

Free Will, Grace, and Anti-Pelagianism

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Abstract: Critics of synergism often complain that the view entails Pelagianism (or at least semi-Pelagianism), and so, critics think, monergism looks like the only live (orthodox) option. Critics of monergism often claim that the view entails that the blame for human sin ultimately traces to God. Recently, several philosophers (including Richard Cross, Eleonore Stump, and Kevin Timpe) have attempted to chart a middle path by offering soteriological accounts which are monergistic (and thus avoid Pelagianism) but maintain the resistibility of God's grace (with the aim of blocking the tracing of sin to God). In this paper, we present a challenge to such accounts of the resistibility of grace, namely that they imply that human beings are praiseworthy for omitting to resist God's grace. Even if such views escape Pelagianism as it is typically defined, they fail to avoid the worry at the heart of prominent criticisms of Pelagianism concerning the praise for a human being's salvation. At the end of the paper, we suggest three possible solutions to this problem.

Keywords: free will; moral responsibility; omissions; Pelagianism

1. Introduction

In debates about Christian soteriology, there are monergists and synergists. Monergists maintain that God brings about the salvation of human beings without their cooperation, and synergists maintain that human cooperation is required for salvation. A common complaint (especially popular among Reformed theologians) against synergism is that the view entails Pelagianism,¹ or at least semi-Pelagianism, both of which are unorthodox.² A common complaint

¹ We say more about Pelagianism in the subsequent section, but minimally, as Stump puts it, "What characterizes all forms of Pelagianism is the claim that a human being is capable of some good act without grace" (2003: 401). Since semi-Pelagianism has it that the first steps toward faith (or some other good act) is from us and not God's grace, we will treat semi-Pelagianism as one form of Pelagianism.

² As Cross (2005: 199-200) notes (in a passage we discuss below), the Second Council of Orange deems Pelagianism unorthodox, and many think that requiring human cooperation for salvation is tantamount to requiring that a human being do some good act apart from grace. Cross (2005: 199) also notes that some (particularly Calvinist theologians) are skeptical that even the doctrine of the resistibility of grace (much less full-fledged synergism) is consistent with rejecting Pelagianism.

against monergism, on the other hand, is that the view entails that the blame for human sin ultimately traces to God; since not everyone accepts God's grace, and since (according to monergism) the acceptance of God's grace and ceasing to sin is brought about by God alone, God is apparently blameworthy for failing to intervene in all cases.³ In order to avoid the problems with each of the soteriological positions, Richard Cross (2005), Eleonore Stump (2003), and Kevin Timpe (2007) have recently offered accounts which are monergistic (and thus avoid even semi-Pelagianism) but maintain the resistibility of God's grace (with the aim of blocking the tracing of sin to God).⁴ On each account, God alone is causally responsible for the human being's salvation, despite the human being's ability to resist grace.

As we argue in this paper, however, the reasons for being anti-Pelagian are not limited to the issues concerning who is causally responsible for salvation. At the heart of many criticisms of Pelagianism is the concern that it entails that the human being deserves praise for her

³ See, for example, Stump's (2001) worry for Augustine's soteriology. Stump recommends an alternative account (which we discuss below), influenced by Aquinas's moral psychology, which she takes to avoid this worry:

Augustine's difficulties would be solved if he could find a way to hold that human beings are able, on their own, to reject grace, without God's being ultimately responsible for their doing so. Suppose that God offers to every person the grace that produces the will of faith, but that it is open to a person to refuse that grace. Then the will of faith would be a gift of God, but it would be up to a human person whether he had such a will or not.

Augustine is kept from such a solution by his conviction that he would then also have to say that human persons have it in their own power to accept grace. (2001: 139-140)

⁴ It is worth noting that Cross, Stump, and Timpe might plausibly be construed as synergists, since they believe that some cooperation (or at least some refraining from being uncooperative) of the human being is required for salvation. But we must keep in mind that, even if it means that the human being plays some role in salvation, such cooperation will not come to a causal contribution to salvation (indeed, on these views, human beings contribute nothing positive to their own salvation), since each takes God to be the only causal source of salvation. Nothing we say here hangs on whether or not Cross, Stump, and Timpe are construed as monergists.

salvation, which many theologians (especially Reformed ones) have denied. Even if it could be shown that, on some soteriological account, God alone is causally responsible for a human being's salvation, it would be a problem for that account, some might say, if it entails that a human being nevertheless deserves praise for her salvation (despite that salvation's being caused by God alone). It is important, then, to distinguish these two worries about Pelagianism and to consider whether both can be avoided by any monergistic account that maintains the resistibility of grace.

To this end, we will first, in section 2, say more about the distinction between the two worries about Pelagianism, the first about the causal role of human beings in their own salvation and the second about the praiseworthiness of human beings for their salvation. Next, in section 3, we will survey the three accounts defended by Cross, Stump, and Timpe, each of which maintains the resistibility of grace and yet eschews Pelagianism. We argue that, while it is clear that each account avoids the first worry about Pelagianism, the second worry about Pelagianism presents a challenge to each account. Finally, in section 4, we suggest three ways that these accounts may attempt to deal with the praiseworthiness problem.

2. Two Worries About Pelagianism

Getting clear on the troubling aspects of Pelagianism is complicated by the fact that the term *Pelagianism* is used equivocally to refer to the historical movement following Pelagius as well as a set of theological positions. Moreover, the members of the set of the theological positions labeled *Pelagian*, while not unrelated, do not obviously hang or fall together. For example, Pelagius was infamous for denying the orthodox doctrine of original sin, but one can maintain original sin and yet run afoul of Pelagianism by (say) maintaining that nonetheless

human beings cause their own salvation. For our purposes, however, only two of the several theological worries (and nothing to do with the historical movement) associated with Pelagianism are relevant to the accounts we will consider in the next section. Our aim is to show that the main council condemning Pelagianism (namely, the Second Council of Orange), as well as Pelagius's most outspoken contemporary critic (namely, St. Augustine), expressed these two worries about Pelagianism, and that these worries provide constraints on any soteriological account in this tradition, which includes the accounts of Cross, Stump, and Timpe. We will begin, then, by providing relevant passages from the Second Council of Orange and from St. Augustine, and we will then spell out the soteriological constraints endorsed by these anti-Pelagians.

To see the first worry about Pelagianism, consider Canons 3 and 9 of the Second Council of Orange:

Canon 3. If anyone says that the grace of God can be conferred as a result of human prayer, but that it is not grace itself which makes us pray to God, he contradicts the prophet Isaiah, or the Apostle who says the same thing, "I have been found by those who did not seek me; I have shown myself to those who did not ask for me" (Rom 10:20, quoting Isa. 65:1).

Canon 9. Concerning the succor of God. It is a mark of divine favor when we are of a right purpose and keep our feet from hypocrisy and unrighteousness; for as often as we do good, God is at work in us and with us, in order that we may do so.

Referring to these Canons, Cross helpfully articulates the first worry about Pelagianism (though he thinks that this just *is* Pelagianism):⁵

According to Canon 9 of the Second Council of Orange (529), every good act that we do is brought about in us by God. In line with the Catholic tradition, I understand ‘good’ here to mean “salutary,” and that the view that is being condemned is that we can in any sense cause our own salvation. Thus, Canon 3 of the same council condemns the view that the grace of God “can be conferred by human invocation,” a condemnation that (if read synonymous with Canon 9) is in accord with the interpretation of ‘good’ I am presupposing here. And this gives us the “Pelagian” view that we somehow cause our own justification. (2005: 199-200)⁶

On Cross’s view, Pelagianism is problematic because it maintains that human beings can cause some part of their salvation, and this view is condemned by the Second Council of Orange.

Timpe is similarly concerned with the causal role of human beings when he formulates his anti-Pelagian constraint on any plausible soteriological account: “No fallen human individual is able to cause or will any good, including the will of her coming to saving faith, apart from a unique

⁵ According to Cross, “The semi-Pelagian view is distinct from the Pelagian since the view that the beginning of our justification is from us does not entail that view that our justification is in any sense caused by ourselves” (2005: 200). Still, everything we say about Pelagianism (which we are taking to be the more general category, subsuming semi-Pelagianism) can be applied, *mutatis mutandis*, to semi-Pelagianism, since what’s at issue in the latter is either whether or not the human beings causes the beginning of (or first steps toward) her justification or whether or not the human being deserves praise for the beginning of (or first steps toward) her justification.

⁶ Cross goes on to say, “Note that if grace is irresistible, then we have no causal role in the reception of grace, and Pelagianism is thus *ipso facto* false” (2005: 200). But Cross is mistaken here. Even if God’s grace is irresistible, it might nevertheless be the case that the mechanism by which the grace is received involves causes internal to the agent, such as the agent’s exercising faith and repentance.

grace” (2007: 285). Timpe is concerned with good in general, but it will suffice here to focus on the good of the parts of salvation (such as coming to have faith), whether or not human beings can cause or will goods that are independent of salvation.⁷ The first worry about Pelagianism, then, which plausible soteriological accounts should avoid, is that it allows for human beings to cause some good part of their salvation (such as their coming to have faith) apart from grace.

To see the second worry about Pelagianism, it will be helpful to consider other Canons of the Second Council of Orange as well as some passages from St. Augustine. Let’s start with the former, and in particular Canons 16 and 18:

Canon 16. No man shall be honored by his seeming attainment, as though it were not a gift, or suppose that he has received it because a missive from without stated it in writing or in speech. For the Apostle speaks thus, "For if justification were through the law, then Christ died to no purpose" (Gal. 2:21); and "When he ascended on high he led a host of captives, and he gave gifts to men" (Eph. 4:8, quoting Ps. 68:18). It is from this source that any man has what he does; but whoever denies that he has it from this source either does not truly have it, or else "even what he has will be taken away" (Matt. 25:29).

Canon 18. That grace is not preceded by merit. Recompense is due to good works if they are performed; but grace, to which we have no claim, precedes them, to enable them to be done.

⁷ Note that we are concerned only with the “unique” grace involved in salvation, not a more common grace. Our claims are consistent with the view that, for example, Aquinas held, according to which someone who has not received saving grace could nevertheless will “natural law” goods like happiness and survival.

The view condemned in these Canons is the view that a human being can, without (or before) grace, do some meritorious work (or be honorable because of some seeming attainment) in some part of salvation. St. Augustine reiterates this worry about Pelagianism in his anti-Pelagian works:

For there are three points, as you know, which the catholic Church especially defends against them [Pelagians]. One of them is that the grace of God is not given according to our merits because all the merits of the righteous are also the gifts of God and conferred by the grace of God. (1999: 193)

And later in the same work, Augustine says:

Hence, as the apostle says, *It does not depend on the one who wills or the one who runs, but on God who shows mercy* (Rom 9:16), for he also helps the little ones whom he wills to help, even they do not will or run. He chose them in Christ before the creation of the world in order to give them grace gratuitously, that is, without any preceding merits of theirs coming from faith or works...He, of course, prepares his praise from the mouth of infants and sucklings so that we do not hesitate in the least to accept as happening also in adults what we see in these little ones whose deliverance is preceded by no good merits of theirs and in these little ones whose condemnation is preceded only by those original merits common to both. That is, we do not suppose either that grace is given to anyone according to his merits or that anyone is punished except because of his merits, whether those who are set free and are punished have equal or unequal guilt. For that reason, *let one who thinks he stands watch out that he does not fall* (1 Cor 10:12), and *let one who boasts boast in the Lord* (1 Cor 1:31), not in himself. (1999: 206)

Whether it be an infant or an adult, Augustine says, grace is not preceded by merit in any part of salvation. The second worry about Pelagianism, then, which plausible soteriological accounts should avoid, is that it allows for human beings to behave meritoriously (as some part of salvation) prior to the grace involved in salvation.

But what is meant by *behaving meritoriously*? As we read the passages from the Second Council of Orange and from Augustine, we take it that the condemned view is that praise should be due to the human being for some part of salvation, that is, that a human being should be praiseworthy for some part of salvation.⁸ The main way in which philosophers have conceptualized *moral responsibility*—and the way that, we think, is assumed by everyone in the tradition with which we are engaging—is a “*merit-based view*, according to which that praise or blame would be an appropriate reaction toward the candidate if and only if she merits—in the sense of ‘deserves’—such a reaction” (Eshleman 2014). This, we think, is what the anti-Pelagian council and author cited above have in mind; no human being should be praiseworthy (in the sense of deserving praise) for any part of salvation prior to (or independent of) salvific grace. This use of *praiseworthy* should be distinguished, though, from the praiseworthiness we might

⁸ It is worth noting that some have recently endorsed this constraint. Consider the claims made recently by Jeremy Evans and Kenneth Keathley, both aiming to show that their own views avoid Pelagianism. Evans says, “If the only contribution humans make in salvation is negative, then this contribution can hardly be considered an act *worthy of praise*...” (2010: 261, emphasis added). And Keathley says, “If you are saved, it is because of the sovereign, gracious, and monergistic work of God. If you are lost, it is your fault” (2010: 106). We take it that Keathley’s contrast of our being saved (because of God’s activity) with the *fault* of rejecting grace implicitly suggests that salvation should not involve any praiseworthiness of the human being. For our purposes, though, it only matters that this concern about praiseworthiness is taken to be a worry by the relevant tradition, and we think the Second Council of Orange and Augustine’s anti-Pelagian works establish at least this much.

attribute to a beautiful painting, or to the Grand Canyon. Perhaps there is some sense in which these things deserve praise, but not because it would be an appropriate reaction toward some behavior, such as a particular action, which is what we take Augustine and the Second Council of Orange to be focusing on. Thus, we take the second worry about Pelagianism to be a worry about praiseworthiness for behavior in the merit-based sense.⁹

Before we move on to consider a sample of recent soteriological accounts, it is important to see that these two worries about Pelagianism—the first about the causal role of human beings in their own salvation and the second about the praiseworthiness of human beings for their salvation—come apart. On the one hand, one can be causally responsible for some state of affairs without being praiseworthy (or even morally responsible at all) for that state of affairs. An agent may be causally responsible for pushing you out of the path of an oncoming train, but if she pushed you with the aim of hurting you, unaware of the train, then she is not praiseworthy for pushing you out of the path of an oncoming train.¹⁰ On the other hand, one can be praiseworthy for something without having played a causal role in that thing's happening. For example, one can be praiseworthy for omitting to buy something for oneself (even though it would bring some personal happiness) in order to donate the money saved to charity. Since abstaining from making

⁹ What we say about behavior applies not only to overt actions like praying to ask God for help, but also to mental behavior such as making choices and decisions. If one thinks that, in the cases of overt action that we will describe, the agent is only really responsible for some mental action or omission, what we say about the overt actions applies, *mutatis mutandis*, to the mental behavior as well.

¹⁰ Clearly the pusher does not merit any praise for this behavior (which is the sense of moral responsibility and praiseworthiness we are assuming), even if it turns out the praising her would likely lead to some desired consequence (such as her saving people from oncoming trains in the future).

the purchase is an omission, is not something that is caused by the agent, so there can be cases of praiseworthiness for things which are not caused by agents.¹¹

Some might think that it is controversial whether it is even possible that human beings can be praiseworthy for omissions. After all, it seems like there might be an infinite number of things that I'm omitting to do at this very moment. For instance, I'm not robbing a bank, stabbing an old lady, raping and pillaging, etc. And surely I'm not praiseworthy for all of these omissions. To motivate the claim that it is possible that someone is morally responsible for an omission, we'll present the following three cases:

Lethal Gas: Bill has been trapped inside a building by terrorists along with many other people. The terrorists have set up a contraption such that if he does not remain completely still for two hours, he will set off a motion detector that will in turn cause a lethal gas to be released into a room where fifteen children are being held hostage. He does not move.¹²

¹¹ We are following Timpe in assuming that omissions are precluded from being causal relata. When an agent intentionally decides to omit to make a purchase, this decision does not cause the abstaining from purchasing, for if it did then the omission would be one of the relata in the causal relation. Not everyone agrees that omissions cannot be causal relata—others, such as Randolph Clarke (2014), do not take a stand on this—but each of the accounts discussed in the following section require that at least some omissions (related to accepting grace) are not causal relata. Still, nearly everyone who thinks that we can be morally responsible for anything also thinks that omissions are among the things for which we can be morally responsible, whether or not omissions are causal relata. Clarke himself says, “If we’re morally responsible for anything, omitting and refraining are among the things for which we’re responsible. One might be blameworthy for failing to keep a promise, or praiseworthy for holding one’s tongue” (2014: 1-2).

¹² Adapted from Isaacs (1997: 484).

Go-Cart: Ahmed is walking down a path. He notices a group of three children playing just a little bit ahead of him when all of a sudden he hears a cry. Ahmed turns around to see a teenager on a go-cart storming out of control in his direction. If he remains in the path he will get away with a few nasty bruises and maybe a broken bone. But if he jumps out of the way and the go-cart hits the group of children they will undoubtedly be much worse off. Ahmed feels a strong desire of self-preservation and just has enough time to contemplate whether he should jump out of the way. He decides not to jump out of the way of the go-cart. The outcome of this decision is that the children do not get hurt.¹³

Beer: Jethro is an alcoholic. He's in the middle of his first year of sobriety, and when he gets home from an AA meeting one night, his brother just happens to be at his house with a six-pack of his favorite beer. The cravings for the alcohol are so intense that he feels physical pain. But he doesn't give in to the cravings, and he omits taking a drink.

We take it that each of these cases involves an agent who is praiseworthy for an omission. If this verdict about these cases is correct, then it is possible that agents are praiseworthy for some of their omissions.

Given that these two worries about Pelagianism (the causal role worry and the praiseworthiness worry) come apart, we need to treat them as independent potential problems for soteriological accounts. As we consider the accounts of Cross, Stump, and Timpe, then, we need to ask, with respect to each account, whether the account runs into either worry about

¹³ Adapted from Bostyn and Roets (2016: 20).

Pelagianism. Each of these accounts, we think, avoids the first worry about Pelagianism but not the second, and the reasons for this will become clear in the next section.

3. Three Monergistic Attempts to Avoid Pelagianism¹⁴

3.1 Richard Cross

Cross's main aim is to show the possibility of a soteriological position that permits the resistibility of grace without being Pelagian. Cross offers several models of accounts which purport to do this, but not all are monergistic. The one which we find most interesting (Cross's fifth of his seven) is clearly monergistic and can be stated as follows:¹⁵

On this fifth strategy, the act *a* itself is simply brought about by God, without any causal origin in the person, or any interior act of will for *a* on the part of the person. The created person wills neither *a* nor not-*a*; the person's will is simply indifferent to *a*...God moves the person like a puppet: God brings about the bodily motions in which some act *a* consists. (2005: 206)¹⁶

¹⁴ It should be noted that, on each of these accounts, in order to be responsible for rejecting grace (and thus for the blame for this sin not to trace back to God), a person must have been able to do otherwise than reject grace (and, additionally, this grace needed to be offered to everyone, or at least all those whom God knew would accept it if presented with it). Since monergistic views according to which God's grace is irresistible maintain that human beings cannot but reject God's grace until God intervenes, the monergistic accounts considered here deny the irresistibility of grace.

¹⁵ Both Evans and Keathley (see note 8) refer to this account as a way to avoid the problems traditionally associated with monergism.

¹⁶ On our view, Cross's characterization of this position is problematic and needs substantive revisions to be viable. Since we think that the problematic features of the position can be addressed, we need not go into the worries for this account here, but we should note one especially important necessary revision. Cross's strategy needs to be revised in order for the person's response to God to count as that person's response. This can be cleared up by allowing the person to act (in a way consistent with a causal theory of action) but by stipulating that God brings it about that the person acts:

To show how this position applies to the case of salvation, Cross provides the following analogy:

Ambulance: Suppose someone moves me in such-and-such a way—perhaps (taking a crude example) I wake up to find myself traveling in an ambulance. Suppose too that I have, all the time that I am conscious of being in the ambulance, the option not to be there. Perhaps I can simply ask the driver to stop and let me out. If I do not do this, then I do not impede the action that is done to me—being brought to the hospital, or whatever. But—by the same token—I do not causally contribute to it, other than counterfactually (i.e., by not impeding it). Does not-impeding *a* amount to wanting or doing *a*? Not generally, given the coherence of the notion of an interior act of will, for given this it is possible to accept that there are many things that I for example, neither impede nor want—even in the case that I can impede them. If I do not do something, I remain in the ambulance. But it would be odd to describe this as a case of my going to the hospital (as opposed to being brought there). (2005: 207)¹⁷

According to this model, God alone is the causal source of a human being's salvation, yet the human being retains the capability to resist God's grace. When a person comes to have faith, for

A primary reason *R* itself is simply brought about by God (either by God causing the relevant belief or desire), which in turn causes an act *a* without an interior act of will for *a* on the part of the person. The person may play a causal role in the action (and so will not be a mere puppet), but, in this case, God's bringing about *R* is a necessary condition for the person's *a*-ing. Before God's intervention, the created person wills neither *a* nor not-*a*; the person's will is simply indifferent to *a*.

¹⁷ As an anonymous reviewer points out, assuming that the person who wakes up in the ambulance consciously and deliberately decides to omit to get out of the ambulance, it is not odd (*contra* Cross) to describe this as a case of the person's going to the hospital. Cross's point, we take it, is that the person does not causally contribute to the consequence that the person arrives at the hospital, and we will grant this point to Cross.

example, the causal source of this is not some act of the human being; rather, the source is in God. Hence, on this account, the first worry about Pelagianism (which concerns the human being's causing something good apart from grace) is avoided.

Cross's account does not straightforwardly avoid the second worry about Pelagianism, though, for, as we noted earlier, one can be praiseworthy for something for which one is not causally responsible. On Cross's account, a person is not (solely) causally responsible for accepting grace, but it turns out that she *is* morally responsible and, arguably, praiseworthy for omitting to resist grace. On one plausible account of moral responsibility for omissions (Clarke 2014), an agent is morally responsible for an omission only if, if she had decided to do otherwise, then she was able to do otherwise. When it comes to accepting grace, then, a human being who omits to reject can be morally responsible for that omission only if, if she had decided to reject grace, then she was able to reject grace. To be sure, this is only a necessary condition on moral responsibility for omissions, certainly not a sufficient condition for praiseworthiness; but we have no reason to think that whatever else is required to get all the way to praiseworthiness will not be present in this case too. Given the human being's epistemic condition, her control over whether or not she rejects grace, and the moral status of the omission (as the best option the agent has), we have no reason to think that the person who omits to reject God's grace (and to whom God then gives grace) is not praiseworthy for this omission. If part of what is troubling about Pelagianism is that it allows for human beings to be meritorious for some part of their own salvation, Cross's account is apparently subject to a worry about Pelagianism.

3.2 Eleonore Stump

Stump's main aim is to show that it is possible for God's grace alone to bring about a human being's will of faith without doing violence to her free will. To this end, Stump makes use of a feature of Aquinas's moral psychology that involves three "settings" of the will rather than two.¹⁸ The will can assent to something, reject something, or be quiescent. When the will is quiescent, it neither assents nor rejects. Such quiescence is not caused by a prior act of will. Rather, the will becomes quiescent when it ceases to assent or reject something. This is similar to an agent's ceasing to perform some action without thereby performing some other action. Just as "my ceasing to walk east is not by itself an instance of my walking west" (2003: 394), so ceasing to assent or reject something is not itself an assent to or rejection of something else.

How does this bit of moral psychology relate to the resistibility of grace? Well, on this account, God offers grace to all human beings; it is open to human beings to reject grace or to be quiescent, but it is not open to human beings, given their fallen state, to assent to God's grace.¹⁹ If some person refuses God's grace, then God will not produce in that person the will to accept faith. But if the person does not refuse God's grace, then God will produce the will of faith in the person without her cooperation (and yet without violating her free will). Yet even this quiescence is under the person's control. According to Stump's account, whether the will is quiescent is in

¹⁸ Stump (2001) argues that a problem with Augustine's view is that he only considered two possible "settings" of the will.

¹⁹ Furthermore, according to Stump's account, quiescence must follow active rejection of grace. She claims that the will becomes inactive because the intellect becomes divided against itself. That is, when the intellect is unable to resolve some conflict or indecision within itself, then it becomes quiescent. The will does not become quiescent because of some kind of inattention. These details of Stump's account are not important for our project here, but for more on this see Stump (2003: 397-399).

the power of the will itself. That is, an agent is in control of whether or not her will is quiescent.

Stump explains:

Consequently, without risk of falling into Pelagianism, we can suppose that it is up to a human willer, and to her alone, whether her will refuses grace or is quiescent with regard to grace. As I have been at pains to show, this is not to say that the human willer at issue looks at the options of refusing grace or being quiescent with regard to grace and forms a decision about which of the options should characterize her will. Rather, it is to claim just that control over whether her will acts or fails to act is vested ultimately only in her.

(2003: 402)

Since it is up to the human willer whether or not her will is quiescent, Stump thinks that her account avoids the worry about the sin of rejecting God's grace tracing back to God; and since the human agent does not herself bring about anything good apart from grace, Stump thinks that her account avoids Pelagianism. Because, on Stump's account, God alone is the causal source of the will of faith, which is brought about in a human person once her will is quiescent, we agree that Stump's account at least avoids the first worry about Pelagianism (which concerns the human being's *causing* something good apart from grace).

Before we consider whether Stump's account avoids the second worry about Pelagianism, a potential problem with the account should be flagged. Stump claims that an agent's becoming quiescent does not depend on that agent's prior act of will. But if this is the case, then there seems to be no explanation for why the agent's will ceases to resist grace. The problem is that it seems to be just a matter of chance, or luck, whether or not some person's will becomes quiescent. That is, there is nothing about the agent (or about God's actions) that explain

why an agent becomes quiescent (or fails to become quiescent). If this is the case, then it seems that the agent is not in control of her will. And if she is not in control of her will, then it seems that she is not morally responsible for what she wills.²⁰ Timpe's account, which we consider below, is designed to modify Stump's account in a way that avoids this problem. In any case, Stump needs a solution to this problem since her account is committed to the human agent's control or power over her will's quiescence, without which, Stump thinks, her account would not avoid the worry about the sin of rejecting God's grace tracing back to God.

Since Stump needs to account for the human agent's control over her quiescence/rejection of grace in order to avoid the worry that God is to blame when human beings reject grace, Stump is committed to the moral responsibility of human agents for their quiescence. But this gives rise to the second worry about Pelagianism, that human beings are praiseworthy for their salvation. Given the human being's epistemic condition, her control over whether or not she rejects grace, and the moral status of her quiescence (as the best option the agent has, since the alternative is to reject God's grace), we have no reason to think that the person whose will is quiescent toward God's grace (and to whom God then gives grace) is not praiseworthy for this quiescence. If part of what is troubling about Pelagianism is that it allows for human beings to be meritorious for some part of their own salvation, Stump's account is apparently subject to a worry about Pelagianism.²¹

²⁰ For more on this worry see Timpe (2007: 288).

²¹ While Stump does not address the problem of praiseworthiness directly, she does claim that the will's state when quiescent is not a good state for the will to be in. This suggests a possible response to the problem of praiseworthiness, namely that the human agent is not praiseworthy for her will being quiescent since this is not a good state for the will to be in. We consider this type of reply to the problem of praiseworthiness in section 4.

3.3 Kevin Timpe

Timpe's main aim is to amend Stump's account in a way that avoids a problem he raises for Stump's account and yet secures all of the advantages of her account.²² Consider what Timpe calls the *anti-pelagian constraint* (APC):

APC: No fallen human individual is able to cause or will any good, including the will of her coming to saving faith, apart from a unique grace. (2007: 285)

Timpe wants an account of an individual's accepting God's grace that does not violate APC and according to which it is clear that the person possesses the kind of control that a libertarian understanding of moral responsibility requires. His suggestion will require that a unique gift of grace is needed to cause the will of faith because placing one's faith in God is good and people cannot will any good thing without some gift of grace. But his account is like Pelagius's view in that he affirms that God's grace is not sufficient for salvation. God's grace will produce faith in a person as long as the person does not resist. In this way, Timpe attempts to provide an account that navigates between theological determinism (according to which God's grace is irresistible) and Pelagianism.

Timpe calls his view the *quasi-causal view* (QV). It is supposed to explain how some person's becoming quiescent is under her control while at the same time avoiding the position that the agent causes her own salvation. Timpe suggests that we understand refraining from willing to reject salvation as an omission – specifically an omission of both accepting and rejecting grace. Timpe makes use of Phil Dowe's (2000) account of quasi-causation by omission

²² We briefly mentioned Timpe's worry for Stump's account in section 3.2.

to get this result. Dowe claims that omissions are not genuine causes, rather they are *quasi-causes*. Here is Dowe's analysis of 'causation by omission,' where *A* and *B* name positive events and *x* is a variable ranging over the events:

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

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

(O2) if *A* had occurred then *A* would have prevented *B* by interacting with *x*.

(Dowe 2001: 222)

To illustrate, Timpe provides the following example. Suppose a father's inattention was the quasi-cause of the child getting run over by a car. The father's not-paying attention quasi-caused the child's being run over if the child's being run over occurred and the father's paying attention did not, and there occurred a car backing up such that the car backing up caused the child's being run over and if the father had paid attention, then the father's paying attention would have prevented the child's getting run over by interacting with the car backing up.

Timpe endorses the following control condition for moral responsibility:

CCMR: an agent *S* is morally responsible for an event *e* only if *S* has (or at some point had) control over the occurrence of *e*. (2007: 291)

He claims that Dowe's account of causation and quasi-causation provides a way of understanding the control at issue in CCMR. Timpe makes use of Dowe's account to explain the difference between *direct control* and *indirect control*. An agent directly controls some event by causing it. An agent indirectly controls some event by quasi-causing it. He states, "we can thus say that an agent controls an event *e* when either [the agent causes *e* to occur or the agent quasi-

causes *e* to occur]” (2007: 292). This distinction allows Timpe to be able to claim that an agent controls an event (via indirect control) without causing it. And since the agent controls the event, the necessary condition expressed in CCMR is satisfied.

Timpe then applies his account to grace. He states:

[L]et *A* name the event which is the agent’s rejecting God’s grace, let *B* name the event which is the individual’s coming to saving faith, and *x* be the efficacy of the grace necessary for salvation and given by God. So long as the agent rejects the grace given by God, then the grace does not bring about the individual’s salvation. As soon as the agent refrains from or omits rejecting the grace (not-*A*), then the grace will be causally efficacious in bringing the individual to saving faith; that is, not-*A* allows *x* to cause *B*. On this account, since it is God’s grace that is causally efficacious for an individual’s salvation so long as the individual does not reject that grace, the agent is not causing her own salvation. This avoids the central problem of Pelagianism. But since whether or not the individual rejects God’s grace is up to the agent, and not ultimately up to God, the agent will have indirect control over her salvation... APC isn’t violated... Furthermore, on this account unlike on Stump’s account, whether or not the agent’s will is quiescent can be straightforwardly under the control of the agent. (2007: 293)

Timpe claims that, on his view, human agents can will to refrain from resisting God’s grace, yet APC is not violated because omissions are only quasi-causes. So the agent does not cause her own salvation, nor does she cause any other good act. Hence, on this account, the first worry about Pelagianism (which concerns the human being’s causing something good apart from grace)

is avoided. But also, since the agent's omitting to resist grace is under her control, she controls her own salvation without her being the cause of her own salvation.

Before we consider whether Timpe's account avoids the second worry about Pelagianism, a potential problem with the account should be flagged. One thing Timpe's proposal overlooks concerns the nature of omissions.²³ There are two kinds of omissions: omissions that result from a prior act of will and those that do not. Let *willed omissions* be those that result from a prior act of will and *non-willed omissions* be those that do not result from a prior act of will. When an agent omits to resist grace, if this was a non-willed omission (and this omission was not preceded by a prior act of will), then the agent's omission seems inexplicable.²⁴ If the agent's omitting to resist grace was a willed omission, then it seems that APC is violated.²⁵ Recall that, according to APC, no fallen human individual is able to cause or *will any good*, including the will of her coming to saving faith, apart from a unique grace. Now, the agent's salvation is a good thing, and the agent's omitting to reject God's grace must also be a good thing. But if this is the case, then because the agent's omitting to reject God's grace is preceded by an act of will, then the agent wills some good in clear violation of APC. This is a serious problem for the account, and it needs to be addressed to vindicate the account's anti-Pelagianism. Nevertheless, we can set the problem aside here.

²³ For an extended discussion of the points made in this paragraph, see Kittle (2015).

²⁴ This was the same problem that Timpe had with Stump's account; see Timpe (2007: 288).

²⁵ Timpe makes it clear that he has a willed omission in mind, but he denies that this is a problem for his account, apparently because he thinks that this state of the will is not a good state: "ceasing to will to resist a good isn't the same as willing that good. Thus, it doesn't violate (APC) to say that individuals can, through an act of their will, become quiescent with regard to divinely given grace" (2007: 294). For a way of utilizing this point in reply to the praiseworthiness problem, see our first suggestion in section 4.

Since Timpe's proposal explicitly attributes moral responsibility to human agents for omitting to resist grace, it is even more clearly subject to the second worry about Pelagianism, that human beings are praiseworthy for their salvation. Given the human being's epistemic condition, her control over whether or not she rejects grace, and the moral status of her omission (as the best option the agent has), we have no reason to think that the person who omits to reject God's grace (and to whom God then gives grace) is not praiseworthy for this omission. If part of what is troubling about Pelagianism is that it allows for human beings to be meritorious for some part of their own salvation, Timpe's account is apparently subject to a worry about Pelagianism.

4. Punting the Praiseworthiness Problem

As we have argued in the previous section, the soteriological accounts developed by Cross, Stump, and Timpe succeed in avoiding the first worry about Pelagianism—that human beings can cause something good apart from grace—but leave the worry about praiseworthiness intact. The main goal of this paper—to clarify a distinct worry about Pelagianism that applies to these accounts—is complete. In the remainder of this paper, we will suggest three ways that Cross, Stump, and Timpe could supplement their accounts to avoid this problem. Given the purpose of this paper, we intend only to sketch these suggestions; a full consideration of each is the next stage in defending an anti-Pelagian soteriological position that maintains the resistibility of grace, but we will not enter this stage here.

One way to attempt to avoid the praiseworthiness problem is to deny that omitting to resist grace is good and to require for praiseworthiness for an omission that the omission is good. Recall that we motivated the praiseworthiness of the agent who omits to resist grace by appealing to her epistemic condition with respect to the omission, her degree of control over the

omission, and the moral status of the omission. Given that the omission is the best option the agent has (remember: she can only resist grace or omit to resist grace), it would appear that the omission is good.²⁶ But it is contentious whether omitting to resist is itself good. In defending her account against the charge that it entails that human beings cause something good apart from grace, Stump says:

But a will which is quiescent in the way at issue here is not a good will. The configuration that grace introduces into such a will is the will to detest sin and want goodness, and this is the configuration that the quiescent will lacks. But, clearly, a will which does not so much as will to will goodness is not a good will. (And the point remains the same even if the person whose will is quiescent has some ineffective higher-order desire for a will that is not quiescent. To do no more than wish ineffectively that one wanted a will that willed the good is still to be in a morally lamentable condition.) It is true that a will in this condition is better than a will which wants sin and does not will to will goodness. But comparatives do not suppose positives. One thing can be better than another and yet not be good. (2003: 401-402)

To omit to resist grace may be better than to resist grace, but Stump denies that it follows from this that omitting to resist grace is good. Given that Stump is already committed to the claim that such an omission is not good, she can avoid the praiseworthiness problem by adopting the requirement that an omission be good as a necessary condition for praiseworthiness for

²⁶ There are further reasons one may think it obvious that the omission is good, such as that the omission leads to very much good, or that it involves a great feat, since it may be very difficult for the agent to omit to resist, given the strength of her desires to resist grace.

omissions. If a human being's omitting to resist grace is not good, and if goodness is required for praiseworthiness, then a human being's resisting grace is not something for which she is praiseworthy. Note that this requires a commitment to which Stump has not explicitly committed herself, namely that being praiseworthy for an omission requires that the omission be good.²⁷ Moreover, to show that this is an adequate solution to the praiseworthiness problem, more would need to be said in defense of this additional requirement on praiseworthiness for omissions, and neither Stump nor the other authors considered here have argued for this requirement.

A second way to attempt to avoid the praiseworthiness problem is to maintain that human beings lack the moral standing to be praiseworthy for omitting to resist grace.²⁸ There are (at least) two ways of understanding this attempt to solve the problem. First, it may be argued that, despite being morally responsible for omitting to resist grace, human beings are not praiseworthy for omitting to resist grace because of their moral standing. Second, it may be argued that, despite being morally responsible for omitting to resist grace, it would be inappropriate for anyone (including God, other human beings, or the human agent herself) to praise the human being for omitting to resist grace because of her moral standing.²⁹ On either way of

²⁷ A challenge to this requirement is the possibility of cases in which the best one can do (or fail to do) in a certain situation is not good and yet the person is praiseworthy for doing her best (perhaps because doing so in the situation is very difficult). If there are any such cases, then this suggestion is not viable.

²⁸ The parable of the unforgiving servant (Matthew 18:21-35) sets some precedent for thinking that one's history (such as having been forgiven) can affect one's moral status in such a way that it would be inappropriate to hold others responsible to a certain degree. By contrast, we're suggesting here that one's moral status can affect whether one is in fact praiseworthy, not whether one can appropriately praise others.

²⁹ Of course, if someone who thinks that for an agent to be praiseworthy *just is* for it to be appropriate for others (or the agent herself) to praise the agent, then such a person will not see a

understanding what is meant by the agent not being praiseworthy for omitting to resist grace because of her moral standing, one can defend this attempt at solving the problem by appealing to cases in which agents are morally responsible for something good even though they are not praiseworthy for it. If I am a hardened thief who has continuously (every week for five years, say) robbed the poor-box of a little country church, I may lack the moral standing to be praiseworthy for occasionally dropping some pocket-change into the poor-box, even though I would be morally responsible for this donation and ordinarily such a donation is something for which one would be praiseworthy. Perhaps omitting to resist grace is a similar case, since human beings have resisted grace in the past and also have committed various moral wrongs and therefore need God's grace. Given the sinner's standing, then, perhaps she cannot be praiseworthy for her morally good omission to resist grace despite being morally responsible for this omission.

Lastly, a third way to attempt to avoid the praiseworthiness problem is to deny that human beings are praiseworthy for doing what is their duty (except, perhaps, in atypical cases) while maintaining that it is the duty of a human being not to resist grace.³⁰ Just as a parent is not praiseworthy for doing what is minimally required of a parent, such as feeding one's child, perhaps it is minimally required of all human beings that we not resist grace and so we are not praiseworthy for omitting to resist grace. This is consistent with it being good to resist grace (just

difference in the two ways of understanding this attempt to deal with the praiseworthiness problem.

³⁰ Perhaps passages like Luke 17:10 imply that no human being deserves praise for doing her duty: "So you also, when you have done all that you were commanded, say, 'We are unworthy servants; we have only done what was our duty.'"

as it is good for a parent to feed her child), and it is also consistent with a human being's moral responsibility for the omission (just as a parent may be morally responsible for feeding her child). A potential problem for this attempt to solve the problem of praiseworthiness is that it seems to imply that God is not praiseworthy for much of what he is typically praised. For example, if God makes a promise to someone, it is God's duty to keep his promise; yet it would be strange to say that God is not praiseworthy for keeping his promises. Perhaps, though, it is different in God's case than it is in the case of mere human beings (perhaps the relevant duties—that we are not praiseworthy for fulfilling—are the ones commanded of us by God, which would include omitting to resist his grace, and so would not apply in God's case). A full defense of this attempt to solve the praiseworthiness problem would, of course, require more than we have said here, but our aim here has only been to suggest some possibilities and not to defend any particular one.³¹

5. Conclusion

We have argued that it is possible for an account which is monergistic but that maintains the resistibility of grace to succeed in being anti-Pelagian. This required distinguishing two worries one might have about Pelagianism, the first concerning the human being causing some good and the second concerning the human being's praiseworthiness. In defending their accounts against the charge that they are committed to Pelagianism, Cross, Stump, and Timpe are concerned with only the first of the two worries about Pelagianism, but we have suggested some

³¹ A fourth option that has been suggested to us is this: first, adopt as a necessary condition for praiseworthiness that one had the right (or a good) motive; second, deny that one does have the right motive (or perhaps any relevant motive at all) in omitting to resist grace. Thanks to Jim Taylor for suggesting this response.

ways that they might go about dealing with the second. Distinguishing these two worries about Pelagianism can help to clarify criticisms of views which are monergistic but that maintain the resistibility of grace, and taking the second worry seriously can help defenders of such accounts in making their accounts more attractive to other monergists.

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