

# Response to Professor Eleonore Stump

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My allotted time for this response is relatively short, so please allow me to get straight to it. In what follows, I offer a brief summary of the core of Professor Stump's interesting paper from today, insofar as I understood it, followed by an invitation for some clarifications, and lastly, two concerns: one on the nature of sin and another about the ability of her model of a life in grace to accommodate certain marginally responsible agents.

In her brief presentation this morning, Professor Stump developed a Thomistic take on the moment of justification; that is, the point at which an agent surrenders to the love of God such that God infuses into her a higher-order will for a will that wills the good. What is crucial for Professor Stump on this account, then, is to demonstrate, first, that an act of surrender is not a *good* human act (i.e. thus exonerating her from the accusation that her account is Pelagian) and, second, that God's infusion of grace (i.e. the infusion of a second-order will that wills the good) into a human person is consistent with that person exhibiting Professor Stump's brand of Libertarian free will. In her abridged paper this morning, she directly addressed anti-Pelagianism but did not have time to address the issue of freedom. Allow me, then, to rehearse again the former and describe in brief the latter.

First, with respect to Pelagian accusations, Stump characterizes surrender as a sort of quiescence of will where an agent chooses neither for nor against divine grace. Importantly, it is not that such an agent makes a *prior* decision to enter into this state of quiescence, for such a prior decision would presumably be the human agent's contribution of a good to the salvation process. Rather, the agent assumes a state of indecision, that is, a state which is not the actualizing of some capacity. It is instead precisely *not* to act, and in virtue of this passivity, we can rightly say that the agent does not contribute any *good* to the moment of justification. Hence, there is no Pelagianism.

Second, with respect to worries about Libertarian freedom, Professor Stump maintains the Thomistic position (and this is from a longer version of the paper) that no will on which God acts with efficient causation is free in the relevant Libertarian sense. To avoid the charge that God's infusion of grace counts as an instance of efficient causation, then, Professor Stump claims that God simply infuses a new form into, rather than removes one from, a surrendering human agent. The divine form so infused results in a will of faith (i.e. a higher-order desire for a will that wills the good), and it is both consistent with the will of the surrendering agent (in service of preserving Libertarian free will) and a positive good given the agent by God (in service of avoiding grounds for Pelagian criticism).

On Aquinas's account, the infusion of a form or configuration around the good leaves intact the redeemed person's propensity to evil actions. In other words, for Stump, Paul's words from Romans 7—i.e. "I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing"—seem particularly apt for one who lives in grace.

These are the central features of Professor Stump's account needed for understanding the worries I will raise momentarily, but first, I want to highlight some clarifications that would be helpful for Professor Stump to address. First, I am sure there are those among us who when they hear about an agent becoming quiescent in the will, they wonder, "How psychologically plausible is such a story? And moreover, why should we not think of a refraining from acting as the result of a prior decision to not act, in which case, the anti-Pelagianism of the account would be undermined?"

A second clarification that I think is worth our time is some explanation of how God's infusion of grace can rightly be said to be conditioned on something—namely, surrender—for which a human agent has control (and is thus responsible). If surrender is something out of the control of the agent (e.g. something into which she retreats), then it appears that God's responding to such surrender with grace would not be a response to *the agent* (or as some might call it, the deep self), but rather, a response to something else entirely.

Now for some challenges. First, it's undoubtedly the case that chief amongst those things with which justification is meant to deal is a fallen human's propensity to moral evil. However, the biblical category of sin seems to include more than just questions of moral concern, or moral impurity you might say. In Leviticus, for instance, we find laws prescribing sin-offerings for agents who have unwittingly stepped on an animal carcass on their way to the Temple. Such actions are sinful in the biblical context, but importantly, the offenses so delineated need not flow from a failure on the part of the offender's will to be sinful. How might your understanding of justification deal with sins such as these which do not appear to flow from any deficiency in the will?

Second, it strikes me that the occasion of quiescence of will or surrender upon which God infuses an agent with divine grace is still lacking. Perhaps I do not fully appreciate the nature of quiescence, but it seems to me that one might be caught in such a state for reasons that would prevent God's reasonably infusing that person with divine grace. Suppose that someone possesses a quiescent will in virtue of assuming a state of indecision where they are unable to choose either for or against God. If such indecision is the result of a struggle of moral reasons—i.e. where the agent struggles to choose due to internal moral conflict—then it seems fine for God to infuse them with divine grace. But suppose someone is in such a state of indecision for purely prudential reasons—i.e. they cannot choose for or against God because they cannot determine which choice would be more expedient. Or perhaps they never act for moral reasons *in principle*.

For instance, some agents have a form of OCD known as scrupulosity, where they sometimes have disruptive thoughts which are unconnected to their deep self (i.e. higher-order desires). Suppose a scrupulous agent were committed to a life in rejection of God but that he was also commonly assaulted by thoughts of the love of God; that is, thoughts which though not connected to his deep self nevertheless left him unable to will for or against God for brief moments of time. Would an agent in this condition be a candidate for justificatory grace?

In addition, consider an instance of someone who might become quiescent for purely prudential reasons. A psychopath might find himself stuck in a place of indecision between willing for or against God on the basis of prudential reasons. But most of us would find God's justifying an agent on the basis of such quiescence (i.e. quiescence resulting from the egoistic deliberations characterizing psychopathy) to be problematic. How might we think about a case such as this or others involving *atypical agents*?

Now, I recognize that both of these challenges (i.e. the one on sin and the other on atypical agents) can be vexing in contexts other than a discussion of justification. Indeed, these are deeply complex issues. But these sorts of complex considerations are precisely the things with which Professor Stump is uncommonly well-equipped to deal. So, I look forward to learning from her thoughts on these questions.