

The Moral Tug: Conscience, Quiescence and Free Will

ROLFE KING

University of Aberdeen

rking@abdn.ac.uk

Abstract: In this article I argue that if conscience, working properly, involves some form of ‘moral tug’, then this is incompatible with the state of ‘quiescence’ put forward as a central element of Eleonore Stump’s account of repentance. Quiescence is also a key notion for Stump’s theodicy in *Wandering in the Darkness* and Stump’s thesis in her book, *Atonement*. Quiescence is about an inactive, or neutral, or stationary, state of the will prior to turning to the good, or God, through receiving God’s saving grace. But if God exerts a non-coercive pressure on people through their conscience to turn to him, and turn from evil, then this drawing towards the good, or tugging away from evil, can only be yielded to, or resisted. There is no neutral state. I give examples of language such as being ‘bound’ to obey one’s conscience, which seem to reflect such non-coercive pressure. I conclude by commenting on free will.

Keywords: Conscience, Moral tug; Eleonore Stump, Quiescence, Free will.

1.

At its core, the argument I set out here is simple. If someone is tugging at one to go in one direction, in this case the direction of God and the good, then one must be resisting that tug if one is standing still. Eleonore Stump, by contrast, as we shall see, has developed a notion of ‘quiescence’, where she argues that the will can be inactive, and one can be standing still, or stationary, in relation to turning to God and receiving God’s saving grace, but nevertheless one is not resisting God. One is neither resisting God, nor moving towards God in repentant faith. However, if prior to turning to God, God authoritatively calls one, through one’s conscience, to turn to God in repentance and faith, where one experiences some form of ‘moral tug’ on one through one’s conscience which ultimately comes from God, then standing still, so to speak, must involve some resistance to God.

This issue matters. One reason is that Stump relies on the notion of quiescence in two very significant books of philosophical theology, *Wandering in Darkness* (Stump 2010), and *Atonement* (Stump 2018), which themselves are of interest to philosophical theologians and other Christian thinkers. In particular, the theodicy she develops in *Wandering in the Darkness* is a distinguished attempt to deal with perhaps the most troubling problem for Christians, the problem of evil. In both these books the notion of union with God is central, and for Stump it is very important that the will is quiescent prior to that union.

Another reason is that the topic of free will is profoundly important, and Stump considers that the notion of quiescence resolves a problem that Augustine's theology was unable to resolve: why God, if God can insert goodness into anyone's will, does not do so (2018, 209), a problem which generated deep difficulties regarding election and predestination for the Christian tradition.

No attempt is made here at offering a full account of conscience. And my argument is merely conditional. All it needs is the claim that *if* a right account of conscience involves a moral tug, or something broadly similar, in the situation which Stump's notion of quiescence addresses, then that poses a problem for her account, a point which does not seem to have been raised in discussions about quiescence.¹

We shall be focussing on where conscience involves a sense of conviction of sin, or as a minimum, a prompting in the right direction with an element of warning if one does not move in that direction. In such situations I shall take it that conscience, working properly, will involve a form of tug in the direction of the good, where this relates to the general moral law, or to God, where God is specifically calling one to repent and turn to him. It is the latter case which will be our focus when it comes to Stump and the notion of quiescence, for that, for Stump, is where someone moves from resisting saving grace to their will being inactive, neither resisting such grace nor accepting it. My argument is that this state is not possible if God is actively exerting pressure on their will, through their conscience, to move towards God in repentant faith. In fact, although this is a point I shall not dwell on, it is surely gracious of God to exert that pressure, and there is a sense in which to yield to it seemingly is to accept God's saving grace.

I shall take it that the tug involves a sense of what one *ought* to do. And although I do think that conscience, operating properly in relation to the moral law, does involve a kind of call, or witness from God, about the way to go, I acknowledge that not everyone may subjectively be aware of the tug as involving an inner call. Even so, under the basic model of conscience I am working with, the quite commonly used phrase, 'the testimony of conscience', should not be

¹ E.g. Conscience does not feature in the following articles engaging with Stump's notion of quiescence: Ragland (2006); Timpe (2007); Eford and Worsley (2015); Kittle (2015); Rooney (2015); McGregor (2018).

taken as mere information; it comes with an authoritative element which involves some sense of tug. There may also be a significant sense of discomfort that is part of the phenomenology of that tug, a discomfort that one knows one will feel if one does not obey the call to yield to that tug. But it is the element of tug that is critical to the argument here.

One does not need for my purposes to develop a full account of conscience, or what its relation is to natural reason, nor develop an account of notions such as *synderesis*, habit, act or power in relation to conscience, such as Aquinas does, for example.² For Aquinas, as Brian Davies notes (1992, 233–4), *synderesis* is a natural disposition of the human mind by which we infallibly apprehend ‘certain general moral principles. But these principles need to be applied as we find ourselves in concrete circumstances’ (234), and this practical reasoning is what Aquinas calls conscience. Even here, though, Davies cites Aquinas as saying that the job of *synderesis* ‘is to murmur back in reply to evil and to turn us towards the good’ (Davies 1992, 234, citing *De veritate*, 16.2), so one can see the notion of both of some *inner testimony* to us, and some *inward pressure* on us to *turn* towards the good. It is this inward pressure, linked to some notion of divine call, or divinely designed call, which I am highlighting in this article.

By contrast, a more Protestant approach is likely to be wary about the impact of the fall, perhaps especially about claims of infallible knowledge,³ and might want to include under conscience only any *residual* natural knowledge, however significant, and whatever other processes of reasonings and inner feelings may be involved. So, to try to avoid such potential differences, for my purposes I am going to settle on a very broad account, taking it that our consciences in some sense witness to us about good and evil, or about the law ‘written on our hearts’, so to speak, thus drawing, in broad terms, on Romans, chapter 2.⁴ Furthermore, I will take it, as I am writing from a Christian perspective, that God witnesses to us, in some way, through our consciences about repenting and turning to him, or to Christ.

Within this framework, although a fuller theory of conscience may be desirable, all that is needed for my argument is the notion that conscience, when working properly, as designed by God, will involve some form of tug, or internal pressure, pulling on one towards the right way, and in particular (with an eye to

² E.g. Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, 1.79.12 and 13.

³ E.g. John Webster: “Conscience is caught up by the struggle of God against sin; conscience, too, is overthrown. ... construals of conscience as a phenomenon of natural existence whose operations are reliable and of whose probity we can be justly confident [are] to be rejected ... because of the theological miscalculation involved: about human depravity, about the lack of transparency in human self-knowledge, about our incapacity for innocent and scrupulous enquiry into ourselves.” (Webster 2001, 257)

⁴ Esp. vv. 12–16.

Stump) there will be a tug when God is drawing one towards fundamentally reorienting one's life and calling one to repent and turn to him. Such a minimal account also avoids worries about cultural conditioning of conscience, or issues regarding family and other personal circumstances, as one's conscience develops. This is because our focus is on when God in some way operates through the conscience such that on those occasions the 'tug' really is ultimately rooted in God's design and intentions for our lives. Concerns about whether the tug, or internal pressure, reflects moral realities or God's actual desires, are resolved, for in the situations we are considering there is an internal pressure genuinely pulling one in the right direction.

2.

The notion of a tug, in simple terms, implies that if one is at a place and one is being tugged in a direction away from that place, then one must resist that tug to stay at that place. Thus, if God is in some way exerting a pull on one to move towards the good, and one does not move in that direction, one must resist God to do that.

There is no neutral position. If God's call through conscience is, in effect, to yield to this tug pulling one towards the good, then not to yield is to resist that tug. Put simply, if there is no tug, then a neutral position, involving no resisting of God, is possible, but if there is a tug, then a neutral position is impossible.

There would seem to be two main kinds of moral tug relevant here. First, the tug which relates to obedience to God's moral law (granted there is such a law). Second, a specific call, which seemingly must go through one's conscience, the witness of God's Spirit in some sense that one should turn to God, or Christ.⁵ Both of these tugs would seem to involve a moral imperative, and thus each would seem to be a form of 'moral tug'. It is this second form of tug which is particularly relevant to considering Stump's notion of quiescence which relates to a fundamental reorienting of one's life in the direction of God and the good. I shall take it that God permits resistance to both these forms of moral tug.⁶

Faith is vital here. If God as creator gives a form of witness to one through one's conscience that one has done wrong, and furthermore God's Spirit gives one some form of witness that one should call on God and ask for forgiveness and help to turn from wrongdoing, then this call is a call to put one's trust in God for this. For one cannot respond to such a call from God and ask for forgiveness without putting one's trust in God that this call is indeed from God. So, the call

⁵ This aligns with the scriptural notion that the Holy Spirit witnesses to Christ, and the truths of the gospel, and also convicts people of their guilt. E.g. John 16:7-15

⁶ I shall not, however, discuss the nature of that permission and any related freedom, or how all this may relate to any enslavement to evil.

to faith, if it is indeed through our conscience and comes with the kind of tug I have referred to, is also one that one either yields to or resists. There is no neutral state provided the tug comes with a sense of call and tug to do this *now* and not delay. The call to put one's trust in God, if it comes with this tug, is not something that one can be neutral about. Deferring the decision is to resist God.

This account seems to tie into what Avery Dulles (2002) tells us about Newman's views, who according to Dulles held that God's voice resounds in "the testimony of conscience" such that "normal persons ... have a conscience that commands them categorically to do what is right and to avoid evil" (Dulles 2002, 50).⁷ This also seems similar to what Paul Moser calls being "authoritatively convicted" through conscience, with God leading one "noncoercively, via *volitional pressure*, towards volitional cooperation with God in unselfish love"; conscience includes "conviction of my moral waywardness and noncoercive *nudging* of my will towards divine human cooperation in perfect love" (Moser 2010, 201, my emphases). Nudging, again, suggests a gentle pressure; to ignore the nudging when one is aware of it, is to resist the 'call' involved in that nudging.

Indeed, Moser has made developing an epistemology, which takes God's authoritative call to conscience as epistemically foundational, a key part of his apologetic defence of God's hiddenness, including using language such as "God's perfectly authoritative, trust-inviting call revealed in conscience" (Moser 2008, 74). For my purposes, it is significant that Moser's prominent work gives some *prima facie* support to the notion of the moral tug being central to God's call for us to fundamentally reorient our lives towards him.

Conviction regarding what Moser refers to above as our 'moral waywardness', and of God's authoritative call, can clearly involve more than nudging. It can involve a firm tug, even to the extent of generating considerable interior discomfort. And I shall later suggest that major conversions will involve a crisis of conscience when a stronger sense of God tugging is likely. But even an insistent still small voice, calling one towards God and the good, can come with a sense of interior pulling on one's own will.

Further work would be needed to clarify any distinction between the call to the good, relating conscience to the moral law, and the specific divine call to repent and turn to God. And one might argue that the metaphor of *light* could be used about conscience, but where this may not involve a significant sense of noncoercive pressure on the will or sense of call. It does seem possible, for example, for someone moving properly towards the good to be given more 'light'

⁷ Dulles notes on the same page how Newman puts on the lips of his fictional character, Callista, the notion that disobeying conscience produces a feeling of soreness, akin to when one offends a revered friend. For a helpful discussion of Newman on conscience, see Wainwright (2005, 28–48).

where this need not involve one resisting God.⁸ But it is the element of the *authority* of conscience that seems significant, for this links to notions of the authoritative call or witness. There would seem to be an element of divine authority ‘behind’ any light of conscience, which may still involve some kind of pressure, even for someone in principle without sin, which would then be immediately and obediently yielded to.⁹ But in any case, such further clarifications of my account of conscience are not needed for engaging with Stump’s defence of quiescence, for that is where people have not yet decisively turned to the good and accepted saving grace.

Then one might ask whether the moral tug is really experienced all the time, to which the answer is no, but what matters is the phenomenology when major decisions such as turning to God or the good, are involved. Even then there is no need for the experience to be continuous. By analogy, the simple awareness that someone is in the room, or they could quickly come into it, when that person would pull one in a certain direction could, of itself, be sufficient to exert a kind of internal pressure. *The awareness that such a ‘tug’ could come if one were to go in a particular (wrong) direction itself can still be a form of pressure.* So, whilst I acknowledge that the phenomenology may be complex, and the notion of the pressure would need developing in a fuller account, once again, all that is needed for my argument is the notion that *some form of moral tug* is involved, some form of volitional pressure, particularly in a major reorienting of life towards God and the good such as Stump focusses on.

This basic notion of some form of moral tug helpfully contrasts with the imagery which, as we shall see, Stump uses. It is worth making the related point, though, that perhaps one could develop an account at least partially along the lines of reformed epistemology, to the effect that conscience, if working according to divine design in the right circumstances, can yield a form of knowledge in relation to God’s call. Moser’s project is akin in some ways to this, but strictly speaking, this seems an unexplored option in recent reformed epistemology as such.¹⁰ There may, though, be complex questions regarding whether conscience would then need to involve a distinct cognitive faculty, or

⁸ Thanks to a referee for raising the points in the first part of this paragraph.

⁹ There could also be nudges from the Holy Spirit where someone is not resistant to God, akin to ‘this is the way’, where the natural conscience may not clarify one clear route to take. But such nudges would seem to be both authoritative and to *give light*.

¹⁰ The topic of conscience has not been prominent in reformed epistemology. I take Reformed epistemology, in broad terms, to involve the claim that religious belief can be rational without evidential arguments. For a recent argument that this does not require a special cognitive faculty, see McAllister and Dougherty (2019, 537–557). For a helpful summary of work on Reformed epistemology, see Moon (2016). For a helpful discussion of the notion of the witness of the Spirit, see Abraham (1990). See also King (2013, 292–293) which links conscience and the witness of the Spirit.

whether it would be sufficient if it was a distinct element of a cognitive process, or perhaps just a key element of a family of complex cognitive processes involving reason, desires, volitions and so forth.

Different views over whether conscience involves a cognitive faculty are clearly possible. William Spohn (2000, 123), for example, says that “Conscience is not a distinct faculty, because it integrates a whole range of mental operations.” But for my purposes what is interesting is that in making his case he uses the phrase ‘moral tug’, when he asserts that “Larger purposes and standards beyond the self exert their moral tug on the individual through conscience” (123). And the phrase, ‘moral tug’, is used quite prominently in Russell Connor and Patrick McCormick’s influential introduction to Catholic ethics (e.g. Connor and McCormick 1998, 3–4; 14; and chaps. 7 and 8).

It is that element of moral tug which, if it is operating in line with divine design, may point to some kind of faculty if it yields something *additional* in terms of information, or awareness of a form of call, which other cognitive faculties and processes would not yield. This may be an inward sensing of some kind of signs, which needs to be combined with other such processes, but if God is to convey something about his intentions for us, it would seem that he must signify this in some way to us, through some form of witness.¹¹

There are related notions to that of a tug, such as conscience involving an authoritative command, or a sense of being *summoned*, or of being *bound* to keep to one’s conscience as to being bound to keep the law, or of being *held* to account by one’s conscience. The word ‘bound’ here is perhaps particularly common. But note the metaphorical element in these terms, which nevertheless points to a real sense of *pressure, even with a measure of force*. Here I am not suggesting a coercive force. A tug need not be coercive. Indeed, the voice of conscience can surely sometimes be a still, small voice. But there is still this element of pressure, even if at times it is loving and gentle pressure. At other times, of course, as with a parent who might start with loving gentle pressure but then must be more assertive, the same is surely true for conscience. But these concepts, I suggest, come with a sense of volitional pressure, to use Moser’s phrase mentioned above. There is a pressure on the will to move in a distinct direction. The language too of being ‘bound’ to *follow* one’s conscience also indicates this *directional aspect*.

3.

I am not attempting to fully defend this account, although I accept its broad accuracy. My argument is conditional: *if* the operation of conscience includes features such as I have outlined, then when conscience is operating in line with

¹¹ On this see King (2013).

God's design, one cannot be neutral about the divine call involved. Unless one obeys that call, one is resisting it, and thus resisting God. There is no neutral state.

Whilst not making a full defence of the claim that there is such a moral tug, what I have been doing is commenting on some of the language used in Christian comments about conscience, indicating some links which potentially give support to this claim. Here, before turning to consider Stump's notion of quiescence, I give a few more illustrations along these lines.

I start with some statements from Vatican II:

On his part, man perceives and acknowledges the imperatives of the divine law through the mediation of conscience. In all his activity a man is bound to follow his conscience in order that he may come to God, the end and purpose of life. (Vatican Council II, *Dignitatis Humanae*, 3.)

In the depths of his conscience, man detects a law which he does not impose upon himself, but which holds him to obedience. Always summoning him to love good and avoid evil, the voice of conscience when necessary speaks to his heart: do this, shun that. For man has in his heart a law written by God; to obey it is the very dignity of man; according to it he will be judged. Conscience is the most secret core and sanctuary of a man. There he is alone with God, Whose voice echoes in his depths. (Vatican Council II, *Gaudium Et Spes*, 6.)

These statements include language already identified such as 'bound to follow', 'holds him', 'summoning him'. The 'voice of conscience' 'speaks to his heart' and there is a command involved: 'do this, shun that'. Conscience when operating properly may not enable the direct hearing of God's voice, but one hears an echo of God's voice. Given that it is sin not to obey God, it follows that not to obey one's conscience, when it is operating in line with 'God's voice' is to sin. So, if God calls to one to repent and turn to him in faith, and this call is heard through the conscience, then to disobey this call is to sin. The nature of such a *call* from God is that we are to *yield* to it. It is authoritative; not to yield is to resist that call. There is no neutral option. The call comes with a form of noncoercive pressure which should be yielded to.

Another related notion is that of being *accused* (as in Paul's language in Romans 2:15) which again hints at this sense of pressure. Similar notions of threat and promise, but also with a slightly different tone, seeing conscience as a kind of ruler and teacher of the soul, can be combined as, for example, when the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* cites Newman, who is arguing that conscience is a 'dictate' which conveys:

the notion of responsibility, of duty, of a threat and a promise. ... [Conscience] is a messenger of him, who, both in nature and in grace, speaks to us behind a veil,

and teaches and rules us by his representatives. Conscience is the aboriginal Vicar of Christ. (*Catechism*, s.1778, citing Newman [1885, 248]).

This aligns with what I have been suggesting in relation to both to the moral law and the witness of the Holy Spirit to us ('both in nature and grace' as he puts it). But here Newman uses the language of threat and promise, and of duty. Not to obey one's conscience is to sin, to not do what one is *duty bound* to do. Again, as with the language of threat and promise there is this sense of the exertion of some form of pressure, as, of course, the notion of a dictate speaks of an authority that it is necessary to obey. Even so, this is not coercive pressure, in that one remains free to resist the pressure, but there can be a real threat associated with not obeying.

The *Catechism* also says:

Moral conscience, present at the heart of the person, enjoins him at the appropriate moment to do good and to avoid evil. It also judges particular choices, approving those that are good and denouncing those that are evil. It bears witness to the authority of truth in reference to the supreme Good to which the human person is drawn, and it welcomes the commandments. When he listens to his conscience, the prudent man can hear God speaking. (*Catechism*, s. 1777)

Here the word 'enjoins' reflects that notion of exerted pressure, as does the notion of 'the authority of truth'. And the language of 'the supreme Good to which the human person is drawn' illustrates this again. We are *drawn* to the good. Drawing is like a gentle, ongoing tug. Or it could even be a firm, ongoing tug. But there is pressure, however lovingly, or occasionally perhaps with much more assertively commanding force, being applied.

A related image of being drawn to the good would be that of magnetic force. One could think of someone saying that Jesus and his teaching had exerted a magnetic force on them. Here something about the goodness of the person involved is what draws, and there may at that time be less focus on one's personal wrongdoings. But this magnetism too may come with what is (from a Christian perspective) the divine call through the conscience to follow Christ, with an awareness that there is something right about moving in that direction, being drawn to do so.¹² In sum: *The Good draws one towards the good, through one's conscience, when it is operating rightly.*

It is the link between conscience and the interior pressure of the divine witness (when conscience is operating rightly with the right information available to the

¹² One might also consider the scriptural notion about no-one coming to Christ unless the Father *draws* them (John 6:44).

person) which is significant here. The word 'tell' is also important; it speaks of the authoritative witness, or testimony, of conscience, the 'dictate' of conscience, as a kind of 'dictate of reason'. According to the outline model I am working with, when our consciences are working in the right way, with the right information, then they 'tell' us, or 'dictate' to us, the way to go, with a sense of authoritative, real internal volitional pressure.¹³

As I have said, I am not putting forward a full theory of conscience. *But what matters is what a properly, or at least an adequately, functioning conscience would do in the situation which Stump focuses on in her defence of the notion of quiescence.* This is where a person is considering turning in repentance and faith to God. If in that situation God does exert pressure through the call of conscience, then there is no place for neutrality: not to obey God's command through the tug of conscience is to disobey it, which involves some form of resistance to God.

4.

We are now ready to consider the notion of quiescence as set out by Eleonore Stump and relied on in a significant way in her account of atonement, in her book *Atonement*, and in the theodicy she offers in her book *Wandering in the Darkness*. Both these books are remarkable achievements, with much material of real interest for both philosophical and theological reflection.

Neither book, however, has a significant discussion of conscience as it relates to repentance and turning to Christ or God in faith.¹⁴ And there is a tension between the notion of conscience involving a tug, and the notion of 'quiescence' developed and relied on by Stump in these books. For the notion of quiescence is one which takes it that a neutral position is possible, or to use Stump's language, the will can be 'turned off'. Drawing on her understanding of Aquinas, she says:

- (1) The will can detest its past wrongdoings and love God's goodness.
(Call this 'an acceptance of grace.')
- (2) The will can cleave to its past wrongdoings and reject God's goodness.
(Call this 'a refusal of grace.')

¹³ See Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, I.2.19.5, for this kind of tone deployed by Aquinas even in referring to obeying an erroneous conscience.

¹⁴ She does comment on conscience in her book on Aquinas; e.g. Stump (2003, 89–90; 354–358), but this is not used as a basis for any discussion in *Wandering in Darkness* and *Atonement* as regards the role of conscience in repentantly turning to God, or Christ, in faith.

- (3) The will can simply be turned off as regards its past wrongdoing and God's goodness. (Call this 'the quiescence of the will as regards grace.')

For Stump, only if one is quiescent, can God then put 'operating grace' into a person's will, which will efficaciously move them towards the good. Only then will such a person form a "global higher-order desire that is the will of faith" (2018, 207). For Stump, "the will of faith is ... the global second-order will to have, though God's help, a will that wills the good, universally understood" (204). If God were to insert such a desire into someone before they were quiescent, when they had a global higher-order desire to resist God and the good, then God, for Stump, would be over-ruling that person's free will. God would be replacing a person's will, which would involve undermining their nature, which God would not do (201). Union with God is central to Stump's project, both in *Wandering in Darkness* and *Atonement*, and for Stump that cannot happen without the will first being quiescent, for this avoids this problem of over-ruling a person's free will.

Stump holds that this account "can give an answer to a question Augustine wrestled with unsuccessfully, namely, why God does not cause the justifying act of will in everyone" (209), or, in short, why if God has the power to save everyone he does not do so. For, under Stump's account, it is *not* in God's power to save those who continue to resist him. Under her account ultimate control over a person's will remains *with the person*, not with God: they can always choose again to start resisting God. People can still refuse grace or fail to refuse grace (209).

On its own terms, Stump's account also avoids any worry about Pelagianism,¹⁶ for it is in line with the traditional Christian view that people cannot move towards God of their own ability at all. God alone must be the cause of such a movement. Pelagianism is avoided because of the state of quiescence.

Here it is helpful to trace back to Stump's account of love. She writes:

In desiring the good for a human person and union with a human person, God is desiring the same thing, at least where the ultimate good is concerned. In addition, God's love is the source of whatever goodness or excellence there is in a person... So, in loving a person God is offering goodness to that person (2018, 80).

¹⁵ Stump, 2018, 207. In this article I draw mainly on her more recent book, *Atonement*, but comparable material can be found in *Wandering in Darkness* (Stump 2010, 165–9).

¹⁶ I take this to involve the view that human beings are capable of some good act, or of moving towards God and the good, independently from God moving them. Stump has similar material in her book on Aquinas, (Stump 2003, chap. 13), but with a fuller defence of why her position, derived from her reading of Aquinas, involves neither Pelagianism nor semi-Pelagianism.

God graciously offers us goodness. Note here that the language is of offer, not of authoritative call, or command. It is certainly different in tone to Christ's recorded command to repent and believe the good news.¹⁷ It is also not clear how anyone could desire the good which God offers unless they have some recognition that it might be desirable, nor is it clear how they could recognise that it is God who makes the offer, for without faith in God they cannot believe the offer is from God.

How do people know, or even begin to sense, that they are being offered something by God? One cannot be offered something except by some form of communication. So there must, I suggest, be some form of divine communication, some way God testifies that God desires to bless this person.¹⁸ And since it is clear that this person has not yet turned to the good, it would seem in line with traditional Christian thought that God also communicates in some way his displeasure with that person's sin, and calls them to turn to God. Grace, then, in these circumstances must involve *some awareness* of an offer of great blessing, and seemingly also of the potential consequences of continuing to resist God.

Could such a great offer and call to turn away from wrongdoing make an appropriate impact on one independently of one's conscience? Not if, as Christian tradition surely affirms, conscience is central to our moral life. So, there must be some way in which one's conscience witnesses to one that one ought to receive God's offer of grace. It must do this, given that conscience is a feature of our cognitive processes (if not a faculty) designed by God, and God is the one making this offer in a way that the person can become aware of that offer. Grace itself must graciously come with a call through one's conscience. There must be a *call of grace*. God's Spirit, the Spirit of grace,¹⁹ must witness to one in some way about this call, and this witness must be connected to the witness of one's conscience. The call would seem to involve an explicit, or at least implicitly understood, form of *promise and warning*: turn to me and I will bless you. Keep sinning and you will reap further painful consequences of such sin.

5.

The role of conscience here is critical. And here Newman's comments cited above, about conscience conveying a threat and a promise, are clearly relevant. We are in the region of the moral tug. There must be a sense of it being *right* to move in the direction one is bidden to move towards. One knows not to so move is to do something wrong. If one's conscience is working properly, or at least

¹⁷ Mark 1:15. See also 1 John 3:23, referring to the *command* to believe in the name of God's Son, and Acts 17:30 about God *commanding* all people to repent.

¹⁸ Some form of divine self-communication would seem necessary. On this see King (2013).

¹⁹ Heb. 10:29.

adequately, there will be a tug on one to obey the call of grace. It is more than just an offer, an invitation. It involves an authoritative call. God does not offer us the option of whether we would like to obey the divine law. We are commanded to obey, albeit that we are given freedom to disobey that command. And that command to obey is what, on the account of conscience I have sketched out, is echoed in consciences when God moves upon them, and they and the relevant related cognitive processes work in line with God's design. There is both an element of testimony *and* a moral tug which conveys to one that one should *yield* to that call. At the very least one must begin to sense being drawn towards the good and begin to sense that one ought to respond to that call and that interior drawing towards the good.

Stump, however, puts forward different imagery, where:

the will's motion is ... analogous to bodily motion, Paula can walk east, or Paula can walk west; but Paula can also simply cease walking east. Paula's ceasing to walk east is not itself an instance of her walking west. Furthermore, Paula can move from walking east to ceasing to walk east without having to walk west in order to do so. Finally, Paula's ceasing to walk east is not a special kind of walking; it is simply the absence of walking, an inactivity or quiescence in those particular bodily parts that function to produce walking. The will's ability to be quiescent is like this... (2018, 207–8).

This is clearly possible, provided God is not exerting some pressure tugging, or drawing one towards the west. But if God is exerting such pressure, then even though one can still stay in one place, without moving east or west, one will then be resisting God.

Stump offers two other related illustrations, this time about 'Jerome' and 'Paula'. Jerome 'is suffering a dangerous allergic reaction to a bee sting and rightly fears death because of that reaction.' He has a great fear of needles such that:

if the doctor were to ask Jerome whether he is willing to accept the injection, Jerome might not be able to bring himself to say 'yes.' But Jerome might nonetheless be able to stop actively refusing the injection, knowing that if ceases to refuse it, the doctor will press it upon him... then his will comes quiescent with regard to the injection, neither accepting it nor refusing it, but simply being turned off in relation to the injection.

A person Paula whose will is quiescent with respect to grace is in an analogous condition... When God gives Paula the grace of justifying faith while her will is quiescent, God is infusing grace into Paula's will when it has ceased to reject grace but has not yet accepted it either. In this condition Paula's will is just inactive. But the inactivity is a surrender, not a mere calm or indifference, because in moving into that quiescence Paula feels her quiescence as a letting go of

resistance to God and God's grace, just as the bee-sting victim understands his quiescence as a letting go of resistance to the injection he fears (208–9).

The first thing to note is that Jerome has faith in the doctor. By analogy he already has faith in God, so this cannot be an illustration about coming to faith in God. As such, it is not correct to say that Paula's situation 'with respect to grace is an analogous condition'. Jerome already has faith. He has already accepted some form of testimony about the doctor that he is a trustworthy doctor. So, this is *very different* to someone wrestling over whether to put their trust in God. The decision to entrust oneself into God's loving care is such that *any form of ceasing to resist entrusting oneself into God's care is itself entrusting oneself to that same extent into God's loving care*. Exactly to the extent that we cease resisting entrusting ourselves into God's loving care we entrust ourselves into God's loving care. There is no neutral point.

Jerome already has faith in the doctor, so there is no analogy with Paula, given the claim that her movement is from lack of trust in God to trust in God. But if Paula is aware that she has been resisting God then she already believes in God and knows that God is calling her to turn to him. How can she know this, or even begin to sense this, independently of God acting through her conscience, through God's Spirit calling her to turn to him? How is this possible without some sense of conviction of sin, and conviction that she should repent? But if such conviction comes with a sense of interior tug, pulling her, or drawing her towards God and the good, then the only way to cease resisting the call of such divine grace is to yield to it. As noted at the outset, it is gracious of God to exert that pressure and it seems that to yield to it *is to accept God's saving grace*.

Paula cannot feel 'her quiescence as a letting go of resistance to God' unless she knows that it is God she has been resisting. If Paula knows that God is calling her to turn to him then she knows that it is sin not to do so. Sin is disobedience. *If she genuinely ceases resisting entrusting herself into God's loving care, then she in fact entrusts herself to God*. Ceasing resisting the call to trust simply is to begin trusting. Insofar as she ceases resisting God's command to entrust herself to him, she does entrust herself to him. There is no neutral state. She obeys God's command. But this she cannot do according to the traditional Christian view: she cannot move to obeying God's command to entrust herself to him unless God moves her.

It is noteworthy too, that we are not dealing here with a minor sense of 'nudging' which I referred to earlier, which may relate to conscience as God might gently desire to alter one's path in life. The kind of changes discussed by Stump relate, as she says in a comparable passage in *Wandering in Darkness*, to "people in the process of serious psychological change" (2010, 167). She then goes on to cite Augustine and his conversion (167). But this conversion, as surely other dramatic conversions do, involved, I suggest, a *crisis of conscience*. As such, the

divine witness and tug, through conscience, was surely felt *more strongly*, if indeed conscience comes with the moral tug I have highlighted. If so, there could be no quiescent state in such conversions.

One might, of course, say that a person involved in such a conversion experiences both the divine tug and the pull to evil. And that would seem true. But Stump's position in effect involves the claim that we can escape the pull of evil without God moving upon our will and arrive at a neutral position. However, if God is pulling us towards him, then there is no neutral position.

We have, then, two very different ways of reading things, dependent on one's view about whether conscience, or God's witnessing through conscience, involves a form of moral tug, or a drawing towards the good. As already noted, Stump does not clarify the role of conscience in her account, as regards repentantly turning to God, or Christ in faith, although she does note that:

Aquinas thinks there is an objective moral standard and that it can be known by the exercise of reason. In fact, he thinks that the objective moral standard, even in its rudiments, is so accessible to ordinary human reason that no human intellect is ever totally in ignorance of it (2018, 126).

This draws on the notion of *synderesis* as a basis for acts of practical reasoning involved in Aquinas's notion of conscience. The question at hand, though, is related to what it is to *resist* one's conscience, and how God acts, or what occurs in one's conscience, *prior to coming close* to repenting and turning to Christ or God, or the good, and whether that involves some form of moral tug. *One cannot resist something without pressure having been exerted. Resisting the Spirit is resisting pressure from the Spirit. This pressure is a non-coercive pressure on a person's will, nudging, tugging or drawing that person towards repentance and faith.*

Stump's work is remarkable and of real significance. And I am aware that I have not engaged with the fuller Thomistic nuances of her account of free will, but at the very least a problem has been identified which indicates that it would be helpful if Stump clarified what, in her wider account, resistance to God is, and how that relates to conscience and turning to God.

This article has simply drawn attention to a seeming problem for the notion of quiescence. Further clarification is undoubtedly necessary, but in brief, the problem is that the notion of quiescence seemingly cannot apply if the following argument holds:

- 1) To resist God (and thus the Holy Spirit) is to resist the non-coercive pressure exerted by the Spirit on a person's will, through their conscience, to move towards God in repentance and trust.

- 2) To cease that resistance is to yield to God, and thus to move towards God in repentance and trust.
- 3) A properly, or adequately, working conscience, is activated by the Spirit in such a way that this pressure on the will occurs at all relevant moments in the process prior to a person yielding to God.
- 4) Therefore, there is no state of quiescence, no state between resistance to God and yielding to God.

If this is so, then the person might be stationary, with the person neither moving towards God nor moving further away from God, but their will cannot also then be quiescent.²⁰ Whilst, in fairness to Stump, it does seem a *prima facie* problem if one goes from not having a higher-order desire to an opposing desire, through a direct work of God without any state in between these desires, and that may be true regarding many types of desires, it does not seem to apply to the logic of entrusting oneself into God's loving care. Precisely to the extent that we cease resisting entrusting ourselves into God's loving care, we entrust ourselves into his loving care.

6.

I conclude with some tentative reflections intended as pointers for future research. In examining the notion of the moral tug, and resistance to it, I have examined a key feature of our resistance to God. One might have argued that it is always wrong to resist one's conscience and that until one obeys it, one is resisting it, and thus one is resisting God if indeed one is hearing God's witness through one's conscience to repent and turn to God. There is no neutral state. If one's conscience, and related cognitive processes, are operating according to God's design, and one then *knows* that God is either commanding one, or calling one, to do something, then not to do it is to resist God. This seems right to me. But my focus has been on Stump's notion of quiescence and the notion of the moral tug. Here I do not need a fuller account linking conscience to knowledge. It is enough to show that resistance to a tug that ultimately comes from God is resistance to God. But clearly the wider argument is of interest and a theory

²⁰ A reviewer suggests that under a Thomist notion of the will, the will is defined by its being ordained to universal good. It is essentially dynamic; it is the rational 'appetite', and as such cannot, properly speaking, be in a quiescent state. Furthermore, the will is either in an upright relationship with the good, or in a more or less distorted one, but never in a neutral state. I cannot discuss these points in detail here, but it seems that: a) the will could be stationary in one area yet remain active in many other areas; b) a distorted relationship might include resisting God, but also being drawn to God to the point where the will is divided, and is thus stationary as regards neither moving towards God nor actively moving away from God.

linking conscience to knowledge, needs exploring, including links with the notion of *synderesis*.

Then there is the question of whether conscience needs healing as part of the process of salvation. My perspective is that healing is required. Indeed, seeing this may perhaps even help with understanding free will. Thus, if God begins to give light to one's conscience, a light that involves a drawing in the direction of the good and towards repenting and turning to God in faith, then this would seem to involve some light about the desirability of life in 'God's kingdom'. If so, then in one part of one, there is an inner orientation either being formed, or perhaps that has laid dormant, an orientation towards God and the good, now being awakened. (Further research is clearly needed as to whether this orientation has lain dormant or needs to be entirely re-formed according to God's original design for that person.) In another part of one, there is resistance to that voice of conscience and to this growing light. But because this growing light also awakens desires for the good, there may be a process of melting, such that one's resistance slowly ceases *as one's own desire in the other part of one's being* increases for God and God's ways.

Critically, our conscience *really is our own conscience*. The 'voice' that echoes in it, when it works properly, is ultimately God's, but it is *also* the voice of our *own* conscience. My *own* conscience, so to speak, calls to me to turn to God and orient my life in the direction of the good, as God's Spirit increasingly acts to restore it. So when the turning point arrives, when the drawing towards the good finally is such that I come to desire the good, it is my own conscience, in that sense the conscience of my true identity, the true self that God always designed me to be,²¹ with the related desires that God always designed for my true identity to be moved by, that God awakens to call me to turn to God. God's Spirit turns me and my conscience, reorienting me, including my will and desires, so that now my fundamental orientation is perfectly pointed in the direction of the good, as Christ's life enters mine. I may still have many flaws, but at the point of turning to God, my true self, the self that is again being re-formed in line with God's original design for me (or has perhaps been latent in some way within me, slowly dying until God breathes new life into it), now overcomes, though God's power, the resistance of my old self. I arise and I walk into a new realm of freedom.

Is this a form of violence, of God riding roughshod over my free will? But it is I, with my conscience and feelings being renewed in line with my true self, who then desires to be freed from the pull of the old self, the pull to the life of selfishness. Is it not my old self that was violent in rejecting my true, original

²¹ John Webster interestingly comments that, "In conscience I attend to the call of my "perfected" self; conscience is the presence to me in reflection of the moral effect of my new identity established in Christ through the Holy Spirit." (Webster 2001, 258–9)

design as a child of God? Did not the rejection of conscience itself *fracture my soul* in some way?²²

From my perspective, it is the Spirit who orients the fundamental direction of our natures perfectly towards God and the good; the Spirit is given to perfect us. So, in rejecting God at the fall we in some way rejected the Spirit and thus the perfect orientation of our consciences. Some knowledge of sin clearly remained, but not the fullness of light.

In spite of this lack, one part of my fallen self could still have had latent desires, or an imperfect residual deep orientation no longer perfectly pointed, through the agency of the Spirit, towards God and the good, but which was still echoing God's voice, even if in a partly corrupted way. This residue was on the path of certain disintegration and death, with no ability to become spiritually alive. And in the other part of my fallen self, the will of the fallen self was actively involved in rejecting any residue of the soul's original design to be perfectly oriented towards God and the good, and was in danger of moving ever more deeply towards evil. Healing comes when the Spirit reorients my conscience (and desires) at the deepest level of my being, so that the voice of God comes sufficiently clearly through, and the pull on my fallen will becomes a greater tug, so that at some point I myself desire to turn to God.

Is there a problem with control here? But by contrast, in entrusting our lives into God's care are we not giving ultimate control of our lives to God? Was not the fall connected with us wanting to have inappropriate control of our lives? Stump argues that there must be two wills aligned with one another for true loving communion, noting:

mutual closeness of the sort required for union depends on a harmony between two different wills. But if God determines a person's will then the only will that operates in her is God's will. In that case there will not be two wills to bring into union with each other. There will only be one will, God's will, which is in her as well as in God. Union between her will and God's will is not established by such means; it is obviated or destroyed (2018, 200).

The above problem, about the need for the alignment of two wills,²³ seems potentially resolvable if my true self, with the latent desires which God placed

²² On this, Elizabeth Willems comments that "To disobey the internal law of conscience is to fracture the self at its core." (Willems 1997, 121)

²³ A reviewer suggests that there is an implicit assumption in Stump's thought that consent must come completely from our own selves to be truly ours. But, the reviewer points out, there is a different ontology of evil and good acts: an evil act is one that prevents God from creating, and not a creation of our own, whereas a good act lets God create, so is at the same time completely ours and completely God's creation. Whereas in doing good we never act on our own, in doing evil the sole responsibility is ours. The alignment of the divine will and the human will

within me, which were distorted and slowly dying because I had repressed those desires, even at times violently or at least forcibly resisting them, is what is being restored by God's Spirit. For it is the true self, which through the Spirit, then overcomes the old self. True love between the soul and God is only found when the old self is overcome by the new self, the self now 'in Christ'. Being 'in Christ' surely involves deferring to him as our shepherd. The good shepherd can be trusted to lead us. In that sense we must give him control. He is, and remains, Lord, even while calling us friends and members of his family.

Clearly further research is needed here. But my suggestion is that only when the will of a soul's true identity, the identity designed for it by God, is restored in Christ, with an orientation, including the orientation of conscience, held in place by the Spirit, pointing one's deepest will perfectly towards God and the good, can there be true loving communion between God and a soul. God will not unite in communion with a soul unless within that soul there is a deep orientation perfectly pointing to God and the good. This can only be when the Spirit holds the fundamental orientation of that person's nature so that it points, by the Spirit's power, perfectly towards God and the good, even while such a person still needs much sanctifying. Things in creation are only ordered to God and the good by the Spirit upholding, orienting and renewing their natural powers. *Only when the tug through one's conscience, now being healed and renewed by the awakening power of the Spirit, is such that the resistance of one's old self is overcome, can one enter into loving communion with God, with one's will aligned to God's will.* The will of one's new, true self overcomes the active will of the old self. Then the alignment of two wills occurs, the will of the true self 'in Christ' and the will of God. If, then, these tentative speculations reflect a measure of how things are, it may be that the concept of conscience as involving a moral tug will be of help in reflecting on divine grace and human free will.²⁴

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cannot be understood as the coming together of two independent wills. God's will and a finite created will are not at the same metaphysical level.

I am not sure whether this assumption is present in Stump's thought, and I would prefer not to use the word 'create', but rather stress that the existing creation is brought to perfection, or full potential, by the Spirit with our co-operation. However, my account may be consistent with the ontological distinction the reviewer highlights.

²⁴ I am very grateful to an anonymous reviewer for some very helpful comments.

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