

What God Could Have Made

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I. Introduction

Atheists have argued that if there is a God who is omnipotent, omniscient and omnibenevolent, then God would have made a better world than the one in which we live. Many different possible worlds are better than this one. Some have less natural or moral evil than this world, and some even have no natural or moral evils at all. Consequently, there is no God who is omnipotent, omniscient and omnibenevolent because such a God would have made one of those worlds that is better than this one.¹

Philosophical theists typically reply to the problem of evil by focusing on one aspect of it, namely on the claim that there are better worlds without moral evil. There are possible worlds with no moral evil, the theist responds, but these are worlds without freedom, and freedom is a moral good that outweighs the moral evil that necessarily attends freedom. Worlds with freedom are better than worlds without freedom, and the existence of freedom entails the existence of moral evil. So perhaps this is the best of all possible worlds or at least a better world than worlds with no evil, and so it does not follow that the existence of moral evil and God are incompatible. This defense of theism -- the Free Will Defense -- has provoked the following response by J. L. Mackie: "Why could God not have made men such that they always freely choose the good?" (1955, p.209). The point of this rhetorical question is that freedom does not entail moral evil. There are possible worlds that include freedom but lack moral evil, and these worlds are better than worlds with both freedom and moral evil. So even if it is granted that freedom has the value the Free Will Defense places on it, there still are better worlds than this one, and a God that is

omnipotent, omniscient and omnibenevolent would have created one of those instead of this one.

Mackie's response assumes that such a God could have created one of those better worlds. Alvin Plantinga has challenged this assumption, and this challenge is widely considered to be the definitive reply to Mackie's critique of the Free Will Defense.² Plantinga grants that there are possible worlds with freedom and no moral evil, but he argues that it is possible that although God is omnipotent, it is not within God's power to actualize a world containing freedom and no moral evil. Plantinga believes that the atheologian assumes that it is necessary that it is within an omnipotent God's power to actualize these better worlds, but in fact, Plantinga argues, this is demonstrably not the case. Since so many philosophers have regarded Plantinga's Free Will Defense to be a definitive solution to the logical problem of evil, the focus of the debate of the problem of evil has changed from the logical problem of evil to the evidential problem of evil. But we believe that the atheist tossed in the towel too early, and the theist celebrated victory too early. We will argue that Plantinga's argument does not succeed. Mackie, incidentally, thought the same. He wrote "But how could there be logically contingent states of affairs, prior to the creation and existence of any created beings with free will, which an omnipotent god would have to accept and put up with? This suggestion is simply incoherent" (1982, p. 174)

In this essay we argue that Plantinga fails to demonstrate that it is possible that God is omnipotent, and it is not within God's power to actualize a world containing freedom but lacking moral evil. Thus Plantinga does not refute Mackie's response to the Free Will Defense, and the point of Mackie's question "Why could God not have made men such that they always freely choose the good?" still stands unrefuted.

Before we turn to Plantinga's argument, we need to highlight the very narrow focus of this

debate. Even if, contrary to fact, as we will argue below, Plantinga had succeeded in showing that there are possible worlds with freedom and no moral evil that an omnipotent God does not have the power to actualize, this still leaves many other possible worlds that are better than this one. These are worlds with less moral evil, and there are possible worlds with less and even, as David Hume suggested in the *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*, no natural evils. These too are possibilities that atheists use to draw the conclusion that an omnipotent, omniscient and omnibenevolent God does not exist.³

II. Plantinga's Argument

Plantinga aims to demonstrate the following proposition:

(P) It is possible God is omnipotent and God does not have the power to actualize a possible world in which there is freedom but no evil.⁴

It will be immediately noticed that the locution “a possible world” in (P) is ambiguous. It can mean that it is possible God is omnipotent and *there are possible worlds W* in which there is freedom but no evil and God does not have the power to actualize W. To show this, all Plantinga needs to do is show that there is at least one such possible world. A stronger reading of (P) is that it is possible that God is omnipotent and *for any possible world W* in which there is freedom but no evil, God does not have the power to actualize W.

Plantinga needs to argue for the stronger reading.⁵ An argument that shows the weaker existential proposition that there are possible worlds that an omnipotent God does not have the power to actualize fails against the atheist. What about the other possible worlds? After all, the atheist claims against the Free Will Defense that there are possible worlds in which there is

freedom and no moral evil that God has the power to actualize. An argument, even if sound, whose conclusion is that there are possible worlds with freedom and no moral evil that an omnipotent God does not have the power to actualize is not a refutation of this claim. The two existential claims are compatible. So a successful refutation of Mackie's problem of evil must arrive at the stronger conclusion that it is possible that an omnipotent God does not have the power to actualize *any* of the worlds with freedom and no moral evil.

A key premise of Plantinga's argument defines the concept of *transworld depravity*. A transworld-depraved person is one that could be free and always morally good (which grants Mackie the possibility that there are free persons who are not immoral), but who is such that if actualized, she commits a moral foul. Plantinga expresses this notion more precisely as follows:

1. A person P is transworld depraved just in case for every possible world W such that P is free in W and P does only what is right in W, there is an action A and a maximal world segment S' such that:
 - (1) S' includes A's being morally significant for P;
 - (2) S' includes P's being free with respect to A;
 - (3) S' is included in W and includes neither P's performing A nor P's refraining from performing A;
 and
 - (4) If S' were actual, P would go wrong with respect to A. (1974a, p.48)

A crucial feature of transworld depravity is clause (4), which in our discussion below we will refer to as clause (1.4). Clause (1.4) is not a necessary truth. Plantinga reminds the reader that (1.4) "is to be true in fact, in the actual world -- not in that world W" (1974a, p.48). If (1.4) were

true in W, world W would be contradictory and hence not a possible world. In W, by definition, P does only what is right. For the evaluation of (1.4) it cannot be overemphasized that (1.4) is a contingent truth, because as premise (1) entails, there is a possible world W different from the actual world in which P is faced with exactly the same choice and does not go wrong with respect to A.

The importance of clause (1.4) is evident immediately in the following conclusion that Plantinga draws from the definition of transworld depravity:

2. Therefore, if a person P is transworld depraved, then a possible world W such that P is free in W and P does only what is right in W cannot be actualized.

The reason for this is simple. Consider a possible world W that includes a free person P who does only what is right in W, but is transworld depraved as defined in (1). If W were actualized, then S' would have to be actualized. But by clause (1.4), if S' were actual, P would go wrong with respect to A. Consequently, W cannot be actualized. W is a world in which P does only what is right, but given (1.4), actualizing W implies that P does something morally wrong.

The next premise in effect states that not being able to actualize W given transworld depravity is a constraint that does not diminish God's omnipotence:

3. If a possible world W cannot be actualized, then an omnipotent God does not have the power to actualize W.

Although Plantinga does not discuss this issue in depth, presumably this constraint is compatible with God's omnipotence because it is a logical constraint. Given the truth of (1.4), actualizing W would entail actualizing something contradictory, which is impossible, and an omnipotent God

need not be able to do what is not possible.

From premises 2 and 3 we can conclude:

4. Therefore, if a person P is transworld depraved, then an omnipotent God does not have the power to actualize possible worlds W such that P is free in W and P does only what is right in W.

The next premise introduces the possibility that all possible worlds that include free beings are such that at least one of those beings is transworld depraved:

5. It is possible that for any possible world W, if W includes free persons, then W includes a person P that is transworld depraved.⁶

To show that it is possible that *any* world that contains freedom and no moral evil is one that God, though omnipotent, does not have the power to actualize, Plantinga needs to assume that it is possible that every possible world that contains freedom includes at least one transworld-depraved person.⁷ With this premise in place, it follows that it is possible that any possible world in which all free persons do only what is morally good cannot be actualized. In other words:

6. Therefore it is possible that for any possible world W, if W includes person P, P is free in W and P does only what is right in W, W cannot be actualized.

Assuming the following:

7. Only possible worlds that include persons are worlds that include freedom.

it follows:

8. Therefore, it is possible that God is omnipotent and for any possible world W that includes freedom and no moral evil, God does not have the power to

actualize W.

Assuming the argument is sound, it shows that it is not necessary that an omnipotent God has the power to actualize any possible world in which there is freedom and no moral evil.

Certainly premise (5) is controversial, and Plantinga does not argue for it. It appears false to us that possibly every possible world with free persons includes a person that is transworld depraved, and more importantly, it is not at all clear on what grounds a theist would plausibly argue for premise (5). While it is easy to grant that it is possible that there are possible worlds with at least one transworld-depraved person, it is not easy to see on what grounds one would show that it is possible that *every* possible world with free persons is like that. That is, why should one accept that it is possible that *necessarily* if there are free persons, there are transworld-depraved persons?⁸ Although this is a major weakness of the argument that calls for further investigation, we will pass over it here. Instead, we will examine more closely the constraints on God placed by clause (1.4) of the definition of transworld depravity and the inference Plantinga draws from it in the second step of the argument

III. What God Made

Clause (1.4) is the motor that drives Plantinga's argument:

1.4 If S' were actual, then person P would go wrong with respect to A.

As Plantinga emphasizes, this is true as a matter of fact; it is a proposition included in the actual world and it is not included in worlds W where persons do no wrong and go right with respect to A. Thus clause (1.4) is a contingent truth, but it nevertheless keeps these better worlds from being actualized.

This raises a question that Plantinga fails to address. If clause (1.4) is a proposition that is true in the actual world, then either this proposition was made true by God or it was not. For instance, if following Plantinga we suppose that God actualizes states of affairs in virtue of which propositions are true or false, then either clause (1.4) is true in virtue of states of affairs that God actualized or clause (1.4) is true in virtue of states of affairs that God did not actualize. So, is (1.4) true on account of what God actualized or not?

Let us illustrate this question in terms of Plantinga's example of the transworld-depraved person Curley. For any possible world in which Curley exists, is free and does no moral evil, there is some segment S' such that it is true as a matter of fact that if S' were actual, Curley would commit a moral evil. Consider a particular possible world W^* in which Curley is offered a bribe, but Curley, being all-good, does not accept the bribe. Since Curley is transworld depraved, there is a segment S' in W^* that leads right up to Curley's rejection of the bribe but does not include that rejection in accordance with clauses (1.1), (1.2) and (1.3) of the definition of transworld depravity. Moreover, it is true as a matter of fact that if the segment S' were actual, Curley would accept the bribe. This truth constrains God from actualizing W^* , and so we must ask: Did God make it true that if S' were actual, Curley would accept the bribe or is this counterfactual true, but not in virtue of what God actualized?

Consider the first alternative. God is constrained by the truth of (1.4), but this is a constraint due to what God actualizes. Unfortunately, Plantinga does not discuss on what grounds clause (1.4) might be true, but perhaps Plantinga ignores this issue because there is an obvious answer. Clause (1.4) is true for a person P in the actual world because as a matter of fact there is a segment S' and as a matter of fact it is followed by a moral evil. In the actual world if

S', then P goes wrong with respect to A, and that is why if S' *were actual*, then P *would* go wrong with respect to A. In Curley's case this means that the proposition that if S' were actual, Curley would accept the bribe is true in virtue of the actual fact that the segment S' obtains plus the state of affairs of Curley accepting the bribe.

Plantinga's argument would then amount to the claim that given that God has actualized a world in which there are free agents and moral evil, another world incompatible with the already actualized world cannot be actualized. The underlying reasonable assumption is that even an omnipotent God cannot actualize other distinct worlds that are incompatible with the actualized world *once that world is actualized*.

It will be noticed that this is a limit on what worlds God can actualize that is much wider than the limits set by transworld depravity. Once God actualizes a world, God cannot actualize any other possible world that is incompatible with the already actualized world. Consequently, if it is true as a matter of fact that snow is white, then God cannot actualize a possible world in which snow is not white. There is really nothing special about transworld depravity. On these grounds, Plantinga could just as well have argued that it is possible that God is omnipotent and God cannot actualize a world in which snow is not white.

But this result would be irrelevant to the question whether God can actualize worlds in which there is snow and snow is not white. The question is not whether or not God can actualize worlds in which snow is not white *under the condition that a world is already actualized in which snow is white*. At issue is whether or not God can actualize those worlds, period. Without the constraint of the condition that a world is already actualized in which snow is white, there is no reason to believe that God cannot actualize worlds in which snow is not white. The actual world

in which snow is white is a world actualized by God, and presumably God had a choice between worlds in which snow is white and worlds in which snow is not white.

Similarly, given that a world has been actualized in which a person P commits a moral foul, then God cannot actualize *another* world in which P does not commit any evil acts. But this is irrelevant because the question is not whether God has the power to actualize a world without moral evil given that God has actualized a world with moral evil, but whether God has the power to actualize a world without moral evil.

It is interesting to note that if God had actualized one of those worlds in which there is freedom and no moral evil, then it would have been possible to argue that God cannot actualize worlds in which there is moral evil. *Under the condition that God actualized a world in which there is freedom and no moral evil*, God cannot actualize worlds in which there is freedom and moral evil. Those possible worlds are incompatible with what would have already been actualized, and thus they cannot be actualized. But the flaw with this argument about transworld saintliness is the same as the flaw in Plantinga's argument about transworld depravity. It assumes that a certain possible world has been actualized, and then relies on the reasonable principle that once a world is actualized, other incompatible worlds cannot be actualized. But this begs the question, namely what are the worlds God can actualize in the first place?

So far we considered the suggestion that clause (1.4) is true in virtue of the fact that S' is followed by person P committing a moral wrong. We have argued that in this case clause (1.4) is a constraint of God's own making, and assumed that God could have done otherwise than make clause (1.4) true by actualizing S' and the moral misdeed that follows it.

This result can be generalized. Whatever the states of affairs may be in virtue of which

clause (1.4) is true, if God actualizes these states, then clause (1.4) is a constraint of God's own making. It is possible that the truth of clause (1.4) constrains what possible worlds God has the power to actualize, but if God actualizes the states of affairs that make (1.4) true, the truth of (1.4) is a result of God's choices, and God could have done otherwise.

IV. What God Had to Make

Let us take stock of the situation up to this point. Plantinga argued that it is possible that there are possible worlds that God does not have the power to actualize, namely worlds with freedom and no moral evil. This argument depends on the possibility that there are transworld-depraved persons, and this, in turn, entails that it is possible that clause (1.4) is true. We investigated one way of understanding the truth of clause (1.4), namely that (1.4) is true in virtue of states of affairs God actualizes, and we argued that if that is the case, then clause (1.4) is a constraint of God's own making because there are possible worlds in which those states of affairs that make (1.4) true do not obtain, and God could have actualized those worlds. Nothing in Plantinga's argument precludes that God has the power to actualize those possible worlds.

The response developed in the previous section assumes that God could have done otherwise than make clause (1.4) true. That is, we assumed that God has the power not to actualize the contingent states of affairs that make clause (1.4) true. The theist could use this assumption to develop a new line of reasoning. Although there are possible worlds in which clause (1.4) is false, the theist can try to bypass these possibilities by adding a new premise, namely that God does not have the power to actualize the states of affairs in virtue of which clause (1.4) false. So not only is transworld depravity possible, but it is possible that God lacks

the power to actualize worlds in which clause (1.4) is false. The theist now aims to argue for the possibility of one lack of power -- that it is possible that God does not have the power to actualize possible worlds with freedom and no moral evil -- by relying on the possibility of still another lack of divine power, namely that God does not have the power to actualize states of affairs that result in the falsity of clause (1.4).

This new premise requires a new argument. The theist cannot argue that it is possible that God does not have the power to actualize possible worlds that do not include (1.4) on the grounds that it is possible that God does not have the power to actualize worlds that include freedom and no moral evil. This argument obviously begs the question because it uses as a premise what Plantinga aims to show. In fact, Plantinga cannot appeal to any argument that uses the premise that it is possible that an omnipotent God does not have the power to actualize worlds with freedom and no moral evil. What is needed is an independent reason for holding that it is possible that clause (1.4) is true, that it is true in virtue of states of affairs that God actualizes, but that God lacks the power *not* to actualize those states of affairs, and all this lack of power is compatible with God's omnipotence.

Needless to say, Plantinga does not offer an argument for this new premise, and it is not a premise that has some initial plausibility. In fact, on a first glance it does not seem at all plausible to suppose that it is possible that God, who is omnipotent, must actualize certain contingent state of affairs that make clause (1.4) true. It certainly will be granted that *if* God actualizes a certain state of affairs S, God must actualize the states of affairs that are entailed by S, but this still leaves an omnipotent God with the choice of not actualizing S in the first place.

The fact that an omnipotent God labors under conditional constraints, that is the constraint

to actualize the states of affairs entailed by the states of affairs God actualizes, suggests a strategy the theist might exploit to support the claim that God cannot help but actualize clause (1.4). The atheist has granted that if there is a God, God actualizes free agents, and the theist can try to argue that the existence of freedom entails the truth of clause (1.4). Accordingly, given that God actualizes freedom, God must actualize states of affairs that make (1.4) true. But Plantinga grants that there are possible worlds in which freedom obtains but clause (1.4) is false. For example, there is a possible world in which Curley is free, S' obtains, but Curley does not commit a moral foul. Consequently, freedom does not entail the truth of clause (1.4).

Although the existence of freedom by itself does not *entail* the truth of (1.4), there are possible worlds -- worlds such as our own -- in which a person P is free, S' obtains, and it is true that if S', then P commits a moral foul. So if these worlds are actualized, then it is true that if S' were actual, P would commit a moral foul. Now perhaps there are reasons to believe that freedom together with certain additional facts entail that God does not have the power to actualize worlds that do not include clause (1.4).

A standard theist suggestion is that freedom together with facts about the nature of knowledge entails that God does not have the power to avoid the truth of (1.4). Suppose that God's knowledge is constrained so that when God actualizes a world, God does not have the power to know what free actions will be performed. Perhaps the best of all possible worlds includes a free person P and an initial segment S' and so God actualizes a world with these. But due to the nature of freedom and knowledge, God cannot foresee which world will be actualized once person P, P's freedom and S' are actualized. Perhaps a free action is wholly uncaused, but knowledge of what actions are performed requires knowledge of causes.

So there are possible worlds in which it is not the case that if S' were actual, then P commits a moral foul and there are possible worlds in which this is the case, but God does not know which of these worlds will be actualized when God actualizes person P, P's freedom and S'. Accordingly, God has the power to actualize either one of these worlds, but God does not have the power to identify and choose one over the other because God does not know which of these worlds will be actualized when God actualizes P, P's freedom and segment S'. So, God does not have the knowledge that is needed for God to have the power to select the world in which P does no moral wrong. On such grounds one might argue that God does not have the power to actualize states of affairs in virtue of which clause (1.4) is not true.

This argument assumes that freedom is incompatible with foreknowledge about free actions. But as Plantinga recognizes, freedom and God's foreknowledge are compatible.⁹ Even if it is the case that a free action is wholly uncaused, God can have *scientia media* or middle knowledge, that is knowledge of subjunctive conditionals about free actions. God knows in what possible worlds if S' were the case, P would freely perform a moral evil and in what possible worlds if S' were the case, P would freely refrain from evil. God not only distinguishes possible worlds that include clause (1.4) from those that do not include it, but God can now know which of these worlds is being actualized without undermining human freedom. God does not need to rely on causal knowledge to know what would occur if S' were actual; God simply knows what free decisions P would make if S' were actual. Hence, freedom does not place any limits on God's knowledge that would entail that if God is actualizing worlds with freedom, God does not have the power to not actualize worlds that include (1.4).¹⁰

Of course, having the *capacity* to have middle knowledge does not mean that God in fact

has this knowledge. Perhaps God does not choose to exercise this divine epistemic power to have middle knowledge. Specifically, God can but chooses not to know whether or not (1.4) will be true when God actualizes P's freedom and S'. Given this divine choice, God in fact does not know whether God is actualizing a world that includes (1.4) or a world that does not include (1.4). So it is possible that God actualizes P's freedom and S', but given God's epistemic choices, God does not know whether or not a world is being actualized that includes clause (1.4), and without this knowledge, it is possible that God does not have the power to actualize the states of affairs in virtue of which clause (1.4) is not true.

This approach will certainly not convince the atheist. In these circumstances, God does not have the power to actualize states of affairs in virtue of which clause (1.4) is not true only as a consequence of God's choice not to exercise God's power to have middle knowledge. But this choice is God's choice, and it was in God's power to make a different choice, namely simply to know if S' were actual, P would perform a moral evil or if S' were actual, P would refrain from this evil. So God does have the power to actualize worlds that do not include clause (1.4) as long as God exercises God's power to have middle knowledge.

Traditional theists should also not be happy with such an answer because it is incompatible with God's providence. God deliberately actualizes a world and cares that the best of all possible worlds is actualized. A God that does not choose to know whether or not the world that is being actualized includes (1.4), is not exercising the providence that would be expected from an omnipotent, omniscient and omnibenevolent God. So not only *can* God have middle knowledge, but God's providence requires that God in fact relies on this knowledge when actualizing worlds.¹¹

The remaining option seems to be one that claims that God does not have middle knowledge. While theists have claimed that Plantinga's Free Will Defense does not depend on God having middle knowledge, the option that he does not have such knowledge is not at all appealing. Again, God not having such knowledge seems incompatible with his providence. Instead of God deliberately actualizing a world and caring that the best possible world is actualized, we now get the impression that God actualizes a world and then simply hopes for the best, and that is not a very reassuring picture of God's act of creation.¹²

We have considered whether or not God's actualizing of freedom in any way limits God to actualizing states of affairs that make clause (1.4) true and conclude that there are no such limits. Without any reasons for denying that God does not have the power not to actualize states of affairs that make clause (1.4) true and armed with Plantinga's own admission that there are possible worlds that do not include clause (1.4), we continue with the assumption that if God has the power to actualize states of affairs in virtue of which (1.4) is true, then an omnipotent God has the power to refrain from actualizing worlds that include clause (1.4).

V. What God Did Not Make

So far we assumed that if clause (1.4) is true, it is true in virtue of contingent states of affairs that God actualizes. We considered two cases under this heading: (i) that clause (1.4) is true in virtue of states of affairs God actualizes and an omnipotent God has the power not to actualize these states of affairs and (ii) that clause (1.4) is true in virtue of states of affairs God actualizes but an omnipotent God does not have the power not to actualize those states of affairs. We assume that if (1.4) is true in virtue of contingent states of affairs that God actualizes, then God has the power

not to actualize the states of affairs that make (1.4) true. Accordingly, we are left with the conclusion that what Plantinga succeeds in showing is that *if God actualizes worlds that include freedom and moral evil*, then it is possible that God is omnipotent and God does not have the power to actualize a possible world in which there is freedom but no moral evil. Since the atheist is concerned with why an omnipotent, omnibenevolent and omniscient God actualizes a world with moral evil in the first place, Plantinga's conditional result is irrelevant.

But as was noted at the beginning of Section III, there is another account available for what makes clause (1.4) true. Perhaps clause (1.4) of the definition of transworld depravity, is true in the actual world, but not true in virtue of states of affairs that God actualizes. To make sense of this suggestion, we need to distinguish two parts or subsets of the actual world: a part God actualizes and a part that God does not actualize.

This distinction entails that God does not create or actualize everything that is actual. This consequence is not in conflict with theism, particularly Plantinga's theism. For example, Plantinga writes that God "has not created himself, or numbers, propositions, properties, or states of affairs: these have no beginnings" (1974b, p.169). Plantinga continues: "...since God did not create numbers, propositions, pure sets, and the like, he did not actualize the states of affairs consisting in the existence of these things" (*ibid.*) So numbers, propositions, states of affairs, God, and the like exist in the actual world, although God did not create these or actualize their existence.

Accordingly, there are propositions whose truth does not depend on God's activity: that there are propositions, that there are numbers, that there are states of affairs, that there are properties, that there is God, and so on. These are true propositions that are true in virtue of states

of affairs that God does not actualize. This class of propositions will also include certain subjunctive conditionals that are necessarily true. It will include the proposition that if there were triangles, there would be closed 3-sided figures. Similarly, since God does not control the structure of possible worlds, truths about what would be the case if a certain world were actual are also not in God's control. For example, if world W with no moral evil were actual instead of this one that contains moral evil, then there would be no evil. This is also something God did not make true, and it is true in all possible worlds.

With this in mind, we can understand the suggestion that there is a part of the actual world that God does not actualize. It is the portion in which certain things obtain that God does not create or actualize: numbers, propositions, states of affairs, pure sets, and God. It is from within this part of the actual world that God actualizes a possible world. The possible world God actualizes is a consistent extension of this part of the actual world that consists of the actual states of affairs that God does not actualize, such as that God exists, that there are propositions, and so on.

This is a part of the actual world that is not under God's control: God does not control whether God exists, whether there are propositions, and relatedly, God does not control the constitution of the set of all propositions, the set of all possible worlds, and so on. God also does not control subjunctive conditionals that are necessarily true. We will grant for the sake of argument, that God's lack of control over this part of the actual world is compatible with God's omnipotence.

The current suggestion, then, is to include clause (1.4) in this portion of the actual world that is not actualized by God and from within which God actualizes a world that is a consistent

extension of this segment. On this view, the truth of (1.4) prevents God from actualizing certain extensions of the initial segment of the actual world. Just as the truth that God exists or the truths of logic constrain what God has the power to actualize, (1.4) constrains God from actualizing certain possible worlds, namely extensions in which S' obtains but there is no moral evil.

Plantinga does not address this issue and the textual evidence is ambiguous. On the one hand, Plantinga writes that "perhaps we may say that he actualizes every *contingent* state of affairs," which would preclude that (1.4) is true in virtue of contingent states of affairs not actualized by God (1974a, p.169). On the other, there is some indirect textual evidence that what Plantinga intended is that clause (1.4) is an actual but contingent truth before God actualizes a possible world. Plantinga always states clause (1.4) and its various instances as a counterfactual conditional: if S' *were* actual, P *would* go wrong with respect to A or if S' *were* actual, Curley would accept the bribe, and so on. This suggests that the truth of clause (1.4) is antecedent to God's actualizing S'. If we take seriously the counterfactual nature of the claim that if S' *were* true, then P *would* go wrong with respect to action A, we must reject the suggestion made earlier that Plantinga argues it is possible that an omnipotent God cannot actualize worlds in which there is freedom and no moral evil on the grounds that it is possible that a world with freedom and moral evil is already actualized. Clause (1.4) would hold before God actualized anything at all, and this is the suggestion we examine next.

VI. *God's Omnipotence*

This reading of the truth of clause (1.4) escapes our earlier critique. God is still constrained by a truth in the actual world, but it is not a constraint of God's own making. It is a constraint on par

with the existence of propositions, states of affairs, possible worlds, and God's own existence.

It is plausible to suppose that God's omnipotence is compatible with the constraints of logic and God's lack of dominion over the existence and constitution of numbers, states of affairs, propositions, or possible worlds does not diminish God's power. It is also plausible to grant that God's omnipotence is not compromised by God's lack of control over subjunctive conditionals that are necessarily true. But clause (1.4) is a different kind of proposition. While arguably, it is necessary that there are propositions, states of affairs, possible worlds and God, it is not the case that clause (1.4) is true in all possible worlds. As we highlighted earlier, Plantinga emphasizes in the context of the definition of transworld depravity that (1.4) is true in the actual world and, additionally, that it is contingently true. There are possible worlds which do not include S', and in which Curley commits no evil. Clause (1.4) is a contingent truth, and so if God does not control the truth of clause (1.4), God is constrained by a contingent truth. What sort of contingent state of affairs that is actual but that God does not actualize could make clause (1.4) true? We are looking for a contingent state of affairs that obtains, but not in virtue of something God actualizes. We are reminded that if clause (1.4) is made true by states of affairs that are actual in virtue of something that God actualizes, then Plantinga is open to the criticism raised earlier, namely that clause (1.4) constrains God, but it is a constraint of God's own making and God could have done otherwise. To avoid this criticism, the theist needs to show that it is possible that clause (1.4) is true, but that God did not make it true. The theist needs to explain how it is possible that clause (1.4) is true but not in virtue of something God actualizes, and that this is compatible with God's omnipotence. Plantinga does not have an argument to show that it is possible that clause (1.4) is a contingent truth not of God's own making, and that this is compatible with God's omnipotence,

omniscience and omnibenevolence. In the absence of such an argument, Plantinga's response to Mackie's critique of the Free Will Defense is far from being a definitive refutation.

Moreover, it is our contention that it cannot be shown that it is possible that (1.4) is a contingent truth not of God's own making, while maintaining God's omnipotence. If clause (1.4) is true, but not true in virtue of something God actualizes, then there is a contingent structure to the world that is not subject to God's power. While it can be granted for the sake of argument that God's omnipotence is not diminished by the fact that truths of logic and other necessary truths are independent of God's power, the lack of power over contingent truths grounded in the world's contingent structures is the hallmark of weakness.

To avoid this conclusion, a theist must show that it is possible that the contingent clause (1.4) is a constraint on God that is not of God's own making, but that this does not diminish God's omnipotence. Theists have not shown this and we look forward to such arguments, but in the meantime we can only speculate about various strategies theists might pursue,

One possible strategy is to argue that clause (1.4) is true in virtue of a state of affairs actualized by some person P, and not in virtue of a state of affairs God actualizes. The reason for this claim is that free actions are actualized by their agents and thus the counterfactual *if S' were actual, then P would perform a moral evil* is true due to P's freely performing a moral wrong. This strategy is not very promising because God actualized the state of affairs that person P exists and several other states of affairs that enable P to act freely. That these states of affairs obtain is necessary for P's free activity. If God had not actualized that P exists, then P's free performance of a moral wrong would also not have obtained. Thus the truth of (1.4) still depends on what God actualizes. Although God's actions are not sufficient for the truth of (1.4) -- the free actions of P

are also needed to make (1.4) true -- what God actualizes is necessary for the truth of (1.4), and thus (1.4) is still true in virtue of what God actualizes.

To avoid this dependency, the truth of (1.4) must be completely independent of God in the sense that nothing that God actualizes is necessary for its truth. Accordingly, the conditional *if S', then person P commits a moral foul* is true of the actual world, it is a contingent truth, and nothing God actualizes is sufficient or necessary for the truth of this conditional. Even if God does not actualize anything at all, clause (1.4) remains true. Thus there are contingent features of the actual world that are wholly independent of God.

Clause (1.4), then, expresses a special law of any world that might be actualized, that is, a law *in situ* of any such world (Millikan 1984, p.20). Consequently, the actual world has a non-logical nomic structure that does not depend on God's power and God does not have the power to alter or avoid this structure. This lack of power is not due to logical or other necessary constraints that hold in all possible worlds nor is it due to a conditional constraint that depends on other decisions God has already made. We are now faced with a God with an absolute lack of power over the world's contingent structure, and this is a mark of weakness. So the independence from God of the truth of (1.4) is gained at the expense of God's strength.

Our conclusion depends on characterizing omnipotence in terms having power over the world's contingent structure. Although we assert that this assumption has a high degree of initial plausibility, it is open to the theist to deny this. For example, a theist might take it that our argument shows something surprising about God's omnipotence. Since there are contingently true counterfactuals that are true before God actualizes anything, there are surprising limitations on God that are compatible with God's omnipotence. So just as the real lesson of the Paradox of

Omnipotence is that an omnipotent God is not required to have power to do what is contradictory, the lesson of our argument, a theist might argue, is that an omnipotent God is not required to have power over contingent matters either. Omnipotence, when properly understood, a theist might try to argue, is compatible with these contingent limitations on God's creative activity.

What might this argument be? If the theist can show that any possible being actualizing a world would be faced with true counterfactual conditionals like (1.4), then perhaps it can be argued convincingly that this limitation is compatible with omnipotence. We say "perhaps" because an equally plausible alternative conclusion is that given that there are such true, contingent counterfactuals, no possible being faced with such counterfactuals is omnipotent. Given such counterfactuals, there are no omnipotent beings that actualize possible worlds, we would argue.

However, this is a moot issue because not only has the theist not shown that any possible being actualizing a world would be faced with true counterfactual conditionals like (1.4), but it is evidently false. Counterfactual conditionals like (1.4) are conditionals that assert that a person goes wrong with respect to some action that satisfies the conditions of the definition of transworld depravity. Since (1.4) and conditionals of this sort are contingent, there are worlds in which the antecedent of these conditionals are satisfied, but it is false that persons take the wrong course of action. That is, there are possible worlds in which none of the counterfactual conditionals about a person going wrong with respect to some action are true.

Certainly there are possible beings that can actualize such worlds. One such possible being is an omnipotent being who is not constrained by counterfactual conditionals of the sort under consideration. For example, a possible being that exists necessarily and who can actualize

any possible world would be such a being. This is precisely the possible being we considered in our discussion of the case where clause (1.4) is made true by God.

Plantinga's God is constrained because this God exists in an initial segment of a possible world over which God has no control, God actualizes the extensions of this possible world, and in this initial segment beyond God's control there are true counterfactual conditionals such as (1.4). It is not clear why this God does not actualize other extensions of other possible worlds. Perhaps the God of the Free Will Defense is not a necessary being, but exists contingently, say only in worlds where (1.4) is true, and thus this God cannot actualize worlds in which (1.4) and the like are false. But this does not entail that any possible being is so constrained. A possible being that has all the powers of God but can also avoid making (1.4) true is such a being. This possible being would also be more powerful than the constrained God of the Free Will Defense. While Plantinga's constrained God has no control over the initial segments contingent state, this possible being does have such control. Consequently, there is a being more powerful than the God of the Free Will Defense, which is sufficient to show that the God of the Free Will Defense is not omnipotent.

The fact that true counterfactual conditionals hold of every possible world does not show that any possible being, including a necessarily existing being, is constrained by true counterfactual conditionals. All this shows that any being that actualizes possible worlds has to make true some counterfactual conditional or other and thus does not have a choice regarding this matter. In other words, it is necessary that there are true counterfactual conditionals and hence even a necessary being is constrained to make this type. But this does not mean that this being is constrained by any particular counterfactual conditional. Specifically, even if a being that

actualizes possible worlds with significantly free persons must make true some contingent counterfactual conditionals that state under what conditions such persons go wrong or do not go wrong, it does not follow that such a being is constrained by any particular such conditional. For instance, even if such a being has to make true either that a person goes wrong or does not go wrong with respect to some action, it does not follow that this being is constrained by the conditional that this person would go wrong.

The only remaining option for the theist we can see is to argue that possibly it is necessary that if there are free persons, some person or other will go wrong with respect to some action. Consequently, any possible being that actualizes worlds with free persons must actualize moral evil. It should be noticed that the claim that it is possible that necessarily some free persons will commit moral evil, is much stronger than the already controversial premise (5) in our reconstruction of Plantinga's argument above. Now the theist is not only claiming that it is possible that necessarily there are transworld-depraved people, but that it is possible that necessarily there are free but depraved persons. Persons are not just transworld deprived, but there are no possible worlds in which persons do not go wrong with respect to some action or other.

We have not seen an argument for such a conclusion and we cannot imagine a remotely plausible argument for it. Moreover, Plantinga himself grants Mackie the possibility that there are worlds with free persons and no moral evil, and it is a background condition of this debate that there are such possible worlds. To deny this is to shift the terms of the debate. Finally, and most importantly, it is flatly false. As Mackie has argued, "if there is no logical impossibility in a man's freely choosing the good on one, or on several, occasions, there cannot be a logical

impossibility in his freely choosing the good on every occasion” (Mackie 1955, p.209).

VII. Conclusion

Plantinga’s response to Mackie’s claim that an omnipotent God would have actualized possible worlds that include freedom and no moral evil is that it is possible that an omnipotent God does not have the power to actualize these worlds. Plantinga’s response rests on the possibility that there are transworld-depraved people, which implies that it is possible that for some segment S’ and person P, if S’ were actual, P would commit a moral evil. This is clause (1.4) of Plantinga’s definition of transworld depravity, and it is the clause that in Plantinga’s argument constrains God from actualizing worlds in which there is freedom and no moral evil. It is on account of the possibility that (1.4) is true, that it is possible that an omnipotent God does not have the power to actualize worlds with freedom and no moral evil.

Clause (1.4) is a contingent truth, and Plantinga simply assumes that it is possibly true without examining the conditions under which it could be true. Given that God exists and actualizes states of affairs, there are two generic conditions available for the truth of (1.4). Either it is true in virtue of states of affairs that God actualizes or it is true in virtue of states of affairs that God does not actualize. In the former case, clause (1.4) is a truth of God’s own making and thus God has the option of avoiding this constraint. In the latter case, there are contingent states of affairs over which God has no power, and this is incompatible with God’s omnipotence. Consequently, Plantinga has failed to show that it is possible that God is omnipotent and does not have the power to actualize a world with freedom and no moral evil. But if Plantinga has failed to show this, he has not refuted Mackie and the existence of evil remains a problem. Even granting,

for the sake of argument, the supreme value of freedom on which the Free Will Defense rests, the existence of an omnipotent, omniscient and omnibenevolent God is incompatible with the existence of evil.¹³

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1. The argument is usually presented in terms of the best of all possible worlds, rather than better worlds. However, this does not cast the net wide enough. Atheists need not be committed to the idea that there is such a thing as *the* best of all possible worlds. All that is needed is the notion of a better world and that God would have created a better world than this one.
 2. For example, Rowe 1979, Wykstra 1984, Adams 1985, and Draper 1992.
 3. See Adams 1985 for helpful distinctions between various versions of the problem of evil. The problem we will deal with is traditionally called the logical problem of evil, although the treatment of the problem has more to do with metaphysical necessities and possibilities than it has to do with logical necessities and possibilities; i.e., the focus is on what worlds are metaphysically possible. A distinct approach, and one we will not pursue, is to focus on the evidential relation between the relevant propositions (Rowe 1979, Wykstra 1984, Draper 1992, and Snyder 1996).
 4. Plantinga's actual words are "the following is possible: (8) God is omnipotent, and it was not within His power to create a world containing moral good but no moral evil" (1974a, p.45). We have replaced "create" with "actualize," following Plantinga's argument that God really does not create the possible world that in fact obtains, but that God "actualizes the possible world that does in fact obtain." Also, we have made explicit what Plantinga means by "moral good," namely freedom.

It should be noted that Plantinga distinguishes between strong and weak actualization.

Essentially, if God strongly actualizes a world, then he can actualize only what he can cause to be actual and so, since Plantinga holds that free acts are not caused, there would be no free acts in that world. But God can weakly actualize a world in the sense that he strongly actualizes a world segment that includes free beings who then can make free choices. Our concern is with free acts and, hence, with weak actualization.

5. Plantinga 1974a appears to argue only for the weaker thesis. There he argues that it is possible that "God, though omnipotent, could not have created any of the possible worlds containing just the persons who do in fact exist, and containing moral good and no moral evil" (1974a, p.48). Since there are possible worlds with other persons than the persons who do in fact exist, this conclusion does not entail the stronger thesis. However, in Plantinga 1974b, p.187, he considers other possible persons and clearly argues for the stronger thesis.

6. Plantinga also develops a version of this argument in terms of the proposition that a person's essence is transworld deprived. So it might be suggested that instead of premise (5), Plantinga needs the premise that possibly every person's essence is transworld deprived. In that case, since a person, say Curley, is an instantiation of Curley's essence, if Curley's essence is transworld deprived, then Curley is transworld deprived. But as a matter of fact Plantinga does not argue that it is possible that essences are transworld deprived. Instead he argues as follows, for example:

And now recall that Curley suffers from transworld depravity. This fact implies something interesting about Curleyhood, Curley's essence. Take those worlds *W* such that *is significantly free in W*

and never does what is wrong in W is entailed by Curley's essence.

Each of these worlds has an important property, if Curley suffers from transworld depravity; each is such that God could not have actualized it. (1974b, p.187).

We will argue that Plantinga's notion of transworld depravity for individuals is flawed, and by doing so we undermine his notion that essences are transworld depravity.

7 Plantinga suggests an even stronger premise when he discusses transworld-depraved essences. Then he suggests that it is possible that every creaturely essence suffers from transworld depravity and thus that every instantiation of essences results in persons that always perform at least some wrong actions. (1974b, pp. 188-189)

8. DeRose 1991 questions whether we have good reasons to accept that every person suffers from transworld depravity. While he says that he does not have any clear intuitions regarding the truth of transworld depravity and even produces an example that potentially undermines the concept, oddly enough he eventually claims that he does not have reasons strong enough not to accept it.

9. Although Plantinga's account of middle knowledge does not discuss Luis de Molina, there are substantive agreements between the two. According to Molina, *scientia media*, which is the knowledge God has of future contingent events, includes knowledge of the free actions persons will perform. According to Molinism, God has this knowledge independently of anything that God decrees or actualizes, and thus God's knowledge is not based on what God determines.

Thus God's foreknowledge is compatible with freedom.

10. Bishop 1993 suggests an Intervention Strategy, according to which if God has middle knowledge, then he could fix an agent's initial mental states and capacities in such a way that it is highly likely that she will freely do the right thing at the time of her first moral choice. In case it is apparent that she will not do the right thing, then God stands ready to cause the right choice by direct intervention. Perszyk 1999 points out that Bishop has not fully accepted libertarianism that traditionally is thought to go along with Molinism when devising the Intervention Strategy. Unlike Bishop, we are not assuming that God will intervene. Instead, our strategy assumes that God can see how free beings will act in any given situation and by doing so God can see how the world that includes free beings will unfold through their free actions.

11. It might be objected that if God exercises middle knowledge and actualizes a world in which we always do right, then we are not free since, in a significant way, we could not have done otherwise. The idea is that if God actualizes a world in which we only do good, then it seems that we could not do something wrong. But this is not so. A libertarian or indeterminist can still maintain that by actualizing a world, God need not force an agent to choose A, a good action, rather than refraining from doing A. Relative to all the *causal* conditions that affect the agent, the undetermined agent can still do either A or refrain from doing A, for according to the libertarian the action is not causally determined. Moreover, strictly speaking an agent could do otherwise even if God actualizes a world in which this agent does A. Although the agent does A, there are possible worlds in which the agent refrains from doing A. God, knowing that,

actualizes the one in which she freely does P. For further discussion see Morriston 2001.

12. David Lewis (1993) discusses the possibility of God being an unlucky gambler.

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