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I argue that, contrary to the opinion of Wes Morriston, William Rowe, and others, a supremely perfect God, if one should exist, would be the freest of all beings and would represent the clearest example of what it means to act freely. I suggest further that, if we regard human freedom as a reflection of God's ideal freedom, we can avoid some of the pitfalls in both the standard libertarian and the standard compatibilist accounts of freewill.

My purpose in this paper is to set forth a theory of agency that makes no appeal to *mysterious* notions of agent causation. But lest I be misunderstood at the very outset, I should perhaps clarify the point that my emphasis here is on the term "mysterious" and not on the expression "agent causation." I shall begin with what seems to me the best possible example of agent causation: the sense in which a supremely perfect God, if one should exist, would *initiate* or *originate* his own actions. I shall not, however, simply adopt without modification the standard understanding of agent causation, assuming there to be such an understanding. I shall not make it true by definition, for example, that an agent-caused event can occur only in a context of alternative possibilities and hence can never be necessitated. Neither shall I make it true by definition that the internal states of an agent can never determine, or even causally determine in the case of human beings, a genuine instance of agent causation.[1] Instead, I shall begin with *the assumption* that God represents the best and the clearest example of

[1]Although many agency theorists argue that in the nature of the case no instance of agent causation can itself be causally determined, at least a few disagree. A notable example is Richard Taylor, who insists that "the claim of determinism . . . does not by itself require us to deny that there are agents who sometimes initiate their own acts." (*Action and Purpose* [Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1966], p. 115). Another is William Hasker, who observes that "the event, *S's causing e*, essentially involves S's *reasons* for causing *e*"; he then points out that "on occasion (though certainly not always) one's reasons may be so compelling as to literally 'leave one with no alternative.'" The reasons, in other words, may be "so strong that they, in effect, preclude any other course of action" [*The Emergent Self* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1999), pp. 106–107]. Such cases may not be instances of free action, in Hasker's view, but they are genuine instances of *action* and therefore of agent causation. Others, such as Timothy O'Connor, disagree (see *Persons and Causes* [Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2000], p. 61). Given such a disagreement over such a fundamental issue, one might wonder whether *any* specific understanding of agent causation can justifiably be regarded as standard. But for the record, my own sympathies lie with Hasker on this issue.

agent causation and then explore some implications of this assumption for the concept of human agency. I shall also argue that, contrary to the opinion of Wes Morriston, William Rowe, and others, the Anselmian God would be the freest of all beings and would represent, indeed, the clearest example of what it means to act freely.[2] The idea of divine freedom can even provide a perspective, I believe, from which to evaluate the ongoing dispute between libertarians and compatibilists and can, in the end, help to bring these two warring camps a bit closer together.

The remarkable thing is that the negative libertarian arguments against the compatibilist view (e.g., the worry that unbroken causal determinism is indistinguishable from external manipulation[3]) and the negative compatibilist arguments against the libertarian view (e.g., the worry that indeterminism is indistinguishable from random chance) both seem initially plausible. Given that libertarians and compatibilists hold *contrary* views rather than *contradictory* ones, moreover, we must at least consider the possibility that both views are mistaken.[4] One might even wonder whether the concept of freewill is itself incoherent. In this paper, however, I shall argue, first, that a proper understanding of divine freedom can point to a way out of the quagmire; second, that the way out is to understand human freedom as a reflection, however pale it may be, of God's ideal freedom; and third, that such an understanding will enable one to avoid some of the pitfalls in both the standard libertarian and the standard compatibilist accounts of freewill.[5]

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[2]For my earlier defense of the idea that God is the freest of all beings, see Thomas Talbott, "On the Divine Nature and the Nature of Divine Freedom," *Faith and Philosophy* 5 (1988), pp. 3–24; for a more recent defense of a similar view, see Edward Wierenga, "The Freedom of God," *Faith and Philosophy* 19 (2002), pp. 425–436; and for criticisms of this view, see Wes Morriston, "Is God Free? Reply to Wierenga," *Faith and Philosophy* 23 (2006), pp. 93–98 and William Rowe, *Can God Be Free?* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).

[3]The argument that unbroken determinism would be indistinguishable from freedom-removing external manipulation has received a lot of attention in recent literature. For an important statement of this argument, see Derk Pereboom, *Living Without Free Will* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), pp. 110–126.

[4]For important contemporary arguments against both views, see Richard Double, *The Non-reality of Free Will* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991) and Pereboom, *Living Without Free Will*.

[5]But just what, one might ask, is the standard libertarian account of freewill? That is certainly a fair question, given the variety of views that those who call themselves libertarians have held. Many of them accept the so-called principle of alternative possibilities, but some do not. Some hold that no free action can be causally determined, whereas others insist that a properly formed character (together with other factors) can causally determine a free action under the right conditions. Beyond that, libertarians rarely, if ever, try to specify an informative (i.e., non-trivial) sufficient condition of free action; they usually seem content to specify a few necessary conditions. For my purposes in this paper, however, it is enough to have a very rough idea (if any at all) of what constitutes a libertarian and a compatibilist view. For I begin with a certain conception of divine freedom and then explore its implications for human freedom and for certain *specific* claims that those who call themselves libertarians and those who call themselves compatibilists have in fact made.

The Supremely Perfect Cause of the Universe

I begin with the Anselmian conception of God, according to which God is a necessary being and such attributes as omnipotence, omniscience, perfect rationality, and loving-kindness are to be numbered among his essential properties. According to this conception, then, God never makes a mistake concerning the best course of action, never acts upon a false belief, and never suffers from any illusion concerning the consequences of his own actions. With respect to the individual who is God, in other words, it is a necessary truth that *this individual* always knows which course of action is the best, at least when there *is* a best course of action; it is also a necessary truth that he always chooses whichever course of action he knows to be the best. So in that sense, his most important actions flow, as Spinoza and Leibniz also insisted, from the inner necessity of his own being or, more specifically, from the inner necessity of his own rationality. Once he has promised to do something, for example, that promise together with his essential attributes entails that he will in fact do it.

But even if God should always act from an inner necessity, at least with respect to the most important matters, he would still be, so I am assuming, the agent cause of his own actions. Yes, some philosophers have questioned whether the idea of a necessary being whose perfections are essential properties is truly intelligible. Nor is it my intention here to defend the intelligibility of this idea with an argument of some kind or another. Assuming its intelligibility, however, my point is simply this: Because neither God's existence nor any of his actions is the product of sufficient causes external to himself, he is the uncaused cause of every event he causes to occur; that, I presume, is utterly non-controversial. And because it is necessarily true that God never acts contrary to his own (correct) judgment concerning the best course of action, there can be no question of his actions being wholly, or even partially, a matter of random chance. So even when God acts from an inner necessity, he remains the agent cause of his actions in just this sense: Each of them reflects his own perfectly rational judgment concerning the best course of action; none of them is the product of sufficient causes external to himself; and none of them is even partially a matter of random chance.

The Anselmian God, if he should exist, would also be, I shall argue below, the freest of all possible beings. Such a God would not, it is true, *freely choose* to be free, nor would the fact of his freedom be something that he brings about in himself or causes to be the case. But in that respect he would be no different from anyone else, for with one kind of exception the whole idea of someone freely choosing to be a free agent seems deeply incoherent. If, unlike God, I should have the power to destroy my freedom—through the use of drugs or by committing suicide, for example—then perhaps one could view my freely choosing not to exercise such power as a case of freely choosing to *remain* free in the future. Still, even in a case such as this, the freedom expressed in my earliest free choices could not itself be a causal consequence of any prior free choices of my own. So even as no created person freely chooses to become a free agent—Sartre would say that we are condemned to freedom—neither does God freely choose to be the free agent that he is essentially.

Wes Morriston on Divine Freedom

But if God's very nature is such that he is incapable of error, moral failure, and the like, then how, one may wonder, can I nonetheless insist that he always does the right thing and always acts for the best *freely*? Wes Morriston poses just such a question in a recent (and important) discussion, where he writes: "Since [the Anselmian] God is simply 'stuck' with his moral nature, he is not responsible either for it or for what follows from it, and is not therefore morally free."[6] In saying that God is "stuck" with his moral nature, Morriston means, I take it, that God never freely chose to have one nature rather than another.

As an illustration of his claim about God, Morriston asks us to imagine that "a finite person," whom he calls Bonnie Chance, comes into existence by random chance and does so with the following characteristic: "her nature prevents her from ever choosing what she sees to be less than the best."[7] Like God, then, Bonnie Chance "can't help being good," says Morriston, "because she is 'stuck' with a nature that prevents her from ever going wrong";[8] nor is her nature, which is the product of random chance, any more the product of external causes than the nature of God is the product of such causes. And although Morriston concedes that the existence of Bonnie Chance may be impossible (even as some might argue that the existence of God is impossible), he also insists that such an impossibility is irrelevant to the point of his thought experiment, which is this: "The mere absence of external causes [in the case of God] is insufficient to *guarantee* his freedom, for the fact remains that he is just as determined by his nature as Bonnie is by her nature" (my italics).[9] So, with respect to Bonnie Chance, Morriston writes: "Since it is Bonnie's nature—and not Bonnie herself—that is responsible for her good behavior, we can only conclude that she is not acting freely when she acts for the best."[10] And with respect to God, he likewise writes: "So if God's *nature*—rather than *God*—is the ultimate determiner of his moral choices, then I do not see why we should think that he is making them freely" (Morriston's italics).[11]

Now I certainly agree with Morriston that the "mere absence of external causes," particularly where such an absence is indistinguishable from random chance, is hardly a *sufficient condition* of the freedom that pertains to rational agents, as I shall here call it. But then, I know of no one who has claimed otherwise; most libertarians (including Morriston himself, I presume) would claim only that the absence of external causes is a *necessary condition* of the relevant freedom. So the more relevant question, as I see it, is this: If you *combine* the absence of external causes with perfect rationality and the power to act in accordance with such rationality—or, in the case of human beings, the power to act in accordance with a

[6]Morriston, "Is God Free? Reply to Wierenga," p. 96.

[7]Ibid.

[8]Ibid.

[9]Ibid.

[10]Ibid.

[11]Ibid., p. 97.

reasonable and well informed judgment concerning the best course of action—why do you not then have something *close* to a sufficient condition of the freedom that pertains to rational agents? What further freedom could a rational agent possibly desire to have? In any event, however one answers such questions as these—and I shall return to a fuller discussion of them in the final section below—I have a two-fold objection to any suggestion that Morriston's example of Bonnie Chance counts against the freedom of God.

Consider first an important respect in which anything like the Anselmian God would be quite different from Bonnie Chance. I do not here refer to the obvious point that, whereas Bonnie exists *contingently* (assuming her existence to be possible at all), the Anselmian God would exist *necessarily*; I refer instead to an ambiguity in the concept of *nature*, as Morriston evidently employs it, and to its bearing on the issue of an individual's identity. The ambiguity is between the philosophical notion of an essence, a set of essential properties, and the more ordinary notion of a person's accidental character traits, behavioral dispositions, and the like. A nature in the former sense, being a set of properties, is an abstract object and causally inert, so to speak; it neither *causally* determines nor exercises any *causal* influence over a person's actions. But a nature in the latter sense is the sort of thing that could in principle figure into the *causal* explanation of an action—as, for instance, when a man's honest character prevents him from telling a lie on some occasion or another. A specific character trait in that sense is not a property, conceived of as an abstract object, but the concrete instance of a property. In an effort to resolve this ambiguity, therefore, I shall henceforth use the term "nature" not as a synonym for the term "essence," but as a term that signifies those concrete character traits and behavioral dispositions, however contingent they may be, that we ordinarily think of as constituting a person's nature (as in a sinful nature, for example) and as exerting a causal influence over, if not outright determining, some of our actions.

Accordingly, because Bonnie's nature in the relevant sense includes many accidental character traits, behavioral dispositions, and the like, her specific nature in the actual world is hardly essential to her individual identity; and because she has a different nature in different possible worlds, we can coherently distinguish Bonnie herself, as Morriston does, from her nature (or at least from *some* of her accidental character traits even if not from all of them). But when Morriston speaks of God's nature in the context of his argument concerning the freedom of God, he has in mind, I presume, an essence in the philosophical sense, a set of properties that God instantiates in every possible world in which he exists. So unlike Bonnie, who *just happens to be*, for example, perfectly loving, merciful, and just, the Anselmian God is *essentially* loving, merciful, and just; indeed, his essential goodness is just what raises a problem of divine freedom in the minds of many. But it also provides an effective counter to Morriston's claim that "God's *nature*—rather than *God*—is the ultimate determiner of his moral choices." For that claim seems to make no coherent sense at all in the present context. If we think of God's nature as a causally inert abstract object, then it has no more *causal* influence over his actions than any other abstract object does; and if we think of God's nature, no less

than God himself, as the concrete instantiation of his essence, then God is clearly identical with his nature. In deciding to create, for example, it was God himself, and nothing other than God, who was the agent cause of the heavens and the earth.[12]

Consider next the example of Bonnie Chance more closely. Before we can even begin to evaluate Morriston's claim that "it is Bonnie's nature—and not Bonnie herself—that is [causally?] responsible for her good behavior," we must first ask: Just who (or what) is Bonnie *herself* (the individual that Morriston contrasts with Bonnie's nature)? Or, to put the question another way: Just what is it that the name "Bonnie Chance" supposedly signifies if the individual named is to be distinguished from *all* of the character traits, behavioral dispositions, desires, and attitudes that, however contingent they may be, we ordinarily associate with a person's nature? Does "Bonnie Chance" name anything beyond a characterless subject of predication? If not, then I certainly agree that a characterless subject of predication does not act in the world and does not, in particular, act freely.[13] But suppose we think of Bonnie herself as a particular person, a rational agent whose cognitive faculties work properly, whose judgments concerning the best course of action are reliable, and whose true beliefs are such that she holds them for the right sorts of reasons.[14] So conceived, I see no reason to deny that Bonnie, like God, fits the very paradigm of someone who acts freely. For even if a rational agent should pop into existence by random chance,

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[12]At the end of his article, Morriston acknowledges that his assumption "that God (like Bonnie) is distinct from his nature [or essence] . . . is controversial"; he then goes on to make the intriguing suggestion that a doctrine of divine simplicity, assuming it to be coherent, can solve the problem of divine freedom because, according to that doctrine, "God is *identical* to God's nature" (p. 98). But this does not, it seems to me, get at the critical issue. For the critical issue is not whether God is identical to some abstract object, namely, a set of properties; it is instead whether God, unlike Bonnie Chance, is identical to an individual G such that it is logically impossible that G should have been less than perfectly good. If God is identical to G, then we cannot coherently distinguish God himself from the ultimate springs of his moral actions. And although the simplicity doctrine likewise entails that we cannot distinguish God himself from the ultimate springs of his moral actions, it is hardly *necessary* for such a view.

[13]I should perhaps emphasize here that I am *not* attributing to Morriston the view that "Bonnie Chance" names nothing more than a characterless subject of predication. My point is simply that we need a clear conception of just who Bonnie herself is (in contrast to Bonnie's nature) before we can evaluate the claim that Bonnie's nature, and not Bonnie herself, determines her good actions.

[14]Here I gloss over a host of difficulties, as I see them, in the example of Bonnie Chance. Are we to suppose, for example, that Bonnie is omniscient from the time that she pops into existence by chance? That is, does she come into being already knowing all the laws of nature, everything about the state of the universe at the time of her emergence, and all the causal consequences of all possible actions? If so, then from whence comes her knowledge? Unlike God, she does not simply know the nature of the things that she herself has made or designed; unlike ordinary human beings, she does not acquire her knowledge of how things work from experience; and unlike a *created* being with implanted or innate knowledge, she is in no way a *recipient* of her knowledge. If she is not omniscient, however, then one wonders how her nature alone could prevent her from ever going wrong.

as we are here imagining, it would nonetheless be, by hypothesis, a rational agent once it came into being. Nor would the fact that its *existence* is the product of chance carry any implication that its *actions*, subsequent to its having come into existence, are the product of chance. To the contrary, if Bonnie *herself* qualifies as a rational agent, then the ultimate explanation for her actions, at least in cases where she sees the best course of action clearly, lies in *her own* practical reason and *her own* rational judgment concerning the best course of action.[15] Accordingly, even as the Anselmian God would be a rational agent who exists necessarily and initiates his own actions, so Bonnie Chance would be a rational agent who sprang into existence by random chance and then began initiating her own actions. In that respect, Bonnie's actions, no less than God's, would qualify as legitimate instances of agent causation and also legitimate instances, so it seems to me, of free action.[16]

Now even many libertarian philosophers—Robert Kane and Laura Ekstrom, for example[17]—are suspicious of appeals to agent causation, and for good reason. For when agency theorists appeal to agent causation in an effort to distinguish a free choice, uncaused by any events, from random chance, they too often merely deepen the very mystery that they are trying to explain away. Suppose that yesterday I had a non-decisive reason R to do A and a non-decisive reason R* to refrain from A, and suppose that, after deliberating for a while, I made the choice, uncaused by any events, to do A in a context in which refraining from A was likewise causally possible. If this is a context, as some libertarians would have it, in which I categorically could have chosen otherwise, the well-known objection is that such a choice would in the end be indistinguishable from a random selection between alternatives. For what other than random

[15]According to Morriston in a personal correspondence, Bonnie's practical reason and reliable judgments concerning the best course of action constitute "the *proximate* explanation [of her actions], not the *ultimate* one." But here is why I regard this proximate explanation of her actions to be the ultimate explanation as well. The chance instantiation of Bonnie's essence, if it should occur, would entail that her instantiation (or coming into being) has no explanation at all. Given, however, that she comes into being without explanation as a perfectly rational agent, one whose judgments concerning the best course of action are utterly reliable, the only explanation (and thus the ultimate explanation) of her actions lies in the deliverances of her reliable practical reason. So even though her existence remains an unexplained mystery, her actions, once she comes into being, are not.

[16]At this point one might wonder about Suzie Determined, whose existence and perfectly rational nature are, let us suppose, both causally determined. Could we say the same thing about her? Could we say, to be specific, that Suzie's actions, no less than God's, would qualify as genuinely free actions? Here too, I believe, it matters not how Suzie Determined comes into being, *provided that*, once she does come into being, her own reasoning powers control her actions in the right sort of way. But in the end we must also confront the issue of what is possible. Is it genuinely possible for Suzie's reasoning powers to determine her own actions and to control them properly in a fully deterministic universe? For more on that issue, see the final section below.

[17]See Robert Kane, *The Significance of Free Will* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996) and Laura Ekstrom, *Free Will: A Philosophical Study* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2000).

chance might "explain" why I acted from R and chose to do A when I categorically could have acted from R* and have chosen to refrain from A? Granted, whichever choice I had made, whether I had chosen to do A or had chosen to refrain from A, that choice would have been distinguishable from chance in the sense that I, the agent, would have acted for a reason. But what nonetheless remains unexplained, whether properly so or not, is why I should have acted from R and have chosen to do A when I categorically could have acted from R* and have chosen to refrain from A; in that respect, it is hard to see why my having chosen to do A rather than having chosen to refrain from A was not the product of random chance or at least the product of random elements in some decision making process. Nor do I see how one can remove the apparent arbitrariness here simply by calling this an instance of agent causation, which does nothing to remove the mystery.[18]

It seems to me, therefore, that an appeal to agent causation does little to address the worry of many compatibilists (and even some libertarians) that the very existence of alternatives, each being causally possible, already implies a degree of randomness, chance, or arbitrariness. But insofar as the God of Anselm, Spinoza, and Leibniz has *decisive* reasons for his most important actions,[19] these actions are in no way the product of chance and in no way a random selection between alternatives. So, because God provides the clearest example of a *rational agent* whose perfectly rational actions are the product of neither external manipulation, on the one hand, nor random chance, on the other, he also provides the clearest example of both agent causation and the freedom that pertains to rational agents.

William Rowe and the Principle of Alternative Possibilities

According to Morriston, as we have just seen, the Anselmian God, who of necessity always acts for the best, does not act freely because he is "stuck" with a moral nature that prevents him from doing otherwise. So Morriston

[18]The best defense of this objection is, in my opinion, Peter van Inwagen's. See Part 2 of "Free Will Remains a Mystery" in *The Oxford Handbook of Free Will*, ed. Robert Kane (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), pp. 167–175.

[19]As an anonymous referee very properly pointed out, I here sidestep "entirely the question of whether God's decision to create this world (or something very like it) is something for which he has decisive reasons." Although it is by no means essential to my thesis here, my own view, for what it is worth, is that God does indeed have decisive reasons for creating a universe that includes people of some kind or another; hence, it is necessarily true, I believe, that he creates such a universe. For two reasons, however, one need have no fear of fatalism at this point: First, its being necessarily true that God creates a universe with people of some kind or another is quite consistent with its being a contingent fact, with respect to each created person x, that God creates x. And second, even if, for each created person x, it is indeed necessarily true that God creates x, we can still avoid fatalism in the way I pointed out in "On the Divine Nature and the Nature of Divine Freedom." For if it is also necessarily true that God creates a universe in which indeterminism and chance have an important role to play in the lives of created persons, then that would suffice not only for the existence of contingent facts about the created universe, but also for the existence of contingent facts about God. See pp. 15–16 of the above-mentioned article.

seems clearly committed to the much-discussed principle of alternative possibilities: the principle that a person chooses freely in a given context only if the person categorically could have chosen otherwise in the same context. William Rowe likewise insists that freedom implies "an important kind of control over the future, limited as that control may be. Such control consists in *freedom to do otherwise*, the power we possess to make any one of two or more alternative paths into the future the path we shall actually follow" (Rowe's italics).[20] So, because it is logically impossible that God should ever choose less than the best, at least where there is a best course of action, Rowe, like Morriston, denies that God chooses the best course of action freely.

Even in the case of human beings, however, the so-called principle of alternative possibilities is quite mistaken, I believe, if it is understood to include the following faulty assumption:

(FA) A person S does A freely in a set of circumstances C only if in C it is also psychologically possible for S to refrain from A.

The first difficulty with (FA) is that it fails to account for cases in which choosing otherwise would be an instance of choosing irrationally. In a case such as that, why should acting freely (or why should the freedom that pertains to rational agents) *require* the psychological possibility of choosing otherwise? In fact, why not regard the power to choose irrationally as itself *incompatible* with a fully realized freedom? Suppose that in a moment of delusion a schizophrenic young man, standing in the kitchen with a butcher knife in his hand, should suddenly come to believe that his loving mother is a sinister invader from space and not really his mother at all. Suppose further that the young man's delusion should create for him a context of alternative possibilities that would not have existed apart from it; it creates, in other words, a context in which he finds it psychologically possible to slash his mother to death *as well as* psychologically possible to refrain from killing her (after all, other sinister invaders could easily turn him into their next meal as a punishment for killing his mother!). So whichever decision he makes, his irrational deliberation, as chancy as such things can be, could have produced the contrary choice under the same initial conditions. Here, at least, the presence of alternative possibilities seems incompatible with genuine freedom precisely because it entails a degree of irrationality that is itself incompatible with freedom. In such a context, I contend, a fully realized freedom not only does not require, but actually *precludes*, the psychological possibility of choosing otherwise.

A second difficulty with (FA) is that, unless restricted in some way, this principle is also incompatible with too many ordinary paradigms of free action, such as the loving mother who cares for her children and the honest banker who refuses a bribe. Some libertarians have thus rejected these paradigms altogether and have even concluded, as Peter van Inwagen once did, that "we have precious little free will."[21] For consider a young mother, full of love for her baby, who finds it utterly unthinkable (and

[20]William Rowe, *Can God Be Free?*, p. 55.

[21]See Peter van Inwagen, "When is the Will Free?" *Philosophical Perspectives, Vol. 3: Philosophy of Mind and Action* (1989), p. 414.

therefore psychologically impossible) to torture her baby, or even just to abandon it somewhere. According to (FA), such a loving mother does not care for her child *freely*. But I see no compelling reason to suppose that a rational agent would lose her freedom at the very instant that she judges it overwhelmingly important to act in one way rather than in another. If no one can act freely in a context where the only available alternative to some action seems unthinkable or utterly indefensible, then why should any rational agent prize or value freedom at all?

It is my contention, then, that libertarians ought to reject (FA).[22] According to William Rowe, however, "Examples in support of this principle are not difficult to come by," and he goes on to give the following example:

> If a young child is exposed to electric shock every time he fails to say 'Yes sir!' when his teacher orders him to do something, it eventually will be *psychologically impossible* for the child to refrain from saying 'Yes sir!' on hearing an order from his teacher. No one who has command of the language, and knowing the circumstances just described, is likely to insist that when the child, subsequent to this coercive conditioning, says 'Yes sir!' in response to the teacher's command, nevertheless freely utters that response.[23]

After setting forth his example, Rowe then asks: "how on earth can Talbott maintain that the child *freely* says 'Yes sir!' in those circumstances . . . ?"[24] The answer, of course, is that I would never dream of making such a claim, and neither would a sophisticated compatibilist.

Observe first that, contrary to what Rowe suggests, his example of coercive conditioning offers no support at all for the *general* claim in (FA); at best it supports the more specific claim that *under certain conditions* the psychological impossibility of acting otherwise is incompatible with freedom. In a companion to the article that Rowe criticizes,[25] I thus distinguished between two very different kinds of cases: those where one finds it psychologically impossible to act *in accordance with* one's own judgment concerning the best course of action, and those where one finds it psychologically impossible to act *contrary to* such a judgment. In the first kind of

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[22]I agree wholeheartedly, therefore, with Edward Wierenga who asks: "Why has it proven so difficult to find an acceptable statement of the principle" of alternative possibilities? Wierenga goes on to suggest that "the intuitive use of the principle is as a test, an *approximate* test, for the presence of the wrong sort of antecedent conditions, the ones that would render an action unfree. It is difficult to state exactly because it is only a rough test. If this is right, then it doesn't matter that God fails the test posed by one's preferred principle of alternative possibilities. We can judge that actions proceeding from his own divine nature are free, and thus we do not need to employ a detector for the sorts of antecedent conditions which, if present in human agents, preclude their acting freely." (See Edward Wierenga, "Perfect Goodness and Divine Freedom," *Philosophical Books* 48 [2007], p. 210.)

[23]William Rowe, *Can God Be Free?*, pp. 143–144.

[24]Ibid., p. 144.

[25]See Thomas Talbott, "On Free Agency and the Concept of Power," *Pacific Philosophical Quarterly* 69 (1988), pp. 241–254.

case, the relevant psychological impossibility is indeed incompatible with freedom, as the example of certain alcoholics and drug addicts illustrates nicely. For it may happen that an alcoholic, having judged it best to refuse another drink, nonetheless finds it psychologically impossible to do so; and if that should happen, then the alcoholic's will would be in a kind of bondage to an addiction or perhaps to the temporary euphoria that alcohol can sometimes induce. In the second kind of case, however, the relevant psychological impossibility is not always, so I argued, incompatible with freedom. Quite the contrary. When a *rational agent* finds an action (or inaction) to be utterly unthinkable, utterly indefensible, and, *for that very reason*, psychologically impossible, this psychological impossibility may be, provided that the relevant judgments are both reasonable and well informed, just what true freedom requires.

So my own view, which I first expressed (rather confusedly) back in 1988, includes an asymmetry thesis not altogether unlike the one that Susan Wolf defends, but with one important difference. According to Wolf's Reason View, moral responsibility as well as the freedom that moral responsibility presupposes "depends upon the ability to act in accordance with the True and the Good"; it requires, in other words, that one have the power to do the right thing for the right reasons. But it does not require the psychological possibility that one might in fact act wrongly or fail to do the right thing for the right reasons.[26] My own asymmetry thesis, however, requires only that one have the power to *follow one's own fallible judgment* concerning the best course of action; it does not require that one's fallible judgment be correct, nor does it require, particularly in cases where the agent remains ignorant of pertinent matters (such as the actual consequences of a given action or the true character of his or her own interests), the psychological possibility of the agent actually doing the right thing (assuming there to be a right thing) for the right reasons.[27] Wolf and I nonetheless agree concerning this: The psychological possibility of acting in an utterly irrational way, far from enhancing the freedom of a rational agent, might even undermine such freedom altogether.[28]

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[26]According to Wolf, "The Reason View is thus committed to the curious claim that being psychologically determined to perform good actions is compatible with deserving praise for them, but that being psychologically determined to perform bad actions is not compatible with deserving blame" (see Susan Wolf, *Freedom Within Reason* [New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990], p. 79). But because the Christian religion requires, in my opinion, that we give up "the blame game" altogether and abandon the whole idea of *intrinsic desert*, it also requires that we rethink the concept of moral responsibility accordingly. I have therefore restricted my attention here to the concept of freedom.

[27]So if a Mafia boss, for example, should qualify as a rational agent and should (mistakenly) judge it best, all things considered, to do something immoral, such as ordering the assassination of a competitor, the Mafia boss might nonetheless issue the order freely, in my view, even if the following should be true: It is psychologically impossible, at the time of his issuing the immoral order, that he should have refrained from issuing it.

[28]Concerning "the ability to choose and to act independently of all, even all rational, bases," Wolf thus insists that "responsibility [and therefore freedom] requires something more limited than that, namely, the ability to choose and to act

A Rejoinder to Rowe

Although I flatly reject the so-called principle of alternative possibilities when interpreted as (FA), Rowe thinks it a mistake to do so, and he diagnoses my supposed error in the following way: "Talbott makes the mistake of confusing a 'free act' with an act for which an agent is, at best, derivatively 'morally responsible.'"[29] The distinction is important and easy to illustrate. Rowe himself cites the example of Odysseus, who "orders his men to tie him to the mast so that at the time he hears" the voices of the sirens "he will be unable to yield to the temptation to follow the sirens' call."[30] Accordingly, even as a drunk driver may be blamable, on account of prior choices, for an accident he was later unable to avoid, so Odysseus, having given his order, may be praiseworthy for his inability to respond to the sirens' call after being tied to the mast. Still, as Rowe points out correctly, "It is simply a mistake to think that when he hears the sirens' song Odysseus 'freely refrains' from responding."[31] Instead, he has a kind of "derivative responsibility," as Rowe calls it, for having freely chosen to remove his own freedom in an effort to ensure that he would not act upon his moral weaknesses.

So why does Rowe attribute such an elementary mistake (or confusion) to me? Here is a clue. Concerning a man who could never bring himself to torture the wife he genuinely loves, Rowe suggests that "the impossibility of his presently wanting to torture his wife is the result of his earlier *free decision* to spend his life with her, a decision that resulted in his coming to love her in a way that makes it psychologically impossible for him to want to torture her."[32] Rowe thus countenances the idea that the man may have, on account of his prior free choices, a kind of derivative responsibility for the relevant psychological impossibility and may, in that sense, be praiseworthy for it; Rowe then concludes that I have simply confused the concept of freedom with this kind of derivative responsibility.

Of course, if I have indeed fallen into confusion at this point, then so have a number of other libertarian philosophers. According to James F. Sennett, for example, "A character that is libertarian freely chosen is the only kind of character that can determine compatibilist free choices."[33] And Robert Kane likewise writes: "Agents with free will . . . must be such that they could have done otherwise on some occasions of their life histories with respect to some character- or motive-forming acts by which they make themselves into the kinds of persons they are."[34] Such philosophers would no doubt see important differences between Rowe's example of

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in accordance with Reason, that is, the ability to choose and to act in accordance with what reasons there are" (*Freedom Within Reason*, p. 96).

[29]Rowe, *Can God Be Free?*, p. 145.

[30]Ibid., p. 143.

[31]Ibid., p. 145.

[32]Ibid.

[33]James F. Sennett, "Is there Freedom in Heaven?" *Faith and Philosophy*, 16 (1999), p. 74.

[34]Kane, *The Significance of Free Will*, p. 72.

Odysseus, where being tied to the mast merely protected him from his own character weaknesses, and cases where one's choices supposedly shape one's own character in a direction that henceforth makes certain actions psychologically impossible. But beyond that, I see no reason to suppose that our ordinary paradigms of free action, as I have called them, in any way rest upon a confusion between free action, on the one hand, and a kind of derivative responsibility, on the other. Indeed, with a few notable exceptions, such as the Odysseus example above, where the consequences of someone's choices are both immediate and quite foreseeable, the whole idea of derivative responsibility seems to me utterly problematic. For as Rowe himself points out, "There are long range causal consequences of our free acts that are not themselves freely chosen or consciously foreseen."[35] And as I have elsewhere expressed a similar point:

> But the problem is that actions too often have unexpected consequences in our lives. One person lies and cheats in pursuit of wealth and fame, only to discover that the result is emptiness and misery; and the circumstances surrounding this discovery may causally determine (even compel) a life transformation. Another may sincerely cultivate moral integrity and inadvertently produce some of the worst character traits: moral rigidity, self-righteousness, and a lack of compassion.[36]

Accordingly, in many cases where our immediate desires, beliefs, and the like determine our actions, the idea that we have a kind of *derivative* responsibility for these actions, grounded in our past choices, seems to me far more problematic than the idea that we have simply acted freely. Consider again the loving mother who cares for her child freely, so I claim, despite the psychological impossibility of doing otherwise. As far as we know, she may never have chosen, at least not in any explicit way, the desires, motherly instincts, and beliefs that presently determine her actions; and even if some undetermined choices had influenced some of these causal factors, these influences may not have been foreseeable at all. So contrary to what Rowe supposes, I would appeal to something in the present, not to the woman's past choices, in an effort to explain her freedom in the matter of caring for her child.

How, then, would I account for her freedom? I would do so by pointing to an important respect in which she differs from the young boy who is coercively conditioned into uttering the words "Yes sir!" For nothing in Rowe's description of the latter case suggests that the boy has ever reflected on his own behavior or has made any judgment at all, much less a reasonable and well informed one, concerning the wisest course of action

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[35]Rowe, *Can God Be Free?*, p. 145.

[36]"Free Choice and Moral Character: A Difficulty for Libertarians," presented at the Central Division Meetings of the American Philosophical Association in April, 2003. In an extremely important essay, Manuel Vargas likewise notes that "even freely chosen features of our lives and ourselves can, because of our epistemic limitations, yield unanticipated consequences" ("The Trouble with Tracing," *Midwest Studies in Philosophy* xxix (2005), p. 282).

in the matter of uttering the words "Yes sir!" in response to the teacher's commands. To the contrary, the boy appears to utter these words as automatically as Pavlov's dog salivated whenever it heard a certain bell ringing. So our loving mother differs from the boy in just this respect: Unlike the boy, she has a *belief*, for which she could provide reasons (if asked), concerning what is best, all things considered, in the matter of whether or not to care for her baby. Her belief also rests upon her own assessment of the evidence for a host of matters, such as the probable consequences of various actions and the conditions of her own happiness as well as that of her baby. And finally, her belief is, let us suppose, both reasonable and as well informed as can be expected. Given these important differences between the two cases, I fail to see how Rowe's example of coercive conditioning is even relevant to the case of the mother who finds it utterly unthinkable to abandon her child.

So let us now alter Rowe's example just a bit. Let us suppose that, as a developing rational agent, the boy in Rowe's example should become acutely aware of what his teachers had done to him in the matter of subjecting him to electric shocks, that he should also become aware of an elaborate plot to expose these disgraceful techniques to the public, that (when asked to do so) he joins with the conspirators because he desperately wants their plot to succeed, and that the success of this plot requires that he "fake it" for several weeks and continue to say "Yes sir!" in response to every command from his teacher (sort of like Paul Newman repeatedly saying "Yes boss" in the film *Cool Hand Luke*). For the sake of this thought experiment, let us also adopt two additional assumptions: First, given the precise circumstances in which he was asked to join with the conspirators, there was no chance that the boy would refuse to do so. For just as the beliefs and desires of a drowning man who desperately wants to live may determine that he will grasp the lifeline that someone tosses to him, so the beliefs and desires of the boy in our revised example suffice to determine, let us suppose, that he will join with the conspirators. Second, when the boy first joins with the conspirators, his responses to his teacher's commands are over-determined in this sense: Even if he did not have this new reason for saying "Yes sir!" in the relevant circumstances, his conditioning would have taken over and he would have uttered these words nonetheless. But after a few days, he finds that his prior conditioning begins to lose its power over him; indeed, he begins to feel utterly free in this matter. Still, at no time is it psychologically possible for him not to utter the words "Yes sir!" in the relevant circumstances. For by the time that his prior conditioning loses its power over him, he already has a compelling reason to pretend that it had not lost its power over him. After all, he desperately wants the plot to succeed, as I said, and he is therefore unwilling to do anything that might sabotage it.

Now, concerning his own example of coercive conditioning, Rowe writes: "No one who has command of the language . . . is likely to insist that when the child . . . says "Yes sir!" in response to his teacher's command, the child, nevertheless, 'freely' utters that response."[37] That is correct, which is also why such examples do little to further the dispute

[37]Rowe, *Can God Be Free?*, p. 144.

between compatibilists and incompatibilists. But would Rowe say the same thing about the boy in my revision of his example? I, at least, would not, and I strongly suspect that most ordinary people with a good command of the language would conclude that the boy in my revised example comes to utter the words "Yes sir!" quite freely, despite the psychological impossibility of his acting otherwise.

The Freedom that Pertains to Rational Agents

It is almost a truism, I suppose, that the concept of *rationality*, as employed in ordinary moral and legal contexts, is an essential part of the concept of *freedom*, particularly as the latter applies to rational agents. But unlike God (and perhaps even Bonnie Chance), ordinary human beings are neither perfectly rational nor all knowing; instead, their rationality and the extent of their knowledge are both limited and matters of degree. Still, despite the enormous difference between God's perfect rationality, as traditionally understood, and our more limited rationality, the freedom of God nonetheless represents the ideal, I have suggested, for a rational agent. Accordingly, even as God acts freely whenever his perfectly rational and wise judgments determine his actions, so we act freely whenever our more limited understanding, as expressed through reasonable judgments concerning the best course of action, determines our actions. All of which points, I suggest, to a sufficient condition for the freedom of *any* rational agent, whether it be a perfectly rational supreme being or a less than perfectly rational human being.

So let us say, as a sort of rough characterization, that an action A is *available* to an agent S in a set of circumstances C provided that S would successfully do A *if* S should undertake to do so. In that respect, my own available actions right now include checking my e-mail from the computer on which I am now typing, but they do not include flying like a bird. In a locked jail cell, one's available actions might include walking from one side of the cell to another, but might not include opening the door and leaving the cell. Beyond that, however, an action might be available in the specified sense even when an agent finds it psychologically impossible to undertake doing it—as the loving mother who finds it psychologically impossible to torture to death her newborn baby illustrates nicely. For even though she could not so much as undertake doing something that horrendous, she would nonetheless do it successfully *if* she should undertake to do so.[38] Accordingly, where two or more actions are, in that sense, available to S in C, I propose the following sufficient condition of S's acting freely in C:

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[38]Clearly, then, one should not object to my conditional analysis of *an available action* on the ground that it includes actions that an agent is incapable of undertaking. For the whole point of such an analysis is to include such actions. Neither should one think of an available action as an epistemically possible alternative or as one of the live options from which an agent chooses. For the act of torturing her beloved baby is in no way a live option for our loving mother and may not even be epistemically possible (at least not if she knows herself well enough to know that such a horrendous act would be psychologically impossible for her).

(SCF) S does A freely in C if the following conditions obtain: (i) S is rational enough to make reasonable judgments concerning which of the available actions in C is, all things considered, the best thing to do in C, (ii) S in fact makes a reasonable judgment that A is, all things considered, the best thing to do in C, and (iii) S does A in C for the very reason that S reasonably believes it to be the best thing to do in C.[39]

When I say that someone "is rational *enough* to make reasonable judgments" concerning the best course of action, I assume that a minimal degree of rationality is also a necessary condition of the relevant freedom. But as with borderline cases in general, it is probably impossible to say exactly when a maturing child, let us say, becomes rational enough to advance above the relevant threshold or when someone suffering from age-related dementia sinks below that threshold. In the case of a woman suffering from Alzheimer's Disease, for example, there need be no exact instant at which her ever-diminishing rationality removes the last shred of her remaining freedom; it is enough that at some point she has clearly lost the ability to make reasonable judgments concerning the best course of action and has therefore lost the ability to act freely. Suffice it to say, therefore, that the minimal degree of rationality required includes an ability to draw reasonable inferences from experience, to reflect intelligently on one's own attitudes, desires, and motives, and to learn important lessons from the consequences of one's actions.

If (SCF) is sound, as I believe it is, then many libertarians are simply mistaken on the issue of alternative possibilities. For only in cases where one experiences *weakness of will*, that is, only in cases where one fails to follow one's own judgment concerning the best course of action does freedom *require* the psychological possibility of acting otherwise. In the case of God, moreover, freedom does not even require the *logical* possibility of acting otherwise. So if God's freedom is the ideal freedom and our freedom is a reflection of his, as I am here assuming, then in no way does freedom require a robust set of alternative possibilities; it requires instead the kind of *independence* that rational deliberation and, in particular, a rational selection between alternatives implies. In the case of God's supreme rationality, the relevant independence is an absolute *causal* independence, because none of God's rational judgments is the product of external manipulation or even external sufficient causes. But unlike God, who exists necessarily, and unlike Bonnie Chance, who supposedly pops into existence by sheer chance as a fully mature and fully rational being, the rest of us are, at least in part, the product of external causes—the causes of our own birth, for example. We also emerge as newborn babies with only the potential, not yet fully realized, of developing into a reasoning adult. So the question inevitably arises: Just how should we construe the independence that ordinary human freedom requires?

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[39]For some similar sufficient conditions, see Alfred R. Mele, *Free Will and Luck* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), pp. 200–201. Common to all of Mele's sufficient conditions, tweaked differently for different purposes, as well as to my own is the idea that an agent acts freely when the agent acts "on the basis of a rationally formed deliberative judgment that it would be best to do A."

Now a theistically inclined libertarian will no doubt insist that even as God's ideal freedom includes an absolute causal independence, so our more limited freedom requires at least a degree of causal independence. It requires, in other words, that we be something more than a mere extension of either the physical universe or even God himself. And that suggests the following necessary condition of acting freely:

(NCF) A person S does A freely only if no condition or set of conditions *external* to S is causally sufficient for S's doing A.

Unfortunately, I have no rigorous criterion for distinguishing between a sufficient cause that is, and one that is not, external to S. For present purposes, however, I shall simply assume that S's desires, attitudes, beliefs, and judgments are internal (and therefore not external) to S; I shall also assume that if a *sufficient cause* of S's doing A should lie either in the distant past before S was born or in eternity itself, then that sufficient cause would be external to S. So if S's own desires, beliefs, and judgments should be causally sufficient for S's doing A in a given context, this would not, given just that information, violate the putative necessary condition of freedom set forth in (NCF). But if these very desires, beliefs, and judgments should also be the product of sufficient causes that lie in the distant past before S was even born, this would indeed violate the putative necessary condition set forth in (NCF).

Still, even with respect to (NCF), a compatibilist, whether theistically inclined or not, might register the following complaint: If (SCF) is a *sufficient condition* of freedom, as I have suggested, then anyone who meets this condition has indeed acted freely. It should make no difference to one's freedom, therefore, whether or not determinism is true. Or to put it another way: If (SCF) does not obviously entail (NCF), why regard (NCF) as a necessary condition of the freedom that pertains to rational agents? The issue that such a question raises is whether it is genuinely possible to satisfy (SCF), our *sufficient* condition of acting freely, in a fully deterministic universe. If this should be possible—that is, if rational deliberation should be possible in a universe in which *all* of our present thoughts and beliefs are the product of sufficient causes that already existed back in 1500 A.D.—then the freedom that pertains to rational agents would be possible in such a universe as well; and if the latter should be possible, then the right kind of determinism should be quite distinguishable, at least in principle, from freedom-removing manipulation.[40] But if rational deliberation should not be possible in such a universe, then neither would the relevant freedom be possible in such a universe. In adopting (SCF), therefore, we have effectively transformed the question of whether freedom is possible in a fully deterministic universe into the question of whether rational de-

[40]What might it even mean to say, for example, that a rational agent has been manipulated into believing a true proposition and into believing it for the right sort of reasons? Suppose that God (or a scientist working with a zygote, for that matter) should produce a rational agent S and put S in a situation where S experiences fire and learns that fire can burn and cause severe pain. So long as S assesses the evidence properly and follows the evidence where it leads, thereby holding the relevant belief for the right sorts of reasons, the idea that S has been subject to rationality-removing manipulation seems flatly self-contradictory.

liberation is itself possible in such a universe. It seems to me, moreover, that libertarians and compatibilists should both accept (SCF), even as they continue to argue about (NCF). That would also have the consequence of bringing these two warring camps a bit closer together.

Be that as it may, the question of whether rational deliberation is possible in a fully deterministic universe, if we should try to pursue it any farther here, would take us far beyond the scope of this paper (and far beyond anything illuminating that I might have to contribute). Suffice it to say that, according to a few philosophers at least, the very appearance of rationality would be an illusion in a fully deterministic universe. For even as libertarians have typically argued that no free action in the present could be the product of sufficient causes lying in the distant past, so a few philosophers have argued that no rational belief in the present could be the product of such causes either.[41] The basic idea here is that reason must somehow proceed on its own in a difficult to specify sense. Insofar as our reasoning powers exercise the right kind of control over both our beliefs about the universe and our actions in it, these beliefs and actions are neither the product of external sufficient causes, such as might have existed before we were even born, nor the product of random chance. But insofar as our reasoning powers fail to exercise the right kind of control over our beliefs and actions, the explanation for this failure will typically lie either in external causes (such as manipulation or brainwashing), or in the wrong kind of internal causes (such as ignorance, distraction, or forgetfulness), or perhaps even in random chance.

So herein lies, I believe, the real issue between libertarians and compatibilists; the real issue is (or ought to be) the nature of the rationality that freedom requires and whether reasonable beliefs concerning the best course of action are genuinely possible in a fully deterministic universe. Put it this way: The freedom that pertains to rational agents is possible in a fully deterministic universe if, and only if, the rationality that freedom requires is itself possible in such a universe.

Conclusion

In this paper, I have contended that a supremely perfect God, if one should exist as traditionally conceived, would be the freest of all possible beings as well as provide the clearest and most accurate example of agent causation. It also stands to reason that God's freedom would represent the ideal freedom for *any* rational agent and that God would therefore value the kind of freedom that he possesses more highly than he would any

[41]For an excellent defense of this basic idea, one that appeared in the middle of the last century, see Warner Wick, "Truth's Debt to Freedom," *Mind* Vol. LXXIII (October, 1964), pp. 527–537. Alvin Plantinga's argument against naturalism (see *Warrant and Proper Function* [New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993], chaps. 11 and 12) and William Hasker's explanation of why (in his opinion) the physical cannot be closed (see *The Emergent Self*, pp. 58–80) also appear to rest upon the idea that rational belief could not exist in a closed system of blind *physical* causes, although neither argument would rule out certain kinds of theological determinism. See also J. R Lucas's argument against determinism in *The Freedom of the Will* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1970), pp. 114–134.

lesser kind.[42] So it is probably best, I have suggested, to think of human freedom as a matter of degree. We all start out as small children, and in the beginning we are neither rational agents, nor free agents, nor agent causes of our own actions, however undetermined some of them might be. But as we mature, as our cognitive faculties continue to develop, and as we acquire first an ability to control the movements of our body and later a more sophisticated ability to reflect upon, and to make decisions about, our own behavior, our capacity for free action likewise evolves. Insofar as we come to exercise rational control over our actions, we also become, in a perfectly ordinary sense, the agent cause of our own actions. Whether agent causation *in this sense* can ultimately be reduced to event causation, or perhaps to an ingenious combination of event causation and random chance, is a separate issue—related, perhaps, to the remaining point of dispute between compatibilists and libertarians. But in any case, the idea of agent causation, as I have just explained it, is no more (nor less) mysterious than the idea of a rational agent whose reasonable judgments concerning the best course of action determine his or her own actions.

Now finally, the idea that God's freedom is the ideal freedom also carries important implications for the problem of evil and, in particular, for any freewill defense that a theist might want to embrace in response to it. Some may even worry that the above sufficient condition of acting freely, namely (SCF), undermines such a defense altogether. Outside the context of the *logical* or the *deductive* problem of evil, however, freewill defenses have always been of limited usefulness insofar as (a) they purport to offer only a *possible* explanation for the existence of *all* evil, natural evil no less than moral evil, and insofar as (b) their proponents have allowed free choice to figure into their abstract calculations no differently than an utterly random event or chance occurrence would. My point is not that an appeal to freewill offers nothing of value to a theistic response to the problem of evil; to the contrary, even many compatibilists—Daniel Dennett, for example—will concede that we could not be free in relation to a *purposive agent* who causally determines (and thus controls) all of our actions.[43] So if a purposive agent such as God cannot determine all of our

[42]Although every theist of a traditional stripe *ought*, in my judgment, to regard God's freedom as the ideal freedom, not even an atheist need disagree. For just as an ideal observer theory in ethics in no way requires the assumption that the ideal observer actually exists, neither does my assumption that God's freedom would be the ideal freedom require the further assumption that God actually exists

[43]See Daniel Dennett, *Elbow Room: The Varieties of Free Will Worth Wanting* (Cambridge, MA, and London: MIT Press, 1984). Dennett distinguishes *mere determinism* from various *non-coercive forms of control*, arguing that, however exhaustively it may determine our future, "*the past does not control us*," at least not in the way a purposive agent might. It does not control us in the latter sense because "there is nothing in the past to foresee and plan for our particular acts"; neither are there "feedback signals from the present to the past for the past to exploit" (p. 72). Remarkably, Dennett even concedes that a Laplacean "superhuman intelligence" that also determines the future could easily control us and would indeed undermine our compatibilist autonomy (p. 61). As even Dennett appears to concede, therefore, not even compatibilist autonomy could exist in a theistic universe in which God causally determines every event

actions without subjecting us to the wrong kind of external manipulation and without undermining our agency altogether, then that alone gives point to a theistic appeal to freewill. An adequate account of the role that rationality plays in freedom will also, I believe, give additional support to a soul-making theodicy.[44] But that, of course, is the subject for another paper and for a much longer discussion.[45]

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[44]Elsewhere I have suggested that, for all we know, God had no choice, provided he wanted to create any rational agents at all, but to start them out in a context of ambiguity, ignorance, and even indeterminism (see "Why Christians Should Not Be Determinists: Reflections on the Origin of Human Sin," *Faith and Philosophy* 25 [2008], pp. 300–316). But even if he just had a morally sufficient reason to start us out in a context where we could learn for ourselves important lessons from experience and from the consequences of our actions, his options would be limited at least to this extent: He could not *both* systematically protect us from the consequences of choices made in ignorance *and* permit these consequences to correct us and to teach us important lessons about the nature of our environment, about the conditions of our own happiness, or about the best way to live in relation to others.

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