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DIVINE FREEDOM AND FREE WILL DEFENSES

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ABSTRACT: This paper considers a problem that arises for free will defenses when considering the nature of God's own will. If God is perfectly good and performs praiseworthy actions, but is unable to do evil, then why must humans have the ability to do evil in order to perform such actions? This problem has been addressed by Theodore Guleserian, but at the expense of denying God's essential goodness. I examine and critique his argument and provide a solution to the initial problem that does not require abandoning God's essential goodness.

Introduction

Central to any conception of Christian theism is the idea that God is worthy of worship. This worthiness can be spelled out in various ways, but two themes are likely to emerge. One is that God is worthy of worship simply for being who he is. God, as a perfect being, commands the respect and admiration of any other being. The second theme, that follows from the first, is the idea that God is worthy of worship because of what he does. On traditional Christian theism it is taken to be true that God not only created, and sustains, the universe, but also interacts with it, and this interaction produces great goods. This much is, seemingly, quite benign. However, when one considers the type of will that God has problems arise for a free will defense. If God is able to act in such praiseworthy ways, and bring about such great goods through those actions, then why do humans need to have such a different type of will in order for *them* to bring about goods? This is a pressing question regardless of what *type* of freedom you think God has. However it is that God is able to bring about great goods without also, given his perfection, being able to bring about evils, why would God create humans differently? Namely, why would God refrain from creating humans with a will like his own?¹

1. I assume that 'moral perfection' entails, at least, an inability to commit evil. To this one might object that the portrayal of God found in the Old Testament should then cast doubt on the claim that God is morally perfect. I

The Problem of Divine Action

Proponents of a free will defense attempt to give a plausible explanation for why there is evil in this world. Such an explanation must include all that one takes to be true in the actual world, which, of course, includes one's beliefs about God.² It is in this context that the problem of divine action arises. When faced with the logical problem of evil the Christian philosopher may respond with some version of a free will defense demonstrating that, given the existence of morally significant freedom, God and evil are not logically incompatible. To this the atheologian may ask why an omnibenevolent God would bother with creating human beings with such freedom in the first place. After all, is all the evil that comes with it really worth the price? Here the advocate of a free will defense can respond in one of two ways. First, she might advance various pieces of natural theology in an attempt to demonstrate, independent of questions about evil, that there is a God. With that established, she might then argue that the free will defense is the best way to make sense of two seemingly disparate facts about the actual world: the existence of God, established by natural theology, and the existence of evil, established by a brief glance at the morning paper.³ A second, and more common, way to respond to the question is by arguing that

- (1) there are some goods that can only be obtained if humans have morally significant freedom,
- (2) the having of morally significant freedom allows for the occurrence of evil, and

agree that there is a potential difficulty reconciling God's moral perfection with certain passages in the Old Testament, but believe such a project can be completed. For more on this important issue, see Michael Bergmann, Michael Murray, and Michael Rae's edited collection of essays and responses, *Divine Evil? The Moral Character of the God of Abraham* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013).

2. Philosophers in agreement with Steven Cowan are likely to object to this. Cowan states that even though the free will defense (FWD) assumes a libertarian conception of freedom, such an admission would not 'disallow me, a compatibilist, from utilizing the FWD and claiming that it actually works—as a defense. It would only be necessary for the compatibilist to deny that it works as a theodicy' ('Compatibilism and the Sinlessness of the Redeemed in Heaven', *Faith and Philosophy* 28 (2012), pp. 416-31). However, it seems unlikely the atheologian will find such a response useful in any meaningful way. I give the outline of a more dialectically useful approach to defenses, that remain short of theodicy, in 'Original Sin and a Broad Free-Will Defense,' *Philosophia Christi* 14 (2012), pp. 353-71. Presently, I only take it to be desirable that one's response to the problem of evil be consistent with other beliefs one takes to be true.

3. This approach corresponds nicely with Michael Murray's account of approaches to the problem of evil up to Leibniz. See his, 'Leibniz on the Problem of Evil,' in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Spring 2005 Edition), ed. Edward E. N. Zalta, URL=<<http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2005/entries/leibniz-evil/>>.

- (3) the goods that result from having morally significant freedom outweigh the evils that come along with that freedom.⁴

This second response, while perhaps initially plausible, may in fact be untenable because of the dilemma it generates.

Either the goods that are brought about by humans as a result of having morally significant freedom are greater in value than the goods God brings about or they are not. Those committed to traditional accounts of Christian doctrine are going to be reticent to accept any view of man's activities that puts man on a higher moral plane than God. So, the first option is, at the least, unappealing. But, if these goods are less valuable than that which results from God's actions, then an account must be given spelling out why God would not simply create humans with the same type of freedom that he has since that freedom brings about greater goods with no associated evils. A world in which creatures bring about greater goods than they do in the actual world, without bringing about any accompanying evils, would appear to be vastly superior to the actual world. Without an account as to why a wholly good God would not actualize such a world, the atheologian has the resources to reject one of the underlying motivations for the free will defense.

The Problem as a False Dilemma

There are several ways one might attempt to respond to this problem of divine action. One way is to argue that it is actually a false dilemma. The dilemma above can only be generated if one assumes that the goods brought about via divine or human actions are comparable. God, on traditional accounts of Christianity, is not a super-human as the Greek gods might be characterized. Instead, God is 'wholly other' and it is incorrect to even try to compare actions between these two very different kinds of beings.

While it may be true that God is a different kind of being than humans, this response is unsatisfactory for two reasons. First, it precludes one from making use of an Anselmian strategy in determining God's various attributes. This strategy starts with an *a priori* understanding of God as a maximally perfect being. This means that God possesses the set of all the great-making properties and each property is had to the greatest degree possible. So, for example, because it is intrinsically better to possess power than to not, God must have that property to the greatest degree. However, if God and humans are such different kinds of beings that their actions are incomparable, then it is highly unlike-

4. Here one may note that this response would appear to turn the free will defense into a type of greater goods defense. Whether or not such a taxonomic revision of responses to the problem of evil is problematic will not be considered — though at first glance it does not appear to be so.

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ly that one will be able to use this Anselmian strategy for identifying God's attributes. One would still be able to begin with a conception of God as the greatest-conceivable being, but could not draw anything from that conception regarding God's specific attributes. Those in the Anselmian tradition must first look at what they take to be great-making properties in humans and then infer that they would be great-making for God as well. If the two beings are so fundamentally different that they cannot be compared, then there is no guarantee that a great-making property in one would be so in the other.

The second objection is not limited to those in the Anselmian tradition. If God and humans are indeed too different to compare, then it is inaccurate to say that God's actions are *better* than human actions. If the two are incomparable, then we are left with only being able to say that God's actions are different from our own. We cannot say they are better, and this seems to be only a marginal improvement to saying they are worse. If we are unable to say that God's actions are better than our own, then we are also unable to say God's actions are praiseworthy. If we have independent reasons for thinking that God is wholly good and cannot do wrong, then we could still say God is praiseworthy, but this would be closer to praising a child for being naturally intelligent than praising a child for doing her chores without being asked. The Christian tradition, however, is full of examples of God being praised for both who he is and for what he has done.⁵

Rejecting God's Essential Moral Perfection

A second way the proponent of a free will defense can avoid the problem above is to reject one or more of the beliefs that lead to the dilemma. That is, one might reject or modify one or more of the attributes traditionally ascribed to God. It is true that God's moral perfection, moral praiseworthiness, and moral freedom are well-entrenched within the Christian tradition, but one might attempt to modify one or more of these in a way that is consistent with much of that tradition, and yet avoids the problem above. In rejecting the idea that God is essentially morally perfect, this is precisely what Theodore Guleserian has tried to do.⁶ It is obvious that human creatures are not essentially morally perfect, but if it turns out that God is not either, then one might respond to the above dilemma by arguing that the goods brought about by divine and human agents are actually of the same type

5. For this reason Bergmann and Cover focus on divine thankfulness instead of divine praiseworthiness when examining whether either is appropriately attributed to an essentially perfect being. See, Michael Bergmann and J. A. Cover, 'Divine Responsibility Without Divine Freedom,' *Faith and Philosophy* 23 (2006), pp. 381-408.

6. As will be seen below, Guleserian does *not* reject the idea that God is morally perfect but only that he is so essentially. His strategy is different from those who attempt to resolve the problem of evil by simply denying altogether one or more of the attributes regularly ascribed to God. Guleserian is rejecting the traditional understanding of God's perfection, but is not rejecting the idea altogether.

because they issue from the same type of will.

In his paper 'Divine Freedom and the Problem of Evil' Guleserian attempts to 'render the Free Will Defense more plausible' by arguing that one ought to reject the idea that it is a greater excellence for God to essentially conform to the moral law than to do so contingently.⁷ If traditional 'Anselmian' accounts of divinity are right and it is better for God to have an essentially perfect will (PW), 'then it should be true for *any* moral agent who can have essential PW that it would be a greater excellence for that agent to have PW essentially than to have it freely and hence contingently' (original emphasis).⁸ Further, if God is omnipotent, then he has the ability to create humans with essential PW. Because the traditionalist believes both that it is better for God to have essential PW and that God is omnipotent, she is committed to believing that God could create humans with essential PW and that it would be better for him to do so.⁹ Not only would it be better for God to create such a world, it turns out that his ability to do so undercuts the primary reason proponents of free will defenses give for why God would choose to create a world with morally significant freedom rather than one without. If Guleserian is correct, God could have created a world in which all moral agents have the same type of will that God has, resulting in the complete lack of evils associated with the greatly inferior type of will that moral agents actually have. However, if it is false that having essential PW is greater than having it contingently, then the free will defense stands on a much greater footing. The reason God would create moral agents with morally significant freedom is because the goods that go along with having a genuinely free will are sufficiently great to justify the evils that may come along with it.

Guleserian begins by discussing the necessary features for a being to be morally perfect. He argues that there are at least two distinct concepts at work in the notion of moral perfection. First, a morally perfect being must have PW. Any agent with this property always wills to conform to the moral law in any situation where the agent recognizes both that the moral order calls for a particular action and that the agent has the power to do that action. This alone is not sufficient for moral perfection because there is no guarantee that the agent will in fact act in accordance with the moral order. One might will to conform to the law, but not have the requisite knowledge to ensure she actually does conform to it. What is needed for moral perfection, in addition to PW, is 'perfect conformance of

7. Theodore Guleserian, 'Divine Freedom and the Problem of Evil,' *Faith and Philosophy* 17 (2000), pp. 348-66.

8. *Ibid.*, p. 350.

9. I will use 'traditional' and 'non-traditional' instead of Guleserian's 'Anselmian' and 'nonAnselmian' because Guleserian's conclusion is consistent with Anselmian accounts of divinity. If one understands, as Guleserian does, 'Anselmian' accounts of divinity to maintain that for any property p, if it is a greater excellence for God to have p than to not, then God does indeed have p, then Guleserian's account is still Anselmian. The difference is that on the non-traditional view having PW contingently is a greater excellence than having it essentially whereas the traditional view maintains the opposite.

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outward action with the moral law' (PC). Any agent with this property will always act in accordance to the moral law any time the agent has the power to do so. This alone is not sufficient for moral perfection because it does not preclude the possibility that one might always intend to break the moral law but always conforms with it because of, for example, some cognitive defect. However, having both PW and PC together entails 'perfect intentional conformance' (PIC).¹⁰ Any agent with PIC will always intend to conform to the moral law, and will always actually do so. That is, a being with PIC will be morally perfect.

That Christian theists take God to have PIC is obvious, even for Guleserian. The question is whether God has PIC essentially or contingently. Because both PW and PC have essential and contingent counterparts, any being that has either contingently will also have PIC contingently. According to Guleserian, the traditional understanding of God has maintained that God has PIC essentially. As will be shown momentarily, Guleserian does not believe that God's having PIC essentially would mean that created beings could have it too. However, for Guleserian to generate the problem for a free will defense he does not need it to be the case that God could create creatures with essential PIC. Created beings having contingent PIC is enough. If God could have created creatures with PIC, even contingently, then he could have created a world in which every agent in that world always conforms to the moral law because they always intend to do so. In that world one would have far greater beings than what is found in this world and there would be no evil of the sort we find in this one. But why, exactly, does Guleserian think it's true that a created being could have both PW and PC?

First, it should be noted that even though Guleserian believes God can create other beings with essential PW, that does *not* commit him to the idea that God can create other perfect beings. Guleserian admits that a 'perfect being has the attribute of necessary independent existence—a property which no *created* being could have' but nothing in his argument requires the creation of other perfect beings (original emphasis).¹¹ In fact, while Guleserian is optimistic about God's ability to create beings that are both omnipotent and omniscient, provided that God is also able to exercise something like middle knowledge to ensure that any such created being would always conform to his own will, he restricts the discussion to essentially finite creatures, 'who due to their essential finitude cannot be omnipotent and cannot be omniscient'. The essentially finite creatures under consideration are not perfect but are able to have essential PW. They are not, however, capable of having essential PC because for any finite being there 'are some possible worlds in which that person is in a situation S in which the moral law requires that person to do a certain act A, but in which she does not believe that she is in S or does not believe that the moral law requires her to do A in S'.¹² In such a situation this

10. Ibid., pp. 348-49.

11. Ibid., p. 351.

12. Ibid.

person refrains from doing A and thus does not perfectly conform to the moral law. If this person had essential PC then such a world would be impossible.

Even though created beings cannot have essential PC, the same sort of argument does not apply to considerations of created beings having essential PW. Why, then, think that God could create creatures with essential PW? The basic argument for this starts with the traditionalist's assumption that 'it is really possible for a divine being to have moral and factual beliefs that metaphysically necessitate its moral volitions'. If one accepts this assumption then 'there seems to be no reason to suppose that the same may not be true of a creature.' Here one might object that a finite creature could not have essential PW because even if he wanted to act in accordance with the moral law, without omniscience there may be times that he was ignorant of what the moral law actually requires or, without omnipotence, be unable to comply with it. Guleserian considers, and rejects, this objection. Creatures with essential PW do not need to have omnipotence or omniscience. All that is required are beliefs sufficient to 'metaphysically determine or necessitate one's acts of will about moral matters' and the power required to act as the moral law requires.¹³ This allows the range of beliefs and the range of power to fall short of omniscience and omnipotence while retaining essential PW. However, this does not mean that such an agent would always act in conformance with the moral law. There may still be situations in which the agent fails to have the correct moral beliefs about some situation he finds himself in. All essential PW states is that when the agent is in a moral situation, and believes himself to be in one, the agent always wills to act rightly in that situation.

God's ability to create creatures with essential PW creates a problem for a free will defense because there is no reason to think God could not also give such creatures the requisite moral and factual knowledge that, along with their perfect will, necessitates they always conform to the moral law. The creatures would have contingent PC and essential PW, which together entail PIC. If this is correct, then 'God could have avoided the intentional wrongdoing in this world of morally free creatures by actualizing instead a world of *better* creatures.' This undercuts one's ability to explain actual evil by referencing the goods associated with the libertarian freedom found in free will defenses. God's inability to create free creatures that always do what is right is irrelevant because God could have instead created 'these more excellent nonfree creatures having PW'.¹⁴ If one takes seriously the idea that 'moral freedom is an excellence so great that even a world of creatures who *by nature* conform perfectly to the moral law would not be greater than our world, because of our moral freedom' then the free will defense remains plausible.¹⁵ This, however, requires that traditionalists explain why this

13. Ibid.

14. Ibid., pp. 353-54.

15. Ibid., p. 363.

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type of moral freedom is a great good for created beings but not a great good for God.

What should we make of this type of argument? Does Guleserian's argument succeed in resolving the initial worry raised above? I will argue, first, that there are good reasons to reject his conclusion because it depends on the assumption that there is a best possible world and that God must create it. I will then demonstrate that Guleserian's argument is useful in providing an account of why the worry raised above is misguided. It shall be shown that such a worry assumes that it would be better if God and created creatures possess the same type of will.

The first way one might object to this type of argument is by denying that a perfect being like God must actualize a world with creatures that have essential PW and contingent PC, even if it turns out that such a world is better than a world like this one where creatures have free PW. While many take it to be the case that God must always do what is best, Robert Adams has given an argument to the contrary. According to Adams, it would not be wrong for God to create the world he did create, even if another much better world could have been created in its place. As long as none of the creatures in the created world would exist in the better world, none are so miserable in the created world that it would be better had they not existed, and every creature in the created world is at least as happy overall as it would have been in any other possible world in which it exists, then it is false to say that God has wronged anyone in creating less than the best.¹⁶

Guleserian considers this type of objection but finds it lacking because, primarily, in creating a world God must evaluate the 'overall moral character' of a world and not simply the 'amount of moral good and moral evil' in that world as it relates to some other possible world that God could create. Even if two worlds contain the same overall amount of moral good 'it would be *morally wrong*' (original emphasis) for God to choose to create a world with moral monsters if the alternative available to God does not result in such morally deficient beings.¹⁷ Guleserian justifies this with a thought experiment where two universes, U₁ and U₂, both contain an infinite number of people. In U₁ every person commits a great moral evil but also performs just enough morally right actions to outweigh that evil. In U₂ every person also commit a moral evil, but it is of the much more mundane variety, like lying about one's weight. In U₂, however, the goods each person performs greatly outweighs the evils they committed, but because in each world there is an infinite number of people, the overall amount of good and evil is the same. Who, Guleserian asks 'would consider herself justified in choosing to create U₁ instead of U₂, if the choice were hers?'¹⁸

16. Robert Merrihew Adams, 'Must God Create the Best?,' *The Philosophical Review* 81 (1972), pp. 317-32.

17. Guleserian, 'Divine Freedom and the Problem of Evil,' p. 360.

18. *Ibid.*, p. 359.

At first there is an intuitive appeal to Guleserian's argument but it's not clear that this helps his case against Adams. First, in order for this thought experiment to serve as grounds for rejecting this Adams-style objection, we must specify that the beings in U₁ and U₂ are entirely different beings. This is required for two reasons. First, one should recall that the creatures that could have essential PW are of a different sort altogether from the free creatures God did create. Second, the first of Adams's conditions is that none of the beings in the less-than-best possible world exist in the best possible world. The choice is not simply between creating U₁ or U₂, the only difference between the two being the kinds of evil in each. Instead, the choice is between creating U₁ with one type of creature that does great moral wrong and creating U₂ with an entirely different type of creature that does moral wrong, but not egregiously so.

With this in mind, we can see how the defender of the Adams-style objection is going to respond. In order to say that it would be morally wrong for God to create U₁ instead of U₂ one must specify who is being wronged. The creatures in U₁ cannot have been wronged by God creating U₁ instead of U₂ because they do not exist at all in U₂. As long as they are, on the whole, better off having been created than not, then God could not have wronged them by creating U₁. If those in U₁ have no complaint against God, then perhaps one could say the creatures in U₂ have been wronged because they were not created when they could have been. This Adams explicitly rejects because 'The moral community consists of actual beings. It is they who have actual rights, and it is to them that there are actual obligations. A merely possible being cannot be (actually) wronged or treated unkindly.'¹⁹ If those in U₁ were not wronged, and neither were those in U₂, then it is not clear what would make it the case that choosing U₁ over U₂ is morally wrong.

This type of response seems able to adequately undercut Guleserian's argument, but is not without weaknesses of its own. For example, William Rowe has argued that Adams's contention that God does not have to create the best only demonstrates that it would not be *morally* wrong for God to create less than the best, not that he could actually do so. Even if it is morally acceptable to create less than the best, it remains true that 'one being may be morally better than another even though it is not better by virtue of the performance of some *obligation* that the other failed to perform. It may be morally better by virtue of performing some *supererogatory* act—a good act beyond the call of duty—that the other being could have but did not perform' (original emphasis).²⁰ From the fact that one being does something morally better than a second it does not follow that the second did something morally wrong. This does not mean that a perfect being could refrain from creating the best, it only suggests that the reason why a perfect being like God must create the best may not be moral in nature. In fact, according to Rowe, the principle reason why God must create the best is that if he did not, it

19. Adams, 'Must God Create the Best?,' p. 319.

20. William Rowe, *Can God Be Free?* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), p. 82.

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would be possible for there to be a being that is morally better.²¹ The traditional conception of God, however, is that God is morally perfect which would make it logically impossible for there to be a being morally better.

A full discussion of whether Rowe's objection to Adams succeeds is beyond the scope of this project. Here it shall be enough to note that those who do not find Rowe's objection persuasive have the resources to deny the conclusion of Guleserian's argument. Even with that discussion set aside, one is able to see that Guleserian's argument is susceptible in a second way. It may turn out that God does not have to create the best possible world simply because there is no best possible world. Alvin Plantinga, for example, has argued that:

Just as there is no greatest prime number, so perhaps there is no best of all possible worlds. Perhaps for any world you mention, replete with dancing girls and deliriously happy sentient creatures, there is an even better world, containing even more dancing girls and deliriously happy sentient creatures. If so, it seems reasonable to think that the second possible world is better than the first. But then it follows that for any possible world *W* there is a better world *W'*, in which case there just isn't any such thing as the best of all possible worlds.²²

While one may wonder how God could choose to create at all if faced with an infinite range of possible worlds, Bruce Langtry has provided an account of what conditions would need to be satisfied for a perfect being to do just that. This account cannot simply state that God chooses the best because the infinite number of worlds ensures that whatever world God chooses to create, there will be another even better. Langtry argues that if God were faced with an infinite range of good possible worlds he ought to simply 'satisfice'. That is, God ought to 'select some good state of affairs even though [he] could select a better one'.²³ Rowe's contention, that if there is no best possible world then God could have always acted better by creating an even better world, fails in situations in which the following is true:

- (4) For every world that could have been selected there is a better one that could have been selected.
- (5) The world that was in fact selected is good enough relative to the foregoing circumstances.
- (6) Failure to select any world would have led to an outcome that is far inferior to each of the

21. *Ibid.*, p. 97.

22. Alvin Plantinga, *God, Freedom, and Evil* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977), p. 61.

23. Bruce Langtry, *God, the Best, and Evil* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), p. 78.

worlds which is good enough.²⁴

In this context what Guleserian must show is that a world with creatures like what we find in the actual world does not satisfy the second of Langtry's three conditions.

But such a denial does not seem to be available to Guleserian because he actually believes that creatures with free PW are more excellent than those with essential PW, and that creatures in this world do indeed have free PW. From the fact that God's having essential PW is a greater excellence than his having free PW, as traditionalists maintain, and from the fact that God could create creatures with essential PW, as Guleserian maintains, it does not follow that a world with creatures having mere free PW is not a world that is good enough. In other words, the ability for better creatures to be created does not mean that the creatures actually created are worse off than if they were the only type of creatures that God could create. If I purchased a valuable painting from a prominent local artist, that painting's value would not be diminished simply by a friend pointing out that I had the ability to purchase a much more valuable painting from an historically important artist.

What we have seen is that even if one accepts Guleserian's argument that God could have created creatures with essential PW, and if one accepts Guleserian's contention that traditionalists are committed to the view that such creatures would be more excellent than creatures with free PW, it does not follow that God would have to create a world with such creatures. This means that one can still appeal to the various features found in a free will defense to explain the existence of actual evils. As long as there is reason to think that the world God actually created is good enough, then the traditionalist's belief that God has, essentially, a perfect will cannot serve as grounds to reject the free will defense. While this failure of Guleserian's account means that there is no immediate conflict with a free will defense and the traditionalist's account of God, it also means we are still without an answer to our initial question. If the goods brought about by God are so much greater than the goods brought about by humans, then why would God refrain from creating us with that same type of will?

God's Morally Superior Acts of Will

If God does not have to create the best possible world, either because there is not one or for some other reason, then Guleserian's solution to the problem of divine action will have been undercut. So what, then, are we to make of the problem of divine action? Why would human agents be created with an inferior will, compared to God's, especially since God is able to bring about even greater goods without any accompanying evils? In answering this problem it will be helpful to explain a second way that Guleserian's argument fails. Guleserian wrongly assumes that a created being with the same type of will as God would be better than one with a lesser type of will. The rationale for rejecting that idea

24. Ibid., p. 75.

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can in turn be used to resolve our initial worry.

Recall that Guleserian argued that if God's having PW essentially is a greater excellence than having it contingently, 'then it should be true for *any* moral agent who can have essential PW that it would be a greater excellence for that agent to have PW essentially than to have it freely and hence contingently'.²⁵ Central to Guleserian's defense of the idea that created creatures are capable of having PW essentially is the belief that God's actions are metaphysically necessitated by his moral and factual beliefs. He writes, 'Surely, then, on the traditionalist assumption that there is *one* individual whose moral volitions are metaphysically necessitated by his beliefs, viz., God, and therefore that it is *possible* for moral and factual beliefs to metaphysically necessitate moral volitions'. Further, it is possible, perhaps even plausible, that God 'could create finite spirits, who possess *essentially* the property of always willing in accordance with their moral beliefs' (original emphasis).²⁶ This remains possible even if one does not believe that God could create creatures with attributes like omniscience because even finite creatures can be given the requisite moral beliefs to metaphysically determine their acts of will.

What are we to make of this argument? There appears to be two deficiencies in this account, the second building upon the first. First, it is not clear that God's acts of will are metaphysically necessitated by his beliefs, but by his nature instead. Second, if we deny the assumption that beliefs metaphysically necessitate God's acts of will then we have no reason to accept the claim that God could create creatures that have their acts of will metaphysically necessitated by their beliefs. For creatures to have a perfect will, like God's, they would have to be created with a perfect nature. But there are reasons, consistent with a free will defense, to think a world with these sorts of creatures would not be as morally good as a world where creatures do not have a perfect will.

The traditionalist's assumption that God is incapable of acting contrary to the moral law does not require one to accept that God's actions are determined by his beliefs. In fact, there are reasons to think this is not the case.²⁷ If God's beliefs necessitate his acts of will then one immediately wonders what it is that God's beliefs are *about*. It is likely that one will answer that God's beliefs are about the moral order, especially since it is those beliefs that allegedly necessitate his actions. But we now need to know what sort of thing the moral order is. Is it something that is external to God himself or simply

25. Guleserian, 'Divine Freedom and the Problem of Evil,' p. 350.

26. *Ibid.*, p. 352.

27. The critique that follows does not explicitly take into account the possibility that God does not have beliefs at all, though such a critique would likely be devastating. If God has no beliefs then one will have trouble specifying how they could determine his acts of will. For development of the idea that God has no beliefs see, William Alston, 'Does God Have Beliefs?,' *Religious Studies* 22 (1986), pp. 287-306. The critique I offer appears compatible with this conception of divine knowledge.

created by God? Here a similar worry arises as those that are associated with what is commonly referred to as Euthyphro's Dilemma. Does God believe what he does about the moral order because such beliefs are appropriate to a perfect being, or is it the beliefs of a perfect being that causes the moral order to be what it is? Taking the second horn of this dilemma is untenable. Not only does it commit one to a sort of divine voluntarism about morality that results in the moral order being entirely arbitrary, but in this context it may not even be logically coherent. This view maintains that it is God's beliefs about the moral order that necessitates his acts of will. But on voluntarism it is God's very act of will that is supposed to create that moral order. If there is no moral order, then there can be no beliefs about it. But those very beliefs are what are said to necessitate his moral acts.²⁸ Taking the first horn of the dilemma fares no better, especially for the traditionalist, because it seems to result in the moral order being something distinct from God himself.

This dilemma is well known to anyone who ascribes to a divine command theory of ethics, and some of the resources for responding to that problem will help elucidate why it is a mistake to say God's acts of will are necessitated by his beliefs. Those resources can then be employed to solve our initial problem of divine action. Robert Adams has argued that we ought to think about morality as consisting in the commands of a loving God. On this account one need not worry about the problem of arbitrariness because 'it is only the commands of a definitively good God, who, for example, is not cruel but loving that are a good candidate for the role of defining moral obligation.'²⁹ This also negates worries about the moral order coming from some source not intimately connected with God because the moral order is to be identified with the commands of a loving God. What is important in this context is that it is ultimately the nature of God, and not his beliefs, that form the moral order. When asking what necessitates God's acts of will it may be correct to say it is his beliefs, but that would not tell the complete story. Those beliefs can only necessitate God's acts of will because of the nature God has. This means that if one wants to maintain the idea that God could create creatures with the same type of will he has, then those creatures will not only need beliefs sufficient to determine their actions, but also a nature that determines those beliefs.

What would it mean for a finite creature to have her acts of will determined in such a way? If a finite agent's actions are determined by her beliefs, because of her nature, then it turns out the choosing originates with God and not with the agent. The morally salient difference is that the finite agent would not have the same grounding for her moral and factual beliefs that God does. As is commonly

28. This should not be read as a general critique of those who believe God creates the moral order. For a recent defense of that claim see, T J Mawson, 'God's Creation of Morality,' *Religious Studies* 38 (2002), pp. 1-25. This is only to be a problem for those who say God's beliefs necessitate his acts of will and are also voluntarists about the moral order.

29. Robert Adams, *Finite and Infinite Goods: A Framework for Ethics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), p. 250.

W. Paul Franks, forthcoming.

understood, a finite agent chooses based upon her moral and factual beliefs. Sometimes she may act with a great deal of prudence and make the correct decision that perfectly complies with the moral law, but there may also be times when she acts irrationally and acts contrary to the moral law. Still yet, there may be other times that she *intends* to make the correct decision, but actually makes the wrong one or is unable to follow through with her intention. In any of these scenarios, it is the agent that makes her own decision and no one else. She chooses freely without reliance on her beliefs or intentions being determined by someone or something else.

In order for God to ensure that the correct choice is always made, a finite agent would need to have essential PW coupled with enough knowledge to know what the correct decision is, and enough power to follow through with that decision. Guleserian argues that this is a genuine possibility; 'God can create finite spirits who possess *essentially* the capacity to think and to believe, and who possess *essentially* the capacity to will and to form intentions regarding moral acts, just as God possesses' (original emphasis).³⁰ But notice that it is God that creates in the agent the essential capacity to think, believe, will, and form intentions. The agent does not have the possibility to choose incorrectly, but, unlike God, it is *not* due to the agent's own nature. Instead it is due to the active role that God played in necessitating that the agent have the nature, beliefs, and powers that she has. When asked why an agent with an essentially perfect will always acts in accordance with the moral law, one could rightly reply that it is because of her perfect will, moral and factual knowledge, and power to carry out what ought to be done. But that is not the whole story. One must also ask why she has that perfect will, why she has that knowledge, and why she has that power. In this case the only reason she has that power is because God created her with it. Had God chosen to create this agent without such capacities, then there is no guarantee she would have acted rightly. However, when one asks why God always acts in accordance with the moral law, the whole story can be told without relying on anything external to God. Perfect intentional conformance to the moral law simply follows from his perfection. Unlike finite creatures, a perfect being's actions trace back to that being alone.

While it may be possible for God to create creatures that have a perfect will essentially, the above discussion should raise questions about whether it would be better for God to do so. Guleserian argued that if the traditionalist is correct to say that God's having a morally perfect will essentially is a greater excellence than his having it contingently, then it would be greater for all moral agents too. Further, if God were able to create creatures with a perfect will essentially, that he would be obligated to do so. We saw, however, that Guleserian's argument for this second contention does not justify the claim that God would be obligated to create such creatures, and we saw that the traditionalist's assumption about God having a perfect will essentially does not carry over to other agents. With this in mind, the solution to our initial problem is straightforward. The proponent of a free will defense can maintain the commonly held view that the goods that result from God's actions are greater than those

30. Guleserian, 'Divine Freedom and the Problem of Evil,' p. 352.

that result from human actions. When asked why God would refrain from simply creating humans with the same type of will that he has, we now have the resources to show that not even God can create a world that has the same moral goods as this one, but with finite creatures who have essential PW. When God brings about moral goods it is only because of the type of being that God is. The moral valuation of such goods starts and stops with the person of God. But that cannot be said of any created being. Regardless of whether God is able to create creatures with a essential PW, the moral value of their acts of will eventually traces to God. When agents like those found in the actual world choose to do the good, it is not simply because God created them with requisite capacities that determine they choose to do the good. Instead, they do so because of their own free will, which also means they are able to choose to do evil instead. And this, of course, is exactly what the proponent of a free will defense believes.

Conclusion

We have seen various reasons to think that it would be appropriate for God to create humans with a distinctly different type of will than his own. Even if God could create humans with the same type of will as his own it does not follow that God must. First, God may have no obligation at all to create the best possible world. Second, there are reasons to think that there simply is no best possible world. If there is not, then as long as this world is good enough, then it does not matter that there may be another possible world where creatures have a better type of freedom than what is had in this world. Finally, reasons were given that demonstrate a world where creatures have the same type of will as God would be less desirable than the actual world. In the actual world when humans do right, their doing so traces to their free will. However, in worlds in which creatures have perfect wills that determine their actions, any moral goods that result from those actions would ultimately trace to God's will and not the creatures'. As a result, adherents to traditional conceptions of divine will can retain those traditional conceptions while, at the same time, making use of all the resources found in a free will defense.