

# Actions, Their Effects and Preventable Evil

There is an engaging though unsound argument against Alvin Plantinga's Free Will Defense that begins by presuming humans possess libertarian free will. It proceeds, in Susan Anderson's words, as follows:

Why, then, couldn't God let the beings he creates be free as long as they do right actions and interfere (take away their freedom) when He sees that they would sin if allowed to act freely? Wouldn't this world, let us call it  $w^*$ , be a better world than either of the two possible worlds Plantinga thinks God would ultimately choose between (a world in which all of men's actions are determined or a world in which all of men's actions are free)? Many of the actions which the beings he creates would perform would have moral worth (being done freely); and, since they would be right actions, they would give positive value to such a world, making it better than the world in which persons are determined to always do right actions. Furthermore, since the wrong actions done from free will would be eliminated, so would the negative value which is associated with our world. Why would Plantinga not find this acceptable?<sup>1</sup>

I shall dub this the 'Sophomoric Argument'.

The rhetorical point is ambiguous: It could be that (1) Anderson demands an explanation for the logical impossibility of what have become known as 'Mackie-worlds,' in which humans always freely choose to do good and freely choose

not to do evil. However, (2) she may want to know the reason God does not create Mackie-worlds (on the assumption that their creation is metaphysically possible). As construed as (2), a demand for a theodicy, there are obvious objections to the Sophomoric Argument centering on the fact that the world that results under such miraculous circumstances would be unlivable and incoherent; I shall develop these shortly. I am more interested in the fact that proponents of the Sophomoric Argument have thus far only dimly defended a tacit suspicion underlying their argument, namely that the lack of miracles is deeply incongruous with God's character (as traditionally construed). In this essay I will approach anew this intuition and argue that certain theodicy considerations are incapable of explaining why God does not perform certain miracles.

In section I. I enumerate and explain three types of miracles and imbed the discussion in the context of agent causation. In II. I argue that, though there are types of miracles that we cannot expect God to perform (e.g. turning knives into wine), there is nonetheless an important set of miracles, referred to below as 'Type-3' miracles, whose members God can perform with neither chaotic consequences nor violations of human free will. This will show that standard objections to the Sophomoric Argument are not forceful against situations in which God could perform a Type-3 miracle to prevent harmful effects of human actions. After considering some theodicies for the lack of Type-3 miracles in III. and arguing they fail, in IV. I develop some conclusions about the utility of a suggestion made in (but not a proper part of) Plantinga's Free Will Defense. Coupled with results from

the discussion about the relation between free will and effects of actions, we will show that attempts to explain natural evil by appeal to the possibility that a non-human agent causes it are ineffective. This has a clear implication for the scope of such a theodicy.

## I. Freely Willed Action

A. An Example. Let's discuss a case in which an appalling physical pain results from a freely performed action. In approximately the year 860 John Scotus Erigena, at that time a professor of philosophy and theology, was tortured by a student when the student—call him Gerald—repeatedly stabbed John Erigena with a quill pen. Suppose that Gerald desires to harm John and that Gerald has the second-order desire—the volition—to harm John. Gerald is embedded in a certain physical and social environment and such factors at least partially determine his intentions and volitions. However, Gerald's infliction of pain upon John with a pen is free in the sense that it is not fully determined by anything external to Gerald's will. In short, Gerald has free will. (I need not, and so will not, wed this argument to any specific analysis of free will.)

The event of Gerald's murder of John encompasses, in successive order, Gerald's intention and his volition, the stabbing action and the effect the action has on John. We may diagram the process in this way:

(1) Intention—> (2) Action—> (3) Effect

There are three points in any agent-caused event at which God could perform a miracle that would prevent the painful effects from obtaining.<sup>ii</sup> He could prevent an agent from having a pernicious intention, prior to (1); He could prevent an agent from acting on his intention, prior to (2); or He could prevent the effects from obtaining, prior to (3). I wish carefully to consider interventions of the third sort, what I shall dub ‘Type-3’ miracles, because their relation to free will and God’s power is especially important.<sup>iii</sup> Prior to this we must address two preliminary points.

B. Agent Causation. Depending upon one’s theory of action, one may believe that the tidy three-stage division outlined above is philosophically suspect. Several philosophers of action would comfortably affirm the distinction as I have rendered it, including Chisholm<sup>iv</sup> and Danto.<sup>v</sup> For those who find Chisholm’s distinction between transeunt (event-event) and immanent (agent-event) causation plausible, it is likely they will have no objection to considering the effect of an agent caused event as distinct from the agent’s action.<sup>vi</sup>

However, those in the opposing camp (best represented by Donald Davidson<sup>vii</sup>) may argue that we cannot consider as numerically distinct a primitive action, e.g. moving one’s hand, and events precipitated by this action. That is to say, when a queen poisons a king, “The moving of her hand by the queen on that occasion was identical with her doing something that caused the death of the king... Doing something that causes a death is identical with causing a death. But there is no

distinction to be made between causing the death of a person and killing him.”<sup>viii</sup> The three different descriptions of the queen’s action all describe one event. Notice, though, that Davidson stops short of identifying causing the death of the king with the death of the king (or the state of affairs in which the king is dead). Hence, the tension between Davidson’s analysis of actions and my own use of a distinction between effects and actions is merely apparent.

Notice that these positions are taken with respect to the individuation of actions and events; their proponents do not clearly draw conclusions regarding the relationship between effects of actions and freedom of the will. Chisholm and others hold that an agent caused event is not identical to any effect of the action. I have briefly argued that Davidson’s position does not deny that, but rather, he denies that there is any principle of individuation according to which an event like pulling a trigger is distinct from a shooting-a-bullet event. But let us suppose for the sake of argument that someone does want to include the effects of an action in an analysis of that action.<sup>ix</sup> Supposing actions and events are coarsely individuated, it does not necessarily follow that freely willed actions isomorphically track Davidsonian events. An example will assist in illustrating the point.

Suppose my grandfather freely acts to plant a sapling and one effect of this free action is the presence of a large apple tree in my back yard. (I won’t trouble with identifying my grandfather’s intentions in performing this act.) His planting activity in 1937 and the presence of a flowering apple tree in my yard in the year 2000 combine to form a singular event, according to my interlocutor. Suppose I now

cut down this tree. It is absurd to hold that my doing so violates my grandfather's free will. So, even though Davidson and others may disagree with the way in which I carve up an agent-caused action, it does not follow from their view that the conclusions I draw about the relation between free will and effects of human actions (or transient events) are false or misleading.

C. Miracles and theories of Free Will. One might wonder what types of divine intervention violate an agent's free will (1) on compatibilism and (2) on libertarianism. I will not pause to discuss this issue because, unfortunately for our purposes, traditional debate about God and human freedom has excluded treatment about the relation of effects of human actions to free agency. Nonetheless, some facts in this neighborhood are obvious. When God performs Type-1 miracles he manipulates one's will, e.g. God forces Gerald to love John Erigena as he loves himself. Clearly He violates Gerald's free will. Such being the case, the libertarian theist (and probably the compatibilist theist) has a solid reason to suppose that God would not intervene with Type-1 miracles if human freedom is (or is necessary for) a significant good. Type-2 miracles in which God prevents an agent from carrying out the intended action are also prima facie violations of free will. (Theists who are compatibilists may believe that Type-2 miracles do not violate human free will, but since this is of no consequence to my larger argument, I will not take time to slake this objection here.)

Alvin Plantinga concurs. A person is free with respect to an action A only if causal laws and antecedent conditions do not determine that he either performs A

or that he refrains from performing A. Says Plantinga, “More broadly, if I am free with respect to an action A, then God does not bring it about or cause it to be the case either that I take or that I refrain from this action.”<sup>x</sup> This is the import of his explanation of the type of free will required for the Free Will Defense:

[God] can create free creatures, but He can't cause or determine them to do only what is right. For if He does so, then they aren't significantly free after all; they do not do what is right freely. To create creatures capable of moral good, therefore, He must create creatures capable of moral evil; and He can't give these creatures the freedom to perform evil and at the same time prevent them from doing so... [T]he fact that free creatures sometimes go wrong, however, counts neither against God's omnipotence nor against His goodness; for He could have forestalled the occurrence of moral evil only by removing the possibility of moral good.<sup>xi</sup>

Contrary to ordinary language, in order freely to will, e.g. to stab someone, one must be capable of more than freely intending to stab someone.

There are sound reasons to believe that God violates an agent's freedom by performing Type-1 or Type-2 miracles. Granting that freedom is (or is a necessary condition for) a good of enormous proportions, this observation serves as a theodicy to explain why God allows agents to will and act in evil ways (or so I will suppose for the sake of argument). Yet for what reason does God refrain from performing Type-3 miracles (in large quantities) to prevent evil effects from obtaining?

## II. Preventable Effects and Theodicies for the Lack of Type-3 Miracles

There are several rationales resembling theodicies for moral evil that one might provide in order to explain why God does not perform Type-3 miracles. Such proposals are attempts to account for the central intuition behind the Sophomoric Argument, namely that the lack of miracles is deeply incongruous with God's character.<sup>xii</sup>

A. Free Will. The obvious first place to look for such a rationale follows directly from the above considerations: perhaps God refrains from performing Type-3 miracles because doing so would violate human free will, as in Type-1 and Type-2 miracles. Are Type-3 miracles relevantly similar to Type-1 and Type-2 miracles? There is a clear prima facie case for holding that God's performance of a Type-3 miracle is more similar to the performance of a Type-0 miracle (see footnote 3) than it is to the performance of a Type-1 or Type-2 miracle. In most accounts of freedom, compatibilist or libertarian, the free mental activity of an agent is explained by appeal to features of an agent's will—that it not be coerced or determined by factors external to the agent. Likewise, free bodily activity is often described as the absence of physical constraints upon one's use of one's body.

First, I'll offer some considerations in favor of affirming that effects of freely willed actions are not constitutive of free will, and ipso facto that an appeal free will cannot provide a theodicy for the lack of Type-3 miracles. Second, I will address a few objections to my view.

Some may claim that a free will is not genuinely free if the effects of an action



caused by an agent are prevented. There are two ways in which this might be developed. My interlocutor may argue that effects are constitutive of (1) the free action or that they are constitutive of (2) the freely willed event. (In (2) my interlocutor seeks to remain neutral with respect to just what a freely willed event is.) However, both (1) and (2) lead to absurdity. If Gerald freely acts so as to stab John and cause him pain, but John doesn't experience any pain, we do not conclude that Gerald's action was not freely performed. Perhaps John has no feeling in the area of his arm where he was stabbed. There is no obvious intuitive or conceptual connection between Gerald's mental state and Gerald's physical movements, and the failure of certain pain receptors in John's arm to fire. Hence, an appeal to (1) is (at least so far) ad hoc. Furthermore, even if effects were constitutive of a freely willed action in some sense, it is manifestly untenable to hold that the precise effects that occur are constitutive of the agent's freely willed action. In other words, in (1)'s strong form, my objector believes that the presence and high degree of pain in John Erigena's body is a proper part of the freely willed action of Gerald. However, surely that John experiences  $X+1$  rather than  $X$  degrees of pain, is not constitutive of Gerald's free action of stabbing John.

The foregoing are reasons to think there is no prima facie plausible, principled justification for (1), but there are also reasons against the coherence of (1). First, if we included the effects of one's freely willed physical movements within the domain of a freely willed action, it would make posthumous acts of free will and violations of such acts possible. Suppose I take a tour of a prehistoric cave, bump

into the wall and smudge a painting on its surface. An advocate of (1) claims that I violate the freely willed action of a Paleolithic man who, while painting the picture, intended that it remain fully intact throughout eternity. This objection employs the notion that the effects of free actions performed with certain long-range intentions in mind are prevented at the expense of violating the agent's free will, yet this is absurd. (With slight modification this is applicable against (2).) For one, again, there is no principled connection between smudging certain pigments on a cave wall (in the year 2000) and the free will of a Paleolithic person. For two, since this person does not exist, it is senseless to say I violate his free will. If freedom supervenes on someone's will, and that person has not existed for millennia, there is nothing for me to violate.

If (1) is implausible, (2) likewise offers little promise. (2) attempts to escape the absurdity in (1) by widening the concept of free will to include intentions, actions and whatever else we think is included in it. But writing this blank check is an ad hoc maneuver. The burden is on my interlocutor to specify just what the scope of free will is, since I have provided strong intuitive considerations for thinking that a freely willed event does not include the consequences it precipitates.

There is another serious problem with (1) and (2). Once an intention and action are put into place, most (if not all) of the events that follow are physically determined. It is highly plausible to hold that physical events (as opposed to mental events, some advocates of libertarianism might remind us) occur in a causally closed system and are governed by laws according to which it is physically necessary that

one event causes another. Physical effects of actions are not free in the way that defenders of freedom of the will believe mental events are free. That the puncture wound in John's arm incubates infectious bacteria is not a free event. Since it is not free in any obvious sense, it is difficult to understand how it might be constitutive of a freely willed event. (A principled objection to my separation of free will from effects of freely willed actions might be that there is a necessary connection between actions and their effects. Since I believe this is a move that would tempt Plantinga, I will wait until section III.C to consider it.)

So, the attempt to counter the central intuition behind the Sophomoric Argument via an appeal to the presence of free will in humans fails to explain why God chooses not to reduce X+1 degrees of suffering John Erigena undergoes to a mere X degrees. A theodicy for the evil of effects of freely willed actions cannot successfully appeal to freedom as a countervailing good that prevents God from intervening in small but significant ways.

Neither the freedom of Gerald's will nor his activity is violated or removed by God by performing a Type-3 miracle. (Notice I do not deny that Gerald is morally responsible for many of the effects of this action, even though the effects are not proper parts of the freely willed event. Since people can be held responsible for acts they do not perform (e.g. sins of omission), it is not surprising that freely acting is not a necessary condition for blameworthiness.) Let's now examine another prima facie plausible reason for which God does not perform Type-3 miracles.<sup>xiii</sup>

B. Incoherence. Recall that the proponent of the Sophomoric Argument holds

that God, being all good, would prevent moral evil from coming about, e.g. by rendering a weapon being used for torture useless. One needn't slavishly follow Leibniz to appreciate the point that such a world would be egregiously incoherent. Were God to prevent all moral evil by Type-3 miracles in this way, our world would be chaotic indeed. One might argue, depending on how often God did perform certain sorts of Type-3 miracles, that the violations of the laws of nature in such a world would be so incoherent as to cause more harm than good.<sup>xiv</sup>

Thus, in a multitude of cases the Sophomoric Argument fails to establish that God's performing a miracle would be better, ceteris paribus, than his refraining from performing it. At this concession, my interlocutor may be anxious at the prospects of forcing me into a squeeze play. On the one hand I have conceded that Type-1 and Type-2 miracles are violations of free will (and that as such, God is prevented from performing them). On the other, I have acknowledged that incoherence considerations go far toward explaining the lack of many Type-3 miracles (performed on effects to human agents). One might contend that between the two we have found a fine theodicy for the lack of miracles.

Such a judgment would be premature. There is a class of states of affairs, members of which occur all too frequently, in which miraculous actions by God would prevent evil by neither causing pernicious incoherence nor violating human free will. I need to distinguish between two kinds of Type-3 miracles—those that produce unwelcome chaos, and those that do not. I say 'unwelcome' because there is a clear sense in which all miracles produce some chaos on a plausible analysis of

that term. However, contra Leibniz, clearly many divine violations of laws would be desirable, on balance, because they prevent great amounts of evil and do not sacrifice comparable amounts of good.

Experiencing a high degree of emotional or physical pain is clearly one of the most undesirable states of affairs for any agent, whether human or animal. Consider a case in which someone has severely painful internal hemorrhaging resulting from a gunshot wound. God could perform a Type-3 miracle here to ease the excruciating pain without eliminating all the pain. God could likewise reduce the physical pain inflicted upon children who are starving or diseased without producing chaotic events or violating free will.<sup>xv</sup> However, I need not insist on this point for in section III.C I present another and more important argument against the appropriation of incoherence considerations in a theodicy for God's failure to prevent natural evil.

### III. Type-3 Miracles and the Free Will Defense

A. 'Moral Evil'? Taking stock, we have clarified our notion of a freely willed action, and we have provided an analysis of discrete types of potential miracles that it is logically possible for God to perform. Our efforts can aptly be read as clarifying a highly circumscribed evidential problem of evil—how do we explain why God does not perform Type-3 miracles to prevent at least some of the evil from effects of a certain class of human actions?

It seems we have correlatively unearthed some facts about the nature of evil

which are of significant importance for an understanding of defenses and theodicies. Unfortunately, our terms ‘moral’ and ‘evil’ both hover uncomfortably between various realms of discourse. Philosophers have rightly and inextricably bound the term ‘moral evil’ to intentions and actions of agents. Let me now offer some argumentative considerations in favor of holding that the painful effects of certain free actions are not moral evil. (Note, however, that the argument here is independent from the argument here in III.A. Hence, even if one believes that my argument about the nature of moral evil is unsound, this in itself in no way impugns my conclusion in the next section.)

Gerald’s having an intention to torture John Erigena surely is an example of moral evil; the intention is valuable with moral predicates, as is his action expressing that intention. Call it what you will—pain, suffering, agony—but John’s physical state is not the kind of thing that could be evil. As the preceding argument contends, his neuro-physiological state is not immoral as a result of his being the victim of torture.

If this intuition and the preceding argumentative considerations on its behalf do not sway the reader, consider this pair of cases. In the first case, Steve intends to cause Jeremy serious pain by pushing a boulder in Jeremy’s direction and Steve successfully acts on that intention. Three days later the boulder catches up with Jeremy, partially crushes him and causes him great pain. In the second, Steve does not intend to cause Jeremy serious pain, but is accidentally bumped into a boulder which catches up with Jeremy three days later, partially crushes him and causes

him serious pain. As it happens, Steve's physical state in the second case is identical with his state in the first—he makes the same movements, etc. Jeremy's physical states before and after being hit with the boulder are also identical in the first and second cases. In the first case Steve's intention and action were morally evil, but not in the second case. Notice that we describe Jeremy's plight in the same way across the two cases: it is tragic, painful and unfortunate. Jeremy's physical and mental pain are themselves not morally evil, even though in the first case they result from a morally evil action.<sup>xvi</sup>

I take this to show only that prima facie it is a confusion to apply the term 'moral evil' to the effects of actions caused by agents. There is nothing moral about the increased firing rates of the pain receptors in Jeremy's nervous system; specifying certain non-physical features that causally precipitated Jeremy's plight are irrelevant to evaluating Jeremy's physical condition as unfortunate. Clearly this argument requires more thorough analysis, but if it can be defended an interesting result follows, a result that would amplify the force of my conclusion in this paper: contra ordinary parlance in the philosophy of religion, many states of affairs commonly thought to be morally evil are actually cases of natural evil.<sup>xvii</sup>

B. Natural Evil, Theodicy and the Free Will Defense. Earlier I quoted Plantinga on the value of freedom. He says that “[God] can create free creatures, but He can't cause or determine them to do only what is right. For if He does so, then they aren't significantly free after all; they do not do what is right freely.”<sup>xviii</sup> Strictly speaking this is accurate, but there is a key ambiguity in the use of the

word 'do.' If it refers to one's ability freely to intend and act, what Plantinga says is acceptable. However, another reading, more likely than the former, has it that 'do' refers to the consequences of one's free action, as well as to the action itself. This latter interpretation I have shown to be false: one can freely do something even if the natural course of the consequences of that action is interrupted. This has an urgent importance for what Plantinga claims next:

To create creatures capable of moral good, therefore, He must create creatures capable of moral evil; and He can't give these creatures the freedom to perform evil and at the same time prevent them from doing so... The fact that free creatures sometimes go wrong, however, counts neither against God's omnipotence nor against His goodness; for He could have forestalled the occurrence of moral evil only by removing the possibility of moral good.<sup>xix</sup>

Here the same ambiguity is present in his use of 'performing evil.' No doubt it is correct that to perform moral good in the world one must be capable of performing moral evil, but in neither case must the consequences of one's free actions obtain. Creatures can create moral evil by intending and acting in hurtful ways without the normal effects of their evil actions obtaining. Most of what we colloquially might consider moral evil actually is natural evil preventable by God without any violation of our free wills.

In the Free Will Defense Plantinga defends the compatibility of God's existence with the presence of moral evil in our world in part by appeal to the possible libertarian free agency of God's creatures.<sup>xx</sup> From the foregoing I conclude



that such an appeal to free agency does not provide a rationale for why God allows painful effects of free actions to come about. Notice that this claim does not deny any formal step in the Free Will Defense for evil and so, strictly speaking, I dispute neither the validity nor soundness of Plantinga's defense. However, I do disagree with an obvious way in which some (including Plantinga himself) have been tempted to extend this defense into a theodicy. Let's turn to Plantinga's discussion of natural evil in order to examine this move.

Formally Plantinga's version of the Free Will Defense for natural evil is not tarnished by these considerations. This is because the following proposition remains possibly true:

(36) All natural evil is due to the free activity of non-human persons; there is a balance of good over evil with respect to the actions of these non-human persons; and there is no world God could have created which contains a more favourable balance of good over evil with respect to the free activity of the non-human persons it contains.<sup>xxi</sup>

Plantinga is careful to emphasize, rightly, that (36) is not required to be true for the success of the Free Will Defense.<sup>xxii</sup>

Nonetheless, I hesitate to expand the Free Will Defense in the way Plantinga insinuates we can in order to explain the existence of natural evil. This is desirable from the theist's perspective since facts about the nature of natural evil make it more difficult to explain, given the existence of God, than moral evil. Plantinga urges that it is possible that natural evil simply is moral evil because the great

suffering of humans from natural disasters could result from the free (and thus morally culpable) choices of Satan and his minions.<sup>xxiii</sup> Whereas I have argued that much of what is normally considered moral evil is in fact natural evil, Plantinga thinks just the opposite is true.

The move that would take Plantinga from a defense of natural evil to a theodicy would require affirming, not merely the possibility of (36), but its truth. Plantinga notes that Augustine did just this. Though not made explicit by Plantinga, I take it that what he refers to as the ‘Augustinian assumption’ on which (36) is made true can be rendered as follows:

(1) Satan’s freely willed actions are the causes of all natural evil.

If (1) is not merely possible but also true, according to Plantinga it follows that “both moral and natural evil would then be special cases of what we might call broadly moral evil—evil resulting from the free actions of personal beings, whether human or not.”<sup>xxiv</sup> So, if (1) is true, we know the reason God refrains from preventing natural evil. I take it that this would amount to a theodicy for natural evil. (As it stands, Plantinga only affirms the conditional and does not affirm the antecedent.)

Let’s explore the relationship between Satan’s free agency and the effects of his (evil) actions. It seems that the truth of (1) depends upon another assumption about the nature of effects and their relation to actions. Where  $n$  denotes an

instance of natural evil, this assumption reads:

(2) ■ (n)(God prevents n  $\wedge$   $\sim$ (God violates Satan's free will)).<sup>xxv</sup>

The preceding argument in the first half of the paper shows that the relation between Satan's willing (his intending and acting) and the effects of his willing is not conceptually necessary, but is instead contingent. Our previous labors show that

(3) ◆ (∃n)(God prevents n  $\wedge$   $\sim$ (God violates Satan's free will)).

The effects of human actions are not subsumed within an analysis of a freely willed action. Furthermore, there is no principled reason to deny the same is true of Satan's actions and their effects. The consequences of at least some of Satan's actions are also preventable by God via the performance of Type-3 miracles. (For present purposes I need not affirm that all of the effects of Satan's actions in our world are preventable by God.) Hurricanes causing extreme pain and anguish for thousands of people could be prevented by God without violating the free will of Satan. While Plantinga's (36) is possible, I contend that since (2) is false, it follows that the Augustinian assumption that would allow the move from a defense of natural evil to a theodicy for natural evil is illicit. In the relevant sense of 'do' or 'performing evil,' the obtaining of harmful effects is not necessary for Satan to act freely.

Hence, it is possible that God prevents large quantities of natural evil without violating the free will of an agent, human or non-human. The conclusion of this section is that, though the Free Will Defense stands as a defense, its formal apparatus cannot be extended to provide the theodicy for natural evil that Plantinga insinuates it can provide.

C. Objections and Replies. There are two objections to the preceding argument that I will briefly consider. First, I need to make good on my earlier promissory note. I mentioned that Plantinga might respond to this argument by rejecting the soundness of the argument in the first half of the paper by metaphysically grounding the relation between effects and actions. The most probable way of accomplishing this is by affirming something like:

- (4) ■ All free, agent-caused actions include the effects they would naturally cause.

If this can be shown to be true, it will have several desirable effects. The most important among them is that the effects of Satan's actions would not be preventable by God without violating Satan's free will.

Nonetheless, there are several persuasive reasons against adopting such a strategy by affirming (4). First, the necessity operator here cannot be given a logical reading. But there are few prospects for making a principled case that the operator must be given a moral or conceptual reading. Second, without a logically necessary reading, the affirmation of (4) entails placing a serious constraint on God's omnipotence.<sup>xxvi</sup>

Third, as hinted at earlier with examples, such a view would have difficulties providing principled constraints on the notion of inclusion at work here. What could one mean by “the effects they naturally cause”? If (4) was true, the weather, indigestion or other people wouldn’t be able to interfere (as they seem able to) so as to prevent effects “naturally caused” by an agent’s action. Suppose robbers assail their victim, stealing his money and physically brutalizing him. Left for dead, a Good Samaritan intervenes to save the victim’s life, capture the thieves and return the victim’s money. It seems as though the Samaritan has falsified (4) by preventing the effects of the free actions of the thieves from coming about. Not only, then, is (4) false, but effects of agent-caused harms are routinely prevented. Shooting victims often (thankfully) arrive in emergency rooms enabling people to save their lives and decrease their pain. Furthermore, notice that my interlocutor believes free will is either a valuable good in itself or a means to a valuable good. By expanding the notion of a freely willed action to constitute such an agent’s effects, free will (and its preservation) is devalued to the extent that it is unsuitable for a theodicy for the lack of miracles.

There is a second objection to my argument that avoids the insuperable problems with (4). One might be inclined to appeal to what I earlier referred to as ‘incoherence considerations’ to show that God may have reasons unrelated to the preservation of free will for which he does not perform Type-3 miracles on Satan’s actions. After all, in the case of the natural world, the theodicy considerations we adduced did show that God cannot, on pain of incoherence, prevent a large number

of the effects of free human actions. Such incoherence is a countervailing evil.

However, these incoherence considerations do not apply to the actions of non-human agents. The incoherence factors motivating the explanation for the lack of certain Type-3 miracles in the human case, e.g. that God must deceive observers into believing that some person has a right hand when in fact it was removed in a knifing, do not apply in the non-human case. If God works to prevent Satan from acting thus and so, it will not disturb our natural world. (Presumably in the spiritual realm there are not the sorts of laws which would be upset by God acting to prevent His spiritual creatures from performing their actions.) Even if there were certain supernatural laws of the relevant sort, it is not at all obvious God should desire to avoid causing Satan some incoherence given the harm to large numbers of human beings that God's Type-3 miracles would prevent (not to mention the fact that Satan is God's enemy). So, these objections to the foregoing argument are ineffective.

Plantinga attempts, with the appropriate modal qualifications, to reduce natural evil to a species of moral evil. We have identified a temptation in Plantinga to extend his defense to a theodicy by appeal to the free activity of Satan. I have argued, first and most importantly, that such an attempt will fail. Since effects of agent caused actions are not constitutive of the exercise of the agent's free will, Satan can freely act to create a lethal plague, for example, but God can prevent the effects of Satan's actions from obtaining. Second, I have briefly argued that moral evil is restricted to intentions and actions and that, from this, it follows that there is

much more natural evil (i.e., evils of effects) than previously imagined. Hence, the move to extend Plantinga's defense of moral evil to a theodicy for natural evil is not only false, but also is rather backward. We now see that we cannot make this appeal to the free activity of supernatural agents just as we realize that there is a much larger quantity of natural evil that merits an explanation.

## NOTES

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<sup>i</sup> Anderson, Susan. "Plantinga And The Free Will Defense." Pacific Philosophical Quarterly 62 (1981): 275-281, p. 276.

<sup>ii</sup> Here I will not countenance the view that it is not metaphysically possible for God to perform miracles (see Michael S Quinn's "A Puzzle about the Character of God." Southwestern Journal of Philosophy 4 (1973): 73-80), nor the view that miracles would diminish our justification for belief in God (see Christine Overall's "Miracles as Evidence Against the Existence of God." The Southern Journal of Philosophy 23 (1985): 347-353).

<sup>iii</sup> There is an additional sort of miracle that God could perform to prevent moral evil that does not violate the free will of any agent. (We might call this a 'Type-O' miracle.) I have in mind a case in which God diverts the sperm that was fated to contribute to the zygote that later became the dastardly villain of your choosing. Clearly no violation of free will is at stake here. And it will probably do more harm than good to argue that God had some obligation to the person who would result such that God (morally) must refrain from manipulating the sperm in question. This is because the fact that God has no moral obligation to non-actual though possible people is the reason adduced by Robert Adams to explain why God does not flaunt a fairness obligation in creating worlds with lesser degrees of happiness than he could have created. (See "Must God Create the Best?" Philosophical Review 81 (1972): 317-332.)

<sup>iv</sup> "Freedom and Action."(11-44) In Freedom and Determinism Lehrer, K. (Ed.) Random House: New York, 1966.



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<sup>v</sup> See “Basic Actions.” (American Philosophical Quarterly 2 (1965): 141-148.) and “Freedom and Forebearance.” ((45-63) In Freedom and Determinism Op. Cit.) In both papers, Danto explicitly distinguishes between ‘basic events,’ agent caused events, and ‘non-basic events,’ events caused by those or other events.

<sup>vi</sup> See Chisholm, Op. Cit., pp. 16-18.

<sup>vii</sup> See “Agency.” (43-62) In Actions and Events Oxford University Press: New York, 1980.

<sup>viii</sup> Ibid., p. 58.

<sup>ix</sup> One may be tempted to attribute such a view to Joel Feinberg, given that he believes we can ‘puff out’ an action to include some of its effects. However, I resist making this attribution on the basis of his distinction between ‘simple’ and ‘causally complex’ acts. See “Action and Responsibility.” (134-165) In Philosophy in America Black, Max (Ed). Cornell University Press: Ithaca, 1965.

<sup>x</sup> Plantinga, Alvin. The Nature of Necessity (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1974), pp. 170-71. (His emphasis.)

<sup>xi</sup> Plantinga, Alvin. God, Freedom, and Evil (Eerdmans: Grand Rapids, 1977), p. 30.

<sup>xii</sup> There are two options to explain away this intuition that I will not consider in the body of the paper: (1) an appeal to the lack of foreknowledge and (2) an appeal to Soul Making considerations. Soul Making considerations are so familiar that I need not address them here; my argument leaves their role in a theodicy undisturbed. One may appeal to God’s lack of foreknowledge to explain the lack of Type-3 miracles, but by my lights extending the Middle Knowledge strategy in this way is doomed to failure. Let’s grant that God is logically incapable of knowing what choices human agents will make in cases in which those choices are freely made. To do the needed work, one must next claim that God

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could not know what the effects of such actions would be. If this were the case, He is logically incapable of preventing the painful effects of freely willed actions.

When advanced by a mildly orthodox theist there are clear difficulties with this argument. On standard analyses of omniscience, God could not be omniscient if he did not know what the effects would be for any one of several free actions open to moral agents. Perhaps views according to which God does not have knowledge of the truth values of counterfactuals of freedom are plausible, but they by no means entail that God does not have the ability to foreknow which effects would follow from which actions. There seems to be no logical constraint preventing God from possessing this knowledge. So, this attempt dilutes the property of omniscience.

<sup>xiii</sup> There is a rationale I will not be able to explore in the body of the text due to space limitations. This rationale appeals to Leibnizian considerations about the nature of God and its implications for the teleological demands on God's creation. According to Leibniz, performance of Type-3 miracles would lessen the quality of goodness in the world. Leibniz defines 'miracle' as an event that cannot be accounted for by the natures of created things within the domain of natural laws. As such, miracles "are not to be multiplied beyond necessity." (Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz: Philosophical Papers and Letters Loemker, L.E., Ed. Second Edition. (Reidel: Dordrecht, 1969.) From the 24 January 1713 letter to DesBosses, p. 608.)

Leibniz claims that God has chosen the most perfect world to actualize and thus it is "the simplest in its hypotheses and the richest in its phenomena." (Ibid., p. 306. From the Discourse on Metaphysics, section 6.) Given this is the case, it follows, according to Gregory Brown, that for Leibniz God has created a world in which the fewest miracles possible happen. ("Miracles in the Best of All Possible Worlds: Leibniz's Dilemma and Leibniz's

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Razor.” History of Philosophy Quarterly 12 (1995): 19-39.) For example, Leibniz says that “Imperfections are exceptions which disturb general rules, that is, general observations. . . . And so one can also say that that which is more perfect is that which is more regular, that is, that which admits of more observations, namely, more general observations.” (G.W. Leibniz: Philosophical Essays (Roger Ariew and Daniel Garber, Eds. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1989), p. 231. From a 2 April 1715 letter to Wolff.)

I have no space here to explain the many difficulties with this view, but I describe several the problems with this view itself and with its adoption by a traditional theist in the published version of this paper.

<sup>xiv</sup> One might defend the Sophomoric Argument by claiming that God could perhaps preserve all relevant phenomenology contained in such experiences, yet eliminate evil to the best of His divine ability. Accordingly, when Gerald stabs John, God would preserve the appearance, to Gerald, of John’s fits of writhing and woeful yelps, though John would not be experiencing pain. Perhaps John is rendered temporarily unconscious, or his mind is placed in a body in another local possible world. But such a response is unsuccessful. First, God becomes a deceiver, and theists rejecting the Sophomoric Argument will argue that God is metaphysically incapable of deception. Furthermore, incoherence is still present in this gerrymandered case, even though the appearance of coherence in the actual world would be preserved. The incoherence, taking the form of violations of natural laws, is farmed out to a nearby possible world. Having God play with the experiences of His creatures as a way to defend the Sophomoric Argument is a non-starter.

<sup>xv</sup> A defender of the Sophomoric Argument may give this response to a proponent of a Soul Making theodicy. The advocate of the Sophomoric Argument need not claim that the Soul Making rationale is in principle incapable of explaining why God allows harmful

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effects of free human actions. However, one might argue that the Soul Making theodicy cannot adequately explain the degree and peculiar nature of the pain allowed by God. I am unable to treat this matter in any depth here.

<sup>xvi</sup> This argument relies on the plausible intuition that an identity of indiscernibles principle applies to the application of moral predicates to Jeremy's states. Someone who holds that the term 'moral evil' does apply to effects of actions must contend that in the first case Jeremy's physical and mental states are morally evil without saying the same of the second case. This strategy is unlikely to meet with success since Jeremy's states are identical in every respect across the cases.

<sup>xvii</sup> Steven Boer makes this point in his "The Irrelevance of the Free Will Defense." Analysis 38:3 (1978): 110-112.

<sup>xviii</sup> God, Freedom, and Evil, p. 30.

<sup>xix</sup> Ibid. See the parallel discussion in The Nature of Necessity, pp. 169-174.

<sup>xx</sup> This appeal is a necessary link in a chain of steps in the Free Will Defense. Plantinga must show that it is possible that worlds containing creatures who never perform morally wrong actions and instead only do good are not weakly actualizable by God. This link depends upon the possibility that everyone suffers from 'transworld depravity' which is, strictly speaking, the link that in turn depends upon the possibility that human agents have libertarian freedom.

<sup>xxi</sup> The Nature of Necessity, p. 192.

<sup>xxii</sup> Ibid., pp. 192-93.

<sup>xxiii</sup> See The Nature of Necessity, pp. 191-93, and God, Freedom, and Evil, pp. 57-59.

<sup>xxiv</sup> The Nature of Necessity, p. 193.

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<sup>xxv</sup> In this and the following propositions, I set the meaning of ‘■’ as ‘it is necessary that,’ and the meaning of ‘◆’ as ‘it is possible that.’ As I will shortly explain, extended debate about just what sort of reading to provide for these modal terms is otiose, for none of them will assist Plantinga.

<sup>xxvi</sup> Appeals to causal or physical necessity seem to have the same fate by my lights.