

Book Review



Stratton, T. (2020) *Human Freedom, Divine Knowledge, and Mere Molinism: A Biblical, Historical, Theological, and Philosophical Analysis*.

Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock. 328 pages, ISBN: 1725276119

Do we really have free-will? Are our choices true reflections of free-will or are one's choices predetermined by irresistible grace, as forwarded by Calvinist theology, or instinct, as supposed by Darwinian evolution? This debate—whether humans act on free-will or by deeply embedded instincts—is not just between secularists and theists. These questions seemingly have been part of philosophical and theological dialogue since before the infancy of the Church. Passages like Matt 22:14, Eph 2:10 and 1 Pet 1:1-2 seem to promote the idea of predetermination while Matt 23:37, Gal 5:13, and 2 Pet 1:5-7 proffer the idea of free-will. The debate exists within Christian thought typically between Calvinism and Arminianism. It impacts not only theology but also how the Church may engage a post-modern culture.

Dr. Stratton offers an excellent study of human free-will as part of divine design and sovereignty. For the theologian the text offers a comprehensive study of human free-will and its treatment within Christian thought. For the apologist, it unfolds how free-will and God's middle knowledge support classic apologetic arguments for the existence of God. This is an important reading that helps Christians understand key points of faith and makes practical connections with theology to everyday living. Stratton draws on historical Christian theology infused with apologetics to inform Christian evangelism in a post-modern society.

The author begins by addressing the common assumptions about free-will as used in theology and philosophy. He regards atheist Sam Harris' position, "Free will is an illusion," as an echo of divine determinism (p.2). Stratton responds by developing a working definition of Libertarian Free Will (LFW) that balances individual ability, uncton, and moral responsibility for their choices to support the rest of the work (p.160-1).

The author then focuses his attention on how both secular evolution theory and theological determinism runs shy to explain human choice and action. Stratton challenges Calvinist determinism by arguing the essential characteristic of *imago dei* is the ability to choose. Stratton argues that if determinism is true, then individuals could excuse themselves from the responsibility for their actions (p.163). The author pushes back against this idea by dissecting Calvinist theology of predeterminism. However, in doing so, it seems Stratton becomes a bit too bullish challenging Calvinism and perhaps misses the irresistibility of God's grace with the dynamic of the Holy Spirit.

Stratton then attends to the atheist's ideas of determinism. He offers an elegant apologetic syllogism referred to as, the Freethinking Argument against Evolutionary Naturalism (p.167). It is a logical and precise challenge that hollows out secularist rationality and reveals the want of theological determinism. He moves on with a series of apologetic discussions to further highlight LFW as more than academic exercise; it is also an important apologetic tool in evangelism. Stratton establishes LFW not only as evidence of God's existence, but also humanity's capacity to choose as a reflection of God. He backs his argument by drawing on several points of Scripture that clearly support the idea of LFW and moral responsibility (p.180-1; 192). Stratton leaves the idea of determinism standing alone within a philosophical wilderness without any rational ground to stand on.

The author then addresses the matter of divine knowledge. It is an important concept as it connects the dots between what God knows and LFW. Stratton draws on the work of a 16th century monk named Luis de Molina to forward what may be a lost key in theology and apologetics. The author unfolds how de Molina's idea of "middle knowledge" brings together God's natural knowledge and God's free knowledge. It is this bridge that possibly leaves Calvinist theology fragmented. Molina defines middle knowledge as "what God knows logically prior to His decision to create the world of what would happen in any possible scenarios" (p.220). Stratton tests this idea against God's omniscience, omnibenevolence, and omnipotence to demonstrate that God does not causally determine people to think, act, or believe in a certain way.

Stratton devotes the rest of his book to an examination of Molina's idea of God's middle knowledge through the crucible of each classic apologetic argument for the existence of God. This is vital for both theologian, apologist, pastor, and lay person. Contemporary western society is flush with self-styled philosophy or rational science that attempts to nullify the viability of Christianity. Stratton furnishes the believer with the means to see the beauty, elegance, and simplicity of LFW as a significant apologetic to argue for the existence of God, the presence of evil (p.258), and the dynamics of prayer (p.268-88). Moreover, it affirms for the believer who they are as a child of God because each believer is imbued with LFW. Therefore, by possessing LFW each person has access to a relationship with God who knows them and understand the struggles of human experience.

Stratton's years in youth ministry serve to inform him how to make complex theological principles understandable. This book anchors the believer to Christianity's historical theological roots. It connects us to the foundational New Testament idea of an eternal destiny and what it means to experience freedom in Christ but not freedom from Christ. Moreover, it brings in to focus ancient theology and classic apologetics with practical language for today's Christian witness.

Reviewed By:

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