Introduction

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This volume brings together fifteen new essays, some by well-established philosophers and theologians, others by rising young scholars, on the topic of theological (or divine) determinism. But what is theological determinism? And who cares if it's true? In this Introduction to the volume, we begin with a brief overview of the view, before turning to reasons we think it is a subject of importance today. We then summarize some arguments commonly offered in support of theological determinism, as well as some objections to it. Finally, we give a brief overview of each chapter.

0.1   Defining the View

Theological (or divine) determinism is the view that God determines every creaturely event. Loosely, we can think of this as the view that God has decreed the world to be exactly as it is, or that God controls every aspect of creation. According to theological determinism, the unfolding of the universe through time occurs exactly as God has arranged, and, given God's will, it does so infallibly. When we look for more precise definitions, we find matters become a little more complicated.[1] It is tempting to define the way in which God determines in *causal* terms. Derk Pereboom, for example, defines theological determinism as "the position that God is the sufficient active cause of everything in creation, whether directly or by way of secondary causes" (2011, 262). Some, however, might worry that we should not think of God's activity as causal, since causal language is tied too closely with creaturely causation, with all the limitations this includes.[2] Heath White avoids this issue with the definition he provides in his contribution to this volume (Chapter 1):

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[1] For further discussion, see Vicens (2021), Furlong (2019), and White (2019).
[2] For discussion of this issue, see Vicens (2021).

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> [L]et *the facts about God's will* denote a complete description of God's intentions. Then *theological determinism* is the conjunction of two propositions, (i) the facts about God's will entail every other contingent fact, and (ii) the facts about God's will are explanatorily prior to every other contingent fact.

In Chapter 8, Alicia Finch suggests that White's definition can be spelled out as the conjunction of two theses:

> *The Necessitation Thesis:* For any *x* such that *x* is a contingent fact and *x* is not identical to the fact that God wills what God wills, the fact that God wills what God wills necessitates *x*;

and:

> *The Explanation Thesis*: For any *x* such that *x* is a contingent fact and *x* is not identical to the fact that God wills what God wills, the fact that God wills what God wills explains *x*.

This definition, both as proposed by White and as explicated by Finch, appeals to relations between facts, and replaces causal priority with the broader notion of explanatory priority. Other definitions omit both elements. Taylor Cyr, in Chapter 7 of this volume, provides the following account: "for any time *t* in a theologically deterministic world, given God's decrees, there is only one way that the future (relative to *t*) can unfold from *t*."

Although this account avoids both causal and explanatory priority, the language of decrees points to a sort of priority, since decrees seem prior, in some sense, to that which is decreed. Whatever definition is given, theological determinism does seem to require that God controls all aspects of the created universe, and this control seems to involve some sort of priority. Finch's chapter offers a detailed examination of this issue, suggesting that theological determinists should ultimately understand the priority involved in their view to be *ontological*. One reason to look to ontological priority is that it might allow for common ground between those who give causal accounts of divine activity and those who worry about using causal language in reference to God's will.

Definitions of theological determinism are important for not only what they include, but what they do not. Some authors do not require, as a matter of definition, that a determining God *intends* all creaturely events. At least on some accounts, whether God intends every event is a separate question from whether each is divinely determined. Indeed, even on White's account mentioned above, which appeals to divine intentions, a determining God need not intend every event. In the past few years, the

question of whether divine determinists must say that God intends every event has come under close scrutiny, with some (White 2019) arguing that theological determinists need not say this, and others (Pruss 2016, Furlong 2019) suggesting that theological determinists face difficulties in allowing for the possibility that God does not intend some events. In this volume, T. J. Mawson discusses this issue (Chapter 2), maintaining that a determining God need not intend all aspects of creation.

Whether any particular definition is acceptable is, itself, an issue to be explored by those interested in theological determinism. Indeed, within this volume, a definition proposed by one contributor, W. Matthews Grant, is critiqued by another, Simon Kittle. It must not be thought, however, that fruitful discussion can occur only after the perfect definition has been crafted. Despite some continuing debate over the best definition of theological determinism, the variety of definitions betrays a shared core conception, identified by various ways of loosely characterizing the view. Because of this, it is often possible to have productive debate about the merits and costs of theological determinism without worrying about the details of precise definitions. Of course, as Chapter 6 from Kittle shows, sometimes fruitful debate brings us right back to the issue of definition.

0.2 Why Theological Determinism?

Theological determinism is one of those rich topics that philosophers and theologians investigate for a number of reasons. Theological determinism might be forced upon theists whether they like it or not. If physical determinism turns out to be true (which we take to be a still open question), then theists could avoid theological determinism only by accepting the odd and surely unattractive view, given theism, that the universe is determined, but not by God. If theological determinism turns out to be untenable, and this odd view is thought likewise implausible, then the credibility of theism would be largely at the mercy of future empirical discoveries. Given this, theists have an excellent reason to investigate the viability and implications of theological determinism. The view is also of interest to philosophers – theist or not – working in agency theory. The idea of a determining God provides an excellent test case for investigating whether being "manipulated" or determined by an intentional being is a threat to free will, and whether such deterministic manipulation is relevantly similar to determinism by natural causes. (See Chapter 7 by Cyr in this volume for a discussion of this question.)

Theological determinism has a long and storied theological history, often serving as a point of contention between different religious thinkers. Seemingly suggested by some scriptural passages, while seemingly inconsistent with others, the view also makes some religious doctrines easier to make sense of, while making others more difficult. For instance, in Chapter 15, Katherine Sonderegger notes that a statement of the 6th Ecumenical Council suggests that Christ's human will, though free, is thoroughly determined by the divine will; and yet the very biblical passages that inspired this statement raise some trouble for it, in painting a picture of the will of Christ as in conflict with the divine will. Leigh Vicens, likewise, notes that the New Testament idea that sin is *inevitable* for human beings points to a form of determinism; yet, Vicens argues, there are biblical and theological reasons for maintaining that God is not the "author" of sin, and denying that God authors sin would seem to require rejecting theological determinism.

Historically, there have been many reasons put forward for believing in theological determinism. In some cases, authors propose stand-alone arguments for this position, while at other times, they simply note some benefit of the view that might be incorporated into a larger argument, perhaps contributing to a cumulative case for the view. Defenders of this position often appeal to some purported divine characteristic such as divine power, providence, knowledge, or aseity, arguing that God could have the characteristic only if theological determinism were true.[3] Others suggest that theological determinism is either required or suggested by particular religious doctrines, or by particular scriptural passages.

In the present volume, a number of authors suggest new reasons in support of this view, or give new life to old considerations. Thus, White argues that "theological determinism receives a boost" from considerations of the common theistic view that God creates *ex nihilo*. Jesse Couenhoven explores the idea that the concrete people who actually exist depend upon their rich personal histories, and that God's love for *these* people required God to call into being a very particular world, where particular individuals had the histories they in fact have – which requires something close to determinism. And while some have thought that theological determinism rules out appropriate trust in God, Daniel M. Johnson contends, in Chapter 13, that not only is trust in God compatible with this view, but those who reject theological determinism face difficulties in this very area.

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[3] For further discussion of the relationship between divine attributes and theological determinism, see Vicens (2021), Furlong (2019), and White (2019).

Two important points should be noted about these arguments, which speak to ongoing trends on this topic. First, there is a wider variety of considerations that are used in arguing for theological determinism than ever before. Second, these arguments come in a variety of strengths. None of the arguments in the following pages is suggested as a conclusive argument for theological determinism. Instead, authors argue, for example, that the view "receives a boost" from some consideration, or can handle a problem that may pose a difficulty for those who reject it. Although philosophers and theologians of past centuries may have sought to settle the matter of theological determinism in one fell swoop, contemporary authors are likely to both be more cautious and work in a more piecemeal fashion, suggesting that this or that consideration makes the view more plausible than it otherwise would be.

Historically, arguments against theological determinism have tended to arise from one or both of two related claims:

(1) At least some humans are free agents.
(2) God is not the author of sin.

An argument against theological determinism which appeals to claim (1) – let's call it the "argument from libertarianism" – will also take as a premise the truth of incompatibilism, the view that free will is incompatible with determinism. (The view that humans have a kind of freedom which is incompatible with determinism is called "libertarianism.") The argument concludes that determinism, including theological determinism, is false.

Many philosophers and theologians have resisted the argument from libertarianism. "Compatibilists" are those who reject incompatibilism, and thus can still maintain claim (1) above. In order to put pressure on theological determinists, then, a defense of incompatibilism is needed. At this point, an important question arises: are natural or causal determinism and theological determinism similarly related to the possibility of human free will? In other words, should one be a thoroughgoing compatibilist or a thoroughgoing incompatibilist, or might one think that one sort of determinism undermines human free will, but the other does not? If theological determinism threatens free will if and only if ordinary natural determinism does, then many contemporary arguments about incompatibilism and compatibilism can be simply "ported over" to a new context. While some have suggested that these sorts of determinism are relevantly similar, others disagree.[4] In many of the chapters in this volume, matters related to

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[4] For discussion, see Vicens 2021, Vicens and Kittle 2019, and Furlong 2019.

free will are close to the surface. Most notably, in their chapters, Philip Swenson (Chapter 11) offers a new argument for incompatibilism, and Cyr (Chapter 7) argues that compatibilists about natural determinism should be compatibilists about theological determinism, as well.

The argument from libertarianism might also be rejected by denying the existence of human free will. Those who accept divine determinism, but reject the existence of human free will, are known as hard theological (or divine) determinists.[5] Vicens discusses this view in Chapter 9 and explores a position that is between compatibilism and hard determinism, while Justin Capes offers an objection to hard theological determinism – that it cannot account for divine forgiveness.

The basic argument from (2) – let's call it the "author of sin" argument – is even more straightforward. In addition to the claim that God, the most perfect being, cannot be the source or author of sin, the argument relies on the premise that if theological determinism is true, God is the author of sin after all. So theological determinism must be false. As mentioned above, Vicens considers this argument in her chapter. Once again, it is open to theological determinists to deny either of the premises of this argument.[6] They might argue, as James Anderson (2016, 211) does, that theological determinists can accept that God is the author of sin in a "relatively thin sense," without calling into question God's goodness. Alternatively, divine determinists might maintain that there is no legitimate sense in which God is the author of sin, perhaps because, as White (2019) argues, a determining God need not either cause or intend sin.

Recently, (1) and (2) have been tied closely in discussions of arguments from evil, according to which the existence of evil (or of certain sorts or quantities of evil) is evidence against the existence of God. One famous response, the free-will defense, contends that the evil of this world comes from the exercise of human free will, which is incompatible with determinism. Thus God was constrained in choosing between a world with both significant human freedom and great evils, and a world without either one. Given the choice, this reply claims, a perfect being might reasonably choose to actualize the former. Theological determinists seem unable to take advantage of this reply. If the free-will defense represents the best response to the argument from evil, then theological determinists

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[5] See Pereboom 2005, 2011, and 2016 for explorations of hard theological determinism.
[6] For discussion, see Bruce 2016, White 2016 and 2019, Grant 2009 and 2016, Furlong 2014 and 2019, and Anderson 2016.

are at a disadvantage relative to other theists, and this provides a reason to reject their view. But it is controversial whether (a) the free-will defense is particularly powerful relative to other defenses and theodicies, (b) theological determinists cannot utilize this defense, and (c) the inability to utilize a powerful reply to the argument from evil should count against the plausibility of theological determinism. Although a number of chapters in this volume touch on issues related to the problem of evil, two especially take up this topic. Swenson argues that divine determinists cannot make use of the best sorts of free-will theodicy, while Garrett Pendergraft offers a new response to the problem of evil that does not appeal to the existence or value of libertarian freedom and that is available to theological determinists.

Of course, not all worries about theological determinism relate immediately to concerns about human free will or divine authorship of evil. Just as some chapters of this volume discuss underexplored strengths of theological determinism, so too do some focus on underexplored worries. One such worry, explored in Johnson's essay already mentioned (Chapter 13), is that if theological determinism is true, then it seems inappropriate to trust in God. After all, we don't know whether God plans for our ultimate salvation or damnation. Another worry, explored in Peter Furlong's essay (Chapter 12), is that if divine determinism is true, then we ought to respond with joy and thanksgiving to the evils around us, since they are part of God's wise, eternal plan. Finally, Alexander Pruss (Chapter 4) considers and responds to an argument that if the principle of sufficient reason (accepted by theological determinists) is true, an unacceptable metaphysical thesis known as "modal fatalism" follows.

0.3 Overview of Chapters

Chapter 1, Heath White's "Theological Determinism and Creation," offers an argument in favor of theological determinism from the doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo.* White defends theological determinism from the objection, raised by Peter van Inwagen, that on the assumption that God faces equally good alternatives in deciding what to create, an arbitrary divine choice would be improper. Yet White points out the strangeness of imagining that God decrees the existence of some object with undetermined properties. He also notes that on a "chancy" view like van Inwagen's, God must be "indifferent to many elements of the universe" in the sense that God does not have a preference for these actual elements over some alternatives. Among such elements, White suggests, might be the existence of

humanity itself. White concludes that the chancy view "demands a rather chillier God than some of us might have thought most desirable" making it hard to see "in what sense God loves and cares for individual creatures."

The next two chapters pick up this debate about the extent to which we are intended by God. T. J. Mawson in "Am I Here by Accident?" (Chapter 2) compares theological determinism and theological indeterminism on the question of whether human beings in general, and we individuals in particular, exist by accident, in the sense that God did not intend to create us. On the one hand, when considering our very existence, or good events (like Winston Churchill's recovery from a traffic accident in 1931), Mawson finds theological determinism to provide a comforting answer: "God designed the universe with us in mind, with you in mind; we are here for some purpose; you are here for some purpose. And, what is more, that purpose cannot be hampered by the apparent vagaries of luck; by human ignorance of the purpose; or by attempts to oppose the purpose. There is no such thing as luck." On the other hand, when considering bad events (like Georg Elser's failure to assassinate Hitler in 1938), Mawson finds theological determinism less comforting. The view he considers to be "maximally comforting" is one according to which God "intends the existence of humanity and of every particular human who does exist" but the bad events which might be necessary conditions for the existence of human beings are "merely accidents," not intended by God. Mawson thinks that both theological determinism and theological indeterminism may be compatible with such maximal comfort. On theological determinism one would need to distinguish between divine determination of some event and divine intention of that event. And on theological indeterminism, one would need to accept that God significantly restricts the libertarian freedom of human beings to bring about the creation of individuals. Yet in the end Mawson suggests that being accidental might not be so bad, if one is loved.

Whereas White starts from the doctrine of creation to reach theological determinism, Jesse Couenhoven, in "You Searched Me and Knew Me: Divine Determinism and the God of Love" (Chapter 3) begins with the nature of God as lover of individuals and author of our stories. Couenhoven reasons that "our world might be deterministic because God desires to have particular persons in it." Following Robert Adams, Couenhoven argues that if God loves particular people, this might give God reason to bring them into existence in all their particularity. He draws on the analogy of a character in a story whose identity is shaped by the many events that occur in her life: "if God elects to give us life, as the particular persons

we are, that requires commitment to something very much like the actual history that we have had. In turn, that history, and the people in it, require something very much like the history that preceded us." Whereas White thinks that one cost of theological determinism is its difficulty explaining why individuals suffer the evils that they do – and Mawson likewise takes views in which God intends every evil to be less comforting – Couenhoven suggests that the idea of God as author of our individual stories helps make sense of the evil we encounter: for such evil may in part make us who we are, the very particular creatures God loves.

While some take the doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo* as a reason to favor theological determinism, others have argued that theological determinism entails an unacceptable kind of fatalism. For theological determinists would seem to be committed to the principle of sufficient reason – the idea that everything happens for a reason, or, more technically put, all contingent truths have an explanation. And this in turn might be thought to imply modal fatalism, the view that there are no contingent truths at all. Alexander Pruss, in "Fatalism and Some Varieties of Contrastive Explanation" (Chapter 4), argues that the principle of sufficient reason is in fact compatible with the existence of contingent truth, and that the argument from the principle of sufficient reason to modal fatalism depends on a misunderstanding of the nature of explanation.

Before arguing for theological determinism on the basis of considerations of divine love for individuals, Couenhoven considers the view of those like Kathryn Tanner, who maintain that divine and creaturely agency are "non-competitive" due to God's transcendence, and that this lack of competition "dissolves" any purported problem about divine causation undermining human agency or freedom. Couenhoven, himself a compatibilist about divine determinism and human freedom, argues that the problem of free will "cannot simply be 'dissolved' with reference to the slogan of non-competitive relations. Difficult choices cannot be avoided." W. Matthews Grant, in "Divine Transcendence: Is There a Third Way in the Debate over Theological Determinism?" (Chapter 5), also takes a close look at the view of Tanner and others who take divine transcendence to be "the key to reconciling human freedom with God's universal causality." Grant considers whether this "transcendence approach" offers a third way between libertarianism and compatibilism, as some of its proponents have claimed. He concludes that it does not since, carefully defined, libertarianism and compatibilism are "mutually exclusive and exhaustive options" for those who affirm free will. He then considers the various strategies employed by proponents of the transcendence approach to reconcile free

will and God's causality, arguing that these strategies, as typically deployed, leave it unclear whether the approach is a libertarian or compatibilist view. Nevertheless, he argues that a consistent deployment of these strategies results in a version of the transcendence approach – what he calls "Dual Sources" – that is clearly libertarian while at the same time upholding a strong view of divine sovereignty and providence of the sort "that many have thought incompatible with libertarianism."

Simon Kittle, in "The Incompatibility of Universal, Determinate Divine Action with Human Free Will" (Chapter 6), considers a group of thinkers who claim that God's creative activity is *universal* in the sense that "God causes all created entities," and *determinate* in that God's causation "pertains to every aspect" of the entities, and yet *not deterministic*. He takes Grant to be a representative of this group, and gives an in-depth critique of his view, arguing first that it is occasionalist, and second, that even setting aside the issue of occasionalism, it meets a broader definition of determinism than the one on which Grant relies.

Whereas those taking the "transcendence approach" to the relationship between divine and human agency tend to think that natural-causal determinism is incompatible with human freedom, but universal determinate divine causation is not, Kittle is an incompatibilist about both natural determinism and human freedom (what might be called a "natural incompatibilist") *and* an incompatibilist about theological determinism and human freedom (a "theological incompatibilist"). Taylor Cyr, on the flip side, is both a natural compatibilist and a theological compatibilist. In his "Natural Compatibilists Should Be Theological Compatibilists" (Chapter 7), Cyr considers a famous argument against natural compatibilism, called the "Manipulation Argument," and argues that the most promising reply to this argument entails theological compatibilism. The manipulation argument relies on just two premises: that a person manipulated by another into performing an action is not responsible for that action, and that there is no relevant difference between such manipulated agents and agents who act in deterministic worlds. Cyr argues that rather than trying to find some relevant difference between manipulated and determined agents, compatibilists should take a "hard-line" approach to the argument and reject the first premise, maintaining that manipulated agents are in fact responsible for what they do. For compatibilists already accept that regarding whatever action is the first one for which a person is morally responsible, the person is (by hypothesis) not responsible for any of the factors (internal or external) that determine her action. But then there is no relevant difference between such a determined action and a