

GRACE AND CONTROLLING WHAT WE DO NOT CAUSE

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Eleonore Stump has recently articulated an account of grace which is neither deterministic nor Pelagian. Drawing on resources from Aquinas's moral psychology, Stump's account of grace affords the quiescence of the will a significant role in an individual's coming to saving faith. In the present paper, I first outline Stump's account and then raise a worry for that account. I conclude by suggesting a metaphysic that provides a way of resolving this worry. The resulting view allows one to maintain both (i) that divine grace is the efficient cause of saving faith and (ii) that humans control whether or not they come to saving faith.

I - Introduction

Christianity holds that human agents are fallen and in need of salvation.¹ It also holds that humans are not able to save themselves; they are instead saved by divine grace. For example, Augustine writes that "unless this [sinful] will, then, is freed by the grace of God from the servitude by which it has been made a 'servant of sin', and unless it is aided to overcome its vices, mortal men cannot live rightly and devoutly."² Aquinas echoes this sentiment: "a man cannot perform meritorious deeds without grace."³ And the Council of Trent declares that "the efficient cause [of our justification is] the God of mercy who, of his own free will, washes and sanctifies, placing his seal and anointing with the promised holy Spirit who is the guarantee of our inheritance."⁴ It is clear that in affirming that humans are saved by divine grace, Christian orthodoxy is denying that humans are able to be the efficient cause of their own saving faith in

Christ.⁵ One way to insure that God is the efficient cause of an individual's coming to faith is by embracing theological determinism—the thesis that God determines all human actions and volitions through His will.⁶ But theological determinism comes with what many consider to be too steep a price; it would be preferable, then, to be able to give an account of grace and its relationship to faith that didn't require theological determinism.

Eleonore Stump has recently developed such an account. Drawing on resources from Aquinas's moral psychology, Stump's account of grace affords the quiescence of the will a significant role in an individual's coming to saving faith. In section II, I briefly outline Stump's account and show how it is neither deterministic nor Pelagian. In section III, I raise a worry for Stump's account that seems to render her account unsatisfactory. Following this, in sections IV and V I suggest a metaphysic that provides a way of resolving this worry. The resulting view allows one to maintain both (i) that divine grace is the sole non-instrumental efficient cause of saving faith (thereby avoiding what I take to be the central objectionable feature of Pelagianism) and (ii) that humans control whether or not they come to saving faith (thereby avoiding theological determinism).

II – Stump on Grace and Faith

In a series of recent articles, Eleonore Stump articulates and defends an account of divine grace and its relationship to the act of faith. Stump develops this account by first noting a problem with what she takes to be Augustine's view of grace and showing how Aquinas's moral psychology provides the resources for resolving this problem. It

will be helpful to follow Stump's lead and begin with what she takes to be the Augustinian position on grace before moving on to her preferred Thomistic account.

In her treatment of Augustine's account of free will and its relation to grace, Stump begins by suggesting that Augustine's view should be understood as a libertarian, and hence incompatibilist, account.⁷ If Stump is right that Augustine believes both (a) that incompatibilism is true and (b) that an act of free will is involved in our coming to have saving faith,⁸ consistency would require that Augustine deny the truth of theological determinism. Such a denial does not, however, commit him to a Pelagian view of the relationship between free will and grace:

In the *Retractationes* he [i.e., Augustine] asserts vigorously that the Pelagians are mistaken to think he ever held a view of free will like theirs, that is, a view of free will which makes the freedom of the will independent of divine grace.... For Augustine, a person who is unaided by grace cannot do otherwise than sin, and yet she is morally responsible for the sin she does.⁹

In his writing against Pelagius¹⁰ and his disciples, Augustine repeatedly emphasizes that, due to Adam's sin and the subsequent Fall, all humans are in bondage to sin and death. In other words, in maintaining that fallen and corrupted human nature must be further supported in order for one to will the good, Augustine was arguing that the grace of creation is not sufficient for an individual to will the good. What is at issue, then, is whether another grace—sometimes called 'cooperative grace' or what Augustine calls 'a unique grace'¹¹—is also required for a fallen human to will the good. Augustine vehemently insists that it is, and resolutely defends the claim that apart from a unique

grace no agent is able to will the good.¹² We can think of Augustine's insistence on a unique grace as motivated by what I will call the anti-Pelagian constraint (APC):

(APC): No fallen human individual is able to cause or will any good, including the will of her coming to saving faith, apart from a unique grace.

For purposes of this paper, I will consider as acceptable only those views which satisfy this constraint. Furthermore, I will take a strong reading of (APC) according to which a fallen individual cannot even be a cause of her coming to saving faith apart from a unique grace. My motivation for this strong reading here is two-fold. First, I think that an argument for the strong reading can be made from tradition.¹³ Second, if one holds that fallen humans are able to be a cause of their own saving faith, just not the *sole* cause, then one faces the following dilemma: either the cause that the individual contributes to his own salvation is independent of a unique grace or it is not. The first disjunct is often elaborated along the line that individuals cooperate, on their own, with God's grace so that the individual's cooperation and the divine grace are jointly efficacious. However, since cooperating with divine grace is itself a good, if agents can cooperate apart from a unique grace given by God as suggested by the first disjunct, (APC) is violated.¹⁴ The agent is doing a positive act apart from grace. On the other hand, the second disjunct begins a potentially infinite regress that would only be terminated by embracing the first disjunct at some level.

The difficulty with Augustine's view comes when one attempts to reconcile his acceptance of (APC) with his apparent rejection of theological determinism. Because he accepts (APC), Augustine holds that an individual isn't able to cause the will of faith

on her own. Instead, God causes the will of faith via an infusion of grace. According to Stump, Augustine's view here faces a problem. If the will of faith is caused only by God, then the argument that Augustine's account of free will is [an incompatibilist account] appears to collapse like a house of cards.... It is hard to see why her [i.e., the agent's] will should be thought of as free in any sense. It is also difficult to ward off the conclusion that in this case God is responsible when a human will doesn't will the good.... Finally, on this position, it is hard to see why a good God wouldn't cause the will of faith in everyone, so that everyone is saved.¹⁵

According to Stump, Augustine ultimately does affirm the view that the will of faith is caused by God: "There seems to be every reason for Augustine to reject the claim that the will of faith is a gift of God and caused by grace. There can be no doubt, however, that Augustine did in fact accept it."¹⁶ It looks, then, that Augustine ultimately rejects libertarianism insofar as God, rather than the individual, is the ultimate source or first cause of her act.¹⁷ According to Stump, "Augustine becomes increasingly insistent that the will of faith is a gift from God in the sense that God alone is the cause of it."¹⁸ Thus, Stump suggests that Augustine's commitment to (APC) leads him, despite initial appearances, to theological determinism.

Stump goes on to argue that Augustine would need not resort to theological determinism if he "could find a way to hold that human beings are able, on their own, to reject grace, without God's being ultimately responsible for their doing so."¹⁹ Stump thinks the difficulty should be resolved as follows: "Suppose that God offers to every person the grace that produces the will of faith, but that it is open to a person to refuse

that grace."²⁰ In other words, suppose that God offers grace to each individual such that, if that person doesn't resist the grace offered, that grace will cause the individual to have the will of faith. Since it is still the grace causing the will of faith, (APC) isn't violated. This view, Stump argues, requires an understanding of the will, such as that found in Aquinas' moral psychology, that involves three, rather than just two, settings:

The will can assent to something or reject it, but it can also simply do nothing at all.... If this view of the will is right, then there are at least three possibilities for the will as regards grace...: the will can assent to grace; it can refuse; or it can be quiescent. When it is quiescent, it doesn't refuse grace, but it doesn't accept it either. It is thus possible to hold that a human person has it in her power to refuse grace or to fail to refuse grace without also holding that she has it in her power to form the good act of will which is the assent to grace.²¹

According to Stump, it is the possibility of the quiescence of the will that allows one to claim both that "divine grace produces the act of will necessary for justification and that that act of will is free in a non-compatibilist sense."²² Theological determinism is avoided because "it is up to a human willer, and to her alone, whether her will refuses grace or is quiescent with regard to grace.... A human being is still ultimately in control of the state of her will, insofar as it is up to her either to refuse grace or to fail to refuse grace."²³ Her account also satisfies (APC) because "divine grace produces the act of will necessary for justification,"²⁴ and not some action or choice done by the agent apart from grace.

III – A Problem for Stump’s Account

The previous section illustrates how, on the account of grace developed by Stump, the possibility of a quiescent will allows one to resist theological determinism by vesting the ultimate responsibility for an agent’s will in the agent herself and not in God, while at the same time not requiring that the agent is able to form a good volition apart from grace. While I think that Stump’s account both avoids theological determinism and satisfies (APC), in the present section I want to raise an objection to her view. Remember that the reason Stump postulates the quiescence of the will is to avoid saying that an agent wills to receive saving grace. If an agent were to will to receive grace, then, since doing so is good, the agent would then be a cause of a good apart from grace, violating (APC). On her view, then, God offers grace to all and an individual will come to faith when she neither affirms nor rejects that grace, but merely ceases willing with regard to the grace, that is, when her will is quiescent. When the agent’s will is quiescent, grace produces in that individual the will of faith.

Since quiescence plays such a central role in Stump’s view, it is natural to ask *why* it is that an individual’s will might become quiescent such that, in virtue of this fact, God’s grace will produce in that individual the will of faith. Stump writes that “the exercise of the will—whether the will is turned off or not—is always in the power of the will itself.”²⁵ So it initially looks like she would say that it is up to the will to turn it itself off. Somewhat surprisingly, however, she instead says that the will’s becoming quiescent cannot be a further act of the will. She compares the activity of the will to bodily motion. Just as “my ceasing to walk east is not by itself an instance of my walking west,”²⁶ so too ceasing to will is not something that is itself willed. A will’s

becoming quiescent “is not itself an act of will.”²⁷ Since quiescence thus doesn’t depend on a previous volition by the agent, it looks inexplicable *why* the agent’s will would cease resisting grace according to Stump’s view. It looks like whether or not an individual’s will is quiescent is perhaps a matter of chance; at the very least, since it doesn’t depend on a previous act of will, it is hard to see how the agent could control her quiescence.

Stump canvases a number of reasons that an agent could become quiescent with regard to her will, including simple inattention, distracted inattention, willed inattention or mere abstention.²⁸ But none of these are the kind of quiescence involved with the will of faith, for in none of these cases does quiescence follow active rejection, as she thinks it must with regard to the case involving grace. Instead, Stump suggests that in the case of quiescence with regard to grace, the will becomes inactive because the intellect comes to be divided against itself:

the intellect becomes locked in indecision, unable to resolve the conflict within itself into one single, integrated judgment. In the face of this blockage in the intellect, the ... will becomes quiescent. But now the quiescence can appropriately be said to drive out the rejection. In this ... case, it is not simply that the will is inactive because the intellect has lapsed into inattention of some sort. Rather, the will becomes inactive because the intellect has come to be divided against itself.²⁹

On Stump’s view, then, the kind of quiescence involved in an individual’s coming to have saving faith has a number of interrelated features. We might describe these relevant features in the following way:

- (a) there is a unique grace given by God which causes the will of faith,
- (b) God offers this unique grace to all,
- (c) this unique grace will cause the will of faith in every individual whose will has become quiescent with regard to God's offer of grace,
- (d) an individual's will becomes quiescent in this way when the agent's intellect becomes divided against itself, and
- (e) the individual's will becoming quiescent in this way is neither itself a volition nor the result of a previous volition by the agent.

These five features jointly comprise the central elements of Stump's account. But it appears that the satisfaction of any of these features cannot be attributable to the agent in any way that would satisfy a libertarian understanding of moral responsibility.³⁰ The first three of these features are ultimately attributable to God, not the individual agent; thus, the agent cannot be morally responsible for either (a), (b) or (c), nor can their satisfaction be attributed to the agent's intellect and will. Feature (d) initially looks like a candidate for grounding the individual's moral responsibility for her coming to faith, since it involves the agent's intellect and will; but whatever plausibility (d) has for grounding the individual's moral responsibility is undercut by (e). Furthermore, jettisoning (e) doesn't appear to be an option for Stump's account, since it is (e) that allows her view to satisfy (APC). Thus, whatever merits Stump's proposed account of grace has (which, I think, are many), her account ultimately appears unsatisfactory.³¹

IV – Refraining, Quasi-Causation and Control

What is needed, then, is an account of grace according to which it is clear that the individual controls whether or not she comes to have saving faith in some way that

allows for her being morally responsible for whether or not she does, but that also satisfies (APC). In other words, an account is needed which can maintain both that grace is the sole non-instrumental efficient cause of saving faith and that human agents control whether or not they come to saving faith.

Such an account is, I think, available. In the present section and the next, I develop one such account around the central idea that grace is necessary but not sufficient for saving faith. Contra Pelagianism, the account developed here holds that a unique grace is needed to cause the will of faith because placing one's faith in God is good, and human individuals can't will this sort of good unless a unique grace is first given. In virtue of this feature, the present account satisfies (APC). Like Pelagius' view, this view also affirms that grace is not singularly sufficient for saving faith, and thereby avoids theological determinism. God's grace will lead one to saving faith so long as it is not resisted or rejected, though whether or not the grace is resisted is ultimately up to the agent. For ease of reference, and for reasons that will become clear below, I'll call this view the Quasi-Causal View, or simply (QV) for short.

How then should we understand the agent's refraining from resisting divine grace? Stump's view, with its focus on the quiescent will, gives us a good starting point, even if it is ultimately unsatisfactory for the reason outlined in the previous section. What is needed is an account that explains the agent's refraining from resisting grace in a way that is ultimately under her control, yet that doesn't lead to the agent causing, even indirectly, her own salvation. I think such an account can be given.

To say that an agent refrains from willing an action, or is quiescent with regard to that action, is to say that the agent does not will that action to occur. But as we learned

from Stump above, refraining from willing need not itself be a willing. I suggest that we should understand an instance of refraining as an omission—specifically an omission of both accepting and rejecting grace. Furthermore, according to one popular theory of efficient causation, omissions cannot be causes.³² This theory holds that causation is a relation between events, and since omissions are the absence of a particular event, rather than an actual event, omissions are precluded from being causal relata.³³ If this is correct, then omissions, including the event of the omission of refraining from resisting grace, cannot be the cause of events, including one's coming to saving faith. Such an account of causation can provide a basis from which to understand the nature of the refraining involved in (QV).

Recent work by Phil Dowe will be helpful at this point; Dowe argues that omissions are not actual, genuine causes.³⁴ Dowe begins his account by calling our attention to two intuitions, which he calls the 'genuinist intuition' and the 'intuition of difference'. The former is the intuition that omissions certainly seem like they can be causes. For example, it seems that a father's omitting to closely watch his child while walking alongside the road is a cause of the child being hit by a car. Building on this intuition, 'genuinism' is the view that omissions can be causes. The second intuition, however, gives reason to reject genuinism. According to this intuition, one recognizes upon further reflection that cases of seeming causation by omission are not genuine cases of causation:

You say that the father's inattention was the cause of the child's accident.

Surely you don't mean that he literally made the child run into the path of the car, or that he made the car hit the child. Rather, you mean that his

failure to guard the child was the cause in the sense that if he had guarded the child, the accident would not have happened. You don't mean that he literally caused the accident; you mean that it was possible for him to have prevented it.³⁵

What Dowe sets out to do then is give an account of omissions in line with the intuition of difference without recourse to negative-events or any other spurious ontology, while at the same time giving an account as to why the genuinist intuition seems so plausible.³⁶

At the heart of Dowe's view is the claim that every seeming case of causation by omission should be understood "primarily as a counterfactual claim about genuine causation," that is, as "the mere possibility of causation."³⁷ In other words, while omissions aren't genuine causes, they are intimately related to cases of genuine causation in that they involve the possibility of genuine causation. So omissions aren't causes, they are only 'quasi-causes' and apparent cases of causation involving omissions are really cases of 'quasi-causation'. Here is Dowe's analysis of 'causation by omission', where *A* and *B* name positive events and *x* is a variable ranging over events:

not-*A* quasi-causes *B* if *B* occurred and *A* did not, and there occurred an *x* such that

(O1) *x* caused *B*, and

(O2) if *A* had occurred then *A* would have prevented *B* by

interacting with *x*.³⁸

Note that according to this definition of omissions, causation is taken to be primitive and

cases of quasi-causation are defined in terms of cases of genuine causation. Dowe takes this to be a benefit of his analysis because it means that such an account solves the problem of omission “in a way that is consistent with all theories of causation.”³⁹ Note also that this approach to omissions avoids a problem for genuinism mentioned earlier: since omissions are not genuine causes, there is no problem with negative-events like omissions being causal relata.⁴⁰

There are a number of attractive features of Dowe’s account of quasi-causation. First, it allows for omissions to causally explain events without the metaphysical commitment to genuine causation by omission. Helen Beebe, for example, writes that “to cite an omission in an explanation is to say something—albeit something negative—about the causal history of the event to be explained.”⁴¹ Dowe’s account of quasi-causation shows why an omission can be a causal explanation for a later event even if the intuition of difference ends up being true: the omission not-*A* causally explains why *B* occurred in virtue of it being the case that had *A* occurred, *A* would have prevented *B* by interacting with *x*. Furthermore, it is very plausible that it is causal explanation, and not causation itself, that often motivates the genuinist intuition. Dowe’s account thus respects both of the previously mentioned intuitions. It preserves the intuition of difference since it holds that quasi-causation is not genuine causation, but only the possibility of causation. And while it can’t affirm the literal truth of the genuinist intuition, it can offer two reasons why such an intuition arises: (i) causation and quasi-causation are so intimately related that for many purposes it suffices to treat cases of quasi-causation as if they were cases of genuine causation, and (ii) omissions can be causal explanations. Particularly when coupled with the epistemic difficulty of telling positive

events from omissions, these reasons provide a plausible explanation of the origin of the genuinist intuition. Thus, Dowe concludes that the habit of treating quasi-causation as causation is justified “by the fact that [quasi-causation] plays the same role as causation in evidence, explanation, and agency.”⁴²

Elsewhere, Carolina Sartorio suggests that genuinism is often motivated by considerations of moral responsibility: “the possibility of causation by omission helps to preserve the important connection that seems to exist between causation and moral responsibility.”⁴³ Dowe himself suggests that genuinism need not be true in order for an agent to be morally responsible for an omission insofar “quasi-causation may also ... track moral responsibility in just the way that causation does.”⁴⁴ Dowe himself doesn’t develop this suggestion in any detail, but I think it can be done by employing the language of control that is often found in debates about moral responsibility.⁴⁵ A natural first stab at the notion of moral responsibility takes control seriously: an agent can only be morally responsible for an event that she has some control over. Let us call this the control condition for moral responsibility: an agent *S* is morally responsible for an event *e* only if *S* has (or at some point had) control over the occurrence of *e*. Such a suggestion underscores our willingness to hold agents morally responsible for the consequences of their actions, for example, but not for things that happened prior to their births. I think that Dowe’s account of causation and quasi-causation offers a way of understanding the sort of control at issue in discussions of moral responsibility. Sometimes an agent has control over some event *e* in virtue of causing *e*. Let us call this ‘direct control’. But if omissions are not causes, as Dowe suggests, then it may be that genuine causation and control can come apart—an agent may control an event

even if she does not actually cause it. She may, instead, control it in virtue of quasi-causing it. Let us call this ‘indirect control’. Indirect control allows us to maintain that agents are morally responsible for their omissions or the consequences of their omissions, which thinking of control solely in terms of causation would not. We can thus say that an agent controls an event *e* when either

- (1) an action of the agent causes *e* to occur, or
- (2) an omission by that agent quasi-causes—in the sense spelled out above—*e* to occur.⁴⁶

If we understand control in this way, we see that an agent can be responsible for the results of both her actions and her omissions even if genuinism is false.⁴⁷

V – Completing (QV)

In order to see exactly how the above discussion of control and quasi-causation can be used to develop (QV), it will be helpful to reexamine the two views of grace that I am attempted to navigate between. According to deterministic accounts, no individual is able to will to come to saving faith apart from grace, and thus no individual is more than a merely instrumental cause of her own salvation. Neither are individuals in ultimate control of their own salvation; all of an agent’s volitions are ultimately controlled, not by that individual, but by God. So, according to this view, individuals can neither cause nor control their own salvation.

In contrast, Pelagius’ view of grace holds that individuals can both control and cause their own salvation. Since Pelagius’ view of the will and its relation to grace is not deterministic, God’s giving of grace to an individual is not sufficient for that individual to come to saving faith; an act of the individual’s will is also needed. Given that Pelagius

understood grace to be primarily in God's giving of human nature, he held that a unique grace is not needed for an agent to will the good. Individuals are able to will their own salvation simply in virtue of their having human nature. Thus, individuals are able to will, or cause, their salvation to occur apart from a unique dispensation of grace by God. Keeping in mind the distinction between direct and indirect control from the previous section, Pelagianism holds that individuals directly control their own salvation in virtue of being able to will to come to saving faith.

I think there are reasons to reject both of these views. The problem with the former view stems from its holding the dispensation of grace as sufficient for salvation, for this entails either universalism or that God refrains giving some individuals the grace needed for salvation. While universalism might not be an official heresy, its condemnation by the majority of the Christian tradition gives a very strong *prima facie* reason for rejecting it. The second option raises a serious version of the problem of evil. Since this option holds that the grace sufficient for salvation is not given to all, it must be that God refrains from giving grace to some individuals. Given that this view holds that grace is not just sufficient, but also necessary for salvation, the lack of grace is sufficient for an individual's not being saved. Insofar as individual's failing to be saved is a morally bad state of affairs, it looks as if God is directly responsible for an evil that He could have avoiding bringing about by giving that individual the needed grace. On the other hand, Pelagianism errs in holding that a unique grace is not necessary for salvation, insofar as an individual is able to will the good of her own salvation apart from a unique grace. Pelagius' view fails, then, precisely because it violates (APC).

The non-deterministic account of grace that I'm proposing can be understood as a middle way between these other positions. In order to avoid the dilemma facing the deterministic view, the present account rejects that God's giving of grace is necessary and sufficient for coming to saving faith. In order to avoid the problems associated with God giving the grace needed for salvation to only some, the present account affirms that God's grace is universally given. Furthermore, it also holds that such grace is the cause of our good will and coming to saving faith, thereby preserving the theological claim that God is the ultimate cause of goodness. But I think that we should reject that God's giving of this grace is sufficient for salvation—the individual whose salvation is at issue must also contribute a necessary condition. In other words, individuals have no control over whether grace is given, but since they can resist grace, they do have indirect control over whether that grace causes its intended result. Agents thus have control over their own salvation, not in virtue of causing it, but in virtue of an omission that they indirectly control. The conjunction of God's grace and the individual's refraining from resisting will be jointly sufficient for the individual's coming to saving faith.⁴⁸ And since, as I've already noted, God extends this grace to all individuals, whether or not an individual comes to saving faith is ultimately up to the agent rather than God.

Unlike Pelagianism, the account that I've proposed here does not violate (APC). Agents directly control those events that they cause to occur, while they indirectly control those events or omissions which they quasi-cause. How does this distinction apply to the grace needed for salvation that God gives to all? If we hold that the grace that God gives to each individual will cause that individual to come to saving faith unless

the individual rejects such grace, then the agent will in fact be saved via God's grace once she refrains from rejecting the grace offered.

Remember that Dowe defines an omission (not-*A*) as the quasi-cause of some event *B* if *B* occurs and *A* did not, and there is some other event *x* such that *x* caused *B*, and had *A* occurred, then *A* would have prevented *B* from occurring by interacting with *x*. As applied to grace and saving faith, let *A* name the event which is the agent's rejecting God's grace, let *B* name the event which is the individual's coming to saving faith, and *x* be the efficacy of the grace necessary for salvation and given by God. So long as the agent rejects the grace given by God, then the grace does not bring about the individual's salvation. As soon as the agent refrains from or omits rejecting the grace (not-*A*), then the grace will be causally efficacious in bringing the individual to saving faith; that is, not-*A* allows *x* to cause *B*. On this account, since it is God's grace that is causally efficacious for an individual's salvation so long as the individual does not reject that grace, the agent is not causing her own salvation. This avoids the central problem with Pelagianism.

But since whether or not the individual rejects God's grace is up to the agent, and not ultimately up to God, the agent will have indirect control over her salvation. Grace will cause an individual to come to saving faith when the agent's will becomes quiescent. But, since quiescence isn't the same as willing to accept grace, (APC) isn't violated if the agent becomes quiescent apart from grace. Furthermore, on this account unlike on Stump's account, whether or not the agent's will is quiescent can be straightforwardly under the control of the agent. As we've seen, we can adapt Dowe's account of 'causation by omission' to show how quiescence is an omission that quasi-

causes the act of saving faith. But we can also spell out how it is that an agent is able to quasi-cause an omission. As before, let *A* and *B* name positive events and let *x* be a variable ranging over events or dispositions. *A* quasi-causes an omission not-*B* just in case *A* occurred and *B* did not, and there occurred some *x* such that

(Q1) the occurrence of *A* interferes with *x*, and

(Q2) if *A* had not occurred then *x* would have caused *B*.

To see how this allows an individual to quasi-cause her own quiescence in the sense involved in coming to saving faith, let *A* be a previous volition by the agent, let *B* be the agent's resisting God's grace (so that not-*B* is the agent's quiescence with regard to the unique grace), and let *x* be a natural disposition to choose contrary to God (one can think of this disposition is a result of original sin if so inclined). On this model, individuals are naturally disposed to continue to reject the grace that God gives to all individuals. Insofar as they are fallen and sinful, they are not able to choose to accept God's grace; such a choice would violate (APC). But, as we saw earlier in the discussion of Stump's view, ceasing to will to resist a good isn't the same as willing that good. Thus, it doesn't violate (APC) to say that individuals can, through an act of their will, become quiescent with regard to divinely given grace. Once they are quiescent, the grace will cause them to come to saving faith. Since the agent causes neither her quiescence nor her coming to faith, the agent is not a cause of her own salvation and (APC) is not violated.⁴⁹ It is precisely because omissions are only quasi-causes and not causes that this view can maintain that an agent wills to refrain from resisting God's grace without thereby causing either her salvation or any other good act. But since an agent's quasi-causing can provide control to the agent, an agent can clearly control her

salvation without having to be the cause of her receiving salvation. Therefore, unlike on deterministic views which hold that the only reason a particular individual doesn't come to saving faith is that God does not give that individual the needed grace, the present account allows the non-regenerate to be responsible for their own lack of salvation.

VI – Conclusion

In summary, the present view maintains both that God alone causes saving faith through the grace He gives to all and that individual agents control whether or not they receive that grace. It also has the benefit, I think, of providing a metaphysic for grounding a traditionally accepted account of divine grace: “Neither does that person do absolutely nothing in receiving that movement of grace, for he can also reject it; nor is he able, by his own free will and without God’s grace, to move himself towards justice in God’s sight.”⁵⁰ Furthermore, while the present account in the same spirit as that developed and defended by Eleonore Stump, it more clearly gives control over her salvation to the individual by rooting the quiescence of the individual’s will in a previous act of her will.⁵¹

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NOTES

¹ Exceptions to this claim are the Incarnate Son and, according to some theological traditions, the Virgin Mary.

² Augustine, *Retractions*, Book 1, chapter 8 (in *The Fathers of the Church*, volume 60, trans. by May Inez Bogan, R.S.M. (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University Press, 1968)), 35.

³ Aquinas, *Truth*, 24.1 ad 2, trans. by Robert Schmidt, S.J. (Chicago: Henry Regnery Co., 1954), 139.

⁴ Council of Trent, Sixth Session, Chapter VII, as quoted in *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils*, Volume II, ed. Norman Tanner, S.J. (Washington DC: Georgetown University Press, 1990), 673. Also note that efficient causation is the only kind of causation that I am concerned with in the present paper.

⁵ Here, I have in mind the act of coming to faith in Christ, and not the theological virtue of faith. The act of coming to faith is sometimes also referred to as the act of justification, “whereby someone from being unjust becomes just, from being an enemy becomes a friend, so that he is an heir *in hope of eternal life*” (Council of Trent, Sixth Session, Chapter VII, 673).

⁶ Similarly, Christopher Kirwan defines theological determinism as the thesis that “every event and state of the world either is God’s act or is brought about by God’s act” (*Augustine* (London: Routledge, 1989), 117).

⁷ More specifically, Stump argues that Augustine’s view is a form of ‘modified libertarianism’, which consists of assent to the following two claims:

(L₁) an agent acts with free will, or is morally responsible for an act, only if the act is not *ultimately* causally determined by anything outside the agent

and

(L₃) an agent acts with free will, or is morally responsible for an act, only if her own intellect and will are the sole ultimate source or first cause of her act.

'Modified libertarianism' differs from 'common libertarianism' insofar as the latter accepts, but the former rejects, a further condition for free action:

(L₂) an agent acts with free will, or is morally responsible for an act, only if he could have done otherwise.⁷

See Stump, "Augustine on Free Will," in *The Cambridge Companion to Augustine*, Eleonore Stump and Norman Kretzmann, eds. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 125f. For a criticism of Stump's modified libertarianism, see my "A Critique of Frankfurt-Libertarianism" (forthcoming in *Philosophia*).

⁸ See Stump, "Augustine on Free Will," 130f.

⁹ Ibid. For a further complexity that need not concern us here regarding Augustine's view on this point, see pages 132f.

¹⁰ Pelagius' view is often portrayed as one according to which a human agent is able to will the good apart from grace. Strictly speaking, this characterization is false. Pelagius consistently maintained that the giving of human nature is itself a grace; thus, even on his account, grace is required for an individual to will the good. This grace is sometimes referred to as 'enabling grace' or 'the grace of creation'. Augustine understands Pelagius' view of grace as simply the natural human capacity of free will and knowledge of the law (see, for example, William Collinge, "Introduction," *On the Proceedings of Pelagius*, in *Saint Augustine: Four Anti-Pelagian Writings*, John Mourant and William Collinge, eds. (Washington D.C.: Catholic University Press, 1992), 105). A similar position seems to have been held by Pelagius' disciple Caelestius. Augustine quotes

Caelestius as having written that “the grace and assistance of God is not given for individual acts, but consists in the freedom of the will, or in the law and doctrine” (Augustine, *On the Proceedings of Pelagius*, 141). Both Caelestius and Pelagius thought that each individual was born as free as Adam was before the Fall, and thus is able to choose the good through his/her own will. Thus, on this view, humans are able to cause their coming to faith in virtue of the grace of creation.

¹¹ See for example Augustine, *On Nature and Grace*, in *Saint Augustine: Four Anti-Pelagian Writings*, 69.

¹² See Augustine, *On the Proceedings of Pelagius*, 131.

¹³ For starters, the Council of Ephesus in 431 and the Council of Orange in 529 condemned as heretical the view that humans can be saved apart from a unique grace, and appear to also condemn the view that humans can even be partial causes of their own salvation. While the Council of Orange was not an ecumenical council, Pope Boniface II ratified the teaching authority of the council in 531. See the entry on the Council of Orange at the *Catholic Encyclopedia*, found at <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/11266b.htm>.

¹⁴ It is for this reason that I reject Scott Ragland’s proposal in “The Trouble with Quiescence: Stump on Grace and Freedom” (forthcoming in *Philosophia Christi*). See also footnote 31 below.

¹⁵ Stump, “Augustine on Free Will,” 136f.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 137.

¹⁷ More specifically, this would involve a rejection of (L₃); see footnote 7 above.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ Ibid., 139.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid., 140.

²² Stump, *Aquinas* (London: Routledge, 2003), 489.

²³ Ibid., 402f.

²⁴ Ibid., 389.

²⁵ Ibid., 394.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid., 401.

²⁸ Ibid., 397.

²⁹ Ibid., 399.

³⁰ More specifically, as with Augustine's view, Stump's view seems unable to satisfy (L₃) discussed above in footnote 7.

³¹ For a similar criticism of Stump's account, see Scott Ragland, "The Trouble with Quiescence: Stump on Grace and Freedom," particularly section V: "Though Stump's picture ensures that quiescence is not determined, and therefore happens *contingently* and originates in the agent, I doubt that her picture gives human agents the relevant sort of *control* over quiescence (and hence, faith).... It seems to me that in order to avoid slipping into semi-pelagianism, Stump is forced to represent humans as altogether too passive with respect to whether they become quiescent: quiescence is not a state that they actively choose, but is rather a kind of paralysis of intellect and will that *befalls* humans (with some degree of randomness).... I think that on Stump's scenario, agents do not exercise full libertarian control over whether or not they have

faith. Though Stump's view avoids theological determinism by making it a contingent matter whether or not the intellect will 'freeze up', this is not enough for humans to exercise genuine control. This leads to trouble whether or not there is damnation" (pages 17 and 20 in manuscript). Note, however, that Ragland's preferred response to this objection is different than my own.

³² There are, of course, other accounts of causation on which omissions are causes. For example, D. H. Mellor's account of causation in *The Facts of Causation* (London: Routledge University Press, 1995) allows for causation by omission, though it does so because Mellor conceives of causation as primarily relating facts and only secondarily, if at all, relating events. My aim in the present paper is not to argue against accounts such as Mellor's that allow for genuine causation by omission, though I recognize that the truth of such accounts potentially pose problem for my argument here. Let me just say that what I find particularly attractive about Dowe's account is its ability to explain the genuinist intuition without recourse to negative events. For reasons why such entities should be avoided, see Judith Jarvis Thomson, "Causation: Omissions," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 66.1 (2003): 81-103.

³³ Scott Ragland has objected that describing the present account in this way might make it incompatible with agent-causal incompatibilist views, which hold that agents as well as events can be causal relata. I don't intend this restriction. For those who favor agent-causal accounts, they are welcome to understand the previous sentence in the following way: "Causation is a relation between either two events or between an agent and an event; since omissions are the absence of a particular event, rather than an actual event or agent, omissions are precluded from being causal relata." While I omit

this clarification in what follows, the reader is welcome to understand the view developed here in such a way that it is amenable to agent-causal views if she so desires.

³⁴ Phil Dowe, "A Counterfactual Theory of Prevention and 'Causation' by Omission," *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* 79.2 (2001): 216-226. Following Dowe, I intend the following discussion to be independent of the exact nature of causation, whether it be counterfactual analysis, regulatory analysis, probabilistic accounts, a transference theory or other. Though he does not fully spell out his reasoning for rejecting that omissions are causes in the present article, he does so in chapter 6 of *Physical Causation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000). In short, Dowe thinks that omissions fail to be causes because omissions do not involve the sort of processes and conserved quantities necessary for true cases of causation.

³⁵ Dowe, *Physical Causation*, 125.

³⁶ Dowe's project involves reinterpreting the genuinist intuition as "an intuition that we definitely have either causation or quasi-causation" (Dowe, "A Counterfactual Theory of Prevention and 'Causation' by Omission," 218f). I explain Dowe's understanding of quasi-causation below.

³⁷ Dowe, "A Counterfactual Theory of Prevention and 'Causation' by Omission," 216.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 222. Earlier in the same article, Dowe analyses cases of prevention as follows: "A prevented B if A occurred and B did not, and there occurred an x such that (P1) there is a causal interaction between A and the process due to x, and (P2) if A had not occurred, x would have caused B" (*Ibid.*, 221). As I understand quasi-causation, it is a

genus that includes apparent cases of ‘causation by omission’, cases of prevention and cases of ‘causing an omission’, discussed below in section 5.

³⁹ Dowe, *Physical Causation*, 124.

⁴⁰ In addition to Dowe’s account, Judith Jarvis Thomson’s account of ‘causation’ by omission would provide a metaphysical foundation for the account of grace I develop here, though I will not pursue this second option in the present paper. See her “Causation: Omissions.”

⁴¹ Helen Beebee, “Causes, Omissions and Conditions,” manuscript p. 11, as cited in Sarah McGrath, “Causation by Omission: A Dilemma,” *Philosophical Studies* 123 (2005), 131.

⁴² Dowe, *Physical Causation*, 145.

⁴³ Carolina Sartorio, “Causes as Difference Makers,” *Philosophical Studies* 123 (2005), 94 footnote 11.

⁴⁴ Dowe, “A Counterfactual Theory of Prevention and ‘Causation’ by Omission,” 225.

⁴⁵ See, for instance, John Martin Fischer and Mark Ravizza’s highly influential discussion of ‘guidance control’ and ‘regulative control’ in *Responsibility and Control: A Theory of Moral Responsibility* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

⁴⁶ This isn’t to say that (1) and (2) here are sufficient conditions for the agent being morally responsible for *e*—there are certainly other conditions needed for moral responsibility. The point is simply that control over an event is required for moral responsibility, and there are two ways that an agent could exercise the required control.

⁴⁷ At the conference where a previous version of this paper was read, Matthew McGrath raised a worry regarding the proliferation of quasi-causes if quasi-causation, like

causation, is transitive. I'm inclined to think that it isn't, given that hypothetical syllogism is invalid in counterfactual logic. But even if it were, I do not see the resulting proliferation of quasi-causes as a reason to reject quasi-causation. Given that my primary interest with quasi-causation in the present paper is how it relates to the kind of control needed for moral responsibility in general, or the act of faith in particular, I am interested in what quasi-causation can contribute to an agent's responsibility for her own salvation. However, insofar as being either a cause or a quasi-cause of *X* is only a necessary but not sufficient condition for being responsible for *X*, I believe that the other conditions needed for moral responsibility will prevent the proliferation of responsibility by quasi-causation. See footnote 46 above, as well as Sarah McGrath's "Causation by Omission: A Dilemma" for a related discussion.

⁴⁸ This isn't to deny that individuals are later capable of losing their salvation if they sin or again reject divine grace.

⁴⁹ In commenting on a previous draft of this paper, an anonymous referee raised the following objection: "Suppose that what is most important about (APC) for (some) of its defenders is that the agent not be able to *take credit* for her own salvation. (I'm not supposing that this is the only reason one might endorse (APC), only that it might be one reason.) But agents can be praised and blamed for the omissions when brought about by their own acts of will, whether or not one wants to bring such cases under the rubric of quasi-causation. So it's not clear, even if (APC) on the strong reading is 'technically' satisfied (in virtue of the agent's will being only a quasi-cause rather than a full-blooded cause), that it isn't violated in a more important sense (in virtue of its being possible to *credit* the agent for bringing about the quiescence through an act of will)."

This objection misses a central point of my account, namely that one doesn't deserve credit for one's becoming quiescent precisely because quiescence isn't a positive or good act of the will—it is instead a lack of an act of will. Nor is the will to become quiescent with respect to divine grace something that the agent is due moral credit for insofar as willing to be quiescent with respect to grace is distinct from willing to accept that same grace. While it is true that the agent's willing to become quiescent is a better act than his willing to resist God's grace, superlatives do not presuppose positives. To illustrate with a different example, suppose that Joe has the opportunity to steal \$100 from his boss, but steals instead only \$20. Joe's action here is better than it could have been, but this does not mean that Joe deserves any sort of moral credit for the action that he did do. Additionally, the present account requires only that an agent is morally blameworthy for her not coming to saving faith in virtue of not becoming quiescent with respect to the grace given by God.

⁵⁰ Council of Trent, Sixth Session, Chapter V, 672. Compare also Aquinas's *Questiones disputatae de veritate*: "God causes virtues in us without our causing them but not without our consent" (*Truth*, 28.3 ad 17).

⁵¹ Tully Borland, H. E. Baber, William Hasker, Tim Pawl, Linda Peterson, Neal Tognazzini and two anonymous referees for *Faith and Philosophy* provided numerous helpful comments and discussions on various aspects of this paper. Scott Ragland and Mike Rota both provided extensive comments on numerous earlier drafts, significantly improving the final version. A previous version of this paper was present at the First Annual Philosophy of Religion conference at the University of Missouri—Columbia,

where I benefited from numerous questions, comments and objections from those present, especially from Eleonore Stump and my commentator Scott Ragland.