

DIVINE FREEDOM AND THE PROBLEM OF EVIL

Theodore Guleserian

The traditional theistic philosopher is committed to hold that God has a perfect will *essentially*, and that this is better than having a free will. It will be argued that God, being omnipotent, would have the power to create creatures who also have a perfect will essentially. This creates a problem for the traditional theist in solving the problem of moral evil. The problem of *actual* moral evil will not then be solvable by reference to the value of our moral freedom, in accordance with the Free Will Defense. This favors the view that moral freedom is an excellence in both man and God.

There is a certain nontraditional conception of divinity, call it the *nonAnselmian* conception, according to which a perfect being has moral freedom essentially, i.e., has essentially the power to choose between doing right and doing wrong. This conception implies that it is impossible for a perfect being to be morally perfect essentially.¹ On the nonAnselmian conception, God can do wrong acts.² This is intolerable to the traditional theistic philosopher, and this conception would be rejected unless some strong reason is provided to accept it over the traditional conception. I believe that there are strong reasons, one of which I shall endeavor to develop here: the assumption that God's freely chosen conformance to the moral law is a greater excellence than God's essential conformance to the moral law renders the Free Will Defense more plausible.

I

Consider the property PW — for *perfection of the will* — that *x* has just in case, for every situation *S* and act *A*, whenever *x* believes both that he or she is in situation *S* and that he or she has the power to do act *A* in situation *S* and believes that the moral law requires that anyone who is both in *S* and has the power to do *A* in *S* ought to do *A*, *x* wills to do *A*.³ Having PW is not sufficient for having moral perfection in the full sense, but on any plausible account of moral perfection in the full sense, PW is a property that is included in (i.e., entailed by) moral perfection. PW is contrasted with PC, i.e., perfect conformance of *outward* action with the moral law. PC is the property that *x* has if and only if whenever *x* is in situation *S* and *x* has the power to do act *A* in *S*, and the moral law requires that anyone who is both in *S* and has the power to do *A* in *S* ought to do *A*, *x* does *A*.



PC is not sufficient for moral perfection either. It is logically possible for a person to have PC quite by accident. A person's actions might conform to the moral law in spite of his or her intention to do great wrong. A doctor, in an attempt to secretly murder his wife, might inject her with a poison which in fact cures her of a fatal disease that she had acquired unknown to both of them. We can even imagine a comic character who always aims at doing a morally wrong act but who, due to peculiar circumstances, always fails — and does what the moral law requires. If we knew of this person's intentions and were to attempt to judge *him* as a moral being, I think that we ought not to judge him as being *morally virtuous*.

Moral perfection in the full sense demands that one *will* or *choose* or *intend* to do what one believes that the moral law requires. Moral perfection in the full sense might be called *perfect intentional conformance* with the moral law, or PIC for short. PIC entails both PC and PW, which jointly entail PIC. PW is in fact a perfection of *the will*, which lies at the heart of moral perfection. A person who has PW may, from lack of moral or factual knowledge or (on some views) from lack of the requisite power, fail to do what is right; but such a person will never intentionally do a wrong act while believing that it is wrong. PW is, in my judgment, much more important than PC as a *moral* property in terms of which to evaluate any person as a moral being.

I know there are those who would claim that PW without PC is no better, no greater virtue, than PC without PW. We can imagine a counterpart of the above mentioned comic character: a tragic person who has PW but who, due to peculiar circumstances and/or defects in his cognitive faculties, always has moral volitions to do acts which he *incorrectly* believes to be right. Some would say that such a tragic character who has PW would be no more morally virtuous than the aforementioned comic character who has PC. After all, *Hitler* might have sincerely believed that his attempted genocide was morally right; he may have sincerely believed that the Jews were parasites on the German economy, as he claimed. But surely his volitions to act on these sincere beliefs brought him no moral virtue; rather they were morally disastrous, i.e., not only disastrous to others but disastrous *to him* as a moral being.

I believe that persons who think along these lines may be overlooking the fact that the Hitlers of this world have the duty to investigate their claims before acting on them, such as Hitler's claim just referred to, which they usually fail to do. Such a failure is a *moral* failure, since their moral volitions depend on their beliefs, and the correctness of their choices depends upon the veracity of those beliefs. For whatever other reasons such persons may not have PW, they fail to have PW due to their moral negligence with respect to their duties to thoroughly investigate their important moral beliefs — especially those that will have significant social impact. We can correctly *blame* them for refraining from those investigations which would at least have made them doubt that their claims are true and hence would have given them reason to refrain from those morally disastrous volitions.

But let us suppose that there is a tragic character who *does* investigate and *does* take great precautions to do the right thing in every case, but who

because of defects in his cognitive faculties comes to believe just such wildly false claims as those of Hitler and other racists. We are to imagine that he is simply incapable of arriving at the relevant moral and factual truths before deciding what to do, and is incapable of discovering that his faculties are defective. This person has PW but wills and does what is in fact wrong every time. While nothing in my central argument depends on this point, in my judgment this tragic figure still has a moral virtue precisely because *he is aiming at what is right*. We can correctly say that he is *attempting* to do what is right but is failing due to a defect that is *not of his own making*. We could not say these things about the comic counterpart who has PC accidentally. Rather, we would have to say that the comic character is *attempting* to do what is *wrong* but is failing due to lucky circumstances that are not of his own making. None of this is intended to deny the great importance of PC when conjoined to PW. A perfect being would, of course, have PC as well as PW.

Now, each of the three properties, PC, PW, and PIC, have essential, free, and causal counterparts. Essential PW is just the property of having PW essentially. Free PW is the property that *x* has just in case, for every situation *S* and act *A*, whenever *x* believes that he or she is in situation *S* and has the power to do *A* in *S*, and believes that the moral law requires that anyone who is both in *S* and has the power to do *A* in *S* ought to do *A*, *x* *freely* wills to do *A*. That *x* has free PW entails that *x* has PW as a contingent (i.e., nonessential) property. There could be an individual who has *moral freedom* essentially, but there could not be an individual who has free PW essentially. That is because the freedom of one who has free PW requires that this person freely wills to do a wrong act in some possible worlds. Causal PW is the property that *x* has just in case, for every situation *S* and act *A*, the state of affairs that *x* believes that he or she is in *S* and has the power to do *A* and believes that anyone who is both in *S* and has the power to do *A* ought to do *A* *causes under standard conditions* the state of affairs that *x* wills to do *A*. Causal PW itself can be possessed either essentially or contingently. Both contingent causal PW and essential causal PW will be discussed in section II below. It may be needless to say that on the libertarian concept of freedom assumed by the Free Will Defense, free PW is incompatible with causal PW and hence with both contingent and essential causal PW.

Now, the traditional theistic philosopher is committed to hold that God has essential PW, i.e., that he has PW essentially. On his view, it is better that God has PW essentially than that God has PW contingently — as God would if God had free PW, which he would have if God *freely* chose to do the right thing every time. This is due to the fact that, according to the traditional view, the property of having essential PW is a greater excellence than the property of having free PW. But then it should be true for *any* moral agent who can have essential PW that it would be a greater excellence for that agent to have PW essentially than to have it freely and hence contingently. This raises an important question: does God have the power to create creatures that have PW essentially instead of creatures like us who (at best) can have PW contingently? There seems to be just two possible answers: (i) he does have this power; (ii) he does not have this power because such *creatures* are impossible to create, i.e., while it is possible for

God to have PW essentially, it is not possible for a *creature* to have PW essentially.

The second answer requires some investigation. Let's beat around the neighboring bushes. What kinds of individuals are beyond God's power to create? Well, at least we know that, on the traditional conception of God, he can't create another perfect being, because a perfect being has the attribute of necessary independent existence — a property which no *created* being could have. Could God create another omnipotent individual? It is impossible for there to exist two omnipotent individuals whose wills conflict. But if God has middle knowledge, could he not foresee which possible omnipotent individuals would always in fact conform their will to his? Couldn't he choose to create just *those* omnipotent individuals? I don't know, but I don't see a reason to deny that he could.⁴ When it comes to the question of creating individuals that are omniscient, there is even less reason to doubt that he could create them, because there seems to be no possible conflict that could arise between two omniscient individuals that would be due to their shared omniscience — even two persons who are *essentially* omniscient, say, God and an essentially omniscient angel. But let's not try to answer these questions; instead, let's just restrict our range of possible creatures to *essentially finite creatures*, who due to their essential finitude cannot be omnipotent and cannot be omniscient. About such creatures it is possible to justify at least a belief that none could have *essential* PC and hence none could have essential PIC, i.e., none could have essentially the property of being intentionally in conformance with the moral law.

The argument is straightforward. For any possible finite person, there are some possible worlds in which that person is in a situation S in which the moral law requires that person to do a certain act A, but in which she does not believe that she is in S or does not believe that the moral law requires her to do A in S. In some of these worlds, the person chooses to refrain from doing A and hence fails to act in accordance with the moral law. It follows that such a person cannot have essential PC and hence cannot have essential PIC either. Such a person cannot exhibit (intentional or unintentional) perfect conformance with the moral law in *every* world in which she exists.

The same sort of argument, however, will not work to show that no finite creature could have essential PW. A creature that has an essentially perfect will need not be omniscient or omnipotent or have any infinite attribute that is traditionally thought to be unique to God; one does not need these attributes in order to have one's factual and moral beliefs metaphysically determine or necessitate one's acts of will about moral matters, as they are in God's case on the traditional conception. To be sure, a creature's factual and moral belief types will be finite in number, have a finite range; its volition types will likewise deal with a finite range of act types. But on the assumption that it is really possible for a divine being to have moral and factual beliefs that metaphysically necessitate its moral volitions, there seems to be no reason to suppose that the same may not be true of a creature; there seems to be no incompatibility between being a finite individual and having one's finite volitions metaphysically necessitated by one's finite factual and moral beliefs. To oversimplify, what is required is

that when one has the power to believe that it would be wrong for one to do an act, one has the power to will to refrain from doing it; i.e., the volition must be within the range of one's potential volitions if the moral belief is in the range of one's potential moral beliefs. Neither range need be infinite, as great as God's. Hence, there seems to be no logical barrier for an omnipotent being to create a finite spirit who is designed to have its moral intentions and moral acts of will metaphysically determined by its moral and factual beliefs, just as God's are according to the traditional view. God can create finite spirits who possess *essentially* the capacity to think and to believe, and who possess *essentially* the capacity to will and to form intentions regarding moral acts, just as God possesses. Surely, then, on the traditionalist assumption that there is *one* individual whose moral volitions are metaphysically necessitated by his beliefs, viz., God, and therefore that it is *possible* for moral and factual beliefs to metaphysically necessitate moral volitions, it is plausible to suppose that it is possible for God to create others in his own image: God could create finite spirits who possess *essentially* the property of always willing in accordance with their moral beliefs. I don't believe that this result is *provable*, but it certainly seems to me to be *plausible*, on the traditionalist assumption we are making.

One might be tempted to reject the above line of reasoning on the grounds that, besides having such properties as omnipotence and omniscience which finite individuals cannot possess, God has such special properties as being totally perfect and necessarily existent, which creatures cannot have. Perhaps having essential PW depends in some way on having these special properties. Essential PW *is itself* a perfection; if creatures cannot be perfect perhaps they cannot have essential PW. I have two comments to make about this line of thought. The first is that although creatures cannot have the property of being totally perfect, this would not prevent the possibility of their having *some* perfections. Even though on the present view the property of essential PW is itself a perfection and can be possessed by finite creatures, none of these creatures could have it in connection with an infinite range of beliefs or an infinite range of moral volitions. On the present view, none of these creatures could have the combined property comprising all these features. So, the present view does not endanger the proper distinction between a perfect being and a finite creature.

The second comment requires a thought experiment. It is sometimes remarked by mathematicians that "God made the natural numbers and man made all the rest." The point of this remark is not truly a theological one but only a reflection of the view that we can use the natural numbers to define other numbers. Just to fix an idea, however, let us suppose that the numbers really are contingent objects created by God. So God created 7, and 5. But it is, I think, even under this assumption, overwhelmingly plausible to suppose that God could not have made it the case that 5 is greater than 7, or that the sum of 7 and 5 is 5. In other words, even if these objects are contingent, as long as they exist their basic relations to each other must remain the same. For example, even if 5 and 7 are contingently existing objects, it would remain true that 5 is essentially less than 7.⁵ There are essential properties of each number, then, that relate the given number to other numbers which the given number would have even if that

number were a contingent object. Adding necessary existence to each number would not alter the fact that each number has just those essential properties. Similarly, taking away necessary existence from each number would not alter the fact that each number has just those essential properties. There is no reason to think that the matter is different with an object having PW essentially. Whether it has necessary existence or not seems to be irrelevant to whether its moral and factual beliefs are necessarily related to its moral volitions by metaphysically necessitating them. An object that has essential PW might exist necessarily or might exist contingently: that its moral volitions are metaphysically necessitated by its moral and factual beliefs does not seem to *entail* that it has necessary existence. In fact, it seems that even if God's existence should be contingent — as some have maintained — he could still have PW essentially. Nothing about having essential PW seems to require having necessary existence.

While it is probably impossible to prove it, the first answer to our question, then, seems to be right: on the traditionalist assumption that God himself has PW essentially, and that consequently it is possible for moral and factual beliefs jointly to metaphysically necessitate moral volitions, God does have the power to create creatures who have PW essentially. On the assumptions that God is necessarily existent and essentially omnipotent and omniscient, it seems to follow that God has this power *in every possible world*. Unlike the case of creatures who have moral freedom, the moral freedom of these essentially PW creatures cannot prevent this result from being true, because creatures who have essential PW have no moral freedom.

As we have noted, having essential PW does not require having infinite powers or infinite knowledge. But in fact, there seems to be no logical barrier to an omnipotent, omniscient being providing finite spirits who have essential PW with sufficient finite moral and factual knowledge to cover all those moral situations that he knows they will confront, so that these spirits would in fact exhibit a perfect (albeit limited) conformance to the moral law, as well as having essential PW. In other words, God could create such creatures and provide them with sufficient moral and factual knowledge to cause them to have PC as well as PW. These creatures would have PC as a *contingent* (nonessential) property only if there are other possible worlds in which God creates them but does not directly or indirectly cause them to have the requisite finite knowledge. We need not decide the issue of whether this possibility exists. The important point is that apparently God has the power *in any initial world segment*⁶ to create finite creatures that have both PW and PC, i.e., who exhibit PIC — perfect intentional conformance to the moral law.

This creates a problem, however, for the traditional theist in solving the problem of *actual* moral evil. If God could have avoided the intentional wrongdoing in this world of morally free creatures by actualizing instead a world of *better* creatures — who have more excellence by virtue of having PW essentially, — it would seem that he ought to have done so. By additionally supplying these creatures with all the factual and moral knowledge they would need to achieve PC, he would thereby have both avoided the intentional wrongdoing of this world and created more excellent creatures as well. The problem of actual moral evil will not then be solvable by refer-

ence to the value of our moral freedom, in accordance with the Free Will Defense. The fact, pointed out by Plantinga, that it is logically possible that even an omnipotent God does not have the power to create a single *free* creature who would be morally perfect, would be irrelevant to the problem of actual moral evil. For if it should be the case that God was in that situation in *this* world, he would have the alternative of creating these more excellent nonfree creatures having essential PW. So, the Free Will Defense, when deployed to solve the problem of *actual* moral evil, seems to presuppose not only that moral creatures are free but that a world of creatures that always intentionally but *nonfreely* conform to the moral law is *not a better world* than a world like this one, in which morally free creatures sometimes do great wrongs. The value of moral freedom and the significance it brings to our actions compensates for those moral evils, according to the Free Will Defense. The truth of this proposition favors the nonAnselmian conception of God over that of the traditional theistic philosopher.

II

No doubt many traditional theists would answer that I have oversimplified the role of freedom in the Free Will Defense. The Defense assumes only that a world of creatures who intentionally but nonfreely conform to the moral law is not better than this free world if those creatures are *causally* determined to will as they do. The traditional view, they would insist, is that *free* PW is better than *causal* PW, but that *essential* PW is better than *free* PW. We must now consider in turn contingent causal PW and essential causal PW to assess the traditional view just expressed.

Now, it is clear why the traditionalists consider it to be true from their point of view that essential PW is a greater excellence than contingent causal PW: that *x* has contingent causal PW entails that it is metaphysically possible for *x* to intentionally will to do a wrong act. In other words, contingent causal PW is a metaphysically contingent property; so if someone has contingent causal PW in one world, there are other possible worlds in which she lacks it. It is generally considered to be a defect of an excellence that one could lack it; better to have that excellence essentially. I have attacked this traditional assumption elsewhere and I won't stop to repeat my argument against it now.⁷ What I want to point out is that even if we accept this traditional axiom about excellences, there is still no explanation for the thesis that free PW is better than contingent causal PW. Free PW is just as much a contingent property as contingent causal PW; like contingent causal PW, if someone has free PW in one world there are other possible worlds in which she lacks it. So, if this is a defect, it is one that does not make contingent causal PW less of an excellence than free PW, which shares it.

Indeed, with respect to *insuring* the right result, contingent causal PW is more like essential PW than is free PW. If a person has contingent causal PW, the insurance that she wills in accordance with her moral and factual beliefs stems from the fact that her having these beliefs *causes* her to have her moral volitions; if a person has essential PW, the insurance stems from the fact that his having his beliefs *entails* that he has his moral volitions. Both relations *guarantee* that the agent has volitions that conform to his or

her moral and factual beliefs. Free PW offers no such guarantee; if a person has free PW, she may or may not have volitions that conform to her moral and factual beliefs. It looks as though a rational creature would be *more* like the traditionalist's God if the creature has contingent causal PW than if she has free PW. So, what makes free PW better than contingent causal PW on the traditional view? I can't help thinking that the traditionalist's stance on this matter is opaque to reason.

It seems that there is a property that is even more like essential PW than contingent causal PW. Perhaps in some cases causal powers can be essential properties of the objects that have them. For example, perhaps the causal power of a proton to attract an electron is essential to it, so that if *p* is essentially a proton in this (the real) world and in some possible world an object failed to attract a nearby electron *under the standard conditions* (in this, the real, world⁸) for protons attracting electrons, that object could not be *p*. Similarly, there could be a spiritual individual (or even a species of such individuals) that has causal PW as an essential property. Let's take '*a*' to be the name of such an individual, '*S*' to be the name of a situation (state of affairs), and '*A*' to be the name of an act which *a* has the power to will to do. By virtue of having PW, *a* satisfies statements of the following sort: *a*'s believing both (i) that he or she is in *S* and has the power to do *A*, and (ii) that anyone who is both in *S* and has the power to do *A* ought to do *A*, causes under certain standard conditions *a*'s volition to do *A*.

Using '*B*' for 'the belief in both (i) and (ii),' and using '*V*' for 'the volition to do *A*,' we can say that *a*'s having *B* causes under certain standard conditions *a*'s having *V*. The relevant standard conditions may be nothing more than the state of affairs that an omnipotent being such as God does nothing to prevent *a*'s having *V* when *a* has *B*. Now, if *a* has causal PW *essentially*, every possible world in which *a* has *B* under the relevant standard conditions is one in which *a* has *V*. In other words, that *a* has *B* under the relevant standard conditions *entails* that *a* has *V*. This means that while *a*'s having *B* does not by itself *entail* *a*'s having *V*, *a*'s having *B* under certain standard conditions *does entail* *a*'s having *V*. This entailment does not hold for contingent causal PW. If *a* has contingent causal PW in the real world, there will be other worlds in which *a* has *B* under the standard conditions for causing *a*'s having *V* such that in those other worlds *a* fails to have *V*.

So, essential PW is not essential causal PW. If *a* has essential PW, *a*'s having *B* just by itself would entail *a*'s having *V*. If *a* has essential causal PW, the entailment of *a*'s having *V* requires both that *a* has *B* and that the relevant standard conditions obtain. In case *a* has just contingent causal PW, even the conjunctive state of affairs that *a* has *B* and the relevant standard conditions obtain is not sufficient to realize the entailment of *a*'s having *V*. It is evident, then, that essential causal PW is more like essential PW than contingent causal PW is like essential PW. We have already noted that contingent causal PW is more like essential PW than free PW is like essential PW. So it should not be surprising that essential causal PW is *much* more like essential PW than free PW is like essential PW.

The traditional theist would have us believe that God has essential PW on the grounds that this property is a greater excellence than any of the other forms of PW. The Anselmian and nonAnselmian can probably agree

that a divine (perfect) being would not have PW as a causal property. The traditional Anselmian would insist that in God's case, God's having B *entails* God's having V — without it being true that God's having B *causes* under *any* conditions God's having V. For various reasons, the intrinsic states of a divine person would not be *causally* related to each other. Presumably God is not subject to contingent causal laws even if he creates all contingent causal laws himself.⁹

In section I above I maintained that it is plausible to suppose that if it is possible that God has essential PW, it is also possible for God to create other individuals that have essential PW. But even if this should not be true — even if we assume that God has essential PW but that no creature can possibly have essential PW — it seems that on the traditionalist's assumption that essential PW is a greater excellence than free PW, *essential causal PW would be a greater excellence than free PW precisely because essential causal PW is much more like essential PW than free PW is like essential PW*. In other words, an individual that has causal PW as an essential property is more like the traditionalist's God than is an individual that has free PW. The greater similarity of essential causal PW renders it highly implausible for the traditionalist to maintain that while essential PW is a greater excellence than free PW, free PW is nevertheless a greater excellence than essential causal PW.

The traditionalist would no doubt be quick to point out that there are relevant ways in which essential PW is more like free PW than like essential causal PW, and he could argue as follows. One crucial similarity is a kind of *autonomy*. Both God's volitions and the volitions of creatures with free PW are never determined from anything *outside themselves*. But when God creates creatures who have essential causal PW, God in effect *determines* that they have the right volitions (or at least ones they believe are right). The source of *their* right volitions thus lie outside themselves. So, the autonomy of creatures who *freely* will what is right more adequately mirrors *this* aspect of God's volitions than the volitions of creatures with essential causal PW.¹⁰

Now, autonomy, or independence, is indeed a relevant and important feature, and I think there is some truth to this claim of the similarity of essential and free PW. But with respect to autonomy there are some crucial differences as well. First, one kind of autonomy of volitions is *independence* from the agent's *other inner states*. The volitions of a free being are not causally or metaphysically determined by, and hence are independent of, any of his other inner states, whereas the volitions of a being with either essential PW or essential causal PW *are* determined by some of his other inner states. This difference leads us to a much more crucial difference: if God has essential PW, God's volitions are *not always* and *necessarily* autonomous in the sense claimed by the above traditionalist — independence from *determining* external factors; but the moral volitions of an individual having free PW — at least if he has full-fledged moral freedom (such as we conceive ourselves to have) — *are always* autonomous in this sense.

I'll explain this in terms of an example. Suppose that, as the traditionalist claims, God has essential PW. Suppose further that God is a temporal being and that he makes a promise to his moral creatures who have sinned: he promises, e.g., that all who truly and sincerely repent shall be

forgiven by him. Subsequent to his making this promise, one of these creatures, Luke, freely and sincerely repents. And, of course, God then forgives Luke. Is not God's volition to forgive Luke *determined* by Luke's act?

It seems to me for all the world that it is a consequence of the traditionalist view that God's volition is in this case *determined by the external fact* of Luke's act. Even if God knew before he ever made his promise and before he created Luke that he would put himself into this situation, the fact remains that at the moment of Luke's decision, *it is in Luke's power* to determine God's volition, that is, to do something that makes it impossible *in these circumstances* for God to will anything else.¹¹ It is a consequence of the traditionalist view, then, that it is possible for the volitions of a temporal God *to be subject to the will of another*.¹² This is a crucial and, in my judgment, *telling* difference between one who has free PW and one who has either essential PW or essential causal PW, the latter pair of properties being similar in this respect. On the other hand, if God (or anyone else) has as essential properties what I call *the two grades of moral freedom* — the power to freely choose between right and wrong, and the power to freely alter or freely retain one's previous moral intention up to the time of the act¹³ — it is impossible for him ever to be subject to the will of another. This difference, *by itself*, is reason enough (in my judgment) to prefer a conception of God as fully morally free over the traditional view. If complete autonomy is important, one can find it only in a being that is fully free in the libertarian sense.

These considerations lead, I believe, to the conclusion that, overall, the similarity of essential PW to essential causal PW is much greater than that of essential PW to free PW. There are some relevant similarities between essential and free PW which are not shared by essential causal PW, but these are more than compensated for by other crucial similarities between essential PW and essential causal PW not shared between essential PW and free PW, viz., the ones just pointed out. Again, the greater similarity of essential causal PW to essential PW makes it highly implausible for the traditionalist to hold that while essential PW is a greater excellence than free PW, free PW is nonetheless a greater excellence than essential causal PW.

It is a consequence of the assumption that essential PW is more excellent than free PW that God could choose to make a more excellent creature than one with free PW by creating a creature with essential causal PW — even if it should be impossible for him to create in his own image individuals with essential PW. And I think there can be little doubt that an omnipotent, omniscient being would have in any initial world segment the power to create individuals with essential *causal* PW. Thus, the problem identified in section I that the traditional assumption (that essential PW is a greater excellence than free PW) creates for the Free Will Defense is not dissolved simply by denying that creatures with essential PW are impossible. The same problem arises for creatures with essential *causal* PW as for creatures with essential PW. Since creatures with essential *causal* PW are possible, God could have avoided the intentional wrongdoing which obtains in this world of morally free creatures by actualizing instead a world of *better* creatures who have essential causal PW. More specifically, by supplying these creatures with all the relevant knowledge required to achieve PC, and by insuring that the relevant standard conditions obtain, he would have

avoided all the wrongdoing in this world and created more excellent creatures as well. So, if essential causal PW, like essential PW, is a greater excellence than free PW, the Free Will Defense, as a solution to the problem of *actual* moral evil, fails.

III

Be that as it may, perhaps those traditionalists who would accept the possibility of creatures having either essential PW or essential causal PW might retain the Free Will Defense. God is not morally obligated, they might say, to actualize a world of creatures that are more excellent by virtue of having essential PW instead of a worse world of morally free creatures. Robert M. Adams has famously argued that God need not be morally obligated to have created a better species than any lesser existing species, provided that certain minimal conditions are maintained with respect to the well-being of the existing lesser species.¹⁴ Why may not Adams' thesis be extended to cover whole universes? Just to make a point, suppose that God is an everlasting being, who exists in his own absolute time. Suppose further that each event in our 16 billion year old universe has an absolute temporal location in divine time. What was God doing during that infinite time stretch before our universe began? It is absurdly myopic to believe, that *our* universe is the only one. An omnipotent and omniscient being can be expected to be creating countless universes at each and every instant of divine time, for the infinite past and the infinite future. The actual world would contain all of these actual universes. Some of these may contain creatures that have PC as well as essential PW, and thus be morally better universes than ours. So God could have created another one of those instead of creating this universe. So what? As long as this universe has more good than evil and more moral good than moral evil, God has no obligation to avoid creating it, anymore than you or I have an obligation to avoid breeding stupid but pretty goldfish rather than, say, intelligent dogs or horses. Just for convenience, and certainly without imputing this view to Robert M. Adams, let's call this the Adams strategy.

Well, I like the Adams strategy when it is a matter of justifying the creation of one species of creature over another. But I myself can't accept it when it is used to justify great moral evil. My basic thought is that there are some persons who have done deeds that are so morally wicked that they render themselves unworthy of existence. We are all struck by the depth and the finality of Christ's last words to Judas: "It would have been better *for you* if you had never been born." Whatever else Christ meant by this, it certainly seems to include a judgment about Judas' worth as a moral agent and as a child of God. We can say the same in this century about Hitler and Stalin, that by their own acts as moral agents they rendered themselves unworthy of existence. The degree of immorality that such men have committed leaves the earthly lives of these men in moral ruins, regardless of how much they themselves valued their lives. It is not that such men are beyond all redemption or that forgiveness is impossible. I believe that even if they were to be redeemed and forgiven, it would still be true that *as moral agents* they would be unworthy of existence, and it is

still true that it would have been better if the entire universe in which such men lived had never been created provided that another morally better universe housing only basically good people would have taken its place — no matter how many such good universes there already were.

This line of thought is easily dismissed — all too easily — on the basis of the principle that a creator is justified in creating *any* universe that has both more good than evil and more moral good than moral evil, as long as every evil is necessary to a greater good. I believe that this principle is false. The justifiability of the creation of a universe does not depend solely on the *amount* of good and evil in it, even if each evil is necessary to a greater good; it is not a wholly quantitative matter. And it is not a matter to be judged solely on the basis of properties intrinsic to the contemplated universe; the alternative possible universes available for creation are always relevant.

Let us consider two possible universes, U1 and U2. In U1, every person commits some egregious moral evil (worth about 1,000 “turps”, to use a Plantingan term), such as rape, enslavement, and the kidnaping and sale of children, but each person also manages to do enough moral good over a lifetime to just barely outweigh his or her own moral evil. In U2, every person commits just one immoral act of a mildly reprehensible sort (worth just one “turp”), such as lying about one’s weight to a prospective date, but each person also does many morally excellent acts any one of which far outweighs his or her single moral evil. Further, let’s stipulate that in each universe every evil is necessary to a greater good. Finally, let’s suppose that each universe contains an infinite number of persons. Which universe is morally better? Mathematically speaking, they are of exactly equal value: each contains an infinite amount of moral good and an infinite amount of moral evil. And again mathematically speaking, each universe has the same balance of moral good over moral evil: infinity over infinity. But who among us would consider herself justified in choosing to create U1 instead of U2, if the choice were hers? Where U2 is an alternative available for creation, would not the choice to create U1 instead of U2 be morally wrong? What this example shows is that we do not evaluate universes and worlds simply in terms of the *amount* of moral good and moral evil they contain; we also look at what I must opaquely refer to as their *overall moral character*. As vague as this notion is, it is clear that the overall moral character of U2 is much better than that of U1, because the moral character of each person in U2 is better than the moral character of each person in U1.

This qualitative aspect of the overall moral character of a universe is not tied strictly to cases involving infinitudes. Consider another pair of universes, U3 and U4, which are just like U1 and U2 respectively, except that their populations are both finite. However, the number of persons in the “morally challenged” U3 is 100 trillion, whereas the number of persons in morally excellent U4 is but 100 thousand. In this case, the quantitative measure of the net moral value (units of moral good minus turps) of U3 might easily be greater than the quantitative measure of the net moral value of U4. This is due, not to the individual moral greatness of the persons in U3 (whose individual moral worth is positive but very meager), but rather primarily to their vastly greater number. But who among us would choose to create U3 instead of U4? Which of us would choose to *live*

in U3 rather than U4? Again, it is clear that the overall moral character of U4 is much greater than that of U3 because in this idealized case the moral character of each person in U4 is so much better than the moral character of each person in U3. Of course, many comparisons of the overall moral characters of different possible universes (and worlds) are not as clear as these ideal cases. The point, however, that such comparisons are not simply a function of quantities is important to questions about the justifiability of the creation of universes — in the main case we are considering, universes inhabited by moral monsters.

My moral intuition here is not just that it would be *better* for a Creator to choose to make universes without moral monsters when a morally perfect universe could be made instead. My intuition is stronger than that. I think it would be *morally wrong* for a Creator to choose to create the moral monster provided that — and this is the crucial point — he had the alternative of creating a morally much better world, a world with a much better overall moral character, without such *monsters*. If having essential PW (or even just having essential causal PW) is better than having free PW, then God would always have available the better alternative in question. The alternative of creating a universe of creatures having essential PW (and giving them the knowledge they need to then achieve PC) renders both unnecessary and *unjustifiable* the existence of the universes with moral monsters.

If this is correct, the traditional view that essential PW is a greater excellence than free PW leads to a failure of the Free Will Defense. On the other hand, what if the traditional view is mistaken? Suppose that free PW is a greater excellence than essential PW. Then, the value of freedom can make a universe or an entire possible world containing free creatures better than a universe or world containing nonfree creatures who have both PC and essential PW. In that case, the best world that God has the power to create may be a free world which contains some moral monsters, and the Free Will Defense might succeed in solving the problem of actual moral evil.

IV

In this closing section I want to offer two other reasons for rejecting the traditional view that God is *essentially* morally perfect in favor of the nonAnselmian view that God is morally perfect by his own free choice. The first has to do with our modal intuitions. Put very briefly, it very much seems to me that just as it is metaphysically possible for there to be more natural good than natural evil, it is metaphysically possible for there to be more natural evil than natural good. And, just as it is metaphysically possible for it to be true that all moral creatures jointly do more moral good than moral evil, it is metaphysically possible for it to be true that all moral creatures jointly do more moral evil than moral good. In short, it seems to me that naturally and morally bad worlds are metaphysically possible.

This modal intuition, however widely held, is inconsistent with the traditional view of God as a necessary being who essentially conforms to the moral law. On this view, these apparently possible bad worlds cannot be metaphysically possible after all, since an essentially good God would not permit any of them to be actualized. So the traditional theist

must give up this modal intuition if he has it. But the nonAnselmian can preserve it, because on her view God has the moral freedom to choose between doing right and doing wrong. This entails that it is possible for God (or Yahweh) to do wrong acts, which allows for the possibility of his freely actualizing a bad world.¹⁵

The second reason I wish to offer here against the traditional view presents an even more serious problem for that view, and one that is more germane to the principle objection developed in sections I through III above. Thomas Morris describes one of two alternative views compatible with the traditional viewpoint as follows:

"To be an agent such as God who freely engages in acts of grace or supererogation, but necessarily acts in accordance with moral principles, is to be in the greatest possible state of axiological goodness."¹⁶

It will be instructive to approach the second reason I have in mind by first considering an objection to my own position outlined in sections I-III above, a traditionalist's objection which is based on the basic idea contained in Morris' passage.

The traditionalist might argue as follows. "Just because A is better than B, we cannot conclude that a world God creates with A will be better than a world God creates with B. And part of what traditional theists say is that God values more the love and worship of individuals with free PW than individuals with [essential PW or] essential causal PW. This is consistent with it being true that considered apart from one's relationship to God, an essential causal PW [or an essential PW] is a more excellent thing than a free PW."¹⁷

In other words, suppose it is correct to conclude that since essential PW and even essential causal PW is more excellent than free PW, God could choose to make a more excellent creature than one with free PW by creating a creature with either essential PW or even essential *causal* PW. We cannot conclude from this that any world God creates with creatures having essential PW or essential causal PW will be better overall than a world that God creates with creatures having free PW. One reason we cannot reach this conclusion is that God values freely given love and worship more than determined love and worship. As the passage from Morris quoted above implies, when it comes to supererogatory matters, such as love, freedom enhances the value of the act or *state*. So, a world with the more morally excellent creatures having essential PW or essential causal PW will not be one in which love is as great in value as in a world in which the creatures have free PW, since the love and worship belonging to the former creatures would be metaphysically or causally determined and that of the latter would be freely given.

In considering this objection, we must separate some issues. First, I wholeheartedly accept and endorse the principle that freely given love, worship, trust, and many other states are *much* more valuable than the determined version of these states. But second, the argument in its present form is flawed, because it assumes that love and worship by creatures that have either essential PW or essential causal PW must be metaphysically or causally determined. In those cases in which love and worship are *supererogatory*,

these creatures could *freely* love and worship to as great a degree as creatures with free PW. Those with essential or causal PW may be determined only with respect to *moral* volitions, and need not be determined with respect to supererogatory volitions. So it would seem that the above argument fails.

However, the above traditionalist argument suggests to me another, more powerful argument that must be considered. A Plantingan-style argument, involving counterfactuals of *nonmoral* freedom, could be constructed to show that there is some world W (or some initial world segment W) in which the most valuable worlds that God has the power to actualize are worlds that contain only creatures with free PW, because *it just so happens* (due to the counterfactuals of *nonmoral* freedom that happen to obtain in W) that in W all of those possible persons with free PW if created would *freely* love and worship God to a much higher degree than those with essential PW or essential causal PW if created would *freely* love and worship God. (This relationship between having free PW and freely loving and worshipping God to a higher degree would not be due to the nature of these properties but could be a pure coincidence.) So, why should we accept the conclusion that essential PW or even essential causal PW is not better than free PW? They might be better, and yet God could have a good reason — the one just pointed out — to prefer a world of creatures with free PW.¹⁸

I have two replies to this argument. The first is briefly stated. We are attempting to deal with the problem of *actual* moral evil. We are trying to understand what could justify the creation of persons like Hitler, Stalin, and many, many others, who have performed such horrendous evils that they make themselves unworthy of existence. It seems to me quite implausible that, if creatures with essential PW or essential causal PW are by virtue of these properties superior to those who have moral freedom, the choice of this world with its tremendous moral evils over that of a world W of creatures having essential PW or essential causal PW is justifiable on the grounds that the love that God receives in this world would be greater than the love he would receive from those persons having PW in world W. I just cannot believe that a perfect being would allow *these moral evils* in order to receive the extent of love and worship that is actually directed toward him by some of his creatures. But if moral freedom renders *by its nature* a vastly more significant life for his creatures than essential PW or essential causal PW, then, it seems to me, the choice could be justified.¹⁹

My main reply to this argument is also my second objection in this section to the traditional view that God has essential PW rather than free PW because essential PW is a greater excellence than free PW. Underlying the above argument is the assumption, implicit in the quoted passage by Morris, that it really makes perfectly good sense to attribute to God freedom with respect to supererogatory acts but determination of the will with respect to moral acts, and hence that it can be better for his creatures to be free with respect to nonmoral evaluative volitions but better to be metaphysically or causally determined with respect to moral volitions. I believe that this assumption is profoundly mistaken. It seems to me that the traditional theistic philosopher is deeply conflicted about the value of freedom. In his view, it is good for humans to have moral freedom but not good for God to have it. Yet, God is said to have freedom regarding nonmoral or

supererogatory matters, in granting grace, forgiveness, love, etc. *But if it is better to have one's moral intentions determined by one's knowledge of the truths of morality, then it would be better to have one's supererogatory intentions determined by the truths of nonmoral axiology.* If it is the *determination* of the will by moral truths that makes the moral volitions more excellent than they would be, it should be the case that the *determination* of the will by nonmoral evaluative truths would make the nonmoral volitions more excellent than they would otherwise be. For example, if in a particular case it is better to grant forgiveness than not, then it would seem that by parity with God's morality it would be more excellent for God's will to be *metaphysically determined* to grant forgiveness, in this case by his knowledge that in the particular circumstances it is better to do so. On the other hand, if the *freedom* of one's nonmoral axiological volitions make them more valuable than they would be if determined by nonmoral axiological knowledge, then the *freedom* of one's moral volitions would make them more valuable than they would be if determined — by moral knowledge or anything else. There is no *basis* for treating freedom as an excellence in one case and not in the other. The same is true of creaturely conformance and divine conformance to the moral law.

To sum up, then, on the nonAnselmian conception, moral freedom is an excellence so great that even a world of creatures who *by nature* conform perfectly to the moral law would not be greater than our world, because of our moral freedom. This fact makes the Free Will Defense more plausible than it would be on the traditionalist implausible assumptions that moral freedom is not an excellence when it comes to God but is when it comes to humankind, and that moral freedom would be a defect in God's case but nonmoral freedom is an excellence in God's case.

A total of four reasons in favor of the nonAnselmian view that a perfect divine person would have moral freedom has now been presented: (i) that the superiority of moral freedom over moral determination makes the Free Will Defense against the problem of actual moral evil more plausible, (ii) the greatest possible divine autonomy requires full-fledged divine moral freedom, (iii) the argument from modal intuitions, and (iv) the argument from the parity of the value of moral freedom and nonmoral freedom. I believe that the intuitive and epistemic weights of these reasons are accumulative — together they make the case for the nonAnselmian view even stronger. Nevertheless, even though I myself find this view of perfection overwhelmingly more plausible than the traditional view, I don't think that I have *proved* that the traditional view is false. I don't believe that a *proof* is possible. In fact, I am content to regard my entire effort here as no more than the justification of a *request*, addressed to the traditionalists, that they *give us an explanation* as to (i) *what makes* essential PW a greater excellence than free PW without also making essential causal PW (and even contingent causal PW) a greater excellence than free PW, and (ii) in light of and consistent with the answer to (i), *what makes* freedom regarding nonmoral acts (such as forgiveness) a greater excellence in God's case than the metaphysical determination of God's will by his nonmoral axiological knowledge. I believe that there is no good explanation that can do it.

NOTES

1. I presented my argument for this conception in "Can Moral Perfection be an Essential Attribute?," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, Vol. XLVI, No. 2, December 1985.

2. I shall use the term 'God' as a *name*, like 'Yahweh,' and not as a term which logically implies that its bearer is a perfect being in all worlds.

3. This specification is oversimplified in at least two ways. First, a more adequate version would use a subjunctive conditional relation in place of the material conditional relation implicit in the clause 'whenever *x* believes..., *x* wills....' Secondly, a more adequate version would eschew quantifying into intentional contexts. Simplicity and ease of communication are the motivations behind the version presented.

4. As a possible reason to hold that God could not create other omnipotent individuals, one referee suggested an argument that ran basically as follows. "Suppose that God does create only omnipotent individuals whom he foresees will always conform their wills to his. Still, if they are omnipotent, they *could* have willed not to conform their wills to his and, being omnipotent, their wills would have been effective. So, there is a possible world in which their wills conflict with and thwart God's will. But, as already pointed out in the text, a world of this sort is not possible." I believe that this argument fails under both of two possible interpretations of it. One reading of "they could have willed not to conform their wills to his" would have it that the content of their volitions could have been "I will to do what is in conflict with God's volition." Note that the argument assumes that the will of an omnipotent being is always effective. But then an omnipotent being, including God, cannot will to do what is impossible; so these omnipotent creatures could not form the volition in question in any world. The other reading requires a setup: suppose that in world *W* God wills to make event *E* occur. On the second reading (of "could" etc.), each omnipotent creature in *W* has it in *his power* to will to prevent *E*; but this requires only that in some other appropriately close world *W** the creature effectively wills to prevent *E*. It must be, however, that in *W** God does not will to make *E* occur; he either wills (along with his comrades) to prevent *E* or abstains from willing with respect to *E*. It is the truth of the statement under this second interpretation that lends the argument an air of plausibility; but then the conclusion that there could be no world in which such omnipotent creatures exist fails to follow.

5. For the sake of the thought experiment we assume that if numbers are contingent objects, then necessarily, all the numbers exist if any do. Alternatively, we could assume that such properties as *being less than 7* do not require the existence of the contingent objects mentioned in expressions which represent them, in this case the number 7. This would be a position analogous to one held by those who say that Plato would have had the property of *being nonidentical to Socrates*, even if Socrates had not existed.

6. Following Plantinga, I use this expression to refer to the state of affairs *S* included in a possible world *W* such that *S* includes all states of affairs that are not strongly or weakly actualized by God in *W*. Intuitively put, these are the actual states of affairs in *W* that are ontologically prior to any of God's decisions, such as the necessary states of affairs and the "counterfactuals of freedom." The expression in question is a dispensable heuristic device and could be replaced with 'world.'

7. See my "God and Possible Worlds: The Modal Problem of Evil," in *Nous*, Vol. XVII, No. 2, May 1983, and my "Can Moral Perfection be an Essential Attribute?," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, op. cit.

8. In expressions of the sort 'event E1 causes under standard conditions event E2' one can either take the phrase 'standard conditions' to be a rigid designator (possibly involving indexicality), designating the same set of general conditions in every world, or one can take the phrase to be nonrigid — in which case the predicates in causal expressions of the sort just mentioned will pick out different causal properties in different worlds. This difference makes no difference to the point I will make about how essential causal PW differs from essential PW. Let us just assume the rigid interpretation; thus, 'event E1 causes under standard conditions event E2' can be taken as elliptical for 'event E1 causes under standard conditions C event E2,' where 'C' is a rigid designator of a set of general conditions.

9. It must not be assumed that all causal laws are contingent and hence under God's control. Consider the proposition that for every individual x and every event e , if x is a temporal being and x is omnipotent and x has the power to cause e to occur, then x 's volition that e occur *causes* e to occur. This is a necessary truth, but a causal one nonetheless. If such propositions are not true, I don't see how a temporal (or atemporal) God could be the *cause* of anything.

10. I thank the referee whose comments provided a verbal variant of this argument.

11. This example involves divine promising, but the case can be generalized. A creator may incur certain moral obligations just by creating moral creatures and putting them in certain situations. Suppose that God is a temporal being who has actualized a situation in which he is morally obligated to do A if his creature does B. Then, if God has essential PW, his creature's doing B necessitates God's volition to do A. If God is a temporal being, I don't believe that the traditionalist can plausibly escape from this conclusion by claiming that God makes all of his decisions at the outset, before he creates anyone. In the beginning, God may form a *conditional* volition to do A if the creature does B, and God may *know* that the creature will do B. But it doesn't really make sense to say that in the beginning God also forms the *categorical* volition to do A; for example, it doesn't make sense to say that God *forgave* Luke before Luke even existed, a statement which seems to be analytically false, even though he may have known beforehand that he *would* forgive Luke when the time arrives. God could have formed earlier the conditional intention *to forgive Luke when Luke repents*, but he had to perform at or after the time that Luke repents the categorical volition *to forgive Luke*.

12. I have framed the example in terms of a temporal conception of God, and without dealing with the issue of how human events fit into divine time. But I believe that the basic point remains intact even on an atemporal conception: on the traditional view of God as having essential PW, an asymmetric relation of ontological determination can be shown to hold between certain free human decisions and some of God's moral volitions even if God is conceived to be atemporal. There would be a necessitating asymmetric function from some free creaturely decisions to some divine moral volitions; there is a sense in which the divine volitions would both depend on and be explained by the creatures' decisions, even if God is not in time.

13. In "Can God Change His Mind?," *Faith and Philosophy*, Vol. 13 No. 3, July 1996, I explored and defended the conception of a perfect being as having both grades of moral freedom.

14. Robert M. Adams, "Must God Create the Best?," reprinted in *The Virtue of Faith and Other Essays in Philosophical Theology* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987).

15. I presented a form of this argument in "God and Possible Worlds: The Modal Problem of Evil," *Nous*, op. cit.

16. Thomas V. Morris, "Duty and Divine Goodness," *American Philosophical Quarterly*, Vol. 21, No. 3 (July 1984), p. 267.

17. This is a verbatim comment from one of the referees, except for the bracketed inserts. The original comment was directed toward statements made in another part of the text; I have taken the liberty to transplant the argument to the present context. I thank this referee for this argument, which I develop into another version in the text below.

18. This is a powerful type of argument, some versions of which could be used to defend the Free Will Defense as a solution to the *logical* problem of moral evil. The objection might be that in *any* possible initial world segment God has the power to create creatures with the *more excellent* property of essential PW, or essential causal PW, and thereby avoid all intentional moral evil by his creatures. A version of the above argument can be used to reply that the overall best worlds that God had the power to actualize (from certain initial world segments) may be worlds that contain creatures with moral freedom but also with *nonmoral* freedom, which results in their having a higher degree of love and worship than any creature with essential PW or essential causal PW *would* have had. Some of these worlds will contain no *horrendous* moral evils. The higher degree of love and worship may compensate for a certain amount of *nonhorrendous* moral evil and the lack of the presence of the more excellent properties of essential PW and essential causal PW. So, even if they contain some moral evil, the overall value of these worlds would be greater than any that contain only creatures with essential or causal PW which God had the power to actualize. And this is consistent with the claim that essential PW (and even essential causal PW) is a greater excellence than free PW.

19. It may be pointed out by the traditionalist that a world with morally free creatures could also have supererogatory love among fellow creatures (in addition to the supererogatory love of God by creatures and of creatures by God), and that some possible worlds containing creatures with essential PW or causal PW totally lack all such supererogatory love. This is correct but can be misleading if it is taken to suppose that God could be faced with a choice between a world of loving, morally free creatures and a world of creatures having essential PW or essential causal PW that is totally devoid of creaturely love. Surely some very salient types of loving relationships, once entered into, are not supererogatory. Once the parent acquires and begins to raise the child, the child very much *needs* not just the care but *the love* of the parent; does not the parent then *owe* the child love? And when the child is raised by good and loving parents, laying the foundation for the happiness of the grown child, does not the grown child similarly *owe* the parents the love that they *also* need from the children whom they love? Even the love of a creature for a good and loving Creator may fulfil an obligation rather than be a merely appropriate or fitting responsive state. None of this is to deny that love can be simultaneously given freely and as fulfillment of a moral obligation. Indeed, my view is that if given freely it is much more significant than if given nonfreely. However, a world similar to ours but containing only creatures with essential PW or causal PW would still contain very substantial cases of loving relationships, even if all of them were cases of love that fulfilled an obligation. Such a world couldn't lack significant cases of love.