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The Compatibility of Individual Free Will With Providential Determinism

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Introduction

The belief in individual freedom of choice is essential to the adoption of personal convictions that contribute to the shaping of well-thought-out worldviews and commitments to core values by which we strive to live. It is due to acknowledgement of the truth of the proposition that no one can be held morally accountable for anything they do unless they are able to engage in freely willed deliberations that we condemn people for their acts of wrongdoing or, conversely, praise them for deeds we deem morally right. The same holds true in the domain of legal discourse and judicial deliberation: one can be rightfully convicted of a crime with which he or she has

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² See www.CSUDH.edu.

been charged only if the evidence presented by the prosecution proves beyond a reasonable doubt that the defendant acted knowingly and voluntarily, with intent to commit the criminal deed. The idea of freedom of choice is so intuitively believed in by the majority of our fellow human beings that it would seem simply foolish to insist that people really don't have such a power of self-determined decision-making. I count myself among those so-called intuitionists who take it for granted that at least some of our decisions to act are completely up to us to carry out, regardless of whether we intend to harm others or to do good on their behalf.

There is admittedly a lengthy catalogue of proposed answers to the free will “problem,” and the solutions seem endless while the debates go on and on. So, you might be inclined to ask, “Why write another article on this seemingly time-worn concept? Why do we need another essay on such a knotty, troublesome dispute?” Well, I have at least two reasons for going forward with what to some looks like an unwieldy and tedious task. First, I’m not convinced that contributing to this long-standing debate is a sheer waste of time or a case of fighting imaginary windmills. The free will debate is bound to remain a vigorous topic of discussion precisely because we are each affected by inter-subjective decision-making almost every passing day. We blame other people for hurting us and they blame us for doing the same. We agonize over concrete decisions that leave us with feelings of intense guilt, with regrettable shame, and wanting to fall upon our knees asking for forgiveness. These experiences of remorse, of heart-felt pangs of regret, are part of the multi-layered fabric of moral consciousness, the bedrock of lived-experiences that gives rise to self-conscious acts of *willing*. Secondly, there is a side to the controversy that, in my estimate at least, adds to our curiosity about how to unravel all the complexities of the idea of free will to everyone’s satisfaction—namely, the presence of a certain amount of mystery-laden opaqueness involved in grasping the essential beingness of the phenomenon of freedom. This sense of being puzzled by or being incomprehensibly challenged by darker (not fully disclosed) layers of existential encounters with apparent elusive “unknowns” surrounds the discursive climate whenever we seek to settle issues having to do with concepts such as causation, chance, fate, freedom, life, and death itself. There is a heightened desire to want to know

more about our relationship to these *big questions* of lived-experience.

As I reflected on a suitable topic of discussion for this paper I was already predisposed to believing by faith that the Almighty Creator is an orderly designer of whatever He has brought into being. To my mind, I felt no uneasiness accepting the truth that as living beings created in the Maker's own image, we were fashioned as free moral agents—i.e., we were biologically designed with the innate ability to choose between right and wrong, between good and evil. The issue of most relevance that logically arises when we take the foregoing truths for granted is to determine why it isn't contradictory to hold that individuals are free to decide their own destinies in life despite the fact that the Sovereign, all-knowing Creator allowed for a cosmic order in which there is structured or *providential* determinism.

To ward off any potential misunderstanding of my use of the notion of providence in this study, the term has reference to a cosmic order containing purposive design—an arrangement set in place by the Creator to provide supernatural direction to the workings of His creation and to infuse the cosmic flow with vital meaningfulness. So, when I give the name *providential* determinism to the Creator's allowance for necessity within this created order, I mean to say that the workings of nature as well as the affairs of mankind fall within the purview of God's all-seeing eyes and that all of creation is tended to by His invisible hands. Things therefore don't just happen by random chance but happen for reasons that fit in purposively with the in-built designs of the created universe and with the climactic unfolding of the drama of divinely envisioned ends.

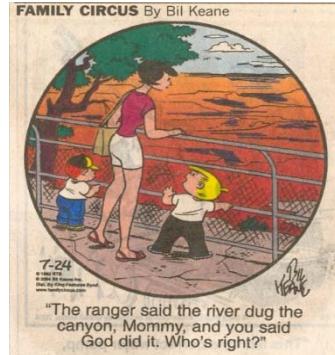
I have focused my discussion around three variations on the theme of compatibilism.³ Each approach examined is aimed at showing good reasons tending to be supportive of compatibilistic

³ The historical disputes regarding the free will-determinism problem have propagated a litany of divergent streams of reasoning. Arguments range from the classical doctrines of hard determinism to soft determinism to libertarianism. There are moreover arguments focusing more narrowly on topics such as indeterminism, chance, and fatalism. On peculiarly theological preoccupation with freedom-determinism discourse, we find a version of the hard determinism theory associated with Calvinistic predestination arguments on the one side. Calvinists argue in favor of conditional election—that is, God made a sovereign choice of certain individuals who would enjoy the blessings of salvation. On the other side of the theological spectrum we find the quite expansive individual free will doctrine, characteristic of Armenianism. Armenians advocate unconditional election—that is, any person who on his own initiative chooses to willingly believe in the Messiah by faith becomes the recipient of eternal salvation.

worldviews. Section I deals with the Augustinian-Aquinian theistic accounts of free will. Section II concentrates on non-theistic or naturalistic discourses on the view that the idea of freedom of choice is an experientially real phenomenon with which we have to seriously reckon. Daniel C. Dennett and Harry Frankfurt, following somewhat similar pathways, treat talk about free will as having reference to a factual world-setting designed to accommodate self-initiated agency decisions. Section III casts the probing lens upon Christian perspectival reasoning on the nature of free will. To help accomplish the latter end I draw upon highly insightful arguments made by Søren Kierkegaard and Alvin Plantinga, substantiating the meaningfulness of discourse on individual freedom.

A. Classical Theistic Accounts

What I want to propose as I begin this first section of the paper is that the argument for free will founded on (intelligent) design is merely an argument worthy of thoughtful consideration. I entertain no presumptuous certainty that the argument itself is indubitably right on point. However, I do believe that what is being postulated through the chain of reasoning followed culminates in a sufficiently plausible conclusion meriting a fair hearing. An idea extracted from the imaginary cartoon art world comes in quite handy here as it sheds a bit more light on the point I'm making. The selection is one of Bill Keane's popular *Family Circus* strips.⁴ Billy and little brother Jeffy, accompanied by their mom (Thelma), are depicted on a sightseeing tour of the Grand Canyon. Pointing to a section of the canyon, Billy addresses his mother, "The ranger said the river dug the canyon, Mommy, and you said God did it. Who's right?" The free will debate ends with the same sort of unsettled curiosity--namely, "Which party has the right answer?" Let the ranger represent the position of naturalistic compatibilists, and



⁴ Bill Keane, *Family Circus*, 07-24-2004, King Features Syndicate. Cartoonist, Keane, tackles a variety of societal issues in his cartoon world. He frequently broaches religious subject-matter, of which the selected cartoon strip herein referenced, is a suitable example.

let Thelma stand for advocates of creationism who endorse the viewpoint of classical theistic compatibilists. We shall find that just like the cartoon character, Jeffy, many well-meaning inquirers might still be left mired in a puzzling and uncomfortable predicament of uncertain doctrinal convictions. The aesthetic gaze upon the red-hued canyon lures each side to want to uncover the mysterious cosmic secrets behind the contours of the natural design laid out right there before their finite eyes, and both sides concede to a hazy residue of *hard-to-explain* terrain clouding the known dimensions.

Saint Augustine of Hippo is appropriately grouped among compatibilists in that he considers the Creator as both sovereign over all creation and for being responsible for having created human beings endowed with free will. For procedural convenience I shall speak of this variation on the theme of compatibilism as *the classical theistic account* of the free will theory. A bit later in this opening section of the essay I will address ways in which St. Thomas Aquinas' treatment of the idea of free choice shares a close family resemblance with Augustine's belief system. An unequivocal characteristic of the approach taken by both of these philosopher-theologians is that it is distinctively *apologetic* in emphasis. They both desire to make a case for the absolute and perfect goodness of the Creator. They both come to grips with a sincerely held belief that cosmic causal design and human free will go hand in hand. It is irrelevant whether it is Billy's mom's contention that God is the final cause behind all of creation that appeals most to searchers after truth or whether the naturalist's worldview is the chosen paradigm—concrete evidence of the presence of natural, organic, and intelligent design is woven through all there is.

God, from the standpoint of Augustine's thinking, is the Un-caused original Cause of the created order. In this unparalleled position of Creator who fashioned all there is *ex nihilo* (that is, out-of-nothing), God has providential oversight of His creation. He has vested Himself with ultimate authority to exercise dominion and control over Nature. By His very nature the Deity is perfectly Good, and on account of His very goodness He fashioned human beings in such a manner that *they would have the capability* to act of their own volition. Of course, there is great mystery in this sort of creative design. That is to say, as finite creatures we will never be able to

fully comprehend the entire mysterious process of God’s intelligent design evident all around us. But by faith we can come to accept the truth that God as sole Creator is a good God. Having acknowledged God’s goodness, however, in no way diminishes His omnipotence for having created human beings who have been gifted with an inner faculty of *willing* to realize their own self-conscious desires, whether the object of desire is something good or something bad. Augustine reasons that God’s goodness is fully consistent with His creation of human agents empowered with free will—the fact that we as humans can choose to do evil or sin of our own initiative is a matter that is entirely compatible with the Creator’s benevolent Nature. To flesh out this argument for compatibility of free will with God’s goodness, I must next draw attention to two of Augustine’s doctrines for belief in free will: one deals with *the argument from the soul’s part* in the constitution of *the self as a person*, and the other has to do with *the theodicy argument* in vindication of God’s perfect goodness.

Let us take a closer look at the doctrine of the soul. Committed as Augustine was to his Christian faith, he accepted the truth of the proposition that human beings were created in God’s very own image. That is to say, we share to a certain degree the likeness of the Creator. We are His image-bearers to the extent that we are not biologically composed of just bodily decaying stuff. We also bear the likeness of His spiritual, immaterial substance in our finite species-being. Our bodily constitution is subject to degeneration and eventual decay, whereas our spiritual constitution is preserved by its possession of the imprints of the eternal. Our dual nature is a unique feature of our humanity, setting us notably apart from the rest of the created natural order. Now, it is to the spiritual part of our essential being that Augustine attributes the function of autonomous deliberation or of personal agency. To this special faculty of spiritual discernment that enables us to engage in acts of *self-willing* he gives the name, *soul*. In his “On Free Choice of the Will”⁵ he maintains:

This movement of the will is similar to the downward movement of a stone in that it belongs to the will just as that downward movement belongs to the stone. But the two movements are dissimilar in this respect: the stone has no power to

⁵ *Free Will: Hackett Readings in Philosophy*, Derek Pereboom, Ed. (Indianapolis/Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., 1997), pp. 19-33.

check its downward movement, but the soul is not moved to abandon higher things and love inferior things unless it will to do so. And so the movement of the stone is natural, but the movement of the soul is voluntary. If someone were to say that a stone is sinning because its weight carries it downward, I would not merely say that he was more senseless than the stone itself; I would consider him completely insane. But we accuse a soul of sin when we are convinced that it has abandoned higher things and chosen to enjoy inferior things.⁶

The human soul, for Augustine, is therefore the agency of purpose-driven movement—that is, of willed deliberation—in us. Human beings, from this vantage point, have been created with inner will power to think for themselves. They are enabled in the exercise of their personal initiative by the immaterial soul dwelling inside of them. To state the matter another way, our consciousness of *being-free-to-act* on our own arises from a sense of conscience, from the soul's still voice within speaking to us as an impartial invisible counselor.

What we call the soul may be thought of as the faculty of moral and spiritual consciousness, giving us the distinct standing of discerning *persons* empowered to decide our own directions in life. To be a person is to be the sort of divinely created living being equipped to think rationally. God, in His infinite wisdom, saw fit to design our constituted species-being with reasoning skills and cognitive powers so that we would not behave like pre-programmed robots. We are choosers of what we desire to do, unlike the inanimate stone that can only follow the strict laws of nature. A stone tossed into the air is bound to fall, not because it *wants* to fall but because it *must* fall given the operations of the law of gravity. Whereas the stone's downward path of movement is natural and inevitable, the soul's way of moving the self toward a particular mode of acting is voluntary. When a person decides, say, to knowingly and intentionally hurt another person's feelings, he or she does so deliberatively—perhaps out of spite, envy, anger, or some other possible state of mind at the time. By setting out to harm one's neighbor bodily, psychologically, or materially, the goal is to do whatever is required to bring about the unpleasant results. Standing in the position of inflictor of injury, the soul-moved agent is acting on his or her own as a willing and able wrongdoer. The decisive point

⁶ Augustine of Hippo, "On the Free Choice of the Will," *Free Will*, p. 28.

made in all of this is that the chief reason *why* we are agents of autonomous free choice is because we are owners of an immaterial soul, an inner faculty of election *designed* by the Creator to enable us to will to do good or evil of our own volition.

Of course, the benevolent Creator by His own perfectly good Nature desires that we would give heed to the soul's promptings to *desire higher things* (i.e., that we would always want to do that which is good) and not yield to temptations that would lead us to *favor inferior things* (i.e., that we should never want to do that which is bad). But we are left on our own to decide for ourselves either a good course of action or an evil course of action. If we were open to seeing things from the eternal perspective, we would be better positioned to appreciate how nobly we have been created. Certainly, it is far better for us that we were biologically and spiritually designed, by the very act of Divine creation, already innately equipped with the propensity to choose either good or evil, than to never having been born (or created) at all.

Let us now briefly direct attention to the second postulate set forth by Augustine: the theodicy justification for God's essential attribute of goodness. This justification relies upon a crucial distinction made between God's foreknowledge and His operative role in designing determined, structured patterns in the universe. A theodicy is a form of argument resorted to by theistic-minded theological classicists. Generally speaking, a theodicy is a defense of God's perceived unadulterated goodness. Put somewhat more succinctly, theodicies are meant to vindicate the Creator of having any direct and intentional involvement with moral wrongdoing. That is to say, God is not the proximate cause of anything anyone does, even though He made us with the inherent capacity to choose between good and evil. This Divine arrangement of man's relationship to the Creator establishes what might be called the viable nexus for reconciling providential determinism with exercise of independent free will. To this end, Augustine endeavors to elucidate the cogency of the theodicy defense, reasoning along these lines:

Simply because God foreknows your future happiness—and nothing can happen except as God foreknows it, since otherwise it would not be foreknowledge—it does not follow that you will be happy against your will. That would be completely absurd and far from the truth. So God's foreknowledge, which is certain even today of your future happiness, does not take away your will for

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happiness once you have begun to be happy; and in the same way, your blameworthy will (if indeed you are going to have such a will), does not cease to be a will simply because God foreknows that you are going to have it.⁷

Augustine's argument is fairly straightforward and quite compelling. He sees no inconsistency between the proposition that God already knows how a person will choose to act before the choice is actually made and the claim that the moral agent acts of his or her own free will *when* the action is actually undertaken. His reasoning is overall internally coherent, moving as it does from the recognition that the Supreme all-knowing Being can foresee everything that will happen in the future, and that it is logically self-contradictory to attribute even the possibility of error to the Divine intellect.

The heart of the matter is that God's foresight is not the same thing as Divine inevitability, strictly speaking, insofar as human decision-making is concerned. The human agent is held accountable for wrongdoing or commended for virtuous conduct precisely because he or she has the inner power of willing—and ordinarily uses such power as a matter of course—to act in self-determined ways as an autonomously deliberating self. Besides, God's Divine goodness is not spread about arbitrarily or capriciously. He longs for us to always choose what's good or right. But we could choose the good in God's intended way *only if* the antecedent conditions under which we make choices allow us to make the desirable election. It would be contrary to God's fair and benevolent Nature to impose upon our essential biological and spiritual make-ups expectations that are impossible to realize. Hence we are led by the force of logically necessary reasoning to believe in the truth that actions for which we can't be held accountable are not the products of self-initiated deliberation, but are due to constraining factors outside of our immediate control. Therefore, just because God knows in advance that a given individual will sin does not nullify His eternal goodness one iota. Understood from the perspective of eternity, God thought it fitting to empower each of us with the gift of freedom of choice. To reiterate: an existence where individuals are left free to sin (or to do wrong) is far superior to the non-existence of such individuals.

⁷ Augustine of Hippo, "On the Free Choice of the Will," *Free Will*, p. 32.

When we cast the spotlight on Aquinas' contribution to the free will debate the focus is placed more directly upon volition as a self-moved action performed for the sake of some desired end. In order to make the truth of this proposition evident, Aquinas starts off by taking it for granted that we do make personal choices. "Man has free choice," he declares, "or otherwise counsels, exhortations, commands, prohibitions, rewards, and punishments would be in vain."⁸ Just like Augustine illustrated in his day, Aquinas describes the manner of a falling stone's movement in contrast to the nature of decision-making of a human agent. The stone's downward movement occurs naturally, without any kind of judgment made by it as an inanimate object. To be a mere stone is to be an entity lacking knowledge. However, an essential attribute of being human is the ability to reason. Now, when a person acts based upon rational considerations, the action proceeds from judgment in contemplation of the achievement of an end. While brute animals as sentient beings can feel pleasurable and painful sensations and thereby fall higher up in the scale of creation than do non-sentient things, they can't cognitively measure up to human beings. Animals can make rudimentary "judgments," due to instinctual needs and reactive responses to stimuli. But in the case of the thinking self, it is only of that self-aware living organism that we can properly attribute free judgment. In Aquinas' words, "But man acts from judgment, because by his apprehensive power he judges that something should be avoided or sought."⁹ Having laid the needed foundation for accommodating free will with providential determinism, we are now better prepared to grasp how the idea of selfhood gets fleshed out into a compatibility account of agency will-power.

First, God-designed determinism is compatible with free choice from the very connotation Aquinas ascribes to the act of individual election. Of paramount importance here is the association made between the act of election in relation to making the concrete election *with some end in mind*. When the end sought to be realized is something proper to our God-given nature it is the sort of thing that ought to be chosen over something else not appropriately tied to our

⁸ Thomas Aquinas, "Summa Theologica," *Free Will*, p. 35.

⁹ Thomas Aquinas, "Summa Theologica," *Free Will*, pp. 35-36.

nature. Similarly, if the end sought is contrary to what God would approve of, we would have to conclude that we ought to refrain from giving in to our desire, however much we might feel drawn to the object of desire. In other words, any genuine choice of action is the product of rational deliberation in some respect. It would have been pointless for the Creator to have given us the ability to have desires that we could not of our own free will act upon.

Suppose I desire to befriend a famous magician because I am intrigued by his talents for trickery and disguise. How would I go about doing something about my newfound desire? It would be wishful thinking to imagine that a friendship relationship would come about of its own accord, perhaps by frequenting as many shows featuring the famous magician, hoping all the while that he will take notice of my presence in the audience. Chances are, that sort of wait-and-see tactic would get me nowhere toward realizing my envisioned end. There are things I must do to bring to fruition the desires I passionately harbor in my heart. I would have to fashion a plan to get to personally know the magician, and if I eventually succeed in forming a friendship bond I would most likely have to work diligently to try to gain his trust in order to increase the likelihood that he will share some of his magic secrets with me. By going about achieving my ultimate goal in the latter self-involved way I would not only have reflectively *willed* the eventual desired outcome, but I would have *elected* the means of achieving that end. This is the kind of reflective process that is characteristic of the voluntary deed in the Aquinian sense. The process of thinking involved in the foregoing hypothetical scenario is part of the intrinsic capability we are *designed to exhibit* in making reasoned choices—whether for good or for bad.

Second, Aquinas refines upon the thought that election is *ends-driven* by arguing that when we make a choice of an end that is proper to our nature such a choice becomes the means to realize our happiness. Once again, the Creator made us that way—not accidentally but by intelligent design. Aquinas talks about happiness as *the desirable end* to be sought after in this way, “Now of human acts some are proper to man’s proper good; those acts which are proper to man have a closer connection with happiness than have those which

are common to man and the other animals.”¹⁰ In sum, our inherent power of willing is a natural biological endowment, and is consequently proper for us to make use of for attainment of worthy ends. It is entirely up to each of us whether we will behave in ways that properly suit the purposes the Creator intended us to realize or to go the other way and choose courses of action that are ultimately not good for us. Possession of free will is to be regarded in this light as something uniquely human and is to be exercised with sound judgment and responsible foresight. This capacity to deliberate over options is an ennobling feature of personhood that sets us uniquely apart from the rest of the created order. When we carry out voluntary acts we are under our own personal jurisdiction, insofar as human decision-making goes. True, God who is supernaturally positioned to see the larger picture of the unfolding of human affairs is already knowledgeable how we will individually attain our desires. But just because He has such foreknowledge does not inevitably make Him the necessary cause of what we do on any given occasion. To equate Divine foreknowledge with inevitability of human choice is the equivalent of attributing to God willful wrongdoing, and we know that the Creator is not chargeable with immorality.

Assuming the plausibility of the Augustinian-Aquinian model of compatibilism, we can draw several other corollary conclusions. Voluntary acts are not the product of chance happenings resulting from random mechanical motions in our zones of activity. Voluntary acts are not reducible to just repeated, habitual modes of behavior in response to external stimuli. Voluntary acts are not, in some mysterious sense, pre-determined options planted inside our consciousness, all geared toward ensuring some sort of pre-established harmony craftily planned by a capricious Deity seeking to derive ultimate self-pleasure at the expense of the living, thinking creatures he created. Hence, we have all the justification needed for making the case that God is not a dictatorial Master over our lives. He does nothing to force or compel us to act one way or another.

10 Thomas Aquinas, “Summa Theologica,” *Free Will*, p. 42.

B. Contemporary Naturalistic Accounts

Some might be inclined to think that my deliberate shift of focus in this section from the classical theistic framework just examined to a consideration of the problem of freedom from a strictly naturalistic standpoint is aimed primarily at presenting both sides of the controversy and, along the way, pleasantly come up with a balanced treatment of the topic as objectively as possible. While I am certainly not necessarily averse to such a direction the inquiry could take, my undertaking aims at achieving an explanatory outcome that is far more modest in scope. What I sincerely hope will result is the recognition of an intellectual pathway of fresh insights that would serve to increase our knowledge of the complexities of intelligent design, all based on empirically derived information. In this respect, I am indeed fortunate to have come across separate scholarly writings authored by Daniel C. Dennett¹¹ and by Harry Frankfurt.¹² Both Dennett and Frankfurt predicate their own treatments of freedom upon non-theological underpinnings. For that reason I characterize their brand of a solution to the free will dispute, *contemporary naturalistic accounts*.

What I find quite appealing in Dennett's discussion in particular are echoes, so to speak, of design mechanisms inherent in the operations of natural phenomena and in our manifold ways of experiencing the workings of our inner consciousness. Dennett, of course, is not equating the “design” component with the “*intelligent design*” explanation reminiscent of theistic classicists such as either Augustine or Aquinas. What I wish to suggest, however, is that Dennett's appeal to the design phenomenon casts at least an *indirect* favorable light upon the creationist's idea of pre-arranged orderly structures in a purposively designed universe. Accordingly, a case can be plausibly made that Dennett's views, on this count at least, are as teleological-driven as those of theistic classicists, despite the fact that he predicates his worldview on non-theological premises. To get

11 Daniel C. Dennett, *Freedom Evolves* (Penguin Books, 2004); Daniel C. Dennett, *Elbow Room: The Varieties of Free Will Worth Having* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1984).

12 Harry Frankfurt, “Freedom of the Will and the Concept of a Person,” *Free Will: Hackett Readings in Philosophy*, Derek Pereboom, Ed, (Indianapolis/Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., pp. 167-183; See also, Harry Frankfurt, “Alternative Possibilities and Moral Responsibility,” *Free Will*, pp.156-166.

to the heart of the matter, free will, he argues is a real phenomenon that has evolved as a biological and behavioral capacity among members of the human species exclusively. With the aid of this highly profitable notion of adaptive design Dennett is able to show how the process of natural selection itself is responsible for equipping human beings, as designed organisms, with reflective abilities to not only adjust intelligently to external constraints, but to use the accumulated information of generations of peoples on Earth to both control some of Nature's workings and to bring about beneficial changes to their own life-circumstances—none of which would be possible if we lacked the ability to depend upon our own efforts to do so. Added to Dennett's Neo-Darwinian accommodation of ever-evolving design in the natural life-world, we will briefly touch upon Frankfurt's treatment of free will as a second order volition, realized when someone wants a certain desire to be his will and is self-moved to do whatever it effectively takes to satisfy the preferred desire.

To help get us off on our exploratory journey with the naturalistic account of compatibility, I introduce a passage from Dennett where he speaks about what it means to say that the idea of freedom can be best explained along the lines of an evolutionary, biological "design" paradigm. I am intrigued by this explanatory starting-point because, if warranted, the approach has a strong tendency in reason to also buttress the significance of what is referred to as "intelligent design" from a creationist standpoint. In a provocative, intellectually stimulating chapter in *Freedom Evolves*¹³ entitled, "Where Does All the Design Come From," Dennett writes:

What is remarkable about the Boston Symphony Orchestra (and the myriad other human institutions and practices) is that, on the one hand, they can be so beautifully designed and organized, so self-sustaining, while, on the other hand, they are composed of a motley assortment of *autonomous* individuals, of different nationalities, ages, genders, temperaments, aspirations. The orchestra members are free to come and go as they choose, so the board of directors must work hard to ensure that the working conditions and pay are sufficient to keep the orchestra members well motivated. Look at the violin section. Twenty talented individuals, but all different. Some are brilliant but lazy while others are obsessive perfectionists; one is bored but conscientious, another is enraptured by the music, yet another is daydreaming about making love to that

13 Dennett, *Freedom Evolves*, pp. 141-167.

adorable cellist over there, but all of them are drawing their bows across their strings in perfect unison, a pattern robustly superimposed on a kaleidoscope of different human consciousnesses. What makes this concerted action possible is a massive complex of cultural products, deeply shared by musicians, the audience, the composer, the conservatories, the banks, the municipal authorities, the violin-makers, the ticket agents, and so on. Nothing in the animal world is a close counterpart to this complexity. Human minds are furnished—and beset—by thousands of anticipations, evaluations, projects, schemes, hopes, fears, and memories that are entirely inaccessible to the minds of even our closest relatives, the great apes. This world of human ideals and artifacts gives individual human beings capacities and proclivities that are strikingly different from those of any other living beings on the planet.¹⁴

It should be noted here that Professor Dennett makes use of the Boston Symphony Orchestra metaphor as an illustrative means of drawing out the principal characteristics of autonomous, self-choosing human agents. Just like an orchestra of this magnitude is put together to accomplish a special entertainment function, human beings in general are biologically constituted in ways that enable them to appropriately carry out fit purposes that enhance their survival as a living species. That is, our biological make-up resembles a symphony orchestra to the extent that both kinds of functioning entities are comprised of different members, no one part (that is, group member) being identical to the other members in relevant respects. As the violinist is to the symphonic integrity of the whole musical body so the eye is to the viable workings of the overall organic design of the human organism. The orchestra is the product of a purposive complex arrangement of talented and creative musicians. What we call individual selves are also products of complex natural processes of *bodily* species-development, *mental* improvement, and *psychological* adaptability to constraints posed by the external environment. To talk of autonomous selves is to make reference to brain-directed human decision-makers who are self-consciously aware of what they are doing. The self that wills, in this respect, not only acts but acts with one or more ends in view. We are brain-shaped thinkers who have learned to act independently, to plan wisely, reason deliberatively, and so on. The advent of evolutionary changes over time has enabled us to better use our reasoning powers

14 Dennett, *Freedom Evolves*, pp. 142-143.

to improve upon our humanity and constructively alter surroundings that are harmful to our continued existence.

Our desire to behave as knowing, responsible agents is, so to speak, a naturally evolved capacity of selfhood. Reinforcing the uniqueness of organic design in the human species Dennett reasons, “We are the only species whose members can *imagine* the adaptive landscape of possibilities beyond the physical landscape, who can ‘see’ across the valleys to other conceivable peaks. The mere fact that we’re doing what we’re doing—trying to figure out whether our ethical aspirations have any sound anchoring in the world science is uncovering for us—shows how different we are from all other species.”¹⁵ What Dennett is stressing here is the fact that our belief in free will is a natural by-product of our awareness of our being-in-the-world, existentially speaking. While we cannot doubt the operations of determined causal patterns in our environment, we know that we have strongly felt feelings of being free to act on our own. This feeling-mediated experience doesn’t mysteriously come from nowhere—it is born of consciousness-stuff, the brainchild of our subjective life sphere. Without allowance for this sort of individual autonomy, life itself would not be worth living in any meaningful sense. Given this sort of phenomenological description of evolved human decision-making propensities, there is no compelling justification for dismissing the lived-experiences individuals have of their own states of conscious awareness that they, sometimes at least, act of their own initiative or freely. The fact that the natural cosmic context in which their acts of decision-making are performed has certain inherent determined structures—evidenced in the very patterns of evolutionary carry-over constancies and periodic revolutionary environmental changes—in no relevant sense deprives humans of real opportunities to act on their own in the absence of external restraints. Such a worldview leaves us with the best of all possible conclusions, allowing for a meaningful reconciliation of claims made about both free will and determinism—that is, the best explanation possible is that found in a compatibilistic account of agent-autonomy.

Dennett acknowledges the fact that it makes plausible sense to him to take for granted the truth of the belief in human free will. The

¹⁵ Dennett, *Freedom Evolves*, p. 267.

alternative point of view goes seriously against the grain of our common sense understanding of the nature of the human organism's relationship to a factual world around him. The fact of the matter is that we come to regard ourselves as *responsible* selves on our own. Our biological constitution as designed agents of choice is far advanced to that of the ordinary bird carrying out its flight maneuvers. The bird flies by instinct in its quest for food to nourish its newborn, a pattern of behavior that is quite rudimentary to this creature's composition. At a somewhat more complex level of behaving, some birds migrate from one territorial habitat to another, sometimes for thousands of miles away from their original nesting grounds, rhythmically in flight with the seasonal changes. Yet even with respect to this sort of seemingly mysterious felt-need to relocate for a period so as to ensure the preservation of their species, these migrating birds are not initiating their flights as the result of a well-figured out plan. They are simply biologically programmed to move back and forth instinctively. However, in the case of human beings, there is an internal control system—the brain—that serves as the centerpiece for equipping the species to carry out voluntary actions. In this latter respect, a voluntary action transcends an instinctive reaction. A voluntary act is a transforming act bearing the imprints of a complex pattern of evolutionary development. As humans have evolved, they have learned to not merely exist, but to affect their existence in a multiplicity of ways. Both their bodily frames and their inner consciousnesses have undergone evolutionary developments. Along the way, humans have learned to communicate with each other through language; they have developed cultures of their own; they have created social institutions to ensure mutual cooperation in their life-worlds, and so on. These are among the kinds of biological design-functions Dennett has in mind in stating:

What new environmental complexity favored the innovations in control structure that made this possible? In a word, communication. It is only once a creature begins to develop the activity of communication, and in particular the communication of its actions and plans, that it has to have some capacity for monitoring not just the results of its actions, but of its prior evaluations and formation of intentions as well.¹⁶

16 Dennett, *Freedom Evolves*, p. 248.

What William Dennett says here about the nature of communication through shared languages gets to the core of the meaning of freedom as an act of self-initiation. A person is self-moved to decide on one's own and to act upon one's desires precisely because he or she has the capacity to interact with other human beings in informed ways. It is only of humans that we can properly say that they can think for themselves, that they have knowledge of their life histories from a past, present, and potentially future perspective. To form intentions and to act upon those intentions knowingly, intelligently, and appreciatively, is to be the kind of living being that's human, and hence a rational chooser of ends.

If Dennett's design phenomenon indirectly complements the creationist's doctrine of intelligent design, and thereby corroborates in some measure what classical theists say about the nature of free will, then Harry Frankfurt's view of freedom tends to further validate the Augustinian-Aquinian account in at least one relevant respect. The factor of material relevance in this regard is Frankfurt's way of associating freedom of choice with wanting to have one's desires satisfied. I now take up this very imaginative and insightful argument in defense of free will as a real, rather than a fictional human ability.

The expository path chosen by Frankfurt to disclose the empirical fabric through which we construct our belief in the authenticity of free will is mapped out in a discourse on how we seek to actualize our desires. To this end he distinguishes between first-order and second order desires. Human beings share with mere animals first-order desires of wanting things, such as desiring to eat, wanting to care for their offspring, and the like. However, humans have the capacity for desires of a higher sort—that is, they have the rational ability to decide whether they ought to want to effectively realize what it is that is truly the object of their desire. This latter kind of wanting to have something or desiring to engage in a certain activity is what Frankfurt terms having second-order desires. We are able to act on second-order desires because of our cognitive ability to reason about, say, the appropriateness of a given want to our biological well-being, and from a long-range view to contemplate the alternative possibilities that acting upon our desires might produce. It is this marked divide between humans as reflective persons and their animal counterparts that forms the locus for actions we regard as freely chosen.

A second-order desire is therefore best understood as a want that is aimed at bringing about an end that is envisioned by the deliberating self—that is, a motive-driven want of an agent capable of conceiving possible outcomes. Under the most typical circumstances such an agent tends to make a self-conscious choice of either acting upon the desire with the hope of realizing some perceived good to his or her well-being or chooses to refrain from yielding to the desire, given the reasonably foreseeable harmful effect or effects carrying out the desire would have upon the agent's well-being. Frankfurt reflects upon the experience of having second-order desires as follows:

There is ... a kind of situation that may be described by ‘*A* wants to want to *X*’; and when the statement is used to describe a situation of this second kind, then it does pertain to what *A* wants his will to be. In such cases the statement means that *A* wants the desire to *X* to be the desire that moves him effectively to act. It is not merely that he wants the desire to *X* to be among the desires by which, to one degree or another, he is moved or inclined to act. He wants this desire to be effective—that is, to provide the motive in what he actually does. Now when the statement that *A* wants to want to *X* is used in this way, it does entail that *A* already has a desire to *X*. It could not be true both that *A* wants the desire to *X* to move him into action and that he does not want to *X*. It is only if he does want to *X* that he can coherently want the desire to not merely to be one of his desires but, more decisively, to be his will.¹⁷

It can't hurt our effort at understanding Frankfurt's reasoning carved out in this passage if we tried to instantiate the meaning of the logical expression ‘*A* wants to want to *X*’ in a real-world subject-predicate context. Let us take *A* to be a convenient symbolic stand-in for *Andy* and *X* to be a short-hand for something attributed to *Andy's desire*—namely, he wants to *pursue an acting career*. The mere logical statement would now read, ‘*Andy* wants to want to pursue an acting career.’ The fully fleshed-out ordinary language statement transforms a mere psychological want into an intentional acted-upon want of *Andy's* that the desire is actually realized through overt action. The “wanting to want the desire” realized is a second-order interest pursued by the deliberating self. This thinking self raises the stakes radically from merely having a sensation of a want to wanting to have the desire fulfilled. This is the proper meaning-domain for purpose-driven discourse on the nature of free will.

¹⁷ Frankfurt, “Freedom of the Will and the Concept of a Person,” *Free Will*, p. 172.

Frankfurt introduces a thought experiment featuring three different types of addicts in order to further elucidate what it means to have second-order desires that satisfy the criteria for freely willed deliberation and action. He closely examines the mind-states linked to persons afflicted with chronic use of narcotics. Such addicts under the influence of the mind altering effects of the drug differ in varying degrees in their abilities to exercise self-control over their craving. How strong a hold the narcotics abuse has over the individual will depend upon whether one fits the mold of the wanton addict, or the profile of the unwilling addict, or the prototype of the willing addict.¹⁸ With respect to the *wanton* addict, we are dealing with a drug victim whose entire identity is wrapped up in narcotics indulgence. This kind of individual behaves in ways that lead us to conclude that he really doesn't care about prioritizing his first-order desires of wanting to succumb to the drug or valiantly struggle not to succumb. He simply displays behavioral indicia that he doesn't prefer one course of action over the other. His addiction is, as it were, a very part of his psychological make-up. Perhaps the highs induced by the drug enhance his enjoyment of life in his own maddening way or perhaps he feels enslaved to wanting to identify his personhood with an addiction that leads him to stand out as a social non-conformist. Who knows! One thing is for certain, the wanton addict is—from all outward manifestation—a wretched individual risk-taker who doesn't care to assess the gravity of any potential harms done to his well-being. He simply lives his addiction.

When we consider the *unwilling* addict's circumstance on the other hand, a striking feature of will power emerges. This sort of narcotics user does anguish over what to do with his first-order desires. Upon reflection of possible courses of action he could take, he will either yield to the temptation to bring to fruition his desire to indulge in the narcotics usage or walk away victorious, having overcome the desire to want to partake of the addictive drug. The unwilling addict is at a perpetual war with his conflicting first-order desires: wanting to take the drug and desiring not to take it. When this second addict makes a choice of action, regardless which direction he takes, he is acting on a second-order desire that is a

¹⁸ Frankfurt, "Freedom of the Will and the Concept of a Person," *Free Will*, pp. 173-176.

manifestation of something he truly wants to become his considered free will. So, what about the case of the *willing* addict? A willing addict of narcotics abuse is a person who is fully cognizant of the inherent harm-producing effects of the mind-altering substance. But because the drug has come to have such an overpowering hold over his mode-of-being, he finds himself in a position of psychological weakness. He recognizes that narcotics addiction is not good for his mental and physiological health, and yet his desire to want to stop using the drug routinely loses out to the stronger desire to go on using it.

The crucial difference between the wanton addict and the willing addict therefore is that the latter knows what choice would be ultimately better for his overall happiness, but is virtuously powerless to follow that desirable inclination. By contrast the wanton addict has waived any interest at looking out for his own health-conducive happiness. But what about the possible presence of external factors that could have had one kind of impact or another upon the addict's self-initiated choice of action? On this issue of causal determinism Frankfurt remains admittedly neutral.¹⁹ Whether or not one is confronted with causal forces outside of one's capacity for independent deliberation ultimately makes no relevant difference on a choice of action that is the fulfillment of a desire to want to do what has been done. So, even if there is universal determinism, such outside causal operations are not incompatible with information-based, knowledgeable exercise of personal free will.

As we can see then, freedom-conferring desires are, for Frankfurt, wants attributable only to persons. Such desires provide us with legitimate grounds for imputing human agents with moral and legal responsibility. I bring to a close this section by reflecting briefly on the meaning of a voluntary act—that is, an act brought about by a desire to want that act to be self-willed. Imagine that *S* is accused of having done *C*—i.e., of having allegedly stabbed his wife to death with multiple knife wounds while she was asleep. To their neighbors, close family members and friends they appeared to be a very happy couple. Let's assume that *S* is either one of the following subjects of accusation: *S₁* suffers from a habitual sleep-walking disorder, *S₂* has

¹⁹ Frankfurt, "Freedom of the Will and the Concept of a Person," *Free Will*, p. 182.

been officially diagnosed with having a psychotic multiple personality disorder, and S_3 is of sound mental disposition. For starters, if it can be demonstrably proven beyond a reasonable doubt that S_1 , the known sleep-walker, killed his sleeping wife while he himself was sleep-walking, a strong case can be made that he could not have helped doing what he did since he had no immediate, conscious control over his sleep-walking episode. True, during his unconscious sleep-walking mental state, he carried out an act of homicide, but this deed was done unknowingly. How can we rightfully blame a man who has no idea that he was doing something wrong while he was unaware of the actual circumstances of the occurrence? It is reasonable to hold that what the habitual sleepwalker did wasn't the fruition of carrying out a desire to want to kill his wife.

If the sleepwalker's act is, legally at least, blameless, then the same sort of act carried out by S_2 , the victim of multiple personality abnormality, likewise poses a hard case for imputing blameworthiness. Suppose this individual lives with at least three *known* different personality displays, any one of which can suddenly and unexpectedly take over his decision-making abilities. Sometimes he gets intensely angry wanting to kill himself and other people he dislikes; at other times he is happy-go-lucky, going out of his way to be considerate of other people's sensitivities and showing kindness to others, and there also occasions when he behaves like an adolescent teenager without a care in the world. The salient issue now facing a fact-finding jury-panel is to determine *which* one personality-type proximately caused the killing of the sleeping wife? Was the wrongful deed effectuated by his anger-driven constituted self? Was it done by his benevolently disposed self? Or was the individual living the moment in his childlike state? A seated jury would in all likelihood be hard-pressed to know beyond a reasonable doubt on which expression of personality to impute possible blameworthiness.

Of the three hypothetical scenarios the easiest legal determination of blame-placement pertains to the case of S_3 , the accused alleged to have killed his wife knowingly and intentionally. That is to say, the latter is deemed to have acted from a state of mind that amounts to malice. He desired to kill his wife while she was asleep, and consummated his desire by wanting that desire to be a fulfillment of a

deliberately thought-out course of conduct. If the weight of the evidence is so compelling that a fair-minded unbiased jury would regard as true beyond a reasonable doubt, then a finding of guilt is justifiable. It would defy reasonable expectations of fairness and justice to give S_3 the benefit of the doubt and thereby allow him to walk away a free man, exonerated of all criminal charges. S_3 ought to be deemed to have acted of his own free will.

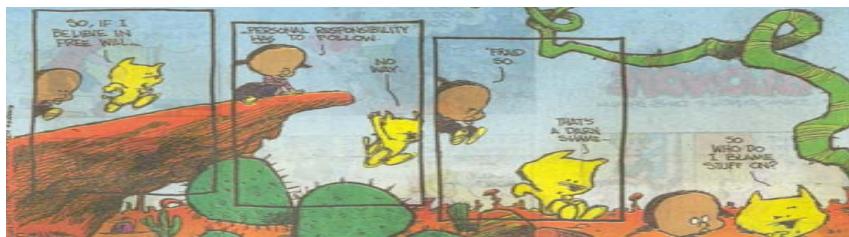
The line of reasoning pursued by Frankfurt bears some affinity with the Aquinian notion that freedom of choice is a self-willed form of deliberation that is aimed at achieving the intended *desirable* good of a rational-minded, moral agent. It will always be up to the individual agent whether he or she chooses a course of action that fittingly suits what he was intended to be as a God-created person or that the resulting choice is bad or contrary to the desire for realizing God-approved happiness (Aquinas). In like fashion, it is always up to the individual person whether he or she will make reasoned choices between first-order desires, such that we have compelling grounds for saying that the agent's desire to act was a desire coupled with a self-conscious want to make the desire the instantiation of his own free will (Frankfurt). We can now aptly transition into the third and final section of the essay.

C. Christian Transcendist Accounts

Up to this point I have tried to argue that the compatibility theory for freedom of choice finds attractive support in both religious and naturalistic camps. The sort of conceptual and experiential evidence touched upon in the conduct of our inquiry leads me to believe that there must be something of special significance to all this interest in discourse about lived-experiences of engaging in acts of personal autonomy. I believe it is possible to flesh out a meaning-construct for free will discourse on Christian faith-grounds as well—an explanatory modality that not only complements the two paradigms explored, but serves as a more expansive pathway toward illuminating much deeper dimensions of the subjective phenomenon of self-willing. This more expanded inquiry effort finds critical expressions in compatibilist discussions engaged in by Søren Kierkegaard and Alvin Plantinga. Their respective versions of the resolution of the dispute can be usefully called *Christian transcendist accounts*. The special concerns about the nature of freedom tackled in my discussion of the

Augustinian-Aquinian classical religious model helped set the stage for rounding out the meaning of free choice from a Christian perspectival standpoint. Of course, it would be presumptuous of me to downplay the constructive complementary support uncovered in non-theological explanatory paradigms (i.e., Dennett's and Frankfurt's contributions to the dispute) conducive to an overall substantive treatment of the biblical version of compatibilism.

In one of Scott Stantis' humorous cartoon strips, Winslow and Carmen are the two featured characters shown engaged in a heated dispute about belief in free will.²⁰ Winslow opens the dialogue with a hypothetical premise that goes, “So, if I believe in free will...” to



which Carmen gratuitously supplies the conclusion, “personal responsibility *has* to follow.” Instantly objecting to Carmen’s bold logical inference, Winslow blurts out, “No way.” Not interested in conceding defeat, Carmen sticks to her conviction, muttering, “Fraid so”—whereupon Winslow reluctantly defers to Carmen’s position. Having lost the hair-splitting debate, the coyote pup regretfully laments, “That’s a darn shame... So who do I blame stuff on?” Yes, even in cartoonist’s Stantis’ fictional small dessert town in the American Southwest, comic strip youthful friends, Winslow and Carmen, find time to ponder the freedom of choice problem. Like the rest of us typical everyday folk living in mainstream real-life habitats, the controversial topic of self-determined choices has “pricked,” so to speak, the curiosity of the two cartoon characters. There’s somewhat of an uncanny aura of settled sincerity evident in Carmen’s common sense perspective: that is, at the end of the day she might not be *correct* with her answer, but she comes across as insinuating that she is always *right*—philosophically speaking, that is!

²⁰ Scott Stantis, *Prickly City*, 08-01-2004, Universal Press Syndicate. Like cartoonist Bill Keane, cartoon artist Scott Santis frequently selects religious-philosophical subject-matter for raising controversial issues.

I've inserted this simple graphic vignette at this point of the discussion as a way of suggesting that free will discourse, characteristically, refers denotatively to an intuitive kind of down-to-earth lived-quality that is virtually impossible to resist. This thought-provoking admission of concrete, referential meaning comes in as a handy aid to unravel the logic of Christian-based compatibilist free will thought. A representative form of Christian perspectival discourse, rich with allusions to the paradoxical and mysterious trademarks of the free will phenomenon, is put forward by Kierkegaard. From a Kierkegaardian standpoint, to say that a person acts on his own initiative is equivalent to saying that the individual is *absolutely* and *unconditionally* the sole author of the action. In this position of solitary decider one carries upon his shoulders, as it were, the weight of an anguished existential predicament. Alone he stands before his Maker to whom ultimate devotion is rendered as a sincere act of humble worship. He must make up his own mind whether he will choose to live a way of life that pleases the Redeemer of his immortal soul or go the other way and willfully set his heart on taking the path of eternal perdition.

First, Kierkegaard's faith-based approach makes the idea of freedom a subjective heart-moved property of *desiring* or *wanting* to first and foremost honor the eternal lordship of Christ. In this vein he reflects:

What a curious, yet profound turn of phrase which makes it possible to say: in this case there is no question of a *choice*—I choose this and this. To continue: Christianity says to a man: you shall choose the one essential thing but in such a way that there is no question of choice—if you drivel on any longer then you do not in fact choose the one essential thing; like the Kingdom of God it must be chosen *first*.²¹

Now, there you have it: Kierkegaard has opened our eyes, so to speak, to the paradoxical meeting up with the “elephant in the room” of free will discourse. The so-called elephant in the room (i.e., seemingly out-of-place stuff) is the hard-to-figure-out elusive nature of this sort of meaning-conferring language. Talk about freedom of choice is fueled by a passionate desire of the heart to want to know

²¹ *A Kierkegaard Anthology*, Robert Bretall, Ed. (New York: The Modern Library, 1938), p. 427. The specific reading selection here is cited from Kierkegaard's *Journals (1850-1854)*.

how to truly possess it. Christianly speaking, there is no question that we can make up our own minds about what we believe we ought to do. But all choices are not equally appropriate choices. We have been fashioned by God in such a manner that we can choose for ourselves whether we shall go after those things pertaining to the Kingdom of God first, or whether we shall wantonly will to deny the very Giver of this free choice. Kierkegaard suggests that there is a sense of spiritual urgency involved in making up our own minds to serve God and thereby truly free ourselves from the oppression of ignorance of eternal matters. To live in a state of spiritual darkness is to live condemned to our turbulent emotions, lost and abandoned from the One and only Source of the grounds of the possibility of being genuinely free to start with.

Second, he acknowledges the sense in which our possession of personal will power is a noble endowment to be exercised with “fear and trembling,” particularly in light of our human vulnerability and finiteness in the face of God’s unconditional and absolute holiness. To live in total ignorance of the eternal perspective is to be blind to spiritual truths. Genuine freedom is, accordingly, realized in the form of a consciousness-based soul activity. The paradox of choosing is that one can, at the very same moment of the anguished choice, be left with a feeling of being both free and un-free. How can this state of consciousness be accepted as *anything* at all? Its realness is known most intimately in the very moment I am willing to take the ultimate risk, through a sincere leap of faith, that I ought to desire to do the Will of the Creator and would want that spiritual desire to be the attainment of my voluntary choice. The seriousness of the weight of this choice bearing down upon our consciousness of having to decide motivates us to want to choose matters of other-worldly concern in solitary fear and trembling. To this effect, Kierkegaard contemplates, “However astonishing it may seem, one is therefore obliged to say that only ‘fear and trembling,’ only constraint, can help a man to freedom. Because ‘fear and trembling’ and compulsion can master him in such a way that there is no longer any question of choice—and then one chooses the right thing. At the hour of death most people choose the right thing.”²²

²² A Kierkegaardian Anthology, p. 427.

How strange and yet how essential it is to the realization of one's total happiness that the agent must choose by faith to give oneself entirely over to the Absolute. It is in this very experience of complete surrender to the Creator's providential interest in our eternal well-being that one comes to know what genuine freedom means. In other words, freedom ceases to be a problem for me precisely at the crossroads of truth and ignorance when I accept the *given-ness* of sovereign and providential necessity. Therein rests the essence of the meaning of compatibility of free will and determinism from a transcendist perspective. The Creator, in His infinite wisdom and on account of His incomprehensible apartness from us, made us (designed us) in this mysterious fashion—that is, to either want to desire His lordship over our lives or to self-consciously want to willingly and knowingly walk away eternally from this holy presence.

I would be among those first in line to register my sentiments that the Kierkegaardian thought categories, though deeply inspiring and suggestively illuminating, can be real difficult to satisfactorily unravel to the practical-minded inquirer. Another markedly lucid and cogently argued transcendist point of view on the free will problem is met up with in Alvin Plantinga's way of thinking. I draw the reader's attention to a pair of his considered or intellectually informed matters of contention. The points to be touched upon here are: (1) the existential consciousness of being significantly free to do what is right *freely*—the free will defense, and (2) the hypothesis that God did not create a world that is merely the best of all possible worlds He could have created—He is in the business of actualizing instead of creating possible states of freely willed affairs.

What does it mean to say that a genuine voluntary personal act consists in being significantly free to do the right thing freely? Plantinga describes the state of mind of an agent who chooses to do the right thing freely in this way:

A world containing creatures who are significantly free (and freely perform more good than evil actions) is more valuable, all else being equal, than a world containing no free creatures at all. Now God can create free creatures, but He can't *cause* or *determine* them to do only what is right. For if He does so, then they aren't significantly free after all; they do not do what is right *freely*. To create creatures capable of *moral* good, therefore, He must create creatures capable of moral evil; and He can't give these creatures the freedom to perform evil and at the same time prevent them from doing so. As it turned out, sadly

enough, some of these creatures God created went wrong in the exercise of their freedom; this is the source of moral evil. The fact that free creatures sometimes go wrong, however, counts neither against God's omnipotence nor against His goodness; for He could have forestalled the occurrence of moral evil only by removing the possibility of moral good.²³

The quoted passage consists of a chain of logical reasoning aimed at demonstrating the coherency of the transcendist's faith-based knowledge of the Creator's intelligently *designed* universe. It is an argument from design that furthermore gives an account of a coherent relationship between an orderly arrangement of all spatio-temporal structural components of the material world and the constitution of organic human life fashioned in the likeness of the Maker. If God desired to make man in his own image (and He in fact created us with that perfectly pure desire in mind) it would have to be the case that His design of our biological and mental make-ups would be of a kind that we could in fact be able to enjoy an expansive scope of personal independence. Intrinsic to His plan for making us in the first place, there needed to be inclusion of functional conditions for actualizing that independence, otherwise we'd live our lives as mere robots pre-programmed to do what is right and pleasing in the Maker's eyes. We would have no choice in the matter of devotion to God, period. However, the Creator saw fit to equip us with a unique power for carrying out autonomous, rational deliberations, a capacity for self-determination unmatched by any other created thing in the cosmos. Such an endowment with autonomous will power could not be something weak or impossible to actualize. He must have given the crowning species of creation—that is, mankind—*significant* powers to deliberate as free moral agents. The Creator therefore went all the way and designed us the way we are: individuals with a human nature innately equipped to make meaningful choices—not only for the doing of what is right in God's eyes, but fashioned with minds capable of having us decide to choose wrongful acts. It is entirely up to each of us to choose whether we shall follow in Yahweh's ways or pursue ungodly life-paths.

Assuming the cogency of Plantinga's transcendist view of our possession of freedom in the significant sense, then it makes good

²³ Alvin Plantinga, *God, Freedom, and Evil* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1974), p. 30.

sense to endorse the proposition that God never causes or determines anything anyone actually chooses to do. If this proposition were untrue, then God failed in His supernatural handiwork of presumably having made us as *born-free* selves. And since we know that God never errs in His judgment, it must be that we were designed with inherent capacity for freedom of choice.

Plantinga's formulation of the doctrine of free will is an argument founded upon the faith-claim that this world is *the one logically necessary world designed by God* wherein human beings would in fact be free to knowingly make their own personal choices. It is not an argument that this is the best of all possible worlds God could have created. If it were the case that this cosmic order, including the life-world, were simply "the best one" the Creator could have brought into being then there is no escaping the inference that God's divine intellect and powers are seriously limited. Such a conclusion would be contradictory of the biblical Christian account of how God made the world and all that is contained therein. Here is how Plantinga explains the biblical truth of the Creator's way of actualizing His divine plan of creation—a created order that would accommodate not the mere potential for individual free choice, but the actuality of *significant* exercise of freedom of choice :

Could God have created just any world He chose? Before addressing the question, however, we must note that God does not, strictly speaking, *create* any possible worlds or states of affairs at all. What He creates are the heavens and the earth and all they contain. But He has not created states of affairs. There are, for example, the state of affairs consisting in God's existence and the state of affairs consisting in His nonexistence. That is, there is such a thing as the state of affairs consisting in the existence of God, and there is also such a thing as the state of affairs consisting in the nonexistence of God, just as there are the two propositions *God exists* and *God does not exist*. The theist believes that the first state of affairs is actual and the first proposition true; the atheist believes that the second state of affairs is actual and the second proposition is true. But of course, both propositions *exist*, even though just one is true. Similarly, there are two states of affairs here, just one of which is actual. So both states of affairs *exist*, but only one obtains. And God has not created either one of them since there never was a time at which either did not exist. . . .God did not bring into existence any states of affairs at all. What He did was to perform actions of a certain sort—creating the heavens and the earth, for example—which resulted in the *actuality* of certain states of affairs. God *actualizes* states of affairs.

He actualizes the possible world that does in fact obtain. He does not create it. And while He has created Socrates, He did not create the state of affairs consisting in Socrates' existence.²⁴

The gravamen of the transcendist's creation-based reasoning is the assertion that there is a significantly relevant difference between God's role in setting in place the conditions for the possibility of actualizing certain states of affairs and the accompanying role of God's benevolent oversight of happenings in a world of actualized states of affairs He hasn't created. On this important distinction rests the *sine qua non* of the Christian perspectival formulation of the case favoring a compatible relationship between intelligently designed free will and a created cosmic world-order containing causal patterns of providential magnitude. Accordingly, I wrap up my discussion of this final section of a Christian perspectival account of free will discourse with some provisional interpretative thoughts pertinent to the foregoing distinction Plantinga makes.

A state of affair is an event or happening in the Life-world. There are states of affairs of a variety of types. For example, I'm in the habit of going to bed at a specified time at night and waking up routinely at a certain time in the ensuing morning. How much personal control do I have over falling asleep? Well, by and large the answer depends to a certain extent on the degree to which my bodily constitution and neural-brain functions have built up a sort of "biological clock" within my consciousness of being-alive. My choices of times of going to sleep are normally within my decision-making control; however, my waking up moments are somewhat beyond my control depending upon how "deeply" in sleep I am on a given night-morning sleep cycle. God's place in my lived, existential moments serves as the catalyst for allowing the actualization of my sleeping patterns. But He is not the One causally creating or determining when I go to bed, when I fall asleep, how long my sleeping episode lasts, and when precisely I wake up. He knows ahead of time exactly how this episode I personally set in motion will work itself out as an actual state of affairs. Take another actualized state of affairs. Linus has been on his best behavior, longing to find the woman he would want to marry someday. This matrimonial quest

²⁴ Plantinga, *God, Freedom, and Evil*, pp. 38-39.

makes it incumbent upon Linus to establish personal boundaries to enable him to narrow his search to achievable proportions, cognizant of the kind of woman possessing desired character traits he would want to be exhibited in his future bride's behavioral styles, and so on. Linus wants to realize the desired state of affair; when the time is ripe and he meets his prospective significant other in his life-history, God stands ready to actualize the event once Linus chooses to go forward with his desire to forsake all others and be lawfully united to the woman of his dreams. God at no time either independently, or arbitrarily, or dictatorially *created* either the union itself or the attending circumstances proximately following from Linus' self-initiated course of action.

Conclusion

What this way of thinking about freedom all boils down to is that to have the kind of free will God envisioned for his human subjects, it was incumbent upon the Creator to *create just that sort of world* in which free exercise of personal will power could lead to the coming into being of desired states of affairs for which the deciding agent is personally responsible. God makes His divine presence known to actualize the agent's desires; however, He doesn't hang around to make Himself the original Supreme causal agent in those matters—that is, He is now not in the position of the Creator. We are the self-determined authors of any and all preferred desires we have willingly and knowingly acted on.

The upshot of the reflections tackled in this paper is to share with the reader a family of ways of thinking about the nature of free will, deliberated along compatibilist lines. Throughout I saw my expository task as one of framing a perspective on the matter that would not turn out to be a claimed, tightly knit presentation of uncontested truths. What the paper has tried to achieve is to posit in suggestive fashion some rationally plausible ways of going about the business of making sense out of free will discourse. I have not herein argued for the absolute indubitability of Christian perspectival compatibilism. I have merely put forward what I have come to regard as a set of sufficiently logically coherent reasoning-frameworks that are strong enough to capture the favorable attention of diligent searchers after eternal and transcendent truths.

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