

Divine Determinism: A Critical Consideration

By

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*To Kate,
who taught me to take seriously the question, even if she might not agree with my answer.*

*To Keith,
who helped me to hone my arguments with his persistent questions and constructive criticisms.*

*And to George,
who helped me find the peace of mind to finish this paper.*

Introduction

In her essay “Why Christians Should Not Be Libertarians: An Augustinian Challenge,” Lynn Rudder Baker expresses her surprise at the apparent consensus among Christian philosophers that divine determinism—the view that every event that occurs in the world is determined or causally necessitated by God—is false. She writes, “The apparent consensus is surprising for two reasons. First, rejection of libertarian [i.e. divine indeterministic] accounts of free will would make the solution to certain philosophical problems for Christians very easy.” Baker goes on to mention some of the problems that she believes would easily be solved by a switch to an account of free will compatible with divine determinism, including how human actions can be “under God’s sovereignty,” and how God can have foreknowledge of all future events. She continues: “The second reason that the apparent Christian consensus... is surprising is that there is a lot of room for the denial of libertarian accounts in the Christian tradition, Roman Catholic as well as Protestant. Indeed... recent theories of free-will libertarianism conflict with central Christian doctrines” (2003, pp. 461-462).

While Baker stands as something of a counter-example to the claim that there is such a consensus among Christian philosophers (since she defends divine determinism), she is nonetheless right that a majority of Christian philosophers hold that divine determinism is both incompatible with human freedom and—for this reason among others—false. Such a position sets them apart from a considerable number of contemporary theologians, who claim that divine determinism is not only compatible with human freedom but in fact entailed by central tenets of Christianity. In response to the criticisms of philosophers, who object to certain problematic

implications of divine determinism, these theologians maintain that such objections fail to take account of some pretty easy solutions.

In this paper I critically examine the arguments on both sides of this debate. Although I write in the tradition of analytic philosophy, I engage the works of theologians as well as philosophers, and attempt to interpret them both as charitably as possible. I begin by considering the most common reasons offered in favor of divine determinism, and argue that these reasons are neither philosophically compelling, nor necessitated by any theological commitments of traditional theism. I then move on to consider what I take to be the most problematic implications of divine determinism, and contend that the solutions that divine determinists normally propose are inadequate. While some of the objections and responses to divine determinism that I consider have been offered before, I also raise what are, as far as I know, novel objections, potential replies, and objections to those replies. Of course, I do not purport to consider *every* reason that could possibly be offered in favor of divine determinism, or every solution that could possibly be proposed to its apparently problematic implications. I do, however, suggest that unless a more compelling reason in its favor or a more adequate solution to its problems can be found, the thesis should be rejected.

Summary of Arguments

The most common arguments put forward in favor of divine determinism come in two forms, which I call *arguments from authority* and *arguments from consistency*. Religious arguments from authority begin with an appeal to some text considered authoritative within a religious tradition. The texts considered authoritative for Christians are primarily the Christian

Scriptures, and secondarily the creeds and confessions of faith developed by the Church, as well as the writings of theologians considered “doctors” of the Church. Obviously, the list of authoritative creeds, confessions, theologians and treatises differ from one Christian denomination to another, and are rejected by many non-Christian theists. Moreover, some of these texts are very difficult to interpret, and are used by divine determinists and indeterminists alike to justify their positions. Thus, arguments from authority have a rather narrow scope, appealing only to those who already take the texts in question to be authoritative, and who agree with the interpretation being offered. For these reasons, my main focus in this paper is not on arguments from authority. Still, I point out in various places that my conclusions are not at odds with the central tenets of the Christian faith expressed in these works. While some of the texts marshaled in to support the opposing view—such as certain writings of St. Augustine, Thomas Aquinas, Martin Luther and John Calvin—may seem clearly to support the divine determinist position, I suggest that the actual story is a bit more complicated. Moreover, I contend that much of the motivation behind these authors’ claims, and the spirit of their works, can be captured without affirming divine determinism.

While I thus occasionally engage with arguments from authority, my main focus in this paper is arguments from consistency. What I mean by this is the sort of argument that begins with the assumption that God is a perfect being and ends with the conclusion that the world has a certain property—in this case, the property of being wholly determined by God. The arguments from consistency that I consider can be put in the following form:

- (1) God, a perfect being, has attribute X.
- (2) If God has attribute X, then divine determinism is true.
- (3) Therefore, divine determinism is true.

“Perfect being theology,” which utilizes this sort of reasoning, is sometimes considered as question begging as the biblical theology that embraces arguments from authority. After all, as even the practitioners of perfect being theology admit, the enumeration of perfection-making attributes proceeds “largely on the basis of intuition” (Rogers 2000, p. 12), and different people engaged in the practice of this theology often have different intuitions about what attributes would make a being more or less perfect. For instance, while most medieval theologians maintained that a perfect being would be eternal, immutable, and impassible, many modern theologians argue that a being who can act in time, undergo change, and experience suffering is much more to be praised. Still, the conception of God *as* a perfect being is one that is both expressed in the texts of a wide variety of theistic religions, and also agreed upon by and large by theists and atheists alike. Moreover, there is *some* convergence of intuitions with respect to the attributes of a perfect being, such as omnipotence, omniscience, and perfect goodness—though there are different ways of fleshing these attributes out. In any case, for the sake of argument I grant the divine determinists who utilize this reasoning the first premise of their arguments, that God does have the attributes they claim. What I call into question is the second premise, that God’s having the attributes in question entails the truth of divine determinism. In Chapter I of this paper, I consider four possible attributes of God that purportedly entail divine determinism: omniscience, creativity, transcendence, and providential activity. I argue that one can consistently affirm God’s possession of these attributes and deny divine determinism.

In Chapter II, I draw a distinction between different forms of divine determinism. As I have defined it above, divine determinism is consistent with, but not entailed by, a view called *natural determinism*, according to which every event that occurs in the world (at least after the

first moment of time) is determined or causally necessitated by antecedent events together with the laws of nature. That is to say, one could be a divine determinist and a natural determinist—and so, hold the view that I call *natural divine determinism*—or, one could be a divine determinist and a natural indeterminist—and so, hold the view that I call (for lack of a better term) *non-natural divine determinism*. Since some divine determinists defend natural divine determinism, and others non-natural divine determinism, I need to consider what the implications of each form of divine determinism are, and whether one might be less problematic than the other. In the first half of Chapter II, I focus on natural divine determinism, and point to an apparent problem facing this view in particular: that it leaves no room for direct and novel special divine action in the world, at least after the initial moment of creation. That there is such divine action, I contend, is a central tenet of traditional theism. Thus, theists have at least some reason to reject natural divine determinism.

In order to allow room for direct and novel special divine action in the world after the first moment in time, theists might be tempted to reject natural divine determinism and accept non-natural divine determinism instead. Not only does this latter view allow for a theistically satisfying account of special divine action, but, non-natural divine determinists argue, it also allows for a philosophically satisfying account of human freedom (which, they say, natural divine determinism does not), since it leaves open the possibility that human action originates with humans themselves, rather than some cause external to humans in the natural world. In the second half of Chapter II, however, I argue that this claim is mistaken—that the apparent incompatibility between natural divine determinism and human freedom is not resolved by a move to non-natural divine determinism. Thus I argue for the conditional conclusion, contra

many divine determinists, that *if* natural divine determinism is incompatible with human freedom, then so is non-natural divine determinism.

A further problem for divine determinism—whether in its natural or non-natural form—I consider in Chapter III of this paper; and that is, that divine determinism seriously aggravates the problem of evil. In particular, I argue that both natural and non-natural divine determinism entail that God is causally and morally responsible for the evil done by human agents, and that if God judges and condemns sin then he is guilty of a great injustice. Such divine blameworthiness is, of course, at odds with both the implicit assumptions and the explicit avowals of virtually every biblical and theological text of traditional theism, as well as with the conclusions of perfect being theology. Yet, divine determinists do not admit such divine blameworthiness; instead, they attempt to defend God’s innocence, in one of three ways. First, some deny that a God who determines all events in the world is even *causally* responsible for human sin. Those who take this route tend to espouse a “privative” theory of sin or draw a distinction between God’s active causation and passive permission of events. Second, some affirm that if God determines all events then he is causally responsible for them, but deny that he is thus *morally* responsible for sin. Those who take this route tend to advocate a divine command theory of morality. Finally, some affirm that God is morally responsible for the sin he has caused, but maintain that he is not blameworthy for causing or condemning it. Those who take this route do so in one of two ways: either by constructing a positive theodicy to defend the righteousness and justice of God, or by embracing a kind of “skeptical theism” with respect to the problem of evil. I consider all of these responses to my initial objection, and argue that none is adequate. In the final section of Chapter III, I consider the claim, made by some divine determinists, that divine *indeterminism* fares no

better with respect to the problem of evil than does divine determinism. I argue that this claim, too, is mistaken. I conclude that since there are strong reasons for a theist to reject divine determinism, and no apparent reasons for accepting it, the thesis should be rejected.

Why it Matters

Before launching into an assessment of all of these arguments, it may be helpful to discuss briefly the reasons why this question, of the truth of divine determinism, matters at all. Of course, for those who enjoy a good philosophical puzzle, the answer may already be obvious: since this question offers us the chance to figure out whether various sets of propositions to which people sometimes ascribe—e.g. that God has middle knowledge but that free human actions are not determined, or that the world is naturally determined but that God specially acts within history, or that God determines all things but that humans are culpable for their own sin—are in fact jointly consistent. Moreover, since divine determinism has significant implications with respect to the nature of human freedom, divine responsibility, miraculous intervention, and the like, our judgments regarding the truth of this thesis will greatly affect what sort of systematic metaphysic we develop to describe the world.

But the truth of divine determinism has great practical import as well as interesting theoretical implications. As David and Randall Basinger note in *Predestination and Free Will*, “How Christians view the relationship between divine sovereignty and human freedom has a direct bearing on how they respond to various issues in their lives” (1986, p. 8). In this book, four authors (one of whom is a divine determinist) each describe their theoretical views on the relationship between divine sovereignty and human freedom, and then apply these views to some

specific cases of individuals wondering how to live their lives. Unsurprisingly, the four authors offer different advice about how the individuals in the cases should think and act. Yet, as Basinger and Basinger note, while these authors try to keep their practical advice consistent with their theoretical views, many less consistent thinkers advocate one view in theory and seem to live according to another in practice; and still others who have no explicit theoretical commitments seem to “switch back and forth” between different views at different times. For instance:

Some accept the birth of a radically deformed and mentally deficient baby as a gift of God, yet advocate birth control or adoption to make sure that more children are not born this way.... Some believe that their time of death is appointed by God; yet they have serious reservations about the parents who, on the conviction that God is in control of life and death, refuse to seek medical treatment for their children. (1986, pp. 9-10)

As such examples make clear, the truth of divine determinism has significant practical as well as theoretical implications, and it is important to make sure that one’s theoretical perspective *informs* one’s practical thinking and decision-making. With this aim in mind, I discuss at various points in this paper how accepting or rejecting divine determinism should affect one’s moral judgments, religious practices, and so on.

Chapter I: Arguments for Divine Determinism

Section 1: Divine Omniscience

One of the attributes that has been thought to entail divine determinism is divine omniscience. Omniscience is the property of having maximal or complete knowledge, such that a subject *S* is omniscient if and only if for every proposition *p*, if *p* is true then *S* knows *p* (Wierenga 2010). Although neither the word “omniscience” nor any such technical definition is found in the Christian Scriptures, various biblical passages support the attribution of such a property to God.¹ Divine omniscience is also thought to follow from the proposition that God is a perfect being, since to not know some true proposition would seem to be an imperfection.

Now, one might think that the propositions that an omniscient being would know include not just those about the actual world, and how things have been in the past, are in the present, and will be in the future, but also those about other possible worlds, and how things *would* be, if the world were different than it actually is. And, one might think, among such counterfactual conditionals, or propositions about how things would be if the world were different than it actually is, are those about free human actions—both those of mere possible people (people who God might have created, but in fact did not), and those of actual people in counterfactual circumstances (circumstances in which God might have placed them, but in fact did not).

The knowledge of counterfactual conditionals about free human actions—or “counterfactuals of freedom” as they are often called—was discussed at length by the 16th

¹ E.g. 1 John 3:20 – “God... knows everything.” (This and all future biblical quotations are taken from the *New Revised Standard Version*.)

century Jesuit theologian Luis de Molina. Molina considered such knowledge to be part of God's *scientia media*, or middle knowledge, since he thought that it stood in between God's "natural knowledge," or knowledge of his own nature and the necessary truths that follow from his nature, and "free knowledge," or knowledge of his own will and the contingent truths that follow from his will. Molina claimed that, like the propositions included in God's natural knowledge, counterfactuals of freedom were pre-volitional, or (logically) prior to, and thus independent of, God's will; though like the propositions included in God's free knowledge, they were contingent truths (Freddoso 1988, pp. 11-12, 23). Although to simplify terminology and follow convention I will use the term "middle knowledge" to describe God's knowledge of counterfactuals of freedom, I will not be assuming that these truths are pre-volitional, since this would presuppose the falsity of divine determinism. That is to say, I will not assume that if God has middle knowledge, then the counterfactuals that God knows are about *libertarianly free* human actions, i.e. actions that are not determined or causally necessitated by anything other than the human agents. Some authors use the term "middle knowledge" to refer only to God's knowledge of counterfactuals of *libertarian* freedom, but I take this to be a merely linguistic point of disagreement, and it will simplify what I have to say here if the term "middle knowledge" can be applied to God's knowledge of any counterfactuals of freedom, whether that freedom is libertarian or not. I will be assuming, however, that if God has middle knowledge, then he has it (logically) prior to, and independent of, his act of creating the world. As we shall see, if the theory of middle knowledge is to be of any use to Molinists, then God would have to know counterfactual conditionals before his act of creation.

Now, despite the initial plausibility of the Molinist claim that God's omniscience includes middle knowledge, Robert Adams has argued that if human freedom is libertarian, then

God cannot know counterfactuals of freedom. Adams accepts that human freedom *is* libertarian, and concludes that God therefore lacks middle knowledge—though he maintains that God is omniscient, for counterfactuals of libertarian freedom lack truth-value (1987, p. 79). In other words, Adams maintains that there *is no such thing* as middle knowledge of counterfactuals of libertarian freedom, and so God’s “lacking” such knowledge is no real limitation or imperfection.

Edwin Curley, however, has argued that maintaining a libertarian conception of human freedom while denying the possibility of middle knowledge of counterfactuals of libertarian freedom requires accepting what has been called a “risky” view of providence, and that such a view should not be acceptable to the Christian theist, since it is incompatible with the Christian conception of the benevolent wisdom manifest in God’s act of creation and governance of the world. Though the risky view of providence has been defended at length by William Hasker, among others, Curley points to problems with Hasker’s argument and ultimately rejects the view. Since Curley accepts Adams’ argument for the impossibility of middle knowledge of counterfactuals of libertarian freedom but also maintains that God would not allow libertarian freedom *without* having such middle knowledge, Curley concludes that the Christian theist must reject a libertarian conception of human freedom and accept divine determinism, at least with respect to human action.²

Although Curley puts his argument in terms of *Christian* theism, he suggests that the basic premises are ones that traditional theists other than Christians—such as Jews and

² Curley also concludes, in the same essay, that the Christian theist must accept divine *indeterminism* in order to avoid making God responsible for human wickedness; thus his ultimate conclusion is that Christian theism is incoherent. I will only be focusing on the first of Curley’s conclusions in this chapter, namely, that the Christian theist must accept divine determinism.

Muslims—might also accept (2003, p. 75), and that they follow from the classic conception of the attributes of a “supremely perfect being” (2003, p. 74). The reasoning he employs to argue for divine determinism can thus be put in the form of an argument from consistency, as follows:

- (I) If human freedom is libertarian then God cannot have middle knowledge
- (II) If God lacks middle knowledge then he take risks with his creation
- (III) A God who takes risks with his creation is not perfect
- (IV) Therefore, since God is perfect, human freedom is not libertarian.

Of course, concluding that human freedom is not libertarian is not the same thing as concluding that human actions are divinely determined, since human actions might be determined by something in the world other than God. However, for the sake of argument I will be granting the divine determinists who would defend such an argument this small step, from the claim that human actions are not undetermined to the conclusion that they are determined by God.

In what follows, I explore this argument in greater depth. I begin with Adams’ argument for the first claim, regarding the impossibility of middle knowledge of counterfactuals of libertarian freedom. I then consider the reasoning which leads Curley and Hasker to accept the second claim, that the denial of divine middle knowledge entails a “risky” view of providence. I continue with a discussion of Hasker’s defense of the risky view of providence as well as Curley’s argument, for the third premise, that the risky view of providence is inconsistent with the benevolent wisdom of God. Though I ultimately accept Curley’s conditional conclusion that *if* God could not have knowledge of counterfactuals of libertarian freedom, *then* it would be incompatible with divine perfection to create libertarianly free humans, I criticize Adams’ reasoning and contend that middle knowledge of such counterfactuals is, in fact, possible for God. In other words, I reject the first premise of this argument and conclude that one can

maintain *both* that divine omniscience includes middle knowledge of counterfactuals of human freedom *and also* that human freedom is libertarian.

Premise I: If human freedom is libertarian then God cannot have middle knowledge

Adams' argument for the impossibility of middle knowledge of counterfactuals of libertarian freedom is based on two claims: first, if God knows a proposition, then that proposition must have truth-value, and second, counterfactuals of libertarian freedom lack truth-value. The first claim seems to me the least contentious, though Adams suggests that Molina may have denied it. Adams quotes Molina, saying "the certainty of middle knowledge comes from the depth and... perfection of the divine intellect, by which [God] knows certainly what is in itself uncertain." Adams interprets such passages as follows: "Molina seems to want to say that what free creatures would do under various possible conditions is not there, objectively, to be known, but that God's mind is so perfect that he knows it anyway." But that, Adams goes on to say, is impossible (1987, p. 81). Though it is not clear to me that this is the best way to interpret Molina's enigmatic doctrine of "super-comprehension," I agree with Adams that if this were what Molina was saying, he would be wrong. If a proposition lacks truth-value, then it cannot be known, even by a supremely perfect knower, for the simple reason that there is nothing to be known. Thus I will focus my attention on the second of Adams' claims, that counterfactuals of libertarian freedom lack truth-value. I reconstruct his argument for this conclusion as follows:

- (1) If a proposition is true, then there must be something that grounds its truth.
- (2) There is nothing that grounds the truth of counterfactuals of libertarian freedom.
- (3) Therefore, counterfactuals of libertarian freedom cannot be true.

In support of the first premise, Adams points out that in the case of every other sort of conditional, there is always something that grounds its truth; in support of the second premise, he contends that the sorts of things that ground the truth of other sorts of conditionals cannot ground the truth of counterfactuals of libertarian freedom. On the one hand, he says, the consequent of some conditionals follow from the antecedent by logical or causal necessity; yet neither logical nor causal necessity can ground the truth of a conditional about how a human would act if placed in a certain circumstance, if that action is undetermined; for such necessity is quite clearly incompatible with indeterminism. On the other hand, features of a person that do not necessitate her action—such as her particular beliefs or desires or her general character—cannot ground the truth of counterfactual conditionals about her action, precisely because such features are non-necessitating (1987, p. 80).

It should be noted that if the above reasoning were all that Adams had to offer for his conclusion that counterfactuals of libertarian freedom cannot be true, then he would seem to be committed to the conclusion that conditionals about *actual* but *future* libertarianly free human actions also cannot be true, and so, that God cannot know those conditionals either. For the consequents of such conditionals also cannot follow from the antecedents by either logical or causal necessity, and so neither logical nor causal necessity can ground the truth of such conditionals. And neither can humans' beliefs, desires, etc. ground the truth of conditionals about their libertarianly free actions, precisely because such properties cannot be necessitating when the actions are undetermined.

However, logical and causal necessity and the personal characteristics of humans are not the only things that Adams suggests might ground the truth of conditionals about libertarianly free human actions. For he writes, "Most philosophers... have supposed that categorical

predictions, even about contingent events, can be true by corresponding to the actual occurrence of the event that they predict.” Thus Adams suggests that the actual action that a libertarianly free human will take in a certain situation can ground a conditional proposition about that action, even before the time the action is taken. Adams maintains that counterfactuals of libertarian freedom cannot be thus grounded, for “there never was, nor will be [an actual event]... to which those propositions might correspond” (1987, p. 80). William Hasker sums up well Adams’ argument, regarding this point:

It is not evident that the truths postulated by [the view of middle knowledge of counterfactuals of libertarian freedom] exist to be known. In ordinary foreknowledge, it may be argued, what God knows is the agent’s *actual decision* to do one thing or another. But with regard to a situation that never in fact arises, no decision is ever made, and none exists for God to know. And if the decision in question is suppose to be a [libertarianly] *free* decision, then all of the circumstances of the case... are consistent with any of the possible choices that might be made. Lacking the agent’s *actual* making of the choice, then, there is nothing that disambiguates the situation and makes it true that some one of the options is the one that *would be* selected. (1989, p. 20)

Adams goes on to consider two other responses to the question of what grounds the truth of counterfactuals of libertarian freedom. One is based on the application of Plantinga’s “possible worlds” explanation of counterfactuals. Following Robert Stalnaker and David Lewis, Plantinga explains that for the proposition *If person S had been in circumstances C, he would have done A* to be true is for the actual world to be more similar to some possible world in which *S* is in *C* and does do *A*, than any possible world in which *S* is in *C* and does not do *A*. Yet Adams suggests two reasons why this analysis fails to establish the possibility of middle knowledge of counterfactuals of libertarian freedom. First, he says, it offers not a new solution to the problem, but simply an “up-to-date form for the expression of attempted solutions that we may already have considered and rejected.” Second, he says, if middle knowledge is to be of use

to God, it must be prior “in the order of explanation” to God’s decision regarding which possible creatures to actualize; yet, Adams maintains, “the truth of the crucial conditionals cannot be settled soon enough” to be of such use (1987, pp. 82-84).

With respect to this second problem, Adams reasons as follows: suppose that God were faced with the choice between creating Adam and Eve and not creating them. If middle knowledge is to be of any use to God, then it must inform his decisions about which creatures to create (if any). So, based on the theory of middle knowledge, one might suppose that God’s decision to create Adam and Eve is to be explained in part by the truth of the proposition *If God created Adam and Eve, there would be more moral goodness than moral evil in the history of the world.*³ But, Adams points out, according to Plantinga’s account, the truth of this proposition depends on whether the actual world is more similar to some possible world in which Adam and Eve exist and there is more moral goodness than moral evil, than to any possible world in which Adam and Eve exist but there is not more moral goodness than moral evil. And that, in turn, depends on which world is the actual world. As Hasker and Curley both note, Anthony Kenny seems to have raised the same objection independently: “If it is to be possible for God to know which world he is actualizing, then his middle knowledge must be logically prior to his decision to actualize; whereas if middle knowledge is to have an object, the actualization must already have taken place” (quoted in Hasker 1989, p. 36). So, Adams concludes, Plantinga’s possible-

³ As Adams points out, some propositions such as this one are not, strictly speaking, counterfactuals, since their antecedents turn out to be true. Thus Adams opts for the term “deliberative conditionals” to describe such a proposition, because it is entertained “in the context of deliberation about whether to (try to) make its antecedent true or false” (1987, p. 84). I shall stick to the term “counterfactual,” however, following the convention of Hasker (1989, p. 26) and others.

worlds account of counterfactuals does not sufficiently ground the truth of counterfactuals of libertarian freedom that are the object of God's middle knowledge.

The second way to account for the truth of counterfactuals of libertarian freedom that Adams considers was suggested by Francisco Suárez, another 16th century Jesuit theologian who, Adams says, "appeals, in effect, to a primitive understanding, which needs no analysis, of what it is for the relevant subjunctive conditionals to be true." Suárez maintained that every possible human has "possible being" in the mind of God, and corresponding to every possible action that each possible human might take there is a property, which the human has, of either being a possible agent who would take that action or being a possible agent who would not take that action. According to Suárez, these "possible properties" are what ground God's middle knowledge of counterfactuals of libertarian freedom (Adams 1987, pp. 81-82).

In response to Suárez's proposal, Adams writes: "My principal objection.... [is that] I do not think I have any conception, primitive or otherwise, of the sort of... property that Suárez ascribes to possible agents with respect to their acts under possible conditions. Nor do I think I have any other primitive understanding of what it would be for the relevant subjunctive conditionals to be true." Though Adams thus seems not to consider Suárez's response adequate, he says he takes it to be "the least clearly unsatisfactory" of the possible responses, since "it is very difficult to refute someone who claims to have a primitive understanding which I seem not to have" (1987, p. 82). Adams maintains, however, that without a completely satisfactory account of the grounds of counterfactuals of libertarian freedom, we do not have good reason to believe that such counterfactuals can be true; and, so, since a proposition must be true in order to be known, he concludes that we do not have good reason to believe that middle knowledge of counterfactuals of libertarian freedom is possible.

A defender of the view that humans have libertarian freedom might accept Adams' arguments that middle knowledge of counterfactuals of libertarian freedom is not possible and simply conclude that divine omniscience does not include middle knowledge. This is, in fact, what Adams concludes, agreeing with Hasker (1989) that God lacks knowledge of counterfactuals of freedom. Yet Edwin Curley has argued that Adams and Hasker's rejection of middle knowledge should not be acceptable to the Christian theist, for "accounting for divine providence... [requires] attributing middle knowledge to God" (2003, p. 91). In defending this claim, Curley appeals to Thomas Flint's exposition of the "traditional conception of providence"; Flint writes: "To see God as provident is to see him as knowingly and lovingly directing each and every event involving each and every creature toward the ends he has ordained for them." Thus it follows from the claim that God is provident that "the events of our world, no matter how chaotic or disturbing they might appear, unfold precisely according to the plan established eternally by our all-knowing and loving sovereign" (quoted in Curley 2003, p. 92). Yet, Curley contends, if God lacks middle knowledge, then he cannot direct all events involving creatures toward the ends he has ordained for them. For such direction requires not just knowledge of the actual world and how things will actually turn out, but knowledge of alternative possibilities and how things would turn out if such possibilities were actualized. To see why this is so, I will consider Hasker's own argument that "foreknowledge *without* middle knowledge—simple foreknowledge—does *not* offer the benefits for the doctrine of providence that its adherents have sought to derive from it" (1989, p. 19), and that without the "benefits" of middle knowledge, God must take risks with creation. I will then return to Curley's own argument against such a

“risky” view of providence, which leads him to conclude that God must have middle knowledge and so that human freedom must not be libertarian.

Premise II: If God lacks middle knowledge then he take risks with creation

Hasker points out that many religious people seem implicitly to assume that simple foreknowledge is both necessary and sufficient for divinely inspired prophetic predictions of the future, made in order to change people’s ways, and events divinely prearranged in response to prayer or for the benefit of God’s people (1989, p. 54). Yet Hasker contends that simple foreknowledge is “of *no importance whatever* for the religiously significant concerns about prayer, providence, and prophecy” (1989, p. 55). To illustrate his point, Hasker considers the example of a young woman trying to decide which of two men to marry and turning to God for guidance. For one thing, Hasker notes:

God *cannot* use his [simple] foreknowledge in guiding the young woman about her marriage decision. For the future situation which God foreknows is, of course, a situation in which she *already* is married to one of the two men... and since the decision’s *actually having been made* is presupposed by God’s *knowledge* of the future, he cannot possibly *use* that knowledge in deciding how to *influence* that decision. (1989, p. 57)

Hasker goes on to write, “What may seem to be possible, however, is this: God, because he foreknows that a certain event will occur, may prearrange *other factors* in the situation in such a way as to produce the best overall result” (1989, p. 58). Yet, noting that God will know not merely which of the two men the woman will choose to marry, but every single event that will occur in their futures and all of the causal antecedents of each event, Hasker points out that none of the causally relevant history of the world leading up to the marriage “is left to be *decided* by

God *on the basis of his knowledge*” of the marriage. Thus it follows that God cannot use his simple foreknowledge of the marriage “as a basis for *any prior action* occurring within the relevant past sector of space-time” (1989, pp. 61-62). It seems, then, that if any knowledge of God’s is to be useful to God in inspiring prophetic predictions and pre-arranging events in response to prayer or for the benefit of God’s people, then it must be middle knowledge and not simple foreknowledge.

It follows from Hasker’s argument that at the moment of creation—and at any further point at which God might act within the world to determine the outcome of an event—God’s simple foreknowledge will be useless to him in providentially governing human history. Hasker accepts this conclusion, and admits that it means that God runs some risk in creating humans with libertarian freedom. He writes, “*Does God make decisions that depend for their outcomes on the responses of free creatures in which the decisions themselves are not informed by knowledge of the outcomes?* If he does, then creating and governing a world for God is a risky business” (1989, p. 197). Thus Hasker’s view of divine omniscience without middle knowledge can be seen to entail a “risky” view of providence. In contrast, the view in which God, lacking middle knowledge of counterfactuals of libertarian freedom, determines all events of the world—including free human actions—can be considered a “risk-free” view of providence. On the risk-free view, God still has what I am calling “middle knowledge” of counterfactuals of freedom, but that freedom is not libertarian. Rather, God knows the truth of the counterfactuals because he *determines* their truth.

Premise III: A God who takes risks with creation is not perfect

The risk-free view of providence may seem to have intuitive appeal, since it “provides absolute security for the believer” that everything in the world occurs exactly as God intends (Hasker 1989, p. 198). Yet Hasker argues that the risky view is sufficient for the Christian theist, offering “an affirmative, constructive, and... religiously satisfying conception of God’s.... providential governance of the world” (1989, p. 186). Indeed, he suggests it may even be preferable to the risk-free view, for “Those who admire risk-taking and experimentalism in human life may feel that the richness of God’s life is diminished if we deny these attributes to him” (1989, p. 199). While Curley admits that risk-taking and experimentalism may be qualities that we admire in human life, however, he notes that “to be truly admirable, risk-taking must avoid recklessness. That is, it must not consciously and unjustifiably disregard the possible negative outcomes. If God’s risk-taking is reckless, then it is not ‘consistent with supreme wisdom and concern for his creatures like that of a supremely loving parent.’” He goes on to argue that the risk-taking involved in the risky-view of providence is, in fact, reckless. For a wise and loving parent would not “let her children court disastrous outcomes”; but a God who gave his creatures libertarian freedom without knowing how they would use it would, in fact, be letting his creatures court disastrous outcomes. Curley says, “He runs, for example, the risk that a Hitler or a Stalin or a Pol Pot will use his freedom to cruelly exterminate millions of people. Is the value of the freedom of these men credibly so great that it would justify such a risk?” The answer, he suggests, is “no” (2003, p. 93).

Thomas Flint makes a similar point regarding the unacceptability of the risky view of providence. First, he notes that, though “there is often something admirable, noble, and virtuous” about taking risks, “the greater the stakes, the less we generally want to engage in risky

endeavors”—especially where others are involved. Then he offers an analogy to the position of a parent faced with two options:

Under Option One, you can place your child in circumstances in which you know with certainty that she will freely develop into a good and happy human being who leads a full and satisfying life. These circumstances may well produce certain difficulties in her life; she may have to struggle at many times.... Still, you know that, though to the uninformed observed (and even to your daughter) she may at times seem to be treading the path to perdition, she will in fact overcome all obstacles, and all will ultimately be well with her.

Under Option Two... you don't have any knowledge of the circumstances in which you could place your daughter in which things would turn out fine for her. All that you know are the likely outcomes for any such situations.... Still, you use your knowledge to take those actions you think will turn out best for her, and you keep your fingers crossed.

Flint says he would, without hesitation, choose Option One, and that the claim that Option Two is in fact preferable is “just short of absurd” (1998a, p. 106). But, he suggests, this is what the defender of the risky view of providence commits herself to, in placing positive value on divine risk-taking with respect to the wellbeing of his creatures.

Curley considers one objection to his argument about the unacceptability of the risky view of providence, which is that if we humans “can judge with a very high degree of probability what other humans will do,” then God, “whose knowledge of people’s character and dispositions is far superior to ours,” must be able to judge what they will do with an even higher degree of probability. But then “the risk of a disastrous outcome may well seem vanishingly small—in fact, negligible” (2003, p. 94). Curley does not explain why such a risk would seem to be so small, but the low-risk factor cannot be the result of God’s ability to predict what individual humans with libertarian freedom would do in any of the various situations he might put them in. For such predictions, if made before the creation of the world, would rely on middle knowledge of counterfactuals of libertarian freedom. So, the idea must be that God would have knowledge

of the general principles about how humans tend to act in different kinds of situations, given their human nature. Such a view might be called a “minimal risk” view of providence.

The problem with this response, it seems, is that if the risk of disastrous outcomes is “vanishingly small,” this must be because our general human nature and natural environment determine how we as individuals will act to a great extent—to so great an extent, that is, that our freedom to do otherwise than what the principles say we will do would seem correspondingly negligible. The question for one who seeks to minimize the risk of “disastrous outcomes” and so to maximize the predictability of individual human action then seems to be: what value is such negligible libertarian freedom with which we are left? And if the value of such libertarian freedom is negligible as well, then why not simply embrace a divine deterministic account of human freedom?

Though Curley does not discuss this particular problem with the minimal risk view of providence, regarding the negligible value of such constrained libertarian freedom, he does point out a related problem, regarding the negligible value of divine experimentation. He asks, “if the indeterminist emphasizes so strongly the extremely low probability of divine error, what becomes of God’s ‘risk-taking’?”:

If the chance of a negative outcome is so small as to be negligible, even though a negative outcome would be disastrous, how ‘real’ is the chance? The talk of a ‘risk-taking’ God now appears to be so much bluster. *Strictly speaking*, God does not know infallibly what free choices his creatures will make, but his probable judgments come so close to knowledge that the difference does not matter. (2003, p. 94)

Curley thus suggests that what Hasker calls “the richness of God’s life,” in experimenting with his creation, would likewise be diminished significantly if God were able to predict to a very high degree of probability how things will turn out within it.

Since the minimal-risk view of providence seems to have negligible value over the risk-free view, Curley suggests that there is no reason to accept it. Thus, for one who denies the possibility of middle knowledge of counterfactuals of libertarian freedom, the only views of providence left to consider are the risk-free view and the risky view. And, Curley maintains, since the risky view of providence entails that God is reckless and irresponsible in creating the world, this view should be rejected, on the grounds that it is not worthy of a supremely perfect being or compatible with a traditional theistic conception of God. Therefore, Curley concludes, one should accept the risk-free view of providence, complete with its divine deterministic account of human freedom.

Evaluating the Argument: Premise III

Now it seems to me that in defending premise III, Curley's reasoning is, in part, not strongly enough put. For when considering whether the value of libertarian freedom justifies taking the risk of creating libertarianly free humans who might use their freedom for ill, one needs to keep in mind not just the atrocities that actual humans such as Hitler, Stalin, and Pol Pot *actually* commit, but the atrocities that such humans might *possibly* commit in a world otherwise like ours. For if God lacked knowledge of how the possible libertarianly free humans he might create would act in possible situations in which he might place them, then God would not know, before creating some such humans and situations, that things were not going to go much worse than they actually have gone. Indeed, for all God would know at the moment of creation, all of the humans he intended to create might have ended up committing horrendously evil acts every

chance that they got, and, if left to their own devices, might have exterminated the entire human race long ago, before any of God's purposes for humanity had been realized.

Of course, this is not to say that, on the risky view of providence, if people want to do evil things such as exterminate the human race, there is nothing at all that God can do about it. Hasker contends, in response to such a suggestion, "It is not as though his resources are strained to the limit, so that if he fails to anticipate exactly what will happen... he will fail to accomplish his ends" (1989, p. 193). God could, for instance, inhibit people from acting once they had proven themselves evil enough or made known their plans to commit atrocities. However, it is not clear that having the power to prevent such atrocities means that *God cannot fail to accomplish his ends*. For God's ends might—and, indeed, according to the traditional theistic conception, *do*—involve more than just the survival of the human race through constant divine intervention to prevent their horrendously evil actions; God's ends involve humans' (free) cooperation with God's purposes, in doing good and acting lovingly toward God and their fellow humans. But, if humans have *libertarian* freedom, then God cannot guarantee such cooperation, regardless of his power. And without middle knowledge of counterfactuals of libertarian freedom, God would not know that the libertarianly free humans he was to create would cooperate with his purposes, so that his ends would indeed be accomplished.

So, on the one hand, it seems that Curley's point could be put more strongly, by contending that the risky view of providence is incompatible with the conception of God as one who has plans for the world which include certain free actions of human beings and which cannot be thwarted by his creatures. On the other hand, one might argue that such an understanding of divine providence is not essential to perfect being theology, or even that it is at odds with certain tenets of traditional theism. For instance, according to the doctrine of hell,

unrepentant sinners are eternally damned; and yet, several passages in the Scriptures suggest that it is God's will that all humans attain salvation.⁴ Thus it would seem that the evil actions of human beings *can*, in fact, thwart God's will or plans for the world.⁵

While it is not within the scope of this paper to debate the merits of the doctrine of hell, or its compatibility with the benevolence of God, I would suggest that Curley's argument is at least not watertight. For while he seems right that the value of divine risk-taking, *per se*, does not outweigh the very great harm that God might allow his creatures to suffer in creating libertarianly free human beings without knowing how they will act, Curley disregards the possibility that there might be some *other* value that God would realize in engaging in such risky behavior. And that value might lie in the creatures *themselves*, or in their experience of existing as free agents, even given the suffering they may face. As some defenders of the doctrine of hell maintain, it is better to exist as a libertarianly free creature of God than not to so exist, even if one ends up damned for one's evil actions. And one who denies the existence of hell and instead asserts that all humans will somehow ultimately be reconciled to God might maintain (more plausibly, I think) that the great value that God realizes in creating libertarianly free creatures justifies this act of creation, even given the possibility that they might commit horrendously evil actions in their lives.

Another way to put this point is in terms of the analogy that Flint offers between the competing views of providence and the options facing the parent of a child. After noting that he would of course choose (risk-free) Option One if he could, Flint says, "the fact that we *don't* have a choice here, that we as parents are stuck with [risky] Option Two, is one of the things that

⁴ E.g. 1 Timothy 2:4—God "desires everyone to be saved."

⁵ This point was suggested to me by Keith Yandell, personal communication, January 2011.

is especially frustrating (and even terrifying) about being a parent” (1998a, p. 106). One convinced by Adams’ argument that middle knowledge of counterfactuals of libertarian freedom is not possible might respond that this must, similarly, be what is especially frustrating (and even terrifying) about being God—that Option One is not a real option, and so that God must opt for Option Two if he wants to create libertarianly free creatures at all. But just as a parent still chooses to give birth to a child, so God still chooses to bring into being libertarian creatures, because of their great value.

I have thus suggested at least one way an opponent might object to Curley’s argument against the risky view of providence, by questioning his assumption that the only value to be realized in creating libertarianly free creatures, rather than creatures who are divinely determined in all of their actions, lies in the divine act of risk-taking itself. For, one might object that libertarianly free creatures are *themselves* of value, and that this value is so great as to outweigh the negative value of their potentially harmful actions and consequent experiences of suffering. However, since this response raises questions about just what has metaphysical value, and how such value should count in God’s deliberations about what to create, and so seems to me not itself unobjectionable, I will for the remainder of this paper assume for the sake of argument that Curley’s reasoning is sound. That is, I will assume both premise II, that if God lacks middle knowledge of libertarianly free human action then he must take risks in creating libertarianly free humans, and premise III, that the risks involved in creating such humans, who might commit horrendously evil acts if not prevented from doing so and thus thwart God’s own purposes and plans for creation, is incompatible with the benevolent wisdom of God, and so with traditional theism. Therefore, in order to show that the traditional theist need not accept divine determinism

with respect to human action, I will have to refute Adams' argument for premise I, that middle knowledge of counterfactuals of libertarian freedom is impossible.

Evaluating the Argument: Premise I

Recall that Adams' argument against the possibility of middle knowledge of counterfactuals of libertarian freedom depends on two claims: first, that if God knows a proposition, then that proposition must have truth-value, and second, that counterfactuals of libertarian freedom lack truth-value. His argument for this second claim itself depends on two further claims:

- (1) If a proposition is true, then there must be something that grounds its truth.
- (2) There is nothing that grounds the truth of counterfactuals of libertarian freedom.

I think either of these latter two claims might be called into question. Let us consider the second one first. Adams is right, of course, that if human actions are undetermined, then neither logical nor causal necessity can ground the truth of counterfactual conditionals about them. However, when he admits that something can ground the truth of categorical predictions about future libertarianly free human actions, he seems to open the door to allowing grounds for the truth of counterfactuals of libertarian freedom as well. For what is it that grounds the truth of categorical predictions about future libertarianly free actions? Adams says it is their correspondence to "the actual occurrence of the event that they predict." In other words, an actual action that a human *will take* grounds the truth of a proposition about that action, even before its occurrence. That means that something need not actually exist, at a certain time, in order to ground the truth of a proposition at that time. But once Adams admits this, why should he not further admit that what

grounds the truth of a counterfactual of libertarian freedom is the action that a possible human *would take*, if she were actualized and placed in a certain situation? Adams cannot simply say that the event of the action's being taken does not exist—for neither yet does the event of the action's being taken in the case of an actual future event.

Both Plantinga and Freddoso have suggested such a parallel between counterfactuals of libertarian freedom and categorical predictions about undetermined events, as well as propositions about some *past* events. Plantinga writes: “Suppose... that yesterday I freely performed some action A. What was or is it that grounded... my doing so? Perhaps you will say that what grounds its truth is just that in fact I did A.” Plantinga responds, “the same kind of answer is available” in the case of counterfactuals of libertarian freedom; for what grounds such truths is the fact that certain people are such that if they were put in certain circumstances, they would do certain things (1985, p. 374). Freddoso likewise points out that “exactly the same question can be raised about past-tense propositions that are true in the present” as are raised about future-tense propositions that are true in the present. He writes:

The proper response, I think, is that there are *now* adequate metaphysical grounds for the truth of a past-tense proposition Pp just in case there *were* at some past time adequate metaphysical grounds for the truth of its present-tense counterpart p . Likewise, a realist about the absolute future will claim that there are *now* adequate metaphysical grounds for the truth of a future-tense proposition Fp just in case there *will* be at some future time adequate metaphysical grounds for the truth of its present-tense counterpart p . So in order for propositions about the past or the future to be true now, it is not required that any agent *now* be causing them to be true. Rather, it is sufficient that some agent has caused or will cause the corresponding present-tense propositions to be true.

But if this is so, then it seems reasonable to claim that there are now adequate metaphysical grounds for the truth of a conditional future contingent $F'(p)$ on H just in case there *would* be adequate metaphysical grounds at t for the truth of the present-tense proposition p on the condition that H should obtain at t . (1988, p. 72)

Thus, one way to respond to Adams' argument that counterfactuals of libertarian freedom lack truth-value is to deny the second premise, maintaining that counterfactuals of libertarian freedom are no less metaphysically grounded than are categorical predictions about undetermined actions. And one can maintain that God knows the truth of counterfactuals of libertarian freedom in the same way he knows the truth of such categorical predictions: not by inference, from propositions about certain present states of affairs together with the laws of logic and causation, but simply by direct awareness of the relevant states of affairs—in the case of categorical predictions, the state of affairs of actual people acting in certain ways in certain actual situations, and in the case of counterfactuals of libertarian freedom, the state of affairs of possible people acting in certain ways in certain possible situations. If Adams can conceive of how God knows propositions about future events brought about by libertarianly free creatures, then he should not have trouble conceiving of how God knows counterfactuals of libertarian freedom—unless, of course, he is demanding something of God's middle knowledge that he is not demanding of God's simple foreknowledge: namely, that it be derived from God's knowledge of *present* states of affairs.

Adams might object to this line of reasoning, however, by pointing out that there is a significant difference between categorical predictions about undetermined events and counterfactuals of libertarian freedom: for the grounds of the former exist in the *actual* world, if not in the present moment, while the purported grounds of the latter *do not* exist in the actual world, and *never will*. Thus, while God might come to know the truth of some proposition about how I will libertarianly freely act tomorrow by “looking” into the future and “seeing” my action,

there is nothing for God to “look” at or “see”⁶ with respect to some proposition about how I would libertarianly freely act if I were placed in a situation in which I will never, in fact, be placed.

One might respond to this objection in two ways. First, one might continue to draw a parallel between the grounds for categorical predictions about undetermined events and the grounds for counterfactuals of libertarian freedom and maintain that there is, indeed, something in both cases for God to “look” at and “see.” For instance, one might suggest that just as God can perceive actual events which do not exist in the present moment—perhaps because such future events have some mode of “potential existence” in the divine mind—so God can perceive possible events that do not exist in the actual world—perhaps because such counterfactual events have a similar mode of “possible existence” in the divine mind.

The other way one might respond is to concede that there is nothing that grounds the truth of counterfactuals of libertarian freedom, but to deny that there must be such a ground in order for a proposition to be true. This would be to reject the first premise of Adams’ argument that counterfactuals of libertarian freedom lack truth-value, as I have construed it above. Richard Gaskin takes such a route, maintaining that there is nothing that grounds the truth of *any* proposition, and contending that “To suppose otherwise is to slide into a substantial and implausible correspondence theory of truth.” Gaskin says that a categorical prediction such as “I will go swimming tomorrow” is rendered true “by the fact that I will go swimming tomorrow. But that fact is not rendered true by anything else. It is just a fact: there is nothing *in virtue of which* it is a fact.” So although God can know such a categorical proposition to be true by

⁶ I place such words in quotations because they are obviously not literally true: God does not have eyes by which to look at and see things. But they suggest that God has some form of direct perception analogical to our own vision, which I take to be a plausible suggestion.

“looking” into the future and “seeing” my going swimming, whereas there is nothing for God “look” at and “see” with respect to such a counterfactual of libertarian freedom as, “If it rained tomorrow I would go swimming,” Gaskin says this does not hurt the latter proposition’s “prospects for truth” (1993, pp. 424-425). For in *neither* case does what God “sees” (or fails to see) serve as the *ground* of the proposition that God knows. In both cases, there is nothing to ground the proposition, other than the fact of the matter.

Gaskin thus comes closest to embracing Francisco Suárez’s view of God’s “primitive understanding” of counterfactuals of libertarian freedom, discussed above. Recall that according to Suárez, “the properties recorded by the conditionals of freedom, and which are objects of God’s middle knowledge, are primitive. It is simply a base-line fact about a free agent... that he would do so-and-so in such-and-such circumstances. There is no prospect of reducing that fact to more fundamental facts” (Gaskin 1993, p. 426). Adams’ principle objection to this view was simply that he lacked any understanding “of what it would be for the relevant subjunctive conditionals to be true.” But in response to such an objection, one might maintain that to ask a defender of the primitive understanding view “what it would be” for a counterfactual of libertarian freedom to be true is to beg the question against the view; for if it is a “base-line fact” that God knows, then there is no more fundamental “what” to be understood. In any case, since there seems to be nothing intrinsically unintelligible about the idea of primitive divine knowledge, perhaps in response to Adams’ confessed lack of understanding the defender of this view should follow Hasker’s recommendation⁷:

⁷ Hasker actually makes this comment in response to the claim made by critics of the doctrine of divine eternity that they cannot understand seemingly intelligible statements about God’s existing outside of time, but I think it applies equally well here.

If someone... professes herself unable to comprehend what is being asserted, this will be taken (pending further argument) merely as an admission of personal incapacity, with no necessary bearing on the general intelligibility of the view in question. It is clear that this approach tends to favor those who find a given assertion intelligible, but I think this is proper in such controversies. The inference 'I don't understand it, therefore it is unintelligible' is too easy to be good philosophy. (1989, p. 147)

Possible-Worlds Accounts and the Grounding of Counterfactuals of Libertarian Freedom

Given what I have said so far, it will not be necessary to respond to Adams' first objection to the possible-worlds account of counterfactuals, since his point was simply that it offers not a new solution to the problem but an "up-to-date form for the expression of attempted solutions that we may already have considered and rejected"—and I have argued that his consideration and rejection of certain other views was too summary. In particular, I have suggested that one might either draw a parallel between the grounds for categorical predictions about undetermined events and the grounds for counterfactuals of libertarian freedom, or call into question Adams' claim that all true propositions need something more fundamental to ground them. I will, however, respond to the second of Adams' objections to the possible-worlds account of counterfactuals. Although as I will suggest below, I think this account cannot—and should not—be taken to provide the ground for the truth of counterfactuals of libertarian freedom, still, it seems illuminating to consider Adams' objection in more depth, since doing so sheds more light on the nature and grounding of counterfactuals of libertarian freedom and on the value and limits of the possible-worlds account.

To begin with, recall the counterfactual of libertarian freedom used in Adams' example, which I shall call "P":

(P) If God created Adam and Eve, there would be more moral goodness than moral evil in the history of the world.

Adams says that, according to the theory of middle knowledge, God's decision to create Adam and Eve "depends on" is "to be explained in part by" the truth of P; and, according to the possible-worlds explanation, the truth of P depends on the truth of the following proposition, which I shall call "Q":

(Q) The actual world is more similar to some possible world in which Adam and Eve exist and there is more moral goodness than moral evil, than to any possible world in which Adam and Eve exist but there is not more moral goodness than moral evil.

But, Adams says, the truth of Q in turn depends on which world is the actual world; and which world is the actual world depends, in part, on the truth of P. Thus, he concludes, there is a vicious sort of circularity: the truth of P depends on the truth of Q, while the truth of Q depends on the truth of P.

Defenders of the possible-worlds account of counterfactuals have not been without responses to this objection. Plantinga, for one, has called into question whether the relation of dependence referred to by Adams is transitive, such that P's depending on which world is actual, and which world is actual's depending on God's decision, entails that P depends on God's decision. He offers the following analogue to Adams' argument:

(1*) the truth of *The Allies won the Second World War* depends on which world is actual;

(2*) which world is actual depends on whether I mow my lawn this afternoon;

therefore

(3*) the truth of *The Allies won the Second World War* depends on whether I mow my lawn this afternoon.

Since (3*) is false, Plantinga concludes that Adams' argument is invalid.

Plantinga may be right that there is something wrong with Adams' reasoning, but his analogical argument is not very helping in showing just what the problem is. One might wonder even if dependence isn't *always* transitive, whether it may be in the case under consideration, such that Adams' conclusion—that there is a vicious sort of circularity—is true. Moreover, Curley has suggested that Plantinga's reply to the argument exploits “inessential features of Adams' statement of it” (2003, p. 90) since, he says, the argument need not assume the transitivity of dependence for the argument to work (2003, footnote 49). Thus, it might be more helpful to begin by investigating just what sort of dependence relations obtain between propositions P and Q, and questioning Adams' assumption that the circularity of dependence in this case is of the *vicious* sort. After all, there are various notions of dependence and some seem unproblematic even if circular. Consider, for instance, if I asked you, “What is the area of a rectangle (A) with one side (X) equal to two?” You might respond, “That depends on the length of the other side (Y).” And if I then asked you, “What is the length of one side of a rectangle (Y), if the other side (X) equals two?” you might respond, “That depends on the area of the rectangle (A).” So, in this case, (A) depends on (Y), which in turn depends on (A). But this sort of circular dependency seems entirely harmless. Why? Well, because the dependence, in this case, is *epistemic*; that is, your knowledge of the answer to one question may depend on your knowledge of the answer to the other, and vice versa. But neither answer is, ontologically speaking, more basic than the other, such that one serves as the metaphysical grounds for the other.

Let us consider, then, the nature of the dependence relations referred to in Adams' argument. First, Adams says that God's decision to create Adam and Eve depends, in part, on the

truth of P. What does this mean? Well, we might suppose that there are the following four sorts of possible worlds before God, when he is considering what world to create:

- (1) Worlds in which Adam and Eve exist, and there is more moral goodness than moral evil
- (2) Worlds in which Adam and Eve exist, and there is *less* moral goodness than moral evil
- (3) Worlds in which Adam and Eve *do not* exist, and there is more moral goodness than moral evil
- (4) Worlds in which Adam and Eve *do not* exist, and there is *less* moral goodness than moral evil.

If P is false, then worlds of sort (1), though possible, might turn out to be *infeasible* to God, in the sense that they are not within God's power to create. If so, then God can only actualize a world of sort (3) if he wants a world with more moral goodness than moral evil. If, instead, P is true, then worlds of sort (1) will turn out to be feasible for God; and assuming that God wants Adam and Eve as well as a world with more moral goodness than moral evil, he will actualize a world of sort (1). So, the partial dependence of God's decision on the truth of P means that his decision of whether to actualize a world of sort (1) or (2) on the one hand, or (3) or (4) on the other, can be *explained by* the truth of P, which is true *independent* of God's volition and serves as a *reason* for his decision.⁸

⁸ Flint suggests that the relation between two similar sorts of propositions which he considers is one of "priority," which "provides us with a partial *reason* for God's performing the action described." Yet he notes that this reason "was neither necessary nor sufficient for God's act," (1998, p. 173) since, to put his point in terms of the case I am considering, God is free to create Adam and Eve or not, and to create a world with more moral goodness than moral evil or not.

Next, Adams says that P depends on Q. What does this mean? I would suggest that the dependence relation here is more akin to that between the geometric propositions discussed above than to the dependence of God's decision on P. In other words, the dependence seems epistemic and not metaphysical. If you know, that is, that Q is false—and so that the actual world is more similar to worlds of sort (2) than worlds of sort (1)—then you know that P is false. But that is not to say that the truth of P is *determined by* the truth of Q. If the truth of P is determined by anything, it is determined by facts about the possible actions of possible humans, or by the possible humans themselves, who have the power to make worlds of sort (1) or (2) infeasible.

It therefore seems false that the dependence relations between propositions such as P and Q are viciously circular. For although the truth of each proposition may *in some sense* depend on the truth of the other, they do not depend on each other *in the same way*. The truth of Q may depend, metaphysically, on the truth of P, but the truth of P does *not* depend metaphysically on the truth of Q. I take this to be Gaskin's point, when he writes:

It is true that the identity of the actual world is itself partly constituted by which conditionals are true in it, but it is not true that which conditionals are true in whichever world is actual is in turn constituted by which world is actual. What is correct, given the availability to God of middle knowledge, is that which conditionals of freedom are true is not logically anterior to the constitution of which worlds God *could actualize*. But that does not determine the identity of the actual world: it merely delimits God's options. The contingency of conditionals of freedom is guaranteed by there being possible worlds in which they are false; that their truth is anterior to the settling of which world is actual is guaranteed by the fact that their truth determines not which world is actual, but merely which worlds are actualizable." (1993, p. 418)

When Gaskin says, "which conditionals of freedom are true is not logically anterior to the constitution of which worlds God *could actualize*," he seems to mean that counterfactual conditionals such as P depend, in part, on the feasibility of certain possible worlds, which in turn

depends on the possible humans within them taking certain actions; so such counterfactuals are not simply determined by which world God chooses to actualize.

What Adams' argument shows, then, is not that there is some vicious circularity in the dependence relations between P and Q, but that there is an asymmetric metaphysical dependence of Q on P. And this means that the possible-worlds account of counterfactuals cannot provide a ground for the truth of counterfactuals of libertarian freedom; for their grounding does not lie, most fundamentally, in the similarity between possible worlds. Curley uses this failure of the possible-worlds account as the basis for a further argument that counterfactuals of libertarian freedom lack truth-value. Considering the proposition (call it "R") *If God had created Adam, had commanded him on pain of death not to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, and had subjected him to unmediated temptation by the serpent, Adam would not have eaten the fruit*, Curley says this counterfactual is true "just in case its consequent is true in the possible world closest to the actual world in which the antecedent is true." But, he contends, if human freedom is libertarian then this condition cannot be satisfied, for "of those possible worlds in which the antecedent is true, there is no world closest to the actual world. There must always be at least two, one in which Adam resists temptation, and another in which he does not" (2003, pp. 90-91).

Now Curley is right, that if what determines the truth of R is simply the closeness of some possible world to the actual world, and not some more fundamental fact about or feature of Adam, then the truth of R cannot be settled. But this just shows that the possible worlds account is insufficient to ground the truth of counterfactuals of libertarian freedom, not that such counterfactuals lack truth-value altogether. And, if one stops to think about it, it would be a very strange thing indeed if the possible-worlds explanation *did* provide metaphysical grounds for the truth of a proposition such as R; after all, if such a counterfactual is truly about a *libertarianly*

free human action, then what makes it true cannot be something unrelated to the human himself, such as the closeness of some possible worlds—for otherwise, the action would not be libertarianly free.

This is not to say, however, that there is no fact of the matter about similarity among possible worlds. But rather, as Plantinga says, instead of looking to similarity among possible worlds “as *explaining* counterfactuality, or as *founding* or *grounding*” the truth of counterfactuals of libertarian freedom, we must recognize that the “founding or grounding” goes “in the opposite direction” (1985, p. 398). That is, we cannot (and should not) say that it is the fact that some possible world in which Adam does not give into temptation is closer to the actual world than is any possible world in which he does which makes R true, but we can (and should) say that it is the fact that Adam would not give into temptation (and thus that R is true), which makes it the case that some possible world in which he does not give into temptation is “closer” to the actual world than is any in which he does.

Yet, as Plantinga notes, the fact that the possible-worlds account cannot serve to *explain* the truth of counterfactuals of libertarian freedom does not mean that it is viciously circular or of no use—for, “In the same way we can’t sensibly *explain* necessity as *truth in all possible worlds*; nor can we say that *p*’s being true in all possible worlds [is] what *makes p* necessary.” But, Plantinga points out, “It may still be extremely useful to note the equivalence of *p is necessary* and *p is true in all possible worlds*: it is useful in the way diagrams and definitions are in mathematics; it enables us to see connections, entertain propositions and resolve questions that could otherwise be seen, entertained and resolved only with the greatest difficulty if at all (1985, p. 378).

As Thomas Flint has noted, some critics have considered question-begging or “Pickwickian” Plantinga’s insistence that similarity of possible worlds is not what grounds the truth of counterfactuals of libertarian freedom but instead that “one point of similarity [among possible worlds] is similarity regarding counterfactuals.” In response, Flint writes:

Such reactions are not entirely unwarranted; after all, as even Freddoso has conceded, the Plantingean response surely “cuts across the spirit, if not the letter, of the standard possible-world semantics for subjunctive conditionals,” for, as usually interpreted, such semantics imply that similarity among worlds is independent of or prior to the truth of counterfactuals. Nevertheless, the fact that Plantinga’s line exudes a hint of heterodoxy in this respect seems to me poor grounds for rejecting it, since it is a kind of heterodoxy which seems but a natural extension for a realist about the future” (1998, p. 136).

Flint suggests that just as counterfactuals of libertarian freedom such as R determine in part the similarity of possible worlds to the actual one, and not the other way around, so it is with categorical predictions of undetermined events. For instance, to return to our earlier example, whether the actual world is more similar to some possible world in which I go swimming tomorrow or to any in which I do not depends (metaphysically speaking) on the truth of the proposition *I will go swimming tomorrow*, and not the other way around. So, the possible-worlds account of counterfactuals of libertarian freedom is no more question-begging or “Pickwickian” than is a possible-worlds account of categorical predictions of undetermined events. Flint concludes,

Perhaps there is a sense in which those who embrace the Plantingean response... are viewing counterfactuals of creaturely freedom as basic, primitive, ungrounded facts about the way things are. But if so, it would seem that, in much the same sense, realists about the future are viewing absolute future contingents as equally basic, primitive, ungrounded facts about the way things are. To reject the antirealist demand for non-Pickwickian ‘here and now’ grounding for absolute future contingents, but insist upon such grounding for conditional future contingents, would hardly be a consistent or reasonable stance.” (1998, p. 137)

To conclude this section, then, I have argued that Adams has failed to show that counterfactuals of libertarian freedom lack truth-value, since one can call into question either the premise that there is nothing that can ground the truth of a counterfactual of libertarian freedom, or the premise that all true propositions must have some metaphysical ground. On the one hand, I have suggested that what grounds the truth of a counterfactual of libertarian freedom may simply be the state of affairs of a possible person acting in a certain way when placed in a certain situation, and that, if it helps, we might imagine that within the divine mind counterfactual events have some mode of “possible existence,” just as future events have some mode of “potential existence,” which inform God’s middle knowledge and simply foreknowledge, respectively. On the other hand, I have suggested that categorical predictions of undetermined events, which Adams considers to be possibly true, seem to have no more metaphysical grounding than counterfactuals of libertarian freedom do, and that we might consider God’s middle knowledge of such counterfactuals to be primitive—just as God’s simple foreknowledge is often considered to be. In any case, I have contended that the arguments against the possibility of middle knowledge of counterfactuals of libertarian freedom based on the possible-worlds account of counterfactuals are unfounded, since such an account is not (or at least, should not be) intended to provide the grounds for the truth of counterfactuals of libertarian freedom. Thus, I conclude, since middle knowledge of counterfactuals of freedom has not been proven impossible, Curley’s argument for a divine deterministic account of human freedom fails. That is, one can maintain a robust conception of divine omniscience, complete with middle knowledge of free human actions, even if one holds that some events—including free human actions—are not determined by God.

Section 2: Divine Creativity

It has been argued that divine determinism follows not only from God's knowledge of actual and counterfactual propositions about the world, but from God's creation of the world itself. These two arguments, which seem to me distinct, are often conflated or at least combined into one. For instance, in his argument against contemporary Molinism, Paul Helm contends that middle knowledge requires there to exist possible worlds in the divine mind that God can consider and choose between. While he admits that there are such "sets of abstract possibilities" that include all the possible people God could create and everything about such people, however, Helm argues that the picture painted by contemporary Molinists of the status of these sets of possibilities is misleading. For, he says, "Creation is not like opening the door of a cage to free a lion; it is the bringing of the lion in to being" (1993, p. 60). What this somewhat enigmatic statement means, I take it, is that the only way for there to be possible worlds or sets of true propositions that include contingent facts about how a creature would or will behave is for God to have determined the parameters of those possibilities: a creature may act in this way or that, according to the will of God. Thus God does not *encounter* some possible lion among the set of possible creatures in the divine mind and then choose to actualize it; rather, he is the very originator of the idea of the lion within his mind and so the determiner of every contingent fact about it. And so it is, Helm maintains, with every creature of God, including human beings.

This view that I attribute to Paul Helm is spelled out in more detail by various other authors, with Kathryn Tanner offering the most in-depth treatment of it. Tanner argues against a libertarian conception of human freedom in "Human Freedom, Human Sin, and God the Creator," contending that "the idea of God as creator is compatible with *any* philosophical

account of the nature of human freedom short of the theological judgment that human freedom requires freedom from or with respect to God” (1994, p. 111). More generally, she argues that God’s role as creator is incompatible with there being any divinely undetermined event in the world. Since, as we shall see, Tanner’s claims about the nature of divine creativity are motivated by the desire to ascribe the utmost power and greatness to God, her argument from divine creativity to divine determinism can be framed in terms of perfect being theology, as follows:

- (I) If God is a supremely perfect being then the world is created by God.
- (II) If the world is created by God then it depends on God “absolutely,” in range, manner, and efficacy.
- (III) If the world depends on God “absolutely,” in range, manner, and efficacy, then divine determinism is true.
- (IV) Therefore, since God is a supremely perfect being, divine determinism is true.

In what follows, I examine Tanner’s argument from divine creativity to divine determinism. I contend that while certain aspects of Tanner’s view of divine creativity do entail a deterministic account of divine causality, the arguments in favor of adopting those aspects of her view are not compelling. In other words, while I accept premise III of the above argument, I reject premise II. By modifying an argument offered by Peter van Inwagen for the conclusion there are “chance” occurrences in the world, I show not only that it is possible for certain aspects of a world created by God not to depend on God “absolutely,” but that it is more plausible that the world is partially undetermined by God than that it is divinely determined in every respect. I further suggest, contra Tanner, that it is the divine determinist, rather than the indeterminist, who fails to appreciate the greatness of the creator by placing limits on what is possible for God with respect to his creation. In conclusion, I suggest various aspects of Tanner’s view of divine

creativity that the divine indeterminist could still affirm, without accepting her ultimate conclusion.

Summary of the Argument

Premise I of the argument from consistency reconstructed above is one that I will be taking for granted here. As Tanner notes, it is such a “distinguishing affirmation of the Christian tradition” that God is creator of the world, that “one would be hard-pressed to maintain one’s identity as a Christian without it” (1994, p. 112). Some perfect being theologians, such as Katherin Rogers, have argued that God’s creation of the world is entailed by God’s identity as a supremely perfect being, since “God inevitably does the best, and this world is it” (2000, p. 108). While many within the Christian tradition would deny such a strong claim, since such “inevitability” would seem to deprive God of significant freedom, still most would agree that God’s creation of the world *is* entailed by God’s identity as a supremely perfect being, *together with* the (contingent) fact that the world exists. In any case, the Christian (and other western monotheistic) Scriptures as a whole certainly support the view that God is creator of the world.⁹

Tanner says that her essay is an attempt to take seriously, and follow “consistently through to its logical end,” the idea that God is, in fact, the creator of the world. She suggests that in order to do so, the term “creator” must be understood in both a “narrow” and a “broad” sense. According to the former, God is “the giver of existence, where the fact of being is contrasted with what one... does”; whereas God acts in the latter mode of creator “whatever the

⁹ See, for instance, Genesis 1.

aspect of created existence at issue: existing, acting, relating to others..." (1994, p. 112). The implications of this view are as follows, according to Tanner:

God's creation of the world loses any specific reference to a beginning time or initiating moment: to be created is to be in a relation of dependence upon God that holds whenever and for however long one exists. This relation of dependence upon God is absolute, moreover, in three distinct senses: in its range, manner, and efficacy.

By "range," Tanner means that the relation is "all inclusive or universally extensive," such that everything "non-divine" is dependent, in every respect that it exists, upon God's creative activity. By "manner," she means that the relation is "always and in every respect a *direct* or immediate relation of dependence upon God." And by efficacy, she means that "God's creative intention for the world cannot be hindered, diverted, or otherwise redirected by creatures."

Tanner describes God's creative activity as bringing forth the world as a whole, which then exists as an entire "plane or level" of being "suspended in existence at each and every one of its points, and therefore in its entirety, by God's creative action" (1994, p. 113). She emphasizes that God does not "call forth or hold up into being any creature as the existing, acting, interacting being it is *by way of* other creatures," for that would mean God was on the same level as creatures, acting within the created plane. Instead, God calls forth and holds up the entire created plane at once, such that those other creatures are also "the *results* of God's creative action... and not the... *means* of that creative calling forth" (1994, p. 114).

Now there are two questions to ask about this view of God's creative activity, with respect to the argument for divine determinism reconstructed above. First, why should we think that this view, according to which the world depends so "absolutely" on God, entails a deterministic account of divine causality? That is, what reason can be given for premise III? And second, why should we accept such a view of divine creativity in the first place? That is, what

reason can be given for premise II? With respect to the first question, it does seem that at least certain features of the picture of divine creativity painted by Tanner entail a deterministic account of divine causality. For instance, the third sense in which the relation of dependence upon God is absolute—its efficacy—in combination with the first—its universality—clearly has deterministic implications. For if “God’s creative intention for the world cannot be hindered, diverted, or otherwise redirected by creatures,” and if everything about creatures’ activity is dependent upon God’s intention, it follows that it is not possible for a creature to do otherwise than God intends. In other words, every creaturely action must be determined in every respect by God.

With respect to the second question, however, Tanner does not seem to offer much argument for favoring this view of divine creativity over one without deterministic implications; instead, she seems simply to assert it at the start, and then show what its implications are and how they are inconsistent with certain other views. For instance, when Tanner is responding to the argument that “created powers cannot be real if... God as the creator of all directly brings about the created effects that the exercise of those created powers themselves are supposed to produce,” she merely says, “This argument operates... with a fundamentally different picture of God’s creative working than the one we started with.... Its fundamental premises about God’s creative working are simply not ours” (1994, p. 12).

Yet at the end of the essay, Tanner does make at least two comments, in response to more criticisms, that hint at her own reasons for adopting this view of God’s creative activity. First, she says: “If the critic insists that human choice can genuinely end with the human agent only if *God* is not also bringing about the agent choosing, is that not finally to push a theological claim? One insists that the non-necessitated character of human choice be taken so far that human

beings are no longer creatures.” And second, she says, “If the claim that human choice is not necessitated by any given conditions must be taken in an absolute sense, with a universal reference that includes God’s creative working among those conditions, then the theologian can only say that such a thing does not exist” (1994, p. 126). In this second quote, Tanner asserts that no created thing exists which is undetermined in its behavior. But why not? Tanner’s first quote seems to answer this question, for she suggests that such indeterminacy of behavior is inconsistent with the very nature of being created by God. Thus Tanner’s reasoning here seems to echo what I have called Helm’s “enigmatic” quote above, that “Creation is not like opening the door of a cage to free a lion; it is the bringing of the lion in to being.” In other words, this is just what it *is* for God to create: not to actualize an already independently determined set of possibilities, nor to bring into being some indeterminate being which then determines itself, but to determine every contingent feature of each created being, according to the divine will. Hebert McCabe reasons along similar lines as Helm and Tanner, writing: “since everything that exists owes its existence to God, since he is the source of anything being rather than nothing, he *must* also be the source of my free actions, since these are instead of not being: *there can be no such thing* as being independent of God” (1987, p. 11, italics added). In other words, it is *not possible* for there to be some feature of a created thing that does not depend “absolutely” on God, since everything is ultimately dependent on God for its being.

Now that we have on the table the basic line reasoning, from divine creativity to divine determinism, we can ask: is it sound? In particular, with respect to premise II we can ask: is it true that there can be no such thing as a bit of God’s creation not “absolutely” dependent on God, in the sense Tanner means? I, for one, do not see any reason why there cannot be. Perhaps it is

hard to imagine how God could create some being with the power to determine its own behavior—but then, isn't it also hard to imagine how God could create being out of nothing? Such a limit on our imagination does not necessarily track a limit with respect to what is possible for God. Moreover, it seems to me that an argument offered by Peter van Inwagen for the conclusion that there are “chance” occurrences in the world shows not only that it is possible for there to be divinely undetermined events, but that it is more plausible that the world is partially undetermined by God than that it is divinely determined in every respect. Van Inwagen's argument appeals to God's sovereignty in not being “internally” subject to chance when there is no reason for God to issue one determinate decree rather than another. After laying out his argument, I will discuss one objection that a divine determinist such as Tanner might raise to it and a way in which van Inwagen might modify the argument in response. I will conclude that the modified argument succeeds in showing that it is at least not inconsistent to maintain that the world is created by God and yet not wholly determined by him. I will then go on to suggest one other positive reason that God might have for refraining from determining some events of the world, which appeals to the positive value of metaphysical indeterminism, or the divine act of creating a world with indeterministic agents.

Indeterminate Decrees and the Sovereignty of God

In his essay “The Place of Chance in a World Sustained by God,” van Inwagen defines a chance event as one that “serves no one's end” or “is not a part of anyone's plan” (1995, p. 42). He points to three possible sources of chance in the world—“the free will of rational creatures, natural indeterminism, and the initial state of the created world” (1995, p. 54)—though he

focuses most of his discussion on the third possible source. With respect to the initial state of the world that God actually chose to create, van Inwagen asks, “is it conceivable that this was the only one out of all possible initial arrangements that suited God’s purposes? Is it conceivable that God chose this arrangement because it was better for His purposes than *any* of the infinitely many alternatives?” Van Inwagen responds that it is very hard to believe that any one of the alternatives could have been better than all of the others (1994, pp. 56-57). And this seems right, given that for any one world God could have chosen, there were many others that differed from it only in the slightest degree – for instance, in the existence of a single atom.

Van Inwagen then supposes, for simplicity’s sake, that there were only two initial arrangements that equally best suited God’s purposes: *X* and *Y*. Then, in creating the world, God could have to have decreed: (1) “Let *X* be” or (2) “Let *Y* be” or (3) “Let *X* or *Y* be.” Van Inwagen acknowledges Leibniz’s argument that 3 is impossible “because God creates only ‘complete’ states of affairs” but dismisses it, simply saying, “It does not seem to be to be logically or metaphysically impossible” (1994, p. 57). He then goes on to say that 3 is not only possible, but more plausible than 1 or 2. For, he notes, if we assume that God decreed either 1 or 2, “this will not remove the element of chance from the world”:

It will simply locate the ultimate source of that chance within the internal life of God, rather than in the results of an indefinite decree. For if God must issue a decree that *X* exist or else issue a decree that *Y* exist, and if He has no reason to prefer one of these states of affairs to the other... then there seems to be no way to avoid the conclusion that some analogue of a coin toss takes place within the Divine Nature.

But to be subject to chance in this way is, van Inwagen contends, “incongruous” with the nature of God, for God is by nature “Lord of all” (1994, p. 59). In other words, it is not worthy of a perfectly sovereign God to be subject to some such coin-tossing mechanism, which God himself does not control. Thus, van Inwagen suggests, given a view of God as supremely perfect, it is not

only possible, but more plausible than not, that the initial conditions of the world are not wholly determined by God.

Now it seems to me that the weakest link in van Inwagen's argument, to which a proponent of divine determinism might object, is his claim that 3 is, in fact, possible. For the divine determinist might contend that if *X* or *Y* really is the *initial* arrangement of the world, then there can be nothing external to God which makes it the case that, say, *X* comes about rather than *Y*. For prior to the creation of the world, there *is* nothing external to God. So it must be something "internal" to God that determines the initial arrangement of the world. But such a conclusion is, of course, inconsistent with van Inwagen's own claim that there cannot be some analogue of a coin toss "within" God, for that would be incongruous with the perfectly sovereign divine nature. Thus, the divine determinist might contend, it must be by God's own will and decree that *X* comes about rather than *Y*, or vice versa. In other words, God must decree 1 or 2, and not 3.

I think that van Inwagen could respond to the above objection, but not without slightly modifying his argument. For at the end of his argument, van Inwagen concludes, "There could, therefore, be chance events even in a wholly deterministic world that was created and is sustained by God" (1994, p. 58). In other words, he suggests that an implication of his argument is that there could be some undetermined feature(s) of the initial state of the world, even if at every subsequent moment only one state of the world is possible. What van Inwagen would seem to have to modify, in response to the divine determinist's objection, is his claim that the world might be "deterministic" from the very first moment of creation. For if the coin-tossing mechanism that determines whether *X* or *Y* comes about is external to the divine nature, then *it must be a bit of creation*. We might imagine it as a sort of randomizing machine which God

creates first, before bringing the rest of the world into being. But this is just a metaphorical way of saying that God might create an *indeterministic law* to govern at least the initial stage of the world's development. Of course, after this mechanism "does its job" and determines that either *X* or *Y* comes about, God might change the law to make it deterministic. But still, van Inwagen's claim that there could be chance events in a *wholly* deterministic world created by God will be false.

Divine Creation and the Value of Metaphysical Indeterminism

Van Inwagen's (modified) argument can be construed as a critique of the argument from divine creativity to divine determinism reconstructed at the beginning of this section, since it shows that we have no reason to believe that premise II is true, and some reason to believe that it is false; for even if the world is created by God, it may not depend "absolutely" on God, in the sense of being determined in every respect by him. On the contrary, God would seem to have some reason to issue indeterminate decrees in cases where he has no reason to prefer one condition of the world to another. While this should be enough to refute Tanner's argument, I would suggest that a further argument from divine creativity to divine indeterminism might be offered—an argument that appealed to the value of metaphysical indeterminism, or the value of some good that required such indeterminism, or, the value of the *divine act of creating* agents who are undetermined in their actions. Such value might give God reason to prefer decreeing "Let *X* or *Y*" rather than, say, "Let *X*," even when *X* is in itself preferable to *Y*.

The last possibility I have suggested, that God's own act of creating beings with libertarian freedom might be, in itself, greater than his act of creating beings determined in all of

their actions, is, of course, in direct contradiction to the claims of those authors who deny that creatures could be “independent” of God. Part of their motivation for offering the arguments they do is their desire to ascribe the utmost power and greatness to the creator. God, they say, is not like some limited human being who has only imperfect control over the works of his hands; rather, God is unlimited in his power, such that every being he creates must be fully determinate; for nothing can be beyond his creative control. To say otherwise, these authors suggest, would be to commit an intellectual act of arrogance and ingratitude, by failing to acknowledge and appreciate the greatness of the One on whom we depend for all that we have, and all that we are.

Tanner attributes such a motivation to herself, writing:

What is at stake here is a proper recognition of God’s beneficence. All that we have for good we have received from God. The more valuable the attribute of free agency the more concern to claim that it is a created gift. The greater the good of free choice the greater the love for God that is appropriate. The greater the good the greater the need for humility, for thankfulness in recognition that one has received from God even that of which one is most proud.

Any attempt to exempt human powers from an absolute relation of dependence upon God can only be suspected, from this point of view, of Titanism. What motivates the desire to exempt the greatest attributes of a specifically human existence from dependence upon God, if not the desire to be un beholden to God in some way for the greatness of what one is? In the most important respects one would be able to say that one is not God’s creature. (1994, p. 115)

In response to such a charge I will argue in Chapter III that Tanner is wrong that the only thing which motivates the desire to exempt free human acts from complete dependence on divine causality is “the desire to be un beholden to God in some way for the greatness of what one is.”

For human beings are not always great, or even good, but sometimes (often) quite bad; and it is devotion to God, not worship of self, which motivates the divine indeterminist’s desire to exempt evil actions from the divine will. But in this chapter, I would suggest that it may be the divine determinist, rather than the indeterminist, who fails to appreciate the greatness of the creator. For

to maintain, as divine indeterminists do, that God can (and does) create libertarianly free agents is to ascribe to God great ingenuity and ability. But those who deny that a divinely undetermined bit of creation is possible thereby deny that such an act is within God's power. In other words, it is the *determinists* who seem to limit the scope of divine omnipotence, by failing to recognize how divine creative power might differ from, by far exceeding, human creative power.

An Indeterministic Account of Divine Creativity

To conclude this section, I wish to return to the original picture of God's creative causality that Tanner sketched and ask what parts of it the divine indeterminist can still affirm. An answer to this question is not absolutely necessary to my argument, since I have already shown that Tanner's particular portrayal of divine creativity is not entailed by the conception of God as a perfect being and creator of the world. Still, it may be helpful to see how much of a convergence is possible between a divine determinist and indeterminist account of God's creative causality. By showing that there can be more convergence than one might think, I hope to allay any remaining concerns the divine determinist might have, as to whether a indeterministic account of divine creativity is really too weak to be worth holding. Moreover, since I will be arguing in Chapter III of this paper that divine indeterminism faces serious and irresolvable problems, it may be helpful here to show that in order to avoid such problems, the divine determinist need not abandon completely her conception of divine creativity, but only modify it slightly.

Recall that Tanner emphasizes three senses in which the “relation of dependence” of creatures upon God is absolute: in range (all-inclusive or universally extensive), in manner (direct or immediate), and in efficacy (unconditionally or necessarily efficacious). As I suggested above, it seems that the combination of range and efficacy has deterministic implications, since if “God’s creative intention for the world cannot be hindered, diverted, or otherwise redirected by creatures,” and if everything about creatures is dependent upon God’s intention, then it is not possible for a creature to do otherwise than God intends. But if one denied, or merely weakened slightly, the range over which God’s creative causality were efficacious, much of what Tanner says regarding the absoluteness of the relation of dependence can still be affirmed by the indeterminist. For instance, if one maintained that every agent is absolutely dependent on God for its being, but denied that this dependence extends to every agent’s activity, one could still maintain that God’s will is necessarily efficacious. For consider the possibility that I have suggested above: that God might decree, with respect to some agent’s action, *either* that she act in one way, *or* that she act in another way; and suppose the agent chooses to act in the former way. Then, even if God might have preferred that she act in the latter way, it does not follow that God’s will is thus “hindered, diverted, or otherwise redirected” by a creature—for his will was simply the content of his indeterminate decree, and this has come about. So the indeterminist can still allow that “what God wills for the world as its creator must happen in just the way God wills” (Tanner 1994, p. 114).

The indeterminist can, moreover, embrace the directness or immediacy of the relation of dependence of creatures upon the creator. Recall that God’s creative activity, according to Tanner, calls forth the world *as a whole*, which exists as an entire “plane” of being, “suspended in existence at each and every one of its points, and therefore in its entirety, by God’s creative

action.” The indeterminist can still affirm all of this. The only difference between the indeterminist’s picture and that painted by Tanner is that, in an indeterministic world, some of the things directly upheld by God are indeterministic events or processes. But God need not, in such a world, act on the same level as creatures, within the created plane; and God need not interact with some creatures *by way of* others or use creatures as the *means* of his creative calling forth. If God wanted to affect the course of some events, even those involving free creatures, he could do it directly, unmediated by any parts of his creation. Of course, he might not be able to directly cause someone do some particular thing *libertarianly freely* or directly cause some specific event to occur *divinely indeterministically*; but he could certainly directly cause her to do the thing, or bring the event about, anyway.

In conclusion, then, to make Tanner’s conception of God’s creative causality compatible with divine indeterminism, one would need to modify it only slightly. The divine indeterminist can agree with Tanner that the relation of dependence of creatures on God is absolute in terms of both its *manner* and its *efficacy*, but simply disagree that it is so absolute in terms of its *range*. And with respect to this last category, the divine indeterminist can still maintain that all created *being* is absolutely dependent on God’s creative power, but merely deny that all creaturely *activity* is. Such a slightly modified conception of divine creativity is still quite robust, and seems consistent with both a traditional account of the divine attributes and with perfect being theology. Therefore, I conclude that the argument from divine creativity to divine determinism fails.

Addendum: Deterministic Divine Creativity and Privative Evil

It may be worth mentioning here, though I will come back to this point in Chapter III, that the modification I have suggested to the divine determinist's account of God's creative causality actually seems necessary for Tanner and thinkers of a similar mindset to make, since without it their account would be incompatible with a certain other claim they make, regarding the nature of evil human actions—namely, that such actions have a kind of *non-being*, as it were. To get a sense of what this claim means, consider what Tanner says when discussing the “all inclusive or universally extensive” aspect of the relation of dependence of creatures upon God: “Such a claim of universal scope holds, it is important to note, insofar as existence and its aspects are good. Existence and goodness are convertible according to this account” (1994, p. 113). Later, she explains, “Sin does not exist *per se* but as a defect ‘exists,’ parasitic upon what does exist, an absence with a horrible enough sort of presence insofar as what is missing is essential or proper to what does exist” (1994, p. 129). Likewise, McCabe says, “since there is no good at all, except incidentally, in a morally evil act, in evil done, there is nothing created there, hence no action of God. A morally evil act as such is an absence of something, a failure on my part... Evidently God does not bring about failure as such, for failure is not there, it is an absence” (1987, p. 37). Now, on the indeterminist view I have just sketched, it is easy to see in what sense sin might be said not to “exist”—for sin is not a being itself, but the activity of a being; and while God brings into existence all beings, the indeterminist maintains that he does not bring into existence all of their activities. For divine determinists like Tanner and McCabe, however, it is not so easy to make sense of the claim that sin is the absence of being; indeed they seem committed to the claim that all our actions, whether good or evil, exist *per se*. Consider again, for instance, the way McCabe explains his reasoning from divine creativity to divine determinism: “Since everything owes its existence to God, since he is the source of anything

being rather than nothing, he must also be the source of my free actions, since these are instead of not being” (1987, p. 11). We might put this reasoning in the following form:

- (1) Everything that *is* or *exists* owes its existence to God; he is the source of anything being rather than not being.
- (2) My free actions *are* or *exist*; they have being, rather than not being.
- (3) Therefore, my free actions owe their existence to God; he is the source of their being, rather than not being.

As we can see from this reconstructed argument, the conclusion that God determines all our actions is dependent upon the claim that all our actions *have being*. But then, if all our actions—even the evil ones—have being, then it cannot be the case that sin “does not exist *per se*.” Thus if Tanner and McCabe want to maintain such a privative notion of sin, they must give up their claim that the relation of dependence of creatures upon God is “absolute” in terms of range, and so includes all human action. But then, their argument from divine creative causality to divine determinism, which depends on this claim, falls apart.

Section 3: Divine Transcendence

Along with divine knowledge and creative power, divine transcendence is another of God's attributes that may be thought to entail divine determinism. Like "omniscience," the word "transcendence" is not found in the Christian Scriptures, yet various biblical passages seem to support the idea that God transcends creation, in the sense that he is "above, other than, and distinct from all he has made" (Nally, 2011).¹⁰ Moreover, the attribution of transcendence to God arises out of considerations of perfect being theology, since a being "than which a greater cannot be conceived" would seem to be quite different than, and distinct from, ordinary created beings. The argument from divine transcendence to divine determinism has been suggested by several theologians writing in the Thomistic tradition, within the context of their discussions about what can be said univocally, versus analogically or equivocally, of God and creatures. In this section of the paper, I focus only on the work of David Burrell, since he characterizes well the basic reasoning of such writers. Burrell's argument, which is directed in particular against a libertarian account of human freedom, might be generalized as follows:

- (I) A supremely perfect creator is transcendent over his creation.
- (II) If God is transcendent over his creation, then we cannot speak of God and his creation univocally, but only analogically.
- (III) If we cannot speak of God and his creation univocally, but only analogically, then we cannot affirm a divine indeterministic account of human freedom or creaturely activity.

¹⁰ See, for instance, Psalm 97:9 ("For you, O LORD, are the Most High over all the earth; you are exalted far above all gods") and Isaiah 55:9 ("For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts").

(IV) Therefore, since God is a supremely perfect creator, we cannot affirm a divine indeterministic account of human freedom or creaturely activity.

In response to such reasoning, I will contend that once one pins down just what theologians such as Burrell mean by *analogical predication*, it becomes clear that the above argument cannot establish the truth of divine determinism. While several critics have objected to premise II, the claim that divine transcendence rules out the possibility of univocal divine-creaturely predication, I suggest that even granting this premise along with the rest does not get us the conclusion that divine determinism is true. For if we cannot speak univocally of God and creatures, then God can no more be said to causally determine creaturely actions than he can be said to leave them undetermined. After briefly explaining Burrell's reasons for asserting the first two premises, I will go on to mention a few criticisms of the second one, before discussing the reasoning which leads Burrell to assert the third premise. I will then suggest that if this premise is accepted, the conclusion which follows (IV) cannot be said to entail the further claim that divine determinism is true.

Premises I and II: Divine Transcendence and Analogical Predication

As with the other arguments for divine determinism that I have so far considered, I will be taking for granted the claim that God has the attribute in question—in this case premise I, the claim that God is transcendent. Burrell suggests a variety of reasons for thinking this, many of which arise out of his particular Thomistic theological framework, including: that God's mode of existence is unique, since his essence is identical with his existence (2008a, p. 179)—that is, since it is his essence “simply to-be” (2008a, p. 181); that God's “oneness” is unique, since he

“cannot be parsed as a single individual” (2008a, p. 182); and, finally, that the relationship between God and creatures is unique (2008a, p. 180), since God himself is unique (give what has been said already) and since God brings creation into being out of nothing and is entirely responsible for sustaining it in existence.

In order to respect God’s uniqueness and transcendence over his creation, or what Burrell, following Robert Sokowski, calls the (creator/creature) “distinction,” Burrell maintains that terms such as *being* cannot be applied univocally to God and his creatures. For, “any attempt to subsume both creator and creatures under a univocal notion of *being*” can too easily lead to idolatry (2008a, p. 178); in other words, it can too easily lead one to speak of, and worship, a *creature* when one means to speak of, and worship, *God*. Burrell concludes that if the same terms are to be applied to both God and creatures, they can only be applied analogically—and so we get premise II.

Now, sorting out just what Burrell means by “analogy” here is a difficult matter. As an example of a term used analogically, he offers a claim made by Paul in Galatians: “I live now not I but Christ lives in me.” Burrell notes that the two instances of “live” in this sentence have radically different meanings, and that if we were “to formulate an apparently univocal bridging concept”—for instance, by defining “life” as “an interior source of motion”—then we would simply be left with radically different meanings of “motion.” Burrell concludes, “When any attempt to define a term’s use will inevitably contain a term which must also be parsed analogously—that is, resists a descriptive definition—the original term is being used analogously” (2008a, p.180). Thus he suggests that a term is predicated analogically when it “resists a descriptive definition,” or when its meaning involves some sort of vagueness. In other words, Burrell seems to be allowing here that when a term is predicated analogically of God and

creatures, the two uses of the term might share some meaning in common—though we might not be able to specify exactly what that common meaning is; our knowledge of this commonality might simply be implicit.

If Burrell seems to allow for the possibility of common meaning between terms predicated analogically in the above considered passage, however, he seems to deny this possibility in the next paragraph. For he says there that to attempt to offer a descriptive definition of theological terms—for instance, of sin, or “offense against God”—would be to pretend “to know what does or does not offend God; that is, to know God.” And such pretending is “bad preaching,” since, Burrell says, “preachers who pretend to know what they are talking about must be falsifying the message. For both testaments abound in examples pointedly showing how ‘God’s ways are not our ways’” (2008a, p. 181). Burrell thus seems to be suggesting that when preachers (and, presumably, theologians and philosophers) speak about God, they should admit that they do not know what they are talking about, since God is radically different than his creatures, to whom our terms ordinarily apply, and from whom we learn the meaning of these terms. But then Burrell would seem to be insisting, not on the *analogical* use of terms to describe God and his creatures, but on something much stronger—on the *equivocal* use, that is.¹¹ In other words, Burrell seems to be saying that since “God’s ways are not our ways,” there is *no* common meaning between the divine and creaturely applications of our terms, so that we have no idea what our terms mean when applied to God.

¹¹ Such an insistence is not unique to Burrell. In fact, William Alston, in his analysis of Thomas Aquinas’ own conception of analogical predication, concludes “Analogy... is a species of equivocity” (1993a, p. 148).

Several authors have objected to Burrell's reasoning at this point, denying premise II of the argument reconstructed above. That is, these authors deny that we need reject univocal predication in order to respect the radical distinction between the creator and his creatures and so avoid using idolatrous language. Richard Cross, for one, has argued that univocal language does not entail that there is anything common to God and creatures (2008, p. 191), while William Hasker, for another, has contended that univocal language can be used to describe the complete dependence of the world on God, and the fact that God is in no way part of creation (2008, p. 198). Cross also offers independent arguments for the necessity of univocal language in theological discourse. Rather than focus on these criticisms of Burrell's argument against the possibility of univocal predication of God and creatures, however, I wish to point out a certain implication of Burrell's view of divine transcendence with respect to the issue of divine determinism. In order to do so, I must go on to discuss the reasons offered for premise III of the argument.

Premise III: Univocal Predication and Divine Causation

Let us turn, then, to consider the application of Burrell's view of the creator/creature distinction to the case of divine and human action. Burrell claims that a "telling test case" for his view is its application to human freedom, since, he says, "inattention" to the distinction has led many to adopt a libertarian account of human freedom which "can quite misconstrue the operative context of created freedom inasmuch as it simply overlooks creation," while "attention to creation and the unique relation of creator to creatures can eliminate the tendency to structure divine and human freedom as a zero-sum game" (2008, p. 184a). Burrell goes on to explain these

comments as follows: when we ignore the transcendence of the creator over his whole creation, we are led to think and speak of God as “an actor along with others”—one whose action “stand[s] over against that of the creature,” competing with creaturely action, and who must break the laws of nature or “intervene” in the world to make things happen. And we are led, when not mindful of divine transcendence, to think that creatures must be “prime movers,” or creators of their own actions, as God is, in order for their actions to be free. But all of this thinking is based on a category mistake—the mistake of putting the creator and creatures into the same ontological category. With respect to divine action, Burrell insists with Kathryn Tanner that we should not think of “God’s creative agency” as anything but “immediate and universally extensive” (2008a, p. 181). With respect to human action, he maintains, “it is not necessary, for creatures to be free, that they somehow be removed from the activity of the creator” or that “in order to assure their freedom, it must be said that God created everything *except* human actions” (2008a, p. 185). For, he says, “demanding that the creator would have somehow to ‘withdraw’ to assure creatures’ freedom... imaginatively misapprehends the unique relationship we have already sketched: a ‘non-contrastive’ sense of divine transcendence, to use Kathryn Tanner’s expression” (2008a, p. 185). Rather than thinking of God as competing with creatures for causal control, we should “employ the ‘opaque context’ device” suggested by Barry Miller in order to speak of divine and human agency: “God makes it to be the case that (I decide this way)” (2008b, p. 211).

Burrell’s staunch rejection of a libertarian account of human freedom, along with his emphatic insistence on the universality of divine causation, would seem to put him squarely in the compatibilist, and determinist, camp. His reasoning would seem to go as follows: maintaining that human freedom is incompatible with divine causation presupposes a “zero-sum”

relationship between God and humans, which disregards the fact that God operates on an entirely different “plane” than creatures do. Once we properly understand God’s transcendence over his creation, we should be led to accept the compatibility of divine causation with human freedom. And once we appreciate the universality of divine causation, we should be led to accept divine determinism. Thus we may conclude that all events—including those involving human action—are determined by God; yet divine determinism does not negate, but makes possible, human freedom.

Divine determinism may seem to be the conclusion for which Burrell is arguing, but it cannot be. For although he rejects an *indeterministic* conception of human freedom and creaturely activity, and so, endorses premise III of the argument reconstructed above, his insistence on analogical predication in theological discourse entails *not* that we should conceive of divine agency *deterministically*, but that we should not conceive of divine action *at all*. For if theologians and philosophers cannot know what they are talking about when discussing God’s causal activity with respect to creaturely events, then they cannot possibly paint an accurate picture of that relationship, or convey any information about it to inform our understanding.

Burrell himself seems to embrace this conclusion at some points. For one thing, he rejects the categorization of his view as determinist, responding to this charge by maintaining that “creator and creature are on decidedly ‘different levels,’ and... so, one cannot blithely conclude that ‘it is ultimately God who decides what the human being will do,’ for that image suggests two deciders competing.” He goes on to say, “The reason that [I]... do not like to describe creation as ‘determining’ is precisely because ‘determine’ presumes a flat field of competing forces, but a God who would be the ‘ultimate’ force in a flat field of like forces, differing only in power, would be ‘the biggest thing around’; not the creator” (2008b, p. 210). Burrell may seem

here merely to be rejecting a label that in his mind carries a negative connotation while still accepting the basic determinist view. However, at other times he seems more clearly to deny divine determinism altogether. For instance, he approves of Aquinas' "insistence that... agents whose actions were caused by another would not be free (the 'determinism' issue)" (2008a, p. 185). And though he agrees with Socrates that "Human agents cannot but act for 'the good,' however distortedly they may perceive it," Burrell still maintains that "the very indeterminacy of 'the good'... assures that such an inbuilt orientation can in no way determine us to a single course of action. On the contrary, the very indeterminacy opens us to countless possibilities, so providing the ground for rational choice" (2008a, p. 185). Moreover, he says of malicious actions that they are malicious "because they (in some mysterious manner—the 'surd of sin') bypass or run counter to this orientation [toward the good] as we refuse to let ourselves be engaged by it. In this sense, it is primarily malicious actions which display the marks of 'libertarian freedom'" (2008a, p. 186). So Burrell would not seem to be a divine determinist, as I have defined the term.

But as we have seen, Burrell is not a divine indeterminist either; indeed, he considers the view downright idolatrous. Instead, he seems to want to stake out some middle position. Commenting on libertarians' "preoccupation" with "the polarity between 'determinism' and 'freedom,' he says: "once we attempt to factor in the creator/creature relation, to ask about the freedom of (free) creatures, we are led into an *alternative space...*" (2008a, p. 184, italics added). In other words, Burrell hopes, by appealing to the transcendence of divine causation, to *transcend* the debate between determinism and indeterminism altogether.

It should be noted here that Burrell is not alone in this hope. Indeed, many contemporary scholars writing in the Thomistic tradition have argued that Aquinas himself attempted to transcend the debate between determinism and indeterminism. Michael Hoonhout, for instance,

points out that Aquinas discussed the doctrine of divine providence twice—once in the context of “the character of God,” and once in the context of “the nature of creation”—and that he appears to state “seemingly contradictory positions” about divine causation in these two places. Yet, Hoonhout maintains, such “speaking twice” is actually necessary because of “the fundamental unequivalency of the terms in the God-world relation.” Such “unequivalency,” Hoonhout says, is due to the radical difference in “orders of intelligibility” or “conditions under which [God and creatures] operate—the conditions under which creatures operate being those of the natural world, and those under which God operates being only “his own transcendent mystery” (2002, pp. 5-6). Brian Shanley, likewise, maintains that while Aquinas’ view of the universally-extensive and “all-pervasive” divine causation might seem to raise “the troubling specter of divine determinism,” it does not, since “God utterly and uniquely transcends the categorical order of mundane causes (for example, necessary and contingent) so as to be no threat to created causes” (1998, pp. 99-100). While Shanley does not interpret Aquinas as recommending theological doublespeak, he does suggest that Aquinas was intentionally silent about the way in which divine causation and human freedom fit together: “[his silence] is not an oversight or failure of nerve, but rather an acknowledgement of the limitations of human thought in the face of divine transcendence” (1998, p. 116).

Conclusion: Determinism, Indeterminism, and Apophatism

The problem with a view like Burrell’s, however, is that it leaves one with very little—indeed, nothing—meaningful to say about divine causation and its relation to human freedom and creaturely activity. If we take seriously the claim that God transcends all of our categories of

language and thought—both actual and possible—and that his being and activity are thus indescribable and inconceivable, then we must lapse into complete apophatism, or speak in terms that we know to be nonsensical. Burrell claims, at the beginning of his paper, to be offering “a coherent account of the creator” which highlights “the unique and ineffable relation between creatures and creator” (2008a, p. 178). But by the end of the paper, it becomes evident that he has offered us no *account* at all—and how could he, if what he means to offer an account of is truly *ineffable*? So long as Burrell relies on human logic and language, he will not be able to give an account of the “alternative space” between determinism and indeterminism—for, at least according to our logic and language, there is no such space: indeterminism is simply the denial of determinism. So it seems Burrell cannot have it both ways, combining the advantages of a deterministic view with those of an indeterministic view to create this alternative space. He can only have it *neither* way, by withdrawing from the debate altogether. (As Wittgenstein once said, “Whereof one cannot speak, thereof one must be silent.”) But then, we need not (and, indeed, cannot) consider the arguments of a silent interlocutor. Thus the purported argument from divine transcendence decidedly fails to establish the truth of divine determinism—or the falsity of divine indeterminism.

Section 4: Divine Providence

In each section of this chapter so far, I have considered an argument that God's having a particular attribute—omniscience, creativity, and transcendence—entails the truth of divine determinism. In reconstructing each argument, I have suggested that it is possible to defend the premise that God has the attribute in question within the framework of perfect being theology, or by reasoning about the properties that a supremely perfect being would have. Now in this last section of the chapter, I consider one final argument—offered by Lynn Rudder Baker—which starts with a premise about God's character or characteristic activity—his election of humans to salvation, and granting to humans grace to do good deeds—and ends with the conclusion that divine determinism is true. For simplicity's sake, I will call this attribute of God his *providence*, or *providential activity*. However, unlike the other divine attributes so far considered, this picture of divine providence does not follow simply from reasoning about the properties that a perfect being would have. Rather, according to Baker, it follows from the central tenets of the Christian faith. While her argument thus may be better characterized, according to the definitions I have offered, as an argument from authority rather than an argument from consistency, I think it is worth considering here. For if there are good reasons for subscribing to some particular religion, such as Christianity, and if that religion entails a thesis such as divine determinism, then there will be good reasons for believing the truth of such a thesis. Of course, it is not within the scope of this paper to consider whether there *are* good reasons for subscribing to Christianity. However, since most theists are not generic “perfect being theists” but subscribers to a particular religion (including Christianity), it is important to consider what implications those specific

religions have, and so, to what claims the theists who subscribe to them are in fact committing themselves.

Now Baker's argument, as I have suggested, focuses on two particular aspects of divine providence: first, God's election of humans to salvation, and second, God's granting to humans grace to do good deeds. As she sets it out in her essay "Why Christians Should Not be Libertarians: An Augustinian Challenge," the argument may be considered in two parts, each focusing on one of these aspects. In the first part, Baker contends that the orthodox Christian doctrine of predestination requires a compatibilist account of human freedom such that a libertarian account "is irrelevant to salvation." In the second part, she contends that an orthodox Christian conception of God's involvement in humans' willing and doing of good deeds also requires a compatibilist account of human freedom. She then argues that as God is involved in humans' coming to faith and willing and doing of good deeds, so he must be involved in all human volition and action. In other words, all human activity must be conceived in compatibilist terms. Now, by "compatibilism" Baker says she means an account of free will that is simply *compatible* with divine determinism. However, as we shall see in laying out her arguments, Baker intends to argue for a stronger conclusion—namely, that an orthodox Christian account of human freedom *requires* divine determinism with respect to all human volition and action. Her argument might thus be reconstructed as follows:

- (I) It follows from orthodox Christian doctrine that God determines both (A) humans' coming to faith and (B) humans' doing of good deeds.
- (II) As God is involved in humans' coming to faith and doing of good deeds, so must God be similarly involved in all human volition and action.

(III) Therefore it follows from orthodox Christian doctrine that God determines all human volition and action.

In what follows, I take up Baker's "challenge" and attempt to show that the texts which she considers authoritative for orthodox Christians are, in fact, compatible with a libertarian or indeterministic account of human freedom, at least with respect to *certain* kinds of human volition and action. After explaining her reasoning in more depth, I contend that there is no good reason to believe premise II of the argument reconstructed above, and that even part B of premise I might be rejected. Finally, I consider the objections Baker raises to some recent libertarian accounts of free will, and suggest that the features of these views that she deems incompatible with a fairly robust view of divine providence can be eliminated without compromising the basic libertarian commitment to some form of indeterminism.

Premise I, Part A: Divine Determinism and Saving Faith

Baker's arguments are based on the stated assumption that "any Christian view held by Augustine, Aquinas, and Luther is part of Christian orthodoxy," such that an account of free will incompatible with their view must "conflict with Christian orthodoxy" (2003, p. 73). In establishing part A of premise I, Baker mainly appeals to the later writings of Augustine—who she considers "the most influential Christian theologian in the West"—though she suggests that Aquinas, Luther and Calvin all held a similar view (2003, p. 462). Of Augustine's understanding of salvation, she writes:

[T]he grace of God through Christ is sufficient as well as necessary for salvation. Salvation is *entirely* in the hands of God, totally independent of anything that any human being might do. According to Augustine, we all deserve damnation, but

God, in His mercy, has selected some for salvation.... There is no role for libertarian construals of free will in the scheme of salvation. (2003, p. 462)

To flesh out her reasoning a bit more: Baker explains that Augustine believed in original sin, or the view that our nature was corrupted by the Fall of man, and that “this corruption can be remedied only by means of the grace of Christ” (2003, p. 464). In other words, without grace no one can be made righteous or ready for the kingdom of God, and so, without grace no one can avoid damnation or attain salvation. Thus grace is *necessary* for salvation. But grace is (as its name would suggest) given *gratuitously* and not for any merit either manifest in one’s life before it is given or foreseen to occur in one’s life after it is given. Moreover, on Augustine’s view, grace is *sufficient* for salvation—or, in the more familiar words of Christian theology, it is “irresistible” (i.e. once it is granted, humans cannot resist accepting it) and “efficacious” (i.e. once it is accepted, it cannot but effect its saving purpose). Now if grace were only necessary but not sufficient for salvation, then an act of libertarian freedom might also be necessary—for instance, the act of accepting the grace offered; and if it were only sufficient but not necessary, then there might be another means of attaining salvation besides receiving grace that depended on an act of libertarian freedom—for instance, an act of charity toward one’s neighbors. But since grace is both necessary and sufficient for salvation, Baker reasons, it follows that a libertarian account of human freedom is “irrelevant to salvation.”

Though it should now be clear why, on Augustine’s view, a libertarian account of human freedom is “irrelevant to salvation,” it may not be clear why a compatibilist account is not also irrelevant. After all, if salvation is “not a prize offered to those who lived a good life,” and if “God does not predestine people for [salvation] on the basis of His foreknowledge of their faith” (2003, p. 465), then human volition and action might seem to have nothing to do with salvation

at all. But in fact, on Augustine's view human volition itself is not irrelevant to salvation, because although God's grace is sufficient for salvation, a necessary consequence of one's being granted such grace is that one comes to have faith; and faith involves one's will. As Baker puts the point, "the will does play a role in one's coming to faith. But the will cannot come to faith without God's causal action on it. Since God causes faith, the will involved in faith is only a compatibilist will" (2003, p. 466).¹² Thus Baker concludes that the account of human freedom implicit in Augustine's view of predestination is compatibilist.

Now, one might pause and wonder here whether Baker has really shown that Augustine was a *compatibilist* rather than a *hard determinist* regarding the human volition involved in coming to faith. After all, some Christians—including Luther—have agreed that God determines one's will in the case of conversion, but conclude that, since such determinism is inconsistent with freedom, the human will is *not* free in this case.¹³ However, it seems that Augustine did consider the volition involved in coming to faith to be free, since he thought that humans were liable to divine judgment and damnation for their lack of faith, and since it seems plausible to assume that Augustine held that at least some form of free will was required for moral responsibility. In any case, what concerns me here is not whether Augustine was a *compatibilist*, but whether he was a *determinist*; and Baker's reasoning as I have laid it out implies not that it is possible for humans' coming to have faith to be both free and also determined by God (compatibilism) but that, in the case of humans' coming to have faith, human volition (whether free or not) is in fact determined by God (determinism).

¹² I take "cause" here to mean "causally necessitate," i.e. "determine."

¹³ Baker herself notes this view of Luther's (2003, p. 461).

Premise I, Part B and Premise II: Divine Determinism and Human Deeds

In the second part of her paper, Baker argues first that, according to Christian orthodoxy, God's involvement in humans' willing and doing of good deeds also requires a deterministic account of human freedom (premise I part B) and then that, as God is involved in humans' coming to faith and willing and doing of good deeds, so he must be involved in all human volition and action (premise II)—and so, that all human activity is divinely determined. To arrive at this conclusion, Baker reasons as follows: first, exercises of the human will can be divided into three categories: (A) willing what is good, (B) willing what is evil, and (C) willing what is morally neutral. According to what she calls “orthodox Christian doctrine”—again, the writings of Augustine et al—every act of the will in category (A) is determined by God. For, on the one hand, God's causation is necessary for every such act of the will: “In order for someone to will what is good... God must cause the will to will what is good; the will cannot will what is good on its own.” And, on the other hand, God's causation is sufficient for any such exercise of the will: “If God causes a person to will what is good, it is not within her power to refrain from willing... what is good.” Now again, if divine causation were necessary but not sufficient for a person to will the good, then libertarian freedom might also be needed, perhaps in cooperating with God; and if divine causation were sufficient but not necessary, then the person's will might be exercised to good without God's help. But since divine causation is both necessary and sufficient, it follows that category (A) exercises of the will do not involve libertarian freedom at all. Baker concludes that “orthodox Christians” should conceive of category (A) exercises of the will in compatibilist terms (2003, pp. 467-468). Again, though one might debate whether such exercises of the will can really be considered *free* and so whether the account is really

compatibilist, the conclusion which actually follows from Baker’s reasoning, and which is of interest to me here, is that such exercises of the will are *divinely determined*. And so, we get part B of premise I.

Baker then goes on to reason as follows: “either God plays the same causal role with respect to all three categories or he does not. If He does, then it immediately follows that compatibilism holds throughout. If He does not, we should still affirm compatibilism.” For, she says, “since orthodox Christians are already committed to compatibilist free will for category (A), it is reasonable to suppose that all free will is of the compatibilist variety” (2003, p. 468). Thus, Baker concludes, Christian theists ought to embrace *compatibilism*—read: *divine determinism*—with respect to all human volition and action.

Now there seem to be several ways one might object to Baker’s argument. One way would be simply to deny that Augustine, Aquinas, Luther and Calvin are authorities on the Christian view of divine providence. There is room for such a denial within the Christian tradition, as evinced by the Arminian school of thought, prevalent in early modern Protestantism. Jacobus Arminius and his followers, from whom this school of thought originated, agreed with their Calvinist contemporaries that grace is necessary for salvation. But they maintained that grace is, in theory, resistible—it is possible for humans to reject it—and that God grants grace to humans on the basis of his “foreknowledge” (which is actually not simple foreknowledge, but what I have been calling “middle knowledge”¹⁴) of who will accept it, so that no one is given

¹⁴ Arminians do not tend to use this word, but instead simply speak of God’s “foreknowledge.” Yet Arminius was familiar with Molina’s work and, as several scholars have pointed out, his own writing seems to assume the idea of middle knowledge. [See, for instance, Dekker (1996).]

grace that turns out to be ineffective in its saving purpose. Certain late medieval and early modern Roman Catholics held this position as well. Alfred Fredosso notes that while some Molinists agreed with their Thomistic opponents that “God antecedently elects certain people to eternal glory and only then consults his middle knowledge to discover which graces will guarantee their salvation,” other Molinists—including Molina himself—rejected such “antecedent absolute election” and insisted that God elects humans to salvation only after consulting his middle knowledge, by which he foresees their acceptance of the grace offered (Fredosso, 1998). Molina’s position was never condemned by the Roman Catholic Church, and Arminius’ claim, that salvation requires the libertarianly free act of accepting God’s grace, is still popular in a variety of Christian denominations. So, one might simply object to Baker’s assumption regarding what counts as *the* orthodox Christian view of divine providence, since at least one alternative to Augustine’s account has been acknowledged as a legitimate position within the Church for centuries.

Rather than going this route, however, and rejecting Augustine et al as authorities on the Christian view of providence, I will discuss two ways that one might object to Baker’s argument while still accepting her sources as authoritative. The first way is to grant her first premise, that both the conversion to faith and any morally good deeds done by humans are divinely determined, but object to her second premise, that all human volition and action must be so determined. After showing how such an objection could be raised, I will suggest that a rejection of premise II is not incompatible with the authoritative texts Baker cites to support her argument. I will then go on to discuss a second way of objecting to the argument, by questioning part B of

In any case, the “foreknowledge” of which most modern-day Arminians speak seems to be equivalent to the “middle knowledge” of which Molinists speak.

premise I, the claim that, according to orthodox Christian doctrine, every morally good deed done by humans is divinely determined. Though denying such a claim would contradict some things that the authors Baker cites explicitly state in their writings, I will suggest that much of the motivation for what they say can still be captured while denying this claim.

Evaluating the Argument: Premise II

To see how an objection to the second premise might be raised, consider again Baker's reasoning, from the claim that every category-(A) exercise of the will (willing what is good) is determined by God, to the conclusion that *every* exercise of the will—including every category-(B) exercise (willing what is evil)—is so determined. Baker claims that even if God does not play the same causal role with respect to category-(B) exercises of the will as he does with category-(A) exercises, "compatibilism" should still be affirmed with respect to both. She defends this claim as follows:

Consider this possibility more closely: Some theologians (Thomas Aquinas, for example) hold that, whereas God causes good acts, He only permits evil acts. (Such theologians want to avoid saying that God causes people to will what is evil.) Let us put aside qualms that, for an omnipotent and omniscient Being, the distinction between causing (or intending) and permitting (or allowing) is a distinction without a difference. To say that God's causal role in category-(B) cases differs from His causal role in category-(A) cases is not to deny Him a causal role in category-(B) cases altogether....

The theologically important distinction between category (A) and category (B) can be made *within* the realms of causality—that is, internal to free will as compatibilists construe it: Category-(A) exercises of the will are caused by God; category-(B) exercises of the will... are not caused by God in the same way as category-(A) exercises of the will. But category-(B)... exercises of the will still have natural causes, and God, who sustains all natural causes, will still have some causal role.... Given that the will must be understood as compatibilist in category-(A) exercises, it seems of dubious coherence to suppose that the will is not to be understood as compatibilist in category-(B)... exercises. Compatibilism... is the

view that the will can be free and caused; it is not a view that distinguishes between natural and supernatural causes. (2003, p. 468)

Now there are several things to note about Baker's reasoning here. One is that her main argument for the conclusion that category-(B) exercises of the will are determined by God seems to rest on some unstated premise. For she simply states, in this passage, that "it would be of dubious coherence to suppose that the will is not to be understood as compatibilist in category-(B) exercises," given that it must be understood as such in category-(A) exercises. But why would this be of dubious coherence? Baker only says: because compatibilism is the view "that the will can be free and caused."¹⁵ But if this is right, then establishing the truth of compatibilism does not establish that a free will is always determined, but only that it *can* be, or *sometimes* is. Perhaps Baker thinks, though, that it is a conceptually necessary truth, that if a free will can sometimes be determined, then it must always be determined. But why think this? Of course, it may be an empirical fact that most compatibilists think that all free acts *are* determined, but this hardly seems to be a reason for believing that they *must* be. And, it should be noted that, on Baker's own construal of a free act, it is not conceptually necessary that the will be determined. Baker writes that "A person S has compatibilist free will for a choice or action if":

- (i) S wills X
- (ii) S wants to will X
- (iii) S wills X because S wants to will X and
- (iv) S would still have willed X even if she (herself) had known the provenance of her wanting to will X. (2003, p. 467)

Since the "provenance of her wanting to will X" might not be some cause external to S herself, it follows that a human action undetermined by God or natural causes would satisfy Baker's conditions for being an act of "compatibilist" free will.

¹⁵ Again, I take her use of "cause" to mean *determined*.

So Baker does not seem to think it is a conceptually necessary truth that the will is determined; and she at least gives no reason for thinking it is a conceptually necessary truth that a free will must always be determined if it can sometimes be. She also does not seem to think that it is a *metaphysically* necessary truth, either that the will is determined, or that a free will must always be determined if it can sometimes be. For, in trying to sort out Augustine's view of original sin, she writes "Perhaps at creation, Adam had free will as libertarians construe it, but the Fall destroyed it for Adam and his descendants" (2003, p. 463). But if it is metaphysically possible that humans originally had libertarian freedom and only later came to have "compatibilist" freedom (read: freedom that is determined), then it is not metaphysically necessary that humans have "compatibilist" freedom, if they ever had it.

Perhaps, though, Baker is not making a point about what is conceptually or metaphysically necessary, but simply what we have reason to believe is the fact of the matter. Her argument might then be put as follows:

- (1) If we have no reason to think that some exercises of the will are determined while others are undetermined, then we should think of them all the same way.
- (2) There is no reason to think that some exercises of the will are determined while others are undetermined.
- (3) Therefore, we should think of all exercises of the will in the same way (as either all determined, or all undetermined).

However, the obvious objection to such an argument, which Baker herself considers in the passage excerpted above, is that the second premise is false: we do have some reason to distinguish exercises of the will that are determined from those that are undetermined, namely, to

maintain God's involvement in and responsibility for good human action while denying God's involvement in and responsibility for evil human action.

Baker responds to such an objection by insisting that "The theologically important distinction between category (A) and category (B) can be made within the realms of causality—that is, internal to free will as compatibilists construe it." But how might this distinction be made? Baker only explicitly answers this seemingly crucial question by saying that "category-(B) exercises of the will... are not caused by God in the same way as category-(A) exercises of the will." Now this is hardly an informative response, but her next sentence implies a more substantial answer—for there she says: "category-(B)... exercises of the will still have natural causes, and God, who sustains all natural causes, will still have some causal role." Thus she suggests that category-(A) exercises of the will are caused *directly* and *immediately* by God, while category-(B) exercises of the will are caused only *indirectly* by God, *mediated by natural causes*. Such an interpretation of Baker's words here makes sense of her next comment that it would be "of dubious coherence to suppose that the will is not to be understood as compatibilist" in category-(B) exercises—for, she says, compatibilism does not distinguish "between natural and supernatural causes." In other words, whether God directly and immediately causes some human exercise of the will, or indirectly causes it through mediating natural causes, the exercise of the will is still divinely determined.

So in response to the anticipated objection to premise 2 of this sub-argument—the objection that there *is* a reason to distinguish between exercises of the will that are determined and those that are not, namely, to maintain God's responsibility for good human action while denying God's responsibility for evil human action—Baker does seem to have a response. She says that the distinction can be made within the category of determined exercises of the will, by

separating those that are directly and immediately caused by God from those that are indirectly caused by God and mediated through natural causes. But is this response adequate? I think that it is not, because it does not solve the problem that the distinction was needed to solve. For the problem was that we needed to be able to say that God *causes* good acts, but only *permits* evil acts. On the view that Baker has suggested, however, God causes *both* good *and* evil acts. Though the former he causes directly, and the latter only indirectly, they are all still *caused* by him. And his indirect causation is not necessarily any less intentional than his direct causation. Another way of putting this point is that the concern Baker considers is a moral one, about the need to avoid attributing moral responsibility for evil human actions to God. But the distinction she has suggested using to avoid this attribution fails because it does not ground a moral distinction, at least with respect to divine action. God is not necessarily any less responsible for those events he brings about indirectly than for those he brings about directly. So a different distinction is needed.

Of course, various other distinctions might be proposed in attempt to avoid the conclusion that God is responsible for moral evil. In the third part of my paper I will consider some of these proposals, and argue that all such distinctions, other than the libertarian one, fail to exonerate God of responsibility. But it suffices here to say that Baker has not offered a satisfying proposal, and so if the sub-argument that I have reconstructed above is an accurate summary of her reasoning, then she has not defended the crucial premise 2 from an obvious objection. Given that we have at least a *prima facie* reason for thinking that some exercises of the will are not divinely determined (namely, that God is not morally responsible for some exercises of the will, and if he determined them he would be responsible), Baker's argument for the conclusion that we should think of all exercises of the will as divinely determined if we think of any of them that

way fails. In other words, Baker gives no reason to believe premise II of her main argument for divine determinism.

Now the reader might wonder: would the conclusion that God determines all good human actions but not all evil ones be admissible to Augustine and the others who Baker considers to be Christian authorities on the subject? The answer to this question is not obvious. Baker does not cite passages from their works which say, one way or another, whether God determines evil human actions, but that is because of the structure of her own argument: as we have seen, she uses her sources only to establish that all *good* human actions are determined by God, and then reasons from there, on the basis of the argument I have reconstructed above, that *all* human actions, including evil ones, must be so determined. But it is hard to say what her sources actually thought about the determination of evil human action even from a more thorough reading of their writings. After all, they were not, for the most part, systematic thinkers, and some of their views seem to change from one work to the next. As Baker herself admits, Augustine offers in *On the Free Choice of the Will* “what sounds like a libertarian view of free will.” Yet she suggests that in his *Retractions*, Augustine repudiated the view. However, in this later work (which might more appropriately be entitled “Reconsiderations,” since in many cases Augustine is not retracting anything¹⁶) he is only focused on good human actions, which he says God determines; thus this work still seems at least open to the interpretation that evil human actions are not divinely determined.

¹⁶ Thomas Williams makes this point in his translation of Augustine’s work (*De Libero Arbitrio* 1993, p. 124).

Baker suggests that Augustine's divine determinism with respect to all human actions is more clearly stated in *The City of God*, but even there I think what he says is ambiguous.

Consider, for instance, one passage from that book which Baker cites to establish that the late Augustine was a compatibilist:

Our wills themselves are in the order of causes, which is, for God, fixed and is contained in his foreknowledge, since human acts of will are the causes of all human activities. Therefore, he who had prescience of the causes of all events certainly could not be ignorant of our decisions, which he foreknows as the causes of our actions.

Baker says at the end of this quoted passage, "So, our wills are contained in the order of causes.

The human acts of will that are our free choices cause our actions and are themselves in the order of causes" (2003, p. 466). But while Augustine does indeed say that our wills are "in the order of causes," it is not clear that he means that they are in the *middle* of that order, such that they are determined by other things nearer the beginning. Rather, his point seems to be that our actions are in the middle of the order, such that because God knows their cause (the exercise of our wills), he also knows those actions as effects. So this passage seems compatible with the claim that the exercise of our wills initiates a new causal chain which, bringing about events all of which God knows as effects, is also known by God as a cause. Thus it seems that the writings of Augustine that Baker cites in order to establish him as a determinist with respect to *all* human actions may only establish him as a determinist with respect to *good* human action.

Evaluating the Argument: Premise I, Part B

I think that the above response to Baker's argument is enough to show that a Christian need not accept divine determinism with respect to all human volition and action simply because

she believes that humans' coming to faith and doing good deeds is divinely determined.

However, I will consider one other way one might respond to Baker's argument, which is not simply to deny premise II, but to deny part B of premise I—the claim that every morally good deed done by humans is divinely determined.

This response would, of course, contradict some things that Augustine and the other theologians cited by Baker explicitly state in their writings. Yet I would suggest that much of the motivation for what they state can still be captured, even when denying this claim. For one could still admit that divine causation is both necessary and sufficient for the conversion to faith and the attainment of salvation, but simply maintain what Thomas Flint has called the “orthodox Catholic view” of human action: that “we humans retain after the Fall our ability to perform some good actions without any special divine assistance”—in other words, with only God's general causal activity that sustains us in existence (1988b, p. 160). On Flint's account, since *general* divine activity is not sufficient to bring about our particular actions, humans thus can exercise libertarian freedom to perform good deeds even before they are given grace. One could also reject this “orthodox Catholic view” and say instead that grace is necessary and sufficient both for the conversion to faith and also for the *ability* to do any good deed, but that the actual performing of such a deed is not determined by God. On this latter account, a person's sanctification (becoming holy and righteous) might be considered a process, the beginning stages of which may still include the performing of some evil actions, but which ultimately leads to the performing of only good actions.

The important thing to note about both of these alternatives to the view of divine providence that Baker espouses is that one's attaining salvation (which seems to be the crucial part of the doctrine of providence, with respect to human lives) is still “in the hands of God”; and

on to the latter account, one's gaining the ability to perform good deeds (which may also be thought of as central to the doctrine) is in God's proverbial hands as well. Thus both of these alternatives avoid the worry that Augustine and the other theologians Baker cites seemed to harbor, that a libertarian view of human freedom would lead to a "works righteousness" theology and/or exclude those whose will was corrupt (that is, all of us, since the Fall) from salvation. As Luther put the point, "As for myself, I frankly confess, that I should not want free will [as libertarians construe it] to be given me, even if it could be, *nor anything else be left in my own hands to enable me to strive after my salvation*" (quoted in Baker 2003, p. 462, italics added). The latter view I have suggested would also be compatible with Luther's insistence that, as Baker puts it, "we do not have the power to do good on our own" (2003, p. 464).

Although I am not advocating either of these alternatives, it is worth noting that they exist—that there are intermediate positions between those Baker lays out in her paper:

- (1) Augustinianism/Thomism/Calvinism: "The grace of God through Christ is necessary and sufficient for salvation. No act of will (construed in a libertarian way or not) is needed for salvation." And "every contingent event... including those involving free agents, is completely determined by God."
- (2) Molinism: "The grace of God through Christ is necessary for salvation, but not sufficient. In addition, an act of free will, construed in a libertarian way, is also necessary for salvation." And all free human acts are undetermined by God.
- (3) Pelagianism: "The grace of God through Christ is neither necessary nor sufficient for righteousness needed for salvation. We must use our free will (construed in a libertarian way) to take at least the first steps toward salvation." And all free human acts are undetermined by God. (2003, p. 462)

The two alternatives I have just considered in objecting to part B of premise I, as well as the position I advocated in objecting to premise II, both fall somewhere in between positions 1 and 2; for they all affirm both the necessity and the sufficiency of God's grace for the attainment of salvation but deny that every free human action is determined by God. If Baker is right about her interpretation of these historical figures, then the two alternatives I have suggested in objecting to part B of premise I, as well as the one I advocated in objecting to premise II, are not represented among the most prominent theologians of the Christian tradition. But that is not to say that they lie outside of the tradition. Rather, they seem at least compatible with the central concerns of these theologians, with respect to God's control over salvation and responsibility for the good deeds of human beings.

A Modified Libertarian Account of Human Freedom

Another way of putting my objection to Baker's argument is that even if "recent theories of free-will libertarianism" do, as she claims, "conflict with central Christian doctrines" (2003, p. 462), these theories are not the only alternatives to an all-embracing divine determinism. For, there are a variety of possible intermediate positions which are compatible both with the orthodox view of providence that Baker espouses and with some form of divine indeterminism. To see this, consider Robert Kane's account, which Baker takes to be "an exemplary libertarian view." According to Kane, free will is "the power of agents to be the ultimate creators... and sustainers of their own ends," where an agent is the "ultimate" source of her choice or action only if, as Baker says, "All the factors that produce the choice or action [are] within the agent's control" (2003, pp. 468-469). Now two things should be noted about this account. First, as I have

already suggested, even if an agent is considered to be the “ultimate” source of *some* her choices and actions—for instance, those that are evil—it needn’t follow that an agent is the “ultimate” source of *all* of them; for one could affirm that some of our choices and actions are free according to Kane’s definition, while other of our choices and actions are free in a different sense. And, second, one need not accept the dilemma which Baker seems to suggest in criticizing Kane’s account: that either an agent is the “ultimate” source of a choice or action or that the choice or action is determined by something external to the agent, whether in the world or in God. For the denial of determinism is much weaker than the affirmation that an agent is such an ultimate source. After all, determinism is quite a strong thesis, implying that (given the initial state of the world, and/or the will of God) an agent is not responsible for *any* novel or decisive input into any causal chain—for given the state of the world and laws of nature and/or the will of God prior to her choice or action, there is only one way that choice or action could go. But clearly, if determinism is false, an agent could make *some* novel causal input which “closes off” one of two previously “open” possibilities, without being in control of *all* the factors that produce her choice or action. In other words, an agent can be a real cause of her action, in sense that she ultimately determines which of multiple possible actions she performs, without being the *only* or complete cause of it.

This point also serves to mitigate the worry Baker expresses about Eleonore Stump’s account of free will. Stump says that an agent acts freely “only if her own intellect and will are the sole ultimate source or first cause of her act.” Baker points out that Stump appends a note to clarify this necessary condition “which seems to indicate that she sees the tension between libertarian free will and Christian doctrine.” Stump says: “Insofar as God is the creator of every created thing and insofar as any created thing is always dependent on the operation of divine

causality, no created thing can ever be the sole cause of anything, or the ultimate first cause of anything.” Baker contends that from this remark, together with the necessary condition Stump stipulates for the will to be free, “the obvious inference is that no created thing has free will.” But, she goes on to note, Stump does not draw that inference since she says she is, for simplicity’s sake, “bracketing the operations of God as first cause and creator.” Baker responds to this move by insisting, “if we are talking about general conditions for free will, we cannot bracket the operations of God as first cause and creator” (2003, pp. 469-470).

Now of course Baker is right: if we are trying to define necessary conditions for free will in a theological context (as Stump is), it makes no sense to “bracket” the operations of God; for then we will end up with much stronger conditions than are really possible. Given that, according to the Christian tradition, if God ceased to sustain creatures they would immediately go out of existence, it follows that nothing created can be the complete cause of anything else. So no human can be the “sole source” of her own act. What Stump must mean, then, is that *besides* God in his role as sustainer, nothing else can contribute to an agent’s action, if that action is free. As I have suggested above, this modified condition is still much stronger than it needs to be in order to be considered libertarian; for an agent could be libertarianly free even if other causes contributed to her action, so long as they were merely partial causes and her own causal contribution determined the act to occur rather than not. But already this modified condition averts Baker’s main worry, that libertarianism fails to take account of the fact that everything in the world, including the human will, is “always dependent on the operation of divine causality.” And it shows that Baker is mistaken in thinking that “such a conception of free will [as always dependent on the operation of divine causality] would be compatibilist, not libertarian” (2003, p. 470).

But besides the fact that recent libertarian theories seem to ignore the *general* causal activity of God in sustaining all things, another worry that Baker brings up is that they leave no room for *special* divine activity, in influencing our particular choices and actions. In response to Roderick Chisholm's claim that "we have a prerogative which some would attribute only to God: each of us, when we act, is a prime mover unmoved," Baker writes, "If we are prime movers unmoved, then it is difficult to see how God... could have any influence over our free acts" (2003, p. 469). Now again I would agree with Baker that Chisholm's definition of free will is, for a Christian, too strongly put. But a weaker version of libertarianism suggested above already seems to leave room for divine influence over our decisions and actions. For God's action could be construed as a *partial* cause of our decisions and actions just as natural causes often are, without precluding some novel causal input on our part. This seems to be what Thomas Flint has in mind when, responding to Chisholm's view of free will, he writes: "Christian libertarians... will be reluctant to embrace suggestions that the free human agent is, like God, an unmoved mover. On the contrary, it seems more accurate to think of our free actions as invariably reactive—as responses to divine initiatives" (1998a, p. 34). For instance, God might "take the initiative" by arranging our circumstances in such a way as to make some decisions or actions on our part seem more attractive. And, as William Alston notes, God might be the partial cause of our decisions and actions not just by affecting our external environment through the arrangement of circumstances, but by shaping our very attractions themselves. He writes:

If divine grace involves the bringing about of such effects as the strengthening of some tendencies and the weakening of others, the greater salience of certain ideas and beliefs, a greater attractiveness of certain goals and a lesser attractiveness of others, then our [libertarian] free choice is left unimpaired, *so long as we do not think of these tendencies, ideas, and attractions as causally determining our decisions and actions*. Why could not God do the same? No doubt God, unlike you, could override my [libertarian] freedom by issuing a divine fiat if He so

chose; but He could make the opposite choice as well.... God could inspire Cyrus to free the Israelites from their Babylonian captivity without *determining* him to do so and leaving him no choice. He could simply make the prospect sufficiently attractive. (Even if you make me “an offer I cannot refuse,” that does not imply that I do not freely accept the offer.) (1994, pp. 54-55)

Thus, a libertarian account of free will need not preclude either God’s general activity in sustaining all things—including human beings—in existence, nor his special activity in influencing the outcome of particular events—including human volition and action. Although the recent libertarian accounts which Baker considers may indeed be too strong for the Christian theist to accept, a weaker position that still maintains that some human volition and action is not divinely determined seems compatible with an “orthodox” Christian view of divine providence.

Conclusions

In this chapter I have examined four arguments, each of which began with the premise that God has a particular attribute and ended with the conclusion that divine determinism is true. I have argued, in response to each, that one can accept that God has the attribute in question—that God is omniscient, creative, transcendent, and providential—and still deny that all events of the world, or even all actions of humans, are divinely determined. Of course, I have not considered every possible argument that could be offered for divine determinism. However, I believe the four that I have considered represent what are the most prevalent forms of argument for divine determinism being presented in contemporary theological and philosophical circles. I therefore tentatively conclude that the reasons offered in favor of the thesis of divine determinism are neither philosophically compelling, nor necessitated by any theological commitments of perfect being theology or traditional theism.

Chapter II: Problems for Natural and Non-Natural Divine Determinism

In the first chapter of this paper, I considered several reasons commonly put forward in defense of divine determinism. The arguments that I examined each began with the premise that God has a particular attribute and ended with the conclusion that the world is divinely determined. In none of the arguments I examined was it specified which form of divine determinism—natural, or non-natural—was being defended. When one begins to consider the problems that divine determinism faces, however, it becomes necessary to get more specific about what form of the thesis one has in mind. In this second chapter, I focus first on *natural* divine determinism, and argue that this view, in particular, does not allow for the sort of special divine action in the world that traditional theism requires. After laying out more precisely what I mean by “natural divine determinism” and “special divine action,” I consider various ways of attempting to characterize special divine action that are compatible with natural divine determinism. I contend that none of these characterizations are entirely unproblematic, but accepting any of them commits one to certain consequences that a traditional theist should find objectionable. Thus, I suggest that traditional theists have some reason to reject the thesis of natural divine determinism.

In the second half of this chapter, I turn my attention to the thesis of *non-natural* divine determinism. Non-natural determinism avoids the problem that I suggest faces natural determinism, by allowing room for a more robust account of special divine action that a traditional theist should find satisfying. But natural divine determinism seems to face another difficulty that I will argue non-natural divine determinism faces as well: and that is the difficulty

of squaring human freedom with determinism. In section 2, I argue for the conditional conclusion that *if* natural divine determinism is incompatible with human freedom, then so is non-natural divine determinism, for they face the same basic difficulty. This conclusion is important since, as we shall see, many divine determinists favor non-natural divine determinism precisely because they think it is compatible with human freedom while natural divine determinism is not. Of course, those who think that natural divine determinism *is* compatible with human freedom will not be persuaded to reject non-natural divine determinism by the argument I present in this chapter. Such readers will have to wait for the third and final chapter of this paper, in which I present my most extended argument against divine determinism in either of its forms.

Section 1: Natural Divine Determinism and Special Divine Action

Before considering what sort of special divine action might be possible in a world where natural divine determinism is true (an “NDD world”), it will be necessary to say something about what I mean by “natural” versus “non-natural” and “special” versus “general.” After offering some rough definitions of these concepts, I will consider two more precise ways of distinguishing special divine action (SDA) from general divine action (GDA) in the world—by appeal to either one’s subjective perceptions or some objective feature of reality. I will argue that although the subjective distinction may seem to leave room for SDA in an NDD world, it leads to contradictions that render it unacceptable. Thus I come down in favor of the objective distinction; and I suggest that, given the traditional theistic conception of God as a personal being, one must consider not only the scope of the effects of God’s actions but also the particularity of God’s intentions to be the objective features which distinguish SDA from GDA.

With these definitions and distinctions set out, I point out the one (and what seems to be the only) possible form that direct and novel SDA could take in an NDD world: that is, God’s action at the moment of creation to realize his particular purposes for the world. I then argue that, while such a possibility might *part* of what traditional theists mean by speaking of SDA, it cannot be the *whole* of what they mean. For a central commitment of traditional theism (as opposed to deism) is that God acts directly and in a new way in the present day and time. Given that an “in-the-beginning” model of SDA limits God’s direct and novel special activity to the distant past, the traditional theist has some reason to reject it. After laying out this argument in more detail, I go on to consider two ways of responding, by proposing modifications to the “in

the beginning” model of SDA: first, by adopting an eternalist account of God’s nature and activity, and second, by embracing a top-down account of divine causation. After pointing out serious problems with both of these accounts, I suggest that unless some less problematic solution can be found, the “problem of God’s temporal distance” gives the traditional theist at least some reason to reject the thesis of natural divine determinism. I then consider three forms that *non-natural* divine determinism could take which would still retain some of the features of natural divine determinism, for those who find this view attractive. After pointing out problems with two of these forms, I conclude that the closest one can get to natural divine determinism while still maintaining an account of special divine action compatible with traditional theism is the third and final form of non-natural divine determinism.

Defining Terms: A First Pass

Natural divine determinism, as I have defined it, is a view that combines divine determinism with natural determinism. As I characterized divine determinism in the introduction to this paper, it is simply the thesis that every event in the world is determined, or causally necessitated, by God. Natural determinism has been characterized in various ways that seem roughly equivalent. As Carl Hoefer has put it, natural determinism is the thesis that “every event” (except, presumably, any occurring in the first moment of time) is “necessitated by antecedent events and conditions together with the laws of nature” (2010). Peter van Inwagen, likewise, has described natural determinism as the thesis that “there is at any instant exactly one physically possible future,” where the set of all physically possible worlds contains all and only

those in which “the laws of nature are the actual laws” and “the past is the actual past” (1983, p. 3). Either of these definitions seems sufficient for the purposes of this paper. However, it should be noted that in Hoefer’s definition, what is being assumed is that the laws of nature remain constant.¹⁷ This assumption is not, on the theist’s account, a necessary truth. For, presumably, if God has the power to bring things into existence, he also has the power to take them out of existence; and if it is possible for God to annihilate the whole world at any moment, then no future state of the world is necessitated by any previous state, together with the laws of nature at that previous time. Thus for the purposes of this paper, Hoefer’s definition of natural determinism must be taken to mean *every event is necessitated by antecedent events and conditions together with laws of nature, which remain constant until the end of the world*. Van Inwagen’s definition, of course, already allows for the (logical) possibility of God’s annihilation of the world, since he says that the set of all “physically possible” worlds includes only those in which “the laws of nature are the actual laws.”

With this definition of natural divine determinism in hand, I will offer a rough characterization of general and special divine action, and some paradigmatic cases of each. As we will see, to offer a more precise definition would be to rule out from the start certain conceptions of SDA in a NDD world without argument. To begin with, then, by “GDA” I mean God’s “usual” activity in creating and sustaining the whole world. This category will include the establishment of any laws of nature as well as the maintenance of whatever “scientific regularity” there is in the world (Saunders, 2002, p. 21). By “SDA,” I mean God’s “unusual” or particular providential activity within the world, especially as it affects the course of human

¹⁷ Hoefer (2010) explicitly states this assumption later: “Determinism requires... [that] the laws of nature... are true at all places and times.”

history and the lives of individual persons. This category might include, to use some biblical examples, the protection or deliverance of a people from some dangerous situation; the healing of a disease or answering of a prayer, such as for the birth of a child; the giving of direction and guidance, or support and comfort during a difficult time; or the effecting of some religious experience, such as the sense of God's presence or awareness of God's power.¹⁸ It is thus a broader category than the term "miracle," which traditionally signified an event that inspires wonder and seems contrary to human knowledge of the natural order, and which since the early modern period has been taken to mean at least an *apparent* violation of the laws of nature.

Another way of putting the distinction between general and special divine action is offered by Nicholas Saunders: he defines GDA as "those actions of God that pertain to the whole of creation universally and simultaneously," and SDA as "those actions of God that pertain to a particular time and place in creation as distinct from another" (2002, p. 21). Saunders' definitions will be a useful starting point for this paper, although, as I will shortly point out, the word "pertain" seems to have multiple senses, which lead to distinct conceptions of SDA.

GDA and SDA: Subjective v. Objective and Causal v. Intentional Distinctions

¹⁸ What I do not intend to discuss in this chapter are what Christians view as "special cases" of SDA involving the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth. As several authors have noted, such cases would seem to require an entirely different model of divine action than the other instances I have described. Thomas Tracy, for instance, writes: "If we interpret this language [e.g. that God "raised Jesus from the dead"] as pointing to an eschatological transformation of the human creature, then the familiar notion of miraculous divine intervention in nature is not so much wrong as insufficiently radical. Certainly the new creation is not merely the disruption or violation of the old order, but rather its fulfillment" (2002, footnote 30). Robert John Russell likewise writes, "the central threefold miracle of the Incarnation, Resurrection, and Ascension of Christ... involve the transformation of nature as a whole and with it the transformation of the laws of nature" (2006, p. 585). Of course, if the laws of nature are so "transformed," then the world is no longer naturally deterministic according to the definition of natural determinism given above, which assumes that the laws remain constant.

Now that we have on the table at least some intuitive definitions and paradigmatic cases of special and general divine action, we can ask: on the basis of what criteria might SDA be distinguished from GDA? One kind of answer to this question that seems unsatisfactory is that which refers only to human perception or interpretation. One example of such a view is discussed by Thomas Tracy, who writes: “an event may be distinguished from other events because it particularly discloses to an individual or a community God’s presence and purposes in the world.” Because such an event serves as the occasion for the individual or community’s recognition of God’s presence or purposes, it takes on special significance. But, as Tracy explains, “What makes this event special is not the mode of God’s action within it, which is no different here than elsewhere, but rather its epistemic role in revealing to us something of the character or direction of the universal activity of God” (2006, p. 603). Such acts of God might be called “subjectively” or “epistemically” special—as opposed to those that have some objective or metaphysical significance.¹⁹

Now I do not mean, in rejecting such definitions of SDA, to deny that events which are subjectively significant, in the sense of their seeming to us to reveal God’s presence or purposes,

¹⁹ As Saunders notes, various theologians have given subjective accounts of miracles and divine revelation as well as special divine action. H. Richard Niebuhr, for instance, offers this analogy to the way we identify God’s communication to the world: “sometimes when we read a difficult book, seeking to follow a complicated argument, we come across a luminous sentence from which we can go forward and backward and so attain some understanding of the whole. Revelation is like that” (2002, p. 242). On this view, then, revelation is anything that allows us to make theological sense of human history or the natural world. R. F. Holland, likewise, describes a miracle as “the kind of thing that, outside religion, we call luck,” while James Ellenberger defines “contingency miracles”—one category of miracle among several that he identifies—as those “extremely rare natural coincidences that, when interpreted in a religious context, have a particular religious significance” (2002, p. 50).

might very well be cases of SDA in the world. But the fact that we *seem* to perceive God's presence or purposes in an event cannot be, in itself, what makes the event a special act of God. For, quite evidently, we can—and probably often do—misperceive or misinterpret the significance of an event. In other words, some events that seem to us revelatory of certain purposes of God's are not; and other events that seem to us *not* revelatory of certain purposes of God may in fact be. That people make mistakes in attributing divine presence and purpose is evident from the fact that they genuinely disagree with each other about whether God is specially acting in particular events. And they even disagree with their former selves about this, as Paul Helm notes: “It may be that, as the further consequences of the events unfold and come to be known, the person who at one stage described them as ‘providential’... may be reluctant to continue to do so. For... what once appeared to be a beneficial outcome is seen now to be part of a wider picture whose outcome, on balance, is judged to be non-beneficial” (1993, p. 125).

Austin Farrer has comically portrayed such “revisionist” interpretations of SDA as follows:

Mr. Jones' rheumatism was a judgment, until his daughter swore to you on the bible that the talk about his secret drinking was baseless slander. Her father was a saint. His rheumatism, therefore, was a trial. But then the bowling-club went on a day's outing and drove their charabanc into the sea; and Mr. Jones' rheumatism, since it kept him home on the occasion, proved a blessing in disguise, and providence indeed (1967, p. 68).

To give another, more tragic example of competing claims about SDA, consider the varying interpretations that were offered of the 2010 earthquake in Haiti. Pat Robertson, for one, described the event as an act of divine retribution for a pact made with the devil, while other religious leaders insisted that the earthquake was no special act of God at all, but that SDA was evident in the compassionate human response to the natural disaster.

The problem, then, with subjective definitions of SDA is that they allow for no way to adjudicate between contradictory accounts. Indeed, if what makes something a special act of God is just an individual or group's perception that it is (where "perception" is not a success term), then we must conclude that all sorts of events both *are*, and at the same time *are not*, SDA. Clearly, this is unacceptable.

Thus we need some *metaphysical* definition of SDA—one that is grounded not simply in our subjective perception or interpretation of God's action in the world, but rather in some objective feature of God or the world. Two possibilities suggest themselves: the actual (not just supposed) intentions of God, or the effects of God's action in the world. These two possibilities correspond to two ways of interpreting the word "pertain" in Saunders' definition of SDA as "those actions of God that pertain to a particular time and place in creation as distinct from another." "Pertain to" might be understood, on the one hand, in *causal* terms, or, on the other, in *intentional* terms. Saunders prefers the former way of construing the distinction; he writes:

The approach adopted here... makes the distinction purely on the basis of the particularity of God's action. The most simple approach to delineating the different forms of action is to look at their... physical effect, rather than stepping behind the physical account and raising more complex notions of intention and purpose. (2002, p. 20)

Although the scope of the actions' effects might be the simplest basis upon which to draw the distinction between GDA and SDA, however, I would argue that the scope of God's intentions in acting must be taken into account. For, as Michael Langford has suggested, since traditional theists think of God as a *personal* being, analogous in some ways to a human person, they should think of particular providence as in some way "analogous to human decision" or human action (Saunders 2002, p. 20). But, we do not demarcate particular human decisions or actions solely on the basis of their effects, for the effects of one's action might "radiate out" indefinitely. (Indeed,

if the world is naturally deterministic, then the effects of a single human action might persist until the end of time!) Rather, we demarcate the actions of personal agents at least in part on the basis of their intentions and purposes in acting—and so, I would suggest, we should do the same with respect to the special acts of God. Thus I propose to distinguish GDA and SDA in the following way: if God’s intention, in acting, regards “the whole of creation universally and simultaneously”—e.g. that the laws of nature or cosmic processes be a certain way—then his action is general; if his intention is that a particular historical event occur, then his action is special. We might call the former sort of intention corresponding to GDA a “general intention,” and the latter sort corresponding to SDA a “special intention.”

“Deistic Providence” and the Problem of God’s Temporal Distance

Given the above construal of SDA, as action of God by which he realizes a special intention—i.e. an intention that a particular historical event occur—at least one form of SDA in a NDD world seems possible. To see what such a form would be, consider Saunders comment that distinguishing SDA from GDA on the basis of the scope of God’s intentions rather than the effects of God’s actions means that “the results of [SDA] may be the same as those of GDA” (2002, p. 20). This is because if, in creating the world, God designs the laws of nature and the initial state of the world in such a way as to ensure that some particular event occurs later, then God’s act of creation, according to the definition I have given, ends up counting as an instance of *both* GDA *and* SDA. Thus, there is at least this possibility for SDA in a NDD world: God specially acts at the moment of creation to realize his particular purposes for the world.

Before going on to consider whether any other form of SDA might be possible in a NDD world, we can ask: would such account of SDA, by itself, be *enough*? Could it, by itself, do justice to the traditional theistic conception of God as living and active in the world? Many have thought so; Thomas Tracy, for instance, entertains the view that, apart from the “special cases” mentioned earlier (footnote 17), “God’s relation to the world as a creator, properly understood, provides the basis for an account of God’s particular actions in history that is sufficiently theologically robust” (2002, p. 38). And several writers have gone to great lengths to show that God’s special activity “in the beginning” can account not only for the general design and development of the universe, but also for the particular miraculous events that occur in human history. Kirk McDermid, for instance, offers a detailed description of how God might use certain features of statistical mechanics and chaotic systems to achieve unpredicted and even (humanly) unpredictable effects “through the law-like progression of events.” By creating what initially appears to be a “typical” macroscopic system but has an atypical microscopic arrangement, and by establishing evolutionary processes which “depend quite sensitively” on their exact present state, of which we “have only limited access to” and “can only specify to finite precision,” McDermid shows how God might by “ordinary” means bring about extraordinary events such as the parting of a sea and the turning of water into wine (2008a, pp. 131-134).

Such accounts, however, are not without their critics. Robert Larmer, for instance, questions the feasibility of such deterministic mechanisms bringing about the miraculous events McDermid describes. He writes, with respect to the first proposal, “It is far from clear that the degree to which the microstates of a system would have to be atypical in order to produce a miracle is consistent with the system appearing to be typical macroscopically”; and with respect

to the second, “Although chaos may be ubiquitous in nature, it comes in degrees and typically shows up only in the background of an otherwise regular evolution of events.” Yet, while Larmer suggests that the achieving of miraculous events through such naturally deterministic processes may be quite difficult, I do not think he shows it to be entirely impossible. His most serious criticism of McDermid’s account, however, is not scientific, but theological. He writes: “Rather than a model of miracle, we seem to be presented with a deistic model of divine providence” (2008, p. 155).

Now the charge that a model of providence is “deistic” can mean different things. It sometimes suggests that God is unconcerned with human history, and has no special intentions that he realizes with respect to particular events in the world. But this cannot be what Larmer means, for he recognizes that on McDermid’s proposed account God may effect particular purposes through his creation of the world’s initial conditions and laws of nature. So what Larmer must mean, instead, is that such an account denies God’s present and active role in human history. Deism, as Larmer seems to understand it, implies that after creating the world God “took a step back” and let his creation “run on its own.” So, while God might have providentially ordered things “in the beginning,” he is not *now* involved in the world’s unfolding. If Larmer is right, then this is a serious problem with the model of SDA proposed; for, quite evidently, a deistic model of providence is inconsistent with a central tenet of traditional theism: that God *is* active in the world today. Thus it will be necessary to consider possible responses to the “deistic charge” and see whether the model can be expanded in such a way as to include some form of divine action in the present state of the world.

One possible response to the deistic charge open to the theist is to say that God is not just the creator of the world “in the beginning of time” but also the sustainer of the world at every other moment. As Tracy writes:

God’s creative action includes the continuous ‘giving of being’ to the created world in its entirety. Creation is not a particular event, completed at some time in the distant past, which leaves behind (as it were) a world that gets along perfectly well on its own.... The mainstream of the theological tradition has held that created things do not possess a power of continuing in existence on their own; rather, the existence of the created world depends absolutely at every moment upon God’s creative action. (2002, p. 233)

Granting such an assumption about the necessity of God’s sustaining power, we can conceive of how God is universally active in every part of the world at every moment in history.²⁰ Moreover, Tracy points out, if we accept Thomas Aquinas’ distinction between primary and secondary causality, we can make sense of another way in which “everything that happens can properly be described as God’s act”—without attributing all causal agency to God, in the manner of occasionalism. For while, on the Thomistic view, created things have “active and passive causal powers of their own,”—that is, “the capacity to affect other things and to be affected by them”—these powers are conferred on them by God; and so the events brought about by such secondary causes can be “regarded as acts of God... insofar as they result from a series of causal intermediaries that God has established” (2002, pp. 240-241).

Thus it seems that in an NDD world, we can conceive of God’s agency in terms of both divine conservation—God’s sustaining all things in existence—and primary causality—God’s establishing the causal chain of events in the world and conferring causal powers on created things. Such a conception of divine providence cannot be described as “deistic” in the sense

²⁰ Thus Thomas Aquinas reasoned: if created being is an effect of God’s continuous action, then “as long as a thing has being, so long must God be present to it.... But being is innermost in each thing.... Hence it must be that God is in all things, and innermost” (*Summa Theologica* I.8.1).

denoted above, for in it God does not “step back” from the world, once created, or let it “run on its own”; indeed, he could not, without the world going out of existence. Yet, one might worry that such a conception is still a far cry from the traditional theistic view, because, while God’s general activity of sustaining the world is on going, any *direct* special activity of God occurs only once, at the beginning of time. After that moment, the particular historical events that occur according to God’s intentions must be understood as *indirect* SDA – that is, as events that God brings about by bringing about earlier events at the beginning of a long causal chain, stretching back to his initial creation of the world. No direct special divine activity would seem to be possible in an NDD world other than that which occurs “in the beginning,” since, according to the definition of natural determinism I have given, every event after the initial moment of creation is *already* directly determined by other natural events in accordance with the laws of nature.

But such a model of SDA seems to depict divine agency as too distant, temporally speaking, from the events of human history. As Tracy puts the point, “divine action programmed into the structure of nature from time immemorial is not what the faithful have in mind when they understand their lives to be lived as a responsive, interpersonal relationship with God” (2002, p. 249). David Corner, likewise, explains, “Theistic religious practice presumes God to be actively involved with the world – not just anticipating our needs from some time in the remote past, but responding to them in the present” (2007, p. 121). People’s petitionary prayers, for instance, seem to assume the possibility of God’s responding to them and acting immediately and directly in the circumstances at hand to offer protection, provide direction, grant healing, and the like. They do not pray “May you have caused it to be the case, when you created the world

billions of years ago, that a miraculous event would occur today,” but rather, “May you presently effect a miracle.”

Thus natural divine determinism seems to present traditional theists with a serious problem—what I shall call “the problem of God’s temporal distance”—for it seems to allow only for direct special divine activity that is too “distant,” temporally speaking, from the particular events which it brings about. Below I consider the two main ways that natural divine determinists have tried to resolve to this problem and so provide an account of SDA that is consistent with traditional theistic commitments about God’s involvement in human history. I argue in response, however, that neither proposed resolution should be acceptable to the traditional theist.

First Proposed Solution: Divine Eternality

The first proposed resolution to the problem of God’s temporal distance has recourse to a certain view of one of God’s attributes. Many theologians and philosophers, both classic and contemporary,²¹ have argued that we should not conceive of God as an *everlasting* being—i.e. one who exists within time but whose existence has no beginning or end—but rather, as an *eternal* being, i.e. one who exists outside of time completely, having “neither temporal location nor temporal extension” (Craig 2009, p. 145). Accepting this doctrine of divine eternity for a

²¹ This view was held by Augustine, Boethius, Anselm, and Aquinas, and is currently defended by such authors as Eleanore Stump, Normam Kretzmann, Richard Swinburne, and Brian Leftlow.

variety of reasons,²² some have gone on to argue that it also solves the problem of God's temporal distance. For, if God's own being does not have temporal location, then neither do his actions, so that the effects God causes cannot be temporally *distant* from his act of causing them. Instead, God can be understood to embrace "the whole of everlasting life" at once, as Boethius most famously said (Helm 2010a), such that the "created world in [all] its temporal extension is immediately present to God"—as Tracy explains. Thus, Tracy, who is a proponent of this view, goes on to say:

When God takes a free human action into account in the overall design of the created world, this 'taking into account' does not occur either before or after the human action. The human action is explanatorily, but not *temporally* prior to the divine act of taking it into account, and the events that constitute God's response take place at the time proper to them in the causal history of the world. (2002, p. 249)

Despite the apparent appeal of this response, however, I do not think it resolves unambiguously the problem of God's temporal distance. To see why, consider some event e —say, the birth of a child—which occurs after the initial act of creation—say, at time t_2 —and which comes about in part because of a special intention of God—say, to respond to the prayer of a mother (as well, in part, because of God's general intentions about how the world will be). Now, if God indeed exists outside of time, then we cannot say that "in the beginning of time" God "willed" or "caused" this particular event to occur at t_2 —for according to the doctrine of divine eternity, God wills and causes eternally, not temporally. But then consider t_1 , the first moment in time, at which the initial state of the world was created and the laws of nature were established. If we, who are not eternal, but temporal, had full knowledge at t_1 of this state of the

²² Among the reasons Craig cites are the incompatibility of divine simplicity and immutability (two other properties attributed to God by Thomistic thinkers) with temporal duration and change, and the incompatibility of divine perfection and completeness with "the fleeting nature of temporal life" (2009, pp. 146-147, 151-152).

world and the laws of nature set to govern it, as well as the sustaining activity of God that would continue in the future, then we could (as Laplace pointed out), predict every event that was to occur in the world—including event e . So, although we could not say that at t_1 God “determined” event e to occur at t_2 (since God’s being and actions are in the eternal present), we could say that at t_1 , event e “was determined to occur” at t_2 , assuming God’s continual act of conservation as well as his initial act of creation.

Now it should be evident why the doctrine of divine eternity does not offer us an unambiguous solution to the problem of God’s temporal distance. For the initial worry was that “divine action programmed into the structure of nature from time immemorial” is not what the faithful have in mind when they conceive of God as responding to their actions and the events of the world. But even if God exists outside of time, so that, *from God’s (eternal) perspective*, none of his actions seem temporally distant from the events of the world—since the whole chain of temporal causes is all-at-once present to and directly caused by God—still, *from our (temporal) perspective* they do seem distant—for the world is temporally extended, and God’s action set in motion billions of years ago the determining causes of events occurring today, such as the answers to our prayers.

Now, one might respond to my argument by pointing out that the temporal distance between God’s act and the events of the world is only apparent from *our* perspective, not from God’s. I am willing to concede this somewhat paradoxical point. After all, if the doctrine of divine eternity is, as even its proponents admit, “an inevitably ungraspable idea” for humans (Tracy 2002, p. 249), then when we try to grasp it we will inevitably run into apparent problems and paradoxes. But if the doctrine of divine eternity is supposed to help *us humans* conceive of

God's special action in the world, then, we might think, it would be better if it were not humanly inconceivable or apparently, from our perspective, incoherent.

Second Proposed Solution: Top-Down Causation

Thus it seems we should consider some other way of responding to the problem of God's temporal distance—one that would not require recourse to any inherently mysterious divine attribute. The other response that natural divine determinists have proposed is best articulated by Arthur Peacocke, who makes use of the concepts of ontological “levels” or “layers” of reality, and of what has been variously called “downward emergence,” “top-down causation,” or “whole-part constraint” to describe God's action in the world.²³ Peacocke rejects quantum indeterministic models of SDA—that is, models that portray God as specially acting to determine naturally *undetermined* quantum events—since, he says, the inherent unpredictability within such an indeterministic system would be “a limitation of the knowledge even an omniscient God could have of... the future trajectory... of the system,” and so would prevent God from being

²³ A number of other philosophers, scientists, and theologians have embraced such a model of “top-down” divine causation, though not all of them have been, like Peacocke, committed to natural determinism at the lowest level of physical reality. On the one hand, John Haught, who thinks of divine action in terms of “information input” into evolutionary processes, also grants that “determinism is present” in the lower levels of physical processes, though he seems to think this does not rule out the possibility of indeterminism at the higher levels (2008, p. 73). On the other hand, John Polkinghorne, who speaks of divine causation in terms of “downward emergence,” suggests that “the apparently deterministic equations” of chaotic systems may in fact only be approximations of lower-level indeterministic processes (1994, pp. 25-26). Nancey Murphy, likewise, pairs her model of top-down divine causation with a bottom-up model, which assumes quantum indeterminacy (1993, pp. 325-357).

able to act within the system “to implement the divine will” (1997, pp. 280-281).²⁴ Thus, he turns to consider processes which are, at bottom, naturally deterministic, but which he describes as exhibiting “top-down” causation—that is, in which, rather than the behavior of constituent units of the system affecting the behavior of the system as a whole (“bottom-up” causation), the opposite happens: the behavior of the system as a whole affects the behavior of its constituent units. Peacocke offers one example of this phenomenon from the field of evolutionary biology, in which, he says, “the network of relationships that constitute the temporal evolutionary development and the behavior pattern of the whole organism is determining what particular DNA sequence is present at the controlling point in its genetic material in the evolved organism” (1997, p. 274). In a second example from the field of cognitive science, he explains how the conscious states of a person, such as her intention to raise her arm, may have an effect on the lower-level neuro-physical states of the person, such as her brain activity and muscle contraction (1997, pp. 275-276).

After describing such purported cases of top-down causation in a naturally determined world, in which “real features of the total system-as-a-whole are constraints upon events happening within the sub-systems at lower levels,” Peacocke goes on to suggest that “we can properly regard the world-as-a-whole as a total system so that its general state can be a holistic constraint upon what goes on at the myriad levels that comprise it.” He then considers the possibility that the cases of top-down causation within the world might “provide a new resource for thinking about how God acts with the world-as-a-whole.” Thus he writes:

²⁴ I have already called into question in Chapter I of this paper the assumption that “there is no fact of the matter” for God to know regarding naturally undetermined events prior to the time at which they occur. I will not reconsider this assumption here, since what is of interest to me is Peacocke’s view of SDA in a naturally deterministic world.

If God interacts with the ‘world’ at a supervenient level of totality, then God, by affecting the state of the world-as-a-whole, could, on the model of whole-part constraint relationships in complex systems, be envisaged as able to exercise constraints upon events in the myriad sub-levels of existence that constitute that ‘world’ without abrogating the laws and regularities that specifically pertain to them—and this without ‘intervening’ within the unpredictabilities we have noted [e.g., quantum indeterminacies].

Peacocke concludes by suggesting that this model can be applied to God’s causation of “*particular* events,” which realize the “*particular* intentions of God”—or what “is usually regarded as God’s ‘providential action’” (1997, p. 283).

Peacocke’s suggested model of particular providence might seem promising for natural divine determinists committed to a traditional theistic conception of SDA, since it offers a way in which God may act directly, in time, to affect naturally deterministic processes—all without “abrogating the laws... that pertain to them.” Yet his approach faces a number of difficulties. The first and most obvious is that, with respect to the cases of top-down causation within the world which are to serve as a model for SDA, the higher-level cause or constraint which affects lower-level events is, as he puts it, the “total system-as-a-whole”—and so, seems to be constituted by, or at least dependent upon, the lower-level subsystems. For instance, the evolutionary development of a species seems to be constituted by a set of biochemical processes involving single organisms; and mental states seem to depend upon the neuro-physiological states on which they supervene. But, given Peacocke’s use of analogies, this would seem to mean that God is constituted by the “world-as-a-whole,” or that God’s being depends on his creation—which clearly contradicts traditional theistic doctrine. Peacocke anticipates such an objection, and responds, “I am not postulating that the world *is*, as it were, ‘God’s body’.... The world-as-a-whole, the total world system, may be regarded as ‘in God,’ though ontologically distinct from

God” (1997, p. 282). But waving the question of whether such a “panentheistic” view (as he calls it) is really consistent with traditional theism, we are still left wondering how Peacocke’s analogies to the natural processes of evolutionary biology and neuroscience are supposed to shed light on God’s interaction with the world. For the higher levels of these natural processes are in fact dependent upon the lower-levels; but even according to the panentheistic view that Peacocke has proposed, God is ontologically independent of the world; in fact, the world depends ontologically on God.

Even if this problem could somehow be sorted out, Peacocke’s model of SDA faces another problem; for the examples of supposed “top-down causation” in the natural world—on which his model of divine causation depends—do not seem to allow for the sort of downward determination that Peacocke desires. Take the example from cognitive science. Peacocke quotes John Searle, saying:

At the higher level of description, the intention to raise my arm causes the movement of the arm. At the lower level of description, a series of neuron firings starts a chain of events that results in the contraction of the muscles... the same sequence of events has two levels of description. *Both of them are causally real*, and the higher level causal features are both caused by and realized in the structure of the lower level. (1997, p. 275)

Peacocke thus suggests that the higher- and lower-level sequences of events are both “causally real,” in that the higher-level events, such as the intention to raise my arm, have real causal power to affect other higher-level events, such as the raising of my arm, while the lower level events, such as my neurons firing, have real causal power to affect other lower-level events, such as my muscles contracting. But Peacocke’s view of top-down causation requires that some *higher-level* events also have real causal power to affect *lower-level* events – for instance, that my intention to raise my arm causes my muscle contractions. Yet if natural indeterminism at the

lower level is ruled out—as it is on his view—so that all lower-level events already have a sufficient natural cause in other lower-level events, then every case of top-down causation must be a case of over-determination.

Before we consider whether over-determination is a problem in itself, it should be noted that Peacocke is unwilling to admit such over-determination in the case of divine causation. He writes: “What is being... suggested here is that we have to envisage God... being able to exert constraints upon the world-as-a-whole, so that particular events and patterns of events can occur, *which otherwise would not have done so*” (1997, p. 283, italics added). But if God’s higher-level causation over-determines events at the lower level, then those events *would have occurred otherwise*, without such higher-level causation. Peacocke thinks that his model of top-down deterministic causation avoids such over-determination since the lower-level natural causal sequences on which he is focused are so complex as to be practically incomprehensible by humans. Regarding the case of cognitive science, he writes, “Descriptions of the total brain state in purely neurological terms would be exceedingly complex and, indeed, considering the complexity of the brain, may never be forthcoming.” Thus, since “the actual succession of states of the brain may prove in practice not describable” in terms of “lower-level” (physical) concepts, he concludes that there is “need for some higher-level [mental] concepts... to denote and explicate sequences of events in the brain” (1997, p. 276). But while Peacocke may be right, that we cannot do without mental concepts, and so perhaps also without the concepts of higher-level and even top-down causation, this is an epistemic point, and does not change the fact that if we are assuming natural determinism “deep down” at the lowest levels of causality, then postulating such “epistemologically non-reducible features of reality” (1997, p. 173) as metaphysically real would commit us to a kind of pervasive over-determination of causes.

Having seen that such a model of top-down causation in a naturally deterministic world implies over-determination, the natural divine determinist might try to respond in two ways. First, she might suggest that divine causation is so unlike natural causation that the former cannot lead to over-determination as the latter can. Alternately, she might point to apparently unproblematic cases of natural over-determination, and suggest that divine over-determination is likewise unproblematic. With respect to the first alternative, one might make use of the distinction between primary and secondary causality mentioned above to offer an account of how divine and natural agents are both necessary, and so only jointly sufficient, for the occurrence of an event, such that taken together they do not constitute a case of over-determination. One might argue, for instance, that there are certain things that God cannot do without material objects and their causal powers and capacities: he cannot, without the power of fire to heat things, and the capacity of water to be heated, bring the pot of water on the stove to boil. (Or, even if God *can* do such things by himself, one might argue that he *does* not, but chooses to make use of the causal powers and capacities of material objects.)²⁵ Thus it is only through the conjunction of God's primary causality and material objects' secondary causality that events in the world occur, so that their occurrence is not over-determined by divine and natural causes.²⁶

²⁵ This is my best attempt to interpret what Freddoso means when he writes: "when the gas flame makes the water boil, the fact that the effect is the boiling of water... is due not to God's causal contribution (which might just as well have contributed to the water's freezing, had other conditions obtained), but rather to the specific natures of the secondary causes (gas, water, and the like). God's general concurrence is, so to speak, a determinable that has to be particularized by the secondary causes" (1998, p. 17).

²⁶ As Elliott Sober (personal communication, April 2010) has pointed out, such a model of secondary causality would seem not to meet the definition of natural determinism offered above, since natural events would not by themselves (in accordance with the laws of nature) determine other events. Even if the definition of natural determinism could be revised so as to allow for the

Such an argument does seem to explain away the appearance of over-determination in the case of primary causality, or what I have described as God's *general* action in creating and sustaining the causal powers of natural objects. But the situation seems different in the case of God's *special* action in bringing about particular events within the world's history. For in this latter case the apparent over-determination is not between a divine and a natural cause, but between two different divine causes. To see why, note that if the "top-down causality" theorists want to resolve the problem of God's temporal distance without appealing to divine eternity (which we have already seen is not a good solution), they must maintain that God has *presently existing* intentions that he realizes by acting *in the present moment*. So then, to take the case of water being brought to boil at time t_2 , God's "higher-level" intention realized in action at t_2 in conjunction with certain material objects' "lower-level" causal powers is sufficient to cause the water to boil. But then, if this event brought about at t_2 is part of a naturally deterministic causal sequence, stretching back to t_1 , the beginning of the world, we can assume that God also had a special intention at t_1 to bring about this event; and so we can conclude that God's action to realize that intention at t_1 in conjunction with the causal powers of the subsequently created material objects was *also* sufficient to bring about the event. So then, it seems that the event was over-determined by two special divine intentions and their realization in two special divine actions. So there does seem to be real over-determination in the case of top-down causation, in terms of a multiplicity of SDA.

But then it might be argued, to turn to the second alternative, that we should not reject such divine over-determination out of hand—for over-determination, even among two of the

necessity of God's primary causality, however, I think that the model of secondary causality still does not allow for the possibility of novel and direct SDA after the initial moment of creation.

same sort of causes, is not always a problematic feature of causal explanations. Indeed, we sometimes have reason to posit two sufficient natural causes of an event. We might observe, for instance, that a person died shortly after having been both poisoned and shot, and so we might justifiably conclude that his death was over-determined by two distinct actions of an overambitious assassin.²⁷ And so we might have similar reason to postulate two distinct divine actions, each sufficient (together with natural causes) for the occurrence of an event.

But what would such a reason be, to conceive of God both acting in the beginning of time to cause some future event, and then acting *again*, at the time of the event, to over-determine its occurrence? I cannot think of any reason except the obvious: that such a conception of divine action would solve the problem of God's temporal distance. But though it would indeed solve this problem, such a solution would be wholly *ad hoc*, and would seem to raise troubling questions about the rationality of divine action. For what sort of agent, we might wonder, would over-determine each and every event that he specially intended? One, it would seem, who either lacked knowledge about his own ability to affect outcomes, or lacked an appreciation of efficiency in action. The first possibility would seem to contradict the doctrine of divine omniscience: for surely if God knows everything, then he knows that he is omnipotent and that the events he intends to bring about really will occur. And the second possibility would seem to conflict with our common understanding of rational agents: that they act for intended purposes and do not multiply their actions purposelessly.

Thus the models of top-down causation proposed by natural divine determinists to resolve the problem of God's temporal distance seem to have problems of their own, since they entail that events specially and directly caused by God after the first moment of creation are

²⁷ This example was suggested to me by Elliott Sober, personal communication, February 2010.

over-determined by God's own actions, and such over-determination calls God's rationality into question, requiring him to act without apparent reason. Of course, God might have some reason for acting twice which is unknown to us; but without any idea what such a reason might be, this "resolution" to the problem again seems to be more an appeal to divine mystery than a satisfying philosophical response.

Conclusion

I have now considered the two main ways that natural divine determinists have tried to resolve to the problem of God's temporal distance and so show that it is possible for direct and novel SDA to occur in a NDD world after the initial moment of creation. I have argued that neither of these proposed resolutions to the problem is adequate. For the first does not bring God temporally closer to the events that he causes, but merely removes him from time altogether; and from our temporal perspective, it leaves God's activity seeming far removed from the events of human history. And the second suggests a model of the divine nature according to which God is constituted by the world, or dependent on it, and which also entails that direct SDA occurring after the first moment of creation is divinely over-determined in a way that makes God seem irrational. Moreover, I would suggest that both of these responses require such paradigm-shifting metaphysical commitments for most contemporary theists that they should not be accepted merely in order to solve the problem of God's temporal distance. For, as William Hasker points out with respect to the first proposed solution:

.... the conceptual structures required for eternalism are complex and difficult, and amount to a conception of the nature of ultimate reality which is fundamentally different than one that might be held by a theist apart from this

doctrine. To adopt such an elaborate metaphysic merely as a solution to a problem... is disproportionate.... Eternalism is a deep metaphysical theory, and it must have deep metaphysical roots.” (1998, p. 181)

The same might be said about the model of top-down causation that Peacocke proposes: it is a deep metaphysical theory, and it must have deeper metaphysical roots than as a purported solution to the problem I have discussed.

I thus tentatively conclude that, unless some more adequate solution to the problem of God’s temporal distance can be found, traditional theists have some reason to reject the thesis of natural divine determinism. This does not mean, however, that traditional theists must give up divine determinism altogether, or that they must embrace some paradigmatic form of natural indeterminism such as quantum mechanics. Although in the next chapter of this paper I will suggest that divine determinism faces another serious problem—the problem of evil—which gives theists a reason to reject the view, it is not my contention that divine determinism itself generates the problem of God’s temporal distance. Rather, that problem is generated by the combination of divine determinism and natural determinism, or the view that I call *natural divine determinism*. Moreover, non-natural divine determinism itself can take various forms, and some of those are closer to natural divine determinism than others. In what follows, I consider three forms that non-natural divine determinism could take which would still retain something of the apparent attraction of natural divine determinism. After pointing out problems with two of these forms, I suggest that the third would actually be compatible with any scientific evidence that might seem to imply that the world is naturally deterministic.

Addendum: “Interventionist” Non-Natural Divine Determinism and SDA

To see what form of non-natural divine determinism would be most similar to natural divine determinism, recall van Inwagen's definition of natural determinism suggested above: it is the thesis that there is only one possible future, given the laws of nature and the past state of the world. As we have seen, this definition does not allow for direct SDA except as it occurs at the beginning of time, or outside of time, or, if within time, in a way that over-determines the effects of God's actions. Thus, to allow for direct SDA that would make a difference in the course of the world's history once that history is underway, one would at least have to say: there is only one possible future given the laws of nature, the past state of the world, *and* the absence of God's special activity. Let us call van Inwagen's definition of natural determinism "conservationist"—since, after the initial act of creation, it allows only for the *conserving* novel and direct activity of God within time—and the proposed non-natural alternative "interventionist"—since it allows also for the *intervening* direct activity of God.

Now, an important thing to note about the interventionist version of non-natural divine determinism is that it is in an important respect similar to (conservationist) natural divine determinism, since it still rules out what seem to be paradigmatic cases of natural indeterminism—such as, for instance, radioactive decay (assuming that this is, indeed, a stochastic and not simply a chaotic process). For, presumably, radioactive decay is a process wholly "natural" to the world, created and sustained only by the *general* activity of God, and governed only by probabilistic laws that leave open multiple possible futures. To put it in Hofer's terms, the decaying of an atom at a certain time is not necessitated by the antecedent conditions of the world and the laws of nature, and the absence of SDA; for, given these three things, the atom could just as well have decayed at a different time. According to the interventionist version of non-natural divine determinism, then, the future of the world is fixed

by the natural processes God created “in the beginning,” *unless* God disengages from his ‘usual’ activity of sustaining the world (and so, annihilates it), *or* engages in some ‘unusual’ activity of altering the course of history. This is an important point that I will return to at the end of this section, in my discussion of why the interventionist version of non-natural divine determinism should be attractive to divine determinists who want an account of SDA compatible with apparently deterministic scientific theories.

But first we should ask, how might God specially act within time, in a world in which the interventionist version of non-natural divine determinism is true (an “interventionist world”)? Three possibilities suggest themselves: first, God might simply violate the laws of nature; second, he might alter the state of the world to which the laws apply; or third, he might exploit some sort of “exemption clause” built into the laws. I will consider these three possibilities in turn and suggest that only the third is consistent with traditional theistic commitments and a plausible metaphysical view of the laws of nature.

The first conception of SDA, as a violation of the laws of nature, corresponds to Hume’s definition of miracles. This would seem to be a natural way of making sense of the historic claims that certain miracles are “contrary to the natural course of things” (Driscoll 1911). Yet, setting aside Hume’s epistemic argument against justified belief in miracles²⁸ there seem to be at least two problems with such a conception of SDA. The first is theological: if we think of the creation and maintenance of the laws of nature as a form of GDA, and GDA as the realization of God’s general intentions for the world, then in any case of law-violating SDA, God’s special intentions will contradict his general intentions. But such contradictions would call into question

²⁸ I set this argument aside since I am concerned not with giving an account of SDA such that particular instances of it may provide grounds for justified belief, but with working out a coherent metaphysical account of what SDA might actually be like.

the rationality of God's intentions, as did the account of divine over-determination considered earlier.

Even if this apparent problem of divine irrationality could be resolved, however, the conception of SDA as a violation of the laws of nature raises troubling questions about the nature of the laws of nature themselves. For it may be asked, in virtue of what are laws of nature true? If, as many philosophers of science have argued, the laws describe the basic properties of the stuff of the world, and so are true in virtue of the essences of natural objects, then to violate a law of nature would be to alter the very essence of a thing. But, of course, the essence of a thing cannot be altered, if the thing is to retain its identity. Thus, if the powers and capacities of natural-kind objects are essential to their identity, then God cannot violate the laws governing them; the closest he can do is annihilate such objects, and create similar ones with different essential properties.

Given that a violation of the laws of nature would require a change in a thing's essence, which is impossible, one might try to conceive of SDA in an interventionist world instead in terms of the annihilation or creation of objects. This is the route that Robert Larmer takes, arguing that such "annihilation/creation miracles" would not require any law violation at all:

Although we may often speak as though the laws of nature are, in themselves, sufficient to explain the occurrence of an event, this is not really so... A scientific explanation must make reference not only to the laws of nature, but also to initial conditions, the actual 'stuff' of nature....

If we keep in mind this basic distinction between laws of nature and initial conditions, it can be seen that... [a miracle is not necessarily] a violation of, suspension of, or exception to, the laws of nature. If God creates or annihilates a unit of mass/energy, he changes the material conditions to which the laws of nature apply. He thereby produces an event that nature on its own would not have produced, a miracle, in short, but he breaks no law of nature. (1996, pp. 41-42)

Thus, Larmer contends, God could effect a miracle by changing the state of the world, without violating any of the laws that govern it.

In claiming that no laws would be broken by the annihilation or creation of some unit of mass/energy, however, Larmer evidently refuses to recognize that conservation laws, which assume the causal closure of the natural systems to which they apply, are themselves laws of nature. This has opened his view up to some criticism. Kirk McDermid, for instance, has argued on the basis of Noether's theorem that conservative and dynamic laws have a necessary relation, such that a violation of one constitutes a violation of the other (2008a, p. 129); likewise, Neil MacGill has contended that "conservation of the 'stuff' of mass/energy is fundamental to law operation, and thus that Larmer's account is just as fundamentally challenging to existing scientific theory as law violation" (Saunders 2002, p. 75).²⁹

Besides such apparent scientific problems with Larmer's conception of annihilation/creation miracles, there would also seem to be something theologically troubling about it. For using Larmer's conception of miracles as a model for all SDA would require saying that when God specially acts in the world, he annihilates bits of the world. But this would seem to be a very *destructive* way for a Creator to treat his creation; and such destructive treatment would seem to contradict the traditional theistic assumption that all of creation is good—and so, one would think, ought to be conserved.

Given such problems with the annihilation/creation model of SDA, one might offer yet another conception of SDA in an interventionist world: instead of violating laws of nature,

²⁹ Of course, as Elliott Sober notes (personal communication, April 2010), conservation laws might be maintained if, for every "creation" miracle God performs, he performs a corresponding "annihilation" miracle whereby he annihilates some bit of creation of the same quantity of mass/energy as that which he creates. While some miracles (such as the turning of water into wine) might be describable in such terms, however, it is not clear that all could be.

whether dynamic or conservative, God might act within some room left open by the laws. Of course, by “room” we cannot mean that God would have the ability to actualize one of several possible alternatives left open by natural processes—for this contradicts the interventionist version of non-natural divine determinism. Rather, we must mean that the “alternative” God may realize is beyond what is naturally possible, but allowed for by some sort of “exemption clause” built into the laws of nature. If, again, we conceive of the creation and maintenance of the laws of nature as a form of GDA, then on this view of SDA, God may be thought of as incorporating exceptions into his general plans in order to realize his special intentions.

Now some would argue that the laws of nature are already recognized to have such “exemption” or *ceteris paribus* clauses. Thus William Alston writes:

If we suppose that divine intervention in a physical process would involve a violation of a physical law, it is because we are thinking of physical laws (of a deterministic form) as specifying *unqualifiedly* sufficient conditions for an outcome.... But we are never justified in accepting laws like this. The most we are ever justified in accepting is a law that specifies what will be the outcome of certain conditions *in the absence of any relevant factors other than those specified in the law*.... None of our laws take into account all possible influences.

So, for instance, one might think of a law of hydrostatics as specifying “as an unqualifiedly sufficient condition for a body sinking in still water... that the body be of a density greater than the water,” such that a person standing on the surface of a lake would be in violation of that law. But, Alston points out, such a law has all sorts of qualifications: “A man standing upright on the surface of a lake will sink, *unless* he is being supported by a device dangling from a helicopter, or *unless* he is being drawn by a motor boat, or”—the list could go on indefinitely. Thus, “since the laws we have reason to accept make provision for interference by outside forces

unanticipated by the law,” Alston concludes, “it can hardly be claimed that such a law will be violated if a divine outside force intervenes” (1993b, pp. 189-190).

While such a conception of the laws of nature would indeed allow room for SDA, however, one might think it allows too much, so as to render practically meaningless the whole idea of law. McDermid, for instance, says that on such an “exemption” model as Alston’s, as well as on an “open-system” model such as Larmer’s, “it appears that almost anything goes! One need not restrict oneself to carefully-worded *ceteris paribus* clauses—one can blatantly violate any natural law.” Thus, McDermid concludes, though such models were proposed to “[minimize] interference with the lawful progression of physical events,” they end up rendering the laws of nature “metaphysically toothless” (2008a, p. 129). Clarifying what he means by “metaphysically toothless,” McDermid writes:

without any sort of *sufficiency* conditions in one’s account of laws, any law-metaphysic... boils down to ‘natural laws apply all the time, except when they don’t.’ ... For if [such an account] cannot give us any metaphysical constraints on the non-physical, then it is really ‘anything goes’ in terms of the behavior of ‘natural’ things. Causal dispositions, or any other physical necessity, become empty. (Quoted in Larmer 2008, p. 153)

In another article, McDermid clarifies further what he means by saying that such accounts lack sufficiency conditions: they are committed to the claim that “the natural is *never* sufficient to determine the natural” (2008b, p. 161). What McDermid thus seems to be assuming is the following: that some natural event e_1 cannot be sufficient for some other natural event e_2 if it is nomologically possible—that is, logically possible, given the laws of nature—that e_1 occur and e_2 not occur; and since such sufficiency is essential to any law regarding the causal dispositions of things (e.g. e_1 ’s disposition to cause e_2), it follows that such laws cannot have “exemption clauses” for divine intervention.

McDermid is, of course, right that e_1 is not sufficient for e_2 , in the sense of sufficiency described above, if there is a possible case in which e_1 occurs and e_2 does not—even if this is a case in which God intervenes. But it does not seem that such a strict sufficiency condition must be met in order for causal laws to have any “bite.” For one might distinguish between such “nomological sufficiency”—where e_1 is nomologically sufficient for e_2 only if in every possible case in which e_1 occurs, and the laws of nature are the actual laws, e_2 occurs—and “natural sufficiency,”—where e_1 is naturally sufficient for e_2 if in every possible case in which e_1 occurs and the laws of nature are the actual laws, *and only natural causes are involved*, e_2 occurs. Natural sufficiency seems all that is needed for the laws of nature to have explanatory and predictive power, at least if cases involving interventionist SDA are relatively rare; but such laws would not rule out the possibility of God intervening, on occasion, to affect the course of things. God’s intervention, though “naturally impossible” (where natural possibility is defined in terms of what natural causes can bring about on their own) would be “nomologically possible” (where nomological possibility would include all that the laws of nature allow); and such nomological possibility is all that seems required to provide “room” for God to act.³⁰

Thus it seems that an interventionist version of non-natural divine determinism according to which the laws of nature have *ceteris paribus* clauses allowing for divine intervention would provide room for direct and novel SDA temporally “close” to the events it brings about. Yet one other objection might be raised to this account: one might argue that it is an entirely *ad hoc*

³⁰ Another view of “natural possibility” has been put forth by Martin Leckey. Leckey thinks of the laws of nature not as necessarily true, grounded in the essential properties of material objects, but as contingent, grounded in an additional property of “naturalness,” which is “shared... by all and only those things which are in a ‘natural’ state” (1999, p. 78). The problem with this view, it seems to me, is that the property of “naturalness” as defined by Leckey is wholly mysterious, and, as I have suggested above, at odds with the current scientific view of laws.

solution to the problem of God's temporal distance, as I suggested above that the natural divine determinist's postulation of divine over-determination is. I would suggest, however, that the non-natural divine determinist's postulation of exemption clauses is different, since theists would seem to have independent reason to expect such flexibility in the laws of nature. After all, if God is the creator of the world, it seems reasonable to suppose that he designed the laws governing the world in such a way as not to prevent him from acting in any "lawful" way within it. As Nancey Murphy points out, it is "an ironic bit of history" that "the laws that once served as an account of God's universal governance of nature" have come to be understood as "a competing force, constraining the action of their very creator" (2009, p. 264). If we understand the laws of nature as "an expression of God's will" for creation, instead of a constraint on his action, then the hypothesis that the laws have exemption clauses which allow for God's special activity no longer seems arbitrary or *ad hoc*; for, according to traditional theism, it is part of God's will for creation that he be able to act within it.

It follows from what I have said that the interventionist version of non-natural divine determinism should be attractive to divine determinists who want their account of SDA to be compatible with scientific discoveries that would seem to support naturally deterministic theories. For while an interventionist world is not, technically speaking, a naturally deterministic one, there do not seem to be any scientific discoveries that could rule out the possibility of *ceteris paribus* clauses in the laws of nature allowing for the occasional instance of SDA. The interventionist version of non-natural divine determinism is thus importantly different than other versions of non-natural divine determinism that could be disproved by the disclosure of previously "hidden variables" in nature which would allow scientists to reinterpret what seemed to be indeterministic processes in terms of deterministic equations. Of course, this is only a

“point” in favor of the interventionist version of non-natural divine determinism if our best scientific theories end up postulating deterministic equations to describe the natural world.

Whether they now do, or whether in the future they might, is a question beyond the scope of this paper.

Section 2: Non-Natural Divine Determinism and Human Freedom

In the first half of Chapter II, I considered the view called “natural divine determinism,” which combines divine determinism—the view that all events are determined by God—with natural determinism—the view that all events are determined by antecedent events together with the laws of nature. I argued that this combination view is problematic for traditional theists, since it does not allow room for novel and direct special divine action in the world after the initial moment of creation. In this second half of Chapter II, I consider what I call “*non*-natural divine determinism” (or, for short “non-natural determinism”), the view that all events in the world are determined by God, though some are *not* determined by antecedent events together with the laws of nature. Non-natural determinism avoids the problem that I have argued faces natural determinism since it allows “room” for novel and direct SDA after the initial moment of creation. For if some event after the initial state of the world is not determined by that state together with the laws of nature, then a divine act temporally located within the world’s history could determine that event to occur without *over*-determining it.

But natural determinism faces another difficulty that I have not yet discussed, and it is an open question whether non-natural determinism faces it as well. The difficulty to which I refer is that of squaring human freedom with determinism. Now, much ink has been spilled over the question of whether human freedom is in fact compatible with natural determinism, and I will not consider that question here. What I will consider is the claim that *non*-natural determinism avoids the apparent problem facing *natural* determinism by leaving open the possibility that human action originates with human agents, rather some cause external to humans in the natural

world. I will argue that this claim is mistaken—that the basic problem is not solved by a move from natural to non-natural determinism—for though the latter thesis allows for human action that is undetermined by any *natural* cause external to the agent, it does not allow for human action that is undetermined by *any cause whatsoever*. This is because non-natural determinism entails that human action is necessitated by God, who is a sort of non-natural cause. And the necessitation arising from a non-natural cause seems as problematic as any arising from a natural cause. Thus I will argue for the conditional conclusion that *if* natural compatibilism (the thesis that natural determinism is compatible with human freedom) is false, then non-natural compatibilism (the thesis that non-natural determinism is compatible with human freedom) must also be false, for they face the same basic difficulty.

Cause for an Argument

Before presenting my argument for this conclusion, though, it may be necessary to say why an argument is even needed. After all, one might wonder, isn't it just obvious that if natural determinism precludes the existence of free will, then any sort of determinism does the same? In fact, this seems not to be so obvious—at least not to some philosophers and theologians, who deny natural compatibilism while embracing non-natural compatibilism. Consider, for instance, the following comment made by Hebert McCabe, at the end of his discussion of the compatibility of free will and determinism; he writes: "... A free action is one which *I* cause and which is not caused by anything else. It is caused by God" (1987, p. 13). Such a set of statements may sound a bit strange to many philosophers' ears. If a free action is one that is not caused by anything other than the agent acting, how could it be caused by God? Indeed, this would seem to

be blatantly contradictory. But McCabe and other thinkers of a similar Thomistic mindset insist that it is not. Anticipating the eyebrow raising that his statements will elicit, McCabe writes, “this is not the paradox that it seems at first sight, for God is not *anything else*” (1987, p. 13). The view that McCabe seems to express in this apparently paradoxical statement is like the one espoused by Kathryn Tanner and David Burrell, discussed in the last chapter: that God is not an agent within the world operating on the same “plane” of existence as created beings and so competing with them for causal control. Such a view, McCabe and others have contended, is an *idolatrous* view (1987, p. 1)—a false view of God, that is, which leads to false worship; and it is a view that leads to much philosophical confusion. For, they say, to treat God’s causation as analogous to creaturely causation is to conflate non-natural determinism with natural determinism; but these two sorts of determinism have quite different implications, especially with respect to human freedom, for while natural causes may *preclude* our ability to act freely, divine causation is the very thing that *enables* our freedom.

Authors espousing such a “hybrid” view, of natural *incompatibilism* and non-natural *compatibilism*, often point to differences between natural and non-natural determinism and contend that in virtue of these differences, natural determinism has implications that non-natural determinism does not. In making this argument, they sometimes draw an analogy between the claim that non-natural determinism is compatible with the existence of *free will* among creatures, and the claim that non-natural determinism is compatible with the existence of *real causal powers* among creatures. According to these authors, the fact that God’s causal power is sufficient for every event that occurs in the world does not preclude some creature having, as Kathryn Tanner puts it, “genuine power of its own.” Non-natural determinists espousing this view admit that in the case of natural causation, one cause’s being sufficient to produce an effect

usually renders another cause superfluous. And so, they suggest, one might be tempted to infer from this fact about natural causation a fact about divine causation: that if God is the sufficient cause of everything, then creatures make no novel causal contribution to the world. But, they assert, divine causation is different than natural causation in that God's being the sufficient cause of an event does not render any creaturely causation of that event superfluous. As Tanner writes, "If it makes sense to say that God can call forth a nondivine being with an integrity of existence of its own, then it makes sense to say that God can call forth nondivine beings with real powers of their own to influence other creatures" (1994, p. 117).³¹ And so, these non-natural determinists suggest, just as non-natural determinism does not negate the possibility of novel causal activity among creatures, since God has the power to create beings with genuine causal powers of their own to bring about his will, so non-natural determinism does not negate the possibility of real freedom among creatures, since God has the power to create free beings who act according to his will.

Thus these non-natural determinists offer a set of sufficient conditions for a choice or action to be free which focuses on freedom from *creaturely* constraints that necessitate the action, while ignoring *divine* constraints which they say do not matter. Tanner, for instance, suggests this set of sufficient conditions for a free choice: "The determination of choice and its specifications end with the human agent in the sense that none of the following factors constrains

³¹ Though Tanner does not put her point this way, one might try to cash out the genuineness of creaturely powers in terms of direct and indirect causality: although God has the power to bring about events *directly*, with no causal intermediary, God gives some creatures causal powers of their own so that his own causal power *indirectly* brings about its effects, mediated through creaturely causes. But of course, the same might be said, *mutatis mutandi*, of a naturally determined world; for B's being a sufficient cause of C does not preclude A's being a non-superfluous cause of C, if A causes C indirectly, by causing B. So, it seems that neither non-natural nor natural determinism entails that created beings do not possess real causal powers of their own.

or necessitates a particular choice: (a) the natural and situationally determined constitution of a human agent (its natural inclinations, transient feelings, bodily state)... (b) the objects of choice that a situation presents... [and] (c) the rational assessment of the greater good in a particular situation” (1994, pp. 121-122). Tanner seems to think that these conditions rule out the picture of divine causation that incompatibilists find troubling, in which God brings about effects in the world just as a natural cause would. She writes:

God does not bring about the human agent’s choice by intervening in the created order as some sort of supernatural cause, so as to make up the difference between created conditions and the human being’s choice and to supply that otherwise missing factor or impetus that takes away the indifference of the human will and brings about choice in a particular direction. God simply brings about, by that selfsame act of holding up into existence, the whole of a world in which human choices occur *without* any sufficient causes for them within the happenings of the world. If a picture of divine intervention is behind the idea that choice does not end with the human agent but is necessitated by the influence of God, then such a conclusion is mistaken. (1994, p. 125)

Jack Crabtree likewise defines a free action as one that is not necessitated by any sort of physical or psychological constraint; he offers the following set of necessary and sufficient conditions for an act to be free: first, “the act was not the result of coercion by means of an overpowering force” and second, “the act was not the result of inviolable laws of nature... operative within the actor himself” (2004, p. 214). In response to the claim that non-natural determinism is just as damaging to creaturely freedom as natural determinism is, he writes:

A cause is a cause is a cause—so the argument goes. The fact that the necessity of a choice is due to a physical cause in particular is not relevant.... But this is exactly the point where this argument is unsound. One cannot, without independent supporting evidence or argumentation, generalize from physical causation to any and every sort of causation. One cannot validly conclude that because every house in Mills City is made of wood, every house everywhere is made of wood. Neither can one validly conclude that because a choice made out of physical necessity is not a real choice, a choice made out of any sort of necessity is not a real choice.” (2004, p. 226)

What such comments by non-natural determinists seems to cry out for, then, is an *argument* which provides good reason for concluding that, with respect to the issue of free will, a cause *is* just a cause—that is, that the inference from natural incompatibilism to non-natural incompatibilism is valid, since *both* sorts of determinism preclude the existence of free will among creatures. The argument I will construct is an attempt to meet this demand, while recognizing that there may be significant differences between divine and natural causation of the sort to which Tanner and others allude.

The Argument

To see how such an argument might be constructed, I will first consider what probably is the most common argument put forward for natural incompatibilism, and contend that what seems fundamentally objectionable about determinism has nothing to do with the properties of a natural, rather than a non-natural, cause. Instead, what is objectionable is the fact that what determines one's actions is *ultimately outside of one's control*. Since, I will argue, the same is true with respect to non-natural determinism, I will conclude that those who find this argument against natural compatibilism compelling should find my argument against non-natural compatibilism compelling as well.

So, to start with what seems to me one of the most familiar and intuitive arguments offered for natural incompatibilism, let us consider what Gary Watson has called the "Consequence Argument." First set out by Peter van Inwagen, the argument is summed up this way by Watson:

- (I) “If [natural] determinism is true, then everything, including human actions, is causally necessitated by the prior state of the universe in accordance with the laws of nature.
- (II) If human actions are causally necessitated by the past together with the laws of nature, then we cannot ever do otherwise than what we do, unless we can falsify the laws of nature or falsify the description of the past.
- (III) We cannot falsify the laws of nature or the description of the past.
- (IV) If we cannot act otherwise than we do, then we lack free will.
- (V) Hence, if [natural] determinism is true, we lack free will.” (2003, pp. 2-3)

Notice that this argument is concerned with what events are under our control, or “up to us,” as van Inwagen has put it. He explains that according to natural determinism, “our acts are the consequences of the laws of nature and events in the remote past. But it is not up to us what went on before we were born, and neither is it up to us what the laws of nature are. Therefore, the consequences of these things (including our present acts) are not up to us” (1983, p. 16).

Now this argument, as it stands, does not answer the question of whether *non*-natural determinism is compatible with free will. For, first and most obviously, the non-natural determinist is not committed to the antecedent of the first premise, but allows for the possibility that some events involving human action are *not* causally necessitated by the prior state of the universe in accordance with the laws of nature. And so the second and third premises will be irrelevant to the issue of non-natural compatibilism as well; it will not matter whether we can change the past or the laws of nature, or whether, if we cannot, this means that we cannot do otherwise than we do. However, it seems to me that a parallel argument for the incompatibility of non-natural determinism and free will can be constructed that retains the crucial fourth premise

of the Consequence Argument and highlights the fact that it is no more *up to us* what God wills for the world than it is up to us what the laws of nature are or what events occurred before we were born. Consider, then, the following argument:

- (I) If (natural or non-natural) divine determinism is true, then everything, including every human action, is necessitated by the will of God.
- (II) If human actions are necessitated by the will of God, then we cannot ever do otherwise than what we do, unless we can change what God wills with respect to our actions.
- (III) We cannot change what God wills with respect to our actions.
- (IV) If we cannot act otherwise than we do, then we lack free will.
- (V) Hence, if (natural or non-natural) divine determinism is true, then we lack free will.

This argument is clearly valid, so if anything is wrong with it, the problem must lie in one of the premises. And since premise I is simply the definition of divine determinism, any objections raised by the non-natural determinist must be leveled at premises II, III, or IV. It is to these, then, that we now turn.

Objections and Replies

The second premise of the above argument seems to be a self-evident truth, and, indeed, a necessary one. Take some action, a , and let r be the proposition that some person, s , does that action; and let q be the proposition that God wills that r . Then the first two premises above can be put as follows:

- (I) If divine determinism is true, then q entails r
- (II) If q entails r , then s cannot render r false unless s can render q false

And this second premise is a trivial truth, as van Inwagen points out with respect to a parallel premise in the Consequence Argument:

For if q entails r , the denial of r entails the denial of q . Thus anything sufficient in the broadly logical sense for the falsity of r is also sufficient for the falsity of q . Therefore, if there is some arrangement of objects that s can produce, which is such that s 's producing it would be sufficient for the falsity of r , there is some arrangement of objects—the very same one—that s can produce, which is such that his producing it would be sufficient for the falsity of q . (1983, p. 52)

The critic, however, might raise an objection to my translation of premise II from a claim about necessity to a claim about entailment; after all, she might point out, there are several different sorts of necessity, and they do not all have the same logical implications. For instance, if we are speaking in terms of *physical* necessity, we might say that some cause X *necessitates* some effect Y , but such a statement assumes that the laws of nature remain what they are, which they need not—for it is *logically* possible that they change. So it's not the case that if X necessitates Y then the proposition X *occurs* entails the proposition Y *occurs*, since there is some possible world in which X occurs but the laws of nature are different and Y does not occur.

In response to this point, I would note that the sort of necessity referred to in the first two premises of my argument is not physical necessity; it is, instead, logical or metaphysical necessity. For *if* divine determinism is true, then God's will cannot be thwarted by anything, so that whatever God wills occurs, no matter what the laws of nature or prior state of the world is. Thus the first two premises might be restated once more, as follows:

- (I) In every possible world in which divine determinism is true, if q is true then r is true.

- (II) In every possible world in which *if q is true then r is true* is true, *s* cannot render *r* false unless *s* can render *q* false.

Thus the claim that if divine determinism is true then *q* (God wills that *s* take some action) entails *r* (*s* takes that action) is analogous to the claim that if the laws of nature remain what they are then *X occurs* entails *Y occurs*—which is true if the natural determinist is right—but *not* analogous to the claim that *X occurs* by itself entails *Y occurs*—which is false (unless the fatalist is right). Therefore, my translation of the non-natural determinist's claim about the *necessity* of God's will to a claim about propositional *entailment* is valid.

A related objection to premise II can be put in terms of the meaning of “can do otherwise” and what is absolutely, versus conditionally, necessary. As Tanner points out, there *is* a sense in which we can do otherwise than what we do, even if what we do is determined by God's efficacious will and we ourselves cannot change God's will; for God's will might have been different than it actually is. She writes:

It is true that if the necessary infallibility that characterizes God's calling forth of a human choice were to necessitate that choice *absolutely*, it would not be possible to say that the creature has the ability to choose otherwise vis-à-vis the created conditions of choice. A theologian holding to our picture has to deny that the necessity with which a human being's choice follows from God's will for it makes that choice simply and in all respects necessary.... ‘If *q* follows necessarily from *p* then *q* is necessary’ is a false proposition of modal logic, where *p* is ‘God's calling forth of a human choice’ (or will that a human choice occur) and *q* is ‘that human choice occurs.’ If *p* were necessary then *q* would be too but, on our premises, *p* is not necessary. (1994, p. 127)

Now of course Tanner is right that if an event is necessitated only by a divine volition, then that event is conditional upon the volition itself. In other words, if God's will with respect to the event were different, the event would not occur. And so, if God's will that some non-naturally determined human action occur is not logically or metaphysically necessary, then

neither is occurrence of the human action. But then, a similar point might be made by the natural determinist: if an event is necessitated only by antecedent events together with the laws of nature, then human actions are not “absolutely” necessary, for the laws of nature or the initial state of the world might have been different than they in fact are. So if by “has the ability do otherwise” we simply mean “is not logically or metaphysically necessitated to do it,” then even in a naturally deterministic world, we have the ability to do otherwise than we actually do. As Watson points out, this is a common response to the second premise of the Consequence Argument for natural incompatibilism, considered above: “To say that we could have done otherwise implies only that *we would have done otherwise if we had decided or chosen to*” (2003, p. 4)—and we could have decided or chosen to do otherwise, since that decision or choice was not itself logically or metaphysically necessary. But of course this is not the sort of ability about which either the natural *or* the non-natural incompatibilist is concerned. Indeed, as Watson notes, such a response “has seemed so plainly defective to its critics that they often entertain unfriendly suspicions about the philosophical integrity of those who pursue it.”³² What both natural and non-natural compatibilists are concerned about, rather, is the ability to do otherwise, *holding everything else constant*—the laws of nature and the previous state of the world, as well as God’s volitions and actions with respect to the event in question. For the claim that we have the “ability” do otherwise than we actually do if we just can change the laws of nature or the will of God will hardly be relevant to the question of free will if we do not in fact have the ability to change the laws of nature or the will of God.

³² Kant, for instance, dismissed the compatibilist interpretation of “ability to do otherwise” as “wretched subterfuge” (quoted in Watson, 2003, p. 4).

Thus it might seem that the critic of my argument would have an easier time objecting to the third premise, that we cannot change what God wills with respect to our actions. Now this premise seems to be a necessary consequence of divine determinism. But perhaps someone would dispute it, on the basis of the following consideration: suppose that some person *s* is faced with a difficult test—say to become a firefighter—and that she fails it; and suppose that *s* did not pray for help in passing the test. The non-natural determinist might point out that *if s had* prayed for help in passing her test, then God might have granted her the help, such that she would have passed it. But then, *s could have* changed what God willed with respect to her performance on the test, in the sense that she could have taken some prior action—praying for help—that would have made it the case that she would have passed.

In response to this objection, I would suggest that it seems to depend on an ambiguity in the third premise, again regarding the word “ability.” For while it might be true that *s* could have changed what God willed with respect to one action—her failing the test (call it *d*)—in order to do so, she would have had to change what God willed with respect to another action—her lack of prayer (call it *c*). But then either *s* could not have changed this volition of God, or if she could have, then she would have had to change what God willed with respect to yet some other, earlier action—say, her failure to attend a church where she would have been taught to pray (call it *b*). Now this chain of actions must end somewhere—there must be some first action that *s* took (call it *a*), which God willed and which led to this series of further events, but which did not itself depend on some earlier action that *s* could have taken to change what God willed. (After all, *s* is, we are supposing, of some finite age and has not been acting for ever!) Thus, while it might be true that *s* could have made it the case that God did not will that she do *d*, in the sense that God’s will that she do *d* was both logically contingent and mediated by her doing *c*, she could only

have made it the case that God not will that she do *d* if *God* had made it the case that she not do *a*—and this, of course, was outside of her control. Thus whether or not we take some action is, on the divine determinist account, not *ultimately* up to us, but up to God, since any action that we might take to change God's will is ultimately determined by God's will and not our own.

Since this would seem to take care of premise III, we can move on to premise IV: the claim that if we cannot act otherwise than we do, then we lack free will. This premise is obviously quite contentious, and I do not intend to defend it at length here. After all, compatibilists have proposed myriad sufficient conditions for one's will to be free which do not include the ability to do otherwise³³; and various purported counterexamples have been offered to the claim that the ability to do otherwise is necessary for an act to be free.³⁴ Rather than taking on such proposals, or critiquing such counterexamples, I simply mean to point out that the claim made in premise IV does not depend on any difference between natural and non-natural determinism. It is the same claim made by both natural and non-natural incompatibilists, since, as we have seen, being "able" to do otherwise means the same for both; it means that given all of the relevant facts of one's situation, which may include features both of the world and of God, one's action could still be different than it in fact is.

However, despite the intuitive plausibility of this claim, that the inability to do otherwise resulting from non-natural determinism is as problematic for creaturely freedom as the inability to do otherwise resulting from natural determinism, it has been challenged by theologians as well. Tanner, for one, contends that the inability to do otherwise than what God wills is not like the inability to do otherwise than what the prior state of the universe in accordance with the laws

³³ See for instance, the list Lynn Rudder Baker (2003) offers, which was discussed in Chapter I.

³⁴ See for instance, Harry Frankfurt (1969).

of nature entail, but rather like the inability to both do something and not do that thing at the same time. She writes:

What then does the inability of a human agent to do otherwise than God wills *mean* if the human agent's choice is not necessitated by any created conditions? A theologian who holds to our picture of God as creator might claim that this is an inability like that whereby I say that insofar as I *am* choosing to do something I cannot choose *not* to so choose. This inability to do otherwise would be like the creature's inability to do other than what *God* wills in that it would hold even under the most libertarian of circumstances. All it means is that I cannot choose and not choose to do the same thing at the same time. If I *am* choosing to do it at *T*, I *cannot* choose *not to* at *T*. But this sort of inability does not indicate any real inability not to choose at *T* what I *do* choose. (1994, p. 128)

Thus, Tanner concludes, just as lacking the ability to both choose something and not to choose it does not mean that one lacks freedom with respect to one's choice, so the inability to choose otherwise than what God wills does not mean that one lacks freedom with respect to one's choice.

In response to Tanner's objection, it first seems necessary to clarify her claim that one kind of inability is "like" another kind. For this could mean a variety of different things, with respect to the following two propositions:

(A) If God wills that I choose X at some time *t*, then I cannot not choose X at *t*

(B) If I choose X at *t*, then I cannot not choose X at *t*.

First, Tanner might mean that these two propositions have the same *truth-value*; second, she might mean that they have the same *modal status*; or, third, she might mean that these two propositions, or the word "cannot" with them, have the same *meaning*. These three possibilities I will consider in turn.

With respect to the first possibility, it seems quite obvious that if the divine determinist is right, that everything in the world is necessitated by the will of God, then both of these

propositions will indeed be true. But if this were what Tanner meant by claiming that the two inabilityes are “alike,” then she would have to conclude that they were also “like” our inability to make choices that our natural circumstances prevented us from making—for it is also *true* that we are sometimes prevented from acting in a certain way by our physical environment. But presumably Tanner would not want to conclude this, since she means to distinguish non-natural determination from natural determination in that the former does *not* infringe on our freedom in the way that the latter does.

So perhaps Tanner means not simply that these two propositions are *true*, but that they are *necessarily* true. She hints at such an interpretation when she says, shortly after the excerpted passage, “this analogy suggests that my choosing as God wills me to choose follows with the same necessity as my choosing as I do when I am so choosing; and that is a very strong necessity indeed” (1994, p. 128). Now B is, quite clearly, logically necessary, since it is guaranteed by the principle of non-contradiction. But what about A? My earlier point, that the divine determinist’s claim about God’s will necessitating events can be put in terms of a claim about propositional entailments, might seem to imply that A is, in fact, logically necessary. But it does not imply this; for as I said above, this entailment relation holds *only within the possible worlds in which divine determinism is true*. And it does not follow from the claim that divine determinism is true in the actual world that it is true in every possible world. Furthermore, it at least *seems* possible that, even if the world is determined in every respect by God, it might not have been. Indeed, I have already presented, in Chapter I of this paper, an argument for the conclusion that it is possible for God to create a sort of “coin-tossing mechanism” or “randomizing machine” that would determine the outcome of his indeterminate decrees. But if such a mechanism is possible, then we can suppose that God might decree “*either X or Y*,” and that the randomizing machine

might bring about X, even though God might have willed—i.e. wanted—Y to come about instead. But if this state of affairs is possible, then A is not necessarily true. Therefore, A and B are not alike with respect to their modal status.

The third possibility is that Tanner might mean these propositions, or at least the word “cannot” within them, are alike with respect to their meaning. But if what I have just argued is true, that they have different modal statuses, then these two propositions must not have the same meaning. For in some possible worlds A will be false while B will be true; and two propositions cannot mean the same thing if one can be false while the other is true. Likewise, the word “cannot” within these two propositions must not have the same meaning if these two propositions have different modal statuses; for in some possible worlds it will be the case that I *can* not choose X at T, even if God wills that I choose X at T, though I still *cannot* not choose X at T if I choose X at T. So the word “cannot” must refer to two different inabilityes in these two propositions.

Thus on any plausible interpretation of her claim that the inability to choose otherwise than what God wills is “like” the inability to choose otherwise than what one does choose, Tanner seems wrong. The inability to choose otherwise than what God wills is rather like the inability to choose otherwise than what the prior state of the world together with the laws of nature entail that one chooses. And this is precisely the sort of inability that precludes freedom of choice, according to the natural incompatibilist. Therefore non-natural determinism is no less incompatible with creaturely freedom than natural determinism is. Of course, we can affirm various differences between the two sorts of determinism; we can, for instance, agree with Crabtree that, if “nothing in my physical or natural environment required my choice to be what it was” then “a choice that I might make could have been different, so far as physical and natural

necessity is concerned.” And we can agree that if God’s volitions are not themselves necessary, then “God could have caused my choice to be different from what it was—he could have created a different choice” (Crabtree, 2004, p. 218). But this, the incompatibilist will insist, is a point about *divine* freedom, and not human freedom. For what I do, if divine determinism of any sort is true, is ultimately up to God, and not me.

Conclusions

In this chapter I have considered two (mutually exclusive and collectively exhaustive) forms of divine determinism and discussed potential problems with each one. First I argued that natural divine determinism does not allow “room” for a kind of divine action that traditional theism requires: the kind by which God directly brings about events that he specially intends within the course of human history. Then, I argued that although non-natural determinism avoids this problem, it is subject to another difficulty which plagues natural determinism as well: the difficulty of allowing “room” for human freedom. After presenting a new argument for non-natural incompatibilism parallel to the Consequence Argument for natural incompatibilism and defending my argument from various objections, I concluded that if natural determinism is incompatible with human freedom, then so is non-natural determinism. Thus traditional theists have some reason to reject natural divine determinism; and natural incompatibilists at least have some reason to reject non-natural divine determinism.

Chapter III: Divine Determinism and the Problem of Evil

In the latter half of the second chapter, I considered the view called “non-natural (divine) determinism,” which combines the theses of divine determinism and natural indeterminism. I argued that if natural determinism is incompatible with human freedom, then so is non-natural determinism, since they face the same sort of difficulty. This conclusion I believe to be significant, since many divine determinists reject natural determinism precisely because they believe it to be incompatible with human freedom. However, the argument I presented in that chapter will not persuade (and was not intended to persuade) those who believe that natural determinism *is* compatible with human freedom to reject divine determinism, since its conclusion was conditional: *if you believe that natural determinism is not compatible with human freedom, then should believe the same about non-natural determinism.* In this chapter, in contrast, I argue for a categorical conclusion: that all theists have some reason to reject divine determinism (in either of its forms), since it makes irresolvable the problem of evil. More specifically, I contend that divine determinism entails two things: that God is *morally responsible* for the occurrence of human sin, and that God is *blameworthy* for condemning, or at least causing, human sin. After presenting brief arguments for these conclusions, I consider and respond to objections to each in greater detail. I conclude that no (known) divine determinist response to the problem of evil is successful. Then, in the last section of this paper, I respond to the objection that divine *indeterminism* fares no better with respect to the problem of evil than does divine determinism. Since I argue that this objection is mistaken, I maintain that the problem of evil provides theists with a weighty reason to reject divine determinism.

Section 1: Divine Responsibility and Blameworthiness

My arguments for the conclusions that divine determinism makes God both morally responsible for the existence of human sin and blameworthy for condemning or at least causing it will rely on the reasoning put forth in the first half of Edwin Curley's article "The Incoherence of Christian Theism," in which he contends that certain central tenets of Christian theism are inconsistent with divine determinism. Oddly, in this first half of his essay Curley seems to equate divine determinism with *natural* (or what he calls "scientific") divine determinism, which he defines as the thesis that "the state of the world at [any] one time 'fixes' or 'determines' the state of the world at any future time," where this condition is satisfied if and only if "from a total description of the world at one time, and a specification of all of the laws of nature, a total description of the world at any [future] time can be derived by a purely logical, deductive inference" (2003, pp. 75-76). Yet in the second half of the essay, in which he argues that Christian theism is also inconsistent with divine *indeterminism*, Curley defines a divinely indeterministic world as one in which some events are necessitated neither by the laws of nature together with antecedent conditions *nor* by God himself (2003, p. 84). Thus Curley does not consider the possibility that some events in the world are undetermined by the laws of nature together with antecedent conditions, but that all are determined by God, and so he does not offer any argument for the inconsistency of Christian theism with what I have called "non-natural divine determinism." Yet, he does say in a footnote to the first argument that "adopting the broader definition [of divine determinism, as either natural *or* non-natural] at this stage would not make the task of establishing... [the conclusion that Christian theism is incompatible with divine determinism] more difficult, only more complicated" (2003, footnote 6). Since my

arguments against divine determinism are meant to apply to *both* forms of divine determinism, however, I will modify the first of Curley's arguments slightly.

Curley begins his first argument by pointing out that if God determines every event in the world, then he is at least *causally* responsible for everything that happens. But, of course, causal responsibility does not necessarily make one *morally* responsible. Curley mentions two conditions that might exempt a person from moral responsibility for an event that she has caused. First, if a person is compelled to act against her will by some other agent or external force—for instance, if she is pushed against another person and because of this knocks that other person off a cliff—she would normally be considered causally but not morally responsible for the event that she brings about. And second, if a person unintentionally but “without either recklessness or negligence” brings about some event—for instance, food poisoning her dinner guests, when she did not know or have any reason to suspect that there was a problem with the food—she would likewise be considered causally but not morally responsible. Though Curley does not explicitly state this, he suggests that these are the *only* two conditions under which a person might be found causally but not morally responsible for some event that she brings about. He then goes on to point out that, given the traditional conception of divine freedom and divine knowledge, “God... will not escape [moral] responsibility in either of these ways.” For on the one hand, God's being free implies that he “acts in accordance with his own will, and is not determined to act by anything external to himself.” And, on the other hand, God's being omniscient implies that he “has full knowledge of the consequences of his actions” (2003, pp. 76-77). But then, since God does not meet either of the disjunctively necessary conditions that would exempt him from morally responsibility for the events that he brings about, it follows that God *is* morally responsible for everything that occurs in the world—including human sin.

Curley's argument can thus be reconstructed as follows (call this "Argument I"):

- (1) If divine determinism is true then God causes all events that occur in the world, including those involving human sin
- (2) A personal agent is morally responsible for every event she causes unless (A) she is compelled to cause an event against her will by some other agent or external force, or (B) she causes an event unintentionally but without recklessness or negligence
- (3) God is a personal agent who neither is compelled to cause any event against his will nor causes any event unintentionally
- (4) Therefore, if divine determinism is true then God is morally responsible for all events that occur in the world, including those involving human sin.

Before considering various objections that might be raised to this argument, for the conclusion that divine determinism entails God's moral responsibility for human sin, I will briefly lay out the second argument mentioned above, for the further conclusion that divine determinism entails God's morally blameworthiness for condemning or at least causing human sin. Curley's argument for the latter part of this conclusion can be formulated as follows (call this "Argument II"):

- (1) "God is our ultimate... judge, who will reward the goodness of his human creatures" and punish their sinfulness
- (2) A judge who punishes people for sins for which he himself is morally responsible is blameworthy.
- (3) If divine determinism is true, then God is morally responsible for human sins.

- (4) Therefore, if divine determinism is true, then God is blameworthy. (2003, pp. 81-82)

Beginning with the third and last premise of this second argument, we can see that it is identical to the conclusion established by Curley's *first* argument; so nothing more will be said about it here. With respect to the second premise, Curley notes that it has nothing to do with the question of whether human freedom or moral responsibility is compatible with divine determinism. To see why, suppose that a compatibilist view of moral responsibility is correct, such that a person may be subject to punishment for a misdeed so long as she acts intentionally, without either recklessness or negligence, and is not compelled by any external force—even if she cannot do otherwise than she does. As Curley sums up such a view, “the vicious character of the criminal may seem sufficient reason to confine him and try to reform him no matter what the cause of his action” (2003, p. 82). Yet it is an entirely different question, supposing that such a guilty person is determined to act the way she does by some *other* agent, whether it would be just for that *other* agent to punish her for the crime she has committed.

In attempt to motivate the claim that such punishment would *not* be just, Curley draws an analogy to a human situation. He asks us to imagine a judge who “moonlights as the mastermind of a criminal organization,” sending out his subordinates at night “to engage in criminal activities, for example, killing rival gang members.” These subordinates, he suggests, have compatibilist, but not libertarian, freedom: they are not physically compelled by anyone or anything to act, but intentionally and even happily carry out their murderous assignments; and yet they are not capable of doing otherwise than they do. For, “Like a trainer of attack dogs, [their boss] has bred them to be vicious agents of his will.” Curley then asks whether, supposing that this judge “encounters some of his subordinates in his day job, when they are brought to trial

for their criminal acts,” there would be anything wrong with the judge punishing them for the acts that he has caused them to do. Curley suggests that even if “the subordinates... *deserve* punishment, there is something wrong with the picture in which *this judge* decides their punishment.” And what is wrong, Curley maintains, is the gross injustice of his action. Thus, he concludes, if God were to behave in a similar manner to this judge, then God, too, would be acting unjustly, and so would be morally blameworthy for his actions (2003, p. 82).

Moving on to consider the first premise, many would consider this to be a central tenet of traditional theism. Within the Christian tradition, at least, the eschatological judgment of God is affirmed in both the Apostle’s Creed and the Nicene Creed, and various passages in the New Testament strongly suggest that some humans will be condemned for their evil actions or lack of faith.³⁵ As I have already mentioned in the first chapter of this paper, though, the existence of hell is not accepted by all contemporary theists, and some appeal to other biblical texts to support their claim that all people will ultimately be reconciled to God and attain salvation. However, even those who deny that there will be divine *damnation* for sinful humans generally affirm that there will be divine *condemnation* or *judgment* of human sin. Thus, those who prefer to think of God in terms of *condemning* or *judging* rather than *punishing* can simply replace the latter word with one of the former and the argument, *mutatis mutandis*, can get underway.

If this suggested modification to Curley’s argument is not accepted, however—perhaps because even the idea of divine condemnation or judgment seems unpalatable—then I would propose the following alternative argument to Curley’s: if God *causes* humans to commit sin—

³⁵ See, for instance, Mark 16:16 (“the one who does not believe will be condemned”) and John 5:28-29 (“the hour is coming when all who are in their graves... will come out—those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of condemnation”).

that is, to act in ways that *deserve* condemnation—then he is morally blameworthy, *even if he does not actually condemn human sin*. To see why this is so, consider again Curley’s analogy to a human situation. Suppose that the judge who moonlights as the mobster decides, when he meets his subordinates in court, to pardon them of their offenses—perhaps because he takes pity on them, or because he loves them so much that he is moved to forgive them. Would we say that the judge has then done nothing wrong—that his actions do not merit blame? I think it is obvious that we would not. For he intentionally “bred [his subordinates] to be vicious agents” and to commit heinous crimes. Similarly, I would argue, causing humans to commit heinous crimes would be a morally blameworthy act of God, even if he immediately forgave them of their sins without making them undergo any judgment or suffer any punishment.

Now that I have presented preliminary arguments for these conclusions, that divine determinism entails that God is morally responsible for human sin, and blameworthy for condemning or at least causing it, I will move on to consider the various objections that might be raised against them. It seems to me that the potential objections fall into three categories: those that deny that God, while determining all events in the world, is even *causally* responsible for human sin; those that affirm that if God determines all events then he must be causally responsible for them, but deny that he is thus *morally* responsible for sin; and those that affirm that God is morally responsible for the sin he has caused, but maintain that he is not blameworthy for condemning or causing it. The first possibility, that God is not causally responsible for sin even though he determines all events in the world, seems to be embraced by those who espouse a “privative” theory of sin, as well as those who draw a distinction between God’s active causation and passive permission of events. The second possibility, that God is

causally but not morally responsible for sin, seems to be what is claimed by those who advocate a divine command theory of morality. And the third possibility, that God is morally responsible for the occurrence of human sin but not blameworthy for condemning or causing it, seems to be the option preferred by those who offer theodicies to defend the righteousness and justice of God, as well as those who embrace a kind of “skeptical theism” with respect to the problem of evil. It is to these three categories of responses that I now turn.

Section 2: That God is Not Causally Responsible (Privative Evil and Divine Permission)

In this section, I consider how one might respond to Argument I reconstructed above by denying premise 1, the claim that divine determinism entails God's causal responsibility for human sin. The two main ways that theists have gone about objecting to this premise are by maintaining a privative view of moral evil,³⁶ or by distinguishing God's active causation of events from his passive permission. The first type of response is characteristic of Catholic thought, especially Augustinianism and Thomism, while the second is more characteristic of Reformed theology or Calvinism. In laying out these responses and raising objections to them, I will consider the works of just a few writers of each tradition. Yet I will suggest that the problems that I point out generalize, such that neither type of response, in its various incarnations, will be successful in absolving God of causal responsibility for human sin.

Privative Evil

The privative view of evil seems to have been embraced by both Augustine and Aquinas at different points in their careers. Today, it is most popular among scholars writing in the traditions of these two historical figures. Thus I will begin my examination of the privation view with a consideration of their own work. Though I will attempt to sort out what Augustine and Aquinas actually said and thought about the nature of human sin, however, my main concern will be with the defenses of their views offered by contemporary philosophers and theologians. I will

³⁶ In this section I use the terms "sin" and "moral evil" interchangeably, following the convention of those whose work I engage.

argue that the privative view of evil is both implausible in itself and unhelpful to divine determinists in their attempt to show that God is not causally responsible for human sin. Since Augustine's view of moral evil seems less developed than that of Aquinas—who cites Augustine's writings frequently but goes on to work out Augustine's ideas in interesting new ways—I will start with Augustine's view; after considering some questions that it leaves unanswered, I will go on to discuss how Aquinas tries (and fails) to resolve them.

William Mann gives a careful exposition of Augustine's understanding of moral evil in his essay entitled "Augustine on evil and original sin," in which he begins by explaining the motivation behind Augustine's adoption of the privative view. In Augustine's day, Mann says, one popular account of the existence of evil was the Manichean one: that there exist "two opposing cosmic forces," one good and one evil, which "incessantly contend" for control over the world (2001, p. 40). Augustine rejected this dualist view, since he believed that God is sovereign over creation and that "no being can be supremely sovereign if there is another being over which it cannot prevail." Moreover, Augustine maintained that there is no room for evil forces *per se* in the world, since "God's sovereignty over all other things is grounded in the fact that he *created* them" and since everything God creates is good (2001, p. 41). Thus Augustine concluded, "every creature is good insofar as it exists" (2001, p. 43).

How, then, did Augustine account for the evil that was evident in the world? Mann explains that according to Augustine, "The word 'evil,' when predicated of creatures, refers to a privation, an absence of goodness where goodness might have been" (2001, p. 44). Thus Augustine reasoned that natural evils—the sickness, injury, disability, etc. which cause pain and suffering in sentient creatures—are not positively existing evil things, but mere defects in physical bodies, i.e. lacks of positive being within God's creation. And Augustine reasoned

likewise about moral evil, that since there can be no evil things in the world, there can be no evil desires, i.e. desires for evil things; so sin must simply be the result of one good desire, i.e. a desire for something good, prevailing over another *better* desire. As Augustine put the point, “sin is not a desire for naturally evil things, but an abandonment of better things. And this itself is evil, not that nature which the sinner uses evilly. For evil is to use a good evilly” (cited in Mann 2001, p. 45). Thus, like suffering, sin does not result from some positively evil feature of a created being, but from some lack of a good feature. In the case of sin, this would seem to be the lack of a volition for a greater good over a lesser one.

Now it will be important to keep in mind, in evaluating the privative theory of evil, that for Augustine and those following his lead in attempting to exonerate God of causal responsibility for human sin, the absence or defect that characterizes moral evil must be not simply a *moral* absence or defect, but a *metaphysical* one. That is, moral evil must be characterized by some lack of *being*. Divine determinists need to assert this in order to maintain that the God who creates all that has being and determines every event that occurs is not even *causally* responsible for human sin.

Given this sketch of Augustine’s view of evil, several questions might be raised about it. Though there seem to be difficulties with his accounts of both natural and moral evil, I will focus my own questions on the latter category. First, one might ask: isn’t the *volition*, i.e. the will’s choosing the lesser good over the greater good, itself some evil *thing*, which has positive being? After all, if we admit that a good volition—i.e. a volition resulting from a desire for a greater good prevailing over a desire for a lesser good—has positive being, shouldn’t we also admit, by parity of reasoning, that an evil volition—i.e. a volition resulting from a desire for a lesser good prevailing over a desire for a greater good—also has positive being? For, evil and good volitions

are the same sort of thing—“movements” of the will, as Augustine put it, which result in the prevailing of one desire over another. But then if we admit that evil volitions have positive being, does it not follow that a God who creates everything that has being is also causally responsible for such evil volitions?

In fact, Augustine refuses to admit that an evil volition for a lesser good is itself a positively existing thing. In responding to the question of whether the fact that there is in God’s creation a sinful “movement” of the will from a greater to a lesser good means that God is “the author of the sin,” he writes:

... that movement will not be from God. From whence then will it come? If I respond thus to your querying – that I do not know – perhaps you will be disappointed – but nevertheless I would response truly. For that which is nothing cannot be known. (quoted in Mann, 2001, p. 45)

There seem to be various ways to interpret this passage, but I will start with Mann’s own. He writes: “the cause of the will’s movement away from God is unknowable non-being... Just as God’s will in creating has no cause, so a human’s will in sinning has no cause” (2001, p. 46).

Now, it is unclear to me what Mann means by saying that the cause of the evil volition is “unknowable non-being,” unless he simply means that *there is no cause*. And indeed, this is what he says in the next sentence. But then, if an event in the world has no cause at all—either in the world or in God—then this event is *undetermined*. And so this interpretation of Augustine would be inconsistent with the thesis of divine determinism.

An alternative interpretation of Augustine’s words which is consistent with divine determinism would be this: the evil volition of the will is not some positively existing thing that has no cause; rather, it exists and has a cause, which is ultimately determined by God; but whatever it is that makes the volition *evil* is some lack of being, for which God is not causally

responsible. This would seem to make sense of Augustine's description of the evil volition as "that which is nothing." But if this interpretation is consistent with divine determinism and at least with some of what Augustine has to say, it still leaves certain pressing questions unanswered. For it still does not explain how the evil-making feature of the evil volition is actually a lack of being, and so how God could fail to be causally responsible for it.

Thus it may help to turn to Aquinas' view of moral evil; for Aquinas fills in certain details in Augustine's view to answer these very questions. Aquinas' view is explained and defended by W. Matthews Grant in his recent article, "Aquinas on how God Causes the Act of Sin without Causing Sin Itself."³⁷ As the title would suggest, Aquinas acknowledges that God causes the *act* of sin. This follows from his identification of God, in his *quinque viae*, or five arguments for God's existence, with the "unmoved source of all motion and cause of all being apart from itself," together with his conception of the act of sin as both "a being" and "a movement of the free will" (2009, p. 455). On the other hand, Aquinas denies that God causes *sin* itself. According to Grant, Aquinas attempts to answer the question of how God could be the cause of the *act* of sin without being the cause of *sin* by maintaining that sin is "an act with a defect," and "it is the defect that renders the act sinful." Grant goes on to explain that according

³⁷ Grant does not actually call Aquinas a "determinist," since, he says, Aquinas thought that "God's causing or bringing about some effect within creation will not involve any real or intrinsic state or property of God that would not be there were he not causing that effect," and since a change in such an intrinsic state or property would be required for God to truly be said to *determine* the effect he causes (since without such a change there would be nothing about God which is both logically sufficient for and prior to the effect itself, and since such logical sufficiency and priority are required for a cause to truly be said to *determine* an effect) (Grant 2002). This argument is too complex to comment on here, but it suffices for my purposes that, according to Grant, Aquinas believed that God *caused* every event that occurs in the world, including acts of sin.

to Aquinas, “To cause a sin... one must cause both the act and the defect. But, while the creature causes both, God does not cause the defect, only the act” (2009, p. 456).

To flesh out Aquinas’ view a bit more, Grant explains that a person causes the defect in an act of sin by a particular “absence of action” on her part—namely, by her failure to apply “the rule of reason and divine law” to figure out what she ought to do (2009, p. 462). For instance, suppose that a person sins, on some occasion, by failing to honor her father and mother, and that this sin follows a prior failure on her part, to consider the moral precept “thou shalt honor thy father and mother.” If this prior “defect of will” is what causes her failure to honor her father and mother, then she herself can be said to cause her sin. But, Grant maintains, God cannot be said to cause either the prior absence of act that causes her to sin (her failure to consider the moral precept), or the sin itself (her failure to honor her father and mother)—for both are mere *defects* or *lacks* of being, and God is the cause of only that which has positive being.

Now one obvious objection to this view, which Grant himself considers, is that it is inconsistent to say that a *person* can be the cause of a defect but that *God* cannot. Grant puts the objection this way: “If the defect in the act of sin is caused by the sinner in virtue of what the sinner does not do (his not considering... the rule) why isn’t it also caused by God in virtue of what God does not do (God’s not causing the sinner’s act of consideration)?” (2009, p. 477). In response, Grant contends that some absences of action constitute the explanation of an event while others do not. For instance, he says, the event of fish food’s still floating in the water of an aquarium hours after it has been dropped there is explained by the fish’s not eating the food, but is *not* explained by the aquarium plants’ not eating the food; so, an absence of action on the part of the fish can be said to cause the event, but such an absence on the part of the plants cannot. After considering such examples, Grant attempts to specify a set of conditions, which he claims

are consistent with Aquinas' own writings on the subject, under which "a substance's not performing some act constitutes an explanation of something such that we can say that the substance causes the thing being explained in virtue of its non-performance" (2009, p. 481). He then argues that, with respect to human sin, a person's failure to consider the moral rule meets these conditions, while God's failure to cause the person to consider the rule or to act in a non-sinful way does not. Grant writes: "Effect *e* is caused by substance *S* in virtue of *S*'s not \emptyset -ing if and only if":

- (a) *S*'s \emptyset -ing would have insured or at least made it likely that *e* not occur
- (b) *S* had the power to \emptyset , and
- (c) *S* ought to have \emptyset -ed (2009, p. 485).

On the one hand, where *e* is a sinful act, *S* is the person who commits *e*, and to \emptyset is to consider the moral precept, Grant contends that all of the above conditions are satisfied. Condition (a) is satisfied, according to the Thomistic view he has laid out, since the person would not have sinned in this way if she *had* considered the moral precept. With respect to condition (b), Grant does not spell out the sense in which a person has the "power" to do otherwise than sin; but, he maintains, "the resolution to our... objection does not hinge on specifying the precise sort of power that figures in condition (b)" (2009, p. 487). Now of course there is an obvious sense in which, on the view Grant attributes to Aquinas, if God did not cause a person to consider the moral precept then the person did *not* have the power to consider it, since she did not have the power to do otherwise than what God caused her to do. However, when Grant considers this point, he responds by noting that a presupposition of his essay is that human freedom is compatible with Aquinas' view of divine causation. Thus he suggests that "power" is to be taken in what I have called the "non-natural compatibilist" sense, i.e. the power

to do otherwise with respect to one's natural environment, though not with respect to God's efficacious will. And so it would seem that condition (b) is also satisfied. Finally, Grant says that condition (c) is satisfied, since according to the Thomistic view, one "ought to perform the activities to which one is naturally inclined," and human beings are naturally inclined to "govern themselves by the moral rule" (2009, pp. 485-487).

On the other hand, though, Grant maintains that where e is a sinful act, S is God, and to \emptyset is to cause the person who commits e to consider the moral precept or to act in a non-sinful way, not all of the conditions are satisfied. Of course, condition (a) is satisfied, since according to the view Grant attributes to Aquinas, God's causation is not only necessary but also sufficient for every free human action that occurs; and condition (b) is satisfied, since it is within God's power to cause humans to do otherwise than they do. But, Grant maintains, condition (c) is not satisfied, for two reasons. First, "God cannot fail to do what he ought, since he is subject to no rule distinct from himself, but is his own rule and measure (2009, p. 489). And second, "It makes sense to say that a substance 'ought' to perform certain activities only on the supposition that those activities are needed... for the substance to attain its own end" i.e. when there is a "gap... between the creature and its full perfection, a gap that must be traversed by action"; but, Grant maintains, "there is no such gap, there are no such activities, in the case of God" (2009, p. 490). Thus Grant concludes that while humans are causally responsible for their sins, God is not.

It seems to me that there are at least three problems with the sort of argument that Grant presents, such it fails to absolve God of causal responsibility for human sin. First, the privative conception of sin on which the argument depends seems false, since in many cases there does not seem to be any real defect in sin, nor any absence of action on the sinner's part that causes it.

Second, the necessary conditions Grant lays out for causal responsibility are either all met by God's failure to prevent a person from sinning, or are not all met by a person's failure to consider the moral rule which leads her to sin, depending on how one interprets one of the conditions; and third, even if all of these conditions were met with respect to a person's failure not to sin, but that one was not met with respect to God's failure to prevent a person from sinning, that one condition would in fact be unnecessary for causal responsibility anyway. I will now consider these three objections, in turn.

First, it should be noted that Grant's argument depends on two Thomistic assumptions: (1) that sin is "an act with a defect," and (2) that the defect of the act is caused by an "absence of action" on the part of the sinner. The first assumption is necessary for the argument since if the sinfulness of an action were due not to some defect, but instead to some positive feature of the action, then God, who creates and sustains all that has positive being/motion, would be the cause of that feature as well. The second assumption is also necessary for his argument, since if a person's sinful action were caused not by an absence of action, but by some prior positive action on her part, then God, who creates and sustains all that has positive being/motion, would be the cause of that prior action, and so would be the indirect cause of the sin by causing that which caused the sin.

And yet, both of these assumptions seem false. To start with the first, we might ask just what it means to say that sin is "an act with a defect." As we have just seen, it does not mean merely that the sinful action is *caused* by an absence of action on the sinner's part (this is the second assumption) but that some sort of defect characterizes the sin itself. But what sort of defect might that be? The example I have considered above, of a person not honoring her father

and mother, suggests that the sin might itself be an absence of action. For instance, the person might fail to show respect in some way such as by greeting her parents with an appropriate gesture, listening to them when they speak, or following their advice. But of course, disrespect of one's parents can take the form not only of a sin of *omission*—of leaving undone things which ought to be done—but also of a sin of *commission*—of *doing* things which ought *not* to be done. One might make some rude gesture toward one's parents, for instance, or shout over them to be heard. And the same is true with respect to most other sins that are proscribed by the “rule of reason and divine law.” Indeed, the majority of the Ten Commandments take the form of *negative* injunctions, to refrain from some *positive* act: thou shalt *not* murder, steal, commit adultery, bear false witness, and so on. But when a person murders or steals there is no action that she can plausibly be said to *refrain* from doing. Rather, she is sinning by *acting*.

But perhaps Grant means not that sin is always characterized by the absence of an action, but that a sinful act is constituted in part by the lack of some positive feature. For instance, a lack of love for, or fear of, one's parents might be constitutive of one's positive acts of disrespect toward them, a lack of compassion for one's victims or of desire for their good might be constitutive of one's acts of murdering them, and a lack of understanding of the value of private property might be constitutive of one's acts of stealing. And so perhaps Grant means to generalize from such examples and claim that a lack of some feeling (such as of concern or care or love) or desire (such as for the good of others) or belief (such as in the harm that one's action is causing) is constitutive of *all* sinful actions.

Yet, again, this does not seem to be true of all sinful actions. For some seem to be partly constituted not by the *absence* of some good feature of the sinner's psyche, but by the *presence* of some bad feature. Todd Calder makes this point in his essay “Is the Privation Theory of Evil

Dead?” in which he argues that the privative theory is unable to account for certain paradigmatic cases of evil actions. Calder admits that “some evils are mostly privative in nature”—for instance, “extreme callousness resulting in significant harm.” He writes: “The extremely callous person commits an evil act when his indifference to his victim’s suffering is coupled with a desire for... something inconsistent with his victim being spared significant harm...” Yet Calder contrasts acts of extreme callousness with acts of “malicious torture,” which, he suggests, are constituted in part by “a desire for a victim’s significant harm” as something which in and of itself would bring the torturer pleasure (2007, p. 379). Calder contends, “the malicious torturer is not just as good as she might be.... Her actions are positively bad and these are constituted by attributes she possesses, i.e., desires for other people’s pain for pleasure...” (2007, p. 373). But, if malicious torture is a sin—which it surely is—then sin cannot always be defined as an act that simply lacks some positive feature, such as a belief or desire or feeling in the actor. For it is sometimes constituted in part by a desire which is in itself evil—a desire, that is, for the suffering of others.

Now, one might respond to this objection by suggesting that even the malicious torturer is lacking in some positive feature that other people have—for instance, a feeling of compassion for others, or a desire for their wellbeing, or an understanding of the harm she is doing by torturing them. But even if this is true, still it is not this lack that makes her a malicious torturer. For without the additional desire for the suffering of others because of the pleasure she gets from witnessing their pain, she would merely be a *callous* person. What makes her downright *malicious* is this positive feature of her psyche.

But then, if the defect that supposedly characterizes sin is neither the absence of some action, nor the lack of some feature of the actor’s psyche, such as a belief, desire, or feeling, then

what is it? The only answer Grant gives is this: “the defect that makes the act sinful is a privation, in particular a *lack of conformity to moral rule or order*” (2007, p. 457, italics added). In other words, Grant suggests that it is the act’s failure to conform the moral precept that the actor has failed to consider which constitutes the defect that makes the act sinful. So, for instance, what makes a person’s act of murder a sin is its failure to conform to the precept “thou shalt not murder.”

But is this failure of an act to conform to a moral precept really a *defect* of the act, in the relevant sense of the word? It seems not. For first, though Grant characterizes this failure in terms of the *lack* of some property—the property of conforming to a moral precept—it seems just as easy to characterize it in terms of the *presence* of some property—the property of violating a moral precept.³⁸ And, second, even if this failure were more properly characterized as the lack of some property than as the presence of one, it would still not be the sort of lack that the divine determinist needs it to be. For recall that the privative theory of evil is supposed to show how God could be not even causally responsible for sin. And since, on the divine determinist view under consideration, God is the source of all being (apart from himself) and the cause of all motion, the divine determinist needs to show that sin is at least partly constituted by an absence of *being* or *motion*—in other words, that it is *metaphysically* defective. But to say that some positively existing action is defective in the sense that it lacks some moral property is not to say that it is lacking in being or motion, or that it is metaphysically defective; it is simply to say that sin is *morally* defective—a point which should be quite obvious.

³⁸ This was pointed out to me by Elliott Sober, personal communication, April 2011.

Calder makes a similar point when he criticizes the view of Donald Cress, who characterizes moral evil as “not simply a matter of lacking this or that integral part” but as the failure to achieve “the level of perfection” appropriate to one’s species. Calder responds:

This defense may save the [privative] theory, but it does so at the cost of making it utterly vacuous. Certainly evil is a lack of perfection, that is implied by the normativity implicit in the concept. But if the privation theory says anything at all, it says that, as a lack of perfection, evil consists in the lack of some attribute, property or substance. It is only by denying that evil has positive existence as attribute, property or substance that the privation theory helps solve the problem of evil by implying that all created being is good. (2007, p. 375)

But the same, I would argue, may be said about Grant’s theory of the defective nature of sin. Recall how he claims that God can cause the act of sin without causing the *sin* itself, since the sin consists of both the act and a defect and God does not cause the defect. But if what is defective about the act turns out simply to be its *sinfulness*—that is, its failure to conform to a moral precept—and not some real lack of being or motion, then there can be no distinction between the act of sin and the sin itself, such that someone could be causally responsible for the former but not the latter. In other words, the One who is the source of all being and motion must be the cause of sin as well.

Although I believe this is enough to establish the implausibility of the first assumption on which Grant’s argument relies—that sin is “an act with a defect”—I will briefly discuss the second assumption on which the argument depends, which seems to me equally implausible. Recall that according to the Thomistic view that Grant defends, the defect of the sinful act is caused by “an absence of action” on the part of the sinner, and this absence is the sinner’s failure to consider “the rule of reason and the divine law.” Now again, this claim seems, at first, quite substantial and so controversial. For on the face of it, Grant seems to be implying that it would be impossible for a person to decide to commit murder while considering the moral precept

“thou shalt not murder.” And if this were what Grant was claiming, he would seem to be wrong. For it seems entirely possible that someone do just that: decide to act in some way, perhaps because the act would benefit oneself, even while considering that the act would be in violation of some moral precept.

However, Grant goes on to weaken this initial claim, by offering two interpretations of what it might mean. According to the first, the sinner “does not have the rule in mind at the moment of choice” (2009, p. 469). This is how I have just interpreted the claim, as implying the impossibility of choosing to do some act even while considering that it is morally wrong. And interpreted this way, the claim seems substantial, but false. But according to the second interpretation that Grant offers, the sinner “can have multiple orders of reason in mind at the time of choice, including the one that contains the rule,” but the will can fail to “subject itself to the rule” which it is considering. Now of course, as Grant says, this second interpretation “is not even superficially vulnerable to the sort of objections raised against the first,” (2005, p. 473) since it allows for the possibility that a person can commit some act even as she considers that it is morally wrong. But then, this supposed virtue of the second interpretation turns out to be a vice—for it so weakens the claim as to make it vacuous. For what initially appeared to be the *absence* of some feature—the consideration of a moral precept—turns out to be simply the failure of the person to conform her decision to the moral precept that she is considering. In other words, the purported defectiveness is simply the decision to commit sin, rather than not. But again, this is not a real defect, of being or motion, at all. And since Grant’s argument depends on there being a real defect, or absence of action, which leads up to and causes the sinful act, his argument cannot depend on this interpretation. For if the purported defect is simply the decision to commit sin, then God can, and on Grant’s view does, cause this decision as well.

These two problems with Grant's version of the privation theory of sin seem enough to prove the unsoundness of his argument that God is not causally responsible for sin. For if either of his initial assumptions—that sin is lacking in some sort of being, or that it is caused by some absence of action—are false, which I have argued that they both seem to be, then his conclusion is without justification. However, in case my arguments against these two assumptions are not entirely convincing, I will point out two further problems with Grant's reasoning.

One other problem with Grant's argument lies in his claim that God's failure to cause a person to consider the moral law and so act in a non-sinful way does not meet all of the conditions necessary for causal responsibility, such that God cannot truly be said to cause the person's sin. In particular, Grant claims that the third condition is not met, since God never ought to cause anyone to consider the moral law. Grant offers two reasons for this. First, he says, God can never fail to do what he ought, "since he is subject to no rule distinct from himself, but is his own rule and measure (2009, p. 489). And second, he says, a substance only "ought" to perform activities which are needed "for the substance to attain its own end" or to traverse a "gap" between its current state and its "full perfection"; but for God, "there is no such gap, there are no such activities" (2009, p. 490). Both of these reasons seem problematic to me, so I will take them in turn.

The claim that God is subject to no rule distinct from himself may be interpreted in two ways. According to the first, God's existence and attributes, including his moral perfection, are necessary, and moral truths are dependent on and determined by the divine nature; so, moral truths are themselves necessarily true. It follows from this that God cannot fail to do what he

ought to do, since he is necessarily morally perfect—and so Grant is right to conclude that “when God does not perform some act, it cannot be the case that he ought to have performed it” (2009, p. 489). However, it does *not* follow from this that God has no moral obligations, or that God is not obligated to cause people to consider the moral law or to act in non-sinful ways. All that follows is that if God has any moral obligations, then he necessarily fulfills them. So, if this is what Grant means by saying that God is “subject to no rule distinct from himself”—that is, that moral truths are part of God’s nature, which is necessary—then he cannot validly conclude that God has no moral obligation to cause people not to sin.

But perhaps Grant means something else by claiming that God is subject to no rule distinct from himself; perhaps he means that moral truths are contingent, and determined by the divine will. But, not only would a divine command theory of morality seem inconsistent with Aquinas’ own view on the matter,³⁹ but moreover once such a theory is accepted, the appeal to a privative conception of evil in attempt to absolve God of causal responsibility for sin becomes unnecessary. For if a divine command theory of morality is true, then it does not matter whether sin is a privation of being or motion, or rather some sort of positively existing substance or property; indeed, it does not matter if God is *causally* responsible for sin at all. For whatever God does, or does not do, is—by definition—not morally evil. Thus, the appeal to a divine command theory will be set aside for now and examined in the next section of this paper, in which I consider whether divine determinism really entails that God is *morally* responsible for human sin.

³⁹ See, for instance, *Summa Theologica* I-II.94.5, where Aquinas says that the “first principles” of natural law are not changeable in the sense that “what previously was according to the natural law, ceases to be so.”

For now, I will move on to consider the second reason Grant offers for his claim that

God has no moral obligation to cause people not to sin. He writes:

It makes sense to say that a substance ‘ought’ to perform certain activities only on the supposition that those activities are needed, either instrumentally or constitutively, for the substance to attain its end. Fire ought to burn wood, dogwoods ought to bloom, eagles ought to fly, and human beings ought to govern themselves by the moral rule—all because such creatures are ordered to these activities and need to perform them in order to achieve their respective goods. There is a gap, as it were, between the creature and its full perfection, a gap that must be traversed by action. But there is no such gap, and there are no such activities, in the case of God. God has the end and good in himself. Thus, while the rational creature needs, in certain situations, to consider the rule in order to attain his end, God need not cause the creature’s act of consideration in order to attain his. (2009, pp. 490-491).

Grant’s claim here, that human beings ought to govern themselves by the moral rule but that it is not the case that God ought to cause them to do so, might seem to require “ought” to be interpreted in a prudential or pragmatic sense. In other words, Grant might seem to be saying that what a substance ought to do is just what is in its own interest, or what is needed for the substance to realize its full potential. This would make sense of Grant’s claim a dogwood ought to bloom, and an eagle ought to fly, for such activities are necessary for the substances’ survival and wellbeing. If the eagle did not fly, it could not find prey or escape predators, and if the dogwood did not bloom, it could not reproduce. Thus in order to survive and reproduce, to flourish and realize its full potential as the sort of thing it was meant to be, each substance must do such activities as are “ordered” to its nature.

If the prudential or pragmatic sense of the term is what Grant means, then he seems right that there is nothing that God *ought* to do. For God has no potential that is not already realized, or good ordered to his nature that God has yet to achieve. And so, there are no activities that God needs to do in order to be what he was “meant” to be. God could do nothing at all, and still be

perfect, sufficient, and complete. However, if Grant does mean “ought” in a prudential or pragmatic sense here, then he seems wrong to say that human beings always *ought* to govern themselves by the moral rule. For it is not true that fulfilling one’s moral obligations is always in one’s own interest or for one’s own good, or that one always needs to do the morally right thing in order to realize one’s potential. For, first of all, sometimes doing the right thing requires sacrificing one’s own wellbeing for that of others, such that one’s prudential or pragmatic “obligations” would in fact require failing to fulfill one’s moral obligations. And second, even a morally perfect person, one who has achieved her “potential” as the sort of substance she was meant to be, still has things she ought to do. For her moral obligations to others do not suddenly cease as soon as she becomes perfect.

Now, one might object to this second point by noting that if a purportedly perfect person stops fulfilling her moral obligations, then she is no longer morally perfect; and so, perfection for human beings requires continual striving to govern themselves according to the moral rule. But the same might be said about God. For to be a *morally* perfect being, God must always do what is morally required of him. Of course, if God is necessarily morally perfect, as Grant seems to believe, then it is not possible for God to fail to do the morally right thing. But this does not mean that there are no activities “ordered” to God’s nature as the sort of being—a morally perfect one—that God is.

Another way of putting this point is that our prudential or pragmatic “obligations”—i.e. those things that we ought to do because they are in our own interest or for our own good—are not identical to, or exhaustive of, our *moral* obligations. For our moral obligations concern not simply our *own* interests or ends, but those of others who our actions have the potential to affect. And so, on the one hand, if Grant means “ought” in this prudential or pragmatic sense, then he is

wrong that humans always ought to do what is morally required of them, since sometimes doing so does not serve their interests or ends. But on the other hand, if Grant means “ought” in the moral sense, then he is wrong to conclude that there is nothing God ought to do. For although God “has the end and good in himself” such that he has no prudential or pragmatic obligations, God may very well still have moral obligations; after all, what God does or fails to do has quite considerable effects on others! Thus it seems that either way one interprets Grant’s third necessary condition for causal responsibility, his argument fails. For he has failed to prove either that God never ought to prevent a person from sinning, or that humans always ought not to sin.

So far I have pointed out two problems with Grant’s argument: first, it requires a privative conception of sin that seems implausible, since some sinful acts have no real defect in themselves and no lack of action on the part of the sinner causing them; and second, God’s failure to cause a person not to sin seems to satisfy all of the conditions which Grant claims are necessary for causal responsibility. The third problem I wish to point out is that, regardless of whether God’s failure to cause a person to consider a moral rule does indeed satisfy the third and final condition, the condition is not, in fact, necessary for causal responsibility. Recall once more what the condition states: that in order for a substance to be causally responsible for an event’s occurrence in virtue of not performing some action, the action must be one that the substance *ought* to perform, where a substance “ought” to perform an action if and only if it is an action to which the substance is “naturally inclined.” Now, this condition seems plausible enough if we consider only cases in the natural world, in which the actions to which a substance is naturally inclined are precisely those that are within its natural powers to perform, such that conditions (b) and (c) amount to the same thing. For instance, returning to Grant’s own example, it seems

plausible that the reason the plants in an aquarium cannot be said cause the fish food's floating in the water is that consuming fish food is not an act to which plants are naturally inclined. But in this case, to say that plants lack a "natural inclination" to eat fish food is just to say that it is not within their natural powers to consume fish food. However, in cases in which (b) and (c) come apart, such that a substance has the power to perform some action to which it is not naturally inclined, it would seem that one could still be held causally responsible for not performing the action. Here is a case I have in mind. Suppose that an evil demon has created the world, and determined every event that occurs within it. And suppose that, while this demon has the power to cause people to do good deeds (in at least whatever compatibilist sense of "power" Grant has in mind), he is naturally inclined to allow all sorts of sin and suffering in the world instead, since he is "ordered" or oriented toward evil. Now it seems clear that even if it is in virtue of some lack of action on the evil demon's part that sin and suffering occur the world, the demon could truly be said to *cause* the sin and suffering, since (a) the demon's performing some action would have insured that the sin and suffering did not occur and (b) the demon had it within his power to perform such an action. Thus, condition (c), a natural inclination to perform some action that would insure that some event did not occur, seems unnecessary to assign causal responsibility for the event's occurring.

In conclusion, I have argued that Grant's argument is flawed in at least three respects: first, the privative conception of sin on which it depends seems false; second, the necessary conditions he lays out for causal responsibility are either all met by God's failure to prevent a person from sinning, or are not all met by a person's failure to consider the moral rule that would lead to her not sinning, depending on how one interprets the third of the conditions; and third,

even if all of these conditions were met with respect to the person's failure but that the third was not met with respect to God's failure, that third condition would in fact be unnecessary for causal responsibility anyway. Thus, Grant's argument fails to prove that God is not causally responsible for human sin.

Of course, I have only considered two variations of the privative theory of sin—Augustine's, as interpreted by Mann, and Aquinas', as interpreted by Grant—and so, strictly speaking, it does not follow from my arguments that *any* variation of the theory would be unhelpful to the divine determinist in attempting to absolve God of causal responsibility for sin. However, I would suggest that any privative theory of sin to which a divine determinist might appeal in such an attempt would be subject at least to the first problem I have pointed out with Grant's version, since it would be unable to account for sins of commission which do not seem to result from any real lack of being or absence of action on the part of the agent. Moreover, it seems to me that any plausible set of necessary conditions which a divine determinist might lay out for causal responsibility either *would not* be met by a person's failure not to sin, or *would* be met by God's failure to prevent a person from sinning. And so, I tentatively conclude that the privative theory of evil is no help to the divine determinist in responding to the charge that her view entails God's causal responsibility for sin.

Divine Permission

Whereas divine determinists writing in the Catholic tradition of Augustine or Aquinas tend to emphasize the privative theory of evil in their attempt to absolve God of causal responsibility for human sin, those writing in the Reformed tradition of John Calvin often instead

draw a distinction between different sorts of divine volitions, maintaining that, whereas God's willing of good human action is "active," God's willing of evil human action is merely "passive." Such Reformed scholars argue that this distinction between different sorts of divine volitions does not face the problems plaguing the privative theory of evil, but allows them to conclude that God does not cause, but only permits, human sin. For instance, after criticizing the privative theory as being "obscure," Paul Helm writes, "Nevertheless, it provides a key idea which is central to a second model for understanding divine providence and human agency – the idea of the divine *permission* of evil" (1993, p. 171). Helm goes on to suggest that the concept of divine permission is more intelligible than that of privative evil. However, after examining the concept of divine permission in more depth, I will argue that it is either inconsistent with divine determinism, or of no help to the divine determinist in her attempt to absolve God of causal responsibility for sin.

The idea of divine permission often arises in the context of a discussion about predestination, and whether God predestines the reprobate to damnation as well and in the same way as he predestines the elect to salvation. In response to the charge that their divine determinism entails such "symmetrical" predestination, Calvinists insist that their position has been misrepresented. The view that God acts "in the same way... with respect to the elect and the reprobate," by "positively and actively" intervening in their lives to "bring them to" salvation or damnation is, as the Reformed theologian R. C. Sproul, has written, "not the Reformed view of predestination, but a gross and inexcusable caricature of the doctrine." According to their view, such Calvinist writers explain, there is an asymmetry between God's action with respect to the elect and the reprobate. In the former case, God "positively" or "actively" intervenes in people's lives, bringing them to faith and causing them to do good deeds. But in the latter case,

God merely “withholds” grace from people, “passing them by and leaving them to themselves” in their sin and unbelief (Sproul 2011).

Sproul documents how this “positive-negative schema” within the doctrine of predestination has been consistently maintained by all of the most prominent theologians of the Reformed tradition—“Zanchius, Turretini, Edwards, Hodge, Warfield, Bavinck, Berkouwer, *et al*”—as well as by the authors of the 16th and 17th century Reformed confessions. Below is a sampling of these confessions, in which the distinction between God’s active causation in saving and passive permission in damning is highlighted.

Belgic Confession of Faith: We believe that all the posterity of Adam, being thus fallen into perdition and ruin... God then did manifest himself such as he is... MERCIFUL, since *he delivers and preserves from this perdition* all whom he... hath elected... without respect to their works: JUST, in *leaving others in the fall and perdition* wherein they have involved themselves.

Westminster Confession of Faith: They who are elected . . . are effectually *called* unto faith in Christ by [God’s] Spirit working in due season, are *justified, adopted, sanctified, and kept by His power*, through faith, unto salvation.... The rest of mankind God was pleased, according to the unsearchable counsel of His own will, whereby He *extendeth or withholdeth* mercy... *to pass by*; and to ordain them to dishonour and wrath for their sin.

Second Helvetic Confession: As often as God in Scripture is said or seems to do something evil, it is not thereby said that man does not do evil, but that *God permits it and does not prevent it*, according to his just judgment, who could prevent it if he wished.... (all cited in Sproul 2011, italics added)

In all of these texts, the authors are quite careful to describe God’s relation to the elect in active terms—choosing, calling, delivering, preserving, justifying, sanctifying, etc.—and his relation to the reprobate in passive terms—leaving, passing by, withholding, not preventing, etc. Though their intention to draw such a distinction is obvious, however, it is not clear from what they write how such a distinction is supposed to be consistent with the divine determinism which they espouse. For God’s *leaving alone* or *passing by* a creature would seem to be a case of his

not exercising control over what that creature does. At least, when we permit our fellow creatures to do something, our permission seems to be constituted by our *not determining* the creature's action. But this would, of course, be incompatible with divine determinism.

Yet Calvinist scholars maintain that the sort of *general* permission that we may grant in our interactions with fellow creatures is different from the sort of *specific* permission that is characteristic of God's passive will. Paul Helm, for instance, illustrates the difference this way:

John may be leaving the country and gives his friend Joe permission to use his car while he is away. This is general permission; no particular uses of the car are specified. While Joe has the car he may go in it wherever he wants. Although John, by his permission, is *affecting* Joe's movements (for John now has the use of a car), he is not *controlling* his movements.

Helm acknowledges that God's giving only such general permission to his creatures would be incompatible with God's determining all events that occur in the world. Thus, he concludes, on the divine determinist view, "the permission in question must be *specific*." Helm goes on to define specific permission as follows:

God ordains all those circumstances which are necessary for the performance by a person of a particular morally evil action.... God does not himself perform that action.... Nevertheless, he *permits* that action to take place. He does not prevent it.... So in the circumstances ordained by God someone does an evil action; the circumstances are ordained, but the evil is permitted. (1993, pp. 171-172)

Thus, according to Helm, God specifically permits an action whenever he ordains all of the conditions necessary for that action to take place (i.e. the sufficient conditions for its occurrence), but does not perform the action himself.

If Helm's definition of specific permission helps clarify the concept and show its compatibility with divine determinism, however, it again raises the question of how such purportedly *passive* permission is different than God's *active* causation of events. For according to the divine determinist, God determines all of the conditions necessary for *both* evil human

actions *and* good human actions, but does not perform *either* the evil *or* the good human actions himself. So there would seem to be a *symmetry* between God's activity with respect to do-gooders and evil-doers of the sort that Reformed theologians mean to deny.

Peter Byrne makes a similar point about Helm's claim that there is an asymmetry between God's activity with respect to good and evil human actions; he writes, "on his account... *exactly the same kind of divine causal responsibility lies behind both good and evil acts*. For both kinds of acts it is the case that God... strictly determines and necessitates that they be done." However, Byrne does suggest one way—the only way—that Calvinists might avoid this conclusion, that there is no asymmetry; and that is "to claim that when human beings do good acts they never act in character; their characters are such that, left untouched by God, they would always do evil. Good action is always the result of intervening divine grace" (2008, p. 198).⁴⁰ Byrne's suggestion does seem in line with the confessional statements quoted above. According to those Reformed documents, human beings are, since the Fall of man, "totally depraved." In other words, humans are determined to sin, not by any specific volition or action of God, but simply by their own corrupted nature. So if God leaves them alone they will, by a necessity of nature, do evil. It is only through God's active grace intervening in their lives that they are able to do good.

But while their insistence on the total depravity of humankind might seem to resolve the question of how God can fail to be causally responsible for evil human actions, it really only

⁴⁰ Byrne says, "This is a possible (and actual) theological position. But it has a consequence which rather strengthens the claim that Helm's God is directly responsible for sin, since [it] will turn out on this view that God made human beings such that they would always and inevitably, albeit voluntarily, choose evil" (2008, p. 198). Though Byrne's assertion that this *strengthens* the claim that God is responsible for sin seems to me to be overstating the case, I argue below that God is *as* responsible for the sin that is determined by an evil nature that he has created as he is for sin that he actively causes a creature with a morally neutral nature to commit.

pushes the question back to God's causal responsibility for the Fall of man. For one of two things must be true: either God positively and actively caused the Fall itself, or he did not. If God positively and actively caused the Fall, then God is causally responsible for the Fall, and so also for all of the sins that humans subsequently commit. For their sin is the result of their fallen nature, and God caused them to have this fallen nature. On the other hand, if God did *not* positively and actively cause the Fall, then, either of two things must be the case: either the Fall was uncaused, or it was caused by something other than God. If it was uncaused, then of course divine determinism is false; so the divine determinist cannot take this route. But if it was caused by some other event⁴¹ than God's positive and active willing—say, by the serpent's temptation—and God passively permitted it to occur, then we must ask whether this other event—the temptation—was *itself* positively and actively caused by God, or not. And again we must answer that if God positively and actively caused this earlier event, then he is causally responsible for the whole chain of events that results; and if God did not positively and actively cause it, then it must either be uncaused (which is inconsistent with divine determinism), or caused by some other event than God's positive and active willing. Such questioning will continue until we reach the first event of this causal chain; and this first event, I contend, *God must have positively and actively caused*. The divine determinist cannot maintain that this first event was merely *permitted or passively willed* by God. For, being the first event, there was no prior set of sufficient conditions for its occurrence which God could “ordain” without causing the event itself. But if this first event was positively and actively caused by God, then God is causally responsible for all of the events that result, including the Fall of man and the subsequent sins of human beings.

⁴¹ I am assuming event causation for the purpose of simplifying my argument, but everything I say could easily be translated into substance-causal terms.

Therefore, the appeal to divine permission will not help the divine determinist in absolving God of causal responsibility for human sin. For even if God merely permits or passively wills that some event occurs, it is still the case that if he has positively and actively caused the conditions sufficient for the event's occurrence, then he is (indirectly) causally responsible for the event.

It is interesting to note that though the distinction between God's active causation and passive permission is drawn by those writing in the Reformed tradition who self-identify as Calvinists, Calvin himself eschewed this distinction, maintaining that it was inconsistent with the divine determinism which he believed the Christian Scriptures taught. As John Hick notes, Calvin frequently used parallel wording to describe God's activity with respect to the elect and the reprobate. For instance, he wrote in his *Institutes*:

We call predestination God's eternal decree, by which he determined within himself what he willed to become of each man. For all are not created in equal condition; rather, eternal life is ordained for some, eternal damnation for others. Therefore, as any man has been created to one or the other of these ends, we speak of him as predestined to life or to death." (Quoted in Hick 1996, p. 125)

Thus Calvin used the same verbs—determining, willing, ordaining, creating, etc.—to describe God's predestination of some to salvation and others to damnation. And Calvin did not simply *imply*, by the use of such parallel wording, that God's activity was of the same sort in both cases; he *explicitly* rejected the distinction between God's passive permission and active causation on which his followers have insisted. Responding to some who in his day were objecting to the doctrine of "double predestination," i.e. God's predestination of the reprobate as well as the elect, Calvin wrote,

Here they have recourse to the distinction between will and permission. By this they maintain that the wicked perish because God permits it, not because he so wills. But why shall we say 'permission' unless it is because God so wills? Still, it

is not in itself likely that man brought destruction upon himself through himself, by God's mere permission and without any ordaining. As if God did not establish the condition in which he wills the chief of His creatures to be! (*Institutio*, 3.23.8)

As Hick notes, with respect to such passages, "Calvin's is almost as extreme and uncompromising as a doctrine of predestination can be. It goes beyond Augustine's teaching in explicitly attributing reprobation as well as salvation to the positive decree of God." Augustine, like most followers of Calvin, thought that God did predestine the reprobate, but that this was done by an act of omission, of passing them by and leaving them to "stew in their own juice," as Hick says. But to Calvin's "more ruthlessly consistent mind" this was "an evasion of the sterner implication" of divine determinism. Hick writes, "If Calvin's position is more repulsive than Augustine's, it is also intellectually more consistent, and more frank in its acceptance of the final conclusion of premises that Augustine and Calvin hold in common. Indeed, it is characteristic of Calvin's absolute respect for what he believes to be the message of God's Word that he makes no attempt to render predestination palatable to either the moral sense or the reason of his readers..." (1966, pp. 127-128).

It seems both ironic and instructive, then, that those writing in the Reformed tradition have studiously avoided this "final conclusion" that Calvin embraced—ironic, since it is clearly entailed by the tenets which they hold, and instructive, since their aversion to it, despite its clearly being entailed by these tenets, suggests just how unpalatable it really is. Its unpalatability, however, will be discussed in a later section of this chapter, where I discuss the further claim that if God causes human sin then he is *morally blameworthy* for doing so. For now, it suffices to conclude that divine determinism does indeed entail that God is *causally responsible* for human sin, and that an appeal to the purportedly passive nature of some divine volitions, like the appeal to the purportedly privative nature of moral evil, will not help the divine determinist avoid this

conclusion.

Section 3: That God is Not Morally Responsible (Divine Command Theory)

I have thus far argued that divine determinists who appeal to a privative theory of evil, as well as those who appeal to the distinction between passive and active divine volitions, fail to exonerate God of causal responsibility for sin and so to successfully refute premise 1 of Argument I reconstructed above. Yet other divine determinists have admitted that God is, indeed, *causally* responsible for human sin, but have still denied the conclusion of Argument I, that God is *morally* responsible for human sin. These divine determinists have rejected premise 2 of Argument I and maintained that, unlike other personal agents, God is not morally responsible for *anything*. Those who reject this second premise tend to espouse a divine command theory of morality, according to which moral categories such as “right” and “wrong” are contingent, dependent on God’s will, and not applicable to God’s own actions. One such author who defends a divine command theory of morality is Hugh McCann. In his article “The Author of Sin?” McCann admits that God causes his creatures to sin, but maintains that this does not mean that God himself commits moral evil. For, McCann says, “If God is guilty of moral evil, that evil has to lie in what is predicated of him”— his causing creatures to sin—and not what is predicated of the creatures themselves—their sins (2005, p. 150). McCann then argues that it is impossible for sin to be predicated of God, since “to sin is to set oneself in rebellion against God by flaunting his edict” and God cannot possibly flaunt his own edict (2005, p. 151). Thus McCann seeks to establish “divine impeccability,” or the doctrine that God can commit no moral evil and so is not morally responsible for human sin. In what follows, I lay out McCann’s argument in more detail, and then argue that it is flawed in several respects. Again, I suggest my objections to McCann’s

argument generalize to all such arguments that appeal to a divine command theory of morality to absolve God of moral responsibility for human sin.

McCann begins his argument by painting a picture of divine causality that seems similar to Kathryn Tanner's, discussed in Chapter I. McCann contends that God does not cause our actions in the same way that we cause events in the world. Though he does not put the point this way, he seems to understand creaturely causation as effecting property changes of already existing substances. In contrast to the way in which events that *we* bring about come to pass, McCann says, "The manner in which our actions come to pass is not one in which God acts upon us or does anything to us, nor are we rendered passive in any way by his action. Rather, God creates us *in* our willings, so that all that we are and do emanates directly from him" (2005, p. 145). McCann maintains that God causing our actions is not like not a puppeteer moving her puppets, but rather like an author creating the characters of her novel. He writes, "The author of a novel never makes her creatures do something; she only makes them doing it. It is the same between us and God" (2005, p. 146). McCann should not be interpreted as denying divine determinism here, i.e. as saying that God is not causally responsible for what his creatures *do*, but only for what his creatures *are*. Rather, he seems to be saying that, unlike creatures who can only make other creatures *do* things, God has the unique ability to make *creatures themselves*; and rather than *first* bringing creatures into being, and *then* making them do certain things, God by one and the same act *makes creatures doing the things they do*. In other words, divine causation is a kind of continuous creation of substances.

Now McCann readily admits that his view has the following implication: "God is intimately and directly involved with the occurrence of those acts in which we sin—as involved

as we would be in a story we create.” So even if we are free in “bringing moral evil to pass”—which McCann maintains that we are—“this fact can no longer be exploited to shield God from responsibility for moral evil.” Yet he suggests that we should be suspicious of this supposed advantage of the traditional free will defense, for “God’s position as creator should not require that he be insulated from moral evil; it should be intrinsically such that no matter how intimately he is involved with us, he cannot be touched by our fallenness” (2005, p. 147).

McCann then says that what is “intrinsic” to God’s position as creator is (as Tanner also says) God’s belonging to “an entirely different order of being” than his creatures (2005, p. 149). Just as the author of a novel who belongs to a different “order” than her characters does not “participate” in the sins they commit, so God does not “participate” in the sins of his creatures. To illustrate this point, McCann considers a case in which Smith maliciously decides to kill Jones. He asks, “why should anyone think that God’s creatively willing the occurrence of this event makes him guilty of anything?” and answers as follows:

Perhaps the worry is that God might actually participate in Smith’s decision, that when Smith decides to kill Jones there actually occurs a joint exercise of agency, in which Smith and God together settle on doing Jones in. If this were so, it would seem God must share in the malice of the decision... in which case Smith’s sin is also God’s. This view of things is, however, mistaken. When Smith decides to kill Jones, the decision is predicated of Smith alone, and belongs entirely to him. He alone forms the intention to kill Jones, hence he alone can incur the guilt of doing so. God does not and cannot participate in Smith’s decision.... Nor does he, in providing for the existence of Smith’s decision, decide in his own right to kill Jones. The content of God’s will is... Smith’s act of deciding.... So if God incurs any blame in the transaction, it has to be for that—for willing Smith’s act of deciding. (2005, p. 149)

Thus, McCann concludes, “If God is guilty of moral evil, that evil has to lie in what is predicated of him—namely, his creating Smith the person who decides as he does—not in what is predicated of Smith, namely, Smith’s sinful decision” (2005, p. 150).

McCann then sets out to prove that God's willing Smith's decision to kill Jones is not morally blameworthy. This does not, of course, simply follow from the fact that it is making Smith the person who decides as he does, rather than Smith's deciding, which can be predicated of God. For, as McCann readily admits, "you and I would certainly be found at fault were we to contrive to have Smith decide to murder Jones" (2005, p. 149). Rather, McCann thinks it is something about the nature of sin and its relationship to God that makes it impossible for God to be found guilty of sin. In attempt to prove the impossibility of God's moral blameworthiness, McCann begins by asking what is "the sinfulness of sin," or what makes wrongful action actually wrong. He first argues that "the true home of moral evil" lies in the will rather than in the harmful consequences which one's willing brings about. For once a person decides to commit some sin, it does not matter whether the person is successful in carrying out his intention or is thwarted in his efforts; he is still guilty of sin. And if a person brings about some harmful consequence without intending to, he is not necessarily guilty. For instance, McCann writes:

... even if no harm comes to Jones: if the gun fails to fire, say, or if Smith is afflicted by sudden paralysis, so that he cannot even move his finger... Smith would still be guilty, by virtue of his decision and volition alone. By contrast, if Jones were to die as a consequence of some innocent act on Smith's part—in an unavoidable auto-pedestrian accident, let us say—then there would be no wrongdoing by Smith, even though the same harm was caused. (2005, p. 147)

After determining the locus of moral evil to be not in the consequences of one's willing but in one's volition itself, McCann goes on to ask what it is about wrongful willing that makes it wrong. He writes, "perhaps the first answer that comes to mind is this: that iniquity lies not in evil that is willed, but in the willing of evil—so, in Smith's case, not in the death he intends for Jones, but in his willing that death, by deciding on the murder." Despite the intuitive plausibility of this answer, McCann rejects it for three reasons. First, he says, "our primary aim in

wrongdoing is always some anticipated good,” not some anticipated evil. In the murder example, he suggests that Smith might intend “to inherit a fortune with Jones out of the way,” or “to visit due recompense on Jones for some grievous deed.” McCann thus implies that since bringing about such consequences might be Smith’s primary intention in murdering Jones, and since such consequences are not in themselves evil, it is not the case that one can commit sin only by willing evil. The second reason why McCann rejects the proposed account of the sinfulness of sin as the willing of evil is that there seem to be cases in which it is not wrong to will evil. For instance, McCann points out that it is not always wrong to will the death of another, though (he suggests) such a death would itself be evil. But then again, he concludes, a volition cannot be sinful simply in virtue of its being a volition for evil; what makes the volition sinful must be something else.

The third reason McCann offers for rejecting the account under consideration, according to which what makes sin sinful is the willing of evil, is that “there are some cases of sinful deciding where it is hard to put one’s finger on *any* evil that falls within the actual content of the decision.” McCann offers, as an example of this point, the quintessential case of sin in the Scriptures: Adam and Eve’s decision to eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Noting that “the decisive appeal” of eating the forbidden fruit was that it brought about knowledge of good and evil, “which would make Adam and Eve like God,” McCann contends that “in pursuing knowledge of good and evil... Adam and Eve did no wrong, for if such knowledge is a divine trait it cannot be a bad thing to have” (2005, p. 150). Thus he suggests not only that their primary aim was an anticipated good and not any anticipated evil, but that the state of affairs which their intended action would bring about was not at all evil either.

So what was sinful about Adam and Eve's decision to eat the forbidden fruit?

McCann claims that their sin "lay in the fact that in eating of the tree, Adam and Eve were defying a divine command. God ordered them not to eat of the tree, and they knowingly did so, thereby putting themselves in rebellion against God" (2005, p. 150). Thus McCann defines sin as the setting oneself in rebellion against God "by flaunting his edict." He writes: "The sinfulness of sin consists in our placing our own projects above God's decrees, by defiantly willing what he has commanded us not to do." But then, McCann contends, it is impossible for God to sin, since "no one can be in moral rebellion against himself, for no one has moral authority over himself" (2005, p. 151). He writes:

I have moral authority over my teenage son. If I tell him he is to be in by midnight, I impose an obligation on him which, if he acts out of duty, will be carried out. I can, however, have no such effect on myself. I can, of course, engage in the game of self-commanding—as when, in the morning, I order myself to answer the importunate alarm clock. But this kind of 'command' results in no duty. (2005, p. 151)

McCann concludes that since God is "the ultimate moral authority," whose commands are "the source of moral obligation," and since it is impossible for one to have moral authority over oneself or to impose duties on oneself by giving commands to oneself, it is therefore impossible for God to commit moral wrongdoing.

An important thing to note about McCann's argument is that it appeals to the nature of sin as a violation of God's commandments, rather than to God's nature as essentially good. McCann says that he is wary of the latter sort of appeal since God's having to act in certain ways and not others by a necessity of his nature would seem to threaten divine freedom (2005, p. 152). Thus it would seem to follow from McCann's argument not simply that God is not *blameworthy* for some particular action he takes, but that God is not *morally responsible* for any action he

takes, since he is not subject to the moral law that his commandments establish. In other words, God is neither morally blameworthy nor morally praiseworthy for any of his deeds; he is beyond morality altogether.

Now it seems to me that the sort of argument McCann presents is flawed in at least four respects. First, the reasons offered for rejecting an account of sin as the willing of evil (and so, adopting the alternative account of sin as the flaunting of God's commands) are unconvincing. Second, the implications of the sort of divine command theory of morality that a divine determinist would need to defend in order to prove God's lack of moral responsibility for human sin are so problematic as to be sufficient reasons in themselves for rejecting the argument. Third, the argument offered for the conclusion that an agent cannot be subject to her own moral commands depends on a false premise. And finally, one implication of the divine theory defended by McCann and other divine determinists, that God is entirely beyond morality, seems at odds with the further attempt of many divine determinists (including McCann) to offer a moral justification for God's causing of human sin. I will consider these objections in turn.

First, then, McCann might be right that the sinfulness of sinning lies primarily in the will, rather than in the consequences of one's willing. His example—the case in which a person decides to commit some evil deed but is thwarted in carrying it out—seems to suggest as much; for the person still seems to be guilty of sin, even though no evil consequences follow from her decision. In a case in which a person decides to commit an evil deed and is successful in carrying it out, the consequences of her decision might be considered sinful secondarily, or as McCann says “extrinsically,” in virtue of their being consequences of the sinful decision. In any case, I

will grant McCann this much—that “the true home of moral evil is in the will itself” (2005, p. 147).

However, the reasons he offers for rejecting the account of sin as willing what is evil seem to me unpersuasive. Recall his first reason, which is that one’s “primary aim in wrongdoing is always some anticipated good,” rather than some anticipated evil. It is unclear to me why McCann uses the word “primary” here. For the view against which he is arguing is not that aiming *primarily* at evil is sinful, but that aiming at it *at all* is. So in order to successfully refute the view, McCann needs to prove that anticipated evil is never any part of one’s aim in acting. Thus I will assume that this is what McCann means to say. Now the claim that people never aim at some anticipated evil could be interpreted in either of two ways. The first way would be to say that people never *conceive* of the deeds they intend to do *as* evil, when they are forming their intention to do them. The second would be to say that the deeds people intend to do are never *in fact* evil, regardless of how people conceive of them. Regarding the first claim, it is not obvious to me that it is true, that people never aim at some deed which they conceive of as evil. Consider again the example of the malicious torturer described by Calder. While it may be that some torturers aim only at certain goods in torturing—the extraction of some important information from their victims, perhaps, or the rectification of some perceived wrong—it also seems possible for a torturer simply and sadistically to aim at the suffering of his victim, which he knows to be a great evil. However, since it is arguable that even in such a case the torturer might conceive of the deed he intends to do not in terms of the suffering of his victim, but in terms of his own pleasure—which is not itself an evil—I will not press this point. Instead, I mean simply to point out that while the first claim may be plausible, it is the second claim that McCann needs to establish. For, in order to prove that sin does not consist in the willing of evil, McCann needs to

show that the deeds people intend to do are always *actually* good and never *actually* evil, regardless of how people conceive of them. And this is obviously false, as McCann's own example, of Smith's decision to maliciously murder Jones, proves.

It should be noted that if McCann insists on making the first rather than the second claim about people's aims in sinning, then his own account of sin falls apart. For when people form the intention to commit some evil deed, they do not always, or even usually, consciously aim at the flaunting of God's decree. McCann himself admits this when discussing the sin of Adam and Eve; he writes: "God had ordered them not to eat of the tree, and they knowingly did so, thereby putting themselves in rebellion against God. *Not that rebellion was the point of their decision; the point was to achieve a certain kind of standing. But for the sake of that standing the two were willing to rebel...*" (2005, p. 150, italics added). Thus, McCann suggests that it was not the conscious *aim* of Adam and Eve to rebel against God; their conscious aim was, rather, to gain knowledge of good and evil. It just so happened that their attempt to gain such knowledge was actually an act of rebellion. But, of course, the same may be said about the willing of evil. It is not always, or even usually, people's conscious aim to do evil; it just so happens that sometimes, the deeds they intend to do are actually evil. Thus the account of sin as willing evil and the account of sin as flaunting God's decree stand or fall together.

So the first reason that McCann offers for rejecting the claim that sin consists in the willing of evil is both unconvincing and inconsistent with his own account of the nature of sin. His second reason seems likewise problematic. Recall that McCann offers some purported counterexamples to this claim, of cases of willing evil that are not sinful. For instance, he says that it is not always wrong to will the death of another, though (he thus suggests) such a death is in itself evil. McCann's objection, however, seems to hinge on a certain conception of sin that

we need not accept; and it is a conception of sin which McCann himself seems to reject, when developing his own account. For while the death of a human being is a *natural* evil—an event, that is, that causes pain and suffering—it is not a *moral* evil. And sin is much more plausibly construed as willing the occurrence of moral evil.

But what is moral evil? Can any definition be given, or are we simply substituting one undefined term for another here? I think a definition can be offered, though it will depend on what moral theory one accepts. A Kantian will define moral evil as the failure to act in accordance with a universalizable maxim, or the treatment of a person as a mere means; a utilitarian will define it as the failure to maximize or increase utility; a virtue ethicist will define it as the manifestation of some vicious character trait, and so on. Moral theorists of all these stripes will agree that *killing* others is not necessarily morally wrong; what is wrong is *murdering* others, or *unjustifiably* killing them; and they will define justifiability in terms of their own preferred moral theory. Sin, then, will be the willing of moral evil, and moral evil will be any deed that is unjustified according to whichever moral theory is correct.

Again, it is worth pointing out that McCann also seems to rely on the concept of justifiability in defending his own view of sin. For he writes, “In Smith’s case... the moral evil of his decision to murder Jones consists not in the harm he wills for Jones, nor in his willing that harm, but rather in his willing it in defiance of God’s command that we not engage in *unjust killing*” (2005, p. 151, italics added). In other words, the content of God’s commandment is not “thou shalt not kill,” but “thou shalt not murder,” where murder is killing that is unjustified. And so, we might ask McCann, unjustified by what? McCann does not say. But since presumably God has not laid out particular commandments that apply to each individual case of killing, it would seem that reliance on some more general moral theory would be required to answer the

question. Of course, McCann might think that such a theory could be extracted from the commandments given by God; and this may be true. My point is simply that there is no problem with defining sin in terms of another concept—moral evil—which must itself be defined in terms of the justifiability of an act according to some more general principles.

McCann's second reason for rejecting the view of sin as the willing of evil therefore seems unpersuasive. While it is true that the willing of *natural* evil is not necessarily sinful, the willing of *moral* evil is. And there is no problem with defining sin in terms of moral evil, since this latter concept need not be left undefined, but can be spelled out in terms of a non-divine command theory of morality.

I turn, then, to the third reason McCann offers for rejecting the account of sin as willing evil: that “there are some cases of sinful deciding where it is hard to put one’s finger on *any* evil that falls within the actual content of the decision” (2005, p. 150). Whereas earlier I interpreted McCann as making a claim about one’s conscious aim in acting, here I interpret him as making a claim about the true nature of the deed one intends to do—in other words, that sometimes what one sinfully wills is not *actually* evil. Recall the example McCann gives to support this claim: the decision of Adam and Eve to eat forbidden fruit from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Now, McCann seems right to insist that no definition of sin should be acceptable to Christian theists if it cannot account for what is sinful about Adam and Eve’s act, since the New Testament writers categorically call their act sinful, and indeed consider it to be the act by which sin “entered the world.”⁴² However, McCann does not seem justified in claiming that what Adam

⁴² See, for instance, Romans 5:12-14: “sin came into the world through one man, and death came through sin, and so death spread to all because all have sinned— sin was indeed in the world before the law, but sin is not reckoned when there is no law. Yet death exercised dominion from Adam to Moses, even over those whose sins were not like the transgression of Adam....”

and Eve willed was not actually evil. For one thing, their act arguably did bring about much evil, for, according to the Genesis story, it was through their act that death, as well as enmity between men and women, pains in childbearing, and toil in harvesting all entered the world. Of course, such evils might be interpreted as divine punishment for sin rather than natural effects of the sin itself. However, their act might be considered evil for other reasons, as well.

McCann seems to think that the only way for an act to be morally evil, on a non-divine command theory of morality, is for it to bring about a harmful state of affairs; and he suggests that Adam and Eve's act did not bring about such a harmful state; he writes: "Even in pursuing knowledge of good and evil... Adam and Eve did no wrong, *for if such knowledge is a divine trait it cannot be a bad thing to have*" (2005, p. 150, italics added). However, the fact that knowledge of good and evil is not itself "a bad thing to have" does not entail that it is morally permissible to pursue it. For sometimes pursuing something is morally wrong even if it is not harmful to oneself or others. For instance, Adam and Eve's defying God's command might be wrong, not because God's commandments determine the content of morality, but because by defying God's command, Adam and Eve were ungrateful toward and disrespectful of the one who had so generously provided for them the garden and all of its other fruits. An analogy might be drawn to a more mundane case: suppose a person going out of town for a weekend allows another person to stay in her house while she is gone. This host sets up a space for her guest to sleep in, and tells him that he can have full range of her house, except for her bedroom. Now, if the guest decides to enter the forbidden room, he would be doing wrong—not because his host's

Interestingly, this passage would seem to count against McCann's divine command theory, since if sin was "in the world before the law"—i.e. before the commandments of God were given—then its sinfulness would seem to depend on something other than the sinner's defiance of the law.

commandments necessarily generate a moral obligation, nor because breaking her commandments will necessarily have bad consequences, but because the guest has evidently failed to appreciate the kindness of his host, in allowing him to stay at her house; instead, he seems to think he is entitled to what is hers.

This is just one possible explanation of the moral evil inherent in Adam and Eve's act which does not rely on a divine command theory of morality—that it is a form of disrespect to another agent and ungratefulness for his gift. Other explanations might be given, or one might simply insist that there is always some reason why what God prohibits is morally wrong other than the mere fact that God prohibited it, even if the reason is not always accessible to us. In any case, McCann seems too hasty in concluding that in the case of Adam and Eve, there is no evil that “falls within the content of their decision.” So, McCann's third reason for rejecting the claim that sin is the willing of evil also seems unconvincing, at least to those who are not already committed to a divine command theory of morality.

Thus it seems that McCann has offered no good reason for rejecting the account of sin as the willing of evil. But the argument he offers for accepting his own account of sin as the flaunting of God's commandments consists of a process of eliminating all alternative accounts; in other words, the reasons discussed above for rejecting the alternative accounts are the only ones McCann offers for accepting his own. So, without any good reason for rejecting the alternatives, his own account is left unmotivated. But, since his argument for divine impeccability depends on his account of sin as the flaunting of God's commandments, McCann thus fails to provide any positive reason for believing that God is incapable of sin, and so not possibly culpable for the sin he causes humans to commit.

Besides the above mentioned problems with McCann's argument for accepting a divine command theory of morality, I would argue that the divine command theory which he proposes, and which is needed to justify the divine determinist's claim that God is not morally responsible for human sin, is so problematic in itself as to provide sufficient reason for rejecting it. One problem facing his divine command theory is the familiar Euthyphro problem—that if God's commandments determine the content of morality, then morality is arbitrary, such that what is right might have been wrong and vice versa if God had commanded that it be so. McCann only briefly considers this point in a footnote to his paper, writing in response: "Space does not permit adequate treatment of this problem, but I think it may be argued that God's commands are tied to something else he creates—namely, to the nature of things—and so are not arbitrary" (2005, footnote 13). What McCann thus suggests is that it is the nature of reality—and not simply the fact that God commands things—which makes his commandments true. Now this response would allow McCann to avoid the charge of arbitrariness that divine command theories usually face. But if he were saying that it is the nature of reality which ultimately grounds the truth of God's commandments, then McCann would no longer really be a divine command theorist. For what makes an act sinful, on his account, would not ultimately be the fact that God prohibited it, but something else about the nature of the act. And McCann needs morality ultimately to depend upon God's commandments in order to establish his conclusion that morality does not apply to God.

Another problem with McCann's divine command theory lies in his claim that in order to sin, one must know what God's commandments are and be conscious of the fact that what one wills is in violation of them. As he puts it, "To sin it to set oneself in rebellion against God by flaunting his edict, by *knowingly*... willing what he has forbidden us to do" (2005, p. 151, italics

added). But if this is so, then anyone who does not know God's commandments, or who is not conscious of the fact that what one wills is in violation them, cannot possibly sin. But surely this is not an acceptable conclusion, for if it were true then only monotheists aware of God's commandments would be capable of sinning; and the more one reflected on God's commandments, the more liable one would be to sin, being more conscious of how one's actions failed to measure up to them. Indeed, if this were true, one could avoid sinning entirely by making oneself entirely oblivious to God's commandments! But surely, people who do not know the commandments of God are still capable of sin.

Perhaps McCann might try to respond to this objection by arguing that those who do not know the commandments *should* know them, and that the reason they do not know them is because they are willfully ignorant of them, consciously avoiding attending to God's word. But how should they know them? Many people have never had the opportunity to study the commandments. And if what I have suggested above is right, that McCann cannot appeal to the nature of things in order to ground the truth of God's commandments if he wants to maintain that morality ultimately depends on what God commands, then those who have not had such an opportunity will not be able to figure out what God commands simply from their knowledge of the world. Thus it seems that the divine command theory on which McCann's argument depends is problematic not only because it makes morality arbitrary, but because it implies, quite implausibly, that those who do not know God's commandments are incapable of moral evil.

The third problem I wish to point out with McCann's argument is that, even if his divine command theory were true, and even if sin could be accounted for in terms of the flaunting of God's commandments, it still would not follow that God is incapable of moral evil. For

McCann's argument for this conclusion rests on a dubious premise, that "no one can be in moral rebellion against himself," since "no one has moral authority over himself" (2005, p. 151). The argument McCann offers for this premise depends on a comparison between his commanding his son to obey a curfew, on the one hand, and his commanding himself to answer an alarm clock, on the other. McCann suggests that by commanding his son, he thereby "imposes an obligation" on his son which, if his son "acts out of duty, will be carried out"; but, he points out, his commanding himself imposes no such duty.

Now it seems to me that McCann is wrong, that in the case of his commanding his son, a moral obligation is generated simply in virtue of a command. For commandments, at least between mortal beings, are not sufficient to ground moral obligations. What grounds his son's duty to obey curfew must be the fact that McCann commanded it in conjunction with some other facts—perhaps the fact that his son, by living in his house and depending on him for material and other support, implicitly agrees to obey his rules; or perhaps the fact that McCann needs to wait up for his son to get home, to make sure he is safe, so that it would be a burden on him if his son stayed out too late; or perhaps some other fact about their situation or relationship. But the commandment alone does not generate the moral obligation. This can be seen by considering a case in which a stranger commands you to do something—say, he walks up to you on the street, late at night, and tells you to go home; in such a case it seems obvious that you are not under any moral obligation to obey his command.

But if in the context of interactions between human beings, commandments do not automatically generate moral obligations, then the analogy on which McCann's argument depends falls through. For his analogy is supposed to show that whereas one person's command to another *does* generate a moral obligation, a person's command to himself does *not*. But if I am

right, that commandments neither to oneself nor to others automatically generate moral obligations, then the analogy to the human case cannot tell us for whom God's commandments generate moral obligations. Obviously if McCann's divine command theory is true, then God's commandments must be of a different sort than human ones—for they must ground morality in a way that human commandments cannot. But if by giving commandments God is able to generate moral obligations for his creatures, it is not clear why he could not also generate them for himself. At least, McCann's analogy does nothing to illuminate why this would not be possible.

Moreover, it would at least *seem* possible for God to generate moral obligations that applied to himself as well as to creatures, if a divine command theory of morality were true. For God could simply decree, for example, that it would henceforth be wrong always and everywhere for anyone to tell a lie—in which case, it would be as wrong for God to tell a lie as it would be for creatures. There does not seem to be anything inconsistent about this idea, of God binding himself, or as some say, “self-limiting.” The idea of divine self-limitation is appealed to in various theological contexts. For instance, some open theists argue that God limits his providential control and foreknowledge in order to make “room” for free creatures. And the biblical concept of *covenant*—of God and his people making promises to each other about their future actions—would also seem to be a case of divine (and human) self-limitation. Thus it seems at least compatible with McCann's divine command theory that God binds himself to the moral code that he decrees, such that thereafter any action God might take at variance with that code would be morally wrong. I therefore conclude that even if McCann could successfully defend his divine command theory from the objections I have raised, he still would not have established that God has no moral obligations; for he would have failed to prove that the One whose commandments ground morality cannot be subject to them himself.

This should be enough to show the unsoundness of McCann's argument that God is not morally responsible for the sin he causes humans to commit. Yet I will point out *one* further problem with this sort of argument, which seeks to establish that God is "above" or "beyond" morality, as it were. The problem is, such a conclusion is inconsistent with other arguments that divine determinists often put forth, in attempt to offer a moral justification for God's causing humans to sin. The reason the proponents feel the need to offer such a justification is suggested by McCann at the conclusion of his argument for divine impeccability:

The argument just given may do well in securing divine impeccability, but it offers very little reassurance on the question of God's goodness. Given his position, God could easily be sinless in his dealings with us, yet care little or nothing about us, be willing to see us and our destinies sacrificed for purposes irrelevant to our well-being, and perhaps even take some satisfaction in our suffering and confusion in being thus spent.

So, McCann concludes, one who puts forth such an argument for divine impeccability ought to be able to "offer some helpful suggestions" regarding how God's "creating us the sinners we are... can both manifest his goodness and serve our good (2005, p. 152). McCann's own suggestion is that the experience of enmity with God is necessary for the development of true friendship with God, which is a great good—indeed, the "foundational good of our earthly existence" (2005, p. 153). And so, McCann suggests, God is good and to be praised for causing us to rebel, because by doing so he enables us to experience such enmity, and thus develop such friendship.

I will discuss McCann's suggestions in greater detail in the next section of this paper, where I consider theodicies that divine determinists have offered in attempt to defend God from the charge of moral blameworthiness. The point I wish to make here is simply that any such

argument for the conclusion that God is *morally* good, or *morally* justified in his actions, is inconsistent with the claim that God is not subject to morality. For if God has no moral obligations, then he can neither be blamed *nor* praised for meeting or exceeding them. Thus to suggest, as McCann does, that God's causing us to sin can be morally justified by his bringing about some greater good is to misapply creaturely concepts to God. If McCann and other defenders of a divine command theory wish to be consistent, then, they must swallow the (seemingly bitter) pill and live with no "reassurance" on the question of God's moral goodness.

In conclusion, I have argued that McCann fails to prove that God is not morally responsible for the sins that he causes humans to commit, for at least four reasons. First, the only arguments McCann offers in favor of his own theory of the "sinfulness of sin"—arguments against an alternative theory—are not compelling, such that he has not motivated his own theory. Second, the implications of his divine command theory are unacceptable, requiring for his argument to be successful that morality depends only on the contingent will of God, and thus is arbitrary. Third, even if his divine command theory were acceptable, he would not have succeeded in establishing his further claim that God is "above" morality, since his argument for the conclusion that an agent cannot be subject to the moral obligations generated by her own commands is unsound. And finally, the conclusion that McCann hopes to establish, that moral categories do not apply to God, is inconsistent with his further attempt to construct a positive theodicy; and so, if he wants to maintain that God is indeed above morality, he must accept that there can be no moral justification of, or moral praise for, God's decisions or actions. And this would seem to be at odds with much that theists want to say about God.

As was the case with my objections to Grant's argument that God is not *causally* responsible for human sin, I believe that many of my objections to McCann's argument that God is not *morally* responsible for human sin generalize to all such arguments which depend on a divine command theory of morality. For although they are not all structured as McCann's argument is, in terms of a process of elimination of competing theories, all of them will require some argument motivating their theory of morality over its competitors; and all of them will face the challenge of making a divine command theory of morality seem plausible, and not subject to grave difficulties. All of them, then, will have the grapple with the Euthyphro problem; and none will be able to appeal, in attempt to resolve the problem, to the nature of things in the world as a ground for the truth of God's commandments. Otherwise, if they admit that what makes an act morally wrong is ultimately *not* the fact that God prohibited it, but something about the nature of the world, then they will not be able to establish the conclusion that morality does not apply to God. Moreover, none of them, simply by establishing that moral truths *are* ultimately grounded in divine commands, will be able to conclude that God has no moral obligations; for it does not follow simply from a divine command theory of morality that God's commandments do not apply to God himself. A further argument would be needed to establish that an agent such as God cannot be subject to the moral obligations generated by his commands; and such an argument would not seem to be forthcoming. Appealing to a divine command theory, then, would not seem to be a promising way for a divine determinist to defend God from the charge of moral responsibility for human sin.

Section 4: That God is Not Morally Blameworthy (Theodicies and Skeptical Theism)

So far I have considered arguments offered by divine determinists for the conclusion that God is either not *causally* responsible for human sin or not *morally* responsible for the sins that he causes humans to commit; and I have suggested that such arguments face irresolvable difficulties. Some divine determinists, however, admit that God is both causally and morally responsible for human sin, but deny that he is *blameworthy* for condemning and/or causing it, maintaining that he has some morally sufficient reason for doing so. Thus they object to premise 2 in Argument II reconstructed above—i.e. the claim that a God who condemns people for sins for which he himself is responsible is blameworthy—and/or (if they think God does not condemn) to my alternative claim, that a God who causes humans to sin—that is, to act in ways that *deserve* condemnation—is blameworthy, *even if he does not actually condemn the sins he causes*. My focus in this section will be on ways divine determinists might object to this latter premise, since I think it is the harder one to deny. Those objecting to this claim tend to take one or another of two approaches: some offer a theodicy, or plausible explanation of why God causes human sin, which aims to morally justify God's actions and so exonerate him of moral blame; and others appeal to skeptical theism, the view that although we do not know God's reasons for causing human sin, this is no evidence that God is not morally justified in doing so. I will consider these two types of responses in turn. With respect to the first, I will argue that the theodicies commonly offered to justify God's creation of a world containing moral evil will not help divine determinists, for they require the world to contain creatures with libertarian freedom, which is inconsistent with the thesis of divine determinism. Moreover, I will contend that when these theodicies are modified so as to be compatible with divine determinism, they end up

appealing to implausible claims about either a necessary connection between human sin and some greater good or the value of that good relative to the disvalue of the sin. With respect to the second sort of response, I will argue that the appeal to skeptical theism requires divine determinists to embrace a problematic sort of “double-mindedness” about the value of human sin and our proper response to it. Thus I will conclude that, given these problematic implications of divine determinism, there is a weighty reason to reject the thesis.

Theodicies

Before beginning an assessment of possible divine deterministic justifications for God’s causing of human sin, it will be helpful to decide on a set of standards that a theodicy must meet in order to count as successful. Michael Murray presents a set of three conditions which he considers jointly sufficient for a successful theodicy, but it seems to me that at least the first two are individually necessary as well. Thus, I will suggest that any theodicy that is to succeed in justifying God’s causing of human sin must meet at least these two conditions. Murray writes:

“God is justified in permitting evil only if he has a morally sufficient reason for doing so....

According to most theists, a reason counts as morally sufficient when the evil is connected with a greater good in a way that meets the following three conditions:

- (A) “The Necessity Condition: The good secured by the permission of the evil, E, would not have been secured without permitting either E or some other evils morally equivalent to or worse than E.
- (B) The Outweighing Condition: The good secured by the permission of the evil is sufficiently outweighing.
- (C) The Rights Condition: It is within the rights of the one permitting the evil to permit it at all.” (2009, pp. 355-356)

In motivating the first condition, Murray offers an analogy to a human situation.

Suppose, he says, a surgeon causes you “to endure the pain and suffering of surgery” to save your life, when she could just as easily have saved your life by giving you a pill with no harmful side effects. The surgeon would seem unjustified in causing you such suffering precisely because she could have brought about the same good without it. Thus, Murray says, “If the pain and suffering of surgery were not necessary to secure the good result (saving your life), we would conclude that this surgeon [was] a greedy moral monster. Likewise, if God permits an evil to occur, it must be because the good that is in fact connected with it would not have been secured at a ‘lower price’ (i.e. with less evil)” (2009, p. 356). Thus it would seem that the Necessary Condition is itself necessary for a successful theodicy.

Murray likewise suggests that the Outweighing Condition is necessary for a successful theodicy; he writes, “explanations for evil should seek to explain not only how evil is a necessary condition for some outweighing good, but also why it would not be better to have neither the evil nor the good that it spawns” (2009, p. 358). Although he does not offer another analogy to a human situation, such an analogy might help make clear why the good must sufficiently outweigh the evil in order to justify its existence. Consider, then, a case in which a surgeon makes you undergo great pain and suffering—say, with months of recovery time, in which you are confined to bed and miserable about your state—in order to fix some very minor problem—say, the removal of a benign tumor that was no threat to your health and caused you very little discomfort. In this case, the surgeon would seem unjustified in performing the surgery, not because the evil was *unnecessary* for the good but because the good did not *sufficiently outweigh* the evil: it would have been better for you not to have had the surgery at all. Analogously, it

would seem that God would not be justified in causing evil, even if it were necessary for some good, unless the good was so great as to sufficiently outweigh the evil.

Murray suggests that the Rights Condition may also, at least in some cases, be necessary for a successful theodicy since, he says, “there may be occasions in which one being can permit evils in the service of securing greater goods, but where the absence of a right to do so would render such permission immoral” (2009, p. 358). However, such a necessary condition would seem more controversial than the first two, depending on how one spelled out the rights of God. Murray notes that some philosophers consider the Rights Condition to place “substantive constraints on theodicy,” since they claim it is not within someone’s rights to allow an innocent person to suffer evil unless the good outweighing the evil is a good *for that person* (2009, p. 358). Others, though, have argued that this constraint does not apply to God. For, as Murray explains their view, “one person (*X*) can justly allow another person (*Y*) to suffer even when the suffering does not yield a net benefit for *Y*, under the following conditions”:

- (a) *X* is in a position of lawful authority over *Y* and any others who stand to gain or lose from *Y*’s suffering;
- (b) *X* is responsible for the welfare of *Y* and these others;
- (c) the good to be gained by allowing *Y* to suffer substantially outweighs the suffering produced by *Y*; and
- (d) there is no other way to obtain the goods produced by allowing *Y*’s suffering without permitting some situation in which the overall balance of goods and evils is worse. (2009, p. 359)

In other words, these philosophers suggest that it is within one person’s rights to allow another person to suffer evil so long as (1) the Necessity and Outweighing Conditions are met and (2) the first person is in a position of “lawful authority” over those who would be affected and is responsible for their wellbeing. Since God would seem to have such authority over all of his

creatures and to be responsible for all of them, it follows on this view that only the Necessity and Outweighing Conditions must be met for a successful theodicy.⁴³

Although I tend to think that this latter interpretation of the Rights Condition is too weak, since it would render it morally permissible for God to sacrifice the welfare of some of his creatures for the sake of others and so to treat some as “mere means,” I will not press this point here. Nor will I press the point, suggested by Peter Byrne, that even if from the “heinous” evil which some individuals suffered a greater good came *for those individuals*, there would still be something wrong with God’s causing such evil for the sake of the good, since it would not “square with the Pauline injunction that one should not do evil that good may come of it” (2009, p. 200).⁴⁴ I set these points aside since I want the necessary conditions I set out for a successful

⁴³ Some might even go so far as to suggest that God’s rightful authority over his creatures is *alone* sufficient to justify whatever he chooses to do with them. Such proponents of a rights-only condition might point to the following biblical passage in which Paul discusses God’s election and rejection of people “even before they had been born or had done anything good or bad,” and his hardening of the hearts “of whomsoever he chooses” to support their view:

What then are we to say? Is there injustice on God’s part? By no means! ... You will say to me then, ‘Why then does he still find fault? For who can resist his will?’ But who indeed are you, a human being, to argue with God? Will what is moulded say to the one who moulds it, ‘Why have you made me like this?’ Has the potter no right over the clay, to make out of the same lump one object for special use and another for ordinary use? What if God, desiring to show his wrath and to make known his power, has endured with much patience the objects of wrath that are made for destruction; and what if he has done so in order to make known the riches of his glory for the objects of mercy, which he has prepared beforehand for glory...? (Romans 9)

Even here, though, Paul might be interpreted as saying that God’s hardening of people’s hearts is necessary for and sufficiently outweighed by God’s making known his power and glory—a possibility that I will discuss later. In any case, I will not consider the view that the Rights Condition is alone sufficient for a successful theodicy, since this seems to me implausible unless God is “above morality,” and so not subject to moral obligations—a view against which I have already argued, in section 3 of this chapter.

⁴⁴ Byrne writes:

The place of that injunction in traditional moral theology is to set limits to how far

theodicy to be acceptable to as wide an audience as possible—utilitarians as well as Kantians. And, anyway, I hope to show that it will not matter how the third condition is interpreted, since the explanations that a divine determinist might offer to justify God’s causing of human sin will not even meet the first two conditions for a successful theodicy. With these conditions before us, then, let us consider what theodicies are usually offered to explain God’s creation of a world containing moral evil, and whether any could be of use to the divine determinist.

Probably the most popular and intuitively plausible of all justifications for the moral evil that exists in the world is the free will defense. Very briefly, the basic idea of this theodicy is that the free will of creatures is a great good, either intrinsically, or instrumentally, by making possible moral goodness which is itself a great good. But having true freedom and the capacity for moral goodness requires having the capacity to commit moral evil as well. Thus it was impossible for God to realize the great good of free creatures without allowing for the possibility of moral evil in the world. But, as Alvin Plantinga has argued, it is possible that God could not have created a world in which there were free creatures, none of whom actually commit moral evil. For it is possible that free creatures are “transworld deprave”—that is, that in every possible

we can pursue good by way of doing evil as its precondition. There are some acts that are so heinous that one may not do them for the sake of the bringing about a greater good or warding off a greater evil.... Helm’s God has precisely planned, purposed, and necessitated acts of... horrendous wickedness so that good may come of them. Helm argues... that the vision of God which will come to us... will swallow up and defeat all horrendous evils.... But why should we not say that such a vision would be sullied, dirtied by God having to purpose, and the innocent to endure, such evils? This is not the objection that the innocent have to suffer for the sake of others’ benefit, but the complaint that even where they partake of the redeeming good, it is cheapened by the means employed to reach it. (2009, p. 200)

world that God had it within his power to actualize (“feasible worlds”), such creatures commit moral evil. But if free creatures really are transworld deprave, then in order to create them at all, God had to create a world in which there was moral evil (Plantinga, 1977).

Although Plantinga’s version of the free will defense, put in terms of modal logic and transworld properties, is philosophically sophisticated, the basic idea behind it is rather intuitive and has been prevalent in theistic thought from early on.⁴⁵ However, the free will defense has met a number of objections in contemporary philosophy. Some have wondered whether the notion of transworld depravity is plausible⁴⁶; others have doubted the value of creaturely freedom relative to the disvalue of the actual moral evil in the world, thus raising the question of whether the free will defense meets the Outweighing Condition for a successful theodicy.⁴⁷ But regardless of whether such objections to the free will defense can be countered, it should be obvious why

⁴⁵ Many Christians have interpreted the account of Adam’s sin in Genesis 3 in terms of the misuse of free will. Augustine developed an elaborate theodicy on the basis of this idea in his *City of God*, according to which God’s angels first revolted against God’s rule, after which humans, tempted by these fallen angels, did the same. As John Hick has noted, Augustine’s theodicy is “built on two central pillars of doctrine: first, that God created all things good; and second, that free creatures, by an inexplicably perverse misuse of their God-given freedom, fell from grace, and that from this fall have proceeded all the other evils that we know” (1966, p. 68).

⁴⁶ For to grant the mere possibility that free creatures are transworld deprave is actually to commit oneself to quite a strong claim, which might seem to require independent argument of the sort that Plantinga and other proponents of the free will defense fail to provide. Zachary Manis, for instance, has argued “(A) that to grant the central claim of the [free will defense] is to grant that it is in fact metaphysically impossible for God to create a world that contains moral goodness but no moral evil; (B) that the possibility of transworld depravity is incompatible with a proposition that is *prima facie* more plausible (namely, that it is possible that not all essences are transworldly depraved); and (C) that if transworld depravity is a possibility, then it is, in fact, a truth about the actual world” (2006, p. 159). Interestingly, after raising such objections in an earlier article (2004), Manis attempts to rebut them in a later one (2006).

⁴⁷ Quentin Smith, for instance, has claimed in his argument from the problem of evil that if God exists, it is not possible for him to do evil, and yet “God is not lacking in anything of value”; thus, the freedom to do evil is not of any value (Pruss 2008, p. 433).

such a theodicy is not available to the divine determinist. For it only makes sense to say that free creatures are transworld deprived if the freedom of which we are speaking is *libertarian* freedom—i.e. the freedom to do otherwise than what God wills. Otherwise, if we were talking about *compatibilist* freedom, then it would be entirely inexplicable why God could not create a world in which there were free creatures who never commit moral evil. So, it would seem that any divine determinist version of the free will defense will not meet the Necessary Condition for a successful theodicy. For any account of creaturely freedom that divine determinists could accept would be compatibilist; but if compatibilism is true, then the existence of moral evil is not a necessary consequence of God's creating free beings capable of moral goodness.

Thus the free will defense is not really an option for the divine determinist. Another popular justification of God's permission of evil, the so-called "soul-making theodicy," also seems to depend on a libertarian conception of human freedom; and yet some have suggested that it might be possible to modify this theodicy in order to make it compatible with divine determinism. The basic idea of the soul-making theodicy, which also has roots in early theistic thought,⁴⁸ is that it is a great good for the world to contain creatures who develop, morally and spiritually, through struggle, suffering, trial and temptation. As John Hick, a modern proponent of this view, has put it:

One who has attained to goodness by meeting and eventually mastering temptation, and thus by rightly making responsible choices in concrete situations, is good in a richer and more valuable sense than would be one created *ab initio* in a state... of virtue. In the former case, which is that of the actual moral achievements of mankind, the individual's goodness has within it the strength of

⁴⁸ John Hick claims that the first major proponent of the soul-making theodicy was Irenaeus, the 2nd century Bishop of Lyons and author of "the Church's first systematic theology" (1966, p. 217). Hick also suggests in his book that various scriptural passages imply this view.

temptations overcome, a stability based upon an accumulation of right choices, and a positive and responsible character that comes from the investment of costly personal effort. (1966, pp. 291-292)

But, according to Hick, a few conditions must be met in order for such soul-making to occur:

First, people must have the ability to choose between good and evil, and sufficient opportunities to carry out their choices in the world so as to allow for character-building. And second, the world must contain challenges to people's characters "of a sort that allows for both virtuous and vicious responses" (Murray, 2009, p. 368).

Thus Hick suggests that *natural* evil is necessary for people's moral and spiritual development. For unless there is need and want in the world, we cannot learn to give charitably; unless there is pain and suffering in the world, we cannot learn to respond compassionately; and so on. Furthermore, Hick contends, the natural evil must seem to us undeserved and "dysteleological" — that is, given neither as a punishment for wrongdoing, nor for any redemptive purpose. Otherwise, it would not seem to us something that we should try to prevent or eliminate, and so it would not prompt us to a sympathetic response. Hick writes, "it is precisely this feature of our common human lot [that is, suffering that is apparently pointless] that creates sympathy between man and man and evokes the unselfish kindness and goodwill which are among the highest values of personal life" (1966, pp. 377-378).

Hick therefore concludes that natural evil is necessary for the development of human virtue. But why is *moral* evil also necessary on his account? As Paul Helm notes, Hick is committed to a libertarian conception of human freedom, and thus his soul-making theodicy for natural evil seems to be combined with a sort of free will defense for moral evil. In other words, Hick thinks that the ability to do moral evil as well as good is necessary for moral development, and for the coming to have an "authentic faith" which characterizes spiritual maturity (1966, p.

311). But then, if creatures are made in a state of moral and spiritual immaturity, at an “epistemic distance” from their creator—which Hick says is required for real creaturely autonomy (1966, p. 317)—then it is “virtually inevitable” that they will commit moral evil (1966, p. 313).

Now, as I have already noted, the traditional free will defense is not an option for the divine determinist, since it depends on a libertarian conception of human freedom. And it might seem that Hick’s view could not easily be modified to accommodate a divine determinist conception, since creatures with such freedom could still, presumably, develop morally and spiritually through struggle, suffering, trial and temptation without ever actually committing moral evil.⁴⁹ Yet, Helm has argued that “while Hick, a prominent proponent of this theodicy, is himself committed to indeterminism, indeterminism is not a necessary or intrinsic part of such an approach.” For, Helm says, it is “possible to hold that evil is justified by the good that will result from it as men and women react to evil in a way that is compatible with determinism and which God can infallibly ordain and foresee” (1993, pp. 207-208). Helm does not explain what he means by this, but in another section of his book, in which he discusses the “*felix culpa*” theodicy, his reasoning becomes clearer. Helm explains there that “The ‘happy fault’ to which this phrase refers is the fall of Adam. This is happy because it, and it alone, makes possible the divine redemption from which the blessings of pardon and renewal flow.” But what exactly are these blessings, and why are they not possible without the fall of man? Helm writes:

As it is impossible for a person to be forgiven who has not committed a fault, so it is impossible for God to forgive, to show mercy, in a universe in which there is no fault. If one supposes that it is a good thing for God to display his mercy and grace, and that both the universe and its creator benefit if God manifests his

⁴⁹ Some have suggested that this is the best way to understand the freedom of Jesus, who, according to the author of Hebrews, was tested in every way as we are, yet did not sin.

forgiveness and grace, then this also provides a reason for permitting evil.” (1993, pp. 214-215)

Thus Helm seems to be drawing an analogy between divine and human forgiveness, arguing that neither is possible without the existence of moral evil and both are so good as to more than compensate for that evil.

If Helm is right about his claim that without human fault there can be no human forgiveness, and that such forgiveness more than compensates for such fault, then his theodicy for moral evil would succeed in meeting both the Necessary Condition and the Outweighing Condition described above. Moreover, his theodicy would not require a libertarian account of human freedom. For, in contrast to the traditional soul-making theodicy, which claims that having the *possibility* of doing both moral evil and good is necessary for the greater good of moral and spiritual development, this modified theodicy claims only that the *actual doing* of moral evil is necessary for the greater good of human forgiveness and mercy.

But is Helm right, that moral fault is both necessary for human forgiveness and sufficiently outweighed by it? It seems to me that both of these claims are questionable. With respect to the first claim, there seem to be two ways to object. First, one might offer a counterexample, in which forgiveness is granted even though no wrong is actually done. Here is one:

Sue promises John a ride to an appointment; but when the time comes for her to drive him, she does not show up. John thinks that Sue must have forgotten her, or just decided not to come; but although he feels hurt by Sue’s apparent carelessness, he decides to forgive her. Yet as it turns out, Sue was not careless;

rather, she was in a car accident on the way to John's house that prevented her from showing up.

This seems like a case in which there is forgiveness without moral fault.

Now one might try to respond to such a counterexample by arguing that in a world such as Sue and John's, in which there was only *apparent* and not *actual* moral wrongdoing, people would soon realize that they had misperceived their situations, and so cease to forgive each other. But this is both untrue, and beside the point. It is untrue, since in a situation like John and Sue's, the forgiver might never find out that he was not, in fact, wronged. Sue might never get the chance to tell John that she was in a car accident; or she might decide not to tell him, instead simply taking the blame for not fulfilling her promise. And it is beside the point, since even if people did come to realize that they had not been wronged, and so eventually stopped forgiving each other for perceived wrongs, this would not be a problem. For according to the soul-making theodicy proponents, people will progress in their moral and spiritual development until they reach maturity, at which point they will completely cease to do wrong. Hick, for instance, writes: "The picture with which we are working is... developmental and teleological. Man is in process of becoming the *perfected being* whom God is seeking to create" (1966, p. 292, italics added). So, on their own view, too, there will come a time when the process of moral and spiritual development is complete, when there will be nothing to forgive, and thus no acts of forgiveness.⁵⁰

⁵⁰ One might wonder whether proponents of a deterministic soul-making theodicy could reject this claim and maintain that people will always be wronging each other and requiring forgiveness. It seems to me, however, that it is a central tenet of the Christian faith that at least some humans will reach a state of moral perfection, after which point they will no longer sin. This is the eschatological vision expressed, for instance, in 1 John 3: "when he is revealed, we will be like him, for we will see him as he is. And all who have this hope in him purify

One might still object to this counterexample, however, by pointing out that if there were such acts of forgiveness without fault in a divinely determined world, then God would be “the Father of lies,” so to speak—for he would intentionally be causing people to be deceived about their having been wronged by others, in order to make forgiveness of such (mis)perceived wrongs possible.⁵¹ This must be granted. But it should be noted that according to Helm’s modified theodicy, God is, as they say, “the Author of sin,” since he intentionally is causing people to wrong others in order to make forgiveness of such (rightly) perceived wrongs possible. Now I would ask, which is worse? It seems to me that causing someone to misperceive their situation such that they believe that they have been wronged is not as bad as causing someone to actually wrong another. But according to the Necessary Condition for a successful theodicy, it must not be possible for the good secured by God’s causing the evil in question to have been secured by God’s causing of some lesser evil. So, even if people’s misperceiving of their situations is evil, since it is less evil than their committing wrongdoing against each other it follows that Helm’s theodicy fails to meet this Necessary Condition.

It therefore seems that moral fault is not necessary for acts of forgiveness so long as there is the (mis)perception of faults to be forgiven, and that such misperception is less evil than any actual moral fault. Moreover, even if acts of forgiveness were *not* possible in a world free of moral fault, it seems that forgiving characters could still exist. By forgiving characters, I mean the characters of people who *would* forgive others, if they *were to be wronged*—even if they never actually are wronged. (We might call such people “counterfactually forgiving.”) Such a

themselves, just as he is pure.... No one who abides in him sins; no one who sins has either seen him or known him.”

⁵¹ This objection was raised by Keith Yandell, personal communication, April 2011.

character trait of forgiveness seems to be a great good in itself, and also to be integrally related to other character traits that are great goods. For people who are forgiving—whether actually or counterfactually—tend to be understanding of human frailty, empathetic with others who are suffering, and desiring of eliminating human misery; and they also tend to be generous, giving up what is rightfully theirs, and self-sacrificial, willing to put themselves at risk of being hurt again. These are all valuable traits of character that can manifest themselves in various ways, not only in acts of forgiveness. Thus, for this reason, too, it seems that forgiveness—at least as *trait of character* or *tendency of a person* to act in certain ways—can exist without the actual occurrence of moral failing. Therefore, the modified soul-making theodicy does not seem to meet the Necessary Condition for a successful theodicy, since moral evil seems unnecessary for the realization of the good of forgiveness.

Not only does the modified soul-making theodicy seem not to meet the Necessary Condition for a successful theodicy, it also seems not to meet the Outweighing Condition. For the evil purportedly required for the good of forgiveness seems not to be sufficiently outweighed by that good. To see why not, compare the following two relationships, and consider which one actually has more value:

(Rel. 1) Mark and Mary live in an environment with much natural evil and face many challenges in their lives; and the temptation for each one to abandon the other and strike out on their own, or at least to put their own needs before the other's, is at times very great. But they love each other, and are greatly concerned about each other's wellbeing, and so they resist this temptation, always looking out for each other and sacrificing their own wellbeing when necessary for the sake of the other's good. Over the course of their lifetimes, and many trials and temptations,

they display every virtue possible in a world of great natural evil—patience, kindness, compassion, cooperation, commitment, courage, and so on⁵²—except for forgiveness; for, since they are both so virtuous, they never have the occasion to forgive each other’s vices.

(Rel. 2) Bill and Betty find themselves in a similar situation to Mary and Mark’s—facing many challenges because of their difficult circumstances—but they often give in to temptation, taking their frustrations out on each other and putting their own needs before the other’s. Over the course of their lifetimes, they manifest a good many vices: impatience, unkindness, cruelty, uncooperativeness, infidelity, cowardice, and so on. On some occasions, they have outbursts of anger, accusing each other of the vicious acts of which they are both guilty. But after such outbursts, they “make up,” each apologizing for their own wrongdoings and forgiving the other for theirs.

⁵² I take it that all of these virtues are possible in a world in which there is natural but no moral evil. For instance, compassion could be manifested in response to the suffering of another brought on by a natural disaster, while patience could be displayed in dealing with one’s own protracted diseases or disabilities, and so on. However, it has been suggested to me by Steve Nadler (personal communication, May 2011), that the virtue of *contrition* may be like forgiveness, in that it requires some moral evil for its manifestation. While this may be true, it seems to me that the arguments I present against a theodicy appealing to the good of forgiveness could equally well be applied to a theodicy appealing to the good of contrition.

One might also wonder (as Keith Yandell has) whether such moral virtues as Mark and Mary display are possible in a world without either moral *or* natural evil. Though a detailed answer to such a question is beyond the scope of this paper, it seems to me the answer is *yes*, for the same reason there could be moral virtues without moral evil: so long as there was the (mis)perception of natural evil, there could be morally virtuous responses to those in (mis)perceived need. However, I am not sure that a world in which there was misperception about one’s natural environment would be *better than*, or even *of the same value as*, a world in which there was natural evil. Thus, I am not sure that the objection that God could cause people to (mis)perceive natural evil, rather than causing actual natural evil, is an adequate response to the soul-making theodicy for natural evil—for God’s being the “Father of lies” may be worse than his being the “Author of suffering.”

Now, I would ask, which relationship is, overall, greater? It seems to me that the first, in which each person is morally perfect and always acts virtuously toward the other, is much better than the second, in which there is much vice, but which provides the occasion for forgiveness. And the reason *why* the first seems better than the second I have already suggested: for what is good about forgiveness seems to be not so much the *actual acts of forgiving wrongs*, but the *sort of character that would forgive if wronged*—the sort of character that is compassionate and kind and generous and self-sacrificial. In other words, acts of forgiveness seems to be a great good in large part because they are a manifestation of these *other* virtues—ones that Mary and Mark have to a greater extent than Bill and Betty. But if I am right, that relationships between morally perfect people are greater than those between morally imperfect people, even though the latter allow for acts of forgiveness which the former do not, then Helm's modified version of the soul-making theodicy fails to meet the Outweighing Condition for a successful theodicy. For although forgiveness might be a great moral good, it is not great enough to justify God's creation of a world in which there is moral evil.

It might be worth pointing out here that for Helm's modified soul-making theodicy to be sufficient, it is not enough that the good of forgiveness outweighs the evil of *some* possible moral fault; it must outweigh *all* of the moral failings that occur in the actual world. For since, according to the divine determinist, God determines every human action, all acts of moral evil must be justified by a deterministic theodicy. Yet, when one considers the actual quantity and quality of moral evil in the world that would have to be outweighed by the good of forgiveness, Helm's theodicy becomes even less plausible as a complete account of moral evil. For it is *extremely* implausible to suppose that the evil of all the mass genocides and other crimes against humanity that have occurred in this world are outweighed by the goodness of the acts of

forgiveness that they brought about. Indeed, in many cases such atrocities have not brought about much forgiveness at all, but rather have embittered the sufferers and survivors. Thus a supplement to the soul-making theodicy would seem to be needed, to account for the more horrendous of evils that have occurred in the world. I will consider such a supplemental theodicy shortly.

We can conclude here, though, that *on its own* or as a *complete account* of moral evil Helm's modified soul-making theodicy fails to meet both necessary conditions for a successful theodicy. For moral evil seems neither necessary for the good of forgiveness, nor (at least in many cases) to be outweighed by that good. Of course, I have only discussed the part of Helm's account that appeals to the good of *human* forgiveness. But I think that at least part of what I have said can also be applied to the "felix culpa" theodicy, which appeals to the good of *divine* forgiveness and mercy. For, just as a human relationship between morally perfect people seems better than one between morally imperfect people who forgive each other for the wrongs they do, so a relationship between God and morally perfect human beings seems better than one in which God bestows his mercy and forgiveness on penitent sinners.

Having determined that the soul-making theodicy is insufficient to justify God's causing of all human sin, I will now consider two other ways theists have attempted to explain the existence of evil in the world, through appeals to divine punishment or the natural consequences of sin. According to the first theodicy, "some evil is to be explained as a result of divine punishment for human wrongdoing" (Murray 2009, p. 360). Such evil might either be natural, such as suffering due to some disease or disability, or moral, in the form of being caused to commit further sin. Again, such an account of evil seems to have roots in the historical theistic

tradition.⁵³ However, as Murray notes, if such an explanation is to be successful in justifying God's permission of evil, divine punishment must be necessary for some greater good. But what could such a greater good be? Proponents of this theodicy have variously argued that punishment secures the goods of rehabilitation, deterrence, societal protection, and retribution (2009, p. 361).⁵⁴

In contrast to, or in combination with, such a divine punishment theodicy, a "natural consequence" theodicy accounts for at least some evils in the world as the natural consequence of human sin. Thus Leibniz, who held such a view, wrote, "Original sin, which disposes men towards evil, is not merely a penalty for the first sin; it is a natural consequence thereof.... It is like drunkenness, which is a penalty for excess in drinking and is at the same time a natural consequence that easily leads to new sins" (quoted in Murray 2009, p. 362). But what would be the greater good secured by such evil consequences? Peter van Inwagen, a modern proponent of the natural consequence theodicy, has suggested that the consequences of sin make us "dissatisfied with our state of separation" from God and render it very hard for us "to delude ourselves about the kind of world we live in: a hideous world, much of whose hideousness is quite plainly traceable to the inability of human beings to govern themselves" (cited in Murray

⁵³ This would seem to be the way Paul reasons, for instance, in his attempt to explain the sins of the Gentiles:

"God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the degrading of their bodies among themselves, because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshipped and served the creature rather than the Creator... And since they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them up to a debased mind and to things that should not be done" (Romans 1).

⁵⁴ Origin of Alexandria, for instance, appealed to rehabilitation as the reason for at least some evil, describing it as chastisement "for the benefit of the chastised." Aquinas appealed to retribution, writing, "the order of justice belongs to the order of the universe; and this requires that penalty should be dealt out to sinners" (both cited in Murray 2009, p. 361).

2009, p. 362). Thus such evils would seem to secure our awareness of the great evilness of sin and our conversion to God and the moral life.

Now as both Murray and Helm have pointed out, the divine punishment and natural consequence theodicies cannot be complete accounts of all of the moral evil in the world. For each presupposes the existence of some first sin, which either results in punishment or begets more sin; but neither are able to account for the existence of the first sin. Thus, both Murray and Helm conclude, the divine punishment and natural consequence theodicies need to be supplemented with another theodicy that can explain why God would cause sin in the first place (Helm 1993, p. 209; Murray 2009, p. 362). But, the supplementary accounts to which proponents of the divine punishment and natural consequence theodicies tend to appeal are the free will defense or traditional soul-making theodicy, which we have already seen depend on libertarian conceptions of human freedom at odds with divine determinism. So, neither the divine punishment nor the natural consequence theodicy, as each is traditionally put forth, would seem to be of much use to the divine determinist.

The divine determinist might argue, however, that the good of divine retribution, either by itself or in conjunction with some other good, is so great as to justify not only God's punishment of sinners, but God's causing humans to sin in the first place. Such a theodicy might be offered in conjunction with the one already discussed that appeals to the goodness of God's forgiveness. For instance, one might suggest that God's saving of some sinners while damning of others makes possible a manifestation of both divine mercy and divine justice. Such a theodicy seems implicit in Aquinas' explanation of God's predestination of some and reprobation of others, which he maintains "must be sought in the goodness of God":

God is said to have made all things through His goodness, so that the divine goodness might be represented in things. Now it is necessary that God's goodness, which in itself is one and simple, should be manifested in many ways in His creation; because creatures in themselves cannot attain to the simplicity of God. Thus it is that for the completion of the universe there are required diverse grades of being, of which some hold a high and some a low place in the universe. That this multiformity of grades may be preserved in things, God allows some evils, lest many good things should be hindered.... Let us then consider the whole of the human race as we consider the whole universe. God has willed to manifest His goodness in men; in respect to those whom he predestines, by means of His mercy, in sparing them; and in respect of others, whom he reprobates, by means of his justice, in punishing them. This is the reason why God elects some and rejects others." (*Summa Theologica* I.23.5)

As Thomas Flint has summarized Aquinas' view, a world in which only some are saved is "a more fitting illustration of the divine nature" than a world in which all are saved, since the former manifests divine justice as well as divine mercy, whereas the latter manifests only divine mercy (1988, p. 169). Thus Aquinas implies that God's creating a world that reflects more of the divine nature is a great good, so great as to justify God's causing of sin in the first place.

But does such a combined appeal, to the goodness of divine justice and the goodness of divine mercy, succeed in justifying God's causing human sin? I think not, for much the same reason that the appeal to the goodness of divine mercy, on its own, did not succeed. For in both cases, the Outweighing Condition for a successful theodicy seems not to be met. As I suggested above, forgiveness might be a great good, but it is not great *enough* to sufficiently outweigh the evil of moral fault. And the same can be said of retributive punishment. We can, to make this point evident, again compare two human relationships—one in which both partners are morally perfect, and always treat each other right, and the other in which at least one of the partners is morally imperfect, and frequently wrongs the other. Even if the latter relationship allows the wronged partner the opportunity to manifest both mercy, in forgiving, and justice, in punishing,

the former relationship would still seem to be better, overall. Likewise it would seem that a world in which all creatures did what was right would be better than one in which they frequently did wrong, even though only the latter would allow for God to manifest his mercy and justice, in forgiving some and punishing others.

What is more, Aquinas' justification for God's causing of human sin not only fails to meet the Outweighing Condition for a successful theodicy, but it fails to meet the Necessary Condition, too. For while acts of forgiveness arguably do require some moral fault to forgive, acts of justice do not require any such fault. And that is because justice is done whenever people are given what they *deserve*. But God could give people what they deserve without punishing them, if he created them such that they never did any wrong and so deserved only praise and no punishment. Thus, God's justice could be manifest in a world without moral evil. Therefore, the combined appeal to the goodness of divine mercy and the goodness of divine justice is still not sufficient to justify God's causing of human sin.

So far we have considered four attempts to justify God's creation of a world with moral evil: the free will defense, the soul-making theodicy, the natural consequence theodicy and the divine punishment theodicy. As we have seen, all of these in their traditional forms depend on a libertarian conception of human freedom, and attempts to modify them to accommodate a divine deterministic conception render them unable to meet either the Necessary Condition or the Outweighing Condition for a successful theodicy. One other attempt to justify God's creation of a world containing evil that also appeals to a libertarian conception of human freedom is the natural law theodicy. This theodicy, in its original form, is unhelpful for our purposes not only because it is indeterministic, but because it is intended to explain only the existence of *natural*

evil. However, it seems to me that these two limitations are connected; for, it is in virtue of the fact that the natural law theodicy views human actions as undetermined by natural laws that it cannot explain the existence of moral evil in terms of them. Thus the theodicy might be modified to accommodate a divine deterministic conception of human freedom, and to account for moral as well as natural evil. After briefly describing the original indeterministic natural law theodicy, however, I will argue that the divine deterministic modification faces irresolvable problems.

According to the original natural law theodicy as Murray explains it, “the world needs to cooperate with our choice-making” in order for us to be able to act freely. But one thing that is necessary in order for the world to so “cooperate” with our choices is “that the environment around [us] be governed by regular, orderly laws of nature.” For otherwise, if the world were chaotic, there would be no reliable connection between the choices we make and the actions that we take, and so we would not be able to carry out our intentions in the world. But, in a world that “operates according to regular, orderly laws of nature,” it is possible that such laws “conspire to intersect with the interests of creatures to cause them harm. When they do so, natural evil will be the result” (2009, p. 366).⁵⁵ Of course, one might question whether natural evil is a *necessary* consequence of the world’s being governed by laws of nature, or whether different laws than the actual ones might have been ordained which would not cause harm to creatures. However, as Murray points out, there is some reason to that that “there is not much wiggle room in the way the laws and constants of the world are constructed.” He writes:

One fairly recent discovery of scientists is that the cosmos seems to be balanced on a razor’s edge in such a way that were the laws and constants that govern its activity slightly different, the cosmos would be unable to sustain intelligent life.

⁵⁵ This version of the natural law theodicy seems importantly different than the versions presented by Leibniz and Malebranche, which do not appeal to the good of free human agency and the necessary connection between such agency and the laws of nature.

This provides us with some good reason to suppose that if the universe is going to be capable of supporting life, it will have to be governed by laws and constants similar to those we find in the actual world (2009, p. 366).

Thus, proponents of the natural law theodicy argue that natural evil may very well be a necessary consequence of the great good that is our free agency, which requires the existence of such natural laws.

Now as I have already mentioned, proponents of the natural law theodicy normally appeal to a libertarian conception of human freedom, and so their account cannot, as it stands, explain the existence of moral evil in the world. For the only way they could explain the existence of moral evil in terms of an unfortunate confluence of the laws of nature would be to say that free human actions are *determined* by those laws. Otherwise, if morally evil human actions were not determined by the laws of nature, then the natural law theodicy would not meet the Necessary Condition for a successful theodicy, since whatever good the laws of nature realized could have been secured without those actions occurring. But perhaps this theodicy could be modified to accommodate a divine deterministic conception of human freedom and so to account for moral as well as natural evil. What would such a modified natural law theodicy look like? Well first, it would have to assert that some great good could only be realized by *natural* divine determinism, i.e. the thesis that all events in the world—including those involving human action—are determined by the will of God, *mediated by antecedent events in accordance with the laws of nature*. Then, it would have to maintain that just as natural evil is a necessary consequence of these laws conspiring “to intersect with the interests of creatures” to cause them pain and suffering, so moral evil is a necessary consequence of such laws conspiring against the better judgment of creatures to cause them to sin.

But what would this great good be, that only natural divine determinism could make possible? As we have seen, according the original natural law theodicy, the greater good is supposed to be free human agency; and it is argued that free humans could not effectively act if there were no law-like connections between causes and effects, for then they would not know how to carry out their intentions in the world. But this claim, that law-like connections are required for free human agency, is only plausible on the assumption that creatures are *ultimately* responsible for their own actions, such that if they did not know how to carry out their intentions, they would not be able to do so. In other words, this is plausible only if we assume that *God* is not ultimately responsible for human actions, and so that divine determinism is false. For if free human action were divinely determined, then God could make humans freely act even without their knowledge of the natural connections between causes and effects.

It thus would seem that on a divine determinist account of human freedom, it is not plausible to claim that the natural laws and so the evils such laws purportedly cause are necessary for the greater good of *free human action*. For, it would seem that God could cause such action even without the environmental stability and predictability that natural laws provide. But perhaps a divine determinist might respond by pointing out even if human beings could *act* without knowledge of any law-like connections in the world, by being caused to act by God, such human action would not be *rational*. For the agents would have no *reason* to believe that acting in certain ways would bring about the effects that they intended. For example, in a naturally chaotic but divinely determined world, it might be the case that my mailing someone a letter would result in their receiving it, because God would make sure that the letter got to the intended recipient; but I would never have *reason to believe* that my action would have such an effect. And, just as natural laws governing physical phenomena would thus seem to be required

for my actions involving physical objects to be rationally grounded, so the divine determinist might argue that natural laws governing psychological phenomena are required for my actions involving other psychological agents to be rationally grounded. Thus, she might contend that natural laws governing both physical and psychological phenomena are necessary for rational action in the world, in order to provide ground for agents' reasons for acting.⁵⁶ And such rational action is a great good—great enough to justify God's maintaining such laws, even though they sometimes result in the occurrence of both natural and moral evil. Or so a divine determinist might argue.

The problem with such an argument is that, while the creation of deterministic natural laws may be *one* way of grounding the rationality of human action,⁵⁷ it does not seem to be the only way. For first of all, even in an otherwise totally chaotic world, God could make it known to humans that their actions would have the effects they intended; and such a divine revelation could serve to ground the rationality of human action. For people would know that even though

⁵⁶ One might interpret Jack Crabtree as offering this sort of argument. After defining the “controlling nature” of an individual as the “certain set of laws that determine that it will act in one way rather than another” (2004, p. 114), he writes, “If there were no controlling natures determining the rational orderliness of things, there would be no objective, determinative patterns of human experience. And if there were no determinative patterns in human experience there could be no knowledge” of other people. But, he says, “We rely on our knowledge of other people’s personality... on a daily basis. When we get married, sign contracts, vote for candidates, hire employees, or make any of a host of other decisions, we are making judgments based on our understanding of the controlling nature of individual human beings” (2004, pp. 118-119). Yet Crabtree seems to think that such determination of human action is not according to *natural* laws, for, as mentioned in Chapter II, he insists that for an action to be free, it must not be “the result of inviolable laws of nature... operative within the actor himself” (2004, p. 214).

⁵⁷ This itself is a questionable claim. Many have argued that a naturally deterministic world would preclude rational action altogether. E. J. Lowe, for instance, writes, “To act for a reason is to act in a way that is responsive to the cogency of certain considerations in favor of one’s so acting—and this is incompatible with one’s being *caused* [i.e. *determined*] to act in that way, because causal processes bring about their effects with complete indifference to the question of whether those effects have cogent considerations in their favor.” (2008, p. 156)

there were no natural laws, God would see to it that their actions were effective, and this fact would give them reason to attempt to carry out their intentions in the world. And second of all, it is not as though the only two options for the world are total chaos and natural determinism; for the world might be governed by *probabilistic* natural laws. And such probabilistic laws could still ground the rationality of human action. For instance, if I knew that there was a 90% chance that my mailing a letter would result in someone's receiving it, this would seem to give me reason enough for mailing it (supposing I had reason for wanting them to receive it). But it is not clear why either in a naturally chaotic but divinely determined world, or in a world governed by probabilistic natural laws, moral evil is necessary. Defenders of the original natural law theodicy make a case for the necessity of natural evil by arguing that "there is not much wiggle room in the way the laws and constants of the world are structured," at least if such laws are to allow for intelligent life in the world (Murray 2009, p. 367). But in a naturally chaotic or probabilistic world, there would seem to be much more "wiggle room," as it were, for God to prevent both natural and moral evil. It thus seems that the natural law theodicy, modified to account for moral evil in addition to natural evil, is unconvincing, since it fails to meet the Necessary Condition for a successful theodicy. For natural laws determining human actions do not seem necessary for the good of either human freedom or rational agency.⁵⁸

One final justification of God's causing of human sin that I will consider has been recently put forward by Hugh McCann. McCann's theodicy is like John Hick's, in that it insists on the necessity of a painful process of development, which involves moral evil, for the

⁵⁸ A further problem with the natural law theodicy is one I have already discussed, in Chapter II of this paper: since it would require the laws of nature to be naturally deterministic, it would not seem to allow for a theologically robust enough account of special divine action.

realization of an end of much value. Unlike Hick's theodicy, though, McCann's begins with a divine deterministic conception of human freedom. McCann starts with the following question: "Why should it be that the best of all possible worlds would be populated by creatures like us" — that is, by "sinners, one and all"? He goes on to suggest that one of God's purposes in creating the world was to make creatures with whom God could "share his life... in a state of eternal union." McCann writes,

Ultimately, then, God aims to be not only our creator, but also our friend. True friendship, however, is a matter of mutual commitment. And the commitment has to be voluntary... it takes a meaningful and responsible decision on our part to accept the offer of friendship [God] presents to us. But (and here is the final rub) a responsible choice in God's favor requires that we understand the alternative — which is to be at enmity with him.

Thus McCann argues that the experience of enmity with God is necessary for our coming to be in right relationship with him. For only after having turned from God and "come to know what it means to be alone" — what the alternative to friendship with God is like — can we be "in a position to choose responsibly to accept or to reject God's offer of fellowship" (2005, p. 153).

Now for McCann's theodicy to be successful, two things must be the case: first, the good of creatures' friendship with God must sufficiently outweigh the evil of both the sin that they commit, and the suffering that such sin causes; and second, the good of such friendship must not be possible without such evil. This second claim seems dubious, however. For why could creatures not know what the alternatives are (friendship and enmity with God) and what their relative values are (the former being greater than the latter) — and so make a reasonable choice between them — without ever having experienced them? McCann claims that the effects of enmity — "guilt, remorse, a sense of defilement, and the hopeless desolation of being cut off from God" — cannot really be understood "in the abstract, because if they are only understood

abstractly they cannot be *ours*” (2005, p. 153). He thus insists that the first-hand experience of sin is not simply “a causal means” to our coming to have friendship with God, but “is an indispensable *part* of the process—something without which a legitimate choice to accept God’s friendship is not just causally but conceptually impossible” (2005, p. 154). But, it seems clear that we can, and do, make responsible choices all the time between alternatives of which we do not have such first-hand experience. Indeed, some of the most important decisions we make in our lives—of whether to get married, have children, etc.—*cannot* be made with first-hand experience of the effects of those decisions. And the case of friendship seems no different: we can, and do, responsibly choose to become friends with others without having been enemies with them first. Moreover, as Katherin Rogers has pointed out, God presumably has knowledge of guilt, remorse, defilement and desolation without himself having sinned (2007, p. 306); and a Christian might add that Jesus certainly understood such experiences, in such a way as to enable him to sympathize with the human condition, though he was without sin. But then, McCann is wrong to say that first-hand experience of sin is conceptually necessary for a responsible choice between enmity and friendship with God.

What is more, the choice as McCann describes it—between true fellowship with God and the enjoyment of salvation, on the one hand, and rebellion and enmity, complete with guilt, remorse, a sense of defilement, and hopeless desolation (not to mention eternal damnation) on the other—is so stark that it is not clear that one can be fully free in making it. For, imagine I present you with a similar choice: you can either be friends with me, or be shot in the head. Surely, if you have the desire to live another day, you will choose friendship with me. But your choice would not seem to be a fully free one, at least in the sense that McCann means by “free choice”—of a choice that “completes our nature” or “construct[s]... our character” through

actions that express the “overarching values of our lives” (2005, pp. 152-153). For, since sudden death is *such* a bad thing for you, choosing the only alternative to it—friendship with me—does not really reflect who you are or what you value. And so it would seem to be regarding enmity with God: its consequences are so bad that a choice between it and its only alternative leave one very little freedom to exercise. Thus, if the great good to be realized is our *free* decision to become friends with God, then enmity with God would seem not only unnecessary for this good, but also to make its realization virtually impossible.

I have now considered six different theodicies that have been proposed to account for God’s permission of moral evil in the world. Five of them—those that appeal to either the intrinsic or instrumental goodness of free will, moral and spiritual development, divine punishment, natural consequences of sin, and laws of nature—in their original form depend on a libertarian account of human freedom; and I have argued that attempts to modify them to accommodate a divine deterministic account render them unable to meet either the Necessary Condition or the Outweighing Condition for a successful theodicy. The final theodicy that I have considered, which appeals to the goodness of friendship with God, is divine deterministic in its original form. However, I have contended that this account, too, fails to meet the Necessary Condition for a successful theodicy. Thus, none of the theodicies that I have considered have successfully exonerated God of moral blame for causing human sin.

Of course, the six accounts that I have considered are not exhaustive of all those that have been offered in the history of theism. I would suggest, however, that they are the most well known because they are the most intuitively plausible, and so if even these more familiar accounts cannot meet the necessary conditions for a successful theodicy, then it is unlikely that

the less familiar ones will be able to do so. Therefore, I tentatively conclude that the divine determinist is not able to successfully justify God's causing of human sin by means of a complete theodicy.

Skeptical Theism

There is, however, another way that divine determinists might respond to the charge that God is morally blameworthy for causing human sin, and that is by appeal to skeptical theism. As Justin McBreuer explains it, skeptical theism is the view that “we should be skeptical of our ability to discern God's reasons for acting or refraining from acting in any particular circumstances” and, in particular, that “we should not grant that *our* inability to think of a good reason for doing or allowing something is indicative of whether or not *God* might have a good reason for doing or allowing something” (2010). I take “indicative” here to mean “some evidence.” In other words, skeptical theists maintain that our inability to think of a reason that would justify God in permitting evil is no evidence at all that there is no such reason. While skeptical theists do not claim to *know* the reason why God would create a world in which there is the sort and amount of evil that we observe, they maintain that, *for all we know*, God has a sufficient moral reason for doing so; and so they conclude that, for all we know, God is morally justified in creating a world like ours. A divine determinist appealing to skeptical theism might thus contend that the fact that no successful theodicy has been constructed to justify God's causing of human sin is no evidence that God is morally blameworthy for doing so. After explaining the skeptical theistic position in more depth, I will describe one common criticism of the view, regarding its implications for the moral life. I will then argue that while a skeptical

theist who is not committed to divine determinism may be able to respond adequately to this criticism, one who is so committed will not be able to. I therefore conclude that the divine determinist who appeals to skeptical theism must live with some seriously problematic implications of her view.

As Michael Bergmann explains it, skeptical theists are skeptical of our ability to discern “God-justifying reasons.” As a “first approximation,” Bergmann says that “a good state of affairs G—which might just be the prevention of some bad state of affairs E*—is a God-justifying reason for permitting an evil E if and only if (1) G’s goodness outweighs E’s badness and (2) G couldn’t be obtained without permitting E or something as bad or worse” (2009, p. 376). Thus he would seem to be saying that the Necessary and Outweighing Conditions are both necessary and sufficient for a successful theodicy. While he maintains that we have failed to discern God-justifying reasons for all the evil in the world, however, Bergmann suggests that we should not infer, from our failure to come up with such reasons, that there are none. He calls the inference, from apparently unjustified evil to actually unjustified evil, a “noseum inference” (2009, p. 376)—because, as McBreyer explains, it is to infer “if we can’t see ‘um [the God-justifying reasons, that is], they ain’t there” (2010). Though such an inference may seem too strong to be plausible—and also stronger than is needed by the opponents of skeptical theism—McBrayer and Bergmann both suggest at other points in their essays that the “noseum inference” can be put more weakly, in terms of likelihoods: if we can’t see the God justifying reasons, it’s likely they ain’t there.

From the perspective of skeptical theists, then, the reasoning I have presented so far might be put as follows:

- (1) God is morally blameworthy for causing human sin, unless he has a morally sufficient reason for doing so.
- (2) It does not seem to us that God has a morally sufficient reason for causing human sin.
- (3) Therefore (by 2), it is likely that God does not have a morally sufficient reason for causing human sin.
- (4) Therefore (by 1 and 3), it is likely that God is morally blameworthy for causing human sin.

Put in these terms, we can see that the inference from (2) to (3) is the “noseeum inference” to which a skeptical theist might object.

Bergmann goes on to explain that the skeptical theist’s skepticism about the “noseeum” inference is based on three more particular theses that the skeptical theist endorses:

- (ST1) We have no good reason for thinking that the possible goods we know of are representative of the possible goods there are.
- (ST2) We have no good reason for thinking that the possible evils we know of are representative of the possible evils there are.
- (ST3) We have no good reason for thinking that the entailment relations we know of between possible goods and the permission of possible evils are representative of the entailment relations there are between possible goods and the permission of possible evils. (2009, p. 376)

Again, I take “good reason” here to mean “some evidence.” Assuming that these premises are true, Bergmann asks us to consider some instance of a horrific moral evil that might lead one to question the goodness of God—say, the evil of “a 5-year old girl being raped, beaten, and murdered.” Even if none of the possible goods we know of that might outweigh this evil “stand in entailment relations” that we know of to it, “such that obtaining those goods would justify

permitting [this evil],” Bergmann says we have no warrant for concluding that God is not justified in permitting it. For ST3 prevents us from concluding that the possible goods we know of do not “feature in a God-justifying reason” for permitting the evil; and ST1 prevents us from concluding that the possible goods we do *not* know of feature in such a God-justifying reason (2009, pp. 377-378). And the same, of course, might be said of the possible *evils* we do and do not know of, the prevention of which might justify God in permitting this horrific evil. Thus, if such skeptical theses are true then the fact that such a horrific evil seems to us pointless is no evidence that God did not have some sufficient moral reason for permitting it.

One might wonder at this point whether skeptical theists have any good reason for accepting theses ST1-ST3, or whether their appeal to skepticism is simply an *ad hoc* attempt to avoid the problem of apparently pointless evil. But skeptical theists have offered various arguments in support of their skepticism. One common sort of argument begins by contrasting the vastness of divine omniscience with the relative limitedness of human understanding and proceeds to draw an analogy between our epistemic position with respect to God-justifying reasons and the epistemic position of a person with very little knowledge, experience, or skill in a particular area with respect to the reasons that a very knowledgeable, experienced, or skilled person has for acting. For instance, some skeptical theists claim that the “cognitive distance” between humans and God is analogous to that between a young child—or even an infant (Wykstra 1990, p. 155)—and her parents. But then, as McBrayer points out, “The fact that a young child cannot discern a reason for her parents allowing her to suffer pain does not constitute a good reason for the young child to conclude that there are no such reasons” (2010). Likewise, our failure to discern God’s reasons for allowing humans to suffer does not constitute a good reason for us to conclude that there are no such reasons.

In addition to making such “Arguments from Analogy,” which emphasize the immense disparity between divine and human knowledge, skeptical theists have offered so-called “Arguments from Complexity” in attempt to justify their appeal to skepticism with respect to God-justifying reasons. According to this second sort of argument, the judgments made by the opponents of skeptical theists that there are “instances of evil which were not necessary either to avoid an evil equally bad or worse or to secure some compensating good” are extraordinarily complex (McBrayer 2010). For such instances of evil are part of long causal chains, consisting of many more events; and such chains are causally connected to many other chains, such that a change in one would affect countless others. As Kirk Durston puts the point,

History is like a collection of billions of equations... that are all dependent upon each other. Each equation contains thousands or millions of variables.... If we change just one of the variables, innumerable variables in all the other dependent equations are changed as well. Although it is easy to suggest exchanging one variable for another... if we wish to see if history is actually improved by the substitution we must simultaneously solve billions of equations containing millions of variables to see if the overall, ultimate outcome has been improved.

But once we recognize that such a task is “far beyond human ability,” we should distrust our ability to make such complex judgments (Durston 2000, pp. 66-67). Thus, skeptical theists conclude that not only the vastness of divine knowledge relative to the limited scope of human understanding but also the great complexity of the natural world provides reason to accept their skeptical theses.

Despite such arguments, however, many have objected to skeptical theism on the grounds that embracing skepticism about our knowledge of God-justifying reasons forces one also to accept much farther-reaching and problematic forms of skepticism. One particular and troubling consequence which critics of skeptical theism have claimed follows from the view is skepticism about moral knowledge, and the subsequent implications of such skepticism for moral

deliberation and action. Michael Almeida and Graham Oppy, for instance, have argued that if the “noseum inference,” from “‘We have found no reasons why...’ to ‘There are [likely] no reasons why...’” is blocked by the sorts of skeptical considerations to which skeptical theists appeal, “then similar inferences will be blocked in cases of ordinary moral reasoning which we all have reason to endorse” (2003, p. 497). Taking up Bergmann’s example of the horrific evil of a 5-year old girl being raped, beaten, and murdered (E), they write:

Suppose we take seriously the idea that it follows from our acceptance of ST1-ST3 that [it] is not unlikely that there are goods beyond our ken... which justify a perfect being in not preventing E. Suppose further that we are, right now, witnesses to E, and that we could intervene to stop it at no personal cost. What we have just conceded is that, merely on the basis of our acceptance of ST1-ST3, we should insist that it is not unlikely that there is some good which, if we were smarter and better equipped, we could recognize as a reason for a perfect being’s not intervening to stop E. Plainly, we should also concede—by a parity of reason—that, merely on the basis of our acceptance of ST1-ST3, we should insist that it is not unlikely that there is some good which, if we were smarter and better equipped, we could recognize as a reason for our not intervening to stop the event. (2003, pp. 504-505)

In other words, Almeida and Oppy contend that accepting the skeptical theist’s skeptical theses requires admitting that it is not unlikely that a horrific evil is for the best, all things considered; but if it is for the best, then we have an all-things-considered reason not to try to prevent it. So, accepting these skeptical theses means admitting that it is not unlikely that we should not intervene to stop such a horrific evil from occurring. Almeida and Oppy thus conclude that skeptical theism “undermines our ability to engage in perfectly ordinary kinds of moral reasoning” (2003, p. 511) and so poses “a serious threat to ordinary moral practice” (2003, p. 512). For once we come to believe the skeptical theist’s skeptical theses, we become unable to “give first personal endorsement of any of our actions,” so that “moral deliberation can never end in anything more than the equivalent of tossing a coin.” Almeida and Oppy go on to point out

that if a person “refrains from intervening in the case of E because they have internalized the skeptical theist’s skepticism... then skeptical theists are simply in no position to say this person’s failure to intervene is wrong” (2003, p. 512). For skeptical theists must acknowledge that the person lacks justification for intervening, since she does not have reason to believe that doing so would be for the best.

The crucial question which Almeida and Oppy’s argument raises, as they point out, is “whether there is reason to hold that it is not unlikely that there are goods outside our ken which would justify a perfect being in not intervening to prevent E *which is not also* reason to hold that it is not unlikely that there are goods outside our ken which would justify us” in not intervening to prevent E (2003, p. 507). In other words, the question is whether the “parity of reason” that they put forth in the above quoted passage is warranted. Of course, one significant difference between the cases of divine and human non-intervention is that the former involves *God*, who knows what reasons there are for not intervening, while the latter involves us humans, who are in the dark about such reasons. Almeida and Oppy consider such a difference, but maintain that it is unimportant. They write, “If there are goods utterly beyond our ken... then it is hard to see that we have any reason to think that this is a relevant difference. Given that we have no knowledge of the goods at issue, surely it must be an entirely open question whether they can be secured by our failure to prevent E” (2003, p. 508). For, they suggest, even though we might lack access to God’s reasons for not intervening to prevent some horrific evil, the fact that it is not unlikely that there *is* some God-justifying reason would seem to leave open the question of whether we should also not intervene.

The skeptical theist might respond, however, by pointing to some difference between the divine and human situation which would justify God’s failure to intervene but not justify our

own failure. Daniel Howard-Snyder seems to suggest such a difference in a recent article in which he argues that if we endorse a subjective moral principle to govern our actions, according to which what we ought to do is grounded entirely in how things seem to us, based on the evidence available to us, then buying into the skeptical theist's skepticism regarding God-justifying reasons will not undermine our ability to engage in ordinary moral reasoning. The following are a few examples of such subjective moral principles suggested by Howard-Snyder:

Subjective Maximizing Act Consequentialism: An agent's act is permissible solely in virtue of the fact that she does not believe that its total consequences are overall worse than those of any option open to her; otherwise it is impermissible.

Subjective Rossianism: An agent's act is permissible solely in virtue of the fact that she does not believe that it has less on balance prima facie rightness than that of any option open to her; otherwise it is impermissible

Subjective Moral Imperative: "Intervene to prevent horrific evil you can prevent, unless you believe there is better reason for you not to intervene. (2010, p. 40)

Supposing, for instance, that the Subjective Moral Imperative is true, it does not follow that our acceptance of ST1-ST3 forces us to embrace skepticism regarding whether or not we should intervene to prevent some horrific evil like E from occurring. For the fact that we lack any reason to believe that God has a reason not to intervene does not itself constitute a positive reason for us not to intervene. And such a positive reason would be required in order to justify our lack of intervention, according to the Subjective Moral Imperative. As Howard-Snyder explains the idea behind this principle, "the presumption in favor of intervention is overridden by *believing* that there is a better reason for us not to intervene, not by *being in doubt* about whether there is a better reason for us not to intervene" (2010, p. 42). But, since there are reasons to which God has access but humans do not, God may end up having different moral obligations than we do, with respect to events like E.

Thus skeptical theists would seem to have a way of countering the charge that their skeptical theses pose a threat to our ability to engage in ordinary moral reasoning; for they can endorse a subjective moral principle according to which we should take the course of action justified by the reasons available to us and not be inhibited by the question of whether there are reasons accessible only to God that would justify a different course of action. As Bergmann, who makes a similar point, summarizes the response, “The fact that we’re in the dark about whether there are reasons that would justify a *perfect being* in permitting easily preventable horrific suffering doesn’t give us a reason to doubt that *we* ought to prevent easily preventable horrific suffering when... we can think of no outweighing goods that will be achievable by our permitting it. For we are reasonable and moral to base our decision on the likely consequences we know of and ignore the far-off ones we’re ignorant of” (2009, p. 393).

While such a response seems to be an option for most skeptical theists, however, it would not seem to be an option for one who is also a divine determinist. To see why not, consider once again the horrific evil of a 5-year old girl being raped, beaten, and murdered; and suppose that this event has already occurred, and that we are wondering whether those who witnessed it should have intervened to stop it. Now note the difference between the way in which a skeptical theist who is not committed to divine determinism and one who is so committed would respond. Recall that the skeptical theist, whether or not she is committed to divine determinism, must maintain that God did have some reason for permitting E that justifies God’s permission of it. And there being such a God-justifying reason means, as we have seen, that there is some good state of affairs G such that (1) G’s goodness outweighs E’s badness and (2) G couldn’t be obtained without permitting E or something as bad or worse. But this second condition, it should be noted, is about *God’s* permission of E, not *humans’* permission. So, the skeptical theist who is

not committed to divine determinism could maintain that G's obtaining required God's failure to intervene, but did *not* require our own failure. For if divine determinism is false, God's permitting E does not entail E's occurrence; God might permit E but E still might not occur. Thus, while the skeptical theist must say that God's permission of E was necessary for some greater good that justifies God's permission of it, if she is not committed to divine determinism, she can still maintain that those who witnessed the event had a moral duty to prevent it if they could have. Divine determinists, however, cannot make this latter claim. For if E occurred in a divinely determined world, then God not only permitted it, but positively willed and caused it; indeed, as we have seen in section 2 of this chapter, divine permission and divine causation must amount to the same thing in a divinely determined world. So, it's not only the case that God's *permission* of E is necessary for G but further that God's *causation* of E is necessary for G. In other words, the divine determinist must maintain that if this horrific evil (or one just as bad) had not occurred, then the greater good that it made possible could not have been realized. But if this is true, then it would seem that those who witnessed the event should *not* have intervened to stop it; for if they had, they would have prevented the realization of some greater good.

Here is another way of putting my point. The reply I have been considering, which skeptical theists might make in response to the charge that their skeptical theses undermine ordinary moral deliberation and action, is that "what is wrong for a person depends only on what... she knows" (McBreyer 2010)—or at least, what she thinks she knows. But the divine determinist thinks she knows something that those not committed to divine determinism do not think they know: and that is, that God has determined every event that occurs in the world. But then, this additional knowledge must factor into the divine determinist's moral deliberation. The divine determinist must reason that if some horrific evil was divinely determined, then it was

necessary for some greater good. But then, it must have been good, all things considered, that such an evil occurred. And so it would have been bad, all things considered, if someone had prevented its occurrence. So, no one should have prevented its occurrence.

To put the point still another way, recall that according to the Subjective Moral Imperative, “the presumption in favor of intervention is overridden by *believing* that there is a better reason for us not to intervene, not by *being in doubt* about whether there is a better reason for us not to intervene.” But whereas the skeptical theist not committed to divine determinism is simply *in doubt* about whether there was a good reason for those witnessing E not to intervene, the divine determinist *believes* (if she is consistent) that there was such a reason—for she believes that this horrifically evil event was divinely ordained for the sake of some greater good. And so, while the skeptical theist not committed to divine determinism will not be kept by her doubt from engaging in ordinary moral reasoning about such horrific evil, the divine determinist’s belief will undermine her ability to engage in such reasoning.

Now, the divine determinist might try to respond, at this point, by suggesting that in ordinary moral deliberation, one should not concern oneself with such greater goods known only to God; one should simply do one’s duty, as laid out in the divine commandments; and such commandments include relieving the suffering of others when we are able to do so. McCann seems to suggest such a response when he points to the difference between God’s expressed commandments and God’s efficacious will, emphasizing that it is the violation of the former, not the latter, which constitutes sin. He writes: “It is important... to emphasize that it is God’s *commands* that are crucial here, not his will. What God finally willed... [in the case] of Adam and Eve, is obvious: he willed that they do exactly what they did.... But he commanded the opposite, and *that is what counts*” (2005, p. 151, italics added). Thus the divine determinist

might say that God has given us commandments so that we can focus on “what counts”—doing our duty and not being impeded by concerns about what God’s higher purposes are and how they might actually be realized by our disobeying God’s commands.

The problem with such a response, however, is that if it does not lead to moral skepticism about our obligations to others, it will at least lead to a sort of moral “double-mindedness” about the value of events in the world. For, in reflecting on the occurrence of an event such as E, the divine determinist will reason, on the one hand, that it was a violation of God’s expressed commandment, an instance of moral evil, and so cause for *regret*—regret over the rape and murder of an innocent child, the spinelessness of the witnesses who stood by and did nothing to prevent it, and the depravity of the man who commit such a heinous crime. And yet, the divine determinist will also reason, on the other hand, that this event was necessary for some greater good that God was bringing about, which would seem to be a cause for *joy* and *celebration*, *thanksgiving* and *praise*. The divine determinist might try to maintain that we should “keep our eyes on the ground,” as it were, focusing on how things seem from our human perspective, and not thinking at all about how God’s higher purposes are fulfilled by such a horrific evil. But theists cannot prevent themselves completely from contemplating the purposes God is realizing in and through the events occurring around them. Indeed, I would contend that it is central to religious practice to strive, through prayer, study of the Scriptures, and the like, to see the events in one’s life from God’s own perspective, and to value them as God would, in his wisdom and benevolence. If some self-sacrifice is necessary for the establishment of God’s kingdom, for instance, then one ought to strive to accept, and even embrace, such self-sacrifice. Self-sacrifice need not be valued for its own sake, as an intrinsic good; and yet if it is necessary for the realization of such a greater good, it should be valued as an instrumental good. But, if the divine

determinist is right about God's ordaining of human sin, then theists should spend time, in prayer, study, and the like, grappling with the sin that they encounter in the world, and striving to appreciate how it is necessary for the realization of God's purposes. They should, in other words, attempt to accept and even embrace human sin as God-given and for the greater good. Such an attempt, however, would seem to be in serious tension with a teaching most central to the traditional theism, that human sin is opposed by God, and should be opposed by humans as well.⁵⁹

There would thus seem to be a problem with the divine determinist's attempt to exonerate God of moral blame for causing human sin. Although I have cast the problem as one facing the divine determinist who appeals to skeptical theism, the same problem arises for the divine determinist who attempts to construct a theodicy to justify God's actions. For those who attempt to give an account of God's reasons for causing human sin and those who appeal to human ignorance regarding those reasons are both assuming that there *are* God-justifying reasons; and there being such reasons entails that the moral evil in the world is necessary for some greater

⁵⁹ In a paper responding to Paul Helm's view of providence, Peter Byrne makes a similar point about the implications of divine determinism with respect to our moral attitudes. Byrne acknowledges that, on Helm's view, God only causes morally evil human actions so that some greater good may come of them, so that there is a sense in which "these acts are what God wants and a sense [in which] they are not."⁵⁹ For on the one hand, taken as necessary conditions for the greater good, God positively wants and wills their occurrence. But on the other hand, taken in and of themselves, God does not want or will them—indeed, God "hates and forbids" them. But granting this distinction, Byrne goes on to ask:

What happens when believers are persuaded of the merits of Helm's account...?

The ones who do evil deeds—the murderers, rapists, and torturers—can be assured that when they do evil they are doing just what God planned, purposed, and necessitated. They are doing just what is conceptually necessary for the attainment of God's long-term good for creation.... This looks to be highly comforting for the evil doers, but less so for those who suffer evil. (2008, pp. 199-200)

But surely, the contemplation of God's will should not be of comfort to evildoers! Something, then, must be wrong with such an account.

good. Both responses to the problem of moral evil, then, require the divine determinist to adopt a sort of double-mindedness about the status of human sin. For, on the one hand, it is a central tenet of traditional theism that human sin is prohibited by God, and so should be opposed by us. And yet, on the other hand, the divine determinist must maintain that human sin has been ordained by God, to serve some higher purpose, and so is to be appreciated and embraced as given by God for the greater good. Since this double-mindedness seems to be an unacceptable implication of both the attempt to construct a positive theodicy and the appeal to skeptical theism, I conclude that the divine determinist should not make either move. But then, the only alternative seems to be to accept that God does *not* have any morally sufficient reason for causing human sin, and so is morally blameworthy for doing so.

Section 5: That Divine Indeterminism Fares No Better

In the above sections of this chapter, I have argued that divine determinism entails God's causal and moral responsibility for the occurrence of human sin, and that, on pain of "double-mindedness," the divine determinist must accept God's moral blameworthiness for causing human sin. This last point, I would suggest, provides the traditional theist as well as the perfect being theist with a weighty reason to reject divine determinism. For it is both a central tenet of traditional theism and an implication of perfect being theology that God is morally perfect, and so that none of God's actions are morally blameworthy.

Some divine determinists have responded to this charge, however, by claiming that divine *indeterminism* fares no better with respect to the problem of human sin than does divine determinism—that is, that divine indeterminists are no more (or less) able to defend God from the charge of moral blameworthiness than are divine determinists. If this claim is right—if human sin is equally a problem for all theists—then my arguments will not count against divine determinism any more (or less) than they count against divine indeterminism. So, I will have to consider the claim that divine indeterminism also entails that God is morally blameworthy for the occurrence of human sin.

In order to see how the problem of human sin for divine indeterminism might be formulated, we can start off by dividing divine indeterminists into two categories, based on their view of God's knowledge of counterfactuals of libertarian freedom. On the one hand, *open theists* hold that God created libertarianly free human beings without first knowing how they would act, while, on the other hand, *Molinists* and *Arminians* maintain that God has middle knowledge of how the libertarianly free humans he could create would act in various

circumstances, and that he consults this knowledge before choosing to create them. In Chapter I of this paper, I discussed Edwin Curley's argument that the open theist view involves God's taking risks with his creation in a way that is reckless and irresponsible. Though I considered one possible response to Curley's argument, I also noted the questionable assumptions that this response required, and so granted for the sake of argument that Curley was right: a God who lacked knowledge of counterfactuals of libertarian freedom but created libertarianly free humans anyway would be morally blameworthy for doing so. Now I will consider an argument, put forward by a number of divine determinists, that the Molinist/Arminian view also renders God morally blameworthy for allowing human sin.

The argument I will consider was first put forward by 18th century theologian Jonathan Edwards, and has been reformulated more recently by William Wainwright. In defending his divine deterministic position, (which Wainwright simply calls "Calvinist" or "Reformed") against the charge that it makes God morally blameworthy for the occurrence of human sin, Edwards argued that "Arminians are exposed to much the same sort of difficulties that Calvinists are" (Wainwright 2001, p. 81). After discussing this argument in some depth, I will contend that the main objection to it that Wainwright considers and dismisses—based on the principle of double effect—does in fact have some force, and that even if the principle is false, it points to an important difference between Calvinism and Molinism/Arminianism which shows Edwards' argument to be unsound. Thus I will conclude that at least some form of divine indeterminism escapes the problem facing divine determinism, of rendering God morally blameworthy for human sin.

In response to the charge that Calvinism makes God “the author of sin,” Edwards contended that Arminianism does the same. Wainwright sums up Edwards’ argument this way:

Arminians who accept foreknowledge face the same sort of difficulties [Edwards] does since, in their view, ‘God does determine beforehand to permit all the sin that does come to pass,’ and ‘certainly knows that if he does permit it, it will come to pass.’ In other words, they too believe that God has taken steps which He knew would inevitably lead to sin. There is therefore neither more nor less reason to suppose that God is the author of sin upon the Reformed view than upon that of the Arminians. (2001, p. 85)

Wainwright says that he believes Edwards to be “partly right and partly mistaken” about this point. On the one hand, he admits that on the Calvinist’s view, God’s actions are causally sufficient for the occurrence of sin, while on the Arminian’s view, God’s actions are not causally sufficient, and so only on the former view can God properly be called the “author” of sin. On the other hand, Wainwright maintains, authorship is not a necessary condition for moral responsibility or blameworthiness, but the God of the Arminians is as morally responsible and blameworthy as the God of the Calvinists for the sin that he foresees but fails to prevent from occurring. Below I explain in more detail Wainwright’s argument for these claims.

First, Wainwright lays out the most significant difference between the Calvinist and Arminian positions. According to Calvinism, God determines the truth of “subjunctive conditionals,” i.e. propositions about what possible creatures would freely do if placed in various possible situations. For instance, God determines the truth of the proposition *If Judas were in situation X he would betray Jesus* (where situation X includes God’s failure to intervene and prevent Judas from betraying Jesus). As we have seen in section 2 of this chapter, some Reformed thinkers (including Edwards) claim that God merely “permits” the occurrence of events such as Judas’ betrayal by “withholding gracious influences” that would keep people from committing sinful acts. Still, God’s permission is what Wainwright calls a “causally sufficient

condition” of Judas’ betrayal; for unless God grants Judas such grace, it is “causally inevitable” that Judas will commit this sin.⁶⁰ On the Arminian view, in contrast, God does *not* determine the truth of subjunctive conditionals about free human actions. However, God knew that the proposition *If Judas were in situation X, he would betray Jesus* was true, and yet he created Judas and allowed him to be in situation X anyway. Thus Wainwright writes, “In the Arminian’s system, God permits sin by refusing to limit the freedom of persons whom He foresees will, if they remain free, choose to sin. Given that the person in question will freely sin if He refuses to interfere, God’s permission is a *sufficient* condition of their sinning” (2001, pp. 85-86).⁶¹

So on the one hand, both Calvinism and Arminianism entail that God’s permission of a sinful act is, at least in certain circumstances, *sufficient* for that act’s occurrence. Yet on the other hand, according to the Arminian view God’s permission is not *causally* sufficient for the occurrence of sin. Wainwright draws an analogy between the Arminian’s view of God’s situation with respect to sin and the situation of someone with respect to the outputs of a randomizing machine. Suppose, Wainwright says, such a machine flashes either a red or a green light when turned on, and that I somehow know (because a clairvoyant has revealed to me) that the next time it is turned on, the green light will flash. My turning on the machine would be a sufficient

⁶⁰ I take it that Wainwright calls the inevitability with which Judas will betray Jesus (if not prevented from doing so by God) “causal” because even if God does not directly cause this betrayal, he must still indirectly cause some earlier event that eventually results in the betrayal’s occurrence.

⁶¹ Of course, it is not true that God’s permission of a person’s free action is by itself a sufficient condition of her sinning; another necessary condition is the person’s choice to sin. For it’s possible, and actually happens (if Arminians are right) that God permits people to sin, but they do not, since they choose not to. Thus the first part of Wainwright’s assertion must be emphasized: *given that a person will freely sin if He refuses to interfere*, God’s permission is a sufficient condition of her sinning.

condition of the green light's flashing. Yet, Wainwright maintains, "it seems wrong to say that my action was a *causally* sufficient condition of the occurrence.... For this suggests that the light's flashing green was not genuinely random but the inevitable outcome of a chain of causes initiated by my action" (2001, p. 86).⁶² Just so, he suggests, neither is God's creating human beings with libertarian freedom in the knowledge that they will sin a sufficient *cause* of their sinning.

Wainwright then reasons that the proposition "If a person does x... and knows that x is a sufficient condition of y, then he... is the 'author' of y" is plausible when x is a *causally* sufficient condition of y, but not when y is "a random occurrence or contra-causally free decision." For, he says, "authorship implies *control*, and breaks in the causal chain diminish an agent's control over the outcome." Thus, Wainwright concludes, "the God of the Calvinists is the author of sin while the God of the Arminians is not" (2001, pp. 86-87). For God's actions, on the Arminian account, are not causally sufficient for the occurrence of sin, and such causal sufficiency is necessary for the sort of control that is essential to authorship.

One might be tempted to conclude, based on such reasoning, that the Arminian is off the hook with respect to the problem of human sin that I have argued faces the divine determinist.

⁶² Wainwright's intuition, that my action of turning on the machine would not be *causally* sufficient for the occurrence of the green light's flashing, might be explained and defended as follows: My turning on the machine is consistent with the red light's flashing, since it is not determined that the green light will flash. So my turning on the machine cannot, by itself, be a *sufficient cause* of the green light's flashing, since it is not even *sufficient* for this event. Yet my turning on the machine, coupled with my knowledge that the green light will flash, is not consistent with the red light's flashing; for given that I know that the green light will flash, the red light cannot flash. So, my turning on the machine, coupled with my knowledge that the green light will flash, is indeed *sufficient* for the occurrence of this event. But my knowing that the green light will flash is not the *cause* of the green light's flashing; and as we've already seen, neither is my turning on the machine. So then, neither is my turning on the machine in the knowledge that the green light will flash a sufficient *cause* of the green light's flashing.

For authorship, one might assume, is essential to moral responsibility. Yet Wainwright maintains that “the dispute over authorship” or *causal* responsibility is not *morally* significant. For, he maintains (as Edwards suggested), “A person is [morally] responsible... for events of which she is not the author if she was able to prevent their occurrence and knew that they would occur if she did not interfere” (2001, p. 87). For instance, a person who knowingly allows a young child to drown in a shallow pool when he has the ability to prevent the drowning would seem to be as morally responsible, and blameworthy, for the child’s drowning as one who drowns the child himself. But since, on the Arminian view, God is able to prevent the occurrence of human sin and knows that if he does not interfere the sin will occur, he is still morally blameworthy for its occurrence. Or so Edwards and Wainwright argue.

One might object to the argument that Wainwright presents by maintaining that in certain cases, a person is less morally blameworthy for events which she merely foresees and fails to prevent than for events which she intends and causes. Peter Byrne raises just such an objection to Paul Helm’s argument, similar to Wainwright’s, according to which the God of “libertarian theists” (that is, divine indeterminists who believe humans have libertarian freedom) is just as much to blame for human sin as the God of divine determinists is. In response, Byrne claims that Helm’s argument “masks the crucial asymmetry in the kinds of responsibility the all-determining and the libertarian Gods have for moral evil.” Byrne puts the asymmetry in terms of God’s “purposing” of evil. He writes:

On standard libertarian theodicies, the free will defense is employed to this end: to show that God permits but does not purpose or bring about moral evil committed by human beings. This God ordains that human beings have free will and with it the capacity to do evil and inflict harm on the innocent. Depending on the view of foreknowledge espoused, God either foresees the particular moral

evils human beings commit or foresees in general that moral evil will be committed by human beings. God thinks, given his wider purposes, that it is overall good that he created the opportunity for human beings to perform morally evil acts and thinks that it is overall good that he permit the occurrence of the evil human beings commit.... But the moral evil is not purposed by God. He does not bring about moral evil for the sake of the good he can get out of it. The harm inflicted by the human agents of moral evil is not inflicted by God in order to secure his purposes. That harm is incidental to his purposes. (2008, p. 200)

Though Byrne's use of the term "purpose" may seem a bit unclear, he later clarifies the distinction between evil that is purposed and evil that is not by appealing to the principle of double effect (PDE) (2008, p. 201). After explaining this principle, which distinguishes between permissible and impermissible actions with harmful effects, Byrne contends that it shows why the God of divine determinists is morally blameworthy while the God of "libertarian theists" is not. In response to this sort of objection, however, Wainwright considers two versions of the PDE and argues that both are "of dubious help to the Arminian." Below I lay out both versions of the PDE, explain how Arminians appeal to it in objecting to the sort of argument Wainwright has put forth, and then discuss Wainwright's response to this objection.

According to Aquinas' version of the PDE, an action with "mixed good and evil effects" is permissible, provided:

- (1) The action itself "from its very object" is either good or neutral
- (2) Only the good effect, and not the evil effect, is intended
- (3) The good effect is not produced by means of the evil effect
- (4) There is "a proportionally grave reason for permitting the evil effect."

(Wainwright 2001, p. 87)

Although Wainwright phrases these criteria as *sufficient* conditions for the permissibility of an action with mixed good and evil effects, I take it that he also considers them *necessary* conditions, such that failing to satisfy them renders impermissible an act with “mixed good and evil results.” The other version of the PDE that Wainwright considers makes the necessity of these conditions clearer. Wainwright explains that, according to Phillipa Foot, there is “a morally significant difference between agency of type (i) and agency of type (ii)”:

- (i) initiating or sustaining a harmful causal sequence
- (ii) (a) allowing or enabling a harmful causal sequence to run its course
(b) diverting a harmful causal sequence.

The difference, Foot maintains, is this: “When forced to choose between actions of type (i) or between actions of type (ii), it is morally permitted to choose the least harmful action. If one is forced to choose between a type (i) and a type (ii) action, however, one is ‘morally required’ to choose the latter even when doing so results in more harm” (Wainwright 2001, p. 88).

Now Arminians argue that according to the PDE, God’s *causing* human sin would be morally impermissible, for God would be producing sin as a *means* to his ends. This, I take it, is what Byrne means by saying that on the Calvinist view, evil is “purposed” by God—it is brought about “for the sake of the good,” and must occur in order for his purpose to be realized—so Aquinas’ criterion 2 is not met. Or, to put the point in terms of Foot’s version of the principle, by causing sin (or some causal antecedent of it) God would be *initiating and sustaining* a harmful causal sequence. But, Arminians contend, God’s merely *permitting* sin is morally permissible according to the PDE, for in such a case God is neither intending human sin, nor producing it as a means to his ends—for the sin is in no way essential to his purposes. Rather, God intends the preservation of human freedom, and as his means to this end God simply refrains from

intervening to prevent humans from freely sinning. Again, to put the point in terms of Foot's version, God would not be initiating or sustaining a harmful causal sequence, but simply *allowing or enabling* a harmful causal sequence to run its course. Thus, Arminians conclude that on their own view God acts morally permissibly, but on the Calvinists' view God acts morally impermissibly.

Yet, Wainwright contends that the Arminians' argument is flawed. For, he says, they present God's alternatives, with respect to human sin, as only two:

- (A) Respect humans' autonomy and not interfere, thus allowing them to sin, or
- (B) Prevent them from sinning.

Wainwright admits that, if these were God's only alternatives, B would be an impermissible course of action, since (in Aquinas' terms) it would require God to violate human autonomy—a harmful action—as a means to prevent sin, whereas A would be permissible, since sin would neither be God's intended effect nor the means to his end; rather, his intended effect would be the preservation of human freedom, and the means to this end would be God's lack of interference. Or, to put the point once again in Foote's terms, only A would be morally permitted because, while A would be a type ii action, B would be a type i action (2001, p. 88). However, Wainwright points out that while A and B may be the only alternatives facing God once he has created the world, God had more choices about what world to create in the first place. With respect to his alternatives at creation, God had the choice to create the free beings he did and leave them alone, and to create the beings he did and intervene to prevent them from sinning. But, Wainwright says, God also had two other choices:

In the Arminian's scenario, God's options included not creating contra-causally free agents and (probably) creating a world containing contra-causally free agents which, while less good than our own, is such that its inhabitants never abuse their

freedom. That is, two courses of action were open to God which, while producing less overall value than the consequences of the action he has taken, had no harmful effects. Since the PDE comes into play only when all alternatives involve harmful consequences, the Arminians can't appeal to it to show that God's permission of the sinful choices which He knew would occur is morally permissible. (2001, p. 90)

Wainwright concludes that the objection to his argument based on the PDE is groundless. Thus, he maintains that God is no less morally blameworthy for the human sin which he merely foresees and fails to prevent than he is for the human sin which he intentionally causes. In other words the God of Arminians is as morally blameworthy for human sin as the God of Calvinists.

Now it seems to me that there are at least two ways that an Arminian can object to Wainwright's argument. First, she might call into question an assumption Wainwright relies on, regarding the conditions under which the PDE applies; and second, she might point out that, even if PDE is morally untenable, Arminians still have ways of responding to the problem of evil which are not available to Calvinists, and which allow them to deny God's moral blameworthiness for permitting human sin. I will consider, and defend, these two possible objections in turn.

Wainwright's response to the Arminian objection to his argument rests on two assumptions: first, that in deciding what sort of world to create, God had open to him alternative courses of action which involved no harmful consequences; and second, that the PDE only applies "when all alternatives involve harmful consequences." The second of these assumptions, I would argue, is evidently false.⁶³ Indeed, neither version of the principle that he considers

⁶³ One might also wonder, with respect to the first assumption, what the basis is for Wainwright's claim that God's options in the beginning "probably" included creating a world containing

requires all possible alternative courses of action to involve harmful consequences. To see why not, suppose that God did, as Wainwright suggests, face the following four choices:

- (A) to create a world with free beings who would freely sin if not prevented from doing so, and to respect their autonomy by not interfering
- (B) to create a world with free beings who would freely sin if not prevented from doing so, but to violate their autonomy to prevent them from sinning
- (C) to not create a world with free beings
- (D) to create a world with free beings who would not sin, but which was much less good than the world he could create by choosing alternative A or B

According to Foot's version of the PDE, since alternatives A, C, and D exist – which are all type ii actions – alternative B – a type i action – is ruled out as morally impermissible. But then, when forced to choose between alternatives that are all actions of type ii, Foot merely says “it is morally *permitted* to choose the least harmful action” (italics added). So on Foot's account, it would be *permissible* for God to choose C or D over A, but *not* morally required. And a similar point might be put in terms of Aquinas' version of the PDE. Recall Aquinas says that an action with “mixed good and evil effects” is permissible, so long as criteria 1-4 are met. But nowhere do these criteria specify that one must compare all alternative courses of action and choose the least harmful one. So, choosing A rather than C or D would be permissible, according to Aquinas, so long as God had a “proportionally grave reason” for permitting the greater harm that would result from A.

libertarianly free agents who never abuse their freedom. If Plantinga is right that free creatures are “transworld deprave” then there is no such possible world, and Wainwright has offered no reason for thinking that Plantinga is wrong. Yet Wainwright does seem right that God at least had the option of creating no libertarianly free creatures at all. So I will not press the point here.

So according to either version of the principle of double effect that Wainwright considers, the God of the Calvinists would be morally blameworthy for causing human sin, while the God of the Arminians would not (necessarily) be morally blameworthy for permitting human sin. Yet, the PDE might itself be criticized as a tenuous principle on which to ground an objection to Wainwright's argument. In particular, some critics of this principle have called into question the distinction between "harmful effects that are regretfully intended as part of the agent's means, and harmful effects that are regretfully foreseen as side effects of the agent's means." Alison McIntyre offers the following example intended to show that this distinction is not doing the explanatory work that proponents of the principle suppose:

... if the soldier who throws himself on the grenade in order to shield his fellow soldiers from the force of an explosion acts permissibly, and if the permissibility of his action is explained by double effect, then he must not intend to sacrifice his own life in order to save the others, he must merely foresee that his life will end as a side effect of his action. But many have argued that this is an implausible description of the soldier's action and that his action is permissible even if he does intend to cause his own death as a means to save the others. Shelly Kagan points out that if someone else were to shove the soldier on the grenade we would certainly say that that the harm to the soldier was intended by the person who did the shoving. Equally, Kagan argues, we should say that it is intended in this case. (2009)

Now McIntyre and Kagan seem right about both of these points: the soldier who throws himself on the grenade intends to sacrifice his life as a means to an end; and yet his act seems morally permissible. However, the contrast between the soldier's act of self-sacrifice, and the other person's sacrificing of a soldier by throwing him on the grenade—which does *not* seem morally permissible—suggests a simple exception to the PDE: that it does not apply when the evil one intends as a mean to some good end is only harmful to *oneself*. But this possible exception would not apply in the case of God's causing human sin, since in that case God would be harming *humans*, not himself.

Yet the moral distinction on which the PDE depends— that between harmful means to ends and harmful side effects – has been called into question in other cases as well. For instance, McIntyre suggests that the same kind of argument that is made about acts of self-sacrifice could also be made about acts of killing in self-defense. That is, she suggests that it seems equally implausible to say that the death caused in an act of self-defense is (always) only a side effect and not an intended means to an end; and yet in that case, too, it seems (at least sometimes) that such an act is morally permissible. And in such a case, the simple exception that I have suggested would not apply, since the harm is not done to the agent acting, but to another.

So, the distinction between harmful means and side effects that the PDE draws may be morally untenable. However, I would argue that even if this is so, such that the PDE itself is indefensible, still the principle points to an important difference between Calvinism and Arminianism which *is* morally significant, and which can be used as the basis of another objection to Wainwright’s argument. To see what this difference is, consider what critics of the PDE take to be the truth at the heart of it. As McIntyre explains, regarding the view that the distinction between “harmful effects that are regretfully intended as part of the agent’s means and harmful effects that are regretfully foreseen as side effects of the agent’s means” is not morally significant:

Those who take this view can claim that what is often called the proportionality condition associated with double effect is really doing all of the explanatory work: it is because the end is judged to be worthy that the harmful means is considered to be permissibly brought about. Those who reject double effect for this reason may still maintain that there is a morally significant difference between self-sacrifice... and suicide, but that the difference depends on a difference in the agent’s motives and ends, not a difference in the means adopted. (2009)

McIntyre thus suggests that what may really be doing the explanatory work in the PDE is, in Aquinas’ version of the principle, the fourth criterion: the requirement that when causing

significant harm, there must be “a proportionally grave reason” for permitting or causing the evil done. Whether one causes the harm as a means to this end, or simply as an unforeseen side effect of it, is not morally significant; what is significant is that the end is worthy enough, such that there is a sufficient reason for permitting or causing the harm. So, if one person commits suicide and another sacrifices her life to save others, the moral difference lies not in the fact that one death is a mean to an end and another is a side effect, but that only in one case is a worthy-enough end being realized which justifies the harm done.

Let us suppose, then, that the distinction drawn by the PDE—between intending harm as a means to an end and merely foreseeing it as a side effect—is morally untenable, but that the “proportionality condition” regarding the gravity of the reason for permitting or causing the harm is sound. Where does this leave the debate between Calvinists and Arminians? Are they equally able (or unable) to justify God’s moral blameworthiness for the occurrence of human sin? I would argue that they are not, but rather that the Arminian position has a distinct advantage over the Calvinist one. For the proportionality condition of the PDE seems to encapsulate the two necessary conditions for a successful theodicy proposed in section 4 of this chapter, according to which the good secured by the permitting (or causing) of evil must not be securable without such evil, and that the good must sufficiently outweigh the evil. If the evil is either not necessary for the good secured, or not sufficiently outweighed by the good, then there would not seem to be “a proportionally grave reason” for permitting or causing the evil. But, as we have already seen, divine deterministic accounts of God’s reasons for causing human sin have more than a bit of trouble satisfying both of these conditions. Most of the traditional theodicies considered in section 4 depend on a libertarian conception of free will. And when those theodicies are modified so as to make them compatible with divine determinism, they end up making the implausible

claim that the goods to be realized—such goods as (compatibilist) free will, effective rational action, moral and spiritual development, a mature faith, and friendship with God—require the evil of human sin. And those divine deterministic accounts that more plausibly do satisfy this necessary condition for a successful theodicy—such as those that appeal to the value of forgiveness, mercy, and retributive punishment—fail to satisfy the outweighing condition, since such goods do not seem worth the “cost” of human sin.

Moreover, I have argued that divine determinists who attempt to construct a positive theodicy as well as those who appeal to skeptical theism in attempt to morally justify God’s causing of human sin are forced to adopt an unacceptable sort of double-mindedness about the status of human sin. For they must maintain, on the one hand, that human sin is prohibited by God—and so should be opposed by us—and, on the other hand, that human sin has been ordained by God to serve some higher purpose, and so should be appreciated and embraced as given by God for the greater good. Since this double-mindedness is an unacceptable implication of both the attempt to construct a positive theodicy and the appeal to skeptical theism, I have argued that the divine determinist should not make either move, but must conclude that God does *not* have some morally sufficient reason for causing human sin, and so is morally blameworthy for doing so.

Indeterministic accounts of divine agency, however, do not lead to either of these problems. For, first, when human freedom is understood as incompatible with divine determinism, the claim becomes more plausible that certain goods—again, free will, effective rational action, moral and spiritual development, a mature faith, and friendship with God—cannot be secured by God without the occurrence of human sin. For it seems plausible that if humans are given the freedom to choose and act, and so develop their characters, their faith, and

their relationships with God on their own, they will sometimes use their freedom for ill. And second, even if these accounts of God's reason for permitting human sin ultimately fail to satisfy their critics, divine indeterminists can still appeal to skeptical theism, maintaining that our inability to discern God's reasons for permitting human sin is no evidence that God lacks such reasons, and so that we are unwarranted in concluding that God is morally blameworthy for permitting human sin. As I have already suggested, divine indeterminists will not face the charge of double-mindedness in making either of these moves, since they can maintain both that *God's permission* of human sin *is* necessary for the outweighing goods, and also that the *sin itself* is *not* necessary for those goods, such that we still ought to oppose it.

To sum up my argument then, it seems that, contra Wainwright's assertion, divine indeterminists of the Arminian or Molinist variety are *not* exposed to the same sort of difficulties regarding the problem of human sin as are divine determinists. For even if the distinction on which the principle of double effect depends—that between harmful means and side effects—is morally untenable, still the PDE's "proportionality condition,"—which requires a "proportionally" grave reason for permitting or causing the harm—is defensible. And since the divine indeterminist's claim, that God *permits* sin, allows for the offering of proportionally grave reasons (or at least the appeal to the existence of unknown proportionally grave reasons) which the divine determinist's claim, that God *causes* sin, does not allow for, it does not follow from divine indeterminism, as it does from divine determinism, that God is blameworthy for the occurrence of human sin.

Conclusion

In this paper I have taken a long, hard look at the thesis of divine determinism, considering reasons both for and against adopting the view. I argued in Chapter I that the reasons that have commonly been offered in favor of divine determinism are neither philosophically compelling nor necessitated by any theological commitments of traditional theism. Unlike certain other theological positions (such as process theology or open theism) that may be found objectionable because they deny some divine attribute (such as omnipotence or omniscience) that is essential to a perfect being, accepting divine *indeterminism* does not entail adopting a picture of God as that-than-which-a-greater-can-be-conceived. Rather, I have contended in response to the arguments put forward in favor of divine determinism that one can consistently reject the view and still maintain:

- (1) that God is the creator of the whole world and continually sustains it in being, and that God's "creative intention" for the world cannot be hindered by creatures;
- (2) that God is transcendent above all things, being in no way part of creation and having nothing in common with creatures;
- (3) that God is omniscient and does not recklessly take risks with creation, but foreknows all divinely undetermined events that will occur, and plans accordingly so that his ends will be realized; and
- (4) that God is providentially governing all human history, including the election of humans to salvation, and the granting of grace to them to do good deeds.

What is more, I suggested in Chapter I that there is at least some reason to think that the God pictured by divine indeterminists is *greater* than the God pictured by divine determinists, since

the former has a power which the latter lacks—the power, that is, to create beings who are able to determine *their own* actions. At the end of Chapter I, I concluded that there are no obvious (good) reasons for adopting the thesis of divine determinism.

In the next two chapters, I put forward several new arguments against divine determinism. In Chapter II, I considered two versions of the thesis and pointed out problems with each one. First, I argued that natural divine determinism—the view that combines divine determinism with natural determinism—does not allow room for novel and direct special divine action in the world after the initial moment of creation. Since it is a central tenet of traditional theism that there *is* such special divine action, I concluded that the traditional theist has some reason to reject natural divine determinism. Then, I put forth a parallel argument to the Consequence Argument for the conclusion that human freedom is incompatible with non-natural divine determinism—the view that combines divine determinism with natural *indeterminism*. I suggested that this argument gives the theist who is already convinced of the incompatibility of human freedom and natural determinism (as well as the existence of human freedom) some reason to reject non-natural divine determinism as well.

For those not persuaded to reject divine determinism by the arguments put forward in Chapter II—perhaps because they think human freedom *is* compatible with natural determinism—I offered one final argument in Chapter III against divine determinism in either of its forms. I argued there that divine determinism entails that God is morally blameworthy for causing human sin—a conclusion that should not be acceptable to any theist. After laying out this argument I examined in considerable depth three ways of objecting to it:

- (1) deny that divine determinism entails that God is causally responsible for sin (by maintaining a “privative” theory of evil or drawing a distinction between God’s active causation and passive permission of events);
- (2) deny that divine determinism entails that God is morally responsible for the sin he causes (by asserting a divine command theory of morality); or
- (3) deny that divine determinism entails that God is morally blameworthy for the sin he causes, and for which he is morally responsible (by constructing a positive theodicy or embracing skeptical theism).

In response I argued that all of these objections present serious problems for the divine determinist. Then, in the last part of Chapter III, I contended that the argument I presented against divine determinism does not count equally against divine indeterminism, since the divine indeterminist has ways of responding to the problem of evil not available to the divine determinist—such as by offering a theodicy to morally justify God’s permission of sin, or by appealing to skeptical theism to maintain that, for all we know, God has good reasons for permitting sin unknown to us. Unlike the divine determinist, the divine indeterminist is not forced into a sort of “double-mindedness” about the purposiveness of human sin by making such a response; for she does not maintain that God positively intends and causes human sin for the sake of some greater good. Therefore, given the lack of reasons in favor of adopting the thesis of divine determinism, as well as the serious problematic implications of the view and the *lack* of such problematic implications of its alternative, I conclude that divine determinism ought to be rejected.

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