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## MIDDLE KNOWLEDGE AND THE SOTERIOLOGICAL PROBLEM OF EVIL

According to the thesis of divine ‘middle knowledge’, first propounded by the Jesuit theologian Luis de Molina in the sixteenth century, subjunctive conditionals stating how free agents would freely respond under counterfactual conditions (call such expressions ‘counterfactuals of freedom’) may be straightforwardly true, and thus serve as the objects of divine knowledge. This thesis has provoked considerable controversy, and the recent revival of interest in middle knowledge, initiated by Anthony Kenny, Robert Adams and Alvin Plantinga in the 1970s, has led to two ongoing debates. One is a theoretical debate over the very intelligibility of middle knowledge;<sup>1</sup> the other is a practical debate over its philosophical and theological utility.<sup>2</sup>

Since defeat in the theoretical debate would render the practical debate otiose, there is obviously a sense in which the former is the more fundamental of the two. Yet this simple dependence of the practical on the theoretical is hardly the whole story. The fact is that we grant ourselves considerable latitude in deciding what is to count as ‘success’ and ‘failure’ in philosophical disputes, and the practical side of a dispute, by showing us what is at stake in the controversy, largely determines how stringently we set the criteria for

<sup>1</sup> The following is a sampling of recent sources for the theoretical debate. For defences of middle knowledge, see: Alvin Plantinga, *The Nature of Necessity* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1974), ch. 9; Plantinga, ‘Replies to My Critics’, in *Alvin Plantinga, Profiles: An International Series on Contemporary Philosophers and Logicians*, vol. 5, ed. James E. Tomberlin and Peter van Inwagen (Dordrecht, Netherlands: D. Reidel, 1985); Jonathan Kvanvig, *The Possibility of an All-Knowing God*, Library of Philosophy and Religion (Houndmills, UK: Macmillan Press, 1986), ch. 4; William Lane Craig, *The Only Wise God* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1987), ch. 12; Richard Otte, ‘A Defense of Middle Knowledge’, *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion*, xxii (1987), 161–69; Alfred Freddoso, ‘Introduction’, in Luis de Molina, *On Divine Foreknowledge* (Part IV of the *Concordia*), translated with introduction and notes, Alfred J. Freddoso (Ithaca: Cornell U. Press, 1988); and Edward R. Wierenga, *The Nature of God*, Cornell Studies in the Philosophy of Religion (Ithaca & London: Cornell U. Press, 1989), ch. 5. For critiques of middle knowledge, see: Robert Merrihew Adams, ‘Middle Knowledge and the Problem of Evil’, *American Philosophical Quarterly*, xiv (April 1977), 109–17; Anthony Kenny, *The God of the Philosophers* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979), pp. 61–71; Adams, ‘The Problem of Evil’, in *Alvin Plantinga, op. cit.*; William Hasker, ‘A Refutation of Middle Knowledge’, *Nous*, xx (1986), 545–57, expanded in *God, Time, and Knowledge* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989), ch. 2; and David P. Hunt, ‘Middle Knowledge: the “Foreknowledge Defense”’, *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion*, xxviii (1990), 1–24.

<sup>2</sup> Contributions to the practical debate may be found in a number of the sources cited in note 1; in addition, the following articles by David Basinger should be noted: ‘Human Freedom and Divine Providence: Some New Thoughts on an Old Problem’, *Religious Studies*, xv (1979), 491–510; ‘Divine Omniscience and Human Freedom: a “Middle Knowledge” Perspective’, *Faith & Philosophy*, 1 (1984), 291–302; and ‘Middle Knowledge and Classical Christian Thought’, *Religious Studies*, xxii (1986), 407–22. A reply to the last of these articles may be found in David Gordon & James Sadowsky, ‘Does Theism Need Middle Knowledge?’, *Religious Studies*, xxv (1989), 75–87.

success on the theoretical side. The classic arguments against the rationality of belief in other minds, for example, are sufficiently impressive by the usual standards of philosophical ‘success’ that they would have spawned little opposition if their consequences were not deemed intolerable. A similar (if less imperative) dynamic appears to govern the recent discussion of middle knowledge. On the one hand, the theoretical debate has turned up serious threats to the coherence of middle knowledge, based on such considerations as ‘power entailment principles’<sup>3</sup> and the semantics of subjunctive conditionals.<sup>4</sup> On the other hand, the theoretical debate is far from over: if we become convinced that significant benefits are to be gained from the employment of middle knowledge, this will encourage us to persevere in its theoretical defence, while a judgement that these benefits are over-rated or illusory will deprive the theoretical discussion of much of its interest.

An example from the practical debate will serve to illustrate what might be at stake in the theoretical debate. A number of recent defenders of middle knowledge have proposed that divine foreknowledge be analysed in terms of God’s middle knowledge.<sup>5</sup> What makes such an analysis possible in the first place is the ‘Molinist’ assumption that there is always a truth of the matter about what would happen under specifiable conditions, even when what happens does not follow logically, metaphysically, or even causally from those conditions. Thus every future event, however produced, becomes expressible as the consequent of a true subjunctive conditional whose antecedent expresses an actual (rather than counterfactual) condition; and God, who knows all these true subjunctive conditionals, is in a position to deduce the occurrence of any future event without having to exercise any additional capacity for prescience.

What advantage is to be derived from replacing foreknowledge with middle knowledge in this way? The advantage cannot consist in the elimination of a metaphysically questionable aspect of the divine nature, for middle knowledge is, if anything, even more open to charges of metaphysical impropriety than is foreknowledge.<sup>6</sup> Rather, the claim is made that this reduction of foreknowledge to middle knowledge solves the problem of how God can make *use* of His foreknowledge in the course of divine deliberation. On the traditional ‘previsional’ account, foreknowledge is logically posterior to the future events it encompasses; but then foreknowledge comes to God too late to be any use, since He can do nothing to alter events He already knows are going to occur. The truth of subjunctive conditionals, on the other hand, is independent of the truth of their antecedents; this means that God’s

<sup>3</sup> See Hasker, ‘A Refutation of Middle Knowledge’, *op. cit.*; also David Basinger, ‘Middle Knowledge and Human Freedom: Some Clarifications’, *Faith and Philosophy*, iv (1987), 330–6, and William Hasker, ‘Reply to Basinger on Power Entailment’, *Faith and Philosophy*, v (1988), 87–90.

<sup>4</sup> See Adams, Kenny and Hunt, *op. cit.*

<sup>5</sup> See especially Basinger [1984], Basinger [1986], Kvanvig, Craig and Freddoso, *op. cit.*; this is also the use for which Molina himself introduced the notion of middle knowledge.

<sup>6</sup> This point is discussed in some detail in Hunt, *op. cit.*

knowledge of such conditionals, even those whose antecedents are in fact true, is logically prior to the actualization of a particular world, and is thus available to guide Him in His deliberation over which world to actualize. In short, the appeal to counterfactuals of freedom removes crippling barriers to God's exercise of full providential control over the world, and does so without having to compromise the freedom of that world's finite agents. Or so goes the brief for middle knowledge, at any rate.<sup>7</sup>

This exemplifies one direction, at least, that the practical debate has taken. What I would like to do in the following pages is examine another area in which the thesis of divine middle knowledge may appear to have applications, but which has not (until recently) come under Molinist scrutiny.

#### THE SOTERIOLOGICAL PROBLEM OF EVIL

In his book *The Only Wise God*, William Lane Craig prefaced his theoretical defence of middle knowledge with the remark that 'middle knowledge, if coherent, is one of the most fruitful theological ideas ever conceived'.<sup>8</sup> Amongst its many advantages, he suggested, is its potential for 'dealing with the eternal status of those who have never heard about Christ'.<sup>9</sup> Now, in more recent work, Craig has had an opportunity to develop this suggestion.<sup>10</sup>

What exactly is the problem regarding the eternal status of those who have never heard about Christ? In general terms, it is a post-mortem extension of the problem of evil which arises when we accept the traditional doctrine of eternal damnation for those who reject Christ. On this doctrine the evils of this present life are just the beginning: for many people, death will only inaugurate a condition of incalculable misery enduring for all eternity. Not only does this multiply (by infinity) the *amount* of evil that must be reconciled with the existence of an omnipotent and omnibenevolent God, but it also depletes the *resources* that can be brought to bear on the problem. Many of the moves by which the classic theodicies endeavour to justify evil are no longer available once our pre-mortem existence is at an end – for example, if pre-mortem evils are justified (in part) by their constituting an essential ingredient in a regimen of soul-making, this justification will hardly be available for post-mortem suffering, when our souls have presumably completed whatever development is to count in determining their eternal destiny.

The traditional account of these post-mortem evils is that they may be (and on occasion are) the fitting *consequences* – whether externally imposed or

<sup>7</sup> Skeptics include Adams and Kenny, who have argued that current semantics for subjunctive conditionals make the truth-conditions for such conditionals dependent on the prior specification of an actual world (thus putting them on a par with foreknowledge); Hasker, who has denied that the full providential control that middle knowledge makes possible is theologically necessary or even desirable (Adams also appears to find a 'venturesome' God theologically acceptable); and Gordon & Sadowsky, who claim that middle knowledge is not even providentially superior to present knowledge(!).

<sup>8</sup> *Op. cit.* p. 127.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.* p. 138.

<sup>10</sup> "'No Other Name": a Middle Knowledge Perspective on the Exclusivity of Salvation through Christ', *Faith and Philosophy*, vi (1989), 172–88.

self-inflicted – of how we lived our lives, especially our response to God’s gracious invitation to join our destinies to His. But this answer is not without its difficulties. For one thing, there are legitimate questions about whether eternal suffering really *is* a fitting consequence for rejecting Christ; and if it is, whether God would go ahead and create a world in which He knows that myriads of souls will end up suffering this consequence. While it is true that the Scriptures appear to endorse an affirmative answer to these questions, and a majority of theologians throughout history have accepted this position, it is quite another matter to say that anyone has a clear understanding of how such a position could be morally justified. This issue, however, is not one to which Molinism appears suited to make much of a contribution. Craig’s own comments here, which are standard fare from those whose moral intuitions are in apparent harmony with the traditional picture, do not rely on any peculiarly Molinist assumptions.<sup>11</sup> I therefore leave to one side the question of the proportionality of pre-mortem fault to post-mortem punishment in order to develop at greater length that part of the problem that appears more vulnerable to the resources of Molinism.

The second aspect of the problem can be thought of as a matter of *comparative justice*. It arises in the following way. On the traditional account, salvation comes through Christ alone, while the terms of this salvation are made known to us in two basic forms. Their most explicit form is ‘special revelation’, which includes God’s dealings with His people Israel, the inspired proclamations of the Old Testament prophets, the testimony of the early Church as collected in the New Testament, and above all God’s revelation of Himself in the person of Jesus Christ. But the availability of special revelation is obviously dependent on the circumstances in which people find themselves: proximity to churches, access to Christian literature, the witness of acquaintances, visits by missionaries, and the like. Not everyone is in such circumstances, or in them to the same degree.

This inequity in the availability of special revelation is compensated by the provision of ‘general revelation’: an inner witness which instructs us in the need for reconciliation with God. General revelation is available to everyone; it is not dependent on contingent circumstances in the way that special revelation is. Unfortunately, the compensation it offers is incomplete. While sufficient in principle to bring us into a right relationship with God, it is rarely effective in achieving this result: for various reasons, one’s chances

<sup>11</sup> On the suitability of eternal suffering as the consequence of unbelief, he has this to say (p. 176): ‘I do not see that the very notion of hell is incompatible with a just and loving God... Those who make a well-informed and free decision to reject Christ are self-condemned, since they repudiate God’s unique sacrifice for sin. By spurning God’s prevenient grace and the solicitation of His Spirit, they shut out God’s mercy and seal their own destiny. They, therefore, and not God, are responsible for their condemnation, and God deeply mourns their loss.’ And on the suitability of God proceeding with creation in the face of these consequences, he offers this (p. 185): ‘The happiness of the saved should not be precluded by the admittedly tragic circumstance that their salvation has as its concomitant the damnation of many others, for the fate of the damned is the result of their own free choice.’

of attaining eternal felicity on the strength of general revelation alone are far less than they would be on the basis of special revelation. Since so much is at stake, while the opportunities for success are so unevenly distributed, it is hard to resist the conclusion that those who have never heard of Christ have grounds for complaint against the hand they have been dealt. God appears to be in the position of a casino operator who stacks the deck in favour of the house at certain tables while stacking it in favour of the patron at other tables. It is true that those who lose at the unfavourable tables still had a *chance* to win; it may even be true that their losing was abetted by the foolish manner in which they played their hands. But this would hardly justify the casino's practices against an inquiry from the State Gambling Commission.

And the problem is even more general than this, for the relative availability of special revelation is only one of a myriad of factors that may influence how one responds to Christ. It is not simply that there are two categories of people, with those in the one category having a better chance at salvation than those in the other. Even within a single category there are significant differences, apparently present through no merit or fault of one's own, which affect one's chances. There can be no doubt that some family environments, for example, are more conducive than others to a favourable response to the divine call, whether that call comes through special or general revelation. While the existence of such advantages may be grounds for rejoicing on the part of their beneficiaries, it would appear to warrant complaints from those not so favoured. The soteriological problem of evil, then, is not simply the problem of the eternal destiny of those who have never heard of Christ; it is also the problem of the eternal destiny of those who did hear of Christ but whose different circumstances in life led to very different likelihoods of a favourable response.

Let us state the problem a bit more precisely. Suppose that there are free agents and possible conditions  $C_1$  and  $C_2$  for which both of the following express true propositions:

- (1) If  $C_1$  were to obtain,  $x$  would freely reject Christ.
- (2) If  $C_2$  were to obtain,  $x$  would freely accept Christ.

Suppose too that we accept the traditional doctrines of divine judgement and salvation through Christ alone. Then for any free agents, the following will also be true:

- (3) If  $x$  were freely to reject Christ,  $x$  would be eternally damned.
- (4) If  $x$  were freely to accept Christ,  $x$  would be eternally saved.

Since one's response to Christ determines one's eternal destiny, an incomparably great good will be either gained or lost according to whether  $C_1$  or  $C_2$  happens to obtain. Suppose that  $C_1$  actually obtains. Then all those agents of whom (1) is true are eternally damned; but some of these (we have

supposed) are agents of whom (2) is *also* true. Let us call one of these agents 'Jack'. As matters now stand, Jack will be the recipient of eternal woe; but if different conditions had obtained, Jack would have received eternal bliss. We may agree that God must have had His reasons for actualizing a world in which  $C_1$  obtained rather than  $C_2$ ; but it seems unfair that Jack, who would have accepted Christ under other conditions, must pay with his immortal soul the price of God's cosmic fine-tuning.

A comparison will help to confirm this judgement. The reply might be made that Jack nevertheless *could have* accepted Christ in  $C_1$ , if only by responding to general revelation; his rejection of Christ was free and uncoerced, and he may, on this basis, be held accountable for his unfavourable response. Suppose that this is true. But now consider Jill, who would freely *accept* Christ in  $C_1$  and freely *reject* Him in  $C_2$ . (Perhaps  $C_1$  is the occurrence of an evangelical crusade in Jill's hometown of A—, while in  $C_2$  heavy rains close the airport at A—, diverting the crusade to Jack's hometown of B—.) Jill, too, would presumably be accountable for her unfavourable response in  $C_2$  on the grounds that she nevertheless *could have* accepted Christ. Yet the scenario under which she would culpably reject Christ will never in fact occur — God has decided, for His own reasons, to actualize a world in which  $C_1$ , rather than  $C_2$ , obtains. Jack, then, will be eternally damned while Jill will be eternally saved, despite the absence of any morally significant difference in how they would respond under similar conditions. This certainly appears to be a clear case of comparative injustice.

It should be remembered that the soteriological problem of evil arises only on the assumption of soteriological exclusivism. Can the universalist then afford to ignore this issue? Not if he also regards himself as a Christian. The Bible itself is overwhelmingly exclusivist.<sup>12</sup> For Christians, at least, that fact should count for *something*. Now the universalist presumably rejects Biblical exclusivism, not out of sheer obstreperousness, but because it seems morally abhorrent, i.e. precisely because it engenders a serious problem of evil. But if that problem can be solved, there would no longer be any reason to demur from the Biblical position. The (Christian) universalist, then, no less than the exclusivist, should be keenly interested in the prospects for resolving the soteriological problem of evil.

#### A MOLINIST SOLUTION TO THE PROBLEM

The thesis of divine middle knowledge has an obvious application to the soteriological problem of evil. The comparative aspect of that problem evidently arises only because certain subjunctive conditionals, like (1) and (2), are true. But if God has middle knowledge, He knows which of these

<sup>12</sup> Craig reviews some of the evidence for this claim in 'No Other Name', 172–4.

conditionals are true; He can then make use of this knowledge in deciding which world to create. If (1) and (2) are true of Jack (or of his essence, since they are true whether or not Jack exists), and we agree that (1) and (2) support a charge of injustice should God place Jack in a world in which  $C_1$  is actual, then far from implicating God in any intractable problem of evil this simply suggests that God would never have created a world containing both Jack and  $C_1$  in the first place. God can avoid creating this unjust world, thus solving the soteriological problem of comparative injustice, only because He knows (1) and (2); and He can know (1) and (2) *only on the supposition of divine middle knowledge*.<sup>13</sup>

This is the heart of the ‘Molinist’ response to the problem. There is one respect, however, in which this solution appears to make the problem even worse. In appealing to middle knowledge, the Molinist asks us to accept that God has *even more* knowledge than we may have thought any omniscient being capable of possessing. But this supposition is a two-edged sword: while alleviating the problem in one respect (since a certain class of complaints about our opportunities in life no longer arises), it exacerbates the problem in other respects (since we hold agents to higher standards of conduct the more knowledge they possess). The Molinist has already proposed that God can rely on this extra knowledge to guarantee that no world containing both Jack and  $C_1$  will ever be actual. But if He can do this for Jack, why can’t He do it for everyone? Why can’t God employ this extra knowledge to create a world in which *everyone* freely accepts Christ? And if He can, what does it say about God that He doesn’t?

Notice that this question resembles a familiar query about *pre-mortem* evil, namely: Why can’t God create a world in which everyone freely refrains from sin? This question has a standard answer in the Free Will Defence as developed by Alvin Plantinga.<sup>14</sup> Though the Free Will Defence hardly requires yet another summary, the following points are relevant to the present discussion.

In deciding which world to create, God operates with standards of perfect goodness – standards which, among other things, place a premium on freedom rather than coercion. Since He is also presumably in possession of Derek Parfit’s mysterious *Theory X* for applying standards of the good to different global scenarios involving different numbers and identities of people, He can make infallible judgements of comparative goodness between possible worlds.<sup>15</sup> God’s will is that the best of these worlds be actual; and given the value God attaches to freedom, the best must involve free agents. Now suppose that  $W_1$ , consisting of particular agents making particular choices in

<sup>13</sup> This is essentially the position worked out by Craig on p. 184 of ‘No Other Name’.

<sup>14</sup> Its fullest development is in *The Nature of Necessity*, *op. cit.*

<sup>15</sup> *Theory X* is the elusive grail of part 4 of Parfit’s *Reasons and Persons* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984). Like Parfit, God would presumably reject ‘the Average Principle’, and so would not assign first place to a world containing just one person who is immensely saintly; see ‘No Other Name’, 182–3.



a particular environment, is one of the many worlds locked in a virtual tie for first place. The ranking accorded to  $W_1$  is mainly a function of the fact that, if those agents existed in that environment *and acted in that way*, this would be a superlatively good thing. But of course, whether they would have acted in that way in that environment is up to them; indeed, given all the possible ways they might have acted, it is rather unlikely that they would have acted exactly like that.

Suppose then that those agents, if placed in that environment, would *not* have acted in that way – they would have freely responded in some other way. Then  $W_1$ , while *possible*, is nevertheless not *feasible* – God cannot actualize it, since the very nature of this world is such that the cooperation of its resident agents is essential, and that cooperation is in fact withheld.<sup>16</sup> Suppose now that the same thing is true of every first-place world: none of them is feasible, owing to the free decisions that their resident agents would actually make if they existed in the various first-place environments. The same thing might also be true of every second-place world, and so on. Now we may suppose that there is some ranking – call it the ‘Worthless Level’ – below which it would no longer be good, overall, for God to actualize a world. If God failed to discover any feasible worlds above the Worthless Level, He presumably would not have created a world at all. Since He did create a world, we may conclude that it is above the Worthless Level. Sadly, it is also well below the superlative rank. Because freedom is the condition of so many of the values guiding God’s cosmic deliberation, and because so many possible scenarios contain so many people making so many bad choices, the best feasible world turns out to contain considerable moral and spiritual evil; in fact, it contains the very amount we find in the actual world.

This strategy is obviously adaptable to the special concerns of the soteriological problem of evil. In ranking worlds, the post-mortem situation must be considered along with the pre-mortem. Suppose then that (3) and (4) are true. What effect should this have on the ranking of a world containing Jack and  $C_1$ , if Jack is such that (1) and (2) are both true? A just God, we have agreed, will not actualize this world. But there may still be much in this world to make it worthwhile; so rather than assigning it a rank below the Worthless Level, let us say that God simply vetoes it and moves on to the next world on the list (Jack’s right not to be actualized in these conditions having pre-empted any considerations of general welfare that might recommend this world). Now suppose that the best feasible world has to be vetoed on these grounds. Such a veto, though required in order to save Jack from paying eternally for the ‘luck of the draw’, is nevertheless quite costly. We can presume that God would not lightly pass by the best feasible world; nor should we wish Him to, given the stake we all have in His decision.

<sup>16</sup> Roughly, a world  $W$  is feasible for an agent  $A$  iff there is something  $A$  can do such that, were  $A$  to do it,  $W$  would be actual (but wouldn’t be actual otherwise).

Bearing in mind the costliness of these cosmological vetoes, how do we think God should handle a world containing  $C_1$  and *Jock*, Jack's evil twin, of whom (1) is true and (2) is *false*? The fact that God would never place an individual of whom both (1) and (2) are true in environment  $C_1$  does not entail that He would never place an individual of whom (1) is true and (2) is false in environment  $C_1$ . If we are inclined, nonetheless, to think that God should veto this world as well, thus forcing Him to look even further down the list for a world to actualize, this may reflect a fear that there is some other condition,  $C_3$ , in which Jock would accept Christ, thus provoking the soteriological problem of comparative injustice all over again. But this fear may be unnecessary. Just as Plantinga has appealed to the possibility of transworld depravity as a defence against the problem of pre-mortem evil, so Craig appeals to the possibility of transworld damnation in response to the problem of post-mortem evil.<sup>17</sup> A person suffers from transworld damnation if there are *no* conditions under which the person would freely accept Christ. Jack, for example, who would have accepted Christ if other conditions had obtained, is only contingently damned;<sup>18</sup> but it is at least possible that some people – Jock, for example – are transworldly damned.

Suppose, then, that God, still seeking the best feasible world to actualize, comes to consider a world  $W_a$ . Every world with a higher ranking has proved either unfeasible or subject to veto. In  $W_a$ , there are people who reject Christ and consequently suffer eternal damnation. But none of these people, as it turns out, is contingently damned: all the damned who inhabit this world would have rejected Christ no matter what conditions had obtained. Should God veto this world, reaching even further down the list in search of a world to actualize? According to Craig, He would not. God would go ahead and actualize this world; He would not forego the comparative overall goodness of this world merely on account of the transworldly damned.

So Craig's Molinist analysis of why the actual world apparently contains many who reject Christ and thus (by the exclusivist principles (3) and (4)) are eternally damned comes down to the plausibility of the following proposition:

- (5) God has actualized a world containing an optimal balance between saved and unsaved, and those who are unsaved suffer from transworld damnation.<sup>19</sup>

In assessing the adequacy of this response to the soteriological problem of evil, notice first that (5) does not even address the universalist's gravest

<sup>17</sup> 'No Other Name', 184.

<sup>18</sup> Of course, the 'contingent damnation' referred to here should not be confused with *logically* contingent damnation, since even the transworldly damned (with whom I am contrasting the contingently damned) are such that there is some logically possible world in which they freely accept Christ and escape damnation. Like transworld damnation, contingent damnation is to be defined in terms of feasible (rather than logically possible) worlds.

<sup>19</sup> 'No Other Name', 184. This is Craig's proposition (9).

complaint against the exclusivist's soteriological scheme: the apparent lack of proportion between pre-mortem sin and post-mortem suffering. Since Molinism has nothing to say about this aspect of the soteriological problem of evil, it appears that its contribution to a defence against this problem is rather modest. Even this modest contribution, however, costs far more than it is worth, as I hope now to show.

#### AN EVANGELICAL OBJECTION

According to Craig, a rejection of universalism explains and motivates the Church's historical commitment to evangelism; it also has implications for my own life. 'My compassion toward those in other world religions is therefore expressed, not in pretending that they are not lost and dying without Christ, but by my supporting and making every effort myself to communicate to them the life-giving message of salvation through Christ.'<sup>20</sup> A successful defence against the soteriological problem of evil 'helps to put the proper perspective on Christian missions: it is our duty to proclaim the gospel to the whole world, trusting that God has so providentially ordered things that through us the good news will be brought to persons who God knew would respond if they heard it'.<sup>21</sup> Unfortunately, the Molinist means by which Craig hopes to secure this conclusion have implications that point in exactly the opposite direction.

An evangelist must assume that there are conditions in which the person he is evangelizing would freely accept Christ. If he somehow came to know that there were no such conditions, his evangelical efforts would be undermined. But (5) involves the division of all human beings, not only into the saved and the damned, but into the saved and the transworldly damned. While this doubtless renders the justice of eternal torment for the damned marginally less incredible than it may have seemed initially, thus lending at least some support to Craig's exclusivism, it achieves this result only by making the damned incorrigible, thus immunizing them to evangelical outreach.

The claim, then, is that Craig's appeal to the resources of middle knowledge involves him in a species of evangelical fatalism. Since arguments for fatalism are notoriously prone to modal fallacies, we will need to argue this claim with some care. Now the soteriological problem of comparative injustice begins with the moral intuition that a just God would never consent to a state of affairs in which a person rejects Christ and is eternally damned if different circumstances (of some sort) would have elicited from that person a different response. These circumstances, along with the person's response to them, define a class of worlds; and since the whole dispute will turn out

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.* p. 187.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.* p. 186.

to hinge on the proper specification of these worlds, let us leave that issue open for the moment and simply call them the '*J*-worlds.' With Jack as our Everyman, we can now state the key moral intuition as follows:

- (6) It is unjust for Jack to suffer eternal punishment for rejecting Christ if there is any *J*-world in which he freely accepts Christ.

The problem is that this principle appears to be inconsistent with a package of beliefs held by Craig and many other Christians, including the belief that God is just, that some people will reject Christ, that rejecting Christ entails eternal punishment, and that unjust eternal punishment – whatever might be true of lesser injustices – cannot be outweighed by a greater good. In the interest of holding this package together in the face of (6), Craig notes that one may admit to (6) while also insisting that

- (7) It is not unjust for Jack to suffer eternal punishment for rejecting Christ if there is no *J*-world in which he freely accepts Christ.

If it is possible for there to be people who satisfy the antecedent of (7), this may provide a way out of the impasse; for a God equipped with middle knowledge could see to it that the world selected for actualization is such that any damned are transworldly damned, thus preventing (6) from ever coming into play. Craig's solution to the soteriological problem of comparative injustice is to suppose that God does act on this strategy, so that

- (8) If Jack rejects Christ in the actual world, Jack rejects Christ in all *J*-worlds.

But (8) allows Craig to escape from one quagmire only by stepping into another; for (8) can now serve as a premise in an argument for evangelical futility. It is trivial that any world in which a person rejects Christ is a world in which all evangelical efforts directed toward that person fail; consequently,

- (9) If Jack rejects Christ in all *J*-worlds, all *J*-worlds are such that any attempt to evangelize Jack fails.

But futility is simply failure no matter what one does – that is, failure in all of some class of worlds. Call these the '*K*-worlds.' Then

- (10) If all *K*-worlds are such that any attempt to evangelize Jack fails, then any attempt to evangelize Jack is futile.

The question is whether it follows from (8)–(10) that

- (11) If Jack rejects Christ in the actual world, any attempt to evangelize Jack is futile.

This obviously depends on the relation between the *J*- and *K*-worlds. If the

*K*-worlds are a (proper or improper) subset of the *J*-worlds, then the fatalistic conclusion follows. Clearly, if Craig is to escape evangelical futility with his Molinist soteriology intact, he must promote an alternative account of the *J*- and *K*-worlds under which there may be *K*-worlds that are not *J*-worlds.

The *K*-worlds are easy to identify. Their role in the analysis of futility employed in (10) implies that *K*-worlds are simply worlds that are *feasible for me*: worlds which *would* be actual were I to exercise my free choice in any of the ways available to me. What is open to dispute is the identity of the *J*-worlds.

These obviously must be more selective than the class of logically possible worlds; for if this were the relevant class, the antecedent of (7) could never be satisfied (since every free agent accepts Christ in some logically possible world), and (7) would thereby lose any potential it might have for rescuing exclusivism from the threat posed by (6). But we can separate Jack's free response from the circumstances in which he makes that response and then ask whether Jack's obduracy should be conceived as a rejection of the gospel in every logically possible *circumstance*. This is significantly different from the first suggestion. Here the *J*-worlds are identified with the class of worlds which not only violate no laws of logic (the logically possible worlds), but also violate no true counterfactuals of freedom of which Jack is the subject. So construed, transworld damnation is no longer an obviously impossible condition for a free agent to be in.

There are places in which Craig appears to endorse this interpretation; for example, he notes that 'it is possible that some persons would not freely receive Christ under *any* circumstances', and then proposes 'that God has so ordered the world that all persons who are actually lost are *such persons* [emphases added]'.<sup>22</sup> This interpretation (call it the 'Broad Interpretation') is an attractive one. It undoubtedly captures the moral intuitions of many who accept some version of (6); and by detaching Jack's destiny from the contingencies of events beyond his control, it also imparts some plausibility to (7) (assuming that we keep any concerns about the proportionality of pre-mortem fault to post-mortem punishment in the background). Unfortunately, while the Broad Interpretation scores well soteriologically, it forfeits the game evangelically, for the *K*-worlds are then all *J*-worlds: if there are no circumstances at all in which Jack would accept Christ, there are no circumstances feasible for me in which Jack would accept Christ. Evangelism, on this account, is clearly futile.

Craig's resources for evading this conclusion depend, then, on the availability of some other candidate for the class of *J*-worlds. And Craig in fact offers such a candidate: for a person to be transworldly damned, he writes, is for that person to be damned 'in every world *feasible for God* in which that person exists [emphasis added]'.<sup>23</sup> This interpretation (call it the 'Narrow

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.* p. 184; see also p. 181.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*

Interpretation') makes it possible for there to be *K*-worlds that are not *J*-worlds, thus blocking the inference to (11).

To see that my evangelical responsibilities are preserved under the Narrow Interpretation, suppose that I have an opportunity to share the gospel with Jack but fail to take advantage of it; Jack then dies without ever accepting Christ. Since Jack and I are free agents, there must be a possible world (call it ' $W_n$ ') in which we both give a better account of ourselves: I evangelize, and Jack converts. But since Jack is damned in the actual world, we may conclude (on the basis of (8)) that he is transworldly damned, and therefore (under the Narrow Interpretation) that  $W_n$  is not feasible for God.  $W_n$ , however, may be unfeasible either because (i) if I were to share the gospel with Jack he would still reject Christ, or because (ii) there are no conditions under which I would share the gospel with Jack. Either (i) or (ii) is sufficient to render  $W_n$  unfeasible for God. Now suppose it is (ii) that is true. Since (ii) is a subjunctive of freedom, it does not restrict in any way my power to share the gospel with Jack. It might then be the case that there is something I could have done such that, had I done it, Jack would have been saved – and this despite the fact that Jack is transworldly damned. Though there is no world *God* could have brought about in which Jack is saved, it does not follow that there is no world *I* could have brought about in which Jack is saved – indeed,  $W_n$  is such a world.

Under the Broad Interpretation, (6) and (7) appeared to be well-motivated, but turned out to entail evangelical futility. The Narrow Interpretation, on the other hand, avoids evangelical futility; unfortunately, it leaves the motivation for (6) and (7) utterly opaque. It is open to Craig to take a hard line on the issue of comparative justice, as he does on the proportionality issue; but once he accepts the idea that the justice of eternal punishment depends in part on how a person would have acted in other circumstances, he is obligated to explain why certain sorts of circumstances are relevant while others are not. One looks in vain for such an explanation, however. It appears that Craig has no better reason for defining transworld damnation in terms of worlds feasible for God than the fact that these are the worlds in terms of which Plantinga defined transworld depravity. But this is no reason at all. The concept of transworld damnation is formulated in light of the moral principles (6) and (7), which determine whether Jack deserves eternal punishment for rejecting Christ rather than accepting Him. Since these principles have no bearing on the formulation of the concept of transworld depravity and its role in determining whether God deserves censure for creating this world rather than another one, there is no antecedent reason for supposing that transworld damnation and transworld depravity are to be parsed in terms of the same set of worlds.

Not only is there no reason to assimilate the cases, but there is positive reason not to. Suppose, for example, that there are *many* circumstances in

which Jack would accept Christ (perhaps he is so hungry for the gospel that virtually any Christian witness at all would lead to his salvation); Jill, on the other hand, is a hardened sinner for whom there is only a *single* circumstance in which her resistance to Christ would be overcome (e.g. the Pope himself shares the gospel with her as he lies dying of injuries suffered while rescuing her from a burning building). Suppose, moreover, that due to the counterfactuals that are true of the various possible individuals with whom Jack and Jill might be coinstantiated, the one circumstance in which Jill would accept Christ is feasible for God while the many circumstances in which Jack would accept Christ are unfeasible (perhaps Jack is so physically repulsive that no one will get close enough to share the gospel with him). Then according to the Narrow Interpretation, Jill (but not Jack) avoids transworld damnation; therefore God will see to it that Jill escapes eternal punishment by vetoing any world in which she rejects Christ, but He will not make this effort on behalf of Jack. Aside from the fact that it would block the argument for evangelical futility, it is hard to think of anything that can be said on behalf of this disposition of the cases.

The mistake involved in making Jack's behaviour in circumstances feasible for God count for everything and his behaviour in other circumstances count for nothing can be brought out most clearly if we recast the moral intuition behind the soteriological problem of comparative injustice in terms of the following schema:

- (6') It is unjust for Jack to suffer eternal punishment for rejecting Christ if there is something  $x$  can do such that, were  $x$  to do it, Jack would freely accept Christ.

Instead of asking which way of specifying the  $\mathcal{J}$ -worlds yields the preferred interpretation of (6), we can ask which substitutions for  $x$  render (6') plausible. Now clearly Craig would reject the interpretation under which  $x = \textit{Jack}$  – if we ignore the proportionality issue, which is not in question here, then this substitution yields a paradigm of personal responsibility, rather than an occasion for excuses. The Narrow Interpretation, of course, proposes that  $x = \textit{God}$ . But now compare this with the substitution  $x = \textit{me}$ . There does not appear to be any morally relevant difference between these two. If it is wrong for Jack to be punished when God could have brought about conditions in which he would freely have accepted Christ, this is presumably because it is wrong for Jack to be punished when someone other than Jack could have brought about conditions in which he would have accepted Christ. (What special significance could attach to the fact that this other person is God? That may be relevant to God's responsibilities, but it can hardly be relevant to Jack's.) So (6') must be just as acceptable when  $x = \textit{me}$  as when  $x = \textit{God}$ . Since God's control encompasses everything that He has not ceded to free agents like myself, this is equivalent to the Broad

Interpretation, and the Broad Interpretation (as we have seen) entails evangelical futility.

Having focused on the implications for evangelical effort if Jack is in fact damned, little remains to be said about the case where Jack is in fact saved. Craig does not tell us whether a complete defence against the soteriological problem of evil must involve transworld salvation as well as transworld damnation. There are reasons to think that it should: claims of injustice can arise in cases of reward as well as in cases of punishment; granting heavenly citizenship to the contingently as well as transworldly saved may transform heaven into a two-class society in undesirable ways; and so forth. On the other hand, it may be a mark of God's grace that He receives into the heavenly community even those who would have rejected Him under alternative conditions; it may even be that there are no creaturely essences with the property of transworld salvation, so that heaven would have remained unpeopled if God had not opened it up to the contingently saved.

Since speculation on this point is risky, we should consider all three possibilities, namely, that the company of the elect consists of (i) the transworldly saved, (ii) the contingently saved, or (iii) a mix of the transworldly and the contingently saved. Alternative (iii) need not receive separate treatment, since it will share the defects of (i) and (ii), whatever they might be. Alternative (i) yields the same argument that applied to the transworldly damned. If Jill is transworldly saved, she will accept Christ no matter what. Therefore she will accept Christ even if I fail to share the gospel with her; so there is no particular urgency to my doing so. The coherence of evangelicalism, then, appears to rest with (ii); but (ii) can provide little incentive for evangelism when the only alternative outcome for the contingently saved is contingent damnation, and the latter is excluded under Craig's theory. If Jill is only contingently saved, her salvation may well depend on the fact that I shared the gospel with her; but since she would go through life without accepting Christ only if transworldly damned (which we are assuming she is not), I can be certain that the effect I actually had in this case would have been brought about in some other way if I had not acted as I did.<sup>24</sup>

In sum, the intuition behind Craig's proposal is this: though one's course in life is fraught with enough contingencies that the actual world is an insufficient basis for eternal judgement, this limitation may be overcome by

<sup>24</sup> This argument, of course, does not demonstrate that there can be no good reason for undertaking evangelical endeavours if Craig's position is accepted. For it might be the case that I receive great personal satisfaction from sharing the gospel with others; it might also be the case that, while someone else would have shared the gospel with Jill if I had not done so, my taking the initiative in the matter freed this person to perform other worthwhile actions instead. But clearly none of this is relevant to Craig's thesis, which requires that my evangelical efforts might make a difference to someone's *salvation* – i.e. that it is possible for these efforts to result in someone being saved who would not otherwise have been saved. What the argument shows is that *this* sort of difference will not be made, regardless of any expected differences in my personal satisfaction, or in some third party's achievement of some nonevangelical good.



grounding eternal judgement, not in the contingencies of this life, but in the complete ‘modal profile’ of an individual. This dispels our worries about eternity resting on a single throw of the dice, and the soteriological problem of evil is thus mitigated. But if it is an individual’s modal profile that determines his post-mortem fate, I can do nothing to influence that fate, since (i) I can do nothing to affect the truth-value of Jack’s counterfactuals, and (ii) while I can act so as to make the antecedents of some of his counterfactuals true, my making them true adds nothing to his modal profile – they have no more bearing on his fate when actual than when merely hypothetical. The moral announced by Craig, then, is quite different from the one that actually follows from his Molinist position. As a Christian contemplating my evangelical obligations, I can console myself with the knowledge that Jack won’t be damned unless his modal profile includes no circumstances in which he would accept Christ; but if there are no circumstances in which he would accept Christ, I needn’t fret over my failure to share with him the good news of salvation.

#### A METAPHYSICAL OBJECTION

Not all Molinists will be as committed to the importance of evangelism as is Craig. This leaves it an open question whether Craig’s Molinist strategy might still be employed on behalf of a *nonevangelical* form of exclusivism. Its success here is doubtful, however. It will escape the objection of the last section, to be sure; but it faces another objection, springing from the nature of Molinism itself. This objection arises naturally once one begins to consider why a God equipped with middle knowledge would need to create a pre-mortem environment for souls at all.

The problem, in brief, is this. On the Molinist soteriology, as we have seen, God’s assignment of souls to a post-mortem destiny is based entirely on the truth of certain subjunctive conditionals about how those souls would have responded under various pre-mortem conditions. These subjunctive conditionals, in turn, are true independently of which pre-mortem world is actual – as Craig puts it, they are true in the ‘moment’ logically prior to God’s decision to actualize a world.<sup>25</sup> But then the post-mortem fate of any soul can be determined independently of which world is actual; indeed, since this fate is fixed logically prior to the actualization of a pre-mortem world, it is fixed *whether or not a pre-mortem world ever exists*. It appears, then, that a God equipped with middle knowledge could instantiate us directly into our eternal destinies, bypassing pre-mortem existence altogether. And if pre-mortem existence is unnecessary, so is all the pre-mortem evil that the traditional theodicies have attempted to justify. More importantly, so is post-

<sup>25</sup> ‘No Other Name’, 177.

mortem evil, which is infinitely greater than pre-mortem (if universalism is false). Post-mortem evil consists of the sufferings of the damned; but the only reason the damned were called to life was to play a putatively indispensable role in a pre-mortem existence that now seems superfluous on the supposition of divine middle knowledge. Thus the whole *raison d'être* for a class of souls who will suffer eternal torment has apparently collapsed.

Consider the matter as follows. Since God, on the basis of His middle knowledge, could instantiate essences directly into the appropriate post-mortem life, He would surely instantiate all the transworldly damned or none. For if He were to instantiate some but not all, there would have to be some basis for His choice. Now on the traditional account, that basis is the fact that a certain subset of transworldly damned essences makes an indispensable contribution to the best feasible pre-mortem world. But if there is no pre-mortem world, then this principle of selection is inoperative; nor does any other principle of selection appear to be available. Furthermore, if God would instantiate either all or none of these essences, He would surely choose to instantiate none. There are at least two reasons for this. (i) The existence of innumerable souls condemned to eternal suffering must count against a world in determining its overall goodness. Where this suffering occurs post-mortem, the usual resources for justifying an evil in terms of a greater good are unavailable. Therefore God would never actualize such a world. (ii) While a calculus of overall value can sometimes be defeated by considerations of justice, such considerations have no foothold in the present case. It is unjust to punish someone who has not actually done (or even *been*) anything. Only actual sins deserve actual punishment; the punishment for merely subjunctive sins should remain merely subjunctive.

These considerations suggest that an omnibenevolent God equipped with middle knowledge would actualize a world consisting of nothing but eternal felicity for the elect, omitting pre-mortem life with all the (pre- and post-mortem) evil it entails. Since He didn't, we must drop either middle knowledge or one of the traditional divine attributes. This is the last choice a Molinist would wish to face.

It is not absolutely necessary that the Molinist face this choice, however. While granting (as he must) the critic's charge that his account of how souls are allotted their post-mortem deserts makes it irrelevant *which* pre-mortem world is actual, he might nevertheless insist that the actuality of *some pre-mortem world or other* is justified. The critic has shown only that one plausible justification is no longer available on the assumption of middle knowledge; but of course God may have had some other reason for arranging a pre-mortem existence for us. In particular, middle knowledge, which allows God to know what would happen without having to inspect an actual history, can only supplant the epistemic value of pre-mortem existence. But the existence of a pre-mortem world may have non-epistemic value: moral value, perhaps,

or metaphysical. Though the post-mortem life of a blessed soul may be incomparably its best phase, such a phase may be unachievable and even incoherent if not preceded by a particular pre-mortem history. Recall, for example, the central value-judgement that lies behind the soul-making theodicy: ‘one who has attained to goodness by meeting and eventually mastering temptations, and thus by rightly making responsible choices in concrete situations, is good in a richer and more valuable sense than would be one created *ab initio* in a state either of innocence or virtue.’<sup>26</sup>

The vale of soul-making suggests the metaphor of a course of study, complete with exercises, drills, tests, etc. Certainly one function – perhaps even the major function – of tests for the instructor is epistemic: they enable her to know what grade each student deserves. Suppose, however, that the instructor is endowed with middle knowledge. Now she needn’t give tests in order to know how the students would score; she can even give them their grades without ever teaching the class. Is there then no point to having the class? One has only to consider the sorry condition of the would-be students to know the answer. They have infallibly accurate report cards (by some measure at least) – yet no learning has taken place. In like manner, a God equipped with middle knowledge would not need souls to undergo an actual pre-mortem history in order to know infallibly what their destiny ought to be; but without that history the souls themselves would be much impoverished, and an essential propaedeutic to eternal life would be missing.

The central assumption at work in this reply appears to be the following:

- (12) A viable and worthwhile post-mortem life requires grounding in a pre-mortem life.

There are at least two reasons why this assumption does not save the Molinist position, however.

In the first place, (12) comes into conflict with the empirical fact that many pre-mortem lives are too brief to provide the grounding in question. Consider in this regard the following four accounts of the final fate of those who die prematurely. (i) Their purchase on actuality is too brief and tenuous for them to survive their death; their fate is oblivion. (ii) They survive death, but their pre-mortem life is an inadequate preliminary for heaven or hell; they go to a third place (call it ‘Limbo’). (iii) They survive death, but there is no third place; since accepting Christ is a necessary condition of entering heaven, there is no alternative for them but hell. (iv) Though they never accepted Christ, they never rejected Him either; God in His graciousness therefore receives them into heaven. Each of these has had its defenders in the history of Christian thought. Unfortunately, the most attractive of these – option (iv) – flatly contradicts (12). Of those that remain, (iii) is morally repugnant, while (i) and (ii) hover on the outer fringes of orthodoxy.

<sup>26</sup> John Hick, *Evil and the God of Love*, rev. ed. (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1978), p. 255.

There is, however, an alternative that is peculiarly Molinist in conception. In *The Only Wise God* Craig noted with approval a colleague's suggestion that a dead child might be judged on the basis of God's middle knowledge of how she would have responded to the gospel if she had grown to maturity, since a divine policy of automatically accepting the souls of dead children into heaven (option (iv) above) 'leads inescapably to the conclusion that the kindest thing that parents can do for their children is to kill them'.<sup>27</sup> Presumably Craig would graft this suggestion for the post-mortem disposition of infants onto his new solution to the soteriological problem of evil for mature adults, requiring that God not only take into account how a particular child would have responded to Christ under those conditions in which she would have found herself had she lived longer, but also how she would have responded under all those conditions in which she might have found herself.

Unfortunately, this Molinist alternative, no less than (iv), is incompatible with (12). For if one person, a thousand people, or a million people, can live out a life of eternal post-mortem felicity or suffering on the basis of what they would have done if they had grown up, why couldn't everyone live a post-mortem life on this same basis? And if such lives are possible for those whose pre-mortem existence lasted only a couple of years, or a couple of weeks, or a couple of minutes, why shouldn't they be possible for those who were never born at all? Why shouldn't heaven be possible even though no one was ever born into a pre-mortem life? Clearly it would be, if the Molinist alternative to (i)–(iv) were true; but it couldn't be, if (12) is true. The Molinist will have to choose.

This problem can be avoided, of course, simply by opting for the somewhat heterodox (i) or (ii). But there is a second problem that cannot be escaped so easily. Note that there is a certain asymmetry in the relation of the saved and the damned to pre-mortem existence. If (12) is accepted, the following seems true:

- (13) God desires that the actual world contain souls enjoying eternal felicity and communion with Him; in order that such a result actually obtain, it is necessary that these souls have a pre-mortem history.

But this does not seem true:

- (14) God desires that the actual world contain souls suffering eternal torment and separation from Himself; in order that such a result actually obtain, it is necessary that these souls have a pre-mortem history.

Instead, the eternal suffering of the damned is held to be an unfortunate concomitant of the eternal felicity of the blessed. On this view, the chain of

<sup>27</sup> *Op. cit.* p. 138.

entailments would appear to have the following configuration: the post-mortem existence of the blessed entails the pre-mortem existence of the blessed (by (12)), which entails the pre-mortem existence of the damned (by considerations of ‘optimal balance’ drawn from the Free Will Defence), which entails the post-mortem existence of the damned (by the traditional logic of exclusivism – e.g. standards of divine justice).

Though each of these entailments is problematic, my contention is that the middle entailment is one that the Molinist in particular cannot plausibly defend. What is required by (12) is that the elect have a pre-mortem history (of a certain sort). And why must that history involve the damned? Because, it is said, the elect need to have actual experiences of trials and temptations. But these could be arranged without the agency of the damned; and even if there is some refinement in soul-making that is unachievable without the actual existence of evil-doers, it is still doubtful that the pre-mortem instantiation of the damned is really required. (i) Evil-doing is hardly confined to the damned; the elect themselves take remarkable detours on their way to beatitude and can surely supply a full complement of evil-doing on their own. (ii) We may (perhaps) be brought to accept cancer as the price of an otherwise unachievable refinement in the soul-making process; if the price is instead the eternal suffering of countless souls, the refinement their existence would produce in the perfected virtue of the saints may be one it would be better to do without. (iii) Even if the contribution made by actual evil-doers is essential and cannot be adequately made by the elect themselves, it could still be made by soulless simulacra.

The Simulacrum Strategy requires a word of explanation. On the ‘optimal balance’ view that Craig takes over from the Free Will Defence and extends to cover post-mortem existence, the damned are actualized only as the necessary condition for the salvation of the elect, who must have certain pre-mortem experiences requiring the actual existence of the damned. But recall the problem of other minds. It seems that each of us could have exactly the experiences we actually have even though (unbeknown to us) none of the other bodies in our experience is itself a centre of experiences. Why then could not God arrange things so that only the elect have a psychological ‘inside’ – a mind or soul – while the role of the damned (which is solely to elicit experiences in the elect) is played by perfect simulacra? This possibility is enough to show that the existence of the damned could not be necessary for purposes of ‘optimal balance’.

Why isn’t the Simulacrum Strategy a familiar item in the atheologian’s arsenal? One reason might be that it appears to involve God in deception in ways that would be unacceptable to the theist.<sup>28</sup> Two questions must be

<sup>28</sup> For a recent treatment of the problem of evil which relies heavily on appeals to God’s nondeceptive nature, see Peter van Inwagen, ‘The Magnitude, Duration, and Distribution of Evil: a Theodicy’, *Philosophical Topics*, xvi (1988), 161–87. In each case where this appeal is made, however (God’s failure

considered in evaluating this defence against the Simulacrum Strategy. In the first place, there is the question whether the kind of deception at work in the Simulacrum Strategy really is *prima facie* repugnant to the divine nature. This is a more complicated question than it may sound, involving such sub-questions as: Is deception really an essential feature of the Simulacrum Strategy? If so, what sort of deception is it? Does it conflict with some aspect of God's nature? Which aspect(s)? How serious is this conflict? and so on. It would require a separate essay to deal adequately with this complex question, and I will not attempt to do so here. Suffice it to say that it is far from obvious that the final answer to this question would raise serious problems for the Simulacrum Strategy.

Even if it did, however, the second question would need to be addressed: namely, whether this *prima facie* conflict is sufficient to rule out divine involvement in deception no matter what good such involvement might achieve. It would be difficult for any theist to answer this question in the affirmative. The reason is that *any* defence against the problem of evil – pre-mortem, post-mortem, or both – must allow that there can be morally sufficient grounds for the theistic God to permit the existence of evil. Thus God's essential goodness is consistent with the existence of evil when there are morally sufficient reasons for permitting the evil. But if this is acceptable (and even indispensable), on what basis could one resist the claim that God would tolerate the existence of *deception* when there are morally sufficient reasons for its occurrence? And it certainly does appear to be the case that, if there are morally sufficient reasons for God to actualize a world in which pre-mortem evils like suffering occur, there are morally sufficient reasons for God to actualize a world in which the sort of deception involved in the Simulacrum Strategy occurs. For example, if God's permitting a particular instance of torture is compatible with His goodness on the grounds that it helps build the victim's moral character (or achieves some other favourite morally sufficient good), then surely God's contriving the torturer to be a mere simulacrum (though he appears to be a person) is compatible with God's goodness on the grounds that it allows God to avoid actualizing for the role of torturer a person who will then suffer for eternity in hell.

There is, however, a better reason why the Simulacrum Strategy is not a standard move in discussions of the problem of evil. The reason is simply that there is an obvious counter-move to this one. But it is a counter-move that is not available to the Molinist. Assume that (13) is (at least part of) the purpose of creation while (14) is not. Then that purpose would obviously be frustrated if *all* persons were replaced by simulacra; it would not be frustrated

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to restore us to our original state before the Fall (p. 172), to protect us from the harmful consequences of our bad choices (pp. 173, 177), and to preserve us from natural disasters (p. 181)), van Inwagen cites additional reasons for God's forbearance that have nothing to do with nondeceptiveness, but instead draw attention to how such intervention might be harmful in the long run for the agents concerned.

if *only the damned* were replaced by simulacra. But how could it come about that all and only the damned are replaced? Obviously, God must know in advance of His decision to actualize a world which souls would be damned under which conditions. If God has middle knowledge, He has the requisite information, and it is inexplicable why He would not then implement the Simulacrum Strategy; failure to do so, given God's middle knowledge of the consequences, turns the damned into a mere means to the salvation of the elect. But if He lacks middle knowledge, the situation is quite different: now every soul has the potentiality *so far as God knows* for freely growing into the desired relationship with Him; no souls stand out as definite candidates for replacement; and creation becomes a risk taken for the good of all created souls.

#### CONCLUSION

Given the paucity of scriptural support for universalism, Christian philosophers should give a sympathetic hearing to exclusivist alternatives like that of Craig. The major exclusivist alternatives appear to involve commitment to one of the following: (i) everyone is given an adequate chance in *this* life; (ii) everyone is given an adequate chance in *some actual* (perhaps post-mortem) life; (iii) everyone is given an adequate chance in *some possible* life; (iv) it is not necessary that people be given an adequate chance – rejecting Christ by itself merits eternal damnation. Craig's favoured alternative is a version of (iii), in which our nonactual responses to nonactual opportunities are available to God in the form of counterfactuals of freedom, and He uses this knowledge to guarantee that the actually damned will include only the transworldly damned (whose rejection of Christ no matter what prevents them from appealing to inadequacy of opportunity as an excuse). I have argued that this particular approach is misguided;<sup>29</sup> unfortunately, none of its rivals is an obvious replacement. It is no easy task to decide which option the exclusivist should embrace.<sup>30</sup>

While I am reluctant to find in this discussion any implications for the ultimate viability of exclusivism, I do think that one can regard it as a cautionary tale concerning the appeal to divine middle knowledge with

<sup>29</sup> It is also of some (slight) interest that one of the major 'proof texts' for middle knowledge cited by Molina (and also by Craig) appears to conflict with Craig's soteriological proposal. At Matthew 11:21–4 Jesus is represented as saying that certain miracles he had performed in Korazin, Bethsaida and Capernaum were such that, had they been performed in Tyre and Sidon, 'they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes', and had they been performed in Sodom, 'it would have remained to this day'. The passage in its entirety certainly suggests that at least some residents of Tyre, Sidon and Sodom, though actually damned, were not transworldly damned. See Molina, *op. cit.*, p. 116 (Disputation 49, sec. 9), and Craig, *The Only Wise God*, p. 132.

<sup>30</sup> For another recent defence of exclusivism, also sympathetic to Molinism, see Jerry L. Walls, 'Is Molinism as Bad as Calvinism?', *Faith and Philosophy*, vii (1990), 85–98. Walls argues that the actual world, despite apparent inequities in life-circumstances, might nevertheless include an adequate chance for all, since God could provide an 'optimal measure of grace' at a point Walls identifies variously as 'at the moment of death', 'after death', and 'during the passage of death' (p. 93). Thus he seems to endorse some combination of my options (i) and (ii).

which Craig hoped to justify his exclusivist soteriology. I will note just two of the morals that can be drawn from this tale. In the first place, the main criticism that has been levelled against middle knowledge in the theoretical debate is that it is impossible *both* that (i) the subjunctive conditionals toward which middle knowledge is directed are adequately ‘grounded’ *and* that (ii) the responses expressed in their consequents are free in any sense that is incompatible with determinism.<sup>31</sup> Defenders of middle knowledge have responded in several ways: by challenging the critics’ concept of a ground; by denying that a ground, insofar as its concept is clear, is a requirement of truth; and by claiming that a ground, insofar as it is required, is simply ‘what *would* be actual in certain situations’.<sup>32</sup> The adequacy of these replies is primarily a topic for the theoretical debate; but our examination of Molinism as applied to the soteriological problem of evil reveals its underlying weakness with respect to both (i) and (ii). The puzzle about why an actual pre-mortem existence is even necessary if our post-mortem fate is determined by the truth of subjunctive conditionals points to unresolved questions about grounding, while Craig’s implication in evangelical futility reflects Molinism’s uneasy relationship with libertarian freedom.

In the second place, the attempt to develop a Molinist soteriological theodicy is hampered by the fact that theodicy in general is one of the less promising areas for the deployment of Molinist resources. As Plantinga himself has stated, ‘the assumption that middle knowledge is impossible... should make the free will defender’s job easier, not harder’.<sup>33</sup> If we begin with a conception of the divine attributes which does not include omniscience, the problem of evil becomes a relatively minor crux within the theistic scheme. Add to this conception the attribute of omniscience, and the full problem of evil in its classic form is the unavoidable result. Now add in *omniscience plus* – ordinary omniscience plus middle knowledge – and the result is *the problem of evil plus*. The resultant viability of the Simulacrum Strategy, blocked under ordinary omniscience, is just one indication of the added difficulties that arise on the assumption of omniscience plus.

It is true that a Molinist theodicy does enjoy one clear advantage over its rivals: it does not have to answer the charge that God’s proceeding with creation without knowing exactly how things would turn out is unconscionably risky and unworthy of an omnibenevolent being. The ethics of risk-taking when it is others who reap the rewards and suffer the losses is a topic that deserves more attention than I can give it here.<sup>34</sup> But it seems incredible to me that a riskless creation guided by omniscience plus would have issued

<sup>31</sup> See Hunt, *op. cit.*, for a discussion of the grounding issue in light of the Molinists’ commitment to libertarian freedom.

<sup>32</sup> Otte, *op. cit.* p. 167. See also Kvanvig, *op. cit.* pp. 136–7, and Craig, *The Only Wise God*, p. 140. The best response to the grounding objection, however, is to be found in Wierenga, *op. cit.*; I hope to address its arguments on another occasion.

<sup>33</sup> Alvin Plantinga, p. 379.

<sup>34</sup> For a recent defence of a risk-taking God, see Hasker, *God, Time, and Knowledge*, ch. 10.



in souls suffering eternal torment; at the very least, such a result strikes me as more of a challenge to God's omnibenevolence than the scenario of a risky creation undertaken by a God prepared to defeat and redeem whatever evil might result. I conclude that, whatever the practical advantages of middle knowledge in other areas, its application to the problem of evil, both post-mortem as well as pre-mortem, yields a net loss.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> I wish to thank Bill Hasker for his helpful comments on an earlier draft of this paper. His own reply to Craig, 'Middle Knowledge and the Damnation of the Heathen', which focuses on the evangelical implications of Craig's position, is forthcoming in *Faith and Philosophy*.