

PROVIDENCE, FREEDOM, AND HUMAN DESTINY

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I. Introduction

According to some theists, God will never completely destroy moral evil or banish it from his creation entirely; instead, he will eventually confine moral evil to a specific region of his creation, a region known as hell, and those condemned to hell, having no hope of escape from it, will live out eternity in a state of estrangement from God as well as from each other. Let us call that the traditional doctrine of hell. Elsewhere I have argued that any form of theism which includes such a doctrine, even one that tries to preserve consistency by denying the universal love of God, is in fact logically inconsistent.¹ But moderately conservative theists, as I have called them, have an argument for the traditional doctrine that some have found convincing, one that emphasizes libertarian free will.² The argument is this. Because God is perfectly loving, he wills the good for every created person and wills the redemption of all who have fallen into evil; but because he has also given his loved ones the gift of freedom and some of them in fact exercise their freedom to reject him forever, it is simply not within his power, even as an omnipotent being, to redeem all of those who fall into evil. According to moderately conservative theists, therefore, the following hypothesis, which I shall call the Rejection Hypothesis (RH), is at least possibly true:

(RH) Some persons will, despite God's best efforts to save them, freely and irrevocably reject God and thus separate themselves from God forever.

I shall argue in this paper, however, that if God is a necessary being and omnipotence, omniscience, and loving kindness are among his essential properties, then (RH) is not even possibly true. I shall assume, contrary to what I have argued elsewhere,³ that the choice specified in (RH)

is indeed coherent; that is, if God were to permit it, a rational agent could freely choose to reject God forever. But within the context of that assumption, I shall defend two additional claims: first, that if, as seems likely, God could have populated a universe with free agents none of whom are irredeemable in the sense that they freely reject him forever, then he would most certainly have done so; and second, that if God could not have so populated a universe, and knew that he could not, then he would have faced a catastrophe of such proportions that he would have had no choice but to prevent it, either by not creating any persons at all or by interfering with human freedom as the lesser evil. Even if the kind of choice specified in (RH) were coherent, in other words, God would necessarily prevent anyone from making such a choice; so if God is also a necessary being, then (RH) is not even possibly true.

But first a point of clarification. Just what might it mean for a person S freely and irrevocably to reject God? It would mean, I take it, that S freely resolves never to be reconciled to God and then freely sustains a commitment to such rejection in the face of all that omnipotent love might do to change S's mind; it would mean, therefore, that there is nothing *both* within God's power to do *and* consistent with the interest of all other created persons that would (weakly) bring about repentance in S. But here one wonders what the motive (or reason) for such rejection might be. If God is the ultimate source of human happiness and separation from God can bring only greater and greater misery into one's life, as Christians have traditionally believed, then why should anyone want to reject God? Well, S might be ignorant of certain facts about God, or mired in self-deception, or (perhaps as a consequence of previous bad choices) in bondage to unhealthy desires; any one of these conditions might provide S with a motive for rejecting God. Under such conditions as these, however, it would always remain open to God to remove S's ignorance, or to shatter S's illusions, or to free S from S's bondage to desire; far from interfering with S's freedom of choice, such actions would, at least in cases of extreme moral corruption, tend to restore true freedom of choice. And once God had purged S of all ignorance and deception and bondage to desire, what motive for rejecting God would then remain? Is the supposition that one might *freely* choose eternal misery for oneself and do so in the full knowledge of what

one is choosing in fact coherent? I think not. But for the purposes of this paper, I shall assume, as I have said, that such free choices are in themselves perfectly coherent (even if finally impossible for the reason that God would necessarily prevent them). My purpose here is to examine the kinds of providential control that might be compatible with libertarian free will; in particular, I want to consider the options that an omnipotent and omniscient God might have had in creating free persons and how we might expect a loving God to have dealt with them.

I shall begin with this question: Is it possible that God was powerless to create a universe (or to make actual a world) of free agents all of whom are, of their own free will, eventually reconciled to him? How one answers this question will depend, at least in part, on how one conceives of divine omniscience, a matter about which contemporary philosophers disagree. So let us begin with some distinctions. Let us say that God has *simple foreknowledge* if he knows every future event, including every future choice of every free agent, and let us say that God has *middle knowledge* if, in addition to his simple foreknowledge, he knows the truth value (either *true* or *false*) of such counterfactuals as these:

- (1) If Servetus had not been burned at the stake and had been allowed to live, he would have forgiven those who accused him unjustly in Geneva.
- (2) If Don Coe were to win the Oregon lottery next year (and the other circumstances of his life were to remain roughly the same as they are now), he would make a sizeable contribution to the American Philosophical Association.

Middle knowledge, then, includes far more than simple foreknowledge; it includes a knowledge of how every possible free agent would act in every possible set of circumstances. Of course many philosophers deny that middle knowledge is truly possible,⁴ and others deny that even simple foreknowledge is compatible with free will;⁵ but it is not my purpose here to settle such disputes as these. Instead, I shall examine the implications of three possible views: (1) the view, increasingly popular today, that God has neither middle knowledge nor a simple foreknowledge of future contingencies; (2) the view, often associated with De Molina, that God has middle knowledge as well as a simple foreknowledge of future contingencies; and (3) the view, which has received little

attention, that God has a simple foreknowledge of future contingencies but no middle knowledge. I shall argue that, regardless of which view a theist adopts, we have no reason to think (RH) even possibly true.

II. Providence Without Foreknowledge

Increasingly popular today, as I have said, is the view that God is omniscient in this sense: he knows all that it is logically possible to know, but neither middle knowledge nor a simple foreknowledge of future contingencies is a possible form of knowledge. Such a view is compatible, perhaps, with the possibility that God cannot *both* leave all created persons free *and* reconcile all of them to himself; but that should provide little comfort for those who claim that (RH) is possibly true.

In the first place, given such a view, neither God nor anyone else can *now know* that (RH) is true; that is, neither God nor anyone else can now know that some persons will not only freely reject God but also freely sustain a commitment to such rejection in the face of all that omnipotent love might do in the future to change their minds. If you deny foreknowledge of God, therefore, you cannot consistently hold, at the same time, that some free persons, those condemned to hell, are somehow beyond any hope of restoration; for however corrupt and rebellious a sinner might become and however many ages might pass, an infinity of hope would remain that God will yet find a way to restore that sinner to repentance and life and to do so without interfering with (what might remain of) that sinner's freedom of will. Nothing short of the certain knowledge that God will never achieve such reconciliation, in other words, could possibly remove all hope for it.

But more than that. If God is essentially omniscient but has no knowledge of future contingencies, then propositions about such future contingencies are, it seems to follow, neither true nor false. For if God is essentially omniscient, then the person who is God necessarily knows all true propositions; and if, therefore, this person does not know that a proposition p is true, then p is not true at all. Or consider the following principle, which makes no reference at all to divine omniscience:

(P₁) It is necessary that, for any proposition *p* and time *t*, *p* is true at *t* only if it is logically possible that someone (or other) knows at *t* that *p* is true at *t*.

This principle seems to me unassailable. It is one thing to insist that, even though no one in fact knows that *p* is true, *p* might be true nonetheless; it is quite another to insist that, even though it is logically impossible that *anyone* (including an omniscient being) should know that *p* is true, *p* might be true nonetheless. The latter claim seems altogether empty. One could say, I suppose, that a tenseless proposition such as

(3) Smith freely does A at time T₂,

though unknowable at an earlier time T₁, is nonetheless true at T₁ if, and only if, at T₂ and every moment subsequent to T₂ (3) is *both* true *and* knowable in the relevant sense. But then, in the event that Smith should do A freely at T₂, how would the view that (3), though true at T₁, is (logically) unknowable at T₁ differ in substance from the view that (3) is neither true nor false at T₁? On the one view, (3) is true but (logically) unknowable at T₁, then becomes knowable as well as true at T₂, and remains knowable forever afterwards; on the other, (3) is neither true nor false at T₁, then becomes true at T₂, and remains true forever afterwards. So far as I can tell, there is no substantial difference here at all; at the very least, the latter way of talking is just as reasonable as the former. And if we adopt the latter way of talking—if we adopt (P₁), that is—we can then defend the following conclusion: If neither God nor anyone else can now know that propositions about future contingencies are true, then such propositions are not true at all; so if neither God nor anyone else can now know that (RH) is true, then (RH) is not true either.

But more than that. If no propositions about future contingencies are now true, then neither is (RH) so much as *possibly true*. For compare (RH) with a more specific proposition about some future contingency, a propositions such as (3) above. Even though (given our present assumptions) (3) is neither true nor false at T₁, it remains possible that (3) should be true at some subsequent time and therefore possible that (3) should be true at some time or another; in that sense we can say, speaking rather loosely, that (3) is at least *possibly true*. But (RH) is quite different from (3) in this regard; it is not even possible that (RH) should be true at some specific time

or another. And to claim that a proposition p is possibly true even though it is not possible that p should be true at some specific time or another would be remarkable indeed. So if neither God (an essentially omniscient being) nor anyone else can ever know that (RH) is true, we may safely conclude, I think, that (RH) is not even possibly true.

I have heard but one objection to my line of argument in this section. Though he may not himself want to defend the objection, William Hasker once suggested (in a letter) that, according to some moderately conservative theists, a past tensed proposition relevantly similar to (RH) may be both true and knowable. His point was that some persons may *already* have rejected God so decisively that it is no longer possible for them to change their minds; and if that were so, then God could know, even in the absence of foreknowledge, that a past tensed proposition relevantly similar to (RH) is true. If some have already rejected God irrevocably, then it matters not, in the present context, whether others will also do so in the future. The difficulty with this objection, however, is two-fold: First, no one would claim, I presume, that some have already rejected God so decisively that it is now *logically impossible* for them to change their mind; logical impossibilities do not, after all, come into being in time. So for any sinner S who has already rejected God with some degree of fervor, there is a possible world W that shares an initial segment with the actual world up to the present time (including S's rejection of God) and in W, even if not in the actual world, S will finally repent of all wrong doing and be reconciled to God. Of course one might so define "rejection" that S truly rejects God at a time T only if S's mind never changes at some time subsequent to T; then it would indeed be logically impossible for S both to reject God and then later to repent of such rejection. But in that case God could no more know at the present time that S has already rejected him than he could know that (RH) is true. And that brings me to a second (and more important) consideration. If the kind of impossibility in question is not *logical* impossibility but something like *psychological* impossibility, then it is precisely the kind of impossibility that can change over time; that I find a given action psychologically impossible today does not imply that I will find it so next year. And not only that, the psychological impossibilities that result from a slide into moral corruption are, I believe, just the kind of impossibilities that an

omnipotent being *can* overcome without interfering with human freedom. If I sink deeply into moral corruption, an omnipotent being may be unable, consistent with my freedom, simply to reconstitute me with a good character, but he surely can, as often as he likes, release me from my *bondage* to a bad character.

Consider, by way of analogy (and I offer this merely as an analogy), the high school dropout who begins experimenting with drugs and, through a series of choices made at least partly in ignorance, acquires an addiction to heroin. We might suppose that our addict, whom I shall call David, is truly responsible for his addiction, that he knew a good deal about the dangers of addiction and about the misery that such an addiction can bring. At the beginning of his experimentation, however, David would presumably not have known *experientially* just how great the danger is, whatever he might have been told, or just how miserable the drug would eventually make him. Though truly free at the outset (let us suppose) and fully responsible for his addiction, he would never freely and knowingly have chosen misery for its own sake; but sooner than he could possibly imagine, he loses his freedom to resist the drug. Now in a case such as this, a physician who readjusts the balance of chemicals in David's brain in an effort to cure him of his addiction is in no way violating his moral freedom—not even if (especially not if) the drug has so deranged him that he is no longer free to submit to treatment. The physician's aim is rather to restore David to freedom and to a degree of rationality. And the same would be true of a God who releases terribly corrupt persons from their bondage to unhealthy desires or from the psychological impossibility of doing what is right; whether such bondage is their own fault or not, a God who releases them from it and restores them to freedom, but neither causes them to act rightly nor prevents them from continuing to act wrongly, would in no way violate their moral freedom.

Is it not at least possible, however, that some persons have already made the free choice both to reject God and to give up their freedom in the process?—and if that is so, would not God's restoring such persons to freedom itself be a disregard for, if not a violation of, their free choices made in the past? Here we must distinguish between two cases: one where a person S freely chooses a given end and is fully informed about (and fully appreciates) what it is that S is

choosing, and one where S freely chooses a given end at least partly in ignorance of what it is that S is choosing. In the latter case, even where S chooses to give up S's own freedom (whatever exactly that might mean) and is fully responsible for that choice, a loving God who later removes S's ignorance of the true nature of S's choice and restores S to freedom, perhaps using the consequences of S's own choice as a means of doing both, would not in that way disregard S's freedom but thereby pay it the highest respect. Only in the former case, therefore, would the question of God's disregarding human freedom even be relevant. But in that case the nature of the imagined choice is by no means clear. If our heroin addict above *wanted* an addiction with all the misery and torment that such an addiction entails, if in the full knowledge of the alternatives and in the absence of an overpowering (and uncontrollable) desire for the drug, he had freely chosen his addiction because that is just what he wanted, then perhaps *any* attempted cure would disregard his moral freedom. But not only does nothing seem to qualify as a motive for such a choice: in the absence of middle knowledge, not even God could know ahead of time that the addict really wanted what the addict thought he wanted. That is because we often think we want certain ends until we achieve them; then we discover that we never really wanted them at all.⁶ In order for our pursuit of an end to be fully informed, therefore, we must know with certainty what judgment we would make if perchance we should achieve it. And the same is true for God; in order for God to know that *our* pursuit of some end is fully informed, he must know what judgment we would make if perchance we should achieve it. So how could a God without middle knowledge now know that some persons have already made a fully informed decision to reject him and to give up their own freedom *forever*? The answer is that he could not know this, because he could not now have reason to believe that, if restored to freedom at some future time, those who have indeed rejected him for a season would continue to do so in the future. And that point seems to me decisive. For the very reason that in the absence of middle knowledge God could never know that (RH) is true, neither could he ever have reason to believe that some sinner had already made a *fully informed decision* to reject him forever.

I conclude, therefore, that if God has neither middle knowledge nor a simple foreknowl-

edge of future contingencies, then neither God nor anyone else could ever have reason to believe that some sinners are beyond the possibility of restoration; nor could anyone have reason to believe that (RH) is true; nor would (RH) in fact be true; nor would it be so much as possible that (RH) is true. If God is perfectly loving, moreover, he would never give up on any of his loved ones, however corrupt some of them might become and however far they might stray from him.

III. Providence with Middle Knowledge

I now turn to the assumption that God has middle knowledge as well as a simple fore-knowledge of future contingencies. Given this view of divine omniscience, God retains a good deal of providential control over created free persons, even though he does not, so to speak, cause it to be the case that a free person wills in a given way. God may not bring about a person's free actions in Plantinga's *strong* sense, but he does bring them about in Plantinga's *weak* sense.⁷ Suppose, for example, that each of the following subjunctive conditionals is true:

- (4) If God were to subject Smith to experiences A, B, and C, then Smith would freely repent of all wrong doing.
- (5) If God were to subject Smith to experiences A and B but not C, then Smith would freely refuse to repent of all wrong doing.

If God knows that (4) and (5) are both true, he is in a position both to bring it about (weakly) that Smith freely repents of all wrong doing and to bring it about (weakly) that Smith freely refuses to repent of all wrong doing. We might imagine that C involves a special form of punishment that God knows to be particularly well suited for Smith's personality; but though C provides an occasion for Smith to repent and in fact influences Smith in that direction, it is neither a sufficient cause of, nor a member of a set of conditions causally sufficient for, such repentance. The assumption here is that Smith is truly free (in a sense incompatible with determinism) but that God also knows the conditions under which Smith would freely repent of all wrong doing. And if God has such knowledge, he can presumably act upon it in his effort to bring reconciliation to a fallen world.

But it still remains *possible*, one might argue, that God is powerless to bring about (weakly) repentance in every sinner; it remains possible that some sinners suffer from a malady far worse than Plantinga's transworld depravity, what I shall call *transworld reprobation*. Now a person suffers from transworld depravity in Plantinga's sense if every possible world in which that person always freely chooses rightly belongs to the set of worlds that God is powerless to make actual.⁸

Similarly:

- (D₁) A person S suffers from *transworld reprobation* if, and only if, every possible world in which S faces one or more free moral choices and *either* (a) always freely chooses rightly *or* (b) eventually and freely repents of all wrong doing is a world that God is powerless to make actual.

So if some persons have transworld reprobation (as an accidental property, of course), then God faces this dilemma: No matter what circumstances he places them in or how he responds to them, they will never freely repent of their wrong doing. But if God had middle knowledge from the beginning, then it was always open to him not to create such persons at all; by merely contemplating the essence of a person,⁹ God would know whether that person was in fact redeemable (not because transworld reprobation is an essential property of the person possessing it, a property *in the essence*, but because it is an accidental property *of the essence*). Accordingly, where a *creaturely essence* is one whose instantiation would be a created free agent, we can also say:

- (D₂) A creaturely essence E suffers from transworld reprobation if, and only if, every possible world in which *the instantiation of E* faces one or more moral choices and *either* (a) always freely chooses rightly *or* (b) eventually and freely repents of all wrong doing is a world that God is powerless to make actual.

Now if transworld reprobation were truly possible, then one of three different possibilities would confront a creator: Either (a) all creaturely essences would suffer from transworld reprobation, or (b) none of them would suffer from it, or (c) some of them would suffer from it and some would not. If all creaturely essences should suffer from transworld reprobation, then it would not be within God's power to bring it about that a single created person always freely chooses rightly nor would it be within his power to bring it about that a single person freely repents of all wrong doing. But if at least some creaturely essences should be free from this malady,

then it would be open to God to create only those persons who instantiate these essences, those who are both free and redeemable in one way or another. A moderately conservative theist might argue, however, that even if some creaturely essences do *not* suffer from transworld reprobation, the following possibility remains: Some created persons will freely enter into everlasting fellowship with God only if others experience everlasting damnation and therefore everlasting separation from God. For it is at least possible, a moderately conservative theist might insist, that God faces this dreadful reality: He must bring about (weakly) the damnation of some in order that he might bring about (weakly) the salvation of others; it is possible, in other words, that the company of the redeemed in heaven will remain faithful only because they have seen what happens to those who do not remain faithful. In that event, there would be no feasible worlds (that is, no possible worlds within God's power to make actual) in which God saves some persons but damns no one.

Or suppose there are such feasible worlds, those in which God saves some persons and damns no one. A moderately conservative theist might yet insist upon another possibility: that God can increase the number of saved persons in heaven by bringing about the everlasting damnation of others. In a recent paper, William Lane Craig defends just such an idea.

It is possible that the terrible price of filling heaven is also filling hell and that in any other possible world which was feasible for God the balance between saved and lost was worse. It is possible that had God actualized a world in which there are less persons in hell, there would also have been less persons in heaven. It is possible that in order to achieve this much blessedness, God was forced to accept this much loss.¹⁰

According to Craig, then, God's purpose is to produce an *optimal balance* between saved and unsaved; that is, he wants to include as many as he can in the company of the redeemed and to eliminate as many as he can from the company of the damned. But it is possible, says Craig, that had God made actual a world in which fewer persons are damned, he would also have had to settle for a smaller company of the redeemed. So Craig's idea is this: It is possible that God instantiated some essences that suffer from transworld reprobation (or transworld damnation, as he calls it) as a "terrible price" for filling heaven; it is possible, in other words, that

(6) God has actualized a world containing an optimal balance between saved and

unsaved, one in which some persons are unsaved and those who *are* unsaved suffer from transworld reprobation.¹¹

In that way, God damns only those whom he never could have saved anyway, and in damning them he supposedly manages to save more than he otherwise could have saved.

But are all of these alleged possibilities genuine? Is it possible, for example, that even *some* creaturely essences should suffer from transworld reprobation? I am persuaded, for reasons similar to those mentioned in the Introduction, that this is not possible. Once we fully think through the concepts of *freedom* and *power* and *moral corruption*, we shall come to see that the very concept of an irredeemable person is deeply incoherent.¹² Compare the idea of an irredeemable person, or that of transworld reprobation, with Plantinga's idea of transworld depravity. It seems entirely possible that, in every feasible world which includes the instantiation of some creaturely essence E, the instantiation of E slips up at least once; this may even seem *probable* if you believe, as I do, that a degree of ambiguity, separation, and blindness is an essential element in the process by which God creates a free, independent, and rational agent. I see no reason to think it even possible, however, that in every feasible world which includes the instantiation of E, the instantiation of E freely chooses eternal damnation and therefore eternal misery for itself. With respect to any *rational* agent S, it is, I should think, within God's power to impart to S (over time) a clear revelation of what separation from God would entail; it is therefore within his power to remove all of the ignorance and to shatter all of the illusions that make evil choices possible in the first place. And if that is true, then there are, for any given person S, feasible worlds in which God undermines (over time) every possible motive that S might have for rejecting him. As I understand the Christian view, moreover, a fundamental "contradiction" exists on the side of evil and a fundamental asymmetry exists in the relationship between good and evil. Though it is quite possible that someone should continue freely to choose the good for an indefinite period of time, it is not possible that someone should continue freely to choose evil; over the long run (by which I mean to include the afterlife) evil will always undermine and destroy itself. Neither, it seems to me, is it possible that, because certain "counterfactuals of freedom" are true, the salvation of one

person, or even that of a given *combination* of persons, might "require," from the perspective of God's providential control, the damnation of other persons; at least this is not possible, I shall suggest below, if salvation provides a guarantee of future blessedness. For the present, however, I shall concede the possibility that *some* creaturely essences suffer from transworld reprobation, the possibility that *all* of them suffer from it, the possibility that no created persons would *freely* enter into everlasting fellowship with God unless some should experience everlasting damnation, and even the possibility that the number of the redeemed in heaven "depends," in the way that Craig suggests, upon the number of the damned in hell. We must still ask how a loving and omnipotent God would deal with such possibilities in the event that he should confront them as dreadful realities.

Now one point is, I take it, utterly noncontroversial. Had *every* creaturely essence suffered from transworld reprobation, God would have found that intolerable; either he would have chosen not to instantiate any creaturely essences at all, or he would have set his sights, regretfully perhaps, on lesser goods that do not require free will of the incompatibilist kind. And similarly, I believe, for the possibility that *some*, though not all, creaturely essences suffer from transworld reprobation; in that event, God would simply have eliminated from consideration those who do suffer from it. But that, as we have seen, is more controversial. For it is at least possible, Craig argues, that the following is true: If God should instantiate some creaturely essences that suffer from transworld reprobation, he would then be able to achieve a larger company of the redeemed in heaven. Even if that were true, however, Craig has neglected one all-important point: that the lost, simply by being lost forever, would bring intolerable suffering, not only into their own lives, but into the lives of *others* as well. Suppose that when my daughter was born, God had the choice of giving me a child whom he knew to be irredeemable or of giving me one whom he knew he could eventually bring into fellowship both with himself and with other persons. If, under those conditions, God had given me a child that suffers from transworld reprobation, he would have done irreparable harm to me. He could, of course, always deceive me concerning the fate of my child, producing within me a kind of blissful ignorance; but on the Christian view, God is in-

capable of such immoral deception. And apart from such deception, God cannot escape this dilemma: Either I will love my child even as I love myself, or I will not. If, on the one hand, I do so love her, then her being lost to me forever would be the kind of evil for which there could be no conceivable compensation; I cannot *both* love my child as myself *and* be happy knowing that she will be forever miserable.¹³ If, on the other hand, I do not so love her, if I am, or become, so calloused that I do not experience her loss as my own loss, then two things follow: first, that I have a serious moral defect myself, and second, that I therefore have no capacity for the kind of happiness that is supremely worthwhile.¹⁴ God cannot give me a daughter who suffers from transworld reprobation, therefore, without doing irreparable harm to me: Either he will not save me from my callousness and my sin, or if he does save me from that, he will make me forever miserable. It is not merely out of love for those who would be lost, therefore, that God would refuse to create irredeemable persons; it is rather out of love for those who are *not* lost.

That is also why a loving God would never engineer the damnation of some of those he could have saved, some who do not suffer from transworld reprobation, in order to save others.

According to Craig:

one could argue that so long as people receive sufficient grace for salvation in whatever circumstances they are, then they are responsible for their response in such circumstances and cannot complain that had they been in different circumstances, then their reaction would have been different.¹⁵

But that misses the point altogether. The issue is not whether the damned are *responsible* for their damnation; the issue is whether God would permit some people to damn themselves and thereby to do irreparable harm to *others*. Consider again David, our high school dropout who becomes addicted to heroin. As we assumed in the previous section, David is fully responsible for his addiction; he had sufficient grace, if you will, to avoid it. But however responsible he may have been for it—indeed, just because he is responsible for it—his addiction will bring indescribable anguish into the lives of those, such as his parents, who continue to love him. Of course in this case God can still repair all of the harm done, and it is possible, therefore, that he has a morally sufficient reason to permit David's addiction. But suppose that God were to permit my

daughter to damn herself *eternally*, even though he could have saved her; and suppose that he were to do so in order that he might save others, including myself. Could I, if I truly loved my daughter as myself, so much as desire salvation for myself under such conditions as these? Would I not have to say with the Apostle Paul, "For I could wish that I myself were accursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my brethren, my kinsmen by race"?¹⁶ If the redeemed, those filled with the love of God, could never be happy knowing that some of their own loved ones were lost forever, would not the knowledge that God could have saved these loved ones, that these loved ones were in effect sacrifices on behalf of the redeemed, be even more crushing still? Here, it seems, is yet another impossibility: I cannot *both* love my daughter as myself *and* love (or worship wholeheartedly) a God whom I believe to have done less than he could to save her from a life of misery and torment. For necessarily, if I truly love my daughter, then I will disapprove of any God whom I believe to have done less than his best for her, less than I would have done if I should have had the power; and necessarily, if I disapprove of God, then I do not truly love him. For as long as I truly love my daughter, therefore, God cannot bring about (weakly) her damnation and, at the same time, bring me into perfect fellowship with himself.

Examples such as these illustrate a point that Craig ignores altogether: the sense in which blessedness in one person requires blessedness in others, and one person's ruin implies the ruin of others; they illustrate how the misery of those in hell would inevitably undermine the blessedness of those in heaven; and finally, they illustrate why, contrary to what we have assumed for the sake of discussion, neither the salvation of one person, nor that of a given combination of persons, could possibly require, in virtue of certain true "counterfactuals of freedom," the damnation of other persons. The last point depends, of course, upon a particular conception of what salvation is. So let us adopt the following, as a partial definition:

- (D₃) God brings salvation to a sinner S only if, among other things, God brings it about (weakly) that the following conditions obtain: (a) that S is reconciled to God and in a state of supreme happiness, (b) that S is filled with love for others and therefore desires the good for all other created persons, and (c) that there is no fact F such that (i) S is ignorant of F and (ii) were S not ignorant of F, then S would have been unable to

experience supreme happiness.

The idea behind condition (c) is that salvation brings not only happiness, but the kind of happiness that could survive a full disclosure of facts; the blessedness of those in heaven is not merely, in other words, a blissful kind of ignorance. But then, if salvation requires that each of the conditions in (D₃) be met, the damnation of one person could not possibly *contribute to* the salvation of others; to the contrary, it would necessarily *undermine* such salvation.

Here is why. For any two persons, S and S*, if S is eternally damned and is therefore destined to be eternally miserable, then either S* is aware of S's miserable condition or S* is not aware of it. If, on the one hand, S is eternally damned and S* *is* aware of S's miserable condition, then either (1) S* does not truly love, or desire the good for, S or (2) S* cannot be happy knowing that S will be forever miserable. If (1) is the case, then S* does not meet condition (b) of (D₃); and if (2) is the case, then S* does not meet condition (a). So if S is eternally damned and S* *is* aware of S's miserable condition, then God cannot, given (D₃), bring salvation to S*. If, on the other hand, S is eternally damned and S* is *not* aware of S's miserable condition, then either (1) S* is the kind of person who is filled with love for others and thus desires the good for all other created persons or (2) S* is not that kind of person. If (1) is the case, then S* does not meet condition (c) of (D₃); for if (1) is the case, then S* is the kind of person such that, had S* known of S's miserable condition, that very knowledge would have undermined S*'s own happiness. If (2) is the case, then S* does not meet condition (b) of (D₃). So even if S is eternally damned and S* is *not* aware of S's miserable condition, God still cannot bring salvation (of the relevant kind) to S*. Accordingly, for any two persons, S and S*, if S is eternally damned and therefore destined to be eternally miserable, then God cannot bring salvation to S*.

We are now in a position to see exactly why Craig's defense of the traditional doctrine of hell is unsuccessful. According to Craig,

- (6) God has actualized a world containing an optimal balance between saved and unsaved, one in which some persons are unsaved and those who *are* unsaved suffer from transworld reprobation,

is at least possibly true. But (6) is quite impossible. Given (D₃), the eternal damnation of a single

person would undermine the salvation of all others; so an optimal balance between saved and unsaved could not possibly include any who are unsaved. Of course, Craig may want to modify, or even to reject, (D₃), but nothing of substance in the argument against Craig requires (D₃) anyway. In a nutshell, the argument is this. God necessarily wills that each created person should eventually achieve a special kind of blessedness: a kind that (a) exists only when one is filled with love for others and (b) would survive even a full disclosure of facts about the world. But such blessedness is simply not possible in a world in which some persons are eternally damned and therefore eternally miserable. If God has middle knowledge, therefore, neither is it possible that he would make actual a world in which some persons, because they are eternally miserable themselves, undermine the blessedness of all others. If God knows in advance which persons, or which combinations of persons, are irredeemable, then he would simply not create those persons, or those combinations of persons, in the first place. He would instead restrict himself to those feasible worlds, if there are any, in which all persons eventually and freely enter into fellowship with himself. If there should be no such feasible worlds, then he would set his sights on goods that do not require free will of the incompatibilist kind. But if, as I believe, there are such feasible worlds, then we can be confident that he would choose one of them to make actual. For even if, apart from the damnation of others, God could save but a single person, he would not—indeed could not—bring about (weakly) the damnation of some in an effort to save others; it is far better, after all, that one person should achieve eternal blessedness than that the eternal misery of some should undermine the blessedness of all others.

IV. Providence with Simple Foreknowledge but Without Middle Knowledge

There remains but one view of divine omniscience yet to be considered, and this one appears, at least initially, to permit the possibility that (RH) is true. A moderately conservative theist might hold that God has a simple foreknowledge of future contingencies but no middle knowledge because, even though a proposition of the form:

(7) Smith will freely do A tomorrow,

is now either definitely true or definitely false, such propositions as (1) and (2) above have no truth value at all. On this view, God's foreknowledge adds little, if anything, to his providential control. He knows with certainty what will happen at every future moment; he even knows the truth of certain counterfactuals, and the probability of certain others, in so far as he can calculate that from his knowledge of causal laws, antecedent conditions, a person's character, etc. But he does not know with certainty what free choices a person would make in various hypothetical circumstances that will never in fact exist. On this view, therefore, the following may seem at least possible: Even though God does his best at every moment to save a given sinner, God knows with certainty that nothing he will in fact do will be successful. God thus knows with certainty that (RH) is true; and if he knows that, then he could presumably reveal it to us as well.

The view of divine omniscience expressed here is, I believe, essentially correct and deserves much closer attention than it has so far received in the literature on divine omniscience. But such a view, if not formulated carefully, easily leads to paradox; in fact, as we shall see shortly, we can formulate the view without falling into paradox only if we assume that the universe is ultimately *safe* in this sense: the most important ends that a loving God would necessarily try to achieve in creation, such as the reconciliation of all persons, are already foreordained.

The first point we need to clarify is why foreknowledge without middle knowledge would add little or nothing to God's providential control. If God has no middle knowledge, then he cannot base any of his decisions on an infallible knowledge of what various free persons would have done in a variety of circumstances that do not in fact arise. So suppose that some free persons should reject God forever and hence also that (RH) should be true. From God's point of view, that would have to be something like an eternal and unplanned discovery, or surprise, or even defeat. It is not as if God knows what Sarah would do freely in situation A and what she would do freely in situation B and then decides, on that basis, to place her in situation A instead of situation B. If God decides *not* to place Sarah in situation B, then he has no certain knowledge of what she would have done freely in that situation; and if he decides instead to place her in situation A, then his decision to place her in that situation must be, in a difficult to specify sense, more basic than

his knowledge of what she does freely in it. Because God is, on the view in question, a *dependent* knower, at least in so far as his knowledge of our free choices is concerned, it is as if he actually looks into the future and *sees* what our future choices will be. There is no time, it is true, when he is ignorant of what they will be, but neither can his decision to permit a given situation to arise, or to permit a free choice to be made in it, be based upon his knowledge of what that choice will be. His knowledge of our free choices is thus like a discovery, though not one that is made at a specific time.

But here, it seems, we have the makings of a paradox. Given our ordinary intuitions about free will, the following would seem to be a sound principle:

- (P₂) It is possible that some of the created persons who are free in their relationship to God freely reject God forever only if it is possible that all of the created persons who are free in their relationship to God freely reject God forever.¹⁷

Now suppose, as seems entirely possible on the view in question, that God should have found himself facing a kind of "eternal catastrophe" in creation; suppose that, having decided to create free agents and to leave the matter of their eternal destiny in their own hands, his "eternal discovery" were that *every* created person will eventually reject him forever. Given the view of freedom with which we are working—one that is, in my opinion, deeply incoherent—a rational agent is quite capable of rejecting God forever; and if there is no absurdity in *some* persons freely rejecting God forever, neither is there any in *all* of them doing so. But would a loving and omnipotent God allow himself to be defeated in that way? Would he not exercise his power in an effort to avert disaster, either by creating no persons at all, or by placing those he does create in different circumstances? Presumably God's knowing that such a catastrophic end is in the offing, though incompatible with his *exercising* his power to prevent its occurrence, is quite compatible with his having such power. If God were perfectly loving, moreover, he would most assuredly exercise his power to avert such a catastrophe; that is, if he knew the conditions under which such a catastrophe would come about, he would surely eliminate those conditions. But if he *were* to exercise his power in this way, he would have no reason, in the absence of middle knowledge, for doing so.

Here, then, is a seeming paradox. Let SE be the set of creaturely essences that God chooses to instantiate, and suppose that each instantiation of each essence in SE will freely reject God forever. If God knows this, as he would on the view that he has simple foreknowledge, he would have a good reason not to instantiate this particular set of essences or, if he did instantiate them, to place them in different circumstances; but also if he *had* instantiated a different set of essences, he would not have known the consequences of instantiating the members of SE and would therefore not have had *that particular reason* not to instantiate them. Under such conditions as these, where God's knowing the future would provide him with a morally sufficient reason to act differently in the present and his acting differently in the present would likewise prevent him from having that morally sufficient reason, there can be no divine foreknowledge, it seems to me, in the absence of middle knowledge.

Now if God has middle knowledge, the nature of his providential control over history is relatively simple; he always acts not only in the full knowledge of the consequences of his actions, but also in the full knowledge of what the consequences would have been had he acted differently. So if God has middle knowledge, then there are no surprises for God and no occasions on which he might wonder whether things would have turned out better had he acted differently. And this does seem very close to the biblical picture of God's providential control; according to that picture, God's loving purposes in creation are never defeated and he always knows exactly how to meet the spiritual needs of his loved ones. We are now assuming, however, that no such middle knowledge is possible. Does this assumption also require the view that free agents have the power ultimately to defeat God's loving purpose for them? Well, that depends upon our conception of free agency. Even if we adopt an incompatibilist conception, as I think we must, it need not follow that free agents have the power to defeat God's loving purpose for them. Many Christians have believed that, however free we may be with respect to specific moral choices, the end of salvation is a matter of *grace*, not of human effort; it is something for which we should praise God, not something for which we should try to take credit. As the Apostle Paul puts it, "For by grace have you been saved through faith; and this [the faith as well as the grace] not of your own

doing, it is a *gift* of God—not because of works, lest any man should boast”¹⁸ What the New Testament in general gives us, I would argue, is a glorious picture of how the end of salvation can be a matter of grace (already foreordained and not a matter of human effort at all), even though we are fully responsible for all of our free choices made along the way. The picture is very simple: All paths ultimately lead to the same end, the end of salvation, but our choice of paths at any given instant may be a matter of our own free choice. This picture is not quite the same as that of the grand chessmaster who is able to checkmate a novice regardless of the specific moves that the novice should make. It is rather a picture of the nature of moral evil and of the way in which, over a long period of time, moral evil inevitably destroys itself. On this picture, the root of all moral evil as well as the ultimate source of human misery is separation from God (and from others); and the motive for moral evil is the *illusion* that we can benefit ourselves at the expense of others. So the more we separate ourselves from God, the more miserable we become, and the more miserable we become, the more likely we are to shatter the illusion that makes moral evil possible. Many of us can, of course, continue to deceive ourselves for many years, perhaps even for the duration of our short seventy years or so in this life; Adolph Hitler may even have thought himself happy during the early years of World War II. But in the end, according to the New Testament picture, moral evil will always destroy itself and thus becomes its own corrective.

Given such a picture, God's providential control of history in no way depends upon his foreknowledge of future contingencies. He in fact knows each of us from the beginning and which free actions each of us will perform, but the power he has to accomplish his loving purposes does not rest upon such knowledge; it rests instead upon the nature of the universe he has created, the nature of the choices that created persons face, and the self-corrective nature of moral evil itself. Given this picture, moreover, foreknowledge without middle knowledge is in no way paradoxical, because none of our free choices, whichever way they are made, could ever lead to the kind of catastrophe that a loving God would be required to prevent. Because the end is in that sense foreordained, God never has to worry—as he would on some conceptions of human freedom—about whether things might have turned out better had he acted differently. In one re-

spect, then, a God with simple foreknowledge but no middle knowledge is indeed similar to the grand chessmaster who, without predicting an opponent's specific moves, is able to checkmate that opponent; like the grand chessmaster, God is able to bring about the desired end, the reconciliation of all persons, regardless of which specific choices his loved ones make on specific occasions. But unlike the grand chessmaster, God also knows all the free choices of each created person and therefore which path each person will follow on the way to reconciliation.

V. Conclusion

My purpose in this paper has been to argue that, if God is omnipotent, omniscient, perfectly loving, and noncontingent, then

(RH) Some persons will, despite God's best efforts to save them, freely and irrevocably reject God and thus separate themselves from God forever

is not even possibly true. Towards that end I have examined three views of divine omniscience: the view that divine omniscience does *not* include the foreknowledge of future contingencies, the view that it includes both middle knowledge and a simple foreknowledge of future contingencies, and the view that it includes a simple foreknowledge of future contingencies but no middle knowledge. Concerning the first view, I have argued that, if God has no foreknowledge of future contingencies, then (RH) is not true at all, nor is it even possible that (RH) will be true at some future time. Concerning the second, I have argued that, if God has both middle knowledge and a simple foreknowledge of future contingencies, then (RH) is necessarily false for this reason: Either it is within God's power to make actual a world in which he reconciles all created persons to himself, or it is not. If this is *not* within his power, then he faces the kind of catastrophe in creation that he would necessarily choose to prevent, either by choosing not to create any persons at all or by choosing to interfere with human freedom as the lesser evil. If it *is* within his power to make such a world actual, then he would do so for the reasons given. Finally, concerning the third view, I have argued that in the absence of middle knowledge God has a simple foreknowledge of future contingencies only if none of his loved ones are able finally to defeat his loving

purpose for them. Accordingly, even if the kind of choice described in (RH) were perfectly coherent, which I believe it not to be, it is not even possible that someone should actually make such a choice.

NOTES

1. See "The Doctrine of Everlasting Punishment," forthcoming in *Faith and Philosophy*.
2. See C. S. Lewis, *The Problem of Pain* (New York: Macmillan, 1944), Chapter VIII; Richard Swinburne, "A Theodicy of Heaven and Hell," in Alfred J. Freddoso, *The Existence of God* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1983); and Eleonore Stump, "Dante's Hell, Aquinas' Moral Theory, and the Love of God," *Canadian Journal of Philosophy*,
3. *Op. cit.*
4. See, for example, Robert Adams, "Middle Knowledge and the Problem of Evil," *American Philosophical Quarterly* (April, 1977), pp. 109-117; and William Hasker, "A Refutation of Middle Knowledge," *Nous* (December, 1986), pp. 545-557.
5. I have set forth my own reasons for thinking that divine foreknowledge and human freedom are compatible in "Divine Foreknowledge and Bringing About the Past," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* (March, 1986), pp. 455-469.
6. Of course there is a use of "want," not my use here, according to which it is analytic that we always do what we want. But it is also quite natural in many contexts to distinguish between what we *think* we want and what we *really* want. In any event, the important point is this: I cannot be fully informed about the end I have chosen to pursue unless I can know how I would evaluate it if perchance I should achieve it.
7. For Plantinga's distinction between the strong and weak sense of bringing it about that some state of affairs obtains, see Alvin Plantinga, *The Nature of Necessity* (London: Oxford University Press, 1974), pp. 169-174.
8. See Plantinga, *op. cit.*, p. 186. Plantinga's own definition is more complicated than this, in part because his aim is to prove what I take for granted: that if a person S suffers from transworld depravity, then God is indeed powerless to make actual a world in which S always freely chooses rightly.
9. I am also using the term "essence" in Plantinga's sense. See Plantinga, *op. cit.*, p. 188.
10. William Lane Craig, "'No Other Name': A Middle Knowledge Perspective on the Exclusivity of Salvation through Christ," *Faith and Philosophy*, Vol 6, No. 2 (April, 1989), p. 183.
11. *Ibid.*, p. 184.
12. I examine some of these concepts in my paper, "On Free Agency and the Concept of Power," *Pacific Philosophical Quarterly*, Vol. 69, (September, 1988). See also "The Doctrine of Everlasting Punishment."
13. According to Peter Geach, "someone confronted with the damned would find it impossible to wish that things so evil should be happy—particularly when the misery is seen as the direct and natural consequence of the guilt" [*Providence and Evil* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), p. 139]. But that misses the point altogether. From the premise that I could not wish to see my daughter *both* morally corrupt *and* happy, it simply does not follow that I would not wish to see her happy. Indeed, if my own daughter should become as corrupt and miserable as Geach describes, that would only *increase* the sense of loss and the yearning for what might have been, the desire to see her both redeemed and happy.
14. I borrow the term "supremely worthwhile happiness" from Richard Swinburne, *op. cit.*, p. 39. According to Swinburne, the most worthwhile forms of happiness do not rest upon false beliefs and do not arise from bad actions or a bad character. See *op. cit.*, p. 40.
15. Craig, *op. cit.*, p.184.
16. Romans 9:3.
17. A similar inference seems to underlie Plantinga's Free Will Defense. If it is possible that some creaturely essences suffer from transworld depravity, then it is possible that all of them suffer from it.
18. Ephesians 2:8-9.