ABSTRACT. David Griffin and Nelson Pike recently had a spirited discussion on divine power. The essence of the discussion centered around what was labelled Premise X: "It is possible for one actual being's condition to be completely determined by a being or beings other than itself." Pike maintains that "traditional" theists have affirmed Premise X but denies that this entails that God has all the power there is and thus denies that Premise X can be considered incoherent for this reason. Griffin maintains that traditional theists have as a matter of fact affirmed that God has all the power there is and then argues that, given standard Process metaphysical assumptions, to say that God has all the power there is is incoherent. Griffin succeeds in demonstrating that, given Process assumptions, God cannot determine all of the activities of any human—i.e., all of an individual's desires, choices and actions. But Pike is primarily interested in whether God could determine all of the bodily behaviors of any given human. And to this question, Griffin gives no response.

David Griffin and Nelson Pike recently had a spirited discussion on the nature of divine power. The essence of the discussion centered around what was labelled Premise X: "It is possible for one actual being's condition to be completely determined by a being or beings other than itself." Pike maintains that "traditional" theists have affirmed Premise X but denies that this entails that God has all the power there is and thus denies that Premise X can be considered incoherent for this reason. Griffin maintains that traditional theists have as a matter of fact affirmed that God has all the power there is and then argues that, given standard Process metaphysical assumptions, to say that God has all the power there is is incoherent.

First, just a word about the 'historical question'. Traditional Christian theists, Pike tells us, do believe that God is all-powerful. But they have "not meant to imply" by this "that God (in Hartshorne's words) 'has all the power'." What they have actually meant, rather, is that "the exercise of power on the part of any finite beings is impor-
tantly conditioned, i.e., it is contingent upon God's willingness to refrain from exercising some power of his own."

In his response, Griffin reaffirms his belief that "traditional theodicy said, either explicitly or implicitly, that God has a monopoly on power." He has given ample historical evidence for this claim in God, Freedom and Evil, he reminds Pike, evidence that demonstrates clearly that traditional theists do in fact believe—"although often denying it verbally—that one being could simply have all the power."

Unfortunately, Griffin's comments do not clarify the issue since it is difficult to see which (or which set) of the following claims he has in mind:

1. God could have all the power there is.
2. God does, in fact, have all the power there is.
3. To affirm that God could have all the power is really to affirm that God does in fact have all the power.

If Griffin is arguing that traditional theists affirm (1), then he is certainly correct. Traditional theists certainly have believed that God could have all the power—e.g., that he could have created nothing else, could have created other entities with no power, etc. But Pike would not deny this fact. What Pike is clearly denying is that traditional theists have affirmed (2). And if this is the claim Griffin is disputing, then he is wrong. Even deterministic theists such as Luther and Calvin exhort people to turn from sin and live holy lives. And such talk would be meaningless if such theologians had actually believed that only God had any power.

But it may be that what Griffin is actually affirming is (3). And if so, he may be correct. But this is a logical/metaphysical issue and must not be confused with the historical question of what traditional theists (possibly inconsistently) believe (or have believed).

The more important issues, though, center around Premise X. Pike denies that those whose activities are completely determinable are necessarily devoid of all power because he believes there are some obvious counterexamples to this contention. Consider, Pike argues, those situations in which an individual has the ability to completely determine the actions of another but chooses not to do so. Suppose, for example, that a father has the power to keep his daughter from moving her arm (or even from desiring to move her arm) but chooses not to exercise this power. In this case, Pike maintains, the father clearly has the ability to completely determine the arm-raising activity of his daughter and yet the daughter clearly retains the power to move her arm. In short, to generalize, one reason why Pike denies that Premise X entails that determinable beings have no power is because he assumes that

4. A being's power to perform a given activity is not removed or lessened by the fact that another entity could, but chooses not to, bring it about that this power cannot be exercised.
Pike also asks us to consider those situations in which a person does completely determine the activities of another. For example, he states, let us assume that although a person is making a maximum effort to raise her arms, it is being held down by a person much stronger. In this case, he argues, "the person would still have something which counts as arm-raising potential." She would not be like "a dead man or a rag doll." In short, Pike denies that determinable beings have no power because he assumes that

(5) A being can have the power to do something (the potential ability to do something) even when some other being is bringing it about that this power cannot be exercised.

Griffin attacks both (4) and (5). Pike's examples, Griffin rightly argues are based on the distinction between an individual's 'choice'—i.e., an individual's desire to act in a certain way—and an individual's 'action'—i.e., an individual's ability to act out what he/she desires to do. But, Griffin informs us, Process theists include "an individual's choices in its activities." "If A is completely determining all of B's activities," he states, "then B cannot make any effort of its own to determine its own activities." Moreover, he continues, given a Whiteheadian point of view, an individual is its creative activity, and its activity is its power of self-determination. And accordingly, he concludes, (5)—Pike's contention that an entity can have power even when such power cannot be exercised (even when an entity is being completely overpowered)—makes no sense. Since, according to Process thought, individual actuality is creative activity and creature activity is the exercising of power, an entity can have no potential power. If (per impossible) a being were to have both its actions and choices completely determined, it would cease to exist as an entity. There would be no 'nonactive' substance which would remain, waiting to exercise its power once the external manipulation ceased.

Nor, Griffin argues, need we accept (4)—Pike's contention that if the activities of one entity could be, but are not in fact, completely determined by another entity, the former retains some power of self-determination. If, for example, a father could really control all the activities of his daughter—"all her desires, all her emotional reactions, all her decisions, as well as all her bodily movements—we would not attribute to her any power of her own, at least not while he was controlling her, and . . . we would be reluctant to say she had power of her own even in those times when he was not controlling her . . . (s)he would not be operating under inherent power but under bestowed or loaned power." And thus we may conclude, he argues, that if God had (per impossible) the ability to totally determine the activities of all other beings, then he would in fact possess all the power whether he in fact determined the activities of the other beings or not.

Is either side victorious in this interchange? Process theology does maintain that a being is 'composed' totally of creative activity. And given this ontological commitment, Process theists can justifiably deny (5)—Pike's claim that a being can have power even when such power cannot be exercised. However, Griffin's claim that a being whose activities were determinable would not, even when not being determined, possess any power of self-determination is a dubious Process response
to (4)—Pike's claim that a being who is allowed to act as it pleases possesses some power of self-determination.

Most of us would agree that if an entity (A) has the power to control all the activities of another entity (B), A could be held morally responsible for whatever B does. Most of us would agree, for example, that if a parent could stop a child from hitting (or even desiring to hit) another child but decides not to, we could rightfully argue that the parent was morally responsible for what the child did. But does it also necessarily follow that the child would in this situation possess no meaningful sense of self-determination—i.e., that the child was not in this situation free to decide to hit the child or to act on this desire? Griffin may be reluctant to say that the child would have any inherent power of its own in this case. But it is questionable whether, as Griffin believes, this is an intuition which most of us would share with him.

And, more importantly, it is an intuition which Process theists need not share. Rather than attempting to refute (4) by arguing that if one entity were totally determinable (but not totally determined) by another, the determinable entity would have no power, the Process theist would be better served by simply arguing that (4) is incoherent because no entity could be completely determinable—i.e., because it doesn't make any sense to say that one entity could bring it about that another has no power. This follows quite readily from the standard Process definition of "actual being" while the contention that a being would possess no power even if it were completely determinable (but not being determined) does not.

Accordingly, if the basic question is (as Griffin seems to assume) whether Pike has demonstrated that Process theists cannot consistently reject the 'traditional' concept of divine omnipotence he is defending, the answer is clearly no. Given standard Process metaphysical assumptions, the Process theist can justifiably deny both (4) and (5)—i.e., can justifiably deny Premise X.

But Pike, at least implicitly, raises another very important question to which Griffin has not in my estimation given an adequate response. Pike makes it clear that he is discussing omnipotence as it relates to the traditional problem of evil. But what type of power have individuals had in mind when they discuss divine omnipotence in this context? With what concept of divine power are atheologians such as Mackie and McCloskey concerned when they contend that some of the evil generated by humans is incompatible with God's existence? What tensions do they see? They are not, it seems to me, asking why a wholly Good God does not 'totally determine' the activities of certain individuals in Griffin's sense of this term. Many atheologians are untroubled by the fact that individuals purportedly created by God have the ability to desire or to choose to perform evil actions. Such atheologians are primarily concerned with why a perfectly good God does not control the actions (bodily behavior) of certain beings in certain contexts. For example, what primarily troubles most atheologians in the case of Hitler is not that a perfectly Good God would create a world in which a person like Hitler would have the ability to choose to harm millions of people. They are primarily troubled by the fact that God, if he exists, did not stop Hitler from carrying out his plan. Moreover, it seems reasonable to assume that it was Pike's recognition of this fact which led him to couch his discussion of Premise X in terms of 'action' rather than 'choice'.
Accordingly, when Griffin argues in response to Pike that, given Process assumptions, God could only completely determine an entity's condition if he controlled all of its activities—both its choices and bodily behaviour—Griffin is failing to come to grips with an important part of what Pike is getting at by the use of his examples. Griffin's comments do show us why Pike's examples fail as a criticism of the Process conception of divine omnipotence. For the individuals in Pike's example are not totally determined in Griffin's sense. But given Griffin's comments, Pike can still ask the following question: Do Process theists have good reasons for believing that God cannot completely control the bodily behaviour of self-determining beings—i.e., beings who are free to desire or choose to act? And unless Process theists can answer this question affirmatively, Pike can argue that, given the context of his discussion, he has in a meaningful, important sense shown that all human activity is determinable by God—i.e., he has in a meaningful and important sense shown that Premise X is true.

Now it seems to me that Process theists (as well as traditional free-will theists) can convincingly argue that it is impossible for God to totally determine all the bodily behavior of any given individual. But the point is that an argument of this sort is needed. To simply argue that God cannot totally determine the activities of someone in the Process sense is not adequate to respond to the question of whether God can totally determine human activity in the sense assumed by most traditional theists and atheologians in this context.

Or to state this important point differently yet, there are two important metaphysical questions being discussed in the interchange between Pike and Griffin. As Griffin sees it, Pike's question is:

(6) Can we, given Process assumptions, claim that God could determine all the activities of any given human—i.e., all the individual's desires, choices and actions.

And he convincingly demonstrates that the answer is no. But Pike, it seems to me, is also asking another important question:

(7) Can we, given Process assumptions, claim that God could determine all the bodily behaviors of any given human?

And to this question Griffin (at least in this context) gives no answer. But when discussing divine omnipotence in the context of the problem of evil, it is (7) which has traditionally been considered the more important issue. Thus it is a question which Process theists ought not overlook.

ENDNOTES


6 Pike, 157.

7 Pike, 159

8 Griffin, 176.

9 Griffin, 180.

10 Griffin, 176


12 Pike, 148-50

13 Griffin does discuss deficiencies in the theodicy which he believes follows from the belief that God has 'total control'. But unless it is shown that (7) must be answered negatively, these comments also serve as a criticism of the Process system.