

10-1-2017

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### Recommended Citation

Churchill, John (2017) "Determinism And Divine Blame," *Faith and Philosophy: Journal of the Society of Christian Philosophers*: Vol. 34 : Iss. 4 , Article 3.

Available at: <https://place.asburyseminary.edu/faithandphilosophy/vol34/iss4/3>

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# DETERMINISM AND DIVINE BLAME

John Ross Churchill

Theological determinism is, at first glance, difficult to square with the typical Christian commitment to the appropriateness of divine blame. How, we may wonder, can it be appropriate for God to blame someone for something that was determined to occur by God in the first place? In this paper, I try to clarify this challenge to Christian theological determinism, arguing that its most cogent version includes specific commitments about what is involved when God blames wrongdoers. I then argue that these commitments are not essential to divine blame, and that there are plausible alternative accounts of such blame that would not court similar challenges. I end with a case for the intelligibility of divine blame within theological determinism, in light of its possible similarity in relevant respects to certain instances of intelligible *human* blame.

## I. Introduction

It is a great irony of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* that the *creator* is so monstrous. Having built and animated his creation, Victor abandons him at the first signs of life, leaving his creature with no one to care for or guide him, in a world that will receive him only as a source of fear and disgust. This mistreatment makes it hard to accept the legitimacy of Victor's later condemnation of his creature, leading many of us to recoil at tirades like the following:

"Why do you call to my remembrance," I rejoined, "circumstances, of which I shudder to reflect, that I have been the miserable origin and author? Cursed be the day, abhorred devil, in which you first saw light! Cursed (although I curse myself) be the hands that formed you! You have made me wretched beyond expression. You have left me no power to consider whether I am just to you or not. Begone! relieve me from the sight of your detested form."<sup>1</sup>

Indeed, we may find ourselves sympathizing with the creature as he addresses his "heartless creator" and asks, "Why did you form a monster so hideous that even you turned from me in disgust?"<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Shelley, *Frankenstein; or, The Modern Prometheus*, 101.

<sup>2</sup>Shelley, *Frankenstein; or, The Modern Prometheus*, 139 and 130.



Accusations are likewise hard to stomach when the accuser himself has *orchestrated* the wrongful action. Iago may not have created and subsequently abandoned anyone in his campaign against Othello. But we are nevertheless repulsed at his indictment of Othello's beloved Cassio, having watched Iago manipulate Cassio into committing his crime.

Given all this, what are we to make of a being who exercises *total* control over another's wrongdoing and yet still blames the perpetrator for that wrongdoing? How much more should we recoil when the blamer's control over the wrongdoer's actions extends beyond the creation of the wrongdoer, and beyond even an ability to play expertly upon his desires, fears, and the like?

This sentiment—the judgment that someone with total control over another's behavior cannot appropriately blame the person so controlled—forms the basis of an objection to an account of God's sovereignty that is quite popular in many Christian denominations, an account we will refer to here as *theological determinism*. This account has been championed in the past by influential Christian theologians like John Calvin and Jonathan Edwards, and it claims many adherents in the academy and churches today. Because Christian theological determinists want to affirm both total divine control over human behavior and the appropriateness of divine blame, they face a direct threat from considerations like those above.

In the sections to come, I first introduce this deterministic approach to God's sovereignty and contrast it with competing approaches. I then present what I take to be the strongest objection to the appropriateness of divine blame on this approach, drawing in part from recent articulations of this objection. My response will be to highlight and reject some of the assumptions about divine blame that are implicit in the challenge, and to suggest plausible alternative conceptions of divine blame that would not court similar challenges. I then close with a case for the intelligibility of divine blame within theological determinism, one that trades on analogous instances of intelligible human blame. If these considerations are cogent, they would provide a way for those who wish to endorse both the all-encompassing divine sovereignty of theological determinism and the appropriateness of divine blame to do so without fear of incoherence or the need to appeal to mystery on these matters.

This would be a modest conclusion, but an important one nonetheless. For determinism of the relevant sort remains a common view among theologians, clergy, and laypeople alike, even if it is a fringe view among Christian philosophers. And unlike its rivals, this account does not require that humans have libertarian free will, and so it is not hostage to the same empirical fortunes as libertarianism. It would be significant, then, to know that a popular Christian view of God's sovereignty that is compatible with a wide range of discoveries in the science of human agency is fully consistent with, and intelligible with respect to, traditional commitments on divine blame.

## II. Preliminary Matters

Before tackling these topics, however, some preliminary clarifications are in order.

First, it's important to note that the present paper is focused on divine blame, and not on human moral responsibility. These are related concepts, to be sure. For one condition on the appropriateness of God's blaming is that those who are blamed are morally responsible, in a sense that is sufficient for them to be *worthy of blame*.<sup>3</sup> Even so, the question of whether a wrongdoer is worthy of blame is distinct from the question of whether some specific person may appropriately blame that wrongdoer. If I knowingly aid in your act of theft, for example, it may be that I cannot legitimately blame you, despite the fact that you are fully blameworthy for the act.<sup>4</sup>

Second, and similar to the first point, care must be taken not to conflate divine blame with divine punishment in what follows. For blame and punishment are plausibly distinct<sup>5</sup>—I may blame you without thereby punishing you—even if considerations about the appropriateness of blame are relevant to considerations about the appropriateness of punishment.<sup>6</sup> As before, my focus here is on divine blame, and not on this related but distinct concept. This will be especially important to keep in mind in later sections, lest my proposed solution to an apparent problem for divine blame be misinterpreted as something that is intended to handle certain worries about divine punishment. (And it may be that what helps a lot in the former case is of much less use in the latter.)

Finally, I want to make clear that the aim here is not to defend theological determinism as the best account of divine sovereignty. Rather, my goal is simply to defend it against a rather thorny objection—an objection that can lead philosophers to dismiss it as a live option. While I ultimately conclude that this position ought not to be dismissed on these grounds, I remain agnostic as to whether it is superior to any of its rivals, all things considered.

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<sup>3</sup>I assume a concept of moral responsibility on which a responsible wrongdoer is one who is worthy of or deserves blame *regardless of any consequences that might follow from that blame*. I do so because I believe it to be common within the Christian tradition and standard in challenges to theological determinism. This concept can be contrasted with views on which blame is simply not something that anyone ever deserves, such that blaming is only justified on instrumental grounds. For more on this distinction, see Michael McKenna, *Conversation and Responsibility*, 114–148, and Derk Pereboom, “Libertarianism and Theological Determinism,” 113–119.

<sup>4</sup>See the discussion in section 2.2.2 of Neal Tognazzini and Justin Coates, “Blame.”

<sup>5</sup>McKenna offers several distinctions between punishment and blame in his *Conversation and Responsibility*. For example, punishment often has a tit-for-tat structure (e.g., eye for eye) that is atypical of blame (142). And it is possible to blame offenders without intending any harm to them, while this is not possible in cases of punishment (144–146).

<sup>6</sup>Perhaps it's worth clarifying that I will not be arguing (and I do not assume) that there are cases in which *God* is entitled to blame someone but not entitled to punish them, in the way these two entitlements often come apart for humans. This is no part of my strategy later in the paper.

### III. Theological Determinism

This is not the place to rehearse in detail the various approaches to divine sovereignty within the Christian tradition.<sup>7</sup> For present purposes, it will be enough to highlight a distinctive characteristic of theological determinism, and contrast this aspect of the position with all other approaches. This will provide sufficient background for the challenge and response to follow in later sections.

What distinguishes theological determinism from rival approaches is its affirmation that *for any human action, the ultimate explanation as to why the person acted as he did rather than acting otherwise (or refraining from acting) is that God determined that he would so act.* For example, while there are no doubt natural explanations for Peter's third denial of Christ—Peter's fear was surely a cause, for instance—the determinist will insist that the fundamental reason why Peter sinned precisely as he did rather than acting otherwise is that God determined that he would sin in just that way.

It is true, of course, that alternatives to determinism also accord a role to God's will in the explanation of all human actions. Molinists and open theists, for example, both affirm that God's creation and conservation are necessary conditions for such actions, and they may affirm that in some cases God specifically determines such actions in the strong sense articulated above. But both groups deny that in *all* cases, the ultimate explanation as to why an agent acted as she did rather than acting otherwise (or refraining from action) is that God determined it to be so—preferring in at least some cases to root the explanation in the agent herself or to deny that there is any such explanation. Theological determinists part ways with proponents of both groups in affirming, as Thomas Flint has put it, that “all actions are determined ultimately by events external to and not under the causal control of their agents,”<sup>8</sup> with God as the external source in question.

Similarly, there are many views of divine sovereignty on which God exercises providential control over human affairs.<sup>9</sup> But the degree of divine control exercised according to the different views will vary along a spectrum, with determinism as the limiting case of total divine control in virtue of God's specific determination of all human behavior.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>7</sup>Others have done so admirably. For articulations and defense of the Molinist approach to divine sovereignty, see for example Thomas Flint's *Divine Providence: The Molinist Account* and Kenneth Keathley's *Salvation and Sovereignty: A Molinist Approach*. Resources that favor open theism include William Hasker's *God, Time, and Knowledge and Providence, Evil, and the Openness of God*, and John Sanders's *The God Who Risks: A Theology of Divine Providence*. Theological determinism is defended in John S. Feinberg's *No One Like Him*, Paul Helm's *The Providence of God and Eternal God*, and Hugh J. McCann's *Creation and the Sovereignty of God*.

<sup>8</sup>Flint, “Providence,” 331.

<sup>9</sup>See for example the discussions of divine providence within Molinist and Open Theist accounts in the resources listed above.

<sup>10</sup>I take it that control assumes some kind of asymmetry—at the very least, if one thing controls another, then the second depends on the first in a way that the first does not depend on the second. This is true of theological determinism as presented above, in God's control

Note, importantly, that theological determinism allows for a plurality of theories as to *how* God determines creatures' behavior. It is thus consistent with multiple positions on God's relation to evil human actions and, relatedly, with multiple positions on the causal structure of the world. Various accounts of God's control over human evil are on offer,<sup>11</sup> but all parties agree that God's reasons for determining such behavior will differ significantly from the reasons for determining good behavior, in such a way as to safeguard divine goodness; they will, in other words, agree with D. A. Carson that "God does not stand behind evil action in the way that he stands behind good action."<sup>12</sup> As far as the causal structure of the world is concerned, a theological determinist may, but need not, defend the truth of *causal determinism*. It is therefore open to her to claim that while (e.g.) the laws and the various physical and mental states of the world prior to Peter's sin were jointly consistent with his acting virtuously, Peter's denial was nevertheless determined by God.<sup>13</sup>

This leads to another important clarification. Theological determinism is sometimes understood in causal terms, e.g., as the thesis that God is the *sufficient cause* of everything that exists, or of everything that happens, within the creation.<sup>14</sup> I take such characterizations to fit comfortably with my own. Even so, it's important to keep in mind that theological determinists need not (and should not) deny that behavior that is divinely determined is also typically caused by agents' normal psychological states and processes. Divine determination, in other words, does not preclude the causation that we take to be crucial to ordinary, natural agency; it is fully consistent with Peter's fears (beliefs, desires, etc.) counting as factors that contributed causally to his action.

Much more could be said about theological determinism and how it differs from its rivals. But the distinction above is what defines the position

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over what creatures there are, as well as what those creatures do and what happens to them. For an apparent account on which God is the cause of creatures and their behavior, but in a way that rejects any asymmetry (and thus control) of this sort, see W. Matthews Grant, "Divine Universal Causality and Libertarian Freedom."

<sup>11</sup>See for example Jonathan Edwards, *Freedom of the Will*, part IV, section XI, subsection III; Feinberg, *No One Like Him*, 651–656; Helm, *Eternal God*, 162–164, and *The Providence of God*, chs. 7–8; Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, Vol. I, 402–404; and McCann, *Creation and the Sovereignty of God*, ch. 6. See also Helm and Feinberg (respectively) on Calvin on this subject in *John Calvin's Ideas*, 165–171, and *No One Like Him*, 696. Also helpful is Flint's discussion (but not endorsement) of this issue within the position he calls "Thomism" in *Divine Providence*, 87–94. Some of my comments in section IV are relevant as well.

<sup>12</sup>Carson, *Divine Sovereignty and Human Responsibility*, 36.

<sup>13</sup>McCann is an example of a theological determinist that rejects causal determinism, while Edwards affirms both theological and causal determinism. See McCann's "Edwards on Free Will" and *Creation and the Sovereignty of God*, ch. 5, and Edwards's *Freedom of the Will*, part II, section X. See also Feinberg's *No One Like Him*, 716–718, and Flint's discussion of the "Thomistic" approach in "Two Accounts of Providence," 172–173, *Divine Providence*, 87, and "Divine Providence," 266–268.

<sup>14</sup>See Pereboom, "Libertarianism and Theological Determinism," 112, and O'Connor, "Against Theological Determinism," 133, respectively.

of interest, and it is what serves as the basis for philosophical challenges to its plausibility. I now turn now to one such challenge.<sup>15</sup>

#### IV. *The Problem of Divine Blame*

I noted earlier that the deterministic approach to divine sovereignty is popular across a number of Christian audiences. It's not uncommon for members of these audiences to see this aspect of God's nature as a cause for gratitude and love, and as a basis for peace and strength. For it means, among other things, that the God who loves them and who seeks their highest good has left no part of the divine plan for their lives vulnerable to defeat by imperfect creatures, protecting them from themselves no less than from others.<sup>16</sup>

However, there are elements of Christian theology that make this account of divine sovereignty much harder to celebrate. Indeed, one such element seems at first blush to render determinism implausible at best, and incoherent at worst. I'm speaking here of *divine blame*.

It doesn't take much reflection to see the apparent difficulty. In addition to their preferred view of divine sovereignty, determinists typically want to affirm that God blames wrongdoers, where such blame is entirely appropriate. That is, wrongdoers are taken to be worthy of blame, and God is counted among those who are entitled to blame them. But it is hard *prima facie* to see how theological determinists can coherently maintain both of these commitments. For it is not at all obvious how it can be appropriate for God to blame someone for wrongdoing that was due ultimately and specifically to divine determination. If, in other words, God determined Peter to act exactly as he did rather than otherwise—if divine determination was the ultimate explanation for that outcome—it is puzzling, to say

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<sup>15</sup>One might wonder why I have chosen the label "theological determinism," or often simply "determinism," rather than referring to this position via one of its more famous alleged proponents, as is common. In other words, why not *Augustinianism*, or *Calvinism*, or perhaps even *Thomism*? I prefer "determinism" because it is a term with some currency at present (see for example the many contributions in Kevin Timpe and Daniel Speak's *Free Will and Theism*), and because it conveys only a fairly general thesis that is often attributed to these and other theologians without suggesting additional content peculiar to any one of them. (Gregory Boyd defends the endorsement of Augustine as a theological determinist in his *Satan and the Problem of Evil*, 249. Helm places Calvin in this tradition in *John Calvin's Ideas*, 170–171, and *Calvin at the Centre*, 259. In *The God Who Risks*, Sanders counts Luther [155] as a theological determinist alongside Augustine [149–153] and Calvin [156–157]. See the previous references to Edwards as theological determinist above. Flint presents Bañez and Leibniz as theological determinists, and thinks it possible that Aquinas may have held this position, too ["Two Accounts of Providence," 149, "Providence," 332]. Hodge falls in this category as well; see 440–441 of Vol. I and 301–302 of Volume II of his *Systematic Theology*, and Carson's comments in *Divine Sovereignty and Human Responsibility*, 207 and 254n4. Note, importantly, that Jesse Couenhoven rejects the characterization of Augustine as a theological determinist [though not as "a kind of compatibilist"] in his *Stricken by Sin, Cured by Christ*, 13, 104–105.)

<sup>16</sup>See for example Charles Spurgeon's comments on Matthew 20:15, quoted in Arthur W. Pink, *The Attributes of God*, 32–33. See also David Fergusson, *Creation*, 57; Martin Luther, *The Bondage of the Will*, 313; Pereboom, "Libertarianism and Theological Determinism," 114–115; and Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, Vol. I, 441, and Vol. II, 301–302, the latter of which includes the gem "Who would not rather be governed by a Father than by a tornado?"

the least, how it can be appropriate for God to blame Peter for that very action. Patrick Todd sums up this sentiment well in a recent paper:

[S]uppose you “wake up” to find yourself in an afterlife, during which time it is somehow made clear that everything you ever did was part of a divine preordained plan. And then God says to you: “You know, what you did on this occasion was really a horrible thing to have done. What’s your excuse? How could you?” Isn’t there something deeply unsettling about this scenario? Wouldn’t you suppose that something had gone completely wrong? In the end, it simply seems to me that if God determines us to perform an action, he cannot blame us for having performed it. I do not know how to argue for this claim. I simply say that it is eminently plausible, and that we would need some very good reason to deny it.<sup>17</sup>

The apparent problem generalizes, of course, given that the view counts all human actions as divinely determined in this way. Moreover, it poses a significant challenge, as the reality and legitimacy of divine blame is taken as a staple of Christian belief across many traditions.<sup>18</sup> It seems, then, that short of appeal to mystery, one cost of the deterministic account of divine sovereignty is the highly revisionist denial that God ever blames anyone for their wrongdoing.

Todd’s recent work in this space enables us to sharpen the objection a bit.<sup>19</sup> What exactly is it about the degree of divine control that appears to undermine God’s ability to blame appropriately—God’s “standing to blame,” as it is sometimes called? What is driving the intuition that he articulates in the passage above?

It is not, Todd claims, that in determining that an act of wrongdoing will occur, God is therefore *guilty of that same act or kind of wrongdoing*.<sup>20</sup> God is not, that is, akin to a conspirator who cannot legitimately blame her co-conspirators, or to a dishonest citizen who lacks the standing to blame politicians for their lies. For in the relevant cases, the misdeeds are performed by human agents, not by God; the divine determination of a misdeed is distinct from the misdeed itself. Moreover, a creature’s wrong action will have been performed for one set of reasons—indeed, these reasons will be important to the action’s moral status—while God’s determination of that wrongdoing (along with its reasons) will have been for other reasons. Even on the determinist’s account, it was not God but *Peter*

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<sup>17</sup>Todd, “Manipulation and Moral Standing,” 16.

<sup>18</sup>See for example the treatment of divine wrath toward, or divine judgment of, sin in the following: Articles 4, 9, and 12 of *The Thirty-Nine Articles of Religion* in J. I. Packer and R. T. Beckwith, 6–10; ch. VI, section VI and ch. XXXIII, section I of *The Westminster Confession of Faith* in A. A. Hodge, 115 and 389, respectively; and sections 678–679 of *The Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 194–195.

<sup>19</sup>Note that Todd’s specific focus in the paper is on the kind of theological determinism that assumes causal determinism as well. (See 4–5 of “Manipulation and Moral Standing.”) But the aspects of his case to be considered below apply equally against theological determinism more generally.

<sup>20</sup>Todd, “Manipulation and Moral Standing,” 6–7. See also discussion of this point in Flint, “Divine Providence,” 269, and ch. 6 of McCann’s *Creation and the Sovereignty of God*.

who denied Christ, and Peter's reasons for sinning were not God's reasons for determining that Peter would do so. God's determination of a wrong action does not entail that God has performed that same wrong action or an action that is sufficiently similar in kind and moral status.

Nor, Todd argues, is the apparent problem for divine blame due to God's being *at fault* for the determination of the wrong behavior.<sup>21</sup> For this would require that God acted wrongly in determining such behavior, like the mother who hypnotically induces her son to murder in *The Manchurian Candidate*. And the determinist can avail herself of resources familiar to discussions of theodicy to reject this charge, such as the claim that divine determination of wrong action is ultimately morally justified on consequentialist grounds of one sort or another.<sup>22</sup>

I find Todd's response plausible in each case. I also think he provides a cogent response to the charge that divine standing to blame would be undermined by God's being *complicit* in the wrongdoing.<sup>23</sup> Likewise for his response to the claim that in blaming those who have been divinely determined, God would thereby be professing to care about the moral values at stake in the wrongdoing while nevertheless behaving in ways that belie this profession.<sup>24</sup>

Even so, I cannot endorse Todd's positive proposal, which is that the real problem for theological determinism in this context is ultimately one

<sup>21</sup>Todd, "Manipulation and Moral Standing," 9.

<sup>22</sup>See Helm, *Eternal God* (162–164) and *The Providence of God* (213–215), and Steven B. Cowan and Greg A. Welty, "Pharaoh's Magicians Redivivus," 160–163, on these points. Note that I am not endorsing such consequentialism here, only claiming it as a strategy open to the theological determinist. See Feinberg's *No One Like Him*, 787–795, and McCann's *Creation and the Sovereignty of God*, 120–121, for alternative defenses against the charge above.

<sup>23</sup>Todd's discussion is in "Manipulation and Moral Standing," 10–11. Here is my gloss. Not all situations in which one person orchestrates the misbehavior of another are such that the first person lacks the standing to blame in virtue of being complicit in the misbehavior. For the orchestrator's *reasons* matter quite a bit to our judgments here. After all, most of us accept that in at least some sting operations the undercover officers may legitimately blame the persons that have been apprehended. The lesson seems to be that one's reasons for engineering behavior factor into whether or not one is complicit in that behavior (or, if you prefer, into whether or not one's complicity is of a sort that undermines one's standing to blame others involved in the behavior). Given the rather weak assumption that the God of the theological determinist is motivated by reasons that are, morally speaking, more like those of a virtuous undercover agent than those of Iago, divine orchestration of wrongdoing is consistent with God's appropriately blaming the wrongdoer. I take these same considerations to count against Matt King's conclusion that a divine determiner would lack the standing to blame. See King, "Manipulation Arguments and the Moral Standing to Blame," 4–9.

<sup>24</sup>See p. 7 of "Manipulation and Moral Standing" for Todd's discussion. See also O'Connor's "Against Theological Determinism," 135–136. As an example of blame that would be illegitimate on these grounds, consider Claudius's false endorsement of reverence for God and reverence for the dead in blaming Hamlet for his prolonged mourning, when Claudius himself has dishonored both of these through his recent actions. Todd argues, and I agree, that the determinist can use the resources of theodicy projects to respond here as well. For divine determination of an action does not entail divine moral approval of that action considered in itself, "in isolation from the rest of the story" (Todd, "Manipulation and Moral Standing," 7). Nor does it entail divine scorn for or indifference toward the values flouted by that action, although it may entail that God subordinates these values to others.

about *human moral responsibility*, and not about the appropriateness of divine blame *per se*. In particular, he argues that the problem with divine blame on a view like determinism is that the agents would simply not be morally responsible, in which case they would not be worthy of blame whatsoever, and thus *no one*—not God or anyone else—could legitimately blame them. Todd's path to this conclusion is to prioritize his intuition about divine blame within theological determinism, and then to offer as the best explanation of this intuition—better than any alleged problem with God's distinctive standing to blame—the proposal that moral responsibility requires a kind of free will that creatures would lack if they were determined by God to act as they do.<sup>25</sup>

But this conclusion is too hasty. For there is another interpretation of the apparent problem for theological determinism that has thus far been left out of the discussion, one that makes better sense of the judgment that divine blame would be especially inappropriate if God determines the misbehavior. Key to this construal of the problem is an assumption about the nature of blame itself, namely, that the act of blaming involves making a certain kind of *demand* of those blamed—a demand that, as we will see, God would be *disingenuous* in making if theological determinism were true. Among other virtues, this approach has the advantage of counting theological determinism as uniquely problematic for *God's* standing—it identifies a distinctive problem in the case of the divine controller blaming the controlled—rather than counting all blame, divine and human alike, as equally problematic within a deterministic framework.

By way of introduction to this proposed alternative, look back at the long quote from Todd above, taking note of the language involved in the divine blame: "What's your excuse? How could you?," God asks. This is familiar language in our everyday blaming practices. If I hear it from a loved one, I recognize it as a demand to *explain* my behavior—to give an account as to why I acted as I did rather than acting otherwise. Furthermore, I recognize the demand as one that assumes that my explanation will provide no excuse or justification for my action, but rather will end in my acknowledgment that I have behaved badly; indeed, in

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<sup>25</sup>This strategy raises an issue that is worth a longer discussion than I can give here. Todd seems to believe that the fact that a view is "massively counterintuitive" constitutes strong evidence that it is "overwhelmingly implausible" ("Manipulation and Moral Standing," 16–17); at any rate, the alleged counterintuitiveness of the claim that divine blame is legitimate within theological determinism is treated as good evidence in favor of its implausibility. But this strategy requires data and argumentation, and cannot simply be assumed. (This is especially true given recent research on intuitions about related issues. For discussion of recent work on intuitions concerning moral responsibility, see John Ross Churchill, "Intuition, Orthodoxy, and Moral Responsibility." See also Tamler Sommers's argument in Part I of *Relative Justice* that moral responsibility intuitions vary significantly across cultures, and his use of this argument to defend the coherence of theological determinism and human moral responsibility in "Relative Responsibility and Theism." And for recent empirical evidence of significant cultural variation in judgments relevant to assessing moral responsibility, see Clark Barrett et al., "Small-scale Societies Exhibit Fundamental Variation in the Role of Intentions in Moral Judgment.")

this sense the questions are more like expressions of *shock* or *incredulity* at my behavior than requests for information. And—to come to the key point—such a demand from God would seem to be deeply problematic within the framework of theological determinism, on the grounds that it would be *insincere* in the extreme. For surely the God who has determined me to sin—where such determination is the fundamental reason why I sin rather than refrain—cannot sincerely confront me with anything like shocked or incredulous demands that I explain that very sin. “How could you?,” in the sense intended here, cannot be expressed sincerely by the being who determined not only that I could, but that I *would* commit the wrong for which I am being blamed. Todd is no doubt in good company in finding divine blame of this sort “deeply unsettling.”<sup>26</sup>

It’s important to note that this kind of demand is by no means contrived. Rather, as multiple philosophers have argued of late, it is common in our ordinary blaming practices.<sup>27</sup> Moreover, it appears in some presentations of divine blame within the Christian tradition, as in the famous “Song of the Vineyard” from the book of Isaiah.<sup>28</sup> Taken at face value, that song sits ill with theological determinism, as God’s blaming of Israel—couched in questions of the form “What more could I have done?”—would thereby be disingenuous. (After all, on the deterministic account, there was *plenty more* God could have done to improve Israel’s behavior.)

Moreover, the apparent insincerity would be unique to God, which means that it would serve to constitute a specific challenge to *divine* blame. Those who initially took the apparent problem to be especially difficult for *God’s* standing will see this as fitting. It’s true, of course, that theological determinism is often taken to be inconsistent with human moral responsibility, and therefore inconsistent with any legitimate blame, human or divine; Todd’s intuitions on this point are not idiosyncratic. But even so, some of us see in the problem of divine blame something *distinctively* problematic about God’s blaming behavior—i.e., something uniquely troubling about *the determiner blaming the determined*. This interpretation of the problem is preserved if we understand the difficulty as one that is ultimately about the apparent insincerity of the blamer. But it is lost on Todd’s account, which casts all blame—human and divine—as equally problematic under theological determinism.

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<sup>26</sup>Compare Paul Russell’s charge that controllers cannot blame those they control because “[m]oral communication and responsiveness presupposes that agents are not related to each other as controller and controllee,” as well as his likening of such blame to a situation in which an author criticizes one of his fictional characters through a *dialogue* with that character. See Russell, “Selective Hard Compatibilism,” 159 and 171n20, respectively.

<sup>27</sup>See for example Russell, “Selective Hard Compatibilism,” and Angela Smith, “Responsibility for Attitudes: Activity and Passivity in Mental Life,” 269–271, and “Control, Responsibility, and Moral Assessment,” 380–382. See also McKenna’s discussion of overt blaming in the presence of the person blamed in *Conversation and Responsibility*, 174–178 (esp. 176), along with his list of the ways in which reactive attitudes manifest themselves on 67.

<sup>28</sup>See Isaiah 5:1–7.

We seem, then, to have arrived at a distinctive problem for divine blame within theological determinism. This problem does not turn on a requirement that in determining the misbehavior of the agents that are to blame, God would be guilty of wrongdoing. Nor does it assume that a God who determines an agent to perform a wrong action cannot care about the values flouted by that wrong action. Moreover, it is a problem that specifically concerns *God's* standing to blame those who have been divinely determined, rather than threatening to undermine the legitimacy of all blame everywhere by challenging the moral responsibility of all agents. This threat to divine blame is ultimately about apparent *insincerity*: it is hard to see how, on the theological determinist's approach, God could legitimately blame in anything like the familiar way discussed above—i.e., via something like shocked or incredulous demands for explanation—without being disingenuous.

#### V. A Response to the Problem

But must all divine blame include demands of this problematic sort? If not, then we may be on our way to a solution to the problem above, as there may be plausible models of divine blame on which theological determinism is immune to the charge that God would be insincere.

The theological determinist is helped here by recent work in moral psychology on *human* blame. For not all models of such blame prioritize aspects that lead to the problem in the divine case.

There are, for example, accounts of blame that can be classified as *cognitive* approaches in light of their emphasis on the role of certain kinds of *judgments* in our blaming practices—in particular, negative evaluations of the blamed person's moral character or quality of will. Or take *affective* approaches, which prioritize the role of certain *emotions*—e.g., anger, resentment, indignation—in their accounts of blame.<sup>29</sup> For present purposes, it will suffice to point out that at least some of our blaming behavior manifests either or both of the requisite cognitive or affective features, *but does not include explicit explanatory demands of those blamed*. For example, Hamlet blames Claudius for multiple offenses, as is evident in his anger and resentment, and in his evaluation of Claudius's vicious character and lack of regard for the former king. But Hamlet is uninterested in hearing Claudius give any account of his wrongdoing; he makes no demands—incredulous or otherwise—that are intended to force Claudius to acknowledge his sin. Closer to home, I may blame the inconsiderate stranger who jumps the line at the airport in virtue of my judgments about and emotions toward him, with no thought of making demands of the relevant sort.<sup>30</sup>

<sup>29</sup>See Coates and Tognazzini, "The Nature and Ethics of Blame," 199–201, and "The Contours of Blame," 13–15, as well as Tognazzini and Coates, "Blame," sections 1.1 and 1.2.

<sup>30</sup>Interestingly, Hamlet's blame of his mother does seem to involve such demands, as we see in his treatment of her in the "closet scene" of Act 3 ("Have you eyes?"). Similarly, if it is not a stranger but my brother who jumps the airport line, I am much more likely to confront him and insist, incredulously, that he explain himself. These observations may be

Note also that there are approaches to blame that focus not on the kinds or contents of mental states that are characteristic of blame, but rather on the *goals* of our blaming behavior. For example, blame might best be understood as a kind of *protest* against the vice or ill will that the blamed person manifested in her misbehavior.<sup>31</sup> Here again, it seems clear that blame can sometimes serve this function without including demands of the sort at issue. Indeed, the two examples just above plausibly count here as well, as cognitive and affective elements will likely be typical (though perhaps not necessary) elements of blaming activity on this approach.

These examples of blame provide a response to the problem that was articulated in the last section. That problem, recall, was that a God who determines an agent's wrongdoing cannot sincerely confront that agent with anything analogous to the kind of shocked or incredulous demand for explanation that is common to the expression of human blame. And thus if divine blame involves such demands, then theological determinism has a problem with divine blame. But the considerations above cast doubt on the antecedent. For it's not clear why we ought to insist on certain requirements for divine blame that are frequently unsatisfied in ordinary cases of human blame. Why, that is, ought we to think God's blaming behavior must involve demands of the sort above when some instances of legitimate human blame do not? In light of this, it's open to the theological determinist to claim that divine blame need not involve such demands, in which case the charge of divine insincerity cannot get off the ground.

This seems to me to constitute a successful response to the challenge to theological determinism. It's true, of course, that ordinary human blaming practices are not a surefire guide to understanding divine blame. But no strong principle of that sort is needed for the response above. Rather, the situation is this. The determinist has been presented with a challenge that turns on divine blame taking a certain form, which renders such blame problematic. The fact that ordinary practice commonly includes cases of blame that do *not* take this form is surely relevant here. For it shows that not all blame takes the form in question, which in turn gives us reason to believe that divine blame need not take it either. Barring an argument that divine blame *must* take this form—i.e., that it must include demands of the sort discussed above—the problem for theological determinism appears to have been solved.

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clues that the more intimate the human relationship, the more likely it is that blame will involve demands of the relevant kind. Or it may suggest that our blaming practices involve a cluster of features that all appear together in only some instances of blame, where the more intimate the relationship the more features one will typically find. Regardless, much work would be needed to translate these considerations into a case that divine blame *cannot* lack such demands, which is the crux of the present section.

<sup>31</sup>See Coates and Tognazzini, "The Nature and Ethics of Blame," 202, and "The Contours of Blame," 15–17, as well as Tognazzini and Coates, "Blame," section 1.4.

### VI. Theological Determinism and the Psychology of Divine Blame

Still, it's hard to deny that such blame looks *very strange*, at first glance anyway. Even if the alleged problem of insincerity is solved, the fact remains that divine blame on the theological determinist's account appears quite alien to us. Assume, for example, that God's blaming involves some combination of cognitive and affective elements in the way that was sketched in the previous section.<sup>32</sup> God blames Peter for the denial of Christ, where this includes negative moral evaluations of Peter's character or concern for Christ, along with emotions like wrath directed toward Peter. Is there any way for us to relate to such behavior—to take up the perspective of a being who judges and feels like this while simultaneously determining the very behavior that occasions these judgments and emotions? Or is such behavior simply unintelligible? William Hasker puts the concern nicely:

If we are told, then, that God has a deep and abiding anger at the unrighteousness that takes place on the earth, our only possible response is that this simply cannot be: to represent God as angry and hostile to situations which are exactly as he wishes them to be, is just incoherent—or worse, it is to represent God as afflicted with something like schizophrenia.<sup>33</sup>

Unlike Hasker, I'm not convinced that we can proclaim divine blame of this sort to be impossible on the grounds of its unintelligibility. For there are bound to be limits on our ability to empathize with God, cognitively and emotionally. And the determinist seems within her rights to claim this as an instance where the gulf between humans and the divine precludes such empathy.

But the determinist need not concede this point and embrace a mystic position on the matter too quickly. It's true, of course, that we must beware of allowing anthropomorphism undue influence on our theology; a counterintuitive conclusion is not *ipso facto* a *reductio*, especially in the

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<sup>32</sup>Classical theologians count ascriptions of emotion (or certain emotions, like wrath) to God as mere anthropopathisms, on the grounds that genuine divine emotions (of the relevant sort) would violate the doctrine of *divine impassibility*—the doctrine that nothing acts upon or causally affects God. (See Wainwright, "Concepts of God," Section 2; Murray, *Reclaiming Divine Wrath*; and Sanders, *The God Who Risks*, ch. 5.) Is the assumption in the text above inconsistent with this aspect of classical theology? Not necessarily. For it seems to me that an approach used by some classical theologians to explain apparent divine emotions can be employed here as well. In particular, a theist partial to divine impassibility could reinterpret talk of apparent emotions in divine blame as talk about certain divine *actions*. (See Murray, chs. 2 and 3.) So long as such actions do not amount to *punishment*—i.e., so long as instances of divine blame do not *ipso facto* constitute instances of divine punishment—this reinterpretation could work just fine. For example, the apparent wrath involved in an instance of divine blame might be said to consist entirely of God's denouncing the offender or his behavior. Or it may be characterized as consisting of one or more divine *judgments*—perhaps drawing on judgment-oriented accounts of natural emotions (as in de Souza, "Emotion," section 5, and Prinz, *Beyond Human Nature*, 242–237)—in which case the apparent affective components of divine blame would appear to collapse into the evaluative components.

<sup>33</sup>William Hasker, *Providence, Evil, and the Openness of God*, 159.

theological domain. But intelligibility here would seem to be a theoretical improvement, all other things being equal. And for those whose faith thrives best alongside understanding, it could have devotional value as well. So it is in the determinist's interest to seek intelligible human analogues to divine blame of the relevant sort, as a means of rendering the divine case intelligible.

I propose that such analogues may be found in the attitudes and responses of at least some *authors toward their fictional characters*. I will try to illustrate this proposal through examples, but before doing so it is important that the claims to follow not be misunderstood. To be clear, I will not be using the analogy below to argue that God's goodness is consistent with divine determination of human wrongdoing or with God's subsequent blame for that wrongdoing. Nor will I be using it to defend God's standing to blame persons for actions that have been determined in this way.<sup>34</sup> These conclusions have all been defended in the two previous sections. My goal in this section is different: I will be presenting some real-world, non-pathological cases in which humans seem to be judging and feeling in ways that are analogous to the kind of divine blame sketched above, *where my sole purpose in doing so is to render the psychology of such blame intelligible*. Because these human cases are similar enough to the divine case in relevant respects, the determinist can claim divine blame within theological determinism to be psychologically intelligible (and thereby avoid appeal to mystery on this point).

Let's turn now to the central analogy of this section. It's true of course that there are no actual cases of human persons who have total control over other humans' wrongdoing and yet simultaneously blame those wrongdoers for their actions; *a fortiori* there are no cases with these features where the blame includes the cognitive and emotional elements discussed above and is intelligible, to boot. But there are, I believe, approximations to such cases in the attitudes of authors toward their fictional characters, in at least some instances. That is, we find some fiction writers that exercise complete sovereignty over the behavior of their characters, and yet nevertheless judge or respond emotionally to those characters—and all in ways that resemble the elements of the account of blame sketched in the section above. Take Joseph Heller, for example, on his attitudes toward some of his characters:

I told several people while I was writing the book that Slocum was possibly the most contemptible character in literature. Before I was finished, I began feeling sorry for him. That has happened to me before. That's why there are two generals in *Catch-22*. General Dreedle certainly had bad qualities, but then there were certain characteristics I liked (he was straightforward, honest, not a conniver), and I found I didn't want to attribute certain

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<sup>34</sup>Todd uses the author analogy for these purposes in "Manipulation and Moral Standing," 7. Relatedly, McCann uses the author analogy to argue that divine determination is consistent with human moral responsibility in *Creation and the Sovereignty of God*, 107–108.

unsympathetic qualities to him. So I invented General Peckem as a sort of substitute scapegoat. Very hard to like him.<sup>35</sup>

Note that Heller refers to moral evaluations (“contemptible,” “honest”) of what are, first to last, his own creations. We see something similar in other authors, as in Vladimir Nabokov’s evaluation of character Humbert Humbert as “a vain and cruel wretch who manages to appear ‘touching.’”<sup>36</sup>

I suspect, however, that it is the emotional elements of divine blame within theological determinism, and not the cognitive elements, that are apt to seem most puzzling. In other words, my suspicion is that divine wrath (resentment, etc.) toward those who have been determined to act wrongly will seem less intelligible than God’s negative moral evaluation of the action or the agent’s character. (See for example Hasker’s focus on divine emotions in the quote above.) On this point, then, Heller’s discussion of his emotional responses (“I began feeling sorry for him,” “hard to like”) to his creations are especially relevant. We might also contrast J. K. Rowling’s responses to the deaths of characters Bellatrix LeStrange (“Being able to kill her was a pleasure”) and new father Remus Lupin (“the only time my editor ever saw me cry”).<sup>37</sup> Indeed, while it is certainly not a universal feature of fiction writing, there seem to be quite a few authors who respond emotionally to the actions and fates of characters that are entirely at their command. For some, like John Irving, this aspect of writing seems to cast a pall over much of the process:

I can’t say I have fun writing. My stories are sad to me, and comic too, but largely unhappy. I feel badly for the characters—that is, if the story’s any good. Writing a novel is actually searching for victims. As I write I keep looking for casualties. The stories uncover the casualties.<sup>38</sup>

I hope the relevance of these examples is clear. God’s blaming activity on theological determinism may *prima facie* seem unintelligible, as it may appear impossible to relate to the practice of evaluating and (especially) responding emotionally to behavior that one has determined oneself. But we find approximations to such practices in the judgments and emotions of many fiction writers. And while it may be difficult for some of us to relate to such authors in these respects, there nevertheless seems to be no good reason to describe their behavior as *unintelligible*. But then we have found what we were seeking, namely, a psychologically intelligible human analogue to the kind of divine blame in question. It is not a perfect analogy, to be sure. But it doesn’t need to be perfect. It only needs to show

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<sup>35</sup>Heller, “The Art of Fiction No. 51.”

<sup>36</sup>Nabokov, “The Art of Fiction No. 40.”

<sup>37</sup>See Rowling, “I’ve Really Exhausted the Magical,” and Loughrey, “J. K. Rowling Apologizes for Killing Off Remus Lupin in Harry Potter,” respectively. Note that Rowling specifies that her tears were over the fate of *Teddy* Lupin, the infant son of Remus, upon his father’s death. Even so, the point holds: pleasure is taken in the death of the wicked, displeasure in the death of the virtuous.

<sup>38</sup>Irving, “The Art of Fiction No. 93.”

the intelligibility of thinking and feeling towards one's creations in ways that sufficiently approximate the relevant kind of divine blame, so as to make such blame itself intelligible. And this it does.

One might worry that the divine case is too dissimilar to the proposed human analogue for the analogy to serve its purpose, contrary to my claim just above. Particular concern might come from the fact that in our engagement with fiction, either as authors or consumers, we believe of the characters *that they are fictional*, i.e., merely imaginary. But the human targets of God's blame are as real as can be, and (obviously) God takes them to be so. Doesn't this imply a difference that is sufficient to undermine the analogy?

It does not. To see why, it's important to keep in mind that my sole aim in using the analogy is to defend the psychological intelligibility of divine blame within theological determinism, where such blame is assumed to be the evaluative and emotional sort discussed above. The analogy highlights the similarity between divine blame (so understood) and cases of human authors blaming their fictional characters, with the conclusion that this similarity is such that the intelligibility of the human case renders God's blame intelligible as well. And, to return to the worry at hand, while it is certainly true that we believe of fictional characters that they are merely imaginary, it's nevertheless plausible that fiction provokes in us *real* emotional and evaluative attitudes toward those characters.<sup>39</sup> This may be puzzling, but it seems to be a puzzling *fact* about us. Colin Radford captured this fact nicely many years ago, noting that while we do not rush the stage to stop Tybalt's violent behavior—we know we are watching a play, after all—we respond with genuine emotion to what we see:

We shed real tears for Mercutio. They are not crocodile tears, they are dragged from us and they are not the sort of tears that are produced by cigarette smoke in the theatre. . . . We are appalled when we realise what may happen, and are horrified when it does. Indeed, we may be so appalled at the prospect of what we think is going to happen to a character in a novel or a play that some of us can't go on. We avert the impending tragedy in the only way we can, by closing the book, or leaving the theatre.<sup>40</sup>

This kind of sorrow for fictional victims is matched by our *indignation* toward and *condemnation* of fictional villains, to come back to emotions and evaluations that are more relevant to our discussion. And as seems clear in the writers used as examples above, these attitudes are not limited to consumers of fiction, but extend to the authors of the works as well.

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<sup>39</sup>See for example Gendler, "Imagination," section 5.3, and Neill, "Fiction and the Emotions." Note however that there is not perfect consensus about this; see Kendall Walton's "Fearing Fictions" for dissent. Note also that some who work in this area believe that we respond to fiction with genuine emotions, but we are *irrational* in doing so. Radford is emblematic here—see his "How Can We Be Moved by the Fate of Anna Karenina?"—and thus my use of his work in the text should not be taken as an endorsement of the *entirety* of his position.

<sup>40</sup>Radford, "How Can We Be Moved by the Fate of Anna Karenina?," 70. See also 71.

Moreover, this all seems perfectly intelligible, regardless of whether one is a consumer or an author of the work. But then all the pieces are in place for the analogy to succeed in its aim, as we have intelligible cases in which persons blame that over which they exercise complete control.

It may clarify matters to note that the fictional aspects of the human analogue would matter a great deal more if the hope were to defend the intelligibility of God's *punishing* those who have been divinely determined. For insofar as it even makes sense to punish fictional characters, such punishment would presumably have to take place within the fictional story, and thus the punishment would be just as imaginary as the characters themselves. But blame, as understood here, is as real as can be, whether targeted at fictional or actual objects. This makes the analogy to God's blame apt in the present case, even if it would fail to support a similar conclusion about divine punishment.<sup>41</sup>

Alternatively, one might object to the analogy on the grounds that a fiction writer's creative process is one in which the characters take on "a life of their own," as it were, dictating the course of the story rather than falling under the strict control of the author. In response, it's certainly true that *some* writers talk this way—Khaled Hosseini,<sup>42</sup> for example, and perhaps E. M. Forster.<sup>43</sup> But it's hard to know just how seriously to take this kind of language. More to the point, however, even if some authors speak this way, there are others who describe the creative process very differently, including some of those cited earlier in support of the analogy. A colorful example comes from Nabokov, commenting snidely on the idea that characters exercise this kind of "control":

My knowledge of Mr. Forster's works is limited to one novel, which I dislike; and anyway, it was not he who fathered that trite little whimsy about characters getting out of hand; it is as old as the quills, although of course one sympathizes with his people if they try to wriggle out of that trip to India or wherever he takes them. My characters are galley slaves.

Given that at least some authors respond evaluatively and emotionally, in the relevant ways, to characters whose behavior they have determined completely, the analogy is fitting.

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<sup>41</sup>Most people who are concerned about determinism and divine blame will also be concerned about determinism and divine punishment. Thus, some readers may be disappointed that I have not explicitly defended God's standing to punish those who have been divinely determined, and similarly, that I have defended the intelligibility of divine blame via a proposal that seems irrelevant to the intelligibility of divine punishment. In response, I'll just reiterate something I said in an earlier section: because I count issues concerning divine blame and issues concerning divine punishment as related but distinct, I don't expect that what illuminates our thinking about the one will always illuminate our thinking about the other. Even so, I count it worthwhile to seek improvements in our understanding of the one, even if these do not immediately yield the same amount or kind of improvement in the other.

<sup>42</sup>See Hosseini, "'Kite Runner' Author On His Childhood, His Writing, And The Plight Of Afghan Refugees."

<sup>43</sup>Nabokov, "The Art of Fiction No. 40."

But what if the human analogues were much more similar to the divine case? In other words, what if we consider not real human authors, but fantastic “superhuman” authors, who—somewhat like the narrator in *Breakfast of Champions*—have the power to create and control real worlds, with real people performing real actions? Suppose also that these authors blame the creations that are under their control. Do we find such blame intelligible? If not, we have the makings of another objection: when we make the analogous human (or superhuman) blame much more similar to the divine case, that blame ceases to be intelligible; but the best analogy should comprise analogues that are as similar as possible in relevant respects; therefore, we cannot argue by analogy that the divine blame of interest here is intelligible.

I think we should resist this line of thought. For I can’t think of a better way to evaluate the intelligibility of the outlandish superhuman blame than to think about the superhuman author’s creation, control, and blame as being substantially similar to a *normal* author’s process. And if this is our approach, then we should judge the blame in the fantastic case to be intelligible, just as we do in the case of normal human authors. Thus, even if we switch to the more exotic analogue—and I’m not convinced that we should—the analogy still supports the conclusion that divine blame within theological determinism is intelligible.

That said, there may be one way in which our judgments about superhuman authorship and normal authorship vary significantly, over and above the obvious difference in the authors’ abilities. In particular, we (or many of us) may judge that a superhuman author, unlike a normal author, is doing something *morally wrong* in creating as she does. For, as we have imagined her, she brings real people into existence, with real lives that include wrongdoing and (presumably) suffering. But crucially, she does this without the knowledge, wisdom, power, and moral perfection that are present in God’s creative and providential acts. And some might take these divine qualities to be necessary conditions on morally permissible creation (regardless, perhaps, of whether the creator determines the creatures’ behavior or instead allows them to lead “lives of their own.”) The important thing to see for present purposes is that even if you judge superhuman authors to be acting immorally, this is irrelevant to the main argument of this section. For the goal of the present section—the end that the central analogy serves—is to defend the *intelligibility* of divine blame within theological determinism, not to defend God’s *goodness* within this approach. (Defense of the latter has been provided by others, and was reviewed to some extent in section IV.) And neither the objection we have just considered, nor the previous two objections, give us reason to doubt the intelligibility of such blame.

Appeal to mystery is unavoidable for the Christian theist. But the timing of that appeal will vary, depending on one’s theology. The upshot of the above is that theological determinists can, if they wish, delay mysterianism

a little longer than it might initially have appeared, in light of the fact that divine blame on their account is intelligible after all.

### VII. Conclusion

Although the term “theological determinism” may not be common in the pews, the position that it names has long been a part of select Christian denominations. These denominations tend not to prioritize passages like the “Song of the Vineyard” from Isaiah when articulating their doctrine of divine sovereignty, and such passages are typically not interpreted as a realistic depiction of divine psychology. Far more priority is given instead to passages like Romans 9, which is often interpreted as an endorsement of both theological determinism and legitimate divine blame, and which famously includes the following:

You will say to me then, “Why then does he still find fault? For who can resist his will?” But who indeed are you, a human being, to argue with God? Will what is molded say to the one who molds it, “Why have you made me like this?”<sup>44</sup>

The sentiments in this and similar passages,<sup>45</sup> so interpreted, raise a number of philosophical questions. In previous sections I have argued for the appropriateness of divine blame, and presented real-world human analogues in an effort to render such blame intelligible. But many other important questions have been bracketed here. Human moral responsibility has been assumed rather than defended; the justness of divine punishment has been left unaddressed; and the question of how to respond to the problem of evil has been given only a passing glance. Thus, philosophically-minded Christians must look elsewhere for answers to these other questions—or propose new solutions of their own.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>44</sup>Romans 9: 19–20, NRSV.

<sup>45</sup>For discussion of more Biblical passages often taken to support Christian theological determinism, see Carson, *Divine Sovereignty and Human Moral Responsibility*, and Feinberg, *No One Like Him*, 677–714.

<sup>46</sup>For treatment of one or more of these issues, see Churchill, “Intuition, Orthodoxy, and Moral responsibility,” 188–189; Cowan and Welty, “Pharaoh’s Magicians Redivivus,” 163–164 and 168–172; Edwards, *Freedom of the Will*, part IV; Feinberg, *No One Like Him*, chs. 14 and 16; Flint, “Two Accounts of Providence,” 169–170, and “Divine Providence,” 269; Helm, *The Providence of God*, chs. 7 and 8, and *Eternal God*, 144–164; McCann, *Creation and the Sovereignty of God*, chs. 5 and 6; and Sommers, “Relative Responsibility and Theism.” Also relevant are recent defenses of non-libertarian approaches to the problem of evil in John Martin Fischer, “Libertarianism and the Problem of Flip-flopping,” 61n14, T. J. Mawson, “Classical Theism has No Implications for the Debate between Libertarianism and Compatibilism,” 148–150, and O’Connor, “Against Theological Determinism,” 134–135. (Exposition of contemporary non-libertarian approaches to moral responsibility may likewise be of interest; see McKenna and Coates, “Compatibilism,” for a thorough overview, and ch. 8 of Valerie Tiberius’s *Moral Psychology* for a brief introduction.) For objections to theological determinism that do not turn on challenges to divine blame, see the references just above to O’Connor (135–140) and Mawson (154); see also Boyd, *Satan and the Problem of Evil*, chs. 2–3 and appendix 5; Flint, *Divine Providence*, 90–94, and “Divine Providence,” 268–269; Neal Judisch, “Theological Determinism and the Problem of Evil” and “Divine Conservation and Creaturely Freedom,” 239–243; Katherin Rogers, “The Divine Controller Argument for Incompatibilism”; Sanders,

Progress here, whether in the form of new proposals or of renewed comprehension and timely application of the old, is to be welcomed for two reasons. The first stems from the fact, mentioned above, that theological determinism has long been common among theologians, clergy, and laity alike. Those Christian philosophers interested in defending a “big tent” vision of the rationality of Christian belief—and who wouldn’t want to be in that number?—will thus want to defend this common position against charges that it suffers from one or another defeater. The second is that this approach to divine sovereignty, unlike some alternative approaches, does not require that humans have libertarian free will in order to be morally responsible. On Christian theological determinism, our responsibility is compatible with a wide range of discoveries in the science of human agency, rather than being hostage to the truth of some rather risky empirical hypotheses.<sup>47</sup> It seems only prudent, therefore, for Christian philosophers to try to meet the various challenges to theological determinism, regardless of their personal inclinations on the position. Or anyway, it seems prudent for those keen to give moral responsibility—a central commitment across Christian denominations—an especially firm foundation.<sup>48</sup>

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*The God Who Risks*, ch. 7; and Jerry Walls, “Why No Classical Theist, Let Alone Orthodox Christian, Should Ever Be a Compatibilist.”

<sup>47</sup>On libertarian approaches, causal determinism is incompatible with the kind of free will that is needed for moral responsibility. Some libertarian approaches treat non-deterministic but mechanistic agency as incompatible with such freedom as well. But both the thesis of causal determinism and mechanistic accounts of agency are open to empirical confirmation or disconfirmation, and each is a live possibility as far as the current empirical evidence is concerned. Thus libertarians, it seems, are staking their commitment to moral responsibility on some fairly specific, and as yet unsettled, empirical theses. Furthermore, if moral responsibility is assumed to be central to Christian orthodoxy, then libertarian Christians are staking their security within the bounds of orthodoxy on these same empirical theses as well. Alternative approaches to free will and moral responsibility require far weaker commitments—and thus safer bets—with respect to empirical theses. For more on this line of reasoning, see the discussion in Churchill, “Intuition, Orthodoxy, and Moral Responsibility.”

<sup>48</sup>I am grateful to Jesse Couenhoven, Mark Murphy, and two anonymous referees for their helpful comments on earlier versions of this paper.

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