

Compatibilism, Evil, and the Free-Will Defense

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Abstract It is widely believed that (1) if theological determinism were true, in virtue of God's role in determining created agents to perform evil actions, created agents would be neither free nor morally responsible for their evil actions and God would not be perfectly good; (2) if metaphysical compatibilism were true, the free-will defense against the deductive problem of evil would fail; and (3) on the assumption of metaphysical compatibilism, God could have actualized just any one of those myriad possible worlds that are populated only by compatibilist free creatures. The primary thesis of this essay is that none of these propositions is true. This thesis is defended by appealing to a recently proposed novel, acausal, composite, unified theory of free action – the Theory of Middle Freedom – that evades the central problems plaguing traditional theories of metaphysical compatibilism.

Keywords Compatibilism · Freedom · Free-will defense · Deductive problem of evil · Free will · Evil · Middle freedom · Molinism · Metaphysical libertarianism

Love, we are in God's hand.
How strange now, looks the life he makes us lead.
So free we seem, so fettered fast we are!
I feel he laid the fetter: let it lie!

Robert Browning's (1855) *Andrea del Sarto* (49b–52)

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Introduction

It is widely believed that (1) if traditional theological determinism were true, in virtue of God's role in determining created agents to perform evil actions, created agents would be neither free nor morally responsible for their evil actions and God would not be perfectly good; (2) if metaphysical compatibilism were true, the free-will defense (FWD) against the deductive problem of evil would fail; and (3) on the assumption of metaphysical compatibilism, God could have actualized just any one of those myriad possible worlds that are populated only by compatibilist free creatures. The primary thesis of this essay is that none of these propositions are true. This thesis is defended by appealing to a recently proposed novel, acausal, composite, unified theory of free action – the Theory of Middle Freedom – that evades the central problems plaguing traditional theories of metaphysical compatibilism.

I proceed first by introducing James Sennett's argument against the possibility of embedding Alvin Plantinga's FWD against the deductive problem of evil in a compatibilist framework. Next, Harry G. Frankfurt's purported counterexample to the Principle of Alternate Possibilities is discussed for the primary purpose of more deeply probing the relationship between moral responsibility, libertarian freedom, and an agent's control over his actions. An investigation into this relationship is then further extended by invoking the Theory of Middle Freedom that is employed, initially, to argue that Sennett's misgivings concerning the relationship between Plantinga's FWD and metaphysical compatibilism are misguided. Jerry L. Walls, like Sennett, believes that Plantinga's FWD against the deductive problem of evil cannot succeed if metaphysical compatibilism were true. I next attempt to show, that the Theory of Middle Freedom also provides the resources for enabling Plantinga's FWD to evade Walls' criticism. I then argue that John Martin Fischer's appeals to 'semicompatibilism' and (with Mark Ravizza, S. J.) to 'guidance control' do not provide the resources necessary to deliver an account of compatibilist free action that is able to support a FWD in a traditional theological determinist framework – a framework in which each and every voluntary action (whether good or evil) performed by creatures is specifically and causally determined by God. Only the Theory of Middle Freedom, I conclude, clearly has the resources required to support a plausible traditional theological determinist framework for divine providential governance in a world overrun with evil.

The Problem Circumscribe

Suppose that all free actions performed by creatures in Alpha, the actual world, are compatibilist free actions. Further suppose that God exists, that all of God's actions are libertarian free actions, and that God providentially causally determines all events in Alpha (except His own libertarian free actions), i.e., suppose that traditional theological determinism is true in Alpha. If traditional theological determinism is true in Alpha, then God determines all human actions, including all *evil* human actions. If all free human actions are, in this manner, determined by God, then it appears that God Himself would be wholly morally responsible for all evil actions that are performed by humans. But God's being, thus, wholly morally

responsible for all evil actions that are performed by humans appears incompatible with God properly holding humans morally responsible for doing evil; yet, according to the Christian tradition, we *are* properly held to be morally responsible for doing evil. Antony Flew states this worry succinctly:

It is not only intellectually scandalous but also an outrage against justice and humanity to maintain that someone whom God arranges shall, freely and eagerly, act thus, may properly by Him be punished for so acting. Certainly the creature is a free agent, in as much as he is not acting under compulsion. But in his relations to his Creator he is, as it were, the unwitting subject of a total programme of post-hypnotic suggestion.¹

Furthermore, God's being morally responsible for the bringing about of evil in the world appears to be incompatible with God's being perfectly good;² yet, according to traditional Christian theism, God *is* perfectly good, for if we were to do evil under such theologically determined circumstances, then whether we were compatibilist *free* in such circumstances or not, it would not be *us* but *God* who is the primary, ultimate, and sufficient source of the evil that we do in virtue of God's *determining* us to do evil. However, it seems, no wholly good being would be the determining cause of others' evil acts. Therefore, for this reason as well, it appears that no free evil human act is a theologically determined compatibilist free act.

Recently, an argument similar to this one has been advanced by James Sennett in the course of objecting to the possibility of embedding Alvin Plantinga's FWD³ against the deductive problem of evil in a compatibilist framework.⁴ Sennett's charge is a serious one not only because God's causally determining evil human actions both appears to be exculpatory with respect to those evils acts God determines humans to perform and appears to be incompatible with God's perfect goodness, but it is at least arguably the case that, historically, some of the most prominent theologians within the Christian tradition have been compatibilists of a traditional theological determinist variety (including, for example, Jonathan Edwards and

¹ Antony Flew, 'Splitting Hairs Before Starting Hares', *The Personalist* 53 (1972), pp. 84–93, p. 91. Elsewhere, Flew referred to God under such circumstances as a 'Great Manipulator' who, Flew implies, is a mere pretender when it comes to being the 'Great Justiciar' in light of His alleged mass manipulation of humanity. See Antony Flew's 'Compatibilism, Free Will and God,' *Philosophy* 48 (1973), pp. 231–244.

² Cf. 'Leibniz attacks the Dominican view...in claiming that it is open to serious challenge when it come [sic] to explaining evil in the world. If the specific nature of every causal event is determined by God's causal contribution to the event, it seems difficult to avoid the conclusion that God is a direct and willing accomplice in every evil event that occurs' (p. 81). See Michael J. Murray's 'Leibniz on Divine Foreknowledge of Future Contingents and Human Freedom', *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 55 (1995), pp. 75–108.

³ See Alvin Plantinga, *God and Other Minds* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1967), pp. 131–155; *God, Freedom, and Evil* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1974), pp. 7–55; and *The Nature of Necessity* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978), pp. 164–190. Although I shall write (for ease of exposition) that it is *Plantinga's* FWD that is or is not compatible with metaphysical compatibilism, I mean my comments to remain *neutral* between Plantinga's and any other plausible version of the free-will defense.

⁴ James F. Sennett, 'The Free Will Defense and Determinism', *Faith and Philosophy* 8 (1991), pp. 340–353, is here responding to Edward Wierenga's 1985 review of the book *Alvin Plantinga* (eds. James E. Tomberlin and Peter van Inwagen, Dordrecht, Holland: D. Reidel Publishing Company, 1985) in which Wierenga argues that Plantinga's free-will defense is compatible with the truth of metaphysical compatibilism. See Wierenga's 'Review of Alvin Plantinga,' *Faith and Philosophy* 5 (1988): 214–219.

Martin Luther). Therefore, if Sennett is right, then it does not appear that adherents to those denominational traditions that have tried to remain faithful to what many believe to be the teachings of these influential theologians concerning divine providence can avail themselves to Plantinga's FWD.⁵

Interference & Control

Before our critically examining in greater detail Sennett's view concerning the depth of God's causal entanglement with evil in a compatibilist free-creature-filled world in which evil is legion, a brief review of Harry G. Frankfurt's well-known purported counterexample to the Principle of Alternate Possibilities (PAP) is in order.⁶ Frankfurt's insights invite us to reconsider the range of actions that one might think are required to be available to an agent in the context of performing free and morally responsible actions, and for this reason, examining his central contribution to this discussion might help activate those intuitions that are relevant to highlighting the possibility of developing a free-will defense in a compatibilist framework. Recall that Frankfurt asks us to consider a scenario in which a person I* (the intervener) wants another person S to perform a morally significant action A. I* has secretly implanted in S's brain a neuroregulatory device that I* can use to *cause* S to perform A if S even slightly hesitates to perform A before some time t, but not otherwise.

Now, suppose that S performs A libertarian freely before t. Clearly (and note that Frankfurt relies on this intuition for his main effect), under this circumstance, S could plausibly be held morally responsible for performing A in spite of the fact that I* had a significant degree of control over both *when* S acts and *which* act S performs before t. The reason, it seems, that *this* manner and degree of control over S's activity does not compromise S's moral responsibility for the actions S performs before t – in spite of the fact that, in virtue of being under I*'s control, S could not have done otherwise (in *some* important sense of 'could have done otherwise') – is at least partly because the libertarian free performance of A in this circumstance – in what John Martin Fischer has called 'the actual sequence'⁷ – was clearly under S's ultimate control.

Frankfurt and Fischer have not only helped sharpen our intuitions regarding what it means to say that 'S could (not) have done otherwise,' but they have also helped us to appreciate the fact that certain *kinds* of control over another person's actions – even when quite pervasive, as in the case of the aforementioned Frankfurtian intervener, I* – need not compromise one's *ultimate control* over the manner in which one acts (i.e., in this case, over one's acting libertarian freely in a given circumstance) and, thereby, need not compromise one's moral responsibility for one's

⁵ This perceived libertarian chauvinism on Plantinga's part has also troubled, among others, Antony Flew. Flew suspects that libertarian freedom does not accord with our ordinary usage of what it means to act freely, whereas compatibilist freedom does. See Flew's 'Compatibilism, Free Will and God' (1973). It is of interest to note that some philosophers and theologians also find compatibilism to be at the core of Aquinas' teaching on free will. See, for example, Reginald Garrigou-Lagrange, *The One God*, translated by Dom. Bede Rose (St. Louis: B. Herder, 1944).

⁶ See Frankfurt's 'Freedom of the Will and the Concept of a Person,' *Journal of Philosophy*, 68 (1971), pp. 5–20.

⁷ John Martin Fischer, *The Metaphysics of Free Will: An Essay on Control* (Cambridge, Massachusetts and Oxford, United Kingdom: Blackwell, 1994).

actions.⁸ The degree of control over S exercised by Frankfurt's intervener – in those cases in which the intervener does *not* intervene – preserves S's moral responsibility for A because the intervener's act of *being prepared* to prevent S from refraining from performing A does not at all *interfere* with S's *doing A* in virtue of the fact that *doing A* is what S would have done *whether or not* I* had intervened. Furthermore, I shall soon argue, there is no reason to believe that *going beyond mere preparation* increases (from a baseline of zero degrees) the degree of *interference* by the intervener. I shall next propose a manner in which even if the intervener *had* triggered the device on the heels of S's hesitation to perform A freely, the degree of *interference* involved in S's doing A freely *might* still remain zero.

Suppose that (unlike in Frankfurt's original example⁹) the Frankfurtian intervener, I*, possesses *middle knowledge*¹⁰ and that I* were to *cause* S to perform *precisely* that action which S *would have* performed libertarian freely at t *if S had been* allowed to perform action A libertarian freely at t.¹¹ In what sense would I*, in *this* instance, be *intervening*? Well, clearly, one could say, the intervention by I* in this instance would be to *cause* S to perform A rather than to allow S to perform A without being *caused* to perform A. In other words, in this case, I* *intervened* in S's doing A by altering the

⁸ This is not at all meant to imply that Frankfurt-style cases are uncontroversial. They clearly are not. For representative criticisms of Frankfurt-style 'counterexamples' to the 'Principle of Alternate Possibilities', see Robert Francis Allen, 'Re-examining Frankfurt Cases,' *Southern Journal of Philosophy*, XXXVII (Fall 1999), pp. 363-376, David Copp, 'Defending the Principle of Alternate Possibilities: Blameworthiness and Moral Responsibility,' *Nous*, 31 (1997), pp. 441-456, and Stewart Goetz, 'Frankfurt-Style Counterexamples and Begging the Question,' *Midwest Studies in Philosophy*, 39 (2005), pp. 83-105.

⁹ Some authors, for example, Keith Yandell, have mistakenly attributed to *Frankfurt's* intervener knowledge about certain relevant counterfactuals of creaturely freedom:

Suppose that I can make you do, or refrain from doing, anything I like, and that I always know what you are up to. Being benevolent, when you face a choice between good action G and bad action B, I let you do G if that is what you choose yourself but make you do G if I know that unattended you will do B. You are then my puppet, but you are a puppet who never does bad things (p.177). See Yandell's 'Some Problems for Thomistic Incarnationalists,' *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 30 (1991), pp. 169-182.

¹⁰ Middle knowledge is a category of divine knowledge posited by the sixteenth century Jesuit, Luis de Molina – a kind of knowledge situated *midway* between God's *free* knowledge (i.e., God's postvolitional knowledge of contingent truths) and God's *natural* knowledge (i.e., God's prevolitional knowledge of necessary truths). God's *middle* knowledge is that category of knowledge involving those events that are both *contingent* and *not* under God's control, including (but not limited to) the knowledge of what libertarian free creatures would freely do if placed in various possible circumstances. Middle knowledge, therefore, includes knowledge concerning those subjunctive conditionals that are termed 'counterfactuals of creaturely freedom.' For a rigorous explication of the value of middle knowledge for philosophical theology, see Thomas P. Flint, *Divine Providence: The Molinist Account* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1998). Not all metaphysical libertarians, however, believe that such counterfactuals of creaturely freedom possess truth value. For those who deny the possibility of middle knowledge, see Timothy O'Connor, 'The Impossibility of Middle Knowledge,' *Philosophical Studies*, 66 (1992), pp. 139-166, and Robert Merrihew Adams, 'An Anti-Molinist Argument,' *Philosophical Perspectives*, 5 (1991), pp. 344-353.

¹¹ I am assuming here two principles of action theory, one that is widely held and relatively uncontroversial, and the other that, although not widely held and more controversial, appears to me to be plausible. The first principle is that, possibly, *voluntary actions* in general can arise from multiple different sources: such actions can be determined, be agent-caused, or be simply indetermined. The second principle is that it is possible for *the very same voluntary action* to arise from any of these different sources, for example, it is possible that one voluntary action A, performed by agent S in possible world W, was causally determined, whereas *that very same voluntary action A* performed by agent S in another possible world W* was simply indetermined. Actions, on this view, are not individuated by their sources, but by other (primarily intentional and structural) properties.

mechanism by which S would have done A from, say, an agent-causal libertarian mechanism to a causally determined mechanism, but, by having done so, I* did *not* thereby *interfere with* S's doing A. Whether or not I* acted to change the *mechanism* by which S performed A from one that *would have* been agent-caused to one which *was* causally determined by I*, the end result was that S fulfilled his desire to A. A, in this instance, can be seen as flowing from the core of S's self; it is one of his explicitly chosen ends, a genuine object of his desiring to act in one way rather than another *irrespective* of whether A would have been agent-caused *by S* or agent-caused *by I** (such that, supposing that I* performs all of his actions by way of an agent-causal libertarian mechanism, I* agent-caused an action that causally determined S to A).

If 'being I*'s puppet' implies being caused to do whatever I* would like for S to do *independently* of what S himself *really wants to do* in this instance of acting, then S is *not*, in this regard, I*'s *puppet*, for in this instance, I* causally determines S to do whatever it is that S *himself* really wants to do. S, it seems, thereby remains free with respect to, and morally responsible for, performing A in this circumstance whether or not S's action A was *causally* initiated or mediated by S *or* by I* because S would have done A at t in C *whether or not* I* had intervened as previously outlined. The amount of *causal control* that I* possesses over S's action does not compromise S's *ultimate control* over and, correlatively, S's *ultimate moral responsibility* for A. Why might anyone think otherwise? Why, that is, think that the *causal source* of S's action A (not of *just any* action at all, but of that action that is S's – that action that flows from S's core self – that action that S *really wanted* to perform at t) is at all relevant to whether or not S is *morally responsible* for A?

There has recently been proposed a theory of free will, the 'Theory of Middle Freedom,' that gives more rigorous expression to the aforementioned metaphysical conjecture.¹² The Theory of Middle Freedom is a *composite, acausal, unified* theory of free action that centrally relies upon core insights from Molinism. It is *composite* insofar as it combines elements from agent-causal libertarian theories of free action with elements from compatibilist theories of free action. It is *acausal* insofar as free action, according to the Theory of Middle Freedom, does not fundamentally depend on the obtaining of any *particular* causal relations between one's actions and the source of one's actions (but, rather, to a first approximation, on a *non-causal* relation that obtains between the counterfactuals of creaturely freedom that partly comprise one's individual essence and one's voluntary acts). And it is *unified* in that it brings together agent-causal libertarian (or 'agent-libertarian') and compatibilist theories of free action (and can also easily be extended readily to assimilate simple indeterminist and causal indeterminist theories of free action and, in fact, every *possible* theory concerning the connection between agents and their free actions) into a single theory – a theory in which all free acts countenanced by the theory are free *in the same sense* – governed by a single metaphysical principle, *viz.* the Principle of Middle Freedom (PMF): Any determined voluntary act A that is performed by an agent S at time t in circumstances C in world W is an act that is, ultimately, under S's control and, hence, is an act that S *freely* performs, if and only if (a) S possesses agent-libertarian powers at t in C in W, and (b) if S *were* permitted to exercise his agent-libertarian powers in C* at t in W* (where 'C*' denotes circumstances in a possible or non-actual world W* that are at least 'relevantly similar' to C, and where W* is a world

¹² A. A. Howsepian, 'A Libertarian-Friendly Theory of Compatibilist Free Action,' *The Southern Journal of Philosophy* XLII (4), 2004, pp. 453–480.

closer to W than any other world in which S is permitted to exercise his agent-libertarian powers at t) S *would* agent-libertarian freely perform A at t in C*.

The key idea expressed in PMF is that free human actions do not depend upon those actions' mechanisms of implementation, but (to a first approximation) on the (non-causal) relation between one's actions and one's counterfactuals of creaturely freedom. PMF, thereby, presupposes that agents may possess agent-causal libertarian free powers even in those worlds in which such powers can never be exercised. In this manner, PMF establishes a connection between voluntary actions and what it is that agents *genuinely wish to do* in various circumstances in such a manner that even agents' *determined* actions can be seen to flow from agents' selves in a way that transparently reveals how such actions are properly connected to the agents who perform them; additionally, it does so in such a way that those compatibilist (middle) free actions are immune from widely proposed incompatibilist defeaters of traditional compatibilist free action.^{13,14}

¹³ 'Traditional compatibilism,' as I use this term, is any version of compatibilism that entails the 'demarcation thesis,' where the demarcation thesis is the thesis that *only some* determinants in the set of all possible determinants of voluntary action are capable of providing sufficient conditions for an agent's acting freely. For a more detailed explanation of PMF, how precisely it performs this revealing function, and how the Theory of Middle Freedom evades extant criticisms of traditional compatibilism, see Howsepien (2004).

¹⁴ A reviewer for this journal raised the following two objections to the Theory of Middle Freedom. First objection: 'The conditions cited are consistent with its being the case that the continuing correlation between what the agent is determined to do and what he would have done had he been permitted to exercise his libertarian powers is entirely due to the arbitrary decision of I*, quite independently of the agent's values and the agent's likely reaction if he were to discover what is going on. Hence, the agent is under the domination of I*. Hence, despite the correlation, the agent is not, after all, in control of his life and actions.' Response: Of course, in those instances in which some decision, arbitrary or not, by I* determines the agent to act in a way that is *independent of the agent's values* - in ways in which the agent would *not* have chosen to act in those circumstances - *then* the agent would *not*, in those instances, be in control of those aspects of his life. It is precisely those actions that *are* in accord with the agent's deep values (in virtue of being those actions that would be performed libertarian freely by the agent at that time in those circumstances, if he were at that time allowed to act libertarian freely) that the intervener does not *interfere* with simply by changing the source or mechanism of the action in question. Second objection: 'Suppose that God causally determines my doing A in circumstances C if and only if his middle knowledge reveals that if I were in C and God did not act, then I would do A libertarian-freely. If God determines my doing A in C, and the foregoing condition is fulfilled, and nevertheless my doing A is not under my control, then surely my doing A freely is not under my control. For the Theory of Middle Freedom does not specify any way in which I could effectively decide whether to do A freely or instead to do A unfreely.' Response: First, one need not endorse the Theory of Middle Knowledge in order to endorse the Theory of Middle Freedom; these theories are independent. Theism is not a prerequisite for the Theory of Middle Freedom, but it is for the Theory of Middle Knowledge. What *is* needed for the Theory of Middle Freedom is that counterfactuals of creaturely freedom are truth-valued. Second, according to the Theory of Middle Freedom, these truth-valued counterfactuals of creaturely freedom, as noted by Thomas P. Flint (1998), make reference *not directly* 'to creatures, but rather to the individual essences of such creatures, where the essence of a creature is simply the set of properties essential to it.' (p. 47) The truth-values of those counterfactuals of creaturely freedom that comprise a creature's individual essence, therefore, are not up to God or up to any other agent or entity; rather they are grounded in, or dependent on, or originate from, a creature's individual essence. Of course, the agent herself could not possibly *directly* and straightforwardly control the truth values of her counterfactuals of creaturely freedom *prior to her existence*. (And, in fact, some individual essences might not be instantiated at all and, hence, there would never *exist an agent* that controls the truth values of these counterfactuals.) It is, rather, in virtue of the (non-causal) relation between an agent S and S's individual essence, that an existing agent with agent-libertarian free powers - whether or not these powers are ever exercised - thereby controls which of her acts, *whatever* their source, are free or unfree, *by being such that* the agent *would* libertarian-freely perform that specific action, A, if S were placed in circumstance C. If there is mystery here (and, clearly there is) there does not appear to me to be any significantly greater mystery than can be found in the standard manner of understanding the relationship between creatures and counterfactuals of creaturely freedom in standard Molinist accounts, nor, for that matter, any significantly greater mystery than can be found at the very heart of libertarian freedom (or compatibilist freedom, or *any* theory of metaphysical freedom) itself (or themselves).

A 'Middle Freedom' Reply to Sennett

Sennett's primary reason for thinking that the causal source of one's actions *is* of crucial importance in one's making proper moral responsibility attributions is bound up with his endorsement of the following principle:

(P) God bears no moral [responsibility] for the evil determined by his actualizing T(W) [where T(W) is a set of states of affairs such that God actualizes all of its elements in bringing about the actual world] only if W_1 (causally determined by the actualization of T(W) [sic] is such that there is no W^* such that

- (a) It is in God's power to actualize W^* or to causally determine that W^* be actualized.
- (b) W^* is morally preferable to W_1 (i.e., W^* contains a balance of moral evil preferable to that of W_1).
- (c) God knows a and b.¹⁵

Sennett then goes on to evaluate (P) as follows:

Given that God is omniscient, condition (c) is met trivially for any world in which a and b are true. W^* meets conditions (a) and (b) just in case it is an SD world [i.e., a Soft Determinism world, where Soft Determinism is the thesis that all events are causally determined and that there are some free actions] and it is a morally better world than W_1 . Since... [according to P]...God is not morally responsible for the evil in W_1 only if there is *no* world meeting conditions (a) and (b), it follows that God is not morally responsible for the evil in W_1 . Hence, if *all* events are causally determined, God is morally justified in actualizing T(W) only if W_1 is the best possible world in which SD is true.¹⁶

Sennett next proposes two putative counterexamples to the claim that W_1 is the best possible world in which SD is true: First (C1), there being a possible world W' that is like the actual world in every respect except that mass murderer Ted Bundy commits no murders in W' ; and, second (C2), there being a possible world W'' , 'in which SD is true and the causal chains are such that all free moral agents are determined freely to choose only the good[.]'¹⁷

Sennett's (C2) parallels J. L. Mackie's¹⁸ challenge to the coherence of theism based on the deductive problem of evil, a challenge that Plantinga's FWD meets head-on. The Theory of Middle Freedom, however, makes clear that Plantinga's FWD does *not* require agents who act libertarian freely as Sennett believes, for just as it is possible that there is no feasible world populated by *libertarian free* moral agents that choose only the good (or choose more good and less evil than obtains in

¹⁵ Sennett, 'The Free Will Defense and Determinism,' p. 346.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ John L. Mackie, "Evil and Omnipotence," *Mind* 64 (1955), reprinted in *God and Evil*, edited by Nelson Pike (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1964), pp. 46–60.

W₁), it is also possible that there is no *compatibilist middle free* feasible world populated with moral agents that meets these conditions. Just as it is the case that what *libertarian free* creatures do libertarian freely is ultimately contingent and not up to God, so too what *middle free* creatures do *middle freely* is ultimately contingent and not up to God *even if* God *determines* middle free creatures to act and, hence, even if it *is up to God* what such free creatures *do simpliciter*. In the theological determinist middle freedom scheme, although S's performing action A itself depends upon God, the *valence* of A (i.e., whether or not A is performed *freely*) does not; rather, the *valence* of A contingently depends upon S (or, more precisely, upon those properties that comprise S's individual essence).¹⁹ Thus, if the Theory of Middle Freedom is true, then *contra* Sennett, although it may be *true* that, 'if SD is true, then what [compatibilist free creatures] do is ultimately up to God', it is *false* that, 'a soft determinist who wishes to construct a FWD is saddled with the enormous task of arguing that this is the best of all possible SD worlds.'²⁰

Suppose, for example, that God causes me to perform an action A such that my performing A is something for which I am blameworthy. The Theory of Middle Freedom does not entail that *my doing A* is under my control (in Fischer's regulative sense), but only that *my doing A freely* – and, correlatively, my being *blameworthy* for A – is under my control (in that same sense). It may be the case that I would do A at t come what may, i.e., it may be the case that doing A at t is *unavoidable* for me. In that case, I could not help but do A at t. What I *could* help, however, is whether or not I do A *freely* at t. Being able to *do* otherwise at some time t is not, according to the Theory of Middle Freedom, necessary for my acting freely at t; the Theory of Middle Freedom does, however, entail that if I did A at t and A was under my control (in the sense made explicit by the Theory of Middle Freedom), then I did A freely at t. Therefore, if A is an action for which I am blameworthy, my being blameworthy for A itself depends critically on my counterfactuals of freedom. Performing A *in a blameworthy way* is, therefore, within my control (in Fischer's sense). In this way, God or some other determinant, could act as the sufficient cause for my doing *something* – my performing an *action* the performance of which is unavoidable for me – such that if I performed that action freely I'd be morally blameworthy or praiseworthy for having performed it, but such that the sufficient conditions for so acting *themselves* are not also sufficient for that action's being an action *for which* I am morally praiseworthy or blameworthy.

Although I am not able to avoid performing A itself stripped, as it were, of its being an act for which I am blameworthy, it is *I* (or, more strictly speaking, my individual essence) who contribute the blameworthiness or praiseworthiness to a particular action that I am determined to perform – in virtue of those counterfactuals of freedom, the truths of which are governed by a subset of contingent properties that are *of* my individual essence and, in this manner are both *mine* and, insofar as

¹⁹ According to Thomas Flint (in conversation), the most illuminating way to understand Frankfurt's scenario is to say that although S cannot do other than perform action A, S *can* choose whether or not to perform A *libertarian freely*, i.e., the *mode* (or what I am calling the *valence*) of A is up to S, although the doing of A is not. Likewise, in the Theory of Middle Freedom theological determinist model, the *valence* of A depends upon S, but S's *doing* A does not; rather, S's doing A depends upon God.

²⁰ Sennett, 'The Free Will Defense and Determinism,' p. 346.

they are contingent properties of *my* essence, are *under my control*. So far as praiseworthiness or blameworthiness is concerned, therefore, what is critical according to the Theory of Middle Freedom is not *what* we do, but the *manner* in which we do it and, in turn, the manner of our doings is contingent upon the kinds of characters that we have, characters that are revealed by and reflected in our counterfactuals of freedom. This underscores the *agent-primacy* of the Theory of Middle Freedom: What dictates *one's* praiseworthiness or blameworthiness is not primarily *what one does* (for what one does, if determinism is true, is unavoidable for one) but *who one is* (which is not unavoidable for one and which is reflected in one's counterfactuals of freedom).

Thus, according to the Theory of Middle Freedom when conjoined with traditional theological determinism, God's freedom-compatible causal determination of the events in W^* is dependent upon the counterfactuals of freedom that are true of those middle free creatures that populate W^* . For those W^* residents to *be* (middle) free and, hence, morally responsible for some of their actions, God's determining influence must respect the contingent essence-governed counterfactually drawn boundaries of these residents' morally significant actions. It is consistent, therefore, *both* with the Theory of Middle Freedom and with Molinism that there are possible worlds that God cannot actualize.

Thus, if Plantinga's doctrine of 'transworld depravity'²¹ is possibly true in those worlds populated by libertarian free creatures, it is also possibly true in those worlds populated by middle free creatures all of whose acts are determined. And just as '[t]he libertarian can be content that this is not the best possible world in which L [i.e., libertarianism] is true,'²² so too the 'Middle Freedom Molinist' can be content that this is not the best possible world in which the Theory of Middle Freedom is true. *Contra* Sennett, therefore, principle (P) fails and, therefore, Plantinga is correct to acknowledge the truth of Wieringa's conclusion regarding the compatibility of the FWD with metaphysical compatibilism: Free agents in the context of the FWD need not be *libertarian* free, they need only to be *unfettered* (a technical notion that Plantinga had the foresight to introduce over 30 years ago²³), i.e., they need only to be free in *either* the libertarian sense *or* free in the compatibilist sense.²⁴

²¹ Plantinga's doctrine of transworld depravity states that it is *possible* that every creaturely essence is transworldly deprived where, 'An *essence E* suffers from transworld depravity if and only if for every world W such that E contains the properties *is significantly free in W* and *always does what is right in W*, there is an action A and a maximal world segment S' such that

1. S' includes E 's being instantiated and E 's instantiation's being free with respect to A and A 's being morally significant for E 's instantiation.
2. S' is included in W but includes neither E 's instantiation's performing A nor E 's instantiation's refraining from performing A .
3. If S' were actual, then the instantiation of E would have gone wrong with respect to A . See *God, Freedom, and Evil*, pp. 52–53.

²² Sennett, 'The Free Will Defense and Determinism,' p. 346.

²³ In *God and Other Minds*, p.135.

²⁴ More precisely, Plantinga states that *unfettered* actions are actions that are either 'free in [Antony] Flew's sense' (i.e., compatibilist free) or 'causally undetermined[.]' *God and Other Minds* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1967), p. 135. I am taking Plantinga's term 'causally undetermined' to mean undetermined *simpliciter*.

Walls on Moving from Defense to Theodicy

A similar strategy may be employed in an effort to mount an adequate response to Jerry L. Walls in his ‘Why Plantinga Must Move from Defense to Theodicy.’²⁵ Like Sennett, Walls believes that metaphysical compatibilism is incompatible with Plantinga’s FWD and, therefore, that Plantinga’s FWD is committed not merely to the *possibility* of libertarian free will, but also to its actuality. Hence, suggests Walls, Plantinga ought explicitly to go beyond a mere free will *defense* to a free will *theodicy* (i.e., a model demonstrating the consistency of there being evil in the world and there existing a necessarily omnipotent, omniscient, and omnibenevolent being), one essential element of which is a commitment to the role of specifically *libertarian* free actions on the part of creatures.

As Walls has noted, Plantinga has refused to rule out the possibility that his FWD can succeed even if metaphysical compatibilism were true.²⁶ Thus, Walls is correct to ‘take Plantinga to mean that he need not, qua free will defender, believe in libertarian freedom...[and to] take him to be saying that in his role as free will defender, [although he *believes* that we are free in the libertarian sense] for all he knows we are actually not free in the libertarian sense. Perhaps all our actions are determined and we are free only in the compatibilist sense.’²⁷

Walls believes that Plantinga is mistaken about taking this possibility seriously. Rather, Walls states that, given the evil in the world and assuming the truth of traditional Anselmianism, ‘it is not even possible that we are free only in the compatibilist sense[.]’²⁸ Walls gives the following argument for this claim:

1. If God is necessarily perfectly good, He eliminates all evil He can properly eliminate in all possible worlds.
2. In all worlds in which persons are not free or are free only in the compatibilist sense, God could properly eliminate all moral evil.
3. Therefore, there are no possible worlds in which persons are free only in the compatibilist sense, and in which there is moral evil.
4. Our world contains much moral evil.
5. Therefore, in our world persons are free in the libertarian sense.²⁹

What should we say about this argument? Well, it is clearly valid, but is it sound? Walls is sensitive to the fact that some might press him about the truth of premiss 2, but he is not sanguine about the prospects of any objection against premiss 2’s succeeding for, ‘moral evil is the product of human choices, and if freedom and

²⁵ Jerry L. Walls, ‘Why Plantinga Must Move From Defense to Theodicy,’ *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 51 (1991), pp. 375–378.

²⁶ Again, see Plantinga’s *God and Other Minds*.

²⁷ Walls, ‘Why Plantinga Must Move From Defense to Theodicy,’ p. 376.

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ *Ibid.* Walls also turns this argument around in a way that, he claims, shows that if no humans in the actual world are free in the libertarian sense, then it is false that Anselmianism is true. More specifically, he claims that if no humans in the actual world are free in the libertarian sense, then it is false that God is necessarily good.

determinism are compatible, then God could determine all persons to make only good moral choices.³⁰

The truth of premiss 2, of course, depends on the truth of the aforementioned conditional, viz. if freedom and determinism are compatible, then God could determine all persons to make only good moral choices (call this conditional 'C'), for otherwise it would be the case both that freedom and determinism are compatible and that it is *not* the case that God could determine all persons to make only good moral choices. Therefore, if C is false, then premiss 2 is false; and if premiss 2 is false, then Walls's argument against Plantinga fails.

Now, as we have seen, if the Theory of Middle Freedom is true, then it is possible both that metaphysical compatibilism obtains and that it is false that God could determine all human persons to make only good moral choices. For, if the Theory of Middle Freedom is true and if it is possible that all human individual essences are transworldly depraved, then, in spite of the fact that God can *cause* humans to perform acts that are good, it is possible that God is *not* able to determine that *all* humans perform *only* good acts. But if this is possible, then premiss 2 is false, and if premiss 2 is false, then Walls's argument against Plantinga fails.

Fischer's 'Semicompatibilism'

John Martin Fischer's 'semicompatibilism' also appears to threaten the broad success of the FWD against the problem of evil, for it follows from Fischer's view that it is metaphysically possible for God to have actualized a world in which all persons are causally determined only to do good.³¹ According to Fischer's semicompatibilism, what he calls 'weak reasons-

³⁰ Ibid., p. 377. John Bishop appears to concur: 'Perhaps God *can* ensure that all created free beings always freely do right - certainly, this would seem to be so if compatibilism is true.' (p. 15, footnote 12), 'Evil and the Concept of God', *Philosophical Papers* 22 (1993), pp. 1-15. Elsewhere Bishop states that 'Free Will Defenders *can* be compatibilists - but only provided they upgrade the Defence[.]' (p.115) In fact, what Bishop means in this passage is that free-will defenders can be only *soft* compatibilists (where *soft compatibilism* entails that only some free actions are determined). He argues later that what I have been calling 'hard compatibilism' (where *hard compatibilism*, let us say, is the view that, necessarily, all free actions are determined actions) is a metaphysical view that is not open to free-will defenders. See Bishop's 'Compatibilism and the Free Will Defence', *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* 71 (1993), pp. 104-120. Although it might initially appear that the Theory of Middle Freedom is incompatible with the truth of hard compatibilism, the PMF is fashioned in such a way that it attempts to provide conceptual space for the compatibility of hard compatibilism and middle freedom. Suppose, for example, that fatalism is true and, hence, that there is only one possible world W_F . In that case determinism is true in W_F and, furthermore, there are no possible worlds in which agents perform libertarian free actions. Therefore, in W_F , if agents perform any free acts at all then, necessarily, hard compatibilism is true. Might any of those (hard) compatibilist acts performed in W_F also be *middle free*? Perhaps. But only if there are *non-actual, albeit not possible*, worlds in which some agents act libertarian freely. I believe there are such worlds and, hence, that the FWD would be viable even if hard compatibilism - to wit, even if fatalism - were true. A thoroughgoing defense of this claim must wait for another day.

³¹ Fischer explicitly discusses the potential threat that his theory of free will is to the FWD (in *The Metaphysics of Free Will*, p. 183):

Now it might be that the proponent of the free will defense thinks that acting freely requires freedom to do otherwise...But I have severed this connection. And, given the separation of acting freely from freedom to do otherwise, I do not see why God could not have set things up so that human beings always choose the right thing as a result of a weakly reasons-responsive mechanism. That is, I do not see why God could not have ensured in advance that agents have guidance control of their actions and yet always choose and do the right thing. Of course, a world in which there is no evil caused by humans acting freely may not be the best of all possible worlds for some reason apart from considerations of free will, but I do not see how one could argue for this conclusion based upon considerations relevant to free will. This admittedly sketchy presentation at least casts doubt on the free will defense.

responsiveness' underwrites a plausible account of 'guidance control,' where guidance control is that freedom-relevant condition that, unlike 'regulative control,' does *not* require alternative possibilities. Fischer, at one point, suggests that one's having guidance control over an action is both sufficient and necessary for one's being morally responsible for that action.³²

As its name suggests, weak reasons-responsiveness requires a 'looser fit' between actions and reasons than what Fischer calls 'strong reasons-responsiveness'. Fischer claims that moral responsibility requires that a weak reasons-responsive mechanisms lead to an action in the actual sequence. According to Fischer,

Under the requirement of strong reasons-responsiveness, we ask what would happen if there were a sufficient reason to do otherwise (holding fixed the actual kind of mechanism). Strong reasons-responsiveness points us to the alternative scenario in which there is a sufficient reason for the agent to do otherwise (and the actual mechanism operates) which is most similar to the actual situation. Put in terms of possible worlds, the non-actual possible worlds which are germane to strong reasons-responsiveness are those in which the agent has a sufficient reason to do otherwise (and in which the actual kind of mechanism operates) which are *most similar* to the actual world. In contrast, under weak reasons-responsiveness, there must exist some possible world in which there is a sufficient reason to do otherwise, the agent's actual mechanism operates, and the agent does otherwise. This possible world needn't be the one (or ones) in which the agent has a sufficient reason to do otherwise (and the actual mechanism operates) which is (or are) most similar to the actual world.³³

There is good reason to doubt the plausibility of Fischer's view. In particular, I see no good reason to believe that weak reasons-responsiveness is a plausible account of any kind of control that is sufficient for moral responsibility. Curiously enough, Fischer himself expresses reservations about the sufficiency of weak reasons-responsiveness for moral responsibility. He appears to make his reservations known first by parenthetically stating that the sufficiency of weak reasons-responsiveness is sufficient for moral responsibility, 'at least to a first approximation.'³⁴ He elaborates upon this in a revealing footnote:

Originally, Ferdinand Schoeman kindly brought to my attention a sort of example that threatens my claim that weak reasons-responsiveness is sufficient for guidance control. Imagine someone who is, by any ordinary criterion, insane. This person commits a barbarous act, such as killing a number of persons on the Staten Island Ferry with a saber. And suppose that this individual would have killed the persons under all possible circumstances except one: he would have refrained if he believed that it was Friday and thus a religious holiday. Intuitively, the individual is highly irrational and should not be considered morally responsible, and yet he seems to satisfy the conditions of acting from a reasons-responsive mechanism. Weak reasons-responsiveness obtains by virtue of the agent's responsiveness to a 'bizarre' reason, even

³² Ibid., p. 168.

³³ Ibid., pp. 166–167.

³⁴ Ibid., p. 168.

though the agent is not responsive to a wide array of ‘relevant’ reasons...I now think the account of guidance control in terms of weak reasons-responsiveness needs to be refined in part to accommodate such examples. But I do not think the revision will be radical; most importantly, I do not see any reason to think it will alter the fundamental nature of the account of moral responsibility as *not* requiring alternative possibilities.³⁵

I do not see how Fischer will be able to escape the full weight of Schoeman’s objection; specifically, I do not think that Fischer will be able to evade what I take Shoeman’s objection to be simply by focusing on the ‘bizarreness’ of the reasons to which one is weakly reasons-responsive. It seems to me that what Schoeman is gesturing towards is a much deeper objection than simply the one to which Fischer is attending.

As I see it, the main problem for Fischer’s theory is this: It gives no account of why it is that how one *would* act under the influence of sufficient reasons, under a large number of counterfactual conditions – some quite far removed from one’s *actual* circumstances – is at all *relevant* to the making of proper moral responsibility attributions. Put differently: *so what* that Jones responds to sufficient reasons differently (even if these reasons are, in some robust sense, *relevant* reasons) under conditions that are radically different from the ones in which he actually finds himself. It does not seem that Fischer’s theory *explains* the *relevance* of this alleged critical connection between weak reasons-responsive mechanisms, agents, and moral responsibility.

Even supposing that S’s psychoneurological mechanism is weakly reasons-responsive, Fischer has given us no good reason to think that it is up to S *to which* reasons he will actually respond. There is, in Fischer’s model, no satisfactory account given for how to understand the claim that it was up to *Jones himself* to act on *one reason rather than another*. The critical variable in need of elucidation is the nature of the *connection* between Jones and the reasons *for which* he acts – a connection which makes clear that Jones is acting *for* those reasons with regard to which he is weakly reasons-responsive (not simply *in accord* with these reasons) and, thereby, which makes clear that *Jones* is himself *in control* of the acts that he performs. In the absence of such an explanation, Fischer will be unable to ward off challenges to his account that posit extraneously implanted responsibility-undermining weak reasons-responsive mechanisms that nevertheless appear to meet his specifications for mechanisms that issue forth in morally responsible actions. Certainly, in such cases involving brain manipulation, for example, Fischer would *not* want to say that Jones is morally responsible for his actions. Rather, the *mechanism* implanted in Jones’ brain is what controls Jones rather than its being Jones himself who is in control of the operation of the mechanism.

Surprisingly, Fischer himself appears to concur. Toward the end of *The Metaphysics of Free Will* (1994), he writes:

I believe the first approximation to an account of moral responsibility for action which I have sketched is attractive in part because it begins to consider the

³⁵ Ibid., p. 243, footnote 8.

history of an action and the relationship between the reasons the world presents and the agent. But clearly the account needs to be filled in and refined substantially. Indeed, as it is presented it would seem vulnerable to an objection similar to the one I have leveled at the mesh theories. More specifically, I have suggested that an agent is morally responsible for an action insofar as the action issues from a mechanism which is weakly reasons-responsive. But it may be that the actual operation of this sort of mechanism occurs as a result of a responsibility-undermining process - direct stimulation of the brain, hypnosis, and so forth. So whereas my approach suggests that we look to the past rather than solely the current time-slice, it may only be 'locally historical,' where what is needed (arguably) is a more globally historical theory of moral responsibility. I concede this point, and I intend to develop a more globally historical theory in the future.³⁶

I do not believe that Fischer will succeed. Fischer's primary aim in *The Metaphysics of Free Will: An Essay on Control* is to show that once one abandons PAP, there can be no independent action-theoretic motivation for one's embracing non-determinism.³⁷ But this appears to be so only if one is able plausibly to distinguish free and morally responsible determined actions from determined actions that are not free and for which one is not morally responsible. It is not, I believe, in an agent's more global history that one will find these roots of freedom and moral responsibility. Rather, a more local theory will suffice; but it must be a local theory that - unlike Fischer's - is invulnerable to being undermined by standard responsibility-undermining processes (as Fischer concedes). Fischer's appeal to there being a nomologically possible world, 'in which the same mechanism operates, there is sufficient reason to do otherwise, and the agent recognizes the reason, chooses, and acts on it',³⁸ although closer to the target than many of its alternatives, still widely misses the mark: What Fischer needs is not simply a generically (nomologically) possible world with a different past, but specifically a non-actual world in which the agent activates those libertarian free powers the exercise of which no sufficient causes *could* possibly undermine. It seems, therefore, that only a *composite* theory of free action and moral responsibility - a theory that, like the Theory of Middle Freedom, is based upon a foundation of agent-causal libertarianism - can deliver this sort of invulnerability.

History, Mesh Theories, & Moral Responsibility

Fischer makes perhaps the most sophisticated attempt at defending a traditional compatibilist view of moral responsibility (with Mark Ravizza, S. J.) in *Responsibility*

³⁶ Ibid., p. 209.

³⁷ Fischer believes that the sole plausible reason for holding that determinism is incompatible with moral responsibility is that deterministic causes deprive agents of alternative possibilities. But this, I have argued, is false. According to the Theory of Middle Freedom, the reason that *some* deterministic causes undermine free and morally responsible actions is *not* in virtue of depriving agents of alternative possible routes of action, but because some such causes compel agents to act in ways that are not really *up to them*, in ways that they *really* do not *want* to act.

³⁸ This quote is taken from Kandri Vihvelin's careful critical review of Fischer's book (p. 480). See Vihvelin's 'John Martin Fischer, *The Metaphysics of Free Will* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994)', *Nous* 32 (1998), pp. 406-420.

and Control,^{39,40} in which the “more globally historical theory” to which Fischer previously gestured is more deeply developed and defended. Were this theory to be successful, arguably, it might also possess the resources necessary to undermine the possibility of one’s constructing a viable FWD in a compatibilist framework. A central claim of this more elaborate theory (like its predecessor theory) is that *guidance control* grounds moral responsibility and an agent exhibits guidance control over an action, ‘to the extent that the action issues from his own reasons-responsive mechanism.’⁴¹ Guidance control, therefore, requires both this mechanism’s involving *the agent’s* action and this mechanism’s being *appropriately responsive to reasons*. Being ‘reasons-responsive’ is an *ahistorical* property of an agent, one that is cross-sectional, involving only a ‘current time slice’ or a ‘snapshot’ of the agent. A mechanism being ‘an agent’s own’, however, is characterized as being a *historical* property, that is, a property that in some interesting way depends on features of an agent’s history. Moral responsibility, therefore, according to Fischer and Ravizza’s theory, is essentially a *historical* notion.

According to Fischer and Ravizza (1998) one motivation for the claim that moral responsibility is a historical notion is ‘the apparent inadequacies of various current time-slice models of moral responsibility.’⁴² One representative approach to moral responsibility that, according to Fischer and Ravizza, particularly appears to illustrate this inadequacy is the approach to moral responsibility developed by Harry G. Frankfurt.⁴³ According to Frankfurt’s well-known account, ‘an agent is morally responsible for an action if there is a conformity (or mesh) between his second-order volition [i.e., assessments regarding which of our first order desires should move us to perform a particular action] and his will.’⁴⁴ Moral responsibility on Frankfurt’s view depends on one’s second order volition being in harmony with, or *meshing* with, one’s will. Such ‘mesh theories’ of moral responsibility, as Fischer and Ravizza refer to them, are ahistorical insofar it does not appear to matter how the meshing has come about: The history of how it happened to come about that one’s will and one’s second-order volitions happen to mesh does not appear to be important in Frankfurt’s view. Frankfurt himself is explicit about this point, claiming that, ‘to the extent that a person identifies himself with the springs of his actions, he takes responsibility for those actions and

³⁹ John Martin Fischer and Mark Ravizza, S.J. *Responsibility and Control: A Theory of Moral Responsibility*, (Cambridge University Press, 1998). Although sophisticated and thoughtful, even Fischer and Ravizza concede that they have not produced a *decisive* defense of the compatibility of determinism and moral responsibility, only that they “have rendered the compatibility claim highly attractive” (p. 236). I do not believe they have done even this much. It is, I contend, only a theory of compatibilism that includes libertarian elements that has any hope of successfully fending off the usual, and to my mind decisive, *manipulation objections* (whether this manipulation be by agents, artifacts, or natural determinants) to traditional compatibilist theories of free will or moral responsibility.

⁴⁰ Also see John Martin Fischer and Mark Ravizza, “Responsibility and History,” in Peter A. French, Theodore E. Uehling, and Howard K. Wettstein, Eds., *Midwest Studies in Philosophy* 19: Philosophical Naturalism (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1994), pp. 430–451.

⁴¹ Fischer and Ravizza, *Responsibility and Control: A Theory of Moral Responsibility*, p.170.

⁴² *Ibid.*, p.184.

⁴³ Harry G. Frankfurt, ‘Freedom of the Will and the Concept of a Person’; ‘Three Concepts of Free Action: II,’ *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, suppl., 49 (1975), pp. 113–125; and ‘Identification and Wholeheartedness,’ in Ferdinand Schoeman, Ed., *Responsibility, Character, and the Emotions* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1987), pp. 27–45.

⁴⁴ Fischer and Ravizza, *Responsibility and Control: A Theory of Moral Responsibility*, p. 184.

acquires moral responsibility for them; moreover, the questions of how the actions and his identifications with their springs are caused is irrelevant to the questions of whether he performs the actions freely or is morally responsible for performing them.⁴⁵ Fischer and Ravizza discuss other mesh theories of moral responsibility (for example, those mesh theories proposed by Gary Watson⁴⁶ and Richard Brandt⁴⁷, among others) and not only reject them all, but posit a ‘problem with *all* mesh theories, no matter how they are refined,’ in virtue of their all being ‘purely structural and ahistorical. Moral responsibility, however, appears to be a historical phenomenon: Whether an agent is morally responsible cannot be read off his snapshot properties, but is at least in part a matter of how those properties came to be instantiated.’⁴⁸

Fischer and Ravizza concede that there exist multiple ‘clear cases in which the relevant snapshot features are “put in place” in ways that rule out moral responsibility. For example, these features...can be induced by such processes as hypnosis, brainwashing, and even direct stimulation of the brain.’⁴⁹ In these kinds of cases, claim Fischer and Ravizza, ‘it is plausible to think that the individual is *not* morally responsible.’⁵⁰ In light of all of this, it appears *prima facie* plausible to Fischer and Ravizza that moral responsibility attributions crucially depend on the *history* underlying an agent’s mental configuration.

Fischer and Ravizza present two cases intended to make reasonable their contention that moral responsibility is a historical notion, one involving the injection of alcohol in a driver against his will and the other involving forced crack cocaine addiction, after which the reader’s intuitions concerning moral responsibility are probed when these episodes of *involuntary* substance use are contrasted *ceteris paribus* with episodes of *voluntary* substance use. Both of the cases discussed by Fischer and Ravizza are used to buttress the claim that ‘the selected mesh could be generated by an apparently “responsibility-undermining” process or mechanism, and thus, the *mere existence* of the mesh is *not* indeed sufficient for moral responsibility; the *history* behind the mesh is also relevant.’⁵¹ They add, ‘If the mesh were produced by certain sorts of brainwashing or subliminal advertising, presumably we would not hold the agent morally responsible for his behavior (in spite of the existence of the mesh).’⁵² Further adding that, certain ‘science fiction’ cases of ‘direct stimulation of the brain provide graphic ways of motivating the point that the mere existence of a configuration of mental ingredients is not sufficient for moral responsibility...[since] [w]hen the...mesh...in the selected ingredients – whatever they are – is produced in these ways, the mechanism that issues in the relevant behavior is *not*, in an important sense, the *agent’s own*.’⁵³

Note first that, in light of Fischer and Ravizza’s account, the Theory of Middle Freedom appears to be a kind of mesh theory: One’s voluntary action in this theory must mesh with one’s counterfactuals of creaturely freedom in order for one’s act to be a free

⁴⁵ Frankfurt, ‘Three Concepts of Free Action,’ pp.121–122. Quoted in Fischer and Ravizza, *ibid.*, p. 185.

⁴⁶ Gary Watson, ‘Free Agency,’ *Journal of Philosophy* 72 (1975), pp. 205–220.

⁴⁷ Richard Brandt, ‘Blameworthiness and Obligation,’ in A.I. Melden, ed., *Essays in Moral Philosophy* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1958), pp. 3–39.

⁴⁸ Fischer and Ravizza, *Responsibility and Control: A Theory of Moral Responsibility*, pp. 186–187.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p.187.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 196.

⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 197.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 197.

act and, to a first approximation, for one to be morally responsible for one's action.⁵⁴ But is the Theory of Middle Freedom really a mesh theory? Well, it clearly does require, as stated, for proper moral responsibility attribution, a meshing of one element with another. However, one element that participates in the (preliminarily construed) meshing, namely, the counterfactuals of freedom true of the acting agent, has an important *historical* feature, namely, it is a counterfactual (or perhaps more perspicuously, a subjunctive) conditional that is true of the agent and *has been* true of the agent *ever since* the agent commenced existing (*and* was true of the agent's *essence* even *before* the agent commenced existing). It *is*, in this sense, a part of – in fact, a critically important part of – the agent's *history*. It just so happens to be a part of the agent's history that *does not change*. We can say, then, that one element in the moral responsibility mesh posited by the Theory of Middle Freedom is part of the agent's *static* history (as opposed to its *dynamic* history), in spite of the fact that this historically anchored property of one's essence can also be construed as being a kind of 'snapshot' property.⁵⁵ In one sense, therefore, the Theory of Middle Freedom is, in Fischer and Ravizza's sense, a mesh theory (*viz.* in that sense in which one's static history is part of one's history proper) and in another sense it is not.

Also note that, even if the Theory of Middle Freedom is construed to be a mesh theory after all, unlike the mesh theories considered by Fischer and Ravizza, the Theory of Middle Freedom does *not* rule out free and morally responsible acts simply because the *source* of those acts happens to be hypnosis or brainwashing or direct brain stimulation or divine determinism *or any other conceivable source* of voluntary action. So long as an action is voluntary, and so long as the agent performing that action is such that her counterfactual of creaturely freedom in that circumstance meshes with the action there and then performed, then, according to the Theory of Middle Freedom, the agent in question is free and (so long as other critical ingredients for morally responsible action are present) morally responsible for performing the action in question. In the Theory of Middle Freedom, one (preliminarily construed) element of a moral responsibility mesh, namely a counterfactual of creaturely freedom true of an agent, is *invulnerable to being undermined* by any source whatsoever. *Any* voluntary action from *any* source, so long as it is middle free, is an action that is an *agent's own*, is an action that reflects

⁵⁴ The qualification is critical here. In fact, I do not believe that all actions for which one is morally responsible are free actions. It seems plausible that, on their view, a free action or, more likely, a pattern of free actions, could result in voluntary actions that are not free yet for which one is morally responsible nonetheless.

⁵⁵ Fischer and Ravizza at least appear to suggest that the *relata* of the mesh relation are essentially "elements of one's mental economy" (Fischer and Ravizza, *Control and Responsibility: A Theory of Moral Responsibility*, p. 185), whether occurrent or dispositional. The *relata* of the mesh relation in the Theory of Middle Freedom are on the one hand, agent A's voluntary actions, and on the other hand (to a first approximation) A's counterfactuals of freedom. More precisely, the second *relatum* in the mesh relation in the Theory of Middle Freedom is some *mere propensity* (or as Suarez has termed it, a *habitude*) of A – specifically a 'dispositional' property of A's essence – that itself corresponds to a certain subjunctive conditional of creaturely (libertarian) freedom true of A. *Either* the counterfactual conditional or the agent's mere propensity to act in that manner specified by the counterfactual conditional (in virtue of the fact that there exists a unique mere propensity to action for every unique counterfactual of freedom true of an agent) could be used to bridge the mesh, however in virtue of the fact that A has the counterfactuals of freedom that A in fact has *because* of the (contingent) mere propensities of its essence, not the other way around, it might be more proper to specify the *relata* of the mesh relation in the Theory of Middle Freedom as a voluntary action and a mere propensity to libertarian free action in the circumstance under which one acts.

an agent's values, is free *simpliciter*, and an action for which one may be morally responsible.

What, according to Fischer and Ravizza, makes an action both an agent's own and one that issues forth from an appropriate reasons-responsive mechanism and, thus (to a first approximation), an action for which an agent is morally responsible? One's 'taking responsibility' for the specific mechanism that issues forth in that action. This *process* of taking responsibility is historical in character, developmentally grounded, and involves one's having certain (dispositional) beliefs about oneself. This, in brief and to a first approximation, according to Fischer and Ravizza, is how an agent *makes* certain mechanisms his own. But could not the proper dispositions, beliefs, actions, etc., issuing forth in putative morally responsible acts have been *implanted* in an agent? Could not, in other words, an agent have been *manipulated* into acting (whether electronically, or through years of indoctrination by an isolated cultic and paranoid family, or by repeated hypnotic inductions, or by way of Traditional Theological Determinism, or in virtue of bursts of brain-altering radiation, or other suspect natural determinants) in ways that satisfy Fischer and Ravizza's constraints on morally responsible action? Fischer and Ravizza claim that their theory of moral responsibility is immune to such responsibility-undermining manipulations because in such cases the agent would '*not* have formed his view of himself in the appropriate way'⁵⁶, thereby specifying a *third* condition for morally responsible action, viz., 'the agent's view of himself must be based on his evidence in an appropriate way.'⁵⁷ None of the above parenthetically noted traditional responsibility-undermining determinants would, according to this view, result in an agent's developing a belief about himself based on evidence *in an appropriate way*. And how, according to Fischer and Ravizza, is this notion of 'an appropriate way' supposed to be understood? We are told by Fischer and Ravizza that they are not offering a 'reductive account' of this notion and, hence, that this notion of an agent's developing a view of oneself in 'an appropriate way' 'must', at least for the moment, 'remain unanalyzed.'⁵⁸

This gaping hole that remains in Fischer and Ravizza's theory of moral responsibility does not, to my mind, bode well for their theory. It is not, after all, a hole that was unanticipated. *Every* theory of traditional compatibilism faces this central problem that Fischer and Ravizza's theory faces; in fact, every theory of traditional compatibilism has, I dare say, *collapsed* at precisely this point. No theory of traditional compatibilism has ever provided a satisfactory account of that which Fischer and Ravizza have decided to leave unanalyzed, and both the history and the nature of this problem very strongly suggest that no theory of traditional compatibilism ever will provide such an account. Only a theory of (non-traditional) compatibilism like the Theory of Middle Freedom – a theory that endorses core commitments of metaphysical libertarianism – appears to have the resources necessary to defeat (by wholly dispensing with) this core ('demarcation') problem that Fischer and Ravizza and every other metaphysician attempting to defend compatibilism has faced.

⁵⁶ Fischer and Ravizza, *Responsibility and Control: A Theory of Moral Responsibility*, p. 236.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

Conclusion

Until Fischer and Ravizza provide greater clarity regarding what it means for an agent to develop a view of himself in ‘an appropriate way’, it will not be possible for us to discern whether Fischer and Ravizza’s particular theory of traditional compatibilism is or is not – and if it is, under what circumstances it is – compatible with a free-will defense against the problem of evil.⁵⁹ The Theory of Middle Freedom suffers from no such unclarity. According to the Theory of Middle Freedom *there is no demarcation problem*. In other words, the Theory of Middle Freedom entails that *any and all* determinants that are sufficient causes of *voluntary action* can also be sufficient sources of *free and morally responsible action*. There is, therefore, in this composite, acausal, unified theory, no conceptual space for ‘manipulation’ of any kind undermining free and morally responsible action. What is critically important, according to the Theory of Middle Freedom, in order for there to exist free and morally responsible actions, is simply that there exist agents with agent-causal libertarian powers who perform voluntary actions and that there exist relevant counterfactuals of freedom true of those agents such that, at the time of acting, an agent’s actions mesh with that agent’s relevant counterfactuals of freedom. Thus, it appears that, among extant theories of free and morally responsible action only the Theory of Middle Freedom clearly possesses⁶⁰ the resources necessary to provide an account that is able to support a free-will defense in a traditional theological determinist framework, a framework in which each and every voluntary action (whether good or evil) performed by creatures is specifically causally determined by God.⁶¹

⁵⁹ It is epistemically possible that at least *some* divinely determined human actions – depending critically on *how* they were divinely determined – might just meet Fischer and Ravizza’s conditions for morally responsible action. However, again, without knowing precisely what the notion of *appropriateness* amounts to in their theoretical framework, this possibility must remain merely epistemic.

⁶⁰ It is of interest to note that Hugh J. McCann has recently proposed an intriguing theory concerning God’s relationship to creation in which God is the first cause of voluntary human action (including *evil* action) and in which God is completely sovereign over creation, but in which God’s complete causal sovereignty is compatible both with divine impeccability and with moral authenticity on the part of created agents. McCann’s view involves an understanding of God’s relationship to his creation as being analogous to an author’s relationship to his characters in a novel. Although I confess both to being intrigued with McCann’s account and to finding it unconvincing on its face, I must also confess to not fully understanding it. See his ‘The Author of Sin?’ *Faith and Philosophy*, 22 (2), (April 2005), pp. 144–159.

⁶¹ I am most grateful to Alvin C. Plantinga and Thomas P. Flint for comments on previous versions of this essay.