

# Faith and Philosophy: Journal of the Society of Christian Philosophers

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Volume 33 | Issue 2

Article 9

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4-1-2016

## Kevin Timpe, FREE WILL IN PHILOSOPHICAL THEOLOGY

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### Recommended Citation

Quitterer, Josef (2016) "Kevin Timpe, FREE WILL IN PHILOSOPHICAL THEOLOGY," *Faith and Philosophy: Journal of the Society of Christian Philosophers*: Vol. 33 : Iss. 2 , Article 9.

DOI: 10.5840/faithphil201633263

Available at: <https://place.asburyseminary.edu/faithandphilosophy/vol33/iss2/9>

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is both essential to some important kinds of human relationships and that it presupposes libertarian free agency. Unlike Kane, however, he is skeptical that those kinds of relationships are possible. He argues that much of their importance can be retained even if they are not possible via similar relationships that presuppose “a notion of demand that does not require the ability to do otherwise and a sensitivity to which does not require the reactive attitudes” (168). The notion he identifies is the demand of axiological recommendation (e.g., “You ought to stop abusing me or it will destroy our relationship”). In contrast with the demand of moral obligation, which Nelkin’s account of personal relationships requires, the demand of axiological recommendation is consistent with the agent who is the target of the demand not being able to do otherwise. A failure to meet this sort of demand does not—or should not—engender reactive attitudes. For this reason, the kinds of personal relationships Pereboom gives an account of seem less valuable and important than the ones discussed by Nelkin and Kane. Pereboom admits that we would lose *something* if he is right about the nature of personal relationships, but he argues that the loss is not very significant. A disavowal of reactive attitudes in our personal relationships would not preclude having personal but non-reactive attitudes, like disappointment, sadness, and hurt feelings. And relationships characterized by susceptibility to those non-reactive attitudes *are* especially valuable, and, according to Pereboom, they are valuable enough.

While the collection is limited in scope insofar as it targets only one variety of libertarianism, the authors discuss a sufficiently wide range of topics and perspectives that the volume would be a valuable addition to a graduate seminar on free will. Moreover, as one of the only volumes devoted to libertarianism, it makes for an efficient but thorough introduction to the contemporary debate surrounding libertarianism.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Thanks to Chris Tweedt and Brandon Warmke for comments on an earlier draft of this review.

*Free Will in Philosophical Theology*, by Kevin Timpe. New York and London: Bloomsbury, 2014. 177 pages. \$120.00 (hardcover).

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Free will is essential for Christian faith. Without free will, there would be no sin, no guilt, and no moral responsibility. The Christian doctrine of salvation through divine forgiveness and through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ would be meaningless without free will. On the other hand, the Christian



theological tradition places strict limitations on free will: human decisions are shaped by the influence of original sin, human beings are unable to perform good actions without divine grace, and there is a notorious tension between divine providence and human freedom.

In *Free Will in Philosophical Theology*, Kevin Timpe aims to give a philosophically coherent defense of central Christian doctrines concerning the free will issue. To avoid the notorious problems surrounding the diversity and complexity of theological approaches, he takes the Catechism of the Catholic Church as his theological point of departure. There are different methods of defending the Christian doctrine. Instead of developing arguments justifying specific Christian beliefs, Timpe chooses to clarify them. He provides this clarification through “philosophical theology,” an application of the techniques of philosophical analysis to the central doctrines of Christian faith. Explaining central elements of Christian doctrine with the help of specific approaches in analytic philosophy’s free will debate can be a way to argue for the rationality of these doctrines.

Timpe’s philosophical point of departure for this enterprise is his own “sourcehood incompatibilism”—an approach in the philosophy of free will which focuses on the agent’s being the ultimate source of her actions rather than on her having alternative possibilities. In particular, the view that Timpe applies to Christian doctrine, is a version of sourcehood incompatibilism, namely virtue libertarianism. On this view, the agent is free if her acts are based on her character or habits (for which she is responsible), even if at the time of the decision she might not have a choice between alternate possibilities. Aristotle presents a similar view in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, where he argues that human acts derive quasi-naturally from the agent’s habit. Timpe applies virtue libertarianism to the aspects of Christian doctrine where freedom of the will is at stake. In elaborating his arguments, Timpe follows the classical *exitus-reditus* model: he starts with the state of humans (and angels) before the fall, then he discusses the problems for free will posed by original sin and grace, and finally he deals with the challenges to human freedom posed by the states of damnation and redemption. At the end of his book, Timpe discusses the freedom of God and the relationship between divine and human freedom.

Timpe successfully manages to subsume the classical connection between the will and the perceived good under the reasons-constraint of free choice (chapter 2). The assumption in the free will debate that every choice of an action depends on specific reasons corresponds to the classical assumption that “the agent chooses to act for the sake of some end which she perceives to be good in some way” (20). Virtue libertarianism makes this reasons-constraint on free choice even stronger: one’s habit or moral character “influences what one does see as a reason, the ordering of reasons, the causal efficacy of the reasons” (26).

Even if virtue libertarianism is a useful tool for adequately analyzing human free will after the fall, its explanatory power is weaker when it comes to human beings’ prelapsarian state. According to Thomas Aquinas

(*Summa Theologiae* Ia, q. 95, a 3), pre-fall humans possess every virtue. How can agents—with a morally perfect habit or character—turn away from the supreme object of love and decide to sin? Libertarians could reconstruct original sin as a decision based on genuinely open alternative possibilities in the moment just before the fall. Virtue libertarians, however, have the problem that the morally bad actions of pre-fall-agents cannot stem from a morally corrupted character.

A way out of this problem would be to shift the first bad decision from human to purely spiritual agents (angels), who then exerted a negative influence on human decision-making. In fact, Timpe analyzes original sin exclusively in the case of the fallen angel(s). However, even in this case an explanatory gap remains—how is it that a morally and intellectually perfect being decided to defect from the highest good? After comparing intellectualist and voluntarist approaches to this problem, Timpe seems to share the conclusion that Katherin Rogers ascribes to Anselm, according to which the primal sin remains something “inexplicable and ultimately mysterious” (47). He admits that a “Christian account of primal sin cannot avoid all arbitrariness” (48).

A notorious difficulty for human freedom faced by Christian doctrine is the relationship between original sin, free will, and grace. How can the virtue-libertarian approach cast light on this complex issue? According to Christian doctrine, original sin shapes the character of every human being so to dispose her to act against the divine order. Against Pelagius, the Council of Ephesus maintained that the individual cannot willingly cause his or her own salvation. Humans cannot even willingly choose to accept God’s grace. In the light of this, the question arises how a virtue-libertarian account can be maintained. Factors beyond the control of a person’s free will, like original sin and grace, seem to determine all of the human actions that are relevant for salvation. Virtues could have a positive influence on our being in a state of grace, yet we are not free to develop them ourselves. Timpe tries to avoid this theological determinism. According to him, the fact that we have no direct causal influence on our salvation does not imply that the receipt of divine grace is not up to us. Even if we cannot directly control our being saved by divine grace, we can indirectly enable salvation by ceasing to resist that grace. There is no active role for free will in this enterprise; the libertarian aspect manifests itself in the quiescent abstinence from willing (61). Here, however, it is hard to avoid the question why refraining from willing should not itself be an act of (free) will. Moreover, departing from a virtue-libertarian approach, why shouldn’t we assume that an individual can willingly choose to develop a habit or virtue consisting in not manifesting the power of our (natural) will to reject God’s grace?

In Timpe’s book, virtue libertarianism unfolds its full explanatory powers in discussing the question of free will after death. In chapters 5 and 6, Timpe deals mainly with the two optional eschatological states, which have a definitive and irreversible character: eternal damnation and salvation. According to Christian doctrine, both states are permanent; this means it

is not possible for the eternally damned to attain salvation or for the redeemed to become unredeemed. Yet human persons retain their freedom in both states. To deny free will in these eschatological states would amount to rejecting the claim that free will is part of human nature. However, is it possible to reconcile freedom of the will with the requirement that these two states be permanent? According to Timpe, the source-incompatibilist approach of virtue libertarianism offers a solution to this problem. In accordance with the Catechism of the Catholic Church, he maintains that the impossibility of escaping hell is not a consequence of divine punishment but rather of individuals' free choice. The idea is that they have formed their moral character in such a way that it is psychologically impossible for them to choose to leave hell and they simply see no reason to improve their moral character. In a similar fashion, the redeemed have formed their character in such way that they are now unable to choose sin. Timpe even integrates purgatory into this virtue-libertarian conception of eschatological states. Purgatory is the last step in this process of character formation, which completely erases a person's ability to sin, yet does so without annihilating her free will.

In the last chapter of his book, Timpe uses the virtue-libertarian model to resolve the "conflict between God's freedom and His essential goodness" (104). God's character is essentially morally perfect; therefore, he is unable to act in a morally imperfect way. His perfect moral nature implies that he is unable to make bad choices. Timpe admits that specific actions—e.g., the creation of the best of all possible worlds—necessarily follow from God's nature; but the kind of necessity at issue, according to Timpe, does not contradict God's freedom, since it comes "from God's own nature and not from anything outside Himself" (116). This argument against compatibilism, however, raises the suspicion that, for Timpe, freedom is here equivalent with authorship: An agent acts freely if she (and not something external) is the author of her actions. Obviously, authorship is a necessary condition of free agency, but as Timpe himself indicates at the end of chapter 7, it might not be sufficient.

*Free Will in Philosophical Theology* provides a comprehensive and systematic philosophical reconstruction of central elements of Christian belief concerning the free-will issue. Timpe successfully relates purely theological topics like the fall, original sin, grace, and redemption to the technical philosophical debates. Virtue libertarianism seems a promising tool for handling the ambivalences of the Christian concept of free will. The application of the virtue-libertarian approach to a Christian understanding of human and divine agency contributes to solving certain theological problems like that of the compatibility of human freedom with grace and original sin. Yet it elaborates the limits of a philosophical clarification of some religious assumptions, such as the original sin of morally perfect agents and the freedom of God. I recommend this book especially to theologians seeking a bridge between their area of specialization and the free will debate in analytic philosophy.