straction and, therefore, by no means unsurpassable! Were there no modal distinction in God, Alston's refutation, as well as Findlay's, must be valid. God's reality is not just another case of contingent reality, nor is it an exclusively necessary reality. It is (if conceivable at all) a contingent reality actualizing a property to whose being actualized *somehow* there is no alternative.

Can a negative existential statement be contradictory? Yes, if it implies that a noncontingent or indispensable predicate is yet contingent or dispensable, or that the principle of existence could exist as a mere accident of existence, or that the unreality of the possible ground of all possibility is itself a possibility, or that a (not impossible) unlimited creative capacity could yet be unable to be the creator of a certain kind of possible world, or an unlimited cognitive capacity unable to know a certain possible state of affairs, or that an incapacity of being caused could be combined with contingency and so with the need of a cause. These are just some of the ways in which the absurdity inherent in atheism can be expressed.

If God *could* fail to exist, but also could exist, then, should he exist, it must be with the taint of *existential* contingency, and so as less than God. (Contingency of concrete *actuality* is necessarily universal and so no defect.) Thus atheism contradicts not just the truth but the bare conceivability of theism. Willy-nilly it turns into positivism.

Historically, the great nontheists have been more or less consciously positivistic. In the system of ideas of Democritus or Epicurus, "God" (in the proper sense) is not even a conception. This is true of Carneades, Hume, Santayana, Russell, Carnap, Dewey, Wittgenstein (so far as I can see), and many another. Conceivability is the issue, not fact.

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PLANTINGA ON THE FREE WILL DEFENSE: A REPLY

ANTONY FLEW and J. L. Mackie claim that the proposition "God is omnipotent, omniscient, and all-good" entails the proposition "God creates no persons who perform morally wrong actions."[1] They argue as follows: Since God is omnipotent, he

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[1] Cf. Flew's "Divine Omnipotence and Human Freedom," in *New Essays in Philosophical Theology*, ed. Flew and A. MacIntyre (New York: Macmillan, 1955); and Mackie's "Evil and Omnipotence," *Mind*, 64, 254 (April, 1955): 209.

could create any person he chooses. Since God is omniscient, he would know, before creating a given person, whether that person will perform morally wrong or morally right actions. And if God is all-good, he would create only those persons who (he knows in advance) will perform only right actions. If this claim is correct, then traditional Christian theism is in considerable trouble. Traditional theism holds that God is omnipotent, omniscient, and all-good, and it also holds that God created every person who exists. But no one would deny that there exist persons who perform morally wrong actions. Thus, it is clear, God (as understood in traditional Christian theism) does not exist.

In a paper entitled "The Free Will Defence,"[2] Alvin Plantinga contends that the argument against the existence of God offered by Flew and Mackie is deficient because the statement "God is omnipotent, omniscient, and all-good" does *not* entail "God creates no person who performs a morally wrong action." The argument Plantinga gives in support of this position is extremely interesting and very demanding. It is my suspicion, however, that, as stimulating and as rigorous as it is, this argument involves a mistake. It will be my purpose in this paper to examine Plantinga's argument in an effort to show that it fails to reveal an inadequacy in the argument against the existence of God advanced by Flew and Mackie.

I

Consider the following five-step argument (217. I retain Plantinga's designations for these propositions):

- (b) God is omnipotent, omniscient and all-good.
- ($r1$) God creates some free persons.
- ($r2$) Every possible free person performs at least one morally wrong action.
- ∴ (d) Every actual free person performs at least one morally wrong action.
- ∴ (e) God creates free persons who perform morally evil actions.

This argument, Plantinga says, is valid. And, he adds, the conjunction of propositions b–$r2$ is "evidently" consistent (217). But if this argument is valid and if propositions b–$r2$ are collectively consistent, then the statement "God is omnipotent, omniscient, and all-good" does not entail "God creates no persons who perform morally wrong actions." As a general principle: if a proposition P (e.g., b above) and a proposition R (e.g., $r1$ & $r2$) are jointly consistent, then if the conjunction of P and R entails Q (e.g., e above), then P does not entail not-Q (e.g., not-e above).

The general strategy of this argument seems to me to be sound. Indeed, if propositions *b–r*2 are jointly consistent and if they jointly entail *e,* then Plantinga is right in claiming that ''God is omnipotent, omniscient, and all-good'' does *not* entail ''God creates no persons who perform morally wrong actions.'' Thus the questions to be discussed are whether propositions *b–r*2 are collectively consistent and whether they jointly entail *e.*

I have had considerable trouble arriving at an answer to these two questions. This is because I have had difficulty understanding the *meaning* of proposition *r*2. Proposition *r*2 says that every possible free person performs at least one morally wrong action. This is a very odd-sounding item. I think I know what it means to say that a *person* is free and that a *person* performs at least one morally wrong action. But what does it mean to say that a *possible person* is free and that a *possible person* performs a morally wrong action? In the course of his deliberations, Plantinga offers two definitions for the phrase 'possible person'. In both we are told that a possible person is a *set of properties* having some special kind of member. What, then, does it mean to say that a possible person is free and that a possible person performs morally wrong actions? It surely cannot mean that a set of properties (of some special kind) is free and that a set of properties performs morally wrong actions. Sets of properties cannot be *free*. And sets of properties cannot *perform actions* (either right or wrong). The claim that a possible person is free and that a possible person performs morally wrong actions can mean only that a certain set of properties (answering some special description) *includes the property* ''is-a-free-agent'' and *includes the property* ''performs-at-least-one-morally-wrong-action.'' And although such locutions inflict considerable damage on our notion of what it is to be a ''property,'' if we allow ourselves to catch the swing of Plantinga's thinking, I think we can grasp the general impact of proposition *r*2. It says: ''Every possible free person performs at least one morally wrong action.'' And what this means is: ''Every set of properties (of some special kind) that includes the property 'is-a-free-agent' also includes the property 'performs-at-least-one-morally-wrong-action'.''

Having now arrived at some tentative understanding of the *kind* of claim being advanced in proposition *r*2, I think we can safely move on to consider Plantinga's special definitions of the phrase 'possible person' and, via this route, approach the basic questions I want to probe, viz., whether propositions *b–r*2 are collectively consistent and whether they jointly entail proposition *e.*

II

Plantinga's first definition of 'possible person' reads as follows:

x is a possible person = *x* is a consistent set of *H* properties such that for every *H* property *P*, either *P* or *P̄* is a member of *x* (212).

An *H* property, we are told, is a property that can attach to a human being without logical absurdity. Thus, for example, "having-red-hair" is an *H* property, while "being-one-mile-long" is not an *H* property. It makes sense to speak of a human being as having red hair. But it makes no sense to speak of a human being as being one mile long. A possible person, then, is a set of properties of a very special sort. It is a consistent set of properties having as its members only properties that can attach to a human being without logical absurdity (211–212).

Now, let us consider whether the following statement is true or false, viz., "There exists a possible person who is free and who performs only right actions." This means: "There exists a consistent set of *H* properties that includes the property 'is-a-free-agent' and the property 'performs-only-right-actions' (as well as every other *H* property or its negation)." This statement seems to be true. We can construct a list of properties that describes a consistent set of *H* properties containing the property "is-a-free-agent" and the property "performs-only-right-actions." In fact (1) "is-a-free-agent" and (2) "performs-only-right-actions" is, itself, such a list. That this list (plus every other *H* property or its negation) describes a property-set seems to follow from the way in which Plantinga is using the terms 'set' and 'property'. That the properties itemized in this list go together into a consistent set, no one would deny. There is no *contradiction* in the claim that a free agent performs only right actions. (Plantinga says that this is "granted by everyone"; 212.) And that this list contains only properties that can attach to a human being is surely obvious to all. Thus, the statement, "There exists a possible person who is free and who performs only right actions," is true. In fact, now that we see what considerations went into determining its positive truth-value, we can see that this statement is not just true; it is *logically* true. Whether a given list of properties describes a property-set, whether a given list of properties describes a consistent property-set, and whether a given list of properties describes a set that contains only *H*-properties or their negations are all purely a priori questions to be answered on the basis of purely conceptual considerations. Thus, any proposition of the form "There exists a possible person *X*"—where the specific values of *X* are (and are always replaceable by a list of)

specific properties—is either logically true or logically false. It would make no sense to say of a proposition having this form that it *might* be true or it *might* be false—not if this latter means that the matter is a contingent one depending on something other than purely conceptual considerations.

Now consider proposition $r2$ in Plantinga's original five-step argument. This proposition reads: "Every possible free person performs at least one morally *wrong* action." And this means: "Every consistent set of H properties that contains the property 'is-a-free-agent' (and every other H property or its negation) also includes the property 'performs-at-least-one-morally-wrong-action'." This proposition is false. The statement, "There exists a possible person who is free and who performs only *right* actions," is true. And since this latter is true, proposition $r2$ is false. But the most important point to see here is this: Since the statement, "There exists a possible person who is free and who performs only right actions" is not just true, but *logically* true, proposition $r2$ is not just false; it is *logically* false. The statement, "Every number is an even number," is false because the statement, "There exists an odd number—three," is true. But, more importantly, the statement, "Every number is an even number," is logically false because the statement, "There exists an odd number—three," is logically true. An exactly parallel situation holds with respect to proposition $r2$ and the statement, "There exists a possible person who is free and who performs only right actions."

Given Plantinga's first definition of 'possible person', propositions b–$r2$ are not jointly consistent because one of their number (viz., $r2$) is logically false. We can thus see the need for an adjustment in the notion of a possible person. This brings us to Plantinga's second definition of this phrase.

III

The second definition of 'possible person' is given as follows:

> x is a possible person $= x$ is a consistent set of determinate H properties such that (1) for every determinate H property P with respect to which x is not free, either P or $\bar{P}$ is a member of x, and (2) x does not entail any indeterminate property (215–216).

An *indeterminate* H property is defined as an H property that God could not cause a person to have. Thus, for example, the property "freely-refrains-from-doing-A" is given as an indeterminate H property. It is an H property in that it can (logically) attach to a human being. But it is indeterminate in that it would make no sense to say that God caused someone *freely* to refrain from doing something. If God caused someone to refrain

from doing something, the (refraining) action in question would not count as having been done *freely*. A *determinate H* property is defined as an *H* property that is not indeterminate. Thus, a determinate *H* property is any *H* property that God could cause a person to have. "Has-red-hair" is given as a determinate *H* property. It would make perfectly good sense to say that God caused someone to have red hair (213).[3]

Now, given this second definition of 'possible person', let us ask again whether there exists a possible person who both is free and performs only *right* actions. This is to ask whether there exists a consistent set of determinate *H* properties (meeting restrictions 1 and 2 in the above definition of 'possible person') which includes the property "is-a-free-agent" as well as the property "performs-only-right-actions." The answer is clear. The property "performs-only-right-actions" is an *indeterminate* property. God could not cause a person to perform a right action. If God caused a person to perform a given action, that action would not count as morally right. The action would have no *moral* significance whatsoever. Thus, any set of properties that includes the property "performs-only-right-actions" includes (and thus trivially entails) an indeterminate property. And, by restriction 2 in Plantinga's second definition of 'possible person', no such set could be listed as a member of the class of possible persons. We seem then to be rid of the counterexample that caused trouble when dealing with the first definition of 'possible person'. A set of *H* properties containing both "is-a-free-agent" and "performs-only-right-actions" no longer counts as a possible person.

But now look back at proposition *r*2. Again, this proposition reads: "Every possible person performs at least one morally wrong action." And, given our second definition of 'possible person', what this means is: "For every consistent set of determinate *H* properties (meeting restrictions 1 and 2), if that set includes the property 'is-a-free-agent', it also includes the property 'performs-at-least-one-morally-wrong-action'." This statement is logically false. The property "performs-at-least-one-morally-*wrong*-action" is an *indeterminate* property. God could not cause someone to perform at least one morally *wrong* action, any more than God could cause someone to perform only *right* actions. If God caused someone to perform a given action, the action in question would not count as *morally wrong*. Again, it would have no *moral* signifi-

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[3] I shall say nothing here about the concept "*X* is *free with respect to* property *P*" (used in restriction 1 of the above definition and defined by Plantinga on p. 215). What I want to say in this paper can be said without a separate discussion of this concept.

cance whatsoever. Thus, given a set of properties that includes the property ''performs-at-least-one-morally-wrong-action,'' that set could not be a consistent set of determinate H properties entailing no indeterminate properties. This is to say, (by restriction 2 in the second definition) such a set could not be a possible person. Hence, proposition $r2$ is, again, logically false. It says that *every* possible person includes an indeterminate property (viz., ''performs-at-least-one-morally-wrong-action''), whereas Plantinga's second definition of 'possible person' *guarantees* that *no* possible person will include *any* indeterminate property. Our adjustment in the notion of 'possible person' avoids one difficulty only to land us in another which has the same unfortunate consequences for proposition $r2$.

Thus, for the second time, some revision is needed in our concept of the possible person. In particular, what is needed is a sense in which possible persons can be said to perform morally wrong actions. Unless we get a refinement of this sort, proposition $r2$ cannot stand as a consistent proposition, and, accordingly, propositions $b-r2$ in Plantinga's original five-step argument cannot be taken as jointly consistent. It is at this point that Plantinga puts a final touch on the notion of the possible person.

IV

We already know that a possible person cannot *include* an indeterminate property such as ''performs-at-least-one-morally-wrong-action.'' But a possible person, Plantinga tells us, might nonetheless *have* an indeterminate property. To say that a given possible person *has* (as opposed to *includes*) a given indeterminate property is to say that if that possible person were to be *instantiated* (i.e., if each property in the set making up the possible person were to characterize an *actual* person; 212) the indeterminate property in question would characterize that actual person as well (216). The possible person does not *include* the indeterminate property as a member. But the indeterminate property characterizes any actual person who is the instantiation of the possible person in question.

Now look again at proposition $r2$. It no longer seems to be contradictory. Given Plantinga's remarks about the way in which a possible person can *have* (as opposed to *include*) an indeterminate property, $r2$ now means: ''For any set of determinate H properties (meeting restrictions 1 and 2 in the second definition of 'possible person'), if that set were to be instantiated, the resulting (actual) person would perform at least one wrong action.'' This proposition, Plantinga assures us, is logically contingent. It might be

true and it might be false (216). I think he is right about this. But this proposition also entails proposition *d* in the original five-step array. And, since propositions *r*1 and *d* entail proposition *e*, we now seem to be ready to conclude that propositions *b–r*2 are collectively consistent and that they jointly entail proposition *e*. Plantinga seems now to have shown that Flew and Mackie were wrong in claiming that ''God is omnipotent, omniscient, and all-good'' entails ''God creates no persons who perform morally wrong actions.'' He seems to have found a contingent proposition (viz., *r*1 & *r*2) which is consistent with the first of these statements but which entails the negation of the second.

But proposition *r*2 is still troublesome. What is peculiar about this statement is that it starts out in a technical vocabulary talking about *possible persons* being *instantiated,* and ends in our ordinary vocabulary talking about *actual persons performing actions.* It reads: ''For any possible person, if it were to be *instantiated,* the resulting *actual* person would *perform* one wrong action.'' But what is it for an actual person to perform one morally wrong action? Using the conceptual scheme in which Plantinga has framed *most* of his discussion, to say that an actual person performs at least one morally wrong action is to say that some instantiated set of properties (though, of course, not a possible person by the second definition) includes the property ''performs-at-least-one-morally-wrong-action.'' In this scheme, to say that Jones walks across the street is to say that a certain set of instantiated properties includes the property ''walks-across-the-street.'' It would seem, then, that, for those of us who have trouble grasping the more subtle implications of propositions in which technical and ordinary ways of speaking are mixed, there would be no objection if we reformulated our latest version of proposition *r*2 so as to make it consistently technical throughout. This will not be difficult. We need just one minor observation first.

It is a conceptual truth about each possible person (i.e., each set of determinate H properties meeting the qualifications of the second definition) that it is a subset of two separate sets of properties, viz., one containing the indeterminate property ''freely-performs-one-morally-wrong-action'' and one containing the indeterminate property ''freely-performs-only-right-actions.'' Any possible persons *could* be instantiated as a subset of either of these wider sets. This is simply to say that, with respect to any actual person, it is logically possible that he freely perform one morally wrong action; and it is also logically possible that he freely perform only right actions. When cast completely in the technical

scheme Plantinga has been using, our latest version of proposition *r*2 can now be read as follows:

Every consistent set of determinate *H* properties (meeting the qualification of the second definition of 'possible person') that is instantiated is instantiated as a subset of a wider set of properties which contains the indeterminate property ''freely-performs-at-least-one-morally-wrong-action.''

This statement is logically consistent and entails that each actual person performs at least one morally wrong action (i.e., proposition *d*). Plantinga is exactly right in pointing out these two features of proposition *r*2. But what Plantinga fails to point out about this proposition is this: If we return to the position held by Flew and Mackie—the position we have been trying to refute—we can see that the whole point they are trying to make can be put as the claim that proposition *r*2 (as now understood) is logically incompatible with proposition *b*. If God were all-good, he would *want* to instantiate each possible person as a subset of a larger set containing the indeterminate property ''performs-only-right-actions,'' rather than as a subset of a larger set containing the indeterminate property ''performs-one-morally-wrong-action.'' And if God were omnipotent-omniscient, he *could* instantiate each possible person as a subset of a wider set including the indeterminate property ''freely-performs-only-right-actions.''

Plantinga will reply to these reflections as follows: we have said that God could instantiate each possible person either as a subset of a wider set of properties containing the indeterminate property ''freely-performs-only-right-actions'' or as a subset of a wider set of properties containing the property ''freely-performs-at-least-one-morally-wrong-action.'' But if God were to instantiate a possible person *as* part of a set of properties containing the property ''freely-performs-only-right-actions'' (or as a subset of a set of properties containing the property ''freely-performs-at-least-one-morally-wrong-action''), God would then be *causing* some actual person to freely perform right actions (or freely perform morally wrong actions). This is absurd. If God were to cause someone to perform an action, the action in question would not count as having been done freely, and it would not count as either right or wrong. It would have no moral significance whatsoever. The whole point of distinguishing between determinate and indeterminate *H* properties and of including only determinate *H* properties in the sets designated as ''possible persons'' was to assure that in instantiating a possible person, God would not be instantiating such properties as ''freely-performs-only-right-actions'' and ''freely-performs-at-least-one-morally-wrong-action.''   Whether these latter attach to a given actual person must be ''up to'' the

actual person in question. It cannot be due to the instantiating activity of God.

It is exactly at this point that we can identify what I take to be the basic mistake in Plantinga's discussion of the Free Will Defense. It seems to me that we must distinguish two very different ideas, viz., (1) the concept of making someone *do* something, and (2) the concept of making (creating) a person who (one knows in advance) *will do* something. Analogy I: I hire a man, and I make him do the job. Here I do two things. I hire the man, and I make him do the job. Contrast this case with another. I hire a man who I know in advance will do the job of his own free will. Here I do just one thing. I hire the man. I do not (also) make him do the job. Analogy II: I make (create) a statue out of brass, and I paint it green. Here I do two things. I make (create) the statue, and I paint it green. Contrast this case with another. I make (create) a statue out of brass which I know in advance will eventually turn green. Here I do one thing. I make (create) a statue. I do not (also) make it (cause it to be) green. Now, to instantiate a given set of H properties is to create an actual person who has every H property in that set (cf. 212). But this does not mean that if God instantiates a set of H properties containing the property ''freely-performs-only-right-actions'' he thereby *causes* some actual person to freely perform right actions. What God would be causing (if this is the right word) is an actual person who (He knows in advance) will freely perform only right actions. God would not be determining the actions; He would be determining that there be a person who (He knows) will in fact perform the actions of his own free will. (It is like hiring a man who one knows in advance will do the job of his own free will.[4]) Thus Plantinga's distinction between determinate and indeterminate H properties and his revision of the notion of a possible person to include only determinate H properties appear to be idle moves in the argument. God can instantiate sets of H properties that include such items as ''freely-performs-only-right-actions'' or ''freely-performs-at-least-one-morally-wrong-action.'' Such instantiating activity is not incompatible with the fact that the resulting actual person performs right actions or performs wrong actions of his own free will. It does not mean that God *causes* the result-

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[4] Under one analysis of the statement ''God knows X'' the statement ''God knows at $T1$ that Jones will *freely* do A at $T3$'' is nonsense. But this need cause no trouble here. There are alternative ways of understanding statements of the form ''God knows X'' that do not have this implication. For a fuller discussion of this issue see my ''Divine Omniscience and Voluntary Action'' *Philosophical Review*, 74, 1 (January, 1965): 27–46.

ing actual person to behave rightly or to behave wrongly. It means only that God creates a person who will (when it is left "up to him") behave rightly, or a person who will (when it is left "up to him") behave wrongly, and that God knows in advance which of these persons He is creating.

V

I think I can best summarize my critique of Plantinga's treatment of the Free Will Defense by reviewing the challenge put by Flew and Mackie as it would be framed in Plantinga's technical vocabulary under each of his definitions of 'possible person'.

If we begin with the idea that a possible person is just any set of properties that can attach to a human being without logical absurdity (as we do under Plantinga's first definition of 'possible person') we can say with complete (logical) assurance that there exist possible persons that include the property "performs-only-right-actions" as well as possible persons that include the property "performs-at-least-one-morally-wrong-action" (proposition $r2$ is logically false). What Flew and Mackie claim is that an omnipotent, omniscient, and all-good being would instantiate (create) only possible persons of the *former* kind. Since it is clear that there are actual persons that are instantiations of the latter kind, a being of the above description does not exist.

Now, if we revise the notion of a possible person in such a way as to exclude the properties "freely-performs-only-right-actions" and "freely-performs-at-least-one-morally-wrong-action" from membership in a possible person, we alter the basic problem not one bit. We still know, with complete (logical) assurance, that there exist the very sets of properties which counted as possible persons on the first definition (i.e., those which include the properties "freely-performs-only-right-actions" and "freely-performs-at-least-one-morally-wrong-action"), though these no longer count as possible persons on the second definition. To deny that these sets exist would be to deny the *logical possibility* of there being a person who freely performs only right actions and of there being a person who freely performs at least one morally wrong action. (Plantinga explicitly avoids such a denial.) What Flew and Mackie still want to know is how an omnipotent, omniscient, and all-good being could instantiate possible persons as subsets of sets including the property "freely-performs-at-least-one-morally-wrong-action" rather than as subsets of sets including the property "freely-performs-only-right-actions." The challenge is the same whichever definition of 'possible person' is employed. And so far as I can

see, Plantinga has said nothing in his paper that helps us see that this challenge fails.

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PIKE AND POSSIBLE PERSONS

I WISH to thank Mr. Pike for his clear and careful discussion of my paper. It does seem to me, however, that pages 212–214 of the paper (with which what follows presupposes some familiarity) contain an explicit answer to his objection.

In the paper I define 'possible person' in two different ways. Here I shall reserve that term for the second of those ways (215–216 of my paper, or 97 of Pike's discussion), using the phrase 'whole possible person' for the first (my paper, 212; Pike, 96). And let us use the term 'perfect possible person' for any whole possible person that contains the properties "free to do what is right and free to do what is wrong" and "never freely does what is wrong."

Now, says Pike, proposition r2:

(r2) Every free possible person [1] performs at least one wrong action.

is inconsistent with the proposition that God exists. If this is true, of course, then the conjunction of propositions b, r1, and r2 (Pike, 94, 95) is not, contrary to what I say in the paper, consistent; in that case my restatement of the Free Will Defense will be unsuccessful. But what leads Pike to suppose that r2 *is* inconsistent with the proposition that God exists? Pleading difficulty in "grasping the more subtle implications of propositions in which technical and ordinary ways of speaking are mixed," Pike renders r2 as what I shall call "r3":

(r3) Every consistent set of determinate H properties (meeting the qualifications of the second definition of 'possible person') that is instantiated is instantiated as a subset of a wider set of properties which contains the indeterminate property "freely-performs-at-least-one-morally-wrong-action" (101).

Now r3 is not equivalent to r2. For r2 says that every free possible person has a certain property: every free possible person is such that, if it is instantiated, its instantiation will perform at least one wrong action. Pike's r3, of course, does not say that.

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[1] That is, possible person containing the property "free to do both right and wrong."