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Kenneth Boyce

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NON-MORAL EVIL AND THE FREE WILL DEFENSE

Kenneth Boyce

Paradigmatic examples of logical arguments from evil are attempts to establish that the following claims are inconsistent with one another: (1) God is omnipotent, omniscient and wholly good. (2) There is evil in the world. Alvin Plantinga's free will defense resists such arguments by providing a positive case that (1) and (2) are consistent. A weakness in Plantinga's free will defense, however, is that it does not show that theism is consistent with the proposition that there are *non-moral* evils in the world (i.e., that there obtain morally bad states of affairs for which no creature is morally responsible). But many of us firmly believe that there *are* evils of that sort. I show how Plantinga's free will defense can be extended so as to redress this weakness.

Introduction

Paradigmatic examples of logical arguments from evil are attempts to establish that the following claims are inconsistent with one another:

- (1) God is omnipotent, omniscient and wholly good.
- (2) There is evil in the world.¹

Alvin Plantinga's free will defense resists such arguments by providing us with a positive case that (1) and (2) are in fact consistent. It does so by arguing that possibly, though God is omnipotent, it is not within his power to bring it about that there is moral good but no moral evil.²

A weakness in Plantinga's free will defense, however, is that (even if it is otherwise successful) it does not show that theism is consistent with the proposition that there is *non-moral* evil in the world. That is, it does not show that theism is consistent with its being the case that there obtain morally bad states of affairs for which no creature is morally responsible.³

¹See J. L. Mackie, "Evil and Omnipotence," *Mind* 64 (1955): 200–212, for a classic exposition of this sort of argument.

²See Alvin Plantinga, *God, Freedom, and Evil* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1974), 24–64, and Alvin Plantinga, *The Nature of Necessity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1974), chap. 9.

³One may take this sentence as a stipulation on my part concerning how I will use the term "non-moral evil." Compare my usage here with Plantinga's use of the term "broadly moral evil" in *God, Freedom, and Evil*, 59, and *The Nature of Necessity*, 193.



But many of us firmly believe that there *are* evils of that sort.⁴ Many of us (theists and non-theists alike) believe, for just one kind of example, that the suffering of sentient beings is intrinsically morally bad and that there have been many occasions of animal suffering for which no moral agent (other than God, perhaps) is responsible. If God is indeed wholly good, why does he not prevent evils of *that* sort, even if he does need to allow some moral evil for the sake of moral good? The free will defense fails to show that there is no logical inconsistency here.

In this paper I show how Plantinga's free will defense can be extended so as to redress this weakness. My extension of the free will defense will turn on the claim that it is possible that God has what philosophers of religion (following the medieval philosopher Luis de Molina) have called "middle knowledge." I will argue that if Plantinga's original free will defense is successful and it is possible that God has middle knowledge, then it is also possible that, though God is omnipotent, it was not within his power to bring it about that there is moral good without also actualizing a world that contains non-moral evil.

I. A Review of Plantinga's Free Will Defense

Plantinga's free will defense aims to offer a positive argument that (1) is in fact consistent with (2). "One way to show that a proposition *p* is consistent with a proposition *q*," Plantinga notes, "is to produce a third proposition *r* whose conjunction with *p* is consistent and entails *q*." "*r*," he points out, "need not be true or known to be true; it need not be so much as plausible. All that is required of it is that it be consistent with *p*, and in conjunction with the latter entail *q*."⁵ The aim of the free will defense is to find such a proposition with respect to (1) and (2), thereby showing that these propositions are consistent with one another. Plantinga does this by arguing that it is possible that

- (3) God is omnipotent and it was not within his power to create a world containing moral good but no moral evil.⁶

If (3) is possible, then it seems that so is the conjunction of (3) with

- (4) God actualizes a world containing moral good.

Clearly, if the conjunction of (3) and (4) is possible, then so is the conjunction of (1), (3) and (4).⁷ But obviously, the conjunction of (1), (3) and

⁴Sometimes I will use "evil" as if it were a count noun (e.g., speaking of there being various evils), sometimes as a mass noun (e.g., speaking of there being *some evil* in the world) and sometimes as though "evil" picked out a type of which there are instances (e.g., speaking of there being *instances of evil*). I hope the reader will not find this stylistic variation too distracting.

⁵Plantinga, *Nature of Necessity*, 165.

⁶See Plantinga, *God, Freedom, and Evil*, 45, and Plantinga, *The Nature of Necessity*, 184.

⁷See Plantinga, *God, Freedom, and Evil*, 54–55, and Plantinga, *The Nature of Necessity*, 189. Plantinga simply takes it as intuitively evident that if (3) is possible then so is the conjunction

(4) entails (2). So if the conjunction of (3) and (4) is possible, (1) is in fact consistent with (2).

The main task for the free will defender, then, is to argue that (3) is possible. Plantinga's argument for the possibility of (3) depends upon two key premises. The first of these is that an agent's acting freely is incompatible with her being causally determined so to act. The second is that for agents to perform morally good acts they must (on some occasion or another) be "significantly free." That is, they must be such that on some occasions there are actions that are morally significant for them with respect to which they are free (where "an action is *morally significant*, for a given person at a given time, if it would be wrong for him to perform the action then but right to refrain, or vice versa"). If both of these premises hold, then not even God could causally secure that there are agents who perform morally good acts but always refrain from performing morally bad acts.⁸

As Plantinga observes, however, establishing that not even God could *causally* secure that there are agents who perform morally good acts but always refrain from performing morally bad acts is not sufficient for establishing that (3) is possible. It may be that even though God could not have *causally* secured such an outcome, he could have secured it in some other way. He might have been able to do so, for instance, if he had knowledge of various counterfactual (or subjunctive) conditionals concerning what the creatures he could create would freely do in various non-determining circumstances were he to create them and place them in those circumstances. If God did have knowledge of such counterfactuals of freedom, then one way in which he might have secured this outcome is by creating only those creatures he knows would never freely go wrong (in any circumstances in which he might place them). Another is by placing his creatures only in those circumstances in which he knows they would not freely go wrong (rather than in circumstances in which they would go wrong). Given the truth of incompatibilism, God could not have (to employ another one of Plantinga's distinctions) *strongly* brought it about that there are significantly free creatures who never go wrong (i.e., he could not have causally secured such an outcome). However, possibly it was within God's power that he weakly bring it about that this is the case (i.e., possibly it was within his power to strongly bring about certain states of affairs that are such that, were he to bring them about, there would be significantly free creatures who never go wrong).⁹

of (1), (3) and (4). As Thomas Flint pointed out to me, however, *perhaps* this claim could be rationally denied. One might think that if (3) were true, God would be morally obliged not to actualize a world containing moral good, given the fact that such a world would be marred by evil. I confess that, while I share Plantinga's intuitions on this point, I do not know how to persuade someone who doesn't. For present purposes, I will be content, in this paper, with merely establishing the following conditional claim: If Plantinga's free will defense is successful and it is possible that God has middle knowledge, then it is also possible that, though God exists and is omnipotent, omniscient and wholly good, there is non-moral evil.

⁸See Plantinga, *God, Freedom, and Evil*, 29–30, and Plantinga, *Nature of Necessity*, 165–167.

⁹Plantinga, *Nature of Necessity*, 172–173.

Surely the atheologian is right to insist that if God has knowledge of the sort described above, it is at least *broadly logically possible* that it was within God's power to weakly bring it about that there is moral good without bringing it about that there is moral evil.¹⁰ But in order to show that the free will defense fails, the atheologian needs something much stronger than a mere possibility claim. She needs the claim that it is a necessary truth that if God exists it is within his power to weakly bring it about that there is moral good but no moral evil. And this stronger claim, Plantinga contends, is simply false.

It is at least broadly logically possible, Plantinga argues, that every creature is such that, were God to create that creature and to grant it significant freedom, it would perform a morally bad action on at least one occasion, regardless of what other states of affairs (within God's power to actualize) God were to bring about. Or, more generally, since we are discussing God's decisions regarding whether or not to create creatures that he might not have brought into existence, it is at least possible that every creaturely individual essence is such that, were God to cause that essence to be instantiated and to grant its instantiation significant freedom, its instantiation would perform a morally bad action on at least one occasion, regardless of what other states of affairs (within God's power to actualize) God were to bring about.¹¹ Plantinga describes this unfortunate state of affairs as one in which all creaturely essences are "transworldly depraved."¹² If, in fact, it is possible that all creaturely essences are transworldly depraved, then it is possible that it was not within God's power to actualize a world containing moral good without also actualizing a world containing moral evil.¹³

¹⁰I'm taking it for granted that omniscience entails knowledge of all truths. But some philosophers have denied this. See: William Hasker, *God, Time, and Knowledge* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989), 53–54, 187–188; Richard Swinburne, *The Christian God* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 130–134; and Peter van Inwagen, "What Does an Omniscient Being Know About the Future?" *Oxford Studies in Philosophy of Religion*, vol. 1, ed. Jonathan L. Kvanvig (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 216–230. Suppose, contrary to what I've been taking for granted, there are true counterfactuals of freedom but God (though omniscient) does not know them. Then it may be that it is within God's power to do something, such that were he to do it, he would have managed to create significantly free creatures who never go wrong, even though he does not know this to be the case. Nevertheless, under such circumstances, God could hardly be blamed if he failed to create significantly free creatures who never go wrong since (through no fault of his own) he did not know how to bring about that outcome. His failure to bring about that outcome under such conditions would not impugn his perfect goodness. Therefore, the atheologian's objection requires the claim that if God is omniscient, he knows all true counterfactuals of creaturely freedom.

¹¹For a discussion of the notion of an individual essence being employed by Plantinga here, see Plantinga, *Nature of Necessity*, chap. 5.

¹²The characterization of transworld depravity that I have provided here is rough and ready. See Plantinga, *Nature of Necessity*, 188, for Plantinga's original attempt at a precise formulation of what it is for an individual essence to be transworldly depraved. See Alvin Plantinga, "Transworld Depravity, Transworld Sanctity, and Uncooperative Essences," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 78 (2009): 178–191, for a discussion of some needed refinements.

¹³See Plantinga, *God, Freedom, and Evil*, 53, and Plantinga, *Nature of Necessity*, 188–189.

II. *The Problem of Non-Moral Evil*

Suppose the free will defense does in fact succeed in showing there is no logical inconsistency between (1) and (2). That does not suffice to show that (1) is consistent with there being evil of *any* sort. Plantinga's free will defense, if successful, shows that there is no inconsistency between (1) and the claim that there is *moral* evil in the world. But one might still wonder whether (1) is consistent with the obtaining of morally bad states of affairs for which no moral agent (other than God himself perhaps) is responsible. That is, we might wonder whether (1) is consistent with there being *non-moral* evil in the world.

As Plantinga himself points out, we might ask "What about *natural* evil? Evil that cannot be ascribed to the free actions of human beings? Suffering due to earthquakes, disease and the like? Is the existence of evil of *this sort* compatible with (1)?"¹⁴ Plantinga's response to these questions is that it is at least broadly logically possible that all natural evil is brought about by demons. If that possibility obtains, then natural evil is really just a kind of moral evil. And the free will defense goes on as before.¹⁵ Since what Plantinga is after is merely to show that (1) is *consistent* with there being natural evils, it does not matter whether the proposition that all natural evil is brought about by demons is a plausible one, provided that it is in fact broadly logically possible.

This response is certainly fine as far as it goes. But the atheologian might press further. She might point out that many of us (theists and non-theists alike) do in fact believe that there are instances of natural evil for which no moral agents (other than God perhaps) are responsible. Many of us believe, for example, that on some occasions, animals have suffered on account of predation, natural disasters and the like (perhaps millions of years before humans came on the scene). Many of us also believe that the suffering of sentient creatures is intrinsically morally bad. And while it is certainly broadly logically possible that moral agents (other than God) are responsible for all such states of affairs, many of us believe that this is not in fact the case. That is, many of us (including those of us who are theists) believe

(5) There is non-moral evil in the world.

And the free will defense does not show that (1) and (5) are consistent with one another.

Here it is open to those who believe both (1) and (5) to go entirely on the defensive. They might point out that a simple assertion on the part of the atheologian that (1) and (5) are inconsistent does not amount to an argument that they are. They might simply stand back and insist that she provide them with such an argument before they concede that their belief in the conjunction of (1) and (5) is inconsistent. But it would be nice if they

¹⁴Plantinga, *Nature of Necessity*, 191.

¹⁵See Plantinga, *God, Freedom, and Evil*, 57–59, and Plantinga, *Nature of Necessity*, 191–193.

could do better than this. It would be nice if they had available to them a positive argument for the conclusion that (1) and (5) are consistent.¹⁶

There are, as Plantinga himself points out, other things that might be said about why God permits natural evils. As he notes, one might take a line along that of John Hick's "soul-making theodicy" by noting that "some people deal creatively with certain kinds of hardship or suffering, so acting that on balance the whole state of affairs is valuable."¹⁷ One might also attempt, along the lines of Richard Swinburne, to argue that familiarity with natural evil is a necessary condition for having the kind of knowledge required for being free with respect to a variety of morally significant acts.¹⁸ Or one might take a line like that advocated by David O'Connor, according to which having certain proclivities toward choosing possible evils is a necessary condition for "morally creditable free choice" and that the having of such proclivities is itself a natural evil.¹⁹ If any of these strategies are successful, they might afford a way of extending the free will defense so as to argue for the consistency of (1) and (5).

I will not attempt to evaluate the success of these proposals, however. Instead I will note that even if the atheologian were to grant their success, there is a further kind of retreat available to her. She might point out that many of us believe that there are non-moral evils that bear no relevant logical or causal connection to morally significant acts on the part of free beings. Many of us (including theists) believe, for example, that there have been instances of animal suffering of which no moral agents (other than God) are aware, instances which are not logically necessary for any sort of morally valuable choice and which bear no direct causal relation to the activities of moral agents.²⁰ Call evils of this sort "remote non-moral evils." Even if the atheologian grants the success of one or more of the proposals mentioned in the previous paragraph, she might still accuse those theists who believe in the existence of *remote* non-moral evils of having inconsistent beliefs. In the remainder of this paper I will present an argument for the consistency of (1) and (5) that blocks this sort of retreat on the part of the atheologian (in that it will be easy to see how the same defense could be applied both to remote and non-remote non-moral evils).

¹⁶There are other ways that a theist might respond to arguments from non-moral evil. Rather than attempting to argue positively for the joint possibility of (1) and (5), she might, for example, try telling a story that, *for all we know*, is true (but which also, for all we know, might well be necessarily false) which clearly entails the joint possibility of (1) and (5). For an example of such a strategy applied to the problem of animal suffering in the distant past, see van Inwagen, *The Problem of Evil* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), chap. 7.

¹⁷Plantinga, *Nature of Necessity*, 191–192.

¹⁸Richard Swinburne, *The Existence of God*, 2nd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 247–256.

¹⁹David O'Connor, "A Variation on the Free Will Defense," *Faith and Philosophy* 4 (1987): 160–167.

²⁰William L. Rowe ("The Problem of Evil and Some Varieties of Atheism," *American Philosophical Quarterly* 16 [1979]: 335–341) famously invokes a case of this sort in presenting an evidential argument from evil against the existence of God.

By way of setup for what follows, recall from Section I that one objection to the free will defense, put forward on behalf of the atheologian, was that although God could not strongly bring it about (i.e., causally secure) that there are significantly free creatures who never go wrong, he might still have been able to weakly bring that about (i.e., he might have strongly brought it about that certain states of affairs obtain which are such that were he to bring them about, there would be significantly free creatures who never go wrong). This objection on behalf of the atheologian presupposes that (possibly) God has knowledge of various contingent counterfactuals pertaining to free creaturely actions, counterfactuals which are not within his control, but which are useful for guiding his actions, prior even to his choice to create free creatures.²¹ That is, the objection presupposes that God has what contemporary philosophers of religion (following Luis de Molina) have come to call “middle knowledge.”²² In the dialectical context in which the free will defense is given, the possibility that God has middle knowledge is granted as a *concession* to the atheologian.²³ It is a concession, however, that affords the free will defender resources of her own.

As I will argue in the following sections, if Plantinga’s free will defense is successful and it is possible that God has middle knowledge, then it is also possible that it was not within God’s power to actualize a world containing moral good without actualizing a world containing non-moral evil. My argument for this conclusion will turn on the claim that if it is possible that God has middle knowledge, it is also possible that there are various bizarre counterfactual connections, outside of God’s control, that link the performance of morally good actions with states of affairs that are intuitively irrelevant to the performance of those actions. In the next section, I provide an argument for this claim.

III. Middle Knowledge and the Possibility of Bizarre Counterfactual Connections

Suppose that God does have middle knowledge. For the purposes of illustrating what God’s having such knowledge might involve, let us adopt Plantinga’s example of Curley Smith, the mayor of Boston, who (in

²¹See note 10 for further discussion concerning this point.

²²“Middle knowledge” is so called because, if God has it, it is logically prior to God’s knowledge of what is actual but logically posterior to God’s knowledge of all possibilities; it is, so to speak, “in the middle” of these other two kinds of divine knowledge. See Alfred J. Freddoso, *Luis de Molina: On Divine Foreknowledge: Part IV of the Concordia* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988), for an English translation of Molina’s classic exposition of the doctrine of middle knowledge. See Thomas P. Flint, *Divine Providence: The Molinist Account* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998), for what is widely regarded as a definitive contemporary philosophical exposition of the doctrine.

²³See Alvin Plantinga, “Replies to My Colleagues,” in *Alvin Plantinga*, ed. James E. Tomberlin and Peter van Inwagen (Boston: D. Reidel Publishing Company, 1985), 379; and Plantinga, “Transworld Depravity, Transworld Sanctity, and Uncooperative Essences,” 186n6.

“the fine old traditions of Bay State politics”) freely accepts a \$35,000 bribe to go along with a proposed freeway construction project.²⁴ If God has middle knowledge, then God knew, prior to Curley’s action, in what complete, non-determining circumstances Curley would and would not have freely accepted the bribe.²⁵ Furthermore, since these truths of which God has knowledge pertain to how Curley would *freely* act, it was not within God’s power to render them false.²⁶

Now consider the complete non-determining circumstance in which Curley did in fact freely accept the bribe. Since this circumstance is complete, presumably it includes the entirety of the (hard) past up to the moment of Curley’s action. And presumably God knows that if certain aspects of the past had been different (say, the nature of Curley’s upbringing) and Curley were offered the bribe, he would have freely refused. It is interesting to ask just which elements of the past, had they been otherwise, might have made such a difference in Curley’s behavior.

Suppose, for example, that centuries before Curley’s birth, on February 14, 44 BC, Julius Caesar barely evaded stubbing his toe by noticing a stone in his path just in time. Then the complete circumstance in which Curley accepts the bribe includes the fact that this toe-stubbing evasion occurred. We might ask, “What would have happened if Caesar *had* stubbed his toe on that date?” Perhaps not much would have been different. Perhaps Curley would have been born as he in fact was and would have kept up the fine traditions of Bay State politics just as he in fact did. But it is also at least conceivable (especially if those who talk about phenomena such as “the butterfly effect” are to be believed) that had Caesar stubbed his toe, the entire history of the world after that point would have been radically different, that Curley would have never been born and that Bay State politics would have been a shining beacon of honesty and integrity within governmental administration.²⁷

Let’s restrict our attention, however, to a case where this latter sort of possibility does not obtain. Consider a world, *W*, which shares an identical history with our own up to the time that Caesar narrowly evaded stubbing his toe, but suppose that Caesar did stub his toe in *W*. Suppose also, however, that what David Lewis called a “convergence miracle” occurred in *W*,²⁸ one that washed out all of the causal traces of Caesar’s toe stubbing

²⁴Plantinga, *Nature of Necessity*, 173–174.

²⁵Here I am adopting the notion of completeness employed by Flint (*Divine Providence: The Molinist Account*, 47). According to Flint, a complete antecedent “includ[es] all of the prior causal activity of all agents along with all of the simultaneous causal activity by all agents other than the agent the counterfactual is about.”

²⁶Given, at least, that the antecedents of these counterfactuals are complete.

²⁷For a classic science fiction short story that exploits this sort of possibility, see Ray Bradbury, “A Sound of Thunder,” originally published in *Collier’s Weekly* (1952). Reprinted in *The Best Time Travel Stories of the 20th Century*, ed. Harry Turtledove and Martin H. Greenberg. (New York: Ballantine Books, 2005), 75–86.

²⁸David Lewis, “Counterfactual Dependence and Time’s Arrow,” *Nous* 13 (1979): 455–476.

and brought the history of *W* back in line with our own, up to the time just prior to when Curley has the choice to accept the bribe. What would Curley have done had the history of the world up to the time of his acceptance been the same as it is in *W* rather than as it actually is? There's a strong temptation to say that it would have made no difference, that Curley would have accepted the bribe regardless. As I will argue in this section, however, this is a temptation we should resist. We should acknowledge that it is at least broadly logically possible that though Curley would have accepted the bribe under the conditions that actually obtained, Curley would have broken with Bay State tradition in this alternative circumstance and refused the bribe.

Let "*C*" denote the state of affairs including all and only those portions of the history of the world that the actual world and *W* share in common up to the moment that Curley accepts the bribe. *C* will include almost everything that the complete, non-determining circumstance in which Curley actually accepts the bribe includes, absent those states of affairs that entail that Caesar did not stub his toe on February 14, 44 BC (and that there was no subsequent convergence miracle, etc.). Now consider the following bizarre conjunction of counterfactual conditionals:

Bizarre: If Caesar had stubbed his toe on February 14, 44 BC and *C* had been actual, Curley would have freely refused the bribe. But, if Caesar had not stubbed his toe on February 14, 44 BC and *C* had been actual, Curley would not have freely refused the bribe.

I contend that (given the supposition that God has middle knowledge) we ought to accept that it is at least broadly logically possible that propositions like *Bizarre* are true.²⁹ I offer three lines of support for this claim.

The first line of support adopts an argument that has recently been put forward by Dean Zimmerman for the conclusion that proponents of middle knowledge ought to acknowledge the possibility of there being bizarre counterfactual connections between free creaturely actions and intuitively irrelevant states of affairs (such as the quantum states of fundamental particles in distant galaxies and the like). Zimmerman notes that if there are true counterfactuals of freedom, of use to God in his providential decision making, then the truth of these counterfactuals is not grounded in the ways that the truth of other counterfactuals is plausibly said to be. As Zimmerman points out, since the relevant counterfactuals here are counterfactuals of *freedom* (and we are assuming that free will is incompatible with determinism), the conditions specified in their antecedents are not logically, causally or nomologically sufficient for the truth of their consequents. Furthermore, he notes, the truth of these counterfactuals is not underwritten by similarity relations between worlds that are

²⁹Flint (*Divine Providence: The Molinist Account*, 207–209, 248–249) seems to take it for granted that advocates of the doctrine of middle knowledge are committed to the possibility of there being bizarre counterfactual connections of this sort.

prior to their truth. Rather, their truth is simply brute.³⁰ But if their truth is simply brute, what necessitates that pairs of counterfactuals of freedom that have the same consequent but whose antecedents differ only with respect to matters that are intuitively irrelevant to an agent's choice must have the same truth values? If the truth of these counterfactuals is brute, Zimmerman argues, we should concede that it could simply turn out that some such pairs differ in their truth values.³¹ If Zimmerman is right about this, then it is least possible that *If Caesar had stubbed his toe on February 14, 44 BC and C had been actual, Curley would have freely refused the bribe* is true but *If Caesar had not stubbed his toe on February 14, 44 BC and C had been actual, Curley would have freely refused the bribe* is false. And if that is so, then it is at least possible that the conjuncts of *Bizarre* are both true.³²

Aaron Segal has suggested to me (in conversation) another argument for the claim that it is possible for propositions like *Bizarre* to be true. Consider Peter van Inwagen's useful thought experiment in which we imagine an agent making a free choice, God's subsequently resetting the state of the universe to how things were just prior to the agent's making that choice, and then God's repeating this procedure multiple times.³³ Suppose we imagine this happening to Curley just after he freely chooses to accept the bribe. What should we expect to happen in this scenario? As van Inwagen's discussion suggests, given that free will is incompatible with determinism, it is at least broadly logically possible that on some repetitions Curley freely accepts the bribe while on others he freely refuses.³⁴ Furthermore, it is at least possible (though perhaps not probable) that, by sheer coincidence, some strange patterns would emerge. Imagine each repetition as being numbered sequentially. It might just so happen that Curley always freely refuses the bribe on prime numbered repetitions but always freely accepts it on composite numbered repetitions. Or it might be that Curley's refusals fall exactly along a Fibonacci sequence. And so on.

Now we need only to imagine a "transworld" version of our van-Inwagen-inspired thought experiment. We imagine each "repetition" occurring

³⁰Here we can construe the term "brute" liberally enough so that certain ways of maintaining that counterfactuals of freedom are trivially grounded are compatible with their being "brute." For instance, we can take Plantinga's ("Replies to My Colleagues," 374) off-hand suggestion that "what grounds the truth of the counterfactual [concerning Curley's taking the bribe] . . . is just that in fact Curley is such that if he had been offered a \$35,000 bribe, he would have freely taken it" as compatible with that counterfactual's being brute.

³¹Dean Zimmerman, "Yet Another Anti-Molinist Argument," in *Metaphysics and the Good: Themes from the Philosophy of Robert Merrihew Adams*, ed. Samuel Newlands (New York: Oxford University Press 2009), 33–94. I am indebted to Aaron Segal for the manner in which I have summarized Zimmerman's argument.

³²I am assuming here that necessarily, either *If Caesar had not stubbed his toe on February 14, 44 BC and C had been actual, Curley would have freely refused the bribe* is true or *If Caesar had not stubbed his toe on February 14, 44 BC and C had been actual, Curley would not have freely refused the bribe* is true.

³³Peter van Inwagen, "Free Will Remains a Mystery," in *The Oxford Handbook of Free Will*, ed. Robert Kane (New York: Oxford University Press 2002), 171–172.

³⁴*Ibid.*

not on different occasions after God has reset the state of the universe but in different nearby possible worlds. For definiteness, suppose that we consider only those nearby worlds in which Curley finds himself in circumstances very much like *C* (differing, perhaps, in minor manners that are intuitively irrelevant to Curley's choice, such as the states of electrons in distant galaxies and the like). By analogy to the original thought experiment, we should grant that possibly, in some of these worlds, Curley freely accepts the bribe while in others he freely refuses. Likewise, we should believe that it is at least possible that, by sheer coincidence, odd correlations show up in the pattern of Curley's refusals and denials that we find across these worlds. And it might just so happen that these correlations are such that *Bizarre* comes out true.

I'll close this section with one final argument for the conclusion that it is possible for propositions like *Bizarre* to be true. Suppose we endorse a version of the consequence argument for the conclusion that free will is incompatible with determinism. Let " C_1 " denote a state of affairs that results when *C* is completed (in such a way that it constitutes a complete, non-determining circumstance) by adding that Caesar stubbed his toe on February 14, 44 BC (and any other omitted details) and let " C_2 " denote a state of affairs that results when *C* is completed by adding that Caesar did not stub his toe on that date.³⁵ If we let "*R*" denote the proposition that Curley freely refuses the bribe, then what affirming the possibility of *Bizarre* amounts to is affirming that it is possible that $C_1 \Box \rightarrow R$ is true but $C_2 \Box \rightarrow R$ is false. So denying the possibility of *Bizarre* commits us to denying that it is possible that $C_1 \Box \rightarrow R$ is true but $C_2 \Box \rightarrow R$ is false. That is, denying the possibility of *Bizarre* commits us to the following claim:

$$(6) \quad \Box((C_1 \Box \rightarrow R) \rightarrow (C_2 \Box \rightarrow R)).$$

Now suppose that C_2 obtains, that Curley has no choice about this³⁶ and also that $C_1 \Box \rightarrow R$ is true. Then $C_1 \Box \rightarrow R$ has a false antecedent. And while it seems right to affirm that Curley has (or has had) a choice about the truth value of many counterfactuals of freedom pertaining to him (those that happen to have true antecedents), it also seems right to affirm that Curley doesn't have (and never has had) a choice about the truth values of many of those true counterfactuals of freedom pertaining to him that have false antecedents (since he has never had the opportunity to act in such a way that would directly falsify them, that is, falsify them by rendering their consequent false when their antecedent is true). Plausibly, then, it is at least possible that Curley does not have (and never had) a

³⁵Sometimes I will use these names to denote states of affairs and sometimes I will use them to denote the propositions that those states of affairs obtain. Context should make it clear which is intended.

³⁶In an ordinary situation of this sort, much of the past that is included in C_2 would include Curley's free choices as well as items shaped by those choices. But, for present purposes, we may artificially stipulate that this is the occasion of Curley's first free choice. (Thanks to Patrick Todd for noticing the need for this stipulation.)

choice about the fact that $C_1 \square \rightarrow R$ is true. But if that is so, then it also seems at least possible that

- (7) $N_{\text{Curley}}(C_2 \& (C_1 \square \rightarrow R))$ (where " $N_{\text{Curley}}(p)$ " is to be understood as "p and Curley doesn't have and never had a choice about whether p").

It is also true, however, that (6) entails

- (8) $\square((C_2 \& (C_1 \square \rightarrow R)) \rightarrow R)$.

And, by a standard beta-like principle,³⁷ we can infer from (7) and (8) that

- (9) $N_{\text{Curley}}(R)$.

But since R is a proposition that entails that Curley *freely* refuses the bribe, (9) cannot be true. Something above has to give. It seems plausible that what ought to give is our denial that *Bizarre* is possibly true.³⁸

Each of the above arguments (though perhaps not irresistible) is persuasive on its own. Together, they make for a powerful cumulative case that (provided it is possible that God has middle knowledge) it is possible for propositions like *Bizarre* to be true. As I will explain in the next section, this possibility opens up a way of extending Plantinga's free will defense to provide us with a positive argument that the claim that God's being omnipotent, omniscient and wholly good is consistent with there being non-moral evil.

IV. Extending the Free Will Defense

Suppose *Bizarre* is true and suppose, furthermore, that the counterfactual conditionals that are the conjuncts of *Bizarre* are among those whose truth values are outside of God's control.³⁹ If so, there is an interesting limitation on God's power. God is not able to bring it about that C is actual and Curley freely refuses the bribe without also (at least weakly) bringing it about that Caesar stubs his toe on February 14, 44 BC. Perhaps Caesar's stubbing his toe is not a clear example of a non-moral evil (perhaps Caesar was being carelessly irresponsible with his toe at the time). But, of course, there is nothing special about this particular example. It could just as well

³⁷We can make the inference that follows by employing an individualized version of the following inference rule (which Finch and Warfield have labeled "Beta 2"): $(Np \& \square(p \rightarrow q))$ implies Nq . See Alicia Finch and Ted A. Warfield, "The *Mind* Argument and Libertarianism," *Mind* 107 (1998): 515–528.

³⁸I *do not* claim that this argument should rationally compel someone who is dead set on denying the possibility of *Bizarre* to change her mind. She might rationally deny the possibility of (7) instead (by maintaining that necessarily Curley does have a choice about whether $C_1 \square \rightarrow R$ in the given circumstances). I *do* claim that the premises on which this argument relies are plausible and that they give someone who is neutral concerning the possibility of *Bizarre* a reason to affirm that it is possible.

³⁹Given that God has middle knowledge, it is sufficient for these conditionals being outside of God's control that every way of completing their antecedents (so that the circumstance they describe is one that is complete and non-determining) is such that the resulting conditionals are both true. If any of my arguments in the previous section for the conclusion that *Bizarre* is possible are sound, then it is possible that this is the case.

have turned out that there is some circumstance C' (in which God is able to place Curley) such that God cannot bring it about that C' is actual and Curley freely refuses the bribe (though Curley is free to do so in C') without also bringing it about that some specific instance of non-moral evil obtains (though C' itself includes no such instances). It may be, for example, that God is not able to bring it about that C' is actual and Curley freely refuses the bribe without permitting a certain deer to suffer minor back pain (back pain that does not result from the activities of any moral agent) on some occasion in the distant past.

In fact, it might just have turned out that for *any* circumstance, C^* , God is not able to bring it about that C^* is actual and Curley freely refuses the bribe without also bringing it about that some instance of non-moral evil obtains. And, of course, there is nothing special, on this score, about Curley's choice whether to accept the bribe. Indeed, it might have been that for every circumstance, C^* , God is not able to bring it about that C^* is actual and that Curley freely does something *morally good* without God's also bringing it about that some instance of non-moral evil obtains. Were this so, God would not be able to bring it about that the instantiation of Curley's essence freely does something morally good without also bringing it about that there is at least one instance of non-moral evil. Let us say that if Curley's essence is in this condition, it is "transworldly non-morally depraved."

Given that God does have middle knowledge, it is possible that not only Curley's essence, but all creaturely essences are transworldly non-morally depraved. If things had turned out that way, then God would not have been able to bring it about that some creatures freely perform morally good actions without also bringing it about that there is some non-moral evil in the world. And so, given all of the above, it is possible that

- (10) God is omnipotent and it was not within his power to create a world containing moral good but no non-moral evil.

Clearly, if the conjunction of (4) and (10) is possible, so is the conjunction of (1), (4) and (10). But obviously, the conjunction of (1), (4) and (10) entails (5). So if the conjunction of (4) and (10) is possible, (1) is in fact consistent with (5). It is intuitively evident that if (10) is possible, then so is the conjunction of (4) and (10).⁴⁰ And above we have an argument for the conclusion that (10) *is* possible. Thus, we have a positive argument for the conclusion that (1) and (5) are consistent. Here we have our desired extension of the free will defense.⁴¹

⁴⁰I take the claim that if (10) is possible then so is the conjunction of (1), (4) and (10) to be intuitively evident in the same way that Plantinga takes as intuitively evident the claim that if (3) is possible then so is the conjunction of (1), (3) and (4). (See note 7 on this point). At the very least, it seems that we ought to endorse the following material conditional: If the conjunction of (1), (3) and (4) is possible, then so is the conjunction of (1), (4) and (10) (provided (10) is possible). What plausible reason could one have for affirming the antecedent of this conditional but denying its consequent?

⁴¹Upon completing an initial draft of this paper, I discovered that Robert M. Adams ("Plantinga on the Problem of Evil," in Tomberlin and van Inwagen, *Alvin Plantinga*, 236)

I believe that the above argument provides us with a strong case for the conclusion that (1) and (5) are consistent. However, I would be remiss if I did not mention that there is one respect in which this extension of Plantinga's free will defense is dialectically weaker than the original. As already noted, as far as Plantinga's original free will defense is concerned, the claim that God has middle knowledge is granted as a *concession* to the atheologian. While Plantinga himself believes that God does have such knowledge, he does not need to invoke that claim as a *premise* in his argument. He could just as well have evaded the atheologian's objections by simply arguing for the conditional claim that if God has knowledge of counterfactuals of creaturely freedom, it is nevertheless still possible that it is not within his power to bring it about that there is moral good but no moral evil. Not so when it comes to the extension of the free will defense offered above. The above extension crucially relies on the premise that possibly God does have middle knowledge. And the claim that it is possible for a being to have middle knowledge is a highly contentious one.⁴²

Nevertheless, many theists do believe that God has middle knowledge, and this claim has been defended by a number of able philosophers.⁴³ Furthermore, at the very least, the availability of the above extension of the free will defense places a further burden of proof on the atheologian who would put forward a logical argument from non-moral evil. I conclude, therefore, that the availability of the above defense affords theists with a promising way of resisting certain kinds of arguments from non-moral evil.⁴⁴

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makes (in passing) a similar suggestion concerning how, given the assumption that God has middle knowledge, Plantinga's free will defense might be extended to accommodate the kinds and quantities of evil that actually occur, without appealing to the activities of demonic agents.

⁴²For some arguments against this claim, see: Robert Adams, "An Anti-Molinist Argument," *Philosophical Perspectives* 5 (1991): 343–353; William Hasker, *God, Time, and Knowledge*; and Peter van Inwagen, "Against Middle Knowledge," *Midwest Studies in Philosophy* 21 (1997): 225–236.

⁴³For some defenses of this claim, see: William Lane Craig, *The Only Wise God: The Compatibility of Divine Foreknowledge and Human Freedom* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1987); Flint, *Divine Providence: The Molinist Account*; and Plantinga, "Replies to My Colleagues," 373–378.

⁴⁴For helpful comments and conversation, I would like to thank Sarah Boyce, Aaron Segal, Andrew Moon, Brandon Schmidly, Garrett Pendergraft, Justin McBrayer, Patrick Todd, Philip Swenson, Thomas Flint and the participants in Thomas Flint's Spring 2010 seminar on divine providence held at the University of Notre Dame.