

APPENDIX H

DIVINE DETERMINISM: REFORMING OR NON-REFORMING DOCTRINE

There are two kinds of philosophies: those that ask us to reform the way we see and experience things, and those that merely seek to explain what lies behind the way we see and experience things. The former we might call a ‘reforming doctrine,’ the latter we might call a ‘non-reforming doctrine’.

The theory of atoms is the latter, *non-reforming* kind of philosophical (scientific) doctrine. When the physicist suggests that the table in front of me is, in reality, a collection of atoms bound to one another in particular patterns by atomic forces while existing in empty space, he is not asking me to exchange my commonsensical understanding of the table for a scientific one. He is not proposing that I transform the way I experience reality; nor is he asking me to transform the way I perceive the table. Rather, he is attempting to explain more fully the metaphysics of what lies beneath and behind my ordinary, mundane experience. The scientist’s atomic theory does not displace my old way of looking at the table for a new one. I can, without contradiction, view the table both ways. The old way is valid and true. The new way simply answers further questions and seeks deeper understanding of what lies below the surface of my experience.

The New Testament teaches that this world, this present age, is passing away and that one must not seek his or her fulfillment in the things it has to offer. One is wise to place one’s hope in the age that is to come. This New Testament teaching, in contrast to atomic theory, is clearly a *reforming* doctrine. The New Testament authors are asking me to transform the way I look at my life and experience right now. I must stop viewing it as the end all and be all of my existence and view it, instead, as a temporary, short-lived stepping stone to another existence, one that is above and beyond this one. This is asking for a significant and radical transformation of my ordinary outlook on life. I am to exchange one way of looking at life for another, to displace my old way of looking at life for a new one.

If we have come to rightly understand divine determinism, we will recognize that divine determinism *per se* is a *non-reforming* doctrine. Divine determinism is not proposing that I transform the way I experience reality.

Rather, it is attempting to explain more fully the metaphysics of what lies beneath and behind my mundane experience. It does not ask me to exchange one way of looking at ordinary experience for another. I can, without contradiction, view my mundane experience in two distinct ways. It is not asking me to displace my old way of looking at reality for a new one. The old way remains valid and true. In proposing a new way to look at reality, divine determinism intends only to promote a deeper understanding of what underlies the surface of our experience. Accordingly, to embrace divine determinism does not require that I set my commonsensical understanding of ordinary experience aside. Leaving my common-sense understanding intact, it simply proposes that there is more to be known than ordinary perception alone can reveal. If we look deep enough, we will discover that there exists a transcendent author of the surrounding reality.

Divine determinism is not suggesting that the divine authorship of reality is visible on the surface of our experience, nor that what is visible is an illusion. Rather, it is suggesting that there is more to reality than meets the eye. Accordingly, divine determinism is not saying:

“I know it looks to you like you make your own freewill decisions. But that is not true. That is an illusion. In reality, God makes your decisions. You don’t. Stop believing the illusion. Stop believing that you are free. Come to see and understand that you are not free. Your every step is determined by the will of God.”

On the contrary, divine determinism is saying something like this:

“Obviously, the uncoerced decisions we all make are decisions that arise out of our freedom as free moral agents. While that is true, we can look deeper and ask ourselves wherein the power and reality of our being as free moral agents lies. And what do we find? We find that it does not lie in ourselves, as if we were self-existent beings. It lies in the will of the one who is the author of our very being and all that our being includes. So our freewill choices are authored by the same one who authors all of reality in the first place. My reality, my history, my substance, my choices, my desires—everything about me ultimately derives from the creative will of God. Am I a creature who exercises a free will? Yes, absolutely! Do I exist as a free creature from and of myself? No, of course not! If God did not will my existence, I would not exist. If God did not will my choice, my choice would not be made. If God did not will that my

choice be a free choice, it would not be free. Nevertheless, while it is true that I am not autonomous, for God is the author of my being, yet my being *is* just what it appears to be. I am a free-will creature who makes freewill choices. That is what God has authored me to be. That is what I appear to be. That is what I experience. And that is what I am.”

So divine determinism *per se* is a non-reforming doctrine. After I come to believe it and embrace it, it leaves everything just like it was before I believed it.

However, while I must insist on the non-reforming nature of divine determinism *per se*, there are doctrines that are logically founded on divine determinism that are *reforming* in nature. The doctrine of unfailing hope that the gospel teaches, with divine determinism as its basis, is a reforming doctrine. If we live without hope in this world, we are invited, by the implications of divine determinism, to transform the way we look at and experience human existence. We are to live in hope in this world, not in despair. We are to exchange our desperate view of reality for a hopeful one, based on the sovereign, determinative grace of he who authors my being.

As we saw in chapter 2, there are many important practical and life-changing ethical, spiritual, and existential implications of divine determinism, implications that should reform our outlook on life. But while divine determinism has many significant reforming implications, as a theory of the metaphysics of being, it remains thoroughly non-reforming in nature. It does not transplant my ordinary, familiar way of looking at reality. It supplements it, answering questions about what lies ultimately at the root of ordinary experience without requiring any change in the way I perceive the nature of ordinary experience.