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Deism Defined and Defended

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DEISM DEFINED AND DEFENDED

English and Anglican philosopher Samuel Clarke (1675 – 1729) argued that deism is not an internally consistent worldview. Clarke suggested that there are four categories of deists: first, those who believe in “an Eternal, Infinite, Independent, Intelligent Being” that created the world but is not concerned about the world and humans, and the world can go on without God’s constant support. Clarke offered two arguments against this version of deism. First, he argued that, according to the current science, nature alone cannot sustain the world and therefore the world must be constantly sustained and regulated by God. Two objections must be made. In the first place, contrary to what Clarke asserted, modern scientists have figured out and explained many natural processes; moreover, virtually all scientists, even theistic scientists, agree that the world is self-regulating. In the second place, since God is omnipotent and omniscient, it seems plausible that He set the initial conditions and laws so that the universe regulates and sustains itself, even though God might have guided certain processes (e.g., evolution, inflation). Clarke’s second argument against the first type of deism is that if God is not concerned about the world, he must lack one or more of the divine attributes. But this conclusion clearly does not follow. For example, it could be the case that God does not show interest due to a certain purpose we don’t understand or that we have the impression that God doesn’t show interested because we expect God to be more present in our lives, although in reality He does or has morally sufficient reasons not to show his presence.

The second category of deism is the one according to which God does interact with the world, but He is morally indifferent with respect to the world. Consequently, ethics is a matter of human construction. Here I agree with Clarke that moral value and duties are not human-made.

Rather, moral value and duties are undeniably objective and eternal truths grounded in God's everlasting nature.

The third type of deism according to Clarke is the one that affirms God's moral attributes but denies that humans have an immortal soul or that there exists an afterlife. Clarke claims that this sort of deism is completely incoherent because it questions all the attributes of God.

The fourth type is the form of deism that accepts the notion of God as pronounced by Christianity. However, such a form of deism argues that all the important theological and ethical doctrines can be known on the basis of reason but irrespective of special revelation. Regarding this sort of deism, Clarke thinks that is too close to Christianity that it has been subsumed by Christianity. (Yenter, 2018: §4.5) My own version of deism is somewhat similar to the fourth type of deism that Clarke identifies. In what follows I will try to articulate more clearly the similarities and the differences between my version of deism and the most general doctrines of classical theism.

DEFINING DEISM

Although some writers note that it is possible to trace the origin of deism back to the late seventeenth century (Beiser, 1996: 220), I concur with others that deism is the most natural and arguably the world's most ancient form of belief in God (cf. Voltaire, 1972: 386; Paine, 1892: 68). Most notably, as Davis (1983: 148) notes, it is fair to say that Socrates, Plato and Aristotle had a deistic understanding of God. Since deism affirms the existence of God, without the confusing and often contradictory myriads of theistic doctrines, deism became increasingly persuasive and congenial to many gaining widespread attention—particularly by appealing to the educated classes around the end of the eighteenth century (Morais, 1932: 436,

452-453; Gorham, 2013: 126; Herrick, 2014: 2).

In order to explicate my version of deism, I shall explain what embracing deism implies regarding the purpose of life, the afterlife, miracles, prayer, divine judgment, God's attributes, and the value of divine revelation.

DEISM AND GOD'S PROVIDENCE

According to John Orr, God "endowed the world at creation with self-sustaining and self-acting powers and then abandoned it to the operation of these powers acting as second causes" (Orr, 1934: 13). Other writers echo Orr in asserting that God only created the world as a watchmaker creates a self-regulating, perpetual motion clock (Miller, 1996: 128; Gould, 2005: 463). While I agree that God created the world so as to be self-regulating and self-sustaining, it does not have to follow that He abandoned His creation thereafter. Arguably, God seems, from our standpoint, to be detached from mundane human affairs in such a way that some may form the impression that God will never be concerned about the world so as to intervene in the universe, and therefore it may be thought that God is "remote and religiously unavailable," and can only "be thought but not felt" (Viney, 2010: 100-102). Even Spinoza observes that since God established certain laws of nature, He would not be "tinkering" with them because tinkering with such laws would entail that God is not perfect; by tinkering Spinoza means performing miracles, answering prayers, and sending divine revelation. He writes, "So if anything were to happen in Nature contrary to her universal laws, it would also be necessarily contrary to the decree, intellect and nature of God" (2002: 445).

The version of deism that I would like to endorse accommodates the concerns expressed by the above-cited authors and those of many others. I do not share Spinoza's concern, for

example, that God's tinkering with the regularities of nature would entail God's imperfection. God's intervention and His perfect nature do not seem to be logically incompatible. I suspect that Spinoza's remark stems from his monistic view of reality. But this is not the place or the time to discuss such an issue. My view is that God can intervene, but He does not want to intervene for reasons already familiar to the reader, reasons in connection with the problem of evil. So, is God indifferent?

One may answer this question in a few ways. One answer can be that nature is morally ambiguous and thus it may not necessarily be the clearest way to determine God's intentions. Another way, no doubt, would be to say that we can determine God's intention from revelation and religious texts. I will discuss this issue in a later section. But to give a sense of my later discussion here, the problem can be stated in the form of two questions—which revelation? Which religious texts? Yet another answer is that given the anthropic argument and the fine tuning of the universe, in that sense it is plausible to assume that God cares about his creation—otherwise He would not have taken the trouble to fine tune the world in such a way that intelligent life would arise. The worry that an evil God might just as well be behind the fine tuning, at this point, should not be a problem, as I have argued against the impossibility of an evil God in chapter two. The important point that I wish to defend here is that God created the world and then stayed gone—but not gone forever. In other words, what I argue is that God created the world and then chose to refrain from intervening and interacting with humans; but not because God is morally indifferent, or he is not interested in humans. Rather, he refrained from interacting with the world because he created the world for our benefit. Thus, the absence of God in the world that early deists lamented need not signify that God is indifferent. Rather, it signifies that, in order to benefit us, God created a self-regulating and self-sustaining world,

created humans and endowed them with freedom of the will so as to give us complete freedom to choose how to live. As discussed in the previous chapter (chapter seven), our experience of moral evil and suffering, although terrible from an emotional standpoint, are of great importance both intellectually and spiritually. Only by existing in a physical world where we experience moral evil and suffering, and natural evil as embodied beings can we fulfill the *imago dei* and be prepared for a relationship with our creator (Swinburne 1998: 106). Consequently, God chose to refrain from preventing or eliminating moral and natural evil and suffering. But in order to do so, God had to step back, so to speak, and not interact with humans.

Regarding the classical problem of evil, there is an aspect of the problem that works in favor of the argument above. In my discussion of the problem of evil in the previous chapter, I noted that moral evil results from the free action and choices of moral agents. My argument then, may be expressed in the form of the wise proverb “You can’t have your cake and eat it too.” That is to say, according to classical theism moral evil is not something that has positive existence. Evil is not the name of something. Rather, evil is the privation of goodness. Thus, evil is what humans experience as a result of their freely choosing to turn away from goodness. Some humans exercise their freedom in ways that often result in moral evil. Now, according to the so called free will theodicy, God can create a world devoid of evil. However, the price to pay for a world devoid of moral evil would be the privation of human freedom (Plantinga 1974: 30). In other words, God can prevent evil only by determining people’s actions such that when confronted by options, we never choose the wrong one, i.e., we never choose to do evil or act wrongly. Put another way, God can prevent moral evil only by taking away the freedom of an evildoer. Why can’t God just do that? Again, because God sees that a world that contains free-willed beings that are free to choose whether to do good or to do evil is more beneficial to us

than a world where God determine us to always do good. So, as bad as the experience of moral evil and suffering may be from an emotional standpoint, such experience is intellectually and spiritually too important to be eliminated or prevented.

In my view, the free will theodicy is an effective, and a satisfactory, argumentative strategy to explain the concomitance of an omnibenevolent, omniscient, and omnipotent God and evil and suffering in the world. Some people may not find it as satisfactory but that's not germane to the case. The point is that theists regard the free will theodicy as a successful theodicy. But the problem, as I have put it, is that theism cannot have their cake and eat it too. Either they endorse the free will theodicy, which explains away the existence of evil and suffering in view of divine goodness and providence, or they don't. If they do, then they have to give up the doctrine of providence. If they don't, then they find themselves without a justification for the existence of evil. My argument is that by endorsing the free will defense, the theist is forced to give up the doctrine of divine intervention, and thereby affirm the sort of deism that I defend, one according to which God is interested in His creation but refrains from interacting with the physical world. Otherwise, the theist must give up the notion that humans are endowed with freedom of the will.

EVIL, FREEDOM, AND THE MIND

In order to explain how my argument works, I need to say a few words on about the freedom-determinism debate now, and a few more words in the next section. This subject is one of the most contentious and controversial one in the history of thought and, therefore, I shall be able to merely scratch the surface. But my treatment of these topics should be sufficient to get an idea of my argument. The first point that I shall clarify is the meaning of freedom, which is

what's at stake here. As I shall argue, freedom is essential in order to run the free will theodicy. But if divine intervention is true, then the free will theodicy is thereby undermined. So, what I argue is that deism is the most plausible solution to this problem because, on deism, God does not make interventions in the world precisely because humans have freedom to make their own decisions.

What is freedom, then. Well, that's a million-dollar question because, to my knowledge, no one has ever given a completely coherent and satisfactory account of what it is for an agent to be free. Metaphysical libertarianism is the (mysterious, I may add) view that an agent is free to choose how to act and her actions are not determined (logically or causally) by events beyond her control. Perhaps I should say a few words about by parenthetical comment. I think that the concept of *libero arbitrio* is mysterious because it is very difficult to capture and understand. Perhaps it is a basic principle of reality and the universe that we certainly don't fully comprehend now, and that we might never understand. Think about it, if an agent performs an action, either that action is caused by antecedent events beyond the agent's control or it is uncaused. If it is caused by events beyond the agent's control, then the agent's action is not free. But if nothing caused the agent's action, then the agent's action is random and therefore, not free, either. I suppose that the libertarian might observe that there is a third option, that is, the action is caused by the agent. This means that a person is free in the sense that she is able to choose more than one possible course of action under any given circumstance. To put it in a more philosophical lingo, a person is free just when she is the author or the cause of her own actions, decisions, thoughts, and so on.

For example, Malaika can choose whether to go out and hang out with her girlfriends or whether to stay home and read a book instead. According to metaphysical libertarianism,

Malaika's final decision, whichever decision she does make, say, stay home and read a book, is an original decision. By "original" I mean that Malaika's decision to stay home and read a book is made entirely by herself. No external or internal factor over which she has no control caused or authored or influenced her final decision to stay home and read a book. Moreover, according to libertarianism, although Malaika made the decision to stay home and read a book, she was potentially free to act otherwise. She was free, for example, to go out with her girlfriends or to start reading a book and then change her mind and go out with her girlfriends after all or to take any other course of action she wished. One important point to note is that libertarianism does not argue that a person is free in the sense that she can do whatever she wants. For example, a person cannot just fly at the speed of light or otherwise perform actions that are not permitted by her physical limitations and by the regularities of nature. Rather, libertarianism argues that a person's decisions, action, thoughts, and more, are totally up to that person and that no factor outside or inside that person causes the person's decisions, actions, thoughts and dreams. I know that some readers might be unsatisfied with my definition of libertarianism. But the concept is so complicated and difficult to articulate that it would take an additional book in order to explain it. One, for example, would have to talk about non-physical and physical or naturalistic versions of libertarianism. The bottom line, and perhaps the best way to explain libertarianism, is that libertarianism is an indeterministic worldview.

Some thinkers have proposed a mid-way between total freedom and determinism, a way known as compatibilism. But libertarianism rejects that we are determined in any sense that is important. We are free, for example, to make moral decisions. And furthermore, since we are completely free, we are morally accountable for our actions. Thus, libertarianism is regarded as an incompatibilist view of the world. This means that libertarianism argues that when it comes to

the lives, actions, decisions, thoughts of human beings, freedom and determinism are incompatible. Determinism is a seemingly simple view but, in reality, it is quite controversial. Philosophers recognize disparate kinds of determinism, nomological, logical, biological, and more. But traditionally, regarding the question of whether human choice is free, the notion of determinism is intended as that of causal determinism. This is the view that every event in the universe, since its inception, has a cause; and therefore, given the way the universe is and its laws, all events are determined completely by antecedent causes in such a way that any state of the universe explains subsequent states of the universe. It cannot be overstressed the difficulty of providing a noncontroversial account for the notion of causality or cause-and-effect. However, a helpful way to explain causality is to regard it as a sort of gel or glue that makes events stick together. State of the world objects or events are completely determined by prior states or by the actions of other objects and events.

To give a textbook example, imagine a billiard table with several balls on its playfield. I decide to take the cue ball and push it with my hand toward the eight ball. Upon impact, the cue ball causes the eight ball to roll forward toward the side rail and hit the cushion, which causes the eight ball to bounce in the opposite direction and roll into the side pocket. In general, an event may have many causal factors or contributing causes. For example, I light a match by striking its head against its matchbook striker. What exactly caused the match to light up? As Mackie (1974) argues, when we speak of something causing something else, in fact, we refer what Mackie calls INUS conditions (insufficient but non-redundant parts of a condition which is itself unnecessary but sufficient for the occurrence of the effect). In other words, many factors may contribute to igniting a match, such as oxygen, the humidity of the match or striker, the force exerted in

striking the match, and so on. But for the purpose of this discussion let's stick to the billiard example.

Going in reverse order over my example, the eight ball in my example fell into the side pocket of the table as a result of its impact against the cushion on the side rail. The physical properties of the cushion on the side rail of the table caused the eight ball to bounce back and roll into the side pocket. Obviously, when we say that the cushion caused the eight ball to bounce, we mean that, given the physical properties of the cushion, the physical properties of the ball, and the laws of the universe, the ball had to end up into the table pocket. The cushion on the side rail would not cause the same effect, for example, to a soft-cotton ball. Next, the eight ball's hitting the side rail is the effect of another cause, namely, the cue ball's hitting the eight ball. So, the cue ball hits the eight ball and thereby causes the eight ball to roll onto the side rail. And the cause for the cue ball's hitting the eight ball is my pushing the cue ball toward the eight. This, on the surface, seems a pretty straightforward description of the notion of cause-and-effect. It describes how every event has a cause or, to put it yet another way, events in the world have a certain power to bring about certain effects as in the billiard balls example just illustrated.

So, determinism argues that given the circumstances (the table, the texture of the cloth, the tightness of the cushion on the rail, the spin applied, the balls, the environment, the laws of nature, etc.) upon impact with the eight ball, the cue ball necessarily causes a unique event, the eight ball's moving onto the table in a forward motion. It would be impossible, for example, that upon impact with the eight ball, the cue ball disappeared, or that it moved upwards toward the ceiling, or it or the cue ball turned into a frog. Determinism is not intended as a probabilistic phenomenon;¹ rather, it is a mechanistic process according to which the cue ball hits eight ball causing eight ball to roll forward onto the table—and that's it, that's the only way things can go

and will go. The eight ball could not have behaved otherwise (given all the occurrence of antecedent causes plus the laws of nature). This seems quite uncontroversial as an example of determinism because it can be accepted without fight by virtually all and it is confirmed by science and by common sense. Another example to illustrate determinism is the so-called domino effect, the chain reaction produced when one domino piece in a row of dominoes falls onto another piece causing all the subsequent domino pieces to fall by necessity.

Now when we return to my example of the billiard balls and we consider what caused *me* to push the cue ball toward the eight ball, things get more complicated very quickly. Most non-philosophers intuitively say that I made the (mental) decision to push the cue ball and my decision made me do it. But not according to what is referred to as hard determinism. Hard determinists would note that sauce for the goose is sauce for the gander. In other words, there is no reason to think that the billiard balls are determined to do what they do but I am not. After all, I am a physical object, too; and therefore, my decision to push the ball, too, had a cause. This cause is not something that I chose, decided, brought about. Nor is this cause something over which I had control. So, it follows that the reason I push the ball is not that I willed to do so, but simply because some factor or a chain of factors and antecedent events over which I had no control, caused my pushing the ball. In this sense, hard determinism sees reality as predictable in the sense that if the cause is there the effect must necessarily occur. Or in the Laplace's demon sense, it would be possible for an intellect (such as a demon or a God) to calculate the exact outcome of any event or behavior of any object considering that the present state of the universe is the effect of its past states; and the present state is the cause of its future states (Laplace, 1951: 4). For example, without the cue ball's hitting the eight ball, or anything else exerting some type of force upon the eight ball, the eight ball could not have moved, and certainly could not have

moved the way it did upon impact with the cue ball. Using an analogy, suppose that you are watching a film where the cue ball hits the eight ball. If you rewind the film of reality (if such a thing were possible) to the moment before the cue ball hits the eight ball and play the section of the film where the impact of the two balls occurs, you will see the same things happening. Similarly, certain events always and necessarily bring about certain causes. If we could rewind the universe and play it back, the chain of events as we have experienced them to this day would not change.

Consequently, according to hard determinism, as d'Holbach put it, "Man's life is a line that nature commands him to describe upon the surface of the earth, without his ever being able to swerve from it, even from an instant ..." (1970: 397) As d'Holbach argues, humans are not exempt from the necessity imposed upon events in the world. Trees grow branches and stones thrown into water cause ripples; these are natural processes that must happen as a result of antecedent events. By the same token, everything that human beings do, everything that they say or think or dream, is caused by antecedent events. Trees and bodies of water do not make free decisions to grow branches or to produce ripples. Similarly, human beings, given that they are made of matter like trees and bodies of water, do not have the freedom to decide what they think, say, choose, etc. thus, in the billiard balls example, the answer to the question of what caused my decision to push the cue ball toward the eight ball is that certain events over which I have no control made me do it. And whether the events that caused my pushing the cue ball are external or internal to me, I am not the one who decides. To use again as an analogy the example of the dominos falling, according to hard determinism I am a domino between many other dominos. When the first one falls, my decision to fall is not mine, but rather it is determined by the domino behind me that pushes me and causes me to fall.

To be abundantly clear, according to the hard type of determinism, when we think that we are the authors of our desires, choices, actions, and so on, we are quite deluded. Some determinists may note that the structure of the brain is so complex having trillions of neurons that such a complexity gives rise to the illusion that we are in control of our lives. In reality, decisions are made in our brains by factors over which we have no control. Moreover, we may never know what causes a certain decision we have made. For example, the reason one prefers the Led Zeppelin to Elis Regina, or vice versa, may never be known. Perhaps such taste in music might have been acquired as a result of the concomitance of a long chain of events that it is impossible to identify. And again, such antecedent events are outside one's control.

Furthermore, hard determinists often point out the following. To speak of freedom, any freedom, doesn't even make sense. Consider the example of my raising my right arm above my head. A determinist would argue that either my raising my right arm over my head was caused by some antecedent event or it was random. If it was caused by some antecedent event, say, you challenged me to do it, then I did not raise my arm freely because the challenge plus my desire to prove you wrong were the causal factors that produced my raising my right arm above my head, which is the effect. Therefore, I was not free to do otherwise. On the other hand, if my raising my arm was not determined by any antecedent factors, then nothing caused my decision to raise my arm. In other words, my arm went up over my head by pure random accident—in which case I did not have the freedom to do it. Thus, either way, whether my thoughts, decisions, and more have antecedent causes or whether they don't have any causes at all, I am not free.

One might object that it is still true despite your challenging me and my desire to prove you wrong that I could have done otherwise, at least in principle. But this can only mean that if the circumstances had been different, then I would have done otherwise. One may also point out

that my decision to raise my arm was not determined by antecedent events; rather, it was a decision generated by my conscious mind as a result of non-random but probabilistic brain states. My brain states can be explained in terms of something non-deterministic at a subatomic particle level occurring in the cascade of brain activity leading to the physical choice of raising my arm. Some writers are satisfied with this sort of freedom because it frees us from the shackles of determinism. (Balaguer, 2010: Ch. 3) After all, according to the model just described, my brain states are mine because they happen in my brain—in fact, they are my brain. However, this sort of move is not giving us a robust conception of freedom because, while it frees us from the shackles of determinism, it takes us straight into the jaws of randomness of quantum probability.

Now in the first place I would like to mention that it is simply a popular misconception to think that the rise of quantum theories in physics has demonstrated that at the fundamental level the world is probabilistic. On one important interpretation of non-relativistic quantum mechanics, Bohmian mechanics, quantum mechanics turns out to be a fully deterministic theory of particles. (See de Finetti 1970; Vaidman 2014) I must also acknowledge that whether quantum field theory has shown that the world is fundamentally deterministic is, according to some, still an open question. One relevant reason to think that the world is fundamentally deterministic is the self-evidence of the principle of sufficient reason according to which for every contingent event or object there must be an explanation or cause for its existence or nonexistence. The explanation must be either that an object or event is necessary, in which case the explanation is internal to the object; or the explanation is external to the object. (See Pruss, 2010; Romero, 2014) Consequently, even if subatomic particles and events seem to be unpredictable to us, they must have a reason for their existence and occurrence.

At any rate, even if quantum events were in fact random in the sense of probabilistic and undetermined, then even in such a case we would lack freedom because our actions, thoughts, desires, decisions, and so on, would be random and thus uncaused and thus not free. Any robust concept of free will imply that a choice can be made by an agent without any antecedent events causing that decision and the decision is not the product of randomness either. So, where is my conscious decision in the example of my raising my hand? Why aren't we taking into account my brain states and conscious decision, which are mine, and therefore it was I who made such a decision even though I was provoked to do it. But the determinist would respond that, in the first place, even my brain state is, after all, the effect of some antecedent events over which I have no control, whether internal or external. For example, my short temper and my willingness to take up challenges and desire to prove people wrong are traits and dispositions that I did not decide. Rather, I genetically inherited such characteristics, or they formed through my upbringing, my experiences, and so on. And in the second place, the most important point is that according to materialism there is no mind or self—the mind is the brain. Compatibilists, those who hold that determinism and freedom can coexist, do not worry so much about the origin of action because they think that, so long as the agent's actions and thoughts spring directly from the agent in the sense that the agent's mental states are the agent's, freedom simply means that the agent is the author of his actions, behaviors, thoughts, and so on.

According to the fundamental laws of nature, everything that happens in our universe is due to gravity, electromagnetism, and the strong and weak nuclear force. These forces don't leave any room for free will. Accordingly, the past entirely predicts the future. Since the big bang fifteen billion years ago, every event thence had to happen. There is no free will according to such a fundamental law because given the current state of the subsequent states of the universe

are inevitable. And even if we assume that the universe at its most fundamental level is indeterministic, then freedom would not be possible either. Randomness, after all, has no room for freedom. Moreover, if there are random events and my brain states are themselves, or are caused by, random quantum events, such events cannot be influenced or caused by me. Again, there is no free will in such a model because events would be random. In either case, we do not have free will in any meaningful way.

Therefore, these are the only two options, determinism, and randomness. I personally don't believe that anything in the universe can be random. In order to appreciate the problem of freedom, further, let me now turn to a brief discussion about the mind. The so-called mind-body problem has four different aspects. First, we have sensory experiences and we have been aware of reality for most of our lives. This is the problem of consciousness. Second, we have many beliefs, thoughts, feelings, hopes, and other mental states. Such states have aboutness. For example, my beliefs are psychological attitudes that have a mental content: my belief that I teach at a university located in Brooklyn, New York, is about a university, a city, and a certain relation between the two. But if thoughts are none other than my neurons firing in my brain, how can neuron firing be about anything? Moreover, in what respect are immaterial thought or the firing of neurons true or false? Propositions and thoughts are not identical to firing of neurons. This is the problem of intentionality. Third, my conscious experiences are subjective—personal. They cannot be experienced by anyone else. Others can have similar experience, but only I know what it is like to be me and to feel what I feel. A brain surgeon can open my head and see certain activities going on, but never see what I see or feel. So, what happens in my experience is inside my mind not inside my brain. This the problem of subjectivity. Fourth, my thoughts make my

body move. I think “dinner” and my body moves into the kitchen to prepare food. But how can immaterial thoughts and desires cause anything? This is the problem of mental causation.

These four aspects make up the mind-body problem. A variety of solutions have been given to address the problem. Materialist theories argue that mental states are *physical* states—states of the brain, which is a physical thing. Physical things can be accounted for by physics, biology, chemistry, etc. Dualist theories argue that mental states are not states of any physical thing; the mind is a non-physical entity.

While I don't have the space here for an exhausting discussion on materialism, I shall briefly express my worry about materialistic theories of the mind. The first one is behaviorism, which is not a serious theory that can explain the mind. In fact, it denies the existence of the mind. Accordingly, there is no mind-body problem because people's mental states are just people's dispositions to behave in certain ways. Behaviorism's biggest flaw is its denial of the inner aspect of mental states, e.g., pain is not just a disposition to action; rather, it has a certain quality—it *feels* a certain way.

Another model of the mind is the so-called identity theory or reductive materialism, according to which mental states are identical to brain states. Pain, for example, is identical to the firing of certain neurons in a brain. The identity theory claims that for every individual mental state, there is an identical brain state. The problem is that mental states have semantic properties, that is, they have meanings and beliefs can be true or false and beliefs and desires that can logically conflict. But brain states do not have any semantic properties; the firing of a certain neuron cannot be true or false, cannot logically conflict with other neurons firing. If two entities are identical, then they have the same properties. But mental states have properties brain states do not. Thus, mental states are not identical to brain states.

As a result of the failure of the identity theory, another theory was proposed to explain the mind, functionalism, according to which mental states are defined by its causal relations, i.e., their function in the system. Pain is a state caused by damage or trauma of a certain fiber and it causes distress. To understand functionalism, contrast paperweight with gold. Any object, a shoe, a rock, a coffee cup, can serve as paperweight so long as it is capable of holding paper in place. An object does not need to have any specific essence in order to be paperweight. On the other hand, not any shiny yellow rock can be gold. Gold has a specific molecular structure. Similarly, functionalism says that our mental states are like paperweight in the sense that they are not identical to the brain, but rather are functions of the brain. A thought or desire, for example, or any other type of mental state, depends on its function in the cognitive system. The problem is that two individuals could be functionally identical but have different experiences. And again, functionalism cannot explain the inner quality of our mental content, or what it is like to have that mental state.

The main point is that materialistic theories fail to explain the problems we face in explaining what the mind is, namely, consciousness, intentionality, subjectivity, and mental causation. Thus, the view that I endorse that is the most plausible model of the mind that explains these four problems is a version of substance dualism according to which each mind is a distinct nonphysical substance. My mind and your mind, therefore, are non-physical and non-spatial. While the physical brain has an important role in our decisions and our lives, the mind uses the brain—but the two are clearly not identical. On materialism, it is hard to explain why a brain, regardless of its intricate neuronal structure, is conscious, its contents have intentionality or can be true or false, why it is the locus of the self, and so on. Conversely, since according to substance dualism the mind is non-physical, its nature can explain these problems.

One argument for substance dualism is, surely, to observe that God is an immaterial mind, and therefore mind does not require a physical body. Another argument is the argument from irreducibility. If there are mental phenomena for which no physical explanation could be given, we must conclude that the physical world is not all there is. One of the most important argument for dualism, in my view, is the argument from personal identity. Consider that physically, we are not the same persons we were, for example, at the age of three. Every cell in our bodies is completely different now. But then what exactly make you and I yourself and myself? On a materialistic view of the world, the self does not exist. Rather it is a contiguous series of different individual selves. However, since according to substance dualism the mind is separate from body and, most importantly, the mind is not affected by natural processes as the body, I am the same person throughout time because my self is a nonphysical unity rather than an everchanging body.

Having now explained the nature of the mind and freedom, I now return to my argument for deism. As I have observed, theists regard the free will theodicy as an effective solution to the moral problem of evil and suffering. But the problem is that theists have two options. Either they endorse the free will theodicy, which explains why God permits evil and suffering, or they don't. If they do, they will have to give up the doctrine of providence and the belief that God interacts with humans. If they don't, they will not be able to avail themselves of the free will defense. My argument is that if God permits moral and natural evil and suffering, then, in the interest of human freedom, he does not intervene or interact with humans because doing so would change events and thereby undermine human freedom.

If God endowed humans with freedom of the will in order to choose how to live, on libertarianism (or even on compatibilism), humans are totally or significantly in control of their

lives, choices, decisions, thoughts, and so on. Freedom requires that no antecedent events cause my behavior or my decisions. My decisions are not determined by factors over which I have no control. Nor are my choices random. Therefore, according to theism, humans are free to make original decisions without antecedent events causing it to make certain decisions. On materialism, the mind is identical to the brain; and since the brain is a physical thing affected by the laws of nature, my decisions are the product of mindless, electro-chemical, mechanistic processes. Moreover, whatever decision my brain makes is never my decision, but rather the decision of numerous internal and external factors over which I have no control.

Suppose that Mark has planned to murder Frank at midnight. Now suppose that God intervenes by changing Mark's mind so that Mark will not kill Frank. Instead, Mark will yell at Frank. The question here is whether Mark freely chose to refrain from killing Frank. Now one may argue the following. Mark had a variety of choices available, yelling at Frank, not yelling at Frank, talking to Frank, and so on. Therefore, Mark was in fact free. However, if God had not changed Mark's mind about killing Frank, Mark would have freely killed him. Therefore, Mark was not free to refrain from killing Frank. Perhaps he was not determined by God to yell at Frank. But all the same, Mark's freedom was undermined by God's intervention. Now the theist can of course take a compatibilist view about this. They may argue that, for example, that Mark's freedom was undermined, but only in that occasion and not in future occasions. But the fact is that if God intervenes in human affairs and changes future states of affairs, then we are not really free. One may respond that God's modifying Mark's behavior does not thereby affect, for example, other people's freedom. However, in the first place, events in the world are never isolated but are like waves that have repercussions even after many years after their occurrence. After all, it makes a world of difference whether Frank will live or die and whether Mark will

kill Frank. And in the second place, in the end God's intervention would undermine human freedom.

The free will defense explains that God permits evil and suffering because such experiences, emotionally difficult as they may be, are important to the moral formation of our souls. Moreover, moral evils result from human free choice. Therefore, according to this notion, God allows humans to choose how to live because human freedom is too important for us to prevent it. But by intervening God would thereby prevent our freedom. Regrettably, many humans choose to do evil and to inflict pain and make others, animals, and even the environment, suffer. And the idea is that God cannot prevent such evil without thereby removing human freedom. So, God does not prevent or eliminate evil and suffering for two important reasons: one is that evil and suffering is necessary for soul making. And two, evil and suffering result from human free choice of the will, which is of great importance to humans, and therefore God will allow humans to exercise their freedom even though freedom often leads to evil doing and suffering.

In other words, in order for God to prevent, say, a terroristic attack that will result in numerous casualties, God would have to prevent the terrorists from freely perform their terroristic actions. And it is not only the freedom of the terrorists that is at stake. For consider how the events set off by the terrorists will send a ripple out into the world thereby modifying the natural course of actions. For instance, suppose that a Sara, chooses to perpetrate a colossal financial fraud (like the one Bernard L. Madoff executed, for example); God knows that if Sara executes such a financial scheme, she will be arrested and, as a result, out of shame she will take her life; and as a result, her daughter will take her life too. And perhaps some further disgraceful events may ensue, which will cause enormous pain and suffering not only to Sara's family and

relatives and to her community. Thus, right before Sara is about to execute her financial scheme, God sees to it that Sara chooses not to go through with it. As a result, Sara will not go to jail, not commit suicide, and her daughter will not commit suicide either. But if God intervenes changing the natural course of action, then Sara has not freely refrained from executing her financial scheme; rather what she has done was the performance of an action brought about by God's intervention. In short, Sara's freedom is undermined. But this is contrary to the free will theodicy, which requires complete freedom, regardless of the consequences. Again, many theists may argue that there is nothing wrong with God's intervening from time to time and change the natural course of events. In fact, some theists even believe in predestination. But then, as I explained, they cannot avail themselves of the free will theodicy.

Does this mean that if God makes interventions the world contains beings that are not free? Again, one may note that, if freedom exists and humans are free, whenever God does or doesn't intervene, humans are free. However, in the first place, whenever God intervenes, God will remove the possibility for humans to choose what to do. In the second place, since events in the world are interconnected, by preventing or permitting people to freely choose how to act, God would thereby modify the natural course of events. And thus, humans would not be totally free to choose how to live. The states of affairs of the world will be the result of God's intervention rather than the result of people freely choosing how to act. But the whole point of the free will theodicy is that God endowed people with freedom of the will in order to choose how to live. And their choices alone are what determine the states of affairs of the world. Granted, moral evil often results from our free actions. But freedom is so important that God does not prevent evil. Therefore, God does not intervene in human affairs. And consequently, either the doctrine of divine providence is false or, if it is true, then theists cannot justify moral

evil. So, divine providence cannot be used as an argument against deism or as an argument for theism. J. L. Mackie argued that if God is truly omnipotent, he ought to have been able to create creatures who possessed free will, but who never did wrong (1955, 209). But God's allowing evil and suffering, far from proving the nonexistence of an omnibenevolent and omnipotent God, it actually supports deism, according to which God *does* care about humans and values their freedom. He cares and values our freedom so much that after creating the world, he gave us total freedom to decide how to live, even though moral evil and suffering results from human freedom. Surely, in the end, a theist may argue that God operates this way: He gave us freedom to choose how to live, but at the same time he makes certain interventions to help us along, do to speak. I do not claim to have a knockdown argument to disprove such a view. My argument, rather, is that, having considered moral and natural evils and the importance of free will, it is more plausible to believe that God wants us to choose how to live our lives without ever interfering with our decisions by performing miracles or changing the natural course of events.

THEISM AND REVEALED RELIGION

Closely connected to denying God's providence, deism also rejects the notion that religion is revealed, and that God communicates to his creation via divine revelation. Deists do not denounce everything revealed religions teach; rather, they only repudiate those elements they believe have caused human suffering (Penelhum, 2005: 22); moreover, deism rejects theistic doctrines that appear to be inconsistent with the nature of God. Deism is a religion-non-religion that seeks unity among human societies and argues that belief in God must be grounded in reason rather than religious authorities (Westphal, 2010: 134). Furthermore, deism rejects those aspects of religions that are "superstitious," "supernatural," and "nonsensical" according to reason

(Gould, 2005: 463; Love, 2008: 182; Westphal, 2010: 134). After all, anything revealed by God would have to be comprehensible through human reason and would be consistent, accurate, and uncontroversially easy to discover. As Voltaire noted, “the only gospel one ought to read is the great book of Nature, written by the hand of God and sealed with his seal” (cited in Love, 2008: 64). And Paine, who also rejected divine revelation, writes,

There is a happiness in Deism, when rightly understood, that is not to be found in any other system of religion. All other systems have some things in them that either shock our reason, or are repugnant to it, and man, if he thinks at all, must stifle his reason in order to force himself to believe them. But in Deism our reason and our belief become happily united. The wonderful structure of the universe, and every thing we behold in the system of the creation, prove to us, far better than books can do, the existence of a god, and at the same time proclaim his attributes (1892: 398).

Thus, with regard to knowledge of God and his existence, revelation is not clear, in fact, it is confusing, and there are too many. Deism argues that belief in God can be acquired through reason alone, so in the first place there is no need for God to communicate to us via divine revelation, and in the second place His existence is evident from “the great book of Nature.” In other words, all that is important about life and morality is available to be discovered by studying nature. This, by the way, goes back to the previous point about freedom. Namely, revelation could undermine our freedom or otherwise affect the way we understand the world. Therefore, any beliefs about God that cannot be acquired solely through reason must be rejected. Consider now prayer. Some deists believe that prayer is important (cf. Lucci & Wigelsworth, 2015: 168). But important why, if God is perfect? As others have pointed out, (Love, 2008: 64;

Viney, 2010: 102) God does not need prayer. Lord Herbert of Cherbury (1583 – 1648) argued that human beings have been naturally endowed with the capacity to recognize that God is worthy of worship and that living a life of virtue is an essential aspect of that worship (Pailin & Manuel, 2015: para. 4).

Thus, some deists hold that prayer stems from desire to worship God out of gratitude for the graciousness he shows by creating the world. I would like to make the following points about prayer. First, if God is omnipotent and wholly good, prayer cannot improve in any way his already perfect nature. And regarding worship when talking about God, it is often used the analogy of a father. I would like to suggest that a more appropriate analogy is that of a friend. Either way, however, since God is a perfect being, it would seem that He does not require or desire that humans worship him. Certainly, there is nothing wrong with our expressing our reverence and adoration for God. But as a friend, or a father, God would not demand adoration. Just as I don't demand adoration from my children or from my wife, there is no reason God would demand adoration. In fact, it would seem plausible that God would want us to focus more on our admiration and reverence for other human beings, animals, and nature—that's where admiration would benefit the world.

As I discussed in chapter two, omnibenevolence is other-regarding, which means that God loves his creatures without the need to be loved back. Therefore, it is implausible that humans would be required by God to praise Him. Therefore, prayer must be something subjective, based on the particular individual's sensibility and sentiments. Second, contemplation, and other forms of gratitude can only be symbolic, but not required. When friend A does a favor to his friend, B, friend B thanks A as a sign of respect or gratitude. But when you think about it, if two individuals are true friends, friend A may just say to B, and indeed such a

thing is typically said among friends, “You don’t need to thank me. That’s what friends are for.” And the third point goes back to my previous argument that any intervention from God would undermine our freedom. In other words, some theists believe that God answers their prayers. However, as I argued in the previous section, since we are completely free to choose how to live, then God cannot answer any of our prayers. Obviously, He could, but our freedom is more important than answering our prayers.

NO MIRACLES REQUIRED—OR DESIRED

By the same token, the notion that God performs miracles would seem to be false. Is it possible for God to make miracles happen? I think, however, that Paine was correct in asserting “the Deist needs none of those tricks and shows called miracles to confirm his faith, for what can be a greater miracle than the creation itself, and his own existence” (1892, p. 398)? Many great thinkers like Voltaire and Hume have defined miracles as violations of laws. I don’t agree that miracles would be examples of violation of the laws of nature. Rather, the troubles with miracles are at least two. First, as Hume pointed out, it is not possible to rely on eyewitness testimony as proof that miracles happen. The reason is that many people are willing to see miracles for a variety of reasons. One reason may be that such individuals hallucinate. Another reason may be that some people seek notoriety. Yet another reason is that some people may not understand certain phenomena. All the same, the point is that a discussion on the merit of the alleged evidence for miracles is hopeless because it is impossible to determine what counts as a miracle and a reliable source that can confirm the truth of miracles.

I do not think it is correct to define miracles as divine acts that violate nature’s law. First, it is God who created nature. And there should be no reason God cannot perform an act in the

world. What we call miracles do not have to violate nature, however. They can be, from our standpoint, exceptions to natural laws. But it does not follow that natural laws, as we understand them, cannot accommodate certain acts. Perhaps as Augustine thought, miracles are “hidden potentialities” within nature itself, which are not normally observable to us. (Corner, 2019: para. 5). Thus, there are no reasons for either thinking that God cannot violate the laws of nature, or that performing miracles would undermine God’s attributes. However, once again, miracles would be, in fact, examples of intervention of God. As I argued above, since God gave us free will, any miracle would modify the natural course of action in the world, thereby undermining freedom. Therefore, according to many religions, prayer is a fundamental aspect of faith; indeed, for many religions prayer is a duty for humans. Also, theism argues that miracles are true. But if God is an omnibenevolent being who desires that we are free, and he endow us with freedom of the will, then prayer can only be a subjective way to express our personal feelings about God; and miracles are not impossible for God, but He does not want to perform them in order not to undermine our freedom. Deism, therefore, seems to describe in a more accurate way than theism our relationship with God. That is to say, deism can explain why God is concerned about and loves humans and evil exists.

In the next chapter, I continue the discussion on freedom versus determinism. I will defend an argument according to which human beings are free. In other words, our thoughts, decisions, and actions are free in the sense that we are the authors of those thoughts, decisions, and actions if and only if, in so doing, we are not influenced by external or internal factors over which we have no control. However, what I shall argue is that we are not ultimately free and, therefore, not ultimately morally responsible for our actions in a way that would warrant punitive

measures. In other words, I shall demonstrate that God does not punish anyone, including evildoers. Rather, God educates and rehabilitates the evildoer.

8

DEISM AND *JUDICIUM DIVINUM*

Many religious traditions believe in the idea of a *judicium divinum* or final judgment in the afterlife. But I do not believe that God, a supreme being, punishes anyone. By punishment here I intend the sort *contrapasso* or retributive punishment that Dante describes in the *Divine Comedy's Inferno*. The world is no doubt replete with injustice. Many good people suffer, and many don't get what they deserve, while others who are evil prosper and get some reward they don't deserve. As a result, many theists find solace in the idea of a final judgment that will take place in the afterlife. Since God is perfectly just, it is believed, He can restore justice and somehow make the wrong we experience in our lifetimes right. Many deists reject the notion of *judicium divinum* because God is not a "God of fear and trembling, of punishment and damnation" (Manuel, 1983: 34). Since divine judgment is such an important doctrine of theism, and according to common definitions of deism deists don't believe in a final judgment, most theists deem deism as a false belief. The obvious response is that God is an omnibenevolent being. As such, deism finds it unlikely and even implausible that the very omnipotent and omnibenevolent being that put us here will torture anyone or cause anyone to suffer. At all events, in what is to follow I would like to discuss the reasons I reject a final judgment, at least in the classical sense in which many religions believe.

The first point to mention is that our idea of judgment, for better or for worse, has been shaped by the legal system. Our lives depend on many important things, one of which is the concept of law and order. In the U.S.A., we pride ourselves of the unalienable rights to life,

liberty, and the pursuit of happiness that, according to the United States Declaration of Independence, have been given to all humans by their creator. Other countries have similar rights. But legal rights are human-made principles. However, such rights require responsibilities. And in order to make sure that people's rights are respected, the legal system and law enforcement must protect people and, when necessary, the law specifies how to punish people, and to what degree, for acting in ways that infringe people's God-given rights.

Talking about theories of punishment would be beyond the scope of this book. But I shall say just what I regard as necessary for the purpose of my argument. Theories of punishments may be divided into two general camps, utilitarian and retributive. The utilitarian theory of punishment is based on the idea that lawbreakers ought to be discouraged or deterred from future wrongdoing. Conversely, the retributive theory argues that we ought to punish offenders because they have done wrong and, as such, they *deserve* to be punished.

According to utilitarian ethics (roughly), we ought to act in such ways as to maximize the overall good or satisfaction or preference of the greatest number of individuals. Thus, utilitarian laws ought to be used to maximize the good or satisfaction or preference of society. The utilitarian theory of punishment is consequentialist in nature. It argues that punishment produces desirable consequences for both the offender and society, provided that the total good produced by punishment should exceed the total evil. Jeremy Bentham thought that since punishment entailed suffering, and suffering is an evil, there could be no justification for making people suffer unless suffering leads to social good. On the utilitarian theory, laws that detail punishment for criminal acts should be designed to deter future criminal conduct. Deterrence means that the goal of the punishment is to prevent other people from committing criminal acts. Also, the punishment serves as an example to the rest of society, by warning others that criminal behavior

will be punished. Deterrence works in two ways. First, a wrongdoer may be incarcerated in order to be physically prevented from committing further crime. Second, incapacitation is designed to be so unpleasant as to discourage offenders from repeating their criminal behavior.

Rehabilitation is another way to address wrongdoing. The purpose of rehabilitation is to prevent future crime by enabling offenders to reflect on their behavior within the confines of the law. Rehabilitative measures may include treatment for mental illness, chemical dependency, and chronic violent behavior. Moreover, rehabilitation includes the use of educational programs to give offenders the skills to be able to find a job. The U.S. legal system, for example, offers probation, and parole, which try to limit punishment. Also, different punishments should be given for different crimes; the amount and severity of punishment should be in proportion to the harm that a person caused by his actions.

Regarding retributive theory, offenders are punished for criminal behavior because they deserve punishment. Criminal behavior disrupts the normal balance of society and offends honest citizens. So, punishment restores the balance and “pays back” primarily the citizens who have been wronged and secondarily the community at large. While the utilitarian theory implements punishment as a measure that leads to social benefits, the retributive theory focuses on the crime as the basis for punishment. The retributive theory argues that human beings have free will on the basis of which they make rational decisions. Typically, offenders who are insane or otherwise incompetent are not be punished. However, a person who makes a conscious choice to commit a crime is be punished.

There are different moral criteria for retribution. One is that punishment is a form of vengeance: wrongdoers ought to suffer as they have forced others to suffer. For example, such a principle is expressed in the Old Testament of the Judeo-Christian Bible (Leviticus 24:20):

“When a man causes a disfigurement in his neighbor ... it shall be done to him, fracture for fracture, eye for eye, tooth for tooth....” Another view is that retribution protects the rights of both society and the offender. That is, punishment shows respect for the wrongdoer as it allows offenders to pay their debt to society before returning to society. Yet another view is denunciation in the sense that punishment is an expression of societal condemnation. The idea is that denouncing serves as a deterrent and, at the same time, it is retributive because it shows that offenders deserve to be punished, and they are punished.

Emotionally, it is natural to resent others who have wronged us, but perhaps when we consider punishment intellectually, we realize that retribution does not do what it is supposed to do. Such a feeling of anger and the idea of revenge and punishment possibly have an evolutionary basis. However, my point is that notions such as punishment, payback, vengeance, retribution, and hatred toward wrongdoers involve the illusion that somehow justice will be served by punishing criminals or otherwise evildoers and the balance of the universe, upset by evildoers’ acts, will be restored. Educating or reeducating people may be useful for the future, by deterring wrongdoing and reforming offenders. But the retributive notion of blood for blood is useless. Killing a murderer, for example, doesn’t bring back the life that the murderer took away. Rather, it can create more resentment that is bad for people and bad for society. No one can change the past. The only hope is to change the future by addressing the root of wrongdoing in a compassionate way. To be clear, I am not arguing that society should take no steps to deter crime or do nothing to deal with criminals, such as putting dangerous criminals behind bars. Rather, I am simply noting that an ultimate divine judgment and punishment doesn’t serve any purpose. Punishment often produces obedience and politeness—but not morality. Humans, as I noted, feel that there is a need to punish wrongdoing in order to establish the just relief that victims seek.

What I would like to suggest is that this sort of idea leads people to develop feelings of hatred. But when thinking about justice, we should not use our feeling of hatred to think about justice; rather, we should use our feeling of compassion. Vengeful motives often lead people to cause unnecessary harm.

We remove wrongdoers from society because we don't value their presence in society. As a result, we put them behind bars in giant facilities and regard them and treat them as evil individuals. People hate criminals and think that they "deserve" all the punishment and suffering that they caused to their victims. A just society should take steps to ensure that people do not violate each other's rights by intervening to stop violations when they are happening and taking steps to educate people and prevent and discourage them from committing crimes. But this does not entail punishment, desert, and retribution. The fundamental problem with the notion of payback and punishment is that such ideas view morality in a vacuum, discounting the personal lives and problems of individuals, many of whom grow up in destitute families without parents, and many of whom suffer from severe mental illnesses. The issue is that no one can take full credit for their circumstances. So, the more I think about it, the more I am convinced that there is a loose sense in which humans are free to act and experience reality. But in a stricter sense, the degree of freedom that human beings have may not be sufficient to attribute full moral responsibility that warrants divine reward or punishment.

Thus, I next consider the purpose that a divine justice could possibly serve. While it is true that God endowed humans with freedom of the will, it is important to recognize that there are different levels of freedom due to many factors that get in the way of our freedom, factors such as social and natural events playing a significant role in shaping people's personalities and behavior. As but one example of such factors, consider that one in five American adults

experiences a mental health issue. Mental health issues, clearly, often cause people to act in strange ways. Many factors contribute to mental health problems, such as genes, physical illness, injury, brain chemistry, trauma, abuse, family history of mental health problems, and more. About social factors, consider an individual who became a thief as a result of his upbringing, constantly exposed to crime since early on in his life, perhaps the absence of a mother and father, the absence of any point of reference, the lack of education, racial discrimination, and so on. While it is true that humans are free, often our freedom is severely, and often negatively, affected by misfortune and a host of factors that we cannot control. All these factors must be taken into consideration. Thus, in the case of this hypothetical thief, certainly it would be just that he returned the stolen goods to their original possessors. And it would be right, in the event that the thief no longer has those stolen goods, that the thief worked to earn money to repay the people whose goods were stolen. But again, this does not entail any further form of punishment.

Considering an analogy, think how difficult it is for some people to control themselves, despite their being free and functional adults. Many people suffer from the Tourette syndrome disorder, which involves repetitive unwanted movements or unwanted sounds often hard for the subject to control. Tics typically manifest themselves between the ages of 2 and 15. At present, there is no cure for Tourette syndrome, but only certain treatment are available. Scientists do not know the exact cause of Tourette. It is possibly due to a number of factors, again, genetics and environmental. Scientifically, Tourette syndrome is due to the malfunctioning of neurotransmitters. Now consider more complicated and dramatic cases, such as serial killers like Ted Bundy, Jeffrey Dahmer, or a dictator like Hitler. Such individuals committed monstrous crimes against humanity. Virtually all people are appalled by their cruel acts. To be sure, we often refer to those acts as moral evils. But there are more difficult questions than satisfactory

answers. Did such individuals understand that their actions were wrong? In what sense were they free to control themselves and not commit those acts? How ought God to judge and punish them? And what is the purpose of punishment in their specific cases. Should they be tortured? Should they suffer as much as they made others suffer? And how do you calculate the right amount of suffering that they ought to be given?

In his book, *The Social Psychology of Morality*: Roy F. Baumeister (2012: 367) writes,

When doing research for my book on evil (Baumeister, 1997), I was struck by how routinely other social scientists rushed to assert that this was not really a problem. To understand is not to forgive, they insisted. Yet I was not so sure. Indeed, my own work pointed toward different conclusions. In particular, *as we understand the perpetrators' inner processes and attitudes, we come to see their crimes as considerably less heinous than how others judge them. Most people who commit evil acts do not themselves regard their actions as evil.* Therefore, to understand their perspective is to understand the actions in a way that somehow diminishes their evilness. To be sure, as researchers and scientists our primary goal is to understand. Hence, we must perhaps accept that our approach will carry the moral risk of mitigating our condemnation of some of the worst things that human beings do. (Emphasis mine)

Evildoers such as serial killers, it would seem, know that what they did is wrong in the sense that they know they did an *illegal* act, which they justify to themselves one way or another. But the question is to what extent serial killers are free to choose their actions. It seems that it would depend on the degree of their mental issues, among other factors. Most humans, despite their being free-willed creatures, find themselves on many occasions in situations where they have no

idea how they got there in the first place. As but one example, think of yourself being in a heated argument. Have you ever said or done something that you never thought you would say or do? Have you ever regretted doing or saying those things, thinking how in the world such things could have come out of your mouth or how you could have acted in certain ways? And how did you get into that argument in the first place? Surely, people can and do work on their temper, and they often have the strength to prevent outbursts and other bad behavior. Just like people who suffer from Tourette syndrome can, if they work hard, control their unwanted movements and sound, though they may never completely resolve their issue. Heinous acts, of course, involve higher stakes of morality than unwanted jerks of the arm or bad temper.

However, to a certain extent the situations are analogous. The point is that serial killers, and other evildoers are not completely free to decide how to act. Many of them act the way they do as a result of a number of factors, such as traumas, child abuse, chronic stress, mental illness, mental constitution, upbringing, and other factors that led them to their personality and terrible behavior. What about good, moral people. The same applies to them. Good, honest, moral people are the way they are due to a number of factors, external and internal, which shaped who they are. So many evildoers may know or realize that society regards their acts as wrong, and they know that what they did is illegal, but it does not seem that they know that their actions are immoral. Or if they think that their actions have a moral dimension, they may think that morality is, after all, relative. Thus, it isn't a mere or simple question attributable to freedom and these individual's capacity to do otherwise; rather, their behavior is due to the fact that psychopaths are neurologically different from the average functional individual in that their brains experience the urge or pressure to behave the way they do as a result of many factors that influence in a

negative way their freedom to act one way or the other. But then again, even the average functional individuals are the product of many factors over which they had no control.

TRULY AND ULTIMATELY MORALLY RESPONSIBLE

In this section, I continue my discussion on freedom and determinism. This time, I shall examine the connection between *libero arbitrio* and moral responsibility. Some authors argue that moral responsibility is impossible. A notable example is Galen Strawson (1994, 2002, 2010, 2011) who offers what he calls a Basic Argument (which he has formulated in various ways) to defend this contention. Strawson's argument, in a nutshell, claims that—whether determinism is true or false—moral responsibility is impossible because we are not ultimately accountable for who we are, in the sense that we have not created ourselves or have decided how we come to choose what we do choose. Strawson's formulation of the Basic Argument may be, briefly, explained as follows: In order for people to be truly morally accountable for their actions, they would have to be self-created—which is impossible because no one can create himself before he exists. Therefore, it is impossible to be truly morally responsible for our actions.

Many writers have responded to Strawson's argument objecting that, in order for an agent to be truly morally responsible for her actions, an agent is not required to be self-made and to be responsible for her choices and for the events that cause her causes (Clarke 1997; Corabi 2017; O'Connor 2011: 320–21; Pereboom 2001: 65–68; Tucker 2007). Some philosophers have shown that it is more plausible that an agent is truly morally responsible than the plausibility that the agent be self-created. (Coffman 2015: 113–15; Fischer 2006: 112). Another argument has been offered to the effect that Strawson's requirements are so unreasonably demanding as to render its conclusion implausible, (Wolf 1990, 2015; Mele 1995: 221–30; Kane 1996; Clarke 2005;

Fischer 2006; McKenna 2008; Russell 2008; Hartman 2018). Such criticisms, however, miss the mark. For example, the Basic Argument does not claim that an agent can be ultimately responsible for an action only if the agent is responsible for all the factors that contribute to the agent's action. Also, it just seems implausible to think that an agent can be morally responsible for her action, A, when the factors that contribute to A are not up to her. But this is a complicated discussion that I shall not undertake here. For the purpose of this chapter, and book, it is not necessary to discuss the literature in full.²

The point that I shall make for the purpose of this chapter is that God does not punish human beings, in the sense of retributive justice that might entail damnation or any sort of punitive measures such as suffering, because, in the strict sense, people are not the sorts of creatures that are liable to any kind of negative sanction or punishment. This is because of the combination of two factors. One, although humans are free, they are not truly and ultimately morally responsible for their actions because they are not ultimately responsible for who they are—that is, they are not *causa sui*. Two, retributive justice is a primitive practice that a supreme being such as God does not implement. No creature, not even the vilest, deserves punishment in a way that warrants suffering. And moreover, the sort of retribution in terms of making a person suffer for what she has done, is useless—especially in the context of the afterlife. Therefore, all humans, including evildoers, deserve compassion and rehabilitation.

The strict sense of moral responsibility to which I refer means that we exist in a world that has physical laws and regularities, which we must and do obey without exception. Our actions and thoughts are inevitably informed and affected by a number of factors over which we have no control. This, however, does not mean that we never act freely. As I shall argue, acting freely does not mean acting randomly. For example, my decision to drink a glass of water may

be influenced by my having eaten something salty, which, in its turn, my eating something salty, might have been influenced or caused by some internal physiological or external events. In addition to such laws and regularities, although we are free, it is inevitable for humans to be affected by such factors as our upbringing, our mental constitution, peer pressure, weakness of the will, geographical and environmental factors, and, moreover, luck. Consequently, in the strict sense, people are not completely free to do, choose, and think what they want. Our choices and actions must, by the very nature of the world and by our nature, always be in part due to external and internal factors beyond our control. But why must humans be ultimately morally responsible in a strict sense for God to hold them accountable for their actions? Presumably, God knows that people are affected by many different factors and, nonetheless, He can affirm that human beings still have the capacity to choose, and thereby He can hold them accountable. Why must God only judge persons considering a strict sense of freedom? The reason, as I shall illustrate in the following, is that humans are not responsible for their nature. Second, God does not punish people due to the futility of retributive justice. Third, the very omnibenevolent nature of God entails that God does not judge people. Judging and punishing are human practices that matter for practical purposes in our temporal realm. God understands our conditions and, instead of making people suffer for their actions, He tries to mend and rehabilitate our souls.

Compatibilists, those who think that we are free despite the truth of determinism, try to reconcile determinism with free will by redefining freedom. There are several accounts of compatibilism—Stace (1952), P. F. Strawson (1962), Frankfurt (1971), Watson (1975), Wolf (1990), Fischer (1994), Fischer and Ravizza (1998), Wallace (1994), Mele (1995), and Bok (1998), to name a few. While their theories vary, the general message is that humans are morally accountable insofar as they physically and psychologically are the authors of their actions. As

Walter T. Stace explains, free actions are those actions that “have been caused by their own desires, wishes, thoughts, emotions, impulses, or other psychological states.” And unfree actions are those that are caused by external factors (Stace 1952: 411). That is, an agent is normally free to act in certain ways that he chooses or think or make certain choices as he sees fit so long as other factors, including luck, do not get in his way. Stace gives several examples, one of which is to consider the difference between a man who leave his office to go to lunch and another man leaves the office because he is removed by the police. For Stace, the man who left the office to go to lunch made a free decision because his decision is caused by his psychological state, a state that exists in the man. But the second man, the one removed by the police, is not free because his leaving the office is caused by his removal by the police, which is a factor external to the man. But this is not the looser sense of freedom that I have in mind. As Van Inwagen (1975) points out, if compatibilism is true, the world is deterministic and yet we are free. But if that were the case, then we would have the ability to freely perform actions the performance of which would either break a natural law or would make the past different from how it was.

Compatibilism does nothing to undercut Strawson’s argument and to show that we have the kind of freedom required in order to be morally blameworthy or praiseworthy. Many people are impressed with such examples because, intuitively, it appears that the first man performed a free action because nothing outside him obstructed or hindered his decision to go to lunch. Conversely, the second man was caused to leave the office by the police. But such observations should not be so impressive because they don’t show that freedom exists to the degree that one is ultimately morally responsible for his or her actions. The strategy used by compatibilists is to be content with a definition of free will that admits that everything has a cause. If the cause is something external that influences or forces us to act in certain ways, then our actions are not

free. But if the cause is an internal nudge, a psychological state of the agent's, then our actions are free. But aside from a superficial difference, in the end both men's acts of leaving the office could still be determined. It does not help to say that what cause the first man to leave the office is his (internal) psychological states simply because, if determinism is true, his psychological states can be determined by factors that are beyond his control.

Two things must be noted. First, whether determinism is true or whether indeterminism is true or whether compatibilism is true, human beings cannot ever be truly morally responsible for their actions, in the strict sense, to a degree such that God justly rewards or punishes them for what they have done. In order for an agent to be ultimately morally responsible for her actions, in the strict sense, she would have to be truly responsible for the origin of her actions. And in order for her to be responsible for the origin of her actions, she would have to be responsible for the origin of the origin of her actions. But in order to be responsible for the origin of the origin of her action she would have to be responsible for who she is—which leads to an infinite regress all the way down to her birth, which was not caused by her. The only way to stop such an infinite regress of origination is something impossible, and that is, that the agent be *causa sui*, the cause of herself, which is clearly impossible. Second, I must clarify that I do not endorse Strawson's argument. Galen Strawson, as far as I know, at the time I am writing this, is a hard determinist and thinks that freedom is an illusion. Conversely, I believe that we have free will. I may not be able to explain and articulate exactly to what freedom of the will amounts, I think that our being free is an epistemically basic truth. The question, then, is "Since I believe in free will, why am I using an argument for hard determinism to aid my own argument?" The reason is that, with Strawson, I share the view that an agent is not truly morally accountable in such a way that the agent would be liable to some kind of punishment or sanction or retributive justice in the eyes of

God. This is especially evident with regard to God because, in the light of God's perfect moral nature, and having considered and shown the futility of punishment, it is implausible to think that God punishes and causes people to suffer for what they have done—even if people are free. Thus, Strawson's argument works well in showing that we are not ultimately morally accountable and what it is required for humans to be ultimately morally responsible for their actions without thereby endorsing determinism. At the end of my discussion of Strawson's argument, I shall explain why I think that, while the argument succeeds in explaining well why we are not truly and ultimately morally responsible, the argument fails to show that we are not free.

Let me try to explain my argument by using an example. Consider an agent that I shall call Paul. If Paul intentionally performs an action, say that he helps the homeless, is Paul truly morally responsible for it? Is he morally praiseworthy? It seems that the answer hinges on certain features of Paul's mental constitution—that is, the reasons or the cause that brought about Paul's action to help the homeless. And clearly there are other factors at play, such as luck, opportunity, and others. According to Strawson's argument, Paul would be truly morally responsible, and thus his action of helping the homeless would be praiseworthy, only if Paul is truly morally responsible for the parts of the reason that caused or that explain his helping the homeless. But Paul is truly morally responsible for the parts of the reason that caused or that explain his helping the homeless only if Paul is truly morally responsible for an earlier event that Paul intentionally brought about. A problem soon emerges. Paul is truly morally responsible for helping the homeless because of his mental constitution and because of the event that caused or explained his mental constitution at the time of his helping the homeless if and only if Paul has performed an infinite number of antecedent free actions.

But it is impossible for finite beings like us to have performed an infinite number of past actions or to be responsible for an infinite number of events. Therefore, it is impossible for a finite being like Paul (or any other human being) to be truly morally responsible for anything. As Strawson (2010: 24) writes,

But to be truly responsible for how one is, mentally speaking, in certain respects, one must have chosen to be the way one is, mentally speaking, in certain respects. It is not merely that one must have caused oneself to be the way one is, mentally speaking; that is not sufficient for true moral responsibility. One must have consciously and explicitly chosen to be the way one is, mentally speaking, in certain respects, at least, and one must have succeeded in bringing it about that one is that way.

In short, the requirements for a finite person to be truly morally responsible for a certain action are impossible to meet because they would involve self-determination. True moral responsibility, then, requires that one has consciously, explicitly, and successfully chosen in the past one's present reasons for action. And as Michael Anthony Istvan Jr. (2011: 405–406) aptly observes, being truly and ultimately morally responsible for one's actions does not require the agent's total control over an action; rather, true moral responsibility requires that the agent be truly morally responsible for just the part of his mental constitution (the way he is) that explains her action (cf. Strawson 2002: 445).

Now suppose that Paul could choose or self-determine his beliefs and desires. Would that change anything? Could Paul, then, be a truly morally responsible agent whose actions may be worthy of praise or blame? On the strict interpretation of moral responsibility, the answer is no—and the reason is that, even if that were the case, there would remain the issue of infinite regress

of choices and events causing those choices, that no human being, due to his or her finiteness, could possibly bring into existence (cf. Strawson 2010: 42). Surprisingly, even if Paul were an infinite being capable of performing an infinite number of self-creating past actions, Paul would not be a truly morally responsible agent, either. As Strawson (2010: 50) explains, “Not even God could be truly self-determining as to his motives for action; nor therefore could he be truly responsible for what he did in any ultimate way.” Here, however, I want to note that, given God’s nature, He is not under any moral obligations.

Does any version of substance dualism render the agent ultimately morally responsible in the strict sense? The claim of substance dualism is that the self is, in fact, a non-physical substance, which may be “exempt” from causality, unlike physical things that are caused to act by antecedent events and the laws of nature. Perhaps some form of agent causation is true (or if one doesn’t like the notion of “causation” one can substitute it with any other term). As Chisholm explains agent causation, human beings have “a prerogative which some would attribute only to God: each of us, when we act, is a prime mover unmoved. In doing what we do, we cause certain events to happen, and nothing—or no one—causes us to cause those events to happen.” (1964: 12) While I am sympathetic with the idea, and I do believe that the agent-self is more than just matter, the problem, however, to put it simply, is to explain how an agent causes itself to act the way she acts. In other words, the agent-self makes the decisions *qua* “prime mover unmoved.” The agent-self is the ultimate cause of the choosing. But how exactly does this work? Either the agent makes decisions based on certain reasons for acting or it would seem that the agent’s actions are uncaused—in which case we would have to face the fact that the agent’s actions are random. One may argue that such actions may not be random in some important respect. But the fact is that, in the case just described, the agent’s actions would have no

explanation at all—which would make freedom a dubious prospect. At the very least, this sort of self-authorship would seem to violate the principle of sufficient reason. Thus, even if the agent-self is nonphysical, as substance dualism suggests, an agent-self might even be “exempt” from obeying the laws of nature and from causality. However, the point is that, even if the agent-self is a nonphysical substance or a soul, the decisions made by a nonphysical substance or a soul must also have an explanation of a cause. If, for instance, the soul makes the decision to take chocolate over pistachio, or to get an abortion, either the decision just occurs by springing from the soul without any cause or explanation, in which case it would be random—and not ultimately free; or it must be caused or brought about by or explained in terms of something else in a non-viciously-circular way. Furthermore, substance dualism notoriously lacks an explanation of how an immaterial soul can interact with the material brain. Again, I do not want to exclude such a possibility. At this point, it is obvious that no theory of mind can fully capture the nature of freedom.

So, who is truly and ultimately morally responsible? No one is—not even God because, as Strawson observes (2011), “To be truly or ultimately responsible . . . there has to be, and cannot be, a starting point in the series of acts of bringing it about that one has a certain nature—a starting point that constitutes an act of ultimate self-origination.” In other words, consider again the case of Paul’s helping the homeless. In order for Paul to be truly morally responsible for his actions, and thus be praised for them, there would have to be a starting point in the chain of events that bring about his nature. But even if there is one, Paul is not the author of such a starting point. As Strawson suggests (2010: 50), “One cannot ultimately choose one’s psychological condition; we cannot describe this. It’s not simply that we don’t know how to, but that we know we cannot.” A moral agent would have to be *causa sui*, i.e., Paul would have to

cause the actions that bring about who he is at the time he helps the homeless and Paul must be truly morally responsible for who he is *prior* to his action.

That is why not even God is truly morally responsible for who He is and, therefore, He is not ultimately praiseworthy. After all, even if God is eternal, He did not choose to be eternal. And since He is eternal, He could not have brought Himself into existence. Arguably, God did not choose His omnibenevolent moral nature, either. It would seem that God cannot, for example, be the originator of the decision to choose to become omnimalevolent. God is what is known as *actus purus*, which means that God is eternally all that He can be. He is pure actuality. If God did not choose to be morally perfect, and to be pure actuality, being morally perfect, in the strict sense, cannot be praiseworthy. If one cannot, by his own nature, ever choose to act wrongly, but must always act rightly, then one cannot be praised for being what one is and for what one must do. God is the paradigm and source of goodness and, as such, we don't praise Him for living up to His moral duty or for acting rightly. For in the first place, God does not have any moral duties, and in the second place, God cannot be anything else but *actus purus*.

Some philosophers are persuaded by the sorts of arguments offered by Harry Frankfurt (1969) that free choice does not require the ability to do otherwise. Imagine that someone, let's call him Asmodeus, has total control of your brain and can affect your choices. Suppose that Asmodeus knows that you are planning to embezzle some money from your employer, and he wants you to do it. Just to be sure, if at the last minute you decided not to do it, Asmodeus would make you do it. When the right opportunity presents itself, you decide to go through with it and steal the money, and so Asmodeus never made you embezzle the money. Note that you "freely" decided to embezzle the money and did take the money—even though you really did not have a choice. You could not have done otherwise since, if at the last minute you had decided not to

steal the money, Asmodeus would have made you do it anyway. In other words, it was not possible for you to do otherwise. What this thought experiment is meant to show is that your actions can be free even if you could not have done otherwise. So, your actions are free so long as there aren't any causal constraints impeding your choices. And this means that it is up to you how you choose, and that you are the author of your actions.

Now the problem with this sort of argument is that it begs the question by assuming that libertarian free will exists and it is compatible with the deterministic laws of the universe. In other words, it does not show that you are free in the strict sense of freedom required for moral responsibility. The thought experiment only shows that you are free in the looser sense of freedom. You are free to embezzle the money in the sense that you chose to embezzle the money and, immediately prior to your going through with your misdeed, your mental state caused you to take the money. No question about it, if your employer finds out, and the police catch you, you will be punished because you actually embezzled your employer's money. However, the problem is that, while you were responsible for stealing the money, you were not ultimately responsible for it. Why? Because if your action is caused by a certain mental state immediately prior to your stealing the money, what caused that mental state? That mental state might have originated from a number of external and internal factors over which you had no control, in which case you were not ultimately free.

In a recent paper, Hartman (2018) suggests a way to undermine the main premise of Strawson's argument according to which one is truly morally responsible only if one is self-made, which is impossible. And it is luck what determines the way one is. Hartman observes that Strawson's premise, which is based on a commonsense assumption or intuition about moral luck can be undermined. Hartman's strategy is to demonstrate that luck shows that our commonsense

supports both notions that, in certain circumstances, an agent is praiseworthy and blameworthy. And since it is not clear which intuition is correct, Strawson's premise will be undermined. How does this work? Hartman give three examples (169): in one case, two drivers drive irresponsibly; by sheer misfortune, one driver kills a pedestrian. the second case involves two judges who "would freely take a bribe if one were offered." By luck one judge has the opportunity to take the bribe, but not the other judge. And the third example involves two individuals who "would freely help a beggar if they had a good upbringing..." One of them gets a good upbringing and the other a bad upbringing. As a result, one helps the beggar, but the other doesn't.

So, what's Hartman's point? Hartman observes that,

In our everyday lives, however, we make moral judgments that imply that the killer driver is more blameworthy than the merely reckless driver; the bribe taker is more blameworthy than the mere would-be bribe taker; and the helper is more praiseworthy than the mere would-be helper (169).

But at the same time, Hartman notes, it seems plausible to believe that moral luck should not affect our moral responsibility. Citing Zimmerman (2002), Nagel (1979), and Williams (1985), Hartman argues that the drivers and the judges are equally morally blameworthy, and the two persons are equally praiseworthy. After all, the pedestrian's being there at the wrong time, the bribe offer, and good habituation are a matter of luck, which is beyond the drivers', the judges', and the citizens' control. Thus, according to Hartman, this thought experiment shows that Strawson's responsibility premise is false because moral luck contradicts it and supports it at the same time. I think that Hartman is wrong. Let me show you why. Hartman writes, "The upshot is that our moral intuitions do not obviously justify the responsibility premise, because part of common sense implies that the responsibility premise is false and another part of common sense

appears to support it.” (171) However, I think that Harman’s ambivalence argument from moral lack is not sound.

Starting with the drivers, the killer driver is more blameworthy than the reckless driver because she killed a pedestrian, but the reckless driver did not kill anyone; so, the reckless driver should not be blamed over the mere possibility of killing a pedestrian. The fact that a pedestrian could have been there and would have been killed by the reckless driver does not entail that both drivers are equally blameworthy. True, both drivers’ actions can be regarded as immoral—but for different reasons, one for killing a person and the other for driving recklessly. The point is that, as things stand, the correct moral intuition is that, regardless of luck, the killer driver is morally blameworthy for killing a pedestrian; but the reckless driver is not blameworthy for killing a pedestrian because she did not kill it. It would not be correct to say that the killer driver and the reckless driver are equally blameworthy for the death of a pedestrian just because the reckless driver was just “lucky” that no pedestrian was around while she was driving recklessly but if a pedestrian had been there, the reckless driver would have killed it.

The only moral blame that we can assign to the reckless driver is for her driving recklessly. If Hartman wishes to show that a part of our moral intuition supports the belief that both drivers are equally morally responsible, he needs to run a different thought experiment: there is a possible world in which the second reckless driver also kills a pedestrian—and consequently the second driver, too, is equally blameworthy to the killer driver for killing a pedestrian. Put that way, it is obvious that both drivers are equally blameworthy—but this is an entirely different kind of thought experiment that does not affect the truth of the responsibility premise. Why should we say that the second driver is as worthy of blame as the killer driver if she didn’t kill anyone? Only if Hartman considers the issue based on the logic of a possible

worlds can he claim that there is a sense in which our moral intuition supports the notion that both drivers are equally morally blameworthy. However, if that is the case, we must be consistent and assess our cases based on such a criterion and, when we do, the ambivalence disappears.

Consider next the thought experiment involving the two judges. This case is significantly different from the previous because, unlike the reckless driver who (presumably) does not desire to kill a pedestrian, both judges desire to take a bribe. Consequently, the only correct intuition is that both judges are equally morally blameworthy. Even based on the possible-worlds logic, both judges are equally blameworthy. The intuition that the judge who took a bribe is more blameworthy than the one who didn't, perhaps, stems from a legal consideration. One could say that the first judge, but not the second, deserves punishment because he took a bribe. There would be no legal ground to convict the judge who did not take a bribe solely on the basis of the *mens rea* without the *actus reus*. But we are considering moral, not legal, blameworthiness. Thus, in order to determine their blameworthiness, we must understand why both judges are morally blameworthy. The reason is that they both would take the bribe if given the opportunity. The intuition is brought into light by running the thought experiment in terms of a possible world in which the judge who, by luck of the courthouse draw, does not take a bribe is presented with the opportunity to take a bribe and does take a bribe. And in that case, it is clear that both judges are equally morally blameworthy. In other words, our moral intuition does not support both theses that one judge is more blameworthy than the other and that both judges are equally blameworthy. Surely, the judge who took a bribe might (legally) deserve to be disbarred, while it would be illegal to disbar the other judge. However, there is no ambivalence about the

blameworthiness of the judges. The only correct intuition is that both judges are morally blameworthy.

What about the case of the two citizens (one citizen helps a beggar because he had a good upbringing, and the other citizen doesn't not help a beggar because he had a bad upbringing)? Consider this analogy. Suppose that there are two top marathoners who can win a marathon. But by luck, only one runner is selected to run; and he does run and win the marathon. Clearly, it would be absurd to reward the runner who, unluckily, was not given the opportunity to run. It would be wrong to say, for example, that the runner who didn't participate in the race deserves the prize money for winning the race because he would have won the race if he had been given the opportunity to run. By the same token, it would be senseless to praise the person who does not help a beggar due to his wrong upbringing by saying that, if he had had the right upbringing, he would have helped. It would be as senseless as celebrating the victory of the runner who would have won a marathon if he had been given the opportunity to run it! Once again, if we run the thought experiment differently using the possible-worlds logic, it is clear that both individuals are praiseworthy for helping a beggar. That is, there is a possible world where the person in our world with the bad upbringing has a good upbringing and helps the beggar. Thus, in that possible world, that person and the person in our world are equally praiseworthy—but this is an entirely different thought experiment.

In each case, if we use the same assessment criterion, only one intuition is correct, and the ambivalence disappears. There is a possible world in which the reckless driver kills a pedestrian, like the killer driver, in which case both drivers are equally blameworthy; there is a possible world in which the second judge is given the opportunity to take the bribe and takes it, and thus both judges are equally blameworthy; and there is a possible world in which the person

with the bad upbringing receives a good upbringing and helps a homeless, in which case both individuals are equally praiseworthy. When we run the thought experiments by using the logic of possible worlds, the situation may change. However, the point is that Hartman does not ask whether both drivers, both judges, and both citizens are equally blameworthy or praiseworthy in some possible world. Rather, the question is whether these individuals, as things stand, are equally morally responsible for certain events. As I have shown, this depends. In the case of the drivers, it would be absurd to say that they are both culpable for the death of a pedestrian when one driver actually kills a pedestrian and the other doesn't. In the case of the judges, both judges are morally, but not legally, culpable. And in the case of the two citizens, obviously, only the one that helps a beggar is praiseworthy. Thus, the debate on moral luck does not show that the self-creation premise in Strawson's argument is contradicted and supported by our commonsense notion of moral responsibility. Upon closer inspection, it is clear that based on the same criterion there is only one correct conclusion about moral blameworthiness and praiseworthiness. And therefore, there is no ambivalence inherent in the self-creation requirement. Strawson's point still stands: the way we are determines what we do; since we do not decide the way we are, we do not create ourselves, then we cannot be ultimately morally culpable for our actions in a way that warrants liability for retributive justice.

FREEDOM AND PUNISHMENT

Well, it is time for me now to put my cards on the table. Where has the foregoing discussion taken us? If no one can ever be truly and ultimately morally responsible because, for one to be ultimately responsible, one would have to be self-made, then is free will real? And, if it is real, what is it? Free will might be the most obvious thing in the world, and yet it is resilient to

our attempts at defining it. So, at this juncture, I want to make a few points. The first is that my foregoing discussion, in particular my exposition of Strawson's argument, and my observations on the difficulties inherent in the connection between ultimate moral responsibility and free will, do not amount to an affirmation of determinism. I do not endorse determinism. I believe that free will exists. Strawson's argument, in my view, simply demonstrates in a rather adroit manner that we cannot be ultimately morally responsible because no one can be *causa sui*, regardless of whether determinism or indeterminism is true. From our standpoint, in matters of justice and morality as they apply to our lives, we are morally responsible for our actions in the sense that, since we are the actors of our actions, we are accountable for what we do. However, (a) not being *causa sui* does not imply that we lack the capacity to make free choices; and (b) our capacity to make free choices, and our moral responsibility toward others, do not imply that we are the sorts of creatures that are liable to divine punishment.

Strawson's argument contends that every mental state is caused by factors beyond our control. The mistake that Strawson makes (not only Strawson) is to assume that because everything is nature is, so to speak, mechanistic, it follows that, to use Dennett's deflationary adjective, people are "wet robots." In other words, Strawson dismisses the self. A billiard ball, upon impact with another, causes that second ball to move onto the billiard table. But it did not have the freedom to choose to so act. But the obvious difference between a billiard ball and a human being is her reflective capacities.

Free will may not be seen directly, but it is the most plausible explanation of what we see in human life. After Strawson's argument, one may feel persuaded that free will is an illusion. The first argument for free will is a thought experiment against determinism. Imagine what humanity would be like if freedom did not exist. Instead of reflective, rational beings, humans

would not even be asking whether they are free. This, I realize, is not a strong argument. But it is, nonetheless, a remarkable fact about nature. And along with other such argument, it offers a cumulative argument for free will. Namely, everything else in nature besides humans, simply follow regularities, don't have the capacity to express themselves, and do not have the capacity of introspection and self-assessment. Not even the most intelligent animals have such capacities. Think of a soda machine: you insert money, and it dispenses soda. There is no reason to believe that, in addition to the electrical wiring and mechanical processes going on within it, a soda machine reflects upon what it is happening. Humans clearly can. And they can tell you what it is going on with their actions. It would seem to me that, if we were determined beings, every thought, desires, beliefs--including the notion of determinism, by the way—would be the result of mechanistic processes occurring within our brains. But it seems odd that determinism would produce in some, but not all people, the illusion of freedom. And the thought of being free would not be an illusion. An illusion, after all, is a deceptive impression of reality. But one's judgments must be free in order to acknowledge such an illusion. Many thinkers often note that the very fact that we are morally accountable shows that we are free. One must note that the very fact that we are engaged in this learning and wondering about logic, truth, and freedom shows that we must have a certain degree of mental freedom that animals and other objects lack. After all, if determinists' goal is to show people that they ought to realize that free will is an illusion, if we are determined, there is nothing at all there that we ought to or ought not to do.

Furthermore, we must recognize that there are different levels of reality. When we speak of the world from the standpoint of quantum field theory, we get very strange descriptions of the way things are and behave. The picture of reality according to quantum theory is that reality is not made of oranges, babies, trucks, books, birds, and so on. Rather, reality is made of particles

and waves and vibrations that we cannot possibly directly see or understand that behave quite strangely in comparison with the things that we ordinarily experience. Mathematics, for that reason, is the language that connects reality at its fundamental levels and our day-to-day realm of tangible things and concepts. Mathematics allows us to describe reality. Scientists tell us wild things about reality: that at its most fundamental level, particles can be at the same time in two different places, or that reality doesn't exist until observed, or that a photon can be a particle and a wave, and more. This, however, does not invalidate our existence in our mundane realm of airplanes, pizzas, people, cities, and trees. I suggest that the situation is analogous with respect to freedom and determinism. At the level of reality in which we exist, we are free and capable of altering the future. In the strict sense, reality is not composed of trees, airplanes, broccoli, and apples, but rather of strings and vibrations. Nevertheless, trees, airplanes, broccoli, and apples do objectively exist. By the same token, in the strict sense, no creature is ultimately morally responsible for its actions. This would require an impossibility, self-authorship. At the same time, in the context of our reality, it makes perfect sense to talk about moral responsibility. However, note that even at our level of reality, as I have discussed, the concept of punishment in terms of an-eye-for-an-eye type of retribution does not make sense. It does make sense to try to correct wrongs by compassion, education, and rehabilitation.

I don't think that anyone can do any better than this. What exactly free will is we might never be able to fully understand it or precisely articulate. Just as I am more than well justified in assuming that there is an external world and I am not a brain floating inside a vat, everything about human behavior and reasoning is evidence that we are free. Human beings are often free to produce original actions despite the many determining factors that affect them, such as the environment, peer pressure, upbringing, and others. For the purpose of our social interactions, we

are morally responsible for our actions. But it doesn't mean that (a) since we are free, we must resent people for their wrongdoings and (b) we must hold people liable to retributive punishment. Consider a driver who parks his car on the bicycle path. A cyclist takes a screwdriver and scratches the entire side of the car thinking that the driver deserves it. He penalized me, and therefore he must be penalized for what he has done to me or to other cyclists. As I have already observed, such a notion is quite primitive, and useless. Scratching the car to cause the driver suffering, and all the anger one feels toward him, will not restore any cosmic justice, or will contribute to some greater good. It seems more appropriate to deal with wrongdoers by showing them our compassion than to punish them. As Derek Pereboom aptly notes, "One might, for example, explain to an offender that what he did was wrong, and then encourage him to refrain from performing similar actions in the future. One need not, in addition, blame him for what he has done." (1995: 33)

Now regarding the *judicium divinum*, theism argues that, in the afterlife, God will implement retributive justice and decide the proper punishment or reward for humans based on their merits and demerits. I do not mean that we should ignore criminal behavior and do nothing about it in our society. Retributive justice seems to stem from the thought that you hurt me, and I am mad about it and so I will hurt you because it will make me feel better. In other words, the thought behind retributive justice is payback. But in most cases payback is not possible. Murderers cannot return their victims to their loved ones. Rapists cannot return to the victims what they have taken away from them. So, the idea of punishing people out of hate accomplishes nothing positive. It accomplishes something negative by making people experience hate and resentment. Therefore, rather than hating and punishing people, we should offer them our compassion and should try to rehabilitate them when possible. Regarding the afterlife, this point

is even more salient. It would be pointless to torture rapists and serial killers in the name of justice. What good could punishing them possibly bring? Presumably, God would gain nothing from it—nor would other souls. The most plausible course of action is that wrongdoers be rehabilitated and allowed to reflect on their misdeeds. Wrongdoers do not need punishment, but rather rehabilitation through examples, compassion, habituation, and reintegration.

What, then, does deism say about evildoing and divine judgment? For one thing, as Baumeister and Pereboom note, perhaps we should view evildoing through a different pair of lenses; in the sense that what we call moral evil is not so simple a question as it might appear at face value. Perhaps we should be able to condemn the act rather than the actor since, in most cases, the actor's freedom was severely compromised by many factors over which he had no control. As Fyodor Dostoevsky aptly notes in *Crime and Punishment*, "The man who has a conscience suffers whilst acknowledging his sin. That is his punishment." (1866, Part 3, Chapter 5). But if he has no conscience? In other words, in the afterlife, God doesn't punish humans in the sense that He makes sure that they suffer for their misconducts or for their evil acts during their lifetimes. If one has a conscience, as Dostoevsky notes, she will have time to reflect on what she has done wrong. But what can God do to those who have no conscience? Punishment would be useless. The most plausible action is that God will try to rehabilitate that individual and bring her or him closer to His goodness.

Consider now what we humans regard as evildoing from the point of view of God by employing a thought experiment. For practical purposes, I shall use the term heaven and being in heaven in relation to those individuals who are not punished who freely enter into a relationship with God in the afterlife. And I shall use hell or going to hell in relation to those individuals who are judged by God. Suppose that there is a happy family composed of mother, father, and two

children. Let us assume that only one of the two children goes to heaven along with his father, and the other child goes to hell along with his mother (or any other combination of the like). This means that the mother and one of the children who are in hell are separated from God—and also separated from the father and the other child. If the father and his son go to heaven, would they enjoy a state of eternal bliss knowing that the mother and the other child are separated from them and from the eternal goodness of God? It is clear that God does not want the father and his son to suffer as a result of thinking about their unfortunate family members who did not make it in heaven. One solution could be that God somehow “erases” the memories of the father and the child in heaven. No one could enjoy heaven knowing that some family members are suffering in hell, even if the suffering does not stem from eternal fire. Or God may either decide to erase the mother’s and the child’s memories or perhaps may leave their memories, after all they have to suffer, and this would give them something to think about during their separation. This is, however, unlikely because God is compassionate, and He would never inflict unnecessary pain. In fact, arguably God is not capable of inflicting pain or suffering to anyone.

Perhaps, then, God must “erase” the memories of those who go to heaven and hell. However, two other problems arise. One is the ethical question of erasing people’s memories, and the other is the question of identity. Namely, it is not so simple, I argue, to erase somebody’s memory without facing some moral concerns, even for God, who is morally perfect. God can erase one’s memory, but the truth of the matter is that a loving family is separated and God himself knows that they are living apart from each other without knowing what is happening. So, since God loves his creatures, He will not permit the separation of such a family—whether one of the family members is ted Bundy or Jeffrey Dahmer or Bernard Madoff. And this leads to the

second question, the question of identity. We have not, in fact, considered the implication for erasing one's memory.

But what does it mean to erase the father's memory of his wife and the second child, who are now in a state of eternal or otherwise separation? Presumably, it means erasing each and every idea in the mind of the father and the child in heaven that has to do with the mother and the child in hell. This seems a very complicated task. In fact, every idea in our mind is interconnected with numerous other ideas. For example, I have an idea of my father, and I have an idea of going to the park with my father. If I think of my father, sometimes I think of going to the park and, when I think about or I am in the park I think about my father. God, then, would have a very complicated task to perform, and this task consists of removing my idea of my father plus removing the idea of my father from every other idea that I have of him or that triggers his memory in various circumstances. Moreover, the same must be done in order to erase my father's ideas of myself. God would have to remove our idea of my father's feeding me, my father's teaching me things, and my father's giving me affection, my father's taking me to the movies or to the museum, and so forth. But in the end, it would seem, my father and I will completely lose our identities, because what makes an individual himself or herself is in fact a chain of ideas, memories, and experiences intertwined with many ideas. Therefore, as if this were not sufficiently complicated, God would have to resolve the problem of conserving my identity while changing my identity—a task that would seem to be impossible.

The solution is to replenish the gaps produced by the removal of the child's idea of his father with other ideas—but which ideas? Or God may change permanently people's identities. Perhaps, God may decide to substitute the idea that the child's father is in a different place, but that would not work because it would be a lie and God cannot lie. Or God may erase our

memories and that is the end of the story. Consider a mother, for example, who has carried her child for nine long months of pregnancy. For nine months she carried her baby in her womb. Once born, she then nursed him, and washed him, and reared him—in other words, she was a good mother. Then, let us assume that the mother is sent to hell and the son to heaven. It would not seem to be right to erase the mother's and the child's memories. Nor would it seem right, considering that God is omnibenevolent, to separate the two. My contention here is that those religions that believe in hell and heaven and punishment and so forth present a caricature of God. In the view of deism, God is a morally perfect being who loves all his creatures. His love is so perfect that He is not capable of judging or hating anyone, let alone punishing or otherwise inflicting pain on anyone. Therefore, the most plausible conclusion is that in His moral greatness and magnificent nature, God cannot be a God of judgment and punishment. He can only be a God of love—a God who rehabilitates his creatures whose actions have caused others to suffer. Judgment, hate, punishments, law, and other such concepts apply to humans and make sense in this physical arena. People who are affected by crime and offended by the immoral behavior and action of others expect some sort of compensation, whether monetary or the suffering of the wrongdoer. Such an expectation is understandable from an evolutionary standpoint, but not from a divine one.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

In this chapter, I have presented and defended my version of deism. The main theme of my discussion is that deism offers the most plausible understanding of God. The problem with theism is that in my view it offers a bad caricature of God (or often anthropomorphize God). Theists, as I have noted, agree that God endowed humans with freedom of the will. But at the

same time argue that God intervenes and interacts with the world. Theists see this as an important doctrine because they argue that a loving God must interact with His creatures just like a loving parent interacts and helps along his children. Consequently, theist assert that if God does not intervene in human affairs, answer prayers, and performs miracles, He would not after all be a loving God. As I have observed, however, God's interaction, any interaction, would entail that God impairs and even undermines our freedom. Since freedom is so important because God does not want pets, but rather friends, God does not interact with humans. But this does not mean that He does not love humans. On the contrary, He does not interact with us precisely because He loves us so much that He does not want to modify or determine our free choices and ultimately our lives.

Also, deism offers the most plausible understanding of God because, according to deism, God is not a judge who punishes wrongdoers. As I have explained, the very idea of wrongdoing should be revised. We normally tend to see people acting in ways that cause others to suffer. Consequently, we say that the individuals causing suffering are evil or immoral. As I have suggested, the issue is more nuanced than it is normally accepted. Many individuals, despite being free, are either born into unfortunate situations or are negatively affected by their upbringing, genetics, mental health, surroundings, and other factors that cause their aberrant behavior. Thus, I suggested that instead of condemning the actor, we should condemn the act and be more understanding and more compassionate toward others. Furthermore, I have pointed out that punishment does not benefit anyone. Therefore, presumably, since God is infinitely loving and compassionate, and He wants us all to benefit from existence, He does not punish or otherwise inflict any sort of suffering or torture anyone. As an infinitely loving and compassionate friend, God will rehabilitate, teach, and love all humans.

¹ Granted, there is Hume to be reckoned with. Hume questioned the law of cause and effect. But again, for the purpose of this section we need not deal with Hume's problem of induction.

² For a full discussion and defense of Strawson's argument see the work of Istvan, M. A. Jr. (2011) "Concerning the Resilience of Galen Strawson's Basic Argument". *Philosophical Studies*, 155, 399–420.