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God's Freedom, God's Character

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Introduction

My goal in this chapter is to consider the connection between an agent's moral character and those actions that she is capable of freely performing. Most of these connections hold for all moral agents, but my particular focus will be on the specific case of divine agency. That is, I'm primarily interested in the connection between God's moral character and His exercise of His free agency. As I will argue, even if an agent's character determines her choices or actions, that doesn't threaten the agent's freedom so long as her character is formed in the right way.[1] (Or, perhaps more accurately, so long as it's not formed in the wrong way. And I do not see how God's character could be formed in such a way that would undermine the exercise of His agency.) I proceed as follows. First, I explore the relationship between what an agent freely chooses to do and her moral character in general. I then address the relationship between God's character, His reasons, and His freedom, on the assumptions of Perfect Being Theology.[2] In the third section, I turn to the compatibility question, and show how an incompatibilist could agree with everything I say in the first two sections. That is, I argue that the considerations to which I appeal regarding divine freedom do not force the Perfect Being theologian to endorse compatibilism (though they also don't prove incompatibilism).

[1] The 'right way' I have in mind here, as shall be made clear in what follows, will involve those cases where an agent freely performs an action or series of actions that then made her unable to act other than she does at a later time. They are, roughly, what Robert Kane has referred to as 'self-forming actions'; see Kane 1996, 74.

[2] Here, I use the term 'God' as a definite description insofar as, following Anselm, I'm assuming that what it means to have the title 'God' properly ascribed to a being is just for that being to satisfy the description 'that than which nothing greater can be conceived'. On this approach, any being which could be conceived to be greater would fail, by definition, to be God. A danger with this approach to the title 'God' is captured by Rogers: 'If one party to the discussion of a particular attribute holds that the views of the other party are demeaning to God, then the one who takes "God" to be a description may say that what the opposition has called "God" is not really God at all, whereas the one who takes "God" to be a proper name may say that the opposition has offered a picture of God which is entirely at odds with the reality' (Rogers 2000, 5). However, given my assumption of Perfect Being Theology in this chapter, it is a worry that I can live with here. For reasons to prefer treating 'God' as a proper name rather than a definite description in a different context, see Timpe 2013b.

Free Will and Moral Character

In this section, I consider the relationship between an agent's free will and her moral character. But first a few words about terminology. By 'free will' I mean the control condition on moral responsibility; that is, the capacity or set of capacities governing an agent's choices or volitions, the exercise of which are necessary for the agent to be morally responsible for those choices or volitions.[3] This stipulative definition is put in terms of 'choices or volitions' rather than actions because action is sometimes used to refer explicitly to bodily actions rather than in a way that includes mental actions like volitions. I think that an agent can have free will even if she is unable to carry out a bodily action on the basis of that choice or volition. Rogers Albritton gives the following example of such a mismatch between a volition and a bodily action:

> Suppose I am chained up so that I can't walk, but don't yet know it. I deliberate about what to do next and decide on a little tour of my cell. Then I discover that I can't walk. They've chained me up, the swine! . . . Do I have reason to think not only, 'They've chained me up!' but, 'Good God, they've been tampering with my free will!'? No, I don't. . . . It's nothing against my freedom of will if I 'can't walk' because [I'm chained up or] the floor will collapse, or because it has been arranged for me to explode if I shift my weight. These difficulties in the way of my actually getting any walking accomplished are on the side of the world, not the will; and they don't in themselves interfere with the will's part in walking (that is, in these cases, its part in deciding and trying to walk). They don't affect its freedom, therefore. Where there's a will, there just isn't always a way.[4]

As this quotation points out, it is possible to freely will to perform some action and not be free to perform that action. To avoid any ambiguity, I will avoid referring to actions as much as possible. The distinction between bodily actions and mental actions like volitions is sometimes described as the difference between formal freedom and material freedom, a distinction that can be traced back to medieval theologians and philosophers. Formal freedom is an agent's freedom to will what she wants to will, apart from whether or not she is able to realize the object of her choice. In contrast, material freedom involves 'whether we also are able to effectuate the volition, i.e. whether we also have the freedom to realise the object of choice.'[5] An agent has formal freedom when she has free will, but she has material freedom when she has the further ability actually to perform what she has formally chosen to do. However, given that my focus in this chapter is primarily upon God as understood by Perfect Being Theology in such a way that includes the essential attribute of divine omnipotence, this distinction will not matter in what follows.[6] There is nothing external to God that could prevent His formal freedom from resulting in the exercise of material freedom.

[3] For my reasons for preferring this definition to van Inwagen's, see Timpe 2012, 11.

[4] Albritton 2003, 411.

[5] Labooy 2000, 184. See also Dekker and Veldhuis 1994, 155f.

[6] There are some proponents of Perfect Being Theology who deny essential omnipotence, e.g. because they think that omnipotence and perfect goodness are incompatible. For purposes of simplicity and focus, I will not be addressing such views in this chapter.

I turn then to the relationship between free will and the good, one commonly emphasized by medieval philosophers. (Perhaps more accurately, most of the medievals saw the will as oriented to the 'perceived good,' and not the good *per se*. However, given that my focus here is on God, whose perception of the good perfectly tracks the good itself, and necessarily so, this distinction also won't play a role in what follows.) The majority of contemporary philosophical work on free will avoids any explicit connection between free choice and 'the good,' instead preferring the language of 'reasons,' 'explanation,' and—to a lesser degree—'teleology.'[7] I don't think this language is as far removed from the medieval approach as is sometimes assumed, for the most plausible accounts of free will involve a close connection between an agent's free will and at least the agent's perception of the good, if not the good itself. The view that we only freely or intentionally do what we perceive as good in some way is sometimes referred to as 'the Guise of the Good Thesis.'[8] The vast majority of the medievals embraced the Guise of the Good Thesis and rejected the normative neutrality that characterizes much of contemporary philosophical writing on the issue.[9]

I take it to be obvious that agents exercise their free will for reasons. Consider the following quotation from G. F. Schueler, which illustrates this connection nicely:

> It seems clear enough that intentional actions are inherently purposive; indeed, intentional human actions are paradigm examples of purposive behavior. There is always some point, aim, or goal to any intentional action. It is equally clear that our everyday explanations of actions in terms of the agent's reasons ('reasons explanations' for short) must always refer to that fact, that is to the purpose of the action, if only implicitly, on pain of not explaining the action at all. If I tell you that my reason for sprinting toward the bus stop is that the last bus leaves in five minutes, you will take this as an explanation of my action only if you assume that my purpose is to catch the last bus (or anyway that there is something involving my being there at the same time the bus is—spray painting it with graffiti perhaps). Without some such addition, my reference to the time of the last bus simply won't 'connect' in the right sort of way to what I am doing, i.e. sprinting toward the bus stop, and my action won't have been explained.[10]

Freely performed actions aim at a goal, and the achieving of that goal serves as a reason why the agent chose that action.[11] The action is performed by the agent for a reason, and the action cannot be fully explained without mention of both (a) the agent and (b) the goal to which she directed the choice and which served as the reason for her choosing to perform that particular action. As R. Jay Wallace points out:

[7] For just two of many examples, see Fischer 2006 and Smith 2004, ch. 5. Boyle and Lavin 2010, 162ff. suggest that the contemporary departure from 'the Guise of the Good' is largely a result of the rejection of teleological explanations of action.

[8] So far as I am aware, this specific name comes from Velleman 1992, but a medieval predecessor can be found in the common dictum: *quidquid appetitur, appetitur sub specie boni* ('whatever is desired, it is desired under the appearance of the good'). For a collection of worthwhile papers addressing the Guise of the Good Thesis, see Tenenbaum 2010.

[9] For a further discussion, see Timpe 2013a, ch. 2.

[10] Schueler 2003, 1.

[11] In what follows, I'll primarily use the language of 'choice' since my general concern is with free will, and I take choices to be the primary locus of such freedom. Actions too can be free, if freely chosen.

It is important to our conception of persons as rational agents . . . that [their] motivations and actions . . . are guided by and responsive to their deliberative reflection about what they have reason to do. Unless this guidance condition (as we might call it) can be satisfied, we will not be able to make sense of the idea that persons are genuine agents, capable of determining what they shall do through the process of deliberation.[12]

In her good work on reasons, Maria Alvarez makes a related connection, describing how rational agency means we have the capacity to act for reasons: 'we have the capacity to recognize certain things as reasons to act, and to act motivated and guided by those reasons. Because of this, moreover, many human actions can be explained by reference to the agent's reasons for acting.'[13] So, when choosing which of various alternatives for action to do, agents have in mind an end (or ends) that they want to achieve, and the reason for which the agent does the action is the achievement of that end. If, as suggested earlier, an agent's reasons are a function of what she perceives to be good, then this purpose or reason for which choice is made will be connected with the agent's judgment that the end to be achieved by choice is good.

By 'good' here, I do not mean specifically morally good; I mean good in the generic sense of the term, recognizing and accepting that goodness comes in many forms: intrinsic, instrumental, moral, prudential, etc. Using the language of Judith Jarvis Thomson—who claimed that 'when people say about a thing "That's good", what they mean is always that the thing is *good in some way*'[14]—I am endorsing pluralism about the ways a thing can be good. Furthermore, the good need not be good *for* the agent in question; it could be good for some other agent or, if there are such things, it could be a non-agential good. An agent would not intentionally choose some option if she did not believe that option to be good in at least some way or other.

In choosing, then, the agent chooses to act for the sake of some end which she perceives to be good in some way, and in so choosing aligns herself with the promotion of that good end. Here the Guise of the Good Thesis connects quite closely with the more common contemporary talk of reasons, for the belief that the end promoted by the choice is good, again in some way or other, gives the agent a reason for making that choice. Kieran Setiya in fact argues that the Guise of the Good Thesis is fundamentally about reasons and only derivatively about desires:

First: When the object of desire, an action or outcome, is good, there is always some respect in which it is good, which is a reason to perform or to pursue it. . . . Second: If desires represent their objects as good, they represent them as being good in some respect—say, in being *F*—and the fact that the object is *F* is a reason why the agent wants to perform it.[15]

According to Setiya, the exact connection between reasons for action and the perceived good is as follows: 'When someone wants to φ, or wants it to be the case that p,

[12] Wallace 2006, 44.
[13] Alvarez 2010, 7.
[14] Thomson 2001, 17.
[15] Setiya 2010, 85.

they want it for a reason, and reasons for desire must be respects in which the object of desire is seen as good.'[16] Although I am inclined to accept Setiya's argument here, all that is needed for present purposes is the weaker claim that reasons and perceived goodness go together. An agent's having a purpose or reason to perform an action is to have a motivation to work toward actualizing a particular state of affairs that the agent takes to be good in some way.

The previous paragraphs have made repeated reference to the agent's reasons. In general, a reason is a consideration that counts in favor of some particular choice. It thus should provide some degree of motivation for that choice, though the motivation is certainly defeasible by other reasons. Also, agents need not actually be motivated, in the sense of acting on that reason, even if a reason provides a motivation for doing a particular action. Successful moral agency does depend on our capacity to recognize reasons. But, as Manuel Vargas points out, the capacity to detect reasons isn't sufficient for successful agency:

> Success also depends on the agent acting on that information in the right way, which is something we might call a volitional capacity, or a capacity for self governance. A squirrel that is an excellent acorn-detector but acornphobic will do badly at the business of acorn collection. So will a squirrel that is excellent at detecting acorns but completely apathetic about pursuing them. So, the ability to recognize reasons for action is of limited utility by itself— it is absolutely crucial that it be connected to a further ability to act on the detected information in the right way. At least from the philosophical armchair, there is no reason to suppose that excellence in reason detection is necessarily coupled with excellence in being appropriately moved.[17]

In what follows, I'll suggest that one of the characteristics of God's agency is perfection of the ability to detect those reasons that ought to motivate one and volitional responsiveness to those reasons.

Divine Character, Reasons, and Volitions

I think that Vargas is correct that rational agency requires both reasons detection and reasons sensitivity. If God is to be the rational agent than which none greater can be conceived, then He'll need to live up to each of these requirements perfectly.

There are a number of distinctions we might make between different kinds of reasons. For my purposes here, the most important of these will be the distinction between motivational reasons and normative reasons.[18] Motivational reasons are the reasons that an agent has for doing a particular action and are capable of explaining her choice if she were to perform that action. As Maria Alvarez correctly notes:

[16] Setiya 2010, 86. [17] Vargas 2010, 64f.

[18] For more on this distinction, see O'Connor 2010; Smith 2004, 1ff. and 59ff. Motivational reasons are sometimes also referred to as explanatory reasons; see Alvarez 2010, 3 and 33ff.

> What [motivating] reasons a person has for acting and wanting things depends partly on who that person is and on her circumstances and values, because, in general, things are not good or right *tout court* but in some respect; and that respect may be more or less relevant to different people depending precisely on what their circumstances and values are.[19]

In contrast, normative reasons are those reasons which would morally justify a particular choice by the agent at a particular time, regardless of whether the agent actually considers them or not.[20] Insofar as an action is morally good for the agent in question to perform, there is a normative reason for her performing that action. Likewise, insofar as an action would be morally bad for an agent to perform, there is a normative reason for her not performing it. But if the agent is unaware of the moral goodness or badness of an action, or simply does not care about the morality of the action, then her motivational reasons will not track the normative reasons that there are. This distinction, however, will not be relevant to the specific case of divine agency insofar as, given His perfection, God's motivational reasons perfectly track the existing normative reasons, and necessarily so.

We can map these two kinds of reasons on to Vargas' earlier comments regarding rational agency. An agent's ability to detect reasons will be a function of the agent's ability to determine which normative reasons exist for the various options facing the agent. God, as omniscient, will be perfectly aware of all the normative reasons, as well as their relevant strengths, for all possible actions. Similarly, we can understand an agent's sensitivity to reasons as a function of counterfactual sensitivity in weighing those reasons in such a way that lead the agent to act in various ways.

Returning then to the connection between reasons and free will, we can now understand a bit more clearly just what is involved in the claim made earlier that an agent never freely chooses to do an action *A* when she has no reason for *A*-ing. Elsewhere I've argued along these lines for what I call the Reasons-Constraint on Free Choice.

> Reasons-Constraint on Free Choice:
> If, at *t*, A has neither any motivational intellectual reasons for X-ing nor any motivational affective reasons for X-ing, then A is incapable, at *t*, of freely choosing to X.[21]

Two points of clarification regarding the Reasons-Constraint on Free Choice are needed. First, the incapability here should be understood in a strong sense: necessarily, given her lack of reasons for *X*-ing, *A* cannot freely choose to *X*. Second, in order not to have to take a stand here regarding God's relationship to time, the *t* in the Reasons-Constraint on Free Choice should be understood as allowing for *t* to be either a moment in time or the atemporal moment that eternalists think God occupies.[22]

[19] Alvarez 2010, 22.

[20] There may be other sorts of normative reasons that are not explicitly moral in nature, such as pragmatic reasons. However, insofar as my general interest is in free will and its connection with moral responsibility, those need not concern me here.

[21] See Timpe 2013a, ch. 2. A somewhat similar principle, put to a similar use, can be found in Goetz 2009, 22.

[22] For how I think divine eternity relates to God's knowledge and human freedom, see Timpe 2007.

With these two clarifications made, let's turn more directly to the connection between an agent's reasons and the exercise of her agency that is at the heart of the Reasons-Constraint on Free Choice. It is widely accepted that our moral character influences our choices. John Kronen and Eric Reitan write, for example, that 'moral character influences, often decisively, what one does or does not do. In other words, one's moral character gives rise to motives for actions, the totality of which excludes some actions, permits others, and necessitates still others.'[23] I agree with this and think that there are two different relevant ways in which an agent's various moral character traits can shape what she freely chooses to do.[24] (There is a third way in which an agent's moral character can affect her exercise of free will, and that is via weakness of will; given the focus in this chapter on God's freedom, this consideration won't be relevant here.[25]) An agent's character directs one's choices both by influencing what that agent sees as reasons for actions and influencing how one weighs her reasons, in the sense of rank-ordering the various reasons she has. To put this point a slightly different way: in making free decisions, one's character traits affect not only the weights but also the scales. Both of these aspects can be seen as follows. Given that God is an essentially omnibenevolent being, He cannot choose to perform an action He thinks there is no good reason to perform—e.g. inflict gratuitous suffering on another agent. However, other agents with lesser moral characters might be such that they see reasons for doing this. Similarly, God might see that there is some reason for performing a particular action, *Y*, but also see that there are greater reasons to perform an incompatible action, *X*. In such a case, God will always rank *X*-ing as a better option than *Y*-ing, such that if He only performs one, God knows that it is better to *X* than to *Y*. But another agent might wrongly weigh the reasons for *Y*-ing to be greater than the reasons for *X*-ing. Since an agent freely chooses to do only things that she thinks she has some reason to do, an agent's character affects her free choices by affecting both the weight or strength she assigns to reasons, and by affecting the scale by which she compares a reason or set of reasons for acting one way against a reason or set of reasons for acting another. A perfect being, however, will necessarily get it right at both steps, necessarily assigning reasons to various options properly, and necessarily weighing those sets of reasons against each other without fail or confusion.

Character, Inability, and the Compatibility Question

I have just argued that an agent's reasons affect her free choices by influencing both the weight or strength she assigns to reasons, and by affecting the scale by which she compares a set of reasons for acting one way against a reason or set of reasons for acting another. And I think that the libertarian can and should endorse both of these

[23] Kronen and Reitan 2010, 201.
[24] This paragraph is taken, with modification, from Pawl and Timpe 2009, 407.
[25] For a discussion of this as it relates to human agents, see Timpe 2013a, ch. 6.

considerations as well. (The most plausible compatibilist accounts of agency also include these considerations, though I think there are other reasons not to prefer compatibilist accounts.) In an article focusing on human freedom, Thomas Talbott writes as follows, distinguishing two claims that libertarians make:

> The correct claim is this: No action that can be traced back to a sufficient cause external to the agent is truly free. The incorrect claim is this: An action is free only if it is logically and psychologically possible for the person who performs it to refrain from it. The latter claim seems to me inconsistent not only with Christian theology, but with widespread intuitions about the nature of moral character as well. In a very real sense, the measure of one's moral character—the measure of one's love, for instance—is just the extent to which certain actions are no longer possible.[26]

I think that Talbott is correct here. What seems central to a rational agent doing something freely is that the agent is not causally necessitated to do it by anything outside the agent and that it is done for a reason; not that it is both logically and psychologically possible for the agent to have refrained from performing that action (holding everything constant). This is especially true if the agent under consideration is God, given that there can be nothing outside of God that could determine (or constrain) Him in any way.

Perhaps what is most contentious about the view I've been developing so far is how we are to understand the connection between God's freely performed actions, which are done for reasons, and God's essentially and necessarily perfect moral character. In particular, one might think that considerations of God's essentially and necessarily perfect moral character entail that God's freedom should be understood in a compatibilist manner, rather than in libertarian terms. Jesse Couenhoven is a compatibilist who thinks that libertarian views of divine freedom are problematic given God's essential moral perfection.[27] He writes, 'libertarian accounts of God's freedom quickly run into a conceptual problem: their focus on contingent choices undermines their ability to celebrate divine freedom with regard to the essential divine nature. For an Augustinian [i.e. a compatibilist], by contrast, God's freedom is not at odds with the necessities of perfect love but fulfilled by it.'[28] Couenhoven thinks that libertarian accounts of freedom either constrain God's freedom or His essential moral perfection given that an agent's being free, on the libertarian's view, is incompatible with the agent being determined; for him, this is reason to prefer a compatibilist account of freedom. I think that this purported conflict between God's freedom and His essential moral

[26] Talbott 1988, 17.

[27] Couenhoven's preferred view is compatibilist in two senses: 'The view I defend is "compatibilist" in considering human freedom compatible with theological determinism and divine freedom compatible with necessities intrinsic to a necessary [and perfect] being' (Couenhoven 2012, 397, note 4). My own view of free will is incompatibilist in the first sense; see Timpe 2012. Nevertheless, I think the virtue libertarian can accept the second kind of compatibility, as I am arguing here.

[28] Couenhoven 2012, 409.

perfection can be resolved by the virtue libertarian.[29] Couenhoven's claim that 'libertarians are also unable to give God credit for fundamental aspects of divine activity, because they cannot allow that God is free in doing them or responsible for them'[30] is mistaken. To see this, notice that Couenhoven rightly emphasizes that divine freedom 'is sourced in [God's] own life, unforced and unconditional from without, and thus not helplessly but sovereignly overflowing. God's nature is self-determined in the manner called *aseity*—it is from itself.'[31] Nothing in the virtue libertarian's view of divine freedom, however, requires disagreeing with Couenhoven on any of the issues in this last quotation.

As Evan Fales notes:

> answering [this purported conflict between God's freedom and His necessary goodness] will force a confrontation between two alternative ways of formulating the libertarian conception of free will, alternatives which are sometimes taken to be equivalent: first, that freedom involves being able to do otherwise [i.e., leeway-based approaches], and second, that freedom involves the capacity to act from reasons one has [which is a version of a source-based approach].[32]

Like Fales, I endorse the second of these two conceptions, for reasons I've spelled out in greater detail elsewhere.[33] And I think this same conception, when applied to divine freedom, shows that the purported conflict between God's freedom and His essential goodness is illusory.

One of the upshots of the discussion of the Reasons-Constraint on Free Choice is that a free agent can freely will to *X* even if it is not psychologically possible for her, given her moral character, to choose not to *X*. Free choice doesn't always require what Wes Morriston calls 'moral freedom' or what Alvin Plantinga calls 'significant freedom.' By 'moral freedom' Morriston means 'the freedom to choose between good and evil alternatives.'[34] Morriston's use of the term is closely related to Plantinga's terminology of 'significant freedom.' As Plantinga defines it, a person has significant free will only if that individual is 'free with respect to an action that is morally significant for him,'[35] where an action is morally significant for a person at a given time 'if it would be wrong for him to perform the action then but right to refrain, or vice versa.'[36] Significant free

[29] The term 'virtue libertarianism' comes from Dean Zimmerman: 'According to virtue libertarianism, (i) we sometimes bear moral responsibility for choices we make even when our doing so is not a base case of free choice; what matters is whether the choices spring from genuinely moral virtues and vices. As a consequence, (ii) God could often, when it serves his purposes, override our freedom without jeopardizing the chief good for which freedom is given. So long as frequent genuinely free choices are made, God's occasionally determining what we will choose would not seriously undermine the role of freedom in securing the possibility of moral growth' (Zimmerman 2012, 177). For a further elaboration of the particular form of virtue libertarianism I endorse, see Timpe 2013a.

[30] Couenhoven 2012, 409. [31] Couenhoven 2012, 409.

[32] Fales 1994, 65. [33] See Timpe 2013a, ch. 1 and Timpe 2012.

[34] Morriston 2003, 441. See also Morriston 2000, 345.

[35] Plantinga 1974, 166. For a different understanding of morally significant freedom, see Barnard 2007, 320. It should be pretty obvious how Barnard's understanding of morally significant freedom would fit with the virtue libertarian's understanding of perfected freedom.

[36] Plantinga 1974, 166.

will is thus a robust, non-trivial freedom of the will. Furthermore, as defined by Plantinga, a person is significantly free with respect to an action only if either the performance of that action or refraining from performing that action is morally wrong, and the person is free to act or to refrain from acting. The only significantly free choices we have, on Plantinga's account of significant freedom, are those that are between morally right and morally wrong options.

Moral and significant freedom is, I claim, necessary for the formation of a free moral character for any created agent. Furthermore, the goal of forming our character is that we would form it in such a way that evil choices are no longer psychologically possible for us. Consider the following passage from Thomas Talbott:

> According to libertarians, moral virtues cannot be imposed upon one person by another and cannot be instilled, produced, or brought about by a sufficient cause external to the agent. The point is once again essentially negative: any disposition to behave that is produced by an action of creation (i.e., by a sufficient cause external to the created agent), whatever else it may be, is not a moral virtue. Some dispositions, no doubt, are produced in this way, for example the baby's disposition to cry when hungry, but a moral virtue cannot be produced in this way. That point, however, has no relevance in the case of God, since *none* of God's dispositions to behave are imposed upon him by an act of creation; when God acts in a loving way, for instance, that is a true expression of himself as an independent being. It is only in the case of created persons, therefore, that the problem of determinism is even relevant. If God wanted to create persons who are, like himself, both independent and morally virtuous—who are at least sometimes the uncaused cause of morally right actions—he had no choice but to create persons who are free in the libertarian sense. Then, once these created persons are subjected to a process of 'soul-making,' as John Hick calls it, once they are perfected through a complex process of free choice, failure, correction, and redemption, their perfected nature need not be thought of as something imposed upon them from without.[37]

On Talbott's incompatibilist picture, moral freedom is instrumentally necessary for created agents to be (that is, become) 'independent and morally virtuous.' But once these agents have freely formed such a character, it's no longer the case that they require the ability to do otherwise. My discussion elsewhere of the freedom of the redeemed shows that I think he's right about this.[38]

But it should be obvious that God doesn't need to have moral or significant freedom in order to develop a moral character—as created agents do.[39] In thinking about whether or not God has the ability to choose to do evil, Augustine writes that 'if only that one is free which is able to will two things, that is, good and evil, God is not free, since he cannot will evil.'[40] But Augustine thinks that God is free, so he thinks that it is false that only those agents that are able to will good and evil are free. I think it is false that a self-existing being such as God requires moral freedom in order to be free, thereby, like Augustine, rejecting the antecedent of the conditional above. God need

[37] Talbott 1988, 17.
[38] See Timpe 2013b, ch. 6.
[39] For a similar view, see Senor 2008, especially section IV.B.
[40] Augustine 1999, I.100.

not have moral freedom in order to be free and responsible since God doesn't have his moral character contingently. He's not just perfectly morally good, but essentially perfectly morally good. So moral freedom isn't instrumentally valuable in the same way for God as it is for creatures. Given the radical ontological difference between God and creatures, it shouldn't be surprising that God's freedom is different from creaturely freedom at this point. He is not made to have his moral character. Neither is God, however, a beta—his moral character isn't something that He just happens to have. God's moral character is guaranteed precisely by his being essentially morally perfect. As such, it is impossible for God to have a motivational reason for doing a morally bad action and thus—given the Reasons-Constraint on Free Choice—to use His free will for something other than good. None of the reasons for which free creatures require moral freedom is a reason for God to have moral freedom. God has free will (that is, He is free with respect to performing morally good actions) even if He never has moral freedom and the ability to do evil.[41]

None of this means, however, that God's choices are not made for reasons. There are reasons that motivate God's choices to do those things that He does.[42] As I argued in the previous section, God's motivational reasons will always perfectly track the normative reasons that exist. Given His omniscience, God will necessarily always be aware of the existing normative reasons for every possible action. Given His essential goodness, God will necessarily always weigh the normative reasons for *X*-ing with the normative reasons for not *X*-ing (or for doing some other action *Y*, such that doing *X* and *Y* are contrary) properly. And given that divine akrasia is impossible, God will never fail to *X* if He knows that the normative reasons for *X*-ing outweigh the normative reasons for not *X*-ing (or, again, for doing some other action *Y*, if it's the case that doing *X* and *Y* are contrary). God will not perform an action (or fail to perform on action) that He judges it would be wrong for Him, all things considered, to perform (or not to perform). So in God we see the perfection of rational agency, both in terms of reasons detection and in terms of reasons sensitivity. As Even Fales writes:

> God is a perfectly rational agent, and He is so out of logical, or metaphysical necessity. Thus *His* train of thought, when He reasons, embodies perfectly the good-reasons relation . . . and is, moreover, not constrained by any causal laws. Since God is also omnipotent and omnibenevolent, there is no distinction in Him between moral and prudential reasoning. Since God necessarily arrives at the correct conclusion in any deliberation, and necessarily does not suffer from weakness of the will, He necessarily does what is morally best (if anything)—and performs each such action with perfect freedom.[43]

[41] In saying that God doesn't have the ability to do some evil *E*, I'm not attributing a limitation on power to God. Were God to want to will *E*, nothing could prevent Him for willing *E* nor prevent that willing from being efficacious.

[42] So far as I can tell, everything I say here is compatible with the stronger claim, recently defended by Alexander Pruss, that God is omnirational such that whenever God acts, He acts for all the reasons He could have for acting in that way. See Pruss 2013.

[43] Fales 1994, 82.

One might reject this picture on the grounds that God doesn't reason discursively about normative reasons. But as Fales notes, the account above doesn't require that He does:

> God does act for reasons, and in accord with His reasons. It does not matter whether God must engage in discursive reasoning in order to see that a certain action ought to be performed, or whether, as we believe, He just sees this immediately. In either case, He sees that the action is wanted *because* the [normative] reasons dictate it, and in this way His choosing embodies the crucial good-reasons connection that lies at the heart of the above analysis of freedom.[44]

We need not think that God reasons discursively to think He acts for reasons. Given God's perfection, His motivational reasons and free choice necessarily track the realm of normative reasons. God always does what is best despite being free.

These considerations help show that God doesn't need to have moral freedom (that is, the ability to choose between good and evil alternatives) in order to be free and responsible. However, an even stronger claim can be made. Mawson argues that God's having moral freedom would be a liability, since it would involve His having the ability to do that which is less than perfectly good:

> To ask the question whether God would be more powerful if He had the ability to perform an action which is less than that demanded by perfect goodness is to ask whether He would be more powerful if He had the ability to perform an action which, of necessity, there is good reason for Him not to perform (it is less than that demanded by perfect goodness—He has more reason to perform that action which is demanded by perfect goodness instead), and which—being omnipotent—He need not perform in order to bring about any other state of affairs He might want to bring about. In other words, it is to ask whether He would be more powerful if He had the ability to perform an overall unreasonable action. To answer this question 'No' seems, then, obviously right. Such an ability would always be a liability for Him; it could never be a power.[45]

I see no reason to think one should intrinsically value moral freedom (freedom-involving-the-ability-to-sin) over freedom-minus-ability-to-sin. As argued earlier, human agents need the former precisely in order to develop the latter; but once we develop the latter, the former is no longer valuable in and of itself. And given that God doesn't need the former to develop the latter, God has no need for moral freedom. And having such an ability, Mawson claims, would detract from his perfection.

Let me briefly mention two other reasons for thinking that divine and creaturely free creatures differ with respect to their need for moral freedom and its historical role

[44] Fales 1994, 83. See also 84: 'We tend to think of actions as paradigmatically free when careful deliberation is a prerequisite to seeing what ought to be done—that is, where the rights of the matter are, initially at least, far from obvious. . . . But many—indeed legion—are the cases in which one acts for reasons, but in which discursive deliberation is quick and easy, even superfluous. These are the cases in which the consequences of alternative acts are clear, and it is clear what consequence is to be preferred. Such cases are surely *not* cases of unfree action; on the contrary, they are cases in which the good-reasons connection between reasons and action are particularly strong. . . . Choices are not less free because they are more obvious.'

[45] Mawson 2005, 66.

in leading to a perfected moral character. These reasons are intended primarily for those who endorse the doctrine of divine simplicity, as I am inclined to do.[46] At the heart of the doctrine of divine simplicity is the claim that God lacks composition of any sort. Eleonore Stump captures the doctrine of divine simplicity as comprising four central claims:

(1) God cannot have any spatial or temporal parts.
(2) God cannot have any intrinsic accidental properties.
(3) There cannot be any real distinction between one essential property and another in God's nature.
(4) There cannot be a real distinction between essence and existence in God.[47]

First, if God is simple then there is no distinction between God and God's moral character: God just is identical with his moral character. This reinforces the earlier point that not only God's moral character but God himself would be worse if He had the ability freely to sin. The second disjunct of claim (1), that is, the claim that God necessarily has no temporal parts, is often taken to imply that God is not a temporal entity. The only way an object could lack temporal parts is either by being a temporal but instantaneous entity, or by being a non-temporal, or 'eternal,' entity. Proponents of divine simplicity opt for the second alternative for obvious reasons.

The classical articulation of divine eternity is found in Boethius' *The Consolation of Philosophy*:

> That God is eternal, then, is the common judgment of all who live by reason. Let us therefore consider what eternity is, for this makes plain to us both the divine nature and knowledge. Eternity, then, is the complete possession all at once of illimitable life. This becomes clearer by comparison with temporal things. For whatever lives in time proceeds as something present from the past into the future, and there is nothing placed in time that can embrace the whole extent of its life equally.[48]

Aquinas also provides a succinct articulation of divine eternity: 'God is entirely without motion and therefore is not measured by time. . . . He is therefore without beginning and without end, having all His being at once, wherein consists the essence of eternity.'[49] As this brief discussion suggests, divine simplicity entails either that God is instantaneous or that He is eternal.[50] While I think the reasons for preferring the second are obvious, on either disjunct God's having a history is problematic on this view of the divine nature.[51] But insofar as creatures are metaphysically complex and temporal, we should expect creaturely moral agency to be different.

[46] See *Catholic Church* 2003, 43. [47] Stump 1999, 250. [48] As quoted by Stump 2003, 132.
[49] Aquinas 1934, I.15. [50] See Timpe 2007.
[51] Virtually every Christian thinks that God is immutable in some sense or other. Those that reject a strong sense of immutability connected to the doctrine of divine eternity typically insist upon a weaker notion according to which God's moral character is constant and unchanging. Whether one takes a strong or weak view of immutability, one will say God's character is constant and unchanging in the way required above. For more on this issue, see Pawl 2009.

In response to an earlier paper, Steven Cowan suggests that:

> from a compatibilist perspective, an insistence on this asymmetry [between creaturely freedom and responsibility requiring moral freedom but divine freedom and responsibility not requiring it] can only be seen as question begging. A compatibilist can say (this one does say) that God's kind of freedom is a model for our freedom and God's freedom doesn't look a whole lot like libertarian freedom.[52]

The previous discussion should show why I think the claim that, for libertarians, God's freedom differs fundamentally from human freedom is false. God's freedom is still the model for how we should understand creaturely freedom. God is the source of His actions given that He acts on the basis of motivational reasons, cannot choose to do something for which He has no motivational reasons, and is not causally determined to do so by anything outside of Himself. The same is true of created agents such as humans. As Talbott noticed earlier:

> none of this [that it is possible for an agent to freely *X* even if it is not psychologically possible for that agent *not* to *X*] counts against the other claim that libertarians have made: that no free action can be traced back to a sufficient cause external to the agent. Just as God remains the uncaused cause of events in the world even in those cases where his actions are determined by his own nature (or character), so also do the perfected saints. Perfected saints do differ from God in this respect: their moral character is an *acquired* character and must therefore be *freely* appropriated.[53]

And insofar as, unlike the perfected saints, God has His moral character essentially, God has no need to acquire His moral character. Despite the fundamental similarities, this difference between human and divine freedom should not be overlooked given that they are rooted in differences between human and divine agents.

Let me then return to Couenhoven's claim that the connection between God's moral character and His freedom favors a compatibilist account of freedom. According to Couenhoven:

> a libertarian conception of divine freedom is unattractive, then, because it turns God's very greatness into a liability; their necessary perfections limit the freedom of the triune persons. Libertarian accounts also undercut the praise of God's essential perfections, and whatever necessarily follows from them, that is common among believers. . . . Libertarian accounts of divine freedom have the strange implication that God's perfect goodness and infinite and certain knowledge not only do not enhance but are actually at odds with divine freedom.[54]

It should be clear now why I think that none of these implications follow from an incompatibilist account of divine freedom. God's inability isn't a liability that undercuts

[52] Cowan 2011, 429. In its entirety, the last sentence of this quotation reads: 'A compatibilist can say (this one does say) that God's kind of freedom is a model for our freedom and God's freedom doesn't look a whole lot like libertarian freedom, at least not the "full-blown" kind that includes the ability to sin.' I responded to the 'full-blown' part of this quotation in Timpe 2013a, ch. 6, which is why I leave it aside from the discussion here. See also Pawl and Timpe 2013.

[53] Talbott 1988, 18.

[54] Couenhoven 2012, 410 and 417.

His perfection, but is rather wholly consistent with His perfection. Insofar as God's goodness doesn't threaten His freedom, there is no reason to think that He is not praiseworthy for His goodness.

So I disagree with Couenhoven that an incompatibilist account of divine freedom has the drawbacks that he thinks it does. However, there are other aspects of Couenhoven's treatment of divine freedom with which I am in agreement. Drawing on the work of Augustine, he writes:

> Divine freedom . . . offers the strongest argument against conceiving of freedom as limited by the necessities of perfection. Just as God cannot make a round square or a rock too heavy for the Trinity to lift, because being 'constrained' by reason is a higher kind of ability and power than being 'unlimited' by it, so divine freedom expresses itself in an 'inability' to sin. It is greater for God to be unable to sin, the necessity of happiness being more perfect than the 'capacity' to choose the unhappy. . . . The necessity of perfection is not external, forced on God, but arises from God's own nature, since God is the greatest conceivable being, and cannot change.[55]

We can distill the following characteristics of divine freedom from Couenhoven's quotation:

- divine freedom expresses itself as an inability to sin;
- divine freedom is more perfect for including the inability to choose sin;
- the inability to choose sin is intrinsic to God's nature, rather than imposed from without.

First, it is because of the third characteristic that the inability to sin is not a limitation on God's freedom, but rather an expression of it. Second, I think that Couenhoven is right that a satisfactory account of divine freedom should include these three characteristics. However, I think that virtue libertarianism can secure each of them. That is, I think that God's freedom could be characterized as Couenhoven does here even if compatibilism is false.[56]

Conclusion

Not only can one account for these characteristics of God's freedom on the virtue libertarian view I've outlined, but one can also see that God's freedom is the most perfect freedom there can be. The discussion in the previous section shows how it is that necessarily God's exercise of free will can't go wrong. 'There are none of the limitations on God's freedom that there are on ours (and indeed that there would be on any being less than omnipotent or omniscient). God's ability to bring about what He wants is

[55] Couenhoven 2012, 400f.

[56] In the contemporary free will literature, most compatibilists think that while free will is compatible with the truth of determinism, it is also compatible with the falsity of determinism; see Timpe 2012. One reason for Couenhoven to grant that the above desiderata of divine freedom can be satisfied by the incompatibilist is so that his account of divine freedom doesn't *require* the truth of determinism. In this sense, Couenhoven should be grateful for the above account.

unconstrained by either a lack of power or a lack of knowledge; and it is in virtue of this that we must thus describe God as perfectly free.'[57] God's moral character is such that it cannot limit or misdirect His exercise of His agency. Furthermore, given the divine nature, nothing external to God could limit His freedom. Thus, accepting the traditional claims about God's freedom and His essential moral perfection that I've considered does not force one to endorse compatibilism, even from within an Anselmian framework.[58]

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[57] Mawson 2005, 57.

[58] I have benefited from helpful comments on previous versions of this chapter from Rebekah Rice, Dan Speak, Audra Jenson, Eric Silverman, Gregory Sandler, and two anonymous readers for OUP.

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