

DIVINE RESPONSIBILITY WITHOUT DIVINE FREEDOM

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Adherents of traditional western Theism have espoused CONJUNCTION: *God is essentially perfectly good and God is thankworthy for the good acts he performs*. But suppose that (i) God's essential perfect goodness prevents his good acts from being free, and that (ii) God is not thankworthy for an act that wasn't freely performed. Together these entail the denial of CONJUNCTION. The most natural strategy for defenders of CONJUNCTION is to deny (i). We develop an argument for (i), and then identify two ways for the defender of CONJUNCTION to respond. Next we turn to a considerably different, rather less obvious route toward defending CONJUNCTION that is compatible with (i)—one which instead denies (ii). Here too we identify two ways for the defender of CONJUNCTION to proceed, yielding a total of four ways for the theist to respond. Because the last of these represents an important and underappreciated alternative for the theist, we devote the second half of the paper to developing and defending it. We argue that divine responsibility is sufficient for divine thankworthiness and consistent with the absence of divine freedom. We do this while insisting on the view that both freedom and responsibility are incompatible with causal determinism.

I. Introduction

Two central claims in western theistic religions are that (G) God is essentially perfectly good and that (T) God is thankworthy for the good acts he performs. That the divine-goodness tenet (G) has figured prominently in the philosophical development of western monotheism is clear. But theists have also traditionally held to a view of God and his actions according to which the appropriate human response to God is one of devotion, adoration, and thanks. If perhaps less central than (G) to theistic orthodoxy, the thankworthiness proposition (T) is at the very least a claim that most theists would be loath to give up. Here then is a conjunction to which most practicing theists are firmly committed:

CONJUNCTION: (G) God is essentially perfectly good and (T) God is thankworthy for the good acts he performs.

Is CONJUNCTION true, or at any rate defensible? Two other theses, each plausible in their own right, look to serve as premises of an argument threatening the very coherence of CONJUNCTION. The first "no-freedom" premise of The Incoherence Argument (as we shall call it) claims



that an essentially good being must be so constrained by its nature as to render it not free; the second “not-thankworthy” premise claims that a being is thankworthy for acting as it does only if that action is freely performed.¹ Here are “no-freedom” and “not-thankworthy” as they apply to our present case:

No-Freedom

($G \rightarrow \sim F$) God’s being essentially perfectly good prevents God’s good acts from being free.

Not-Thankworthy

($\sim F \rightarrow \sim T$) God isn’t thankworthy for an act that wasn’t performed freely.

The divine-goodness tenet (G) of Theism and the objector’s no-freedom premise ($G \rightarrow \sim F$) together entail that God’s good acts are not free. This, conjoined with the objector’s not-thankworthy premise ($\sim F \rightarrow \sim T$), entails the denial of the divine-thankworthiness tenet (T). We can state The Incoherence Argument as follows:

The Incoherence Argument

1. ($G \rightarrow \sim F$)
2. ($\sim F \rightarrow \sim T$)
3. Therefore, ($G \rightarrow \sim T$)
4. ($G \rightarrow \sim T$) implies that conjunction—i.e., ($G \& T$)—is incoherent.
5. Therefore, conjunction is incoherent.

In order to defend CONJUNCTION against this charge of incoherence, the theist seems forced to deny either the no-freedom premise ($G \rightarrow \sim F$) or the not-thankworthy premise ($\sim F \rightarrow \sim T$).

Our aims in this paper are two: first, to reflect critically on those two premises, with the aim of identifying ways to defend the theistic CONJUNCTION, and second, to argue in support of one of those ways. The most natural strategy for defenders of CONJUNCTION is to deny the first premise of The Incoherence Argument, the no-freedom premise ($G \rightarrow \sim F$). In Section II below we develop an argument for the no-freedom premise, and then identify two ways for the defender of CONJUNCTION to respond. In Section III, we turn to a considerably different, rather less obvious route toward defending CONJUNCTION that is compatible with The Incoherence Argument’s no-freedom premise—one which instead denies the argument’s second, not-thankworthy premise ($\sim F \rightarrow \sim T$). Here too we identify two ways for the defender of CONJUNCTION to proceed. All told, then, in pursuing our first aim we will be articulating four ways for theists to respond to The Incoherence Argument. The last of these has, to our knowledge, received little notice in the literature. Because we think it represents an important and underappreciated alternative for the theist, our second aim is to develop and defend it.

Our defense of this last response to The Incoherence Argument argues for the following two claims, which we'll call "responsible-though-good" (RG) and "thankworthy-if-responsible" (TR):

Responsible-Though-Good

(RG) God can be *responsible* for the good acts he performs even if he is essentially perfectly good.

Thankworthy-If-Responsible

(TR) A person is thankworthy for performing a good act so long as that person is *responsible* for the act in question and it is performed for the right reasons.²

Since our objection to the second not-thankworthy premise is intended to be compatible with the first no-freedom premise, it allows that both the no-freedom premise ($G \rightarrow \sim F$) and the responsible-though-good claim (RG) are true. Together these entail that God's being essentially perfectly good prevents his good acts from being acts which God does *freely*, but does not prevent them from being acts for which God is *responsible*. This might suggest to some readers that we are endorsing a sort of compatibilism, according to which an agent can be responsible for doing A even if *forced* to do A. We reject such compatibilism. Our defense of (RG) and (TR) will be consistent not only with the no-freedom thesis, but also with the incompatibilist view that both freedom *and responsibility* are incompatible with causal determinism. Thus our objection to the second not-thankworthy premise ($\sim F \rightarrow \sim T$) amounts to an *incompatibilist* defense of CONJUNCTION, according to which there can be divine responsibility (and thankworthiness) without divine freedom.³

II. The Problem of Divine Perfection and Freedom

How might an objector to CONJUNCTION defend the no-freedom thesis?

No-Freedom Thesis

($G \rightarrow \sim F$) God's being essentially perfectly good prevents God's good acts from being free.

The strongest defense of this first premise of The Incoherence Argument seems to us most forcefully developed using recent work of William Rowe.

A. A Rowe-Inspired Defense of the No-Freedom Thesis

In his 1993, Rowe offers the following argument for the conclusion that God cannot bring it about that he performs an evil act:

1. God has it in his power to bring it about that he performs an evil act. (Assumption to be refuted.)
2. From God's performing an evil act it follows that God is not perfectly good.

3. If X has it in its power to bring about p , q follows from p and q does not obtain then X has it in its power to bring about q .
4. God has it in his power to bring it about that he is not perfectly good. (From 1 to 3.)
5. Being perfectly good is an essential attribute of God.

Therefore,

6. God has it in his power to bring it about that he lacks one of his essential attributes. [From 4 and 5.]

Because (6) is clearly false,

- [7.] we must deny the initial assumption that God has it in his power to bring it about that he performs an evil act. [From 1-6 by *reductio ad absurdum*.] (Rowe 1993, 224)

Clearly this argument does not show that God's good acts aren't free. As Rowe himself points out, for all the above conclusion tells us, when God performs some good act there may nevertheless be many *other* good acts he is able to perform. If for any good act God performs he could have done otherwise than perform it (by performing some other good act instead), then it seems that God's good acts are free.

In responding to this point, Rowe goes on to consider whether a perfectly good God can bring it about that he performs an act than which there is a better. His discussion (1993, 227-29) suggests the following argument modeled after the argument given above:

- 1*. God has it in his power to bring it about that he performs an act than which there is a better. (Assumption to be refuted.)
- 2*. From God's performing an act than which there is a better it follows that God is not perfectly good.
- 3*. If X has it in its power to bring about p , q follows from p and q does not obtain then X has it in its power to bring about q .
- 4*. God has it in his power to bring it about that he is not perfectly good. (From 1* to 3*.)
- 5*. Being perfectly good is an essential attribute of God.
- 6*. God has it in his power to bring it about that he lacks one of his essential attributes. (From 4* and 5*.)
- 7*. It is false that God has it in his power to bring it about that he performs an act than which there is a better. (From 1*-6* by *reductio ad absurdum*.)

Since the conclusion is reached by assuming that God is essentially perfectly good, one can fairly say that this argument, if successful, yields the "no-power" conclusion that a perfectly good God lacks the power to do better than he does:

No-Power

- ($G \rightarrow \sim P$) God's being essentially perfectly good prevents God from having it in his power to bring it about that he performs an act than which there is a better.

The intuitions driving the present effort to impugn sensible gratitude to God are that (i) his being perfectly good requires his performing only acts than which none are better, and that (ii) such a requirement conflicts with divine freedom. But to make good on (i) by showing (as above) that God lacks the power to do better is not yet to make good on (ii)—i.e., it is not yet to show that God lacks freedom in doing the good acts he does (since one might be free if one can do otherwise even though one can't do better). We are still without a defense of the no-freedom premise ($G \rightarrow \sim F$) of The Incoherence Argument. Consider then the following hypothesis:

No-Power-No-Freedom

- ($\sim P \rightarrow \sim F$) God's good acts are free only if God has it in his power to bring it about that he performs an act than which there is a better.

This hypothesis ($\sim P \rightarrow \sim F$) and the no-power conclusion ($G \rightarrow \sim P$) defended above together entail what was being sought:

No-Freedom

- ($G \rightarrow \sim F$) God's being essentially perfectly good prevents God's good acts from being free.

By thus combining 1*–7* in support of the no-power conclusion together with some defense or other for the no-power-no-freedom hypothesis, one would have an argument for the first, no-freedom premise of The Incoherence Argument.

Is some defense or other available for the hypothesis in question? Here is an argument for the no-power-no-freedom hypothesis:

8. God can do otherwise than what he does only if either
 - (a) God can perform, in place of what he does perform, an act that is better than the one he does perform; *or*
 - (b) God can perform, in place of what he does perform, an act that is worse than the one he does perform.⁴
9. If God can perform, in place of what he does perform, an act that is worse than the one he does perform, then God can perform an act than which there is a better.
10. God cannot perform an act than which there is a better. [from 7*]
11. God cannot perform, in place of what he does perform, an act that is worse than the one he does perform. [from 9 and 10]
12. God can do otherwise than what he does only if God can perform, in place of what he does perform, an act that is better than the one he does perform. [from 8 and 11]

13. God's acts are free only if God can do otherwise than he does. [definition of freedom]
14. God's good acts are free only if God can perform, in place of what he does perform, an act that is better than the one he does perform. [from 12 and 13]
15. God can perform, in place of what he does perform, an act that is better than the one he does perform only if God has it in his power to bring it about that he performs an act than which there is a better.
16. God's good acts are free only if God has it in his power to bring it about that he performs an act than which there is a better. [from 14 and 15]

Since 16 just is the no-power-no-freedom hypothesis ($\sim P \rightarrow \sim F$), we now have an argument for the first premise of The Incoherence Argument: the conclusions of 1*–7* and 8–16 together entail the no-freedom premise ($G \rightarrow \sim F$).

The argument above (8–16) for the no-power-no-freedom hypothesis has only four premises: 8, 9, 13, and 15. The definition of freedom to which 13 appeals seems eminently plausible. And 9 and 15 are utterly unproblematic claims. But 8 is surely controversial, insofar as it takes for granted that when God performs an act, there is no act God could perform in its place that is either *exactly as good as* or *incommensurable with* the act God does perform. Is there a way of revising The Incoherence Argument so that it doesn't rely on the controversial 8?

Yes, there is. But it requires a slight shift in strategy on the part of the proponent of The Incoherence Argument. Instead of deploying the no-freedom premise:

No-Freedom

($G \rightarrow \sim F$) God's being essentially perfectly good prevents God's good acts from being free,

the revised strategy involves deploying a no-*significant*-freedom premise:

No-Significant-Freedom

($G \rightarrow \sim FS$) God's being essentially perfectly good prevents God's good acts from being *significantly* free,

where:

S's act A is *significantly free* if S can perform, in place of A, an act that is either better or worse than A.⁵

Having turned its attention away from the less significant power of being able to do differently but no better or worse, the no-significant-freedom premise of this revised strategy remains easy to defend using the Rowe-style argument (1*–7*) given above. As already noted, that argument establishes the no-power thesis:

No-Power

($G \rightarrow \sim P$) God's being essentially perfectly good prevents God from having it in his power to bring it about that he performs an act than which there is a better.

What is needed, then, in order to defend the no-significant-freedom premise ($G \rightarrow \sim FS$), is some defense of an adjusted no-power-no-significant-freedom thesis:

No-Power-No-Significant-Freedom

($\sim P \rightarrow \sim FS$) If God doesn't have it in his power to bring it about that he performs an act than which there is a better, then God's good acts aren't *significantly* free.

Here is a defense of ($\sim P \rightarrow \sim FS$):

- 8*. God doesn't have it in his power to bring it about that he performs an act than which there is a better. [assume for Conditional Proof]
- 9*. If God can perform, in place of some good act he actually performs, an act that is worse, then God has it in his power to bring it about that he performs an act than which there is a better.
- 10* God cannot perform, in place of some good act he performs, an act that is worse. [from 8* and 9*]
- 11* If God can perform, in place of some good act he actually performs, an act that is better, then God has it in his power to bring it about that he performs an act than which there is a better (since he obviously has it in his power to perform acts he actually performs – and in this case we are supposing there is a better than that).
- 12* God cannot perform, in place of some good act he actually performs, an act that is better. [from 8* and 11*]
- 13* None of God's good acts are significantly free. [from 10* and 12* and the definition of significant freedom]
- 14*. If God doesn't have it in his power to bring it about that he performs an act than which there is a better then God's good acts aren't *significantly* free. [from 8*-13* by Conditional Proof.]

This argument has just two premises, 9* and 11*, both of which are clearly true. By combining this argument (8*-14*) for the no-power-no-significant-freedom thesis ($\sim P \rightarrow \sim FS$) with the earlier argument (1*-7*) for the no-power thesis ($G \rightarrow \sim P$), one secures the no-significant-freedom premise ($G \rightarrow \sim FS$). And that conclusion is precisely the revised first premise of the Incoherence Argument which was being sought.

B. Two Objections to the above Defense⁶

There are two popular ways of resisting both the no-freedom premise and its no-significant-freedom cousin. Each of these two lines of resistance can be viewed as objections to premise 2* of the argument for the no-power

thesis ($G \rightarrow \sim P$) which is employed in the above arguments for no-freedom and no-significant freedom:

- 2*. From God's performing an act than which there is a better it follows that God is not perfectly good.

According to the *first* objection to premise 2*, its proponents fail to see that divine perfection is compatible with:

- BETTER: For every good act that God could perform, there is a better act he could perform in its place.

Notice that the truth of BETTER guarantees both that (a) God can do otherwise when he performs some good act and that (b) God's good acts are significantly free (since among the available alternatives are better acts he could perform in place of the act he does perform). The truth of (a) undercuts the above defense of the no-freedom premise; the truth of (b) undercuts its no-significant-freedom cousin.

One response to this first objection—a response given by Rowe—is to reject the compatibility of divine moral perfection and BETTER by appealing again to the intuitions supporting 2*. The proposition expressed by 2* is that if it really is the case that for every act God could perform, there is a better, then God is not perfectly good. And if we assume that God is, by definition, a being that is essentially perfectly good, the upshot of 2* is this: if BETTER is true—i.e., if for every good act that an omnipotent being can perform there is a better—then there is no such being as God. In support of 2*, Rowe cites the following remarks by Philip Quinn, a theist:

An omnipotent moral agent can actualize any actualizable world. If he actualizes one than which there is a morally better, he does not do the best he can, morally speaking, and so it is possible that there is an agent morally better than he is, namely, an omnipotent moral agent who actualizes one of those morally better worlds. (Quinn 1982, 213)

Opinions divide about what to make of 2*.⁷ What Rowe and Quinn offer in support of the proposition is that it seems obviously true. We shan't risk here the distraction of assessing the merits of this controversial rejoinder to the first way of objecting to the no-power thesis. Given that Rowe and Quinn are appealing to the obviousness of what is being denied by this first objection, we suspect there may be little more to say on the issue. The proponents of this first objection and Rowe seem to have reached an intuitive stalemate.

A second objection to 2* proceeds not on the grounds that for every good act God could perform there is another still better he could perform instead, but rather on the grounds that, even if there is a good act than which none is better, God's essential perfect goodness doesn't entail that he will perform it. What God's essential perfect goodness entails is only that there is some threshold of goodness for acts such that he will perform no act whose goodness falls below it. This leaves God free to choose from a large number of good acts. What is distinctive about this objection is that it neither (i) reduces God's freedom to the less significant power of being

able to do differently but no better or worse, nor (ii) depends on there being no good acts than which there are none better. Divine freedom is secured rather by the fact that there are many good acts—some better than others—whose degree of goodness is greater than the minimum required for a perfectly good God to perform them.

But of course the appeal by Rowe and Quinn to the intuitive obviousness of 2* would work just as well here as it did in response to the previous, first objection. It looks, therefore, as if here too the parties have reached an intuitive stalemate. The no-power thesis, along with the no-freedom and no-significant-freedom premises depending on it, has not been dislodged.

C. Taking Stock before Moving Ahead

We now have before us the makings of two versions of The Incoherence Argument for the conclusion that the theist's CONJUNCTION (i.e., G & T) is incoherent. The first version is the one advertised in Section I at the outset—the version deploying no-freedom:

(G \rightarrow \sim F) God's being essentially perfectly good prevents God's good acts from being free

and not-thankworthy:

(\sim F \rightarrow \sim T) God is not thankworthy for an act that isn't performed freely.

The second version, which surfaced more recently in Section II.A, deploys no-significant-freedom:

(G \rightarrow \sim FS) God's being essentially perfectly good prevents God's good acts from being *significantly* free

and the *revised* not-thankworthy premise:

Revised Not-Thankworthy

(\sim FS \rightarrow \sim T) God is not thankworthy for an act that isn't *significantly* free.

Each version of the argument looks to have its own weakness. The weakness of the first version, which includes the argument for no-freedom consisting of 1*-7* and 8-16, is that it depends on the controversial premise 8 (according to which God has no available alternative actions *exactly as good as* the act he does perform). The second version avoids reliance on 8 by proceeding not via no-freedom but instead via no-significant-freedom, defended using 1*-7* and 8*-14*. However, this second version has the weakness of deploying the less obviously plausible *revised* not-thankworthy premise. The original not-thankworthy premise seems plausible enough: it is quite natural to think that if God was not free in performing an act—if he couldn't do otherwise than perform it—then he was *forced* (constrained, determined) to perform it, in which case he isn't thankworthy for performing it. But those considerations offer no support for the revised not-thankworthy premise. For, working no longer under the assumption implicit in 8, the new assumption that God is not significantly

free offers no reason to think he can't do otherwise—and, therefore, no reason to think he was forced to perform the act he did perform. So why think the revised not-thankworthy thesis is plausible at all?

One can account for the attractiveness of the revised not-thankworthy thesis by appealing to the following principle of thankworthiness:

(PT) S isn't thankworthy for performing an act A if S performed A without any reason for preferring A to *any* of the alternative actions available to S at the time.⁸

To see the appeal of this principle, consider what goes on in an action for which an agent is thankworthy even though the act has been randomly selected from among equally good alternative actions.⁹ Suppose Jill knows that what Bill wants most for his birthday is help in completing his collection of paintings by a certain painter. Jill knows that there are five paintings still absent from Bill's collection. And each costs the same amount of money, which just happens to be all the money Jill can afford to spend (she knows also that Bill would want her not to spend more than that amount on a gift for him). She is considering the five paintings to decide which one to purchase and comes to the conclusion that it doesn't matter to her (and it wouldn't matter to Bill) which one she buys. So she plays *eeny-meeny-miny-mo* and selects one and buys it for Bill, who is very grateful for the gift when he receives it (even after he hears about how her decision process went). What is going on here? Why is Jill thankworthy for performing a randomly selected act?

It seems that Jill has performed at least three acts in sequence in this example in order to purchase the painting for Bill: first, she selects from among all the actions available to her a set of five equally good alternative actions from which she plans to choose one; second, she employs a method for randomly selecting one from among those five options; third, she performs the randomly selected act. Crucial to her being thankworthy for the third act is the fact that it is a part of this sequence of acts that began with her selection of the initial five alternative actions from which she randomly selected one. In particular, it is important that she selected that initial set *because* she knew Bill would appreciate one of those paintings. This shows that she performed the first act (of selecting that initial set) for the right reasons, which, together with the fact that she is responsible for that first act, makes her thankworthy for it. It is, in part, *because* she is thankworthy for that first act that she is also thankworthy for the third act of purchasing the randomly selected painting and giving it to Bill.

Compare the Jill example with one where Jill's sister Sue is somehow *forced* to buy one of the five paintings for Bill though she is permitted to choose which one to buy for him. Suppose that Sue has no reason for preferring the purchase of one to the purchase of another, and so randomly selects one. In this example, Sue doesn't seem thankworthy for purchasing for him the painting she does purchase for him. It is true that she could do otherwise than purchase the one she does purchase. But that freedom isn't significant freedom. As we noted in discussing the Jill example, a randomly selected act makes the agent thankworthy only if she earlier chose (for the right reasons) the set of actions from among which that act was randomly selected. And that is what is missing in this case. In the Jill case, even though Jill randomly chose an act, it is false that she had no reason

for preferring the randomly chosen act to *any* of the alternative actions available to her. She did prefer it to the option of not buying anything for Bill and that was an option available to her. But in the Sue case, Sue has no reason for preferring the act she performs to *any* of the alternative actions available to her. These considerations are what render the principle of thankworthiness PT plausible: if the agent has no reason to prefer the act she performs to *any* of the alternatives available to her, then she doesn't seem thankworthy for performing it.

The application to the case of God is obvious. In the case of God's acts that are not significantly free, we know that—since in such a case all the alternative actions available to God at the time are neither better nor worse than the act he performs—he has no reason for preferring the act he performs to *any* of the available alternatives. Given PT, this shows that God isn't thankworthy for his acts if they aren't significantly free. These considerations suggest that the apparent weakness of the second version of The Incoherence Argument (i.e., that it depends on the *revised* not-thankworthy premise) is not a serious difficulty after all. Thus, the second version of the Incoherence Argument would seem to be better than the first version, which depends on the controversial premise 8.

Despite the apparent superiority of the second version of the Incoherence Argument, we shall continue for the moment with the first version firmly in view. Recall that we want to consider how the theist might resist the Incoherence Argument if she grants that there is some force to the arguments given above for no-freedom and no-significant-freedom. This will involve objecting to either the not-thankworthy premise or the revised not-thankworthy premise. Our strategy will thus be to focus first on the not-thankworthy premise at work in the first version of The Incoherence Argument. By showing how one may resist that component of the *first* version of The Incoherence Argument, we can move more fruitfully to showing how to resist the corresponding component of the *second* version of The Incoherence Argument—the revised not-thankworthy premise.

III. Thankworthiness Without Freedom

We begin, then, with the first version of The Incoherence Argument, which relies on not-thankworthy.

Suppose the theist feels pressed to grant the no-freedom premise. That is, suppose it is conceded that God's good acts are unfree because an essentially perfectly good being cannot do otherwise than perform them. Is there any way for an incompatibilist to defend the coherence of gratitude to God for his good acts? Is there any consistent route by which an incompatibilist can instead deny the second, not-thankworthy premise of The Incoherence Argument:

($\sim F \rightarrow \sim T$) God isn't thankworthy for an act that wasn't performed freely¹⁰

while nevertheless granting its first no-freedom premise? As noted near the beginning of Section I, we think there is. One need only defend what we there called "responsible-though-good" and "thankworthy-if-responsible":

- (RG) God can be *responsible* for the good acts he performs even if he is essentially perfectly good.
- (TR) A person is thankworthy for performing a good act so long as that person is *responsible* for the act in question and it is performed for the right reasons.

Not-thankworthy says God's not being free is sufficient for his not being thankworthy. By way of reply we argue for two things: first, that—as (RG) indicates—God's being perfectly good (and thus lacking freedom) is consistent with his being responsible for an act performed for the right reasons; and second, that—as (TR) indicates—being responsible for an act performed for the right reasons is sufficient for his being thankworthy.

In subsections III.A-C below we shall discuss ways of defending responsible-though-good (RG); in III.D we will defend thankworthy-if-responsible (TR). In the final subsection we will consider how our account in III.A-D, employed in response to the *first* version of The Incoherence Argument, is relevant in responding to the *second* version of The Incoherence Argument. There we shall argue that just as one can consistently reject not-thankworthy while granting no-freedom, so also one can consistently reject the *revised* not-thankworthy premise while accepting no-*significant*-freedom.

A. Can God Be Responsible For His Nature?

That God is essentially perfectly good owes entirely to his nature. Proponents of The Incoherence Argument suspect that God is necessarily determined—forced, somehow—by his nature to perform the good acts he performs. One route toward defending (RG) is to grant that this is so, but to claim nevertheless that God is responsible for having the nature he does. If this were so, then God would at least be mediately responsible for the good acts he does. Let us see what can be made of this approach.

Aquinas reminds us of the obvious fact that thanks, praise and the like are creditable to S for an act or state of affairs A only if (i) S is responsible for A and (ii) A is good: “for to be praised or blamed is nothing else than to be charged with responsibility for a good or bad deed” (ST IaIIae q21, a2). In the present context (ii) is no worry: children know that God is and does good, and philosophers can gloss this readily enough in terms of his nature. But what of (i), of *responsibility*? Well, the present context has us in the company of agents, and (efficacious) willing is one obvious way of being responsible. Aquinas evidently reckoned it possible for God to enjoy that relation to his nature: “God wills his own being and his own Goodness in a necessary way, and cannot will the contrary” (SCG I.80). Echoes of divine simplicity aside, the modal strain this pronouncement may place on some contemporary ears is instructive: latter-day agency-theorists can benefit from a second reminder of Aquinas—that *being an agent* isn't *being a free agent*, that *having a will* may fall short of *having a free will*. ‘Free agent’ and ‘free will’ have persisted as serviceable philosophical notions precisely because neither is redundant.¹¹

As we shall be thinking of it, to be responsible for A involves being the front end of the causal chain issuing in A: S is responsible for her act A so long as the causal buck for A stops with S.¹² To capture this idea of the

causal buck for an act stopping with the agent, we shall be deploying the notion of agent-causation defined as follows:

AC: X is the agent-cause of e iff each of the following three conditions is satisfied:

1. X is a substance that had the power to bring about e
2. X exerted its power to bring about e ¹³
3. Nothing distinct from X (not even X 's character) caused X to exert its power to bring about e .¹⁴

Our idea then is that S is responsible for an act A so long as S is the agent-cause of A in the sense just noted. For S to be the agent-cause of A in this sense is for the causal buck for A to stop with S .¹⁵

On our account, being an agent-cause of A is *sufficient* for being responsible for A . Is it *necessary*? We noted earlier that our defense of CONJUNCTION would be an incompatibilist one. Indeed, the version of incompatibilism with which our defense of CONJUNCTION will be consistent is an agency theorist version according to which a necessary condition of both freedom and responsibility is agent-causation. According to that sort of incompatibilism, S is responsible for A only if S agent-causes A . Likewise, S freely does A only if S is the agent-cause of A .¹⁶

So we have before us two suggestions: that (a) being the agent-cause of A is *sufficient* for being responsible for A , and that (b) God is responsible for his having the nature he does. We'll begin by assuming that (a) is true and consider whether, on that understanding of what is sufficient for being responsible, God is responsible for his nature. If we conclude that, given (a), God isn't responsible for his nature, then of course he won't be responsible for his nature if responsibility requires *more* than agent-causation.¹⁷

Initially, the idea that God is responsible for his nature would seem a misbegotten one. For God's nature includes his great-making properties, which he has essentially: how could anything be responsible for its having the essential properties it has? There is however a metaphysical position that may be serviceable in defending the suggestion that God is responsible for his having the nature he has. The position is called 'theistic activism', and has been recommended by Alvin Plantinga and defended by Thomas Morris.¹⁸ It is a development of the broadly Platonic-Augustinian view that propositions are divine thoughts and that properties are divine concepts.

Let us focus on that part of theistic activism which says that properties are divine concepts. Divine concepts, like all entities distinct from God, depend for their existence on God's creative activity. From this it follows that, according to theistic activism, properties depend for their existence on God's activity. But properties depend for their exemplification on their existence. So according to theistic activism, properties, including essential properties, depend for their exemplification on God's activity.¹⁹ More specifically, God's exemplifying the essential properties he exemplifies depends on God's activity, in which case God's having the nature he does depends on God's activity. And if something depends on God's activity (and the activity of no other agent), then it would seem that God is responsible for it. Thus, theistic activism leads very naturally to the conclusion that God is responsible for his having the nature he does.

But is theistic activism coherent? Could properties be divine concepts? If divine properties were divine concepts, both of the following would look to be true:

- (I) God's exerting his causal power to form divine concepts is logically prior to his exemplifying the property of having causal powers.
- (II) God's exemplifying the property of having causal powers is logically prior to his exerting his causal power to form divine concepts.

(I) seems to follow from theistic activism. For God couldn't exemplify the property of having causal powers unless that property existed, and that property couldn't exist unless God exerted his causal powers to form divine concepts (since, according to theistic activism, properties just are divine concepts). And (II) looks to be a necessary truth. But, given that the relation of logical priority is an asymmetric relation, it is impossible for both (I) and (II) to be true. From this and the plausibility of the claim that (II) is a necessary truth, we seem led to the conclusion that theistic activism, which yields (I), is false.

The above objection to theistic activism, and especially its use of the notion of logical priority, needs further defense.²⁰ But at the very least, the objection underscores the fact that theistic activism is controversial. It is difficult to render comfortable to the intellect the idea of God's actively creating those very properties—those very aspects of the divine nature—that are logically necessary for his creative activity. Best, perhaps, to release theists from the burden of defending responsible-though-good (RG):

- (RG) God can be *responsible* for the good acts he performs even if he is essentially perfectly good

on the basis of such a controversial view as theistic activism. Let us look for an alternative.²¹

B. God's Causing What His Nature Entails²²

Recall that we wish to deploy responsible-though-good (RG) in denying The Incoherence Argument's second, not-thankworthy premise:

- (~F → ~T) God isn't thankworthy for an act that wasn't performed freely

in a way that is consistent both with conceding the no-freedom premise ($G \rightarrow \sim F$) and also with the truth of agent-theoretic incompatibilism. We have rejected the option that God can be responsible for his actions by being responsible for his nature which causally or otherwise determines his performance of the good acts he performs. The option we should like now to pursue is that God is responsible for each of his good acts even though his nature entails that he couldn't do otherwise than perform the good acts he performs.²³

How can this be? How can God be responsible for his good acts if his nature entails that he couldn't do otherwise than perform them? Well, easily enough: by agent-causing what his nature entails without being caused to agent-cause it. *A* entails *B* iff at every world at which *A*, also *B*. Suppose, as

some people think, that properties are necessarily existing things. Then *the property redness exists* entails *two plus two equals four*. But there is no temptation to say that the existence of redness *causes* two plus two's equaling four. Our proposal is that God's being essentially perfectly good is related in just that way to his performing some good act: his being essentially perfectly good *entails* that he bring it about that he performs some act than which none is better, but it does not *cause* him to do bring that about. *Nothing* distinct from God causes (forces, externally constrains) him to bring that about. Recall: God is an agent. God himself is the agent-cause of his bringing it about that he performs some act than which none is better. In our preferred way of putting it: the causal buck stops with him.

But isn't entailing even stronger than causing? Since entailing needn't involve causing, it's not stronger in the sense that it involves causing and more besides. But if *causing* "S's causing A" is responsibility-undermining, then won't *entailing* "S's causing A" also be responsibility-undermining? Well, is the fact that "The moon orbits the earth and S causes A" entails "S causes A" responsibility-undermining? The reason that *causing* "S's causing A" is responsibility-undermining is that being caused to cause precludes agent causation and, therefore, responsibility. Since S's being entailed to cause A—even by some other necessary truth—doesn't conflict with S's agent-causing A, it isn't responsibility-undermining.

But if explanations are virtues, it may be objected that our account lacks a crucial virtue. One might resist our suggestion that God's nature entails without causing the performance of the good acts he performs by saying this: "Look, it's not just that God *did*, in the actual world, agent-cause his bringing it about that he performs some act than which none is better. He *had* to; he does at every world. If you are right, then we have the following necessary truth:

(NT) At every possible world whenever God agent-causes anything, he agent-causes his bringing it about that he performs an act than which none is better.

But why? How do you explain that modal fact? Surely the easiest and most natural way to explain NT is to appeal to the following truth about what – necessarily – his nature causes:

(NC) At every possible world, whenever God agent-causes anything, his nature *causes* him to bring it about that he performs an act than which none is better.

The truth of NC would explain the modal truth reported in NT. But you reject NC. What do you offer in its place?"

Now strictly speaking, one cannot explain the truth of NT by appealing to NC. For if God's nature were to cause him to bring it about that he performs an act than which none is better, then NT wouldn't be true: NT says that at every world *God agent-causes* his bringing it about that he performs acts of that sort. And if God agent-causes it, then his nature doesn't cause him to cause it. Still, the objector is right to isolate NT, to note that the position we are defending is committed to the modal fact it reports, and to note that we've offered no explanation for it. What do we have to say for ourselves?

It is initially tempting to respond by suggesting that *all* necessities are brute, that it never makes sense to ask of some necessary truth why it is true, at any rate not if one is fishing for an explanatory sense of 'because' running deeper than "because it *must* be". Perhaps every necessity entails every other, all are true and can't be false, and none is true because another is.

The appeal of this response may be diminished by recalling the scholastics' distinction between essences and *propria*. By their lights, essences are expressed in what they called the real definition of the kind to which a thing belonged, and are *de re* necessities of the thing. Yet so are other properties necessary of the thing which nevertheless are not part of its essence. The distinction was inherited from Aristotle. After explaining that a (real) definition "signifies a thing's essence" (*Topics* I,5,101^b35), Aristotle says that distinct from what is expressed by the definition are its "properties" (proper accidents), which "do not indicate the essence of a thing, but yet [belong] to that thing alone, and [are] predicated convertibly of it" (102^a18). Here is a famous example from Porphyry: anything that is a rational animal is risible and anything that is risible is a rational animal.²⁴ Risibility is not the essence of man, though man has it of necessity—has it, crucially, *by virtue* of his nature as a rational animal. Thus is man necessarily risible *because* he is necessarily a rational animal, though not conversely. These examples help to show that mutual entailment between necessary truths is consistent with informative explanatory asymmetry between them. And this gives us reason to deny that all necessities are explanatorily brute.

Suppose we proceed on the assumption that some necessities are brute and some are not.²⁵ Into which category does NT fall? It may emerge that we are forced to say "Here we have a brute necessary truth: whenever God agent-causes anything, he agent-causes his bringing it about that he performs good acts than which none are better. This brute necessity is what NT reports." We can live with that. It is likely that brute necessities are ubiquitous. Moreover, it seems entirely plausible to us that we should expect NT in particular to be a brute necessity: since NT is about agent-causation, which is uncaused causing, no *causal* explanation of NT will be satisfactory. We are content, therefore, to let our reply to the demand for an explanation of NT rest on the claim that NT is among the brute necessities.

Some may find this unsatisfactory. For them, we offer the following speculative proposal of how NT might emerge to report a necessity that *isn't* brute. According to this proposal, there would be an explanation for NT but the explanation would be a non-causal one. Arguably, there are many sorts of explanation. In addition to (efficient, agent-theoretic, . . .) causal explanations there are, at least, teleological explanations and what we'll call here "mathematical/logical explanations". Examples of the latter may be given in geometry when one explains, by way of a suitable proof, why some fact of geometry is (necessarily) true: the axioms together with the relevant proof do not merely guarantee, but explain in the mathematical/logical sense, the truth of the conclusion.²⁶ The existence of this kind of explanation, while acknowledging that each necessary truth *entails* every other, draws attention to the fact that some necessary truths *are true in virtue of* other necessary truths, where this "true in virtue of" relation

is asymmetric. The medieval example of risibility and rational animality given above is another instance of this sort of mathematical/logical explanation. Our suggestion is that NT may have a mathematical/logical explanation even though there is no causal explanation of the modal fact reported by NT.

Have we any such explanation in mind? Consider these two claims:

(PN) God has a perfect nature.

(E) PN entails NT.

It is not implausible to claim that the conjunction of PN and E explains NT in the mathematical/logical sense. It is of course true both that (PN & E) entails NT and that NT entails (PN & E). But the mathematical/logical explanation goes just one way: (PN & E) explains NT but not vice versa. On this proposal, NT is not a brute necessity—and this is so even though the modal fact reported by NT does not have a causal explanation.

C. Our Definition of Responsibility

Let us summarize our progress thus far in Section III. We have accepted the challenge of granting that God's moral perfection entails his lack of freedom while nevertheless denying the not-thankworthy premise that such lack of freedom entails his lack of thankworthiness. Our first step toward denying this premise has been to offer a defense of the claim (RG) that God can be responsible for the good acts he performs even if he is essentially perfectly good. Declining the theistic activist's invitation to defend this claim by saying that God can be responsible for his nature, we have argued instead that God can be agent-causally responsible for the good acts he performs even if his nature entails that he perform them. To this conclusion it was objected that our commitment to NT:

(NT) At every possible world God always agent-causes his bringing it about that he performs an act than which none is better.

confronts an embarrassment: refusing as we do to grant the most plausible explanation of this modal fact in terms of God's essential nature causing him to bring it about that he perform the good acts he performs, we are left to say that this modal fact has no explanation whatever. As we have most recently and speculatively proposed, there may be a way of deflecting this charge. But as noted earlier, there is good reason to think not only that there are brute necessities, but also that NT is one of them. Hence, this charge against our account does not strike us as a liability.

A considerably different objection might focus on our notion of responsibility. It may be charged that even if it is possible for God to be the *agent-cause* (in our sense) of acts the performance of which is entailed by his having the nature he does, that alone cannot render it true that he is *responsible* for those acts. To put it another way: although being the agent-cause of A is *necessary* for being responsible for A, it is not *sufficient* for it.

This is a line of attack that Rowe will be inclined to take against responsible-though-good (RG):

(RG) God can be *responsible* for the good acts he performs even if he is essentially perfectly good.

Taking himself to follow Reid's account of agency, Rowe defines agent-causation slightly differently than our AC:

AC*: X is the agent cause of *e* iff each of the following three conditions is satisfied:

1. X is a substance that had the power to bring about *e*
2. X exerted its power to bring about *e*
- 3*. X had the power to refrain from bringing about *e*. (Rowe 2000, 427)

The difference between this definition and our own AC is that it substitutes 3* for our:

3. Nothing distinct from X (not even X's character) caused X to exert its power to bring about *e*.

Rowe goes on to argue that 3* entails 3.²⁷ So he doesn't deny that agent-causing in our sense is necessary for agent-causing in his sense. Moreover, Rowe takes agent-causing (in his sense) to be both necessary and sufficient for responsibility. Thus, Rowe believes that both the causal buck stopping with the agent *and* the power to do otherwise are required for responsibility. We have claimed that only the former is required.

How might we settle this disagreement? What can be said in support of requiring for responsibility merely that the causal buck stop with the agent (and not, in addition, the power to do otherwise)? Suppose that conditions 1 and 2 of AC* are satisfied but that 3* is not—only 3 is. Here we have a substance X exerting its power to bring about *e* without being caused to do so. If Rowe is correct, this is a case where X is not responsible for bringing about *e*. But then who or what is? Clearly X, not some past events in conjunction with laws of nature, *brought e about*; for *nothing distinct from X* caused X to exert its power and (thereby) to bring about *e*. Will it be claimed that in such a case *nothing* is responsible for the bringing about of *e*? That is implausible at worst and unsatisfying at best, given our knowledge that X caused the bringing about of *e* by exerting its power to do so and without being caused to exert this power by anything distinct from itself, not even its nature or character.

We have acknowledged that some will find themselves resisting our application of 'responsibility' to God: it will sound strange to their ears, this running 'couldn't do otherwise' and 'is responsible' together in one harness. The reasons for it sounding strange are, we think, two. (1) 'Responsibility' and 'responsible' have their own currency in the folkways, in the everyday usage of calling someone to moral accountability for improper conduct. (Nine folks out of ten will furrow their brow if, on some occasion of Teresa performing a selfless and benevolent act, you speak of assigning responsibility to her for her praiseworthy behavior, or of Teresa taking responsibility for her good act). Outside the folkways, philosophers have appropriated the term into discussions and theories about free will and determinism, rendering it a term of art that is neutral between accountability for ill and accountability for good. And so it is indeed a neutral term of art, but with something layered atop "being the primary cause of". For so often and long have we deployed the word in the thick of our

reflections about determinism and free will that it has absorbed a nuance properly belonging to 'free', not to 'responsible' itself. Thus will some ears flinch when hearing of an agent that is the primary cause of something it couldn't do otherwise than cause. The flinching is forgivable, but there is nothing philosophically deep in it. (2) Likewise for the second item of the pair 'responsible' and 'couldn't do otherwise', which our account must say are consistent. When the discomfited hear us say "couldn't do otherwise than perform A," they hear more than is being said. With a habit of mind that Hume was pleased to describe as moving from one idea to another, our utterance of 'God couldn't do otherwise than perform A' sounds to them like we are saying that God was *forced*—that he was causally determined by his nature or by something else distinct from him to perform A. But that is precisely what we are not saying. What we *are* saying when we say "he couldn't do otherwise than perform A" is just, well, that *he couldn't do otherwise than perform A*—that it is impossible, or at any rate impossible in the circumstances, that God do otherwise than A. And we are adding that this impossibility is *not* due to God's being forced by his nature or anything distinct from himself to perform A.²⁸

Items (1) and (2) above are empirical claims. We could of course be wrong about them. But if they are at least plausible, then they suggest that we do well to re-assess the force of 'x could have done otherwise'—to see that its denial can owe to one or another of two sources, only one of which licenses the inference to 'x is not responsible for A' and (thence to) to 'x is not thankworthy for doing A'. Clearly enough x's being forced by something outside itself to act as it does licenses the inference to 'x is not responsible'; but x's agent-causing an act by exerting its volitional power to do so, without being caused to exert this power by anything distinct from itself, does not license such an inference—even if x so-agent-causes in every world (in those circumstances).

D. Responsibility and Thankworthiness

Finally, an objector may grant the conclusions of the two preceding subsections (that God can agent-cause acts the performance of which is entailed by his perfectly good nature, and that his having exercised his power to perform them is sufficient for his being responsible for them), yet still deny what we called "thankworthy-if-responsible" (TR):

(TR) A person is thankworthy for performing a good act so long as that person is *responsible* for the act in question and it is performed for the right reasons.

For, they may say, although responsibility may not require the power to do otherwise, thankworthiness does. On their accounting, a person isn't thankworthy for performing an act if it is impossible, given the circumstances, for that person to do otherwise.

(TR) identifies a sufficient condition for thankworthiness for a good act. If (TR) is true, it can be deployed against The Incoherence Argument's not-thankworthy premise:

(~F → ~T) God isn't thankworthy for an act that wasn't performed freely.

The intuitive support for the not-thankworthy premise comes from the fact that freedom requires the ability to do otherwise and the belief that God's inability to do otherwise than A renders him undeserving of thanks for A. But (TR) says that God's inability to do otherwise than A renders no such thing if God is responsible for A. So if the thankworthy-if-responsible thesis is correct, then the intuitive support for not-thankworthy is undercut.

Is (TR) correct? Or is the objector right to claim instead that God is not thankworthy for an action that it is impossible (in the circumstances) for him to do otherwise than perform? Once it is granted that God is responsible for an act, that he is to be credited for performing it by his exercise of active powers as an agent, without being forced to do so by something outside of him, it is difficult to see why one would resist the suggestion that God is worthy of thanks for performing the act. So he does as much at every world: why should this matter? Suppose that God couldn't do otherwise than raise this woman's child from the dead. But suppose also that *this good action flows from God himself*—that God agent-caused it, that nothing distinct from God (not even his own nature) caused him to perform that act, that he is *responsible* for that act. And suppose God performed that act for good reasons.²⁹ If the mother recognized these facts, couldn't she sensibly tell God that (i) she acknowledges this as indeed a good act, (ii) she realizes that he is to be credited with performing it, (iii) she is glad and greatly relieved that he performed it, and (iv) she considers herself to be in his debt (not someone else's or no-one's) since he and nothing else caused her son to be raised from the dead? It seems she could sensibly tell God all of (i)–(iv) even though she realizes that God is perfectly good and couldn't do otherwise than raise her child from the dead. But if she can sensibly tell God those things, then she can sensibly thank God for raising her son from the dead.³⁰ By our lights, one is more than a little hard-pressed to see how thanking God for resurrecting her son could be deeply confused if saying those four things to God is not. And if thanking God while recognizing those truths about the situation is coherent, this suggests that God is indeed thankworthy for performing that act, despite the fact that he couldn't do otherwise.

E. The Second Version of the Incoherence Argument

Thus far we have presented a reply to the first version of The Incoherence Argument, explaining how to reject not-thankworthy ($\sim F \rightarrow \sim T$) while accepting no-freedom ($G \rightarrow \sim F$). In this section we will draw upon that discussion in giving an objection to the second version of The Incoherence Argument, explaining how to reject the *revised* not-thankworthy thesis ($\sim FS \rightarrow \sim T$) while accepting the no-*significant*-freedom thesis ($G \rightarrow \sim FS$).

Let us recall the strategy. The objection to the first version of the Incoherence Argument relies on the following three points:

- (i) God can be the agent-cause of an action the performance of which is entailed by his perfectly good nature (defended in III.B).
- (ii) God's agent-causing an action is sufficient for his being responsible for it (defended in III.C).

- (iii) If (a) God is responsible for some good act and (b) he performs it for the right reasons, then he is thankworthy even if (c) he can't do otherwise (defended in III.D).

Points (i) and (ii) are offered in defense of:

- (RG) God can be *responsible* for the good acts he performs even if he is essentially perfectly good.

Point (iii) is offered in defense of:

- (TR) A person is thankworthy for performing a good act so long as that person is *responsible* for the act in question and it is performed for the right reasons.

Together, (RG) and (TR) are used against The Incoherence Argument to show that there can be divine responsibility and thankworthiness without divine freedom.

The reason point (i) is used against the *first* version of the Incoherence Argument is that, in responding to that version of the argument, we grant the no-freedom premise ($G \rightarrow \sim F$). According to the no-freedom premise, God's essential goodness implies that God's nature entails the performance of each good act he performs, in which case he couldn't do otherwise than perform it, thereby preventing it from being a free act. Point (i) deals with this worry by explaining how God can be responsible for an act even if he couldn't do otherwise than perform it.

But when our focus is the *second* version of The Incoherence Argument, we are no longer granting the no-freedom premise. Instead we are granting its *no-significant-freedom* cousin ($G \rightarrow \sim FS$)—that is, we are granting that even though God could do otherwise than he does, he couldn't do anything better or worse than what he does. Thus, the way to defend (RG) is not by appeal to point (i) but rather by appeal to:

- (i*) God can be the agent-cause of an action that is no better or worse than any of the other acts available to him to perform.

Defenders of point (i*) don't face the same challenge faced by defenders of point (i)—namely, the challenge of explaining how God can agent-cause an act though he is unable to do otherwise. For now we are assuming that there are other (equally good) acts available to God, in which case he *is* able to do otherwise. This makes point (i*) seem unproblematic. And given the assumption of the present context that God's good acts are often selected from among equally good alternative acts, points (i*) and (ii) together support (RG).

However, when one turns to point (iii) in support of (TR) and considers how it might be modified so as to be useful in response to the second version of The Incoherence Argument, one seems to encounter difficulties. Point (iii) was useful in responding to the *first* version of the Incoherence Argument because we were granting the no-freedom claim that, due to his essential goodness, God couldn't do otherwise. But in responding to the *second* version of The Incoherence Argument, we are granting the *no-significant-freedom* claim that, due to his essential goodness, God can't do better or worse than what he does (though he can do otherwise). For this reason, instead of relying on point (iii), one must rely on:

- (iii*) If (a) God is responsible for some good act and (b) he performs it for the right reasons, then he is thankworthy even if (c*) he can't do better or worse than what he does.

The difficulty facing defenders of (iii*) arises in connection with our discussion above, in subsection II.C, where we explained the seeming plausibility of the revised not-thankworthy premise:

- (~FS \rightarrow ~T) God is not thankworthy for an act that isn't *significantly* free

by appealing to:

- (PT) S isn't thankworthy for performing an act A if S performed A without any reason for preferring A to *any* of the alternative actions available to S at the time.

The relevance of that discussion to (iii*) is the following: it might seem that if God has no reason to prefer the good act he performs to *any* of the other acts available to him then he can't perform that act for the right reasons. In other words, if clause (c*) of (iii*) is true, then clause (b) cannot be true, in which case God won't be thankworthy and (iii*) is false.

That's the difficulty with (iii*). What's our response? In explaining why PT seems plausible to its supporters, we gave the example of Sue, who was *forced* to choose one of five paintings to purchase for Bill. Since Sue had no reason at all to prefer one of these paintings to the others, Sue had no reason to prefer the good act she performed to *any* of the other acts available to her. This seemed to be a case where Sue wasn't thankworthy for performing the act she performed (i.e., purchasing for Bill the painting she randomly selected). And that example was supposed to lend support for PT. The problem with that way of supporting PT is that, although it might explain why PT seems attractive, it doesn't show that PT is true. For that way of supporting PT runs together two things that should be distinguished, namely: being *unable to do otherwise* than select from among a set of equally good alternative actions and being *forced* to select from among equally good alternative actions.³¹ The difference between these two is an important difference in our consideration of God's acts.

It is true that God, like Sue in the example just recalled, is unable to do otherwise than select one from among a set of equally good alternative actions. But, unlike Sue in our example, God is not forced to do this. Instead, God agent-causes his selection of a set of equally good alternative actions from among which he will (randomly) select one. And he agent-causes his selection of that set of equally good alternatives *because* they are acts than which none are better.³² In this way, God's good acts are more like Jill's gift to Bill than Sue's. Recall that Jill was thankworthy for her randomly selected act because it figured in a sequence of three acts: the act of selecting a set of equally good alternative actions from which she plans to choose one, the act of employing a method for randomly selecting one from among those alternatives, and the act of performing the randomly selected act. When God performs one of several equally good acts available to him, this too, we suggest, figures in just such a sequence. The only difference is that Jill is free and (on present assumptions) God is

not: whereas Jill could have done otherwise than select the set of equally good alternatives from which she will choose one, God could not. But, for reasons discussed above in subsections III.B-D, God's inability to do otherwise than perform some act A does not prevent him from agent-causing A or from being responsible or thankworthy for A. So we have no reason to think God is not thankworthy for selecting the set of equally good alternative actions from which he plans to choose one (even though he can't do otherwise than select that initial set of alternative actions). In the Jill case, the fact that she was thankworthy for selecting the initial five options from which she randomly selected one made her thankworthy for giving to Bill the randomly selected painting. Likewise, in the case of God, the fact that he is thankworthy (despite his inability to do otherwise) for selecting the set of equally good acts from which he randomly selects one makes him thankworthy for performing the particular randomly selected good act he does perform.

Returning then to (iii*), we can now see why it is true. God's acts that aren't significantly free are, nevertheless, performed for the right reasons. We can see this by noting that, for the right reasons, he agent-causes (and is responsible and thankworthy for) the initial selection of equally good alternatives from which he randomly selects one. And, for reasons similar to those discussed in subsections III.B-D, this is so even though he can't do otherwise than select that initial set of alternative actions. Moreover, being thankworthy for that initial selection of equally good acts makes him thankworthy for performing the randomly selected act even though it isn't significantly free.

At the beginning of this subsection, we noted that our objection to premise two of the *first* version of The Incoherence Argument relied on points (i)–(iii) which we defended in III.B–III.D. We then pointed out that a parallel objection to premise two of the *second* version of The Incoherence Argument relied on:

- (i*) God can be the agent-cause of an action that is no better or worse than any of the other acts available to him to perform.
- (ii) God's agent-causing an action is sufficient for his being responsible for it.
- (iii*) If (a) God is responsible for some good act and (b) he performs it for the right reasons, then he is thankworthy even if (c*) he can't do better or worse than what he does.

Since point (i*) is unproblematic and since (ii) is defended earlier, our only remaining task was to defend point (iii*). With that now behind us we have completed our defense of our objection to premise two of the *second* version of The Incoherence Argument.

CONJUNCTION emerges unscathed by either version of The Incoherence Argument.³³

NOTES

1. Some readers may wonder why we are focusing on divine thankworthiness rather than divine praiseworthiness. The reason is that this second premise wouldn't be as plausible if it claimed that a being is *praiseworthy* for something only if that something is freely chosen. Even incompatibilists can admit that it is sensible to say that a human is *praiseworthy* for something that is not freely chosen by her (e.g., her intelligence or physical beauty). But it doesn't seem reasonable to *thank* someone for something when you realize that something isn't up to her.

2. Since (in the case of God) the "right reasons" requirement will be satisfied, our name for the principle ('thankworthy-if-responsible') highlights only the responsibility requirement.

3. A parallel point could also be made for nondivine agents, namely, that there can be human responsibility without human freedom—though for different reasons (see Bergmann 2002).

4. Obviously, this premise involves the questionable assumption that God can't perform, in place of what does, an act that is neither better nor worse than the one he does perform. We will comment on this assumption below.

5. We've borrowed the term 'significant freedom' from Alvin Plantinga who uses it similarly in his 1974, 166. Of course, if it is to be useful in the Incoherence Argument, the revised no-significant-freedom thesis ($G \rightarrow \sim FS$) shouldn't be combined with the original unrevised not-thankworthy thesis given earlier:

($\sim F \rightarrow \sim T$) God isn't thankworthy for an act that wasn't performed freely.

Instead, it will have to be combined with the *revised* not-thankworthy thesis:

($\sim FS \rightarrow \sim T$) God isn't thankworthy for an act that isn't *significantly* free.

In the end, therefore, the usefulness of this revised strategy for defending the Incoherence Argument will depend in part on the plausibility of the revised not-thankworthy thesis. Below, in section II.C we will explain why the revised not-thankworthy thesis seems attractive to proponents of the Incoherence Argument. For the remainder of this section we shall keep our focus on how one might defend the no-significant-freedom thesis.

6. In addition to the two discussed below, we note here, but shan't pursue, a third objection. Premise 3* (which is the same as premise 3) is false:

3*. If X has it in its power to bring about p , q follows from p and q does not obtain then X has it in its power to bring about q .

Consider this example. Let F be "God foreknows long before X is born that X will freely do A at t ". Since X *freely* does A at t , X has it in her power to bring it about that D: "X doesn't do A at t ". D entails $\sim F$. So according to premise 3*, given that X freely does A at t , X has it in her power to bring it about that $\sim F$ —i.e., that God *lacked* the foreknowledge in question. But intuitively, since F is about the past, not even God can now bring it about that F is false.

7. On the side of naysayers see Howard-Snyder and Howard-Snyder 1994 and 1996, Morris 1993, and Kretzmann 1990. In *support* of 2* see Quinn 1982 and Rowe 1993, 2002 and 2003, chap. 6.

8. Here and throughout when we say there is no reason for preferring X to Y we mean there is no *all-things-considered* reason to prefer X to Y.

9. Note that our goal here is to explain why PT *seems* attractive and, thereby, to explain why the revised not-thankworthy premise *seems* plausible. It is our view that both PT and the revised not-thankworthy premise are false. See section III.E for our explanation of where the PT-defense of the revised not-thankworthy principle goes wrong.

10. Recall again why this premise seems plausible: if God is not free in performing an act, then it seems he was constrained or forced in which case he is neither responsible nor thankworthy for performing it.

11. Thus can Peter van Inwagen's paper "When is the Will Free?" be longer than a single word ("always")—long enough, indeed, to render "sometimes, but only rarely" at least plausible. See van Inwagen 1995.

12. If the true metaphysics of action is one according to which not all acts are intentional, then the possibility of unintentional acts represents the possibility of an agent being responsible for an act for which she is not thankworthy. For example, there may be unintentional acts which are such that the causal buck for the act stops with S. But S isn't thankworthy for the act if it wasn't intended. That explains why it is considered to be a joke for someone to thank her opponent in a competition for making the blunder she did: the opponent is responsible for the blunder but not thankworthy for it since it was unintentional. Notice that (TR) explains this fact: in addition to responsibility, (TR) requires for thankworthiness that the agent perform the act for the right reasons—this requirement being unsatisfied for unintentional acts.

13. It is sufficient for the occurrence of *e* that X exerts its power to bring about *e*.

14. One respect in which AC differs from the broadly Reidian definition of agent-causation proposed by Rowe in his 2000 will be discussed in III.C.

15. We lay no claim here to be rendering a verdict of ordinary-language philosophy or folk-semantics. Should it be said that proper Anglo-Saxon usage demands a moral component to 'responsibility', we would be happy to side with Aquinas in distinguishing—as Thomas did earlier in the *Summa* passage quoted just above—the moral-evaluative (i) from the genetic-causal (ii).

16. It is perhaps worth noting that Rowe, who is one of the main proponents of the Incoherence Argument, is also an agency theorist who assumes that agent-causation, as we've defined it, is a necessary condition of both freedom and responsibility. However, as we will discuss below, he denies our claim that agent-causation as we've defined it is sufficient for responsibility.

17. Recall that our version of incompatibilism is one according to which being the agent-cause of A is at least a *necessary* condition for being responsible for A.

18. See Plantinga 1982, pp. 67–70 and Morris 1987.

19. Objection: since '___ depends for its existence on ___' and '___ depends for its exemplification on ___' express distinct relations, the transitivity inference made here is an invalid one. Reply: the single operative dependence relation stands between the exemplification of properties, the existence of properties, and the activity of God.

20. See Bergmann and Brower (forthcoming) for a fuller development of that sort of argument against theistic activism.

21. Alexander Pruss (2003, section 6) suggests one alternative: it is the view that God's nature causes his actions but that, because of divine simplicity, God is identical with his nature, in which case *he* is the cause of his actions. This position simply identifies God's being the agent-cause of his acts with his nature causing his actions. We've enough on our plate without adding divine simplicity, and so shan't pursue a discussion of this alternative here.

22. Here and in what follows we'll use "God's nature entails that p" as shorthand for "God's having the nature he does entails that p."

23. It may be that the position we develop here has affinities with the views of Aquinas (see Stump 2003, pp. 102–07). One difference between our position and Aquinas's is that, although we think responsibility doesn't require the ability to do otherwise, we (unlike Aquinas) believe that freedom *does* require that ability. Another possible difference is that on the view we develop here, God's acts are agent-caused whereas it's unclear whether Aquinas thinks God's acts are agent-caused.

24. And anything that is a horse is capable of neighing, and conversely. See Porphyry 2003, §4 "Properties" and §9 "Genus and Property", pp. 11–12 and 14–15. According to Buridan rational non-animals like angels can be amused but can't express their amusement using animal parts like vocal chords; and non-rational animals like hyenas can make sounds like laughter but they lack the intellectual ability to appreciate humor. Since risibility requires both amusement and a physical expression of it, neither angels nor hyenas are risible.

25. The suggestion that no necessary truths are brute—that each is explained by another—is one we shan't take seriously.

26. Thus would Aristotle, after claiming in his *Posterior Analytics* that we have genuine understanding of something when we are aware of its *aitia* (explanation or reason), insist that it is necessary for demonstrative understanding that the premises of such syllogisms be "explanatory of the conclusion" (71b20–21)—famously distinguishing thereafter between mere deductions of facts and the more stringent deductions of "reasoned facts" (in I.13 at 78b22–38). For a recent discussion in the spirit of Aristotle's claim that the best examples of the latter explanatory proofs are found in geometry, and for an excellent bibliography of ongoing work on explanation in the mathematical sciences, see Mancosu 2001.

27. This is what his response to Objection II on p. 430 of Rowe 2002 amounts to.

28. Again, to request a story about what this impossibility *is* due to may, as we have argued above, be to request more than can be given. If the request for a story amounts to prohibiting us from leaving 'impossible' just as it is, where it is, full stop, then it comes from a conviction that either (i) all modal truths are explainable in terms of others, or (ii) some but not all modal truths are explainable in terms of others, or finally (iii) modal truths generally either amount to, or have for their truthmakers, something non-modal. We have denied (i), and herewith voice our rejection of the modal reductionism of (iii). As for (ii), we invite its defenders to provide some principled criterion of demarcation between brute necessities and the explicable ones, according to which criterion it can be seen that (NT) falls into the latter group.

29. Objection: If an action is agent-caused, it can't be performed for reasons because acts performed for reasons are caused not by agents but by the reasons in question (see Strawson 1995).

Reply: Agent-caused acts can be performed for reasons without being caused by those reasons. In such a case, the act is performed in light of reasons that incline the person to perform the act without causing the person to perform the act. For discussion of reasons, explanation, and (albeit free) agency, see Ginet 1995 and O'Connor 2000, chap. 5. So far as we can see, their arguments for the coherence of reasons-explanations in the presence of free-agent-causal scenarios suggest no prohibitions against wedding reasons-explanations and nature-entailing but agent-causal divine action.

30. Note that if she were to discover (on God's own testimony perhaps) that God was *caused* to raise her son, then, although she would, quite reasonably, be just as happy and still impressed by the power displayed and the goodness of its consequences, she could no longer sensibly attribute responsibility for raising her son to God. Hence she couldn't sensibly feel gratitude to him for raising her son.

31. This makes good on our promise, in note 9, to explain why the PT-defense of the revised not-thankworthy premise fails.

32. See note 29 in which we respond to the charge that God can't be the agent-cause of his acts if they are performed for reasons.

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