

THE FREE WILL DEFENCE

by ALVIN PLANTINGA

Associate Professor of Philosophy, Calvin College

Since the days of Epicurus many philosophers have suggested that the existence of evil constitutes a problem for those who accept theistic belief.¹ Those contemporaries who follow Epicurus here claim, for the most part, to detect logical inconsistency in such belief. So McCloskey:

Evil is a problem for the theist in that a *contradiction* is involved in the fact of evil, on the one hand, and the belief in the omnipotence and perfection of God on the other.²

and Mackie:

I think, however, that a more telling criticism can be made by way of the traditional problem of evil. Here it can be shown, not that religious beliefs lack rational support, but that they are positively irrational, that the several parts of the essential theological doctrine are *inconsistent* with one another . . .³

and essentially the same charge is made by Professor Aiken in an article entitled 'God and Evil'.⁴

These philosophers, then, and many others besides, hold that traditional theistic belief is self-contradictory and that the problem of evil, for the theist, is that of deciding which of the relevant propositions he is to abandon. But just which propositions are involved? What is the set of theistic beliefs whose conjunction

¹ David Hume and some of the French encyclopedists, for example, as well as F. H. Bradley, J. McTaggart, and J. S. Mill.

² H. J. McCloskey, 'God and Evil'. *The Philosophical Quarterly*, Vol. 10 (April 1960), p. 97.

³ 'Evil and Omnipotence.' J. L. Mackie, *Mind*, Vol. 64, No. 254 (April 1955), p. 200.

⁴ *Ethics*, Vol. 48 (1957-58), p. 79.

yields a contradiction? The authors referred to above take the following five propositions to be essential to traditional theism: (a) that God exists, (b) that God is omnipotent, (c) that God is omniscient, (d) that God is wholly good, and (e) that evil exists. Here they are certainly right: each of these propositions is indeed an essential feature of orthodox theism. And it is just these five propositions whose conjunction is said, by our atheologians,¹ to be self-contradictory.

Apologists for theism, of course, have been quick to repel the charge. A line of resistance they have often employed is called *The Free Will Defence*; in this paper I shall discuss and develop that idea.

First of all, a distinction must be made between *moral evil* and *physical evil*. The former, roughly, is the evil which results from human choice or volition; the latter is that which does not. Suffering due to an earthquake, for example, would be a case of physical evil; suffering resulting from human cruelty would be a case of moral evil. This distinction, of course, is not very clear and many questions could be raised about it; but perhaps it is not necessary to deal with these questions here. Given this distinction, the Free Will Defence is usually stated in something like the following way. A world containing creatures who freely perform both good and evil actions—and do more good than evil—is more valuable than a world containing quasi-automata who always do what is right because they are unable to do otherwise. Now God can create free creatures, but He cannot causally or otherwise determine them to do only what is right; for if he does so then they do not do what is right *freely*. To create creatures capable of moral good, therefore, he must create creatures capable of moral evil; but he cannot create the possibility of moral evil and at the same time prohibit its actuality. And as it turned out, some of the free creatures God created exercised their freedom to do what is wrong: hence moral evil. The fact that free creatures sometimes err, however, in no way tells against God's omnipotence or against his goodness; for he could forestall the occurrence of moral evil only by removing the possibility of moral good.

¹ *Natural theology* is the attempt to infer central religious beliefs from premises that are either obvious to common sense (e.g., that *some things are in motion*) or logically necessary. *Natural atheology* is the attempt to infer the falsity of such religious beliefs from premises of the same sort.

In this way some traditional theists have tried to explain or justify part of the evil that occurs by ascribing it to the will of man rather than to the will of God. At least three kinds of objections to this idea are to be found both in the tradition and in the current literature. I shall try to develop and clarify the Free Will Defence by restating it in the face of these objections.

I

The first objection challenges the assumption, implicit in the above statement of the Free Will Defence, that free will and causal determinism are logically incompatible. So Flew:

... to say that a person could have helped doing something is not to say that what he did was in principle unpredictable nor that there were no causes anywhere which determined that he would as a matter of fact act in this way. It is to say that if he had chosen to do otherwise he would have been able to do so; that there were alternatives, within the capacities of one of his physical strength, of his I.Q., of his knowledge, open to a person in his situation.

... There is no contradiction involved in saying that a particular action or choice was: *both* free, and could have been helped, and so on; *and* predictable, or even foreknown, and explicable in terms of caused causes.

... if it is really logically possible for an action to be both freely chosen and yet fully determined by caused causes, then the key-stone argument of the Free Will Defence, that there is contradiction in speaking of God so arranging the laws of nature that all men always as a matter of fact freely choose to do the right, cannot hold.¹

Flew's objection, I think, can be dealt with in a fairly summary fashion. He does not, in the paper in question, explain what he means by 'causal determination' (and of course in that paper this omission is quite proper and justifiable). But presumably he means to use the locution in question in such a way that to say of Jones' action *A* that it is *causally determined* is to say that the action in question has causes and that given these causes, Jones could not

¹ 'Divine Omnipotence and Human Freedom', in *New Essays in Philosophical Theology*, ed. A. Flew and A. MacIntyre, London 1955, pp. 150, 151, 153.

have refrained from doing *A*. That is to say, Flew's use of 'causally determined', presumably, is such that one or both of the following sentences, or some sentences very much like them, express necessarily true propositions:

(a) If Jones' action *A* is causally determined, then a set *S* of events has occurred prior to Jones' doing *A* such that, given *S*, it is causally impossible for Jones to refrain from doing *A*.

(b) If Jones' action *A* is causally determined, then there is a set *S* of propositions describing events occurring before *A* and a set *L* of propositions expressing natural laws such that

- (1) the conjunction of *S*'s members does not entail that Jones does *A*, and
- (2) the conjunction of the members of *S* with the members of *L* does entail that Jones does *A*.

And Flew's thesis, then, is that there is no contradiction in saying of a man, both that all of his actions are causally determined (in the sense just explained) and that some of them are free.

Now it seems to me altogether paradoxical to say of anyone all of whose actions are causally determined, that on some occasions he acts freely. When we say that Jones acts freely on a given occasion, what we say entails, I should think, that either his action on that occasion is not causally determined, or else he has previously performed an undetermined action which is a causal ancestor of the one in question. But this is a difficult and debatable issue; fortunately we need not settle it in order to assess the force of Flew's objection to the Free Will Defence. The Free Will Defender claims that the sentence 'Not all free actions are causally determined' expresses a necessary truth; Flew denies this claim. This strongly suggests that Flew and the Free Will Defender are not using the words 'free' and 'freedom' in the same way. The Free Will Defender, apparently, uses the words in question in such a way that sentences 'Some of Jones' actions are free' and 'Jones did action *A* freely' express propositions which are inconsistent with the proposition that all of Jones' actions are causally determined. Flew, on the other hand, claims that with respect to the ordinary use of these words, there is no such inconsistency. It is my opinion that Flew is mistaken here; I think it is he who is using these words in a non-standard, unordinary way. But we need not try to resolve that issue; for the Free Will Defender can simply make

Flew a present of the word 'freedom' and state his case using other locutions. He might now hold, for example, not that God made men free and that a world in which men freely do both good and evil is more valuable than a world in which they unfreely do only what is good; but rather that God made men such that some of their actions are *unfettered* (both free in Flew's sense and also causally undetermined) and that a world in which men perform both good and evil unfettered actions is superior to one in which they perform only good, but fettered, actions. By substituting 'unfettered' for 'free' throughout this account, the Free Will Defender can elude Flew's objection altogether.¹ So whether Flew is right or wrong about the ordinary sense of 'freedom' is of no consequence; his objection is in an important sense merely verbal and thus altogether fails to damage the Free Will Defence.

II

Flew's objection, in essence, is the claim that an omnipotent being could have created men in such a way that although free they would be *causally determined* to perform only right actions. According to a closely allied objection, an omnipotent being could have made men in such a way that although free, and free from any such causal determination, they would nonetheless *freely refrain* from performing any evil actions. Here the contemporary spokesman is Mackie:

... if God has made men such that in their free choices they sometimes prefer what is good and sometimes what is evil, why could he not have made men such that they always freely choose the good? If there is no logical impossibility in a man's freely choosing the good on one, or on several occasions, there cannot be a logical impossibility in his freely choosing the good on every occasion. God was not, then, faced with a choice between making innocent automata and making beings who, in acting freely, would sometimes go wrong; there was open to him the obviously better possibility of making beings who would act freely but always go right. Clearly, his failure to avail himself of this possibility is inconsistent with his being both omnipotent and wholly good.²

¹ And since this is so in what follows I shall continue to use the words 'free' and 'freedom' in the way the Free Will Defender uses them.

² *Op. cit.*, p. 209.

This objection is more serious than Flew's and must be dealt with more fully. Now the Free Will Defence is an argument for the conclusion that (a) is not contradictory or necessarily false:¹

(a) God is omnipotent, omniscient, and all-good and God creates free men who sometimes perform morally evil actions.

What Mackie says, I think, may best be construed as an argument for the conclusion that (a) is necessarily false; in other words, that *God is omnipotent, omniscient and all good entails no free men He creates ever perform morally evil actions*. Mackie's argument seems to have the following structure:

(1) God is omnipotent and omniscient and all-good.

(2) If God is omnipotent, He can create any logically possible state of affairs.

∴ (3) God can create any logically possible state of affairs. (1, 2)

(4) That all free men do what is right on every occasion is a logically possible state of affairs.

∴ (5) God can create free men such that they always do what is right. (4, 3)

(6) If God can create free men such that they always do what is right and God is all-good, then any free men created by God always do what is right.

∴ (7) Any free men created by God always do what is right. (1, 5, 6)

∴ (8) No free men created by God ever perform morally evil actions. (7)

Doubtless the Free Will Defender will concede the truth of (4); there is a difficulty with (2), however; for

(a) that there are men who are not created by God is a logically possible state of affairs
is clearly true. But (2) and (a) entail

(b) If God is omnipotent, God can create men who are not created by God.

And (b), of course, is false; (2) must be revised. The obvious way to repair it seems to be something like the following:

(2') If God is omnipotent, then God can create any state of affairs *S* such that *God creates S* is consistent.

¹ And of course if (a) is consistent, so is the set (a)-(e) mentioned on page 205, for (a) entails each member of that set.

Similarly, (3) must be revised:

(3') God can create any state of affairs *S* such that *God creates S* is consistent.

(1') and (3') do not seem to suffer from the faults besetting (1) and (3); but now it is not at all evident that (3') and (4) entail

(5) God can create free men such that they always do what is right

as the original argument claims. To see this, we must note that (5) is true only if

(5a) God creates free men such that they always do what is right

is consistent. But (5a), one might think, is equivalent to:

(5b) God creates free men and brings it about that they always freely do what is right.

And (5b), of course, is *not* consistent; for if God *brings it about* that the men He creates always do what is right, then they do not do what is right *freely*. So if (5a) is taken to express (5b), then (5) is clearly false and clearly not entailed by (3') and (4).

On the other hand, (5a) could conceivably be used to express:

(5c) God creates free men and these free men always do what is right.

(5c) is surely consistent; it is indeed logically possible that God creates free men and that the free men created by Him always do what is right. And conceivably the objector is using (5) to express this possibility—i.e., it may be that (5) is meant to express:

(5d) the proposition *God creates free men and the free men created by God always do what is right* is consistent.

If (5) is equivalent to (5d), then (5) is true—in fact necessarily true (and hence trivially entailed by (3') and (4)). But now the difficulty crops up with respect to (6) which, given the equivalence of (5) and (5d) is equivalent to

(6') If God is all-good and the proposition *God creates free men and the free men He creates always do what is right* is consistent, then any free men created by God always do what is right.

Now Mackie's aim is to show that the proposition *God is omnipotent, omniscient and all-good* entails the proposition *no free men created by God ever perform morally evil actions*. His attempt, as I outlined it, is to show this by constructing a valid argument whose premise is the former and whose conclusion is the latter.

But then any additional premise appealed to in the deduction must be necessarily true if Mackie's argument is to succeed. (6') is one such additional premise; but there seems to be no reason for supposing that (6') is true at all, let alone necessarily true. Whether the free men created by God would always do what is right would presumably be up to them; for all we know they might sometimes exercise their freedom to do what is wrong. Put in a nutshell the difficulty with the argument is the following. (5a) (God creates free men such that they always freely do what is right) is susceptible of two interpretations ((5b) and (5c)). Under one of these interpretations (5) turns out to be false and the argument therefore fails. Under the other interpretation (6) turns out to be utterly groundless and question begging, and again the argument fails.

So far, then, the Free Will Defence has emerged unscathed from Mackie's objection. One has the feeling, however, that more can be said here; that there is something to Mackie's argument. What more? Well, perhaps something along the following lines. It is agreed that it is logically possible that all men always do only what is right. Now God is said to be omniscient and hence knows, with respect to any person he proposes to create, whether that person would or would not commit morally evil acts. For every person *P* who in fact performs morally evil actions, there is, evidently, a possible person *P'* who is exactly like *P* in every respect except that *P'* never performs any evil actions. If God is omnipotent, He could have created these possible persons instead of the persons He in fact did create. And if He is also all-good, He *would*, presumably, have created them, since they differ from the persons He did create only in being morally better than they are.

Can we make coherent sense out of this revised version of Mackie's objection? What, in particular, could the objector mean by 'possible person'? and what are we to make of the suggestion that God could have created possible persons? I think these questions can be answered. Let us consider first the set of all those properties it is logically possible for human beings to have. Examples of properties *not* in this set are the properties of *being over a mile long*; *being a hippopotamus*; *being a prime number*; *being divisible by four*; and the like. Included in the set are such properties as *having red hair*; *being present at the Battle of Waterloo*; *being the President of the United States*; *being born in 1889*; and *being a pipe-smoker*. Also included are such moral properties as *being kind to one's*

maiden aunt, being a scoundrel, performing at least one morally wrong action, and so on. Let us call the properties in this set *H* properties. The complement $\bar{P}$ of an *H* property *P* is the property a thing has just in case it does not have *P*. And a *consistent set of H* properties is a set of *H* properties such that it is logically possible that there be a human being having every property in the set. Now we can define 'possible person' in the following way:

x is a possible person = *x* is a consistent set of *H* properties such that for every *H* property *P*, either *P* or $\bar{P}$ is a member of *x*.

To *instantiate* a possible person *P* is to create a human being having every property in *P*. And a set *S* of possible persons is a *co-possible set of possible persons* just in case it is logically possible that every member of *S* is instantiated.¹

Given this technical terminology, Mackie's objection can be summarily restated. It is granted by everyone that there is no absurdity in the claim that some man who is free to do what is wrong never, in fact, performs any wrong action. It follows that there are many possible persons containing the property *is free to do wrong but always does right*. And since it is logically possible that all men always freely do what is right, there are presumably several co-possible sets of possible persons such that each member of each set contains the property in question. Now God, if he is omnipotent, can instantiate any possible person and any co-possible set of possible persons he chooses. Hence, if He were all-good, He would have instantiated one of the sets of co-possible persons all of whose members freely do only what is right.

In spite of its imposing paraphernalia the argument, thus restated, suffers from substantially the same defect that afflicts Mackie's original version. There are *some* possible persons God obviously cannot instantiate—those, for example, containing the property *is not created by God*. Accordingly it is *false* that God can instantiate just any possible person He chooses. But of course the interesting question is whether

(1) God can instantiate possible persons containing the property of always freely doing what is right
is true; for perhaps Mackie could substitute (1) for the premise just shown to be false.

¹ The definiens must not be confused with: For every member *M* of *S*, it is logically possible that *M* is instantiated.

Is (1) true? Perhaps we can approach this question in the following way. Let P be any possible person containing the property *always freely does what is right*. Then there must be some action A such that P contains the property of being free with respect to A (i.e., the property of being free to perform A and free to refrain from performing A). The *instantiation* of a possible person S , I shall say, is a person having every property in S ; and let us suppose that if P were instantiated, its instantiation would be doing something morally wrong in performing A . And finally, let us suppose that God wishes to instantiate P . Now P contains many properties in addition to the ones already mentioned. Among them, for example, we might find the following: *is born in 1910, has red hair, is born in Stuttgart, has feeble-minded ancestors, is six feet tall at the age of fourteen*, and the like. And there is no difficulty in God's creating a person with these properties. Further, there is no difficulty in God's bringing it about that this person (let's call him Smith) is free with respect to A . But if God *also* brings it about that Smith refrains from performing A (as he must to be the instantiation of P) then Smith is no longer free with respect to A and is hence not the instantiation of P after all. God cannot cause Smith to refrain from performing A , while allowing him to be free with respect to A ; and therefore whether or not Smith does A will be entirely up to Smith; it will be a matter of free choice for him. Accordingly, whether God can instantiate P depends upon what Smith would freely decide to do.

This point may be put more accurately as follows: First, we shall say that an H property Q is *indeterminate* if *God creates a person and causes him to have Q* is necessarily false; an H property is *determinate* if it is not indeterminate. Of the properties we ascribed to P , all are determinate except *freely refrains from doing A* and *always freely does what is right*. Now consider P_1 , the subset of P containing just the determinate members of P . In order to instantiate P God must instantiate P_1 . It is evident that there is at most one instantiation of P_1 , for among the members of P_1 will be some such individuating properties as for example, *is the third son of Richard and Lena Dykstra*. P_1 also contains the property of being free with respect to A ; and if P_1 is instantiated, its instantiation will either perform A or refrain from performing A . It is, of course, possible that P_1 is such that if it is instantiated its instantiation I will perform A . If so, then if God allows I to remain free with respect

to A , I will do A ; and if God prevents I from doing A , then I is not free with respect to A and hence not the instantiation of P after all. Hence in neither case does God succeed in instantiating P . And accordingly God can instantiate P only if P_1 is *not* such that if it is instantiated, its instantiation will perform A . Hence it is possible that God cannot instantiate P . And evidently it is also possible, further, that *every* possible person containing the property *always freely does what is right* is such that neither God nor anyone else can instantiate it.

Now we merely supposed that P_1 is such that if it is instantiated, its instantiation will perform A . And this supposition, if true at all, is merely contingently true. It might be suggested, therefore, that God could instantiate P by instantiating P_1 and bringing it about that P_1 is *not* such that if it is instantiated, its instantiation will perform A . But to do this God must instantiate P_1 and bring it about that P_1 is such that if it is instantiated, its instantiation I will *refrain* from performing A . And if God does this then God brings it about that I will not perform A . But then I is not free to perform A and hence once more is not the instantiation of P .

It is possible, then, that God cannot instantiate any possible person containing the property *always freely does what is right*. It is also possible, of course, that He *can* instantiate some such possible persons. But *that* He can, if indeed He can, is a contingent truth. And since Mackie's project is to prove an entailment, he cannot employ any contingent propositions as added premises. Hence the reconstructed argument fails.

Now the difficulty with the reconstructed argument is the fact that God cannot instantiate just any possible person he chooses, and the possibility that God cannot instantiate any possible persons containing the property of always freely doing what is right. But perhaps the objector can circumvent this difficulty.

The H properties that make trouble for the objector are the indeterminate properties—those which God cannot cause anyone to have. It is because possible persons contain indeterminate properties that God cannot instantiate just any possible person He wishes. And so perhaps the objector can reformulate his definition of 'possible person' in such a way that a possible person is a consistent set S of *determinate* properties such that for any determinate H property P , either P or $\bar{P}$ is a member of S . Unfortunately the following difficulty arises. Where I is any indetermin-

ate H property and D a determinate H property, D or I (the property a person has if he has either D or I) is determinate. And so, of course, is $\bar{D}$. The same difficulty, accordingly, arises all over again—there will be some possible persons God can't instantiate (those containing the properties *is not created by God or has red hair and does not have red hair*, for example). We must add, therefore, that no possible person entails an indeterminate property.¹

Even so our difficulties are not at an end. For the definition as now stated entails that there are no possible free persons, i.e., possible persons containing the property *on some occasions free to do what is right and free to do what is wrong*.² We may see this as follows: Let P be any possible free person. P then contains the property of being free with respect to some action A . Furthermore, P would contain either the property of performing A (since that is a determinate property) or the property of refraining from performing A . But if P contains the property of performing A and the property of being free with respect to A , then P entails the property of freely performing A —which is an indeterminate property. And the same holds in case P contains the property of refraining from performing A . Hence in either case P entails an indeterminate property and accordingly is not a possible person.

Clearly the objector must revise the definition of 'possible person' in such a way that for any action with respect to which a given possible person P is free, P contains neither the property of performing that action nor the property of refraining from performing it. This may be accomplished in the following way. Let us say that a person S is *free with respect to a property P* just in case there is some action A with respect to which S is free and which is such that S has P if and only if he performs A . So, for example, if a person is free to leave town and free to stay, then he is free with respect to the property *leaves town*. And let us say that a set of properties is free with respect to a given property P just in case it contains the property *is free with respect to P* . Now we can restate the definition of 'possible person' as follows:

x is a possible person = x is a consistent set of determinate H properties such that (1) for every determinate H property

¹ Where a set S of properties entails a property P if and only if it is necessarily true that anything having every property in S also has P .

² This was pointed out to me by Mr. Lewis Creary.

P with respect to which x is not free, either P or $\bar{P}$ is a member of x , and (2) x does not entail any indeterminate property.

Now let us add the following new definition:

Possibly person P has indeterminate property I = if P were instantiated, P 's instantiation would have I .

Under the revised definition of 'possible person' it seems apparent that God, if he is omnipotent, can instantiate any possible person, and any co-possible set of possible persons, he chooses. But, the objector continues, if God is also all-good, He will, presumably, instantiate only those possible persons who have some such indeterminate H property as that of *always freely doing what is right*. And here the Free Will Defender can no longer make the objection which held against the previous versions of Mackie's argument. For if God can instantiate any possible person he chooses, he can instantiate any possible free person he chooses.

The Free Will Defender can, however, raise what is essentially the same difficulty in a new guise: what reason is there for supposing that there are *any* possible persons, in the present sense of 'possible person', having the indeterminate property in question? For it is clear that, given any indeterminate H property I , the proposition *no possible person has I* is a contingent proposition. Further, the proposition *every possible free person freely performs at least one morally wrong action* is possibly true. But if every *possible* free person performs at least one wrong action, then every *actual* free person also freely performs at least one wrong action; hence if every possible free person performs at least one wrong action, God could create a universe without moral evil only by refusing to create any free persons at all. And, the Free Will Defender adds, a world containing free persons and moral evil (provided that it contained more moral good than moral evil) would be superior to one lacking both free persons and moral good and evil. Once again, then, the objection seems to fail.

The definitions offered during the discussion of Mackie's objection afford the opportunity of stating the Free Will Defence more formally. I said above (p. 209) that the Free Will Defence is in essence an argument for the conclusion that (a) is consistent:

(a) God is omnipotent, omniscient, and all-good and God creates persons who sometimes perform morally evil actions.

One way of showing (a) to be consistent is to show that its first conjunct does not entail the negation of its second conjunct, i.e., that

(b) God is omnipotent, omniscient and all-good
does not entail

(c) God does not create persons who perform morally evil actions.

Now one can show that a given proposition p does not entail another proposition q by producing a third proposition r which is such that (1) the conjunction of p and r is consistent and (2) the conjunction of p and r entails the negation of q . What we need here, then, is a proposition whose conjunction with (b) is both logically consistent and a logically sufficient condition of the denial of (c).

Consider the following argument:

- (b) God is omnipotent, omniscient and all-good.
- (r1) God creates some free persons.
- (r2) Every possible free person performs at least one wrong action.
- ∴(d) Every actual free person performs at least one wrong action. (r2)
- ∴(e) God creates persons who perform morally evil actions.
(r1), (d)

This argument is valid (and can easily be expanded so that it is *formally* valid). Furthermore, the conjunction of (b), (r1) and (r2) is evidently consistent. And as the argument shows, (b), (r1) and (r2) jointly entail (e). But (e) is the denial of (c); hence (b) and (r) jointly entail the denial of (c). Accordingly (b) does not entail (c), and (a) (God is omnipotent, omniscient and all-good and God creates persons who perform morally evil acts) is shown to be consistent. So stated, therefore, the Free Will Defence appears to be successful.

At this juncture it might be objected that even if the Free Will Defence, as explained above, shows that there is no contradiction in the supposition that God, who is all-good, omnipotent and omniscient, creates persons who engage in moral evil, it does nothing to show that an all-good, omnipotent and omniscient Being could create a universe containing as *much* moral evil as this

one seems to contain. The objection has a point, although the fact that there seems to be no way of measuring or specifying amounts of moral evil makes it exceedingly hard to state the objection in any way which does not leave it vague and merely suggestive. But let us suppose, for purposes of argument, that there is a way of measuring moral evil (and moral good) and that the moral evil present in the universe amounts to ϕ . The problem then is to show that

(b) God is omnipotent, omniscient and all-good
is consistent with

(f) God creates a set of free persons who produce ϕ moral evil. Here the Free Will Defender can produce an argument to show that (b) is consistent with (f) which exactly parallels the argument for the consistency of (b) with (c):

(b) God is omnipotent, omniscient and all-good.

(r3) God creates a set S of free persons such that there is a balance of moral good over moral evil with respect to the members of S .

(r4) There is exactly one co-possible set S' of free possible persons such that there is a balance of moral good over moral evil with respect to its members; and the members of S' produce ϕ moral evil.

Set S is evidently the instantiation of S' (i.e. every member of S is an instantiation of some member of S' and every member of S' is instantiated by some member of S); hence the members of S produce ϕ moral evil. Accordingly, (b), (r3) and (r4) jointly entail (f); but the conjunction of (b), (r3) and (r4) is consistent; hence (b) is consistent with (f).

III

The preceding discussion enables us to conclude, I believe, that the Free Will Defence succeeds in showing that there is no inconsistency in the assertion that God creates a universe containing as much moral evil as the universe in fact contains. There remains but one objection to be considered. McCloskey, Flew and others charge that the Free Will Defence, even if it is successful, accounts for only *part* of the evil we find; it accounts only for moral evil, leaving physical evil as intractable as before. The atheologian can

therefore restate his position, maintaining that the existence of *physical evil*, evil which cannot be ascribed to the free actions of human beings, is inconsistent with the existence of an omniscient, omnipotent and all-good Deity.

To make this claim, however, is to overlook an important part of traditional theistic belief; it is part of much traditional belief to attribute a good deal of the evil we find to Satan, or to Satan and his cohorts. Satan, so the traditional doctrine goes, is a mighty non-human spirit, who, along with many other angels, was created long before God created men. Unlike most of his colleagues, Satan rebelled against God and has since been creating whatever havoc he could; the result, of course, is physical evil. But now we see that the moves available to the Free Will Defender in the case of moral evil are equally available to him in the case of physical evil. First he provides definitions of 'possible non-human spirit', 'free non-human spirit', etc., which exactly parallel their counterparts where it was moral evil that was at stake. Then he points out that it is logically possible that

(r5) God creates a set *S* of free non-human spirits such that the members of *S* do more good than evil,
and

(r6) there is exactly one co-possible set *S'* of possible free non-human spirits such that the members of *S'* do more good than evil,
and

(r7) all of the physical evil in the world is due to the actions of the members of *S*.

He points out further that (r5), (r6), and (r7) are jointly consistent and that their conjunction is consistent with the proposition that God is omnipotent, omniscient and all-good. But (r5) through (r7) jointly entail that God creates a universe containing as much physical evil as the universe in fact contains; it follows then, that the existence of physical evil is not inconsistent with the existence of an omniscient, omnipotent, all-good Deity.

Now it must be conceded that views involving devils and other non-human spirits do not at present enjoy either the extensive popularity or the high esteem of (say) the Theory of Relativity. Flew, for example, has this to say about the view in question:

To make this more than just another desperate *ad hoc* expedient of apologetic it is necessary to produce independent evidence for

launching such an hypothesis (if 'hypothesis' is not too flattering a term for it).¹

But in the present context this claim is surely incorrect; to rebut the charge of contradiction the theist need not hold that the hypothesis in question is probable or even true. He need hold only that it is not inconsistent with the proposition that God exists. Flew suspects that 'hypothesis' may be too flattering a term for the sort of view in question. Perhaps this suspicion reflects his doubts as to the meaningfulness of the proposed view. But it is hard to see how one could plausibly argue that the views in question are nonsensical (in the requisite sense) without invoking some version of the Verifiability Criterion, a doctrine whose harrowing vicissitudes are well known. Furthermore, it is likely that any premises worth considering which yield the conclusion that hypotheses about devils are nonsensical will yield the same conclusion about the hypothesis that God exists. And if *God exists* is nonsensical, then presumably theism is not self-contradictory after all.

We may therefore conclude that the Free Will Defence successfully rebuts the charge of contradiction brought against the theist. The Problem of Evil (if indeed evil constitutes a problem for the theist) does not lie in any inconsistency in the belief that God, who is omniscient, omnipotent and all-good, has created a world containing moral and physical evil.

¹ *Op. cit.*, p. 17.