

# **Human Free Choice and Divine Causality**

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Driving without passengers, your roommate, Pat, slammed into a bridge abutment. Everyone but you assumed it was an accident. Back from the funeral, you get a letter. The police could find no explanation for what happened, and Pat's parents hope you can tell them you know of nothing that points to suicide. You cannot honestly reassure them.

That day, Pat's heartthrob ended their relationship, which you only then learned had become sexually intimate. The story poured out in a torrent of words and tears. You listened and made sympathetic noises until only the tears still flowed. Then you offered the inept consolation that the breakup was a blessing in disguise. Pat stormed out but called a few minutes later and said: "I'm sorry I got mad. Thanks for trying to help. I don't want you to think this was your fault. Goodbye." The phone clicked. Pat was gone.

Now you see only two live options, that is, two possibilities that seem worth considering: tell the truth as gently as you can or lie as convincingly as you can. You have a reason to tell the truth: lying is a sin, and even the smallest venial sin is a great evil. You also have a reason to lie: already grieving over their child's death, Pat's parents will be inconsolable if they learn much more about its why and how. You think that, if you were in their place, you would want the spark of suspicion smothered by "Pat was fine" rather than fueled by "Pat was upset." For, hearing that, you would surely ask: "Upset about what?" and go on questioning until you learned the horrifying truth.

Though unusual, the choice you face has the features of every free choice. You did not bring yourself into being or give yourself the capacity to make choices. You are not free about being in the situation

you are in or having the options that confront you. You might have chosen someone else for your roommate. The police need not have disturbed Pat's parents. But these things and all the other conditions that have generated and limited your options are what they are, and you cannot change them. You must choose between telling the truth and lying.

If your feelings alone were in play, you would lie, though you would feel badly about doing so. But reasons also are in play, and you have a better reason for telling the truth (the sinfulness of lying) than you have for lying. Still, that better reason is not decisive. You think that telling the truth would devastate Pat's parents.

You wish something would settle the issue for you so that you would not have to choose. But you know that nothing is going to do that. Whether you tell the truth or lie is up to you, and to you alone. You are going to do one or the other, and only your own choosing—that is, only you yourself making the choice—will settle which. There are two possible worlds, entirely the same up to now, and each including everything that has been. But in one of those possible worlds you will lie, and in the other you will tell the truth. You are about to make one of those worlds real, and which of them you make real will permanently affect you, Pat's parents, and much else. Of course, if you lie, you may repent, and if you tell the truth, you may wish you had lied. But there will be no going back.

Of course, some people claim that our experience of making free choices is an illusion and that nobody ever really makes a free choice. Such people are called "determinists," for they suppose there must be hidden causes that determine us to engage in the behavior we regard as making free choices. But lacking evidence of any such hidden cause, determinists must try to argue for their position. The arguments they offer are meant to appeal to our reasonableness and to show that we ought to accept determinism.

The difficulty is, however, that this *ought* itself embodies an appeal to freedom. Determinists are asking us to set aside any interests and feelings that might lead us to cling to what they regard as the illusion of freedom. They are challenging us to be faithful to the disinterested pursuit of truth. But we can respond to that challenge only if we can make a free choice. Thus, any attempt to prove that our experiences of making free choices are illusory is self-defeating.

Many people who reject determinism and accurately understand free choice think it obvious that our free choices cannot be caused by God. If such people believe in God, they think he creates us and gives us our ability to choose, but leaves it up to us to make our free choices. On their view, our free choices are entirely our own. Such people

suppose that our choices could not really be free if they depended on God in any more direct way than by depending on our God-given powers. How, they might ask, can your choice to tell the truth or to lie depend on God if only your own choosing settles which you will do?

Plausible as that view is, it should trouble thoughtful theists—that is, believing Jews, Christians, and Muslims. If anyone thinks it poses no problem, atheologians—as I shall call philosophers who challenge theism—will be happy to clarify the issue: “You theists hold that God in no way depends on anything and that he knows absolutely everything. Now, if God knows everything without depending on anything, his knowledge cannot depend on anything other than himself, and so cannot involve receiving information from outside himself. How, then, can he know about the choices you think are free?”

Confronted with that argument, some theistic thinkers have replied: “God’s omniscience is somewhat like our practical knowledge. He knows all possible things by knowing what he can create and knows all real things by knowing what he does create. And he infallibly knows all real things because, being omnipotent, his creative will cannot be frustrated.”

To that, an atheologian can respond: “You must admit that if that were true, your free choices, along with everything else in creation, would depend upon God for their very reality. It follows that they could not be other than he knows them to be. But in that case, how could they be free? And why blame yourself rather than God for your so-called sins?”

In responding to this classical challenge, theists can begin by pointing out that to say our free choices depend on God for their reality is not to say that God settles which option we take when we seem to ourselves to be making a free choice. Those two statements simply do not mean the same thing. Admittedly, if God knows and wills something, it is necessarily so—that is, it is in reality just as he knows and wills it to be. But it does not follow that the choices one experiences oneself as making freely actually are necessary. For God’s creative causality does not bear upon one’s choosing option *A*, so that one cannot choose option *B*. Rather, God creates a whole: one’s being able to choose option *A* or option *B* and freely choosing *A*, or one’s being able to choose option *A* or option *B* and freely choosing *B*.

So, the classic theistic response continues, if God infallibly knows and omnipotently wills that you have the options of telling the truth and of lying and that you freely choose the first or that you freely choose the second, then your options and your free choice are in

reality just as he knows them to be. But nothing is necessary in that whole state of affairs except that you do have those options and that you freely choose whichever option you choose. In other words, there is a necessary relationship between God's saying, "Let so and so have these options and freely choose such and such," and the reality of that created state of affairs. But it does not follow that anything within that created state of affairs forestalls your free choice by eliminating all the options but one.

According to this theistic account, the freedom of human choices belongs to their created reality. The issue about their freedom is between them, us, and other things that could limit our options. Thus, God's creative causality accounts for the freedom of our choices rather than takes it away, just as God's creative causality accounts for, rather than takes away, the contingency of all created beings. If God wills a possible creature to be, it is necessarily true that the creature is. But it does not follow that any creature is necessary in its being. How God can cause free choices is only part of a more basic question: how can he create? How can he take a set of possibilities that are nothing without him and make them into a universe that is really other than himself? And how can the created universe be entirely dependent on God without being part of divine reality itself, though perhaps in a different form? Still, God can and does create. And so he also can and does cause free choices.

Though the preceding theistic response fends off the atheologians' claim that divine causality and human free choice are incompatible, that response entirely satisfies few people. As one would expect, atheologians pick away at its logic. But even many theists manifest perplexity with the proposition that God infallibly knows and omnipotently wills the reality of those states of affairs in which people consider their options and make their free choices, especially if those choices are sinful.

That perplexity often leads to serious trouble. Some theists have more or less frankly given up either freedom of choice or the dependence of choices on divine causality. Most focus upon one element of the problem—either the freedom of choices or their dependence—while ignoring or soft-pedaling the other. Thus, theists tend to polarize, some emphasizing human freedom, others divine causality.

Among Catholics, both of the opposing tendencies were manifested simultaneously by the opposing parties to an argument about grace and free choice that developed between Dominican and Jesuit theologians after the Council of Trent. The controversy went on for twenty-five years, until Pope Paul V ended it in 1607.

Both sides took for granted the classical theistic effort, summarized above, to defend the compatibility of divine causality and free choice. But the Dominicans focused more on grace and the Jesuits more on free choice. Some on both sides accused their opponents of heresy. After very thorough discussions involving the best Catholic minds of the time, Paul V ended the controversy by saying: the Dominican position is not Calvinistic, the Jesuit position is not pelagian, both may teach their own views, neither may condemn the other's view, and everyone should prepare to accept a final judgment by the Holy See.

The controversy ended, but no decision ever came. None of the theologians involved in the controversy nor anyone involved in the papal efforts to adjudicate it had been able to find the key to a satisfying resolution.

Both such perennial perplexity among theists themselves and the ongoing challenges by atheologists strongly suggest that there is something inadequate about the classical effort to defend the compatibility of theistic beliefs about divine causality and free choice. In my judgment, that effort was not pointless: God can and does create our free choices without thereby making them unfree. But to many people, that statement seems absurd, and I do not think it can be understood adequately without a clarification of what we mean by *create*, what we can know about God, and how we can meaningfully talk about him.

To begin with, God does not create everything in the created universe. Consider light and darkness. Light is part of the universe. It is a positive reality. To be real, it needed to be created and it must be constantly sustained in being by God. Darkness also is real in the sense that it is not imaginary, illusory, or merely possible. But darkness is only a negative reality, the absence of light where light might be. Negative realities cannot be created by God. Their reality is incidental to that of positive realities, and they depend on God only by depending on the positive realities to which they are incidental.

Still, some negative realities are directly perceived: entering a cave, one notices darkness, cold, and quiet. Negative realities sometimes are valuable: silence to protect legitimate secrets or to allow others to pray, study, or sleep is golden. But some negative realities are bad. Heart arrest is prolonged lack of the heart's muscular contractions; since regular beating is a good and vital function, heart arrest is bad in itself.

At the center of anything bad is some negative reality that is bad in itself. Such a negative reality is not just a lack but a privation—that is, the lack of a good that should be there. Still, privations are exactly

like other negative realities in one vital respect: they cannot be created by God. Since privations cannot be created and since all evils are reducible to privations, no evil is created by God.

Most bad things are not bad through and through. My bad left knee is good so far as it goes and better than no knee. Still, due to the privation at the root of the trouble, that knee's positive reality is not that of a healthy knee and cannot serve me as a healthy knee would. So, the privation that makes my knee bad is not created, but depends on God only by depending on the positive realities to which it is incidental. But my bad knee's positive reality depends entirely on God. So, I still need to thank God for my bad knee and yet not blame him for the privation that makes it bad.

Though health and physical impairment are very different from moral good and bad, what is true of bad things in general is true of sinful actions: they are not bad through and through. If I lie to Pat's parents, my free choice of that option involves a privation. I deprive myself of a crucial part of my own inner unity: harmony between what I do and what I judge I ought to do, between my free choice and my conscience. That privation and any privations consequent upon it cannot be creatures of God. Being brought about by my own free choice, those evils depend on God only by depending on the positive realities that remain in my choice and action.

At the same time, all the positive reality of the choice and its execution, though involved in my sin, are good so far as they go. Though not morally good, they are good as exercises of my natural capacities. Moreover, some morally positive elements remain even within my sinful choice and action: I have put myself in the place of my roommate's parents and want to avoid hurting them, I realize that lying is sinful and that venial sin is worth worrying about, and so on. All those positive realities depend entirely on God. I ought to be grateful for them. Indeed, that gratitude should have motivated me not to abuse those gifts by sinning.

In the case of any and every positive reality that we can experience, we can understand what it is without thereby knowing whether it actually is. Nothing in our understanding of any experienced thing accounts for its real being. Common sense reflection and scientific inquiry account for the real being of some positive realities only by considering them in the wider context of the real action of other positive realities—whose real being is taken for granted. So, though such inquiry is very worthwhile, it does not even begin to account for the real being of the universe as a whole.

Atheologians suppose the universe simply is, and that nothing accounts for it. Thinking that view absurd, theists are likely to argue

against it by invoking the supposedly self-evident principle that every fact must be accounted for. However, there are exceptions to that so-called principle: each and every time anyone freely chooses *A* rather than *B*, that fact cannot be accounted for. Therefore, the view that nothing accounts for the universe as a whole is logically possible and not absurd in the strict sense of the word.

Indeed, that view would be acceptable if there were no plausible alternative. But there is a plausible alternative: the real being of the universe as a whole depends on a positive reality that, unlike the universe and everything in it, is real of itself. That reality is not directly experienced, of course. If we understood anything at all of what that source of being is like, we would thereby know not only that it actually is but that it cannot not be—in other words, that it necessarily is.

Theists no doubt will recognize that, in reaching its conclusion, the preceding argument has arrived at what they call the one God and creator of all things. But it will be enlightening to set aside for a few minutes everything we think we know about God, including what we hold by faith. During these few minutes, we will see how the argument itself both empowers and regulates our thinking about God.

Since God necessarily is, for him to be, he need only be *what* he is. By contrast, whatever any creature is, its actual being neither is included in nor flows from what it is or any characteristic it has. So, whatever God is in himself cannot be anything that any creature is. And whatever any creature is, God is not. It follows that when we talk about God and use words in the same sense we use them to express something we understand about any creature, whatever we affirm about the creature must be denied of God.

So, God is not a body, matter, or energy; he does not evolve or change in any way; he is not spatial or temporal. God has no size or shape, is neither a whole nor a part. God has no sensible properties, no dispositions or capacities like those found in natural things. In the sense in which experienced things can be self-identical or polymorphous, above or below, inside or outside, God is none of these.

But if God does not change, it does not follow that he is standing still, fixed, inert, or rigid, for those also are intelligible features of creatures. If God is not moved by our pain, it does not follow that he is callous. If he is not above or outside, it does not follow that he is the ground of being or that he pervades the universe as its Force or Life.

If God is not a body, neither is he a mind or conscious subject—using *mind* and *conscious subject* in the same sense we use them about ourselves. If God does not hate and take revenge as we do, neither

does he love and have mercy as we do. Similarly, by experiencing ourselves and one another, we know what it is to be morally good, to know, to choose, to be a person. But whatever we can affirm of ourselves must be denied of God. So, using the words with exactly the same sense to deny of God precisely what we affirm of ourselves, we must say: God is not morally good, does not know, makes no choices, is not a person.

Can we even say that God causes? Not in any of the senses in which we say that a creature causes. However, our analysis began from the experienced universe, whose actual being needed to be accounted for. The problem was unlike any other: Why is there a universe rather than nothing at all? That unique *why* led us to a unique *because*—to an ultimate source of actual being.

Now, various sorts of things within our experience are called “causes” in diverse senses. For instance, in one sense of *cause*, the words a reader sees on the page when reading this sentence were caused to be here by a computer and a printer; in another sense of *cause*, these words were caused to be here by my use of them to express what I have in mind; and in a third sense of *cause*, these words were caused to be here by my interest in providing an example to help readers see that *cause* has many meanings. Though those three causes cause in very different ways, those diverse sorts of things are called *causes*, though in diverse senses, because they answer *why* questions: they account for things. So, when we ask the *why* question about the universe—Why is there a universe rather than no universe?—it is appropriate to say that what answers the question and accounts for the actual being of the universe is its cause, using *cause* in a unique sense.

Where did that unique sense of *cause* come from? It developed in the argument and emerged from it, along with a unique sense of *is*, when we concluded that there is a cause of the universe. Except insofar as the question being asked and the answer being reached by that argument are unique, that generation of fresh meaning is like what happens when we ask other *why* questions and answer them by reasoning to something we had not previously known or even thought about. For reasoning is not merely a way of organizing what we already know; it is also, and far more importantly, a way of coming to know what we did not yet know.

In sum, though we do not know what God is, our knowledge about the relationship of created things to the creator enables us to say, with an entirely clear and definite sense, that God causes. However, by contrast with our insight into how causes within the universe bring about their effects, we do not know and cannot imagine how God

creates the universe. Without understanding anything of what God is in himself, we know something about him: he has what it takes to account for the actual being of the universe. Thus, though we really do know God from the things he has made, he remains hidden and utterly mysterious. As St. Thomas Aquinas said: "We cannot grasp what God is, but what he is not, and how other things are related to him" (*Summa contra gentiles*, 1:30).

It follows that, while we rightly say that God causes, we must take care to avoid supposing that he accounts for things somewhat as one or more other sorts of causes do. We must limit what we mean, in saying that God causes, to what is required to account for the actual being of creatures, including the positive reality of our free choices. We will always go wrong if we think that God is involved with the realities he creates in ways similar to those in which other sorts of causes are involved with whatever they account for. And having gone wrong, we will mistakenly suppose that at least some created realities, perhaps including free choices, cannot both be what they are and be created.

Of course, what I have just explained is not easy to keep in mind. Confronted with the mysterious, we naturally draw upon our existing store of knowledge, and often find help there in clarifying our thinking and expressing our meaning. So, when we say that God causes, elements of the meanings that word has in other uses are likely to slip into our thinking and confuse us. That is not as likely in some cases as in others. We hardly imagine that God creates light by flipping a switch, generating power, or making the heavenly luminaries as GE makes light bulbs. But we are tempted to think that God causes free choices by spiritual pushes and tugs, or by creating real lives somewhat as a playwright creates fictional lives—that is, by knowing his characters so perfectly that he can project what free choices they would make and include just those free choices in their lives. So, we need to keep reminding ourselves that, though God creates everything, in every sense of *cause* except the unique one that applies to him, God causes nothing.

*He causes nothing*—any reader who understands what I mean by that should begin to feel more comfortable with holding that human choices are both free and entirely dependent upon God for all their positive reality. For much of the perplexity we experience in holding the two things together results from elements of what we know about other sorts of causality that we have carelessly imported into our thinking about God's creativity. The rest of that perplexity can be overcome by considering what we can mean by saying that God knows and wills.

The classic account of God's knowing and willing presupposes a certain framework. It begins from the premises that creatures receive their whole reality from their creator, that their whole reality includes all their perfections, and that nothing can give what it does not possess. From these premises it seems to follow that God must somehow possess in himself every perfection we find in creatures, and that all creatures by virtue of their perfections more or less resemble God.

Most of the perfections we find in creatures, however, are called "mixed," because they are inextricably involved with bodiliness, interdependence, and other sorts of complexity and limitation that are regarded as imperfections and that plainly cannot be ascribed to God. It is said that God does not have mixed perfections as they are found in creatures but that he has them only "in a more eminent way." But what is that eminent way of having a rose's blooming, a batter's hitting a home run, or a chaste newlywed couple's consummation of their marriage? No intelligible essence of those perfections can be distilled and attributed to God. To say that he has them in an eminent way can mean only this: nothing of what we understand of those perfections can be attributed to God, but he must have whatever it takes to create them.

Given this framework, the classic account of God's knowledge and will can be understood. By contrast with mixed perfections, such spiritual perfections are said to be *absolutely simple*. Though human knowing and willing always involve obvious imperfections, those contaminants, it is claimed, can be removed, so that the distilled essence of the perfection found in us can be attributed to God as belonging to him perfectly and infinitely. At this point, some suppose that knowing and willing can be attributed to God without further argument, while others argue from other perfections, as St. Thomas argues to God's knowing and willing from his immateriality and unalloyed actuality. But in either case, according to the classic account, *knowing* and *willing* said of God and of us have both some common intelligibility and some differentiating elements, with the result that these and other absolutely simple perfections are predicated according to a four-term analogy: God's willing is to God as our willing is to us.

Venerable as the classic account is, it seems to me only partially sound. It does include two truths. First, because creatures really are related to the creator, the creator really must have what it takes to be the other end of that relationship. Second, whatever can be affirmed about God must be predicated by analogy.

But I think that the perfections of human knowing and willing are inextricably involved with complexity and limitation. If one conscientiously persists to the end in removing all complexity and limitation from human knowing and willing, then, like the child duped into trying to peel an onion completely, one will end with nothing. Moreover—and this is the decisive point—the underlying claims that God must have all the perfections found in creatures and that creatures must resemble their creator derive their plausibility from other sorts of cause-effect relationships. But, as has been explained, the creator-creature relationship is unique, and trying to understand it by introducing intelligible aspects of other cause-effect relationships always confuses and never helps.

Therefore, I do not think that absolutely simple perfections of knowing and willing can be reasonably attributed directly to God. Moreover, I do not think an argument grounded in the creator-creature relationship can justify their attribution, as St. Thomas tried to do. Still, something of what we know about human knowing and willing can be reasonably attributed by analogy to God. However, such predications are reasonable only if they are grounded in relationships that clearly authorize them and are limited by what those relationships authorize.

Are there such relationships? Certainly. Even the religious relationship human beings naturally have with God is rooted in experience that requires us to think of him as intelligent and benevolent—that is, good-willed—toward us. And the relationship of people of faith to the God of revelation provides additional ground for talking about his plan and will. But just as what we mean by saying *God causes* is limited to what is required to account for the being of creatures, what we mean by saying *God knows and wills* is specified by what is involved in our religious relationships to him.

What must be borne in mind is that the ground provided by our relationships to God for our thought and talk about him does not authorize us to project upon him all that can be deduced from our knowing and willing. One is tempted to do that, to say to oneself: "I know what God's knowledge and choosing are like. They are like mine, except, of course, that his are simple and unlimited." Then, we proceed to attribute to God what cannot be true of him. When we talk about God's knowing and willing, our religious relationships to him both ground and limit what we can mean. We are authorized to attribute to God only what it takes for him to be the other end of those relationships.

First, consider the religious relationship that human beings naturally have to God. The basis for that relationship is in the principles

of our practical reason. Just as everything we learn from others about the world presupposes our own experience and basic understanding of it, so all the moral formation we receive from others presupposes our own insight into basic human goods. We could never be taught about right and wrong if we did not know beforehand that good is to be done and pursued, and evil is to be avoided; and that life and health, truth and skills, harmony with others, and so on are goods to be safeguarded, sought, and promoted, while their opposites are evils to be avoided and resisted.

Since these principles of practical reason give us intelligible direction, they cannot have come from subhuman nature, even if we somehow evolved from it. Since they direct us toward what is still to be, we cannot learn them by experiencing the way the world is or by reflecting upon theoretical truths about our human nature. Since they are presupposed in all human deliberation and by every free choice, they cannot have come from previous human action. These basic truths about what is good for us are like a law written on our hearts to shape our deliberation and guide our free choices and actions. A law written by whom? By our creator.

Implicitly if only dimly aware of all this, almost all human beings recognize that we are subordinate to, though not puppets of, a greater-than-human, quasi-personal reality, with whom we ought to cooperate for our own good. That recognition leads to prayer and sacrifice. Of course, most people overlook the fact that we cannot grasp what God is, and so they engage in anthropomorphism. Then too, many people are more eager for God to cooperate with them than they are to cooperate with him, and so they try to refashion God rather than shape their lives according to his guidance. Thus, the relationship to God that grounds natural religion also occasions many sorts of erroneous thinking, idolatry, and violation of human goods.

Nevertheless, the awareness of divine guidance, from which natural religion springs, compels us to think of God as intelligent and interested in our welfare. He directs our actions by providing reasons for choosing and yet allows us to choose freely, even when our choices are at odds with his guidance. Since he is the source of our being and guides us in this way, God even seems somewhat like a father who gives good advice to an adult child but does not back up his advice with force.

At the same time, we realize that knowing and willing as we experience them cannot be in God. Hence, while our relationship to God in virtue of the first principles of our practical reason makes it clear that he in some sense knows what is good for us and wills our fulfillment, knowing and willing are attributed to him only by anal-

ogy. And since the analogy is grounded solely in our relationship to God directing our deliberation and free choices toward our good, we have no warrant for supposing that there is any similarity between our and God's knowing and willing beyond what that relationship requires. Therefore, nothing that relationship authorizes us to say about divine knowing and willing can be inconsistent with the human free choices shaped by that relationship.

Now, consider the relationship of believers to the God who reveals himself. One can easily see how the preceding analysis applies to it. Revelation is accomplished by means of a set of created entities: human words, observable events in the world, and the human nature and life of Jesus of Nazareth. By all these together, the creator makes it clear that he invites all human beings not only to purify the relationship involved in natural religion but to freely commit themselves to the more intimate relationship he offers and to shape their entire lives by its requirements.

This relationship, being interpersonal, demands that we listen to God and respond to him. So, we must think of him and speak of him as personal, as intelligent and free. Nevertheless, even as believers we know that, apart from our relationship with God, we do not know what he is, but only what he is not. He remains hidden; he does not present himself for direct inspection. He makes it clear that he is not offering a description of what he is and he rejects numerous attempts at such a description. As the Fourth Lateran Council teaches, what God is remains incomprehensible and ineffable, and the dissimilarity between him and us always is more marked than any similarity.

Revelation primarily transforms our natural relationship to God and shapes us for intimate communion with him, and this practical point determines and limits its meaning. How we are to relate to God is not summed up in any one statement, but by the whole of Scripture, read in the context of the tradition and life of the Church. So, when we are told, for example, to call God "Father," we are given one element of the whole formation we need for relating to him. We realize that in addressing God as Father we do not imply that he has in a higher and more perfect way the paternity we experience in our natural family life. Rather, we imply that God has what it takes to be the other end of the relationship with him in which and for which this way of thinking and speaking are forming us. So, nothing the relationship authorizes us to say about God's plan and will can possibly be at odds with the freedom of the choice made by those who accept the relationship or of the choices they make about carrying it out.

The preceding account of revelation and faith must not be misunderstood. I am not denying the literal truth of what revelation tells us

about God. For example, though I hold that what we understand about ourselves must be denied of God, I affirm the literal truth of the proposition that we are made in his image and likeness. By including that truth, Genesis confirms and clarifies what the principles of our practical reason already imply: we have been created to know God and to cooperate freely with him, to procreate and to care for subhuman creation.

Again, I am not saying: "God is not really our Father; we are only being asked to treat him as if he were." Rather, I am saying that, whatever God is, his reality is such that it is entirely appropriate for us to relate to him as we are led to do by his entire revelation, including Jesus' instruction to say: "Our Father." So, while the meaning of *Father* said of God is specified by our relationship in faith to him, a statement using the word with that meaning to say that he is our Father is literally true. Consequently, if we eventually see God as he is, we will not be disappointed. We will grasp the literal truth of everything revelation now tells us to say about him.

Finally, the philosophical insight I have tried to promote by this lecture is very important for Catholic theology. If theologians clearly understood and consistently took into account the ground and the limits of sound thought and meaningful talk about God, many of their difficulties would dissolve. I am thinking especially, but not only, of the insoluble difficulties generated by even the greatest efforts to use the data of faith as a point of departure for penetrating the mysteries of the inner life of the Trinity, the how of the Incarnation, the hidden aspects of the divine persons' redemptive work, and the how of the divinization wrought by grace. Setting aside such unhelpful and misleading speculations, theology could pursue more fruitful understanding of God's wise and loving plan for us, including our part in it. Moreover, only such philosophical insight can eliminate the perplexity many Christians experience over the seeming incompatibility between free choice and divine causality. And that perplexity often has serious pastoral consequences.

Focusing on free choice and soft-pedaling grace, which is God's causality of salvific realities, some lean toward pelagianism. In doing so, they distort scriptural teaching, deviate from Trent's solemnly defined doctrine, and needlessly provoke Protestants who are faithful to God's revealed truth about grace. They also undermine humility and gratitude, and perpetuate the thought expressed by the maxim: "Pray as if everything depended on God." That is false inasmuch as it suggests that some of the positive reality in our free choices and actions is entirely ours. In fact, only the evil we introduce by choosing wrongly is entirely ours.

Focusing on divine causality and denying free choice, some—though few today—lean toward calvinism. This mistaken emphasis led Calvin himself, some Protestants, and a few Catholics to maintain that God causes everything about both good and bad choices, thus predestining some to hell just as he predestines others to heaven. The theological trouble with that doctrine of double predestination is obvious. It also but less obviously was pastorally disastrous. If I am damned no matter what I do, I cannot hope for salvation, and have nothing to lose by doing as I please.

Since hardly anyone today is prepared to defend double predestination, those who soft-pedal human free choice and focus too much on divine causality exaggerate the efficaciousness of God's salvific will. Then they either maintain that everyone will be saved or else lean toward and insinuate that view, though without straightforwardly asserting it. It seems to me that those who do that—including Karl Rahner and Hans Urs von Balthasar—also distort scriptural teaching and deny suppositions underlying the Church's constant pastoral practices with respect to sin and penance.

Even if communicated without ever being asserted, universalism also is pastorally disastrous. For no less than double predestination, universalism destroys hope. Since we can choose to do any act only if we think doing it might result in some benefit, feeling that our own and others' salvation is a sure thing ends our efforts to work out our own salvation and makes it pointless to try to help others save their souls. If everyone will be saved no matter what anyone does, nothing is to be gained by prayer, penance, liturgical piety, or apostolic work and witness. We might as well concentrate on this-worldly interests, whether self-gratification, or justice and peace, or, more likely, a life style involving some of each but not too much of either. And if one happens to be so disappointed in love that one feels life no longer is worth living, one might as well go for a drive and slam into a bridge abutment.

