

# God and Freedom : A Discussion

Brian Davies OP

'If there is no logical impossibility in a man's freely choosing the good on one, or on several occasions, there cannot be a logical impossibility in his freely choosing the good on every occasion. God was not, then, faced with a choice between making innocent automata and making beings who, in acting freely, would sometimes go wrong: there was open to him the obviously better possibility of making beings who would act freely but always go right. Clearly, his failure to avail himself of this possibility is inconsistent with his being both omnipotent and wholly good'.

(J.L. Mackie, 'Evil and Omnipotence',  
*Mind*, April 1955, p. 209)

- A. So we are agreed that since God is the Creator he is responsible for everything that happens in creation.
- B. That would seem to be so.
- A. But how are we to understand 'responsible' here? Could it mean that God does everything that is done?
- B. Apparently it does. For what is done is done either by God or by something else. Yet what something other than God does is created and God is therefore responsible for it. So everything that is done must be done by God.
- A. That seems to follow. But it is subjects who do things, is it not?
- B. If that means that what is done is done by something or other, then, of course, I agree.
- A. And does not this mean that what is done is done by an agent?
- B. Certainly.
- A. But can anything done be thought of as done by any agent whatever?
- B. Presumably not. Making a bed is doing something. But we cannot think that beds can be made by just anything. Or are we to suppose that, for example, a grain of sand can make a bed?
- A. We cannot suppose any such thing. So what is done may not be done by just anything
- B. I agree.
- A. Yet we just said that God does everything that is done. So he, at least, can do anything that is done. Should we not therefore say that while grains of sand cannot make beds, God can do this?
- B. I sense a difficulty there. For is not God like a grain of sand when it

comes to making beds? We surely cannot think of God as a human being able to stand by a bed and make it. People make beds. God does not.

- A. And yet God does everything that is done. It would seem to follow that he makes beds.
- B. In one sense it does. If God is the Creator, then he creates people making beds. People make beds, and God makes people making beds. In this sense we can say that God makes beds.
- A. But now we want to know who in the end is responsible for the made-up beds. Is it God? Or is it the people who make the beds?
- B. It is clearly the people. Or, at any rate, it is the people who are responsible if they make the beds up freely.
- A. And yet God makes people making beds. So how can he do this and not be responsible for the made-up beds?
- B. I think you have missed my reference to freedom. God makes people making beds, and in this sense he is responsible for all made-up beds. But if I make a bed up freely, then whether the bed gets made is up to me and it being made is my responsibility.
- A. Here I fail to follow you. For would you not agree that something is responsible for what happens if it causes what happens?
- B. I can see an objection to that suggestion. But let us for the moment agree to it.
- A. And will you not also say that God causes all that is created?
- B. I will say that.
- A. But made-up beds are created. And so are people making beds. I mean by this that they are created—that they are being created—all the time that they are making the beds. It must therefore be true that God causes the making of beds and the beds as made up. And what can that mean if it does not mean that God is responsible for the making of beds?
- B. I can see the point you are making. But it needs to be made rather differently. God causes people to make beds. And he is the cause of there being made-up beds. But if I make a bed up freely, then I am the cause of the bed being made even if God is also. Did we not agree that in one sense it is false that God can make a bed? So can we not therefore hold that, though God creates the business of bed-making, people can be responsible for the beds they make even if God is also involved in what they do?
- A. If someone makes his bed freely, then I do not deny that he is responsible for the made-up bed. But we do now seem to be saying that God is responsible as well.
- B. We can be responsible for our made-up beds. And God is also. This would seem to follow from saying that God does everything that is done.

- A. But now I am worried again. For people do more than make beds. They murder and rob and rape. In fact, of course, they do many dreadful things. So are we now to say that God does these as well? We can, of course, agree that in one sense he cannot do them. He cannot do them in the sense that he cannot make a bed. God cannot murder, rob, and rape any more than a grain of sand can. But if he does everything that is done, must he not be responsible for murders and robberies and rapes? Must he not be just as responsible for these as he is for made-up beds?
- B. I do not see how this can be so. For the things you refer to are evil. And God cannot be responsible for evil.
- A. But how can he not be if he does everything that is done? Acts of murder are perfectly real. They are as much a part of creation as the Golden Gate Bridge. The same goes for acts of robbery and rape. I admit that these are all evil. But I do not see how it could be said that God is not responsible for them. It is, indeed, people who do these things. But people also make beds. And if God causes people making beds, and if, in this sense, he is responsible for the making up of beds, then how can we deny that he is responsible for murdering, robbing and raping, and that he is therefore responsible for murder, robbery, and rape?
- B. But are you not now saying that God causes evil? Or, if that is to put things too strongly, are you not saying that God causes sin?
- A. It looks as though I am saying just that. But it certainly seems an odd conclusion to draw. Could it be that we have missed something?
- B. But what could that be? If God does everything that is done, then our curious conclusion would seem to follow.
- A. But would it follow if we agree that sin is something freely chosen by people?
- B. I do not see how it could fail to follow even if we agree upon that. For suppose I freely murder someone. Obviously, I commit murder and God does not. But God makes me committing the murder, for he creates me murdering someone. If any act of murder is a matter of sin, then God causes sin. This need not mean that I am not responsible for the murder. For there being a corpse will be my doing. But it will also be God's doing if he is, indeed, Creator. And this would seem to mean that God causes sin.
- A. But what if I *freely* choose to murder? What could be God's causal role with respect to that?
- B. This has been settled by what we have said already. My freely murdering is something done and something created. It is therefore caused by God. So God causes me freely to murder.
- A. But may we not at least ask what we mean by saying this? And may

we not distinguish between different senses in which it is true that God causes me freely to murder?

- B. To me it seems that if God causes me freely to murder, then God brings my action about. He brings it about by creating it.
- A. That is something I concede. Human actions are as much a part of creation as anything else. So if what is created is brought about by God, the same applies to human actions. But might not an action be brought about by God on condition that it is chosen by someone?
- B. I cannot imagine what you could mean by this question. If human actions are created, the same goes for human choices. It cannot be that an action is brought about by God on condition that it is chosen by someone. It must rather be that an action is chosen by someone on condition that God brings about the choice of the action chosen.
- A. But is that really true? Consider a case where someone chooses to do something. If what he does is freely done, then nothing makes him do it. So he might have done something else and he could have done something else. Can we not therefore say that in doing what he does he is choosing not to do something else?
- B. I think we can say that, as long as we do not mean that there must be one specifiable thing that he is choosing not to do. But what is the import of this conclusion?
- A. I confess that I am really none too clear about that. But if choosing to do something is choosing not to do something, then there is surely a condition behind what one chooses to do. For what one does is done on condition that one does not do something else. Or is that false?
- B. No. It seems true,
- A. And must it not also be true that if God causes what I choose to do he causes what happens on condition that I do not do something else?
- B. I agree that this seems true.
- A. So should we not say that in causing me to do something freely God is causing what happens on condition that I do not do something else?
- B. Maybe we should. But this only means that God causes what would not come to pass if something else came to pass. And we have not discovered anything very interesting in hitting on that conclusion.
- A. But have we not discovered that God causes what would not come to pass if something else came to pass? We now seem to be saying that when I choose to do something God is causing something other than he would be causing if I chose to do something else. Suppose I choose to sing. Then I am choosing to sing rather than to do

something else. So there is something I am not choosing to do, whatever that might be. And this means that if God causes my singing, this can only be because I choose not to do that thing. So in causing me to choose to sing God seems to depend on something. What can this be but my choice not to choose what I do not choose when I choose to sing?

- B. You are moving too quickly and I have lost the thread of our argument. I take it that we are asking whether God's bringing about a free human action depends on anything other than the causal activity of God. And we seek to answer this question since we want to know whether it is true that God causes sin.
- A. That is what we are doing.
- B. And have we not agreed that God causes human actions and human choices since these are created?
- A. We have agreed about that.
- B. So you are really saying that though God causes human actions and choices he is still somehow dependent in creating them.
- A. Insofar as human actions and choices are free, that is what I am saying. For if my freely choosing to do something depends on my not doing something, then God depends on my not doing that when he creates me doing what I freely choose to do.
- B. But whenever I choose to do something I must be created by God as doing what I choose to do. So how can God depend on my choices when he creates me doing things freely? My choosing to do something freely must surely depend entirely on God. And from this it would seem to follow that my choosing to sin depends on God as creatively causing me to sin. It looks as though our conclusion must be that God does cause sin.
- A. Yet how are we to understand being created by God? Is it that we depend for our existence on him?
- B. We have to say more than that. For dependence, so to speak, takes different forms. Consider my posture as I am sitting on a chair. This depends on the chair alright, but such dependence cannot be what we are thinking of in saying that we depend on God for our existence. We must have something rather stronger in mind. To say that we are created by God is to say that we are made to be by him all the time that we exist. Hence our present problem. For our existence over time is not something different from what we are like and what we do over time. For me to exist when I am chewing a sweet is not for me both to exist and to chew. It is a matter of me being a chewer, so to speak. Therefore it seems that whatever I do is brought about by God and that God causes sin.
- A. But we do agree that to be created is to depend on God. Or does what you have just said deny this?

- B. It does not deny that.
- A. And shall we say that to be created is to be caused to exist?
- B. We can say that if we do not thereby mean that existing is some distinctive operation, or something like that.
- A. So we depend on God as a cause.
- B. That is so.
- A. But what kind of cause? Is it that we depend on him as a necessary cause? Or is that we depend on him as a sufficient one?
- B. What is the difference?
- A. Perhaps we can bring it out like this. Consider your relationship to oxygen. You clearly depend on it and you do so as something that could not live without it. Oxygen, in fact, is a cause of you being alive. And we can put this by saying that it is a necessary cause of you being alive. Yet oxygen by itself will not make you live. It does not suffice to bring it about that you are living. Let us put this by saying that, though oxygen is a necessary cause of you being alive, it is not a sufficient cause. And, in the light of this distinction, let me ask you once again: do we depend on God as a necessary cause or as a sufficient one?
- B. Well, he must be necessary. Just as the absence of oxygen would mean the absence of the living me, so the absence of God would mean the absence of everybody.
- A. Fair enough.
- B. But he must also be a sufficient cause. The creative will of God is enough to ensure that we exist being as we are and doing what we do. For we only exist as we are and doing what we do because God creates us. And God does not himself need anything to help him to do that. There is no cause apart from God on which God depends in creating. His willing to create is therefore enough to guarantee the existence of created things. So we depend on God as a sufficient cause.
- A. Yet we can also act freely. And we have already agreed that this means that when we do something we might not have done it and that nothing makes us do it if we do it.
- B. But what is the significance of that?
- A. It must be that there is something wrong with your account of God being a sufficient cause. For you seem to say that a sufficient cause is not enough to ensure its effect and that God is a sufficient cause of our being as we are and doing what we do. Yet we also agree that my doing something freely has me as its cause and that it goes with the possibility of my not doing what I do. How, then, can God be a sufficient cause of my doing something freely? If I could fail to do what I freely do, if I could do something else, then my doing something in such cases cannot come to pass because God's

creative will is enough to ensure that I do what I freely do. There is also required my choosing not to do what I do not do, which is one with my choosing to do what I do. If God willing me to act thus and so is a sufficient cause of my acting thus and so, then the fact of God willing me to act thus and so must entail that I act thus and so. It must be impossible for God to will me to act thus and so and for me not to act thus and so. For if it were possible for God to will me to act thus and so and for me not to act thus and so, how could God willing me to act thus and so be a sufficient condition of my acting thus and so? On the other hand, we need to concede that God is a necessary cause of what we do, including what we do freely. For free actions are real occurrences in the created world. And this means that they would not be there if God did not create them. May we not draw a distinction, therefore? May we not say that my free actions depend on God as a necessary cause but not as a sufficient one? When I freely do something, then all that goes on does so because of God and it would not happen at all if it were not for God creating. In this sense God does everything that is done. But if what I do is freely done by me, its coming to pass will depend not only on God but also on my freely choosing that it should come to pass. God is thus a necessary cause of all that comes to pass, but not a sufficient one. Without my freely choosing to do something, he cannot bring it about that I freely chose to do it.

- B. I do not much care for that idea. For does it not deny what we have to believe about creatures? Does it not deny that creatures are totally dependent on God for their existence? And are not their free choices part of their existence? And are they not therefore totally dependent on God? I agree, of course, that free choices can occur. But I do not see how they can fail to be created when they are the choices of creatures. Yet you seem to be talking as if they are not created. You seem to suggest that God must somehow wait to discover them as things which originate from something other than his will.
- A. I do not think I am saying quite that. For remember how I said that everything I do is created.
- B. But you must therefore concede that all my choices are created.
- A. So perhaps we should think about choosing. What is that?
- B. I suppose it is doing something without being made to do it. That seems intuitively right to me.
- A. But what is the doing of which you are thinking here? Is it choosing, or is it something else?
- B. I do not think that it can just be choosing. For how can anyone simply choose? There is no specific activity that is choosing as there is, for example, a specific activity that is filling in your football

pools. So it must be something else.

- A. And will that not be what one chooses to do? If one chooses to smile, for example, will the doing that is chosen not be that of smiling? And so on for other examples?
- B. That is what it will be. So to choose is to do something and to do it without being made to do it.
- A. Except, perhaps, in one sense. For everything created is made and my smiling or whatever is created. We can put this by saying that when I choose I am always made to do so for I and my choosing (or me choosing) are made. They are made by God.
- B. We will accept that qualification. So shall we say that to choose to do something is to do what one chooses to do without being made to do it by anything other than God?
- A. But that must be false. For if I am made to choose by God then I am made to choose as I do and I cannot not do what I do. And does not this mean that I do not really choose?
- B. But why say that? Can we not concede that if I am made to choose what I do I am caused to choose what I do by God?
- A. Let us agree to that.
- B. Then your conclusion only follows if what causes something to happen renders what happens inevitable or necessary or something like that. And I do not see why we should suppose that this is true. Why must we identify causing and necessitating?
- A. Surely, the answer is obvious. For when we speak of a cause we speak of what brings about something that follows inevitably given the cause. Arsenic causes people to die if they consume a certain quantity of it. Given a corpse, I might attribute the death to arsenic. What can I mean by 'The death was caused by the arsenic' if I do not mean that the arsenic made the death inevitable?
- B. But how do you know that a cause renders its effect inevitable? Is it part of the concept of causation that a cause determines its effect, that it makes the effect inevitable or necessary? Suppose I kick a ball which then proceeds to move in a certain direction. Suppose too that I am informed that the ball did not have to move as it did even though all the conditions leading to its moving remained the same. Does this mean that I did not move the ball or that the ball did not move because it was kicked by me? Is this conclusion logically entailed by my knowing that the ball did not have to move as it did? Why not just say that I did cause the ball to move though it was not determined that the ball should move as it did? Why not say that I did, in fact, cause the ball's movement even though the ball might not have moved as it did if all the conditions leading to its movement had been the same? And suppose that A causes B. Might not something prevent the occurrence of B? Suppose, then,



that it does not. Then we say 'A causes B'. But it cannot *necessitate* B if something could prevent the occurrence of B. So again I ask why we should suppose that causes necessitate their effects. I do not see why I have to believe that they do. In that case, however, I do not see why I have to believe that if God causes me to choose as I do then I cannot not do what I do. And if being caused to choose as I do by God is being made to choose as I do, I do not see why God cannot make me to choose as I do and it will be false that I cannot do other than I do or that what I do is what I do of necessity or by virtue of being determined. And to this I would add something else. You say that if I am made to choose by God, then I cannot not do what I do, and I do not really choose. Yet may I not reply that this is no more true than it is true that the fact that created causes are created is a reason for denying that there is any causality other than God's? God is the cause of there being, say, arsenic. Arsenic, we may say, is caused to be by God for as long as it exists. But it is still surely true that some quantity of arsenic can truly be the cause of someone's death. Or do you deny that?

- A. It would seem foolish to do so.
- B. By the same token, then, I can really choose to do something even though I am made to choose as I do by God.
- A. But this is surely false. Of course I agree that created causes can be real causes. I also agree that one thing can be the cause of another even though what it does is totally determined by the nature and activity of something else. A volcanic eruption might be the cause of someone's death even though the eruption was determined by the working of things centuries before the volcano actually blew. But what are we to say when it comes to choosing? Surely it is true that if I am made to choose as I do then I do not really choose. Or, better, if I am made to act as I do, then I do not really choose to act in that way.
- B. Why not? Remember that we are talking about choosing in relation to God. And we have agreed that for me to be made to choose by God is for me to be caused by God to choose as I do. Now what if it is true that a cause does not necessitate its effects? Can it not also be true that God causing me to choose as I do does not entail that my choosing is necessitated?
- A. The difficulty with that is that God's causing me to choose as I do renders my choice inevitable. I cannot not choose to do what God causes me to choose to do. And that seems to me to entail what I certainly want to deny—that I cannot freely choose to do certain things. For how can we freely choose to do certain things if our doing whatever we do is doing what God causes us to do and if that means doing what we cannot not choose to do?

- B. But can we not distinguish once again? For is there not a difference between being created and choosing, on the one hand, and being created and made to choose, on the other? And can we not suggest that though people who act freely are created and choosing, they are not made to choose?
- A. I fail to see the difference. For a creature to choose is for a creature to be made to choose by God. And if someone replies that creatures do not have the power of choice, then we must simply assert that whatever human choosing is it cannot be something we are not made to do by God.
- B. That would be one way of proceeding. But to say that one can choose when one is made to choose by God has the unfortunate consequence of seeming to deny that one is choosing. For if I am made to do something, how can what I do be chosen by me? Will it not simply be what I am made to do?
- A. It would seem to be that.
- B. But what of being created and choosing? If something is a choosing creature does it follow that it is made to choose as it does? Or does it only follow that it is made choosing as it does? For there is a difference here. To be made to choose as one does is to be made to do what one does without the option. It is not, in fact, to choose at all. But one can choose if one is made choosing as one does. For if what is made is someone choosing, then someone choosing is made, which is different from someone being made who is made to do what he does without the option.
- A. But how can someone choosing be made by God if it is also true of him that he is made to do what he does by God? What is the difference between being made to choose as one does and being made choosing as one does?
- B. The answer surely lies in your earlier distinction between necessary and sufficient cause. Someone choosing is made by God since without God's creative act he will not exist as choosing. But this act of God does not entail that the person chooses as he does. What the person does, insofar as he really chooses, is caused by him, and it is caused by God only insofar as there being the person doing what he does depends on God creating him doing what he does. God, we might say, empowers the choice of a person. But he does not determine what that choice shall be.
- A. Yet is not the choice caused to be by God? Is not a person freely doing something created by God from start to finish? How, then, can you say that a person's choice is only empowered by God? It must be nothing less than what God wills to come about.
- B. Certainly what happens must be willed to come about by God. Otherwise it would not happen. But choice or freedom is more than

a matter of something happening. It is also a matter of something not happening.

- A. You will need to explain that.
- B. The point is a simple one. When I freely choose to do something, I do what I do not have to do and therefore I turn aside from doing something else. Freedom depends on alternatives. My freely doing one thing depends on my being able to do something else and not doing it.
- A. So, for example, freely to smile is to be able to frown or whatever and not to do that. And so on for other examples.
- B. That is my idea. But if I am right, then when I act freely something is not being done by me even though it could be. And I am responsible for that since my choosing what I do is what brings it about that what I could do but do not is not done. We might put it by saying that I have the freedom to be responsible for what is not.
- A. But how does that help us with our present inquiry? How does it help us to see how free choices of creatures are related to God?
- B. It helps us to see that God can be the cause of all that happens, that even our choosing is made to be by God, without it also being true that God makes us choose as we do. He makes us choosing as we do, but only by creating us as not doing something because we are choosing to do something else. In other words, knowing that someone is acting freely is knowing that what he does is created by God and that what happens as he acts is caused by him as one who could have acted otherwise. What he could do but does not lies in his freedom of choice. It is not created, but its being possible is what makes it true to say that what is actually done is freely done and not something the agent was made to do.
- A. But our choosing to do what we do is caused by God. Our free choices are caused by God. So he must still be responsible for them. And what can this mean if it does not mean that he is the author of sin?
- B. What it means is that God causes me choosing as I do. And if I choose to sin, then he causes me to be there as the sinning individual that I am. But if I freely sin, then what is there is what would not have been there had I chosen otherwise. And I could have chosen otherwise even though God would have been creatively present in what I would then have been doing as well. God is a *necessary* condition of my free choices, of my freely choosing, but not a *sufficient* one.
- A. Then we are co-creators with God, as some have said. What comes to pass is created by us as well as by God.
- B. By no means. My point is that all that comes to pass is created only by God. But what does not come to pass can be our responsibility.

God does not stand to our free choices—to our freely doing things—as a sufficient condition. His will that they shall be does not mean that they must be. It does not make them inevitable. It only makes them what they are. This does not mean that I can choose to do what God does not cause me to do. But it does mean that what God causes me to do can be what I choose to do.

- A. Even if God creates me as wanting to do what I do?
- B. Even then. For if I am free to choose as I do, then what I do is what I could refrain from doing. We can, of course, suppose that God creates me simply wanting to do something and having no inclination to do something else. But that will surely not mean that when I do what I want I am unfree in doing what I do. Am I not free precisely when I do what I want?
- A. Yet suppose God assists people so as to ensure, for example, that nobody wants to do certain things. These people cannot be free, can they?
- B. Only if, for example, the fact that people cannot fly to the moon at will means that they are not free. Not being able to do certain things does not mean not being able to do anything. By the same token, not being free to do certain things does not mean not being free.
- A. And yet being created is being just what God makes one to be. Where is one's choice in this scheme of things?
- B. Can it not lie in one being what one is as something able to choose? And how, in any case, can we think of God's creating as any threat to our choosing in the first place? Nothing can be or come about if it is not created, if it is not caused to be by God. God's creating is therefore necessary for any creaturely choosing whatever.
- A. But is God's creating enough to ensure that creation is what it is?
- B. Of course it is. God's willing that things shall be guarantees them being.
- A. Then God's willing that I do such and such guarantees that I do such and such. And I cannot not do such and such unless God wills me not to do such and such. So God, in the end, is responsible for what I do, and I do not see the relevance of your use of the distinction between necessary and sufficient condition with respect to God and freedom. God, it would appear, is a necessary and sufficient cause of all that comes to pass. And this makes God the cause of sin.
- B. In one sense, yes. But sin is surely a case of doing what one should not do. Does not its essence lie in failure?
- A. That I will concede. For what else are we worried about with sin if we are not worried about a falling away from what is truly good?
- B. So we have sin when someone fails to do something, albeit by doing

something or other. And what can the cause of this failure be if it is not the choice or will of the sinner?

- A. Can it not be God as creating the sinner?
- B. But this does not make God a cause of sin. For sin, we are saying, is recognised as failure, as a not-being. And not even God can cause that. Surely the cause of sin is the will of the sinner.
- A. But what makes that to be as it is?
- B. The answer is surely God. For did we not agree at the outset that since God is Creator he is responsible for everything that is done? *Deus non solum dat formas rebus, sed etiam conservat eas in esse et applicat eas ad agendum et est finis omnium actionum, ut dictum est (Summa Theologiae, Ia, 105, 5 ad.3).*

## Theologies of Repression

### Gilbert Márkus OP

At the end of their National Conference this summer, the bishops of the Philippines spoke out strongly against human rights abuses in their country. They recited a long list of the names of people killed in the past year, including priests, journalists, trade unionists and other community leaders. Such denunciations of violence and repression are now fairly standard parts of the conclusions of many bishops' conferences, but the Philippine bishops' statement is interesting because it singles out the use of 'religious fanatics' in the government agencies' counter-insurgency campaigns. The bishops condemned this as an 'unholy strategy', and claim that it is only 'conducive to the worst forms of terrorism'. The arming and training of fanatical religious groups to fight the New People's Army had led the civilian Home Defence Force to become 'instruments of terror rather than peace'.

Though the Philippine bishops' conference was addressing itself to its own local situation, they are clearly aware that this use of certain groups of Christians by repressive governments is not peculiar to their own country. Other local Catholic hierarchies have spoken out strongly against various religious groups. In recent months Mexican Church leaders, together with labour leaders and others, have called for the