

The Incoherence of Christian Theism¹

By Edwin Curley

§1. IN *THE GOD OF THE PHILOSOPHERS* ANTHONY KENNY ARGUES THAT THE CONCEPT of God which has dominated Christian philosophical theology is incoherent.² I don't think he *shows* that it is incoherent, but he certainly raises a question worthy of our curiosity: is it in fact possible to demonstrate that this concept involves a contradiction?

In any a priori argument against the existence of God, much must depend on our definition of God. Christian philosophers have had two main ways of explaining God's nature: providing a general formula which is thought to capture God's essence, as Descartes does in the Third Meditation, when he defines God as a "supremely perfect being" (Adams and Tannery VII, 46); or offering a list of divine attributes, as Descartes also does in the Third Meditation (AT VII, 40, 45). For the most part I shall follow the latter course, understanding by God a being with the following attributes:

(Definition 1): the creator of the world, eternal, omnipotent, omniscient, providential, a personal, loving, voluntary (or free) agent, our ultimate lawmaker and judge, who justly rewards the good and punishes the wicked, and is worthy of our utmost love, worship, and obedience.

But I assume the general formula would also be acceptable, and is more basic: it provides a principle for deciding whether candidate attributes belong on the list, and a reason for thinking that a being which has some divine attributes must also have the others.³

No doubt we could add other attributes to this list and remain within the bounds of Christian orthodoxy. But these are enough for my argument. It is best to work with as short and uncontroversial a list of attributes as possible. Kenny's argument focuses on an even shorter list: timeless, immutable, omniscient, omnipotent, and all-good. But I think he tacitly assumes

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other attributes which need to be included (for example, being a just judge). And I think he includes attributes better omitted, like timelessness and immutability. It's controversial among contemporary Christian philosophers whether we should ascribe those properties to God, and they are not needed for the argument I shall make. I confine my claims here to Christian theism. I imagine that they might generalize to other forms of theism (for example, Judaism and Islam), but I shall not undertake to show that here.⁴

§2. IN *THE GOD OF THE PHILOSOPHERS*, KENNY FORMULATES ONE OF HIS CENTRAL claims crisply in the final chapter:

If God is to have infallible knowledge of future human actions, then determinism must be true. If God is to escape responsibility for human wickedness, then determinism must be false. Hence in the notion of a God who foresees all sins but is the author of none, there lurks a contradiction. (p. 121)

Call this *Kenny's dilemma*. Let's make explicit the contradiction he alludes to.⁵ Suppose his two conditionals hold:

- (1) If God has infallible knowledge of future human actions, then determinism must be true.
- (2) If God is not responsible for human wickedness, determinism must be false.

Suppose, further, that we take the antecedents of these conditionals as propositions to which Christian theism is committed:

- (3) God has infallible knowledge of future human actions.
- (4) God is not responsible for human wickedness.

Taken in conjunction, these propositions clearly entail that

- (5) Determinism is both true and false.

But (5) is self-contradictory. So, if the Christian is to avoid self-contradiction, she must reject one of the first four propositions. The question is: which can she reject without abandoning commitments essential to her position? I begin with what I think will prove the easiest case, Kenny's second conditional, and will then take up propositions (4), (1) and (3), in that order, showing that each of the four propositions is either true or extremely difficult for a Christian theist to deny, with the result that Christian theists have no good way of avoiding the contradiction of proposition (5).

§2.1 IN CONSIDERING THE SECOND CONDITIONAL, LET'S CONTRAPOSE IT INTO A QUESTION: if determinism is true, does it follow that God is responsible for human wickedness? How shall we understand the terms of this proposition? By "determinism" I understand here scientific determinism of the following kind:

(D2) Determinism is the thesis that the state of the world at [any] one time “fixes” or “determines” the state of the world at any future time... [this condition will be satisfied if and only if] from a total description of the world at one time, and a specification of all of the laws of nature, a total description of the world at any [future] time can be derived by a purely logical, deductive inference.⁶

Suppose, hypothetically, that

(6) Determinism, so defined, is true.

Suppose also that

(7) God is the eternal creator of the world,

where this means that the world has not existed from eternity, that there was a first state of the world, determined by the will of God, who existed before the world came into existence, and has existed forever.⁷ Suppose, further, that

(8) God is omnipotent,

where this means not only that the initial state of the world was determined by the will of God, but also that the laws of nature which figure in deterministic explanations were determined by his will. On these assumptions—(D2), (6), (7), and (8)—it will follow that

(9) In determining the initial state of the world and the laws which govern changes from one state to another, God has determined whatever happens, including whatever acts of human wickedness occur.

And this, we might naturally think, entails that

(10) God is responsible for whatever acts of human wickedness occur.

It may be said, of course, that (9) establishes only causal responsibility, not moral responsibility, and that it is moral responsibility which is (or ought to be) at issue in (10). Agents are not always morally responsible for the events they cause. For example, if I, unintentionally and without either recklessness or negligence, cause someone's death—say, I feed a guest some bad chicken, not knowing or having any reason to suspect that the chicken is bad—I will not be held morally responsible for the result. Nor will I be held responsible if, falling against someone, I knock him over a cliff—if I have myself been pushed by a third party and am unable to keep from falling.

But clearly God, as traditionally conceived, will not escape responsibility in either of these ways. For we assume that

(11) God is omniscient, where this implies that he has full knowledge of the consequences of his actions. So if he initiates a series of actions which causes a certain result, he knows that it will have that result. And he will not fail to be responsible by having his “actions” caused by another agent, since we assume that

(12) God is a voluntary or free agent,

where this implies (at least) that God acts in accordance with his own will, and is not determined to act by anything external to himself. So

(13) If I have done something wicked, God is (morally) responsible for my wicked act.

For he willed the initial conditions and laws which would inevitably lead to it, freely and in full knowledge that they would have this consequence. This argument is essentially a restatement of one Hume considers at the end of Section VIII of the *Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*.⁸ It seems clear that Hume is right about this.⁹ Kenny’s second conditional is surely correct:

(2) If God is not responsible for human wickedness, determinism must be false.

§2.2 WHAT ABOUT THE ANTECEDENT OF THAT CONDITIONAL, OR PROPOSITION (4)? Christian philosophers might escape the contradiction which threatens them in Kenny’s dilemma if they denied that the antecedent of (2) is true, that is, if they affirmed that God *is* responsible for human wickedness. But this looks like jumping from the frying pan to the fire. Is it thinkable that God should be responsible for human wickedness?

§2.21 PERHAPS IT IS. AT ANY RATE, CHRISTIAN PHILOSOPHERS SOMETIMES SEEM TO have thought this, or to have committed themselves to doctrines which would entail it. Consider, for example, James Ross’s definition of omnipotence in his *Philosophical Theology*:

(D3): *S* is omnipotent if and only if for every logically contingent state of affairs, *p*, whether *p* or *not-p* is the case is logically equivalent to the effective choice, by *S*, that *p* or that *not-p* (respectively).¹⁰

Ross grants that “this is a very strong definition.” It requires two conditionals to be true of an omnipotent being. The first looks non-controversial:

(14) Where *p* is logically contingent, *if* the omnipotent being wills that *p*, then *p*.

We might wish to qualify (14) to allow for the common view that even di-

vine omnipotence cannot alter the past. But setting such complications aside, it seems that if omnipotence has any meaning, (14) must be true. How could the will of an omnipotent being fail to be sufficient for its effect? Ross's second conditional is more contentious:

(15) Where p is logically contingent, p is true *only if* the omnipotent being wills that p .

This looks like a more technical and precise way of saying (what theists often say): nothing happens but by the will of God. However, suppose it's (contingently) true that as Mayor of Boston I once accepted a bribe. Then by (15) it follows that God willed that I accept that bribe. And if (14) is true, then God's will that I accept the bribe was sufficient to bring it about that I accepted the bribe.

This certainly seems to make God the author of my sin. Nevertheless, Ross is emphatic in saying that

the entailment must go both ways: not only must whatever God might have willed have been the case; but also, nothing could have been the case had God not willed it... (p. 211)

Ross concedes that this is "a little stronger than the articulated tradition," but contends that it is not stronger than "the implicit tradition." He thinks such a definition is necessary to account for God's creation, for his having determined, by *his* choice alone, which possible world would be actual. God's creation requires that God effectively choose "each state of affairs that belongs to the actual world and is not part of all possible worlds."¹¹

This may seem an unpalatable conclusion, but Ross is right that there is strong precedent in the tradition for accepting both (14) and (15). Consider Augustine in the later stages of his career, when he is arguing against the Pelagians. Pelagius had held that God has given his human creatures free will, a natural capacity to choose the right action, which was not taken away by the sin of Adam, and which, properly used, can merit salvation. The gift of this capacity is God's natural grace, given to all humans. But Pelagius denied that, to conform our will to God's law, we need any particular grace (for example, special assistance to a particular person to resist temptation on a particular occasion). We have the ability to live a blameless life by making proper use of our natural faculties, though this ability has been weakened by disuse and bad moral education. God does assist us through his law and his teaching, which make it easier for us to avoid sin. But punishment and reward presuppose that we have the ability to choose the good without any further assistance than that provided by our natural faculty of choice.¹²

Augustine rejected this Pelagian doctrine as ascribing to man too much independence of his creator. In his treatise *On the Grace of Christ and Original Sin*, he argued that we need divine grace, not only to have the *capacity* to act rightly, but also to *will* to act rightly, and to *act* rightly.¹³ This seemed

to him the clear implication, for example, of Paul's letter to the Philippians: "It is God who is at work in you, enabling you both to will and to work for his good pleasure."¹⁴ Augustine did not think this passage required a rejection of free will. Returning to the topic some years later, he noted that in the immediately preceding verse, Paul had instructed the Philippians to "work out [their] own salvation with fear and trembling."¹⁵ Unfortunately, Augustine does not seem to have left behind any clear explanation of how his doctrine of grace is consistent with his doctrine of free will.¹⁶

Nor have later writers in the Augustinian tradition fared better. In his *Principles of Philosophy*, Descartes writes that once we know God,

we perceive in him a power so immeasurable that we regard it as impious to suppose that we could ever do anything which was not already preordained by him. (*Principles I, 40*)

Whatever we do, we do because God has not merely foreknown it from eternity, but willed it and preordained it (I, 41). Descartes holds that we should not on this ground deny that human beings possess a freedom of indifference. Our awareness of our freedom is too clear for that. The "solution" is that we must recognize the limits of the human intellect. We can see clearly enough that God's omnipotence entails that whatever we do, we do because God wills it; and we can see clearly enough that when we do something, we have the power to act otherwise. What the finitude of our intellects prevents us from seeing is how these propositions are compatible.¹⁷

In some of his anti-Pelagian writings, Augustine explicitly accepts the consequence that God is responsible, not only for human goodness, but also for human wickedness:

If the divine record be looked into carefully, it shows us that not only men's good wills, which God himself converts from bad ones, and when converted by Him, directs to good actions and to eternal life, but also those which follow the world are so entirely at the disposal of God, that He turns them whithersoever He wills, and whensoever He wills—to bestow kindness on some, and to heap punishment on others, as He Himself judges right, by a counsel most secret to Himself, indeed, but beyond all doubt most righteous.¹⁸

The problem, I think, is that it is difficult to give God credit for our good works, as scripture and piety seem to require, without making him responsible for our bad works.¹⁹ If it's true that whatever good we do is a consequence of God's giving us a particular grace to do that good, and that without his willing that we do that good, we could not have done it, then God's decision not to grant us that assistance does seem to implicate him in our failure to do the good. Suppose I am a professor in a medical school, overseeing the work of young interns; I assign one of the interns to perform surgery on a patient, knowing that he will not be able to successfully complete the operation without my assistance at a crucial moment. Does anyone doubt that if I do not give the needed assistance, I would be at least partially, if not fully, responsible for his failure?

Augustine's arguments carried the day, and the Pelagian doctrine

was condemned at the Council of Carthage in 417-418. Among the Pelagian propositions anathematized by that Council was this:

The grace of justification is given to us for this reason: that what we are ordered to do through free will, we may be able to accomplish more easily through grace, just as if, even if grace were not given, we could nevertheless fulfill the divine commands without it, though not indeed easily.²⁰

So by the standards of this council, it is heresy to hold that humans are capable, without a special act of divine grace, of fulfilling the divine commands.

This decision of the Council, and the theological considerations underlying it, generated a persistent tension in the subsequent Christian tradition regarding the relation between grace and free will. For example, in Aquinas we find strong affirmations of human freedom.²¹ But we also find very Augustinian affirmations of the need for grace, which are in *prima facie* conflict with the affirmations of freedom.²² The reconciliation of these apparently conflicting passages remains, I believe, an unresolved problem for contemporary Thomists.

This controversy was debated heatedly during the Reformation. One of the doctrines for which Luther was excommunicated was his contention that after the fall, free will exists in name only. In his treatise *On the Freedom of the Will*, intending to defend the orthodox Catholic doctrine against Luther, Erasmus writes:

Supposing that what Augustine writes somewhere is in some sense true, that "God works both good and evil deeds in us, and rewards his own good works in us, and punishes his evil works in us." If this were made known to the masses, how wide this would open the door to godlessness in countless mortals!²³

Erasmus thinks that even if the view he attributes to Augustine were true, it's not the sort of truth we ought to publicly avow; it would "open the door to godlessness," raising questions about God's justice and making it difficult for people to love God with all their hearts. But he does not deny that the Augustinian view is true: his Church's teachings, and the scriptures on which they are founded, would make it difficult for him to do that.

For his part, Luther seems to accept the Augustinian view, though not without some expression of concern. As Augustine had done, he argues from scriptural passages in which God is represented as causing human acts of wickedness—hardening the heart of Pharaoh, for example. He also invokes a conception of God's omnipotence which makes it difficult for him to reject God's responsibility for our wickedness:

By the omnipotence of God...I do not mean the potentiality by which he could do many things which he does not, but the active power by which he works all in all, which is the sense in which Scripture calls him omnipotent.²⁴

The phrase "he works all in all" is an allusion to I Corinthians 12:6, a text Luther frequently cites. The appeal to scripture here is an attempt to clarify

what Christian theologians must mean, in calling God omnipotent, if they are to use that term in the sense in which their sacred texts use it. Luther acknowledges that

it gives the greatest possible offense to common sense or natural reason that God, by his own sheer will, should abandon, harden and damn men, as if he enjoyed the sins and the vast eternal torments of his wretched creatures, when he is preached as a God of such great mercy and goodness.²⁵

He reports that the doctrine had offended him more than once and had brought him “to the very depth and abyss of despair,” so that he wished he had never been created a man.

Nevertheless, Luther is in a strong dialectical position in his debate with Erasmus. As a defender of orthodoxy, Erasmus is constrained to embrace (even if somewhat tentatively) the doctrine that

without particular grace man cannot desire good, can neither make a beginning, nor persevere, nor bring to completion without the perpetual help of God’s grace from the very beginning. (*De libero arbitrio*, p. 32)

Erasmus takes this to be the position of Augustine and Aquinas, and from what we have seen, he seems to be right about that. As an avowed skeptic about matters theological, he does not unequivocally embrace their doctrine. But he does call it “highly probable.”

Nevertheless, Luther argues forcefully that the probable opinion Erasmus tentatively endorses differs only verbally from his own denial of free will.²⁶ If man, without a special act of divine grace, cannot will or do the good, what meaningful freedom does he have?

I conclude, then, that a number of very influential Christian philosophers *have* thought the apparently unthinkable: they have sometimes endorsed the view that God is the cause of human wickedness. In the next section, I ask whether they can consistently take this step.

§2.22 CAN A CHRISTIAN PHILOSOPHER REJECT (4), THAT IS, CAN SHE ACCEPT GOD’S responsibility for human wickedness, and remain consistent with her other assumptions about the nature of God?

I take it that the strongest argument in favor of affirming (4), that is, denying God’s responsibility for human wickedness, runs like this:

(16) God is our ultimate lawmaker and judge, who will reward the goodness of his human creatures and punish their wickedness, if not in this life, then in the life to come.

And

(17) God is perfectly just.

But

(18) A just judge will not punish people for crimes he himself is responsible for.

Therefore,

(4) God is not responsible for the wickedness he punishes.

The only assumption here which is not part of our initial definition of Christian theism is the moral assumption in (18), about the conditions for just judgment. So the question is, can the Christian philosopher reject (18)?

Sometimes Christian theologians who accept divine determinism try to deal with this question by adopting a theory of moral responsibility according to which what is crucial is the voluntary nature of the action and the absence of compulsion. Here, for example, is Luther, explaining what he means when he says that unless God is present and at work in us, "everything we do is evil and we necessarily do what is of no avail for salvation:"

By "necessarily" I do not mean "compulsorily," but by the necessity of immutability (as they say) and not of compulsion. That is to say, when a man is without the Spirit of God he does not do evil against his will, as if he were taken by the scruff of the neck and forced to it, like a thief or robber carried off against his will to punishment, but he does it of his own accord and with a ready will.²⁷

Now compatibilist theories of freedom may be attractive in a secular context, where what determines an agent's action is a complex series of causes, none of whose members is a personal agent who also takes it upon himself to punish the criminal, and where the vicious character of the criminal may seem a sufficient reason to confine him and try to reform him, no matter what its cause. But the situation seems different when the ultimate cause of the agent's actions is a personal being who will also punish the agent for the crimes he has caused the agent to commit, and the question is whether it is just for such a being to impose punishment on his agent's crimes.

Suppose we have a judge who moonlights as the mastermind of a criminal organization. In his night job, he sends his subordinates out to engage in criminal activities, for example, killing rival gang members. Let us suppose that they are his willing agents. They are happy in their work. But to make this situation properly parallel with theological determinism, we must stipulate that they have this character because he has *willed* that they have it, and in the face of his will, they are not capable of acting otherwise. Like a trainer of attack dogs, he has bred them to be vicious agents of his will. From time to time he encounters some of his subordinates in his day job, when they are brought to trial for their criminal acts. He does not hesitate to punish them for the acts he has caused them to do. A human judge who acted thus would be grossly unfair. However much we may suppose the subordinates to *deserve* punishment, there is something wrong with the picture in which *this judge* decides their punishment. If we thought God were behaving in the same way, should we not make the same judgment? Would it be possible to love and worship such a God?

At this point some Christians will no doubt say: "We cannot judge God by human standards. However repugnant we might find such behavior in a human judge, we must accept it from God, who is, after all, the sovereign lord of the universe, the ultimate law-giver." I take it that this is essentially the position of Luther and Calvin, and indeed, that in the final analysis their best response to the problem of reconciling God's justice with his omnipotence is to adopt the unmitigated divine command theory they advocate.²⁸ It is not, Luther says, "because [God] is or was obliged so to will that what he wills is right, but on the contrary, because he himself so wills, therefore what happens must be right."²⁹ We might formulate this as a definition of rightness:

(D4): Right actions are right just because God approves of them, and wrong actions are wrong just because God disapproves of them.³⁰

On this view, God *cannot* act unjustly, because his decision to act in a certain way, implying approval of that action, is sufficient to make the action right. It will not impugn his justice if he punishes human wickedness for which he himself is causally responsible. Nothing he voluntarily does *could* impugn his justice.

Contemporary Christian philosophers seem generally unwilling to embrace unmitigated voluntarism. Kretzmann comments on (D4) that it deserves the execration John Stuart Mill heaped on it in the 19th century:

If in ascribing goodness to God, I do not mean what I mean by goodness; if I do not mean the goodness of which I have some knowledge, but an incomprehensible attribute of an incomprehensible substance, which for aught I know may be a totally different quality from that which I love and venerate.... what do I mean by calling it goodness? And what reason have I for venerating it?... To say that God's goodness may be different in kind from man's goodness, what is it but saying, with a slight change of phraseology, that God may possibly not be good?³¹

The forms of divine command theory currently in favor among Christian philosophers are modified precisely to avoid the notion that right conduct consists simply in conforming your conduct to the will of a God who might command anything. For example, Robert Adams's modified divine command theory—that the commands must be those of a *loving* God—is meant to ensure that we could not become obliged to practice cruelty for its own sake simply because God commanded it, because he could not, consistently with his nature, command such a thing. I expect Adams would also hold that a loving God could not punish conduct for which he himself was responsible, and that he must, therefore, not be responsible for the wickedness he punishes.

§2.23 THE CONCLUSIONS I DRAW FROM THIS DISCUSSION ARE THAT (a) ALTHOUGH Christian philosophers have *sometimes* held God to be responsible for human wickedness, not only because of scriptural texts which suggest this, but also for philosophical reasons connected with God's omnipotence; (b) they

nevertheless have powerful reasons for denying God's responsibility, since it is difficult, assuming his responsibility, to defend the justice of his punishment; and that (c) although God's responsibility for human wickedness *can* be made consistent with his justice by adopting an unmitigated divine command theory, which allows any behavior whatsoever to be consistent with divine justice, (d) this is a desperate measure, implying that God's "justice" is not the kind of moral attribute which would make him worthy of our love, worship and obedience. The problems involved in rejecting (4) and maintaining that God is responsible for the wickedness he is supposed to justly punish make this not a viable option for clear-headed Christian philosophers.

§2.3 THE PRECEDING SECTIONS (§§2.1-2.2) HAVE EXPLORED THE CONSEQUENCES of assuming the truth of determinism. If determinism is true, can God escape responsibility for human wickedness? And if not, is assigning responsibility for human wickedness to God an option for the Christian theist? I answered "no" to both questions. Now we shall assume that determinism is false. And the questions will be: on this assumption, can we make sense of God's having infallible knowledge of future human actions (that is, can we reject proposition (1), Kenny's first conditional)? And if not, can the Christian abandon the assumption of God's infallible foreknowledge (proposition (3))? Again, I shall answer "no" to both questions. If all these questions require a "no," then the contradiction follows.

§2.31 THE INDETERMINISM CONSIDERED HERE WILL NOT BE A SIMPLE DENIAL OF THE determinism defined earlier in (D2), though it entails denying that determinism. Contemporary Christian philosophers who embrace indeterminism generally defend a conception of human freedom like that of the Jesuit philosopher, Luis de Molina:

(D5): That agent is called free which, with all the prerequisites for acting posited, is able to act and able not to act, or is able to do one thing in such a way that it is also able to do some contrary thing.³²

Commenting on this definition, Freddoso makes clear that it means that a free act is not determined *either* by the laws of nature and antecedent conditions *or* by acts of divine volition. It is a rejection both of scientific determinism and of theological determinism. More recent indeterminists, like Swinburne and Plantinga, offer similar accounts.³³ These philosophers assume that if God's will directly caused human actions, they would not be free, and we could not be held morally responsible for them. And that seems right.

§2.32 WE NEED ALSO SOME CLARIFICATION OF THE KIND OF FOREKNOWLEDGE WHICH is at issue. Until the 1970s, most analytic discussions of divine foreknowledge focused on *simple foreknowledge*, knowledge of the choices humans will actually make in the circumstances they will actually face.³⁴ For example, if God has simple foreknowledge, then before the fall he knew such proposi-

tions as:

(19) Eve will invite Adam to eat the forbidden fruit.

(20) Adam will eat the fruit.

But if God has *only* simple foreknowledge, then before the fall he did not know what choices his human creatures would make in circumstances they did not actually face. For example, he did not know what would happen if it had been the serpent, and not Eve, who tempted Adam to eat the forbidden fruit. This might seem to be an unacceptable limitation on his omniscience. Later, I will argue that it is. But for now, let us assume that God has only simple foreknowledge.

§2.33 EVEN SIMPLE FOREKNOWLEDGE MAY CAUSE SERIOUS PROBLEMS. THERE IS AN argument which goes back at least to Jonathan Edwards, and was formulated with greater precision some 35 years ago by Nelson Pike.³⁵ A simple way of putting this argument is as follows. Suppose the following to be true:

In 4004 BCE, God created Adam and commanded him not to eat the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. In 4000 BCE, Adam ate the forbidden fruit, and did this freely in the Molinist sense; that is, at the time he ate the fruit, he was able not to eat it; he could have refrained from eating it, and would have, if he had not succumbed to Eve's temptation.

Now, if God has simple foreknowledge, he knew, when he created Adam in 4004, that Adam would eat the forbidden fruit in 4000. If he knew that, then

(21) God believed, in 4004 BCE, that Adam would eat the fruit in 4000 BCE.

The question is: was it really possible, consistently with these assumptions about divine foreknowledge, for Adam to exercise Molinist freedom on that fateful day in 4000?

At this point it is often said that one person's foreknowledge of what another person will do does not cause the other person's action. When faced with a choice between red and white wine, I choose red (unless I'm having fish). My wife, who knows me well, knows what choice I will make in these situations. But her foreknowledge does not cause my action.

Still, is this simple solution adequate in the divine case? If I inexplicably choose white wine some night when my wife has confidently predicted that I would opt for red, we will say that she didn't really know what I would choose after all. My choice showed that her confident belief was false. But we can't say that in the case of God. Not only is he omniscient, he is essentially omniscient. It is part of his nature not to have any false beliefs. Even God does not have the power to bring about the logically impossible. So certainly

(22) In 4000 BCE Adam *could not have brought about* the logically impossible situation that in 4004 BCE God had a false belief.

This much will be generally conceded.

What indeterminists say these days is not that, if Adam had exercised his freedom by refraining from the fruit in 4000, he would have brought it about that a belief God had in 4004 was false; but rather that if he had exercised his freedom in that way, he would have brought it about that God believed something different from what he in fact believed. That is,

(23) In 4000 BCE Adam *could have brought about* the logically contingent situation that in 4004 BCE God had a different belief than the one he in fact had.

Paraphrasing what George Mavrodes has said in a recent article on divine omniscience, we might say: God did indeed know, before Adam ate the forbidden fruit, that he would eat it, but there was no inherent necessity that God should know *that particular proposition*; what determined him to know *that* was Adam's decision to give in to temptation rather than to resist it. Divine foreknowledge of future human choices depends on those choices; our present choices determine what God has always believed.³⁶

This seems to be a common response nowadays, among those theists who reject the Edwards-Pike argument. I find it unintelligible. The idea that our present actions might determine what happened in the past makes nonsense of the concepts of causality and the temporal order. Theologians have traditionally held that even an omnipotent God cannot make the past not to have been. If even an omnipotent being cannot bring this about, surely a human, whose powers are finite, cannot bring it about.

Perhaps the most influential attempt to make sense of the notion that humans might have this power over the past, consistently with admitting the fixity of the past, occurs in Alvin Plantinga's "Ockhams's Way Out."³⁷ Plantinga acknowledges that the past is in some sense necessary. Following Ockham he calls this kind of necessity "accidental necessity." Accidentally necessary propositions are those which, once true, become necessary thereafter. Propositions which are *strictly about the past* are accidentally necessary. Suppose

(24) Paul is seated is true now, a time we will designate as t_1 .

Then at any subsequent time

(25) Paul *was* seated at t_1 , will be true and accidentally necessary.

True propositions which are strictly about the past Plantinga calls *hard facts* about the past. Hard facts are accidentally necessary because they cannot be made false by the acts of any agent.

So far, so good, we may allow. The key to the Ockham-Plantinga solution to the Edwards-Pike argument is the idea that not all statements about the past are *strictly* about the past. For example,

(26) At t_1 Paul believes that his wife will get up at t_2 .

Uttered at some time between t_1 and t_2 is strictly about the past, and hence, a hard fact, unalterable by any subsequent acts. But

(27) At t_1 Paul *correctly* believes that his wife will get up at t_2 ,

uttered at the same time, is not *strictly* about the past, since it implicitly makes a claim about a time which is future at the time it is uttered. Propositions not strictly about the past Plantinga calls *soft facts*, since they imply something about the future which some agent might have the power to alter. Between t_1 and t_2 , (27) makes a claim which Paul's wife could falsify by getting up at some time other than t_2 . So even if it is true during that time interval, it is not necessarily true. Plantinga claims that

(21) God believed in 4004 BCE that Adam would sin in 4000 BCE.

is not strictly about the past, not one which it is beyond the power of any agent to falsify. For if God is essentially omniscient, then (21) entails

(28) Adam sins in 4000 BCE.

In general, propositions stating that God had certain beliefs about free future human actions will not be hard facts about the past. Their truth is no barrier to human freedom.

Unfortunately, Plantinga offers no criterion for the distinction between hard and soft facts, and he does not seem to think that a useful criterion can be given. He leaves us to pick up the distinction from his examples, but then he explicitly rejects the criterion which seems to be implicit in his examples, namely that soft facts are those which imply something about the future. In the end, he offers a definition of accidental necessity which has the unhappy consequence that even paradigmatic examples of hard facts turn out not to be accidentally necessary.³⁸

One final comment: if the Edwards-Pike argument is sound, it will work equally well to show that God's omniscience is incompatible with his own freedom, and not merely with human freedom.³⁹ All we would need to do is substitute for the statement reporting a purportedly free human action—such as “Adam ate the fruit in 4000 BCE”—a statement reporting some action God is supposed to have freely performed at some time and then make appropriate adjustments to the rest of the argument. So, if we suppose that God created Adam 6000 years ago, and that he possessed Molinist freedom when he did so, then we seem to imply that he had the power 6000 years ago to alter the beliefs which he would have had 7000 years ago about his actions 1000 years thence. This would show an inconsistency in theism quite independent of the main argument of this paper.

§2.34 I CONTEND, THEN, THAT THE EDWARDS-PIKE ARGUMENT VINDICATES KENNY'S first conditional. But I think there is another way of getting to the same conclusion, which so far has not received the consideration it deserves. Suppose

the following counterfactual conditional is true:

(29) If the serpent had tempted Adam directly, and not used Eve as an intermediary, Adam would not have eaten the fruit.

If God had *only* simple foreknowledge, he would not know propositions like (29), since the antecedent (assuming the Genesis narrative) is false. Few people will suppose that *we* can know whether (29) is true. Nevertheless, we regularly think we know the truth of propositions *like* (29). If I had eaten unwisely last night (a large steak, accompanied by a bottle of wine, and followed by a rich dessert and coffee), I would have been awakened during the night by heartburn. Sad experience has taught me this truth. But if propositions of this kind can be true, and known to be true, then it seems that a proper definition of God's omniscience should imply that he knows them.

The following proposition, taken from Pike, seems at least a reasonable first step towards a definition of omniscience:

(D6): *S* is omniscient if and only if *S* knows all true propositions and believes no false ones.⁴⁰

If (D6) is at least a reasonable first step towards a definition of omniscience, and if whatever definition we ultimately reach incorporates this central idea, and if some counterfactual conditionals are truths, then God must know some counterfactual conditionals.

This is one reason, though perhaps not the most important reason, why recent discussions of divine foreknowledge focus on what Molina called *middle knowledge*: the knowledge God had, prior to his decision to create the world, of the choices his human creatures *would* make, either under the circumstances they would encounter or under different circumstances, and of the choices other possible creatures (whom God *might have* created, but chose not to create) *would have* made, in the various circumstances they might have encountered.

Acknowledging that God has middle knowledge complicates the problem of reconciling divine foreknowledge with indeterminist freedom. Since I believe it is very difficult for theists to avoid the idea that God has middle knowledge, I will frame my main argument in this section on the assumption that God's foreknowledge includes middle knowledge. So as I consider Kenny's first conditional,

(1) If God has infallible knowledge of future human actions, then determinism must be true,

I shall treat the question of its truth as a question about the compatibility of divine middle knowledge with indeterminist freedom, that is,

(30) Is God's middle knowledge compatible with a Molinist indeterminist conception of human freedom?

Middle knowledge may be more difficult to reconcile with an indeterminist conception of freedom than simple foreknowledge is. But it is a more interesting property, since it seems more useful in defending the doctrine of God's providence.⁴¹

Suppose then that some such counterfactual as (29) is true:

(29) If the serpent had tempted Adam directly, and not used Eve as an intermediary, Adam would not have eaten the fruit.

If (29) is true, God, if he is omniscient, must know that it is true. Propositions of this sort are generally called 'counterfactuals of freedom' in these debates.⁴²

Molinist middle knowledge also assumes that *prior to his decision to create the world* God had knowledge of other conditionals which it would be odd to describe as "counterfactual," since they have antecedents whose truth value remains to be determined at the time when the conditionals are known. For example, prior to his decision to create this world, God knew the following conditional:

(31) If I [God] were to create Adam, command him on pain of death not to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, and subject him to the temptation of the serpent, *mediated by Eve*, he would eat the forbidden fruit.

The antecedent describes the series of events God chose to realize, and the consequent describes the choice Adam made.⁴³ Perhaps the following conditional was also true:

(32) If I [God] were to create Adam, command him on pain of death not to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, and subject him to *unmediated* temptation by the serpent, he would not eat the forbidden fruit. (Snakes are easier to resist than wives.)

We can call propositions of this sort *divine deliberative conditionals*.⁴⁴ If some conditionals of this kind were true prior to the creation, then God, if he is omniscient, must have known that they were true. That's one rationale for supposing that God must have middle knowledge. Moreover, it seems that God must have had knowledge of such conditionals, if his decisions to create the world at all, and to create the particular world he chose to create, were to embody a rational judgment that the world he chose to create was preferable to the worlds he chose not to create.⁴⁵ If he created this world without having knowledge of the consequences of his creative choices *and* of the consequences of alternative choices he could have made, then his creative actions would not have been the acts of the wise and provident being Christian theists assume their God to be.

More on this later. For now, let's just assume, hypothetically, that prior to the creation God had knowledge of many true deliberative conditionals involving the choices his creatures would freely make in the various

circumstances he might put them in. We shall also assume that after he has made his initial creative decision, God's knowledge of some deliberative conditionals (those whose antecedents are false in the possible world selected for creation) can be properly described as knowledge of counterfactuals.⁴⁶ The question for us here is whether these hypotheses imply that determinism is true.

If some divine deliberative conditionals were true prior to the creation of the world, and if some counterfactuals of freedom have been true subsequently, it seems reasonable to ask for a theory about what their truth consists in. After all, one prominent objection to the doctrine of middle knowledge has been that we cannot understand what it would be for any such propositions to be true.

To the extent that our contemporary Molinists have a theory about this, it seems to be framed in terms of possible worlds semantics, à la Stalnaker:

A counterfactual is true if and only if its antecedent is impossible, or its consequent is true in the [possible] world most similar to the actual in which its antecedent is [true].⁴⁷

This gives us an account of the truth conditions for counterfactuals, at least, though it's not easy to see how to apply it to divine deliberative conditionals. Suppose the deliberative conditional God contemplates is:

(32) If I were to create Adam, command him on pain of death not to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, and subject him to unmediated temptation by the serpent, he would not eat the forbidden fruit.

This conditional postulates conditions of choice which God in fact chose not to realize. On Stalnaker's theory, it will be true just in case its consequent is true in that world most like the actual world in which the antecedent is true. But on the theory of middle knowledge, God is supposed to know the truth of (32) prior to the creation, that is, prior to his determination that a particular possible world will become the actual world. Indeed, he uses knowledge of such conditionals to determine which world to create. So they must have a truth value, even though the only world which is actual at that stage is a world consisting of God alone.

The objection just mentioned was raised independently by both Anthony Kenny and Robert Adams.⁴⁸ Plantinga has replied to Adams's version of the objection, but in a way which seems to me to exploit inessential features of Adams's statement of it.⁴⁹ I don't think Kenny's way of stating the objection (or mine) is open to this reply. But I will not try to show that, since I am more concerned with other, related problems.

Suppose that, prior to his decision to create this world, God has knowledge of some deliberative conditional, say, (32). So prior to the creation (32) is true. And after the creation, when God has decided that the history of the world will diverge at some point from the history assumed by (32), for example, when the serpent's temptation is mediated by Eve, then a

proposition closely related to (32), call it (33), becomes a true *counterfactual* of freedom:

(33) If God had created Adam, had commanded him on pain of death not to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, and had subjected him to unmediated temptation by the serpent, Adam would not have eaten that fruit.

This tells us what Adam would have freely chosen, in those different circumstances. God, if he is omniscient, must know this truth.

Now, on the Stalnaker account, this counterfactual (whose antecedent we may assume to be consistent) is true just in case its consequent is true in the possible world closest to the actual world in which the antecedent is true. But if indeterminism is correct, this condition can never be satisfied. For if indeterminism is correct, then of those possible worlds in which the antecedent is true, there is no one world closest to the actual world. There must always be at least two, one in which Adam resists temptation, and another in which he does not. More generally, if indeterminism is correct, then for any possible world in which an agent freely chooses to do *A*, there is another possible world just like it, as regards its prior history and laws, in which the agent freely chooses not to do *A*. Indeterminism guarantees that Stalnaker-style truth conditions for counterfactuals of freedom cannot be satisfied.⁵⁰ If we evaluate the truth of counterfactuals in accordance with a possible worlds semantics of conditionals of the kind that Plantinga seems to favor, no counterfactual of freedom is ever true. I believe this vindicates Kenny's first conditional. If indeterminists are to reject that conditional, they owe us a new semantics for counterfactuals.⁵¹

§2.4 IF WE ARE TO ESCAPE THE CONTRADICTION THREATENING CHRISTIAN THEISM, we seem now to have only one way out: to reject proposition (3), that is, to deny that God has infallible knowledge of future human actions. Though this is a very unusual position historically, it's been a popular move in recent Christian philosophical theology. Swinburne, Adams, and Hasker all, in different ways, deny that God has infallible knowledge of future human actions. I contend that this is incompatible both with God's omniscience and with his providence.

§2.41 LET'S BEGIN WITH THE QUESTION OF PROVIDENCE. IN DEFENDING KENNY'S contention that divine foreknowledge is incompatible with human freedom in §2.3, one line of argument assumed a conception of God's foreknowledge according to which it implies foreknowledge, not merely of what would happen in the world he would create, but also of what would happen in all the other worlds he might create. In §2.34 I suggested that accounting for divine providence might require attributing middle knowledge to God, but I did not argue for that there. Now I must do so.

When John Mackie formulated what has come to be called "the logical problem of evil," in which he claimed to derive a contradiction from a short list of traditional theistic assumptions about God's nature and the ex-

istence of evil, Christian philosophers replied that his argument assumed a principle they would not accept: that a wholly good thing always eliminates evil as far as it can.⁵² Not so, they said. For God might have good, morally sufficient reasons to permit certain evils. The evils might be so tightly connected with greater (net) goods that even an omnipotent being, bound only by the laws of logic, could not realize the greater good without accepting the evil.

If Christian philosophers are to use this defense against the problem of evil, then it seems that they must accept a strong conception of divine providence. And Molinist philosophers do that. Here is Thomas Flint expounding what he takes to be the traditional conception of providence:

(D7a): To see God as provident is to see him as knowingly and lovingly directing each and every event involving each and every creature toward the ends he has ordained for them.⁵³

Or as he has put it more recently:

(D7b): The God who has created us...has not left us on our own: rather, the events of our world, no matter how chaotic or disturbing they might appear, unfold precisely according to the plan established eternally by our all-knowing and loving sovereign.⁵⁴

The central idea here is clear enough. If God loves his creatures, he must care what happens to them. If he loves his creatures wisely, he must know what the consequences of creating them will be, and know, in particular, what the consequences will be of creating them with the particular faculties he endows them with. If he endows Adam with freedom, he must know how Adam will use that freedom in the particular choice situations he will face, and how he would use it in the many other situations which he might face, and what the consequences of *not* giving him freedom would be. Otherwise, he cannot know whether the consequences of his gift will be consistent with his love for Adam and his other creatures.

But this defense will be problematic if the greater good which is supposed to outweigh evil requires that humans possess freedom in the Molinist sense. For the argument of the preceding section shows that Molinist middle knowledge is incompatible with Molinist freedom. If God endows Adam with indeterminist freedom, he cannot know the consequences of that choice.

If we wish to retain the Molinist conception of freedom, then, we may feel constrained to embrace a less ambitious conception of divine providence. Suppose we say, not that the events of our world unfold *precisely* according to a pre-established plan, but that

(D8): Though the God who created us does not exercise complete control over the history of the world, he does exercise sufficient control over it that events occur in a way consistent with supreme wisdom and a concern for his

human creatures like that of a supremely loving parent.

To believe in a providential God, on this view, is to believe that there is someone of immense knowledge, power, and love, who is watching over us and cares for us, but who has, to some degree, left us on our own. Is providence, so conceived, consistent with the gift of freedom, if we assume that in giving us freedom God could not know in advance how we would use it?

I think not. Those Christian philosophers who combine a belief in indeterminist freedom with a denial of divine foreknowledge sometimes say that God takes real risks if he makes free creatures.⁵⁵ But it has not been shown, and I think cannot be shown, that this risk-taking is compatible with even a modest conception of divine providence. Hasker writes:

There are...reasons for questioning whether a risk-free providence is even desirable. Those who admire risk-taking and experimentalism in human life may feel that the richness of God's life is diminished if we deny these attributes to him. And...the significance and value of human creativity may seem diminished if our most ennobling achievements are just the expected printouts from the divine programming. (*God, Time and Knowledge*, p. 199)

Well, some of us do admire risk-taking and experimentalism in human life. But to be truly admirable, risk-taking must avoid recklessness. That is, it must not consciously and unjustifiably disregard the possible negative outcomes.⁵⁶ If God's risk-taking is reckless, then it is not "consistent with supreme wisdom and a concern for his human creatures like that of a supremely loving parent."

A wise and loving parent does not let her children court disastrous outcomes. She does not, for example, let her toddler play with a revolver one of whose chambers is loaded. No doubt the toddler is *unlikely* to kill himself or a playmate. But that fact does not make such permission consistent with wise love. Given the horrendous nature of the evil which would occur if things didn't go well, it would be wise to take that chance only if the good to be gained if they went well were *very* great. The Christian God, if he gives his creatures freedom without knowing how they will use it, does let his children court disastrous outcomes. He runs, for example, the risk that a Hitler or a Stalin or a Pol Pot will use his freedom to cruelly exterminate millions of people. Is the value of the freedom of these men credibly so great that it would justify such a risk?

Now it may be said that the risk of this disastrous outcome is really very small. After all, even believers in Molinist freedom do not think that free human actions are unpredictable. As Robert Adams points out:

There does not normally seem to be any uncertainty at all about what a butcher, for example, would have done if I had asked him to sell me a pound of ground beef, although we suppose that he would have had free will in the matter. We say he would certainly have sold me the meat, if he had it to sell. What makes us regard it as certain? Chiefly his character, habits, desires and intentions, and the absence of countervailing dispositions. (He would have had no motive to refuse me.)⁵⁷

Adams confesses that he is perplexed by this case and does not know quite what to say about it. A determinist would say that (i) the reason why we can be certain of the butcher's action is that the butcher is causally determined to sell me the meat by his character and dispositions, and that if we call his act free, the term "free" must be given an analysis which does not require indeterminism. A Molinist would say that (ii) the butcher's character and dispositions do not causally determine the butcher's action, but that they do make it absolutely certain that he will sell me the meat. An indeterminist who denies middle knowledge should say that (iii) it is not absolutely certain what the butcher will do, but that "we normally ignore the minute but real chance there would have been that he would refuse." Since Adams rejects determinism, and since he finds the Molinist response even more implausible than the determinist response, presumably he would settle in the end for response (iii), though he has some (unarticulated) reservations about doing so.

I suspect that his reservations may stem from the following line of thought: if humans can judge with a very high degree of probability what other humans will do, God, whose knowledge of people's character and dispositions is far superior to ours, will judge what they would do with a far higher degree of probability. For the sake of concreteness, let's imagine that we can actually attach some numbers to these probability judgments. Suppose that if the human had to give odds that the butcher would not sell him the meat, he would reckon the probability to be one in one thousand. God, then, can make these predictions much more confidently; for him, the chance of an out-of-character action is one in one million. If the relative probabilities are anything like that, the risk of a disastrous outcome may well seem vanishingly small—in fact, negligible. So God will not be reckless if he takes that risk.

But if the indeterminist emphasizes so strongly the extremely low probability of divine error, what becomes of God's "risk-taking"? If the chance of a negative outcome is so small as to be negligible, even though a negative outcome would be disastrous, how "real" is that chance? The talk of a "risk-taking" God now appears to be so much bluster. *Strictly speaking*, God does not know infallibly what free choices his creatures will make, but his probable judgments come so close to knowledge that the difference does not matter. I conclude that the prospects for reconciling indeterminist freedom, divine ignorance of future human choices, and divine providence are not good.

§2.42 THESE REFLECTIONS LEAD ALSO, I THINK, TO A DIFFICULTY ARISING FROM GOD'S omniscience. Let's look again at the case of the butcher. And let's concede that we do not have infallible knowledge that he would act in character if I asked him to sell me a pound of ground beef. I think this claim gets its plausibility from the fact that it is a third-person case, that is, that I am considering counterfactuals about what another human being would do under circumstances which are not yet realized. It seems to me far less plausible when applied to our knowledge of ourselves.

In 1993 my wife and I sold a house. Before we put it on the market we made inquiries to try to determine what a fair price for the house would be, and decided on an asking price in the middle of that range. The asking price, let's say (fictitiously), was \$100,000. In the first week, we were offered \$98,000 and accepted that offer. Before putting the house on the market we had agreed that we would go as low as \$95,000. Suppose our buyer had offered \$99,000. Would we have accepted? Of course. I know this as surely as I know what the actual selling price was. Suppose our buyer had offered \$97,500. Would we have accepted? Of course we would have. Suppose he had offered \$50,000. Not a chance.⁵⁸ Unless we are radical skeptics, we all believe we have lots of knowledge of this kind. These are not merely probable inferences from our history, desires, character and situation. If humans can have knowledge of such counterfactuals, surely God must. God will not be a supremely perfect being if he lacks knowledge which we have.

§3. I CONCLUDE THAT KENNY'S DILEMMA IS A REAL ONE. IF THE CHRISTIAN THEIST makes enough of the traditional Christian assumptions about God's nature, she cannot avoid self-contradiction. As I have developed it, the argument does require us to assume more about God's nature than Kenny assumed. The crucial attributes are that God is the eternal creator of the world; omnipotent; omniscient; our ultimate judge, rewarding the good and punishing the wicked; that he is perfectly just; and that he is provident, where this implies that he has a loving concern for his creatures and acts wisely concerning them. It does not seem to me that this list of divine attributes is extravagant. It attributes to God no property not accepted by the overwhelming majority of Christians throughout most of the history of Christianity. But the attempt to combine these attributes seems to lead inevitably to the conclusion that determinism is both true and false. And this is impossible. If this is not a demonstration of the incoherence of Christian theism, it will do until one comes along. ϕ

Notes

¹ This paper owes much to conversations with various of my students, most notably Mike Griffin, Jeanine Diller, Peter Hsin, and Brian Jacover. For helpful comments on previous drafts of this paper, I'm indebted to Ian Proops, Rich Thomason, Louis Loeb, Peter Vranas, Dan Garber, Jonathan Bennett, Anthony Kenny, Nelson Pike, David Lewis, Phil Quinn, William Hasker, Jason Stanley, Mike Tooley, Wesley Morriston, and to several anonymous members of the audience, when I presented earlier versions at a conference of the Ontario Philosophical Society in 1999 and at the University of Colorado at Boulder in 2002.

² *The God of the Philosophers* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979), 121. Kenny's formulation of his thesis is more cautious: "the concept of God propounded by scholastic theologians and rationalist philosophers is an incoherent one." But the concept of God propounded by scholastic theologians and rationalist philosophers dominated Christian philosophical theology before the scholastics (for example, in Augustine and Anselm) and has continued to dominate it after the rationalists (for example, in James Ross, Alvin Plantinga, and Richard Swinburne). For Augustine, see the *Confessions* I, iv. For Anselm, see the *Proslogion*. For Ross, see his *Philosophical Theology* (2nd ed., Hackett, 1980). For Plantinga, see *Does God Have*

a *Nature?* (Marquette University Press, 1980). For Swinburne, see *The Coherence of Theism* (Oxford University Press, 1977, rev. ed., 1993).

³ In the First Meditation, Descartes wonders whether the omnipotent being who he believes created him must also be good. I take it that this question is partly answered by clarification of the concept of God, and the recognition that if he was created by an omnipotent being, that being must also have the property of goodness, since what God is most fundamentally is a supremely perfect being, who possesses all perfections. I believe Descartes preferred the general formula to listing attributes, for reasons I explore in "Analysis in the *Meditations*: the quest for clear and distinct ideas," in *Essays on Descartes' Meditations*, ed. Amélie Rorty (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986). Leibniz claims that the "absolutely perfect being" formula expresses "the most widely received and most significant notion of God" (*Discourse on Metaphysics*, §1).

⁴ A short list will also be helpful if we wish to generalize the argument to other varieties of theism. The question for Jewish and Muslim philosophers will be whether they too would embrace this list.

⁵ In laying things out this way I am indebted to my student, Peter Hsin, who adopted this strategy for organizing a paper he wrote for me on this problem.

⁶ Adapted from Lawrence Sklar's article on determinism, *A Companion to Metaphysics*, ed. Jaegwon Kim and Ernest Sosa (Blackwell, 1995). When contemporary Christian indeterminists reject determinism, they understand it more broadly, as holding *either* if the state of the world at any one time is fixed by its states at previous times (scientific determinism) *or* if it is directly fixed by divine volitions (theological determinism). But adopting the broader definition at this stage would not make the task of establishing (2) more difficult, only more complicated.

⁷ By "the world," I understand the totality of finite things. I assume, provisionally, that Christian theism is committed to the idea that the world is not eternal, though I know that some Christian philosophers do not interpret the creation doctrine in this way. See, for example, Swinburne, *The Coherence of Theism*, pp. 129-134. This is a simplifying assumption, not essential to my argument, for reasons to be explained below. My gloss on (6) assumes that God's eternity is temporal, rather than timeless. That is, embracing Nelson Pike's analysis of this contrast (in *God and Timelessness*, Schocken, 1970), God has temporal location and temporal extension, and must be said to exist at all times. I think that the consequences of assuming that God is timeless are disastrous for Christian philosophers and that Swinburne and Plantinga are right to reject these attributes; but I leave that to be argued elsewhere.

⁸ Pp. 99-103 in the Selby-Bigge edition, as revised by P. H. Nidditch (Clarendon, 1975).

⁹ A Christian who interprets the creation doctrine as consistent with the eternity of the world, as Swinburne does, might respond that he does not assume that there is an initial state of the world caused by the will of God. I doubt that the eternity of the world is really consistent with God's omnipotence. But even if God is not responsible for the initial state of the world, if he remains responsible for the laws by which one state is transformed into another, that should be sufficient for this argument.

¹⁰ *Philosophical Theology*, p. 211. Ross distinguishes between willing and effective choice, glossing the latter as "choice that is productively sufficient, in every possible world in which it occurs, for what is elected." But this distinction seems to make a difference only in the case of finite agents, where willing that *p* may not satisfy the conditions for effective choice. Ross himself treats "God wills that *p*" as an acceptable paraphrase for "God effectively chooses that *p*," and I assume that in the case of God the two expressions are equivalent.

¹¹ *Philosophical Theology*, p. xxi. Ross accepts the fact that his understanding of God's omnipotence implies predestination. Indeed, he welcomes that consequence. Some Christians seem to think acceptance of predestination is an aberration of reformers like Luther and Calvin, but it is also good Thomistic doctrine (compare *Summa theologiae* I, qu. 23).

¹² The interpretation of Pelagius is difficult and controversial. Pelagius was anxious to present his teaching in a way which would make it difficult for church councils to condemn him, sometimes, it seems, contradicting himself to avoid condemnation. My account owes much to B. R. Rees's *Pelagius, A Reluctant Heretic* (Boydell Press, 1988). See particularly pp. 32-37

and pp. 135-139.

¹³ See, for example, *On the Grace of Christ and Original Sin*, Bk. I, Chapters 3-7 and 26, in *Basic Writings of St. Augustine*, ed. Whitney Oates (New York: Random House, 1948), I, 584-588, 601-02.

¹⁴ Philippians 2:13. Another highly influential passage in this context was John 15:5, "Without me you can do nothing."

¹⁵ See *On Grace and Free Will*, ch. 21, in *Basic Writings of St. Augustine*, I, 750.

¹⁶ For a philosophically sophisticated attempt to work out a consistent Augustinian doctrine, see Eleonore Stump's contribution to the volume which she and Norman Kretzmann edited, *The Cambridge Companion to Augustine* (Cambridge University Press, 2001), "Augustine on Free Will."

¹⁷ A full treatment of the historical precedent for taking God's omnipotence to entail that he is the cause of all our actions would require discussion of the occasionalist doctrines which surface from time to time in the monotheistic traditions. Anglo-American philosophers will know this best from Malebranche (for example, in *Dialogue Seven* of his *Dialogues on Metaphysics*), but it also appears in the Asharite school of Islamic philosophers. On this see Barry S. Kogan, *Averroes and the Metaphysics of Causation* (SUNY Press, 1985). Space does not permit me to pursue these precedents further here.

¹⁸ "On Grace and Free Will," ch. 41, p. 767.

¹⁹ Compare *On the Grace of Christ and Original Sin*, Bk. I, ch. 17-18.

²⁰ See Henry Denzinger, *The Sources of Catholic Dogma*, trans. Roy Deferrari (Herder, 1957), 45-46, can. 5.

²¹ For example, "Man has free choice, or otherwise counsels, exhortations, commands, prohibitions, rewards and punishments would be in vain" (*Summa theologiae* I, Q. 83, A. 1). "Man does not choose of necessity... For man can will and not will, act and not act; and again, he can will this or that, and do this or that" (*ST* I-II, Q. 13, A. 6). Translations of Aquinas are from *Basic Writings of Saint Thomas Aquinas*, ed. Anton C. Pegis, 2 vols. (New York: Random House, 1945).

²² For example, "We receive from God not only the power to will, but also our very operations... In spiritual beings every movement of the will must be caused by the first will, which is God's" (*Summa contra gentiles*, III, 89). "The very act of free choice is traced to God as to a cause..." (*ST* I, Q. 22, A. 2 ad. 4). "If God moves the will to anything, it is incompatible with this supposition, that the will be not moved thereto..." (*ST* I-II, Q. 10, A. 4 ad. 3). For discussion of these and other passages, I am much indebted to a helpful article by W. Matthews Grant, "Aquinas among Libertarians and Compatibilists: Breaking the Logic of Theological Determinism," forthcoming in the *Proceedings of the American Catholic Philosophical Association*.

²³ See Erasmus, *De libero arbitrio*, in *Collected Works of Erasmus*, ed. Charles Trinkaus, trans. Peter Macardle and Clarence Miller, vol. 76 (University of Toronto Press, 1999), 13. The annotation in this edition cites two places in which Augustine comes very close to stating the view Erasmus ascribes to him: *On Grace and Free Will* 43, and *On the Predestination of the Saints* 16.33. In neither of these passages does Augustine say *exactly* what Erasmus says he says.

²⁴ *The Bondage of the Will*, trans. Philip Watson, *Luther's Works* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1972), vol. 33, p. 189. WA XVIII, 718.

²⁵ *The Bondage of the Will*, p. 190. *Luther and Erasmus*, p. 244; WA XVIII, 719.

²⁶ *The Bondage of the Will*, pp. 112-17.

²⁷ *The Bondage of the Will*, p. 64. Compare also p. 39. Similarly Calvin, *Institutes* II, ii, 7; v, 1.

²⁸ Both Luther and Calvin do also appeal to the doctrine that after the fall humans have inherited the guilt Adam and Eve incurred when they freely chose to sin. In the interests of brevity I leave the rebuttal of this defense as an exercise for the reader.

²⁹ *The Bondage of the Will*, p. 181. For Calvin, see *Institutes* III, xxi-xxiv.

³⁰ This is Norman Kretzmann's definition of a view he calls "theological subjectivism," in "Abraham, Isaac and Euthyphro: God and the Basis of Morality," in *Hamartia: The Concept of Error in the Western Tradition*, ed. Donald and Eleonore Stump, James Arietti, and Lloyd Gerson

(Mellen Press, 1983). Kretzmann does not defend theological subjectivism, so defined, but does defend a revised version of it.

³¹ Mill, *Examination of Sir William Hamilton's Philosophy*, ch. 7.

³² See Luis de Molina, *On Divine Foreknowledge, Part IV of the Concordia*, ed. & trans. Alfred J. Freddoso (Cornell University Press, 1988), 24-25.

³³ See *The Coherence of Theism*, pp. 145-147, and *The Nature of Necessity*, pp. 166-167.

³⁴ In *God, Time and Knowledge*, ch. 3.

³⁵ In "Divine Omniscience and Voluntary Action," *Philosophical Review* (1965). For Pike's most recent formulation of it, see "A latter-day look at the foreknowledge problem," *Philosophy of Religion* 33(1993): 129-64.

³⁶ George Mavrodes, "Omniscience," in *A Companion to the Philosophy of Religion*, eds. Philip Quinn and Charles Taliaferro (Blackwells, 1997), 242.

³⁷ *Faith and Philosophy*, 3(1986):235-69; reprinted in John Martin Fischer's *God, Foreknowledge and Freedom* (Stanford, 1989).

³⁸ See the example of the carpenter ants in the reprint in Fischer, *God, Foreknowledge and Freedom*, pp. 200-201. See also Fischer's comment on Plantinga's article on pp. 47-48 of his introduction.

³⁹ Swinburne noted this in *The Coherence of Theism* and modified his definition of divine omniscience to exclude that result.

⁴⁰ Compare Pike's "A latter-day look at the foreknowledge problem." Pike does not offer (D6) as a definition of omniscience, but does claim it as a necessary truth. Swinburne has a much more complicated account of omniscience, designed to avoid the implication that an omniscient being must know truths about future human free actions. See *The Coherence of Theism*, ch. 10. But he acknowledges that Christian theologians have "normally" wished to attribute a much stricter omniscience to God (p. 182).

⁴¹ So Hasker concludes in *God, Time and Foreknowledge* (Cornell University Press, 1989). I agree, for reasons which emerge below.

⁴² A name introduced by David Vriend. See Robert Adams, "Middle Knowledge and the Problem of Evil," in *The Virtue of Faith* (Oxford UP, 1987), 91, n4. This article was first published in the *American Philosophical Quarterly* (1977), but the reprint adds a number of helpful notes responding to discussion of the original article, and of Adams's later contribution to *Alvin Plantinga*, ed. James E. Tomberlin and Peter van Inwagen (Reidel, 1985).

By a 'counterfactual of freedom' I mean a conditional whose antecedent states a condition contrary to fact and whose consequent asserts that under those circumstances an agent would have acted in a certain way (it being assumed that the action would, in some sense, have been free). The default assumption is that "free" is to be interpreted here in a molinist way. But if the truth of such counterfactuals turns out to be incompatible with the freedom of the action, on a molinist conception of freedom, then we must decide whether to retain that conception of freedom, change our mind about the judgment that the act was free, or reject the claim that the counterfactual is true. When I argue later that there are true counterfactuals of freedom, I do not intend to commit myself to a molinist conception of freedom.

⁴³ If the antecedent does not explicitly mention all the circumstances relevant to that choice, we can stipulate that it is shorthand for a complete history of the world up to the moment of choice.

⁴⁴ By a "deliberative conditional" I mean a conditional in whose antecedent an agent considers an action he might freely take, and whose consequent predicts a consequence of that action. (I make the same stipulations about freedom as in note 42 on counterfactuals of freedom.) The consequent might also involve a free action, but it need not. In the cases which interest us, the action contemplated in the antecedent will be a divine action, and the consequence will be a free human action. If the antecedent involves a possible action of God, I call it a "divine deliberative conditional." Where the antecedent refers to a possible action of a human agent, I speak of a "human deliberative conditional."

I believe the term "deliberative conditional" was introduced by Adams (compare *The Virtue of Faith*, p. 84). But I define the term differently than he does. Adams's paradigm of a deliberative conditional is: "If God created Adam and Eve, there would be more moral good than

moral evil in the history of the world." But I think the proper form for a deliberative conditional is "If X were to do A , then Y " where X is a place marker for some term the agent uses to refer to himself (typically, the first person pronoun).

⁴⁵ Though Plantinga has vigorously rejected the Leibnizian claim that God's moral goodness requires him to create the best of all possible worlds (because there are possible worlds even an omnipotent God cannot create), he does seem to assume that where God makes a choice between two worlds either of which he *can* create, his goodness requires him to choose the better. Compare *God, Freedom and Evil*, pp. 12-44.

⁴⁶ Presumably we should not say that his knowledge of true deliberative conditionals *becomes* knowledge of counterfactuals as the history of the world develops, since he has foreknowledge of his own future choices about which creatures he would create and what circumstances he would put them in. This, combined with his knowledge of deliberative conditionals, would give him complete foreknowledge of the actual history of the world. So from eternity he must have known which conditionals are counterfactual. It's only by abstracting from his knowledge of his future creative choices that we can think of him as not knowing these facts.

⁴⁷ Compare Plantinga, *The Nature of Necessity* (Clarendon Press, 1974) pp. 174-180.

⁴⁸ Adams in "Middle Knowledge and the Problem of Evil," *American Philosophical Quarterly*, vol. XIV, 1977 (reprinted in *The Virtue of Faith*, pp. 84-86); Kenny, *The God of the Philosophers*, pp. 65-71.

⁴⁹ Compare *Alvin Plantinga*, ed. Tomberlin and van Inwagen, pp. 375-376. In particular, it does not seem that the objection depends on assuming the transitivity of dependence.

⁵⁰ My argument assumes, of course, that the relevant similarities are those regarding laws and *past* history. Some philosophers have doubted this. Compare David Lewis's discussion of "The Future Similarity Objection." ("Counterfactual Dependence and Time's Arrow," *Philosophical Papers*, vol. II (Oxford University Press, 1986), 43-48) But Plantinga seems content to accept this assumption. In discussing the case in which a (fictional) mayor of Boston named Curley Smith is offered a bribe of \$20,000, he writes "What happens after t seems scarcely relevant to the question what Curley would have done if offered the bribe" (*The Nature of Necessity*, p. 176). In this passage Plantinga comes close to seeing that there is a problem about combining indeterminism with a possible world semantics for counterfactuals. But his preoccupation with the question whether conditional excluded middle (either $A > B$ or $A > \neg B$) is a valid logical principle muddies the discussion. It is irrelevant to point out, as he does, that we surely know that some counterfactuals are true. And when he proclaims that "one measure of similarity between worlds involves the question whether they share their counterfactuals," he effectively abandons the project of explaining the truth of counterfactuals in terms of similarity of possible worlds.

⁵¹ Some indeterminists seem now to recognize this. Hasker reports that in correspondence, Freddoso wrote, "We might wonder why it wasn't perfectly obvious from the start that comparative similarity [sc. of possible worlds] wouldn't help us if the conditionals in question involve genuine causal indeterminism" (*God, Time and Knowledge*, p. 39n; compare 25n, 31n). Compare his introduction to his edition of Molina, §5.6.

⁵² Mackie's "Evil and Omnipotence" first appeared in *Mind* for 1955 and has been widely reprinted (for example, in Robert Adams and Marilyn McCord Adams, *The Problem of Evil*). Plantinga's response, in *God, Freedom and Evil* is now widely thought to be the definitive refutation.

⁵³ Thomas P. Flint, *Divine Providence: The Molinist Account* (Cornell University Press, 1998), 12.

⁵⁴ P. Quinn & C. Taliaferro, *A Companion to Philosophy of Religion* (Blackwell's 1997), 569. Freddoso attributes a similar definition of providence to Molina in his edition of *On Divine Foreknowledge*, pp. 2-3.

⁵⁵ For example, Adams, *The Virtue of Faith*, p. 91, and Hasker, *God, Time and Knowledge*, pp. 197-205.

⁵⁶ I assume here an analysis of recklessness along the lines advocated in the Model Penal Code. That is, an act is reckless just in case it exhibits advertent disregard for a substantial

and unjustifiable risk.

⁵⁷ Adams, "Middle Knowledge and the Problem of Evil," which originally appeared in the *American Philosophical Quarterly* 1977. I cite the reprint in Adams's *The Virtue of Faith* (Oxford University Press, 1987, p.88).

⁵⁸ Note that although some of my examples might be dismissed as 'semifactuals,' others cannot (Compare Adams, *The Virtue of Faith*, p.88). When I presented this paper at Guelph, some in the audience thought my certainty unwarranted. But those who had such doubts seemed to be committing the fallacy of strengthening the antecedent. That is, they assumed a situation of choice in which the circumstances differed in ways other than that posited in the antecedent of the conditional (for example, the buyer offered only \$50,000 *and* my financial situation was desperate). On this and related counterfactual fallacies, see Lewis, *Counterfactuals*, pp. 31-36.