosophical free will discussion— an application which has been, to my knowledge, latent in the philosophical and theological literature so far. In particular, I attempt to show that doctrinal content from within Christian theism— paradigmatically, the Eastern Orthodox notion of salvation as *theosis*— can contribute plausibility to libertarian accounts of free will.

The Shape of the Debate

The freedom of the will is a perennial question in the history of philosophy. As a metaphysical puzzle, the existence or nonexistence of free will poses a critical problem for every systematic worldview, but the question is also intensely practical— virtually every aspect of daily life is affected, in some way, by the familiar experience of making choices. And the debate is by no means a transparent one. Abstruse ideas, hairline distinctions, and accusations of

[3] Hasker, *Metaphysics: Constructing a World View*, 23.
[4] Kevin Timpe and Daniel Speak, eds., "Introduction," in *Free Will and Theism: Connections, Contingencies, and Concerns* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2016), 1-24, https://academic-oup-com.ezproxy.liberty.edu/book/12714, 2.
[5] Ibid.

misunderstanding characterize the surrounding discussion. Neither is it conceptually isolated; our intuitions about moral responsibility and personhood are bound up with what we decide to say on the subject of human freedom.[6] Competing positions on the existence of free will, consistently applied, can lead to radically discordant conclusions in other important areas. Free will is thus an issue of immense significance, both philosophical and practical.

In this paper, I attempt to make a new foray into the philosophical free will debate by leveraging ideas from within Christian theism— in particular, the Eastern Orthodox concept of salvation as union with God, or *theosis*. Hence, as a preliminary matter, it will be critical to understand both the general contours of the philosophical free will debate, and the ways in which that debate has already engaged with Christian theism. Having gained this general understanding, we will then be in a position to draw some preliminary distinctions and, in the following sections, to consider how resources from within Christian theism might be marshalled in new ways.

The Philosophical Free Will Debate: Four Key Questions

The philosophical free will debate stands against the theological free will debate in that it explores the existence, significance, and intelligibility of free will without making reference to God or religious revelation. In the philosophical discussion, the primary threat to human free will is not divine sovereignty, but determinism: the thesis that every event, including human thought, speech, and action, necessarily follows from previous events and the immutable laws of nature. Our choices, according to determinism, are simply links in a long and inexorable chain of causes and effects. While it may appear, in a moment of decision, that two or more options are "open"

[6] Sam Harris, *Free Will* (New York, NY: Free Press, 2012), 1.

to our choosing, in reality, the relevant facts of the situation— our beliefs, desires, habits, emotional states, etc.— completely determine the outcome.[7] Many have thought that determinism, if correct, leaves no room for free will, in any meaningful sense of the term. In general, philosophers who hold that free will is incompatible with determinism, reject determinism, and affirm the reality of free will are known as libertarians.

Some philosophers protest that libertarians draw a false dichotomy. Free will and determinism, these thinkers insist, are actually consonant concepts; the truth of determinism does not militate against human freedom, properly understood. Such philosophers are typically referred to as compatibilists and, though compatibilists come in many stripes— and their theories in many degrees of nuance and sophistication[8]— they generally disagree with libertarians over what genuine free will requires. Whereas libertarians assert that true freedom requires the capacity, all else remaining equal, *to choose differently than one does in fact choose*, compatibilists conceive of freedom as simply the ability to act on one's strongest desire or impulse; for compatibilists, no "alternative possibilities" are necessary for freedom of choice. Since the rise of compatibilism in the writings of philosophers like Hobbes, Hume, and Mill, the controversy between compatibilists and "incompatibilists" (libertarians and "hard determinists," who assent to determinism but deny the reality of human freedom) has come to dominate much, if not most, of the philosophical literature.[9] The doctrine of determinism therefore underlies one

[7] Baron d'Holbach, "We Are Never Free," in *Metaphysics: The Big Questions*, ed. Peter van Inwagen and Dean W. Zimmerman, 2nd ed. (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2016), pp. 413-419, 11-12.
[8] T. J. Mawson, "Classical Theism Has No Implications for the Debate between Libertarianism and Compatibilism," in *Free Will and Theism: Connections, Contingencies, and Concerns*, ed. Kevin Timpe and Daniel Speak (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2016), 142-157, https://academic.oup.com/book/12714/chapter/162775053, 146.
[9] Peter van Inwagen, *Thinking about Free Will* (New York, NY: Cambridge University press, 2017), 81.

of the most basic distinctions within the philosophical free will discussion; compatibilists affirm the truth of determinism, and libertarians deny it.

It is instructive, however, to realize that "determinism" itself does not refer to a single proposition or monolithic whole. Rather, there are multiple types of determinism, all of which can be viewed, to some extent, as presenting obstacles to libertarian free agency— physical, sociological, and psychological determinism, to name a few.[10] In this paper, I will limit myself to considering the challenge of *psychological* determinism: "the doctrine that our choices are governed by whatever, in the given situation, is our strongest motive [or desire]."[11] In a sense, psychological determinism sets up before the would-be libertarian a kind of logical riddle: how can it make sense to say that an agent makes a choice in conformity to a desire *other* than his/her strongest motive, without simply explaining the decision as the result of probability or chance? Or, as Sam Harris sketches the problem: "Either our wills are determined by prior causes and we are not responsible for them, or they are the product of chance and we are not responsible for them."[12]

Corresponding to this demarcation between types of determinism is a helpful distinction, laid out by Robert Kane, between the kinds of questions which writers on the subject of philosophical free will are ordinarily expected to answer. Kane's taxonomy is worth quoting in its entirety:

> [The] modern attacks on free will have brought to the forefront four basic questions about it: (1) The Compatibility Question ("Is free will compatible or incompatible with determinism?"), (2) the Significance Question ("What kind of free will is worth wanting?"), (3) the Intelligibility Question ("Can we make sense of a free will that is incompatible with determinism or is it, as many claim, essentially mysterious or

[10] Cornelius Plantinga, *Not the Way It's Supposed to Be: A Breviary of Sin* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1999), 103; Hasker, *Metaphysics: Constructing a World View*, 38.
[11] Hasker, *Metaphysics: Constructing a World View*, 38.
[12] Harris, *Free Will*, 5.

> obscure?") and (4) the Existence Question ("Can such a free will exist in the natural order and, if so, where?").[13]

This matrix is implicitly observed by many philosophers, including Timothy O'Connor,[14] and I think it is a sound and helpful one. In this paper, I will attempt to show how considerations from within Christian theism might help Christians answer the "intelligibility question." As we will see, previous writings which set out to apply distinctively Christian ideas to the philosophical free will conversation have tended to focus disproportionately on the "compatibility" and "existence" questions; on the intelligibility question, such writings are largely silent.

Christian Theism and the Philosophical Free Will Debate: Three Approaches

An interesting area of inquiry regarding the philosophical discussion of free will is its interaction with Christianity. As William Hasker points out, "The issue of freedom and necessity is one on which a Christian consensus does not exist."[15] Still, it is more or less a point of consensus in Christian circles that in order to be deemed coherent, the biblical narrative requires that agents be, to some degree, morally accountable for their behavior. For this reason, few Christian philosophers deny human freedom outright. Some, for reasons theological or philosophical, have embraced various species of compatibilism; others, insisting that moral responsibility must stem from a kind of freedom not commensurable with determinism, favor libertarian models. The relationship between Christian theism and the philosophical free will dilemma is usually borne out according to one of three distinct patterns, or approaches: insulation, subordination, and application.

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[13] Robert Kane, John Martin Fischer, and Ishtiyaque Haji, "Free Will and Responsibility: Ancient Dispute, New Themes," *The Journal of Ethics* 4, no. 4 (December 2000): 313-417, https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1023/A:1026729231975, 315.
[14] O'Connor, *Persons and Causes: The metaphysics of Free Will*, 107.
[15] Hasker, *Metaphysics: Constructing a World View*, 50.

Approach 1: Insulation

In general, the first way that ideas from Christian theology and biblical analysis interact with the philosophical free will debate is by remaining separated from that debate altogether. Several important Christian thinkers, including Timothy O'Connor and Peter van Inwagen, tend to eschew explicit reference to theological and biblical concepts in their major works on free will.[16] This makes good sense— many, if not most, of their interlocutors don't subscribe to Christian theism, and wouldn't accept such streams of evidence as legitimate. There is certainly value in attempting to tackle the free will question using only faculties and evidences recognized by all parties concerned, and O'Connor and van Inwagen produce work that their opponents expect to meet on rational, not religious, grounds. Another example of the "divided" strategy can be observed in J.P. Moreland and William Lane Craig's *Philosophical Foundations for a Christian Worldview*, a kind of systematic philosophy for Christians.[17] Craig and Moreland devote a chapter of their text to the question of "Free Will and Determinism," and the discussion, while thorough and perceptive, sidesteps the implications of Christian theism for the philosophical issues concerned.

The inclination to keep Christian theism isolated from the philosophical free will debate is incubated by a set of suspicions regarding the influence of religious doctrine on philosophical discussions. In the view of some philosophers, the religious convictions of participants are at best a distraction, and at worst an impediment, to the furtherance of the philosophical free will conversation. This worry is a microcosm of a more general one— scholars demur to the

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[16] Timothy O'Connor, *Persons and Causes: The Metaphysics of Free Will*; Peter van Inwagen, *Thinking about Free Will* (New York, NY: Cambridge University press, 2017).
[17] J. P. Moreland and William Lane Craig, *Philosophical Foundations for a Christian Worldview*, 2nd ed. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2017), https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/liberty/reader.action?docID=5144368&ppg=1.

inclusion of religious evidences in all kinds of philosophical exchange. Pace Hasker, "Now it should be clear… That religious authority cannot be accepted as a basis for philosophical assertions. To do so would mean that… Philosophy would no longer be a free and independent investigation of fundamental issues; it would at most be an exercise in working out the implications of unchallengeable truths derived from an external source."[18] Still, this skepticism, is especially pronounced within the philosophical free will conversation. Kevin Timpe and Daniel Speak frame the concerns this way: "we detect an undertone of suspicion within the community of philosophers working particularly on the problems of free will; the suspicion is that theistic beliefs are exerting an untoward influence upon the debates."[19]

These worries are magnified by the curious phenomenon that a disproportionate number of Christian philosophers seem to be inclined toward libertarian conceptions of free will, as compared to Christian theologians, who are statistically much more inclined to embrace compatibilism.[20] Timpe and Speak posit a triad of explanations for this seeming imbalance: Christian philosophers, they reason, are more likely than theologians to be acquainted with the value of libertarian freedom in addressing the problem of evil, untangling the problematic notion of eternal punishment, and answering atheistic objections from "divine hiddenness," the idea that God, if He did exist, would likely make His existence more easily discernible than He apparently does in our world.[21] It is not insignificant that Alvin Plantinga's *God, Freedom, and Evil*, a watershed work not only for the problem of evil, but for Christian philosophy in general, makes

[18] Hasker, *Metaphysics: Constructing a World View*, 23.
[19] Timpe and Speak, "Introduction," 2.
[20] Ibid., 6; Lynne Rudder Baker, "Why Christians Should Not Be Libertarians: An Augustinian Challenge," *Faith and Philosophy* 20, no. 4 (October 1, 2003): 460-478, https://doi.org/10.5840/faithphil20032045, 470.
[21] Timpe and Speak, "Introduction," 4, 7, 10.

explicit and unapologetic reference to the possibility of libertarian free will.[22] Overall, the idea behind the suspicions noted by Timpe and Speak seems to be that Christian philosophers would seek to defend libertarianism only *after* accepting it for its apologetic advantages, leading to misguided and spurious arguments that deceive other philosophers and ultimately waste everybody's time. On this view, the potential of Christian theism to provide resources which might legitimately clarify philosophical issues is virtually dismissed.

Approach 2: Subordination

The second major role of theological and biblical evidences in the free will debate is to inform conversation about questions that, though related to free will, are overtly theological in nature. Hence the historical tension between Calvinism and Arminianism, discussions regarding human freedom and divine omniscience, and the like. These discussions are by no means completely isolated from the philosophical free will conundrum; as Michael DeVito and Tyler Dalton McNabb recognize, "The problem of divine foreknowledge and human freedom lies at the intersection of various philosophical and theological issues… Within the cannon of literature devoted to the problem, one will find work focusing on causality, dependance, omniscience, the nature of God, semantics, epistemology, free will and determinism, divine knowledge, and so on."[23] Still, the primary goal in these conversations is to advance the intramural debates within Christian theistic communities— not to clarify the philosophical free will dilemma *per se*. Under such circumstances, the use of theology and biblical exegesis is, of course, quite sensible— those interested in such discussions are, by and large, professing theists already, or at least the

[22] Alvin Plantinga, *God, Freedom, and Evil* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2008), 30.
[23] Michael DeVito and Tyler Dalton McNabb, "Divine Foreknowledge and Human Free Will: Embracing the Paradox," *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 90, no. 2 (October 2021): 93-107, https://doi.org/10.1007/s11153-021-09791-1, 106.

questions posed by the discussions presuppose the existence of God. In fact, without reference to theology and sacred texts, academic conversation in these areas would be seriously impoverished.

Approach 3: Application

Finally, and most significantly for the purposes of this paper, the third relationship which Christian theism can bear to the philosophical free will dilemma is a mindful application of concepts from theology and biblical analysis to the strictly philosophical free will problem. Though this approach is markedly less common than the other two, a standing body of scholarship— especially recent scholarship— does vie to investigate the connections between Christian theism and the philosophy of free will (it is worth mentioning that even much of the work in this vein is undertaken expressly to dispel the suspicions of "untoward influence" identified by Timpe and Speak).[24] Still, such contributions by Christian philosophers have been restricted, to the most part, to the "compatibility" and "existence" questions[25]; little has been done to address the intelligibility question from a uniquely Christian point of view.

Christian philosophers have been comparatively garrulous regarding the compatibility question, mounting numerous arguments to the effect that the theological beliefs of Christians commit them to either a compatibilistic or libertarian understanding of philosophical free will. Given the striking libertarian majority among Christian philosophers, it is perhaps surprising to note that when Christian theism is brought explicitly to bear on the philosophical free will debate, one of the assertions most frequently levelled is the purported inferential link between the content of Christian belief and *compatibilism*. This sort of argument is typically motivated by

[24] Timpe and Speak, "Introduction," 2.
[25] Kane, Fischer, and Haji, "Free Will and Responsibility: Ancient Dispute, New Themes," 315.

a strong concern to preserve the unqualified sovereignty of God, and is often allied to Calvinistic or theological deterministic solutions to problems in the neighboring theological free will debate. For instance, Lynne Rudder Baker avers that Christians, following the views of Augustine, Aquinas, Calvin, and Luther, should reject libertarianism and affirm compatibilism out of respect for the primacy of God's ultimate will.[26] In a similar maneuver, Jeremy Skrzypek reasons from a suite of biblical and theological data— including divine foreknowledge, prophecy, and the freedom of Jesus Christ— to the conclusion that Christians ought to spurn the principle of alternative possibilities, which states that in order to be morally responsible for a decision or action, an agent must have been able to otherwise than he in fact did. This principle fuels many of the intuitions beneath libertarianism, and its repudiation, if Skrzypek is right, clearly tilts the scale toward a compatibilistic approach to freedom.[27]

Also on the side of the compatibilists are Michael Bertrand and Jack Mulder, who carefully assess the merits of Robert Kane's indeterministic libertarianism from a Christian point of view. Ultimately, they decide that Kane's view cannot be rectified with orthodox Christian beliefs, as it cannot be safely extrapolated to explain the freedom exercised by Jesus during his incarnate life. This is because Kane's position stipulates that, during instances of libertarian choice, an agent's will be simultaneously "striving" toward two incommensurable alternatives.[28] Bertrand and Mulder emphasize that such a mechanism, if true, would seem to compromise the

[26] Baker, "Why Christians Should Not Be Libertarians: An Augustinian Challenge," 466-68.
[27] Jeremy W. Skrzypek, "Are Christians Theologically Committed to a Rejection of the Principle of Alternative Possibilities?," *The Heythrop Journal* 64, no. 1 (January 2023): 99-110, https://doi.org/10.1111/heyj.14163, 99.
[28] Robert Kane, "Responsibility, Luck, and Chance: Reflections on Free Will and Indeterminism," *The Journal of Philosophy* 96, no. 5 (May 1999): 217-240, https://doi.org/10.2307/2564666, 231.

moral blamelessness of Christ, who would need to be thought of as sometimes "striving" toward evil— however ineffectually— in order to be genuinely free.[29]

Further, and much more radically, Derk Pereboom, a full-blooded determinist and free will denier in his non-theistic musings, contends that the most plausible option available to Christians is to relinquish their commitment to free will— along with their commitment to human moral responsibility— and become *theological* determinists. Pereboom's reasoning is fairly straightforward: he begins with the claim that libertarian free will, and concomitant ideas of moral responsibility, are blankly irreconcilable with an unmitigated view of the providence of God. Providence, he then argues, is more valuable to the Christian than moral responsibility— therefore, Christians should throw their allegiance exclusively to the former.[30] Though Pereboom technically argues not for compatibilism (his personal position is a strong *in*compotabilism) but for determinism, most of his firepower is directed toward libertarian conceptions of free agency. Hence, even if Christian theists are unprepared to opt for wholesale theological determinism (no doubt, the vast majority of Christians would find it doctrinally objectionable), it is still the libertarian, not the compatibilist, who must wrestle with Pereboom's arguments.

Against this phalanx of Christian compatibilists, some philosophers, their steps lighted by the insights of Christian theism, enter the forest of the philosophical free will dilemma and emerge instead on the libertarian side. Prominent among these is Timothy O'Connor, a seminal contributor to modern theories of agent causation. O'Connor, in a direct reply to Pereboom, opines that without libertarian free will, Christians would be hard-pressed to make sense of

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[29] Michael D. Bertrand and Jack Mulder, "Why Christians Should Not Be Kaneans about Freedom," *Philosophia Christi* 19, no. 2 (2017): 315-329, https://doi.org/10.5840/pc201719226, 326.
[30] Derk Pereboom, "Libertarianism and Theological Determinism ," in *Free Will and Theism: Connections, Contingencies, and Concerns*, ed. Kevin Timpe and Daniel Speak (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2016), 112-131, https://academic.oup.com/book/12714/chapter/162774222, 115.

practices such as confession and repentance of sin. and human-divine dialogue (quintessentially observable in the Gethsemane episode), as well as how God could be morally exonerated for the existence of evil and sin.[31] "Taken cumulatively," says O'Connor, "these problems suggest that the reflective embrace of theological determinism would not merely induce change in Christian belief and practice, it would render it much less coherent."[32] Further, Meghan Griffith— like O'Connor, an agent-causal libertarian— believes she sees in Christian theism reasons to reject compatibilism and embrace agency theory, a form of libertarianism. The biblical story, Griffith claims, is difficult to interpret bereft of an unadulterated concept of human agency— a good which she believes is best secured by the agent-causal picture of human beings.[33]

Jerry Walls, in an argument paralleling O'Connor's, zeroes in on the worry that compatibilism would render God complicit in the tremendous incidence of sin and evil in the world— not to mention perverse and manipulative for punishing human agents who, despite their illusions of freedom, could never have acted otherwise than they nefariously did.[34] Walls's language is strong, and so is his argument; maintaining the unbesmirched goodness of God proves to be a significant stumbling point for Christian compatibilists. Lynne Rudder Baker, for instance, winds up resorting to universalism— the heterodox teaching that God will ultimately redeem all of humanity at the end of time— in order to evade the uncomfortable conclusion that God both determines human agents to act immorally and damns them eternally for their

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[31] Timothy O'Connor, "Against Theological Determinism," in *Free Will and Theism: Connections, Contingencies, and Concerns*, ed. Kevin Timpe and Daniel Speak (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2016), 132-141, https://academic.oup.com/book/12714/chapter/162774845, 133-34.
[32] Ibid., 34.
[33] Meghan Griffith, "Agent Causation and Theism," in *Free Will and Theism: Connections, Contingencies, and Concerns*, ed. Kevin Timpe and Daniel Speak (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2016), 172-194, https://academic.oup.com/book/12714/chapter/162775480, 191.
[34] Jerry L. Walls, "One Hell of a Problem for Christian Compatibilists," in *Free Will and Theism: Connections, Contingencies, and Concerns*, ed. Kevin Timpe and Daniel Speak (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2016), 79-98, https://academic.oup.com/book/12714/chapter/162772717, 89.

misdeeds.[35] It is telling both that Baker's shift to universalism is, as far as Walls can see, one of the only ways to get around his argument, and that for many orthodox Christians, it represents a marked departure from sound biblical teaching.[36]

Despite the stark disagreement between Christian compatibilists and libertarians, Christian responses to the "compatibility Question" are not so cleanly bifurcated along libertarian/compatibilist lines— other philosophers are more skeptical of inferential leaps from Christianity to either compatibilism or libertariaism. T. J. Mawson, for instance, claims that nothing about Christian theism should incline its followers to embrace either compatibilism or libertarianism; rather, Christians should accept libertarianism simply because it is the more rational position of the two, irrespective of its relationship to the Christian religious system.[37] Similarly, Tamler Sommers suggests that, while Jerry Walls's argument may have some force, even libertarians must wrangle with passages in the Bible— such as the hardening of Pharoah's heart in the Exodus narrative— which seem to involve God punishing individuals for choices He compelled them to make, no matter how human freedom ordinarily functions in God's created order.[38] At any rate, the diversity and alacrity of these contributions indicate that Christian philosophers have given considerable attention and thought to the compatibility question.

The existence question has also received plentiful attention from Christian philosophers. In fact, it has long been recognized that there are ontological reasons to suppose that Christian theism coheres most seamlessly with some variety of agency theory. In a pertinent article,

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[35] Baker, "Why Christians Should Not Be Libertarians: An Augustinian Challenge," 472.
[36] Walls, "One Hell of a Problem for Christian Compatibilists," 91.
[37] Mawson, "Classical Theism Has No Implications for the Debate between Libertarianism and Compatibilism," 145.
[38] Tamler Sommers, "Relative Responsibility and Theism," in *Free Will and Theism: Connections, Contingencies, and Concerns*, ed. Kevin Timpe and Daniel Speak (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2016), 99-111, https://academic.oup.com/book/12714/chapter/162773603, 104.

Mawson traces a widely-held belief that agent causation can be rendered more plausible by the adoption of mind-body dualism; and mind-body dualism, in turn, fits snugly with the Christian belief in a sentient, personal, *immaterial* God.[39] Sharpening this point is a 2019 quantitative study of free will beliefs across various cultures, which has revealed an impressive correlation between belief in free will and belief in non-physical minds.[40] Furthermore, Jerry Walls, pointing out the traditional fraternity between Christian theism and mind-body dualism, underscores that dualism presents a uniquely *Christian* reason to support libertarianism; atheistic and naturalistic thinkers cannot so easily postulate the existence of immaterial minds.[41] Thus, the existence question, like the compatibility question, has been addressed by theistic philosophers making use of distinctively Christian ideas.

We can draw two primary lessons from this brief review of the Christian scholarship on the philosophical free will dilemma. First, the panoply of free will-related conclusions drawn from theological arguments demonstrates the legitimacy of the third approach to theism and philosophical free will— "application"— outlined above. In other words, the region at the nexus of these two issues is minable ground after all. Second, it is likely that this region contains insights which have not yet been brought to light. Christian philosophers seeking to apply the unique content of their worldview to the philosophical free will debate have, by and large, stopped short at investigating the compatibility and existence questions. Whether the Christian

[39] Mawson, "Classical Theism Has No Implications for the Debate between Libertarianism and Compatibilism," 155.
[40] David Wisniewski, Robert Deutschländer, and John-Dylan Haynes, "Free Will Beliefs Are Better Predicted by Dualism than Determinism Beliefs across Different Cultures," ed. Jonathan Jong, *PLoS One* 14, no. 9 (2019), https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0221617.
[41] Walls, "One Hell of a Problem for Christian Compatibilists," 88.

worldview contains resources which can analogously respond to the significance and intelligibility questions remains, as it stands, an open challenge.

In this thesis, I attempt to meet that challenge by investigating the Christian doctrine of salvation as *theosis*. I consider whether doctrine of *theosis* might cast any light on the intelligibility question as defined by Kane: "Can we make sense of a free will that is incompatible with determinism or is it, as many claim, essentially mysterious or obscure?"[42] *Theosis*, I believe, can help Christians negotiate the compatibilist-libertarian divide by further elucidating what actually goes on in moments of moral choice. In the following, I defend the claim that a *theotic* understanding of morality and freedom— a distinctively Christian contribution, to be sure— raises the plausibility of libertarian models of free will by situating human choice-making within a metaphysical context that is already, from a Christian point of view, necessarily, inherently, and irreducibly mysterious.

The results of this inquiry will, of course, be of limited interest to those who wish to settle the philosophical free will debate apart from reference to specific religious doctrine. It might be seen as a virtue of Christianity that it helps build the case for libertarian theories of freedom which, lingering questions aside, seems to deftly capture many of our intuitions about free will and the process of moral decision making. For the most part, though, this undertaking will hold the most value for Christians weighing the libertarian accounts on offer against compatibilism and other positions within the philosophical conversation. Those who assent to Christian theism believe that the Bible and biblical theology are valuable repositories of insight into the way the world really works, revelation from a higher authority than human reason or

[42] Kane, Fischer, and Haji, "Free Will and Responsibility: Ancient Dispute, New Themes," 315.

empirical study. Therefore, bringing theology and biblical analysis to bear on philosophical issues, such as determinism and free will, is a pursuit both rational and relevant. It is toward that pursuit which I attempt, with this paper, to make a productive contribution.

Preliminary Distinctions and Qualifications

Before we begin to take inventory of the intellectual resources within the doctrine of *theosis*, there are several clarifying distinctions and qualifications which recommend mention. First, it will be important to remember that, in the spirit of the third approach to Christian theism and the free will debate outlined above, this study constitutes an effort to apply *theological* understanding to a *philosophical* issue. I will not, in this paper, attempt to confront the deserving challenges of theological providence and divine omniscience; rather, I will endeavor to show how Christian doctrine applies to the threat against free will posed by *determinism*, as philosophers have ordinarily understood it.

Secondly, for the purposes of this paper, and in keeping with the promised aim of addressing the "riddle" of psychological determinism, the preponderance of what follows will be devoted to the "intelligibility question"— how, and to what extent, can libertarian free will make sense? Significantly, this question has largely been left alone by theistic philosophers attempting to apply specific Christian doctrine to the philosophical free will debate. As previously demonstrated, such philosophers most typically leverage biblical and theological inputs to form novel contributions to the compatibility and existence questions; on the intelligibility question, the community of Christian philosophers is largely silent. This thesis represents an effort to help right that imbalance by overtly exploring the relevance of Christian doctrine— particularly, the doctrine of *theosis*— for the intelligibility question.

Third, the guiding claim of this paper— that "the doctrine of *theosis* raises the plausibility of libertarian accounts of free will"— is equivocal on its own. In what sense, it might be fairly asked, are we to understand the idea that a deposit of evidence can "raise the plausibility" of a given hypothesis? Here a clarifying distinction may be interpolated from the neighboring philosophical subdiscipline of confirmation theory. Philosophers in this area often distinguish between two basic senses of confirmation, "static" confirmation and "dynamic" confirmation, which are differentiated in part by the "degree to which the adduced evidence changes the likelihood of a claim from its likelihood on our background knowledge."[43] Put simply, static confirmation describes an uptick in the probability of a given theory over its peers when that probability remains below 0.5; it provides a "reason to prefer [one hypothesis] over its competitors."[44] Dynamic confirmation, by contrast, is a considerably stronger notion— it refers to the "confirmation" of a given hypothesis which occurs when its probability is pushed over the 0.5-threshold.[45]

The central claim of this thesis, that the doctrine of *theosis* raises the plausibility of libertarian free will theories, should be understood in the static sense. That is, I believe that recognizing the implications of the doctrine of *theosis* for the philosophical free will debate constitutes *one* legitimate reason to prefer libertarian theories over rival compatibilistic accounts. I do not, however, defend the claim that the doctrine of *theosis* unilaterally "confirms" libertarianism over compatibilism and other competing accounts. The philosophical free will

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[43] Stephen J. Wykstra, "The Humean Obstacle to Evidential Arguments from Suffering: On Avoiding the Evils of 'Appearance,'" *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 16, no. 2 (January 1, 1984): 73-93, https://doi.org/10.1007/bf00136567, 92.
[44] Cristina Sagrafena, "The Old Evidence Problem and the Inference to the Best Explanation," *European Journal for Philosophy of Science* 13, no. 1 (January 5, 2023), https://doi.org/10.1007/s13194-022-00507-4.
[45] Ibid.

debate is simply too vast and complex for this to be the case. There are numerous other data which remain relevant to the conversation, from manifold other fields of study— psychology, biology, neurochemistry, physics, and theology, just to name a few. This, however, does not render the influence of *theosis* on the debate trivial or insignificant; it is simply to concede that there is more— much more— to the equation.

Lastly, it must be stated that, due to the purview of this project, my treatment of the models and arguments constructed by various philosophers will be (indeed, it already has been) glaringly incomplete. Kane, O'Connor, and the others mentioned in this paper have developed their respective views with considerable philosophical and rhetorical subtlety, and I will simply be unable, within the strictures of this paper, to render the nuances of their positions in a way that does each view justice. My thumbnails of their perspectives will necessarily be simplifications— although, I hope that they will be faithful simplifications. Moreover, my intentions are only to accurately draw out those features of their views which underpin, as best I can tell, the core features of the relevant controversy, as well as to demonstrate how, in my view, the Christian doctrine of *theosis* may be able to come to their aid. This I believe I will be able to accomplish even without accurately projecting the full complexities of each philosopher's position.

The Problem of Desire

The problem of "psychological determinism," as Hasker terms it, is as simple as it is ancient.[46] It is not an attack on the value of libertarian free will, nor is it an objection to the possibility that "contra-causal" choices could exist in a world which is "*fundamentally* event-causal in nature."[47] These are, to use Kane's language, the questions of significance and

[46] Hasker, *Metaphysics: Constructing a World View*, 38.
[47] O'Connor, *Persons and Causes: The metaphysics of Free Will*, 107.

existence, respectively. Rather, the problem of psychological determinism is a manifestation of the intelligibility question.[48] Its claim, in effect, is this: "Libertarian free will doesn't even make sense."

Imagine any decision which we might, prereflectively, view as an instance of libertarian freedom. Consider, for example, the decision of a given agent— let's call him Rob— whether to deliver to the proper authorities a plump-looking wallet he finds lying on the sidewalk on his way home from the office. Imagine that the wallet contains a sizeable sum of money, such that Rob, though no more morally depraved than the next hypothetically stipulated decision-making agent, experiences a significant temptation to keep the cash for himself. After all, he could really put a second wallet to good use, especially one as well-stocked as this one, and the likelihood of anyone finding out about his peccadillo is basically negligible. All the same, Rob's selfish will to keep the wallet is not running unopposed— he also feels a considerable moral inclination to "do the right thing" and turn the wallet in at his local police station.

Or, if you like, consider a more mundane situation, one much less freighted with civil and ethical import. To appropriate an example from Alvin Plantinga: Rob is having breakfast. He has at his disposal two cereals, a box of Cheerios and a box of Wheaties, and he finds himself making up his mind between the two.[49] Rob only has time this morning for a single bowl of cereal— in just a few minutes, it will be time to shrug into his coat, leave the house in a bustle, spend a day at the office, and, on the way home, find a wallet lying on the sidewalk.

Whatever the content of the choice itself, the psychological determinist directs our attention to the basic psychological structure of the situation. We have an agent— in this case,

[48] Kane, Fischer, and Haji, "Free Will and Responsibility: Ancient Dispute, New Themes," 315.
[49] Plantinga, *God, Freedom, and Evil*, 30.

Rob. That agent is facing a decision, and in his mind are multiple desires which compete to motivate him to action (assume two desires, for the sake of simplicity). What's more, each of those desires presumably possesses a particular strength; we know by experience that some desires are stronger than others, and the same sort of desire can vary in strength over a period of time. Take O'Connor on this score: "It is a truism that, given the structure of my preferences, stable intentions, and so forth, and the situation with which I am faced, I am often far more likely to act in one way rather than in any other."[50] It would seem, therefore, that there are really two kinds of choices which agents can plausibly face: those in which the strength of one desire clearly outstrips the strength of the other, and those in which the strengths of both desires are equivalent (set aside, also, questions of the agents' ability to accurately perceive the strengths of his/her desires).[51] We will focus on the challenge which psychological determinism poses for the first of these two kinds of choices. Shortly, it will become clear that the challenge applies to both kinds of choices in roughly the same way.

It is from this picture that the psychological determinist makes his simple— and very intuitive— case. Doesn't it seem enormously plausible, he will ask, that Rob, in every case to which this picture applies, will simply act on the content of his strongest desire? In fact, it does seem plausible— but to admit as much invites determinism, compatibilism, and the whole passel of doubts about alternative possibilities and moral responsibility which the libertarian labors so hard to safeguard against. Still, in the absence of the "strongest desire" explanation, what are we to say about this scenario? That Rob is somehow "free" to act on his *weaker* desire— *the desire*

[50] Timothy O'Connor, "The Agent as Cause," in *Metaphysics: The Big Questions*, ed. Peter van Inwagen and Dean W. Zimmerman, 2nd ed. (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2016), pp. 465-471, 471.
[51] John Wisdom, "Freedom, Causation, and Preexistence," in *Metaphysics: The Big Questions*, ed. Peter van Inwagen and Dean W. Zimmerman, 2nd ed. (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2016), pp. 432-441, 439.

he least wants to satisfy? Why, to put it bluntly, would he do a thing like that? Is it even coherent to suppose that he would? The only recourse from determinism, so the psychological determinist would have us believe, is to posit the presence of indeterminism— a kind of "causal loose fit" which would render possible a range of statistically-predicated alternatives.[52] Yet, as compatibilists and determinists are quick to point out, "random chance" is no freer than strict determination. "Chance occurrences are by definition ones for which [we] can claim no responsibility."[53] (Here we recall the second type of choice outlined above— that characterized by two identically-strengthened desires. In such a case, proceeds the simple objection of the psychological determinist, the agent's choice, if he/she chooses at all, could only be the product of "chancy" indetermination.)

This strictly logical puzzle, this "intelligibility question," is clearly what Sam Harris has in mind when he severs his free-will denial from any naturalistic ontological presuppositions: "It is important to recognize that the case I am building against free will does not depend upon philosophical materialism (the assumption that reality is, at bottom, purely physical)… even if the human mind were made out of soul-stuff, nothing about my argument would change."[54] It also underlies John Wisdom's uncomplicated analysis of human decisions: "If a decision has a mental explanation at all, it is always in terms of desires: and, if desires have a mental explanation at all, it is always in terms of other desires."[55] Finally, it explicitly undergirds the thinking of Brian Looper, who mounts a progressive argument for the thesis that "no one can

[52] O'Connor, "The Agent as Cause," 466.
[53] Harris, *Free Will*, 28.
[54] Ibid., 11-12.
[55] Ibid., 438.

refrain from trying to attain the object of his or her currently strongest desire."[56] Looper begins with cases in which a single desire operates alone, absent any countervailing desires, and builds up to cases where two competing desires are very nearly equivalent, all the while arguing— very plausibly— that the same principle of logical inference prompts us to assign necessity, in every case, to an agent's acting on his/her strongest impulse.[57]

This, then, is the challenge of psychological determinism. Despite its simplicity of exposition, it really is quite a formidable challenge, and likely motivates the flight of many disenchanted libertarians to the "next-best thing" of compatibilistic free will. In the subsequent section, I will examine the accounts of several major libertarians, arguing that each of them, despite their novelties and ingenuities, remains beset to some extent with this "intelligibility question"— with the worry that free will, as the libertarian construes it, may not even make sense.

Salient Libertarian Theories

In the paragraphs to follow, I investigate the accounts of three marquee libertarian thinkers: Peter van Inwagen's "mysterianism," Robert Kane's indeterministic libertarianism, and Timothy O'Connor's agent causation. This triumvirate constitutes a sampling of the most sophisticated libertarian theories available today, and each of these three philosophers has inspired numerous epigoni with similar views. Two of the thinkers— van Inwagen and O'Connor— are Christians, though they build their models of free action, in the template of the first approach to the intersection of Christian theism and philosophical free will, largely

[56] Brian Looper, "Free Will and Desire," *Erkenntnis* 85, no. 6 (February 7, 2019): 1347-1360, https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1007/s10670-018-0080-y, 1347.
[57] Ibid., 1356.

independent of any resources from their religious convictions. Once again, the following synopses are not intended to be taken as comprehensive descriptions of the various positions. They are only meant to draw out the residual significance of the intelligibility question pertaining to each view.

Peter van Inwagen's "Mysterianism"

Of the three philosophers to be discussed, the relevance of the intelligibility question is easiest to see in the work of Peter van Inwagen. Within the theater of the philosophical free will debate, van Inwagen is probably most famous for his popularization of the "consequence argument," which supports the conclusion that determinism is incompatible with free will— and implicatively, with moral responsibility.[58] This is a relatively simple argument, which begins by observing that, according to determinism, every event (including every human choice) in the history of the world is jointly determined by two propositions: one proposition encompassing descriptions of all natural laws, and another proposition comprehensively describing the initial conditions of the universe. Once these two factors are set in motion, "the rest is history," so to speak; every event from the beginning of time onward proceeds ineluctably as a matter of causal course.[59] As it happens, however, the truth or falsity of both these propositions is well beyond the scope of influence of any human agent— indeed, if the propositions are true, as the determinists maintain, then every one of, say, Rob's actions is unchangeably determined long before Rob is even born. How then, van Inwagen asks, can we say that Rob is ever "free" to

[58] van Inwagen, *Thinking about Free Will*, 3.
[59] Peter van Inwagen, "The Consequence Argument," in *Metaphysics: The Big Questions*, ed. Peter van Inwagen and Dean W. Zimmerman, 2nd ed. (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2016), pp. 450-456, 455.

determine his own behavior, in anything beyond an illusory sense? What's more, how can we conscionably hold Rob responsible for any of his decisions?[60]

Due to the weight of questions like these, van Inwagen is a staunch incompatibilist. But while he can't see a way to reconcile free will with determinism, he admits that he finds himself equally bemused at the prospect of reconciling free will with *in*determinism. Still, he takes it as an indisputable fact that human free will is real and efficacious— even if he can't see how.[61] Consider this summative statement toward the end of an article: "Either there is something wrong with our argument for the conclusion that metaphysical freedom is incompatible with determinism or there is something wrong with our argument for the conclusion that metaphysical freedom is incompatible with indeterminism— or there is something wrong with both arguments. But which argument is wrong, and why? (Or are they both wrong?) I do not know. I think no one knows."[62]

Van Inwagen toys with a few further, speculative theses. He prognosticates that the argument which *will* turn out to be faulty, if anyone ever does find a flaw in either, will probably be the argument for the conclusion that free will is incompatible with indeterminism.[63] And he notes that he finds "attractive" a proposal by august linguist and fellow philosopher Noam Chomsky that perhaps "there is something about our biology, something about the ways of thinking that are 'hardwired' into our brains, that renders it impossible for us human beings to dispel the mystery of metaphysical freedom."[64] Still, at bottom, the conclusions to which van

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[60] van Inwagen, "The Consequence Argument," 455.
[61] Peter van Inwagen, "The Mystery of Metaphysical Freedom," in *Metaphysics: The Big Questions*, ed. Peter van Inwagen and Dean W. Zimmerman, 2nd ed. (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2016), pp. 456-465, 464.
[62] Ibid., 465.
[63] Ibid.
[64] Ibid.

Inwagen is committed appear to be (1) that libertarian free will exists (2) we simply don't know how this could be.[65]

Several philosophers have taken issue with van Inwagen on his "cognitive closure" hypothesis, including Timothy O'Connor, who warns that such a position "counsels complacency." If such a view were to be consistently applied, O'Connor fears, philosophers would, by the same token, give up their earnest efforts to decipher all sorts of seemingly impenetrable "mysteries."[66] In a similar critique, Laura Ekstrom, a simple incompatibilist, declares van Inwagen's "mysterianism" ill-advised.[67] Ekstrom envisages a slippery slope scenario in which analogous "mysterianisms" are constructed to furnish facile proofs for the existence of God or the existence of aliens.[68] These criticisms may hold some force. At any rate, the point to notice here is that Peter van Inwagen, one of the most prolific living philosophers on the philosophical free will dilemma, still finds himself confounded by the "intelligibility question" after over 50 years of studying the problem.[69]

Robert Kane's Causal Indeterminism

The next libertarian model of free will up for consideration is Robert Kane's causal indeterminism. Kane is avowedly determined to make sense of morally significant, libertarian free will without resorting to mystery; in fact, he sees it as a cardinal virtue of his position that it abstains from positing "'extra factors' in the form of unusual species of agency or causation (such as noumenal selves, immaterial egos, or nonoccurrent agent causes)."[70] Kane, though, is

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[65] van Inwagen, *Thinking about Free Will,* 110.
[66] O'Connor, "The Agent as Cause," 467.
[67] Laura Ekstrom, "Free Will, Chance, and Mystery," *Philosophical Studies* 113, no. 2 (March 2003): 153-180, https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1023/A:1023940209581, 153.
[68] Ibid., 154.
[69] van Inwagen, *Thinking about Free Will,* 1.
[70] Kane, "Responsibility, Luck, and Chance," 223.

sympathetic to the "luck" objections often aimed at his simple indeterministic colleagues, and he has formulated a creative analysis with which he hopes to make sense of a robust libertarian freedom— involving the alternative possibilities and "ultimate responsibility" which are, from his perspective, necessary for the existence of legitimate moral responsibility.[71]

Kane does not propose that all of our decisions are free actions; rather, he relegates instances of libertarian freedom to a relatively restricted class of "self-forming actions," or "SFAs."[72] These SFAs "occur at times in life when we are torn between competing visions of what we should do or become."[73] At such junctures, there arises in the brain "a movement away from thermodynamic equilibrium"; physiological chaos in the brain reflects the feelings of vacillation and uncertainty we experience on a phenomenological level.[74] In the ensuing moments, our brains simultaneously attempt to complete two incommensurable processes, to make each of two, mutually-exclusive decisions; at the level of our brains, Kane thinks, we are literally trying to do two things at once. Each of these "neural feedback loops," however, is impeded by the "indeterministic noise" created by the opposite loop.[75] Eventually, one of the two efforts reaches an "activation threshold" and prevails over its opponent, and a decision is made.[76] This picture accounts for genuinely possible alternatives; during the deliberation period, both futures are, in a non-reductive sense, "open" to the agent. Moreover, Kane stresses that whichever direction the decision goes, it is morally attributable to the agent, since what ends up happening is something he/she was literally *trying* to do.[77]

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[71] Kane, Fischer, and Haji, "Free Will and Responsibility: Ancient Dispute, New Themes," 316-317.
[72] Ibid., 317.
[73] Kane, "Responsibility, Luck, and Chance," 224.
[74] Ibid.
[75] Ibid., 225, 227.
[76] Ibid., 226.
[77] Kane, Fischer, and Haji, "Free Will and Responsibility: Ancient Dispute, New Themes," 320.

As strange and counterintuitive as this "dual willings" picture may seem, Kane's theory has the advantage of his assiduous attention to contemporary research in physics and neurobiology. He insists that "Such [parallel] networks circulate impulses and information in feedback loops and generally play a role in complex cognitive processing in the brain of the kind that one would expect to be involved in human deliberation."[78] The strongest objection against Kane's view, then, is not rooted in its apparent strangeness, but in the well-worn pathways of the luck complaint. This is, in various forms, the objection with which Ishtiyaque Haji, among others, hounds Kane's indeterministic view. It is also the point at which, in the opinion of Timothy O'Connor, Kane's picture finally crumples.[79] The luck objection comes in a variety of forms, and is subject to a compendium of defenses by Kane and other causal indeterminists.[80] Any worthwhile investigation of such views would surely require more attention than can be afforded here. Once again, however, the point to be made is this: Kane's conception of indeterministic free agency, in the opinions of many, continues in the final analysis to struggle in explaining how agents don't simply "get lucky" when they arrive at their decisions. And this, as we have seen, is a difficulty subsumed by the intelligibility problem— it is the same psychological determinism, the problem of desire, in a new set of clothes.

Timothy O'Connor's Agent Causation

The final philosopher whose view we will examine here is Timothy O'Connor, who in recent years has developed and defended an intricate, unabashed agent-causal picture of free will.[81] On O'Connor's view, human agents act— under the right conditions— as the final causes

[78] Kane, "Responsibility, Luck, and Chance," 225.
[79] Kane, Fischer, and Haji, "Free Will and Responsibility: Ancient Dispute, New Themes," 329; O'Connor, *Persons and Causes: The Metaphysics of Free Will*, 37.
[80] Ekstrom, "Free Will, Chance, and Mystery," 164.
[81] O'Connor, *Persons and Causes: The Metaphysics of Free Will*

of the events which constitute their decisions.[82] In defending his position against traditional criticisms of agency theory, O'Connor is clear that these agent-causings do not emerge "unbidden" or at random— rather, they always occur within the context of a given agent's character, motives, and desires. He puts it this way: "our account should capture the way reasons (in some sense) *move* us to act as we do— and not as external pressures, but as *our* reasons, as our own internal tendencies to act to satisfy certain desires or aims."[83]

One of the obstacles to an agent-causal conception of free agency is, as O'Connor recognizes, how to adequately take into account the influence of reasons, motives, and desires on agent-causal choices. After all, even if we grant that the concept of agent causation itself is not problematically opaque, and concede that agents can bring about events by employing an irreducible species of causation distinct from the "event causation" which governs ordinary causal transactions between non-human objects, we would still need to explain how the strengths of an agent's desires in a given instance of choice could remain relevant to the choice at hand, without, in O'Connor's words, explaining them "in terms of a relative tendency, on the part of the reasons, to *produce* [the agent's] actions."[84]

Related to this predicament is the objection that while agent-causal explanations can account for why, in a given situation, an agent makes the decision he/she in fact makes by pointing to the reason on which the agent acts (O'Connor is ardent that agents never act without acting on *some* reason or another), "the reasons to which one points in a given case won't explain why the agent acted as he did rather than in one of the other ways that were open to him."[85]

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[82] O'Connor, "The Agent as Cause," 470.
[83] Ibid., 471.
[84] Ibid.
[85] Ibid., 470.

O'Connor argues that the demand for "contrastive explanation" presupposed by this complaint is too strong a criterion for explanation— we needn't always account for why an agent acted on one desire *rather than another*, provided we can "noncontrastively" identify the desire which the agent did indeed act upon. Perhaps contrastive explanation isn't essential to a coherent theory of free choice; O'Connor argues forcefully that it is not.[86] Still, it is significant that his agent-causal strategy leaves us with questions, and it significant that these questions probe the very *intelligibility* of libertarian free will— that is, they are questions related to the logical puzzle of libertarian freedom itself, questions downstream, once again, from psychological determinism.

When is the Will Free?

It is my belief that Christian theism, particularly the doctrine of *theosis*, can shed new light on what has, in the intelligibility question, proven to be an especially knotty and tenacious dilemma. In order to get a clearer idea of what we can hope to glean from these doctrines, however, it will be worthwhile to examine an article by Peter van Inwagen, entitled "When is the Will Free," and to make a few cursory observations.[87]

In "When is the Will Free," van Inwagen defends the operative claim that "while it is open to the compatibilist to say that human beings are very often— hundreds of times every day— able to do otherwise, the incompatibilist must hold that being able to do otherwise is a comparatively rare condition, even a very rare condition."[88] Using a series of examples, and taking his cues primarily from Kane,[89] van Inwagen gradually delimits the scope of decisions which are, in his view, plausible candidates for genuine libertarian freedom. Ultimately, he

[86] O'Connor, *Persons and Causes: The Metaphysics of Free Will*, 91-95.
[87] van Inwagen, *Thinking about Free Will,* 60-80.
[88] Ibid., 64.
[89] Ibid., 76.

arrives at the rather narrow conclusion that "There are at most two sorts of occasion on which the incompatibilist can admit that we exercise free will: cases of an actual struggle between perceived moral duty or long-term self-interest, on the one hand, and immediate desire, on the other; and cases of a conflict of incommensurable values."[90]

The exact location where van Inwagen draws these borders is not of particular concern to our enterprise here— I will simply mention that others who have taken up the question have drawn the borders elsewhere.[91] What *is* intriguing is that van Inwagen finds it plausible to draw any borders at all. Recall that, as far as an explanation for libertarian free action is concerned, van Inwagen is a thoroughgoing agnostic.[92] He cannot, he admits, conceive of a way to reconcile free agency with either determinism or indeterminism, and he believes that all views which ostensibly do so are, upon closer inspection, fatally flawed. It would seem, then, that for *any* class of putatively "freer" actions that van Inwagen identifies, Harris, Looper, or any of the psychological determinists credited earlier could simply press him with the same set of questions as before— and van Inwagen would find their questions, by his own admission, just as unanswerable as always. Desires, moral or immoral, commensurable or incommensurable, have strengths, and those strengths can be juxtaposed against one another. Does the agent act on his strongest desire, or doesn't he? If not, why not? Why should moral or value-laden desires be exempt from walking this logical tightrope?

I can see no overt resources in van Inwagen's thinking which would equip him to respond to these questions. I believe, however, that the rudiments of an answer can be located in his

[90] van Inwagen, *Thinking about Free Will,* 77.
[91] O'Connor, *Persons and Causes: The Metaphysics of Free Will*, 101, 107.
[92] van Inwagen, "The Mystery of Metaphysical Freedom," 465.

restriction of candidates for libertarian free choice to *moral and quasi-moral* decisions. What van Inwagen wants to say is that it is more likely that agents exercise free choice with respect to *moral* decision making than *amoral* decision making— that is, it is more likely that Rob is free to pocket or return the wallet than it is that he is free to have Wheaties or Cheerios for breakfast. On van Inwagen's own view, however, there is simply no reason why this should be the case. Clearly, moral and value-laden decisions are subject to the same "strengths of desires" line of thought rehearsed above: the intelligibility problem to which van Inwagen ultimately responds with resigned "mysterianism."

The question before us, then, is this: is there a relevant difference in the two decisions confronting Rob, our archetypal decision-making agent, that would license the distinction van Inwagen intuitively draws between them? Clearly, if such a difference is to be found, it is not in the *structure* of the respective decisions; the old "stronger desire/weaker desire" framework imposed by the psychological determinist will, plausibly enough, apply to both choices. If we are to find such a difference, I propose, it will need to be not in the *structure* or *strength* of the pertinent desires, but in their *kind*. It seems to me that the intuition exercised by van Inwagen in distinguishing between the likelihood of freedom in moral and amoral decision-making— an intuition I share— essentially hinges on the types or qualities of the desires, or motives, involved. That is to say: the strengths of the desires only comprise part of the picture. What we need, in my view, is a scheme of understanding which also takes into account the *kinds* of desire at play in a given moment of decision. And this is exactly what the Christian doctrine of *theosis* is prepared to give us.

A New Strategy

At this point, I think it is prudent to cite, as a cautionary note, Chisholm's statement that "in all likelihood, it is impossible to say anything significant about [the] ancient problem [of free will] that has not been said before."[93] This is surely the truth. All the same, I am emboldened by the recognition that the contribution I here endeavor to make does not apply to the philosophical free will debate itself, properly speaking, but rather to the intersection of that debate with Christian theism: an interdisciplinary field of inquiry which has been, for reasons discussed above, more stultified than the purely "secular" free will conversation. Much of my rationale for participating in this field of inquiry rests on the conviction that it is unlikely, when agents make choices, that there are two parallel processes going on at once: one "philosophical" choice-making process, and one "theological" choice-making process. Instead, it seems much more sensible to believe, there is simply one "integrated" decision-making mechanism, whatever the characteristics and limitations of that mechanism may be, and of which the philosophical and theological disciplines have extracted and examined various relevant aspects. In the interest of understanding this coherent "whole" of human decision-making, then, it makes sense to couple insights from theology with advancements from the philosophical free will discussion, especially when that discussion stalls or stalemates.

In essence, I believe that Jerry Walls is correct when he remarks that "By virtue of what they believe about God and our creation in His image, theists have resources from their worldview to make sense of libertarian freedom in ways naturalists do not." [94] (Although, in

[93] Roderick M. Chisholm, "Human Freedom and the Self," in *Metaphysics: The Big Questions*, ed. Peter van Inwagen and Dean W. Zimmerman, 2nd ed. (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2016), pp. 441-450, 441.
[94] Walls, "One Hell of a Problem for Christian Compatibilists," 88.

contrast to the view I develop in this paper, the "resources" Walls has in mind consist in the well-rehearsed collegiality between agency theory and mind-body dualism, a metaphysic which seems to gain plausibility on the Christian theistic world-picture. Such resources apply to the existence question, while the "resources" I have in mind apply to the intelligibility question.) In fact, I believe that the Christian theist has resources within the doctrinal content of his/her worldview which enable him to say that there is much more "going on" when agents face "morally significant decisions"— to use Alvin Plantinga's parlance[95]— than when the same agents face morally insignificant decisions. And it is precisely this difference in the *quality* of choice, and the corresponding *kinds* of desires implicated in that choice, which render the former case a more believable candidate for genuine libertarian freedom.

This notion can be brought into sharper relief by pondering what must be, for the naturalist, the true source and character of impulses which we, in our ordinary lexicon, simply refer to as "moral" or "ethical" desires. For exponents of naturalism, which typically comes frontloaded with propensities toward mind-body physicalism and evolutionary biology, there is nothing especially remarkable about our moral desires, in terms of their ultimate source and character. "Moral" desires or motives are simply those which have, due to hundreds or thousands of generations of natural selection and social conditioning, come to conform to the matrix of norms that favor the preservation of the species. The fundamental guiding principle behind human choice is preservation and survival— whether one's own preservation, or that of the species, or both. This way of thinking about moral choice is evident in the writing of Baron d'Holbach, a noted determinist, who comments of a purely physical choice to take a drink of

[95] Plantinga, *God, Freedom, and Evil*, 30.

water that "The fact… [is] that the motivation in either case is exactly the same: his own conservation," [96] and later declares that "the same necessity which regulates the physical, also regulates the moral world, in which everything is in consequence submitted to fatality."[97] Hence, in our example, the desires which compete in Rob's decision to keep or return the wallet are, for the naturalist, fundamentally no different in kind than the desires which compete in his decision between Wheaties and Cheerios; both choices are, in their most basic sense, a function of conservation value.

This analysis of morality and moral decision-making, of course, is flagrantly offensive to the Christan conscience. Such an analysis, the Christian wants to say, does not begin to capture what actually "goes on" in a moment of moral decision-making. But what is it, exactly, that *does* go on in such moments, over and above the warring strengths of competing, mutually exclusive desires? How can the Christian view of morality help us grapple with the challenge of the intelligibility problem? It is to these questions— and to the Eastern Orthodox notion of salvation as *theosis*— which I now at last turn.

Theosis

The Christian doctrine which I believe is best positioned to help us make sense of this dilemma is *theosis*, a soteriological idea nurtured, for the most part, by the Eastern Orthodox church tradition. It would be possible, I think, to discuss the "resources" which Christian theism can bring to bear on the philosophical free will discussion without making explicit reference to *theosis*. This might seem like the preferable course to take, as it would presumably open whatever insights we can gain from Christian theism to practitioners of all denominations, rather

[96] d'Holbach, "We are Never, Free," 415.
[97] Ibid., 419.

than only to Eastern orthodox believers. For the sake of clarity, however, I will begin by discussing *theosis* as a paradigmatic case of the theistic resources relevant to the philosophical free will discussion; the questions of whether, and to what extent, these resources can be employed by believers from other denominational backgrounds will be picked up afterward.

Theosis is, essentially, a way of thinking about salvation. In Western contexts, many Christians tend to conceive of salvation as primarily consisting in a change in legal or moral status before God— the event of being "justified." In Eastern theology, by contrast, salvation is more typically understood as a process of transformation, with the ultimate aim, or *telos*, of communion with God Himself, "participation" in the divine life. Evangelical theologian Donald Fairbairn writes that "by *theosis* the Orthodox mean the process of acquiring godly characteristics, gaining immortality and incorruptibility, and experiencing communion with God."[98] English renderings of *theosis* variously refer to the concept as "deification" or "divinization," although, as Daniel Haynes emphasizes, "This does not mean that humans become God, but with the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, in the economy of salvation, there is a unique ontological union and transformation of the creature into God, although there is not a fusion of essence."[99]

The doctrine of *theosis* has ancient roots, tracing its lineage through the Patristic tradition in the writings of Augustine, Ignatius of Antioch, Justine Martyr, Irenaeus, Athanasius, and Maximus the Confessor, among others.[100] Orthodox interpreters see allusions to *theosis* in a raft

[98] Donald Fairbairn, "Salvation as Theosis: The Teaching of Eastern Orthodoxy," Themelios 23, no. 3 (June 1998): 42-54, https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/themelios/article/salvation-as-theosis-the-teaching-of-eastern-orthodoxy/.
[99] Daniel Haynes, "The Metaphysics of Christian Ethics: Radical Orthodoxy and Theosis," *The Heythrop Journal* 52, no. 4 (July 2011): 659-671, https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2265.2009.00539.x, 659.
[100] Ibid., 660-61.

of biblical texts, such as Acts 17:28, Romans 5:17, 2 Corinthians 3:18, Galatians 2:20, and 1 John 3:2,[101] but the traditional linchpin of the scriptural case for *theosis* is found 2 Peter 1:3-4:

> His divine power has given us everything we need for a godly life through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness. Through these he has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature, having escaped the corruption in the world caused by evil desires.

For Orthodox theologians, the "participation in the divine nature" spoken of in this passage represents the preeminent salvific hope and power of the Christian life. According to Fairbairn, "Probably the central idea of Eastern Orthodox theology is the concept of *theosis*, and Orthodox writers use this Greek word to refer both to humanity's initial vocation (the task which God gave to Adam and Eve at creation) and to salvation."[102] Daniel Haynes agrees— for many Eastern theologians, *theosis* is "truly the core of Christian spirituality."[103] *Theosis*, on this picture, is the "desired end of the Christian life"[104]; humans are "called to communion with a relational deity that places mutual love and service to others above all else, and that is aimed at our sharing in the joys of unity with God and with each other that result from living in accord with the inner dynamism of the divine life itself."[105]

In fact, the notion of *theosis* is inextricably bound to the doctrine of the Trinity— the uniquely Christian conception of God as a unified "community" of eternal, perfect, self-giving

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[101] Haynes, "The Metaphysics of Christian Ethics: Radical Orthodoxy and Theosis," 660; Douglas Beyer, "From Kenosis to Theosis: Reflections on the Views of C.S. Lewis," in *Inklings Forever: A Collection of Essays Presented at the Fifth Frances White Ewbank Colloquium on C.S. Lewis & Friends*, vol. 5 (Upland, IN: Taylor University, 2006), 90-95, https://pillars.taylor.edu/inklings_forever/vol5/iss1/, 95.
[102] Fairbairn, "Salvation as Theosis: The Teaching of Eastern Orthodoxy."
[103] Haynes, "The Metaphysics of Christian Ethics: Radical Orthodoxy and Theosis," 659.
[104] Wyndy Corbin Reuschling, "The Means and End in 2 Peter 1:3–11: The Theological and Moral Significance of 'Theōsis," Journal of Theological Interpretation 8, no. 2 (2014): 275-286, https://doi.org/10.2307/26373929, 275.
[105] Charles J. Cassini and Gloria L. Schaab, "Transcendentals and Trinity," *The Heythrop Journal* 50, no. 4 (July 2009): 658-668, https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2265.2008.00436.x, 666-67.

love.[106] The Eastern understanding of *theosis* makes the doctrine of the Trinity extremely personal for the Christian, both grounding his/her identity as an intrinsically relational being, and orienting his/her life toward the ultimate end of being "united" with the trinitarian love community.[107] Hence, as Daniel Haynes underscores, Aquinas thought of sanctification in *theotic* terms: " the mission of the whole Trinity is to make the creature into the likeness of the divine."[108] *Theosis* is simply the name Orthodox theologians give to this process—"the mysterious unitive point where the Christian participates in the life of the Trinity."[109] Hence, the doctrine of the Trinity, often considered vexing or abstruse by many contemporary Christians,[110] is imbued, through *theosis*, with enormous importance for everyday life. It is elevated in the baptismal formula.[111] It is reflected in the marriage relationship.[112] It is, in a sense, what life is all about. In C.S. Lewis's words: "The whole dance, or drama, or pattern of this three-Personal life is to be played out in each one of us: or (putting it the other way round) each one of us has got to enter that pattern, take his place in that dance. There is no other way to the happiness for which we were made."[113]

Theosis also emphasizes that the believer's "entry point" to this triune community, the means by which he/she is united to the divine nature, is through the incarnation of Christ and the believer's resultant union with him. For Wyndy Corbin Reuschling, "*theosis* must be viewed

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[106] Cassini and Schaab, "Transcendentals and Trinity," 666; Ellen T. Charry, "Spiritual Formation by the Doctrine of the Trinity," *Theology Today* 54, no. 3 (October 1997): 367-380, https://doi.org/10.1177/004057369705400307, 371.
[107] Joseph Ratzinger, *In the Beginning: A Catholic Understanding of the Story of Creation and the Fall* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1995), 72.
[108] Haynes, "The Metaphysics of Christian Ethics: Radical Orthodoxy and Theosis," 665.
[109] Ibid., 659.
[110] Charry, "Spiritual Formation by the Doctrine of the Trinity," 369."
[111] Ibid., 372.
[112] Beyer, "From Kenosis to Theosis: Reflections on the Views of C.S. Lewis," 94-95.
[113] C. S. Lewis, Mere Christianity (New York, NY: HarperCollins, 1952), 176.

through the incarnation of Christ, in that it is Jesus who presents the pattern and possibilities for *theosis*.[114] Haynes confirms the special role of the second person of the Trinity in the pattern of *theosis*, and suggests that the incarnation is "the key to understanding" the doctrine.[115] "Participation" with Christ is the gateway, or the point of admission, for participation with the Trinity.[116] Thus the atoning sacrifice of Christ retains its primacy in the Eastern theological system: "According to this teaching, through Christ's redemption people become holy, united with God as completely as it is possible for created beings to do so."[117] To again quote C.S. Lewis: "The Son of God became a man to enable men to become sons of God."[118]

Additionally, the process of "deification," or *theosis*, takes time, and though it is always propelled by the initiation of the Holy Spirit, it is often worked out in the context of intense human effort and struggle.[119] This is certainly a tension— even a paradox— but it is akin to the parallel tension native to Westen doctrines of sanctification, where human effort is also considered a key component of the process through which the Holy Spirit works as "the directing and dynamic entity behind [human] freedom and love."[120] Reuschling[121] and Douglas Beyer each acknowledge this seeming antinomy, the latter of whom explains it this way: "We do not achieve this *theosis* by human effort, but by being made to conform to Christ by the new nature given to us as believers… Though theotic change is not a human achievement, it does call for intense and even painful effort."[122] Fairbairn sees in this "progressive" understanding a

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[114] Reuschling, "The Means and End in 2 Peter 1:3–11: The Theological and Moral Significance of 'Theōsis," 277.
[115] Haynes, "The Metaphysics of Christian Ethics: Radical Orthodoxy and Theosis," 666, 668.
[116] Ibid., 668.
[117] Beyer, "From Kenosis to Theosis: Reflections on the Views of C.S. Lewis," 90.
[118] Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 178.
[119] Fairbairn, "Salvation as Theosis: The Teaching of Eastern Orthodoxy."
[120] P. G. Kirchschlaeger, "The Relation between Freedom, Love, Spirit and Flesh in Galatians 5:13," Acta Theologica 33, no. 2 (February 2014): 130-142, https://doi.org/10.4314/actat.v33i2s.7, 139.
[121] Reuschling, "The Means and End in 2 Peter 1:3–11: The Theological and Moral Significance of 'Theōsis," 278.
[122] Beyer, "From Kenosis to Theosis: Reflections on the Views of C.S. Lewis," 94.

propensity of Orthodox theologians to focus inordinately on sanctification, at the expense of justification and glorification; Eastern models, he believes, fail to present the doctrine of salvation in all its multifarious richness.[123] Reuschling disagrees: "First, *theosis* must be understood within the entire economy of salvation… *theosis* infuses and properly orients each element classically understood within the *ordo salutis*: calling, regeneration, conversion, faith, justification, sanctification, and union with God."[124]

Despite the connotations of English appellations like "divinization" and "deification," Eastern Orthodox theologians are resolute that *theosis* does not entail that believers' humanity is diminished as they are progressively unified with God.[125] Rather, it is precisely through *theosis* that the believer's humanity is fulfilled. On the Orthodox view, humans were designed for *theosis*. Reuschling highlights that when believers act in accordance with the divine enterprise of *theosis*, they act in the interest of their own ultimate contentment.[126] The *telos* of humanity, so understood, is to be "like God"— an objective which takes on a perverted, subversive mien in the Edenic temptation of Adam and Eve.[127] Indeed, for Orthodox theologians, it is no coincidence that sin— long understood as, in Augustinian terms, a parasite or "privation" of the good[128]— makes its first move in the biblical story by attempting to undercut the *theotic* mandate of the original man and woman, since, for the Orthodox, this mandate gets at the very core of who Adam and Eve really are.[129]

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[123] Fairbairn, "Salvation as Theosis: The Teaching of Eastern Orthodoxy."
[124] Reuschling, "The Means and End in 2 Peter 1:3–11: The Theological and Moral Significance of 'Theōsis," 277.
[125] Beyer, "From Kenosis to Theosis: Reflections on the Views of C.S. Lewis," 91.
[126] Reuschling, "The Means and End in 2 Peter 1:3–11: The Theological and Moral Significance of 'Theōsis," 278.
[127] Beyer, "From Kenosis to Theosis: Reflections on the Views of C.S. Lewis," 91, 93.
[128] Plantinga, *Not the Way It's Supposed to Be: A Breviary of Sin*, 89.
[129] Beyer, "From Kenosis to Theosis: Reflections on the Views of C.S. Lewis," 93.

This, then, is the pervasive doctrine of *theosis,* the wondrous, teleological unification of human and divine nature— both the means and the end to the Eastern Orthodox vision of the Christian life.[130] Taken seriously, *theosis* offers the believer an ineffable hope— "Our future glory," as Beyer marvels, "is unimaginable."[131] C.S. Lewis supposes that our present liminal state only prefigures that glory with "the sort of resemblance there is between a photo and a place, or a statue and a man."[132] There is, according to Lewis's metaphor, an entirely new dimension of experience and meaning available to us through union with the "three-Personal" life.[133]

Theosis and the Philosophical Free Will Debate

Now that we've grasped the basic idea of *theosis,* we are in a position to ascertain its application to the philosophical free will debate— its application, in particular, to the intelligibility question, the logical quandary posed by the psychological determinist. Recall that the crux of that quandary was this: what sense can be made of the claim that a given agent, in facing any instance of choice, moral or otherwise, is free to act on a desire other than his/her strongest desire, *the desire which he/she most wants, in the moment, to instantiate*?

The application of *theosis* to this logical dilemma is, at bottom, rather straightforward. First, it is important to acknowledge the implications of *theosis* for moral decision-making. As numerous scholars have recognized, *theotic* considerations hold the potential to significantly reframe the way Christians think about ethics. Wyndy Corbin Reuschling, for instance, avers that "*Theosis*, therefore, is not just an important theological category but an equally important ethical

[130] Reuschling, "The Means and End in 2 Peter 1:3–11: The Theological and Moral Significance of 'Theōsis," 275.
[131] Beyer, "From Kenosis to Theosis: Reflections on the Views of C.S. Lewis," 95.
[132] Lewis, *Mere Christianity,* 159.
[133] Ibid., 176.

one for locating the source and purpose of the Christian moral life… *theosis* as our participation in God's divine nature is not just an end but also a means by which we learn to embody the goodness of God as a key motivation and purpose in Christian ethics."[134] The idea is that every morally significant decision we make— internal or external, large or small— either moves us further toward, or "into," the divine nature, or else it exacerbates our alienation from the triune life for which we were created.

A *theotic* understanding of ethics, then, no longer conceives of sin or wrongdoing as simply an infraction of an external ethical code, administered by a "solitary, removed… stern lawgiver."[135] Instead, "*theosis* makes Christian ethics participatory, dynamic, and relational, offering a correction to notions of ethics as static, principle bound, and law driven"[136]; "Christian morality is just as much, if not more, about moving toward the good as it is about avoiding what is bad."[137] Moral decisions and moral transformation are viewed in light of humanity's ultimate *telos*— union with God— and moral wrongdoing is the self-defeating refusal to cooperate with that *telos*. "Our goal of 'godness' means merely 'goodness' or 'godliness,' in the moral sense… but scriptural language [also] suggests much more— a union with God that transforms us to the extent that we become by the grace of God, like Jesus Christ, both human and divine."[138]

Owing to its emphasis on the transformation process, *theosis* exhibits a natural connection to virtue ethics, sometimes referred to an ethics of "being" rather than an ethics of "doing."[139] On virtue ethics— as well as on the *theotic* understanding of Christian ethics

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[134] Reuschling, "The Means and End in 2 Peter 1:3–11: The Theological and Moral Significance of 'Theōsis," 275.
[135] Cassini and Schaab, "Transcendentals and Trinity," 666.
[136] Reuschling, "The Means and End in 2 Peter 1:3–11: The Theological and Moral Significance of 'Theōsis," 282.
[137] Ibid., 279.
[138] Beyer, "From Kenosis to Theosis: Reflections on the Views of C.S. Lewis," 94.
[139] Reuschling, "The Means and End in 2 Peter 1:3–11: The Theological and Moral Significance of 'Theōsis," 276.

endorsed by Reuschling and others— it is critical to understand moral choices in terms of what those choices are leading us to *become*. *Theosis* departs from classical virtue ethics, however, in that it grounds the virtues in the character of God and sees their objective as making us like Him, molding us and preparing us for full participation in the triune life. The list of virtues in 2 Peter 1:5-8, for instance (which immediately follows 2 Peter 1:4, the flagship verse for a biblical understanding of *theosis*) differs from the Hellenistic virtue theory of the Peter's time in that they are "deeply Christological"— rooted in, and informed by, the relational love of the God.[140]

Thus, every opportunity to exercise and conform to the virtues becomes, for the *theotically*-minded Christian, an opportunity to press further into, or to distance oneself from, the triune relationship. In this way, even seemingly banal activities are suffused with *theotic* meaning: "The triune life of God encompasses salvation within itself… One's behavior as a worker, a supervisor, a parent, a citizen, and a consumer is located in the midst of God's plan of redemption for the cosmos. One is never acting alone."[141] *Theosis* collapses the distinctions between being and doing, means and ends.[142] Per Daniel Haynes, "*Theosis* is not only a model of soteriology, but it is also—because of its participatory framework—a key metaphysical principle of Christian ethics."[143] Viewing life, sin, and choice through the lens of *theosis* means that in our day-by-day, moment-by-moment struggle to inculcate the virtues into our lives, we either walk in participation with the triune relationship, or we rebuff the divine invitation to do so which is the very commission placed on our lives and the very lifeblood of our humanity.[144]

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[140] Reuschling, "The Means and End in 2 Peter 1:3–11: The Theological and Moral Significance of 'Theōsis," 280-81.
[141] Charry, "Spiritual Formation by the Doctrine of the Trinity," 378.
[142] Reuschling, "The Means and End in 2 Peter 1:3–11: The Theological and Moral Significance of 'Theōsis," 283, 285.
[143] Haynes, "The Metaphysics of Christian Ethics: Radical Orthodoxy and Theosis," 660.
[144] Reuschling, "The Means and End in 2 Peter 1:3–11: The Theological and Moral Significance of 'Theōsis," 286.

The point to notice here, however, is that as soon as we assent to this *theotic* picture, we are in a very real way inviting inscrutable mystery into our understanding of morality and moral choice. Moral decision-making, in the *theotic* framework, is never a detached, "forensic" affair, but the recurrent decision whether to literally participate in the relational love shared by the members of the Godhead; "This new ethical vision is… based upon ontological reunion with God."[145] That divine, triune community of love, however, is famously incomprehensible. It is, in fact, perhaps the central mystery in all Christian doctrine. As Charry observes, "the claim that God is triune is a mystery. It is not a secret to be disclosed, a riddle to be answered, or a puzzle to be solved but an enigma to be dwelt in. That God is both one and three, a complete unity and yet encompassing eternal inner distinctions is one of the great paradoxes of Christian doctrine."[146] Every cautious Christian knows that all logical explanations and graphical representations of the Trinity ultimately fall short, and would, if taken at face value, divest the doctrine of its mysterious hope and power.[147] Indeed, the Christian conception of love— the guiding force behind all the virtues, and the single overriding principle of Christian ethics— is given its doxastic content by the triune relationship, and so is, on the Christian understanding, deeply mysterious. "It is therefore a constitutive part of Christian faith to accept mystery as the center of reality, that is to say, to accept love, creation as love, and to make that love the foundation of one's life."[148]

From these considerations, then, we can see a reply to the intelligibility question— a distinctively *Christian* reply— beginning to materialize. If Christians commit to saying, as the

[145] Haynes, "The Metaphysics of Christian Ethics: Radical Orthodoxy and Theosis," 663.
[146] Charry, "Spiritual Formation by the Doctrine of the Trinity," 369."
[147] Ibid., 376.
[148] Ratzinger, *In the Beginning: A Catholic Understanding of the Story of Creation and the Fall*, 99.

doctrine of *theosis* would seem to require, that morality is necessarily bound up with the mystery of the triune relationship, then they must also say that human free agency— given its strong logical linkage to moral responsibility[149]— is only understandable in connection with that relationship. (Once again, it is vital to remember that human agents do not, on the Christian understanding, sometimes make "philosophical" free-will decisions and other times make "theological" free will decisions; nor do parallel "philosophical" and "theological" mechanisms operate simultaneously to produce human choice. On the contrary, persons simply make moral decisions, and every decision they make is one for which they are accountable to God—"All sin has first and finally a Godward force."[150]) Thus, for the sagacious Christian, who has already come to terms with the magnificent mystery of the Trinity and its centrality to all of human life, the apparent insolubility of the problem of desire is *exactly* what one would expect to find when he/she turns to the question of free will. *Of course* human free agency is irreducibly mysterious, the Christian can say. After all it, is grounded in and directed by the doctrine of the Trinity— a doctrine which he/she already believes, for other reasons, to constitute an impenetrable mystery.

This line of thinking, to my mind, significantly raises the plausibility of libertarian theories of human freedom which, despite valiant efforts, find themselves unable to completely quell the stern challenge of the intelligibility question. Compatibilistic theories, on the other hand, appear much less attractive once one adopts a *theotic* understanding of moral decision making. The maxim that our choices are only ever the products of our strongest desires seems a cheap, reductionistic analysis of the dynamic mystery at work as we advance, through our *own decisions*, either into or away from our purposive participation in the divine, triune nature— not

[149] Plantinga, *Not the Way It's Supposed to Be: A Breviary of Sin*, 24.
[150] Ibid., 13.

too unlike the reductionistic heresies of monism and tritheism, which attempt to quash the mystery of the Trinity itself by denying its threeness or its oneness, respectively.[151]

Essentially, the upshot of my argument is this: it is a built-in feature of the Christian worldview that reality contains various *logical* dilemmas which are, to the human mind, simply indecipherable. The logic of the Trinity is one such dilemma. Moreover, the logical coherence of libertarian free agency— by virtue of its intimate connection to *theosis* and the triune life— is more likely to qualify as a candidate for such irreducible mystery than has so far been recognized in the literature regarding the intersection of Christian theism and the philosophical free will debate. If Christian theism is true, then it is more likely that the "intelligibility question" is necessarily shrouded in mystery; and if this is the case, there is a corresponding increase in the believability of libertarian, as opposed to compatibilist, theories of free choice. Thus we can extract fresh meaning from Walls' statement that "By virtue of what they believe about God and our creation in His image, theists have resources from their worldview to make sense of libertarian freedom in ways naturalists do not."[152] We can also join Joseph Ratzinger in his assertion that "According to [some naturalists], there is in the universe not only necessity but also chance. As Christians we would go further and say that there is freedom."[153] We take issue, meanwhile, with T.J. Mawson's thesis that "Theism *per se* has no implications for the debate between libertarians and compatibilists."[154] Indeed, Christian theism does have implications— important implications— for the debate between libertarians and compatibilists, not least in that its commitment to mystery increases the relative plausibility of the libertarian position.

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[151] Cassini and Schaab, "Transcendentals and Trinity," 660.
[152] Walls, "One Hell of a Problem for Christian Compatibilists," 88.
[153] Ratzinger, *In the Beginning: A Catholic Understanding of the Story of Creation and the Fall*, 52.
[154] Mawson, "Classical Theism Has No Implications for the Debate between Libertarianism and Compatibilism," 156.

With this understanding in mind, it is easier to account for the distinction between moral and amoral choices raised earlier in discussion of Peter van Inwagen's essay, "When is the Will Free?"[155] Recall what van Inwagen wants to say: that cases of morally significant decision-making are more likely to exhibit genuine free agency than human choices that are not morally significant (here we follow Alvin Plantinga's helpful definition of "morally significant actions": "an action is *morally significant,* for a given person, if it would be wrong for him to perform that action but right to refrain or *vice versa*").[156] We saw that this distinction, though intuitive, is difficult to substantiate on the thin "mysterianism" of van Inwagen's own position— the "strongest desire" rebuttal championed by the psychological determinist applies equally, in van Inwagen's thinking, to all types of human decisions, moral or otherwise.

The theological insights provided by the doctrine of *theosis* can help us make sense of the difference between moral and amoral choice. Let us return to the two decisions facing our workaday hypothetical agent, Rob. When the psychological determinist analyzes Rob's decision to skip the Wheaties and have Cheerios for breakfast in terms of Rob's strongest desire— concluding that Rob simply desired Cheerios, on this particular morning, more than he desired Wheaties— the Christian theist need not protest. But when the psychological determinist attempts to apply the same framework to Rob's decision about whether to return the wallet, the *theotically* minded Christian has good reason to object.

For Rob, when he opts to stop at the police station and return the wallet on his way to work in the morning, is not simply making the "moral choice" in the sense that his conduct

[155] van Inwagen, *Thinking about Free Will*, 60.
[156] Plantinga, *God, Freedom, and Evil*, 30.

merits praise, rather than punishment, from the omniscient, omnipotent referee in the sky.[157] This is, to be sure, a part of "what is going on" when Rob decides— but it is only a part. Crucially, Rob's choice also conforms with various virtues, such as honesty, integrity, and self-control, helping to solidify those virtues in his composite character.[158] In the *theotic* understanding, this means that Rob is acting in step with, literally participating in, the divine nature as he acts.[159]

Such a case stands in contrast to the Wheaties/Cheerios conundrum, which, *ex hypothesi*, has very little or nothing at all to do with Rob's journey into or away from the divine, and could therefore be ably explained by a holistically compatibilist theory of action. That is, the desire to eat Cheerios and the desire to eat Wheaties are, though different in strength, essentially the same in *kind*. However, the motives or desires which jockey in Rob's mind and heart as he makes the wallet decision— indeed, as he makes all consciously moral decisions— are of an entirely different *kind*, or order, altogether— an order that, to the Christian theist, is ultimately impossible to fully understand. Rob's desire to participate in the divine nature, and his simultaneous perverse desire to flee the divine and usurp control for himself, are radically different in a way that is nearly impossible to overstate— it is the difference between light and darkness, good and evil, truth and falsity, very life and very death. The complicated interplay between those desires, to which the Apostle Paul, in Romans 7, bears memorable witness, resists easy explanation in terms of their comparative "strengths."

Perhaps it will be helpful here to hazard an analogy, following C.S. Lewis in his earlier likening of the human life and the divine life to a photograph, on the one hand, and on the other,

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[157] Cassini and Schaab, "Transcendentals and Trinity," 666.
[158] Reuschling, "The Means and End in 2 Peter 1:3–11: The Theological and Moral Significance of 'Theōsis." 282.
[159] Haynes, "The Metaphysics of Christian Ethics: Radical Orthodoxy and Theosis," 660.

the landscape which that photograph depicts.[160] The psychological determinist, I suggest, would have us envision the desires of a given agent during a moment of decision as something like a bar graph— a-side-by side comparison, with the competing strengths of each desire indicated by the height of the corresponding bars on the plane. This, to the Christian theist, may be a suitable representation of *non-moral* decisions, such as Rob's Cheerios/Wheaties dilemma. As a representation of the desires active in *moral* decisions, however, the "bar-graph" picture is woefully inadequate.

Reasoning from Lewis's photo example, the desire to align oneself with, to participate in, the divine nature, and the desire to rebel against this nature, operate in totally different *dimensions*— comparing their relative "strengths" would be like attempting to trying to fit a three-dimensional box into the two-dimensional graph. Or, rather, if we take seriously the radical differences between righteous and unrighteous desires, between the desires of the Spirit and the desires of the flesh, it would be something like attempting to graph an apple against a song. The very idea of it is patently absurd, since— in the Christian understanding— certain aspects of reality simply defy logical and graphical explanation. As Cassini and Schaab point out, the human mind "finds it difficult to think in abstract ideas without an accompanying sensory image, no matter how inadequate a representation it might be of the concept."[161] This, from a *theotic* point of view, is how we must think of the language of "competing strengths," when that language is applied to morally significant human choice: as an attempt to explain what is, due to the inherent mystery of the Trinity, ultimately inexplicable.

[160] Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 176.
[161] Cassini and Schaab, "Transcendentals and Trinity," 662.

Some Objections

Now that we have outlined the argument, it will do to defend it against several objections which I anticipate could be raised against it. First, there is the crimination that anchoring human free will in mystery via the doctrine of *theosis* is merely an evasion— that it simply avoids the intelligibility question altogether, rather than attempting to provide an answer, and therefore represents no real advancement in insight or explanatory power. This objection, I think, ought to be taken seriously. Certainly, the practice of "multiplying mysteries" in order to effortlessly answer all of one's questions amounts to some kind of philosophical malpractice. This is the same sort of worry raised by Ekstrom and O'Connor in response to Peter van Inwagen's "mysterianism": if we can accept mystery here, why not simply "throw up our hands" regarding every philosophical puzzle that appears, at first look, mysterious?[162] Why couldn't we use the same sort of reasoning to vouch "philosophically" for the existence of God, or even the reality of aliens?[163]

The sensible reply to this tack, I believe, is to point out that in declaring the intelligibility question finally unanswerable, the Christian theist is not, strictly speaking, postulating a "new" mystery at all. Rather, he/she simply notices that this question appears to be connected, in fundamental ways, to ground-floor logical mystery which *already exists* in his her/worldview: namely, the doctrine of the Trinity. It is not clear that similar maneuvers could tenably be made in arguments concerning the existence of God, the existence of aliens, or other difficult philosophical questions. Additionally, I reiterate that the purpose of my argument is not to

[162] O'Connor, "The Agent as Cause," 467.
[163] Ekstrom, "Free Will, Chance, and Mystery," 154.

clarify, or provide insight into, the intelligibility question *per se*, but rather to throw new light on the compatibilism/libertarianism debate *as a whole* by underlining how doctrines within Christian theism raise the relative plausibility of libertarian theories of free will.

A second, and in my view, more important, objection is one I alluded to earlier: the suspicion that the entire case for an inferential connection between Christian theism and free-will libertarianism rests on a rather obscure and contentious doctrinal position, which is by and large affirmed only by Eastern Orthodox believers, and about whose independent veracity even most honest Christians can be, at best, only circumspect. The appropriate reply here is to point out that such worries are, on closer examination, probably overstated. Take Donald Fairbairn, for example: "In assessing the Orthodox understanding of salvation, I must begin by asserting that it is not as foreign to the evangelical concept as one might initially think."[164] Fairbairn recapitulates the point that "the word *theosis*… does not imply that people actually become gods in any ontological sense at all; the Orthodox affirm that God is unique and transcendent, just as evangelicals do. Rather, by *theosis* the Orthodox mean the process of acquiring godly characteristics, gaining immortality and incorruptibility, and experiencing communion with God. As a result, deification corresponds somewhat to concepts which evangelicals describe using the terms sanctification, eternal life, and fellowship or relationship with God."[165]

In this regard, the doctrine of *theosis* bears historical affinities with the theological tradition of "soul-making," which counts as partisans such early Christian thinkers such as Irenaeus and Origen, and, in recent history, the enormously influential philosopher of religion

[164] Fairbairn, "Salvation as Theosis: The Teaching of Eastern Orthodoxy."
[165] Ibid.

John Hick.[166] The basic idea behind the "soul-making" family of theories, appropriated and popularized by Hick, is that God created the world as a kind of "schoolroom" for the soul, an arena in which He allows humans to experience suffering primarily for its didactic or formative value.[167] This notion has proven attractive to numerous thinkers for its undaunted evaluation of suffering and evil; indeed, though Irenaeus himself never formulated a theodicy, the heritage has spawned a batch of related theodicies that have come to be called "Irenaean."[168]

The "soul-making" tradition has exerted a profound influence on Western religious thought, and it comports neatly with the doctrine of *theosis* on several crucial points earlier described— both emphasize salvation as a process of transformation, rather than simply a change in forensic status, and both view human struggle as a theater of moral perfection or progress.[169] However, it is also worth noting that Hick himself migrated, over the course of his career, away from orthodox Christianity and toward a nuanced religious pluralism, all the while seeking to accommodate his fundamental commitment to "soul-making" with an increasingly broadened religious picture.[170] Hence, while the prominence of "soul-making" provides additional evidence against the total alienness of *theosis* to the Western theological terrain, it is clear that at least some versions of the concept do not depend ontologically on a robustly Christian understanding of the Trinity. For the purposes of this paper, therefore, *theosis* remains the paradigmatic example of Christian doctrine supporting the claim that the intelligibility question, due to its connection with the Trinity, is inherently and irreducibly mysterious. All the same, the parallel

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[166] Mark S. M. Scott, "Suffering and Soul-Making: Rethinking John Hick's Theodicy," *The Journal of Religion* 90, no. 3 (July 2010): pp. 313-334, https://doi.org/10.1086/651707, 314.
[167] Ibid., 324.
[168] Ibid., 313, 332.
[169] David Cheetham, "John Hick (1922-2012)," in *The Student's Companion to the Theologians*, ed. Ian S. Markham (Chichester, UK: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013), pp. 799r-7100e, 799x.
[170] Ibid., 799r.

tradition of "soul-making" suggests that the content of this doctrine is not as peculiar to Western thought as we might at first suppose.

The fact is that most Western Christians also assent to some version of *theotic* doctrine, even if that doctrine is fleshed out in decidedly weaker terms than "divinization" or "deification." Daniel Haynes notes that this East/West commonality traces its roots to Aquinas, who endorsed in his writings a *theotic* understanding of salvation and formatively influenced both the Eastern and Western theological traditions.[171] Millard Erickson, in a sweeping overview of *theosis* and its place in the Western theological mind, finds that much of the same work done by *theosis* in the Eastern theology is accomplished in the West by "the traditional Protestant view of the union with Christ."[172] And, as Fairbairn and Beyer both concede, while *theosis* perhaps presents the danger of overly extolling the role of sanctification in salvation, rather than justification, this tendency is more a matter of emphasis than logical discontinuity. One can hold both a traditional doctrine of justification and a robust notion of sanctification as progressive union with God; understood correctly, in fact, the former can motivate and animate the latter.[173]

It is also instructive, in this connection, to realize that C.S. Lewis, perhaps the most celebrated expositor of "lay-theology" in the West since his publication of *Mere Christianity* in 1952, appears to have harbored an understanding of salvation that was strongly influenced by *theosis*. Douglas Beyer, in a lecture to at the Ewbank Colloquium on C.S. Lewis & Friends, consolidates a host of apparently *theotic* passages in Lewis's theological writings. While Beyer

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[171] Haynes, "The Metaphysics of Christian Ethics: Radical Orthodoxy and Theosis," 668.
[172] Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2013), https://go.openathens.net/redirector/liberty.edu?url=https%3A%2F%2Fsearch.credoreference.com%2Fcontent%2Ftitle%2Fbpgct%3FinstitutionId%3D5072%26tab%3Dcontents.
[173] Fairbairn, "Salvation as Theosis: The Teaching of Eastern Orthodoxy"; [173] Beyer, "From Kenosis to Theosis: Reflections on the Views of C.S. Lewis," 95.

admits from the first that Lewis never actually uses the word "*theosis*" in his work, he goes on to demonstrate that pressing this point would be a little like insisting that the New Testament never explicitly uses the word "Trinity." Indeed, in Lewis, Beyer successfully locates virtually every key feature of *theosis* outlined above: its connection with the Trinity,[174] its grounding in the incarnation,[175] and its emphasis on sanctification as a point of interaction between the work of the Holy Spirit and human effort and discipline.[176] As an archetypal example of *theosis* in Lewis's thought, take the following pair of quotes from the pages of *Mere Christianity*, a book set out to explain, in Lewis's own words, "the belief that has been common to nearly all Christians at all times":[177]

> The command Be ye perfect is not idealistic gas. Nor is it a command to do the impossible. He is going to make us into creatures that can obey that command. He said (in the Bible) that we were "gods" and He is going to make good His words. If we let Him— for we can prevent Him, if we choose— He will make the feeblest and filthiest of us into a god or goddess, a dazzling, radiant, immortal creature, pulsating all through with such energy and joy and wisdom and love as we cannot now imagine, a bright stainless mirror which reflects back to God perfectly (though, of course, on a smaller scale) His own boundless power and delight and goodness. The process will be long and in parts very painful; but that is what we are in for. Nothing less. He meant what He said.[178]

> The whole dance, or drama, or pattern of this three-Personal life is to be played out in each one of us: or (putting it the other way round) each one of us has got to enter that pattern, take his place in that dance. There is no other way to the happiness for which we were made… Christ is the Son of God. If we share in this kind of life we also shall be sons of God. We shall love the Father as He does and the Holy Ghost will arise in us. He came to this world and became a man in order to spread to other men the kind of life He has— by what I call 'good infection.' Every Christian is to become a little Christ. The whole purpose of becoming a Christian is simply nothing else.[179]

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[174] Beyer, "From Kenosis to Theosis: Reflections on the Views of C.S. Lewis," 91-92.
[175] Ibid., 92.
[176] Ibid., 91.
[177] Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, viii.
[178] Ibid., 205-206.
[179] Ibid., 176-77.

If this is not *theosis* as the Eastern Orthodox church has traditionally understood it, then it is certainly an approximation of that belief— one which makes use of many of the same dynamics and themes. And, I submit, it is a doctrine strong enough to support the argument which I have developed so far in this paper.

Even granted this response to the initial objection, the most importunate detractor might claim that even such weaker notions as we see in Lewis must be abandoned— that there is no room in a responsible theology for even the faintest trace of "union with Christ," or "communion with the Father," or anything of the sort. This insistence would, to my knowledge, place our detractor in the slimmest minority of professing Christians. Still, I will take a moment to entertain the reply.

The question finally before us is this: divorced from any and all conceptions relating to or deriving from *theosis*, what would become of my argument for an inferential link between the truth of Christian theism and the elevated plausibility of libertarian theories of free agency? How would the Christian theist who finds himself stubbornly antipathetic to any approximation of *theosis*, but also inclined toward libertarian free agency, answer the intelligibility question?

Once again, it will not do for the theist to simply postulate, *ad hoc*, that the intelligibility question is ultimately mysterious. The only responsible move, I think, and the one I attempt to make in my argument, is to "ground" the mystery of the intelligibility question in a mystery which *already exists* within the Christian theological tradition. Certainly, rejecting the doctrine of *theosis* does not denude the Christian theological system of all available mystery. Barring the strong Orthodox notion of *theosis*, and even the weaker ideas of union with Christ and fellowship with God more amenable to Western traditions, can we locate any other "resources" within

Christian theism which will "do the trick," connecting human freedom to mystery in a strong enough way to form a similar argument?

I want to tentatively suggest a few areas where a Christian in such a position might turn. Foremost among these is an area well worth exploring but virtually neglected in the present paper— that is, the doctrine of sin. I have proposed, in this paper, that the *righteous* desires involved in moments of moral choice are mysterious to the rational mind, but what about the *unrighteous* desires? Are they fully comprehensible? What can we say about sin— outside of the aforementioned Augustinian concept of evil as a "privation" of the good[180]— that might be relevant here?

In his treatment of the topic, Cornelius Plantinga Jr. points out that sin is, in some respects, a mystery to us. Due to its privative nature, the biblical authors, particularly Paul, never treat sin as a subject in itself, opting instead to "[speak] of sin in terms of what it is against."[181] Accordingly, "Paul knows that sin lures, enslaves, and destroys, that Christ died to redeem us from it, and that our sin must therefore be dreadful, but he never does tell us exactly where sin comes from. Nor does he try to define the nature of its power or the means by which it is transmitted."[182] We know, moreover, that sin is "antirational"— it is always a legerdemain, a clever falsehood, a trick.[183] Moral choice, then, on the Christian view, is always a decision between rational and irrational alternatives, not merely ethical and unethical ones, a conviction which makes especially interesting a particular statement by Timothy O'Connor: "It will be replied that if that is all we can say, the power the agency theory confers on free agents is

[180] Plantinga, *Not the Way It's Supposed to Be: A Breviary of Sin*, 89.
[181] Ibid., 87.
[182] Ibid.
[183] Ibid., 146.

worthless. It is merely the power to make irrational decisions, and who wants that? I deny the claim that an agent's freely choosing to be rational is without value."[184]

One other potential "reservoir" of mystery, which the Christian theist might try to connect to human free agency, is the image of God. The meaning of this biblical notion is contested, and very likely multifaceted. Throughout church history, such personages as Irenaeus and Emil Brunner have connected the image of God to human free will— we are free, the argument goes, because God is free, and our freedom reflects His in important ways.[185] If this deduction is sound, and if God's freedom is, in some sense, mysterious to us (the doctrine of divine incomprehensibility becomes relevant here[186]), then perhaps the image of God supplies the Christian theist with additional munitions to defend his/her claim that the answer to the intelligibility question is necessarily mysterious.

The previous two discussions are not intended to be comprehensive assessments of the issues concerned, nor does it strike me that either the doctrine of sin or the image of God can forge as secure a connection between the mystery of the Christian faith and the intelligibility question as the doctrine of *theosis*, rooted in the Trinity, is capable of doing. The optimal route for the Christian theist who wishes to draw such a connection, therefore, is in my opinion to affirm a variety of *theosis*, either in the fullness of its traditional Orthodox understanding or in a qualified sense more acquiescent to Western theological commitments. I reiterate, however, that embracing such a doctrine by no means places one "on the fringe" in the landscape of Christian theistic thought.[187]

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[184] Plantinga, *Not the Way It's Supposed to Be: A Breviary of Sin*, 89-90.
[185] Erickson, *Christian Theology*.
[186] Devito and McNabb, "Divine Foreknowledge and Human Free Will: Embracing the Paradox," 106.
[187] Fairbairn, "Salvation as Theosis: The Teaching of Eastern Orthodoxy."

Implications: The Freedom We Care About

How, then, does the Christian theist, who adopts such an understanding of libertarian free agency, answer van Inwagen's question, "When is the Will Free?" If the argument I have laid out is correct, then, from a Christian point of view, the more likely it is that a particular decision is "morally significant"— that is, the more likely it is that the decision matters relative to the agent's participation with or alienation from the divine nature— the more likely it is that the agent exercises free will, in the libertarian sense.

This allows the Christian libertarian to circumscribe a decidedly wider "range" of free will decisions than the one at which van Inwagen finally arrives, which excludes all choices aside from "cases of an actual struggle between perceived moral duty or long-term self-interest, on the one hand, and immediate desire, on the other; and cases of a conflict of incommensurable values."[188] Indeed, any instance in which a choice is "morally significant," where there is a real and relevant virtue at stake, is a candidate, on a *theotic* model, for genuine free agency— even some decisions which are made in just a few moments, *contra* van Inwagen, who seems to consider a significant period of "deliberation" or "reflection" as a requisite to cases of libertarian freedom.[189] Such instances, we know from experience, arise many times every day as our moral struggle is fleshed out in "the concrete particulars of existence."[190]

On the other hand, it is not inconsistent with the *theotic* picture to suppose that a great many of our decisions— even the majority of them— happen "in a compatibilistic fashion," proceeding more or less "automatically" from settled states of beliefs, desires, inclinations,

[188] van Inwagen, *Thinking about Free Will*, 77.
[189] Ibid., 72.
[190] Haynes, "The Metaphysics of Christian Ethics: Radical Orthodoxy and Theosis," 668.

etc.[191] This, as R.E. Hobart rightly points out, is actually a desirable feature of a theory of free agency, in that we want to retain a sense of "character," of "morally characterizable selves" that are to some extent unique and predictable, not *totally* beholden to the vacillations of our own libertarian decision-making.[192] Plus, as Robert Kane has taken great pains to establish, that some of our decisions are "compatibilistic" does not imply that we cannot be held responsible for those decisions, provided that, at some point in the past, we were free to alter the formation of the beliefs, desires, intentions, and the like— the "character"— which presently prompts us to action.[193] Of course, we will rarely, if ever, be able to determine to what extent a given choice is attributable to our "morally characterizable selves," and to what extent it originates in the exercise of our own libertarian free agency. On this point, it seems to me that Cornelius Plantinga has the right idea: "Still, none of us knows the degree to which other human beings bear responsibility for their behavior, the degree to which 'they could have helped it.' That is one important difference between us and God."[194]

A *theotic* picture of free choice can also accommodate human freedom in a range of areas not normally invoked in the philosophical free will discussion. To repeat Timothy O'Connor's observation, "Freedom of will is directly connected to the possibility or significance of moral responsibility, autonomy, the uniqueness of persons (involving creativity, originality, and their life histories in general), dignity, love, and friendship. In short, it is connected to everything that fundamentally matters to us in our relationships to one another."[195] Let us consider, as a test

[191] Haynes, "The Metaphysics of Christian Ethics: Radical Orthodoxy and Theosis," 674.
[192] R. E. Hobart, "Free Will as Involving Determination and Inconceivable Without It," in *Metaphysics: The Big Questions*, ed. Peter van Inwagen, 2nd ed. (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2016), pp. 420-432, 420.
[193] Kane, Fischer, and Haji, "Free Will and Responsibility: Ancient Dispute, New Themes," 317.
[194] Plantinga, *Not the Way It's Supposed to Be: A Breviary of Sin*, 139.
[195] O'Connor, *Persons and Causes: The Metaphysics of Free Will*, xii.

case, the issue of creativity. Paul Russell worries that if determinism is true, then it is not only moral responsibility which falls by the wayside, but creative and artistic merit as well.[196] After all, we seem to assume when we praise or criticize a piece of creative work that it originated, in some sense, within the artist *himself*— not merely from the loose assemblage of ideas, tastes, beliefs, and stylistic propensities which he gathered over his lifetime through the inexorable, universal chain of cause and effect. But this way of looking at things apparently presumes a special kind of libertarian freedom, one that applies to art, not merely to morality.

A *theotic* picture of human freedom can make sense of this kind of agency. Conventional Christian theology explains human creativity on the basis of God's creativity; as Ratzinger puts it, "we can be really 'creative' only if we are in harmony with the Creator of the universe."[197] Hence, as long as genuine creativity is one way we can genuinely image and glorify our Creator— as long as there are, as it seems more than plausible to believe, virtues associated with the cultivation of the creative self— then *theosis* invades and enlivens the aesthetic sphere as readily as it does the moral.

And the scope of freedom extends further than this. Consider the apparent freedom involved in intellectual pursuits— freedom, for example, to work hard in fairmindedly assessing opposing views— in light of this quotation from "virtue epistemologist" Jay Wood: "Recent virtue epistemologists, myself included, think it perfectly meaningful to speak of intellectual virtues such as 'intellectual humility,' 'intellectual generosity,' and 'intellectual courage,' which

[196] Paul Russell, "Free Will, Art and Morality," *The Journal of Ethics* 12, no. 3/4 (2008): 307-325, https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780190627607.003.0008, 307.
[197] Ratzinger, *In the Beginning: A Catholic Understanding of the Story of Creation and the Fall*, 38.

combine the operations and ends of the intellect and will."[198] If Wood is to be believed, and there really are such things as "intellectual virtues," then it is easy to see how a *theotically* informed, libertarian freedom could apply to them as well.

There are other examples we could likewise hold up for examination, but I will instead conclude the discussion with the following general observation: a *theotic* view of human freedom, underpinned by the Christian worldview, has the interesting consequence of arranging the "scale" of decisions that we *want* to be free and responsible, and the corresponding "scale" of decisions that we *can* call free and responsible, such that they line up almost exactly. That is, we want to say that Rob is free and responsible when he decides to either turn in the wallet or stow it away in his dresser drawer; and the *theotic* picture enables us to say that this is probably the case. On the other hand, is more difficult, on this model, to conceive of a way in which Rob could exercise libertarian freedom when he decides whether to eat Cheerios or Wheaties for breakfast; but then, we are generally less concerned with ensuring that these kinds of decisions are freely made (unless, perhaps, there are attendant nutritional concerns complicating the decision-making process— perhaps Rob feels dutifully compelled to eat his Wheaties but also feels powerfully moved by a temptation toward Lucky Charms— in which case it would seem more plausible to describe his choice as free, on the *theotic* picture). At any rate, if there is any dissonance between the types of situations which really are free, according to the *theotic* model, and those that a particular individual *wants* to be free, we would be inclined to say that the problem is not with the model, but with the individual— since, in the final analysis, the model scales the likelihood

[198] W. Jay Wood, "Faith's Intellectual Rewards," in *Religious Faith and Intellectual Virtue*, ed. Laura Frances Callahan and Timothy O'Connor (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2014), 29-48, https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/liberty/detail.action?docID=4083220, 39-40.

that a decision is free according to that decision's relevance to what is, according to the assumptions of *theosis,* to be ultimately valued: the agent's union with the divine.

Questions for Further Inquiry

At the close of this study, it is clear that there is more to be said on the matter of Christian theism, particularly *theosis*, and its relationship to the philosophical free will dilemma. Much of the ensuing conversation, to be sure, would revolve around the theological considerations advanced in this paper, which, due to the scope and purposes of my argument, I have only vaguely explicated and defended. This leaves us with copious questions with respect to the implications of *theosis* for human freedom. One question in particular comes to mind as an apt starting place: if there exists, from the Christian point of view, a strong connection between *theosis* and freedom of the will, is there also a significant difference between the libertarian capacities exercised by regenerate and unregenerate individuals?

There are also avenues for further study on the philosophical side. If the intelligibility question can only ever be answered in reference to mystery— as I have argued is implied by the Christian doctrine of *theosis*— then it would be worth investigating in greater detail the relevancy of this conclusion to the models of free agency advanced by major libertarian philosophers. In the following, I gesture toward the ways such a conclusion might impact the way one reads van Inwagen, Kane, and O'Connor.

First, and most obviously, this conclusion significantly increases the plausibility of van Inwagen's controversial "cognitive closure" hypothesis. If the *theotic* picture of free will holds, then the apparent fact that it is "impossible for us human beings to dispel the mystery of

metaphysical freedom"[199] becomes, via the *theotic* link between human freedom and the mystery of the divine life, exactly what we might expect. However, the doctrine of *theosis* might lead the Christian theist toward tentative skepticism regarding van Inwagen's speculation that the source of the "cognitive closure" is to be found in our biological makeup.[200] For, on the *theotic* picture, the opacity of the intelligibility question has less to do with our biology, and more to do with our theology.

Second, should the Christian theist decide that the answer to the intelligibility question can only every be a mystery, he/she need not discard completely Kane's inventive model of indeterministic free will. As previously mentioned, Kane's theory is laudable for its sincere attempt to reckon with the latest findings in a range of scientific disciplines including biology, chemistry, and physics. Even if the Christian believes that Kane's model ultimately fails with respect to the intelligibility question— if, that is, the so-called "luck objections"[201] raised against it are sound— he/she might still enlist Kane's model in order to answer the existence question, which asks, "Can such a free will exist in the natural order and, if so, where?"[202]

Third, if a Christian is persuaded that the content of his/her worldview effectively "closes" the intelligibility question to human understanding, he/she still may find much to commend in O'Connor's robust agent-causal approach to the philosophical free will dilemma. It seems to me, in fact, that if one takes my conclusion seriously, O'Connor's account could remain enormously plausible, and be accepted with only perhaps a few very minor alterations. For the most part, the Christian theist would simply remain skeptical if and when O'Connor insinuates

[199] van Inwagen, "The Mystery of Metaphysical Freedom," 465.
[200] Ibid., 465.
[201] Kane, Fischer, and Haji, "Free Will and Responsibility: Ancient Dispute, New Themes," 329.
[202] Ibid., 315.

that agent-causation can fully answer the intelligibility question (a claim he does not make in his book on the subject[203]), as he/she will have decided in advance that this is a benchmark no libertarian theory can meet.

One more area of interest for further study concerns the collection and analysis of quantitative data on public perceptions and opinions of the philosophical free will debate. Several recent articles have undertaken extensive polls in order to canvass the views of non-philosophers on the free will problem.[204] These studies, however, have largely focused on the relationships between beliefs in theses within the philosophical debate itself— libertarianism, determinism, compatibilism, dualism, etc. More information about the relationship between these beliefs and various theological, religious, and cultural persuasions would likely prove interesting and could help move the conversation forward.

Finally, this study indicates that there are fruitful applications to be made, and conversations to be had, at the intersection of Christian theism and the philosophical free will debate. While I am confident that the thoughts contained in this paper are, for the Christian theist, worthy of consideration, I am also confident that they represent only part of the story. Additional insights from other disciplines of study, other theological traditions, and even other religious systems entirely, are heartily encouraged. There certainly is value in trying to make heads or tails of the philosophical free will discussion without availing the resources of any particular worldview. But there is also value in understanding the relationships between the

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[203] O'Connor, *Persons and Causes: The Metaphysics of Free Will*, 101.
[204] Wisniewski, Deutschländer, and Haynes, "Free Will Beliefs Are Better Predicted by Dualism than Determinism Beliefs across Different Cultures"; Eddy Nahmias et al., "Surveying Freedom: Folk Intuitions About Free Will and Moral Responsibility," *Philosophical Psychology* 18, no. 5 (August 15, 2006): 561-584, https://doi.org/10.1080/09515080500264180.

philosophical free will discussion and the larger-scale worldviews which compete for our allegiance and belief— which is to say, the big picture matters, too.

Conclusion

In this paper, I advanced the claim that there exist resources within Christian theism— paradigmatically, the Eastern Orthodox doctrine of salvation as *theosis*— which can help inform the philosophical free will discussion by raising, for Christian theists, the relative plausibility of libertarian free-will theories over their compatibilistic counterparts. I began with a general overview of the contemporary philosophical free will debate, distinguishing "psychological determinism" from alternate species of determinism as the primary obstacle to libertarian free will to be considered in this paper From there, I examined the ways in which Christian theism ordinarily interacts with the philosophical free will discussion, identifying three principal approaches to the intersection: "insulation, subordination, and application." My paper is an effort to contribute to this third approach: applying insights from within Christian theism to help make sense of the philosophical free will conversation.

Next, I reiterated that the point at which *theosis* most handily applies to the philosophical free will discussion is what Robert Kane calls the intelligibility question: "Can we make sense of a free will that is incompatible with determinism or is it, as many claim, essentially mysterious or obscure?"[205] With this question in mind, I broadly assessed the views of three salient libertarian thinkers— Peter van Inwagen, Robert Kane, and Timothy O'Connor— and tentatively concluded that each of their views leaves open certain questions which are, in their own ways, outflows of the intelligibility question.

[205] Kane, Fischer, and Haji, "Free Will and Responsibility: Ancient Dispute, New Themes," 329.

Finally, I closely examined the Eastern Orthodox understanding of *theosis*— or participation in the divine nature— and argued for the conclusion that accepting *theosis* as true increases the likelihood that the answer to the intelligibility question is inherently mysterious, which in turn raises the plausibility of libertarian models of free will. I then defended this argument against several objections and limned some areas for future research and inquiry.

Perhaps the best way to think about the role of my thesis, as it relates to the intelligibility question, is through a comparison with the role that mind-body dualism often plays regarding the existence question. Generally, the existence question, as defined by Robert Kane, corresponds to the challenge of physical determinism.[206] How, it is asked, can free will as libertarians conceive of it exist in a world that is, for all we know, completely governed by predictable physical laws?[207] Some philosophers believe they can find a way around this question by postulating the existence of an immaterial soul, which can somehow influence or "act upon" physical processes from without, altering causal trajectories and creating space for human freedom in a largely deterministic world. Others find this notion to be *ad hoc* and intolerably mysterious. For the Christian philosopher (whether or not he/she assents to some version of *theosis*), however, the application of mind-body dualism can serve to raise the plausibility of libertarian models of free will, as opposed to rival compatibilistic approaches: the Christian concept of God as an immaterial being increases the plausibility of human immaterial minds or souls (a mysterious conception, to be sure) which in turn increases the plausibility of libertarianism. In like fashion, I believe that what dualism can do for the existence question, *theosis*— or something very like it— can do for the intelligibility question. That is, the Christian doctrine of salvation as *theosis*

[206] Kane, Fischer, and Haji, "Free Will and Responsibility: Ancient Dispute, New Themes," 329.
[207] Walls, "One Hell of a Problem for Christian Compatibilists, 88.

increases the likelihood that the answer to intelligibility question is irreducibly mysterious, which, in turn, increases the likelihood that libertarianism is true.

I expect that such a maneuver would rankle the sensibilities of many philosophers, especially philosophers with a naturalistic bent, who tend to view such appeals to "mystery" as obscure and rather unmanly attempts to shirk important questions rather than answer them directly. In fact, I imagine that it might rankle the sensibilities of Robert Kane, who coined the terms "intelligibility question" and "existence question," and who, pertaining to the latter, deliberately circumvents mind-body dualism and all its related theses in formulating his own model of libertarian free action.[208] All the same, I hope that the connection I draw between Christian theism and the intelligibility question is not an insignificant one for those individuals who are convinced of the merits of the theistic worldview but find themselves vexed by the philosophical free will discussion. My thesis is, I believe, in harmony with the reverent and panoramic conviction that "It is… a constitutive part of Christian faith to accept mystery as the center of reality."[209]

[208] Kane, "Responsibility, Luck, and Chance," 223.
[209] Ratzinger, *In the Beginning: A Catholic Understanding of the Story of Creation and the Fall*, 99.

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