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EVIL FOR FREEDOM'S SAKE?

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Christianity teaches that whenever evil is done, God had ample warning. He could have prevented it, but He didn't. He could have stopped it midway, but He didn't. He could have rescued the victims of the evil, but – at least in many cases – He didn't. In short, God is an accessory before, during, and after the fact to countless evil deeds, great and small.

An explanation is not far to seek. The obvious hypothesis is that the Christian God is really some sort of devil. Maybe He is a devil as popularly conceived, driven by malice. Or maybe He is unintelligibly capricious. Or maybe He is a fanatical artist who cares only for the aesthetic quality of creation – perhaps the abstract beauty of getting rich variety to emerge from a few simple laws, or perhaps the concrete drama of human life with all its diversity – and cares nothing for the good of the creatures whose lives are woven into His masterpiece. (Just as a tragedian has no business providing a happy end out of compassion for his characters.) But no; for Christianity also teaches that God is morally perfect and perfectly benevolent, and that He loves all of His creatures; and that these things are true in a sense not a million miles from the sense in which we attribute morality, benevolence, or love to one another.

We turn next to the hypothesis that God permits evil-doing for the sake of its good effects. And indeed we know that sometimes good does come of evil, and doubtless in more ways than we are able to discover. But omnipotence is not bound by laws of cause and effect. God can make anything follow anything; He never has to allow evil so that good

may come. Cause-and-effect theodicy cannot succeed. Not all by itself, anyway; the most it can be is part of some theodicy that also has another chapter to explain why God does not pursue His good ends by better means.

A hypothesis that God allows evil for the sake of some good might work if there was a logical, not merely a causal, connection between allowing the evil and gaining the good. Therefore Christians have often gone in for free-will theodicy: the hypothesis that God allows evil-doing for the sake of freedom. He leaves His creatures free because their freedom is of great value; leaving them free logically implies allowing them to do evil; then it is not inevitable, but it is unsurprising, that evil sometimes ensues. In this paper, I shall examine free-will theodicy, consider some choices, and consider some difficulties to which various choices lead.

I *Some Preliminary Disclaimers*

I am an atheist. So you might suspect that my purpose is to debunk free-will theodicy, and every other theodicy besides, so as to provide – at last! – a triumphant knock-down refutation of Christianity. Not so. I am convinced that philosophical debate almost always ends in deadlock, and that this case will be no exception.[1] When I argue that free-will theodicy meets with difficulties, I mean just what I say, no more and no less. I am not saying, and I am not slyly hinting, that these so-called difficulties are really refutations. In fact, I wish free-will theodicy success, or at least some modicum of success. I don't want to have a proof that all the Christians I know are either muddle-heads or devil-worshippers. That conclusion would be as incredible as it is unfriendly. But I won't mind concluding that a Christian must believe one or another of various things that I myself find unbelievable. For of course I knew that all along.

I shall, accordingly, suspend disbelief on several points. I shall not make heavy weather over God's supposed omnipotence, despite my own conviction that a principle of recombination of possibilities disallows any absolutely necessary connections between God's will and the world that obeys His will.[2] Likewise I shall not make heavy weather over God's supposed necessary existence. I shall not make heavy weather over God's supposed moral perfection, despite my own conviction that values are diverse and incommensurable and conflict in such ways that

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even God could not pursue some without betraying others. (It is a real loss if God is not a fanatical and diabolically ruthless artist. It can't just be outweighed by the goods that He pursues instead, for lack of any determinate weights to be compared.) I shall not make heavy weather – well, not for long – of assuming incompatibilism, or even of assuming the Molinist doctrine of middle knowledge.

My topic is circumscribed. I ask what free-will theodicy can accomplish single-handed, not what it can contribute to a mixed theodicy that combines several approaches. Further, my topic is evil-doing – not the entire problem of evil. I do not ask why God permits natural evil; or, more urgently, why He permits, and perhaps perpetrates, the evil of eternal damnation. I put these questions aside as too hard.[3] Neither do I ask why God did not create the best possible world. To that question, I am content with the answer that, maybe, for every world there is another still better, so that none is best.[4]

II *Theodicy versus Defence*

Alvin Plantinga, our foremost modern authority on free-will theodicy, would recoil from that name for his subject. He has taught us to distinguish 'theodicy' from 'defence'.[5] 'Theodicy', for Plantinga, means an audacious claim to know the truth about why God permits evil. And not just a trivial bit of the truth – God permits evil for the sake of some good or other – but something fairly substantive and detailed. One who claims to know God's mind so well (especially if he claims to know without benefit of revelation) will seem both foolhardy and impudent.

'Defence', on the other hand, means just any hypothesis about why omniscient, omnipotent, benevolent God permits evil. Its sole purpose is to rebut the contention that there is no possible way that such a thing could happen. To serve that purpose, the hypothesis need not be put forward as true. It need not be at all plausible. Mere possibility is enough.

Plantinga aims only at defence. So why does he invest so much effort and ingenuity in the hypothesis that God permits evil for freedom's sake? I think an easier hypothesis would serve his purpose. As follows. We are partly right, partly wrong in our catalogue of values. The best things in life include love, joy, knowledge, vigour, despair, malice, betrayal, torture, ... God in His infinite love provides all His

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children with an abundance of good things. Different ones of us get different gifts, all of them very good. So some are blessed with joy and knowledge, some with vigour and malice, some with torture and despair. God permits evil-doing as a means for delivering some of the goods, just as He permits beneficence as a means for delivering others.

Why not? The hypothesis isn't true, of course. And it isn't plausible. But a defence needn't be true and needn't be plausible; possibility is enough. And not epistemic possibility, or 'real' possibility given the actual circumstances and laws of nature; just 'broadly logical' possibility. That's an easy standard. If somehow it could be made to explain why God permits evil, the hypothesis that pigs fly would be good enough for mere defence.

I myself think that a false value judgement, however preposterous, is possibly true.[6] But suppose you disagree, and deny that value judgements are contingent. No matter. What you deny is a disputed metaphysical thesis. Plantinga incorporates a disputed metaphysical thesis into his own free-will defence – the thesis that there are truths about how unactualized free choices would have come out – without stopping to prove that it is possible because it is true. Evidently he takes for granted that whether or not it's true, still it is possible in the relevant sense. So why may I not follow his precedent?

Defence is too easy; knowing God's mind is too hard. I think the topic worth pursuing falls in between, and has no place in Plantinga's scheme of theodicy versus defence. *Pace* Plantinga, I'll call that topic 'theodicy', but I don't mean the know-it-all theodicy that he wisely disowns. Rather I mean tentative theodicy, even speculative theodicy. The Christian needn't hope to end by knowing for sure why God permits evil. But he can hope to advance from a predicament of not having a clue to a predicament of indecision between several not-too-unbelievable hypotheses (maybe still including the hypothesis: 'none of the above').[7] The job is to devise hypotheses that are at least somewhat plausible, at least to the Christian, and to find considerations that make them more plausible or less. Robert M. Adams has written that 'the atheological program . . . need not be one of rational coercion. It might be a more modest project of rational persuasion, intended not to coerce but to attract the minds of theists and agnostics, or perhaps to shore up the unbelief of atheists.'[8] Right; and the same, *mutatis mutandis*, goes for theodicy.

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III *Significant Freedom*

If free-will theodicy is to explain the evil-doing that actually goes on, and if it is to be plausible that our freedom is of great enough value to be worth the evil that is its price, then we can't just suppose that God leaves us free to choose what cereal to eat for breakfast. We'd better suppose that God permits evil for the sake of *significant* freedom: freedom in choices that matter. Free choice of breakfast is insignificant and worthless.

But choices that matter needn't be between good and evil. They might be momentous choices between incommensurable goods. Example, half-fictitious: a splendid painting has gradually been covered with dirt. By luck, the dirty painting is splendid in its own way. There's no saying which is better, the old clean painting or the new dirty painting; they're too different. Will you have the painting cleaned? Either choice is tragic, neither is evil.

If freedom in such choices as this is significant enough, unlike free choice of breakfast, then God need not permit evil for freedom's sake. He can leave us free to choose between goods, but not free to choose evil. (Just as He leaves us free to stand or to walk, but not to fly.) To make free-will theodicy explain the evil that actually goes on, you have to say that this is not freedom enough. It would be well (but it isn't compulsory) to say why not.

Plantinga, after he notes that free choice of breakfast is insignificant, goes on to define significant freedom as freedom with respect to an action such that either it is wrong to perform it and right to refrain, or else *vice versa*.[9] That is too weak, if we hope to explain all the evil-doing that takes place. Christians, and some others too, believe in wicked thoughts. Example: spending an hour silently composing an eloquent diatribe against God. Insofar as thoughts are voluntary - and to a substantial extent they are – thinking a wicked thought is an action it's wrong to perform. So God could grant us plenty of significant freedom, in Plantinga's sense, if He left our thoughts free but rigidly controlled our behaviour. You have to say that this too is not freedom enough. We need to explain not only why God permits thoughtcrime but also why He permits evil behaviour.

The same point goes for victimless evil-doing in general, even when it is behaviour rather than secret thought. Some might think it wicked to utter a blasphemous diatribe aloud, even if there are none to hear it save

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the incorruptible and the already-corrupted; but none of the audience will be harmed. And all will agree that some evil-doing is victimless because an attempt to do harm fails.

It cannot be said that harm is ever the inevitable consequence of evil-doing. For omnipotence, no merely causal consequence is inevitable. God could put each of His free creatures in a playpen. He could make freedom safe by making all evil victimless. He could have so arranged things, for instance, that no matter what evil Stalin freely did, no harm would come of it. And Stalin needn't have known the playpen was there. Insofar as the intrinsic character of Stalin and his evil deeds went, the playpen needn't have made the slightest difference. Stalin's freedom to do evil – significant freedom in the sense of Plantinga's definition – would have been undiminished.[10]

So why didn't God put Stalin in a playpen? – An answer is not far to seek. It seems that Stalin's freedom would have been much less significant if nothing much had been at stake. Outside the playpen as he actually was, Stalin's freedom gained its significance from two factors taken together. One was the good or evil intrinsic character of the actions he was left free to perform or refrain from. The other factor was the extent to which good and bad outcomes – the well-being of millions – depended on his choice. Plantinga's definition of significant freedom should be expanded to include the second factor. Without a solution to the playpen problem free-will theodicy does not explain the sort of evil that actually takes place.

(Still, why should the value of the freedom depend on how much is at stake? – Here's one answer, but whether it should appeal to Christians I do not know. Christianity teaches that man is made in God's image; and also that God is not only the creator, but also the sustaining cause of the world. All that is good in the world, as well as all that isn't, depends at every moment on God's will for its continued existence. And likewise much that was good depended on Stalin's will for its continued existence, and so perished. Thus Stalin had his little share of the power that makes God what He is; and he wouldn't have had, if his significant freedom had just been the freedom to misbehave in his playpen.)

God's answer to a prayer from the Gulag:

> No, I will not deliver you. For I resolved not to; and I was right so to resolve, for otherwise your fate would not have been in Stalin's hands; and then Stalin's freedom to choose between good and evil

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would have been less significant. If you had been spared just because Stalin freely relented, that would have been a very good thing. I knew it wouldn't happen. But it was not for *me* to prevent it, and I would be preventing it if I stood by ready to release you if Stalin didn't. So here you stay!

If what I've said about the playpen problem is right, this is where free-will theodicy leads. Absurd? Monstrous? – I rather think not, though I'm of two minds about it. It's uncomfortable, for sure.

I ask a final question. Why should we not do as God does, and leave victims to their fates so as not to make the freedom of evil-doers less significant? – Not unanswerable. One answer: There are other considerations that enter into the decision, notably how we shall use our own significant freedom. Another answer (suggested by John Bishop in conversation): If the victims had been protected by the power of God Almighty, that would have put the evil-doer in altogether too much of a playpen. But if we do our fallible best, the evil-doer is in a very imperfect playpen and his freedom remains significant enough. I think the two answers succeed, but they leave a residual question I don't know how to answer. Why is the significance of the evil-doer's freedom a weightless consideration for us, not merely an outweighed consideration?

IV *Compatibilism*

Compatibilism says that our choices are free insofar as they manifest our characters (our beliefs, desires, etc.) and are not determined via causal chains that bypass our characters. If so, freedom is compatible with predetermination of our choices via our characters. The best argument for compatibilism is that we know better that we are sometimes free than that we ever escape predetermination; wherefore it may be for all we know that we are free but predetermined.

Incompatibilism says that our choices are free only if they have no determining causes outside our characters – not even causes that determine our choices via our characters. The best argument for incompatibilism rests on a plausible principle that unfreedom is closed under implication. Consider the prefix 'it is true that, and such-and-such agent never had any choice about whether', abbreviated 'Unfree';

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suppose we have some premises (zero or more) that imply a conclusion; prefix 'Unfree' to each premise and to the conclusion; then the closure principle says that the prefixed premises imply the prefixed conclusion.[11] Given determinism, apply closure to the implication that takes us from preconditions outside character – long ago, perhaps – and deterministic laws of nature to the predetermined choice. Conclude that the choice is unfree. Compatibilists must reject the closure principle. Let's assume that incompatibilists accept it. Else why are they incompatibilists?

I'll speak of 'compatibilist freedom' and 'incompatibilist freedom'. But I don't ask you to presuppose that these are two varieties of freedom. According to incompatibilism, compatibilist freedom is no more freedom than counterfeit money is money.

It seems that free-will theodicy must presuppose incompatibilism. God could determine our choices via our characters, thereby preventing evil-doing while leaving our compatibilist freedom intact. Thus He could create utopia, a world where free creatures never do evil.

Plantinga once responded to compatibilist opponents as if their objection were a terminological quibble. The hypothesis is that God permits evil so that our actions may be not determined. If you find 'free' a tendentious word, use another word: 'unfettered', say.[12] But of course the issue is one of value, not terminology. The opponents grant the value of compatibilist freedom. But they think that if God permits evil for the sake of incompatibilist freedom, what He gains is worthless.

Yet for purposes of mere 'defence' it needn't be true, or even plausible, that incompatibilist freedom has value. It is enough that it be possible. Plantinga's short way with the compatibilists would have been fair if, but only if, it was common ground that a false and implausible value judgement is nevertheless possible.

Before we turn back to the free-will theodicy that does presuppose incompatibilism, let's consider the compatibilist alternative a little further. Suppose God did determine our choices via our characters, preventing evil-doing while leaving us free. How might He do it? By a wise choice of initial conditions and uniform, powerful, simple laws of nature? – That might be mathematically impossible.[13] The problem might be overconstrained. It might be like the problem: find a curve which is given by an equation no more than fifteen characters long, and which passes through none of the following hundred listed regions of the plane.

Rather, God might attain utopia by elaborate contrivance. Instead of

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uniform and powerful laws of nature, He could leave the laws gappy, leaving Him room to intervene directly in the lives of His creatures and guide them constantly back to the right path. Or (if indeed this is possible) His laws might be full of special quirks designed to apply only to very special cases. Either way, despite our compatibilist freedom, God would be managing our lives in great detail, making extensive use of His knowledge and power.

John Bishop has suggested that 'the value of fully autonomous mutual loving relationships' would be lacking in a world where this happens.[14] (Think of analogous contrivance in the relationship of two people!) Freedom – compatibilist freedom, perhaps – is an integral part, but only part, of this larger value. In this way, Bishop arrives at something akin to free-will theodicy that is available even under compatibilism. The story is for Bishop to tell, and I will not pursue it further. Except to note that Bishop fears it must end in heterodoxy: the loving relationship between God and His creatures will be unspoiled only if God gives away some of His power over them, and becomes no longer omnipotent.

Though I am in fact a compatibilist, from this point on I concede incompatibilism for the sake of the argument. I'll say 'freedom' for short to mean incompatibilist freedom.

We've come this far: there is nothing God can do to make sure that there will be (significantly) free creatures who never do evil. Because whatever act of God makes sure that you choose not to do evil *ipso facto* renders you unfree in so choosing. To show this, apply the closure principle to the implication that runs from God's act, plus the conditional that if God so acts then you will not do evil, to the conclusion that you do not do evil.

It proves helpful to restate this, lumping together all God's acts and all His omissions. A *(maximal) option* for God is a maximally specific, consistent proposition about which acts He does and doesn't do. These options partition the possible worlds where God exists. At any such world, God *(strongly) actualizes* just one of His options: that is, He acts and refrains from acting in such a way that this option, and no other, is true. In a derivative sense, He actualizes other propositions: all and only those that are implied by the option He actualizes. (Implied sometimes with the aid of the necessary connections between God's will and the world that comprise His omnipotence.) And in a still more derivative sense, He actualizes the things that exist, and the events that occur, according to the propositions He actualizes.

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We cannot blame God because He has not actualized significant freedom without evil-doing. He could not have actualized that: He had no option that implied it.

V *God the Unlucky*

At this point we may picture God as an unlucky gambler. He confronted a range of options. Some were mediocre: no free creatures, or at least no significant freedom. Others offered Him a gamble on how His creatures would use their freedom. If He gambled, He might lose. Or He might win: His free creatures might freely shun all evil, and that would be very good indeed. Wisely weighing the prospects of winning and losing, He chose to gamble. He lost. Lost rather badly, to judge by the newspapers; but we don't really know quite how much worse it could have been. Tough luck, God!

(Our commiseration for God's bad luck seems scarcely consonant with worship of Him as a Supreme Being. However, the mysteries of the Trinity may go some way to reconcile dissonant stances toward one and the same God.)

Be that as it may, the picture of God as an unlucky gambler is wrong. Or anyway it is heterodox, which is the same for present purposes. For it overlooks God's foreknowledge. An ordinary gambler makes a decision under uncertainty; he doesn't know how any of the gambles on offer would turn out. When he finds out he has lost, it's too late to change his mind. He can only regret having gambled as he did. God, however, does know the outcome of at least one of His options: namely, the one that He will in fact actualize. He knows all along just what He will and won't do, and just how His free creatures will respond. So if He gambles and loses, He knows all along that He will lose. If He regrets His gamble, His regret does not come too late – it comes as early as early can be. Then nothing forces Him to go ahead with it. He has the power, and it is not too late, to actualize some other option instead.

You may well protest: if He did switch to some other option, how would He gain the foreknowledge that made Him regret His original choice? – Fair enough. My point should be put as a *reductio* against the supposition that God is an unlucky gambler who regrets His gamble. Suppose for *reductio* that God actualizes a certain option O; and O turns out badly; and the prospect for some other option is better than O is when O turns out badly. Then God knows by foreknowledge that O

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turns out badly, so He prefers some other option to *O*. Then He actualizes another option instead of *O*. Contradiction.

God is not, we may conclude, an unlucky gambler who regrets His gamble. He may yet be an unlucky gambler who does not regret His gamble, even though He lost. How might that be?

God might know that the gamble He lost still, even when lost, surpasses the expected value[15] of all the other gambles He might have tried instead, as well as the mediocre options in which He doesn't gamble at all. That could be so if He lost, but much less badly than He might have done. He would have no cause for regret if He took one of the gambles with the best expected value (or near enough[16]) and the actual outcome was no worse than the expected value. But on this hypothesis gambling on significant freedom is a much more dangerous game than we would have suspected just on the basis of the evil-doing that actually happens. That makes it all the harder to believe that freedom is worth the risk.

Or instead, God might not regret the gamble He lost because, somehow, He knows that if He had tried any other gamble, He would still have lost, and lost at least as badly as He actually did.

VI *Molinism*

We might think, with de Molina and Suarez, and Plantinga in at least some of his writings, that God has not only foreknowledge but also 'middle knowledge'.[17] Not only does He know what the free creatures who actually exist, in the predicaments in which they actually find themselves, will actually do; He also knows what the free creatures would have done had they found themselves in different predicaments, and He even knows what would have been done by free creatures who do not actually exist.

If this is so – and if, in addition, God has middle knowledge about chance systems other than free creatures, for instance radium atoms – then God is no gambler. He confronts not a decision problem under uncertainty, not even a decision problem under partial uncertainty alleviated by His foreknowledge, but rather a decision problem with perfect information. He knows just how each of His options would turn out. He can reason step-by-step, using His middle knowledge of free creatures (and chancy nature) at every step. 'If I were to create Satan, he would rebel; if then I were to create Adam and Eve, Satan would tempt

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Eve; if so, Eve would succumb, and would in turn tempt Adam. . . .' In short: so-and-so option would result in such-and-such world.[18]

Under Molinism, God is in the best position imaginable to govern the world wisely. The option He actualizes may yet turn out badly: the free creatures may do evil. But God will have no regrets. He will have known all along that none of His other options would have turned out better (anyway, not enough better to make His chosen option wrong).

The counterfactual conditionals that God knows by His middle knowledge – call them *counterfactuals of freedom*, ignoring henceforth the ones about the radium atoms – must be contingent truths. It is always possible for the antecedent to be true and the consequent false, making the whole counterfactual false. Being contingent, there are various combinations of them that might be true. Some especially unfortunate patterns of counterfactuals yield what we may call, approximately following Plantinga, a pattern of *depravity*: God has no option such that, if he were to actualize it, there would then exist significantly free creatures and none of them would ever freely do evil. If so, evil would indeed be the inescapable price of freedom.[19]

Given Molinism and the hypothesis of depravity, we have a free will theodicy that is immune to our *reductio* against regret. God gambles and loses without any regret, knowing that He would have done no better (nor not enough better to matter) if He had actualized any other option. Insofar as it affords a way around the problem of regret, Molinism makes free-will theodicy easier. In other ways, though, Molinism makes more trouble than it cures.

Not every so-called counterfactual is really contrary to fact. Counterfactuals of freedom come in two kinds: the *fulfilled*, with true antecedents, and the unfulfilled. Consider a fulfilled counterfactual: if Judas had the chance, he would betray Christ for thirty pieces of silver. Counterfactuals obey *modus ponens*. So apply the closure principle to the implication

Judas has the chance;
If Judas had the chance, he would betray Christ;
Therefore Judas betrays Christ.

Ex hypothesi Judas had a free choice about whether to betray Christ; but presumably he never had any choice about whether to be offered the chance. Therefore Judas must have had a free choice about whether the

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counterfactual of freedom was to be true. And that's just as we might have thought: when Judas freely betrayed Christ, he thereby rendered true the counterfactual of freedom.

Unfulfilled counterfactuals of freedom are very different. They're not rendered true by the free choice of the agent, since they concern choices that never actually take place. Some of them even concern agents who never actually exist. It's peculiar – but consistent, good enough for mere defence – that the two kinds of counterfactuals of freedom should work so very differently.

What does make unfulfilled counterfactuals of freedom true? Are they subject to God's will? – If so, it seems that God would have options of actualizing free creatures and also actualizing counterfactuals of freedom such that those creatures would freely shun evil. That goes against the hypothesis of depravity, and thereby wrecks our way around the problem of regret. Further, if God did both these things, then the alleged free creatures would not be free after all, by the closure principle. We conclude that counterfactuals of freedom can be subject to God's will *only* if they remain unfulfilled! God's supposed power to see to it that an agent would freely do so-and-so if put to the test is a 'finkish' power: God has it only on condition that the agent is *not* put to the test. It seems absurd that God's powers should be finkish in this way – the conclusion is a *reductio*. Therefore unfulfilled counterfactuals of freedom are not subject to God's will.[20]

Are they true in virtue of what things and what fundamental properties do and don't exist, and how these things and properties are arranged in patterns of instantiation? In John Bigelow's phrase, does their truth supervene on being?[21] No; for unless God's omnipotence is limited in still other respects, any truth that supervenes on being is subject to His will. So there can be nothing that makes unfulfilled counterfactuals of freedom true. They just *are* true, and that's that.[22]

VII *Selective Freedom*

A final difficulty with Molinism is that it seems to give God a winning strategy whereby He can, after all, see to it that His significantly free creatures never do evil. He needn't just decide, once and for all, whether His creatures are to be free. He needn't just decide, once and for all, which of His creatures are to be free. He can make a creature free only some of the time. He always knows, by foreknowledge or middle

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knowledge as the case may be, whether a creature would do evil if left free on a given occasion. So He can grant freedom selectively, when and only when He knows the creature will not misuse it.

This strategy of selective freedom, if it worked, would circumvent depravity. In other words, the hypothesis of depravity says that the strategy can't work. But what would go wrong if God tried it?

Perhaps this. The counterfactuals of freedom say what the free creatures would do in various circumstances; and among the circumstances are God's granting and withholding of freedom. They just might say that the more God withholds freedom so as to prevent evil, the more evil would be done on the remaining occasions when creatures are left free. For example, we could have a pattern of counterfactuals saying that a certain man would do evil on the first, and only the first, of the days when he is left free. It is useless, then, for God to withhold his freedom on day one – that would only put off the evil day. Given this pattern, the only way God can prevent him from doing evil is to withhold freedom on all the days of his life. Selective freedom doesn't work.

There might be a similar pattern involving many men, at separate times and places. Instead of the days of one man's life, we might have a succession of isolated islands. In that case, however, the pattern of counterfactuals that frustrates the strategy of selective freedom will be much more peculiar. It will be a pattern of occult counterfactual dependence that somehow overcomes barriers to any normal sort of causal interaction. The islands, at the times in question, might even be outside one another's light cones.

Not plausible, except as a last resort for heroic faith. But consistent, good enough for mere defence.

Set aside these peculiar patterns of counterfactual dependence. Then the hypothesis of depravity is false; the strategy of selective freedom would work; and free-will theodicy fails. Or so it seems – unless we can come up with some other objection to the strategy of selective freedom. Several objections are worth considering. I take them in order of increasing strength.

First objection. If God grants freedom selectively, He deceives us. Often we will think we are free when we are not. Deception is wrong.

Reply. At worst He misleads us, permitting us to jump rashly to a false conclusion. And maybe not even that. Why shouldn't we be able to figure out that selective freedom is a good strategy for God – if

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indeed it is – and conclude that God may well be following it? And if that's still not enough, why shouldn't God reveal to us that we are not always free?[23]

Second objection. God ought to follow a uniform policy, leaving us free either always or never. Fairness requires Him to treat like cases alike.

Reply. I am not sure it is the essence of fairness to treat like cases alike. Maybe uniformity is just a by-product of treating each case correctly. Or maybe it is just a means to the end of making the law predictable to those who care to study the precedents and rely on the rule of *stare decisis*. (In which case uniformity loses its point when previous cases are kept secret.)

Anyway, the cases God would treat differently are not alike. They differ in respect of counterfactuals of freedom.

Third objection. Augustine says that 'as a runaway horse is better than a stone which does not run away because it lacks self-movement and sense perception, so the creature is more excellent which sins by free will than that which does not sin only because it has no free will.'[24] Maybe free evil-doing is good in its own right, not just the price of trying for freedom without evil. Then God should not withhold freedom just because He knows that it would be misused. That substitutes the worst outcome for the second-best – the stone for the horse.

Reply. That value judgement, if credible, would surely smooth the path of free-will theodicy. But to stop to think how an unfree man is better than a stone; and to stop to think of the victims beneath the horse's hooves. What we have here, I suggest, is a taste of the aesthetic theodicy that we set aside at the beginning: God the fanatical artist.

Fourth objection. John Bishop's point reappears. To secure freedom without evil by the strategy of selective freedom, God would have to manage our lives in great detail, making plenty of use of His superior knowledge and power. Even when He left us free, a larger value that subsumes the value of freedom would be lost. Such overbearing contrivance on God's part could have no place in a 'fully autonomous mutual loving relationship' between God and his creatures.

Reply. As before, I don't dispute Bishops's point. But I note that it is not exactly free-will theodicy, and I note Bishop's concern that it must end in heterodoxy.

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Final objection. If God resolves to leave me free when and only when He knows that I would not misuse my freedom to do evil, then whatever 'freedom' He sometimes gives me is bogus freedom. Assume for *reductio* that on a certain occasion God left me free to do evil because He knew that I would not do evil. Then what if I had done evil after all? If I was really free, that ought to be an *entertainable* supposition: we ought to be able to reason hypothetically under the supposition that I did evil after being left free, without ending in contradiction. Yet it seems that if I had done evil, God would have foreseen it; so he would not have left me free, so I would not have done evil after all; so the counterfactual supposition that I did evil does end in contradiction. So I was not really left free.

Reply. There is another, and no less plausible, course of hypothetical reasoning that does not end in contradiction. Hold fixed my freedom, rather than God's success in predicting me. God made up His mind, once and for all, come what may, to leave me free. His resolve is firm. (It must be, else His strategy of selective freedom would indeed be bogus.) So if I did evil after all, God might be astonished to turn out wrong, but I'd still be free. If He foresaw that I'd shun evil, then if I did evil He would have been mistaken.

Objection to the reply. God is essentially infallible. If He made even one mistake, He would not be God at all. Whatever happened, God could not lack His essence. So the alternative course of hypothetical reasoning just considered also ends in contradiction: the contradiction that God is infallible and yet turns out mistaken, or more simply the contradiction that God is not God. So again it turns out not to be an entertainable supposition that I do evil; again, my 'freedom' under the strategy of selective freedom is bogus.

Defence of the reply. Not so; or not indisputably so. (Here, as elsewhere, I expect argument to end in deadlock.) Counterfactual suppositions contrary to essence are sometimes entertainable. For instance, the supposition that Descartes is material and the supposition that he is immaterial both are entertainable. Presumably one supposition or the other is contrary to Descartes' essence.[25] Yet it makes sense to reason hypothetically about what would be the case under either supposition, and the reasoning need not end in contradiction. Further, even when an entertainable supposition is not itself contrary to essence, still it may happen that what would be the case given that supposition is contrary to essence. For instance, consider the counterfactuals:

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If all creatures were material, Descartes would be material.

If material things couldn't think, Descartes would be immaterial.

Presumably one consequent or the other is contrary to Descartes' essence; yet both counterfactuals seem non-vacuously true, and neither antecedent is contrary to essence. So even if the consequent 'God is mistaken' is contrary to God's essence, the supposition that I did evil may yet be entertainable.

The logical situation is confusing because it involves a counterfactual within a counterfactual. So it may be helpful to spell it out more fully. Let *OH*, the *outer* hypothesis, be that God can tell whether or not I would do evil if left free, foresees that I would not do evil if left free, follows the strategy of selective freedom, and accordingly leaves me free. Let *IH*, the *inner* hypothesis, be that I nevertheless freely do evil. We take as a premise that unless my 'freedom' were bogus, *IH* would be entertainable; so we have

(1) If it were that *OH*, then not:
if it were that *IH*, then a contradiction would obtain.

And we trivially have

(2) If it were that *OH*, then: if it were that *IH*, then I would freely do evil.

And it seems that we also have

(3) If it were that *OH*, then: if it were that *IH*, then:
God would foresee that I would do evil if left free; and

(4) If it were that *OH*, then: if it were that *IH*, then:
God would still follow the strategy of selective freedom.

From (3) and (4) we have

(5) If it were that *OH*, then: if it were that *IH*, then:
God would not leave me free and so I would freely do evil.

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From (2) and (5) we have

(6) If it were that *OH*, then:
if it were that *IH*, then: a contradiction would obtain.

From (1) and (6) we have

(7) If it were that OH, then a contradiction would obtain.

This means that *OH* – a sample instance of selective freedom – is not an entertainable supposition. That completes the objection. The reply denies (3) and says that what's true instead is

(3') If it were that *OH*, then: if it were that *IH*, then:
God would wrongly think that I wouldn't do evil if left free.

And from (3') there follows no difficulty for the hypothesis *OH*. The objection to the reply uses God's essential infallibility to support.

(8) If it were that *OH*, then: if it were that *IH*, then:
God would not wrongly think anything;

and from (3') and (8) we obtain (6) and proceed as before. The defence of the reply questions (8), finding precendent for (3') in other true counterfactuals with consequents contrary to essence.

We might think, wrongly, that (3) is guaranteed by counterfactual logic; namely, by the same principle that yields: 'if we had ham, then if we had eggs we'd have ham and eggs'. (If *A*, then: if *B* then *A&B*.) This ham-and-eggs principle would indeed yield (3), since the consequent of (3) follows from *OH* and *IH* together. For *OH* says in part that God can tell whether I would do evil if left free; *IH* says in part that I freely do evil, and hence implies that I would do evil if left free; these together imply that God would foresee that I would do evil if left free. But the ham-and-eggs principle would equally yield (3'). For *OH* says in part that God foresees that I would not do evil if left free, and *IH* implies that I would do evil if left free, so together they imply that He's wrong. Anyway, the ham-and-eggs principle, plausible though some of its instances may be, is invalid. Maybe if we had ham, our having ham would depend on our not having eggs; so maybe if we had ham, it would be that: if we had eggs we'd have eggs and no ham.[26] The principle is

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useless to support either (3) or (3'). They must stand or fall on their own merits.

Our present discussion retraces part of the famous dispute over foreknowledge and freedom. Suppose I freely accept a gift of $1000, ignoring putative reasons why I should decline it. God foresaw that I would. If I had declined – an entertainable supposition – then God certainly would not have known ahead of time that I would accept. But what would have happened? God's foreknowledge that I would accept, taken as a whole, is a 'soft' fact: if I had done otherwise, it would have been otherwise, so it does not limit my freedom. But we can divide it into two parts. On the one hand, there is the content of a past belief: it was a belief that I was going to accept the gift. On the other hand, there is the fact that this was God's belief, and constituted part of His infallible foreknowledge. Which part is the soft part? Opinion may well divide.

Perhaps we should hold fixed that the believer was infallible God, and say then that it is the content of His belief that is soft: if I had later declined the gift, He would all along have expected me to decline. 'I am able to make some proposition to have been known by God that is not [in fact] known by God, and conversely' said Richard of Campsall in the fourteenth century;[27] and in our time, Plantinga has taken a similar view.[28]

Or perhaps instead we should hold fixed the content of the past belief, and say that what is soft is that this belief belonged to infallible God. He expected me to accept, so if I had declined He would have suffered a lapse in His essential infallibility, so He would not, strictly speaking, have been God at all. So said Robert Holkot in the sixteenth century;[29] and in our time, Marilyn Adams has taken a similar view.[30]

We should take care how we state the two opinions, lest they seem harder to believe than they really are. The opinion that if I had declined, then God's past expectation would have been different from what it actually was does not mean that I have the power to change the past. There is no question of God's past expectations being first one way and then the other! As Campsall also said, 'I am able to bring about that God has known from eternity that which He never [in fact] has known.'[31] If I had declined the gift, God would always have expected me to decline. The only 'change' I can make, if indeed we may call it that, is to put the actual past in place of a might-have-been past that never was.

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And the opinion that if I had declined, then God would have been mistaken does not necessarily mean that I have it in my power to cause God to have made a mistake long ago. I wasn't around then to cause anything. Unless God's foreknowledge works by backward causation – maybe so, maybe not – I cannot influence God's thoughts long ago. I can only influence an extrinsic description of those thoughts – knowledge or error? – in relation to what comes afterward. A parallel: I don't cause someone to have set an all-time record long ago just by acting today to stop you from breaking his record.

If we put a human predictor in place of God, and we ask again what would have been the case if I had declined the $1000, the answer will depend on the predictor's *modus operandi*. First case: the predictor is a time traveler. He saw me accept the $1000, then departed to the past taking his knowledge with him. His foreknowledge is causally downstream from its object. Then I want to hold fixed that the time traveler has foreknowledge, and say that if I had declined, the time traveler would have known that I was going to decline. If God's forekowledge is like the time traveler's, if it does work by backward causation, then I agree with the first opinion: if I had declined, God would have expected me to. In that case, also, I conclude that Molinist free-will theodicy has nothing to fear from selective freedom, because indeed such 'freedom' would be bogus.

Second case: the predictor is an expert psychologist, who knows past conditions and regularities of cause and effect. His foreknowledge and its object are separate effects of common causes. Then I want to hold the past fixed, and say that if I had declined, I would have violated some one of the regularities the psychologist relied on.[32] If God's foreknowledge is like the psychologist's, then I stand by my reply to the final objection and persist in saying that Molinist free-will theodicy has a problem with selective freedom.

But God's way of gaining foreknowledge cannot be much like either the time traveler's way or the psychologist's way – not if God's way provides middle knowledge as well. So I conclude, most inconclusively, that we just don't know whether my reply to the final objection succeeds, and hence don't know whether selective freedom is bogus freedom or genuine. Some will want to play on by debating which side bears the burden of proof. Myself, I think this pastime is as useless as it is undignified.[33]

NOTES

1. That may suggest an 'anything goes' attitude toward philosophical questions that I neither hold nor approve of. I would insist that when debate over a philosophical question – say, the question whether I have hands – ends in deadlock, it does *not* follow that there is no truth of the matter; or that we don't know the truth of the matter; or that we ought to suspend judgement; or that we have no reason for thinking one thing rather than the other.

2. See David Lewis, *On the Plurality of Worlds* (Oxford, Blackwell, 1986), 86-92.

3. It seems that many find the second question too hard. Seldom does an analytic philosopher of religion defend the eternal torment of the damned. Among those who discuss the question at all, Richard Swinburne, 'A Theodicy of Heaven and Hell' in *The Existence and Nature of God*, ed. by Alfred Freddoso (Notre Dame, Indiana, Notre Dame Press, 1983) is typical: he offers no 'theodicy of Hell' but only a reason why the damned may not enjoy the delights of Heaven. But Peter Geach rises to the challenge: in *Providence and Evil* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1977), he claims that 'someone confronted with the damned would find it impossible to wish that things so evil should be happy' (139). Grant that they shouldn't be happy; but why wouldn't it be best to destroy them? Wouldn't 'the work of the Divine Artist. . . be permanently marred if the surd or absurd element of sin were a permanent element of it'? (140) In reply Geach speculates that time forks, Hell in one fork and Heaven in the other; so that the blessed in Heaven cannot say that Hell was, or is, or will be. But why does this leave the work of the Artist – the *entire* work – unmarred?

4. George Schlesinger, 'The Problem of Evil and the Problem of Suffering', *American Philosophical Quarterly* 1 (1964), 244-247; Peter Forrest, 'The Problem of Evil: Two Neglected Defences'. *Sophia* 29 (1981), 49-54.

5. Alvin Plantinga, *God, Freedom, and Evil* (New York, Harper & Row, 1974), 10, 27-29; Plantinga, 'Self-Profile' in *Alvin Plantinga*, ed. by James Tomberlin and Peter van Inwagen (Dordrecht, Reidel, 1985), 35, 42.

6. That follows from my meta-ethical position, subjectivism with bells and whistles. See David Lewis, 'Dispositional Theories of Value', *Aristotelian Society Supplementary Volume* 63 (1989), 113-137. It's necessary to consider the value judgement taken in an 'unrigidified' form (see 132-133) but there's nothing wrong with that.

7. See Sylvain Bromberger, 'An Approach to Explanation' in *Analytic Philosophy: Second Series*, ed. by R.J. Butler (Oxford, Blackwell, 1965) on the distinction between kinds of predicaments.

8. Adams, 'Plantinga on the Problem of Evil' in *Alvin Plantinga*, 240.

9. *God, Freedom, and Evil*, 30

10. Steven Boer, 'The Irrelevance of the Free-Will Defence', *Analysis* 38 (1978), 110-112, suggests that the question why evil sometimes causes harm belongs to the department of theodicy that is concerned with the problem of natural evil. If so, the playpen problem falls outside our present topic. However I note that in that case, we must dismiss the hypothesis that natural evil is the evil-doing of Satan and his cohorts. (See *God, Freedom, and Evil*, 58-59.) For why does the evil-doing of Satan and his cohorts cause harm? God could have put Satan and his cohorts in the playpen along with Stalin.

11. The closure principle is a generalization of the 'Rule Beta' that plays a leading role in Peter van Inwagen's defence of compatibilism in *An Essay on Free Will* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1983); it first appears on page 94. The closure principle says that the logic of 'Unfree' is a 'normal' modal logic; see Brian Chellas, *Modal Logic: An Introduction* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1980), 114-115. We can see from Chellas's Theorem 4.3(4) that the closure principle is equivalent, *inter alia*, to this combination of four principles:

RE: if '*A* iff B' is valid, so is 'Unfree *A* iff Unfree *B*',
N: 'Unfree *T*' is valid, where *T* is an arbitrary tautology,
M: 'Unfree (*A* & *B*)' implies 'Unfree *A* and Unfree *B*', and
C: 'Unfree *A* and Unfree *B*' implies 'Unfree (*A* & *B*)'.

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The compatibilist must therefore challenge one of the four, most likely *C*; and Michael Slote has done so in 'Selective Necessity and the Free-Will Problem', *Journal of Philosophy* 79 (1982), 5-24.

12. Plantinga, *God and Other Minds* (Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 1967), 135. But later he concedes that this was too short a way with compatibilism: 'Self-Profile', 45-47, and 'Reply to Robert M. Adams', 371-372, both in *Alvin Plantinga*. My complaint here applies only to his earlier view.

13. Remember how much the laws of nature must be 'fine-tuned' before they even permit life. See John Leslie, *Universes* (London, Routledge, 1989), 4-6, 27-65.

14. John Bishop, 'Compatibilism and the Free Will Defence', *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* 71 (1993), 104-120. Note that Bishop's theodicy offers another solution to the playpen problem – one that is not available within free-will theology narrowly construed.

15. Or some vague approximation to an expected value. I don't suppose an incompatibilist will think that free choices have well-defined probabilities; but neither will he want to abandon altogether the idea that some free choices are more likely than others, and so contribute more weightily to the prospect of a certain gamble on freedom.

16. Maybe God is a satisficer; maybe it is not part of His benevolence, rightly understood, that He must actualize the very best of His options. See Robert M. Adams, 'Must God Create the Best?' *Philosophical Review* 81 (1972), 317-332, reprinted in Adams, *The Virtue of Faith* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1987). The more of a satisficer God is, of course, the easier it will be for Him not to regret a gamble that turns out badly.

17. See Robert M. Adams, 'Middle Knowledge and the Problem of Evil,' *American Philosophical Quarterly* 14 (1977), 109-117, reprinted in *The Virtue of Faith*; Anthony Kenny, *The God of the Philosophers* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1979), 61-71; and Plantinga, 'Self-Profile', 48-50.

18. This is not the fallacy of counterfactual transitivity. Instead, it repeatedly invokes the inference

If it were that *A*, then it would be that *B*;
if it were that *A* & *B*, then it would be that *C*;
therefore if it were that *A*, then it would be that *B* & *C*

which is uncontroversially valid.

19. Let $O(W)$ be the option that God strongly actualizes at world W, assuming that W is a world where God exists. We say that God *can actualize* world W if the following counterfactual is true (here at our actual world): if it were that $O(W)$, then W would be actualized. If, in addition, $O(W)$ holds at no world except W and hence strictly implies that W is actualized, we say that God *can strongly actualize* W; if not, we say that God *can weakly actualize* W. These definitions differ from Plantinga's, but they are equivalent; see the statement and proof of 'Lewis's Lemma', in his 'Self-Profile', 50-51.

Assume that God is able to leave something unsettled. What God leaves unsettled comes out differently at different possible worlds, but not because of any difference in what God does. That is: God has an option O that holds at two different worlds V and W, so that $O(V) = O(W) = O$. Then one or both of these two worlds is a world that He cannot actualize, either weakly or strongly. Else we would have two true counterfactuals with the same antecedent and conflicting consequents: it if were that O, V would be actual; if it were that O, W would be actual; but V and W cannot both be actual. That would mean that O was not an entertainable supposition, contrary to the assumption that it is one of God's options. Thus we refute 'Leibniz's Lapse', the thesis that for any world (or any world in which God exists), God can actualiize that world.

(Susanna Siegel has observed that the 'lapse' may be badly named. For Leibniz could invoke his principle of sufficient reason to argue that God is *un*able to leave anything unsettled. In that case it would be no lapse for Leibniz to conclude that God is, after all, able to actualize any world.)

Note that this refutation of Leibniz's lapse does not require us to say anything specific about *what* it is that God can leave unsettled, and *why* He might want to leave it unsettled. But one case to keep in mind is the case that He might leave a creature's action unsettled, because He values incompatibilist freedom. Note also that the refutation does not presuppose Molinism. If the

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difference between worlds *V* and *W* concerns the action of a free creature, Molinism says that *one* of the conflicting counterfactuals is true and anti-Molinism says that neither is true; but what matters for the refutation is just that they can't *both* be true.

Call a world *utopian* if it contains significantly free creatures, none of whom ever freely do evil. Once we know that there are some worlds that God cannot actualize, we are in a position to speculate that every utopian world is one of these unactualizable worlds. That is a weak version of the hypothesis of depravity.

Plantinga's own version of the hypothesis, in *The Nature of Necessity*, 186-189, is stronger by a quantifier shift. His hypothesis is that *every* possible creature *P* suffers from trans-world depravity: that is to say (almost), there is no world God can actualize where *P* exists and is significantly free and never freely does evil. (I omit another unimportant strengthening, and I omit Plantinga's use of essences as surrogates for *possibilia*.)

20. Compare C.B. Martin's idea of a finkish disposition: as it might be, the solubility of something that would instantly cease to be soluble if ever it were put into solvent. Martin discussed finkish dispositions years ago in Sydney, and in 'Powers and Conditionals', presented at the University of North Carolina in 1968. I agree with Martin that finkish dispositions are possible, and that they refute a simple conditional analysis of dispositions. What I deem absurd is not finkishness *per se*, but finkishness applied to God's powers.

21. See John Bigelow, *The Reality of Numbers* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1988), 133; and 'Real Possibilities' *Philosophical Studies* 53 (1988), 38, where supervenience on what things exist turns into supervenience on what things exist and *how they are arranged* (*i.e.* arranged in patterns of instantiation). Bigelow's principle is a weakened form of C.B. Martin's principle that truths require truthmakers; see D.M. Armstrong, 'C.B. Martin, Counterfactuals, Casuality, and Conditionals' in *Cause, Mind, and Reality: Essays Honoring C.B. Martin*, ed. by John Heil (Dordrecht, Kluwer, 1989).

22. *A fortiori*, for what it's worth, they violate the analysis I advanced in *Counterfactuals* (Oxford, Blackwell, 1973). For on my analysis, the truth of counterfactuals is supervenient on being.

23. A charge of deception gives us a third solution to the playpen problem. Again I reply that outright deception is not required to create a playpen.

24. Cited in Plantinga, *God, Freedom, and Evil*, 27.

25. I myself would say that suppositions contrary to essence are entertainable because essence is a flexible matter; it's no contradiction that a being is, loosely speaking, God but is not, strictly speaking, God because of one lapse from omniscience; just as it is no contradiction that a glass is, loosely speaking, empty but is not, strictly speaking, empty because of one remaining drop of beer. Not essentialism *per se*, but only an especially rigid version of essentialism stands in the way of supposing counterfactually that Descartes lacks his essence, or that God lacks His. Nor need we explain this in terms of my theory of counterparts; the same flexibility is available on rival approaches to modal metaphysics, except for one approach that lacks adherents. See my *On the Plurality of Worlds*, Ch. 4.

26. On the analysis I offer in *Counterfactuals* – which, however must remain bracketed so long as we suspend disbelief about Molinism – the ham-and-eggs principle amounts to assuming, roughly, that any closest B-world to any closest A-world to ours must be an A&B-world. The analogy of similarity distance to spatial distance quickly reveals counterexamples. Then why is the ham-and-eggs principle plausible offhand? Maybe we mistake the double counterfactual

If it were that *A*, then: if it were that *B*. . .

for a single counterfactual with a conjunctive antecedent

If *A* and *B*, then. . . .

27. Campsall's *Notibilia*, 7, in *The Works of Richard of Campsall* ed. by Edward A. Synan (Toronto, Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1982), Vol. II, 40.

28. 'On Ockham's Way Out', *Faith and Philosophy* 3 (1986), 235-269.

29. According to Calvin Normore, personal communication.

30. 'Is the Existence of God a 'Hard' Fact?', *Philosphical Review* 76 (1967), 492-503.

31. *Notabilia*, 8, in *The Works of Richard of Campsall*, 41.
32. For contrary views, see Plantinga, 'On Ockham's Way Out'; and Terence Horgan, 'Counterfactuals and Newcomb's Problem', *Journal of Philosophy* 78 (1981), 331-356.
33. I am much indebted to many people for helpful discussion and correspondence; especially Marilyn Adams, Robert M. Adams, Jonathan Bennett, John Bishop, Calvin Normore, Alvin Plantinga, Susanna Siegel, and Peter van Inwagen.

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