

W. Matthews Grant. *Free Will and God's Universal Causality: The Dual Sources Account*. New York, NY: Bloomsbury Academic, 2019. vii+248 pp. \$79.80 (hbk).

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As W. Matthews Grant points out in his introduction, classical theism understands God to be the “universal cause, who causes all being distinct from himself,” and that this implies “that creaturely acts are caused by God” (1). But, if that is what classical theism says, then this seems obviously to imply that a *libertarian* sense of human free will is metaphysically impossible, if classical theism is true. For, if God causes every human action, and libertarianly free actions cannot be caused by God, then since God *does* (on the classical theist understanding of God) cause every human action, there cannot be any libertarianly free human actions.

This implication concerning human freedom seems obvious enough. For example, consider what Alvin Plantinga says in his famous free will defense:

[I]f I am free with respect to an action A, then God does not *bring it about* or *cause it to be the case* either that I take or refrain from this action; he neither causes this to be so through the laws he establishes, nor by direct intervention, nor in any other way. For if he *brings it about* or *causes it to be the case* that I take A, then I am not free to *refrain* from A, in which case I am not free with respect to A.¹

The upshot of what Plantinga says, here, is that if God causes a human to act, then that human doesn't act freely in the libertarian sense. I think we should take it for granted that most contemporary philosophers agree with Plantinga on this score.

I cite Plantinga, from this particular work, for a reason, viz., libertarian free will is often used by theists as ammunition in various theodicies and defenses they marshal against the so-called problem of evil, the idea that there is some tension between the existence of the theistic conception of God (as all-powerful, all-knowing, and morally perfect) with the existence of evil (or, at least, the types, and amount of evils that there are). But, if one wants to affirm classical theism, one will have to affirm that God *causes* every human action. And, given the incompatibility of God's causing human actions, and those actions being done in a libertarianly free way, it seems to follow that the classical theist cannot make use of defenses or theodicies that make use of libertarian free will. What's a classical theist to do?

Enter Grant's *Free Will and God's Universal Causality: The Dual Sources Account*. Here, Grant aims to provide a way around (or, possibly *through*) this alleged tension between libertarian free will and classical theism. That is, his so-called Dual Sources model of divine

¹ Alvin Plantinga, *The Nature of Necessity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1974). p. 171, his emphasis.

universal causality is offered as a way for the classical theist to have her cake and eat it, too; she can affirm *both* that humans have libertarian free will *and* that God causes every action that the libertarianly free agent does. If Grant is successful in his project, this will mean that classical theists *can* be libertarians about free will. This will help the classical theist with more than just handling the problem of evil; it will help her deal with questions about God's causing sin, human moral responsibility, and other related issues. This, then, is the project of Grant's book: to develop a model of divine causality that shows *both* that God is the cause of all existing things that are not God, *and* that humans can have libertarian free will.

Free Will and God's Universal Causality is eight chapters in length, with the earliest chapters (chapters 1 – 3) dedicated to motivating the project as a whole as well as the idea that God is the universal cause of all things that are not God, including human actions. The middle chapters (chapters 4 and 5) are dedicated to the development of Grant's Dual Sources account of divine universal causality, and the final three chapters are dedicated to dealing with potential objections any philosopher or theologian who affirms that God is the cause of all things besides God will have to deal with, viz., the problem of evil (that we've already mentioned), the idea that God causes sin, and the doctrines of soteriology having to do with predestination.

After an introductory chapter in which Grant briefly presents the apparent tension between divine universal causality and human freedom as well as a brief synopsis of his novel account, what he dubs a 'neo-scholastic' approach (a roughly Thomistic model, he thinks), Grant's project begins in chapter two by motivating the classical theistic view of divine universal causality (DUC). In this chapter, he begins by presenting numerous biblical passages that appear to support the view that the Bible *teaches* that God is the cause of everything that isn't God. And the idea is that if the Bible teaches DUC, then Christians ought to affirm DUC. Moreover, chapter two presents four straightforwardly *philosophical* arguments for thinking that DUC is true. The hope for this chapter, then, is that a Christian can see that there are good arguments for taking DUC seriously; and, if it turns out that a Christian can accept DUC *coupled with* other beliefs she wants to hold (like, e.g., libertarian free will), then all the more reason to accept DUC.

Before fleshing out his novel Dual Sources account of DUC, Grant's chapter three has as its aim one particular worry someone might have about DUC when applied to human action, viz., the threat of occasionalism, the view that human 'causes' are otiose, non-efficacious, and so on. But, following the scholastic forebears that motivate some of Grant's arguments in chapter two (e.g., Aquinas and Suarez), Grant argues that DUC does *not* imply occasionalism; it is *consistent with* creaturely efficacy, and this because of reasons having to do with a scholastic understanding of the hierarchy of causation, and the relationship between the different levels in the hierarchy. Here, Grant is thinking of so-called 'primary' causes and 'secondary' causes. Where God is the primary cause of all things, creatures (or created things, generally) are the secondary causes of just whatever it is that they are said to have caused. One example that Grant gives is that of a fire's causing heat. On this sort of example, God is said to be the (primary) cause of the heat because God is the cause of the fire, the heat, the fire's causing the heat, and anything else (if there is anything else) that is involved in the fire's causing the heat. At the same time (but not in the same way), the fire causes the heat. Something similar will be true for humans and their actions. In either case, Grant argues that from God's being the primary cause of a thing, it doesn't follow that

secondary causes aren't genuine causes. All that follows is that they are *subordinate* to God as primary cause. So, DUC doesn't imply occasionalism.

Chapters four and five are dedicated to fleshing out Grant's Dual Sources account of DUC. And, here I'll take my time to discuss this account since it's the main point of the book. Recall that Grant's aim is to marry the classical theistic conception of God and DUC, with human libertarian free will. If God is the cause of all things besides God, including human actions, it seems, on the face of it, metaphysically impossible that humans could be free in the libertarian sense. But, according to Grant, this alleged impossibility pops up only if we fail to understand that God is not a cause like other causes; God is not a creaturely sort of cause; and it's *this* sense of creaturely causation at issue when we think that libertarian free will cannot exist in a world where God is the cause of literally every *thing* that has being or exists, which is not God. So, in chapter four, Grant offers a discussion on the nuanced distinction between the adjectives 'intrinsic' and 'extrinsic' as they relate to Grant's novel Dual Sources account. According to Grant, "the truth-value of an 'intrinsic' predication cannot change without the subject of that predication either changing or ceasing to exist" (54). In contrast, "the truth-values of extrinsic predications...typically can change without the subject's changing or ceasing to exist" (Ibid.). The idea, here, is that creaturely causation requires an intrinsic change in the cause; whereas, God's sort of causation requires no such change. Here's how this affects the free will discussion: on Grant's 'extrinsic model' of divine universal causation, no component of God's causing some human action, A, is both prior to (in some sense of 'prior' that needn't be temporal), nor logically sufficient for A. Here are those components:

- (a) God.
- (b) A.
- (c) God's reason for causing A.
- (d) The causal-dependence relation between God and A.
- (e) God's causal act, or causing of A, which consists in A plus the causal relation between God and A.
- (f) God's willing or choosing A, which is nothing else than God's causing A for a reason when God could have done otherwise. (60, my lettering)

On an *intrinsic* model of causation, the above components would have included something like a *choice* or *intention* in virtue of which God causes A—this is how *creatures* cause things, after all. But, the inclusion of something like *this* would be a component of God's causing A that would be both prior to and logically sufficient for A; thus, ruling out libertarian free will. But, God is not a cause like creaturely causes; so, the extrinsic model excludes this kind of component. Thus, by Grant's lights, we have a model of DUC that is co-possible with libertarian free will.

Moreover, Grant wants to allow that the *human* is actually causing A, too. On his schema, *both* God's causing A *and* the human's causing A are necessary and sufficient conditions for A's being caused. Hence, Grant's model's bearing the name 'Dual Sources'; any human action has dual sources, both God and the human.

This model is, in my estimation, truly ingenious.² And, while space doesn't allow me fully to engage with Grant's argument and model, I do want to raise one significant worry I have about the model. Consider the following argument:

If the extrinsic model of divine causation is true, then our acts are the consequences of the truth of God's existence, God's reasons for causing our actions, the causal-dependence relation between God and our actions, God's causal act, and God's willing or choosing our actions. But we are neither responsible for the fact that God exists, for God's reasons for causing our actions, the causal-dependence relation between God and our actions, God's causal act, nor God's willing or choosing our actions. Therefore, we are not responsible for the consequences of these things (including our present acts).

This is a parody of Peter van Inwagen's direct argument for incompatibilism spelled out in terms of Grant's extrinsic model.³ It depends on two fairly well-known inference rules, rule A and rule B. Rule A says that no one (or, if you like, no mere human) is morally responsible for a necessary truth. Rule B says that if you're not responsible for some fact, P, and you're not responsible for the fact that P implies Q, then you're not responsible for Q either. If the argument is sound, then Grant's extrinsic model fails to show that DUC is compatible with human moral responsibility. And one possible (very plausible) reason this might be so is this: DUC is incompatible with human libertarian free will, the sort of free will (allegedly) required for human moral responsibility.

Another worry that will inevitably crop up once you admit that God is the literal cause of *everything*, including human actions, is this: DUC appears to make God the cause of sin. So, this is the issue that chapter six is dedicated to. But, Grant argues that, even on DUC, God is *not* the cause of sin; and this for reasons having to do with what he believes is the right way to view sin. He thinks that sinful actions have the following two components, viz., an act and "a defect in virtue of which the act is sinful and in which the act's sinfulness consists" (100). So, on Grant's view of things, God causes the act, all right, but he doesn't cause the defect. And that's because the defect is a *privation* of what is *supposed to be* included in some action. Since God causes all that *exists*, some lack or other will be solely the fault of the creature—lacks are not things that need to be created; they are the opposite of creation; they are non-being. So, while some lack or other will have to have a cause, we needn't think this cause is God since God is, again, the cause of all that exists, all that has being. We can, thus, pin the privation on the human agent; *she* is (or might be) responsible for her action's lacking the appropriate moral quality. While this way of thinking about things does not answer follow up questions (e.g., even if God can't be said to cause the sin, he still caused the action that he knew would be sinful; so, how can God cause actions he knows will be sinful?), it does, in my view, get around the worry that God causes *sin*, at least as Grant understands it.

² I'm not an expert on the scholastics. Grant calls his model a 'neo-scholastic' model; so, maybe he's just making clearer what the scholastics (in particular, Aquinas, perhaps) might have originally thought. In that case, the scholastics developed an ingenious model of divine universal causality. Whatever the case, what Grant has done, here, is remarkable.

³ For van Inwagen's direct argument, see, especially, his *An Essay on Free Will* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983), pp. 184ff.

These sorts of follow-up questions just mentioned are really just questions based in and on the problem of moral evil. And that's what chapter seven is devoted to. In this chapter Grant argues, among other things, that free will defenses fail, and, moreover, Dual Sources provides at least as good a response to the problem of evil as some competing views of God given that free will defenses fail (e.g., Molinism and Open Theism). Free will defenses fail, Grant thinks, because, given Dual Sources, it's just not true that God is confronted with a dilemma: either give human creatures (or whatever creatures are relevant to the story) libertarian free will so that there can be genuine moral good (but opens up the possibility of genuine moral evil), or eliminate the possibility of moral evil by causing every creaturely action (which would, presumably, rule out libertarian free will). Given Dual Sources, we can see why Grant thinks God wasn't confronted with such a dilemma. But, I have to admit some confusion, here.

Many use free will (type) defenses against only *logical* versions of the problem of evil; that is, against the idea that there is some contradiction in positing both that God (an all-powerful, all-knowing, morally perfect person), and evil exist. Why can't a Dual Sourcer use free will defenses against such a problem? All she needs to think is that the following three things are possible:

1. libertarian free will
2. libertarian free will is required for moral good and moral evil
3. libertarian free will is incompatible with DUC.

Of course, the Dual Sourcer will not think that 3 is *true*; but, so what? Unless she is committed to the view that 3 is *logically impossible*, I think she can appeal to a free will defense as at least an ingredient in a defense against the logical problem of evil.

To be fair, I think what Grant has in mind when he thinks of the problem of moral evil is the *evidential* problem, the idea that the *odds are low* that all the horrible evils in our world can have a God-justifying reason for their existence. But, against this problem a defense of *any sort* will not be sufficient. Again, the evidential worry is a probabilistic one. An opponent will need to come up with something more than a mere defense, a mere story about what God's reasons *could* or *might* be; she needs a *plausible* story, or, better, a *probable* one. And, right, an appeal to libertarian free will, even if Dual Sources is true, won't get the problem of evil opponent very far. So, it seems to me that Grant's argument that Dual Sources, if successful, is no worse off, here, than other competing theistic views of God (e.g., Molinism, and so forth) is correct.

Finally, in chapter eight, Grant tackles worries that his Dual Sources account (or DUC models, more generally) might raise with respect to issues like predestination, which he defines this way:

Necessarily, a created person attains salvation if and only if God chooses that that person attain it, and, for any possible created person, it is within God's power (whether or not) to choose that that person attain salvation (171).

Given the extrinsic schema of divine action, above, it should be fairly obvious why Grant thinks that predestination, so defined, is not incompatible with a human's (libertarianly) freely accepting (or rejecting) God's offer of salvation. For, there is nothing in the schema

that is *both* prior to and logically sufficient for a human's accepting God's offer of salvation (or failing to so choose).

There is much to be said about the issues in this chapter; however, I will simply punt to the issue I raised about Grant's Dual Sources account, viz., that it seems to me that a theological version of the direct argument successfully shows that no human is now, or ever has been, even partly morally responsible for her accepting (or rejecting) God's offer of salvation. But, I think that *if* Dual Sources is a successful model of DUC, then I think Grant has successfully shown how libertarian free will can be co-possible with a strong view of predestination.

I'll have to end my (all too brief) comments, here. But, I do want to add that regardless of whether or not Grant's Dual Sources account is successful, the model on offer is one that every theologian and philosopher interested in the issues of human free will and the classical theist conception of God will have to consider. My own view is that the account isn't successful, ultimately. But, this is, by far, the best and most elucidated model on offer that tries to marry libertarian free will (and moral responsibility) with divine universal causality. This book should be read by every philosopher and theologian interested in the relevant issues.