The Legitimacy of Paradox as a Theological Model:
Case in Point, Fallen Man does not have Free Will but He has Full Responsibility

ETS, Midwest, Ashland, Ohio, March 20, 2009
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Finally, all of you, have unity of mind, sympathy, brotherly love, a tender heart, and a humble mind (1 Pet. 3.8)

Introduction

This theme is difficult because it has an unmasking quality. The rub: it is personally crushing to face the facts about ourselves as fallen sinners. Recounting his conversion, Augustine says:

> Thou, O Lord…didst turn me round towards myself, taking me from behind my back where I had placed me, unwilling to observe myself; and setting me before my face, that I might see how foul I was, how crooked and defiled, bespotted and ulcerous (Conf. Bk. VIII, par.16).

Just to question "free will" challenges our self-understanding and raises an instinctive resistance. Therefore, to properly engage a study like this of the self, of *my* self, we need open-minded humility. Here, Peter's call to a **humble mind** (1Pet. 3.8) applies to the three things we are about to cover: theological paradox, a case in point, and implications.

1A. Theological Paradox

For Van Til, a paradox is an apparent contradiction *or* any intellectual tension.[1] It relates to the philosophical notion of contradiction.[2] The coherence of God and His revelation calls us to avoid contradictory thoughts and practices. Simply put: being God's image bearers, we are to be like Him. God is logical because He is truth. If there were contradictions in God's knowledge, then some of His knowledge would be false, He would not be the truth, and He would not be God. Accordingly, there is no contradiction in God's revelation; therefore, man, His image bearer, to be like Him, must avoid contradiction.[3]

Nonetheless, we must come to terms with *apparent* contradictions, beliefs that seem inconsistent. Importantly, we know that there is no inconsistency between them because God has revealed them. Paradoxicality should be no surprise. After all, we are creatures and He is the Creator. We have limited knowledge; we cannot penetrate all the interconnections that exist

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[1] Cornelius Van Til, *Common Grace* (Philadelphia: P&RP, 1954) 9-10. In *Defense of the Faith* (P&R Publishing: Phillipsburg, 2008, 4th edition, edited by Scott Oliphint), 67-68 he says: "Our knowledge is analogical and therefore must be paradoxical." Oliphint on Van Til notes that what seems to be contradiction is not ultimately one because "God is exhaustively coherent" (fn38). Oliphant also explains the Van Til uses paradox to refer to "any intellectual point of tension" (fn38).

[2] The idea of contradiction has almost universal recognition. Outside the history of Western philosophy, some people try to make sense of statements like "you are to meditate on one hand clapping." However, this example shows that one of the reasons that contradiction is wrong is that it is meaningless and blocks communication. You cannot make sense of "one hand clapping." Try to clap with only one hand; it becomes "one hand waving." It is ambiguous (you can "clap" one hand against something) but what is meant is "clap your hands together but only use one hand" (trying it I cannot even keep one hand still!). That is contradiction. It breaks down communication; very often, it breaks down honest communication.

[3] Therefore, to fulfill our role on earth receiving God's communication to us in nature and in Christ, we ought to be logical, consistent, and non-contradictory in our thinking. Cf. Van Til, *Common Grace and the Gospel* (P&R, 1972): "The rules of logic must be followed in all our attempts at systematic exposition of God's revelation, whether general or special," 9. Using logic is an "ought to"; it is an ethical ought. Being logical is being godly. It is God-like. It is good and proper. It is required of us not only academically or intellectually but also morally and spiritually. How else are we going to obey the Lord when He says, "Come now let us reason together"? To place a healthy emphasis on logical and critical thinking is a hurdle all its own. However, once we jump this obstacle, we face other ones such as the problem that human reason may take on a magisterial role rather than a ministerial role. When that happens, the reasoning self forgets (avoids, denies) the reality that he is duty bound under the authority of God's revelation and he will have difficulty accepting "mysteries that are beyond reason's ability completely to comprehend" (Scott Oliphint, *Reasons for Faith: Philosophy in the Service of Theology*, [P&R Publishing, 2006; cf. the insightful citation from Owen, 255, fn39] 88-89). In the end, this is a failure to practice the most humble use of logic.

within the truth that God knows. Pointedly, paradox is the "*result of our ignorance about interconnections*."[4]

Moreover, we know that a set of beliefs is a paradox by the following ingredients.

1) There are (at least) two claims or beliefs.

2) Both are in Scripture; they are *clear* threads of biblical teaching, *clear* threads of truth.

3) They seem to contradict each other. This means we have difficulty seeing how they fit together in the fabric of Scripture. It means that human reason has trouble accepting one teaching because of the other.[5] Intellectual tension exists in a tenacious and profound way.[6]

4) Danger: we have the tendency to damage one teaching or the other by our reasoning. Thus, we take a biblical truth and use it to deny another biblical truth! This is a red flag.

On the word contradiction, it is a response to those who claim the presence of actual contradiction. Van Til states that when "contradiction" is wrongly attributed to two truths, one is "thrown overboard" to solve the problem logically.[7]

This use of theological paradox for intellectual tensions, and as a response to thinkers who attribute actual contradiction, grounds a reply to Ciocchi's opposition to paradox; for him it is not a helpful model. He has two main objections: it incorrectly implies types of contradiction and it wrongly claims impossibility of understanding.

a) His claim that the notion of paradox fails "because it implies a distinction between types of contradiction,"[8] is not necessary since the use of the word is simply deflective: opponents make the charge of actual contradiction and they eliminate one belief or the other by logical analysis. Defenders take both beliefs as *clearly biblical* and claim appearance not actuality because God gives us both threads, so both must be true and coherent, however difficult it may be *for us* to reconcile them in the fabric of truth.

b) Ciocchi also claims that paradox as a theological model probably fails because of "its reliance on the dogmatic claim that a logical reconciliation…is known to be impossible."[9] Briefly, in reply, paradox refers to intellectual tensions, to what Ciocchi acknowledges: intractable tensions,[10] due understandably to God's incomprehensibility.

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[4] John Frame, "The Problem of Theological Paradox" in Foundations of Christian scholarship: essays in the Van Til Perspective, ed. Gary North (Vallecito, CA: Ross House Books, 1979), 321. Frame goes on to explain that "we do not know precisely how they 'dovetail,' *how* they take account of one another. We know that they *do* dovetail, for we know that God's plan is wise and exhaustive, and usually we know how they fit together to some degree, but the gaps in our knowledge often demand that we rest content with a paradoxical formulation" (underlining mine).

[5] There may be other factors that make acceptance of x difficult, but the juxtaposition to the corresponding thread is central as a cloud that hinders seeing x clearly and accepting it wholeheartedly.

[6] Not every difficult set of teachings constitutes a paradox. Difficulties such as Jephthah's vow in relation to Jesus teaching on vows are not paradoxical because they do not push against each other. Church history and the history of theology reveal a limited number of paradoxes easy to identify. Paradoxicality is not difficulty in arriving at comparable truths, but difficulty in harmonizing truths that are clear (by themselves Christ's deity and His humanity are quite clear, but reflection on their interconnection takes theologians all over the map). Some example paradoxes are the trinity, the deity and humanity of Christ, the Bible is the word of God and the word of men, sovereignty and responsibility, God's decree and His desire, and moral inability along side of full responsibility.

[7] *Defense* 69. This is not merely a debate between reformed and non-reformed thinkers because, for one example, Van Til wrestled on the basis of paradox in opposition to some reformed thinkers in his book, *Common Grace* (Philadelphia: P&RP, 1954). In more ways that one, J. I. Packer compliments and gives detail to Van Til's approach to common grace and the free offer of the gospel in *Evangelism and the Sovereignty of God* (Chicago: Inter-Varsity Press, 1961). Packer's definition of antinomy (appearance of contradiction, apparent incompatibility) equals Van Til's use of paradox, though Packer restricts paradox to a figure of speech, 18-19. Van Til uses antinomy and paradox interchangeably, *Defense*, 67, fn36.

[8] David M. Ciocchi, "Reconciling Divine Sovereignty and Human Freedom," *JETS* 37/3 (September 1994): 398.

[9] Ciocchi, *Reconciling* 396.

[10] However, his formulation of an intractable tension between paradox and reason is simply another paradox. Even worse, his paradox/reason tension actually boils down to the difference between a ministerial and a magisterial use of reason. For Ciocchi, tensions such as the paradox/reason tension and the sovereignty/responsibility tension are so difficult that they lead him to agnosticism about resolution and to suspension of debate regarding them. He expresses his agnosticism is in the "Reconciling" article (JETS 1994) and the call for suspension is the point of "Suspending debate about sovereignty and freedom" (JETS 1998). For short, his paradox/reason tension is for all

2A. Case in point

The focus here is not on the paradox of sovereignty and responsibility;[11] it is on this assertion: "Fallen man does not have free will in his moral actions, but he does have full moral responsibility." Here, free will means that fallen man has the ability to do good or evil.[12]

Our case in point has two threads. They are in tension since it is difficult to grasp their inter-connection. It is easy to use one to deny the truth of the other. One could argue that if man is morally unable in his actions then he cannot be accountable for them. Moreover, it is easy to reason that if man is accountable (in light of Judgment Day), then he must have moral ability, i.e. free will.[13] Questioning belief in responsibility is hardly controversial, so our present task is to establish the claim that fallen man does not have free will.

Six inter-related reasons support this claim.[14] These things may come to us as personal assault.[15] We want the mirror on the wall to speak, but not to tell the truth of our natural ugliness.

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intents and purposes another theological paradox and is most likely misstated because his paradox/reason tension boils down to the tension between a ministerial and a magisterial use of reason. Thus, and contrary to Ciocchi, when we face tensions such as the deity and humanity of Christ that the records of church history and historical theology show to be "intractable tensions," it is reasonable to conclude that these thoughts transcend our thoughts like the heavens transcend the earth. We should be excused for thinking that it is *impossible* for us to fully comprehend these thoughts revealed to us by the incomprehensible God! For Turretin, reason serves theology as its handmaiden and must function "in subjection to Scripture" and not preside over Scripture; "reason…neither can nor ought to be constituted the rule of belief," Francis Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, ed. James T. Dennison Jr., trans. George Musgrave Giger, 3 vols. (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 1992-97), 1:24-28. Ciocchi's tension thus becomes: paradox (reason in its ministerial role) vs. reason (reason in its magisterial role). On context, we must saturate ourselves with a passage by prayerful meditation and reflection in order to absorb the pattern of thought. We must work hard at grasping the writer's purpose in a verse within a paragraph, within a book in the New Testament, within the Bible, within the history of redemption, remembering that the ultimate author is the Holy Spirit. This is easier to say than to do: we need to practice the art of careful contextual thinking. We need to expend much effort to absorb the patterns present in the word of God (cf. the outline of sound words, 2 Tim 1.13). Failure in the handling of paradoxes shows up in the twisting of words and the forcing of passages beyond clear contextual warrant. Granted, sometimes we will have to debate about what is contextually clear. Thinking there may be contradiction leads us to closer reading of the text; that is a benefit, especially when we engage with open-minded humility.

[11] See John Frame, *No Other God: A Response to Open Theism* (P & R Publishing: Phillipsburg, NJ, 2001), pp. 119-141 for a discussion of free will in relation to foreordination.

[12] "God has give us genuine freedom to accept or reject the grace offered to all," Bruce R. Reichenbach, "Freedom, Justice, and Moral Responsibility," in The Grace of God and the Will of Man, ed. Clark H. Pinnock (Minneapolis: Bethany House Publishers, 1999), 299 and "the power of moral choice entails the ability either to choose the good God designed for us or to reject it…the good thing called free will" is something man has in the fall, Norman Geisler, Chosen But Free: A Balanced View of Divine Election (Minneapolis, Minnesota: Bethany House Publishes, 1999), 22-23, 29. David Basinger emphasizes the philosophical definition that free will is the ability to what you want without being forced in doing it: "God…must allow choice to be voluntary in the sense that it is free from coercive divine manipulation," *The Case for Freewill Theism: A Philosophical Assessment* (Downers Grove, Ill: Inter-Varsity Press, 1996), 36. Notably, Calvin states that those who are not graciously illumined by the Spirit are people who "voluntarily disbelieve," *Concerning the Eternal Predestination of God*, trans. J. K. S. Reid (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1997), 58.

[13] In his infamous book on the philosophy of religion ("*Religion within the Limits of Reason Alone*"), Immanual Kant gave philosophy and theology a definition free will that has the status of a commandment indelibly codified for all time on tablets of stone. His definition is intuitively simple and profoundly toxic. On one hand, if I am responsible for my actions, then I must be able to choose to do what is right or to do what is wrong. On the other hand, for Kant (and in many subtle ways for his disciples), belief in autonomous free will is an ultimate controlling belief (a presupposition) in his interpretation of Scripture and Christianity. For example, according to Kant's reading of Scripture, it is of the essence of man that the antecedent to every act is an expression of freedom; otherwise, "the use or abuse of man's power of choice in respect of the moral law could not be imputed to him nor could the good or bad in him be called moral" (p. 16). Thus, the tablet of stone for much of modern philosophy and theology has these inscriptions: "If I am responsible, then I must be able" and "duty demands nothing of us that we can not do" (p. 43). His ultimate controlling belief leads Kant to some extraordinarily toxic views: restoration from the fall by self-conversion, the Son of God as a personification of the perfect humanity located in each person and justification by faith in the good that one finds within and freely chooses to incorporate as a maxim or rule of life (pp. 40-48). A contemporary example of this same toxicity is the open-theist use of free will as the controlling belief that leads ultimately to a redefinition of the biblical teaching about God (as Frame shows in *No Other God*, pp. 119-122).

[14] For clarity I state them in a blunt way; the intent is not dogmatism but efficiency. My goal is irenic.

Thus, we need to approach the following reasons cautiously knowing that it is difficult to be true to thine own self. There is some overlap.

1) Free will doctrine fragments the person

Fallen man does not have free will because Scripture does not speak of having a "free will" but of being a free person. But fallen man is not a free person; He is enslaved to sin and free from righteousness: **When you were slaves of sin, you were free in regard to righteousness** (Rom. 6.20). He, the person, not his will, must be *set free* for righteousness (Rom. 6.18). Thus, in Scripture, there is no such "thing" as a free will; there is only a free person who chooses and decides accordingly in contrast to an enslaved person who chooses and decides accordingly.

2) Free will doctrine misrepresents human nature

Fallen man does not have free will because he cannot decide, choose, or act outside of his evil nature. Like a diseased tree, he cannot bear good fruit[16] (Mat. 7.18) and **the evil person out of his evil treasure brings forth evil** (Mat. 12.35). Free will doctrine teaches that the evil person out of his evil heart brings forth some good (at least when he chooses to submit to God in faith), but this idea misrepresents the teaching of Jesus that character determines conduct. To make the point by inversion, consider that fact that a loving mother cannot intentionally harm her child; she cannot act outside of her character as a loving mother. Nor can unloving evil people bear good fruit.[17]

Also, note both strands of this paradox: a) moral inability is here: the evil heart *cannot* bear good fruit (Mat. 7.18) and the evil person (Mat. 12.34, **you are evil**) *cannot* speak good things (12.34, **You brood of vipers! How can you speak good, when you are evil?**). b) Full responsibility is here: **on the day of judgment people will give account for every careless word they speak** (Mat. 12.36).[18] Therefore, free will teaching misrepresents human nature by affirming that fallen man can act contrary to his evil nature.

3) Free will doctrine supports only half of its definition

Fallen man does not have free will because he cannot do anything good. Free will teaching (fallen man can do good or evil) has the doing evil half of its definition in place but not the doing good half.

Since Scripture is so clear on the natural man's moral inability (he cannot bring forth good actions, he cannot believe,[19] he cannot understand the things of the Spirit; he cannot submit

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[15] We deceive ourselves with illusions and when the conscience is disquieted by God's law, "it begins to fear that ti might be living in illusion and untruth, that its values and calculations are unfounded, that it is moving in the wrong direction…this law [is] the great disrupting of the presupposed illusion of the "You ought and therefore you can"…a self-entrenching against God…In this illusion man himself is the subject who commands; he is autonomous …refusing to acknowledge God…God makes contact with man at the point where man digs in against him, at the nerve of man's curving in upon himself. The contact is thus a new creation and a new birth…miracle (Helmut Thielicke, *The Evangelical Faith: Prolegomena, the Relation of Theology to Modern Thought Forms* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974] 144-146.

[16] The Christian is a good tree and his inability to bring forth bad fruit is eschatological. For the non-Christian, the inability to do anything good is part and parcel of the present evil age.

[17] However, if character determines conduct, what then do we say about character determining choices such as the choice to study the Scriptures regularly to be shaped by them in submission to Christ for the glory of God? That character determining choice arises from Christian character already, from the renewal of the heart by the Holy Spirit that gives "newness of life" (Rom. 6.4). Otherwise, the natural man cannot submit to the law of God (Rom. 8.7). He must be set free from his slavery in order to be free for righteousness (Rom. 6.18).

[18] Jesus teaches that there is moral inability (because you are evil, you cannot speak good words) and the fact of full responsibility (you will give account for every careless word, which is *a fortiori* for absolutely every word). Before the Genesis flood, every inclination of man's heart was only evil continually, Gen. 6.5. Being so gripped by their rebellion and sinfulness, they could not do anything good, but they were fully accountable as the judgment of the flood showed. That judgment is an anticipation of the final judgment. As an accountable and inexcusable law-breaker (Rom. 1-3), the natural man cannot submit to God or His law (Rom. 8.7, For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God's law; indeed, it cannot). Noting that submission to God is a quality of faith's submissive obedience, it is clear that the natural man cannot come to Christ in faith and coming to Christ is surely something good.

[19] John 6.44 ("**no one can come to me**": no one is able to believe); Romans 8.7 (he cannot submit [in faith] to God).

to the law of God, etc.[20]), we wonder about the source of the idea of free will. What is the biblical basis for tweaking the impact of the large number of *clear* inability texts in the interest of affirming belief in free will? As far as I can tell there is one line of support: the notion that "ought to" implies "able to"; as Geisler claims: the command to believe indicates the ability (freedom and free will) to believe.[21]

This belief is a starting point in Kant's philosophy of religion and in the typical defenses of free will.[22] It is allegedly self-evident and intuitive. Hence, it easily takes on presuppositional status. However, there is the serious problem that *this principle opens a flood gate for evil without responsibility* because "if I am morally responsible then I am morally able" logically, by contraposition, implies "If I am not morally able, then I am not morally responsible."[23] This logical entailment is highly suspect. The following examples show that the "ought/able" inference fails.

a) Sub prime slime example: If I am morally responsible to pay my mortgage (it is more than money; it is a moral obligation) then I must be morally able to pay it (I must be honest and work hard) *and* if not morally able to pay it then I am not morally responsible to pay it. This means that the person who lacks integrity (who cannot find it in himself to be honest, work hard, and sacrifice to meet his financial/moral obligations) is not accountable (to men or to God).[24]

b) Hitler example: if Hitler was not able to love the Jews then he was not responsible to love them. He was so saturated with compounding sins that *bound* him in lust for power, hatred, and murder that he was therefore not responsible for what He did. Clearly, responsibility does *not* imply ability.

c) Worst are least example: if responsibility implies ability, then as a criminal becomes more hardened, he becomes less responsible.

d) Commandments example: is the non-Christian responsible to keep the Ten Commandments? Surely, we will say, "yes!" Is he able to comply with them[25] in their true spirit and intent? Surely, we will say "he is *not* able."[26] Therefore, responsibility does not imply ability and the philosophical basis for free will does not overturn the clear biblical teaching on fallen man's moral inability.[27]

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[20] Cunningham, *Historical Theology*, II, 586-88.

[21] Geisler, *Chosen but Free*, 30.

[22] In Kant's reading of Scripture, it is of the essence of man that the antecedent to every act is an expression of freedom; otherwise, "the use or abuse of man's power of choice in respect of the moral law could not be imputed to him nor could the good or bad in him be called moral," Immanual Kant, *Religion within the Bounds of Reason Alone*, trans. Theodore M. Greene and Hoyt Hudson (New York: Harper and Row Publishers, 1960). 16. Thus, the tablet of stone for much of modern philosophy and theology has these Kantian inscriptions: "If I am responsible, then I must be able" and "duty demands nothing of us that we can not do" (*Religion* 43). Interestingly, Kant's argument for free will is the reductio: without it there is no such thing as morality.

[23] Another example of contraposition (that applies to sufficient conditional statements) pertains to faith and salvation: "If you have faith then you have salvation" logically contraposes to "If you do not have salvation then you do not have faith."

[24] On this principle, the inability to be honest and have a hearty work ethic that leads to mortgage default demands a moral social order in which foreclosures are unethical and bail outs are proper. On a larger scale, this opens a wide door to moral hazard: I can "irresponsibly" take bad risks because I will not be held accountable.

[25] Because of debate about the Law, we should note that this argument has the same weight if we substitute the commandments of Jesus for the Ten Commandments. Or, we might simply ask, "Are we responsible to be holy as God is holy?" Surely, we are responsible even though we are unable.

[26] If he worships false gods, lies, steals, and commits murder, he is accountable, even though he is not able to obey God's precepts. Moreover, if he disobeys the gospel command to repent and believe, he is accountable, even though he is not able to repent and believe. In a word, fallen man does not have free will because he is evil; his nature is evil; his heart is evil. Because he is evil, we reasonably conclude, do we not, that he is all the more responsible? He is fully responsible; he has full responsibility and no "free will."

[27] Cf. the substantive treatment of the three blocks of biblical material that support the bondage of the will in *Historical Theology*, by Cunningham, II, 586-88. By contrast, Wesley affirms and supports a full fledged doctrine of fallen man's moral inability at the beginning of his *Sermon on Free Grace* by noting that free grace does "not depend on any power…in man; no, not in any degree…Whatsoever good is in man, or is done by man, God is the

4) Free will doctrine misses the full depth of evil[28]

Do we overstate when we say that *fallen sinners do nothing good whatever*? No, because though people may do some "good" outwardly, the natural man fails to meet three conditions of a good act: the right standard (according to God's law), the right motive (arising from love for God), and the right goal (aiming at the glory of God).[29] Hence, Jeremiah argues that fallen man can do something good if the Ethiopian can change his skin or the leopard his spots, but both are impossible, so he is not able to do anything good: **Can the Ethiopian change his skin or the leopard his spots? Then also you can do good who are accustomed to do evil** (Jer.13:23; cf. Gen. 6.5, **wickedness of... his heart was only evil continually**).[30]

This is paradoxical: he has full responsibility and *complete* moral inability.

5) Free will perspective blurs saving grace

This doctrine results in diplopia (dual vision) regarding saving grace in which there exists semi-free/semi-enslaved sinners in a state between slavery to sin and freedom for righteousness. Claim: before the regeneration and freeing of a dead slave to sin takes place, there is a regeneration-like enabling of the dead to respond to the gospel, a granting of freedom to the natural man *while he remains in his fallen state*.[31] This is soteriological diplopia at best (and contradiction at worst). At the place where Scripture presents a single setting free which involves newness of life by a new creation, free will doctrine sees double: a giving of ability prior to regeneration and a giving of ability by means of regeneration.

Problem: all the passages that deal with opening blind eyes, unstopping deaf ears, giving life to the dead, setting the slave to sin free, making a new creation refer to regeneration, the actual bringing of a sinner into fellowship with God (1 Cor 1.7).[32]

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author and doer of it. Thus is his grace free in all; that is, no way depending on any power or merit in man, but on God alone" (par. 3.2, 8-9), even though he ends the sermon by stating that "all who suffer Christ to make them alive" (par. 29.4) "shall live" (29.3).

[28] Free will doctrine yields a definition of sin by which fallen man is able to do some good but it is difficult to accept the idea that this good is acceptable in the eyes of God though it may be such in the eyes of man. Both good and evil actions of fallen man are (re)-defined in human terms before human eyes.

[29] Van Til finds the solution to the good act by asking and answering three questions: "(a) What is the motive of human action? (b) What is the standard of human action? (c) What is the end or purpose of human action? *Christian Theistic Ethics* (Philadelphia: den Dulk Christian Foundation, 1971), 3.

[30] We might say that a serial killer "loves" his mother, but even that love does not meet the three conditions of a good act, so it is not good in the eyes of God.

[31] This enlivening-freeing-enabling is not regeneration; it does not save. Instead, it gives man the ability *in his fallen and natural state* to either obey the gospel or disobey it. In other words, this pre-regeneration-regeneration-like action of God bestows free will. Thus, although fallen man has this ability to hear God's call, to see the truth, and to respond to it, having this ability (this life, this freedom) is not regeneration but a working of grace that makes a significant *change* in the dead sinner freeing him sufficiently and making him alive enough to take the next step and allow God to make him alive by the new birth. This is Wesley's way of holding to a strong view of man's depravity (Sermon on Free Grace, par. 3) and compromising it at the same time because for him dead and enslaved sinners who are unable to respond to the gospel nonetheless "suffer" [allow] God to make them alive (Sermon on Free Grace, par. 29). For a helpful explanation and critical evaluation of the Wesleyan view of prevenient see "Does Scripture Teach Prevenient Grace in the Wesleyan Sense?" by Thomas R. Schreiner, The Grace of God and the Bondage of the Will (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1995), II, 365-382.

[32] There are no passages that *explicitly* apply any kind of enabling, enlivening, eye-opening, or setting free in some way that is *prior to and less than regeneration*. Free will perspective views these things with blurred vision and sees double. On this view, there is some kind setting free of sinners *within their bondage* so they can choose to go free or remain in bondage: they are set free within bondage and given the ability to choose freedom, if they choose freedom, they are then set free from bondage. Evidence from Scripture for the presence of free will in pre-regenerate sinners boils down to two key texts: Jn. 1.9 (The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world) and 12.32 (And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself). However, John 1.9 can be reasonably taken to refer to the non-saving light of natural revelation that renders all men responsible on a par with Rom. 1.1-18. In John 12.32, the drawing of all to Christ says nothing of a pre-regeneration semi-saving grace of enablement, but reasonably refers to the drawing of people from all nations to actual salvation by the power of the cross. Thus, in paraphrase, Jesus says, "by the cross, I will draw people of all nations savingly to myself." It is clear, then on the questionable use of John 12.32, that the cross only secured pre-regeneration and not regeneration (the dead in sin are given sufficient life to respond to the gospel); the cross did not secure redemptive release from sin or

6) Free will doctrine misconstrues the rich biblical notion of freedom

Fallen man does not have free will because *the ability to do evil is not a component of freedom*. The part of the definition that is true (the ability to sin) has nothing to do with being a free person. Consider the following examples.

In the garden, Adam's ability to do evil was not part of his freedom. Instead, it revealed the incompleteness and mutability of his freedom. As the *WCF* states: "Man, in his state of innocency, had freedom, and power to will and to do that which was good and well pleasing to God; but yet, mutably, so that he might fall from it" (IX, 2).

For Christians who can live righteously but who may also sin, is their ability to sin central to their new found *freedom* in Christ? No, it shows that they have freedom now partially and not yet fully. *Their ability to sin is not evidence that they are free*. Instead, it is evidence that their freedom is incomplete. What demonstrates their freedom? What shows that they are free persons is their ability to do good from the heart, even though it has to grow.

Furthermore, saints in heaven do not have the ability to sin (i.e. they do not have free will) and this does not alter their personhood, praiseworthiness, or responsibility. Being free from sin completely is **the freedom of the glory of the children of God** (Rom. 8.21). The free person is the person who is able to do good deeds; he is free for "slavery" to righteousness (Rom. 6.18, **set free from sin**, [you] **have become slaves of righteousness**). To be ultimately and supremely free is to be delivered *from* the ability to sin. Accordingly, heaven is a place where free persons enjoy a glorious God-like freedom.[33]

Notably, God is a free person without the ability to do evil (so, He does not have "free will"). What makes Him free is His ability to act with perfect holiness. Surely, God is praiseworthy for His holy actions even though He cannot lie. Thus, the idea of free will as the ability to choose between good and evil confuses the biblical teaching about freedom.[34]

Therefore, fallen man does not have free will; he does not have the ability to do a single good thing such as submitting to Christ in faith (Jn. 6.44; Rom. 8.7), but he is fully responsible.

3A. Implications

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an eternal release contrary to Hebrews 9.12, which teaches that the cross secured eternal redemption. Ultimately, the teaching rests on the Kantian philosophical notion that "duty implies ability." For Thielicke, this notion is the natural man's illusion that is overcome when the Holy Spirit gives a new self-understanding by death to the old Cartesian self, *Evangelical Faith*, 138-173.

[33] The old *Star Trek* TV shows spoofed this point more than once. They would present a world of perfect peace and harmony where everyone performs only good actions. But this state of affairs is rejected by Captain Kirk because man has no free will. For Kirk, if personal beings are not able to choose good or evil, then it is not utopia. He must be able to choose evil but not do so for it to be utopia. We should note that this is a wholesale attack on heaven. It is a denial that heaven as described in the Bible is a good thing. It denies that heaven is utopia. Why do I say this? Because there are all kinds of personal beings in heaven who cannot choose to do evil and that is part of what makes it heaven. To whom do I refer? They are the saints, angels, and God! What kind of heaven would it be if we thought that there could be another host of fallen angels? What kind of heaven would it be if the saints, rescued from sin for eternal life, could fall again like Adam and Eve? Would you even think of it as heaven, if God were capable of sinning? The elect angels can only choose to do good. The saints in heaven can only choose to do good. God can only choose to do good. The epitome of free will, that is, of the free person with the capacity of will, is the immutable ability to choose only to do good.

[34] Perhaps, we would be better off if we stopped using the confusing words "free will." Calvin refers to "free will" as "a proud name" for "a slight thing" that is all too commonly used in an erroneous sense and should therefore be avoided (*Institutes*, 2.2.8; cf. Calvin's "Refutation of the Objections Commonly Put Forward in Defense of Free Will," *Ibid*., 2.5.1-19). Dropping the term would help clarify things in discussion of the "sovereignty/responsibility" paradox. Ciocchi (*JETS*, September 2008, 573-90) however makes matter worse by moving in the opposite direction and claiming that the SR tension should be called the sovereignty/freedom or the sovereignty/free will tension. There are two problems: a) he fails to distinguish the freedom that belongs only to Christians from the slavery of non-Christians, and b) he apparently assumes the definition of free will in which the natural man is able to do good or evil.

Working from the nature of the paradoxicality model, we can draw some implications for biblical study by scholars, pastors, and church members alike.[35]

1) The paradox model advances clarity in biblical study

Acquaintance with paradoxicality, teaching it, and grasping the model is helpful in handling difficult teachings. It is an organizing principle by which to identify threads of truth for clarity in the midst of complexity.[36]

2) The model elevates divine authority in biblical study

It helpfully accents the place of reason in relation to revelation. The model stresses the ministerial versus the magisterial use of reason in which the reasoning self consciously submits to the authority of God's word[37] *acknowledging that what God has said is true precisely at those places where he cannot discern how revealed threads of truth cohere*.[38]

3) The model promotes humility in biblical study

It is a reasonable attempt to do justice to the connection between **the secret things [**that**] belong to the LORD** and **the things that are revealed [**that**] belong to us and to our children** (Deut. 29.29). For example, that Jesus is both fully God and fully man while remaining one person is *clearly* revealed. How these facts fit together is in many ways beyond our grasp as secret things. Likewise, the moral inability and full responsibility of fallen man are *clearly* revealed facts and the inference from responsibility to the denial of inability is a stab in the darkness of divine secrecy.

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[35] There is much that is practical here for the church. Consider the illustration of a rope over a pulley hanging in front of someone stuck half way down a deep well. The person sees two ropes and cannot see that they connect or how they connect to form a single rope. To use the "ropes" to save his life, he must grab both at the same time. If he grabs one to the exclusion of the other, he will plummet to the bottom of the well. To receive the bread of life from Scriptural paradoxes for our benefit, we must believe and live by both threads/ropes of truth, even if our logic tells us that using one to the exclusion of the other is easier.

[36] As theologians, pastors, and church members encounter threads of truth that seem to exist in intractable tension (such as: the full humanity and full deity of Christ, Scripture is the word of man and the word of God, and so forth) having a handle for these theological boiling pots on the stove gives perspective and keeps us from getting burned by confusion. Serving clarity, the paradox model goes hand in hand with the perspicuity of Scripture. Thus, even the most profound teachings of Scripture are bread of life for the church. Both theological formulation and pastoral proclamation can make profitable use of this model.

[37] Reason functions in a ministerial place as the handmaiden of theology. We must use good reasoning skills in learning Scripture. But reason does not rule over Scripture. This is consciously set forth in the quest of truth from the start. The title of Oliphint's book speaks volumes in this connection: *Reasons for Faith: Philosophy in the Service of Theology* (P&R Publishing, 2006).

[38] This is the failure of Craig/Mooreland in their attempt to find a more logically coherent relation between the deity and humanity of Christ (*Philosophical Foundations For a Christian Worldview* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2003), 606-613. They press unity of the divine person against Christ's true humanity. One divine person with two distinct natures for them yields a revived Appolinarianism in which they lose the full humanity of Christ. They distort church doctrine on the true humanity of Christ by logical inferences from His unipersonality. Granted, they affirm both the humanity and deity of Christ, but the formulation fails to do justice to these paradoxical threads of truth because it draws logical entailments from one thread that deny/distort the other. Accordingly, they adopt a version of Appolinarianism in which the Logos (the eternal person, God the Son) did not have a fully human nature except by the union of His person with the animal nature of a human body. Jesus did not have two wills or a dual consciousness. That they feel leads logically to two persons. Their solution is a subliminal *and* a waking consciousness in the person of Christ. Thus the divine nature becomes subliminal (a variation on, but not an improvement on, kenotic theories that lose sight of His divine immutability). Moreover, the human nature that He took to Himself in the incarnation is incomplete being completed by the Logos. Thus, while affirming the orthodox view of two complete natures and one person they lose both the immutability of the divine nature and the completeness of the human nature. Why? It is because of what they see as contradiction in the historic view of a single person who is both fully God and fully man. In reply, if we stick with Scripture and affirm that Jesus is a single person and that He is fully God unchanging and fully human, then though some may claim contradiction in one way or another (cf. the battles underlying the historic creeds), the orthodox and reformed reply is that since Scripture teaches each of these truths *clearly* (without forcing contexts) and that God has no contradiction in His thoughts or revelation, then the idea of contradiction is only a matter of appearance and not actuality. God knows how these things fit together in truth and with no inconsistency. Layman and scholar can both discern the failure by this distortion and can reasonably conclude that something is seriously wrong with the formulation even if they lack philosophical finesse.

In the words of Calvin, we do "not investigate what the Lord had left hidden in secret" and "we should not neglect what he has brought into the open, so that we may not be convicted of excessive curiosity on the one hand, or of excessive ingratitude on the other."[39] Therefore, within a Christian philosophy regarding critical thinking,[40] we may appropriately refer to accepting theological paradox as the most humble use of logic.[41]

4) The paradox model emphasizes faithfulness in biblical study

The great lesson in exegesis and theological formulation is that *faithfulness to the text has precedence over logical coherence*.[42] This does not stifle debate as if anyone may shout "paradox" and dogmatically end discussion. No, debate must continue by faithful study with the caution that though we must engage with critical thinking, *we must not make logical consistency the dominant principle or ultimate goal*.

For example, if Scripture clearly teaches that the natural man has moral inability and if it clearly teaches that he has full responsibility then, however difficult this may be to harmonize logically, we must accept both and work hard to apply both in preaching, teaching, and living. Similarly, if Scripture perspicuously teaches that the natural man is morally unable to do anything good then this teaching ought to take precedence over logical inferences "from Scripture" that contradict that teaching,[43] such as the duty/ability inference.

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[39] *Institutes* 3.21.4.

[40] By a "philosophy of logic," we are referring to the wise principles necessary in the use of logic. Thus, to say Christians need a philosophy of logic is to say that even the pursuit of wisdom must have a godly foundation. We need wisdom to strive for wisdom. Bottom line: a philosophy of logic means that true knowledge begins with the fear of God and knowledge of His will. Five components show how the fear of God and knowledge of His will give us the foundation for wisdom in a philosophy of logic: logical skill, contextual sensitivity, open-minded humility, presuppositional awareness, and the acceptance of paradox (picture a pie with five slices that represent the basic elements in a Christian philosophy of logic). If any of these components are lacking in our reasoning then to that degree we are unwise, which means we are to that degree ungodly. To be a critical thinker is a matter of godliness. For explanation of these components and for a fuller picture of how paradox fits into a philosophy of logic see "A Christian Philosophy of Logic," by R. Ostella, *JBA*, Spring 2008.

[41] Noting the fact of biblical paradox aids presuppositional awareness that is essential in humble self-criticism by which we look at and evaluate the theological bifocals by which we see. Like bifocals presuppositional glasses determine how we see things, but we can tilt our heads and at times see that with which we see. Awareness of our presuppositions is a way for us to bow our heads and, though difficult to do, go through the door to self-critical thinking. Of course, it is important that we engage biblical context with this awareness in order to do our best to examine our beliefs by Scripture knowing that some of our beliefs color how we read every text. Furthermore, self-criticism is something that we must undertake by prayer and meditation because we tend to wear masks when we look into the mirror of Scripture. As Augustine put it, we tend to put ourselves behind our backs; in our context, this means that we tend to put our cherished, even if false, presuppositions behind our backs so we cannot see them for what they are in the light of Scripture. False presuppositions are like demons: they only come out by prayer and fasting! Switching analogies, we can say that we must be concerned with every relevant thread that intersects the piece of fabric at any given time; otherwise, our work of interpretation will come apart at the seams. Paradoxical truths are threads of truth that are clearly and tightly woven together in the fabric of Scripture even though how they can co-exist in the same fabric may be difficult or even impossible to grasp.

[42] In one sense, admitting paradox is simply another way of saying that God's thoughts are above ours as the heavens are above the earth and it should not surprise us when we face difficulty. What we must do in faithful quest of the truth is pull together biblical data and accept paradox "where it is warranted."(John Frame, Ibid, 323-24). Logic is properly used when it is governed by the recognition of our creaturehood and hence by the recognition of the limits of creaturely reasoning. We must acknowledge the distinction between Creator and creature, and thinking this way must control the use of logic because the laws of logic are founded in the character of God (He is truth and thus there can be no contradiction in His knowledge or revelation). Properly used, the laws of logic will reveal no contradiction in the biblical system of truth because as God's revelation it has no real contradiction.

[43] In this light, the inference that people (believers and non-believers alike) draw from duty to ability wrongly sets aside the biblical teaching about moral inability. The command to keep the whole law of God in its spirit and intent is a duty; from that we must not set aside the doctrine that an evil tree cannot bear good fruit. In turn, the fact that lost sinners have the command to repent and believe does not allow us to infer to their ability to believe and repent such that we set aside all the clear texts on moral inability with respect to faith.

Of course, how we interpret the many passages on inability (blindness, deafness, deadness, etc.[44]) must reflect faithful exegesis.[45] Debate is also legitimate with regard to the "duty implies ability" reasoning to see if it is philosophically problematic, Kantian, and counter-intuitive.[46]

Conclusion

Therefore, theological paradox is not only legitimate, but it is also helpful in calling us to a most humble use of logic in subordination to Scripture. It does so by giving conscious priority to faithful handling of Scripture above logical consistency. Then we can follow Calvin's pastoral encouragement to stop inquiry where the Holy Spirit closes His holy lips.[47] At that point, the reasoning self rests, we rest, on Christ the solid Rock; and there we bow in worship and praise.

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[44] Cf. Cunningham, *Historical Theology*, II, 586-588 and *The Canons of Dort*, "Third and Fourth Heads of Doctrine: The Corruption of man, His Conversion to God, and the Manner Thereof."

[45] Our interpretations must be subject to examination by the church at large. Nonetheless, it should be easy for us to see (by the aid of the paradoxicality model) that there are scores of inability texts and "cannot" texts. It is reasonable to affirm that we must keep them front and center in our discussions with acute awareness of the philosophically problematic nature of the "duty implies ability" challenge to the "clear" message of the "cannot" texts.

[46] It is perhaps the result of the failure to preserve the distinctiveness of the "duty implies ability" principle to Christians who have the indwelling Spirit and can discern spiritual things. It is the natural man that can do nothing good whatever.

[47] "When God stops speaking, we end our quest. Scripture is the school of the Holy Spirit, in which, as nothing is omitted that is both necessary and useful to know, so nothing is taught but what is expedient to know. Therefore we must guard against depriving believers of anything disclosed ….in Scripture, lest we seem either wickedly to defraud them of the blessing of their God or to accuse and scoff at the Holy Spirit for having published what it is in any way profitable to suppress. Let us, I say, permit the Christian man to open his mind and ears to every utterance of God directed to him, provided it be with such restraint that when the Lord closes his holy lips, he also shall at once close the way to inquiry"(*Institutes*, 3.21.3).