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## Book Review: The Most Real Being: A Biblical And Philosophical Defense Of Divine Determinism

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One reason Turner is eager to insist on the possibility of rational demonstration is that he wants the debate between theists and atheists to be “capable of being conducted on shared rational grounds” (p. xii). But to hold that God can be seen in nature, if one is in the proper moral and spiritual condition, is not at all to deny a role for rational argument. Just as one often has to argue with a friend in order to get him to see something that really ought to be obvious, rational argument may be of great help in achieving the right state of perceptive awareness regarding nature. (See on this point Del Ratzsch, “Perceiving Design” in *God and Design*, ed. Neil Manson [Routledge, 2003], pp. 124–44.) The church fathers certainly were not shy in using argument to refute materialist or polytheistic understandings of nature. However, they typically understood their own argument, not as a demonstration that God exists, but as a way of explicating nature so as to make apparent to our sinful and fallen eyes something that in its own nature is perfectly evident. Thus St. Athanasius remarks: “as they tell of Phidias the sculptor that his works of art by their symmetry and by the proportion of their parts betray Phidias to those who see them although he is not there, so by the order of the universe one ought to perceive God its maker and artificer, even though He be not seen with the bodily eyes” (*Contra Gentes*, chap. 35). *One ought to perceive*. Certainly there is an important role for rational argument here, but it is ultimately no more than that of opening the eyes to something that is plainly there.

In sum, it seems to me that Turner’s devotion to Aquinas leads him to misconstrue both the nature of apophaticism and the proper goals and character of natural theology. Nonetheless, the book offers a useful critique of Scotistic univocity and of many pernicious and irrationalist trends in contemporary theology. Anyone who seeks to achieve an authentically Christian approach to philosophy will find in it much food for thought.

*The Most Real Being: A Biblical and Philosophical Defense of Divine Determinism*, by J. A. Crabtree. Eugene, Oregon: Gutenberg College Press, 2004. Pp xvii & 384. \$33.00.

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This book is a defense of divine determinism: the doctrine that God causes every event to transpire exactly as it does. Chapters one through four are intended to introduce and motivate the book’s topics to a non-philosophical audience. Chapter five is an argument for divine determinism from scripture. The philosophically interesting material starts with chapter six. In chapters six and seven, Crabtree argues that divine determinism is implied by creation *ex nihilo* and that it is implied by divine foreknowledge. In chapter eight, he gives a separate philosophical argument for divine determinism. In chapters nine, ten and eleven, he defends divine determinism against the charge that it is inconsistent with human free will, that it is inconsistent with divine goodness given the existence and extent of evil, and that it undercuts our motivation to be good.

In chapter six, Crabtree begins his case by arguing that creation *ex nihilo* can only be understood plausibly in two ways. First, God could be understood as a cosmic inventor. According to this model, God has created all kinds of different creatures who all operate in exactly the way he has programmed them to act (p. 112). Accordingly, there are four possible origins of our actions: (a) God controls the actions of his creatures directly through remote control, (b) God controls the actions of his creatures through pre-programming, (c) God controls the actions of his creatures indirectly, mediated through other created causes he designed, or (d) a combination or all of the above. Crabtree argues that no matter which option (a–d) one chooses, the divine determination of all cosmic events is the necessary result (pp. 134–35).

Second, God could be understood as a cosmic author. Under this model, “God’s relationship to the cosmos that we live in is analogous to an author’s relationship to a novel he is writing. The unfolding of events of each day, in all their details, is the ongoing creation of the story of the cosmos in God’s creative imagination. Reality is not like a novel already written, sitting on the shelf. It is a novel being written. Each day is the production of the next scene in God’s creative imagination, created perfectly in accordance with the unchangeable purpose and the fixed and detailed plot that God has already determined in his mind” (p. 111). Crabtree argues that this model of creation entails divine determinism by definition. So Crabtree concludes that no matter how one explains creation *ex nihilo*—whether through the cosmic inventor model or through the cosmic author model—divine determinism follows (p. 141).

In chapter seven, Crabtree argues that exhaustive divine foreknowledge also entails divine determinism. He claims that there are only two plausible ways of understanding exhaustive divine foreknowledge: the divine disclosure model and the divine clairvoyance model. On the divine clairvoyance model, uncaused or random events can be predicted by God’s seeing them before they happen as if they’d already happened. Since it takes no position on what causes the event, the model is consistent with the denial of divine determinism. Crabtree attacks this position by arguing that knowledge of a future event entails that that event is “fixed” as true (p. 156). The divine clairvoyance model—at least of the sort that is inconsistent with divine determinism—denies that the future is fixed in any way. So if foreknowledge is possible, the only alternative view, the divine disclosure model, must be the case (pp. 156–57). According to the divine disclosure model, God predicts events that he will later cause to transpire. He knows that they will occur because he knows he will cause them to occur that way. In this sense, future events are fixed in the right way for foreknowledge to be possible (pp. 147, 157–58). Since the divine disclosure model entails divine determinism and is the only plausible model of exhaustive divine foreknowledge, divine foreknowledge entails divine determinism (p. 169).

In chapter nine, Crabtree argues that divine determinism is consistent with human free will. He first develops an account of human freedom according to which a free act is free just in case (a) the act was not the result of coercion by means of an overpowering external force; and (b) the act was not the result of inviolable laws of nature (construed in the broadest

possible sense) operative within the actor herself (p. 214). Second, he distinguishes between an ordinary cause and a transcendent cause. An ordinary cause is a cause that is a part of created reality. A transcendent cause is any cause that exists outside of some specific created reality such that it is not itself a part of that created reality (pp. 226–27). He argues that since God is a transcendent but not an ordinary cause of human action, human freewill (per his definition) is not violated by divine determinism (p. 231).

In chapter ten, Crabtree argues that divine determinism is consistent with God's goodness given the existence of particular evils and the extent of evil. He treats the existence of particular evils separately from the extent of evil. Concerning the existence of particular evils: Since God is not the ordinary cause but the transcendent cause of evil events, he is not morally culpable for them (p. 251). Here, as in other parts of the book, Crabtree appeals to our intuitions concerning the relationship a human author has to the events of his story. Suppose that an author has the characters in his story do evil things or has someone die because of a natural disaster. Crabtree thinks that we do not hold the author blameworthy for such events. Likewise, we should not hold God blameworthy. That one is a transcendent cause is not sufficient for blame. Since God is the transcendent but not ordinary cause of evil, God is not responsible for particular evils (p. 252). Now, concerning the extent of evil: We can judge a human author blameworthy if, say, the novel is just trash. But we don't know if God's story is of that sort—at least not yet. At present, we do not know how the complete story unveils. We don't know God's motives behind the story, the purposes it accomplishes, and the final effect it has. Crabtree suggests that the extent of evil can be vindicated in the final analysis, if the story unfolds in the right way. At least this possibility is open. Thus, given our present knowledge, we cannot pass judgment on God because of the extent of evil (p. 253).

In chapter eleven, Crabtree argues that divine determinism does not undercut our motivation to be good. The objection he has in mind is that if God causes events to transpire in a certain way, then we have no motivation to be good, since if God wills us to be good, we will be good. Crabtree responds to this objection by arguing that our motive to be good is necessary for a good act to occur (p. 277). Again, every event in the story needs an ordinary cause. Our good actions are caused by our own volition and motives. By contrast, God is the transcendent cause. He ensures that our acts follow according to his plan. But he doesn't force us by ordinary causes to do good things. Thus we shouldn't think that God forces us to do good if he wills it. We should, though, think our motivation to do good plays a necessary role in our doing good actions. So our motivation to do good is not undercut by divine determinism (p. 275).

In my judgment, Crabtree is mistaken in thinking that the doctrine of creation *ex nihilo* and the doctrine of exhaustive foreknowledge each entails divine determinism. Someone could hold just to one doctrine while denying the other and escape the conclusion that divine determinism must be the case. For example, one could take the position that God creates everything out of nothing, wants people to be good, but can't control the actions of anyone. The future is not fixed, and thus every action has alternate possibilities. This is similar to the theology of *Bruce Almighty*.

Such a position embraces creation *ex nihilo*, but doesn't require divine determinism. Instead, it denies divine determinism because it denies that God causes every event to happen just the way it does. In fact, God can't cause events caused by human action and can't even in principle know what they will be. Just the possibility of this position undercuts Crabtree's thesis that creation *ex nihilo* by itself entails divine determinism.

Furthermore, suppose that someone holds to exhaustive divine foreknowledge but denies creation *ex nihilo*. For example, suppose someone holds that God did not create anything and has no causal power over the world, but can see into the future because he has complete knowledge of the present along with knowledge of all of the natural and physical laws. On this picture, the future is fixed; but it is fixed in the way that determinists hold it to be fixed. Accordingly, God's knowing something will be the case does not entail that He causes that thing to be the case. So exhaustive foreknowledge is not sufficient to entail divine determinism.

How well does Crabtree fare with the objections he considers? Concerning the free will objection (chapter nine), his move is plausible and promising. He develops an incompatibilist theory of free will that requires agent causation for freedom and that does not require the principle of alternate possibilities (PAP). God is a super-cause of every event but humans cause their own actions. Alternate possibilities of action are taken out by foreknowledge, but freedom does not require PAP. This move resembles what Zagzebski calls the Augustinian-Frankfurtian solution to the freedom and foreknowledge dilemma, and supplies ample resistance to Lynne Baker's plea that Christians reject libertarianism on the basis of creation *ex nihilo* and foreknowledge.<sup>1</sup>

How he handles the problem of particular evils is promising, but still invites a problem. According to Crabtree, God escapes blame for particular evils because He is not the ordinary cause of bad events. Still, God "writes himself into the story as Yahweh-the-Judge (YTJ) to get credit for good events" (p. 253). So God can be the ordinary cause of some events. But if He can be the ordinary cause of good events, He can be the ordinary cause of bad events. YTJ's hardening Pharaoh's heart is an example of His being the ordinary cause of a bad event. YTJ hardened Pharaoh's heart and then punished Egypt because Pharaoh would not let the Israelites go. On Crabtree's definition of free will, Pharaoh did not perform a free act, since YTJ acted as an overpowering external force. So it looks like Crabtree is committed to saying YTJ gets credit for this bad event. And worse, God intentionally wrote Himself into the story to get credit for this bad event.

This book was written for lay evangelicals, seminarians, and pastors. However, it should be interesting for professional philosophers and graduate students working on the problem of evil, divine foreknowledge/freedom, and philosophical theology.

#### NOTES

1. See Linda Zagzebski, *The Dilemma of Freedom and Foreknowledge* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991); and Lynne Rudder Baker, "Why Christians Should Not Be Libertarians: An Augustinian Challenge," *Faith and Philosophy* 20 no.4: 460–68.