

God and Human Freedom, by Leigh Vicens and Simon Kittle. Cambridge University Press, 2019. Pp. 73. \$18 (paperback).

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In this excellent book, Vicens and Kittle lead the reader on a quick tour of some of the central philosophical issues concerning the relationship between God and human freedom. The volume takes up two central topics, divine foreknowledge and divine providence, examining both insofar as they relate to human freedom. In both cases, there at least seem to be troubling tensions between the divine activity on the one hand and the free will of creatures on the other.

As might be expected from an introductory text, the aim of the volume is not to argue for a single solution or set of solutions to the difficulties considered. The authors make this point explicitly in the section dealing with divine providence: "Our aim in this section is not to defend any particular view of providence wholesale, but to point out certain "costs and benefits" of each" (32). The same point seems to apply to the section on divine foreknowledge, even if this is not as explicitly stated.

Nevertheless, this book is not a dry, detached overview of the work of others. First, the authors are more than happy to weigh into debates in new and interesting ways with the goal of discussing these costs and benefits. Obviously, readers might see the terrain of costs and benefits differently, but I think that the approach taken makes the text far more engaging than it would have been if the authors attempted to remain as mere reporters on philosophical discussions. Second, although the authors refrain from endorsing any single solution to the problems discussed, they have no qualms about rejecting some of those they consider. Indeed, each of the two major sections features such a rejection, both of which will be discussed below.

Before moving onto an overview of the content of the work, it is worth dwelling for a moment on a question of audience: Who should read this text? As an introductory text, its intended audience is likely to be, at least primarily, students. I think this work would be extremely valuable for assignments in courses focused either on philosophy of religion or free will. Although some aspects of the book are likely too complicated for many undergraduates left to their own devices, when paired with in-class guidance, I think students will find it very approachable.

I don't think the value of this book ends with its service for undergraduates, though. Graduate students and professors with little background in this area of philosophy of religion will find an engaging and quick



overview of the major positions and argumentative moves relevant to the book's topic. For those eager for more, the bibliography is extensive for a work of this type, making further investigation easy. I have not read any of the other volumes in the Cambridge Elements series, but after reading this one, I am eager to search for some in areas far outside of my research areas, with the hope that they will be as rewarding as this one.

I turn, now, to an overview of the work. As I mentioned, the volume is split, roughly evenly, between the topics of divine foreknowledge and divine providence, in both cases focusing on those issues relevant to human freedom. In section 1, the authors organize the topic around a particular argument for the incompatibility of divine foreknowledge and human freedom. For those thinking about using this work for a course text, it is worth noting that the argument, as presented, might scare some beginner undergraduates. First, readers are introduced to the N operator: " $N^S_t(p)$ is short for p and S has, at and after t , no choice about the fact that p " (6). With this explained, they move on to the formal presentation of the argument:

- (1) God believed at time t_1 that Jones would decide at t_3 to mow her lawn.
- (2) $N^{Jones}_{t_2}(\text{God believed at } t_1 \text{ that Jones would decide at } t_3 \text{ to mow her lawn})$.
- (3) If $N^S_t(p)$ and $N^S_t(p \text{ entails } q)$, then $N^S_t(q)$.
- (4) $N^{Jones}_{t_2}(\text{God believed at } t_1 \text{ that Jones would decide at } t_3 \text{ to mow her lawn entails that Jones will decide at } t_3 \text{ to mow her lawn})$.
- (5) $N^{Jones}_{t_2}(\text{Jones will decide at } t_3 \text{ to mow her lawn})$.
- (6) If $N^{Jones}_{t_2}(\text{Jones will decide at } t_3 \text{ to mow her lawn})$, then Jones cannot decide to refrain from mowing her lawn.
- (7) If Jones cannot decide to refrain from mowing her lawn, she does not at t_3 decide to mow her lawn freely.
- (8) Therefore, Jones does not at t_3 decide to mow her lawn freely (7).

While there is no getting around this argument—at least not without jettisoning the entire section devoted to foreknowledge—I think instructors should not be fearful of using this even in relatively introductory courses. This is the most imposing part of the book, but the authors handle it well, guiding those readers unfamiliar with some of the philosophical conventions utilized in this presentation. In fact, I think the structure of this section provides a wonderful opportunity to perfect students's understanding of the structure of philosophical debate. This section of the book is focused on responses to this argument, and so positions are explained not merely in terms of some of their key characteristics, but also in terms of precisely how they handle this argument. This structure allows readers—especially students—to see clearly that the dialectical topology is not an amorphous blob of interesting ideas, but instead is tightly structured.

The heart of this section is a discussion of seven different ways of responding to the argument detailed above. Although I have a small quibble about one of these presentations, overall the quality is excellent.

The first of these looks to what the authors call "alternative views of free will." The argument noted above presupposes an account of free will

in keeping with the truth of the principle of alternative possibilities. As the authors say "On this account of free will an agent, P, who faces a decision between A and B will decide freely only if (i) P is able to decide to A, and (ii) P is able to decide to B (where deciding to B might simply be deciding to refrain from A-ing)" (8). Here, I think the discussion might have been made a little clearer for the reader. According to the authors, "When an agent faces a choice or decision (we use the terms interchangeably), she has at least two options from among which she can select. Choice therefore entails the existence of what the contemporary literature calls alternative possibilities" (8). One way to respond to the argument above is to deny this account of free will, and the authors especially highlight what they call "non-choice-based accounts of free will" (8), discussing the views of Hobbes and Frankfurt. Their definition of choice/decision, together with their discussion of non-choice-based accounts, might give the impression that all those who reject the availability of alternative possibilities deny the existence of choices or decisions. Moreover, the sole contemporary view explored here is that of Frankfurt, who offers a view according to which freedom concerns "the alignment of a person's "second-order" desires with her "first-order" desires" as the authors put it (8). In the end, though, Frankfurt comes to claim that the alignment of desires is insufficient for freedom; this view must be supplemented with a decision to identify with a desire. The authors contend that this reveals that decision—or choice—is central after all. The problem with this move is that those who reject PAP need not define choice/decision as the authors do, that is as requiring alternative possibilities.

My point is not that the authors misunderstand the dialectic on this point—I am sure they don't—but instead that many readers, especially undergraduates, might have difficulty making sense of the relationship between choice/decision on the one hand and alternative possibilities on the other, especially when philosophers use the terms in different ways. Additionally, I think it would be especially helpful for the reader to have heard about at least one account according to which the control necessary for moral responsibility is both compatible with the absence of alternatives and still centrally related to human decisions. A brief discussion of John Martin Fischer's distinction between guidance and regulative control might have worked well in this regard (*The Metaphysics of Free Will* (Blackwell, 1994)).

After a brief look at how one might deny the transfer principle articulated in premise 3, the authors turn their attention to Ockhamism. The authors take the reader through the history of this account, focusing most on the developments of this view from the 1960s to the 1990s. The discussion of these developments is both thorough and insightful, especially given the brevity required of them. My only wish is that they would have found space to explain in a little more depth the recent discussion that has arisen over the distinction between soft and hard facts on the one hand

and metaphysical dependence on the other. Unhappily, some things must be cut in the interests of space, I suppose.

The authors then canvas other responses to the main argument, including rejecting the fixity of the past, claiming that God, not existing in time, does not believe things at times, and endorsing open theism. While each of these discussions provides an excellent introduction to their respective topics, I wish to move past them to focus on the section on Molinism. Here the authorial voice comes out more strongly than in discussions of other replies to the foreknowledge argument. Concerning whether middle knowledge solves the difficulty of reconciling divine foreknowledge and human freedom, the authors confidently assert, "We think not" (30). Moreover, they suggest that it might even make matters worse: "Foreknowledge suggests that human decisions in the realm of the future are fixed or settled; middle knowledge suggests that human decisions in the realm of the merely possible are fixed or settled. Anyone who deems the former issue a problem worth addressing should, we think, also deem the latter a problem worth addressing" (31). Moreover, they note that many prominent Molinists link their views to one of the other solutions on offer. They conclude "The key point is that these replies are independent of Molinism: each can be advocated without endorsing Molinism, and Molinism adds nothing to them" (31). Whether one agrees or not, I think that the authors' decision to include some of their own judgments adds interest and dynamism to the book, and, moreover, some research suggests that "engaging the debate" rather than remaining neutral aids students in avoiding skepticism about philosophical problems (Brian Besong, "Teaching the Debate," *Teaching Philosophy* 39 (2016): 401–412). I think, then, that such additions should be welcomed by both philosophers and students.

I turn now to the second section of the book, which deals with divine providence. In this section, the authors investigate a number of different accounts of providence, each of which, according to its adherents, preserves human moral responsibility (Pereboom-style hard theological determinism is mentioned, but not explored at great length). They begin by looking at a view according to which human free will is compatible with theological determinism, but not natural determinism, and conclude the section by looking at a more thoroughgoing compatibilism, according to which freedom is compatible with determinism of both varieties. In between discussion of these two views, they also look at Molinism and open theism, and provide an excellent discussion of free will responses to the problem of evil as these relate to the issue of selecting an account of providence.

Here I will focus on their discussions of the more restricted variety of compatibilism and Molinism, because here we find the authorial voice coming out especially strongly. According to the restricted variety of compatibilism, remember, human freedom is compatible with theological determinism but not natural determinism. (Here I note one small disagreement with the authors: In my view, the views of Brian Shanley

and W. Matthews Grant are not best categorized in this camp.) While the authors admit that this view is not incoherent, the important question is whether it is plausible. At the outset, they reveal their view: "[T]he answer to this seems to be a straightforward no" (34). In defending this response, they note that three purported differences between the two sorts of determinism fail to establish any difference relevant to the issue of compatibility with freedom. First, although God causes our existence and our action simultaneously, this does not seem to give us any reason for thinking our freedom remains intact. Second, although God does not constitute a determining condition that predates our action (since God does not exist in time at all), the authors provide an intriguing argument that incompatibilists ought to worry just as much about simultaneous determining causes. Although God is not strictly simultaneous to us either, their argument is meant to show that temporal priority does not play the important role that is sometimes thought. Finally, the claim that natural causes are problematic merely because they are event causes carries no weight according to the authors. Many ordinary incompatibilists are thoroughgoing event-causalists anyway, and others maintain that free actions must be either uncaused or caused only by the agent herself. In either case, theological determinism would undermine the freedom sought.

When discussing Molinism, the authors introduce the grounding objection and offer extended consideration of whether Molinists might adopt a soul-making theodicy, but I think the most engaging aspect of their discussion centers on the issue of whether, given Molinism, God intends evil. According to the Molinist picture they consider, God absolutely intends that no agents sin, but God's conditional intentions are broader. These intentions, which take into account the circumstances within which God finds himself—including what created agents would freely do in various circumstances—include everything which comes to pass. In this sense, then, God intends everything that occurs in the universe. For this account to get God off the hook for intending evil, absolute intentions must be those most connected with moral evaluation. The problem, the authors contend, is that absolute intentions are not intentions at all; they are desires. Moreover, the sort of conditional intentions the Molinist points to seem to be nothing other than perfectly ordinary intentions, that is, intentions of how to act in the concrete contexts in which we find ourselves, rather than abstracted from all such considerations. It seems, then, that in the perfectly ordinary sense of "intend," God intends sin, at least on the Molinist picture. Importantly, it is these ordinary intentions that we take to be morally significant. While the authors do not conclude that Molinism fails as an account of divine providence, their conclusion does suggest it is more costly than some Molinists think.

In the end, the authors succeed in producing a short, readable, well-comely opinionated introduction to their topic. I highly recommend this book to anyone interested in philosophy of religion or free will, as well as all those teaching in either of these areas.