

Free will defence with and without Molinism

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Alvin Plantinga's formulations of the Free Will Defence have relied on the possibility of true counterfactuals of freedom and God's (middle) knowledge of them.¹ The notion of middle knowledge has, of course, come under some heavy fire in recent years. Though Plantinga himself has said that he believes that God has middle knowledge (and, hence, that there are some true counterfactuals of freedom), he suggests that this was a (mere) concession to atheologians.² It's they, not Free Will Defenders, who really need the assumption of middle knowledge. He says, 'Without the assumption of middle knowledge it is much harder to formulate a plausible deductive argument from evil; and it is correspondingly much easier, I should think, to formulate the free will defense on the assumption that middle knowledge is impossible'.³ The main aim of this paper is to investigate this important claim. I will argue that the atheologian's 'task' may be no harder (and might even be easier) without the assumption of middle knowledge; and, correspondingly, Free Will Defence without middle knowledge may fare no better (and might even fare worse) than its Molinist counterpart in solving 'the problem (s) of evil'.

1. Introduction

Every argument from evil claims that some fact about evil (suffering) in the world either logically precludes or renders improbable the existence of an omnipotent, omniscient, perfectly good God. Versions of the Argument differ depending on which fact about evil allegedly does the trick. I presume that it's common ground among friends and foes of theism that the following are (minimal) constraints on any adequate reply to the Argument from Evil (regardless of its formulation): on the one hand, God must be sufficiently God-like; on the other hand, God must not be blameworthy for the (fact about) evil in question. Theists and their critics differ, both among

themselves and with each other, over whether a proposed solution satisfies these constraints (or over whether any solution can satisfy them). There's surely a tension between these constraints. The more God-like God becomes, the more difficult it seems to be to get God off the hook for evil; conversely, the easier it is to get God off the hook for evil, the less God-like God seems to become. I suspect that this tension virtually guarantees that the problem(s) of evil will never be laid to rest once-and-for-all.

2. Molinist free will defence

It has been standard practice to interpret J. L. Mackie as offering an 'incompatibility' version of the Argument From Evil, based (at least initially) on the mere fact that there is any evil at all in the world.⁴ In reply, Plantinga argues not only that Mackie (indeed, every atheologian to date) has failed to establish the rumoured inconsistency in a theist's belief-set, but that the beliefs in question are demonstrably consistent. Plantinga's Free Will Defence attempts to prove (in the first instance) that

(1) An omnipotent, omniscient, perfectly good God exists
and

(2) There is (moral) evil in the world
are jointly consistent by finding a third proposition whose conjunction with (1) both is consistent and entails (2).⁵ Plantinga has suggested various candidates for this third proposition (central lemma of his consistency proof). The most commonly cited candidate appears to be the *possibility* that

(3) God could not have (weakly) actualized a world containing moral good but no moral evil, and God has (weakly) actualized a world containing moral good.⁶

To establish the possibility of the first conjunct of (3), Plantinga appeals to the *possibility* that

(4) Every (possible) person (creaturely essence) suffers from transworld depravity.⁷

According to Plantinga, (4) entails the first conjunct of (3), and so, if (4) is possible, the first conjunct of (3) is possible; and if (4) is consistent with (1), then since (4) entails [the first conjunct of] (3), and since (1) and (3) entail (2), (1) and (2) are consistent.

So stated, the success of this version of the Free Will Defence relies on the possibility that there are some true counterfactuals of freedom (over which God has no control), and the possibility that a particular pattern or combination of them actually obtains such that, if it does, it was beyond God's power (though omnipotent) to weakly actualize a world containing moral good but no moral evil.⁸ The counterfactuals of freedom which

underpin the hypothesis of transworld depravity are not supposed to be logically necessary truths (logical strict conditionals), but contingent truths. It's not hard to see why. Plantinga admits that Mackie-worlds are logically possible.⁹ This follows from his admission that significant freedom doesn't *entail* moral evil (wrongdoing). Yet these counterfactuals of freedom constrain God, i.e. delimit which logically possible worlds (sets of worlds) God can (weakly) actualize. If they were logically necessary truths, they would prevent God from being able to (weakly) actualize a world containing moral good but no moral evil, but at an apparently great cost. That creatures (essences) are transworldly depraved would, if true, be necessary in the broadly logical sense, in which case moral evil would itself be necessary (in any world in which there are creatures). Mackie-worlds would be *impossible*. While that would surely undercut Mackie's famous objection to the Free Will Defence,¹⁰ it would cut both ways. Creatures wouldn't be *free* (in the libertarian sense) with respect to performing some moral evil, on the assumption that it's a necessary condition of being free with respect to performing evil that it's possible that one [freely] refrain from performing it (i.e. there's a possible world in which one does [freely] refrain). So, if creatures are free (in the libertarian sense) with respect to some morally significant action(s), and worlds containing moral good but no moral evil are themselves possible, the relevant counterfactuals of freedom must only be contingent truths. And since they're only contingently true (if true at all), transworld depravity, which supervenes on them, is *merely* an accidental property of those creatures (essences), if any, it afflicts.

But if they're only contingent truths, this means that it's possible for their antecedents to be true and consequents false, which (in turn) means that in some (possible) world(s) they're false. On its most natural reading, Mackie-worlds are worlds in which the (patterns or combinations of) counterfactuals of freedom which underpin the hypothesis of transworld depravity are all as a matter of fact false, and either some of their opposites (with the same antecedents but negated consequents) or some others (which state that creatures would freely do what's right if placed in the relevant circumstances) are true. But if there *are* such worlds, why didn't God actualize one of them (instead of this world)? Answer: they mustn't have been open to God. That question seems to rely *in part* on the assumption that every logically possible world (or every world including God's existence) is (was) open to God (if he's omnipotent), and so, if Mackie-worlds are a proper subset of the set of logically possible worlds, such worlds are (were) open to him.

Plantinga, of course, denies that assumption (which he labels 'Leibniz's Lapse'). Maintaining a distinction between a world's being logically possible and its being open to God would seem to be a necessary, though not by

itself sufficient, condition for the success of the Free Will Defence.¹¹ Some world(s) must not be (have been) open to God. This distinction isn't sufficient, for it doesn't by itself show that it's possible that it wasn't within God's power to have actualized a world containing moral good but no moral evil. Plantinga thinks he has shown both that there are logically possible worlds which God could not have actualized (strongly or weakly), and that among these worlds are possibly all the worlds containing moral good but no moral evil.¹² By Plantinga's lights, given the (possible) truth of incompatibilist, libertarian freedom, which world (containing free creatures) is (weakly) actualizable by God is not *entirely* up to God, but depends in part on what the creatures *would* actually do if he created them and left them free with respect to some morally significant action(s). So long as it's possible that no matter what God had done in any world containing free creatures, these creatures *would* as a matter of fact have done some evil, then it's possible that it wasn't within God's power to have (weakly) actualized a world containing moral good but no moral evil.

3. Plantinga's (Molinist) free will defence under pressure

There are those who charge that middle knowledge is impossible, e.g. on the ground that there are (can be) no true counterfactuals of freedom, or none which, if true, are (can be) true soon enough to be of any use to God in his providential deliberations (logically) prior to the actualization of a world.¹³ In this section, I wish to address a line of attack on Plantinga's Free Will Defence which doesn't depend on *these* (alleged) grounds for the impossibility of middle knowledge. In particular, I want to consider the claim that his Free Will Defence fails *on its own terms* for one or both of the following reasons: (1) the way in which he incorporates counterfactuals of freedom into the Defence is incoherent, and (2) Molinist principles can in fact be turned against him; a God armed with middle knowledge could (would) have actualized a world containing moral good but no moral evil. If these claims are right, then whether or not middle knowledge is coherent, there's good reason for theists to try to develop an anti-Molinist version of the Free Will Defence.¹⁴

Let's begin with some objections to the way in which Plantinga has incorporated counterfactuals of freedom into his Defence. On the face of it, there's something deeply puzzling about the following claim: there are worlds in which (omnipotent) God exists, God creates significantly free creatures, God actualizes (strongly or weakly) choice situations for them, in all these situations the creatures in question always freely do only what's right, but possibly God couldn't have actualized one of these worlds.¹⁵ As

I've already indicated, Plantinga has in effect tried to dispel this puzzle by appealing to the possibility that there are some contingently true counterfactuals of freedom over which God has no control, and the possibility that a particular pattern of them actually obtains such that, if it does, God couldn't have actualized a world containing moral good but no moral evil. Does this dispel the puzzle? Critics are likely to think that it either compounds it or simply shifts it to the counterfactuals of freedom themselves.

I think we can perhaps best see what has bothered some people here by focusing on the accessibility relation for God which Plantinga's account seems to impose (require). On his account, the accessibility relation for God is not only restricted by counterfactuals of freedom, but by their *actual* truth values. Consider, e.g., the following counterfactual:

(5) If Curley had been offered US\$ 20,000, he would (freely) have accepted the bribe.¹⁶

Plantinga seems to want to say that if (5) is true at *our* (i.e., the *actual*) world, then God could not have (weakly) actualized a world (set of worlds) *W* in which Curley is offered the bribe but freely *rejects* it. If, on the other hand, (5) is false at *our* world, then God could not have (weakly) actualized a world (set of worlds) *W** in which Curley is offered the bribe but freely *accepts* it. So, either way, there's a world (set of worlds) including God's existence which God cannot (weakly) actualize. And once we see that there are such worlds, it's possible to see that worlds containing moral good but no moral evil may be among the inaccessible worlds (which would be the case if a particular pattern of counterfactuals of freedom, such as that which underpins the hypothesis of transworld depravity, *actually* obtained).

But from the truth in the actual world of (5), it follows that if God actualized a world *W* in which Curley is offered the bribe but freely rejects it, then (5) would not be true in *W*, and so *W* would not be actual. But how does it follow from this that it wasn't within God's power (simpliciter) to have actualized *W*? At best, it seems that it's not within God's power to actualize a world in which Curley is offered the bribe, he freely rejects it, and (5) is *true*. If (5) is only contingently true (if true at all), there are worlds in which it's false (worlds in which he freely refrains from taking the bribe in those very same circumstances). What could prevent God from being able to actualize one of them (if he exists and is omnipotent in them)? And generalizing from this, if all counterfactuals of freedom are only contingently true, if true at all, what could prevent God from being able to actualize a world in which creatures always freely do only what's right?

Jonathan Kvanvig argues that Plantinga's argument (against Leibniz) that there are worlds – including omnipotent God's existence – which God could not have actualized fails because it rests on an unduly restrictive conception of what it takes for God to have been able to actualize a world.¹⁷ It's too

restrictive, he says, because which counterfactuals (of freedom) are true depends on which world is actual. Though Kvanvig doesn't himself put the objection quite this way, he might be interpreted as mounting some sort of circularity objection here. That is, on Plantinga's account God is made out to be constrained by the (contingent) truth values of counterfactuals of freedom, but since they're true only from the perspective of the actual world, how can they *constrain* God if *God* is ultimately responsible for whichever God-containing world is actual?¹⁸

There does seem to be something odd going on in Plantinga's account, though it might just be the 'oddity' of middle knowledge at work. If the objection I've been considering here simply assumes that no state of affairs (proposition) can be both contingent and beyond God's control, and for this it doesn't matter whether we're talking about any particular counterfactual of freedom or a collection of them, this objection is arguably question-begging. That is, if it relies on the assumption that *every* contingent state of affairs is subject to God's control, that just seems to deny the possibility of middle knowledge from the start because it denies the possibility of any (in this case, conditional) truths which are contingent but independent of God's control.¹⁹

No card-carrying Molinist could deny that there's a (strong) sense in which God is ultimately responsible for whichever God-containing world is actual. A God armed with middle knowledge (and knowledge of his own decrees) doesn't just find himself in the actual world. Rather, God (eternally) decides, on the basis of his middle (and natural) knowledge, which world is actual. Which world open to God is actual is completely up to God; but, Molinists say, it's not up to God which worlds are *open* to him. God has no control over the truth values of the counterfactuals of freedom he knows by his middle knowledge; he doesn't decide which ones are true and which are false. Counterfactuals of freedom (maximal consistent sets of them) constitute (in part) a 'creation situation' for God; they partition worlds into groups or 'galaxies'. For any creation situation, there will be some worlds God cannot actualize should he 'find himself' in it (or be 'confronted with' it), i.e., should a certain set of counterfactuals of freedom obtain or be *true*. He simply has no access to worlds not part of the actual galaxy.²⁰

While this appears to be enough to rebut this version of the circularity objection to Plantinga's account, by itself it doesn't appear to remove all grounds for complaint here. Unlike Kvanvig, Mackie concedes that Plantinga's tale about Curley does dispose of Leibniz's Lapse.²¹ The crucial (problematic) step, he thinks, comes next, viz. the assumption that the hypothesis of transworld depravity is possible. He says, 'This possibility would be realized only if God were faced with a limited range of creaturely essences, a limited number of possible people from which he had to make a

selection, if he was to create free agents at all. What can be supposed to have presented him with that limited range? As I have already argued, it is not logically impossible that even a created person should always act rightly; the supposed limitation of the range of possible persons is therefore logically contingent. But how could there be logically contingent states of affairs, *prior to the creation and existence of any created beings with free will*, which an omnipotent god would have to accept and put up with? This suggestion is simply incoherent.²² Mackie's primary objection here seems to be that the possibility of transworld depravity (and hence the possibility that some counterfactuals of freedom are true 'prior' to creation) is incompatible with maintaining God's *omnipotence*.²³ If that's right, then Plantinga's (4), and hence (3), is not consistent with (1), and so the Free Will Defence as it stands fails.

On the hypothesis that libertarianism is (possibly) true and that God has middle knowledge, that God is presented with (and has no direct control over) some set or other of counterfactuals of freedom is world-invariant (independent). Following Flint and Freddoso,²⁴ this is a logical limitation on anyone's power, and so, given the supposition that a logical limitation is not a genuine limitation, it's no genuine limitation on omnipotent God's power. Nevertheless, *what* God is able to weakly actualize seems to be world-variant. This appears to place a non-logical limitation on God's power, insofar as what God is able to weakly actualize depends (in part) on what creatures would freely do, and this varies from world to world (or from creation situation to creation situation). If so, and one insists that to be omnipotent there can be *no* non-logical limitations on such a being's power, this amounts to an abandonment of God's omnipotence.²⁵

There are at least two replies one can make to this.²⁶ A Molinist might simply reject the claim that to be omnipotent means that there are (can be) on non-logical limitations on one's power. It's surely arguable that the notion of power, and hence the notion of omnipotence, should be relativized to a world (as well as to times). The Molinist God's power is constrained by contingently true counterfactuals of freedom. Far from constituting a weakening, if not abandonment, of God's power (omnipotence), a Molinist might contend that it gives the ascription of power (omnipotence) to God real substance; it's a key component in explicating God's powers or abilities. The idea that there are (should be) no constraints whatsoever (or at least no non-logical ones) on God's power is arguably so far removed from our ordinary notion of power that the the claim that God is omnipotent (in that sense) isn't useful or informative. While the world-relativity of God's power would no doubt be objectionable to a Leibnizian, e.g., so long as God can at least *plan* the actualization of a world on the basis of his middle knowledge of counterfactuals of freedom (among others), this seems to make God look

sufficiently God-like (despite the fact that God is constrained by hard facts about the actual world or ‘galaxy’ that actually obtained, following Plantinga and Molinists, respectively).²⁷ Since God knows what every creature he might create would freely do in any possible situation in which they were left free, he knows what he has to do to get the world (from within the set open to him) he wants. By deciding which complete creative act to perform (i.e., by actualizing the ‘right’ antecedents), he decides which world (open to him) is actual. Armed with middle knowledge, God is able to (weakly) actualize one entire world rather than some other (that’s open to him).²⁸ This is surely something which distinguishes God’s power or ability from that of creatures, something which clearly makes us non-omnipotent. However much we can actualize (strongly or weakly), we can’t bring about (weakly actualize) the whole of the world we’re in.

Alternatively, one might argue that the world-relativity of God’s power (i.e. the fixity or constraint counterfactuals of freedom impose on his power or creative activity) doesn’t in fact amount to a non-logical limitation. The claim that omnipotence is a world-dependent notion seems equivalent to the claim that not every (possible) world is open to (omnipotent) God. If that’s so, and it’s impossible that every world is open to anyone (and so impossible that every world is open to God), it would seem that the world-relativity of God’s power is itself a logically inescapable fact. It’s impossible for God not to be ‘limited’ by some set or other of counterfactuals of freedom.²⁹ If libertarianism is true, it’s impossible for God (anyone) to strongly actualize the free choices (actions) of another, and God can’t weakly actualize them unless the agents in question strongly actualize them. Insofar as God does bring about (actualize) the antecedents of (some) counterfactuals of freedom, if God could also decide or determine which counterfactuals of freedom were true, it would be hard, if not impossible, to avoid the conclusion that creatures aren’t free (in the libertarian sense) with respect to the actions specified in their consequents.³⁰

It seems to me that there’s a more promising line of attack on Plantinga’s Defence. The idea here is that Molinist principles (whether or not they’re a mere concession to atheologians) can be turned against him.³¹ Grant that if middle knowledge is coherent, God has no control over the truth values of counterfactuals of freedom. Would God *need* to have control over their truth values to actualize a Mackie-world (or a world with a much better balance of moral good over evil than the actual world contains, etc.)? As Plantinga himself is aware, it must be shown that it’s possible that there’s *nothing* God could have done to actualize such ‘nice’ worlds.³²

Consider the general form of a counterfactual of freedom: If P were created and left free in circumstances C, P would (freely) do A. It would seem that God could, given Molinist principles themselves, have actualized

(have ensured that there would be) a Mackie-world without having to have control over the truth values of counterfactuals of freedom, simply by arranging (fiddling with) their antecedents in the ‘right’ way. There are different ways (individually or in tandem) this might have been achieved, depending on which part(s) of the antecedent in the above schema we focus on. E.g., God could have exercised his ultimate ‘veto power’, refraining from *creating* those creatures he knew (by his middle knowledge) would (freely) go wrong on the first occasion in which they were left significantly free; and he could have created just those he knew would go right on the first, or first and second . . . , if not every, occasion in which they were left significantly free. And/or God could have pursued a selective freedom strategy, granting (significant) freedom when and only when he knew that the creatures would not misuse it.³³ He could have actualized those antecedents in which creatures were left free in circumstances C and then did what was right, and have simply withheld freedom in those circumstances D in which he knew that creatures would go wrong (i.e., if in D, P would go wrong with respect to A, God would not actualize D).³⁴ And/or God might have been able to get an even better overall result by actualizing those significant choice situations *similar* to D in which he knew that creatures would freely *go right*. God wouldn’t seem to need to have control over the truth-values of counterfactuals of freedom to do these things.

If every (possible) creature (creaturely essence) suffers from transworld depravity, God wouldn’t have created any (significantly) free creatures if he pursued a strategy of not creating those creatures he knew would go wrong at least once. The actual world would not have contained any moral evil, but nor would it have contained any moral good. Such a world might have been among the least good worlds open to God. The first strategy tries to suggest a way around this. Of course, if every (possible) creature is such that he/she would, if created, go wrong (at least once) *sometime*, this strategy by itself would only seem to postpone evil-doing (unless, perhaps, via his middle knowledge God could arrange for their death in the nick of time). This is one place where an appeal to the second strategy might come to the rescue. God should simply withhold freedom on those occasions in which he knew creatures would go wrong, and grant (restore) it on those occasions in which he knew they would go right. God could presumably have gotten more creatures (than on the first strategy), and more moral good, in the bargain! The latter would especially be so if, instead of simply having to withhold freedom in those circumstances in which God knew creatures would go wrong if left free, God (at least on occasion) could have placed them in those (similar) circumstances in which he knew they would freely go right with respect to the action(s) in question. God needn’t always have had to rely on others for the ‘right’ circumstances; all he might have

had to do was (directly) grant stronger or different supernatural aids, if it were true that the creature would freely go right if placed in circumstances which included them. If for some reason God couldn't have used these strategies to get a world with moral good but no moral evil, it's hard to see why God couldn't have used them to get a much better balance of moral good over evil than he actually got, not to mention a world with as much (or not too much less) moral good but without all the same kinds and/or instances of horrendous moral evil.

How might Plantinga (Molinists) respond to this challenge? Perhaps the first thing that should be said about these suggested strategies is that they are certainly not incompatible with Molinism. In fact, contemporary Molinists have themselves suggested them as *logical possibilities*.³⁵ They should not, however, be taken as suggesting that any one (or more) of them would *always* (or *necessarily*) be open to God; whether God could or would employ them is quite another matter.³⁶

As Lewis says, Plantinga (Molinists) might appeal to the possibility that a rather peculiar pattern of counterfactuals of freedom obtained. E.g., perhaps God was faced with a pattern according to which a certain person would do evil on the first, and only the first, day the person was left free. If so, that would only postpone evil-doing. For God to prevent the person from evil-doing, he would have to withhold freedom on every day of that person's life. And perhaps the same is true for (all) others. If so, the selective freedom strategy wouldn't work. Lewis concedes that such a possibility is good enough for 'mere defence', though he says it's not plausible (except as a last resort for heroic faith).³⁷

It seems to me that Plantinga (Molinists) needn't go to this extreme, though I do think it's likely that they'll appeal to the underlying consideration (possibility), viz. that not enough counterfactuals of freedom were true for God to get a Mackie-world. Consider Curley again. *If* there were worlds (in the galaxy that actually obtained) in which Curley *freely refrains* from taking the bribe in other (even similar) circumstances, there's no reason to doubt (on Molinist principles) that God *could* have weakly actualized his freely refraining from taking the bribe (his freely doing what was right). Of course, if God were able to actualize such a world, it might be the case that Curley would still go wrong with respect to some other morally significant action(s); or even if Curley would freely go right with respect to every morally significant action in that world, it might be the case that at least one of his world-mates would freely go wrong at least once no matter what God did. Part of the initial attraction of thinking that the possibility of doing something to arrange the 'right' antecedents should (always) have been open to God might rest on the examples one gives, in particular counterfactuals with 'thin' antecedents. E.g., in the case of (5), no Molinist need deny that if

Curley had been offered US\$ 20,000 *and* had good reason to think that his acceptance of the bribe would be reported to the press, he would freely have rejected it. To think here that he would freely have accepted it no matter what else was also the case looks like a commitment to antecedent strengthening for counterfactuals (which of course is invalid on the standard semantics). When we recognize that we're really talking here about counterfactuals with rich (complete) antecedents, Molinists would, I think, say that it should be easier to see that it's possible (perhaps even plausible to say) that not enough counterfactuals of freedom were true for God to be able to actualize a Mackie-world. If the antecedents of these counterfactuals are rich (complete), they will typically include previous free actions of creatures (or the results of them). From a Molinist perspective, these will often be actions (results) God wasn't able to weakly actualize. God's ability to strongly actualize antecedents seems severely limited (when we're talking about counterfactuals with complete antecedents), and God can't weakly actualize creaturely free actions (or their results) unless creatures strongly actualize them. On this line of reply, something must have prevented God from being able to arrange (actualize, strongly or weakly) enough of the 'right' antecedents to get a Mackie-world. What could have prevented this? Perhaps the simple fact is that not enough counterfactuals of freedom were true.³⁸ Put another way, if we're considering the suggestion that God could (always) simply grant freedom in those circumstances C in which he knew creatures would go right and simply withhold it in those circumstances D in which he knew they would go wrong, Molinists would say that it's possible (perhaps even plausible to say) that every such C entails some D. Circumstances D might, in other words, be part of (included in) *total* circumstances C.

If we're considering the suggestion that God could (always) have altered the circumstances by granting stronger or different supernatural aids, Molinists are likely to reply in one (or more) of the following ways. First, they might concede that while it's possible (perhaps even plausible to say) that God could thereby have prevented the evil in question (and/or guaranteed that a good effect would result instead), the evil action wouldn't have been *freely* prevented by the creature (and/or the good effect wouldn't have been *freely* performed). The aids in question might, in other words, have eliminated the creature's freedom; the counterfactuals that might have been true weren't really counterfactuals of *freedom*.

Alternatively, suppose I actually go wrong with respect to some action A, and suppose that it's true that I would freely have gone right if God had arranged things differently, perhaps by granting me more supernatural aids. It's not unreasonable to think that this might (would) have opened up different subsequent choice situations for me or a world-mate. But it might also have been true that in those circumstances I or a world-mate would freely

have gone wrong with respect to some *other* action, an action toward which we otherwise (actually) don't go wrong (or actually go right).³⁹ It might be easier to defend this line of reply when the question at issue is why God didn't actualize a Mackie-world, though it could be extended to other relevant questions lurking in the neighborhood. E.g., given Molinist principles, it certainly seems logically possible that worlds containing (much) less moral evil but as much moral good as the actual world contains just weren't open to God. Whether this is a plausible thing to say is another matter.

Finally, suppose that the selective freedom strategy (or its variant) were open to God. In that case, I think the most likely reply (apparently overlooked by Lewis⁴⁰) is that worlds in which God followed it might have been among the least good worlds God could have actualized.⁴¹ If they were, God would have *known* this (if he had middle knowledge). Instead of thinking that middle knowledge would give God a winning hand, i.e., that if he knew that the selective freedom strategy (or its variant) were (sometimes, if not always) open to him, he *would* pursue it, Molinists might say that it was precisely on the basis of his middle knowledge that God *wouldn't* pursue it. Middle knowledge itself might give God a possible (if not plausible) reason for *not* employing it.

It's arguable, however, that this reply really *upsets* the Molinist Free Will Defence, for (on the face of it) it seems to eliminate the whole point of appealing to *Molinist* principles in constructing the Defence. How so? Well, on Plantinga's (the Molinist's) picture, Mackie-worlds are logically possible; but since God has no control over the truth-values of counterfactuals of freedom, it's possible that God was *unlucky*. Mackie-worlds might not have been open to him. This implies that Mackie-worlds are *better* than this one. But if they aren't better, one doesn't seem to *need* Molinism here. At the least, counterfactuals of freedom aren't needed to *constrain* (*prevent*) God from being able to actualize a Mackie-world; if such worlds aren't better, that's reason enough for God not to actualize one of them (if he's a maximizer).⁴² Perhaps the Molinist's only recourse here is to admit that counterfactuals of freedom would no longer be required to prevent God from being able to actualize a Mackie-world, if such worlds aren't in fact better than this one, but argue that they're still required so that God knew that he *wouldn't* get such a world. Without middle knowledge, it doesn't appear that God *could* have known that.⁴³

4. Anti-Molinist free will defence

Suppose, however, that middle knowledge is impossible (or that one thinks it is). Would the atheologian's 'task' be any harder? Correspondingly,

would Free Will Defence without middle knowledge be any easier? What might such a version of the Free Will Defence even look like?

On the face of it, affirmative answers can be given to the first two questions. E.g., if there are (can be) no true counterfactuals of freedom, there is surely a sense in which it's harder for Mackie (or his supporters) to run his famous objection to the Free Will Defence, and easier for the Free Will Defender to get past it. Given Molinist principles, God couldn't have weakly actualized a Mackie-world (if not enough counterfactuals of freedom were true). But one doesn't need *Molinism* to say that, so long as 'weak actualization' is understood in strong would-counterfactual terms. Given Lewis's definition of a 'might' counterfactual (equivalent to the denial of a 'would' with the same antecedent but negated consequent), if no matter what God had done, creatures *might* (still) have freely gone wrong with respect to some morally significant action(s), then it's not the case that there's something God could have done such that if he had they *would* always have freely gone right. In this sense, at least, Molinism appears to be inessential to the Free Will Defence against Mackie's Argument From Evil.

There's another way in which Molinism might be said to be inessential to a 'Defence' against Mackie's Argument. As we've seen, in the Molinist version of the Defence, (would-) counterfactuals of freedom function primarily as constraints or limits on what God can do; Mackie-worlds are possible and better than this world, but possibly God wasn't able to actualize one of them. If there are no true (would-) counterfactuals of freedom, there could still be true 'might' or 'would-probably' counterfactuals of freedom. Is the anti-Molinist God supposed to be constrained by the truth-values of such counterfactuals? Can they be what stop or prevent God from being *able* to actualize a Mackie-world? It's hard to see how they could have that function. Admittedly, without middle knowledge, it doesn't appear that God could have ensured that a Mackie-world *would* be actual. Nevertheless, such a world *might* have been actual if God acted in certain ways, in which case God *could* have actualized (in some sense) such a world. But if 'might' (or 'would-probably') counterfactuals can't stop or prevent God from being *able* to actualize (in the relevant sense) a Mackie-world, an appeal to them wouldn't seem to be doing any real (positive) work. Without middle knowledge, it would appear that a much simpler Defence against Mackie's Argument could be mounted.

Mackie assumes that worlds containing moral good but no moral evil are better than this world. But it's possible that they aren't better, or (what's weaker) it's arguable that Mackie hasn't shown that they are. If they're not better, one doesn't *need* counterfactuals of freedom (of *any* sort) to prevent God from being able to actualize one of them (on the assumption that God is a maximizer, not a satisficer).

There are at least two ways of trying to construct Mackie-worlds. One way is by complete description. But that just can't be done; at best we seem to get a simple, rough picture or description of such worlds. A second way starts off with this world, and then makes step-by-step changes to it (eliminating each evil deed or set of such deeds) to get a world with moral good but no moral evil. Something like this seems to have been the picture Mackie was working with. He seems to have thought that worlds without moral evil would be *just* like this one except for the missing evil, and that they would (given his ordering of worlds) have been better than this world. But one might argue that this picture is just too simplistic. Without knowing what would have happened had God arranged things differently, we're just not in a position to know that Mackie-worlds would have been better. It's even difficult to say that they would probably have been better. The more changes we make to eliminate the evil of this world, the further those worlds are from this one. It's surely arguable that the changes required to get to a Mackie-world are so massive that such worlds just aren't close enough to this one to have any reliable intuitions about their comparative value. At the least, one can't simply assume that they would have been better. In this way, Molinism would seem to be inessential to a Defence against Mackie's Argument. Of course, without middle knowledge, God couldn't have known that he wouldn't get a Mackie-world; at best he could have known that he would probably not get one. On this account, God apparently took a gamble and (odd as it may sound) he won. Praise be to God!

Another apparent advantage of abandoning Molinism is that it seems to make God look less responsible for evil, in which case it seems easier to satisfy the second of our (minimal) constraints on any adequate solution to the problem of evil.⁴⁴ This would seem to be the case regardless of how bad this world actually is. If there are (can be) no true counterfactuals of freedom, God couldn't have known, for any of the creative options open to him, just which world *would* be actual if he followed that option; in particular, he couldn't have known what creatures *would* do if he created them and left them significantly free. At best, he could have known what they *would probably* do. If God knew the conditional probabilities for each of the creative options open to him, and is a maximizer, he presumably went with the option which had the likely best result (or one with an equally good expected utility, or near enough). Suppose it was true that if God strongly actualized creative option O_1 , there would probably be moral good but no moral evil. God went ahead and actualized that option, but (sad to say) creatures did what it was very likely (perhaps even almost certain) that they wouldn't do; they sinned. The actual world is a fluke in the sense that it wasn't the world that was most likely to result from the creative option God

took. One might say here that each evil deed (or set of such deeds) that actually occurs (or perhaps each really serious evil deed or set of such deeds) is a fluke in the sense that the creature(s) in question did what it was likely (perhaps virtually certain) that they wouldn't do. Alternatively, God might have known that if he actualized the option he in fact actualized, creatures (individually or collectively) would probably do evil (even a great deal of it). But God might also have known that creatures (individually or collectively) would probably have done something worse (done more evil) if he had arranged things differently (i.e. actualized some other creative option). One might even grant that God has always had complete foreknowledge of the actual world, though of course God's foreknowledge wouldn't work via middle knowledge if there are no true (Molinist) counterfactuals of freedom. Without middle knowledge, God might have foreknown every evil deed (great and small), but he wouldn't have known (logically prior to the actualization of the world) what we *would* have done if he had arranged things differently. He would presumably have known that we might have gone right and that we might (still) have gone wrong. He might also have known that we would probably have done something worse, or would probably have gone wrong with respect to some other action(s), actions toward which he foreknows that we will actually go right.

Middle knowledge, on the other hand, appears to make matters worse here. It's not hard to motivate this intuition. E.g., if God, knowing Hitler's counterfactuals of freedom, went ahead and actualized their antecedents, and thereby ensured that the world would contain the Holocaust, it's hard to see how such a God could be the supremely good moral agent. One doesn't have to round up the usual suspects to point out the apparent problem for Molinism. In the first instance, one need only consider the Molinist's strong account of God's providence, and in particular here the set of conditions that must be satisfied for any finite free agent to be able to exercise power for evil-doing (great or small) on *any* occasion. Not only must God have a predetermination not to exercise some of his own power, but he must actually create and sustain the causal and other conditions necessary for the performance of every evil free action. God sees every instance of evil 'in advance'. He knows that it would occur on the condition that he actualize the relevant antecedent, and he knows (foreknows) that it will occur given his further knowledge of the total causal contribution he wills to make. The Molinist account of God's providence and model of how God has always had complete and infallible foreknowledge *requires* this. God exercises 'specific providence', at least in the sense that (leaving aside counterfactuals of freedom and God's middle knowledge of them) every contingent state of affairs that actually obtains is either intended or permitted by God. In this sense, God is responsible for everything that happens – good, bad and indif-

ferent. Moreover, God could have prevented the occurrence of any evil state of affairs just by not actualizing (weakly or strongly) the antecedent of the relevant counterfactual, or by not creating the creature in question, etc. It's true that God doesn't *directly* bring about evil-doing on this account; no Molinist will subscribe to the 'ultra-theological' version of the National Rifle Association Principle: neither guns nor people kill people; God kills people. The buck passes through the hands of free creatures alright. Say that God is only 'responsible' for evil-doing in a derivative sense if one likes, and/or that responsibility for evil-doing is a two-way street (insofar as God, having no control over the truth-values of counterfactuals of freedom, must depend on the cooperation of finite free agents). The fact remains that the buck stops in the office of the Molinist God. God weakly actualized this entire world on the basis of his middle knowledge. For every evil deed that actually occurs, God appears to be an accomplice – the accomplice than which none greater can be conceived.⁴⁵

It's not obvious to me, however, that a retreat from Molinist counterfactuals of freedom to 'mights' or 'would-probablys' is enough to get God off the hook for evil (any at all, the quantities and kinds there are, etc.). Nor is it obvious to me that the alleged advantages of abandoning middle knowledge are real, instead of merely apparent. To see this, let's consider in some detail how one might construct the Free Will Defence without middle knowledge.

Recall that the Free Will Defender's aim (in the first instance) is to find a proposition that is consistent with

- (1) An omnipotent, omniscient, perfectly good God exists, and together with (1) entails
- (2) There is (moral) evil in the world.

The proposition suggested by Plantinga (the Molinist) was:

- (3) God could not have (weakly) actualized a world containing moral good but no moral evil, and God has (weakly) actualized a world containing moral good.

If there are no true (would-) counterfactuals of freedom, this would allow the Free Will Defender to establish the possibility of the first conjunct of (3); but so long as 'weak actualization' is understood in strong would-counterfactual terms, this would undermine the second conjunct. As Plantinga tells us, if all counterfactuals of freedom are false, no possible world containing free creatures is one that God could have weakly actualized.⁴⁶ But since the existence of free creatures is a necessary condition for the existence of moral good (and evil), it follows that God could not have weakly actualized a world containing *any* moral good (or, for that matter, any moral evil). In short, if there are no true 'woulds', (3) must be modified for the consistency proof; one must in effect find some surrogate for Plantinga's (the Molinist's) notion of weak actualization.

The Free Will Defender might be tempted to re-define God's power in weaker counterfactual terms, using e.g. the weaker 'might' instead of the stronger 'would'. Call this 'super-weak actualization'. Accordingly, God can super-weakly actualize a world containing moral good if and only if there's some state of affairs *S* God can strongly actualize such that were God to strongly actualize *S*, a world containing moral good *might* be actual.

One might protest that defining God's power in terms of 'might' (or even 'would-probably') counterfactuals is too weak for omnipotence – that whatever precisely omnipotence amounts to, it has surely got to mean more than *perchance* being able to achieve an outcome or world – in which case the amended (3) is arguably not consistent with (1). Of course, if there are no true (would-) counterfactuals of freedom, God's power or ability to actualize a world (containing moral good) *can't* be defined in terms of them. If this doesn't amount to an abandonment of God's omnipotence, it surely weakens it (especially in comparison with Molinism).⁴⁷

Even if anti-Molinists can tough out this objection, this attempt to modify (3) still fails. Instead of employing the notion of weak actualization, understood in Plantinga's original sense, the amended (3) must employ some other notion (e.g., what I've called 'super-weak actualization'). But if super-weak actualization is employed, it doesn't appear that the Free Will Defender could establish the possibility of the first conjunct of (3*), viz. that God couldn't have super-weakly actualized a world containing moral good but no moral evil. Surely such a world *might* have been actual if God acted in certain ways. But then it follows that God *could* have super-weakly actualized a Mackie-world, which the first conjunct of (3*) denies.

Without middle knowledge, God could (if he were lucky) have super-weakly (as opposed to weakly) actualized a Mackie-world, but there presumably could have been no *guarantee* that he would get such a world. Perhaps it was true that no matter what God did, he would probably not get such a world. An anti-Molinist might appeal to this possibility, together with Plantinga's notion of *strong* actualization, in the construction of our consistency proof. Even if God couldn't have weakly (as opposed to super-weakly) actualized a world containing free creatures (if there are no true (would-) counterfactuals of freedom), God could (and presumably did) *strongly* actualize the existence of free creatures. By Plantinga's lights, the existence of free creatures is a necessary condition for the existence (actuality) of a world containing any moral good. In addition, no state of affairs consisting in some creature's freely taking or freely refraining from taking some action, and so no world containing (any) moral good, is one that *God* could have strongly actualized. But what's wrong with saying that God (by strongly actualizing whatever largest state of affairs he can, including the existence of free creatures) *and* free creatures strongly actualize a world

containing moral good? Following Plantinga's suggestion,⁴⁸ one might propose something like the following as the central lemma of our consistency proof:

(3**) For any world W that contains moral good but no moral evil (or a more favourable balance of moral good over evil than the actual world contains), if God had strongly actualized T(W) [i.e., the largest state of affairs God strongly actualizes in W], then W would probably not have been actual; and God and free creatures together strongly actualize a world containing moral good.

Some think that omnipotence should be restricted to (or be understood in terms of) states of affairs God can *strongly* actualize.⁴⁹ One might protest that construing God's power in terms of states of affairs he can strongly actualize is too weak for omnipotence⁵⁰ – the notion of strong actualization seems too world-independent to capture the sort of systematic powers one would expect an omnipotent being to possess – in which case it's arguable that (3**) is not consistent with (1). At the least, omnipotence is once again being watered-down (especially in comparison with Molinism). In addition, an appeal to strong actualization seems to let God off the hook for evil too easily. This results from the apparent fact that strong actualization is more or less a world-independent notion, together with the fact that God can't (given libertarianism) strongly actualize any free creaturely actions (or anything that results from them). On these grounds alone, it may well be reasonable to resist this version of the Free Will Defence.

There is a way to try to make the notion of strong actualization more world-dependent, though I think it leads to more trouble than it's worth. Suppose some 'would-probably' counterfactuals of freedom are true (in the 'galaxy' that happened to obtain or be actual). Since they're only contingently true (if true at all), their opposites are true in other galaxies. Suppose too that the truth-values of some of the 'would-probablys' that happened to be true were too unfavourable from God's point of view. This might lead God to refrain from strongly actualizing the antecedents of those counterfactuals and/or lead him to strongly actualize other antecedents. The truth-values of 'would-probably' counterfactuals in *one* galaxy (set of worlds) might preclude God's creation of a free being(s) he *could* create in some *other* galaxy (if it had been actual instead).⁵¹ What God does (can) strongly actualize might, in other words, be more world-dependent than it first appears, depending e.g. on just how favourable or unfavourable the truth-values of the 'would-probablys' were.

But in that case, it's hard to see how the first conjunct of (3**) could be true, and/or how God could be constrained by its truth. At the least, it's not obvious that anti-Molinist Free Will Defenders are any better off here than Molinists. Just as Molinists have to get past the objection that God could

(without having to have control over the truth-values of counterfactuals of freedom) have arranged their antecedents in such a way that there would have been a better outcome (creatures always freely doing what's right, doing as much good but less evil than they actually do, etc.), anti-Molinists face the objection that God could have arranged the antecedents of 'would-probablys' in such a way that there would (or would-probably) have been such an outcome.⁵² Of course, if there are no true (would-) counterfactuals of freedom, God's best attempt to actualize a Mackie-world, e.g., might fail. But, as Robert Adams has pointed out, it's not obvious that it's logically possible for a world which contains *as much* evil as this one does (or one with the same kinds and instances of it) to have resulted from God's best attempt to actualize a Mackie-world.⁵³

An even graver difficulty looms. Even if (3**) is possible and consistent with (1), it, together with (1), doesn't entail (2), but

(2*): *Probably* there is (moral) evil in the world.

So (3**), as it stands, won't do.

There is, however, a way for the anti-Molinist Free Will Defender to get not only the entailment of (2), but *any* proposition concerning the world's evil which is alleged to be inconsistent with God's existence.⁵⁴ Whether this candidate for the central lemma of the consistency proof is consistent with (1) is another matter. The version of the consistency proof I have in mind here appeals to 'would-probably' counterfactuals, though they don't appear to function as constraints on God's power, in the sense that they don't *prevent* him as such from *being able* to actualize Mackie-worlds (or worlds which contain a more favourable balance of moral good over evil than the actual world contains). Suppose creative option O_1 were open to God, i.e., God could strongly actualize it. If no would-counterfactuals are true, the following could still be true: If God were to strongly actualize O_1 , state of affairs *S* *would probably* be actual, where *S* would be very good or good enough. If *S* is a maximally consistent state of affairs, it's a possible world *W*, and *W* then includes every state of affairs that obtains in it (or every state of affairs that obtains in *W* is included in it). For Plantinga, one state of affairs *includes* another if and only if it's not possible (in the broadly logical sense) for the former to obtain and the latter to fail to obtain. On the basis of this (gigantic) 'would-probably' counterfactual (whose truth is presumably based or grounded on numerous 'would-probablys' concerning individual free creaturely actions), God strongly actualizes O_1 . Lo and behold, *S* (*W*) *is* actual (i.e., God and the free creatures placed in the circumstances specified in creative option O_1 together strongly actualize *W*). But *S* (*W*), as it happens, includes some (moral) evil. Hence, there *is* some (moral) evil in the world. And *mutatis mutandis* one can get the entailment of the amount of moral evil there is in the world, etc. In other words, the

formal ‘trick’ here is to take *any* state of affairs concerning the world’s evil that is alleged to be inconsistent with God’s existence (i.e., any (2) – that there is moral evil in the world, that there are so-and-so many units [‘turps’] of it, etc.) and load it into the consequent of the ‘would-probably’, in the sense that the consequent *includes* it, and we’ll get the entailment of the (2) in question.⁵⁵

This version of the consistency proof seems to rely on the assumption that without middle knowledge, God could still know, for each (complete) set of circumstances he might place free creatures in, what the creatures in question would probably do. And so, he could know, for each creative option he could strongly actualize, what would probably happen (i.e., which world would probably be actual). He could know, e.g., that if he were to strongly actualize a certain creative option, there would probably be more moral good overall than evil in the world. Of course, if Molinist counterfactuals of freedom are (necessarily) false, we must distinguish the probability of a (Molinist) counterfactual of freedom from its conditional probability (i.e., the probability of its consequent on its antecedent).⁵⁶ Creaturely free choices (actions) needn’t have well-defined (conditional) probabilities; one need only say that some free choices (actions) are ‘more likely’ than others (on their antecedents). One might not even need to assume this, or assume that God knew this; if not, ‘would-probablys’ would seem to be dispensable. Without middle knowledge, there would seem to be at least two possibilities for God. (1) Following Adams, he could know the conditional probabilities of free creaturely actions on each creative option he could strongly actualize; or (2) it might be the case that God doesn’t have a *clue* about what free creatures would do. Of course, if God didn’t have a clue about what free creatures would do, it’s hard to see how God could escape from the charge of reckless risk-taking (gross negligence) in creating them. If so, that might give an anti-Molinist good reason to tow the Adamsian line. Knowing conditional probabilities would reduce the risk in creating free creatures. Whether this would be enough to get God off the hook for evil is another matter. If it isn’t, an anti-Molinist might suggest the following. Without middle knowledge, and whether or not God had a clue about what free creatures would do, perhaps God still ‘knew that no matter which free creatures he created and no matter how they used or abused their freedom, it would be within his power so to respond that there would be enormously more good than evil’.⁵⁷

To upset this consistency proof, one would seem to need to argue that (without middle knowledge) God didn’t have a clue about what would happen for any creative option he could strongly actualize, *and* that God didn’t know that no matter what free creatures did it would be within his power so to respond that there would be more good overall than evil (or that

it would be within his power to bring more good out of any evil that actually occurred). Moreover, one would seem to need to argue that God *couldn't* have known either of these things; i.e., these claims would have to be *necessary* truths. But neither, the anti-Molinist will no doubt say, looks like a necessary truth; at the least, (so the story would run) no one has shown them to be necessary truths. So long as it's possible for God to have known either of these things (or perhaps only the latter), that's good enough for (mere) defence.

Anti-Molinist Free Will Defenders think they're better off than their Molinist counterparts. To indict the Molinist God (on Mackie's charge of 'malice aforethought'), they appeal (in part) to the intuition that the more an agent knows, the higher we set the standards for the agent's actions. To exonerate a God without middle knowledge, they appeal (in part) to the intuition that the less an agent knows, the less responsible the agent is for his actions. This Intuition Bowl is not, however, one-sided. Without middle knowledge, it seems that God must in some sense be a risk-taker if he creates any significantly free creatures. Molinists (and others) have found this element of risk-taking morally objectionable; at the least, it's not obvious that risk-taking is compatible with God's perfect (moral) goodness.⁵⁸ Molinists will join forces with Pike (and Mackie), e.g., in insisting that creation is serious business, and that caution (not luck) is a moral category, especially in the light of cognitive limitations. If God didn't ('antecedently') know what any (libertarian) free creatures would do, would he create them? If God knew that free creatures might never produce moral good, or might produce more moral evil overall than good, or might even produce only moral evil, would he create them? If God's primary end or plan in creation is for free creatures to enter into loving personal relationships with him, but he didn't know that any would do so, would he create them? It's not at all obvious that he would, or that doing so would be compatible with his perfect goodness.

Of course, if the charge here is one of logical inconsistency, anti-Molinists might be justified in resting content if they can tough out a tie in this Intuition Bowl.⁵⁹ On the face of it, it's not easy to see how one could establish that risk-taking is logically incompatible with perfect goodness.⁶⁰ Without middle knowledge, God *must* in some sense take a risk if he creates any (libertarian) free creatures.⁶¹ The alternative is to do nothing at all, or at least not create any such creatures. While such creatureless worlds would no doubt have been open to God (afterall, creation was supposed to be a free act of God's), it's possible that such worlds were among the least good worlds God could have actualized.⁶² Logical possibility is good enough for (mere) defence. If God knew conditional probabilities (and went with the option with the likely best outcome, or near enough) and/or knew that no

matter what free creatures did, it would be within his power so to respond that there would be enormously more good than evil, how could one reasonably fault God for taking a ‘risk’ on significant freedom? If God knew these things, the ‘risk’ would hardly seem to be *reckless*; in fact, in some sense there wouldn’t even seem to be a *real risk* (or luck) involved. On this account, God might get surprised on (‘local’) details; on any given occasion, creatures might be unpredictable enough to do what it was likely that they wouldn’t do. But God couldn’t get surprised overall (‘globally’), if he knew that no matter what creatures did, it would be within his power so to respond that there would be enormously more good than evil (or within his power so to respond that he could bring good out of any evil that occurred). If he knew the latter (and perhaps only the latter), he would apparently have known that things just couldn’t get as out-of-hand as Molinist propaganda would lead us to believe; he wouldn’t even have had to know any conditional probabilities of free actions. That the world does (will) contain a favourable balance of good over evil is not a mere matter of luck after all.

Let’s assume, for the sake of argument, that (without middle knowledge) God could know the conditional probabilities of free actions on any antecedents he could strongly actualize, but that if he only knew this, he could reasonably be accused of reckless risk-taking in creating free creatures. Let’s also assume that the decision to create free creatures is compatible with God’s perfect goodness so long as it’s not a matter of luck that there is (will be) a favourable balance of (moral) good over evil in the world. In that case, the charge that risk-taking in the creation of free creatures is incompatible with God’s perfect goodness seems to turn largely on the question of whether (without middle knowledge) God *could* have known that no matter what free creatures did ‘it would within his power so to respond that there would be enormously more [moral] good than evil’.

Notice that I’ve inserted the word ‘moral’ in Plantinga’s original claim. If the claim instead is that God could have known that no matter what free creatures did it would be within his power so to respond that there would be enormously more good of *whatever kinds there are* than evil, while I grant that God *could* have known this without middle knowledge, I don’t see how it circumvents the reckless risk-taking objection. In fact, I think it makes the charge of reckless risk-taking look pretty decisive, unless e.g. it turns out that free evil-doing is either good in its own right or contributes to the ultimate goodness of a world (instead of being the unfortunate side-effect or price of trying for freedom without evil).

How could God (without middle knowledge) have known that there would be enormously more good of *whatever kinds there are* than evil? Here’s one way. Suppose that non-moral goods (e.g., natural goods) are commensurable with moral goods. Suppose also that it’s possible that free

creatures produce more moral evil than good (and even possible that they produce no moral good but only moral evil). God could have the following resolution: If free creatures actually misbehaved in these ways, I would respond by directly producing more non-moral (e.g., natural) goods to compensate (outweigh) their evil-doing.⁶³ The goods in question needn't be non-moral goods, but whatever it is that God values. In this way, God could have known that good would far exceed (moral) evil no matter what free creatures did.⁶⁴

This account, however, is deeply problematic. While I'm prepared to admit that moral good is not the only (or even the most important) good there is, this account appears to sever any (logical) connection between the goodness of a world and freedom (and hence, moral goodness). Plantinga has always admitted that God could have actualized a world containing no moral evil just by actualizing one which contained no significantly free creatures. This would have excised the possibility of moral goodness, but why should that be a worry if the goodness of a world can be made to depend directly on whatever God values and does? It would seem that an appeal to God's resolutions or whims isn't sufficient to get him off the hook for moral evil. In fact, such an appeal seems to open the door to the reckless risk-taking objection with a vengeance. One can't say here that the odds of getting very good worlds (worlds which might have been better than this one) were really no better for God than what he actually got. For on this account, God could have ensured that there would be a very good (and perhaps better) world without creating any free creatures, just by directly producing a world which contained enormous amounts of whatever it is that God values. But how, then, does creating free creatures get him off the hook? If anything, he's impaled on it. Even if it's plausible to suppose that God would prefer a world containing at least some moral good (that moral good is *among* the goods God values) – that some such worlds would be better than some others open to God – why think it's plausible to suppose that he'd take a risk on free creatures if he could directly bring about a very good world without creating them? Satisficing arguments are typically more forceful the less an agent knows. Given the uncertainty about what free creatures *would* do, and given that God could have ensured that a very good world (without free creatures) would be actual, a risk on creaturely freedom would appear to be incompatible with perfect goodness. At the least, the less the overall value of world depends on moral goodness, the easier it is to run the reckless risk-taking objection.

To get past that objection here, one might have to say that significant freedom would be so valuable no matter what creatures did with it, which (I think) would be another way of saying that free evil-doing is good in its own right. While such a view may not be incoherent (though I think it

would be reasonable to resist that value judgement), it surely turns Plantinga's original formulation of the Free Will Defence on its head.⁶⁵

An alternative would be to say that free evil-doing, though not itself a good, contributes to the ultimate goodness or value of a world. One who took this view needn't say that *all* (moral) evil is really *absorbed* (to use Mackie's terminology), i.e., evil which is logically necessary for and actually does produce some outweighing good. Some of it may be absorbed, but the Free Will Defence is (was) supposed to give a possible justification for the existence of *unabsorbed* (moral) evil. If the claim here is that (moral) evil is a *logically necessary* or indispensable component of the best worlds open to God, then God couldn't (given various assumptions about his nature) have actualized a world containing moral good but no moral evil; and he would have a possible (good) reason for actualizing a world with moral evil. While such a view is familiar in the literature and doesn't appear to be incoherent, it seems to have little (if anything) to do with the Free Will Defence as it's usually understood. If the Free Will Defence is supposed to provide a possible justification for the existence of unabsorbed (moral) evil, one should presumably say here that free evil-doing, though not good in its own right and not a logically necessary component of the best worlds open to God, nevertheless contributes to the ultimate goodness (though not moral) of a world insofar as God can order or bring good (of some kind, e.g., the Incarnation and Redemption) out of any evil that actually occurs.⁶⁶ While such a view is by no means obviously incoherent, it (as well as the suggestion that free evil-doing is good in its own right) would seem to be indistinguishable from the claim that for all we know Mackie-worlds aren't (wouldn't have been) better than this one. In that case, one might as well go with the 'simpler Defence' sketched earlier. One doesn't need Molinism to run that 'Defence', unless it's important that God knew that he wouldn't get a Mackie-world. Middle knowledge may be important here for another reason. If significant freedom is so valuable either in itself or because it's a necessary condition for the existence of moral good and evil (both of which God values), without middle knowledge it doesn't appear that God could have known that whatever strategy he might have up his sleeve to bring more good out of any evil that occurred wouldn't in fact *undermine* finite free agency, by undermining some condition necessary for its continued existence (e.g., that there are sufficiently simple, straightforward, accessible natural laws or causal regularities in the world).

If it's important that God knew that there would be more *moral* good than evil, it doesn't appear that God could have known this without middle knowledge (i.e. without any true counterfactuals of freedom). At best it seems that he could have known that there *would probably* be. God's existence and/or actions cannot be included in the overall balance of *moral*

good and evil in a world, for if they were, God could have ensured (without middle knowledge) that a Mackie-world was actual just by actualizing a world in which he was the only inhabitant or only free person.

So far as I can see, there is one way God (without middle knowledge) might have known that there would be more moral good overall than evil. If Mackie-worlds are logically possible, are worlds in which free creatures produce only moral evil, or (at least collectively) more moral evil overall than good, logically possible? Perhaps not. But if not, why? Nothing in the notion of libertarian freedom by itself precludes producing only moral good, or only moral evil, or more of one than the other. What, then, could account for the logical impossibility of worlds containing only moral evil or more moral evil than good? One answer: God's nature. Their impossibility follows from God's nature. If so, and God also knows his nature, God knows that they're impossible. But then God could know, without middle knowledge, that there would be more moral good overall than evil no matter which free creatures he created. He would still be taking a risk in creating any free creatures insofar as they might not do what he most prefers (doing what's right on every occasion in which they're left significantly free), but he would have known that things just couldn't get as out-of-hand as Molinists fear they could. The claim that worlds containing only moral evil, or more moral evil than good, are logically (or metaphysically) ruled out by the nature of God appears to be theologically sound. If creatures are made in the image of God – the metaphysical source or ground of their (continued) being and activity – and God is essentially good, the idea that free creatures (of God) could always produce moral evil, or more moral evil than good, seems logically or metaphysically impossible. This would certainly be a claim that Anselmians (and many others in the Christian tradition) would hold.

If this works, middle knowledge is dispensable. But does it work? I don't think so, for several reasons. Traditionally, God would ('antecedently') know that the worlds in question were impossible on the ground that he knows what he's doing in creating (actualizing) a world. Without counterfactuals of freedom (whether these are known prevolitionally, as in Molinism, or postvolitionally, as for Molina's Dominican critics), it's hard to see how God could know that it followed from his nature that these worlds were impossible. At the least, such a God doesn't know what he's doing in actualizing a world in the sense in which this is true for Molinists (or Molina's Dominican critics). But perhaps this is just another way of *saying* that this suggestion doesn't (or can't) work. If so, there are at least two more serious objections one can raise here. If the impossibility of the worlds in question follows from God's nature, why doesn't the impossibility of a world containing *any* moral evil follow from his nature? One cannot

simply assume (without question-begging) that his nature doesn't preclude their possibility, if the question at issue is whether there is a possible world in which God and evil co-exist. In addition, if one claims that only worlds with a favourable balance of moral good over evil are genuinely possible (and this follows from God's nature), one cannot mean that *God* makes creatures do more moral good than evil (if creatures are free in the libertarian sense). Rather, the creatures in question must themselves do more moral good overall than evil. But if it's logically impossible for creatures (of God) to do more evil than good, would such creatures really be free in the libertarian sense? It doesn't appear that they would be. If it's part of the essence of finite free creatureliness to do more moral good overall than evil (at least collectively), and part of God's essential nature that any creatures he makes are this way, this seems to imply that the creatures (if any) he makes have no choice but to do more moral good than evil. But in that case, it doesn't look like they're *free*.

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Notes

1. According to Molinism (named after the 16th-century Spanish Jesuit Luis de Molina), counterfactuals of (creaturely) freedom, which state what any creature God might create would freely (in the libertarian sense) do if placed in any possible situation in which that creature had occasion to act freely, are among the objects of God's so-called *middle knowledge*. Middle knowledge has an intermediate (logical or conceptual) status; it stands between God's so-called *natural* and *free* knowledge. The truths God knows by his natural knowledge are necessary and independent of his will; the truths God knows by his free knowledge are contingent and dependent on his will; the truths God knows by his middle knowledge are contingent but independent of his will. It's not the case that every stage of Plantinga's Defence has relied on these Molinist principles. In particular, his argument against 'Leibniz's Lapse' (the thesis that if God is omnipotent, God could have actualized just any possible world including his existence) doesn't require either. See Plantinga, 'Self-profile', in James E. Tomberlin and Peter van Inwagen (eds.), *Profiles: Alvin Plantinga* (Dordrecht: D. Reidel, 1985), p. 52, and David Lewis, 'Evil for freedom's sake?', *Philosophical Papers* 22 (1993): 170–171.

2. See his 'Self-profile', p. 49, and his 'Reply to Robert M. Adams', in *Profiles*, pp. 373 and 379.
3. 'Reply to Adams', p. 379. He has continued to repeat this in print and still maintains it in recent conversation. There seems to be a growing consensus that he's right (especially about the second conjunct), though I'm not aware of any detailed attempt in print to establish it. See, e.g., Linda Zagzebski, *The Dilemma of Freedom and Foreknowledge* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), p. 150; David Hunt, 'Middle knowledge: The "Foreknowledge Defense",' *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 28 (1990): 3; and William Hasker, 'Response to Thomas Flint', *Philosophical Studies* 60 (1990): 125, and 'Providence and evil: Three theories', *Religious Studies* 28 (1992): 98.
4. See Mackie, 'Evil and Omnipotence', *Mind* 64 (1955): 200–212, and *The Miracle of Theism* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982), ch. 9. The accuracy of, and motives behind, this interpretation have been the subject of some heated controversy. See, e.g., Michael Tooley, 'Alvin Plantinga and the Argument From Evil', *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* 58 (1980): 360–376, and Alvin Plantinga, 'Tooley and evil: A reply', *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* 60 (1982): 66–75. For an attempt to impose some order on this aspect of their acrimonious dispute, see David Conway, 'The philosophical problem of evil', *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 24 (1988): 35–66. In my view, while Mackie certainly says (argues) that there's a logical inconsistency in a theist's belief-set, it's also clear that (1) in these moods he wavers considerably on just which fact about evil is alleged to lead to inconsistency, and (2) there are a number of passages, especially in his 1982 chapter, which strongly suggest that he isn't relying *solely* on an incompatibility version of the Argument (or on incompatibility 'considerations'). The latter point is, however, complicated by the fact that Mackie often has less than a firm grip on Plantinga's use of the defence *vs.* theodicy distinction.
5. He then briefly extends his consistency proof to cover the amount of moral evil (however much there happens to be), and then the existence of natural evil (which, for him, is possibly a species of broadly moral evil – possibly due to the free actions of Satan and his cohorts – and hence subsumable under the Free Will Defence). See, e.g., his *The Nature of Necessity* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1974), pp. 190–193. Given Molinist principles, one needn't maintain that all apparently 'unabsorbed' natural evil (to use Mackie's terminology) is possibly a species of broadly moral evil. If there's indeterminism in nature, God's middle knowledge isn't confined to knowledge of counterfactuals of freedom; it also includes knowledge of what would result from every possible combination or arrangement of natural (as opposed to free) indeterministic causes. If there's genuinely 'unabsorbed' natural evil, which results from the operation of natural indeterministic causes, Molinist principles can play a role in a defence (or theodicy) for unabsorbed natural evil. Nevertheless, I think it's best to formulate a defence (or theodicy) without trying to settle the question of its scope. While greater scope might well increase explanatory power, I think it's a mistake to require that any single defence (or theodicy) – or any doctrines or principles that may be associated with it – applies to all evil (every fact about evil), if it applies to any.
6. God can *weakly* actualize a state of affairs S (or world W) if and only if there's some state of affairs S* God can *strongly* actualize (roughly, cause to be the case), such that if God were to strongly actualize S*, S would obtain (or W would be actual).
7. Roughly, a possible person P (or creaturely essence E) suffers from transworld depravity just in case no matter what God had done, P (or the instantiation of E) *would* (still) have gone wrong at least once if created and left free.

8. Plantinga [*Nature of Necessity*, p. 190] has suggested a weaker substitute for (3), in case it was within God's power to weakly actualize a world containing moral good but no moral evil. But it too depends on the possibility that some counterfactuals of freedom are true, and the possibility that a particular pattern or combination of them obtains, such that, if it does, it was beyond God's power to weakly actualize a world containing no moral evil but as much moral good as the actual world contains. Strictly speaking, neither candidate requires (the possibility) that God *knew* the truth values of the counterfactuals in question, though there seems to be a good prima facie reason for wanting to maintain this here. Plantinga is not committed to saying that significant creaturely freedom is the only (or even the most important) good worth having; nor is he committed to the claim that it would be (so) valuable no matter how creatures used (misused) it. It is, on his view, a necessary condition for (the possibility of) moral goodness, and it's possible that God thought it good that there be moral goodness and is willing to put up with evil (some, as much as there is, etc.) to get it. Plantinga is suggesting a *possible* justification for God's permission of moral evil. What's possible is that 'a world containing creatures who are sometimes significantly free (and freely perform *more* good than evil actions) is more valuable, *all else being equal*, than a world containing no free creatures at all' (*Nature of Necessity*, p. 166; emphasis added). I think it's easier to see how this can work into a possible justification for evil if (it's possible that) God *knew* what the outcome would be for any creative option open to him, and in particular *knew* that creatures *would* collectively produce more moral good overall than evil if he created them and left them significantly free. If the counterfactuals of freedom that happened to be true had been too unfavourable, and God knew this, he would presumably not have actualized a world containing any significantly free creatures. Without middle knowledge, it doesn't appear that God could have known that the world would contain a favourable balance of moral good over evil. Of course, one might question whether this could be enough to justify the permission of evil. It might not be God's fault that he couldn't have actualized a Mackie-world (i.e., a world containing moral good but no moral evil), or a world with less moral evil but as much moral good as the actual world contains; but one might argue that if God knew that such worlds weren't open to him, he shouldn't have actualized a world with any significantly free creatures (and so shouldn't have actualized this world), regardless of how much moral good would also be produced. Cf. Nelson Pike, 'Plantinga on free will and evil', *Religious Studies* 15 (1979): 454. But at least with middle knowledge, that the world does (will) contain a favourable balance of moral good over evil is not a matter of *luck*, as it would appear to be without middle knowledge.
9. In fact, he thinks it's a *necessary truth* that for any significantly free creature there is a world in which that creature is significantly free but always does what is right. See, e.g., his 'Reply to the Basingers on divine Omnipotence', *Process Studies* 11 (1981): 25.
10. See, e.g., his 'Evil and Omnipotence', p. 208.
11. On the assumptions that Mackie-worlds are possible and better than this world, and that God is a maximizer, this distinction would appear to be a necessary condition for the success of *any* version of the Free Will Defence, i.e., regardless of whether or not Molinist principles are attached. To see this, suppose (as certain critics of middle knowledge think) there are no (contingently) true counterfactuals of freedom (or none which, if true, are true 'soon enough' to be of use to God in his deliberative reasoning 'prior' to the actualization of a world). If God exists in and can actualize every possible world, God doesn't need middle knowledge to actualize a Mackie-world. Presumably, all God needs to know is that there are such worlds, and that these worlds (like all others) are actualizable by him. To suppose that God didn't know, or might not have known, one or

both of these facts is not to suppose that he lacked middle knowledge, but (presumably) so-called natural knowledge (knowledge of all possibilities). It's difficult to see how this would be consistent with maintaining God's omniscience, unless perhaps omniscience is construed (in part) as knowledge of all truths it's logically possible to know, and for some reason it's impossible for God (anyone) to know one or both of the above facts.

12. Plantinga himself seems to think that these latter worlds include God's existence, and that God is omnipotent in these worlds. This, however, is not the only option a Free Will Defender might pursue here. The distinction between a world's being (logically) possible and its being open to God *allows*, though it doesn't by itself require, that one say that there are (possible) worlds in which God doesn't exist or exists but isn't omnipotent. If one maintains that (it's possible that) God cannot actualize every (possible) world, but God *can* actualize every world in which he exists and is omnipotent, then one must say that there are (possible) worlds in which God doesn't exist or exists but isn't omnipotent. One who pursued this strategy would then have to say that the claim that there are (possible) worlds not open to God and (it's possible that) among these worlds are all the worlds containing moral good but no moral evil is equivalent to the claim that there are (possible) worlds in which God doesn't exist or exists but isn't omnipotent, and (it's possible that) among these worlds are all the worlds containing moral good but no moral evil.
13. See, e.g., Robert M. Adams, 'Middle knowledge and the problem of evil', *American Philosophical Quarterly* 14 (1977): 109–117, and 'An anti-Molinist argument', in James E. Tomberlin (ed.), *Philosophical Perspectives* 5 (Atascadero: Ridgeview Publishing Company, 1991), pp. 343–353; and William Hasker, *God, Time and Knowledge* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989), ch. 2.
14. I consider elsewhere the claim that when one moves from the so-called 'logical' problem of evil to the 'evidential' problem and/or to 'theodicy', Molinism is a trojan horse for traditional theism; it makes it even harder, if not impossible, to get God off the hook for the evil that actually occurs. William Hasker has been the chief critic of Molinism on this score. See, e.g., his 'How good/bad is middle knowledge? A reply to Basinger', *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 33 (1993): 111–118.
15. I suspect that this claim is more puzzling if one accepts Lewis's semantics (metaphysics of modality) rather than Plantinga's.
16. Though Plantinga himself uses this counterfactual on occasion, it is not, strictly speaking, a *Molinist* counterfactual of freedom. Molinist counterfactuals of freedom have much richer antecedents. It's typically said that the circumstances specified in the antecedents include the entire (causal) history of the world prior to and simultaneous with the actions specified in the consequents.
17. *The Problem of Hell* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), p. 91f.
18. I'm assuming that if this is Kvanvig's objection here, it isn't equivalent to the Adams-Kenny version of the circularity objection against Molinism, which Kvanvig himself dismissed rather quickly in his *The Possibility of an All-Knowing God* (New York: Macmillan, 1986), pp. 139–140. In that book, Kvanvig doesn't think that God actualizes an entire possible world, but just a certain range (galaxy) of worlds. But if counterfactuals of freedom obtain (only) from the perspective of whichever galaxy is actual, and God is responsible for whichever galaxy is actual, the threat of circularity would loom on Kvanvig's own account.
19. Put another way, this line of objection amounts to the claim that we should view God's knowledge of (5), suitably amended, and indeed all (Molinist) counterfactuals of freedom, as *post*-volitional (i.e., dependent upon his will), but that's just to deny the possibility of middle knowledge.

20. For more details, see e.g. Thomas P. Flint, 'Two accounts of providence', in Thomas V. Morris (ed.), *Divine and Human Action: Essays in the Metaphysics of Theism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988), pp. 158–159, and Alfred J. Freddoso, 'Introduction', in Luis de Molina, *On Divine Foreknowledge: Part IV of the Concordia*, edited and translated by Freddoso (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988), pp. 47–50. On the face of it, Plantinga's (a Molinist's) conception of which worlds are (can be) actualizable by God is more restrictive than Kvanvig's conception. For Kvanvig, worlds are (can be) actualizable by God even when they fail to be actualizable relative to the actual world; if God can 'get to' a world in one way or other (in one or more steps), there's every reason to say it's creatable. But if we're talking about *Molinist* counterfactuals of freedom here, it's hard to see why Plantinga (a Molinist) should grant that God would *ever* be able to do the things Kvanvig suggests. If God could ever do these things, it's hard to see how counterfactuals of freedom could function as constraints on him. It would seem that God does in the end have control over their truth values (or that God knows them post-volitionally), in which case Molinism is rejected. At the least, it's arguable that Kvanvig doesn't take seriously enough the fact that (if Molinism is coherent) God simply doesn't have access to (can't 'get to' or weakly actualize) worlds that aren't part of the actual galaxy (in the sense in which Molinists such as Flint use the term 'galaxy'). If, on the other hand, the worlds Kvanvig considers are members of the actual galaxy, then there's no reason a Molinist would deny that God is able (not necessarily willing) to 'get to' them. I also think it's important to keep Plantinga's semantics (controversial or not) clearly in mind here. In particular, we musn't forget that for Plantinga truth is the basic notion; it is not to be explained in terms of truth-in-the-actual-world; the explanation goes the other way around. See, e.g., his 'Actualism and possible worlds', *Theoria* 42 (1976): 139–160. For Molinists, (contingent) counterfactuals of freedom, if true, are just 'flat out true' (as Flint would say).
21. Mackie, *Miracle of Theism*, p. 173. Accordingly, Plantinga's 'Self-profile' generalization that 'in this way [i.e. by appealing to the idea of counterfactuals of freedom] he [the theologian] claims that for every possible world W (at least for every possible world that includes his own existence) there is something God could have done to bring about its actuality' (p. 49) seems too strong. The atheologian need, I think, claim only that *certain* (morally preferable) worlds could have been actualized by God; or put negatively, that God shouldn't (couldn't) have actualized *this* one.
22. Mackie, *Miracle of Theism*, p. 174. Molinists would shout from all corners the answer to Mackie's first question: God's middle knowledge of counterfactuals of freedom, of course! In *The Nature of Necessity* (p. 188), we're told that there is a world in which Curley is significantly free but always does what's right; if *that* world had been actual, then of course Curley wouldn't have suffered from transworld depravity (if indeed he does). Plantinga would thus agree with Mackie that the 'limitation' in question here is contingent insofar as counterfactuals of freedom are themselves only contingently true (if true at all). In the preceding paragraph, Mackie misunderstands Plantinga's notion of transworld depravity. To say that Curley Smith suffers from transworld depravity is, he thinks, to say that 'in whatever world he exists, if he is significantly free he commits some wrong actions'. See Plantinga's 'Is theism really a miracle?', *Faith and Philosophy* 3 (1986): 125–126.
23. Perhaps Kvanvig is best interpreted as arguing that Plantinga's conception of God's power (ability) to actualize a world is incompatible with maintaining God's omnipotence. For Plantinga, God *is* constrained by hard facts about the actual world; a Leibnizian would presumably find the world-relativity of God's power incoherent.

24. 'Maximal power', in Freddoso (ed.), *The Existence and Nature of God* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1983), pp. 81–113.
25. The chief objection Molina's Dominican critics had to the doctrine of middle knowledge was that its stress on human freedom detracted from, if not abandoned, God's power or sovereignty.
26. Robert Adams has suggested another, viz. that a God with middle knowledge would probably not need omnipotence to establish himself as emperor of the world (if that's what he wanted). See his 'An anti-Molinist argument', p. 343. Insofar as Mackie held that there was a strong presumption that theism couldn't be made coherent without a serious change in at least one of its central doctrines, a Molinist would be inclined, I think, to see Adams's suggestion as conceding defeat, while continuing to make war-like noises.
27. Without middle knowledge, this looks impossible to do. At the least, the sense in which God can 'plan' the actualization of a world (rather than simply 'react' to it) is far less robust without middle knowledge.
28. If Leibniz's Lapse is indeed a lapse, as it is for Molinism, one must distinguish (1) God is omnipotent in $W \Rightarrow$ God is able in W to actualize W , from (2) God is omnipotent in $W \Rightarrow$ God is able to actualize W . (1) is true, but (2) is false; being able to actualize a world is not a necessary condition for being omnipotent in it.
29. Cf. Flint and Freddoso, 'Maximal power', p. 97. In 'Is theism really a miracle?', p. 125, Plantinga says that the conclusion of the central argument of his Free Will Defence is that it's *necessary* that there are some possible worlds that God couldn't have weakly actualized. This doesn't require that any counterfactuals of freedom *are* true.
30. Cf. Peter van Inwagen's Consequence Argument in defence of incompatibilism, in his *An Essay on Free Will* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983).
31. Cf. Mackie, *Miracle of Theism*, p. 174. Immediately after the passage quoted above (note 22), Mackie (in effect) says that by bringing in the notion of counterfactuals of freedom, 'Plantinga has not rescued the free will defence but made its weakness all too clear'. He concludes: 'Given this [that "a person can still be *such that* he will freely choose this way or that in each specific situation", i.e., given the possibility of true counterfactuals of freedom], and given the unrestricted range of all logically possible creaturely essences from which an omnipotent and omniscient god would be free to select whom to create, it is obvious that my original [1955] criticism of the free will defence holds good: had there been such a god, it would have been open to him to create beings such that they would always freely choose the good'. If his original criticism (famous objection to Free Will Defence) does hold good, it wouldn't be for the reason he gives here, if Molinism is coherent. His argument, though valid, is surely unsound given Molinist principles, for the second premiss is false.
32. 'Self-profile', p. 48.
33. See Lewis, 'Evil for freedom's sake?', p. 161f. See also Susan L. Anderson, 'Plantinga and the free will defense', *Pacific Philosophical Quarterly* 62 (1981): 275–276. As Anderson notes, Mackie himself suggested this in passing. See his 'Evil and Omnipotence', p. 210. Robert Adams suggests a combination of this and the first strategy in 'Middle knowledge and the problem of evil', p. 116, crediting Nelson Pike for a crisp statement of the argument. See Pike's 'Plantinga on the free will defense: A reply', *The Journal of Philosophy* 63 (1966): 102.
34. $(D \Box \rightarrow W) \Box \rightarrow \sim D$ is to be distinguished from $(D \Box \rightarrow W) \Rightarrow \sim D$. The latter won't work here, for it entails $D \Rightarrow \sim W$. $D \Box \rightarrow W$ is supposed to be a (non-vacuously) true counterfactual of freedom.

35. E.g. Flint, 'Two accounts of Providence', p. 159: 'If God had, say, wished to prevent Cuthbert's free purchase of that iguana, he could have done so – by seeing to it that Cuthbert was in a situation in which he would freely refrain from buying the iguana; or by directly causing Cuthbert to refrain (unfreely) from entering the pet store; or perhaps even by deciding not to create Cuthbert, or iguanas, at all'. Freddoso, 'Introduction', p. 49: 'it may even be true in $CS(w)$ that there is a situation very much like H in which Adam would not freely sin'. See also William Lane Craig, *The Problem of Divine Foreknowledge and Future Contingents from Aristotle to Suarez* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1988), p. 176. Plantinga himself has always admitted that it was wholly up to God to create any (free) creature(s) at all, and make them free with respect to any particular significant action. The latter, together with, e.g., his talk of the value of a world in which there are creatures who are *sometimes* significantly free (and do more good overall than evil), and his claim that God cannot leave creatures *free* to perform evil and at the same time *prevent* them from doing so, surely open the door for the selective freedom strategy objection. Molina himself looks especially vulnerable to this objection. See, e.g., his remarks at the end of Disputation 53, Part 3, section 9 of the *Concordia*.
36. The situation seems to be different for 'Congruism' (an alleged variation of Molinism), and here I think there is big trouble. See, e.g., Hasker, 'Providence and evil', p. 96. Cf. Flint, 'Two accounts of Providence', p. 162.
37. 'Evil for freedom's sake?', p. 162. In Lewis's view, defence (in Plantinga's sense) is too easy; knowing God's mind (i.e. know-it-all theodicy) is too hard. Something in-between is needed.
- Lewis goes on to consider five objections (in order of increasing strength) to the selective freedom strategy. The final one, discussed at greater length, is that whatever 'freedom' God gives creatures is bogus freedom. I think Molinists are likely to raise this objection (or a variant of it) at some point or other. In fact, a Molinist might try to turn Lewis's own views against him here. E.g., given Lewis's Humean supervenience thesis and (constant conjunction) account of causation, if God pursued the selective freedom strategy, thereby ensuring that everyone always did what was right, it would seem to be a law of nature (in Lewis's sense) that every creature did what was right. But if that's so, creatures wouldn't be *free* (in the libertarian sense). Lewis, of course, is a compatibilist on freedom. But he's supposed to be arguing that *Molinist* principles give God a winning hand.
38. Instead of claiming that not enough counterfactuals of freedom were true, I'm tempted to suggest that some logical fact might have prevented God from arranging (strongly actualizing) the 'right' antecedents. Perhaps he would have had to do something contrary to his nature. E.g., there might have been something about the circumstances in which creatures would have to be placed and sustained in order for them always but freely to go right which was such that they would only have done this if they were systematically deceived; if they weren't deceived (if they knew some relevant fact or other), they would go wrong (at least once). It's unclear, however, whether a Molinist would or could pursue this line. Molinists want, I think, to maintain that God is essentially impeccable. But in that case, the main difficulty, as Flint has pointed out to me, is that it would appear that on this account Mackie-worlds end up being logically impossible. But if that's so, Molinists (and Plantinga) would say that creatures wouldn't really be free. Though Plantinga resists the idea that transworld depravity (sinfulness) is part of the essential nature of free creatureliness (or even that it's in any sense accidental that it's essential), he is prepared to concede that free creatures would have a very strong inclination to go wrong (sin) at least once. The traditional view is that we are made in the

image of God. (In conversation) Plantinga doesn't think it's absurd to say that if we're made in the image of God, we'll have a very strong inclination to think of ourselves in the way God thinks of himself, e.g. as the center of all things, the ground of being on which everything else depends for its continued existence and activity, etc. Hence, it's very likely that any (free) creatures of God would go wrong (sin) at least once.

39. E.g., suppose that in the circumstances which actually obtain I freely steal some jewelry, but if God had granted me more supernatural aids, I would freely have refrained from stealing it. It might also have been true that if God had given me more supernatural aids and I had freely refrained from stealing the jewelry, it would have been seen by Jones (who didn't actually see it). So, if God had granted me more supernatural aids, I would have refrained from stealing the jewelry and it would have been seen by Jones. But it might also be true that if God had granted me more supernatural aids and I freely refrained from stealing the jewelry and it was seen by Jones, Jones would freely have stolen it. But then it follows that if God had given me more supernatural aids, I would freely have refrained from stealing the jewelry, it would have been seen by Jones and Jones would freely have stolen it. This doesn't rely on transitivity, which is invalid for counterfactuals (on Lewis's semantics), but on the valid inference:

$A \Box \rightarrow B; A \wedge B \Box \rightarrow C; \therefore A \Box \rightarrow B \wedge C.$

40. In fairness to him, he does raise the possibility that the selective freedom strategy may not be a good one for God in a passing remark in reply to the first objection he considers.
41. I don't think it would do here to say that the worlds in question wouldn't have been good or good enough, if they're possible worlds to begin with. 'Traditionally' speaking, a world is logically possible if and only if it's possible (not necessarily feasible) for God to actualize it. If a world isn't 'good' or 'good enough', it just wouldn't be possible for God to actualize it, in which case it wouldn't really be a possible world to begin with. I don't think this objection to the selective freedom strategy need be equivalent to the third one Lewis considers, viz. the possibility that 'free evil-doing is good in its own right, not just the price of trying for freedom without evil', though it might come close when pressed. Cf. Mackie, *Miracle of Theism* (p. 173) for a variant of this, and his reply.
42. This seems to provide one reason for saying that middle knowledge is inessential to the Free Will Defence, and I'll return to this in the next section.
43. Without middle knowledge, it seems that God must in some sense be a risk-taker (if he creates free creatures). It's unclear whether risk-taking is compatible with perfect goodness, and I'll return to this issue in the next section.

If Mackie-worlds (or worlds which contain a more favourable balance of moral good over evil) are possible and better than this world, counterfactuals of freedom seem useful insofar as they function as 'limits' on God's power. (Possibly) God was unable to actualize one of these better worlds, because (possibly) he was unlucky when he surveyed the set of counterfactuals which happened to be true. Now, even if God can't be *faulted* for not actualizing (being able to actualize) one of those better worlds, or for actualizing *this* world, Molinism seems to have an odd theological consequence here. In fact, this seems to apply to *any* version of the Free Will Defence which concedes that Mackie-worlds are possible and better than this one. We'd seem to have good reason to regret that we're in this world, or regret that it was actualizable by God. One would seem driven to say e.g. that it would have been better if this world hadn't been actualizable by God (anyone), or better if this world had been actualizable by someone else. If the worlds in question weren't open to God because (for some reason) he didn't exist or existed but wasn't omnipotent in them, one would seem driven to say that it would have been better if God didn't exist or existed but wasn't omnipotent; we'd seem to have good reason to regret

God's existence and/or omnipotence. On the face of it, this ought to leave a Free Will Defender feeling deeply uncomfortable (embarrassed). At the least, there seems to be something odd about commiserating with an 'unlucky' God, regardless of where the 'bad luck' enters the story.

One reply: If we're not Lewisians about possible worlds, but take Plantinga's actualism, e.g., seriously, perhaps it's easier to argue that the charge of regret (or commiseration with an unlucky God) is misplaced. Those other worlds are mere possibilities. We're in the one and only world that is *in fact* actual.

44. Cf. Mackie, *Miracle of Theism*, p. 175.
45. I don't deny that Molinism makes theodicy look even harder. As I said at the outset, the more God-like God becomes on one's account, the more difficult it seems to be to get God off the hook for evil. Nevertheless, I argue elsewhere that Molinists can deflect some of the criticisms that have been brought against them here, they can make a case for saying that those theodicies which have the best chance of working require Molinist principles, and that anti-Molinist accounts such as Hasker's are really no better off when it comes to theodicy.
46. 'Self-profile', p. 52.
47. Similarly, one might protest that an appeal to 'mights' (or 'would-probablys') severely limits, if not abandons, God's omniscience. Cf. Mackie, *Miracle of Theism*, p. 175. One might also argue that the element of risk-taking that enters the story when one appeals to 'mights' (or 'would-probablys') is inconsistent with maintaining God's perfect goodness, and I'll return to this complaint shortly. I think these objections are more forceful the less satisfied one is with Plantinga's sharp distinction between a *defence* and ('know-it-all') *theodicy* (and/or the more one sees the need for something in-between). In recent years, an increasing number of theists and atheists have expressed varying degrees of dissatisfaction with Plantinga's distinction. This dissatisfaction is, I think, itself due chiefly to a conception of the atheological project which Plantinga, by his own admission ('Reply to Adams', p. 382), never intended to attack, and whose prospects, he concedes there, may be less dismal than those of the one he did attack. Following Adams (in 'Plantinga on the problem of evil', p. 240): 'the atheological program ... need not be one of rational coercion. It might be a more modest project of rational persuasion, intended not to coerce but to attract the minds of theists and agnostics, or perhaps to shore up the unbelief of atheists'. If *this* is the atheologian's 'task', it's not at all obvious that it's harder to achieve without middle knowledge, or that abandoning middle knowledge makes it any easier to get past it. At the least, it's surely a project which would attract the minds of *Molinists* (as well as those who would endorse an even stronger account of God's providence).
48. Cf. his 'Reply to Adams', p. 381.
49. See e.g. Robert Adams, 'Plantinga on the problem of evil', pp. 253–254, endnote 2, and Edward Wierenga, *The Nature of God: An Inquiry into Divine Attributes* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989), ch. 1. Incidentally, this move provides another possible reply to the charge that Plantinga's hypothesis of transworld depravity is inconsistent with maintaining God's omnipotence. Wierenga says (p. 131) that someone's having transworld depravity accidentally, and hence God's being limited with respect to worlds he can weakly actualize, doesn't count against his omnipotence, since on his (Wierenga's) view omnipotence depends only on what God can *strongly* actualize.
50. Cf. Flint and Freddoso, 'Maximal power', p. 86.
51. If we're affirming only would-probably conditionals, it's not clear that talk of 'galaxies' still makes sense here. In addition, it's not clear that such conditionals would be contin-

- gent. Why think it's not a necessary truth that, e.g., the probability of Curley's accepting the bribe, given the causal history of the world (which includes all there is to know about his character and intentions, etc.), is .47879? I owe these points to Tom Flint.
52. It would appear that by using only 'mights', the anti-Molinist God could have gotten such an outcome by arranging the 'right' consequents. E.g., if both $\alpha \diamond \rightarrow \beta$ and $\alpha \diamond \rightarrow \sim \beta$ are true, (given Lewis's semantics) this means that for every accessible $\alpha \wedge \sim \beta$ - ($\alpha \wedge \beta$ -) world, there's some $\alpha \wedge \beta$ - ($\alpha \wedge \sim \beta$ -) world which is at least as close.
 53. 'Plantinga on the problem of evil', p. 235. While Adams (p. 234) thinks that the rejection of (any possibly true) counterfactuals of freedom doesn't undermine Plantinga's solution of the 'abstract logical problem of evil', he does think it would be no trivial task to free his (general) solution of the 'concrete logical problem of evil' (i.e., the question of whether God's existence is consistent with the quantities and kinds of evil that actually occur) from the assumption that counterfactuals of freedom can be true.
 54. If this works, the *contra* Adams, the Free Will Defence against the 'concrete logical problem of evil' can be freed from Molinist assumptions. Cf. Plantinga, 'Reply to Adams', p. 381.
 55. In conversation, Plantinga agreed that this would be one way he'd construct the anti-Molinist consistency proof.
 56. It's not at all obvious that knowledge of conditional probabilities (as opposed to knowledge of the probabilities of conditionals) can serve as a reason for God's creative action. See Plantinga, 'Reply to Adams', p. 380.
 57. Plantinga, 'Reply to Adams', p. 379. He went on to say that he hoped to work out a detailed statement of a version of the Free Will Defence along these lines.
 58. See, e.g. Mackie, *Miracle of Theism*, p. 176, and Nelson Pike, 'Plantinga on free will and evil', *Religious Studies* 15 (1979): 456 and 468. In the Molinist camp, Flint has been the chief 'doubting Thomas' over the compatibility of risk-taking and God's perfect goodness.
 59. If, on the other hand, the atheologian's project here is to attract the minds of theists (and/or to shore up the unbelief of atheists and agnostics), it would seem that an anti-Molinist Free Will Defence is at best no better off than Plantinga's original version, and it may well be reasonable to resist it (if not both).
 60. Hasker seems to think that the necessity of risk-taking follows from God's love for his creatures; he can't avoid taking risks (in some sense) without becoming 'the manipulator than which none greater can be conceived'. See his 'Response to Thomas Flint', *Philosophical Studies* 60 (1990): 123–124. This was in response to Flint's description of God (on Hasker's account) as 'the bookie than which none greater can be conceived'.
 61. There's risk-taking at least in the sense that without middle knowledge, God doesn't actualize a world on the basis of knowing the outcomes of free creaturely actions on the condition that he actualize the antecedents of the relevant counterfactuals.
 62. This reply to the reckless risk-taking charge might be combined with what one might call the 'anthropic risk principle': If God hadn't taken any risks, we (or any finite free creatures) wouldn't be here to do our whinging.
 63. This resolution seems to amount to a counterfactual of divine freedom. If so, that doesn't commit one to Molinism. Counterfactuals of divine freedom are not objects of God's (prevolitional) middle knowledge, for their truth is hardly *independent* of God's will.
 64. In conversation, Plantinga agreed that this would be one way to go here.
 65. In Lewis's view, what we get here is more a picture of 'God the fanatical artist' than that of a Christian God who is morally perfect, perfectly benevolent and loves all his creatures. See his 'Evil for freedom's sake?', pp. 149 and 163.

66. This sort of view has been held by a number of Christian philosophers over the centuries. Perhaps the most classic formulation is to be found in Augustine's writings. So far as I can tell, it's something Molina himself seems to have held. Pike suggested (in 'Plantinga on free will and evil', p. 473) that Augustine's 'way out' might have been what Plantinga had in mind all along. While that doesn't appear to have been the case, it seems that Plantinga is heading in that direction these days. In fact, (in conversation) he's more optimistic than he used to be about the prospects of a successful theodicy, referring in particular to the work of Eleonore Stump and Marilyn McCord Adams.

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