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COMPATIBILISM AND THE FREE WILL DEFENCE

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I. Introduction

1. Free Will Defenders have a strong tendency to be libertarians — that is, to hold that there are free actions, that freedom of action is impossible under determinism, and, therefore, that the actual world is not deterministic. Here's why: the Free Will Defence requires that God logically cannot ensure that free agents always do right. (For, otherwise, God could have created free agents without risking so-called 'moral' evil — that is, evil which is caused at least in part by the wrong choices of morally free agents.) But, if compatibilism is correct, God *can* ensure this. All God has to do is choose the right laws and initial state for a deterministic world in which agents always freely do right — a tall order, indeed, but not beyond omnipotence to achieve. Many Free Will Defenders have thus concluded that they had better affirm libertarianism (a position most of them find congenial anyway).

2. In this paper, I shall consider whether libertarianism really does entail that God could not have ensured that free agents always freely did right. I shall claim that, even granted libertarianism, God has a strategy for preventing wrong action while preserving something so close to creaturely freedom that it would be a good enough substitute for it. My first thesis will thus be that, *whether or not compatibilism is correct*, the Free Will Defence is in difficulty in explaining why God could not have prevented moral evil while preserving moral freedom.

3. I shall also consider whether compatibilists may coherently be Free Will Defenders. If my first thesis is correct, this question is more urgent than it might initially seem, since my first thesis implies that incompatibilist Free Will Defenders are in much the same predicament as their compatibilist colleagues. I shall argue — and this is my second thesis — that the Free Will Defence can be upgraded so as to justify God's rejecting available strategies for ensuring that free agents always do right. I shall, however, conclude by suggesting that this upgraded version of the Free Will Defence may prove to be a theist's Trojan horse.

II. The Case for My First Thesis: A Libertarian Strategy for Ensuring that Free Agents Always Do Right

4. Granted libertarianism, how might God ensure that free agents always did right? The trick seems unworkable. Under libertarianism, a free agent's behaviour can at most be *probabilistically* caused by antecedent conditions. Therefore, not even God could *ensure* that person X freely does action A by controlling antecedent

conditions. At best God could *render it highly probable* that X freely does A.

5. This assumes that God could determine free actions *only* by fixing their antecedent causal conditions. But couldn't God *directly* intervene? Couldn't X's behaviour be *both* probabilistically caused by antecedent conditions and *also* directly caused by God? The libertarian Free Will Defender has an obvious reply. Of course God *could* directly cause X's behaviour: but it would then fail to count as X's free action. Why? Because, if God directly brings it about that X performs *b*, *b* occurs only because God causes its occurrence. Without intervention, X would not have exhibited *b*. Therefore, doing *b* is not a free action of X's.

6. This simple argument ignores an important possibility. Note that, under compatibilism, God can fix an agent's free action because God has means for doing so which *eo ipso* guarantee the satisfaction of conditions sufficient for the behaviour to constitute the agent's own free action. I suggest that the same may be true even if compatibilism is false. In which case, the fact that X would not have performed *b* without divine intervention would *not* entail that *b* doesn't constitute X's free action.

7. It seems preposterous to suggest that such intervention could be consistent with *libertarian* requirements for freedom. Yet this suggestion can be supported. To see how, begin with this question: according to libertarians, at what point(s) in the lead up to free action is it crucial that there *not* be a deterministic causal link? We may distinguish two broad stages in the antecedents of a typical free action:

Antecedent states/events	→	X's initial mental states	→	X's behaviour
C		M		B

Standardly, X's behaviour (at B) results from practical reasoning based on X's mental states. While this process typically involves X's passing through mental states generated by X's own reasoning, it must begin from some initial mental states, here represented by M. But M will also have antecedents, represented by C. (The passage from M to B is open to sub-division: arguably, in the paradigm case, X's practical reasoning leads from X's initial mental states to some final mental state — say, a final intention or decision — on which X then acts.) Now, will the libertarian consider it crucial for X's behaviour at B to count as free action that the C→M link not be deterministic, or the M→B, or both?

8. Sensible libertarians should say that it is the M→B link which must not be deterministic, and that the status of the C→M link is irrelevant. For, it must be possible for finite agents to act freely though they play no part in determining their initial mental states. (Although the initial mental states from which our practical reasoning starts often *do* result from previous free actions of ours, *ultimately* they must depend on free actions which begin from a set of mental states and capacities which we do not determine. To deny this would effectively be to maintain, absurdly, that

free agency is possible only for a fully self-created agent.) So, an agent's freedom of action will not be affected just by facts about the origin of his or her initial mental states. Provided the $M \rightarrow B$ link has the right characteristics, it will make no difference whether M was causally determined, probabilistically caused, or, indeed, not caused at all.¹

9. Granted this, how might God guarantee that free agents always freely did right? Consider the following Intervention Back-up Strategy: for the first occasion of moral choice, God directly fixes the agent's, X 's, rational capacities and initial mental states, M , so as to make it as highly probable as possible that X will do the right thing at B . And God fixes these conditions so as to satisfy all the criteria for X to act as a morally free agent. So, for example, X 's capacities include the capacity to succumb to temptation; and X 's initial mental states do not include anything that would introduce coercion — such as a precise awareness of God's commands, and the certainty that hellish tortures will follow their contravention.² In addition, God holds himself ready to cause the right B by *direct intervention* should it become clear that, despite being rendered highly probable, the right B is *not* going to come

¹ Some libertarians *have* thought it crucial that the $C \rightarrow M$ link not be deterministic, on the basis of the following kind of argument: if a powerful neurophysiologist fixed the characteristics of M , then, even if the $M \rightarrow B$ link had the right properties, surely X 's behaviour at B would not be free? But, then surely the $C \rightarrow M$ link's being deterministic would similarly remove X 's freedom? I reply that, once we realise that finite agents cannot control all that conditions the exercise of their free agency, we can be sure that this argument is flawed. A powerful external agent's fixing M does not automatically preclude X 's freedom of action at B — and, even if it did, the analogy between M 's being fixed by a powerful agent and its being causally determined is not strong enough to support the requirement that the $C \rightarrow M$ link not be deterministic. I do concede, however, that a powerful external agent's fixing M , though it wouldn't undermine X 's freedom, *would* undermine the possibility that X 's freedom could contribute to developing or maintaining certain other important goods. I develop this idea in §§ 28 following, below.

However, if I am mistaken, and there *do* turn out to be good libertarian reasons for insisting that the $C \rightarrow M$ link be indeterministic, I suggest that the arguments I offer below concerning God's actions in affecting the outcome of indeterministic $M \rightarrow B$ links could be restated *mutatis mutandis* to apply to indeterministic $C \rightarrow M$ links.

² For X to be morally free, X will, of course, have to have *some* reason to do the wrong thing. However, God will ensure that X 's initial mental states, taken together, do in fact make it most reasonable for X to do the right thing, all things considered. But God's thus fixing X 's initial mental states leaves it up to X autonomously to endorse the all things considered judgment that it's best to do the right thing, and to put that judgment into practice. So what God contrives here will *not* be relevantly like the case of Martin Davies' kleptomaniac [5, p.124] who has an autonomously endorsed reason to refrain from stealing ('he knows that there is a store detective in the vicinity and understands the consequences of being caught'), yet finds that there 'wells up' within him an overriding desire to steal. All God is fixing here is the psychological *starting point* for X 's practical reasoning. Although — as I explain below — the Intervention Back-up Strategy may require God to intervene, those interventions will not involve interference in the agent's autonomous practical reasoning through the intrusion of extraneous and otherwise unmotivated desires or beliefs.

Davies appeals to his kleptomaniac case while considering the possibility that God might provide agents who have a reason for acting badly with a new and better reason for acting well. But, as David Basinger points out [2, p.164], God may have ways of achieving this which do not reduce such agents to a state analogous to that of the kleptomaniac. Basinger's point is straightforwardly correct given compatibilism. My present aim is effectively to defend the same point granted incompatibilism.

about without intervention. The Intervention Back-up Strategy guarantees that the outcome of the first finite moral choice is what God wants. It can then be repeated for each subsequent case of moral choice, with the result that every agent always does the right thing.

If the Intervention Back-up Strategy provides a means whereby God could ensure that morally free agents always do right, then its viability repudiates the suggestion, famously made by Alvin Plantinga,³ that, given incompatibilism, it might be that all possible finite creatures were such that, in any world in which they were actualised by God, they would sometimes freely do wrong. But *is* the Strategy viable?

10. As stated, the Strategy assumes that God can know the truth-values of counterfactuals of the form: 'if X were placed in choice situation C (specified in terms, *inter alia*, of X's initial mental states and rational capacities), and X's being in C renders it highly probable that X will do A, then X would in fact do (not do) A'. Robert M. Adams has raised doubts about God's having 'middle' knowledge of this kind. What Adams' arguments establish, however, is only that the truth-makers for such counterfactuals do not supervene on any actual or possible naturalistic facts — which leaves it open that they should supervene on non-naturalistic facts accessible to the mind of God.⁴ And, as David Lewis has suggested, theists may have reason for believing in such facts: 'if God is to be properly omniscient, and if He is to exercise divine providence without running risks, He had better know just what would happen if He made creatures whose choices were not predetermined'.⁵

There are, then, some grounds for accepting that God *can* have the kind of knowledge needed for operating the Intervention Back-up Strategy. The Strategy could, however, be amended to accommodate the rejection of middle knowledge, by having God intervene in *every* case to actualise directly the action probabilified and made reasonable by the agent's initial mental states. (Intervention would here no longer be a back-up, so this amended version would be a 'Routine Intervention Strategy'.) Rather than try to settle the problem of middle knowledge, I will proceed on this basis: should it turn out that the Intervention Back-up Strategy is unavailable because God can't have middle knowledge, replace it with the Routine Intervention Strategy. (I will use the term 'Intervention Strategy' to refer to features common to both versions.)

11. With each particular case, the Intervention Back-up Strategy works out in either of two ways. If God is merely a *counterfactual* intervener — because the probabilified behaviour comes about anyway — even libertarian conditions for X to act

³ See his [10, pp.184ff].

⁴ Adams notes that 'the least clearly unsatisfactory type of explanation for the alleged possibility of middle knowledge . . . appeals . . . to a primitive understanding, which needs no analysis, of what it is for the relevant subjunctive conditionals to be true' [1, p.111], and concedes that he can offer no conclusive refutation of this explanation [1, p.112]. David Lewis offers further argument in favour of the conclusion that middle knowledge couldn't supervene on actual or possible natural facts. See [8, pp.180-184].

⁵ [8, p.182, fn.7]

freely will be satisfied. For, as has been shown by Harry Frankfurt,⁶ agents can be fully morally responsible in the presence of counterfactual interveners. But if God has to use the back-up option (or has to employ the Routine Intervention Strategy), then libertarian freedom is surely obviously compromised? If God directly intervenes to cause X to do the right thing, then, surely, X will not act freely by libertarian criteria?

12. So it would seem. But is the matter really so obvious? What exactly *are* the libertarian criteria which the Intervention Strategy is supposed so obviously to transgress? What positive account will the libertarian give of what it is for an $M \rightarrow B$ link to constitute free action?

One such account uses the idea that to act freely is to act in accordance with one's own reasons, but with the proviso that free actions can at most be *probabilistically* caused by the mental states which constitute the agent's reasons for the action. That is, libertarians might offer a probabilistic version of a causal theory of action (PCTA). A PCTA will specify the intermediate psychological stages passed through from initial mental states to behaviour in a paradigm case of free action; it will add further conditions about the *kinds* of causal links required (in order to exclude causally deviant cases); and it will require that some (or perhaps all) of these causal links be probabilistic.

13. Now, consider the viability of the Intervention Strategy from the perspective of a libertarian who does adopt PCTA. Recall that the libertarian is taken to have agreed that, with respect to the first moral choice made by the first finite agent, X, God can fix X's initial mental states and reasoning capacities without compromising X's freedom. Then, under the Intervention Back-up Strategy, at each succeeding point in the causal chain leading to action where (according to PCTA) the link has to be probabilistic, God will be ready to intervene if he knows that otherwise the desired and probable outcome is not going to eventuate. (And, under the Routine Intervention Strategy, God will *always* so intervene, 'just in case'.) As the point I wish to make could apply at any of these stages, I shall consider any one of them, which I'll refer to as the link between state *m* and state *n*,⁷ and I will assume that everything has gone well up until *m* so far as God's aim of ensuring that X does the right thing is concerned. So, either God has directly fixed *m*, or *m* has been probabilistically caused by initial mental states of X which God has fixed without undermining X's freedom. In addition, X's rational capacities have been well fashioned by God and are in sufficiently good working order for X to recognise the reasonableness of making the transition to *n* from *m*. (So, everything, so far, meets the

⁶ In his [6].

⁷ I shall use '*m*' and '*n*' ambiguously to refer to particular states, their associated events, or the occurrence of those events. By way of illustration, state *m* might be X's proximate intention to perform the basic action of A-ing, and *n*, behaviour of a kind intrinsic to A-ing. Or, *m* might be X's all things considered judgment that it's best to do A, and *n*, X's intention to do A. The details, here, will depend on the contentious question of what is the right way of characterising the paradigm mental antecedents of action required for a causal theory of action. I offer a view on this question in my [3, ch.3].

conditions imposed by PCTA.) Given the degree of control God has here, it is reasonable to assume that *m* highly probabilifies *n*: *m* makes the occurrence of an event of *n*'s type highly probable.

14. As already claimed, if (under the Intervention Back-up Strategy) there is no need for God to intervene, and *n* comes about anyway (in accordance with its being highly probabilified by *m*), *X*'s action is free. However, assume that *n* comes about only because God intervenes: is it then the case that *m* causes *n*, albeit probabilistically? Well, *m* occurs, *m* makes it highly probable that *n*, and *n* does indeed occur after *m*, and, if these conditions are sufficient for *m* to probabilistically cause *n*, then — since *m* and *n* were (by assumption) just any particular probabilistic links in a causal chain which in all other respects satisfied an adequate PCTA — the libertarian's PCTA-conditions for genuine freedom are met, despite the divine intervention.

15. But, it will be replied, it is not in general the case that when α occurs and probabilifies β , and β occurs subsequently, α is the probabilistic cause of β . β might not be caused by α : β might have some other cause. And this, surely, is the situation here: God's intervention guarantees *n*, and so it is not *m* but God's intervention which causes *n*. So, the requirements which PCTA imposes on the *M*→*B* link are not met, since at the transition from *m* to *n*, *n* is not caused by *m* (not even probabilistically), because *n* is directly caused by God.

16. There can be no quarrel with the truth of this conclusion. But perhaps its significance may be disputed? Here is an argument for the view that its truth is a mere technicality which does not impair the viability of the Intervention Strategy.

First, the argument stipulates the notion of an action's being free*: an action is free* provided it satisfies PCTA*, where PCTA* imposes the same conditions as PCTA, except that, under PCTA*, any causal transition required to be probabilistic under PCTA may be replaced by a transition in which God directly intervenes to bring about the probabilified outcome. Thus, acting freely* is exactly like acting freely, except in the following respect: it is consistent with acting freely*, but not with acting freely, that, at some significant transition(s), $\mu \rightarrow v$, in the causal chain which leads from initial mental states to behaviour, instead of μ actually (probabilistically) causing *v*, *v* follows upon μ in a context with the following features: (i) μ highly probabilifies *v*; (ii) being in μ makes it reasonable for a rational agent to make the transition to a state of type *v*; (iii) all the other conditions which are required for non-deviant causation at the $\mu \rightarrow v$ link are satisfied;⁸ and, (iv) no other natural state or event has a better claim than μ to be the cause of *v*, i.e., *v* is not preemptively caused by any natural state, nor causally overdetermined by natural

⁸ An objector might argue that, when God intervenes directly to cause *v*, the $\mu \rightarrow v$ link is deviant, because μ causes *v* via causing God to intervene to directly cause *v*. If that is the right way to put the matter, then condition (iii) will have to be amended to state that there is no further deviant feature affecting the $\mu \rightarrow v$ link. I suggest, however, that it is mistaken to understand God's intervention as introducing deviance. For, μ 's occurrence is simply the occasion for, and not the cause of, God's directly causing *v*.

states.

Second, the argument asserts that, using the Intervention Strategy, God will be able to guarantee that all finite agents do the right thing while preserving their freedom*.

Third, the argument asserts that freedom* is as good as freedom: an Intervention Strategy world in which some (or all) actions were free* would retain all that is significantly valuable about freedom itself, while lacking the disvalue of moral evil.

And so, the argument concludes, God *can* use the Intervention Strategy without sacrificing anything libertarians take to be important for freedom of action, *given that* libertarians accept PCTA as their positive account of free action.

17. The crucial step in this argument is the claim that freedom* is as good as freedom. Libertarian Free Will Defenders will be confident that they can resist this claim — and I agree that they can indeed do so, but (I shall argue) *only if they abandon PCTA as their positive libertarian account of what it is for a finite agent to act freely*.

Let me explain. The difference between an Intervention Strategy world where everyone always does right, although sometimes only freely*, and a world in which, without any intervention, everyone always freely does right, is a very subtle one. It is a difference which would not be discernible from within a world. For, when God intervenes, it will only be to cause what is *anyway* the most likely and most reasonable outcome in the circumstances.⁹ God's directly causing *n* (when it is highly probabilified by *m*, and it has no potential pre-empting or over-determining *natural* causes) will effectively be a perfect dummy for *m*'s probabilistically causing *n*. Indeed, if an agent's capacity for free intentional action is taken to be the capacity to behave in accordance with his or her own best reasons for acting, then how could this subtle sort of divine intervention impair that capacity? Isn't its effect just to

⁹ It might be objected that the inhabitants of an Intervention Strategy world would soon twig to God's interventions, because whenever they wanted to do something naughty they would find that the attempt fails. But *would* anyone ever want to do something naughty in such a world? In an Intervention Strategy world, God sets things up so that the initial mental states of the first finite agents to exercise moral choice make it highly probable that they will do right, though they retain the capacity to do, and to be tempted to do, wrong — and so finite agents will not *start off* with naughty intentions. (These finite agents, of course, may be strikingly different from human agents . . . but that is no objection: the Free Will Defence requires only that there be morally free finite agents, not that there be morally free *human* agents.) Furthermore, the Intervention Strategy will enable God to ensure that no naughty intentions ever arise subsequently. For, given a 'clean' starting point (which God can straightforwardly achieve), finite agents could develop naughty intentions only through their own exercise of control, or through the exercise of free control by other finite agents. But the Intervention Strategy allows God to make sure that finite agents don't exercise control in these ways. Or, at least, this is so *provided* it is correct to assume that earlier morally right free actions by finite agents will never condition subsequent choice situations in such a way as to produce true moral dilemmas (i.e., situations in which no available action is morally right), or even situations in which it is antecedently improbable that the agent will freely do the right thing. But this proviso is surely plausibly true, given God's omnipotence. (To reject it, I think, would be to deny that it is logically possible that, in a historical process involving a plurality of finite free agents, all of them would always do right . . . but such a version of the Free Will Defence is beyond the scope of this paper.)

ensure that the capacity works the way it is supposed to work, namely to yield behaviour for which the agent has good reason? (Sometimes, a second agent's intervention in the causal process of a first agent's exercise of control repairs rather than subverts that control¹⁰: arguably, this is the case with God's interventions under the Intervention Strategy.) The difference between free* action and free action seems, then, to be naturalistically negligible.

18. Under the Intervention Strategy, it is the conditions of PCTA*, not PCTA, which get met. That is not disputed. But the libertarian Free Will Defender needs to *explain* why the naturalistically negligible difference between satisfying PCTA and satisfying PCTA* could matter *so* much that, for the sake of it, God could be justified in permitting the existence of moral evil.

The only libertarian hope for such an explanation is to emphasise the importance of *agent-causation* for freedom of action — that is, to emphasise that every free action has to involve *the agent's own bringing about* of events. That is why the $M \rightarrow B$ causal chain (or certain of its constituent links, anyway) cannot be deterministic — for only then can there be room for agent-causation.¹¹ If this is what matters for libertarian free action, then it is understandable that God's intervention should seem to block the agent's freedom, since it seems obvious that *God's* bringing about an outcome precludes *the agent's* doing so. Merely free* action thus appears radically impaired.

19. This agent-causation account of action entails that PCTA cannot by itself be adequate for the libertarian. For, on the agent-causation account, while freedom of action may be *consistent* with the relevant behaviour's being probabilified (or even probabilistically caused?¹²) by antecedent events, *what it is* for an agent to perform a free action requires that *the agent* bring about the behaviour, and this cannot be reduced to a matter of (even probabilistic) causation of that behaviour by antecedent events.

So, had PCTA been an adequate libertarian account of free action, it would then have been inexplicable why it should make such a difference that a transition required by PCTA to be one of probabilistic causation should (sometimes) be replaced by probabilification plus direct divine intervention, as would be the case under the Intervention Strategy. Libertarian rejection of the viability of the Intervention Strategy becomes more comprehensible, however, once the libertarian

¹⁰ I discuss this possibility in my [3, pp.159-162].

¹¹ This point might be filled out, for example, as follows: to perform a free action, the agent has to deliberate from his or her initial beliefs and desires to form a judgment [= first agent-causal episode] about what to do, all things considered; then the agent, given that judgment, has to form the intention [= second agent-causal episode] to perform (at the appropriate time) the basic action or actions required for the relevant action; and finally the agent, in the light of this intention, has, at the appropriate time, actually to bring about [= third agent-causal episode] bodily movements of the type required for the relevant basic actions.

¹² True agent-causationists will, I think, take the line that, where events are agent-caused, they cannot also be caused by antecedent events, even probabilistically. But I will not here rule out the possibility of an agent-causationist's taking an 'overdetermination' view.

adopts this ‘Agent-Causation Response’ and argues that divine intervention precludes the agent-causation essential for free agency. For, given this Response, it can be maintained that, however apparently similar an Intervention Strategy world would be to a world in which finite agents always freely did right, it would in fact be seriously (or, if the Routine Intervention Strategy had to be followed, totally) deficient in freedom of action — indeed, in agency itself.

20. I believe, however, that the Agent-Causation Response faces a serious problem, arising from the fact that, as a theist, the libertarian Free Will Defender is committed to the view that finite agents are *creatures*, distinct from *and dependent upon* God for their existence and for their power to act.

Some theists construe the creatureliness of finite agents in physicalist terms: dust they are, and unto dust they shall return! According to this strand of theism, finite agents belong wholly within the created physical world — and so, too, do their actions. Thus, what it is for a finite agent to bring about an event or state of affairs must be realised in an integrated sequence of physical states and events — and, therefore, *some* event-causal reduction of such ‘bringing about’ must be available. But what could yield such a reduction other than some version of the causal theory of action, plus physicalism with respect to mental states and events? Arguably, then, belief in the physical creatureliness of finite agents precludes libertarian theists from appealing to irreducible agent-causation, and obliges them to subscribe to a (probabilistic) causal theory of action. But, in that case, the Agent-Causation Response gets libertarians nowhere, and leaves them with no way of explaining why the difference between satisfying PCTA* and satisfying PCTA could matter as much as it would need to matter in order to rule out the Intervention Strategy.

21. But there is also a Platonising strand in theism, and it might be supposed that, under its characteristic assumptions, the Agent-Causation Response does better. According to this strand, finite agency is *not* physically reducible: the finite agent acts upon, but not wholly within, the physical world. And so the appeal to irreducible agent-causation *does* offer a way of explaining how something crucial could be missing from an Intervention Strategy world.

There are familiar — and serious — objections to this understanding of finite agency. (For example, are physical events which are agent-caused entirely lacking in physical event-causes, or are they caused *both* by the agent *and* by their physical antecedents? Either response proves problematic.) But, even independently of these objections, libertarian Free Will Defenders who rely on this Platonising account of agency face difficulty. For, consider what basis they might offer for the claim — which is crucial to the Agent-Causation Response — that if God directly causes X’s mental states or bodily movements, then that undermines X’s freedom because it is inconsistent with X’s agent-causing those same mental states or bodily movements. Once the finite agent is located outside the physical world, it becomes (it may be claimed) so mysterious what finite agent-causation could amount to, that there is no meaningful way to judge whether finite agent-causation of an event or

state is or is not consistent with infinite agent-causation of that event or state.

22. We do, of course, have the intuition that two distinct agents cannot both agent-cause the same event or state — although care is needed in stating this intuition. I can freely obey your commands, and in that case, it seems that *both* you and I agent-cause my compliant bodily movements. But here your agent-causation of my bodily movements is indirect, and mine is direct, so perhaps the correct formulation is that two distinct agents cannot both *directly* agent-cause the very same events. This intuition, then, might provide a satisfactory basis for maintaining that if God directly causes X's behaviour then X cannot also directly agent-cause it.

23. But this intuition, it may be replied, is uncontentionably applicable only within the context in which it arises, where we are concerned with finite agents only, and with finite agents who are relevantly similar to ourselves. It may be a matter of fact that another *human* agent could *directly* cause a bodily movement of mine only by pre-empting my own control. But why should this be more than a matter of fact about human agents? *Need* it be true of more powerful agents? *Will* it be true, indeed, of the all-powerful supernatural creator? Is it not possible that such an infinite agent could directly cause a finite agent to make certain bodily movements, and also make sure that *the finite agent itself* directly causes them too? I see no basis for ruling this out.

24. Indeed, perhaps there is good reason for ruling it in! Even though finite agency is understood by Platonising theists in terms of the operation of something non-physical upon the physical, the distinction between finite and infinite agency still has to be maintained. Finite agents may not be purely physical creatures, but they are creatures nonetheless. So, if they are to do anything, God will have to give them the wherewithal, albeit a non-physical wherewithal. For the actions of a finite agent to be separated out from the actions of the Creator, there will have to be *some* kind of, non-physical, 'medium'¹³ in which finite agency is realised. But if such realisation is necessary, then there will be realisation conditions for finite agency expressible in terms of descriptions of possible states of this medium. And God, being totally in control of the existence and condition of the medium, will be able to ensure that those realisation conditions obtain, for any possible finite action. This may not, perhaps, entail that God can ensure that finite agents act as God wishes while preserving their freedom (because — as libertarians will doubtless insist — it may be a necessary condition for finite agents to act freely that God does *not* so ensure their behaviour). But it will certainly entail that God can ensure that finite agents act rightly while preserving their freedom**, where acting freely** is *exactly like* acting freely with respect to what is sufficient and necessary at the level of states of the realising medium. And then Platonising libertarians who offer the

¹³ It is not clear that the notion of a 'non-physical medium' is coherent, since it may be that whatever played the role of the 'medium' would *thereby* become what counted as 'the physical'. But that is no objection to my argument, which is intended to be understood *ad hominem*.

Agent-Causation Reponse will have to explain why the difference between acting freely** and acting freely could matter so much, that, for the sake of it, God could be justified in permitting moral evil. They will be returned, that is, to exactly the same kind of predicament from which the Agent-Causation Response was supposed to extricate them.

25. This concludes the case for my first thesis. I claim to have shown that, under libertarianism, God can ensure that finite agents always do right while preserving, if not their freedom of action, then something that is so close to freedom of action, that it is entirely cogent for the atheologian to maintain that God could not be morally justified in permitting moral evil just in order to make sure that the world contained freedom of action rather than its near simulacrum. If I have shown this, then I have also justified my first thesis, namely that Free Will Defenders are in just as much trouble if compatibilism is false as they are if compatibilism is true. Admittedly, the trouble is not quite the same in the two cases. Under compatibilism, God can ensure that finite agents always do right while preserving their freedom of action. Under incompatibilism, God can't quite manage this. But he can manage something that falls short by a margin whose significance cannot bear the heavy moral weight which the libertarian Free Will Defender must suppose to rest on it. The *mere* repudiation of compatibilism, then, does not get the Free Will Defender out of trouble.

III: The Case for My Second Thesis: Upgrading the Free Will Defence

26. I believe that Free Will Defenders can extricate themselves from the difficulty which the truth of my first thesis would present. My second thesis in this paper is the claim that there is a way of upgrading the Free Will Defence which explains why, even if God could have ensured that agents always freely did right, and so avoided moral evil, it was nevertheless justifiable to reject this option. I now turn to develop the case for this second thesis. Since the truth of my first thesis implies that *all* Free Will Defenders are effectively in the position of *compatibilist* Free Will Defenders, I shall proceed by considering how a compatibilist might consistently maintain the Free Will Defence.

27. The kind of world God could attain under compatibilism, where finite agents always freely do right and there is no moral evil, would certainly be markedly different from the world of our own experience.¹⁴ But what justification could God have for rejecting the option of actualising such a markedly different world?

Martin Davies has argued that, if God creates the best kind of deterministic world containing morally free agents, it will have to contain some evil because its inhabitants will sometimes have to be right to believe that they will suffer if they do the right thing. But would such evil have to include moral evil? Perhaps so, says Davies, since it may be required that agents are sometimes right to believe that if

¹⁴ On the question of just how different such a goody-goody world would be, and how much such differences could matter, see [11] and [13].

they do the right thing they will suffer *at the hands of other morally free agents*. Why? Because situations in which agents are right to believe this are logically necessary for the manifestation of 'that virtue — which has no ready name in English — which brings together courage and forgivingness'.¹⁵ If this is correct, however, it would explain only the existence of moral evil which is, to use J.L.Mackie's helpful term,¹⁶ *absorbed* by a sufficiently valuable higher good which it causes and which logically could not have occurred without being caused by evil of that type. Davies' solution does not enable a compatibilist to explain the existence of *unabsorbed* moral evil.

28. Here is a solution — the Upgrading Solution — which *does* enable compatibilist Free Will Defenders to account for unabsorbed moral evil. To develop the Upgrading Solution, it is necessary to emphasise that, although the Free Will Defence is, of course, committed to the claim that there is some — pivotal — higher good (or goods) sufficiently valuable to outweigh the disvalue of moral evil, it is not committed to the view that moral freedom is *itself* that higher good. Rather, it need hold only that moral freedom is *logically necessary* for the achievement of the pivotal higher good.¹⁷

Now, the Upgrading Solution depends on arguing that Free Will Defenders *definitely should* maintain that moral freedom is *not* itself the pivotal higher good which outweighs moral evil, but is simply one necessary condition for the emergence of *some further* higher good which has that status. For, if they do maintain this, it is then open to them to argue that, although God may be able to ensure that the world was peopled by morally free agents who never in fact did wrong, in doing so God would inevitably block the satisfaction of some *other* condition necessary for the achievement of the pivotal higher good.

29. Free Will Defenders *can*, then, be compatibilists — but only provided they upgrade the Defence by specifying a further higher good (beyond freedom of action itself) which could not logically be attained if God ensured that finite agents always acted rightly. Such an upgraded Free Will Defence will also extricate libertarian Free Will Defenders from the predicament of trying to explain why the difference between moral freedom and its Intervention Strategy simulacrum could matter so much that, for the sake of it, God would be justified in permitting moral evil: God's intervention makes a difference, not so much because it detracts from the moral freedom of finite agents, but because it blocks the emergence of that *further*, supremely valuable, higher good for which moral freedom is a necessary condition.

30. To carry conviction, the Upgrading Solution requires a specification of the pivotal higher good it invokes. My suggestion is that this pivotal good is (or, at least, necessarily includes) the good of the highest forms of mutual loving personal rela-

¹⁵ [5, pp.126-127]. The virtue referred to, presumably, is that exemplified by the crucified Jesus.

¹⁶ See [9, p.154].

¹⁷ This point is recognised by Mackie [9, p.155].

tionship. This proposal fits the Free Will Defender's requirements. For, (i) only beings who are morally free can form such relationships; (ii) it is not unreasonable to regard the value of the best forms of personal relationship as high enough to outweigh the disvalue of moral evil; and (iii) it is arguable that, if God did ensure that finite agents always acted rightly, then those beings, though morally free, would nevertheless be logically unable to form and sustain mutual loving relationships of the most valuable kind.

31. How may (iii) be supported? Consider first the theist's traditional emphasis on the importance of personal relationship with God. If God, as one partner to the relationship, ensures from the outset that the other partner, the finite agent, will respond to God's love, then, even though the finite agent's response may still be free,¹⁸ it nevertheless remains *contrived*. God takes absolutely no risk that his love won't be returned. And where one partner has that degree of control, the mutuality and thus the overall value of the relationship is surely impaired?

32. It may, however, be hard to accept that the possibility of a creature's having the highest form of personal relationship with God could be so valuable that moral evil should be tolerated for the sake of it. Would it not have been good enough for creatures to have had less than fully mutual relationships with God, if moral evil could thereby have been avoided? (One could scarcely reply that this would not have been as gratifying from *God's* point of view!) Anyway, isn't it *inevitable* that a relationship between creature and Creator should fail of full mutuality?¹⁹ So, perhaps, God's contriving the free loving responses of his creatures is not, in fact, inconsistent with the highest kind of loving relationship which could exist across the vast ontological gulf separating creator from creature?

Besides, for some theists, the idea of personal relationship with God as something separate from personal relationships amongst finite persons is suspect. (How can you love God whom you have not seen when you don't love your brothers and sisters whom you have seen?) So, on the theist's own terms, what essentially needs safeguarding is the possibility of fully mutual loving relationships amongst finite persons — and, it may be urged, this possibility *would* be safeguarded if God ensured that his creatures, always but freely, chose the good.

33. But would it? Even if we turn our attention from God-to-creature to creature-to-creature relationships, if they exist in a world where God has ensured that all free agents choose the good, including the good of entering appropriately into mutual loving relationships, then it will still be true that these relationships result from contrivance. Though these relationships may be sustained by the partners' own free

¹⁸ As would be the case if compatibilism is true, and near enough the case if it is not. In what follows, I shall not keep repeating similar qualifications, taking it to be obvious where they are needed.

¹⁹ Eleonore Stump, in [12], observes that friendship with God is liable to be overwhelming for the finite agent, but argues that the otherwise puzzling institution of petitionary prayer may be understood as providing a safeguard against this.

responses to each other, that this is so results from God's deliberate contrivance.

34. But how much does this matter? Is the value of uncontrived personal relationships really *so* great a good that it could excuse God for permitting all the unabsorbed moral evil that taints history? After all, just because God's contrivance of the existence of loving mutual relationships would be so pervasive in a world in which moral evil was thereby avoided, it would presumably not be detectable by the inhabitants of that world. From their perspective, love would be just as good as it would have been in a world where God had not ensured that moral freedom (or its near simulacrum) was exercised only for the good.

35. This is a serious objection, but not a conclusive one. If someone discovered that, throughout a relationship, her and her partner's free choices in forming *and maintaining*²⁰ it had resulted from the — at the time, undetectable — manipulation of another powerful agent, she would be justified in feeling betrayed and scaling down considerably her estimate of the relationship's value. From this, I think, we may infer that a relationship which results from the undetected or even undetectable continuous contrivance of another person, however valuable it might seem, would not actually be of the highest value. Just how important it is that personal relationships should not be contrived by a powerful external agent, and whether it is important enough to outweigh the disvalue of unabsorbed moral evil, is a matter which, I suggest, cannot be conclusively settled. In particular, it cannot be settled the atheist's way . . . and that, of course, is all the Free Will Defender needs. The package deal of uncontrived personal relationships with unabsorbed moral evil *may*, all things considered, be better than the package deal which avoids moral evil at the cost of contriving personal relationships.

36. Further support for the Upgrading Solution may be drawn from recognising its value in responding to certain *other* objections to the Free Will Defence, apart from the one which is the focus of my present concern. It has been objected that, even if God *can't* ensure that agents always freely do right, nevertheless God *can* actualise worlds with moral freedom yet with little or no moral evil. For example, (1) God could remove agents' moral freedom when and only when God foresees that they will exercise it by making wrong choices. Or, (2) God could permit agents to make morally wrong free choices, but intervene to ensure that these choices have no seriously harmful consequences. Or, (3) God could endow agents with wide powers to do good, but only limited powers to harm each other: though they couldn't use sticks and stones to break their bones, unkind words might yet harm them.²¹

²⁰ As Stephen Davies has pointed out to me, a marriage need not be less valuable just because it resulted from diligent matchmaking. But that shows only that the value of a relationship isn't diminished by the contrivance of certain aspects of its *formation*. A world where God ensures right behaviour is a world where *every aspect* of the formation *and continuation* of a relationship would be contrived.

²¹ Strategies (1) and (2) were suggested to me in conversation by David Lewis. Steven Boër elaborates strategy (2) in his [4]. Martin Davies' consideration of worlds in which 'ill-intentioned acts are aborted in some way' would seem to straddle strategies (1) and (2). (See his [5, p.121].) Strategy (3) was suggested by a referee for this *Journal*.

The availability of these strategies shows that God could indeed have had moral freedom without (much) moral evil. To justify God's rejecting them, the Free Will Defender's only recourse is to argue that their adoption would yield worlds lacking *significant* moral freedom, where significant moral freedom requires that morally free agents have a robust or standing capacity to do themselves and each other really serious harm (something which would be missing if God adopted strategies (1), (2) or (3)). To show that this appeal to 'significant' moral freedom is not an ad hoc stipulation, it is, I claim, necessary to adopt the Upgrading Solution: that is, to understand the kind of moral freedom appealed to by the Free Will Defence as the kind of moral freedom which is necessary for the emergence of the pivotal higher good (namely, on my suggestion, the good of the highest forms of personal relationship). For, arguably, loving personal relationships could not possess their highest value, unless those who form and maintain them did so against the background of a robust capacity to do themselves and each other really serious harm.

IV. Is the Upgrading Solution a Theist's Trojan Horse?

37. This Upgrading Solution appears to be the salvation of the Free Will Defence. It may, however, prove counterproductive. For, the question arises whether the best kinds of uncontrivedly free personal relationships are possible in a world whose existence is sustained, moment by moment, by a supernatural omnipotent Creator. Perhaps such a Creator could not possibly *avoid* contriving personal relationships within the created order? Perhaps such relationships cannot exist in the shadow of omnipotent power? In which case, the Upgrading Solution is a traditional theist's Trojan horse.

38. If (assuming compatibilism) God decides to create a deterministic world, then it does seem that God cannot avoid contriving the personal relationships of finite agents within that world. For, God's omniscience guarantees that, when he chooses a deterministic world's laws and initial state, he knowingly thereby determines all that happens within it, including the free choices made by finite agents in forming and maintaining personal relationships. But, if my Upgrading Solution is correct, God will not want to play this over-bearing role, since to do so would frustrate the emergence of the best kind of personal relationships. But *can* God give up this role? Obviously, it would be irresponsible to try to decide the initial state and laws of a deterministic universe completely blind — after all, if God simply (so to speak) threw dice, he might get committed to a world in which finite agents didn't evolve at all. Suppose, then, that God sets parameters for the laws and initial conditions such that any world within those parameters (any 'F-world') does contain morally free agents, but then — in order to avoid contriving personal relationships — seeks to settle randomly which *particular* F-world is actualised. Still he will be unable to avoid contrivance, since, as the omnipotent Creator, it remains up to him to bring into existence whatever F-world gets randomly specified, and his omniscience entails that, as he does so, he cannot avoid knowing what the consequences will be for the free choices of all actual finite agents. Furthermore, if there are differences

in overall moral value amongst F-worlds (and certainly there will be, since some F-worlds will contain no unabsorbed moral evil, and others will contain lots of it), God's omnibenevolence will entail that he will (freely) prefer to create better rather than worse F-worlds. So it seems that he will (so to speak) be stuck with having to create an F-world in which there is no unabsorbed moral evil, and yet, in doing so unavoidably contriving the freely chosen personal relationships of finite agents in that world. It might, I suppose, be urged that in choosing the initial state and laws of such an F-world, God didn't *intend* to make finite agents freely choose in certain ways. But he certainly did *know* that this would be a consequence of his choice, and this knowledge was *part of his reason* for making that choice (for, he has to avoid choosing worlds where finite agents do wrong and produce unabsorbed moral evil) — and that, surely, makes for contrivance enough. There is, then, a case for thinking that God cannot create a deterministic world and yet leave open the possibility of the existence of uncontrived personal relationships within it.

39. May God avoid this embarrassment by creating free agents in an indeterministic universe? In arguing for my first thesis, I claimed that, under the constraints of libertarianism, there are yet available to God strategies for ensuring that finite agents always do right which preserve, if not their freedom, then something close enough to it. But, if God did employ those strategies, he would thereby contrive the personal relationships of created agents. Accordingly, in order to make it possible for the supreme good of uncontrived personal relationships to be achieved, God will need to create an indeterministic universe and refrain from using these strategies. And what could block this plan?

The plan *would* be blocked, if it turned out, as some have argued,²² that freedom of action is impossible in an indeterministic universe. Short of that, though, do we here have a way of showing that, even though compatibilism may be true, nevertheless there are good reasons why God would choose to create an indeterministic world — namely, that only in such a world can an omnipotent Creator avoid contriving the relationships of his free creatures? I am not sure. It may be that further scrutiny of the idea of an omnipotent Creator who sustains in existence an indeterministic created order will reveal that such a Creator could not attain the kind of distance from the free actions of his creatures which seems to be required. But such further scrutiny is beyond my present scope. I shall here be content to leave the matter thus: *either* the appeal, made by my Upgrading Solution, to the value of uncontrived personal relationships turns out to be counterproductive for the traditional theist, *or* it establishes that a Free Will Defender has to maintain that God created an indeterministic world — though, interestingly enough, not because the Free Will Defence requires libertarianism, but because it is only in an indeterministic world that God could avoid contriving the free actions of finite agents.

V. Conclusion

40. In summary, what I claim to have shown in this paper is that, although adopt-

²² For example, R.E.Hobart in his [7].

ing libertarianism does not get the Free Will Defender straightforwardly out of the difficulty which the truth of compatibilism would pose, nevertheless there is an Upgrading Solution available to both compatibilist and libertarian Free Will Defenders which enables them to explain why God might be justified in not exercising the kind of close control over free finite agency which his omnipotence places at his disposal. And I have sketched a particular way in which the Upgrading Solution might be filled out, namely by taking the supreme good to include the existence of the highest form of uncontrived personal relationships. Finally, I have briefly explored the possibility that this way of upgrading the Free Will Defence might ultimately prove counterproductive for orthodox theists, because the relationships of finite agents might *inevitably* turn out to be contrived if they have to be formed and maintained in the shadow of the power of an omnipotent Creator. Arguably, God could enable the existence of genuinely uncontrived personal relationships only by ceasing to be omnipotent! I have left it open, however, that God may be able to avoid this dilemma by creating an indeterministic universe.²³

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²³

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