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ORIGINAL SIN AND A BROAD FREE WILL DEFENSE

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ABSTRACT: I begin with a distinction between narrow and broad defenses to the logical problem of evil. The former is simply an attempt to show that God and evil are not logically incompatible whereas the latter attempts the same, but only by appealing to beliefs one takes to be true in the actual world. I then argue that while recent accounts of original sin may be consistent with a broad defense, they are also logically incoherent. After considering potential replies, I conclude by proposing an account of original sin that is both logically coherent and consistent with a broad defense.

Introduction

The free will defense is now widely recognized as being a successful response to the logical problem of evil.¹ What is less clear is whether that success turns out to be helpful in the dialectic regarding the co-existence of God and evil.² Some, like Jerry Walls, have argued that Alvin Plantinga's distinction between a defense and a theodicy is not helpful because the lack of libertarian free will in the actual world would mean the free will defense fails in the actual world—the world we actually care about.³ While it is true that having reasons to think parts of a free will defense are actually false, even if possi-

1. Take, for example, prominent atheist William Rowe's remark that "Granted incompatibilism, there is a fairly compelling argument for the view that the existence of evil is logically consistent with the existence of the theistic God" ("The Problem of Evil and Some Varieties of Atheism," *American Philosophical Quarterly* 16 (1979): 335m).

2. Here, and following, I do not intend my use of phrases like "evil exists" to imply that privation theories of evil are false. One should feel free to replace this phrase with whatever is compatible with privation theories as it will have no bearing on the argument.

3. Jerry Walls, "Why Plantinga Must Move from Defense to Theodicy," *Philosophy and Phenomenological*

bly true, makes the defense less compelling, from that it does not follow that one must commit to a full-fledged theodicy. We may instead distinguish between a *narrow defense* and a *broad defense*. A narrow defense simply aims to provide reasons to think that it is not logically impossible for God and evil to co-exist. This is likely the type of defense Rowe has in mind and the defense for which Plantinga has been widely celebrated.

A broad defense, however, aims to do more. It aims to provide such an account, but in doing so only appeals to beliefs the free will defender actually takes to be true. While approaching theodicy it stops short of maintaining that the account is indeed the reason for evil. The proponent of a broad defense is simply maintaining that for all she knows this could be the reason for evil, and that possible reason for evil is consistent with everything else she actually takes to be true.⁴ I am inclined to think that, ultimately, all theists should be concerned with giving a broad defense because it would be trivial for the atheologian to force it upon us. In formulating his version of the logical problem of evil J.L. Mackie began with beliefs that the theist takes to be true: 1) God is omnipotent, 2) God is wholly good, and 3) Evil exists. If, as we shall consider below, traditional conceptions of original sin are incompatible with the details of a free will defense then Mackie could have simply added: 4) There is original sin. The free will defense would then no longer be useful in resolving this apparent inconsistency.⁵

Whether a broad free will defense will convince the non-theist that evil's existence is not a good reason to refrain from believing in God remains to be seen. It does appear more likely to do so than a narrow defense. It should be noted that this dialectical appeal comes with a cost. The theist advocating a broad defense must do much more than was required before in that she must now demonstrate that the specific details of the defense are compatible with everything else she takes to be true, or at least be ready to defend against accusations of incompatibility. It is to this task we now must turn for there appears to be at least one doctrine commonly believed among orthodox Christian theists that is not compatible with a broad free will defense.

Research 51, (1991): 375–8.

4. Given that Plantinga has been at pains to maintain that aspects of the defense "need not be true or known to be true; it need not be so much as plausible" it is interesting that elsewhere he writes, "And of course if compatibilism is correct, the Free Will Defense fails" (see, respectively, *The Nature of Necessity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1974), 165; and "Self-Profile," in *Alvin Plantinga*, ed. J. E. Tomberlin and Peter van Inwagen (Dordrecht, Holland: D. Reidel Publishing Company, 1985), 45). One might make sense of this apparent inconsistency by appealing to the distinction I make above. Even if the broad defense would fail a narrow defense may still succeed.

5. I will argue below for a conception of original sin that is not incompatible with the free will defense, but this potential move of the atheologian should decisively prove the inability of Christian compatibilists to make use of a free will defense in this dialectically meaningful way.

Original Sin and Christian Doctrine

Central to Christian theology is the idea that God the Son, the second member of the Trinity, became incarnate, died, and rose again after three days. Why was such a dramatic course of events necessary? This was the divine answer to a problem that humanity created for itself—a problem of sin. As Plantinga nicely puts it, "it is sin that occasions Incarnation and Atonement, redemption and renewal."⁶ But why is it that sin is such a universal problem? Why is it that no one is able to go through life without sinning?⁷ According to traditional Christian teaching, such a person cannot be found because all are born with a condition that has been called 'original sin'.

A great number of Christian philosophers and theologians believe in some version of the doctrine of original sin. Of course there is a great deal of variance in how one understands the doctrine, but almost all branches of Christendom explicitly endorse the doctrine. This near-universality of the doctrine within the Church can be traced to one of its earliest proponents, St. Augustine. The Catholic theologian Alfred Vanneste writes, "It was not until the outset of the fifth century that this doctrine, under the impulse of Augustine (354–430) was clearly and neatly formulated. The Council of Carthage (418) and later the Council of Orange (529) confirmed the essential elements of the Augustinian doctrine thus incorporating them into the patrimony of the Western Church."⁸ That incorporation is evidenced by the doctrine's continued acceptance outside of the Catholic church during and after the Reformation by the likes of Martin Luther, John Calvin, and Jonathan Edwards. This fifth century doctrine is still, in some form or other, widely embraced today and anyone attempting to resolve the logical problem of evil by making use of a broad free will defense will need to ensure that their understanding of original sin is consistent with that defense.

Although most Christians in the Western tradition have understood the doctrine of original sin as a doctrine of, at least, original guilt, many contemporary philosophers who endorse libertarian accounts of freedom have recognized that there are difficulties with the notion that someone is held morally responsible for some action over which they had no control. This has led some to reject the traditional Augustinian understanding of original sin and instead argue that original sin is a malady that affects all humankind since Adam and Eve (excepting Jesus and—in some traditions—Mary), but it is not a guilt-conferring malady. These philosophers distinguish one's being born guilty from one's being born in a condition that inevitably leads to sin. The former we shall call *original guilt* and the latter *original inclination* but both are taken to be the result of Adam's sin. Because it is not likely that

6. Alvin Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 201.

7. The observation that no one refrains from sinning at some point or another led G.K. Chesterton to conclude that the doctrine of original sin "is the only doctrine within Christianity that can be proven" (*Orthodoxy* (1908; San Francisco: Ignatius, 1995), 19).

8. Alfred Vanneste, *The Dogma of Original Sin* (Paris: Louvain, 1971), 30–1.

a broad free will defense will succeed if one ascribes to original guilt⁹ we will focus on the seemingly less troublesome doctrine of original inclination.

Original Inclination

While he does not use the labels, Plantinga is one philosopher that appears to reject original guilt while accepting original inclination. On his view all humans are born in a condition of sin, but being born in that condition is not something for which one is guilty. Of such a condition Plantinga writes, "Unlike a sinful act I perform, original sin need not be thought of as something for which I am culpable (original sin is not necessarily original guilt); insofar as I am born in this predicament, my being in it is not within my control and not up to me."¹⁰ Though he denies original guilt, Plantinga retains a doctrine of original sin according to which the condition of sin causes cognitive and affective disorders. But these are disorders with which the agent is born and so is not culpable for having them. He writes that there is a "cognitive limitation that first of all prevents its victim from proper knowledge of God and his beauty, glory, and love... It therefore compromises both knowledge of fact and knowledge of value." But, sin is "perhaps primarily an *affective* disorder or malfunction. Our affections are skewed, directed to the wrong objects; we love and hate the wrong things."¹¹ This disorder results in the individual reversing God's decrees; for example, instead of loving God and neighbor, original sin leads the individual to primarily love himself while hating God and neighbor. Even if one is able to see what is right and what he should do, he finds himself preferring that which he should not. This affective disorder is not guilt-conferring in of itself. But having the disorder leads one to sin, and it is *that* act of sinning for which one is held morally responsible.

Whereas Plantinga is silent on some of the mechanics of actually sinning, Paul Copan attempts a more thorough explanation. He explains Plantinga's position this way, "we do not sin necessarily (that is, it is not assured that we must commit this or that particular sin), we sin inevitably (that is, in addition to our propensity to sin, given the vast array of opportunities to sin, we eventually do sin at some point)."¹² Both Copan and Plantinga seem to want to affirm that every person will sin, but yet deny that any person must commit some particular sin. It is not hard to discern why this would be a desirable feature of their account. If it turns out that I had no say regarding some particular sin, then it

9. For a recent argument that may provide the resources to deny this, see Michael Rae, "The Metaphysics of Original Sin," in *Persons: Human and Divine*, ed. Peter van Inwagen and Dean Zimmerman (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 319–56.

10. Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief*, 207.

11. *Ibid.*, 208–9 (emphasis in original).

12. Paul Copan, "Original Sin and Christian Philosophy," *Philosophia Christi* 5, (2003): 519–31. In a footnote Copan notes that this explanation is based upon a discussion with Plantinga.

will be quite difficult to explain why I can be held guilty for that sin, especially for those with libertarian intuitions. As Copan puts it, "while we may have an inclination to sin... as a result of Adam's sin in the Garden, his transgression does not entail the conferral of an alien guilt upon us at conception."¹³ But nevertheless we do have an original inclination to sin, making sin at some point or other—but at no particular point—an inevitability for each of us. This preserves a fairly robust doctrine of original sin and explains why all of mankind is in need of redemption.

Plantinga and Copan are not alone in understanding original sin in this more nuanced way. Keith Wyma has also argued that "the predominant view on original sin needs alteration." Wyma's altered account is much like Plantinga's in that it proposes that "original sin should be understood more as a *shor.fall* than as a *transgression*... Original sin is a sinful state in that its disorder disposes us to become actual sinners, but is not in itself grounds for guilt."¹⁴ So, Wyma affirms that all humans suffer from original sin, but denies that having original sin is something for which all are guilty. Having an original inclination to sin is what Wyma calls "innocent sinfulness."¹⁵ We are born with a condition that makes sinning inevitable, but no one is guilty for being born with that condition.

Wyma considers a potential objection to his view that, if successful, would also be a problem for Plantinga and Copan. Someone might argue that since we are not responsible for the original state of innocent sinfulness, and since it is this original state that ensures that we will commit sins during our lifetimes, then we cannot be held responsible for those sins that we commit. If one has reason to reject original guilt, but original inclination is what ensures he commits some sin or other, then there seems to be reason to reject original inclination too. The denial of original guilt appears to extend to a denial of guilt for sinful actions we actually perform.

Wyma's response is to appeal to a distinction between the inevitability of sinning and the inevitability of committing a particular sin. Like Copan, he endorses the former but rejects the latter. To illustrate the position, Wyma offers the following (over-simplified) disjunction, arguing that he inevitably makes at least one of the disjuncts true, though for any particular disjunct, it is not inevitable that he make it true:

(S₁) Four-year-old Wyma covets his older brother's Christmas present, *or* (S₂) seven-year-old Wyma falsely accuses his younger brother of breaking a lamp, *or* (S₃) ten-year-old Wyma mocks a classmate's disability, . . . *or* (S_n) twenty-year-old Wyma presents a false I.D. to buy

13. Ibid., 530.

14. Keith Wyma, "Innocent Sinfulness, Guilty Sin: Original Sin and Divine Justice," in *Christian Faith and the Problem of Evil*, ed., Peter van Inwagen (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), 271.

15. Ibid.

beer, . . . or (Sz) on his deathbed Wyma curses God.¹⁶

Since for any single one of these disjuncts, Wyma can avoid making that disjunct true, he is guilty for any of them that he does make true. It is inevitable that he will make at least one of them true, and so it is inevitable that he will be guilty of sin.

This example nicely illustrates Wyma's distinction between the inevitability of sinning and the inevitability of committing a particular sin, but there is a potential problem, one that Wyma recognizes. How does Wyma's theory account "for guilt assigned to persons who refrained from sinning until their last possible action"?¹⁷ To continue with the example above, if Wyma's account of innocent sinfulness is correct, and if disjuncts S_1 through S_n were all false, then S_z *must* be true. Because that particular sin must be committed it is false that no particular sin is inevitable. Wyma recognizes that this scenario presents a difficulty for his view, but denies that it is truly problematic. He agrees that "that *specific* action [S_z] would become unavoidable, and guilt for it appears to be excluded," but thinks this is not a real problem because "the simple truth is that no one who survives past (early) childhood waits till the end of his or her life to sin."¹⁸ While this may in fact be true, it will be shown that Wyma's response either does not fully appreciate the claim being made by proponents of the doctrine of original inclination or it does not take seriously the problem raised by the scenario he himself presents. Further, the problem for Wyma extends to Copan and Plantinga as well.

The Problem with Original Inclination

In rejecting original guilt in favor of original inclination Plantinga, Copan, and Wyma all seem to have a problem. The problem can be set out as follows:

- (1) Necessarily in a world tainted by original sin, (a) every human subsequent to Adam and Eve is born in a condition such that it is inevitable that she sin (given that she performs at least one morally significant action),¹⁹ but (b) it is not inevitable that she sin on any given

16. Ibid., 272.

17. Ibid., 273.

18. Ibid., 274.

19. On some conceptions of sin, the parenthetical should read, "given that she performs at least one morally significant action, or adopts one morally significant attitude, or fails in a morally significant way to perform an action or adopt an attitude." Given that in each of these cases, the moral significance entails that a blameless action or attitude could have been performed or adopted, or a blameworthy action or attitude avoided, this should not affect the argument below.

occasion.²⁰

(1a) expresses the idea that humans sin inevitably, while (1b) expresses the idea that humans do not sin inevitably on any given occasion. The 'necessarily' merely indicates that this is an account of what it means for a world to be tainted by original sin; a world in which (1a) and (1b) are not both true is not one which satisfies this account.

If Wyma's account of original inclination is true, one that ranges over the course of an individual's life, then it would also be true when considering the individual that performs only one morally significant action. Consider the following claim:

(2) Possibly, some human performs only one morally significant action in her lifetime.

Surely (2) is true. Thousands of people of all ages die every day, many of them children. Some of these people die at an age when they have performed very many morally significant actions. Indeed, it could hardly be otherwise for someone who lives an average lifespan. And many of these people die at such a young age that they have performed no morally significant actions. But surely some of them die at an age when they have performed only a very few morally significant actions. And among these, it seems likely that some have performed only one morally significant action before death. And even if in fact, against all odds, there has not ever been someone who died performing only one morally significant action, there is nothing that rules out the possibility of this happening. So (2) seems assured.

(1a) tells us that every human who commits at least one morally significant act inevitably sins. Given (1a), then, the following conditional is true:

(3) If some human performs only one morally significant action in her lifetime, then that action is inevitably sinful.

(1b) tells us that it is not inevitable that any human sin on any given occasion. Given (1b), then, the following conditional is true:

(4) If some human performs only one morally significant action in her lifetime, then that action is not inevitably sinful.

But from (3) and (4) it follows that:

(5) If some human performs only one morally significant action in her lifetime, then that

20. If there are worries about the second conjunct and moral dilemmas that we get ourselves into through sinning, the conjunct can easily be amended to: "it is not inevitable that any human commit her first sin on any given occasion." Also, as mentioned above, (1) admits of at least one exception—Jesus—and possibly Mary as well.

action both is and is not inevitably sinful.

But (5) is absurd. (2) tells us that its antecedent is possible—indeed its antecedent even seems likely. But then, if (5) is true, its consequent should be true as well. But its consequent is not even logically possible. So, at least one of (1)–(4) must be rejected. Since (2) seems obviously true, and since (3) and (4) follow directly from (1), that leaves only (1) as a candidate for rejection. (1) leads to an absurd result, and so must be discarded. But (1) is merely an expression of the doctrine of original inclination. So, it seems that the doctrine of original inclination must be discarded.

Responding to the Problem of Original Inclination

If the argument above is correct, then (1) must be rejected. But nothing in the argument implies that both (1a) and (1b) must be rejected. Rejecting either (1a) or (1b) is sufficient. We shall now consider each of these options.

Rejecting (1a)

Richard Swinburne has embraced (1b) while rejecting (1a). He maintains that in each of our actions we are free to refrain from sinning, and denies that it is inevitable that each of us sin at some point in our lives. He attributes to humans “a disease, original sinfulness” which is “a proneness to wrongdoing.” “The bad desires in which it [this proneness to wrongdoing] consists incline, they do not (as such) necessitate.” That the claim “they do not necessitate” is a rejection of (1a) rather than merely an endorsement of (1b) is clear from Swinburne’s explicit rejection of the view of “some theologians [who] have wanted to go further and say that it is a proneness which led necessarily to sin.” Swinburne endorses (1b) because “unavoidable sin is not culpable”, and he seems to reject (1a) on the same grounds. For if we inevitably sin at some point, then it looks as if even if this or that sin is avoidable, sin is unavoidable. So even while Swinburne differs from defenders of the doctrine of original inclination on (1a), he shares their motivation to avoid attributing culpability for unavoidable actions.²¹

Rejecting (1a) comes at a cost. After all, (1a) was at least partly motivated by a desire to account for the universality of humanity’s fallenness, and the universal human need for redemption. But if (1a) is rejected, then it is possible—even if unlikely—for someone to go through his entire life without sinning, and so to go through life without the need for redemption. This is a departure from the classical doctrines of original sin and of grace. Indeed, it is difficult to see what is distinctively Christian about this account of original sin. Many atheistic ethicists and ethicists from non-Christian religious traditions will readily agree that humans have a strong tendency to do wrong throughout their lives.

21. Richard Swinburne, *Responsibility and Atonement* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 137–9.

Perhaps this is due to selfish traits that have been selected because of their evolutionary advantages,²² or to similar explanations. If the doctrine of original sin is simply expressing this idea, then it hardly deserves the title of *doctrine*, since doctrines are usually taken to be distinctive claims of the religious tradition.

While this may not be a problem for some, it is an even further departure from the traditional understanding of original sin than simply rejecting original guilt—a departure that many would not find desirable. This can be especially problematic for those that associate the universal benefits of Christ's death with the *universal* problem of original sin. If one's doctrine of original sin rejects both original guilt and the inevitability aspect of original inclination, one may wonder for what reason Christ had to die.²³ Whatever the merits of such a resolution to the problem, it does not appear to be one that Wyma or Copan could appeal to. This possibility is not an option for Wyma, who writes that original sin is an "*essential inheritance and corruptive power*"²⁴ or for Copan, who approvingly notes that "orthodox Christianity has held that the pervasiveness of sin is *semper, ubique, ad omnibus*!"²⁵

Rejecting (1b)

Those without libertarian sensibilities, like many in the Reformed tradition for example, and indeed compatibilists in general, are likely to simply reject (1b). If genuine freedom, and the accompanying moral responsibility for action, does not require alternative possibilities for action, then there is no reason to suppose that sinful actions cannot be inevitable. So, the compatibilist can retain (1a) and affirm universal human fallenness and need for redemption, while rejecting (1b) and so avoid the absurd consequences of (1).

However, philosophers, like Plantinga, Copan, and Wyma, who reject the doctrine of original guilt and endorse the doctrine of original inclination appear to be motivated, at least in part, by a lib-

22. This is Swinburne's preferred explanation; see *ibid.*, 110–14 and 142–4.

23. To be clear, Swinburne thinks redemption is indeed needed, perhaps even for all humans. He writes, "Objective sin is almost unavoidable; even with the best intentions, we are morally ignorant, careless and forgetful. And subjective sin is very hard to avoid... The guilt of our own actual sin requires much atonement towards God" (*ibid.*, 146). But, of course, sin being "almost unavoidable" or "very hard to avoid" allows for the possibility that some do indeed avoid it. To my knowledge, the closest Swinburne comes to considering whether such individuals still require redemption is when describing how one can be involved in the wrongdoing of another without being guilty for it (*ibid.*, 90–1 and 144).

24. Wyma, "Innocent Sinfulness, Guilty Sin," 276 (emphasis added).

25. Copan, "Original Sin and Christian Philosophy," 529. Because Plantinga says very little about the exact workings of original sin it is hard to say whether this is an option he could endorse. However, from what he does write in *Warranted Christian Belief* it does not appear that he could avail himself of such a radical reworking of original sin.

ertarian conception of freedom. But libertarians who want to adopt this strategy of rejecting (1b) will likely be compelled to turn in their libertarian credentials and become compatibilists. Most philosophers identify libertarian freedom concerning some act with being able to refrain from performing that act. For example, Randolphe Clarke writes, "Following many other writers on a basic characterization of this freedom, I shall say that when an agent acts freely (or with free will), she is able to do other than what she does then."²⁶ Hugh McCann argues that to have freely decided to perform some action in the libertarian sense one "must, categorically, have been able to do otherwise."²⁷ This ability to do otherwise is now commonly referred to as the principle of alternative possibilities and according to Robert Kane "many people have thought that the existence of alternative possibilities is the characteristic of free will that makes it incompatible with determinism."²⁸ On this understanding of libertarian freedom, to be free with regard to an action requires having alternative possibilities regarding that action.²⁹ But if libertarian freedom involves having alternative possibilities to any action freely performed, then libertarians cannot deny (1b). After all, on the libertarian view sins are actions for which we are morally responsible, and actions for which we are morally responsible are actions freely performed. But inevitable actions are not actions freely performed, for they do not admit of alternative possibilities. So, Christian libertarians who adopt this strategy for retaining the original inclination reading of the doctrine of original sin will pay a philosophical price, namely, giving up their libertarian intuitions. Depending on how their views on freedom are connected to their other philosophically important views, this conversion to compatibilism may have significant and widespread consequences. The inability to make use of a broad defense is one such consequence.

While only committing oneself to either (1a) or (1b) avoids the absurd conclusion, from what we have seen, this is not an option for Plantinga, Copan, or Wyma. Further, it does not seem to be an option for anyone that desires to endorse a broad free will defense and yet retain traditionally held beliefs regarding original sin. But perhaps this is too quick. We will now examine one final way in which one might attempt to avoid the absurdity that appears to follow from (1).

26. Randolphe Clarke, *Libertarian Accounts of Free Will* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 3.

27. Hugh McCann, *The Works of Agency* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1998), 174.

28. Robert Kane, *The Significance of Free Will*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 33.

29. For a dissenting view see Linda Zagzebski, "Does Libertarian Freedom Require Alternate Possibilities?" *Action and Freedom*, *Philosophical Perspectives* 14 (2000): 231–48 or David Hunt, "Moral Responsibility and Unavoidable Action," *Philosophical Studies* 97, (2000): 195–227. Even if Zagzebski, Hunt, and other Frankfurt-style libertarians are correct, it is not clear that such a position alone would solve the problem above. It would indeed provide the resources to avoid the absurdity found in (5), but if the having of original sin is the *cause* of the agent's sinning, then it appears that such a person would not be free, in a libertarian sense, for an entirely different reason. Namely, the sinning would not have been caused by the agent but by something external to the agent. However, if there are ways to avoid this concern, then one may be able to retain both original inclination and a broad free will defense by joining the Frankfurt-libertarians.

Rejecting (2)

Perhaps our acceptance of (2) was too quick. Perhaps a defender of original inclination will say that it is impossible, in worlds tainted by original sin, that some human performs only one morally significant action in her lifetime. Of course, if (2) is false then the argument fails but I can think of no reason one could give for taking it to be false. Saying that (2) is false is, at the least, going to be difficult to maintain. Are we to believe that in all worlds tainted by original sin there is not even one person that commits only one morally significant action? Advocates of this response must, at the least, provide an account as to why it is *logically impossible*, in worlds tainted by original sin, for God to have simply annihilated the universe immediately after some person's first morally significant action. After all, if (2) is even possible in a world with original sin, then the argument goes through and this account of original inclination must be rejected.

An Unsatisfactory Solution to the Problem

Perhaps one can resolve the problems above by appealing to God's middle knowledge. We shall see that the main advantage of this response is that it doesn't require rejecting either (1a) or (1b). For anyone offering a free will defense along the lines of Plantinga's, this response may be quite appealing since it makes use of aspects of that defense. Both Wyma and Copan suggest that a view of original sin informed by the doctrine of middle knowledge will be less susceptible to the worries raised above, but how precisely is middle knowledge supposed to help? If it turns out that some particular sin is inevitable, as long as that person is in some way responsible for acquiring that which makes the sin inevitable then such a person can still be held morally responsible for that sin.

Wyma begins his account by explaining that many have thought that God's omniscience includes middle knowledge and that "in deciding whom to create, and in what conditions and circumstances to place them, God would have reference to truths about what any possible creature would freely do, in any circumstances possible for it."³⁰ No matter what state of affairs an individual found himself in, God would know what that individual would freely do in that situation. When creating Adam's progeny, "God could restrict himself to the set of possible humans who would freely have done as Adam did in the circumstances of his temptation and fall." Of all the possible humans that God could have created he decided to create a "subset of those possible humans who would freely have fallen, just as Adam did."³¹ God creates only those whom he knew would have sinned if they were in Adam's place and simply creates them *as if* they had actually sinned as Adam did. It is not that

30. Wyma, "Innocent Sinfulness, Guilty Sin," 268.

31. *Ibid.*, 269.

humans actually participated in the sin of Adam, but that they would have done the same thing if they were in his place. According to Wyma, "Adam's rebellion becomes a kind of paradigm for all of us, since his action represents what each of us would have done in his place. In him, we all sinned *figuratively* speaking."³² While it is true that no one actually participated in Adam's sin the fact that we would have done the same makes it just for God to punish us as if we did sin.

Copan's appeal to middle knowledge attempts to explain why God is morally justified in treating Adam as the representative for all of humanity. Copan begins by considering a possible objection to the doctrine of original sin, namely why should Adam be everyone else's representative in the first place? According to Copan, the objector has the "arrogant presumption" that if she were in Adam's place she would have obeyed God's command to not eat the fruit and could have prevented the "calamitous fallout from the first disobedience."³³ Since such an objection depends upon divine middle knowledge Copan believes that he has the resources to deny this possibility. While human sinlessness in the garden was certainly logically possible, "it could be the case that those human beings God has actually created would have, according to His middle knowledge, chosen the same Adamic course, resulting in the same Adamic curse... Had any of us actualized human beings been in Adam's place, none of us by his free choice would have avoided bringing about the fall and its consequences."³⁴ The appeal to middle knowledge is supposed to deflate "charges of divine injustice regarding Adam's being our representative head since God knows that the rest of us would have acted in the very same way in the same circumstance."³⁵ If we would have done the same thing as Adam, then there is nothing morally wrong with Adam serving as our representative, and thus there is nothing morally wrong with our being punished for an inevitable sin even if our representative was the cause of that inevitability.

There are at least two reasons why an appeal to middle knowledge along the lines suggested by Wyma and Copan does not succeed.³⁶ First, both make the tacit assumption that it is acceptable for God to base his moral evaluation of humans in this world on some decision made in another possible world. On this account of original sin all humankind is morally evaluated not by what action was actually performed, but what would have been performed in some other possible world. Of course this

32. Ibid.

33. Copan, "Original Sin and Christian Philosophy," 540.

34. Ibid.

35. Ibid., 541.

36. Someone like Robert Adams may object to the entire scenario presented. According to Adams, questions like, "What if I had been born in the Middle Ages?" are of "doubtful intelligibility" because "that would not have been the same person" Adams, "Must God Create the Best?," *Philosophical Review* 81 (1972): 328). If that question is unintelligible then surely questions like, "What if I had been born in Adam's position" are too. Because I am unsure about this I have provided additional reasons to think the appeal to middle knowledge fails. If the reader agrees with Adams, then feel free to skip to the next section.

assumes that it is morally acceptable for God to make such a counterfactual judgment. But it is not the case that this is how current moral evaluations are performed and it is not clear why it would be morally acceptable for God to evaluate humankind in such a manner. For example, even if it were true that were I born in Darfur I would have freely participated in the intentional killing of innocent life, no one includes that truth as part of their moral evaluation of me. The world in which I am born in Darfur would be vastly different from the actual world and thus it would not be morally appropriate to base a moral evaluation of me in this world on that one. The closest approximation to this practice is in morally evaluating a person's future intentions. If a person is arrested on the suspicion of terrorist activities, and then authorities subsequently find in his home various bomb making supplies and detailed drawings of prominent public spaces, one might reasonably morally condemn the suspect based on those findings. It is false that the suspect actually did commit some terrorist activity, but given what was found in his home it seems reasonable to believe that he *would have* committed some terrorist activity. While it is true that it is morally acceptable to punish the suspect for something which did not occur, this case simply does not apply, at least in any straightforward way, to the case of original sin.

This does not apply for two reasons. First, the suspect's punishment actually differs based upon what *actually* happened. It is actually false that he is being punished for something which did not occur. Instead, he is being punished for *planning* something that did not occur. If the authorities did not foil his plan, but he was caught afterward, his punishment would be based upon the crime he actually committed. But if the authorities did foil his plan his punishment would be based upon what he intended to do and that punishment would be less severe than if he successfully carried out that intention. In the legal context, which in this case appears to coincide with our moral intuitions, the punishment would be less severe for intending to commit terrorist activities than for actually committing them. The punishment is based upon what actually did happen and not upon what *would have* happened. However, when it comes to original sin, according to Wyma and Copan, humans are treated in the actual world *as if* each did participate in that original sin. It is obvious that no human other than Adam and Eve did actively participate in that original sin so the only basis for morally evaluating humans regarding that act is on what would have happened. Since this runs counter to standard practices of moral evaluation it appears that one is justified in expecting some account of why it is permissible for God to evaluate humankind in such a radically different way.

One can see that the suspected terrorist example fails in a second way. If one looks at the biblical data regarding that calamitous event it appears that Adam's progeny receive a punishment *worse* than that which he received even though his sin was committed in the actual world while the rest of humanity only commits the sin in some possible world. The relevant biblical passages record that Adam's punishment included being removed from the Garden of Eden, having a more difficult time working the fields, and being subject to physical death and suffering. Each of Adam's descendants are afflicted in the same way but, *additionally*, are *born* in such a state that sinning is inevitable. Not only is humankind punished for an action that is committed in some other possible world, but that punishment includes everything that was dealt to Adam plus the inability to refrain from sinning in the

actual world—something that results in further punishment.³⁷

Here one might object that these criticisms of counterfactual moral evaluation are only applicable to beings that do not have full epistemic access to the truth or falsehood of the counterfactuals in question.³⁸ Even if it were true that were I born in Darfur I would have free participated in the intentional killing of innocent life, the reason no one includes that as part of their moral evaluation of me is because no human is capable of ascertaining that counterfactual's truth value. Similarly, one might object that the reason we treat the individual planning a terrorist attack differently from the one that carries it out is because in the former case we are incapable of knowing whether the individual would indeed have carried it out. In both of these cases, however, God would know the truth of these counterfactuals and so it would be appropriate for him to include that counterfactual knowledge in his moral judgment of humans.

While it is true that God's knowledge of these counterfactuals far exceeds human knowledge, I am not convinced that that fact alone is sufficient to establish the appropriateness of counterfactual moral evaluation. The primary reason for this is that even in cases where we do know what some agent would have done, we still form our appraisal of that agent based upon what was actually done. For example, imagine the authorities above decided to not arrest the terrorist but to instead secretly replace his explosives with identical-looking fakes and that the terrorist would only learn of the replacement after attempting to activate the device. The terrorist not only planned to do something morally reprehensible, but also, as far as he was concerned, carried it out. Indeed, the only reason it was an *attempted* attack and not a *successful* attack was the intervention of the authorities. In this case we would still not treat the terrorist as if the attack were successful. We would not evaluate him for the intentional killing of innocent life because no innocent lives were killed. Our evaluation of this person would be based upon what what happened in the actual world, *attempting* to intentionally kill innocent life, and not what happens in some other, very near, possible world.³⁹

A second problem with the counterfactual moral evaluation envisioned by Copan and Wyma is that it is not clear why God chooses to form his basis for moral evaluation on those worlds in which

37. Here I am reminded of John Wesley's worry that predestination "is highly injurious to mankind, for it puts them in a far worse condition than the devils in hell. For these were some time in a capacity to have stood. They might have kept their happy estate, but would not. Whereas, according to this doctrine, many millions of men are tormented forever, who never were happy, never could be and never can be" (Wesley, *Serious Considerations on Absolute Predestination extracted from a late author* (Bristol: S. and F. Farley, 1741)). Adam and Eve too were able to keep their happy estate but on standard accounts of original sin their descendants are not.

38. This was brought to my attention by an anonymous referee.

39. This, of course, does not mean we would evaluate one who simply planned terrorist activities in the same way as one who planned, and attempted to carry out, such activities. The point here is just that in either case, our moral evaluation would be based upon the actions this person performed in the actual world.

all humans decide to sin as Adam actually did.⁴⁰ The question is, Why would God pick out those possible worlds and not the possible worlds in which humans do not sin as Adam did? Presumably it is not the case that every human would have sinned, necessarily, if in the same situation as Adam. If it is not, then there are at least some possible worlds in which some humans do not choose as Adam did. What reasons would God have for not using those actions as a basis for his moral evaluation? Perhaps one might object and simply deny that there are possible worlds in which humans do not sin as Adam did. The problem with such an objection is that it fails to recognize that there is no original sin at this point that would explain *why* every human does sin as Adam did. That first decision to sin is supposed to be the explanation for all other sinful decisions—it cannot be the explanation for why all humans would choose to sin in every possible world. This is a problem even for free will defenses that utilize Plantinga's notion of transworld depravity. Plantinga, one will recall, admits that it is logically possible that some humans freely refrain from ever committing a wrong action, it just so happens that none of those worlds are actualizable.⁴¹ But if it is logically possible that some person refrains from ever committing a wrong action then, of course, there is a possible world in which that person does no wrong. In such a world that person does not even choose to sin as Adam did. Why, then, does God choose to punish that person in this world based on what she did in some other possible world if there is yet another possible world in which she does no wrong at all?

Here one might object that the above is misguided because it focuses on the existence of possible worlds in which one does not sin. If there is such a thing as libertarian freedom, then it seems there must be some possible worlds in which humans refrain from sinning, but our attention should not be directed there. Instead, one should be concerned whether or not there are *feasible* worlds in which one does not sin as Adam did. Perhaps, in something akin to Plantinga's transworld depravity, humans are also afflicted with "transworld Adam resemblance" and in all feasible worlds, humans sin as Adam did.⁴² While this is an interesting objection, there are two reasons why I do not think it helps the view presently under consideration. First, one might still expect a story as to *why* this is the case. Given that Plantinga was offering a *defense*, such a story need not be provided in that context. Demonstrating logical possibility was sufficient for his purposes. However, it seems reasonable to expect a theological account of original sin to do much more than that. Second, and more pressing, such an account would rob historical accounts of original sin of much of their explanatory force. If this account were true, then it would turn out that Adam's initial sinful decision had very little to do with the fallenness of the human race because it was simply not feasible for God to create humans that

40. For a different worry about the appropriateness of counterfactual moral evaluation as it relates to religious luck see Linda Zagzebski, "Religious Luck," *Faith and Philosophy* 11, (1994): 397–413. The concern there is that such counterfactual moral evaluation appears to make the actual world meaningless. This appears to be compatible with the above worry and, if legitimate, would make the case against the middle knowledge solution that much stronger.

41. Plantinga, *The Nature of Necessity*, 188.

42. I am grateful to the anonymous referee that brought this objection to my attention.

could do anything other than as Adam did. Adam's decision to sin may have been the historical entry point for sin and death, but that had nothing to do with Adam himself. He simply had the unfortunate distinction of being the first created. It appears that even if one can make sense of counterfactual moral evaluation such an account is of no use for explaining original sin.

Towards an Account of Original Sin

If one rejects original guilt, as Plantinga, Copan, and Wyma all do, and original inclination is logically incoherent, then what are we to make of the doctrine of original sin? In what follows I will briefly sketch an account that appears to be consistent with the details of a free will defense, and thus allow one to successfully employ a broad defense to the problem of evil. Whether such an account can do all the theological work that traditional accounts of original sin have done remains to be seen. I, for one, am optimistic that it can.⁴³

What the discussion above regarding original inclination shows us is that accounts of original sin that include the inevitability of sinning are going to either run afoul of a broad defense, because of its reliance on the existence of libertarian freedom, or result in incoherence.⁴⁴ So a new understanding of original sin ought to avoid any such notion. How then are we to explain all falling short of the glory of God or all being in need of Christ's atoning death? Perhaps the following analogy will help.

Imagine that a family moves into a new neighborhood from out of state. Unbeknownst to them, this neighborhood is infamous for its racist attitudes and, unfortunately, this family's immediate neighbors are widely recognized as being the most vitriolic in their hatred of ethnic minorities. Furthermore, this family happens to be part of the ethnic minority that the racist neighbors hate the most. Every morning when leaving for work the father receives the most vile insults imaginable and he, rightfully, finds his neighbors morally reprehensible. One morning he hears a new voice hurling insults and turns to find his neighbor's toddler on the porch copying the father. The man, rightfully, finds such a sight truly disgusting but it is not clear that it would be appropriate for the man to find the toddler *morally* reprehensible in the same way that he finds the toddler's parents. The toddler is merely trying to be like his father and does not likely even understand what it is that he is saying. But this fact does not mean the man refrains from finding the toddler, and his actions, repulsive. In fact, it seems the man may take this view of the toddler even if he did not copy his father. In virtue of being

43. A full fledged account of original sin is beyond the scope of this paper, though it is clear that more work needs to be done connecting various aspects of Christian theology to this account. It is hoped that a fuller account of original sin along the lines suggested below will be made in the future.

44. For a fuller defense of original sin in a Molinist framework, see Michael Rae, "The Metaphysics of Original Sin." It should be noted that Rae's account departs from Plantinga's, Copan's, and Wyma's in that the doctrine he defends *does* include original guilt. However, his corollary to my "original inclination" does not specify the "inevitability" of sinning, but only its being "very likely."

born into the racist family the man may find the toddler repulsive. In this case such repulsion would not be due to something the toddler did, but because of what the toddler represents to the man. In this case repulsion is appropriate even if it is not also accompanied by a negative moral appraisal.

A doctrine of original sin need not specify that all humans are born guilty nor that we all *must* sin at some point or another in order for there to be a chasm between humanity and God, even from birth. One might, in the spirit of the Psalmist, say of this toddler that he was "conceived in sin", yet that does not necessarily mean the toddler was from birth guilty nor that he *must* have continued in his parents' ways.⁴⁵ However, if later in life we find that same child continuing the same sorts of actions then it would be appropriate to find him morally responsible for his actions. At some point he began to take on his parents' attitude as his own when he ought to have refrained from doing so. Similarly we fallen creatures, at some point or another, begin to take on for ourselves sinful desires and commit sinful actions. When we do we are no longer simply repulsive in God's sight because of our being part of a fallen race but we are also worthy of condemnation for endorsing for ourselves that which we ought to reject. To be clear, this account of original sin is not merely stating that Adam was a bad example for everyone else. Instead, it states that Adam was a bad example and that his sin is what created the chasm between God and his creation.⁴⁶

On this account of original sin there is nothing that necessitates a particular sinful action at all. We are influenced by a fallen world to sin, but are free at any point to refrain from sinning. Here one might object that if there is nothing ensuring that we all do wrong at some point or another then it is possible for a person to go through life without sinning and thus to not be in need of Christ's atonement. I do not find this objection problematic for two reasons. First, if some person, either by using her free will to avoid sin or even by sheer moral luck, were to refrain from ever sinning, absent the Cross she would still be repulsive in God's eyes for being a member of a fallen race. Such a person would still stand in need of atonement. Copan, in the context of a discussion regarding whether infants or the mentally disabled are in need of atonement, provides a helpful way of thinking about this. He writes, "atonement is still necessary because the soul of the infant still possesses a deformity that the atonement of Christ can graciously heal."⁴⁷ I heartily endorse Copan's sentiment here and believe it could be extended to those that go through life without sinning.⁴⁸ Even if the toddler born

45. Given that this account is intended to be consistent with a broad defense, a defense that relies upon the truth of libertarianism, one should not be surprised that this takes for granted the idea that one's environment may influence actions without determining them.

46. Here one finds a distinguishing feature of this account from Swinburne's. An additional distinguishing feature is that this account still traces this repulsion to the first sin of Adam.

47. Copan, "Original Sin and Christian Philosophy," 530.

48. To be clear, the view I am outlining does not specify that there *are* those that go through life without ever sinning. The point is only that if there is nothing making sins inevitable, then it is a genuine possibility that this could happen. Even if it did, such a person would still be in need of atonement for the reasons stated above.

into the racist family never engaged in the same activities as his father, one might still think some act of reconciliation between he and the recipients of his father's insults would be needed to show that he has truly departed from his father's ways.⁴⁹

Second, one might make an appeal to God's middle knowledge to remove this possibility entirely. It may be the case that God, via his middle knowledge, actualized a world in which all humans do in fact sin even though it was logically possible for them to refrain from doing so. This appeal to middle knowledge is free of the problems that come with Copan's and Wyma's appeal primarily because all moral evaluation in the actual world is based on what happens in the actual world. When the Apostle Paul writes that "all have fallen short of the Glory of God" he is not saying "necessarily, all have fallen" but simply that in fact all fall short. Because God actualized a world in which no one freely refrains from sinning throughout their entire life, all fall short.

Conclusion

We have seen that one can distinguish between broad and narrow defenses and that the assumed burden of giving a broad defense requires close examination of one's beliefs to ensure that they are consistent, in the actual world, with that defense. When it comes to belief in the Christian doctrine of original sin it appears that potential conflicts with a broad defense are many. While a doctrine of original inclination may at first appear to be compatible with such a defense it suffers from logical incoherence and ways of avoiding that incoherence are either too problematic or in conflict with a broad defense. What is needed is a doctrine of original sin that does not include either original guilt or the version of original inclination proffered by Plantinga, Copan, and Wyma. If one finds the doctrine of original inclination to be theologically indispensable, then the dialectical benefits of a broad defense must be forfeited.⁵⁰

49. Though not a perfect parallel, the practice of a government apologizing to a wronged party years after the wrong was committed may be illustrative. Decision makers in the current government may not have participated in the wrongdoing of their predecessors, but may still recognize that some type of action is necessary in order to bring reconciliation between the current government and the wronged party.

50. Many thanks to Russell Jones, Richard Davis, Linda Zagzebski, and an anonymous referee for many helpful comments on earlier versions of this paper.