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Does God Intend that Sin Occur?

Matthew J Hart
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ISBN 978-3-031-06569-9 ISBN 978-3-031-06570-5 (eBook)
<https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-06570-5>

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The registered company address is: Gewerbestrasse 11, 6330 Cham, Switzerland

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We'd like to thank for their help Michael Hauskeller, Paul Helm, Richard Muller, Mark Murphy, Alexander Pruss, and Helen Watt. We'd also like to think the audience of the Joseph-Butler Society at the University of Oxford, in particular Tim Mawson, Joseph Shaw, and Richard Swinburne, for comments on a presentation given on 29 October 2019. We are particularly grateful to the editors of *The European Journal of Philosophy* for permission to modify in this book our article 'Does God Intend that Sin Occur? We Affirm'. Daniel Hill would like to thank the University of Liverpool for research leave to complete this book.

We'd like to thank the editorial team at Palgrave, Brendan George, Rebecca Hinsley, and Ruby Panigrahi, for their patience and hard work.

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction and Historical Overview

Abstract This chapter defines the philosophical terms to be used and explains the book's reliance on the Christian Scriptures. It then sets out the book's thesis, that God intends that sin occur. The chapter marshals at some length examples of thinkers arguing against the book's thesis, and examples in favour of it. It is suggested that the predominant view in the past has been against the book's thesis, not only in Roman-Catholic thought but also in Protestant thought, even in the Reformed tradition. The chapter admits that the book argues against the majority opinion, but the minority in favour of the view is not insignificant.

Keywords Intention • Divine decree • Augustine • Aquinas
• Reformed theology • New-England theology

Does God intend that sin ever occur? We argue in this book, on the basis of the Christian Scriptures, for the affirmative answer.

1.1 THE RELIABILITY OF THE SCRIPTURES

Let us begin by explaining our reliance on the Christian Scriptures. We are assuming here that the Christian Scriptures are consistent and depict God accurately. There is not space to argue for this assumption here. Even if our readers reject a high view of the accuracy of the Scriptures, our project

should still be of interest, however, since if it is granted only that the testimony of the Scriptures carries *some* evidential force, then the passages we discuss should dispose the reader of the Scriptures to believe that God intends that sin occur. Finally, if they will not accept even that the Scriptures carry weak evidential force, they may still be interested to know, as a matter of literary inquiry, what the Scriptures do, in fact, teach, in our view.

1.2 CLARIFICATION OF TERMS

We now proceed to clarify our terms somewhat. We use the word ‘sin’ here to refer to *a morally wrong action*. We do not reserve it for the property of being sinful, or the aspect of an action in virtue of which it is sinful, or for only those wrong actions directed against God. Neither do we use it to refer to just anything that is morally evil: a disposition to steal might be evil or *sinful*, yet it is not a sin—a sin is an action, as we use the word here. We do not presuppose that every sin is serious, or equally important (cf. John 19:11), or performed knowingly or intentionally (cf. Leviticus 4:2). We assume that it is an objective matter whether an action is wrong, but this does not matter for our argument here. Our argument here makes no assumption concerning the nature of wrongness, or over whether it is constituted by God’s will. Nor do we make any assumption over whether the necessary conditions for an action’s being a sin are as incompatibilism has them or as compatibilism has them; that is, we take no stand here in the debate over the freedom of choice or freedom of the will.

1.3 THE MEANING OF ‘INTENTION’

We do not use the word ‘intend’ in a special technical sense, but have in mind the normal meaning. The exact nature of this normal meaning of the word ‘intend’ has been much debated by philosophers, but our argument does not appeal to specific controversial features of intention. We assume that intention is a mental state, but we do not attempt precisely to define which mental state. A key feature of intention, so it seems to us, is that it differs from mere foresight; it does not follow from the fact that some consequence is foreseen, even foreseen with certainty, that it is intended. For example, one can foresee with reasonable confidence that one’s walking in shoes will wear down the soles of one’s shoes, yet it does not follow that one *intends* that one wear down the soles of one’s shoes. Similarly, fighter pilots may foresee with a high degree of certainty that their aircraft

will emit a sonic boom when travelling over the speed of sound, but it does not follow that they *intend* to make their aircraft emit a sonic boom. Occasionally one comes across the phrase ‘oblique intention’. Jeremy Bentham (1748–1832) seems to have introduced the phrase, and he writes:

A consequence, when it is intentional, may either be *directly* so, or only *obliquely*. It may be said to be directly or lineally intentional, when the prospect of producing it constituted one of the links in the chain of causes by which the person was determined to do the act. It may be said to be obliquely or collaterally intentional, when, although the consequence was in contemplation, and appeared likely to ensue in case of the act’s being performed, yet the prospect of producing such consequence did not constitute a link in the aforesaid chain. (Bentham 1789: 81)

We do not think that such a usage of ‘intentional’ is helpful, and we do not include ‘oblique intention’ when we use the word ‘intention’.

We think that the most precise locution is the verb ‘intends’ followed by ‘that’ and a sentential phrase. We think that this is more precise than using the adjective ‘intentional’ or ‘intended’ of a noun or noun phrase, or the adverb ‘intentionally’. Suppose that some officers of the law intend that they arrest Mr Hyde. It does not follow, we say, that the officers intend that they arrest Dr Jekyll, even though, since Mr Hyde *is* Dr Jekyll (we may assume), arresting Mr Hyde is the same thing as arresting Dr Jekyll. In other words, even though the sentence ‘the officers arrest Mr Hyde’ implies ‘the officers arrest Dr Jekyll’, we deny that the sentence ‘the officers intend that they arrest Mr Hyde’ implies ‘the officers intend that they arrest Dr Jekyll’. The reason for this is that the word ‘that’ creates what philosophers call ‘an opaque context’ (Quine 1960: §30) into which one cannot substitute equivalent terms such as ‘Mr Hyde’ and ‘Dr Jekyll’ (in this example). When we consider the adjective ‘intentional’, however, it does not seem as though an opaque context is created; it seems to us that the sentence ‘the arrest of Mr Hyde was intentional’ implies ‘the arrest of Dr Jekyll was intentional’, even if perhaps it was not intentional *under the description* ‘arrest of Dr Jekyll’. Similarly, when we consider the adverb ‘intentionally’, that does not seem to create an opaque context either; it seems to us that the sentence ‘the officers intentionally arrest Mr Hyde’ implies ‘the officers intentionally arrest Dr Jekyll’, even if they do not intentionally arrest him *under the description* ‘arrest of Dr Jekyll’. If the reader disagrees and thinks that these, along with ‘intends that’, *do*

create opaque contexts then it will not matter for what follows. If the reader thinks, on the other hand, that ‘intends that’ does not create an opaque context, then that will make our task in what follows easier.

1.4 DOES GOD DESIRE THAT SIN OCCUR?

We do not discuss here whether God *desires* or *wants* that sin occur. Some will say that it is possible to intend that something occur without desiring that it occur. Intending that one do something unpleasant, like going to the dentist, would be a possible example: arguably, one does not desire that one go to the dentist. Others will deny this, and insist that intending that something occur is just one way of desiring that it occur (cf. Davidson 1963, 1978, reprinted in 2001). We take no stand here on that. Our assertion here is, again, just that God *intends* that sin occur.

We do, however, affirm that God hates sin, and that it is abhorrent to him. (See, for instance, our discussion of Habakkuk 1:13 later in this book.) Again, we take no position on how one analyses the affective dimension to God’s nature, but we do affirm, at a minimum, that expressions such as ‘God hates sin’ should be warranted expressions for the Christian.

1.5 WILLING, DECREERING, AND INTENDING

Much of the older literature uses the word ‘wills’ or ‘decrees’ of God. We quote quite a lot of this literature below. It seems to us that the word ‘wills’ and the word ‘decrees’ in this context do mean the same as ‘intends’, but we prefer to avoid these words ourselves, as they seem to us less clear than ‘intends’.

1.6 THE DISTINCTION BETWEEN EVIL AND THE EXISTENCE OF EVIL

By the word ‘occur’, we mean simply ‘happen’ or ‘are done’. We do not mean to confine ourselves to whether God intends quite generally that sin occur, but also to take in, with respect to any particular sin that occurs, whether God intends quite particularly that *it* occur.

Traditionally, some have distinguished between evil and the existence of evil. Augustine of Hippo (354–430) was perhaps the first explicitly to draw this distinction:

Although, therefore, evil, in so far as it is evil, is not a good; yet the fact that evil as well as good exists, is a good. (Augustine 1887a: 267)

Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274) discusses the consequent distinction between intending/willing evil and intending/willing that evil exist or occur:¹

Some have said that although God does not will evil, yet He wills that evil should be or be done, because, although evil is not a good, yet it is good that evil should be or be done. This they said because things evil in themselves are ordered to some good end; and this order they thought was expressed in the words ‘that evil should be or be done’. (Aquinas 1920: Ia.Q19.a9)

The coherence of this distinction has been vigorously rejected by many, for example by Jacobus/James Arminius (1560–1609):

For they distinguish between the fall and the event of the fall. [...] They say that God willed that the fall should occur, but did not will the fall. [...] The [...] distinction is verbal, and not real. He, who willed that the fall should occur, willed also the fall. He who willed that the fall should occur, willed the event of the fall, and He, who willed the event of the fall, willed the fall. (Arminius 1853: 305)

You will not escape by the distinction that ‘it is one thing to will a thing per se, and another to will it as to the event,’ unless, by the ‘event’ of a thing, you understand that which results from the prolongation and the existence of the thing itself, which is not your sentiment. For you say that ‘God wills the event of sin,’ that is, ‘that sin should happen, but does not will sin itself,’ which distinction is absurd. For the essence of sin consists in the event, for sin consists in action. God, also, wills sin itself, in the mode in which He wills that sin should happen, and He wills that sin should happen in the mode in which He wills sin itself. He does not love sin per se. He wills that sin should happen for His own glory; He wills also sin for His own glory. I

¹‘Intend’ is more or less what is meant by the verb ‘will’ in the traditional use we find in Aquinas, and so on.

Speak this in the sense used by yourself. Show, if you can, the difference, and I will acquiesce. (Arminius 1853: 385, punctuation original)

We do not commit ourselves to Augustine's distinction, but our question is, in its terms, whether God wills that sin *come to be*—that it *occurs*—rather than whether God wills sin.

1.7 CAN GOD SIN?

We take it for granted that God does not (and cannot) sin. And our arguing that God intends that sin occur should not be taken to offer anyone any encouragement to sin.

1.8 THE MAJORITY REPORT

Now, if there is a majority report among Christian philosophers and theologians over whether God intends that sin should occur, then it is probably in the negative. We believe the average lay Christian would also oppose the idea: 'sins are surely', we suspect they would say, 'foreseen but unintended consequences of God's activity'. We therefore swim against the tide, though, as we trust will become plain, we do not do so alone.

1.9 AUGUSTINE

We have already quoted Augustine on the distinction between evil and the existence of evil. Here is the full context of the quotation:

Nothing, therefore, happens but by the will of the Omnipotent, He either permitting it to be done, or Himself doing it. Nor can we doubt that God does well even in the permission of what is evil. For He permits it only in the justice of His judgment. And surely all that is just is good. Although, therefore, evil, in so far as it is evil, is not a good; yet the fact that evil as well as good exists, is a good. For if it were not a good that evil should exist, its existence would not be permitted by the omnipotent Good,² who without doubt can as easily refuse to permit what He does not wish, as bring about what He does wish. (Augustine 1887a: 267)

²Some editions replace 'Good' with 'God', but 'Good' is correct.

Here Augustine talks about God's permitting sin, but adds that God can refuse to permit what He does not wish. This suggests that God does, in a way, wish that evil exist.

Augustine continues a few chapters later in the *Enchiridion*:

These are the great works of the Lord, sought out according to all His pleasure, and so wisely sought out, that when the intelligent creation, both angelic and human, sinned, doing not His will but their own, He used the very will of the creature which was working in opposition to the Creator's will as an instrument for carrying out His will, the supremely Good thus turning to good account even what is evil, to the condemnation of those whom in His justice He has predestined to punishment, and to the salvation of those whom in His mercy He has predestined to grace. For, as far as relates to their own consciousness, these creatures did what God wished not to be done: but in view of God's omnipotence, they could in no wise effect their purpose. For in the very fact that they acted in opposition to His will, His will concerning them was fulfilled. And hence it is that 'the works of the Lord are great, sought out according to all His pleasure,' because in a way unspeakably strange and wonderful, even what is done in opposition to His will does not defeat His will. For it would not be done did He not permit it (and of course His permission is not unwilling, but willing); nor would a Good Being permit evil to be done only that in His omnipotence He can turn evil into good. (Augustine 1887a: 269)

In this case as well, it seems to us that Augustine thinks that God wishes that sin occur. Augustine continues:

For God accomplishes some of His purposes, which of course are all good, through the evil desires of wicked men: for example, it was through the wicked designs of the Jews, working out the good purpose of the Father, that Christ was slain and this event was so truly good, that when the Apostle Peter expressed his unwillingness that it should take place, he was designated Satan by Him who had come to be slain. How good seemed the intentions of the pious believers who were unwilling that Paul should go up to Jerusalem lest the evils which Agabus had foretold should there befall him! And yet it was God's purpose that he should suffer these evils for preaching the faith of Christ, and thereby become a witness for Christ. And this purpose of His, which was good, God did not fulfill through the good counsels of the Christians, but through the evil counsels of the Jews; so that those who opposed His purpose were more truly His servants than those who were the willing instruments of its accomplishment. (Augustine 1887a: 270)

Augustine's examples here seem clearly to be of sinful actions, yet are nevertheless, according to Augustine, intended by God: Augustine explicitly says that 'it was God's purpose' that the contents of Agabus's prophecy, that Paul should be sinfully bound by the Jewish inhabitants of Jerusalem, should come true. Finally, Augustine also says, recapitulating earlier pronouncements:

For in the very fact that they acted in opposition to His will, His will concerning them was fulfilled. And hence it is that 'the works of the Lord are great, sought out according to all His pleasure,' because in a way unspeakably strange and wonderful, even what is done in opposition to His will does not defeat His will. For it would not be done did He not permit it (and of course His permission is not unwilling, but willing); nor would a Good Being permit evil to be done only that in His omnipotence He can turn evil into good. (Augustine 1887a: 270)

The emphasis here of Augustine's phrase 'in the very fact' is telling: the sinful opposition to God's will is, Augustine says, what fulfils his will, that is, was in some sense willed by God himself. Augustine is clearest, however, in his *On Grace and Free Will* concerning Shimei son of Gera:

He inclined the man's will, which had become debased by his own perverseness, to commit this sin, by His own just and secret judgment. (Augustine 1887b: 461)

In the chapter after that one, Augustine writes:

God stirs up enemies to devastate the countries which He adjudges deserving of such chastisement. [...] For the Almighty sets in motion even in the innermost hearts of men the movement of their will, so that He does through their agency whatsoever He wishes to perform through them—even He who knows not how to will anything in unrighteousness. (Augustine 1887b: 462)

Finally, in the chapter after that, Augustine states:

[I]t is, I think, sufficiently clear that God works in the hearts of men to incline their wills wherever He wills, whether to good deeds according to His mercy, or to evil after their own deserts. (Augustine 1887b: 463)

1.10 AQUINAS AND THE MEDIAEVALS

We have already mentioned that Aquinas quotes in his *Summa Theologiae* Augustine's distinction between evil and the existence of evil. In a response in the same article, Aquinas states:

God [...] neither wills evil to be done, nor wills it not to be done, but wills to permit evil to be done. (Aquinas 1920: Ia.Q19.a9.ad3)

There are, however, odd statements in the mediaeval period to the effect that God intends that sin occur:

For it is clear that God acts in the hearts of human beings inclining their wills whithersoever he wishes, either to goods out of his mercy, or to evils because they deserve it. (Lombard 1880: 1332A)³

1.11 MARTIN LUTHER

Aquinas's view above has largely defined the Roman-Catholic response to our question whether God intends that sin occur, but on the Protestant side there has been a more mixed response. Martin Luther (1483–1546) seems to have held that God intended that people should sin:

God works evil in us, i. e., by means of us, not through any fault of his, but owing to our faultiness, since we are by nature evil and he is good; but as he carries us along by his own activity in accordance with the nature of his omnipotence, good as he is himself he cannot help but do evil with an evil instrument, though he makes good use of this evil in accordance with his wisdom for his own glory and our salvation. In this way he finds the will of Satan evil, not because he creates it so, but because it has become evil through God's deserting it and Satan's sinning; and taking hold of it in the course of his working he moves it in whatever direction he pleases. [...] But why does he not at the same time change the evil wills that he moves? This belongs to the secrets of his majesty, where his judgments are incomprehensible [Rom. 11:33]. It is not our business to ask this question, but to adore these mysteries. [...] The same must be said to those who ask why he

³Manifestum est enim Deum operari in cordibus hominum: inclinandas voluntates eorum quocumque vulerit, sive ad bona pro misericordia sua, sive ad mala pro meritis eorum', our translation. This is quoted in (Aquinas 2001: 225). Regan points out that Aquinas wrongly attributes the quotation to Augustine.

permitted Adam to fall, and why he creates us all infected with the same sin, when he could either have preserved him or created us from another stock or from a seed which he had first purged. He is God, and for his will there is no cause or reason that can be laid down as a rule or measure for it[.] (Luther 1957: 94–95)

This approach has not been maintained by the Lutheran tradition more generally, however. The 1685 *Theologia Didactico-Polemica* of J. A. Quenstedt (1617–1688) is cited by Heinrich Schmid (1811–1885):

God indeed permits, but He does not will, that which is permitted, which occurs [...] while He does not will it. (Schmid 1899: 189)

1.12 JOHN CALVIN

The Reformed tradition has been split on this question. John Calvin (1509–1564) held that God indeed did intend that sin occur:

God wills that the perfidious Ahab should be deceived; the devil offers his agency for that purpose, and is sent with a definite command to be a lying spirit in the mouth of all the prophets (2 Kings 22:20). If the blinding and infatuation of Ahab is a judgment from God, the fiction of bare permission is at an end; for it would be ridiculous for a judge only to permit, and not also to decree, what he wishes to be done at the very time that he commits the execution of it to his ministers. (Calvin 1846: 199)

It offends the ears of some, when it is said God *willed* this fall; but what else, I pray, is the *permission* of Him, who has the power of preventing, and in whose hand the whole matter is placed, but his will? (Calvin 1847: 144)

1.13 THE REFORMED TRADITION IN OPPOSITION

On the other hand, many that have followed Calvin in almost every other respect have diverged from him here. For example, Francis Turretin (1623–1687), a representative of the ‘high orthodoxy’ of Calvinism, states:

God, therefore, properly does not will sin to be done, but only wills to permit it. (Turretin 1992: I.517)

We have already had cause to quote Jacobus Arminius, against whose work the ‘high orthodoxy’ of Calvinism was a reaction. Arminius not only rejected the distinction between sin and its occurrence, but was emphatic that God did not intend that sin occur:

God voluntarily permits sin; therefore, He neither wills that sin should happen, nor wills that it should not happen. (Arminius 1853: 396)

In Great Britain, several of the Puritans followed this line. One example is Richard Baxter (1615–1691):

God neither willeth that it shall be, (because it is sin) nor properly and simply willeth that it shall *not be*. (Baxter 1675: II.10)

Another example is Stephen Charnock (1628–1680):

He [God] never said, Let there be sin under the heaven. (Charnock 1853: II.147)

Richard A. Muller (1948–) says the same when summarizing the Reformed tradition:

God does not will positively that sins occur. (Muller 1985: 222)

1.14 THE REFORMED TRADITION IN AGREEMENT

As indicated, there have, however, been thinkers in the Reformed tradition that have affirmed that God does intend that sin occur. Jerome Zanchius (1516–1590), as interpreted by Augustus Montague Toplady (1740–1778), states:

From what has been laid down, it follows that Augustine, Luther, Bucer, the scholastic divines, and other learned writers are not to be blamed for asserting that ‘God may in some sense be said to will the being and commission of sin.’ For, was this contrary to His determining will of permission, either He would not be omnipotent, or sin could have no place in the world; but He is omnipotent, and sin has a place in the world, which it could not have if God willed otherwise; for who hath resisted His will? [...] to say that He willeth sin doth not in the least detract from the holiness and rectitude of His nature. (Zanchius 2001: 21)

Within the movement of ‘high orthodoxy’ in Reformed scholasticism, Johannes Maccovius (1588–1644) wrote:

Either God willed sin, or he nilled it, or he neither nilled it nor willed it. He cannot be said to have nilled it, because if he had nilled it, then it would not have existed. And it is not the case that he neither nilled it nor willed it because those things are of no concern to him that he neither wills nor nills, which would mean that sin would be outside the providence of God; for the concern of God and the providence of God are one and the same [...] It follows that he willed it, although as we said, with a willing permission, not efficaciously. (Van Asselt 2011: 236)

Within the Puritan movement, William Perkins (1558–1602) is one of those that affirm that God intends that sin occur:

God willed the fall of *Adam*, yet not simplie but onely that it should come to passe. (Perkins 1606: 37)

Paul Bayne (c.1573–1617) is another:

As God willed that sin should be, so he willed that it should be by the will of man freely obeying the seducing suggestion of the Devil[.] (Bayne 1658: 76)

Somewhat later is William Tucker (1731–1814), who states:

Sin, or moral evil, is no accidental thing, but a wise and holy ordination of God. [...] Sin could not have existence, without, or contrary to the divine will: its being, must be the consequent of the divine purpose. This appears demonstrable, from the infinite wisdom and unlimited power of God, by which He might, with the most perfect ease, have prevented its being; from its increase, and the extensive spread of its dire effects, when God could have stopped its progress in a moment, at any period of time, had it been his pleasure [...] These things, among others, indubitably prove, that the being of moral evil was a certain consequence of the divine purpose. [...] God, did eternally will the existence of moral evil. [...] It is certain, then, that the existence of sin was the ordination of the divine will[.] (Tucker 1835: 102, 107–109)

Within North America, Jonathan Edwards (1703–1758) is another example:

I believe, there is no person of good understanding, who will venture to say, he is certain that it is impossible it should be best [...] that there should be such a thing as moral evil in the world. And if so, it will certainly follow, that an infinitely wise Being, who always chooses what is best, must choose that there should be such a thing. (Edwards 1957: 407–408)

1.15 THE NEW-ENGLAND THEOLOGIAN

The New-England divinity—the movement in theology that took its inspiration from the philosophy of Jonathan Edwards—gives very explicit affirmations to the effect that God intends that sin occur.

Samuel Hopkins (1721–1803) in his *System of Doctrines*, first published in 1793, says that he sees no difference between God’s providential operation in bringing it about that good deeds occur and his providential operation in bringing it about that evil deeds occur:

According to divine revelation, God superintends, orders, and directs in all the actions of men, and in every instance of sin; so that his hand and agency is to be seen and acknowledged in men’s sinful actions and the events depending on them, as really and as much as in any events and actions whatever. (Hopkins 1854: 110)

If God has such control over sin, why would God bring it about? Hopkins writes:

It is abundantly evident and demonstrably certain from reason, assisted by divine revelation, that all the sin and sufferings which have taken place, or ever will, are necessary for the greatest good of the universe, and to answer the wisest and best ends, and therefore must be included in the best, most wise, and perfect plan. (Hopkins 1854: 90–91)

Joseph Bellamy (1719–1790) is useful for offering us more concrete considerations on what the New-England theologians took the good ends to be for the sake of which God intends that sin occur. His work *The Wisdom of God in the Permission of Sin* (1760) is his own contribution to the topic of our theme, and there he writes:

If [Satan] hoped to bring our glorious Monarch into contempt in his dominions, among his creatures, he is disappointed; for God is more loved, honored, revered, extolled, and praised, than if these things had never

happened. If he hoped to lessen his authority, and bring his law into contempt, that it should be looked upon a light matter to transgress, he is in this also disappointed; for never would it have appeared so infinitely heinous, and so shockingly dreadful a thing to transgress, if these things had never happened. Or if he hoped, at least, that the execution of divine vengeance would lessen the manifestations of divine goodness, and diminish the happiness of the intellectual system, he is also disappointed in this; for God has shown his wrath in such a manner as to render the riches of his glorious grace infinitely the more conspicuous in the sight of all the inhabitants of heaven; and their love and joy arise unspeakably higher than if these things had never happened. Yea, all things have worked for good, and turned out well. His pride has been the means of a great increase of humility among finite intelligences, as it has led them to see what they might have come to if left of God. His fall has been the means of our confirmation; his ingratitude, of our being forever the more sensible of the rich goodness of God; his setting up to be independent, the means to bring us to a more absolute and entire dependence on God, the only immutable being; and his aiming at supremacy, seducing mankind, and raising all this confusion in the system, has occasioned the Almighty to assert his supremacy, and set his own Son at the head of the creation, and in him to bring all things to an everlasting establishment, in a way most honorable to God, and the most advantageous to the system. So that he is disappointed in every respect. He meant all for evil; but lo, God meant all for good, to bring to pass as it is at this day. (Bellamy 1853: 78–79)

Bellamy thinks that God designed not just the permission of sin, but its occurrence too, for the benefits that accrue to God and saved humanity, benefits that couldn't logically have happened without sin's occurring.

Nathaniel Emmons (1745–1840), like Hopkins, writes frankly in a sermon entitled 'Human and Divine Agency Inseparably Connected':

[I]t is equally important that all the actions of both saints and sinners should be ascribed to the divine agency. [...] [W]e find the exercises and conduct of sinners, by which they are formed for destruction, ascribed to the operation of God upon their hearts. (Emmons 1842: 368–369)

Building on this, he goes on to say:

If the actions of men may be ascribed to God as well as to themselves, then God will be glorified by all their conduct. Whether they have a good or bad

intention in acting, God has always a good design in causing them to act in the manner they do. Joseph had a good design in visiting his brethren, and in conducting with propriety under both the smiles and frowns of providence; and God had a good design in guiding the motions of his heart and the actions of his life. So that God will be for ever glorified by the life and conduct of Joseph. Joseph's brethren had a malevolent intention in abusing him and finally selling him into Egypt; but God had a good design in both foretelling and guiding their wicked actions. So that God will be glorified by all their conduct. And since God equally governs all the actions of all men, whether good or bad, he must be glorified by the conduct of the whole human race. All the wrath, all the malice, all the revenge, all the injustice, and all the selfishness, as well as all the benevolence of mankind, must finally praise him, or serve to display the beauty and glory of his character. His intention and his agency, which always go before theirs, and which is always wise and benevolent, turns all their conduct to his own glory. At the great and last day, when all human hearts shall be unfolded, and all human conduct displayed, the hand and counsel of God will appear in all, and shine the brighter by every act of disobedience and rebellion in his creatures. Their bad intentions will be a foil, to display the glory of God to the best advantage. (Emmons 1842: 373–374)

In another sermon, 'The Agency of God Universal', Emmons makes it clear how readily he believes God will use sinful actions as his means:

[God] perfectly knows his own designs, and the best means to accomplish them; and he has all means and second causes in his hand, which he will certainly employ to answer his own purposes. When he has occasion to form light, he will form light; when he has occasion to create darkness, he will create it; when he has occasion to make peace, he will make it; when he has occasion to create evil, he will create it; and he is constantly doing all these things according to the counsel of his own will, and for the accomplishment of his own purposes. (Emmons 1842: 387)

We therefore see in the New-England Theologians an enthusiastic agreement with the assertion that God intends that sin occur.

1.16 RECENT REFORMED PERSPECTIVES

Benjamin B Warfield (1851–1921) of Princeton writes uncompromisingly:

That the ‘will of God includes the fall of the first man,’ no Calvinist (be he Supralapsarian, Sublapsarian, Post-redemptionist, Amyraldian, Pajonist) either doubts or can doubt. No Theist, clear in his theism, can doubt it. (Warfield 2000: 113, fn 81)

It should be noted that Warfield writes ‘the fall’, not ‘the permission of the fall’.

Among more recent authors, A. W. Pink (1886–1952) argues:

Clearly it was the divine will that sin should enter this world, or it would not have done so. God had the power to prevent it. Nothing ever comes to pass except what He has decreed. (Pink 1964: 207)

John Piper (1946–) states:

God wills that sin come to pass (for example, the murder of his Son, Acts 4:27–28, Isa 53:10). (Piper 2008: 234)

On the other hand, John Benson of Ardwick wrote in 1836 a whole book against the idea, *The Revival and Rejection of an Old Traditional Heresy* (Benson 1836).

In what follows, we defend the view put forward by Augustine, Luther, Calvin, Maccovius, Perkins, Baine, Edwards, Tucker, the New-England Theologians, Pink, and Piper against the opposite view, defended by Aquinas, Baxter, Turretin, Arminius, Quenstedt, Charnock, and Benson that God does not, and cannot, intend that sin occur.

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CHAPTER 2

Interpreting the Scriptures

Abstract This chapter discusses how the thesis that God intends that sin occur might be inferred from the Christian Scriptures. It discusses some schemata of propositions that might be so inferred, and considers how much evidence an instance of each would provide for the thesis. It is concluded that what is really desired is an instance of (P*):

(P*) God chooses to bring it about that a [sin] occur in order that a [state of affairs that can obtain only in virtue of the sin's occurring] should obtain.

An objection from divine simplicity against God's having discrete intentions is considered towards the end of the chapter.

Keywords Biblical exegesis • Bringing about • Divine simplicity
• Discrete intentions • Actualisation

We intend to make our case on the basis of a philosophically informed interpretation of the Christian Scriptures. So, first, we need to think about the conditions that need to be met for it to be rational to believe on the basis of the propositions asserted or implied in the Scriptures that God intends that (at least some) sin should occur. We talk first in terms of general procedure. The Scriptural texts we later present and discuss are a

narrow and carefully selected group, and much that might apply generally does not apply in those particular cases.

2.1 TYPES OF SCRIPTURAL REPRESENTATION

There are two ways in which the Scriptures might represent God as intending that sin occur. They might just state outright that God chose to bring about sin:¹

(P) God chooses to bring it about that [a sin] occur in order that [a state of affairs] should obtain.²

Alternatively, they might represent God as choosing to bring about some state of affairs in order that there might be a sin (itself a means to a further end):

(Q) God brings it about that [a state of affairs] obtain in order that [a sin] should occur.

In the schemata (P) and (Q) the brackets indicate the presence of variables, and the descriptions contained in the brackets indicate the things over which the variables range.

2.2 THE ‘BRINGING IT ABOUT’ RELATION

Some words of explanation: we don’t need the act of bringing about referred to in (P) and (Q) to be as strong as causation. It isn’t necessary to believe that God *causes* sin to occur in order to think that God *intends* that sin occur. Here is how this could work: suppose that freedom is incompatible with determinism. Now suppose that God knows exactly what Adam would freely do in any given circumstance, what is called ‘middle knowledge’ in the literature (e.g. Dekker 2000). So, in particular, God knows whether Adam would freely sin if placed in the Garden of Eden. Suppose that it is indeed the case that if Adam were placed in the Garden of Eden, he would sin. In this situation, if God places Adam in the Garden of Eden,

¹Note that we use ‘chooses’ in such a way that from ‘A chooses to φ ’ one may infer ‘A intends to φ ’.

²In fact, we do not need the last clause ‘in order that a [state of affairs] should obtain’, since the intention is given in the first clause. Nevertheless, we have put this clause in for two reasons: (1) it emphasizes that sin is never an end in itself for God and (2) it shows the relationship between (P) and (Q).

he brings it about that Adam freely sins, even though he does not, on the indeterministic hypothesis, *cause* Adam to sin. This way of bringing about is sometimes called ‘weak actualization’ in the literature.³ Now, if God intended that Adam sin, one way of fulfilling that intention would be weakly to actualization his sin, that is, to create him in the Garden of Eden in order that he might freely sin.

Nor is middle knowledge required of God. God might think it likely, or even just possible, that Adam would sin if placed in the Garden of Eden, and might create him in the Garden in order that this likelihood or possibility become actual. We think this is how the open theist must read the passages we discuss later.

2.3 THE INSUFFICIENCY OF BRINGING IT ABOUT

Why isn’t it enough to derive an assertion of the following form from the Scriptures?

(R) God brings it about that [sin] occurs.

This isn’t enough because such an assertion by itself is not sufficient to show that God *intended* that the sin in question occur. God might bring about, or even cause, a sin to occur without intending that it occur. The occurrence of the sin in question might merely be a foreseen, and unintended, consequence of God’s activity. We are all familiar with such a distinction at an intuitive level. Classic examples include that in driving a car one foresees, but does not usually intend, to use up fuel, and in walking one foresees, but does not usually intend, the wearing down of one’s shoe leather. More controversial examples include a bomber pilot’s foreseeing, but not intending, the death of civilians, and the doctor’s foreseeing, but not intending, the shortening of the patient’s life as a result of the pain-relieving injection. So, from the mere fact that God causes or brings about the occurrence of a sin or sins, we cannot infer that he intends that the sins in question occur, because they may all be foreseen but unintended consequences of his pursuing independent plans.

It might be responded that God never does anything unintentionally. This, however, is not the point. Even if each of God’s actions is intentional, it does not follow that every consequence of each of his actions is intended (unless for every consequence there is a distinct action of bringing about that consequence). For example, when the Holy Spirit led Jesus

³Technically—‘God *weakly* actualizes a state of affairs *S* if and only if he strongly actualizes a state of affairs *S** that counterfactually implies *S*’ (Plantinga 1985: 49).

into the desert (Matthew 4:1), there were many trivial consequences of that action, such as the movement of grains of sand as Jesus' feet went up and down. It does not follow from God's intending that Jesus go into the desert that he also intended all these movements of grains of sand. Although God of course foreknew where the grains of sand would go, it doesn't follow that he had a preference on their location, that their movements were parts of his plans. Of course, we don't rule out such a position either.

One therefore needs to find more than merely (R) in the Scriptures. It is propositions satisfying (P) or (Q) that, if derived from the Scriptures, put rational pressure on one to believe that God intends the occurrence of sin.

2.4 FURTHER SCRIPTURAL REPRESENTATION: (P*)

In fact, as we explain later, what we'd really like to derive from the Scriptures is a proposition of the form (P*):

(P*) God chooses to bring it about that a [sin] occur in order that a [state of affairs that can obtain only in virtue of the sin's occurring] should obtain.

A proposition of this form would be more helpful for our purposes because an objection could be raised to our use of a proposition of the form (P), the objection that God might choose to bring it about that a sin occur (satisfying (P)) without intending that the *sinfulness of the sin* obtain. While we could respond that this objection in fact cedes the debate to us, we wish to argue in what follows for the stronger conclusion that we may derive from the Scriptures propositions that satisfy (P*), that is, propositions according to which the very sinfulness of the sinful action is necessary for the achievement of God's goals. We wish to argue that if propositions satisfying (P*) can be derived from the Scriptures, then not only do the Scriptures teach that God intends that sinful actions occur, but he also intends that their very sinfulness obtain (for just and holy reasons). All this should become clearer when we return to this in greater detail.

2.5 DOES GOD HAVE DISCRETE INTENTIONS?

At this point, we should probably deal with the objection that God has only one undivided will, and the division of his will into intending this and not intending that has no underlying basis in reality. Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274) writes:

the divine will is one and simple, as willing the many only through the one, that is, through its own goodness. (Aquinas 1920: Ia.Q19.a2.ad4)

This view is also shared by many writers in the Protestant tradition. For example, in the Lutheran tradition, Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz (1646–1716) holds that God does not will that we sin, but also holds that God does not will that we do good. Instead, Leibniz thinks, God has only one will, that the best of all possible worlds be actualised:

As God can do nothing without reasons, even when he acts miraculously, it follows that he has no will about individual events but what results from some general truth or will. Thus I would say that God never has [...] *a particular primitive will*. (Leibniz 1951: §206 [256])

In the Reformed tradition, Francis Turretin (1623–1687) writes:

The decrees of God are not many intrinsically and differently [...] in God (although relating to different things [...] extrinsically). Hence the things which in finite beings are formally diverse are eminently identified in the infinite being. (Turretin 1992: I.314)

Although in the decrees (considered formally on the part of God), order cannot properly be attended to (because they are not many and divided acts, but one only and a most simple act by which he from eternity decreed all things), yet there is no objection to ascribing a certain order to them. As they are considered objectively and on our part (with regard to our mode of conception, since the things decreed are manifold and most diverse and have a mutual dependency and subordination, mutually), some order must necessarily be conceived in them (according to which, some may be said, and may be distinctly perceived by us, to be prior or posterior to others). (Turretin 1992: I.417)

We do not wish to enter into discussion here about divine simplicity. The key point is that in the view of Aquinas and Turretin, the one divine

intention has many objects. Our question is, then, whether the occurrence of sin is one of the objects of the divine intention. In what follows, we speak more idiomatically, following the Scriptures, as if God had multiple intentions each with a single object. This talk can be rephrased, we believe, into talk of a single intention with multiple objects.

Leibniz's view is more difficult, since Leibniz holds that God's single intention has only one object, the actualization of the world. It seems to us that the cost of this view outweighs its benefits: the cost is the fact that God does not intend the occurrence of the good things in the world too. It seems to us that this does not comport with the witness of the Scriptures. One might try to respond on Leibniz's behalf that God intends the actualisation of this world because of the good things in it. This would not be faithful to Leibniz's thought, however. God intends the actualisation of this world because it is the *best*, and it is the best not merely in virtue of containing all the good things that it does, but in virtue of containing the best balance of good over evil. So, it is not true to Leibniz's thought to say, with reference to some particular good in the world, that God is partially motivated by the existence of that good. God is motivated solely by the overall value of the world, in Leibniz's view. While we present here no *philosophical* argument against this view, we think it goes against the deeply particularistic tenor of the Scriptures, which hold out God as being motivated by, and, we believe, intending many particular things in the world.⁴

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⁴This matter is further discussed in Chap. 8.

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CHAPTER 3

Triple Effect

Abstract This chapter discusses a rival strategy to ours for interpreting the Scriptures, based on philosophical work by F. M. Kamm (1948–). Before Kamm’s work, a certain principle of means–end reasoning was assumed: ‘if a rational agent intends an end and believes that their doing something is a means necessary to that end, then insofar as they are rational and do not abandon the end, they intend that means to their end’, as Kamm puts it. The chapter reproduces some of Kamm’s counterexamples to that principle, and explains her alternative ‘triple effect’ principle, that it suffices for rationality that the agent act *because* that means leads to their end. In other words, a rational agent need not intend the known means to their end.

Keywords Frances Kamm • Double effect • Triple effect • Means and ends • Elizabeth Anscombe

There are two challenges to finding an example in the Scriptures of God’s intending that we sin. One particularly focuses on our suggestion that we should look for cases in which God chooses that a sin occur in order that a state of affairs might obtain. One might think that if the occurrence of a sin were a necessary precondition of the obtaining of a state of affairs, then, if God intended that the state of affairs obtain, he’d be rationally compelled to intend that the sin occur too. Indeed, this is stated by

Elizabeth Anscombe, widely known for her writing on intention (e.g. Anscombe 1963):

It is nonsense to pretend that you do not intend to do what is the means you take to your chosen end. Otherwise there is absolutely no substance to the Pauline teaching that we may not do evil that good may come. (Anscombe 1961: 59)

Anscombe uses the term ‘means’ in this extract, but the philosophical principle to be discussed here is more general, concerning any known-to-be-necessary precondition that one brings about. We quote from the formulation of the principle given by F. M. Kamm (1948–) in her critical discussion of it:

(M) If a rational agent intends an end and believes that [their] doing something is a means necessary to that end, then insofar as [they are] rational and [do] not abandon the end, it follows that [they intend] that means to [their] end. (Kamm 2007: 104)¹

3.1 KAMM AGAINST THE REQUIREMENT TO INTEND KNOWN MEANS

Kamm goes on to provide a number of counterexamples to (M). Here is a version of one of them, which she calls ‘Party Case II’ (Kamm 2007: 95–96). Suppose I want to host a party in order that my friends and I might enjoy ourselves. I know, however, that the party will produce a mess, and the mess will ruin the party so that none of us will enjoy ourselves for long. This is a defeater for my plan; it is sufficient to dissuade me from hosting the party. Then I realize that the friends I invite would surely, on account of their own good-naturedness, feel indebted to me (which, Kamm notes, is a bad feeling) and, consequently, feel obliged to help me tidy up afterwards. This is a defeater for my defeater; so, I plan to host the party after all. In such a case, I intend to host an enjoyable party, and the bad effect of my friends’ feeling indebted to me is necessary for me to accomplish this. When I invite my friends to attend, however, it does not have to be my intention in doing so that they feel indebted; my intention can merely be that they attend the event. I simply foresee that, by inviting

¹The label ‘M’ is ours, not Kamm’s.

them, I shall also bring about their feeling indebted to me such that they will help tidy up. We might say that, even if I do not invite my friends *intending* that they feel indebted and so help clean up, I invite them *because* they will, out of their feeling of indebtedness, help clean up. As Kamm puts it, it is important to ‘distinguish between doing something *in order* (or *intending*) to bring about something else and doing something *because of* something else that will thus be brought about’ (Kamm 2007: 92, italics original): she calls the relation of doing something *because* it will have an effect rather than *in order that* it might have that effect, the relation of ‘triple effect’ (Kamm 2007: 23). (The name ‘triple effect’ is an allusion to its status as a revision of the ‘doctrine of double effect’.) Note carefully the causal structure of the example: the invitation to the party causes the attendance, which causes both the enjoyment and the mess, which latter causes the indebtedness, which causes the clearing-up, which removes the mess, enabling the enjoyment to continue. Kamm herself analyses it like this:

In the Party Case, though [enjoyment on the part of me and my guests] is not sufficient, it is my *primary reason* for acting, in the sense that it is the goal [...] that originally motivates me to think of giving a party, and this reason *would be sufficient* for action if no problems, such as a mess, arose. The *secondary reason* for giving the party is that the undesirable effect of giving the party that would ordinarily be an objection to giving it (despite the primary reason for acting) can be taken care of by the foreseen [...] guilt in my friends that I produce. The bad effect, we might say, *defeats the defeaters* of my primary reason, and so maintains the sufficiency of my primary (goal) reason. It is not, however, my goal in action to produce what will defeat the defeaters of my goal. (Kamm 2007: 102, italics original)

It is important to note that this is not a case in which Kamm intends to give a party knowing that *afterwards* there will be a problem (the mess) that will be overcome by a foreseen bad thing (the feeling of indebtedness). No, the goal is not just having a party, but having a *long-lasting enjoyable party*, and the problem of the mess will prevent this goal from being achieved, since the mess will prevent Kamm from enjoying the party, unless it itself is overcome. Thus, the mess is not an after-effect that spoils the memory of an enjoyable party. Rather, the mess prevents there being a long-lasting enjoyable party. The absence of a long-lasting mess is a precondition, not a postcondition, of there being a long-lasting enjoyable party.

3.2 FURTHER COUNTEREXAMPLES FROM KAMM

Here is another example that Frances Kamm gives, which she dubs ‘House Case’:

Suppose that I want to build a private home and I must create a hole in plot A in order to do this. However, creating the hole is too expensive just to build my house, so I must not aim to do it. However, I receive a contract to build an apartment complex on plot B, which is next to A. In order to clear the land for the apartment complex, I must use explosives that unavoidably make a hole in plot B but, as an unintended side effect, they also create a hole in plot A. The hole in plot A is an undesirable side effect from the point of view of building on B, since it makes it harder for me to move materials to B, but it is a tolerable cost relative to the goal of building on B. Given that I will produce the hole in plot A as a side effect, I can still pursue my goal of building my home. I do everything else (e.g., buying bricks) that I must do to build my house in order to build it. (Kamm 2007: 109)

In this case, Kamm has a goal, the building of a private home. There is a precondition that she knows is necessary to achieve this goal, that is, making a hole in plot A. But intending this is ruled out. Does this mean that the goal can no longer be intended, if she is not allowed to intend the means? No, because she is allowed to intend something else, building an apartment complex on plot B, that has as an unintended side effect the hole in plot A. Since Kamm knows that it will have this side effect, she can do the other things necessary to build her private home, secure in the knowledge that, without her intending it, the other precondition for the home, the hole in plot A, will be realized.

Kamm gives yet one more case, in a footnote:

suppose I believe that I will, as a side effect of bringing in a tray of dessert, bring in a corkscrew that you have placed on it. Then I need not intend to bring in the corkscrew—indeed, I might refuse to make any even minimal extra effort necessary to get a corkscrew, believing it wrong to aim to get a corkscrew—consistent with my intending to open the wine and my belief that having the corkscrew is necessary for this. (Kamm 2007: 127, fn 38)

Here Kamm’s goal is to open the wine, and she knows that it is necessary to bring through a corkscrew to achieve this goal. Must she then intend that she bring through a corkscrew? No, because she knows that she will bring through the corkscrew anyway, as an unintended by-product of her bringing through the dessert. So, she knows that, unintended by her, the necessary precondition of a corkscrew’s being brought through will be fulfilled, so that she may rationally intend to open the wine.

3.3 KAMM-INSPIRED INTERPRETATIVE STRATEGIES

How is all this relevant to our purposes? It is relevant because a Kamm-inspired objector might say that a Scriptural text showing that God has a goal for which the occurrence of sin is a necessary precondition does not show that God intends that the precondition obtain, even though he knows that the precondition is indeed necessary for the goal. To put this in terms of the distinction between acting ‘in order that’ and acting ‘because’, while we want to assert that God acts in order that sin obtain (as a means to his ultimate goal), our opponent might reply that all that is the case is that God acts because sin will obtain (as a means to his ultimate goal). In other words, if we derive from the Scriptures a proposition apparently satisfying (Q), an opponent might suppose that all the Scriptures mean here is a proposition satisfying the following weaker schema:

(Q′) God chooses to bring it about that a [state of affairs] obtain *because* a [sin] will occur.

The rendering in (Q′), in consequence of the absence of ‘in order that’ or ‘so that’, doesn’t imply that God intended that the sin occur, merely that the fact that it would contribute in some way to the desired state of affairs influenced God’s decision-making. An opponent might suppose that this strategy can be deployed against every proof text that can be brought from the Scriptures apparently falling under (Q), and in this way suggest that the Scriptures never need to be read as implying that God intends that sin occur.

Similarly, where we have in (P) ‘God chooses to bring it about that a [sin] occur’, an opponent may say that ‘God chooses to bring it about that’ is adding in an intentional attitude not there in the original text, and that the original text might be satisfied by the weaker ‘God does something because a sin will occur’. This latter does not imply that God intends that the sin occur.

3.4 HISTORICAL ANTECEDENTS

There are few explicit examples of the Kammian strategy in use, partly because the principle (M) was uncontroversial until recently. But Karl Barth (1886–1968) in the course of his discussion of the Reformed position of infralapsarianism, writes:

The permitting of evil was not thought of as a means which God willed and posited in execution of His electing and rejecting, but rather as a means of which He actually made use in this activity. (Barth 1957: 138)

It could well be that the distinction at which Barth is gesturing here is Kamm's distinction between performing an action in order to bring about an end on the one hand and, on the other hand, performing an action because it will bring about that end.

There is in addition another strategy an opponent might employ, one that has a substantial historical pedigree. To this we turn next.

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The *Substratum* Strategy

Abstract This chapter discusses a second rival strategy to ours for interpreting the Scriptures. It is based on the distinction between the *substratum* of a sinful action and the formal, sinful aspect of such an action. The distinction is somewhat similar to the legal distinction between *actus reus* (e.g. the physical act of killing) and *mens rea* (e.g. the intention to kill), but is broader, since the *substratum* includes all the non-moral properties of the action, including mental properties. The strategy is intended by our opponents to work as follows: where we think that the Scriptures teach that God intends that sin occur, the rival strategy holds that God intends that the *substratum*, but not that the formal, sinful aspect, of the action occur.

Keywords *Mens rea* • *Actus reus* • Matter and form • *Substratum* • Protestant thought

4.1 THE *MENS REA* AND THE *ACTUS REUS*

At law, a crime is a complex thing, in most cases consisting of two parts,¹ an *actus reus*, the bodily event or physical happening (which could be an omission), and the *mens rea*, the ‘guilty mind’, the internal criminal

¹We here ignore offences of ‘strict liability’, such as exceeding the speed limit, where *mens rea* is not legally relevant: it does not matter whether you intended to exceed the speed limit.

intention or psychological attitude that informs or underlies the external, physical action. One and the same *actus reus* can occur in different contexts, in one case without the *mens rea*, and in another case with it. For example, suppose a person *A* kills another person *B*. This killing forms the *actus reus* for the crime of murder, but in order for *A* to have murdered *B*, *A* needs to have had in addition a certain *mens rea*, intention to kill or commit grievous bodily harm. If *A* killed *B* by accident, then this means that the *mens rea* is absent, and so murder was not committed.

In a similar way, a sin has often been held to be a complex thing. One way in which this is frequently explained is similar to the case of crimes: most physical sins have been held to involve an *actus reus* and a *mens rea*. For example, the sin of murder has traditionally been analysed similarly to the crime of murder: if *A* kills *B*, *A* will have committed the sin of murder only if *A* also had the *mens rea* of the sin of murder—an accidental killing does not qualify as the sin of murder (though it may be an instance of the sin of negligence). In fact, this way, though common and natural, is not the one on which we wish to concentrate here.

4.2 THE MATERIAL/FORMAL DISTINCTION

The way on which we wish to concentrate holds that a sin is a complex thing in being composed of a so-called material element and a so-called formal element. The terms chosen in the tradition reflect the Aristotelian analysis of physical things into matter and form, for example how human beings are, according to Aristotle and his followers, composed of a body (matter) and a soul (form). These terms might sound as though they apply only to physical sins like murder, and not to mental sins like lust, but, in fact, the tradition in view here identifies a complexity in *every* sin, and thinks of the material element, also known as the substance or ‘*substratum*’, as being an underlying action, either mental or physical, and the formal element as being the moral property in virtue of which the whole is a *sinful* action.

4.3 THE *SUBSTRATUM* ANALYSIS IN AUGUSTINE AND AQUINAS

This tradition takes as its point of departure the definition of ‘sin’ put forward by Augustine of Hippo (354–430 AD):

Sin, then, is any transgression in deed, or word, or desire, of the eternal law. (Augustine 1887: 283)

Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274) comments as follows on this definition:

Augustine (*Contra Faust.* xxii, 27) includes two things in the definition of sin; one, pertaining to the substance of a human act, and which is the matter, so to speak, of sin, when he says ‘word’, ‘deed’, or ‘desire’; the other, pertaining to the nature of evil, and which is the form, as it were, of sin, when he says, ‘contrary to the eternal law’. (Aquinas 1920: IaIIae. Q71.a6.sc)

It is to be noted that the *substratum* is much broader than the *actus reus*: it includes the whole of the action apart from the moral property of sinfulness. So, in the case of murder, it would include the intention to kill (or, perhaps, to do grievous bodily harm) as well as the physical act of killing. It would not include, however, the *wrongness* of the act of murder; that would be the formal element.

4.4 THE *SUBSTRATUM* ANALYSIS IN THE PROTESTANT TRADITION

It is not surprising that Aquinas’s analysis was continued by the Roman-Catholic tradition, but it was also taken up by the Protestant scholastic tradition too. For example, seventeenth-century Reformed scholastic Gisbertius Voetius (1589–1676) describes sin as a ‘complex matter (*complexum*)’ consisting of the following:

1. the act that is the substratum in which the lawlessness inheres;
2. the lawlessness itself or moral vice that inheres in this act. *Selectae disputationes theologicae* I: 1132, quoted and translated in (Goudriaan 2006: 189)

Jerome Zanchius (1516–1590) had earlier endorsed the distinction, as relayed by Augustus Montague Toplady (1740–1778), his English editor and translator:

we can easily conceive of an action, purely as such, without adverting to the quality of it, so that the distinction between an action itself and its denomination of good or evil is very obvious and natural. (Zanchius 2001: 32)

Jacobus Arminius (1560–1609), although an opponent of Zanchius’s doctrine of predestination, employs on occasion the same distinction:²

in sin, not it alone but the act also, blended with it, is to be considered, as in sin there is the transgression of the law, and the act, that is the act, simply as such, and the act, as forbidden or prescribed, the omission of which pre-script is sin. (Arminius 1853: 430–431)

Among the British Puritans, Stephen Charnock (1628–1680) also makes use of the distinction:

an act, as an act, is one thing, and the viciousness another. [...] [T]he sinfulness of an act consists in [...] a want of conformity of the act with the law of God [...] the sinfulness of an action is not the act itself, but is considered in it as it is related to the law, and is a deviation from it; and so it is something cleaving to the action, and therefore to be distinguished from the act itself, which is the subject of the sinfulness. (Charnock 1853: II.158)

4.5 THE *SUBSTRATUM* STRATEGY AND THE DIVINE WILL

The relevance of all this is that our opponent may employ the following procedure: for any apparent instance of God’s intending that a sin occur, they may respond that, strictly speaking, God didn’t intend that the sin itself occur—that was only a foreseen consequence—but actually intended only that the *substratum* of the sin occur. The thought here isn’t that God intended that *only the substratum occur*, that is, that the bare *substratum* occur without any sinful aspect pertaining to it; we mean our opponent’s suggestion here to be that God had *no intention with respect to the formal aspect of the sin*, either that it should occur or that it should not occur (‘either to will or to nill’, as the older texts put it). We return to this below.

4.6 THE *SUBSTRATUM* STRATEGY IN AQUINAS

For Aquinas and a fair few others in the scholastic tradition, the distinction between the *substratum*, the material element, on the one hand, and the formal element of human beings’ actions, on the other, is crucial to their theories of divine providence: it permits them to hold that God is the

²Arminius does not think that the distinction holds for every action (Arminius 1853: 445–448).

cause of all things, while denying that he is the cause of sin. For God, on this suggestion, causes only the matter, the *substratum*, of a sinful act, not the formal aspect by virtue of which it is sinful. The formal aspect is a privation, a negation, and so not something that can, the scholastics thought, be itself an object of causation.

Hence, Aquinas writes:

God is said to be the cause of a given action insofar as it is an action, and not insofar as it is deformed; not in such a way that he does the action separately from the deformity, but in such a way that he does that which is of the action in the action-together-with-its-deformity, and he does not do that which is of the deformity: since even though in a given effect many things are inseparably conjoined, it is not fitting that whatever is its cause in one aspect, should also be its cause in another aspect. (Aquinas 1856: II.d37. Q2.A2.ad 5)³

Elsewhere, he states:

we trace what regards the activity of those with the power of free choice to God as the cause, while only free choice, not God, causes what regards the deordination or deformity of those with the power of free choice. And that is why we say that acts of sin come from God, but that sin does not. (Aquinas 2001: 239)

4.7 THE SUBSTRATUM STRATEGY IN THE PROTESTANT TRADITION

In the Protestant tradition, the strategy has been used by both Lutherans and Calvinists. On the Lutheran side, David Hollaz (1646–1713) writes about God's involvement in

support of the nature acting wickedly, concurrence with the remote material of a vicious action, permission of the *ataxia* adhering to the sinful action, limiting determination of the sin. (David Hollaz, *Examen Theologicum Acroamaticum* (1707), quoted and translated in Schmid 1899: 193)

³'Deus dicitur esse causa illius actionis in quantum est actio, et non in quantum est deformis; non hoc modo quod actionem faciat a deformitate separata, sed quia in actione deformitati conjuncta hoc quod est actionis, facit, et quod deformitatis, non facit: etsi enim in aliquo effectu plura inseparabiliter conjuncta sint, non oportet ut quidquid est causa ejus quantum ad unum, sit causa ejus quantum ad alterum.' The translation is ours.

The word ‘material’ here refers to the *substratum*, and the word ‘*ataxia*’ refers to the formal element of the sin.

On the Calvinistic side, Francis Turretin (1623–1687) writes:

three things must be accurately distinguished in sin: (1) the entity itself of the act which has the relation of material; (2) the disorder (*ataxia*) and wickedness joined with it (or its concomitant) which puts on the notion of the formal; (3) the consequent judgment called the adjunct. God is occupied in different ways about these. As to the first, since an act as such is always good as to its entity, God concurs to it effectually and physically, not only by conserving the nature, but by exciting its motions and actions by a physical motion, as being good naturally (in which sense we are said ‘to live, move and have our being in him,’ Acts 17:28). [...]

IV. As to the second, which is the lawlessness (*anomia*) itself, God can be called neither its physical cause (because he neither inspires nor infuses nor does it) nor its ethical cause (because he neither commands nor approves and persuades, but more severely forbids and punishes it). [...] But yet sin ought not to be removed from the providence of God, for it falls under it in many ways as to its beginning, progress and end. As to its beginning, he freely permits it; as to its progress, he wisely directs it; as to its end, he powerfully terminates and brings it to a good end. These are the three degrees of providence about sin of which we must speak. (Turretin 1992: I.515–516)

Gisbertius Voetius, whom we have already quoted, says:

The natural act as such [...] God wills and decrees in a direct way; the vice He does not will but the permission of the vice. (Gisbertus Voetius, *Thersites heautontimorumenos*, quoted and translated in Goudriaan 2006: 191)

We have also already quoted Stephen Charnock. He gestures towards the strategy in question when he says:

The will of God is in some sort concurrent with sin. He doth not properly will it, but he wills not to hinder it [...] Though the natural virtue of doing a sinful action be from God, and supported by him, yet this doth not blemish the holiness of God; [...] God may concur with the substance of an act, without concurring with the sinfulness of the act [...] God assists in that action of a man wherein sin is placed, but not in that which is the formal reason of sin. (Charnock 1853: II.147, 157, 159)

The thrust of the *substratum* strategy is summarised by Heinrich Heppé (1820–1879) thus:

That God is not therefore the originator of sin becomes clear, if in the sinful act the act in and for itself, the material element in it, the physical action, and the formal element, the sinful outlook which man adopts in it are rightly distinguished. To the act in and for itself, i. e. to that which is the physical basis of man's sinful attitude man is literally driven by God. On the other hand the sinfulness of the mind proceeds [...] exclusively from man's own will. (Heppé 2007: §31, 276)

4.8 OPPOSITION TO THE *SUBSTRATUM* STRATEGY

Not all have been fans of the *substratum* strategy. Duns Scotus (1265/1266–1308) writes:

there is proof that God cannot be cause of an act that is the substrate of sin: Because then he would act against his own prohibition; for he prohibited Adam from eating [of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, Genesis 2.17]—nor was there anything disordered in that act save that it was prohibited; therefore if God had caused that positive act [sc. of eating by Adam], he would have done it immediately against his own prohibition, which seems to have been a thing of duplicity. (Scotus 2016: II.269)

Duns Scotus here argues that God's holiness prevents him from causing the *substratum* just as it prevents him from causing the formal element.

Another opponent of the use of the strategy was G. W. Leibniz (1646–1716), who, in his 1673 manuscript 'the Author of Sin', wrote:

the famous distinction between the physical aspect and the moral aspect of sin was introduced, a distinction that has been abused somewhat, although it is good in and of itself. [...] Where then is this moral aspect of sin of which so much is said? Perhaps it will be said that it consists in anomie, as holy Scripture calls it, or in the lack of conformity of the action with respect to the law, which is a pure privation. I agree with that, but I do not see what it contributes to the clarification of our question. [...] I am going to make it clear by an example. A painter creates two paintings, one of which is large so that it may be used as a model for a tapestry, while the other is only a miniature. Consider the miniature. Let us say that there are only two things to consider with respect to it, first its positive and real aspect, which is the table, the background, the colors, the lines; and then its privative aspect, which is

the disproportion with respect to the large painting, in other words, its smallness. Now it would be a joke to say that the painter is the author of everything that is real in the two paintings without, nevertheless, being the author of the privative aspect, i. e., the disproportion between the large one and the small one. For by the same line of reasoning, or rather by stronger reasoning, it could be said that a painter can be the author of a copy, or of a portrait, without being the author of the disproportion between the copy and the original, i. e., without being the author of this fault. For, in fact, the privation is nothing but a simple result or infallible consequence of the positive aspect, without requiring a separate author. I am amazed that these people did not go further and try to persuade us that man himself is not the author of sin, since he is only the author of the physical or real aspect, the privation being something for which there is no author. (Leibniz 2001: 111–113)

It should be noted before we move on that some have taken up Leibniz's challenge, and assert that sin has no author at all. John 'Rabbi' Duncan (1796–1870) is one:

I cannot get out of the meshes of Augustinianism on the privative nature of sin. Evil is a defect, just as death is a privation. [...] God is not the author of sin, because sin has no author. (Knight 1879: 3)

4.9 THE *SUBSTRATUM* STRATEGY IN SCRIPTURAL INTERPRETATION

At any rate, the *substratum* strategy would be deployed against us as follows: whenever we say of a certain sin that God is described in the Scriptures as intending that it occur, let us suppose instead that God intended only that the *substratum* of the named sin should occur, and, although he intended to permit that the formal element by which it is constituted a sin in its particular context should occur, he did not intend that that formal element occur. Because the *substratum* is not evil, and because permission of evil is also not necessarily evil, it is less problematic to suppose that God intended that *they* occur.⁴

⁴Obviously, it is only *less* problematic, not *un*problematic.

To make matters clear, recall our schemata (P) and (Q):

(P) God chooses to bring it about that [a sin] occur in order that [a state of affairs] should obtain.

(Q) God brings it about that [a state of affairs] obtain in order that [a sin] should occur.

The *substratum* strategist tries to avoid the implication from propositions satisfying (P) to the proposition that God intends that sin occur by suggesting a proposition of the following sort as an equally adequate derivation from the Scriptures:

(Z) God brings it about that [a *substratum*] occurs, and permits a sin, in order that [a state of affairs] should obtain.

It is this sort of interpretive strategy that Aquinas and the Reformed scholastics (including Arminius) employed to avoid the suggestion that the Scriptures (on account of the various verses we will go on to discuss) imply that God wills that sinful acts occur—God wills merely the substratum, not the formal, sinful aspect of those acts.

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Assessing Interpretative Strategies

Abstract This chapter assesses how well the two rival strategies from the previous chapters, Kamm’s ‘triple effect’ strategy and the *substratum* strategy, fare when it comes to interpreting the Scriptures. It is argued with respect to the test case of Joseph and his brothers related in Genesis 50 that the two strategies both on their own and in combination do not fare as well as the more natural interpretation that is proposed in the book. That is, it is argued that the natural interpretation of the Scriptures is that God does indeed intend that sin occur, and that the rival interpretations involve unnatural philosophical contortions of interpretation.

Keywords Joseph • Genesis 50 • *Substratum* strategy • Triple-effect strategy • Perspicuity of the Scriptures

Now we turn to assessment of the two mentioned interpretative strategies: the Kamm-inspired triple-effect strategy and the substratum strategy. In this chapter, we show how these strategies operate with respect to a concrete instance, Joseph’s being sold into slavery. We offer various objections to the two strategies, and draw the reader’s attention to a certain sub-schema of the schema (P) of which instances, should they be found in the Scriptures, would make matters considerably more difficult for our opponents.

5.1 JOSEPH ON HIS BEING SOLD INTO SLAVERY

In Genesis 50:19–21, Joseph says the following to his brothers about his being sold into slavery:

But Joseph said to them, ‘Do not fear, for am I in the place of God? As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today. So do not fear; I will provide for you and your little ones.’ Thus he comforted them and spoke kindly to them. (Genesis 50:19–21, ESV)

Here Joseph reassures his brothers that he has no hostile feelings towards them after his father’s death. Joseph’s brothers sold him into slavery, and Joseph acknowledges that they had evil motives towards him, but counters that God meant it for good, so that Joseph could come to Egypt and save many lives from famine as Pharaoh’s second-in-command.

Recall again our schemata (P) and (Q):

- (P) God chooses to bring it about that [a sin] occur in order that [a state of affairs] should obtain.
 (Q) God brings it about that [a state of affairs] obtain in order that [a sin] should occur.

We propose, initially at any rate, that a proposition satisfying (P) can be derived from Genesis 50:20:

- (1) God brought it about that *Joseph’s brothers sinfully sell Joseph*, for the sake of *saving many lives in Egypt*.

5.2 THE SUBSTRATUM STRATEGIST’S RESPONSE

The substratum strategist, however, would insist that it isn’t required that we suppose God intended that the sinful act described in (1) should occur; it is enough to suppose that God intended merely that the substratum of the act should occur. Arminius deploys such a reading of the verse as follows:

From the sale of Joseph resulted his removal to Egypt, his elevation to the highest dignity, in that land from which, food, necessary for his father's family, could be procured, in a time of most direful famine. God declares that He sent him into Egypt for this purpose. All this resulted from the sale, not as it was a sin, but as an act. (Arminius 1853: 433)

In other words, the substratum strategist could say that God merely intended the bodily movement of Joseph to Egypt, and the concomitant bodily movements and gestures of his brothers and the slave traders, not the sinful act of their selling Joseph into slavery, even though, in that context, the bodily movements and gestures constituted the act of selling Joseph into slavery. This way of spinning the matter doesn't involve God's intending the occurrence of sin. Thus, if a proposition such as

- (1) God brought it about that *Joseph's brothers sinfully sell Joseph*, for the sake of *saving many lives in Egypt*,

is thought to be derived from the Scriptures (cf. Genesis 37–45), the defender of the *substratum* approach would say that we don't need to suppose on account of this that

- (2) God intended that Joseph's brothers sinfully sell him into slavery as a means to get him to Egypt,

but only that, for example,

- (3) God intended that Joseph's brothers make certain bodily movements as a means to get him to Egypt, and allowed them to sin in so doing.

The parsing we find in (3) removes the occurrence of the sinfulness of the brothers' actions from God's intentions. The sinfulness of their actions wasn't necessary for the occurrence of the desired end; what was necessary was only the *substratum*, or part of it, that the brothers made certain bodily movements that ended up with Joseph's being in Egypt. These bodily movements are in themselves neither good nor bad. (In this particular case, even the brothers' evil intention seems not to have been strictly necessary.) If we believe that God, being perfectly rational, intends

only what is necessary for his ends, as well as that God, being all-knowing, knows what is necessary for his ends, then it follows that God did not intend that the brothers' actions be sinful.¹ This follows because—what is agreed by all—God does not intend as an end in itself that sin occur.

5.3 THE TRIPLE-EFFECT STRATEGIST'S RESPONSE

How might the Kamm-inspired triple-effect strategist interpret Genesis 50:20? The Kammian triple-effect strategist seeks to replace the thought of God's intending that sin occur for a good end with the thought of God's acting *because of* that good end for which the sin is necessary, causally or otherwise. In other words, God (to speak in a human way) sets his sights on a course of action, realises that that course of action would result in a sinful occurrence that would otherwise give him reason to refrain from that course of action, but then realises that that sinful occurrence is necessary for the actualization of a certain good, and so proceeds with his original course of action, his permitting or bringing about of the sinful occurrence being *because of* the good that will result. This understanding does not imply that God intends that the sin in question occur.

One consequence of this understanding is that, when it comes to verses in the Scriptures that describe God as intending that a sin, S , occur for some good end, G_1 , the Kammian triple-effect strategist cannot suppose that G_1 is the end that God seeks. Rather, they must think that there is some other good end, G_2 , for the sake of which God is acting. God acts *because of* G_1 , but does not act with the intention that G_1 occur. That is the essence of the Kammian triple-effect approach.

So, the Kammian triple-effect strategist would deny that (1) should be derived from the verse, replacing (1) with something like,

(1') God brought it about that *Joseph's brothers sinfully sell Joseph*, because it would lead to the *saving of many lives in Egypt*.

But one curiosity about such an understanding is that it leaves unspecified God's objective in acting—it cannot be, on this reading, the saving of many lives, for that would be to abandon this particular Kammian interpretation. The saving of many lives, on this suggestion, is merely a good event that gives God justifiable reason to pursue a separate objective even

¹ On the assumption that God does not have another end in view for which the sinfulness is a means.

though the pursuing of that separate objective would lead to Joseph's brothers sinfully selling Joseph. For that reason, a more illuminating parsing of (1') would be as follows:

(1'') God chose to bring about a state of affairs, *S*, and God's bringing *S* about brought about *Joseph's brothers sinfully selling Joseph*, yet God nevertheless considered it good to choose to bring about *S*, because he knew so choosing would lead to the *saving of many lives in Egypt*.

As one can see, a Kammian triple-effect reading of passages that appear to suggest that God intends that sin occur has the implication that God's *intentions* are really quite elsewhere. The sinful event (or events) and the good event (or events) are all side effects.

Recall again our schemata (P) and (Q):

(P) God chooses to bring it about that [a sin] occur in order that [a state of affairs] should obtain.

(Q) God brings it about that [a state of affairs] obtain in order that [a sin] should occur.

In general, the Kammian triple-effect strategist will hold that, for any verse or verses of the Scriptures from which it appears one may derive propositions satisfying (P) or (Q), propositions satisfying (X) and (Y) (which correspond to (P) and (Q), respectively) are equally satisfactorily derived:

(X) God chooses to bring about [a state of affairs₁], which action has [a sin] and [a state of affairs₂] as consequences,² and part of God's reason for choosing to bring about [state of affairs₁] is that it would lead to [state of affairs₂].³

(Y) God brought it about that [a state of affairs] obtains, and part of God's reason for acting in a way that brought about that state of affairs is that it would help bring about the obtaining of a [sin].⁴

It should be clear how (1'') satisfies (X).

²Perhaps the sin and state of affairs₂ have a common cause, or perhaps state of affairs₂ is a consequence of the sin.

³This is easy to understand if state of affairs₂ is good in itself, but that is not required: it may be that God seeks state of affairs₂ only on account of good consequences to which state of affairs₂ leads.

⁴God, of course, looks favourably on the occurrence of the sin because it would help bring about a certain good or goods.

5.4 OBJECTIONS TO THE *SUBSTRATUM* STRATEGY

It is the hope of the *substratum* strategist that any proposition derived from the Scriptures to show that God intends that sin occur could be handled via the *substratum* strategy. We make several points against the strategy.

First, such a strategy goes counter to the *prima facie* reading of the Scriptures. Even though it might be possible to suppose that the non-sinful *substratum* alone, perhaps together with the very act of the permission of the sin, was the intended means, the *prima facie* reading of the Scriptures must be overlooked in order for it to work. The natural reading of the Scriptures describes the occurrence of sin as the employed and intended means, and the natural reading of the Scriptures carries *pro tanto* force, that is, should be favoured on that account, other things being equal. The point might be put this way: if the Scriptures evidence no great concern to deny that God could ever intend that sin occur, and seem content to describe the occurrence of sin as a chosen means in God's purposes, then why should we, in the construction of our ethics and theology, exhibit great care that such a suggestion be avoided?

At this point, it might be objected that we should not expect the Bible to speak with great precision in such areas. But note that that is not Jesus's attitude. He frequently derives significant conclusions from textual minutiae, and we believe he should be an example for us in this regard. For example, in Luke 20:41–44 Jesus is recorded as saying:

How can they say that the Christ is David's son? ⁴² For David himself says in the Book of Psalms,

'The Lord said to my Lord,

Sit at my right hand,

⁴³ until I make your enemies your footstool.'

⁴⁴ David thus calls him Lord, so how is he his son?

Here, Jesus derives a big conclusion from the easily glossed-over fact that the Messiah is called 'my Lord' by David in Psalm 110:1. See Matthew 22:31–32 and John 10:34–36 for other examples.

Secondly, the *substratum* strategy depends on a rather subtle piece of metaphysics: the Aristotelian distinction between matter and form. It is surely implausible to suppose that Joseph had such subtleties in mind when he claimed that the Lord intended his brothers' selling him into

slavery. Likewise for the other biblical writers we will go on to discuss. The distinction between the *substratum* and *superstratum* of an action is not part of the conceptual world in which the average human being thinks and moves. But the Scriptures are, for the most part, written in terms of that common, shared conceptual arena. Thus, when a biblical writer speaks of God as intending that sin occur, we should read that as being the whole of the sin, not merely the *substratum*.

Thirdly, the *substratum* strategy undermines the perspicuity of the Scriptures. The distinction between an event's *substratum* and its formal aspect is, as we have seen, a very technical one. Most readers of the Scriptures are not cognizant of it. The *substratum* strategist's suggestion is that whenever we see the intention of the occurrence of sin apparently imputed to God in the Scriptures, we must read God as intending only the *substratum* of that sin. But this is a meaning only the select few can grasp, and there is no indication of a technical meaning in the relevant passages.

Fourthly, we worry that God would be guilty of misleading people on the *substratum* strategist's suggestion. God appears to violate norms of communication by making the meaning of the relevant passages hard to grasp in conjunction with the meaning of the passages being too much opposed to the natural, instinctive reading. If it is a great evil to suppose that God could intend that sin occur (as many of our opponents would indeed affirm), then it smacks of irresponsibility for God to place his authority behind words, such as Joseph's, that appear to describe God as intending that sin occur. But the idea that God subscribes at least broadly to human norms of communication through the Scriptures is necessary for them to function as divine revelation.

5.5 THE (P*) SCHEMA

We grant, however, that the strength that one attributes to the foregoing points will vary depending on one's doctrine of divine inspiration, as well as on the relation one thinks the Scriptures bear to other theological authorities.

But there is another important objection to be made against the *substratum* strategy. For most of the verses from the Scriptures that we discuss below, the sinfulness of the sin that God putatively chose in order to bring it about that the desired end occur is a logically required antecedent of the occurrence of the desired end. In other words, the occurrence of no non-sinful event, no matter how closely associated with the occurrence of the

sinful event that God putatively chose in order to bring it about that the desired end occur, would be enough for the occurrence of the sought-after end.

To explain, recall our schemata (P) and (Q):

(P) God chooses to bring it about that [a sin] occur in order that [a state of affairs] should obtain.

(Q) God brings it about that [a state of affairs] obtain in order that [a sin] should occur.

The *substratum* strategist, as we saw, tries to avoid the implication from propositions satisfying (P) to the proposition that God intends that sin occur by suggesting a proposition of the following sort as an equally adequate derivation from the Scriptures:

(Z) God brings it about that [a *substratum*] occurs, and permits a sin, in order that [a state of affairs] should obtain.

But there is an important subclass of propositions under (P) for which that response will not be possible. They satisfy the following schema, which we mentioned briefly earlier:

(P*) God chooses to bring it about that [a sin] occur in order that [a state of affairs that can obtain only in virtue of the sin's occurring] should obtain.

Propositions that satisfy (P*) are perhaps the strongest evidence that God intends that sin occur, for we know here that God requires the sinful act's sinfulness, not merely its *substratum* or its being permitted, to satisfy his purpose. What sort of state of affairs is it that (P*) picks out and that can obtain only in virtue of the occurrence of a sin? Typical examples are states of affairs that involve things like mercy, forgiveness, and punishment. Each of those is something that logically requires, by its very nature, the occurrence of sin for its existence. If God is described as intending that what appears to be a sinful means should occur for the sake of the occurrence of an end like that, then we believe that one should infer that God intends that the sinful means, with all its sinfulness, should occur for his purposes.

5.6 OBJECTIONS TO THE KAMMIAN TRIPLE-EFFECT STRATEGY

Now we bring objections against the Kammiian triple-effect strategy. Many of them are restatements of the objections brought against the *substratum* strategy.

First, we worry that it would do an injustice to the authorial intent of the writers of the Scriptures to suppose that we can easily replace the Scriptural ‘so that’ in every case with the Kamm-style ‘because of’. Kamm’s triple effect is a very subtle idea, and she appears to be the first to have clearly articulated it. It is implausible to suppose that the human writers of the Scriptures wrote with that concept in mind when they described the Lord as employing sin as a means or as intending sin as his end. This suggests that we should read the ‘so that’ of the biblical authors as denoting the standard means–end relationship, not the Kamm-style ‘because of’—that would smack of anachronism.

It might be responded that the relevant Greek and Hebrew terms are *ambiguous* between the Kammiian sense and the standard means–end relationship.⁵ But we are suspicious of this suggestion. Surely the vocabulary of intention arises in human society and thought because of the need to distinguish between the effects of one’s action that one intended and the effects that one did not—mere by-products. But if that is so, the function for which those terms are introduced precludes room for ambiguity here. As evidence of this, consider the fact that the triple-effect relationship Kamm has introduced can’t be non-misleadingly communicated using the standard English terms relating to intention. That’s why Kamm reaches for ‘because of’. Kamm hasn’t discovered a new way of ‘intending’ something—the meaning we attach to the English term doesn’t permit that—she has discovered a new *non-intending* way of relating to a means or an effect, and that is why different language is required.

Secondly, we worry that the triple-effect strategy violates the perspicuity of the Scriptures. Prior to the advent of Kamm, everyone that read the relevant passages surely supposed that they referred in the normal way to means–end reasoning, and believed accordingly.⁶ Even now, with the

⁵We thank an anonymous reviewer from an earlier article of ours for this suggestion.

⁶Of course, we grant that it is possible for the church to have persistent and long-lasting mistakes about what the Scriptures teach, but we think that that tends to arise, not from patient and diligent study, but from hasty and superficial study of the Scriptures.

advent of Kamm, this fresh insight she has offered is unknown to everyone except a tiny minority. But the standard means–ends concepts expressed by ‘so that’ and ‘in order to’ are known to all the world. And those are the concepts that most people today that patiently attend to the teaching of the Scriptures in this matter would bring to bear. Only a philosopher, one might say, could offer a Kamm-style interpretation. It is surely to the disadvantage of the Kammian triple-effect strategy that only the enlightened few are capable of reading the Scriptures without being misled in this matter.

Thirdly, the point about people’s being misled leads to the concern that the triple-effect strategy implies that God is violating norms of communication in the relevant Scriptural passages. After all, if just about everyone, prior to the advent of Kamm, that sincerely attended to discerning the teaching of the Scriptures in this matter would have come to believe that God intended that sin occur, and this view is false, then the worry is that this implies that God has communicated irresponsibly. Although a natural reading of one of the relevant verses has God saying he chose to bring about a certain sin for the sake of some good thing, the triple-effect strategist insists that we must instead suppose that God’s objectives were something else entirely, and the fact that the course of action that God chose to achieve this something else gave rise to this good thing was just a reason in favour of that course of action. But if that is what the real facts of the matter are, then surely God should say that, or something like that. If it looks to all appearances as if one is asserting a standard means–end relationship, but one is not, then one is under pressure either to indicate this somehow or to refrain from making the utterance. But God does neither of those things in the relevant verses.

Fourthly, there is the concern that the Kamm-style interpretative strategy, if legitimate, would license a more general scepticism about divine intentions in the Scriptures. Consider, for example, Isaiah 48:9, where the Lord says, ‘For my name’s sake I defer my anger; for the sake of my praise I restrain it for you, that I may not cut you off.’ God is declaring that he is refraining from punishing the Israelites, from cutting them off, for the sake of his own glory. The means–end reasoning on God’s part looks clear enough. But if the triple-effect strategist is going to be suspicious of the natural, ready interpretation of the passage when it implies that God intends that sin occur, then, arguably, they should also be suspicious whenever the Scriptures attribute any intention to God, such as that in Isaiah 48:9. It would be odd for the triple-effect strategist to treat the

natural reading of the first sort of passage with great suspicion and natural reading of the second sort of passage with easy acceptance, when the way matters are described in both cases has the same form.

Lastly, the triple-effect strategy arguably suffers when God's intentions are declared too clearly in the text. One example would be Exodus 9:16: 'But for this purpose I have raised you up, to show you my power, so that my name may be proclaimed in all the earth.' There, God's intention is too explicit and pronounced upon, we say, for one to deny that Pharaoh's being raised up was God's intention. This doesn't entirely preclude a Kammian reading, because Kamm has shown with her Party Cases and so on that one need not intend the means to one's end. We address the possibility of such readings, in the case of Pharaoh and others, when we discuss the relevant texts below and in the following two chapters.

5.7 COMBINING THE KAMMIAN TRIPLE-EFFECT AND *SUBSTRATUM* STRATEGIES

The Kammian triple-effect strategy does, however, open up an interesting possibility for an objector. They may attempt to take the *substratum* strategy and combine it with the Kamm-inspired triple-effect strategy (call the result 'the combined strategy') and say that (1) the occurrence of the sin as necessary in order that a greater good should occur, (2) God intends that the *substratum* of the sin should occur, (3) God permits that the formal, sinful, aspect of the action should occur, (4) because God sees that the occurrence of the sin is a means to the greater good, while (5) not intending that the sin occur.

For example, this would suggest the following interpretation of Joseph's remark:

(1st) God chose to bring about the *substrata* of the sinful acts involved in *Joseph's brothers sinfully selling Joseph*, and God considered it good to choose to bring about those *substrata*, even though he foreknew that bringing them about would lead to the formal, sinful, elements obtaining, because he knew that bringing them about would lead to the *saving of many lives in Egypt*.

There is a problem here for the combined strategy, however. Since every action of God's is done for a specific intention, either as an end in itself or as a means to a further end, what is the object of God's intention

when he permits that the formal, sinful, aspect of the action should occur? We say that the object of God's intention here must be the greater good for whose occurrence the formal, sinful, aspect of the action is logically or metaphysically necessary. (It cannot be a greater good for whose occurrence the formal, sinful, aspect of the action is merely *causally* necessary. Why not? This follows from God's being all-powerful. His power is limited only by the laws of logic, mathematics, and metaphysics, if, indeed, these can be counted as limitations at all. It cannot be merely that the formal, sinful, elements are *causally* necessary for the object of God's intention, since God has the power to change the causal laws so that the formal, sinful elements would no longer be causally necessary.) What can the combined-strategist say?

Suppose, first, that the combined-strategist says what we say, that the greater good for whose occurrence the formal, sinful, aspect of the action is logically or metaphysically necessary is the object of God's intention. The problem now for the combined-strategist is to explain *how* God intends to bring about the occurrence of the greater good. As Kamm notes:

intending a goal [...] may require that an agent be willing to intend *some* means (whether a necessary one or just a possible alternative) in order to bring the goal about, on pain of just wanting and producing an event, but not intending it. (Kamm 2007: 106)

So, the combined-strategist has to say that God intends *some* means towards the occurrence of the greater good. But what could *be* that intended means, given that the occurrence of the sin is logically or metaphysically necessary for it?

We say that it is the occurrence of the sin itself, or the occurrence of some larger state of affairs including the sin, that is God's intended means. The combined-strategist, however, denies that God intends that sin, or any larger state of affairs including sin, occur.

It seems to us, then, that the combined-strategist is in a tight spot: they have to assert that there is some means, separate from the sin, that is a means towards the occurrence of the greater good for which the occurrence of the sin is logically or metaphysically necessary. Why does this put them in a tight spot? Because the texts do not hint at such a separate means, it seems to us. Now, of course, the combined-strategist can always insist that our finite minds cannot grasp what the means is, and we do not want to say that we can always know the means that God intends. But we

do want to say that the texts in question strongly suggest that God's means is the occurrence of the sin in question. This strong suggestion could be defeated by evidence of a different means that God intends, but no such evidence seems to be forthcoming from the combined-theorist.

The alternative supposition is that the combined-theorist does not postulate that the object of God's intention in permitting it to be the case that sin occur is the greater good; God acts merely *because of* the greater good, rather than *intending* the greater good. The question is not now 'what is God's means?', but, rather, 'what is God's end?'. If God does not intend to permit sin for the sake of the greater good for which its occurrence is necessary, for what end does he permit it? It would seem strange for God to know that there were a greater good for which the occurrence of sin were necessary, and yet to permit sin for the sake of a *lesser* good than the greater one, or to permit it for the sake of something *neutral*, that is, something neither good nor bad. This theory would leave as a *by-product* or *side effect* the fact that we are better off as a result of the occurrence of the sin and God's action. But it seems strange that the greater good would be a mere by-product, while a lesser good, or a neutral state of affairs, the actual end and goal of it all. And the texts do not contain any hint of what such an end might be.

Finally, we note that whatever implausibility the *substratum* and Kammian triple-effect strategies carried individually, that implausibility is now at least doubled if the combined-strategist is going to force us to take every passage where it appears that God intends that sin occur as in fact involving so complicated an arrangement as God intending the *substratum* of the sin while having a triple-effect relationship to any goods that arise out of that sin considered in its sinfulness, with the intended means to these goods being unstated in the text.

We therefore consider appeal to the *substratum* strategy, the triple-effect strategy, and any combination thereof, to offer insufficient reason to overcome the natural force of the Scriptural passages. We do admit, however, that they do offer *some* resistance, and we therefore take note of how they could be deployed in the passages we go on to discuss.

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Passages from the Old Testament (Hebrew Scriptures)

Abstract This chapter analyses in depth a number of passages from the Old Testament (Hebrew Scriptures): Genesis 50:20, Exodus 4:21, Deuteronomy 2:26–30, Joshua 11:18–20, Judges 14:3–4, 1 Samuel 2:22–25, 2 Samuel 24:9–14, 1 Kings 22:19–23, Job 1:9–22, Psalm 105:25, Proverbs 16:4, Isaiah 6:9–10, and Ezekiel 20:25–26. For each passage, the chapter considers the amount of evidence (strong, moderate, or weak) that it provides for the book’s thesis, that God intends that sin occur. Also, for each passage the chapter considers alternative interpretations, interpretations on which God does not intend that sin occur. These interpretations are the *substratum* interpretation, the Kammian interpretation, and the combined *substratum*–Kammian interpretation.

Keywords Old Testament • Biblical exegesis • Exodus 4 • Lying spirit • Samuel • Ezekiel 20

Our procedure is as follows. Several verses or passages from the Christian Scriptures have been proposed by various people to show that God intends that sin occur. Welty (2018) details many of them. We proceed through them in the order in which they occur in the Scriptures, and then determine whether they do in fact indicate that God intends that the sin in question occur. We cover passages from the Old Testament (Hebrew Scriptures) in this chapter and passages from the New Testament in the next chapter. Some of the verses are not quite the sure-fire proof texts they

might at first seem to be, and where that is so we say as much. Others make it only plausible, rather than compelling, to suppose that God intends that sin occur. Nevertheless, some of them carry the requisite clarity for us to be confident in inferring that God sometimes intends that sin occur.

For each of the passages we discuss, we indicate whether the *substratum* strategy, perhaps combined with the Kammian strategy, can be implemented, and note how its interpretation might go. With respect to each passage, we ask first whether we can derive a proposition of this form from it:

(P) God chooses to bring it about that [a sin] occur in order that [a state of affairs] should obtain.

As we have already noted, our opponent can try to respond to this, however, by saying that while God intends that he bring it about that a sinful action occurs, God does not intend that the sinfulness of that action should obtain. For example, while it is true that, as a matter of fact, Pharaoh's saying (the Egyptian equivalent of) 'no' to Moses was sinful, it could be responded that God did not intend that it be sinful. Rather, it could be maintained against us that God intended only that Pharaoh say 'no' to Moses, and did not intend that he do so sinfully. To respond to this approach, it would be good for us to find a passage from which we can derive a proposition satisfying (P*):

(P*) God chooses to bring it about that [a sin] occur in order that [a state of affairs that can obtain only in virtue of the sin's occurring] should obtain.

In this case, our opponent would have a much harder time of it, since in this case God would need the sinfulness of the sin in order to achieve his goal. For example, if—as we later argue—God did choose to bring it about that Pharaoh say 'no' to Moses in order to bring about a state of affairs that could obtain only in virtue of that sin's occurring, then it will not suffice for our opponent to say that God intended only that Pharaoh say 'no' to Moses without intending that he do so sinfully. The reason why this will not suffice is that the mere intention that Pharaoh say 'no' to Moses does not suffice to accomplish God's goal in this case, since that goal precisely requires that sin occur. We explore in detail below whether our opponent can come back at us here.

We also rank the passages we discuss according to the following categories: Strong, Moderate, and Weak. In other words, the passage in question gives Strong evidence that God intends that sin occur, or Moderate evidence to that effect, or Weak evidence to that effect. Moderate evidence is, of course, still evidence. Moderate evidence for p should dispose you to believe p *ceteris paribus*.

In practice, if the probability is only around 0.5 that the verse or passage in question affirms that God intends that sin occur, we call it ‘Weak’. If the probability is greater than 0.5, but the combined strategy appears to offer an alternative possible interpretation, then we call it ‘Moderate evidence’. If the probability is greater than 0.5 and the combined strategy yields what seems to us a very improbable interpretation, then we call it ‘Strong evidence’.

6.1 GENESIS 50:20

As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today.

We have already discussed this verse in the preceding chapter. The following proposition was derived, satisfying (P):

- (1) God brought it about that *Joseph’s brothers sinfully sell Joseph*, for the sake of *saving many lives in Egypt*.

We noted that the *substratum* strategy was viable here, since the sinfulness of the brothers’ action was not strictly necessary for getting Joseph to Egypt, suggesting the following proposition instead:

- (1’) God brought it about that *Joseph moved to Egypt*, by dint of his brothers’ and the slave traders’ moving their bodies thus and so, for the sake of *saving many lives in Egypt*.

There are, however, reasons to doubt (beyond the usual ones noted before against the *substratum* strategy) the plausibility of this application of the *substratum* strategy here.

The verse says that ‘God meant *it* for good’. But what is the antecedent of ‘it’? Its antecedent, we suggest, is surely the ‘meant evil’. But then the verse is saying, *per* our original suggestion, that God intended that the meant evil, the evil intended by the brothers, occur. Thus, the *substratum*

strategy is undermined: God chose that sin occur as a means on that occasion, and intended that the sin occur.¹

Another problem is that it appears that v. 20 explains v. 19, and this fact cannot be incorporated into the *substratum* approach. In Genesis 50:19, Joseph says that he feels prohibited from punishing the brothers because he is ‘not in God’s place’. It appears that v. 20 explains this: because Joseph knows that God intended that their wicked actions occur for good, it appears to him that to punish the brothers for their misdeeds is in some way to go against the plans and counsels of the Almighty, or to display ingratitude to him, who employed the occurrence of such wickedness to such good effect in Joseph’s life and in the lives of many others. But if God didn’t intend that the evil deeds in question occur, as the *substratum* interpretation states, then the force of this reasoning diminishes, if not vanishes, particularly when we note that Joseph strikes a parallel between the brothers’ intentions and God’s: If the brothers’ intentions were not Kammian, why should we expect God’s to be?²

Ranking: Moderate

6.2 EXODUS 4:21

And the Lord said to Moses, ‘When you go back to Egypt, see that you do before Pharaoh all the miracles that I have put in your power. But I will harden his heart, so that he will not let the people go’.

God doesn’t want Pharaoh to let the Israelites go. To this end, he hardens Pharaoh’s heart so that Pharaoh will refuse Moses’s request to release the people. This refusal is, of course, sinful, so we seem to have a proposition satisfying (Q):

¹It should be noted that he need not have chosen this just to get Joseph into Egypt. Since God is omnipotent, we may presume that there were many other ways not depending on the occurrence of a sin that he could have chosen to get Joseph into Egypt. It is not unreasonable to suppose, however, that these other ways would have missed out on other goods, such as the good of Joseph’s forgiving his brothers for their sins.

²Note that because it is Joseph speaking here, his conceptual categories are the ones that we should take to be used or referred to—arguably, his mental inventory determines the range of the divinely inspired meaning. But he surely does not know anything about triple effect or the Aristotelian understanding of the *substrata* of acts. It is therefore unreasonable to understand his meaning as involving such things.

(2) God brings it about that Pharaoh's heart is hardened in order that Pharaoh sinfully refuse to let the people go.³

Evaluation: It might immediately be objected that the word 'sinfully' is not in the text, and that we should have written simply:

(2') God brings it about that Pharaoh's heart was hardened in order that Pharaoh refuse to let the people go.

The objector's point might be that it does not follow from the facts that God intended that Pharaoh refuse and that God knew that Pharaoh's refusal would be sinful that God intended that Pharaoh refuse sinfully. Perhaps, so the objector might say, God merely foresaw the sinful aspect of Pharaoh's refusal.

In response, let us make some remarks on God's broader purposes in this passage. While it does indeed appear that God hardens Pharaoh's heart *in order that* he refuse to let the people go, that is surely not God's ultimate objective here. So, what is? Why is God concerned to secure the occurrence of Pharaoh's persistent refusal? To what end is the occurrence of that refusal a means? The explanation is surely that offered in Exodus 9:12–16:

But the Lord hardened the heart of Pharaoh, and he did not listen to them, as the Lord had spoken to Moses. Then the Lord said to Moses, 'Rise up early in the morning and present yourself before Pharaoh and say to him, "Thus says the Lord, the God of the Hebrews, 'Let my people go, that they may serve me. For this time I will send all my plagues on you yourself, and on your servants and your people, so that you may know that there is none like me in all the earth. For by now I could have put out my hand and struck you and your people with pestilence, and you would have been cut off from the earth. But for this purpose I have raised you up, to show you my power, so that my name may be proclaimed in all the earth.'"

God could have finished the whole business earlier (v. 15—'For by now I could have put out my hand [...]'). Why has this not happened? Because God has been hardening Pharaoh's heart (v. 12), that is, making him refuse to let the Israelites go—a sinful refusal. Why has God been doing this? The answer given ('But for this purpose' (v. 16)) is that God's power

³It might be thought that (2') also satisfies (P), but this would be a mistake. We are interested in whether God intends that sins occur, and a hardened heart is not a sin. A sin is an action, and a hardened heart is a state of affairs, not an action.

would be more displayed this way, leading to a greater proclamation of his name both to Pharaoh and to the whole earth. God intended that the sinful refusals occur, as per this further proposition satisfying (P):

(2'') God chose to bring it about that *Pharaoh would sinfully refuse to let the people go*, in order that *God might give a greater demonstration of his power in plagues and in destruction of the Egyptians*.

It seems from this further information from the Scriptures, then, that the sinfulness of Pharaoh's refusal is integral to God's plans. In the first instance, this is because the way in which hardening is described in the Scriptures appears always to be a hardening to sin, as a review of every instance of 'hardened' in the Scriptures would bear out.⁴

Secondly, we saw in Exodus 9:16 that God intended to display his power to the world, and God's chosen means was a great display of his wrath or punishment.⁵ But each of wrath and punishment is justifiable only given sin, so, given that only sin would have enabled God to make the required display of wrath or punishment, it is more natural to read a *sinful* refusal on Pharaoh's part as the chosen means. (In other words, (2') is better read if interpreted as a (P*) text.)

The objector may insist that God intends only that Pharaoh perform the *substratum* of the sinful action, not that he do it sinfully, even though every refusal of God's command is sinful: this implementation of the *substratum* strategy presupposes a fine individuation of intentions, according to which God may intend that *p* and not intend that *q* even though God knows that it is necessarily the case that it's true that *p* if and only if it's true that *q*. Finally, another, simpler, possibility is that the objector may hold that God intended merely that Pharaoh have the good of a strong will (albeit a will that God foresees will be bent on evil)⁶ or the good of having his first-order desires correspond to his second-order desires (albeit desires that God foresees will be bent on evil).⁷

⁴ See Deuteronomy 2:26–30, Joshua 11:18–20, 2 Chronicles 36:13, and Daniel 5:20, and, from the New Testament, Mark 8:17, Acts 19:9, Romans 9:18, and Hebrews 3:13.

⁵ We take it that God's action here exhibits wrath in punishment, but if the reader thinks that only one of these obtains the conclusion will still follow.

⁶ We are grateful to Mark Murphy and to Alexander Pruss for this suggestion.

⁷ See (Kretzmann 1988) for an exploration of this line from the libertarian perspective. A similar defence could be mounted from a compatibilistic perspective, though it would leave unanswered the question why God had set things up that way.

Against all these implementations of the strategy, we plead (a) that these are very unnatural interpretations of the text, and (b) that God's stated aim, of making a show of his power in wrath or punishment presupposes that Pharaoh will continue to sin.⁸ Now, the defender of the *substratum* strategy may say here that Pharaoh's continuing to sin is a foreseen, but unintended, consequence of God's action (God's bringing it about that he refuse, or God's giving him a strong will). But what, then, would be God's end in bringing it about that he refuse, or that he have a strong will, if not that Pharaoh continue to sin? The text seems to say that God's end is to bring about a display of his power and proclamation of his name. But, as we have seen, the way in which Pharaoh's refusing, or his having a strong will, contributes to that is by constituting a sinful rejection of God's command.

At this point, the objector may combine the *substratum* strategy with the Kamm-inspired strategy, and insist that (1) God intends that he permit Pharaoh to sin and merely foresees that Pharaoh will sin, and that (2) God acts *because* the unintended but foreseen evil of Pharaoh's sin is outweighed by the goodness of God's display of his power and proclamation of his name. But we want to ask what God's intention is, on this interpretation, in permitting Pharaoh to sin. For a start, it is very implausible to understand hardening in terms of permission, but even if the idea is that God hardened Pharaoh by strengthening his will to carry out his already-existing desires or his second-order desires, we have to say again that this is not portrayed as God's goal in the text.

Ranking: Strong

6.3 DEUTERONOMY 2:26–30

‘So I sent messengers from the wilderness of Kedemoth to Sihon the king of Heshbon, with words of peace, saying, “Let me pass through your land. I will go only by the road; I will turn aside neither to the right nor to the left. You shall sell me food for money, that I may eat, and give me water for money, that I may drink. Only let me pass through on foot, [...] until I go over the Jordan into the land that the LORD our God is giving to us.” But Sihon the king of Heshbon would not let us pass by him, for the LORD your

⁸While it is true that Pharaoh has already sinned, the end of displaying God's power and having his name proclaimed is used to justify God's not having already finished the business, but his instead allowing it to carry on. The implication is that God wants Pharaoh to sin more in order that he can show more power.

God hardened his spirit and made his heart obstinate, that he might give him into your hand, as he is this day.’

In this passage, Moses is relating to Israel her recent history. He comments that when the Israelite people requested passage through the land of Heshbon, which belonged to Sihon, the king of that territory, he refused it to them. This refusal seems clearly to have been wicked, because it is described as coming from a hardened spirit and an obstinate heart, and because it justified what seems to be punitive action from God: the invasion of Sihon’s land and the slaughter of its people as related in Deuteronomy 2:32–36. Thus, we derive the following proposition satisfying (P*):

- (3) God chose to bring it about that *Sihon sinfully refused to let the Israelites pass through his land* so that *God might punish him* and give his land to the Israelites.

Evaluation: Perhaps an opponent might try to deny that Sihon’s refusal was sinful. Perhaps he was merely taking sensible precautions. But the stress on his obstinacy in the passage makes this implausible. Perhaps it might be responded that the invasion of Sihon’s land was *not* punitive, and, hence, that we cannot infer that his refusal to let the Israelites pass was sinful. In the context, however, it seems pretty clear that the refusal was sinful, not least because Moses’s request was couched in words of peace (Deuteronomy 2:26). And what would happen to the punitive element of the invasion if God did not intend that Sihon sinfully refuse? At this point, the objector might combine the *substratum* strategy with the Kamm-inspired ‘because’ strategy to suggest that God intentionally permits Sihon to refuse, and foresees that Sihon will sinfully refuse, and does this *because of* the opportunity it provides to punish him. But, once again, it seems implausible to read ‘hardened’ just in terms of permission, and, once again, it does not seem to fit with the text to insist that God did it simply for the good of a strong will, or for some other reason than the punitive one alluded to in the text.

Ranking: Strong.

6.4 JOSHUA 11:18–20

Joshua made war a long time with all those kings. There was not a city that made peace with the people of Israel except the Hivites, the inhabitants of Gibeon. They took them all in battle. For it was the LORD's doing to harden their hearts that they should come against Israel in battle, in order that they should be devoted to destruction and should receive no mercy but be destroyed, just as the LORD commanded Moses.

Joshua leads the Israelites in the conquest of northern Canaan. The Gibeonites had made peace with Israel through deception (Joshua 9), but the rest of the region is determined not to submit to Israel. Moreover, they are determined in this way because of God's actions. He has decided to harden them to make sure that they come out to make war with Joshua. Again, the text paints this as a wicked action on their part, and, again, God's response is punitive. We therefore derive the following proposition satisfying (P*):

- (4) God chose to bring it about that *the kings of northern Canaan sinfully refused to broker with the Israelites in any fashion* so that *God might punish them* and give their land to the Israelites.

Evaluation: This case is structurally parallel to the one from Deuteronomy 2:26–30. Again, because of the satisfaction of (P*), the *substratum* strategy by itself will be of no avail—the punitive nature of the treatment of the kings seems even clearer than the punitive nature of Sihon's defeat in the previous passage. Suppose that, once more, the objector tries to combine the *substratum* strategy with the Kamm-inspired 'because' line, suggesting that God intentionally permits the kings to refuse to broker with the Israelites, foresees that they will do so sinfully, and acts *because* this will provide him an occasion for punishing them and giving their land to the Israelites. Again, the language of 'hardening' in the text does not seem adequately reflected in the suggestion that God permits them to sin, and, again, it seems that it cannot be that his goal is to punish them and give their land to the Israelites if he does not intend *any* means to that end; that would be merely to hope or wish for the end, rather than to intend it. And it does not ring true to the text to suggest that God's ultimate goal was merely to permit the kings to refuse to broker with the Israelites, with everything else's being merely foreseen.

Ranking: Strong.

6.5 JUDGES 14:3–4

But [Samson's] father and mother said to him, 'Is there not a woman among the daughters of your relatives, or among all our people, that you must go to take a wife from the uncircumcised Philistines?' But Samson said to his father, 'Get her for me, for she is right in my eyes.' His father and mother did not know that it was from the Lord, for he was seeking an opportunity against the Philistines.

Here Samson has set his eye upon a Philistine woman, and is desirous that a marriage should be arranged between the two of them. His parents resist the idea of his marrying a Philistine, but they aren't aware that Samson's request is 'from the Lord'. We see later in Samson's story that this betrothal leads to conflicts between Samson and the Philistines, and culminates in Samson's slaughtering many of them. That sort of punishment is presumably what God was seeking opportunity to bring on the Philistines through Samson's initial marriage. So, we suppose the following proposition satisfying (P) can be derived:

- (5) God chose to bring it about that *Samson sinfully request a Philistine bride*, in order that he might give *Samson opportunity to inflict suffering on the Philistines*.

Evaluation: The *substratum* strategy can be deployed straightforwardly. We can leave Samson's sinfulness out of the picture, and replace (5) with (5'):

- (5') God brought it about that *Samson uttered various sounds and made the correct bodily movements, etc.*, in order to give *Samson opportunity to inflict suffering on the Philistines*.

Samson's inner mental life was not necessary to give the Philistines cause for offence; just so long as he said the right things and his body moved in the required ways, this would have been enough for a betrothal to have been arranged and for the Philistines to seek his life, and so on. Samson could have been devoid of any inner consciousness, and yet performed the required part equally well. So, God didn't need to intend the sinfulness for his desired end.

We concede that this is in principle possible, but we also press, as we did in the case of Joseph, the point that the reference of 'it' in v. 4 is surely most naturally taken as referring to Samson's sinful request. But then a

natural reading of the text is that this occurrence of sinfulness on Samson's part is also from the Lord.

Ranking: Moderate.

6.6 1 SAMUEL 2:22–25

Now Eli was very old, and he kept hearing all that his sons were doing to all Israel, and how they lay with the women who were serving at the entrance to the tent of meeting. And he said to them, 'Why do you do such things? For I hear of your evil dealings from all the people. [...]' But they would not listen to the voice of their father, for it was the will of the Lord to put them to death.

Here, Eli counsels his sons to abandon their wickedness, but the Lord, desiring to put them to death, ensures that they remain unrepentant, and therefore fit for his judgment. We therefore derive the following proposition satisfying (P):

- (6) God chose to bring it about that *Eli's sons sinfully refuse to heed their father's warning*, in order that he might *bring about their continued unrepentance*.

Evaluation: It is important to note that we reject one reading of this passage on which God brings it about that Eli's sons sinfully refuse their father's counsel so that God can put them to death for precisely that sinful refusal. This circularity would leave unexplained why God wanted them put to death. We think, by contrast, that God antecedently desires to put Eli's sons to death for the sins mentioned in verse 22, and the sinful refusal on the part of the sons is God's means, not to their death, but to their continued unrepentance, which was, in turn, a condition of God's being able justly to put them to death.⁹ This is why we derive (6).

In this example, the *substratum* strategy could be deployed either, as it was in the case of Samson, that Eli's sons merely perform certain physical actions, such as making the noise (corresponding to the Hebrew equivalent of) 'no' in response to their father's entreaty, or that God didn't intend anything *positive*, merely that they should not heed their father—a

⁹Or perhaps more than that. Perhaps the text implies that God intended that they should sin more in order that the punishment of death should be even more deserved.

mere *lack* as opposed to a positive *omission*.¹⁰ But we don't think that either of these is true to what is related in the passage. When it says, 'they would not listen to the voice of their father', this means that they heard and understood what Eli said, and made a decision to reject Eli's counsel. For, once they have heard, a decision is forced on them, for even if they decide not to think about it anymore, that constitutes a *de facto* decision to disobey. It might be retorted here that the decision to disobey is a foreseen but unintended consequence of the intended lack of heeding. But the question arises: Why, on this view, does God intend that they not heed their father or, on the first way of running the response, that they make the noise (corresponding to the Hebrew equivalent of) 'no' in response to their father's entreaty? The only answer available from the text is that God intended that the sons be justly punishable with death, which presupposes that they continue to sin. So, it seems inevitable that God chose to bring it about that they reject their father's counsel in order to bring it about that they continue to sin in order that he might justly put them to death.

Ranking: Strong

6.7 2 SAMUEL 24:9–14

Again the anger of the Lord was kindled against Israel, and he incited David against them, saying, 'Go, number Israel and Judah'. [...] But David's heart struck him after he had numbered the people. And David said to the Lord, 'I have sinned greatly in what I have done. But now, O Lord, please take away the iniquity of your servant, for I have done very foolishly.' And when David arose in the morning, the word of the Lord came to the prophet Gad, David's seer, saying, 'Go and say to David, "Thus says the Lord, Three things I offer you. Choose one of them, that I may do it to you."' So Gad came to David and told him, and said to him, 'Shall three years of famine come to you in your land? Or will you flee three months before your foes while they pursue you? Or shall there be three days' pestilence in your land? Now consider, and decide what answer I shall return to him who sent me.' Then David said to Gad, 'I am in great distress. Let us fall into the hand of the Lord, for his mercy is great; but let me not fall into the hand of man.'¹¹

¹⁰The difference between a mere lack and a positive omission can be seen in that we all lack the property of heeding Eli's counsel. Nevertheless, we do not omit to heed it, since an omission occurs only when a duty of some kind is breached, and we have no duty to heed Eli's counsel, since it wasn't addressed to any of us, even indirectly in its inclusion in the Scriptures.

¹¹One should bear in mind how the same event is related in 1 Chronicles 21:1: 'Then Satan stood against Israel and incited David to number Israel.'

Here God desires to punish Israel for their sins, and to provide an occasion for this, he brings about the occurrence of sin from Israel's king, David. David sinfully numbers the people, and he is very soon sorry for what he has done. God offers David the choice of three ways in which the people are to be punished, and David chooses pestilence for a reason that suggests he associates it more closely with God's punishment than the other two ways. About 70,000 of the Israelites die, and God thereby achieves the end he sought. We therefore derive the following proposition, satisfying (P*):

- (7) God chooses to bring it about that *David sins by numbering the people* in order that *God has an opportunity to punish Israel*.

Evaluation: Part of the puzzle with this passage concerns why it is that God is angry with Israel—no particular sin is specified on their part. But even if we suppose that they have sinned in some unspecified way, then there is a further puzzle concerning why it is that God appears to need to get David to sin before he can justly punish Israel. If the people are sinful on their own account, why does God need to get David to sin too? One might, on those grounds, push for the suggestion that God intended only the *substratum* of David's sin, that is, that God intended that David number the people, but merely foresaw, without intending, that in this context numbering the people would constitute a sin. One might assert it not to have been strictly necessary for God's purposes that David sin, for Israel had already sinned on their own account—God just wanted to create *an impression* of a necessary conjunction between Israel's sins and the sins of their king.

Yet several things in the passage make this implausible. (1) In the retelling of the event we find in 1 Chronicles 21, it says in verse 7 that 'God was displeased with this thing [David's census], and he struck Israel'. Although it is not explicitly stated that God struck Israel on account of this census, that is surely the natural implication. (2) In 1 Chronicles 21:17 and 2 Samuel 24:17, David declares the people are but innocent sheep in this regard. It would be strange if this were simply untrue. (3) It is surely the thrust of the passage that for David to sin in this regard is a significant and necessary step for God to bring upon Israel the punishment he wishes. To deny it is to favour an implausible reading. And if it is not to create an *appearance* of sin that God incites David to number Israel, for what other reason could it be, other than in order that David *actually* sin?

For these reasons, we think that the circumstances and God's reasoning process are best captured by the following: God is (for an undisclosed reason) angry at Israel; but, for God to punish Israel in the way he wishes, it must be the case (again for an unspecified reason) that David, Israel's king, sins; only then can God vent his anger on Israel in the desired way. But if this is the fairest portrayal of the matter, then it seems that God intends that David sins in order that his end be realised.¹²

Ranking: Strong

6.8 1 KINGS 22:19–23

Micaiah said, 'Therefore hear the word of the Lord: I saw the Lord sitting on his throne, and all the host of heaven standing beside him on his right hand and on his left; and the Lord said, "Who will entice Ahab, that he may go up and fall at Ramoth-gilead?" And one said one thing, and another said another. Then a spirit came forward and stood before the Lord, saying, "I will entice him". And the Lord said to him, "By what means?" And he said, "I will go out, and will be a lying spirit in the mouth of all his prophets". And he said, "You are to entice him, and you shall succeed; go out and do so". Now therefore behold, the Lord has put a lying spirit in the mouth of all these your prophets; the Lord has declared disaster for you.'

Here God, as reported by Micaiah the prophet, tells a lying spirit to go and entice Ahab into going up to Ramoth-gilead. The lying prophets say to Ahab, 'Go up to Ramoth-gilead and triumph; the Lord will give it into the hand of the king' (v. 12); their 'prophecy' does indeed turn out to be false (vv. 34–37). Lying is said in the Scriptures to be a sin (Leviticus 19:11), so it looks as though God here intends the occurrence of the sin of lying in order to bring about the goal of Ahab's going up. We thus derive this proposition:

- (8) God chooses to order that *a lying spirit lie* in order that *Ahab might be enticed to go up to Ramoth-gilead*.

Evaluation: Our opponent here could argue that God did not intend that the lying spirit lie, merely that the lying spirit utter the sounds (or the mental equivalent) corresponding to the Hebrew equivalent of 'Go up to Ramoth-gilead and triumph; the Lord will give it into the hand of the

¹²Arminius also thinks that the *substratum* strategy does not work here: (Arminius 1853: 433).

king'. But, since the lying spirit says itself that it will be 'a lying spirit', and not merely 'an uttering spirit', it seems that the spirit intended to make a false assertion, and that when God says 'go out and do so', he is, therefore, asking the spirit to be a lying spirit, rather than a mere uttering spirit. Nor will it do to say that the Hebrew here translated 'lying spirit' should actually be translated 'false spirit',¹³ since to assert something that one knows to be false just is to lie.¹⁴

Or perhaps our opponent here could say that God intended merely that the lying spirit entice, and didn't have any intentions at all with respect to the means by which the spirit would entice. On this interpretation, 'go out and do so' just means 'go out and entice', not 'go out and be a lying spirit'. Against this, however, it seems implausible that God would use the lying spirit if he did not intend that the spirit lie: Surely God, being omnipotent, could have achieved the desired end of Ahab's going up to Ramoth-gilead by other means?

Our opponent here could also deny that the lying spirit sins. Our opponent could argue that the Scriptural prohibition translated 'you shall not lie to one another' (Leviticus 19:11) rules out only the asserting of an untruth to someone that has the right to know the truth (Ramsey 1968: 89). Since Ahab, it could be argued, has no right to know the truth here, there is no sin in asserting an untruth to him. This would also explain why God seems to be encouraging or ordering the spirit to lie.

This possibility undermines the usefulness of the text for our purposes.

Ranking: Moderate.

6.9 JOB 1:9–22

Satan answered the Lord and said, 'Does Job fear God for no reason? [...] stretch out your hand and touch all that he has, and he will curse you to your face'. And the Lord said to Satan, 'Behold, all that he has is in your hand. Only against him do not stretch out your hand'. [...] Now [...] there came a messenger to Job and said, 'The oxen were ploughing [...] and the Sabeans fell upon them and took them and struck down the servants with the edge of the sword [...]'. [...] Then Job arose and [...] said, [...] 'The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord'. In all this Job did not sin or charge God with wrong.

¹³ In the parallel passage of 2 Chronicles 18, the ESV has 'deceiving spirit'.

¹⁴ Cf. (Aquinas 1920: IIaIIae.Q110.a1.*resp*). This definition of 'lie' is controversial, but there is no space to defend it here.

Here there are two sins mentioned: the sin of Satan in trying to get Job to curse God to his face and the sin of the Sabeans in stealing Job's oxen and killing his servants. The text also mentions two things that are not sins: Job's saying that the Lord had taken away his blessings ('In all this Job did not sin'), and God's so doing ('Job did not [...] charge God with wrong'). Not only does Job say that the Lord has taken away, but the book's concluding chapter states that Job's family 'showed him sympathy and comforted him for all the evil that the Lord had brought upon him' (Job 42:11), and God himself says that Job has spoken of him what is right (Job 42:7). So, we seem to have two propositions satisfying schema:

(P) God chooses to bring it about that a [sin] occurs in order that a [state of affairs] should obtain.

In other words:

(9) God chooses to bring it about that *Satan sinfully afflict Job* in order that *Job's patience and faith under affliction may be demonstrated*.

(9a) God chooses to bring it about that *the Sabeans sinfully rob Job* in order that *Job's patience and faith under affliction may be demonstrated*.

Evaluation: It seems that our opponent could use the *substratum* strategy here, as Arminius notes:

In the affliction of Job, God desired that the patience and constancy of His servant should be tried, and it was tried by the affliction not as a sin but as an act. (Arminius 1853: 433)

Indeed, it would suffice for God to intend the bodily movements of the Sabeans without intending their guilty mind, and it would suffice for God to intend that Satan cause the natural disasters that befall Job, without intending that he do so sinfully.

There is a plausible reply to the *substratum* strategy, however: it seems important that the book records both the occurrence of evils that are obviously sins (the robbery and murder committed by the Sabeans and the Chaldeans) and the occurrence of evils that look like natural disasters (the fire from heaven that consumes his sheep and shepherds, the great wind that takes the lives of his sons and daughters, and the loathsome sores that cover Job's body). If, in fact, God intended the occurrence of the natural evils, but not the occurrence of the moral evils, then that might weaken

the force of the book, since the book presents Job as, in some ways, an archetype for *all* human suffering. The book is intended to speak to those feeling the distinctive pain of being sinned against, as well as to those feeling the general pain of hurt (cf. Welty 2018).

Ranking: Moderate.

6.10 PSALM 105:25

He turned their hearts to hate his people, to deal craftily with his servants.

This psalm relates Israel's exodus from Egypt, and it says of the Egyptians that God turned their hearts to hate the Israelites, and that this led to the Egyptians' dealing craftily with the Israelites. One therefore might try to derive the following proposition satisfying (Q):

(10) God chose to *turn the hearts of the Egyptians to hate the Israelites* in order that *the Egyptians would deal craftily with the Israelites*.

Evaluation: We don't think this verse is of much use for our purposes. The crafty (and therefore presumably wicked) dealing of the Egyptians, and their hatred of the Israelites, can both be read as mere consequences of God's turning the Egyptians' hearts, not as intended effects. Although we think that the more natural reading is that God did intend both effects, we think it is hard to prove that from a short, poetic text.

Ranking: Weak.

6.11 PROVERBS 16:4

The Lord has made everything for its purpose, even the wicked for the day of trouble.

This verse would appear to provide the opportunity to derive a proposition satisfying (P*). The verse is ambiguous in what exactly it is communicating. It may be that the wicked are made for a day when their wickedness will be unleashed to cause trouble; or it may be that they are made for the Day of Judgment when God's glory will be displayed in their destruction. But, in either case, it must be that they are wicked for those purposes to be accomplished. God therefore must intend their wicked deeds as the means to either of these described ends. The proposition satisfying (P*) could, therefore, be:

(11) God chooses to bring it about that *wicked people exist* in order to *punish them for their wickedness on the Day of Judgment/let their wickedness be unleashed in the day of trouble*.

Evaluation: Sadly for our purposes, there is another way of reading this verse. The New International Version prefers this other reading, and renders the verse as follows: ‘The Lord works out everything to its proper end—even the wicked for a day of disaster.’ On this understanding, the verse is only understood to communicate that God is working eventually to punish the evildoer. The NIV reading is a minority reading, and perhaps to be avoided *ceteris paribus* on that ground—most translations accept, broadly, the ESV reading we gave above—yet we concede that the possibility of this other reading implies that the text is not sufficiently clear for our purposes.

Ranking: Weak.

6.12 ISAIAH 6:9–10

And God said, ‘Go, and say to this people; “Keep on hearing, but do not understand; keep on seeing, but do not perceive.” Make the heart of this people dull, and their ears heavy, and blind their eyes; lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their hearts, and turn and be healed.’

One might think that the passage licenses the derivation of the following proposition satisfying (Q):

(12) God chooses to bring it about that *Isaiah makes the heart of the people dull* in order that *they should refuse to believe*.

Evaluation: Sadly for our purposes, we do not think that the passage demands the truth of (12). The text does not specify *refusal* as God’s stated objective, merely an absence of seeing, hearing, and understanding—an absence of belief. Such an absence is not an action, it is a state of affairs not, by its nature, sinful. After all, a rock displays a similar absence of understanding, but that is not sinful, nor even an evil. It is possible that God’s intentions as described in Isaiah may therefore be fully captured by the following proposition:

(12’) God chooses to bring it about that *Isaiah makes the heart of the people dull* so that *they do not believe*.

One should also bear in mind certain instances where Jesus cites this verse in the Gospels. In Mark 4:12, Matthew 13:14–15, and Luke 8:10, Jesus cites Isaiah 6:9–10 to explain why he speaks in parables. He does it to ensure that certain people will not believe. Again, however, we think that the same move that is made with respect to the Isaiah passage may be made on those occasions also: it isn't clear that Jesus intends as his end any sinful refusal to believe, merely a deficiency in mental or spiritual acuity.

Ranking: Moderate to Weak.

6.13 EZEKIEL 20:25–26

Moreover, I gave them statutes that were not good and rules by which they could not have life, and I defiled them through their very gift in their offering up all their firstborn, that I might devastate them. I did it that they might know that I am the LORD.

In this chapter of Ezekiel, God gives a brief history of Israel, pointing out the continual wickedness of the nation. Towards the end of this history, God, presumably out of his great anger at the repeated moral failure of Israel, decides to give to the nation of Israel statutes that are 'not good'. There is some debate about what these statutes were.¹⁵ But, whatever they were, one consequence of them was that the Israelites were defiled (whether by their failure to keep them, or because they were wicked statutes that tended to defilement). And God brought about this defilement that he might devastate them. This devastation surely refers to punitive wrath, and, thus, culpable failure on the Israelites' part with regard to their defilement is presupposed. So, we derive the following proposition satisfying (P*):

(13) God chose to bring it about that *the Israelites be sinfully defiled*, in order that *he might devastate them in his wrath*.

Evaluation: We cannot think of any plausible way out for an opponent. The objector might try to argue that God intended only to permit the Israelites to defile themselves, and merely foresaw that they would in fact

¹⁵ Some commentators think the statutes were pagan strictures that the Israelites sinfully adopted. Early Christians thought that the Mosaic law was being referred to here. There is also the view that the phrase refers to the Deuteronomic code, a code containing elements that weakened Ezekiel's own stricter priestly code: (Hahn and Bergsma 2004).

do so, but the *punitive* nature of the wrath requires the very sinfulness of the sinful offerings the Israelites made, for only thus could they merit punishment. The objector might here once more deploy the combined *substratum*-and-Kamm-inspired strategy, and insist that God permits the Israelites to defile themselves *because of* the fact that they will then merit punishment. But the text holds out only one intention, namely that they might be defiled so that they might be devastated.¹⁶ We therefore consider this verse strong evidence that God intends that sin occur.

Ranking: Strong.

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¹⁶ Could one say that the ‘that’ in ‘that I might devastate them’ in v. 26 is expressive of result, rather than of purpose? Not in the opinion of Daniel Block, who writes that while such ambiguity is present in ‘rules by which they could not have life’ in v. 25, in v. 26 ‘Yahweh declares his intentions explicitly: *so that I might devastate them*’ (Block 1997: 637).

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CHAPTER 7

Passages from the New Testament

Abstract This chapter analyses in depth a number of passages from the New Testament: Acts 2:23 and Acts 4:27–28, Romans 9:21–24, Romans 11:25–32, Galatians 3:19–22, 2 Thessalonians 2:11–12, 2 Peter 2:12, Revelation 17:16–17, and Revelation 22:10–11. For each passage, the chapter considers the amount of evidence (strong, moderate, or weak) that it provides for the book’s thesis, that God intends that sin occur. Also, for each passage the chapter considers alternative interpretations, interpretations on which God does not intend that sin occur. These interpretations are the *substratum* interpretation, the Kammian interpretation, and the combined *substratum*–Kammian interpretation.

Keywords New Testament • Biblical exegesis • Predestination • Acts • Romans 9-11 • Reprobation

7.1 ACTS 2:23 AND 4:27–28

[T]his Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men.

Acts 4:27–28: [T]here were gathered together against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the

Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, to do whatever your hand and your plan had predestined to take place.

The first passage here quoted, Acts 2:23, seems to say that God planned it that Jesus should be sinfully delivered up, and the second passage quoted, Acts 4:27–28, seems to say that Herod, Pontius Pilate, and so on were doing what God had predestined when they were sinfully gathering and acting against Jesus. So, we seem to have a proposition satisfying schema (P), that is to say:

- (1) God chooses to bring it about that *Jesus should be sinfully delivered up and sinfully put to death* in order that *God's plan of redemption should be fulfilled*.

Evaluation: Our opponent has a response here. It can be insisted that God intended the physical movements of the handing over of Jesus, and the hammering in of the nails into his hands and feet on the cross, but that he did not intend, and only foresaw, that these movements would be performed sinfully. How plausible is this response? The verse frankly affirms that Jesus's being delivered up was part of God's plan (2:23), and Jesus's being delivered up was a sinful affair. It strikes us as forced to insist that the sinfulness involved in Jesus's betrayal and his being delivered up was not part of God's plan. ('Plan', of course, suggests intention.) It seems to us likewise forced to insist that the sinfulness involved in Jesus's being killed by the hands of lawless people was not part of God's plan. The moral failure involved in the story of Jesus's betrayal and trial is, after all, one of the most striking features of those narratives in the gospels.

We also find the 'whatever' in 4:28 to be suggestive. It naturally suggests that, *whatever* Herod, Pilate, and the people ended up doing to Jesus, it was all part of God's predestined plan. But sinful acts were performed on Jesus. Therefore, sins are part of God's predestined plan. Our opponent might, however, insist that the 'whatever' is to be understood as communicating that *whatever God predestined to take place* in this context was done by Herod, Pilate, and so on, not that everything that they did in this context was predestined by God. Thus, on this suggestion, it is not clear that the sinful acts were part of God's predestined plan.

We concede the possibility of this reading, but we find the first understanding of 'whatever' to be more plausible because the latter understanding has the strange consequence that perhaps very little at all of the affair was intended by God, for the second reading makes no comment on how

much of the matter was intended by God—it says only that what God *did* intend in this matter came to pass. But surely what is meant here is something more substantive than that: that it *was not possible* for them to do something to Jesus that was outside what God had planned and predestined to occur—whatever they did to Jesus, it was part of God’s plan and predestination that it should be so.

Ranking: Moderate.

7.2 ROMANS 9:21–24

Has the potter no right over the clay, to make out of the same lump one vessel for honourable use and another for dishonourable use? What if God, desiring to show his wrath and to make known his power, has endured with much patience vessels of wrath prepared for destruction, in order to make known the riches of his glory for vessels of mercy, which he has prepared beforehand for glory—even us whom he has called, not from the Jews only but also from the Gentiles?

In this chapter of Romans, Paul has asserted that God has the right both to have mercy as he sees fit, and to harden as he sees fit, and the case of Pharaoh is adduced as proof of the existence of the latter right. Paul then anticipates the response of an objector in v. 19, rendering it as follows: ‘Then why does God still find fault? For who resists his will?’. To this, Paul responds by introducing the metaphor of the potter and the clay—asserting that God has the right to create vessels for destruction as well as to create vessels for mercy—and then follows this with the quoted suggestion above that perhaps the reason why (or, as it seems to us, his intention in so doing) God creates vessels for destruction is so that God can, through a display of righteous wrath on these wicked vessels, make known the riches of his glory, that is, make it plain just what it is from which the vessels of mercy have been spared, and how great that mercy is in consequence. So, we think the following proposition can be derived satisfying (P*):

- (2) God chooses to bring it about that *there exist wicked people* so that he might *make known the riches of his glory through their punishment*.

Evaluation: Someone might object that, since Paul prefixes the remarks of vv. 22–23 with a question beginning ‘what if’, it would not be germane to employ these verses as part of our case. But this would be a mistake.

Paul, even though he is not committing himself to the truth of the explanation he gives, is surely offering it as adequate for all the Christian might know. But if we know that God cannot (or even does not) intend that sin occur, then it isn't adequate for all the Christian knows. It might be responded that Paul is giving an *a fortiori* argument, that he is saying, 'even if God had chosen to create you as a wicked person (which he couldn't have done) you still would have had no grounds for complaint'. But v. 21 is not preceded by a 'what if', and that verse, by affirming that the potter, and therefore God, has the right to create vessels for either honourable or dishonourable use, suggests the actual permissibility of God's acting in this way. Secondly, Paul is giving a quick sketch of a theodicy here, explaining why it is that God would harden some into unbelief, or why this would be morally permissible (namely, 'to make known the riches of his glory for vessels of mercy'). But the passage cannot function to present a theodicy if God cannot (or does not) possess the relevant intentions. Thirdly, v. 24 connects the theodicy to concrete fact: the hardening of the Jews so that the Gentiles might be brought in. Thus, God's acting after this manner cannot be considered a pure hypothetical.

For all these reasons, it appears Paul has no qualms about suggesting that God uses (or may permissibly use)—and intends (or may permissibly intend)—that sin occur as a means, and so neither, we contend, should we have any qualms in this regard.

A significant point to note is that there is some controversy among commentators about whether to give the 'desiring to show his wrath and power' clause a concessive or a causative reading. The relevant portion might be rendered in one of two ways:

Concessive: '*although* desiring to show his wrath and to make known his power...'

Causative: '*because* desiring to show his wrath and to make known his power...'

An objector might insist on the former reading in an effort to argue that it is not the case that God created these vessels in order to destroy them; rather, God merely restrained himself from destroying them for a great while in order to display his great patience to the vessels of mercy. Against this reading, many things can be said.

- (1) Even if true, such reasoning doesn't remove the force of the expressions 'for dishonourable use' and 'prepared for destruction'.
- (2) The concessive reading doesn't interact with the objector's objection in v. 19. The objector was demanding to know why God was bringing about the existence of blameworthy persons. For Paul to offer in response the suggestion that God delays punishing them in order to display mercy is for him to fail to interact with the objector. It seems to switch the question from 'why did you make or raise up these bad vessels?' to 'why have you not already destroyed these bad vessels?'.
- (3) The text does not say that God refrains from destroying the vessels of wrath prepared for destruction in order to display his patience. It says that God refrains from destroying them 'in order to make known the riches of his glory for vessels of mercy'. How would refraining from destroying them contribute to this end? On the face of it, it would go against this end, since if the vessels of wrath prepared for destruction were to fare in this life just as the vessels of mercy do, then that would seem to obscure, rather than make known, the riches of his glory to the latter. The riches of his glory to the vessels of mercy are surely made known in the contrast between the fates of the vessels: destruction for the vessels of wrath and glory for the vessels of mercy.
- (4) As Piper (1993, 207) points out, in the parallel displaying of power in v. 17 ('I raised you up for this very purpose, that I might display my power in you') we clearly have a case in which God raised up Pharaoh because he desired to display his power, so, to adopt the concessive reading would be to break the obvious parity that exists between v. 17 and vv. 22–23.
- (5) The concessive reading is a minority reading among commentators.¹

Again, a difficulty with the *substratum* strategy is that it is the very sinfulness of the vessels prepared for destruction that God requires, else they could not be legitimate objects of his just wrath and destructive power. Our opponent might try to combine the Kamm-inspired strategy and the *substratum* strategy, holding that God prepares them in foreknowledge of the foreseen but unintended sins that they will commit, and prepares them *because* the opportunity to make known the riches of his glory for vessels

¹ Piper (1993: 207) remarks that 'Most commentators [...] do construe *thelon* as a causal clause, and the most compelling reason is the parallel in thought and language between 9:22 and 9:17'.

of mercy outweighs the evil of the sins. But, once more, God's intention in allowing them to sin, on this view, is not in harmony with the text's phrase 'in order to make known the riches of his glory for vessels of mercy'.

We conclude that these verses should strongly dispose one to believe that God is capable of intending that sin occur.

Ranking: Strong.

7.3 ROMANS 11:25–32

[A] partial hardening has come upon Israel, until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in. And in this way all Israel will be saved [...] For just as you were at one time disobedient to God but now have received mercy because of their disobedience, so they too have now been disobedient in order that by the mercy shown to you they also may now receive mercy. For God has consigned all to disobedience, that he may have mercy on all.

In this passage, Paul explains that the partial hardening of Israel was brought upon the nation in order that salvation might go out to the Gentiles, and in order that, on account of this mercy shown to the Gentiles, the Jews might also seek after salvation and find it. In Romans 11:11, Paul suggests that this will be accomplished through envy: 'through their trespass salvation has come to the Gentiles, so as to make Israel jealous.' But Paul doesn't assert merely that the Jews were made disobedient in order that mercy might be given to the Gentiles, he asserts also that all, both Jewish and Gentile, have been made disobedient in order that God might have mercy on all.

Therefore, from the passage from Romans 11 we derive the following proposition satisfying (P*):

- (3) God chose to bring it about that *the Jews (and indeed everyone) were sinfully disobedient* in order that he might *have mercy on them (and indeed everyone)*.

Evaluation: It seems that the *substratum* strategy will not bite, since the mercy that God wants to bestow is forgiveness of sins, and the occurrence of sin is a necessary condition of the occurrence of forgiveness. Again, the objector may combine the *substratum* strategy with the Kamm-inspired triple-effect strategy, and suggest that God intended merely to permit the Jews (and indeed everyone) to be disobedient, and merely foresaw that they actually would be disobedient, but thought his act of permission still

worth it because of the foreseen good of the mercy he could then distribute.

As before, we don't think that the language of 'hardening' in verse 25 can be read as merely permitting disobedience, and, as before, the text seems to hold out the having of mercy as God's end. But if God does indeed intend that end, then, in order for it to be a real intention rather than just a hope or a wish, God surely has to intend some means, or part of a means, to his goal—and the hardening mentioned in the text fits the bill perfectly.

Ranking: Strong.

7.4 GALATIANS 3:19–22

Why then the law? It was added because of transgressions, until the offspring should come to whom the promise had been made [...]. Is the law then contrary to the promises of God? Certainly not! For if a law had been given that could give life, then righteousness would indeed be by the law. But the Scripture imprisoned everything under sin, so that the promise by faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe.

In this passage from Galatians, Paul is dealing with the objection that salvation through faith makes the advent of the law mysterious. Paul says that it was added because of, or for the sake of, transgressions. He goes on to say that 'the Scripture imprisoned everything under sin, so that the promise by faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe'. We believe that both expressions here in the Galatians passage are making the same point: the purpose of the Scripture, or of the law, was to bring about transgressions. Paul noted this function of the law in Romans 7:9: 'I was once alive apart from the law, but when the commandment came, sin came alive and I died.' So, the passage from Galatians shows that God gave the Scriptures, or the law, in order to bring it about that sin occur.

Therefore, from the passage in Galatians we derive the following proposition satisfying (Q):

(4) God chose to *give the law* in order that *people should disobey it*.

Evaluation: We acknowledge that there are ways out for objectors here. The expression 'added because of transgressions' from Galatians can be interpreted to mean 'added in order to manage and halt transgressions'. The Message Bible gives that reading: 'The purpose of the law was to keep

a sinful people in the way of salvation until Christ (the descendant) came.’ The expression has also been interpreted to mean ‘to make aware of what counts as transgression’. Hence the Good News Translation: ‘What, then, was the purpose of the Law? It was added in order to show what wrongdoing is.’ Likewise, the expression ‘Scripture imprisoned everything under sin’ might be understood merely to mean that the Scriptures made people aware of their sins. So the New Living Translation: ‘But the Scriptures declare that we are all prisoners of sin’. We concede that such interpretations are possible, and therefore hold this passage to be of limited use for our purposes.

Ranking: Weak.

7.5 2 THESSALONIANS 2:11–12

Therefore God sends them a strong delusion, so that they may believe what is false, in order that all may be condemned who did not believe in truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness.

In this passage, Paul speaks of the Antichrist and the effects he will have. Verse 11 relates the effects God desires to bring upon ‘those who are perishing’ (v. 10). One might think a proposition satisfying (P) can be derived:

- (5) God chooses to bring it about that certain people believe what is false, in order that they may be condemned.

Evaluation: An objector has a couple of plausible responses here, however. For one thing, believing what is false is not a sin. Such a state of affairs can be arrived at in a manner in which no moral responsibility is violated. A *decision* to believe what is false might well be sinful, but it isn’t clear that God’s intentions here are concerned with *decisions* on the part of ‘those who are perishing’. For another thing, it looks as though the ‘strong delusion’ is responsive to the already sinful status of ‘those who are perishing’. So, God doesn’t need to bring about a sinful decision on their part to guarantee their condemnability—it looks as though they are guilty already, and God is concerned only to make sure that they stay that way. It can be maintained against us, then, that the strong delusion involves no sinful decision, and is the means God employs to ensure that sinful persons in a certain category *remain* sinful and condemnable.

We could try to respond by arguing that if God wants them to stay in the state of condemnability, then God intends that they should not repent. But it is a sin not to repent. So, we might say that God wants them to commit the sin of *failing* to repent in order that he may be able justly to condemn them. To this, the objector can counter, however, that God intends that they have the mere lack of repentance, a lack common to inanimate objects as well as to some moral agents, and merely foresees that this will amount to a sin in the circumstances. Although this doesn't seem a natural reading of the text to us, we cannot refute it. We do, however, affirm that the text shows the weaker thesis that God intends, if not that sin occur, that there at least be sinful people.

Ranking: Weak.

7.6 2 PETER 2:12

But these, like irrational animals, creatures of instinct, born to be caught and destroyed, blaspheming about matters of which they are ignorant, will also be destroyed in their destruction.

In this chapter of 2 Peter, Peter declaims at great length concerning the evil of certain false teachers that have crept into the believers' assemblies. He describes them in this verse as akin to irrational animals 'born to be caught and destroyed'. Such an expression naturally suggests that these false teachers were created and given their wicked lives by God precisely for the sake of being caught and destroyed by God's wrath. We therefore derive the following, satisfying (P*):

- (6) God chose to bring it about that *there were wicked false teachers* in order that *they might be caught and destroyed by God's wrath*.

Evaluation: Unfortunately, it isn't quite clear whether the 'born to be caught and destroyed' clause is to be considered as modifying the 'irrational animals'/'creatures of instinct', or, on the other hand, 'these' false teachers. If the former, then there is a quick riposte available for our opponent. It can be suggested that 'born to be caught and destroyed' applies to the irrational animals that the false teachers *resemble*. But it doesn't follow from '*a* is F' and '*b* is like *a*' that '*b* is F'—not every property is carried over. So, we don't have to conclude that the false teachers were born to be caught and destroyed. We concede this point as a matter of logic, though we think that the fact that Peter should bother at all to introduce

the property of being born to be caught and destroyed signifies that he wishes the property to be imputed to the false teachers—why should he mention properties that he doesn't want to be considered as carrying across?

A more plausible response for the objector is to say that the expression 'born to be caught and destroyed' just means 'born predestined to be caught and destroyed', the idea being that predestination includes not merely what God intends but also the consequences of God's intentions. Strong's survey of the meaning of '*eis*' would appear to bear out the possibility of the term's being given such a construction (Strong 1890: 'eis', B.II.3.b). Alternatively, 2 Peter 2:12 might merely be expressing a relation of natural 'fitness' for eventual destruction, not divine intention. Against this, however, is the fact that, according to Ephesians 2:3, 'we all once lived in the passions of our flesh [...] and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind', so this would arguably not be in any way a distinguishing characteristic of the false teachers. All in all, we consider this verse to give only weak evidence that God intends that sin occur.

Ranking: Weak.

7.7 REVELATION 17:16–17

And the ten horns that you saw, they and the beast will hate the prostitute. They will make her desolate and naked, and devour her flesh and burn her up with fire, for God has put it into their hearts to carry out his purpose by being of one mind and handing over their royal power to the beast, until the words of God are fulfilled.

Here, John describes the way in which the ten horns (symbolising ten rulers) will hand their power over to the beast and take it away from the whore of Babylon, and the way in which they will destroy her with fire. To hand power over to the beast as opposed to the prostitute is a wicked thing, for Revelation presents the beast as a greater evil than the prostitute, and it indicates how great the descent into wickedness will be in the later times. But God says they fulfilled *his purpose* in doing this. God doesn't specify the end that he seeks here, but we nevertheless suggest the following proposition satisfying (P):

(7) God chooses to bring it about that *the ten horns transfer their power to the beast*, in order to achieve *an unspecified purpose*.

Evaluation: Although transferring their power to the beast is sinful, a transference of power by its nature is not sinful. Our opponent might point out, therefore, the possibility that God intended that they transfer their power to the beast, but did not intend (and merely foresaw) that they *sinfully* transfer their power to the beast. The text does, however, mention their ‘being of one mind’ as part of God’s purpose here, which suggests that God’s intentions also concerned the mental states involved here. We believe the natural suggestion of the passage is that God intended that they *decide* to transfer their power to the beast. Further, that decision was a sinful decision. But the question concerns whether God intended that sinful element, as opposed to merely foreseeing it.

We acknowledge that there is nothing in the passage compelling one to think that God intends the sinful aspects of the ten horns’ behavior. We plead only that introducing such subtleties goes counter to the *prima facie* reading of the text. This is not as forceful a piece of reasoning as we should like, however.

Ranking: Weak.

7.8 REVELATION 22:10–11

And he said to me, ‘Do not seal up the words of the prophecy of this book, for the time is near. Let the evildoer still do evil, and the filthy still be filthy, and the righteous still do right, and the holy still be holy’.

Here, the angel to whom John is talking gives him a curious instruction: to let the evildoer still do evil, and the filthy still be filthy. Whatever the reason for it, the command surely represents God’s intentions. One might therefore derive a proposition satisfying (P):

- (8) God *gave a command to John to let the evildoer continue to do evil and the morally depraved to continue in their depravity* in order that *the evildoer would continue to do evil and the morally depraved would continue in their depravity*.

Evaluation: We think there are too many ways to deal fairly with the passage while avoiding the derivation of (8). One might take God as making that command not in order that the evildoer continue in doing evil, but in order that John might not be unduly burdened about the intractability of the wicked. And even if God did have intentions with regard to the filthy and evildoers, they might be intentions not to bring about

wicked decisions or even wicked states, but merely to refrain from preventing such things. Lastly, there is the general point that one does not always give a command with the intention that it be carried out.

For these reasons, we think that little weight can be placed on this passage for our purposes.

Ranking: Weak.

7.9 CONCLUSION

We rank the evidence we have provided to the effect that God intends that sin occur as follows:

Strong Evidence that God intends that sin occur: Exodus 4:21; Deuteronomy 2:26–30; Joshua 11:18–20; 1 Samuel 2:22–25; 2 Samuel 24:9–14; Ezekiel 20:25–26; Romans 9:22–23; Romans 11:30–32.

Moderate Evidence that God intends that sin occur: Genesis 50:20; Judges 14:3–4; 1 Kings 22:19–23; Job 1; Acts 2:23 & 4:27–28.

Weak Evidence that God intends that sin occur: Psalm 105:25; Proverbs 16:4; Isaiah 6:9–10; Galatians 3:19–22; 2 Thessalonians 2:11–12; 2 Peter 2:12; Revelation 17:17; Revelation 22:10–11.

Therefore, in the light of several strong proof texts and several moderate proof texts that God intends that sin occur, we affirm that the rational stance for the Christian to take in the face of these Scriptural texts is to affirm that God intends that sin occur.²

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²There are also further texts that we could have marshalled in favour of our case: Exodus 7:3–4, Judges 9:23, 1 Samuel 16:14, 2 Samuel 12:11 & 16:11, 1 Kings 12:15, 2 Chronicles 25:20, Proverbs 21:1, Isaiah 63:17, Ezekiel 23:25, Amos 3:6, Habakkuk 1:12, and 1 Peter 2:8. It would not surprise us if there are many more still.

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CHAPTER 8

Objections and Concerns

Abstract This chapter responds to some objections and concerns. First, it discusses some Scriptural passages that might be adduced against the book's thesis that God intends that sin occur: Habakkuk 1:13, Romans 3:7–8, Matthew 18:4–7; Luke 17:1–2; Mark 9:42, James 1:13–14. Then, it responds to some philosophical objections that have been adduced against the book's thesis. It concludes with a discussion of whether the book's thesis imperils the place occupied by the Doctrine of Double Effect in Christian teaching, concluding that it may still hold good on the human-to-human ethical plane.

Keywords Habakkuk 1 • Romans 3:8 • James 1 • Temptation
• Leibniz • Double effect

In this final section, we discuss some remaining worries and objections. We divide the objections into two types: Scriptural and philosophical. We begin with the Scriptural.

8.1 HABAKKUK 1:13—GOD CANNOT LOOK AT WRONG

You who are of purer eyes than to see evil and cannot look at wrong, why do you idly look at traitors and remain silent when the wicked swallows up the man more righteous than he?

Habakkuk 1:13 is adduced by Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274) in *Summa Contra Gentiles* (1259–1265) as a proof text for the view that ‘God cannot will evil’ (Aquinas 1975: I.95). The complaint that Habakkuk makes in the verse is occasioned by God’s declaration (vv. 5–11) that he is raising up the Chaldeans as his instrument of judgment—a people described as ‘that bitter and hasty nation, who march through the breadth of the earth, to seize dwellings not their own’. Habakkuk appears to have difficulty accepting that God should raise up such a cruel people to do his will, and he expresses his confusion on this point in v. 13.

Aquinas and others seem to think that the verse refutes our thesis as follows. Habakkuk declares God to be such that he is too pure to see evil, that God cannot bring himself to look at wrongdoing. But our project appears to run counter to the spirit of this verse, for it appears that, far from God’s recoiling in horror at sin, our contention is that God decides for his own purposes to bring it about that sin occur.

We make three points in response.

First, it is unwise uncritically to accept as true everything that a prophet utters. Many commentators take issue, for instance, with some of Jeremiah’s utterances, holding him to speak impulsively and improperly at points.¹ It is possible to read Habakkuk’s remark as embodying a similar sort of failure. After all, God made it clear in vv. 5–11 that he was raising up a wicked people to accomplish his ends. It is not difficult to read Habakkuk’s complaint as expressing a refusal to accept and incorporate that revelation. And, indeed, when God replies to Habakkuk in Chap. 2, God doesn’t disavow the wicked violence of the Chaldeans. Instead, he promises more violence (2:17), albeit violence that functions as just retribution upon the Chaldeans. We do not rest anything on this point, however.

Secondly and chiefly, it is obvious that we cannot take Habakkuk’s expression as literally true. God can indeed see and look at sinfulness. God cannot function as a judge punishing sin unless he knows exactly what sins have taken place. Indeed, Habakkuk’s point is that God *does* look at evil people, the traitors he mentions, and their wrong actions, the swallowing up of those more righteous than they. The puzzlement embodied in Habakkuk’s question arises from the fact that God seems to be looking at their sins with approbation, since he does not prevent them from

¹The *ESV Study Bible*, for instance, remarks regarding Jeremiah 20:7 that ‘Jeremiah’s complaints are not always pure’ (*ESV Study Bible* 2008: 1410).

occurring. This is puzzling because Habakkuk knows, as he reminds the reader, that God is pure and therefore finds sin abhorrent. So much so that it is as if he must turn his face away from it, unable to behold it. That is the anthropomorphism we take to be in use here. But that God hates sin is not something we deny; on the contrary, it is something on which we insist. It is quite possible to abhor something, and yet intend that that thing come to be. One might find the prospect of amputating one's child's leg abhorrent, but nevertheless decide to do it if one were persuaded that it were the only way of stopping a gangrenous infection from taking the life of one's child. What God's hatred of sin implies is, we think, that God will intend that sin occur only if certain goods can be achieved thereby (his desire for those goods outweighing his horror at the evil). And, in many of the passages we have discussed, God appears to be describing those goods.

This view is not unique to us. Gill (1763) comments on this verse:

The Lord with his eyes of omniscience beholds all things good and evil, and all men good and bad, with all their actions; but then he does not look upon the sins of men with pleasure and approbation.

Thirdly, this passage could be used as an extra proof text for our case. God describes the Chaldeans, in addition to what has already been mentioned, as follows (1:10–11):

They laugh at every fortress, for they pile up earth and take it. Then they sweep by like the wind and go on, guilty men, whose own might is their god!

This makes the wickedness of the Chaldeans clear. But, despite that, God has no qualms in affirming that he is raising them up (1:6) and that the ascension of the Chaldeans is his work (1:5).

8.2 ROMANS 3:8—THE BAN ON DOING EVIL THAT GOOD MAY COME

Romans 3:7–8 says this:

But if through my lie God's truth abounds to his glory, why am I still being condemned as a sinner? And why not do evil that good may come?—as some

people slanderously charge us with saying. Their condemnation is just.
(Rom. 3:7–8, ESV)

Here, Paul deals with a critic that supposes that it is a corollary of Paul's doctrine that one might do evil so that good may come. Paul rejects the thought, and condemns those that impute the suggestion to the early Christian church.

But what could 'doing evil' so that 'good may come' amount to other than *intending that sin* (or a sin) occur for the sake of some good? Thus, an objection to our central contention appears: what Paul condemns here is intending that sin occur for the sake of a good end (and therefore *a fortiori* for a bad end). To do such a thing is wicked, affirms Paul. But such behaviour is precisely what we, the authors, say that God does. But God can perform no wicked act. Therefore, God cannot intend that sin occur.

We give two responses.

First, we don't think that Paul's 'do evil' (*poiēsōmen ta kaka*) must be rendered as 'intend that sin occur'. It seems reasonable to us to suppose that Paul's meaning can be captured by the following parsing:

(A) And why not *sin* so that good may come?—as some people slanderously charge us with saying. Their condemnation is just.

Thus, Paul can be read not as condemning intending that sin occur for the sake of a good end, but as condemning *performing sinful acts* for the sake of a good end. In that case, the verse makes no comment one way or the other on whether it is always wrong to intend that sin occur. If there are occasions where it is not sinful to intend that sin occur, then such occasions are not covered by the verse. Some might hold, of course, that intending that sin occur is always a sinful act, but that is the very point at issue. Such a person cannot simply appeal to Romans 3:8 to establish that, given the ambiguity we have identified here. We believe that whether an act of intending that sin occur counts as sinful depends on other considerations—it doesn't follow from the nature of such acts that they are always sinful. We discuss whether or not it is permissible for human beings to intend that sin occur at the end of this chapter.

Secondly, we note that, even if Paul is to be understood as condemning intending that sin occur for the sake of a good end, then it is possible that he has only human-to-human ethics in mind. God has the right to do many things to human beings that we human beings do not have the right

to do to each other. God, for instance, has the right to end a human being's life, if he wishes. But we do not have that right. Thus, one might well imagine Paul writing, in a different context where he faced a different sort of slander, 'Should we kill other people so that good may come? As some slanderously report us as saying?'. Were Paul to write such a thing, it would be unreasonable, we suggest, to take Paul as stating killing others always to be sinful, even in the case of God.² It is simply taken as read that God is often a special case. Thus, even if it is always impermissible for human beings to intend that sin occur, it is consistent with that that it is permissible for God to intend that sin occur. There is, therefore, no clear threat to our central contention here.

8.3 MATTHEW 18:4–7; LUKE 17:1–2; MARK 9:42— THE LITTLE ONES AND THE MILLSTONE

This saying occurs in all the synoptic gospels, but the fullest discussion is in Matthew's gospel, where Jesus says the following:

Whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. Whoever receives one such child in my name receives me, but whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him to have a great millstone fastened around his neck and to be drowned in the depth of the sea. Woe to the world for temptations to sin! For it is necessary that temptations come, but woe to the one by whom the temptation comes! (Matthew 18:4–7)

Jesus speaks here of 'little ones', and it isn't straightforward to determine the class of person Jesus has in mind. Believers? Young believers (either young in physical age or young as believer)? Young children (whether believing or unbelieving)? At any rate, the maximum extension of this expression appears to be the set of everyone that is either a child or a believer. Two things that Jesus says concerning them are pertinent to our case. He condemns those that would 'cause one of those little ones who believe in me to sin' and declares woe upon such people: 'woe to the one by whom the temptation comes!'

² Compare 1 Corinthians 15: 27, 'For "God has put all things in subjection under his feet." But when it says, "all things are put in subjection," it is plain that he is excepted who put all things in subjection under him'. The Scriptures clearly countenance implicit exceptions, especially relating to God, that are too obvious to mention.

But what does Jesus mean by ‘cause ... to sin’ (*skandalisē*)? It is surely not merely causing a little one to sin that earns Jesus’ ire here. After all, one may cause a believer to stumble in sin while being entirely and blamelessly unaware that one is doing so. Doing loud carpentry that causes the Christian in the apartment below to lose his temper, say. Thus, one might argue, it is better to understand Jesus’s condemnation as follows: ‘Woe to those that act with the intention that a little one should sin, or that bring about a little one’s sinning though negligence.’

But if that is a correct understanding, then it is true that

(B) It is wrong to intend that a little one sin

And this might cause problems for our project in two ways. First, one might hold that the truth of (B) is best explained by a more general fact:

(C) It is wrong to intend that sin occur.

And if (C) is true, then, so the argument goes, God does not intend that sin occur, because God does nothing wrong.

The second possible problem for our project is as follows. Even if one does not accept the inference from (B) to (C), one might nevertheless complain that the overall implication of our project is that God is frequently involved in planning that various sins occur, and that some of the sins that he intends should occur are the sins of little ones. Thus, (B) by itself is a problem for our project because, again, God does nothing wrong.

In response, we deny that the ground of the wrongness present in (B) is such that it carries over straightforwardly to the divine case. It does not follow from its being wrong for *a human being* to intend that a little one sin, that it is wrong for *God* to intend that a little one sin. We repeat what we said in discussion of Romans 3:8 above, that God is plausibly taken as a special case. We will return later in this chapter to the question what makes our situation relevantly different from God’s.

We also note that Jesus seems to have in mind here little ones’ being led astray through temptation (v. 7), and one might wonder whether our view implies that God is the one from whom temptation sometimes comes—a problem for our view because surely Jesus would not declare woe against God. But the ESV is misleading here. A more literal rendering of the relevant part of the verse is ‘woe to the human (*anthrōpō*) by whom the

temptation comes!'. We therefore have explicit indication that Jesus' focus is directed at human beings, with the divine position not in view.

However, the question of how God relates to instances of temptation forms an apt segue into the next text from the Scriptures with which we deal, James on God and temptation, where we offer fuller discussion of this point.

8.4 JAMES 1:13–14—GOD DOES NOT TEMPT

In James's epistle, he writes the following:

Let no one say when he is tempted, 'I am being tempted by God', for God cannot be tempted with evil, and he himself tempts no one. But each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire. (James 1:13–14)

This passage's assertion that God tempts no one, in conjunction with an account of what temptation consists in, can be pushed as an objection to the idea that God intends that sin occur. For what is it to tempt someone (to sin) if not to place them in a situation with the intention that they sin in that situation, it may be asked? Thus, from James's insistence that God tempts no one, we can infer that God never places anyone in a situation with the intention that they sin in that situation. But that conclusion is at odds with the central thesis of this book.

This is how Samuel Fancourt (1678–1768) puts the objection:

If the divine being will'd the fall of Adam [...] then God's will was the cause of his fall [...]. But to necessitate to sin is more than to tempt; and yet we are forbid to say, or think, *When we are TEMPTED, we are tempted of God: For God cannot be tempted of evil, neither tempteth he any man.* (Fancourt 1727: 90–91, punctuation original)

In response, we deny that temptation in the sense that James means can be adequately analysed as placing someone in a situation with the intention that they sin in it. To tempt someone involves, we believe, a *communicative presentation* of a sinful action as being one that the tempted person would be, in some sense, better off for doing. This may involve explicit persuasion, such as when the Devil offered Jesus all the kingdoms of the world if Jesus would but worship him (Matthew 4:8–10); or it might be a purely non-verbal matter, such as decorating the entrance to a

brothel with flashy and alluring neon lights. But each example is of a communicative act. Each, in some way, intentionally presents a wicked course of action as desirable, thereby signalling a measure of endorsement of that course of action.

It is this sort of communicative presentation, this endorsement, that we deny that God ever gives to a sinful course of action. God himself may intend on a particular occasion that someone fall when tempted, but he does not personally endorse the temptation. God, we believe, intended that Satan tempt Jesus in the precise way that he did, for example, but Satan's words on that occasion were not God's words. Satan, not God, was the asserter, the communicator there. We therefore hold that God himself offers no communicative encouragement to anyone to sin even though he may bring about the opportunity for them to do so. Indeed, on the contrary, far from offering anyone communicative encouragement to sin, God publicly condemns sin.

In this connection it is worth noting that when God wishes for a human being to be tempted into sin, he is presented in the Scriptures as procuring the services of evil spirits for the task (Judges 9:22–24; 1 Samuel 16:14–23; 1 Kings 22:20–23; 1 Chronicles 21:1). God uses third parties here, we believe, precisely because God's holiness precludes him from offering a communicative presentation of sin as favourable. That would be dishonest communication, and God is not dishonest. But, although God does not lie, the spirits he sends do. At any rate, it is chiefly this idea—the idea that God might be *enjoining* a believer to sin through a particular episode of temptation—that we believe James is concerned to correct in this passage.³

But there is also the affective dimension to be considered. A friend might fall into a sinful practice, and then encourage you to join in on account of the great enjoyment that they find in it, thereby tempting you. Your friendship with them thus imperils you. The idea that something like this might happen to God the Father—he is placed under a sore desire to sin, a desire that gets spread out in some way to his followers—is also an idea James appears concerned to repudiate here by his insistence that God 'cannot be tempted with evil'. Of course, if part of what James intends to rule out is that God *likes* sin, then that is no difficulty for our view. We

³Note that James writes of God that 'he himself' (the addition of *autos*) tempts no one. The emphasis there is suggestive: James likely has in mind the episodes in the Old Testament of God's sending lying spirits, and so on, and therefore is careful to direct his focus on the behaviour of God himself, as opposed to the behaviour of the spiritual agents that God sends.

reaffirm our conviction that God hates sin, even though we believe he intends that particular sinful acts occur.

Thus, by affirming both that God finds sin repulsive and that he offers no communicative encouragement to anyone's sinning, we believe that we have adequately aligned ourselves with James's meaning in this passage. But it is perfectly possible for God to intend that sin occur while hating sin and refusing to offer any communicative encouragement to the effect that people should engage in sin. Thus, there is no problem here for our project.

Finally, should anyone be suspicious about the more restrictive meaning we impose on James—more restrictive, that is, than our objector's—we offer two more points.

First, that the Lord's Prayer surely forces us to read James more restrictively. Jesus himself instructs us to pray to our Father in Heaven, entreating that he 'lead us not into temptation' (Luke 11:4). The fact that such a request needs to be made suggests that God does indeed frequently lead his people into temptation. One might respond that when God leads someone into temptation, he doesn't intend that they succumb to that temptation. We agree that God's intending that they succumb doesn't follow from what is implied by the Lord's Prayer, but the point is that by granting that God sometimes leads people into temptation, one is already forced to restrict the first-blush reading of James. And if it is agreed that God frequently deliberately leads people into tempting situations, then it no longer seems a stretch to say that God leads people into temptation with the intent that they fall into sin thereby.⁴

Secondly, if one is to read the passage from James (and the passage from Matthew) as entailing that God does not intend that sin occur, then we point out that that is to place those verses at odds with the force of the many verses we have discussed earlier, and it seems to us that the combined strength of the verses we discussed in earlier chapters outweighs whatever countervailing strength might be had by the verses discussed in this chapter. Thus, submission to the overall force of the testimony of the Christian Scriptures should incline one to our view.

⁴Indeed, one might argue, why *would* God lead a believer, say, into temptation, knowing, let us assume, that they would fall to the temptation (or that they had a very good chance of doing so), if not in order that they might fall, and learn some lesson, such as spiritual humility, thereby?

8.5 PHILOSOPHICAL CONCERNS (I): MOONEY AND WHITE

Certain thinkers have, while securing various other theological desiderata, gone to some pains to avoid the implication that God intends that sin occur. (Mooney 2019), for instance, is concerned that the use of greater-good defences in response to the argument from evil carries the ready implication that God intended that sin and evil occur for the sake of the goods arising therefrom. He therefore introduces a distinction between foreseen and intended means parallel to the distinction between foreseen and intended effects. This is similar to the idea presented in (Kamm 2007), but Mooney appeals to voluntary bodily movements to illustrate his version of the idea. It seems that when one forms an intention to move one's arm, one does not, typically, intend the intermediate physiological causal chain involving one's nervous system (even when one is aware that that is how one's body works). We thus have a case, Mooney avers, of a fore-known but unintended means. We might say something similar, he says, in the case of God:

But if my hand-raising intention is effective by means of an unintended physiological causal chain, then perhaps some of God's volitions are also effective by means of unintended intermediary causes. In particular, perhaps God can cause certain evils which are a necessary means to some good simply by intending that good or a broader, good state of affairs which includes that good, while merely foreseeing and not intending the evils themselves. (Mooney 2019: 219)

White (2016) makes a suggestion in a similar vein. His concern is that theological determinism appears to imply that God intends that sin occur. White prefers to think of God as standing outside time and actualizing the whole of history, the whole space-time block, 'all at once'. White believes that such a picture of the matter permits one to avoid any troublesome implication about God's intending that sin occur. For if God is simply selecting from timeless eternity his preferred possible history to actualize, then the sin in that history is not God's causal means to the actualization of the good in that history, even though it is necessary to it, for God's bringing about of the sin in that history (insofar as he may be said to do that) is not causally prior to his bringing about of the good in that history—he indivisibly causes the whole thing to come to be. White concludes:

Thus it is perfectly possible for the theological determinist to hold that God *intends* the good aspects of the world but merely *foresees* the evil aspects. There is no need to hold that God ever intends evil, although his will determines every detail of creation. (White 2016: 92)

We do not challenge here, as a matter of pure philosophy, Mooney's and White's suggestions.⁵ We simply note that, since the Scriptures affirm that God has intended that certain sins occur, Mooney's and White's enterprises are unnecessary and misguided.

8.6 PHILOSOPHICAL CONCERNS (II): A LEIBNIZIAN OBJECTION

Someone might be sceptical, however, about our use of the Scriptures. Such a person might put to us the following objection in the spirit of G. W. Leibniz (1646–1716):

Look, all this in the Scriptures about God's intending this or that—it's all just non-literal talk. God is accommodating himself to our lowly conceptual arena. He doesn't really have all these discrete intentions; the only end he really seeks is to create this, the best of all possible worlds, and his whole undivided creative energy is the sole means.

We respond that it would simply be too misleading on God's part for him to present himself as seeking numerous different ends across the Scriptures, and employing a wide variety of means for those different ends, if he didn't, in fact, intend those things individually. The Scriptures tell us, for instance, that God chastens believers *for their good* (Hebrews 12:9–11). If we are to understand that God intended only the great world ensemble,

⁵ However, note the response of Alexander Pruss (1973–) to this idea that by God's actualizing a broader state of affairs that has sin as a part, we can avoid the suggestion that God intends that sin occur: '[It may be responded that] God creates the cosmos in all its spatio-temporal extent as a whole, and hence the means–end analysis is inapplicable. However, the inapplicability of means–end analysis does not follow. For even an agent who produces a sophisticated work as a whole “all at once” would be apt to engage in means–end reasoning such as: “This part of the work (e.g., Eve's sin) is to exist to make fitting that part (e.g., the work of redemption).” The means here may not be causal means, but they are nonetheless intended for the sake of other aspects of the work.' (Pruss 2016: 193).

then this looks untrue.⁶ There is quite a difference between God's saying, 'I intended this time of trial for your strengthening in righteousness', and his saying, 'The fact that that time of trial strengthened you in righteousness was just a by-product of my seeking the greatest possible world'. The first is profoundly personal. The second is not. Thus, we take the implications of the Leibnizian objector's scepticism for the accuracy of the Scriptures' talk about God's intentions to be too damaging to accept.

8.7 PHILOSOPHICAL CONCERNS (III): THE DOCTRINE OF DOUBLE EFFECT AND CHRISTIAN ETHICS

Finally, one might take issue with our project because it involves, one might think, the denial of the Doctrine of Double Effect (DDE), and because of the broader implications that denial would have for Christian ethics. Drawing from (Cavanaugh 2006) and (Mangan 1949: 43), we can state the DDE as follows. A person may permissibly perform an action that they foresee will produce a good effect and a bad effect provided that four conditions are met:

- (i) The action in itself is good or at least morally indifferent.
- (ii) The good effect and not the evil effect is intended.
- (iii) The good effect is not produced by means of the evil effect.
- (iv) The good effect is sufficiently good to compensate for the permitting of the evil effect.

This doctrine is said by (McIntyre 2019) to have its origin in (Aquinas 1920: II-II.Q64.a7), and has held a venerated position in Roman-Catholic thought, and also, on that account, in the Christian tradition more generally.

Our arguments given in this volume for the claim that God intends that sin occur involve God in a straightforward violation of conditions (ii) and (iii) of the DDE, however: we have affirmed both that God intends that certain evil effects of his actions (namely, certain sins) occur and that the good effects of certain of God's actions are produced by means of certain evil (sinful) effects.

⁶Alexander Pruss's point mentioned in the previous footnote would work against this—but, as we mentioned, it also works against the original suggestion.

But if there is no absolute prohibition on intending that sin occur (for God does it, and it is compatible with his perfect goodness), then, an objector might argue, the floodgates have been opened. How did Christians respond to utilitarian-style reasoning that was happy to employ wickedness as a means to a greater good? They appealed to DDE: ‘wicked means cannot be justified by good ends!’. But if DDE is false, then this response can no longer be straightforwardly made. Moreover, the great tradition of ethical theory that Christian philosophers from Aquinas to Elizabeth Anscombe (1919–2001) have built around the principle of double effect (concerning euthanasia, abortion, just-war theory, and so forth) must now be disregarded.

So runs the objection. We do grant that our position will have various implications for Christian ethics, but we are sympathetic to accounts on which ethics at the intra-human level remains largely unchanged. Consider Jonathan Edwards (1703–1758) on the issue:

the [...] reason why it would not be lawful for a creature to permit evil to come to pass, and that it would not be wise and good and virtuous in him so to do, is that he has not perfect wisdom or sufficiency, so as that it is fit such an affair should be trusted with him—he goes beyond his line, he goes out of his province, he meddles with things too high for him. It is everyone’s duty to do things fit for them in their sphere, and commensurate to their power. God never betrustrusted this providence into the hands of creatures of finite understandings, nor is it proper that he should. (Edwards 1743)

Edwards’s position appears to be that God has not entrusted human beings with the right or privilege of intending that sin occur. God considers them not wise enough to be good stewards in that regard. One might put the following gloss in terms of rights on the matter: it is permissible to intend that sin occur only if one has the relevant sort of rights over the sinner, but only God has such rights; the only way, therefore, for non-divine beings permissibly to intend that sin occur is if God grants them that right, but he has not granted human beings that right.

If such an account is true, then it does indeed look as if much of the Christian ethical tradition can be drawn from without alteration. For, although our contention implies that God-to-human ethics is a rather different matter from what the Christian tradition has typically supposed, it does not follow from that that there needs to be any great shift in how we understand human-to-human ethics.

Nevertheless, although this suggestion from Edwards appears to us to have shown that there *need* be no shift in human-to-human ethics, what reason have we to believe that, as a matter of fact, God has not granted to us the right to intend that sin occur?

We believe that Jesus' warning discussed above in Matthew 18—'whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him to have a great millstone fastened around his neck and to be drowned in the depth of the sea'—goes quite a way to establishing this. Jesus' warning here is couched in terms so dreadful that no sensible Christian could consider it a light matter to lead a little one into sin, even a 'small' sin.

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