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SHOULD GOD NOT HAVE CREATED ADAM?

Evan Fales

“This unembellished telling is a terrible accusation against God and humanity.”

—Professor Yehuda Bauer, in the
Introduction to Filip Müller’s
Eyewitness Auschwitz

The free will defense shows that God cannot be held responsible, in general, for the existence of manmade evil. But, I argue, the defense fails to exculpate God if it can be shown that there are ways God could have fashioned human nature, consistent with our freedom (or increasing it), that would have resulted in our being less evil. I discuss two such ways. The second half of the paper considers various defenses of the free will defense against this challenge, including two more general responses to the argument from evil due to Wykstra and Marilyn McCord Adams.

I

Alvin Plantinga has convinced most of us—if indeed, we were not already convinced—that the free will defense exonerates God from the imputation of a certain kind of incapacity. Not even an omnipotent being can guarantee the best of all possible worlds, for if such a world must contain created free beings, it will be partly up to them what transpires.¹ Let us agree therefore that if God creates a world, he ought to create one containing free agents. To be sure, even setting aside the matter of free agents, it has been held, by Aquinas and many others, that among the finite possible worlds there is no unique best one; hence, no particular one that God is bound to create. Nevertheless, there are worlds sufficiently bad that God has adequate reason not to create them. I will defend the view that our world is one of these—and that it is so precisely on account of the free agents it contains, if for no other reason. Although God ought, if he creates a world, to create one with free agents, there are free agents that God would have a sufficient reason not to create. We are among the agents of this sort: so I shall argue.

The argument is straightforward. Human beings, who are among the free agents of this world, are defective in a number of ways. Among their defects are two I shall single out, that are such that: (a) God could have created us



without them; (b) it is virtually certain that His having done so would result in an enormously smaller quantity of humanly produced evil; and (c) in so doing He would not in any way have limited or infringed upon our freedom. Unless the theist can show that the evil that results from these defects is not gratuitous—and that would amount to mounting a theodicy quite *distinct* from the free will defense itself—we can conclude that if a God were to create human beings, He would have sufficient reason to create them with a nature different from the one we find in ourselves. In that case, contrary to what is commonly supposed, the free will defense does not by itself vindicate every humanly produced evil.

II

We know that children are born with a wide range of temperaments. They carry these character traits into adulthood, modified and influenced of course by the circumstances under which they mature. An aggressive nature will be tempered by gentle surroundings; a gentle nature can be made vicious by vicious mentors. We know, too, that, other things being equal, those who have a benevolent nature tend to cause far less mischief than those who are aggressive. They instill benevolence in their children, and in others who might be less inclined to it than they. They generally abhor violence, and seek out opportunities to serve others.

No one supposes that persons who are born with a generous disposition are, by virtue of this natural endowment over which they have no control, rendered less capable of exercising free choice than persons of vicious temperament.² No one imagines that environmental influences, over which an individual has no control, limit his or her freedom more stringently if they tend to produce gentleness than if they tend to produce aggressiveness.

We know, further, that different ranges of temperament are characteristic of different species. Gorillas tend toward a marked mildness of nature; baboons are decidedly contentious. Human beings are in this respect more akin to the baboons.

But God could have made it otherwise. He could have made us, as a species, far more inclined toward cooperation and kindness. Had He done so, He would have virtually guaranteed an enormous decrease in the human production of harm. Moreover, this state of affairs would not diminish the extent of human freedom, at the same time that it assured that we would more often choose the good than in this world we do. Nor are there compensatory evils which this change would engender and which would cancel its benefits.

These are empirical claims. I shall consider shortly some objections to them. But we do believe them: almost no one will, upon reflection, deny that this would be a better world if people were more disposed to be kind toward one another and toward other living beings. If we thought otherwise, we

would not value generosity and attempt to foster it. And let us be clear that it is not only the valuing itself or the attempts that we value, but generosity itself.

It follows that a God, if He created human beings, has a sufficient reason to make them gentler, as a species, than we in fact are.³ This conclusion does not require us to believe that aggressiveness and unkindness are never beneficial. It does not require us to deny that some degree of innate aggressiveness is desirable. It merely demands a recognition that humans are aggressive to a far greater degree than is optimal—and that the toll in suffering, human and animal, that has followed is not matched by any sufficiently compensatory good.

Perhaps, to be sure, there is no single combination of inherent characteristics that is optimal for created beings that have the exercise of free will. Or perhaps there are many possible species of free agents that God would have an adequate reason to create, whether or not they embodied the highest creaturely form of free agency. God could not be faulted for creating such non-optimal agents; nor, of course, can He be faulted for failing to create the uniquely most perfect form of creaturely agency, if there be none such. But He would be at fault if it was He who created human beings. For human beings are the cause—and not solely in virtue of their freedom or anything necessarily connected with it—of an immense quantity of delegated gratuitous evil. If so, then God, in creating us, has performed an act which is itself an undelegated gratuitous evil.

III

Most human beings are born with the capacity to acquire a reasonably good knowledge of their surroundings, of the regularities that govern those surroundings, and (hence) of at least some of the probable consequences of actions that they contemplate. This knowledge serves to guide the choices they make, and those choices may in turn lead to an increase in that knowledge. But our means of acquiring knowledge are imperfect, our efforts fraught with uncertainty and error. Much human evil is the result of human ignorance. Ignorance causes not only the misfiring of well-intentioned plans; but is also responsible, at least in part, for prejudice and malice of various kinds. Intelligence and education are widely agreed to be among the most effective antidotes to moral ignorance. Intelligence and education benefit not only those who otherwise would be morally ignorant, but arms those who are in a position to oppose the actions of the malevolent.

To make matters concrete, consider an event such as the Holocaust. It is surely improbable—is it not?—that this evil would have occurred, had it been the case that: (1) Hitler had known from an early age the history and culture of the Jews, their contribution to the general culture of Europe, and most

importantly, their common humanity, their capacity for suffering, and, in a vivid way, the horrors that the death-camps were to produce, if (2) everyone else had known these things; and if (3) Hitler had known that everyone else knew these things.

We can concede that no amount of knowledge or intelligence insures that a man will not possess an evil will; and indeed, an obdurately evil man is the more dangerous the more he knows. But unless it be supposed that human beings are innately more disposed toward harm than toward good,⁴ it can hardly be doubted that education and intelligence are good things.

God could have given us more knowledge; or alternatively, a greater intelligence⁵ with which to acquire it ourselves. Had He done so, there would be far less human wickedness. Would He, in so doing, have impaired human freedom? Clearly not. He would, on the contrary, have increased our capacity for free choice. The ability to think intelligently and rationally, to foresee the probable consequences of our actions, to deliberate quickly and accurately, to understand what we can hope to achieve and what we cannot, to recognize our own weaknesses—these all require intelligence and knowledge. Had He made us epistemically more perfect, God would have increased our freedom and simultaneously assured a vast decrease in the amount of human harm.

How much more knowledgeable would God have a reason to make us? Could God have any reason for making us less than omniscient?⁶ I think not. God could not create another omnipotent being. And arguably, He could not create us both free and morally perfect. Perhaps it is true that moral perfection (if this entails an inability to will evil) is incompatible with the sort of freedom that it is desirable for us to have. But neither these considerations nor (so far as I can see) any others constrain God to limit our intelligence or our knowledge.⁷

There are thus two things God could have done, in creating us, the result of which would have been a vast improvement in the human condition, and a vast reduction in human and animal suffering: He could have made us smarter, and He could have made us nicer. Could a good God have any sufficient reason to forego such improvements?

IV

I come now to some objections which might be made on behalf of theodicy. These take the form of (1) suggesting sufficient reasons that God might have for not having made in our stead an improved version of the human race; and (2) arguing that we have no reason to suppose there not to be such reasons, even if we do not know what they are.

The most plausible objection of the first sort, I think, is this. The struggle for survival being the precarious business it is, only those creatures whose traits afford them protection from their competitors will survive. It is this

mechanism of Darwinian evolution that brought into being human agents. But success as a species has required of us a certain degree of aggressiveness—the very degree which, as a species, we exhibit. Moreover, the development of intelligence through evolutionary mechanisms is a slow process. If our intelligence as a species is less than ideal, that is because this process has not had sufficient time to work its benefits. If God has a sufficient reason to bring about human existence through the processes of Darwinian evolution, then the complaint that He should have straight off made us brighter and more benign is unfounded.

At first sight this will seem a weak objection. Just possibly (though indeed, this is hardly likely), evolutionary processes are causally necessary for the creation of human life. Yet if God is not constrained by causal laws, would not the preventability of a vast amount of suffering provide a moral imperative for the contravening of those laws?

Against this, theists can and have⁸ argued that God has reason to create a world governed by laws, one of the consequences of which will be the existence of certain harm-producing features. Moreover, one of the reasons God has for doing this—*viz.*, to provide his creatures with an environment of patterned regularities which will enable them to learn and to foresee the consequences of contemplated actions—is a reason which must forestall God from frequent or capricious intervention in the natural course of events. To do so would undermine the use of past experience as a guide to action; and it could undermine as well the grounds we have for assuming responsibility for our actions.

These are serious considerations, yet I think they will hardly serve to deflect my challenge to theodicy. First, because even if Darwinian evolution is the mechanism of choice for the creation of intelligent agents on earth, it is clear that God could have intervened (e.g. by making human intelligence develop very rapidly, and in such a way as to compensate for any loss of competitive advantage incurred by his taming our shrewishness) in such a way that we would not discover this. Second, because even if we did discover this miracle, and discerned its cause, we would surely praise God for having performed it. Had we discovered it but been unable to fathom its explanation (i.e. God's agency), we would have been presented with an enduring puzzle for science. But such puzzles we will probably always have with us in any case: they are a small price to pay for a more felicitous world. Theists have never been loath to allow the propriety of God's performing *some* miracles for human benefit; it would be out of order for them to cavil here.

Thirdly, if we had much greater knowledge and understanding, we would be in a much better position to recognize God's wisdom when He did intervene to prevent suffering, and not to make the mistake of taking this to unsettle our grounds for relying upon the regularities of nature. Nor would

we be as prone to the mistake of supposing that one is absolved of moral responsibility for a maliciously intended action, just because (for what ever reason), that action fails to have the intended consequences. We can disagree with Steven Boër's claim⁹ that God could have preserved human freedom while causing every action motivated by evil intentions to misfire, and also with Swinburne's countersuggestion¹⁰ that it is a condition of human responsibility that God never, or almost never, do this. For if we knew more, God could safely intervene more frequently for the sake of preventing or relieving suffering.

I come now to a second objection, equally familiar, but less troublesome in the present context. According to this objection, the existence of first-order harms is a logically necessary condition for the development of certain second-order goods; e.g., such virtues as generosity and courage. Applied to the present line of thought, the argument would be that in order to make possible the flourishing of these valuable virtues, God had to create in us a certain degree of innate nastiness, and a defective intelligence. He thereby insures an abundance of the evils which provoke virtue and test its mettle.

I hope it will be agreed on all sides that the amount of evil is, in its distribution and its intensity, far in excess of that necessary for the encouragement of virtue. For one thing, this need for evil can be and is served to a significant degree by existing natural evils. Moreover, the extent to which these virtues flourish is not always or necessarily an increasing function of the intensity of the harms they address. It is arguably true that courage is proportional to the degree of perceived danger faced, but the same cannot be said for, e.g., the relation between generosity and need.

In addition, we must not forget that while these virtues have an intrinsic value, they have worth also, and largely, for their instrumental value in overcoming the very evils which are their precondition. Finally, we may remark that (if experience is any guide) an abundance of intelligence and natural generosity are centrally important characteristics among those which enable an agent to develop these virtues. The more richly endowed we are with these, the more rapidly and easily we learn virtue. Hence if God had endowed us more richly in these respects, we would have required less experience of evil to become virtuous.

This brings me finally—and I fear altogether too briefly—to a third and final defense of theism, one that I believe poses the most serious objection to my argument. The first two objections purported to show that God would have sufficient reason to create or allow the evils which result from our stupidity and cupidity. The third objection, which has lately been advanced by Steven Wykstra,¹¹ retrenches at the second line of defense. The fact that these evils (and others) might initially *appear* to be gratuitous is not, according to a principle Wykstra calls CORNEA, evidence at all that they *are*

gratuitous. CORNEA, or the Condition of Reasonable Epistemic Access, is a principle that Wykstra expresses thus:¹²

On the basis of cognized situation S, human H is entitled to claim “It appears that p” only if it is reasonable for H to believe that, given her cognitive faculties and the use she has made of them, if p were not the case, S would likely be different than it is in some way discernible by her.

As the sentence ‘It appears that p’ is used in CORNEA, it means roughly that there is genuine evidence which makes it reasonable to believe that p is true.

Applied to the case at hand, CORNEA allows us to say that the evils that result from human stupidity and cupidity appear to be gratuitous only if it would be reasonable to suppose that our situation with respect to the evils we find would be discernably different if there were a God (and hence no *gratuitous* evil). Wykstra then proceeds to argue that, because of the enormous gap between the understanding of a theistic God and our own, we are in no position to suppose that we have the ability to judge gratuitousness relative to God’s morally guided purposes. Although it may seem, as a result of the considerations put forward above, that God was derelict in constituting us with the nature we have, we cannot reasonably claim sufficient penetration into God’s purposes or the means necessary to achieve these, to judge whether it is even probable that any given evil is gratuitous.

It will be seen at once that CORNEA, given this kind of employment, is an extremely powerful predator which theodicy can employ for devouring candidate arguments from evil. Not only does it provide an all-purpose defense against such arguments; it is also an effective weapon quite indiscriminately against the pretensions of human reason when it raises questions about the Divine Nature. Honoring its apparent source, we might call this defense Job’s Justification, but I shall call it, a bit uncharitably perhaps, Wykstra’s Weasel.

Does the inscrutability of the Divine Will, or Wykstra’s Weasel, achieve its intended end? I think not. To see where the difficulty lies, we need to focus on the fact that the only sort of condition that exculpates God with respect to the existence of an evil, is one that associates that evil with an equal or greater good (or avoidance of equal or greater harm) as a matter of logical necessity. That an evil condition is *causally* necessary for the occurrence of a good gives God no excuse for permitting it, no matter how great the resulting good. For God is omnipotent. David Hume was sensitive to this point, but Wykstra thinks that logical necessity may, for all we know, “account for” all the evils we see.

Certainly logical necessity can account for *some* of the evils we see. It can account for the existence of some gratuitous delegated evil. It can account for the amount of evil minimally necessary to make logically possible the existence and development of certain virtues. It can account for those evils

that are the minimal byproduct of the existence of regularities such as are a logical precondition of our learning from experience. These cases, we have seen, cannot account for all the evils we know of. A Wykstrian theist, for example, is committed to holding that it would have been wrong for God to have endowed us with enough wisdom to understand *why* it would have been wrong to have that wisdom. But perhaps there are other goods such that these additional evils, for example human stupidity or the suffering of William Rowe's burned fawn,¹³ are logically necessary conditions for them. Why should we suppose that, if there are such goods and such necessary connections, we would be aware of them? After all, the necessary connection between the possible existence of delegated evil and the good of free will is not so transparently evident that it has not been denied by some philosophers.

It may help to clarify Wykstra's solution if we classify the types of relation that can hold between an evil and its associated exculpating good. Let us call the evil *E* and the exculpating good *G*. *G* can be an event whose goodness equals or outweighs the badness of *E*; or it can be the absence (i.e. prevention) of some evil equal to or greater than *E* in badness.

If *G* is to justify *E*, it seems that one of the following relations must obtain between them:¹⁴

(1) *E* is logically necessary for *G*,

or

(2) *E* is logically necessary for the causal possibility of *G*;

or

(3) The causal possibility of *E* is logically necessary for *G*;

or

(4) The causal possibility of *E* is logically necessary for the causal possibility of *G*.

So (1) is only the most obvious way in which *E* and *G* might be associated. In fact the cases theists have cited typically involve one of the other relations listed. Thus, the free will defense makes use of the fact that the causal possibility of certain evil deeds is a logically necessary condition of free agency (case 3), and certain virtues are such that the causal possibility of their development and exercise requires (logically) the existence of evil (case 2). In general, God's providence must involve either creating a good *G* directly or creating a world in which *G* can be brought about; and if this requires the existence of an evil *E*, then God can either create *E* directly or create a world in which *E* can be brought about, relying on the likelihood that it will be.

Contraposing now, we can see that for each and every evil *E*, the theist is committed to holding that there is an outweighing good *G* such that either:

(1) Not-*E* entails not-*G*;

or

(2) Not-*E* entails that *G* is causally impossible;

or

(3) That *E* is causally impossible entails not-*G*;

or

(4) That *E* is causally impossible entails that *G* is causally impossible.

Now human beings share a large amount of ignorance and aggressiveness; and fawns suffer. God has either produced these states of affairs directly, or allowed them to come about. So according to the theist, their non-existence, or the (causal) impossibility of their existing *logically* entails¹⁵ the non-existence (or causal impossibility of) some immense good. It will suffice to focus on form (3). This has the strongest premise and weakest conclusion, hence is the weakest claim the theist requires. Our problem is that we cannot *see* any such entailment. Is it that our understanding of such propositions as 'That fawn does not suffer' and 'It is not possible for that fawn to suffer' is so weak that we fail to do this? Might the explanation be that the goods in question are ones of which we cannot conceive?¹⁶ And what does this conceptual deficiency on our part imply about our situation as morally responsible agents?

Although he does not mention Wykstra, Brice Wachterhouser¹⁷ strikes the correct theme here when he argues that this kind of defense of theism leads to moral skepticism. However Wachterhouser focuses on the question whether certain kinds of evil could be morally justified as means to any conceivable ends. If by the means/ends relation Wachterhouser means a causal relation, then his argument, whatever its merits or flaws, is not directly to our purpose here. A theist who employs Wykstra's Weasel is claiming that every evil whatsoever has associated with it, as a matter of logical necessity and not merely as a means, some greater good, or the prevention of some greater evil, which justifies it. In some cases of evil we understand what this necessary connection is; but other evils (e.g. the suffering of the fawn) are such that we cannot even imagine what sorts of goods could be connected to them in the requisite way.

To ferret out what is at stake when Wykstra's Weasel is placed in the service of theodicy, we need to consider two questions: (1) what evidence, if any, does our inability or failure to conceive of the relevant justifying goods provide for the conclusion that no such goods exist; and (2) what kind of moral skepticism would such a *conceptual failure* entail, if these goods do indeed exist?

By way of addressing (1), I introduce here a principle quite closely analogous to CORNEA, that arguably provides a sufficient condition for an agent *H*'s being justified in asserting that it appears that a proposition *p* is false:

(*) If H has done what is within his power by way of seeking confirming evidence for p, if H has found no such evidence, and if the best explanation or every explanation H has for this lack of evidence entails that p is false, then H is justified in claiming that it appears that not-p.¹⁸

Plainly, (*) can be applied only where there is a best explanation that has the required feature, or where every explanation does. Suppose, for example, someone suggests that there is a mouse residing in my desk. I search my desk for signs of a mouse; I look in all the drawers, etc., but find no mouse, no mouse droppings or nest, no mousy odor or other signs of mousy presence. Here, surely, the best reason that can be given for the lack of evidence is the lack of a mouse, so I am justified in asserting that there appears not to be a mouse domiciled in the desk—indeed I am justified in asserting that there is no such mouse.

But on the other hand, if a scientist looks for a black hole in the galaxy in Andromeda, and finds no sign of any, we may have several ways of explaining this: that there are no black holes, or that present instruments are not sensitive enough, or that not enough is understood about black holes to know how to go about reliably detecting them. If no one of these explanations recommends itself as best, or if the one that does, does not entail the nonexistence of black holes, then the application of (*) cannot provide the scientist with a warrant for asserting that there appear to be no black holes in that galaxy.

In many cases however it will not be clear whether there is a best explanation that entails that p is false. For example, large-scale searches through the natural numbers have never turned up an even number that is not the sum of two primes. Is the best explanation of this that there are no counter-examples to Goldbach's conjecture, or is it an equally good explanation that we have not looked far enough? Similarly, is the lack of any counterexample to Church's Thesis concerning computability best explained by supposing that every computable function is Turing-computable, or are there equally eligible alternative explanations?

With these last two cases, which involve our knowledge of logical entailments, we move closer to the issue at hand. For our question, given (*), is: Is the best explanation for the fact that we cannot conceive of any justifying good associated with, e.g., human stupidity or Rowe's suffering fawn, that there is no such good?

I think it is unclear what the answer to this question should be. On the one side it is tempting to say that our conceptual grasp of the relevant descriptions—that is, of good and evil, of suffering, stupidity and so on—is sufficiently good that if there *were* goods associated as a matter of logic with the above evils, we would have hit upon them. But of course we believe the basic notions associated with number theory are also quite conceptually transparent, yet there are theorems about numbers that we do not and never will know.

The theist can answer question (1), therefore, by asserting that our inability to conceive of relevant justifying goods for the problem-cases does not give us strong evidence for their non-existence.¹⁹ But what does this answer commit him to with respect to the issue of moral skepticism?

It is a fact that there are truths—perhaps important truths—about numbers, sets, and the like which we do not know; but this does not show that we fail to understand what numbers and sets are, that we have no clear grasp of these notions. Similarly, a theist can deny that supposing some evils to be analytically associated with equal or greater goods of which we cannot conceive, or whose analytical connection to evil escapes us, entails skepticism with respect to our grasp of moral concepts. Perhaps we can understand quite adequately what it means for suffering to be intrinsically evil, without apprehending its necessary connection to some good, even as we can understand what sets are, without apprehending some of the truths of set theory.

However there is one respect in which the moral case and the mathematical one are not analogous. In matters of morals, we seek to know what the *total good and evil* associated with contemplated states of affairs are, for it is this which determines whether those states are to be desired, and whether we should seek to bring them about. But if our knowledge of the moral value of these states of affairs is as radically defective as the theist has to claim—states of affairs which are not only common but often within our power to produce or prevent—then we have indeed lost our grip upon the possibility of using moral judgments as a guide for action and evaluation.

It is worth emphasizing two points with respect to this conclusion. First, the skepticism it implies applies to our evaluation of states of affairs which we judge to be morally *desirable* as well as to those we judge to be evil. If we admit that overriding but unimagined goods may be necessarily associated with what appear to be evil conditions, then we must equally admit the possibility that unknown overriding evils necessarily accompany what is apparently good. The theist is still in a position to maintain that his opponent has failed to demonstrate the existence of gratuitous evil; but in employing Wykstra's Weasel, he has forfeited the right to make any moral judgments of the all-things-considered variety.

Secondly, the skepticism to which the theist falls prey here is not a skepticism with respect to causal or ends/means considerations. His problem is not the generally admitted difficulty in forecasting the consequences of an action, but rather an inability to understand deep *conceptual* connections between goods and evils, or connections between their very natures.²⁰

If under these circumstances the theist wishes to maintain his conception of himself as a free and morally competent agent, where can he turn for guidance? One suggestion I wish to discuss briefly has been offered by Marilyn McCord Adams.²¹ As I understand Adams, it is not our station as

human beings to make all-things-considered moral judgments. These are God's province. As his creatures, we have a more lowly vocation, which is to carry out as well as we can the moral commandments he has expressly given us. More than this God does not (and of course morally cannot) demand of us. Of course God has to publish these commandments so that we can know them; no doubt the text of this revelation is to be found in a favored source, which for Adams is the Bible. So Adams' Admonition, as I shall call it, seems to boil down to this: Obey the moral commandments of the Bible, and you will have fulfilled your moral duty. The rest is God's providence.

How satisfactory a solution does Adams' Admonition provide? There are two problems with which it leaves us. The first is that it reduces our stature as morally responsible beings in a very serious way, if the free will defense is to be upheld. The second is that it raises the familiar problem of the authenticity of the alleged revelation to which appeal must be made.

God's commands *could* take the form of strictly prescribing or enjoining certain actions, regardless of the consequences foreseeable by us. But if they were of this form, our moral freedom (beyond decisions as to how to apply the Law in particular circumstances²²) would consist of nothing more than the ability to choose whether to obey or not. Deliberation with a view to the consequences of action would be morally irrelevant. But such a limited form of moral responsibility as this would hardly suit the "station" of an intelligent dog, let alone agents such as ourselves.

So suppose God requires us to contemplate certain foreseeable ends in choosing how to act. We have, by hypothesis, no all-things-considered understanding of whether these ends are good ones or ill: for that we must trust God. God may enjoin our causing a fawn to suffer, even if that suffering is an all-things-considered desirable state of affairs; but presumably He will not prescribe actions which normally lead to all-things-considered evil. However in the essential respect this position has no advantage over the first one. True, we would now have responsibility for gauging the effectiveness of various means to prescribed ends. But still we would have no real understanding of the value of those ends: it would not fall to our lot to perceive the overall good or evil of any state of affairs. Lacking this knowledge, we would be unable to choose the good *because it is good*—and hence would not be responsible for doing so. How, indeed, could we know *that it is good to obey God*? Moreover, God would have to *specify* all the ends we are to seek and avoid, or give us algorithms for determining these in any situation we actually encounter.

Perhaps the mathematical analogy can once again here help to clarify what is at stake. Suppose there were mathematical calculations we were forced by our circumstances to make; and suppose we are given rules for making these calculations by a superior being who assures us that the rules are correct. But

at the same time, while we can learn the algorithm by rote, we are incapable of understanding its validity. How should we characterize such a circumstance? It is clear that although we remain free agents in a certain sense—we can choose to follow the algorithm or ignore it—we are, in another sense, reduced to robots: that is, we cannot give any *mathematical* reasons for preferring the one choice to the other. We are not, in this domain, mathematically competent.

A few pages back, I agreed with the theist's point that, if God were to interfere in human affairs by causing every evil-intentioned action to misfire, He would cripple our moral autonomy. For in that case, although we would be free in a certain sense—we could always try to bring about harm—the futility of such choices would deprive us of the possibility of regarding our choices as involving serious responsibility for the welfare of others and of ourselves. In interfering, God would be demonstrating a lack of moral respect for us; and our self-respect would be correspondingly undermined.

But if God required us to follow moral algorithms, perhaps with the guarantee that everything would turn out for the best if we do so; and if He denied us the ability to understand the grounds for his commands, then we would be equally crippled. Though free to obey or disobey, we would be denied the possibility of supplying *moral* grounds for our choices: God would have deprived us of a fundamental condition for respecting ourselves as moral creatures. If God has denied us a comprehension of the logical connections between the goods and evils we must choose, and compensates that denial with an assurance that choices made in good faith and in obedience to Him will by His providence result in greater good than ill, then He deprives us of moral autonomy, just surely as we would be deprived by a providential neutralization of evil intentions. As a result, we would not be morally competent.

The second problem, that of establishing the authenticity of a given body of commandments, is familiar. In the case of Jews and Christians, the attempt to establish the moral authority of canonical scripture is additionally burdened by the pervasive presence of passages which are ethically problematic or repugnant. I shall not comment upon this much-discussed issue, except to say that I believe Adams' Admonition may be the best way to rescue theism from the untoward side-effects of Wykstra's Weasel, but that the application of her admonition requires the theist to have positive grounds for the claim that he possesses an adequately complete set of moral instructions from God.²³

There is, to be sure, one other escape from these side-effects. As a final defense, a theist might adopt the unorthodox view that God has sovereignty over moral norms, in the sense that righteousness consists solely in an action's being in accord with God's arbitrary will. Then whatever God wills or permits is *ipso facto* morally acceptable. If God has not chosen to give us a secure revelation of his will to guide our actions, then that is no fault in God. If He

chooses to make us aggressive and imperfectly wise, if He chooses to let the fawn suffer—from none of these can the imputation of moral defectiveness be lodged against God. I shall not explore this final path here, but content myself with the observation that it is not one which will lead the theist beside the still waters.

University of Iowa

NOTES

1. Evil whose possibility is not logically necessary as a precondition or consequence of some equal or greater good or the avoidance of some equal or greater harm, I shall call *gratuitous* evil. An evil is also gratuitous if, although logically necessary for some greater good or the prevention of some greater harm, an even greater overall felicity can be achieved by foregoing the evil with its associated benefit in favor of some other benefit thereby made logically possible. Evil that exists and is made possible by the existence of free agents other than God I shall call *delegated* evil. The problem of evil has since Plantinga been commonly taken to depend upon the claim that there is gratuitous undelegated evil. But I shall argue that, even *granting* the free will defense, there is delegated evil that is both gratuitous and preventible by God.

2. If anyone denies that we know this, it makes no difference to my argument, for I claim that God *should* have endowed us with certain innate dispositions and capacities that would be relatively resistant to environmental degradation.

3. I should note, however, that Richard Swinburne, on pp. 96-7 of "The Problem of Evil," in Stuart C. Brown, ed., *Reason and Religion* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1977) holds that being born with innate dispositions to pursue the good would constitute a kind of limitation on our freedom. In a passage contrasting the option God has to create us with moral dispositions and to create us so that naturally occurring signs (pains) warn us of harm, he remarks that the former, but not the latter option has the demerit of "imposing a moral character" upon agents—thereby limiting their freedom to fashion their own moral character. Swinburne does not linger over the question whether the capacity to suffer severe pain—together with the existence of environments which cause it—is not equally effective, even coercive, in shaping moral character, for better or for worse. But we need not concern ourselves whether such shaping is or is not the result of free responses to the experience of pain, for in any case, the plain fact is that we come into this world with a range of morally non-neutral innate dispositions. If the creation of creatures with such dispositions is something a God ought not to do, then our existence is an embarrassment to theodicy.

4. It does not follow—and I do not hold—that in so doing God would causally guarantee the diminution of human evil. The connection between nature and nurture on the one hand, and human action on the other, is nevertheless strong enough to ensure the general empirical claims on which my argument depends. This we know if we know any inductively supported truths, and we all use this knowledge to guide our rearing of children. Thus it will not do to object that any world God could create with agents gentler and more

intelligent (see below) than we will be such that it is logically and causally possible for that world to have turned out worse than ours: could it not, the objection goes, be the case that God, foreseeing the history of each of the agent-containing worlds he could create, picked ours as the best of the lot? Indeed it could. The force of my argument is not to show that this situation is impossible, but that it is extremely unlikely. The argument is therefore Bayesian. Unless the prior probability of God's existence is extremely high, the great improbability that a world should exist with agents such as we are, on the hypothesis of God's existence, shows that hypothesis to be improbable.

5. Respecting which see Section II.

6. I mean intelligence in the broad sense in which it is the capacity to acquire understanding, including, of course, moral understanding. There arises here the important question to what extent knowledge of non-moral facts enhances, or is necessary for, moral understanding, and for a good will—a question I shall not pursue here. But even if the two are independent, so that intelligence may equally easily be pressed into the service of harm, it is no argument against me that God would have risked greater delegated evil by having made us smarter. For I am claiming that he should *also* have made us sufficiently kinder to offset this risk.

7. At least with respect to the past and with respect to the laws of nature. I shall leave out of consideration perfect knowledge of the future and of other conscious agents' thoughts: these raise difficult issues.

8. Arguably, no omniscient creature could be considered human, as Del Lewis has reminded me. In that case, my speculation here can be taken to suggest a reason God has for not creating human agents at all. If the possession of omniscience by finite beings is for some reason conceptually impossible, then God should have given His creatures an intelligence that at least encompasses a full knowledge of moral norms and their justification, and knowledge adequate to predict the probable long-range consequences of actions. There is, so far as I can see, no conceptual impossibility in the possession by finite beings of such knowledge as that (or in the possession of the means by which to acquire it with reasonable effort).

9. E.g., Richard Swinburne, *The Existence of God* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1979), pp. 146-47.

10. Steven E. Boer, "The Irrelevance of the Free Will Defense," *Analyses*, vol. 38 (1978), pp. 110-12.

11. It is not my purpose to refute Boer's claim in this paper. But briefly, it seems to me that if God were to intervene in human affairs in this way, then the "freedom" we would possess would be morally truncated, since we would soon learn that achieving evil ends was for us no genuine option.

12. Swinburne, *loc. cit.*

13. Eleonore Stump in "The Problem of Evil," *Faith and Philosophy*, vol. 2 (1985), pp. 392-423, thinks it arguable that this evil is optimal in bringing human souls (perhaps after death) to salvation, but that is a different matter. To take a familiar, if extreme, example, we should remind ourselves that the conditions in Auschwitz virtually destroyed the moral integrity of all but a very few of those interned there.

14. Steven Wykstra, "The Human Obstacle to Evidential Arguments from Suffering:

On Avoiding the Evils of 'Appearance', *International Journal for the Philosophy of Religion*, vol. 16 (1984), pp. 73-93.

15. *Ibid.*, p. 85.

16. See William Rowe, "The Problem of Evil and Some Varieties of Atheism," *American Philosophical Quarterly*, vol. 16 (1979), pp. 335-41.

17. More strictly, let 'E' and 'G' in (1)-(4) represent propositions to the effect that the evil and good, respectively, occur. If there are other modal relations between propositions describing the existence of goods and evils, this list would have to be expanded. But I do not believe that any of the plausible candidates for such relations affect my argument. See also footnote 18.

18. A full discussion of (1)-(4) would require consideration of the various species of necessity by which God might be bound. To give the theist full leeway here, I shall take 'logically entails' as broadly as possible: *A* entails *B* just in case *A* necessitates *B* in any sense stronger than causal necessity. Whether logical necessity is the only such species of necessity or not, I am assuming that these necessary relations obtain in virtue of the identity conditions for the goods and evils they connect.

19. There are two possibilities: either we *cannot* recognize the relevant goods, or their relevance; or at least we *have* not done so. Wykstra's remarks suggest the former possibility, but the arguments which follow apply also in the latter case, so long as these goods (or their relevance) remain unidentified.

20. Brice Wachterhauser, "The Problem of Evil and Moral Skepticism," *International Journal for the Philosophy of Religion*, vol. 17 (1985), pp. 167-74.

21. Perhaps (*) is not quite sufficient for my purpose; perhaps a clause needs to be added, concerning best explanations, to the effect that the explanation in question is not merely the best *H* has (i.e., has thought of), but the best, relative to *H*'s total evidence, that there *is*, or at least the best that a normal human agent can be expected to conceive of. If so, let (*) be thus understood.

22. Rowe, "The Empirical Argument from Evil," in Robert Audi and William Wainwright, eds., *Rationality, Religious Belief, and Moral Commitment: New Essays in the Philosophy of Religion* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1986), p. 244, invoking Swinburne, *The Existence of God*, appeals here to principle of credulity, to the effect that if there do not seem to be any outweighing goods, then we are justified in believing there are none. I disagree. Epistemological problems are not solved by invoking *ad hoc* principles, no matter how well they may reflect the way we actually form beliefs.

23. It may be quite reasonably objected that this is too strong: rather than know the total good and evil some state of affairs entails, we need merely have adequately justified beliefs about *roughly* how much good and evil are involved. I shall accept this correction, but it does nothing to ameliorate the present difficulty. What the Wykstra defense requires is the supposition that we are in no position to justify our estimates of the good and evil necessarily involved in states of affairs, *and* that our best estimates of this are in many cases *wildly* in error.

24. It might be said that this species of moral skepticism introduces no new or special handicap, since our lack of knowledge of the long-range consequences of our actions already renders impossible all-things-considered moral evaluations, of a consequentialist

sort, of those actions. If this is granted, however, it serves merely to reinforce the earlier complaint that God did not give us enough understanding. There are, however, two sharp differences between the two kinds of moral skepticism at issue. First, deontologists might plausibly claim to be free of the problem just raised for consequentialism, but they cannot escape the difficulty engendered by Wykstra's Weasel. To possess a good will it is not enough to merely wish or hope abstractly for the good; one must also direct one's will toward specific ends understood to be good. But the deployment of Wykstra's Weasel required by the present defense of theism implies that we are quite radically lacking in this sort of understanding. It will not do either in this circumstance to will as best we know how, once we face our inability to know whether what we will is good or frightfully bad. Here the good will must shrink from willing any specific action. The second difference is that the Weasel-engendered skepticism is much deeper and more radical. The consequentialist can admit that we know little about the long-range consequences of a particular action, but still maintain with some plausibility that we know something (and can hope to learn more) about what the *common* significant consequences of a given kind of action are. Appealing to the general experience of mankind, he can hope to formulate some rule-of-thumb guides to action. But Wykstra's Weasel confronts us with the possibility of goods and evils, achievable by us, which we are unable to even conceive. Hence there appears to be not hope of bringing to bear on our decisions a kind of inductive wisdom gleaned from the general experience of humans.

25. Marilyn McCord Adams, "Reemptive Suffering: A Christian Solution to the Problem of Evil," in Robert Audi and William Wainwright, eds., *Rationality, Religious Belief, and Moral Commitment: New Essays in the Philosophy of Religion* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1986), pp. 265-66; also in personal conversation. Adams' development of this idea in (1986) is extremely brief and rather oblique. I hope I have not misrepresented her, but if I have, the view I propose here can be considered on its own merits.

26. Decisions about whether, e.g., the prohibition of killing covers military conflict or euthanasia, or what 'honoring' one's parents prescribes, can sometimes be settled on philological grounds. But usually, it is a question of matching a given interpretation to our independent conceptions of good and evil. The theist must now abandon the latter strategy.

27. Our lack of understanding of God's purposes may be, as Wykstra would have it, at least as great as a month-old child's lack of comprehension of its parent's purposes. But in one respect the comparison is inapt: unlike the child, we have a well-developed sense of justice. Adam's Admonition bespeaks a religious attitude which deserves respect, at least toward those who have been true to it in the face of great personal suffering. But since we cannot, at least in this life, see the justice in many evils, it also invites a very different attitude: rebellion.