



Divine and Conventional Frankfurt Examples

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Abstract

The principle of alternate possibilities (*PAP*) says that you are morally praiseworthy or blameworthy for something you do only if you could have done otherwise. Frankfurt examples are putative counterexamples to *PAP*. These examples feature a failsafe mechanism that ensures that some agent cannot refrain from doing what she does without intervening in how she conducts herself, thereby supposedly sustaining the upshot that she is responsible for her behavior despite not being able to do otherwise. I introduce a Frankfurt example in which the agent who could not have done otherwise is God. Paying attention to the freedom requirements of moral obligation, the example is commissioned, first, to assess whether various states of affairs that are unavoidable for God can be obligatory for God and for which God can be praiseworthy. The example is, next, used to unearth problems with conventional Frankfurt examples that feature human agents. I argue that conceptual connections between responsibility and obligation cast suspicion on these examples. Pertinent lessons that the divine Frankfurt example helps to reveal motivate the view that divine foreknowledge and determinism, assuming that both preclude freedom to do otherwise, may well imperil obligation and responsibility.

Research Article



Keywords

Blameworthiness, Determinism, Divine Frankfurt example, Foreknowledge, Obligation, Praiseworthiness.

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1. Introduction

On a customary understanding of “moral responsibility,” an agent’s being morally responsible for performing an intentional action entails that she deserves some moral credit or discredit for that action. The desert is basic in that, roughly, when an agent is responsible for something, she is deserving or worthy of moral credit or discredit on the basis of certain facts about herself or her intentional conduct, and not, for example, on account of institutional rules or practices (Feinberg, 1970, pp.56-58; Smilansky, 2000, p.13; Pereboom, 2001, xx; 2014, p.2; Scanlon, 2013, p.101).¹ Many take responsibility to come in one of three primary forms, “positive,” “negative,” or “neutral.” Although there is no common name for the neutral form, the positive form is ordinarily called *laudability* or *praiseworthiness*, and the negative form *culpability* or *blameworthiness*. Determinism is the thesis that at any instant exactly one possible future is compatible with the state of the universe at that instant and the laws of nature (Van Inwagen, 1983, p.3). Responsibility incompatibilism is the view that moral responsibility and determinism are incompatible.

A prominent argument for responsibility incompatibilism (*AP-Responsibility*) unfolds in this way:

AP-Responsibility

(1R) The free will premise: If determinism is true, then no one can ever do otherwise.

(2R) The alternate possibilities premise: If no one can ever do otherwise, then no one can ever be morally responsible for anything.

(3R) Responsibility incompatibilism: Therefore, if determinism is true, then no one can ever be morally responsible for anything.

One may advance, for instance, what one takes to be the strongest version of the *Consequence Argument* to support the free will premise. In Peter van Inwagen’s famous summary of this sort of argument: “If determinism is true, then our acts are the consequences of the laws of nature and events in the remote past. But it is not up to us what went on before we were born, and neither is it up to us what the laws of nature are. Therefore, the consequences of these things (including our present acts) are not up to us” (1983, p.16). Assuming that if an act is not up to you, you could not have refrained from doing it, the *Consequence Argument*, if sound, yields the conclusion that

1. More generally, basic desert is not anchored in considerations that do not raise traditional free will concerns such as whether determinism is compatible with responsibility.

determinism precludes freedom to do otherwise.¹ The second premise is simply a version of the principle of alternate possibilities concerning responsibility:

PAP-Responsibility: You are morally responsible for performing an action only if you could have done otherwise.

Many have appealed to Frankfurt examples, such as the following, to cast doubt on *PAP-Responsibility*. In *Theft*, imagine that Zafar is blameworthy for deciding to steal some pears in Stage 1. In Stage 2, a “rerun” of Stage 1, counterfactual intervener, Imran, will do nothing if he detects some reliable and involuntary sign Zafar displays that he, Zafar, is about to decide to steal, but will force Zafar’s hand if he discerns the reliable and involuntary sign that Zafar is about to refrain from deciding to steal. But Zafar proceeds exactly as before, and this averts Imran’s need to intercede. Since Zafar, without Imran around, is morally blameworthy for deciding to steal, and he behaves no differently in Stage 2, he is blameworthy for deciding to steal here too, even though he could not have done otherwise.² Partisans of Frankfurt examples (or “Frankfurt defenders”) conclude that principle *PAP-Responsibility* is false.

A notable putative problem with such conventional Frankfurt cases is that they fail to expunge all alternatives in Stage 2. For instance, some have proposed that in Stage 2 Zafar may display the reliable sign that he is about to decide to steal, but it is also up to him to display the sign that he is about to refrain from deciding to steal, and so contrary to what Frankfurt defenders affirm, even in Stage 2 Zafar has alternatives.³ Others have rejoined that these sorts of alternatives - these “flickers of freedom” - are not robust enough to sustain moral responsibility.⁴ They claim that defenders of *PAP-Responsibility* should be taken to hold that the alternatives *PAP-Responsibility* requires are *intentional* commissions or omissions and not mere involuntary happenings. Yet others, heeding this robustness requirement, have defended the potent dilemma objection.⁵ Regarding examples like *Theft*, they would venture that either the relationship between the prior sign Zafar displays and Zafar’s

1. On the *Consequence Argument*, see, for example, (Ginet, 1966; 1990; 2003; Wiggins, 1973; Van Inwagen, 1983).

2. For example, Frankfurt, 1969; Mele & Robb, 1998; Fischer, 2006; 2021.

3. Van Inwagen disagrees with the view that Frankfurt examples are cases of responsibility without alternatives in his 1978.

4. On robustness, see, for example, Fischer, 1994, ch. 7; Pereboom, 2003; 2005, pp.186-188; Shabo, 2014; Kittle, 2019.

5. For example, Kane, 1985, p.51; 1996, pp.142-144, pp.191-192; Widerker, 1995; Ginet, 1996.

subsequent decision for which he is allegedly responsible is deterministic or this relation is indeterministic. If the former, then, arguably, although Zafar could not have decided to refrain from stealing if he were to have displayed the sign for this decision, without further argumentation *Theft* simply begs the question against advocates of the dilemma objection. If the latter - if, for instance, the display of the sign for the decision that Zafar is about to decide to steal is consistent with Zafar's deciding not to steal - then the counterfactual intervener has no reliable cue for intervention. Furthermore, Stage 2 will *not* be purged of robust alternatives: in this stage, it is open to Zafar to decide to steal and to decide to refrain from stealing even when he displays the sign that he is about to decide to steal.

In this paper, I advance an unconventional Frankfurt example featuring God as an allegedly supremely free agent who freely brings about various states of affairs that God cannot avoid bringing about. Some may take this example as an attempt to respond to the concern that Frankfurt examples are doomed to fail because no such examples that eliminate robust alternatives can be developed.¹ My primary interest in advancing an example of this sort lies elsewhere. I expose features of the example that yield what some may deem to be attractive results regarding whether states of affairs God cannot avoid bringing about can be morally obligatory for God. The features also reveal what others may see as disturbing implications concerning whether God can be praiseworthy for bringing about states of affairs of this sort. I then show why these features expose weaknesses in conventional Frankfurt cases involving human agents.

2. The Divine Frankfurt Example

To set the dialectical stage, imagine that you are undecided about whether the following principles are true:

PAP-Blameworthiness: You are morally blameworthy for doing *A* (an intentional commission or omission) only if you could have done otherwise.

PAP-Praiseworthiness: You are morally praiseworthy for doing *A* only if you could have done otherwise.

Although you find both principles plausible, you are open to revising your partiality toward them. You entertain the following thought experiment.

1. Fischer responds to this challenge in Fischer 2021.

Imagine an entity that has the highest possible degree of the sort of freedom moral responsibility demands, an entity that has this perfection. Although this is not essential, suppose you take this entity to be God, a being perfect in every respect or a being with all perfections. Assuming there is a unique best possible world, consider this state of affairs:

Best: God freely actualizes the best of all possible worlds.

Assume, further, that God is praiseworthy for seeing to the occurrence of *Best*. If you have qualms about God's praiseworthiness for *Best*, switch *Best* with this state of affairs:

Love: God's loving humans.

Plausibly, God is praiseworthy for *Love*.

If you still entertain doubts about whether God can be praiseworthy for *Love*, replace *Love* with a sentence expressing a state of affairs that you think God cannot refrain from bringing about and for which state of affairs God is at least *prima facie* praiseworthy. Now supplement the thought experiment in this fashion: given God's nature - given God's perfections which include the perfections of omniscience, omnipotence, and omnibenevolence - God cannot refrain from actualizing the best world. We may say that actualizing the best world is unavoidable for God. Analogously, since God loves humans essentially, God does not have the freedom to choose between loving humans and not loving humans; loving humans is unavoidable for God.¹ If you have the intuition or gut reaction that God is praiseworthy for bringing about *Best*, or God is praiseworthy for *Love*, these claims about unavoidability should not in any way influence your intuition that, in virtue of being supremely free in seeing to the occurrence of *Best* or *Love*, God is praiseworthy for bringing about either of these states of affairs. This divine Frankfurt case is free of *any* sort of alternate possibility, flickers of freedom, or robust alternatives. The thought experiment may lead you to conclude that both *PAP-Praiseworthiness* and *PAP-Blameworthiness* are suspect.

Does the divine Frankfurt case indeed warrant this conclusion? Some may rejoinder that, supposing *Best* or *Love* is unavoidable for God, the divine case simply begs the question against those who believe that *PAP-Blameworthiness* and *PAP-Praiseworthiness* are true. However, this is contentious. If you remain uncommitted at the outset on whether these PAP principles are true, there is arguably no question-begging. The example starts with the reasonable supposition that God is supremely free and the additional plausible assumption

1. See: for example, Choo & Goh, 2019, p.36.

that although *Best* and *Love* are unavoidable for God, God is praiseworthy for seeing to the occurrence of either. Of course, if you think that these dual principles are already true - if you are firmly committed to them - the divine Frankfurt case will not move you. Given the dialectical terrain, however, this *would* amount to begging the question against opponents of these principles or those who are on the fence about whether these principles are true.

Setting aside these initial concerns about question-begging in one direction or the other, I turn to exposing features of the divine case in virtue of which this case generates what may be taken to be some desirable results and other unsettling ones regarding certain appraisals of God. These features can be brought to light by reflecting on, first, conceptual associations between responsibility and obligation, and, second, alternate possibility requirements for obligation. I address each of these things in the ensuing two sections.

3. Bridge Principles

It is highly plausible that there are conceptual links between moral blameworthiness and moral impermissibility, on the one hand, and moral praiseworthiness and moral obligation or permissibility, on the other. What are these links? Starting with blameworthiness, a candidate with extensive following says that blameworthiness requires impermissibility:

Blameworthiness Requires Impermissibility (BRI): You are blameworthy for doing *A* only if it is impermissible for you to do *A*.¹

However, should Frankfurt examples like *Theft* sway you, at least initially, against the proposal that blameworthiness requires that you could have done otherwise, you have reason to reject *BRI*. To explain, start with the following two eminently credible principles:

Ought Implies Can (OIC): If it is obligatory for you to do *A*, then you can do *A* (and if it is obligatory for you not to do *A*, then you can refrain from doing *A*) (Feldman, 1986; Zimmerman, 1996; Haji, 2019; Vranas, 2007; Littlejohn, 2012).²

Just as you cannot be responsible for something unless you are free with

1. For example, Smith, 1991, p.271; Widerker, 1991, p.223; Fields, 1994; Copp, 1997; 2003, pp.286-287; Fischer, 2006, p.218; Arpaly, 2006, 91n3; Campbell, 2011, pp.33-34; Nelkin, 2011, p.100 & p.104; Franklin, 2018, p.35.

2. I omit temporal indices here. I take the agent - and time - relativized canonical form of obligation statements to be this: at *t*, it is obligatory for *S* to do *A* at *t** (where *t** may be *t* or later than *t*).

respect to it and, thus, you can do it, nothing can be obligatory for you unless you are free regarding it and, so, you are able to do it.

Equivalence: It is obligatory for you to refrain from doing *A* if, and only if, it is impermissible for you to do *A*.

Many agree that this “ought not” is equivalent to “impermissible” principle has the status of a morally deontic axiom or theorem (Belzer, 1998; Hilpinen & McNamara, 2013, p.43; McNamara, 2019; Rönnedal, 2009, pp.28-29).¹ From *OIC* and *Equivalence* derive:

Impermissibility Implies Can Avoid (IAvoid): If it is impermissible for you to do *A*, then you can avoid - you can refrain from - doing *A*.

The derivation is straightforward: If it is impermissible for you to do *A*, then you ought not to do *A* (from *Equivalence*); if you ought not to do *A*, you can refrain from doing *A* (from *OIC*); hence, if it is impermissible for you to do *A*, you can refrain from doing *A* (*IAvoid*).

In addition, *OIC*, *Equivalence*, and *BRI* jointly entail *PAP-Blame*: If you are blameworthy for doing *A*, then it is impermissible for you to do *A* (*BRI*); if it is impermissible for you to do *A*, then you can refrain from doing *A* (*IAvoid*); hence, if you are blameworthy for doing *A*, then you can refrain from doing *A* (*PAP-Blame*) (Haji, 1994; Widerker, 1991; Nelkin, 2011, pp.100-101). Provided you are convinced that Frankfurt examples do, indeed, undermine *PAP-Blame*, since the conjunction of *OIC*, *Equivalence*, and *BRI* implies *PAP-Blame*, you should conclude that one or more of these principles is false. And if you accept *OIC* and *Equivalence*, you should reject *BRI*.²

You may have additional reasons to discard *BRI*. For instance, you may believe that *BRI* succumbs to counterexample (Zimmerman, 1997; Capes, 2012, pp.428-430; Haji, 2016, pp.66-70). Or you may reason that just as there are or can be supererogatory acts - roughly, permissible acts especially valuable in some way for the doing of which you are praiseworthy, so there are or can be suberogatory acts, roughly, permissible acts disvaluable in some

1. Pereboom rejects *Equivalence* on the basis of discarding its part that says that if it is impermissible for you to do something, then you ought not to do it. Suppose a serial killer cannot avoid killing her victims. Pereboom proposes that it's impermissible for her to kill them even though it's false (given *OIC*) that she ought not to kill them (2014, 145). Anyone who rejects *Equivalence* on such grounds would have to come to terms with the fact that *Equivalence* is validated by prominent systems or schemes of deontic logic. On *Equivalence*, see, also, Pereboom, 2001, pp.146-147; Haji, 2002, pp.52-53.

2. Fischer (2006, pp.217-222) proposes that Frankfurt examples impugn *OIC*. (See: Haji, 2016, pp.68-71 for a reply.) Needless to say, if you reject *OIC* the prior and subsequent reasoning that appeals to *OIC*, will not convince you.

way for the doing of which you are blameworthy (Haji, 2016, pp.82-92).

If *BRI* fails, what is its replacement? A popular substitute associates blameworthiness somewhat indirectly with impermissibility, tying blameworthiness conceptually to what agents believe is impermissible. While this competitor has variations, its variants all share the following kernel.

Blameworthiness Requires Belief In Impermissibility (BRBI): You are blameworthy for doing *A* only if you believe that it is impermissible for you to do *A* (Moore, 1912, p.101; Parfit, 1984, p.25; Thomson, 1991, p.295; Haji, 1998, pp.151-167; 2012, pp.84-86; 2016, pp.56-64; 2019, pp.142-144; Zimmerman, 1988; 1997; Hanser, 2005, p.454 & 456; Pereboom, 2014, p.142).

Some variants of *BRBI* may require that you have a justified belief that it is impermissible for you to do *A*; others may demand that you have a non-culpable belief that it is impermissible for you to do *A*. Again, since these alternates all imply *BRBI*, we may safely set them aside. The two major rivals, then, are *BRI* and *BRBI*. Since I know of no other plausible candidates, and wishing to remain neutral on which of these two rivals, in the end, wins the day, I advance the following “bridge principle” that associates blameworthiness with impermissibility.

Blameworthiness/Impermissibility: You are blameworthy for doing *A* only if either it is impermissible for you to do *A* (*BRI*) or you believe that it is impermissible for you to do *A* (*BRBI*).

Turning, next, to praiseworthiness, you may propose that just as blameworthiness is conceptually associated with impermissibility, praiseworthiness is conceptually tied to obligation: you cannot be praiseworthy for something unless it is obligatory for you. But this would be too strong. If you do something that is supererogatory for you, you are praiseworthy for it but a supererogatory act is permissible and not obligatory for you. You might instead plumb for the alternative that you cannot be praiseworthy for something unless it is permissible for you. Others may think that this is still too demanding and offer a belief replacement whose core says that you cannot be praiseworthy for something unless you take it to be permissible or obligatory for you. Ignoring variations of the belief alternative, let us proceed by supposing that you are praiseworthy for something only if either it is permissible for you or you take it to be obligatory or permissible for you:

Praiseworthiness/Obligation or Permissibility: You are praiseworthy for doing *A* only if either it is permissible for you to do *A* (*PRP*) or you believe that it is obligatory or permissible for you to do *A* (*PRBP*).

4. Obligation and Alternate Possibilities

In contexts in which you cannot do otherwise, nothing can be obligatory or permissible for you. Regarding obligation, first, bear in mind that provided principles *OIC* (“ought” implies “can”) and *Equivalence* (“ought not” and “impermissible” are equivalent) are true, there is a requirement of alternate possibilities for impermissibility; nothing can be impermissible for you unless you could have done otherwise (*IAvoid*). As we have seen, the conjunction of *OIC* and *Equivalence* entails *IAvoid*. So, if you are in a situation in which you cannot do otherwise than *A*, then *A* cannot be impermissible for you.¹ Second, if nothing can ever be impermissible for you, then nothing can ever be obligatory for you. Why so? Restated, *Equivalence* says that it is obligatory for you to do *A* if, and only, if it is impermissible for you to refrain from doing *A*. Hence, *Equivalence* entails:

Obligation/Impermissible: If something is (or can be) obligatory for you, then there is at least one thing that is (or can be) impermissible for you (refraining from doing this thing).

However, it is false that there is at least one thing that is (or can be) impermissible for you if you can never do otherwise. Given *Obligation/Impermissible*, it follows that nothing is (or can be) obligatory for you if you can never do otherwise.

Regarding permissibility, just as obligation and impermissibility require control, so does permissibility. Hence, this principle is true:

PIC: If *A* is permissible for you, then you can do *A* (Feldman, 1986, pp.36-38; McNamara, 1996, p.436; Zimmerman, 1996, pp.32-33; Haji, 2019, pp.27-29).

A is optional for you if, and only, if both *A* and not-*A* (refraining from doing *A*) are permissible for you. We may now show that in contexts in which you cannot do otherwise, nothing can be permissible for you. If it is permissible for you to do *A*, then either it is obligatory for you to do *A*, or it is optional for you to do *A*. Take, in turn, each of the options that the consequent of the previous conditional statement expresses. Suppose *A* is permissible for you because *A* is obligatory for you. No act can be obligatory for you in situations in which you cannot do otherwise (as already established). Thus, nothing can be permissible for you (in virtue of its being obligatory for you) in such situations. Suppose *A*

1. Here, I overlook concerns about whether the “can” of obligation (and responsibility) is some weak compatibilist “can” or some strong incompatibilist “can.”

is permissible for you because *A* is optional for you. *A* is optional for you only if not-*A* (refraining from doing *A*) is permissible for you. If not-*A* is permissible for you, you can bring about not-*A* because “permissible” implies “can.” So, in a situation in which you cannot do otherwise than *A*, not-*A* is not permissible for you. Hence, in such a situation, *A* cannot be permissible for you in virtue of *A*’s being optional for you. Regarding optional act, *A*, if you remain concerned that although not-*A* is not permissible for you if you cannot do otherwise, this still allows that *A* may be permissible for you even if you cannot do otherwise than *A*, you will have to contend with the following untenable consequence: no matter how heinous your act, that act is still morally *permissible* for you.

To summarize, suppose you are in a situation in which, at *t*, you do *A*, and at *t*, you cannot refrain from doing *A*. Perhaps you are in a Frankfurt situation at *t*. Or maybe your *A*-ing at *t* is deterministically produced: all the facts of the past, and the laws of nature, entail that you do *A* at *t*, and assume that determinism precludes anyone from ever doing otherwise. Or there is divine foreknowledge, and (let us suppose) such foreknowledge ensures that no non-divine agent can ever do otherwise. At *t*, *A* is not impermissible for you because impermissibility entails avoidability, and you cannot refrain from doing *A* at *t*. At *t*, *A* is not obligatory for you. If *A* is obligatory for you at *t*, there is at least one thing you can do at *t* that is impermissible for you at *t*. But other than *A*-ing at *t*, which is not impermissible for you, there is nothing you can do at *t* that is impermissible for you. So, it is false that, at *t*, *A* is obligatory for you. Finally, at *t*, *A* is not permissible for you. If, at *t*, *A* is permissible for you, it is in virtue of *A*’s being obligatory or optional for you. Since *A* is not obligatory for you, *A* cannot be permissible for you on the basis of being obligatory for you. Since, at *t*, you cannot bring about not-*A* - you cannot (intentionally) refrain from doing *A* - not-*A* is not permissible for you. Given that, at *t*, *A* is optional for you only if, at *t*, not-*A* is permissible for you, at *t*, *A* is not optional for you. Hence, at *t*, *A* cannot be permissible for you on the basis of being optional for you. We may conclude that when you cannot, at *t*, do other than *A*, at *t* *A* is not permissible, impermissible, or obligatory for you.

5. Reassessing the Divine Frankfurt Case

The divine Frankfurt example is designed to persuade us that God is morally praiseworthy for the following states of affairs even though God could not have refrained from bringing them about.

Best: God freely actualizes the best of all possible worlds.

Love: God’s loving humans.

Since these states of affairs are unavoidable for God, it is not obligatory, permissible, or impermissible for God to see to their occurrence. We may say that these states of affairs are *amoral* for God. Perhaps this is as it should be because one may believe that morally deontic requirements do not apply to God; such imperatives have no hold on God. Here, it may be instructive to review some of Kant's germane views on whether God is subject to morally deontic demands.

According to Kant, the sort of freedom moral obligation and moral responsibility require - transcendental freedom - partly consists in, or presupposes, the causal power to bring about various things, such as choices or overt actions. It is a power to choose independently of the natural causes that determine all events in the empirical (or phenomenal) world. The causation, which is an essential constituent of practical freedom, is not merely indeterministic as contemporary event-causal libertarians, such as Robert Kane (1996) or Christopher Franklin (2018), propose. Kant rejects the view that you are responsible at *t*, for instance, for deciding to do *A* at *t* only if, at *t*, you decide to do *A* at *t*, and given the same past up until *t*, and the laws of nature, at *t* you could have refrained from deciding to do *A* at *t*. Kant's concern with this sort of libertarianism is that it succumbs to a problem of luck:

If, then, one wants to attribute freedom to a being whose existence is determined in time, one cannot, so far at least, except this being from the law of natural necessity as to all events in its existence and consequently as to its actions as well; for, that would be tantamount to handing it over to blind chance (CPrR 5:95)¹

Rather, Kant claims that the causal power implicated in acting freely is “the power of beginning a state *of itself* (*von selbst*) – the causality of which does not, in turn, stand under another cause determining it in time in accordance with the law of nature” (A533/B561). In another passage Kant writes:

The human being must make or have made *himself into* whatever he is or should become in a moral sense, good or evil. These two [characters] must be an effect of his free power of choice, for otherwise they could not be imputed to him and, consequently, he could be neither *morally*

1. Quotations from Kant's work are from the *Akademie Ausgabe*. The first *Critique* is cited by the usual A/B edition pagination and the other works by volume and page. Where available, translations follow the Cambridge editions of the Works of Immanuel Kant, editors Paul Guyer and Allen Wood. References to specific texts are abbreviated as follows. CPrR: *Critique of Practical Reason*; G: *Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals*; MM: *Metaphysics of Morals*; Rel: *Religion within the Boundaries of Reason Alone*.

good nor evil (Rel 6:44).

According to Kant the power of free choice (*Willkür*) regarding agents other than God is “a power *to do or to refrain from doing as one pleases*” (MM 6: 213). But freedom to do otherwise is not essential to free action. Kant proposes, instead, that God can still freely bring about various things in virtue of God’s “absolute spontaneity” in the production of these things:

There is no difficulty in reconciling the concept of *freedom* with the idea of God as a necessary being, for freedom does not consist in the contingency of an action (in its not being determined through any ground at all), i.e. not in indeterminism ([the thesis] that God must be equally capable of doing good or evil, if his action is to be called free) but in absolute spontaneity. The latter is at risk only with predeterminism, where the determining ground of an action lies in antecedent time, so that the action is no longer in *my* power but in the hands of nature, which determines me irresistibly; since in God no temporal sequence is thinkable, this difficulty has no place (Rel 6: 49-50n).

Commenting on transcendental freedom, Colin McLear proposes that Kant is a “source” rather than a “leeway” incompatibilist:

[T]ranscendental freedom, in general, does not essentially involve leeway or the ability to do otherwise. Kant is therefore a source rather than a leeway incompatibilist: the key notion of (transcendental) freedom is not the ability to do otherwise, but to be the undetermined causal source of one’s actions, insofar as those actions are under one’s control” (2020, p.54).

On whether Kant is subject to morally deontic demands, Derk Pereboom writes:

[T]ranscendental freedom does not essentially involve the ability to do otherwise. Kant would seem to be a source rather than a leeway incompatibilist, stressing that the key notion of freedom is not the ability to do otherwise, but rather being the undetermined source of one’s actions. At the same time...it is of great significance for Kant that we human beings have the ability to do otherwise, since this is a necessary condition for ‘ought’ principles applying to us, and for us, the moral law is a system of ‘ought’ principles. But for Kant, there is no corresponding reason to claim that God can do otherwise, since God is not subject to ‘ought’ principles; “for the divine will... there are no imperatives: ‘ought’ is here out of place, because ‘I will’ is already of

itself in harmony with the law” [G4: 414]. In fact, in Kant’s view, God cannot do otherwise, but God is still free in the sense he has in mind (Pereboom, 2006, pp.542-43).

In sum, there is good textual evidence, supplemented with scholarly commentary, to support the view that Kant agrees with the proposal that God is not constrained by “ought” imperatives. Since nothing can be impermissible for God (on a Kantian view or so supposed), given *Obligation/Impermissible*, nothing can be obligatory for God either.¹

If God is not subject to appraisals of obligation, can God be subject to appraisals of responsibility? States of affairs *Best* and *Love* cannot be obligatory or permissible for God. In conjunction with this fact, the bridge principle regarding praiseworthiness (*Praiseworthiness/Obligation or Permissibility*) implies, contrary to what the divine Frankfurt example seeks to convince us, that God is *not* praiseworthy for bringing them about. Elaborating, since, necessarily, all of God’s beliefs are true, confine attention to the first disjunct of bridge principle *Praiseworthiness/Obligation or Permissibility*: you are praiseworthy for doing *A* only if it is permissible for you to do *A* (*PRP*). Since it cannot be permissible for God to bring about *Best* or *Love*, *PRP* yields the result that God cannot be praiseworthy for bringing about either. Generalizing, any state of affairs that is unavoidable for God is amoral for God. Hence, assuming *PRP* is true, God cannot be praiseworthy for bringing about (if God does) any such state of affairs. Admittedly, some may find this result troubling.

6. Mundane Frankfurt Cases Revisited

The problem I have discussed with the divine Frankfurt case concerning whether God can be praiseworthy for states of affairs like *Best* and *Love* point to a deep problem with conventional Frankfurt cases involving human agents. Consider *Charity*, a Frankfurt example involving praiseworthiness. In Stage 1, Ameena freely decides to donate generously to a good charity, and she is praiseworthy for deciding to donate. In Stage 2, conducting herself just as she does in Stage 1, she cannot do otherwise than decide to donate because that is what ever vigilant counterfactual intervener, Imran, wishes that she decides. Frankfurt partisans would conclude that since Ameena is praiseworthy for

1. Wesley Morriston says, “God’s nature is such that it is logically impossible for Him to perform a wrong action. He is determined - in the strongest possible sense of ‘determined’ - not to perform any wrong actions” (1985, p.258).

deciding to donate in Stage 2 even though she could not have done otherwise, *PAP-Praiseworthiness* is false. Should this conclusion be accepted? Since Ameena cannot do otherwise than decide to donate (or so we are assuming), it is not permissible, obligatory, or impermissible for Ameena to decide to donate; rather, it is amoral for her to decide to donate. The *PRP* disjunct of bridge principle *Praiseworthiness/Obligation or Permissibility* says that you are praiseworthy for doing *A* only if it is permissible for you to do *A*. If this disjunct is true, contrary to the desired verdict, Ameena is *not* praiseworthy for deciding to donate in Stage 2 because, here, it is false that her deciding to donate is permissible for her. The *PRBP* disjunct of *Praiseworthiness/Obligation or Permissibility* says that you are praiseworthy for doing *A* only if you believe that it is obligatory or permissible for you to do *A*. Suppose this disjunct is true. Then it may well be that Ameena is praiseworthy for deciding to donate in Stage 2 because she may have decided partly on the basis of the belief that it is permissible for her to donate. However, it is important to stress that this belief of hers - the belief that it is permissible for her to donate - is *false*. Generally, Frankfurt examples concerning praiseworthiness do not include or reveal the presupposition that in Stage 2 the pertinent agent, like Ameena, must have *false* beliefs concerning the normative status of the act she cannot avoid performing if she is to be praiseworthy for this act. This presupposition undercuts much of the intuitive appeal of Frankfurt cases. After all, when invoked against the principle that praiseworthiness requires alternate possibilities, we are to suppose that ordinary agents who are not mistaken about the moral statuses of choices, which are putatively unavoidable for them, may well be praiseworthy for these choices. Presumably, it is not the intention or goal of Frankfurt partisans to convince us that praiseworthiness does not require alternate possibilities only when agents harbor germane *false* beliefs about the moral statuses of their choices or actions.

Similar problems plague Frankfurt examples concerning blameworthiness such as *Theft*. Frankfurt partisans are drawn to the view that although Zafar could not have refrained from deciding to steal the pears in Stage 2, he is blameworthy for deciding to steal them. According to bridge principle *Blame/Impermissibility*, you are blameworthy for doing *A* only if either *A* is impermissible for you (*BRI*) or you believe that *A* is impermissible for you (*BRBI*). If *BRI* is true, Zafar is not blameworthy for deciding as he does in Stage 2 because it is amoral and, thus, not impermissible for him to decide to steal in Stage 2. If *BRBI* is true, then Zafar is to blame for deciding as he does in Stage 2 only if he *falsely* believes that it is impermissible for him to steal in Stage 2. In this case, once again, Frankfurt examples lose much of their intuitive appeal. These examples were not designed to show that alternate

possibilities are not required for blameworthiness only when agents have relevant false beliefs regarding which of their acts, including those that are unavoidable for them, are impermissible for them.

7. Divine Foreknowledge and God's Judgments

The following triad of theses sustains what some may take to be disconcerting results when it comes to some of God's alleged judgments concerning human agents.

(i) Divine foreknowledge precludes human agents from ever doing otherwise.

(ii) There is a requirement of alternate possibilities for obligation.

(iii) Bridge principles Praiseworthiness/Obligation or Permissibility and Blame/Impermissibility are true.

I end with a brief discussion of these results.

Assume that some agent, Hussain, performs some action, *C*, at time *t*, and assume that God has foreknowledge of this action. The claim of interest regarding such foreknowledge and freedom to do otherwise may be stated in this way:

Foreknowledge: If God has always foreknown that Hussain would, at *t*, perform *C* (at *t**), then it is not within Hussain's power, at *t*, to refrain from *C*-ing (at *t**).

Two principal arguments have been advanced for the incompatibility of divine foreknowledge and human freedom to do otherwise. The first is that if there is divine foreknowledge of free human actions, then humans have causal power over the past; they can causally alter the past. Since causal power over the past is impossible, it is inferred that *Foreknowledge* is true. The second is that if there is divine foreknowledge of free human actions, then certain facts counterfactually depend upon certain present or future facts. Since the past is fixed in a way that precludes such a relationship of dependence, it is inferred that *Foreknowledge* is true.¹ Here, I will not discuss these intriguing arguments any further. Rather, my aim is to reveal pertinent implications of *Foreknowledge* for the kinds of moral assessment that God can make about human agents.

First, since there is a requirement of alternate possibilities for obligation, permissibility, and impermissibility - specifically, nothing can be impermissible,

1. Pike, 1977; Fischer, 1983; Hoffman & Rosenkrantz, 2002, pp.126-135.

obligatory, or permissible for anyone if no one can ever do otherwise - and since divine foreknowledge (it is assumed) precludes any human agent from ever doing otherwise, divine foreknowledge is incompatible with obligation. Hence, divine foreknowledge bars God from assessing human agents on the basis of the rights and wrongs they have committed. (If you believe that determinism rules out freedom to do otherwise, you should, analogously, believe that determinism imperils obligation).

Second, assume that the first disjuncts of the pair of bridge principles previously introduced are true. In other words, suppose that blameworthiness requires impermissibility (*BRI*) and praiseworthiness requires permissibility (*PRP*). Then, since divine foreknowledge eliminates both impermissibility and permissibility on the assumption that such foreknowledge expunges freedom to do otherwise, divine foreknowledge precludes God from assessing human agents on the basis of praiseworthiness or blameworthiness. (Similarly, if determinism ensures that no agent can ever do otherwise, and *BRI* and *PRP* are true, determinism will likewise threaten blameworthiness and praiseworthiness). Assume, that the second (and not the first) disjuncts of both bridge principles are true. That is, suppose that blameworthiness requires belief in impermissibility (*BRBI*), and praiseworthiness requires belief in obligation or permissibility (*PRBP*). As I have explained, in the absence of alternatives, arguably, Frankfurt examples show that agents may be blameworthy or praiseworthy for choices or overt actions which they cannot avoid if they have pertinent false beliefs (again, assuming that the second disjuncts of the bridge principles are true). Regarding blameworthiness, it would have to be the case that they act in light of the false belief that their unavoidable action is impermissible for them. In the case of praiseworthiness, it would have to be true that they act on the basis of the false belief that their unavoidable action is permissible or obligatory for them. Thus, God could appraise human agents by tallying, in some fashion, their overall degree of praiseworthiness or blameworthiness only if these human agents had pertinent false beliefs concerning right, wrong, and obligation. Imagine a possible world (*Enlightened World*) in which human agents never have false beliefs about the moral statuses of their choices or actions. Assume that whenever these people make choices or perform actions, they always do so on the basis of the true belief that their actions are permissible, impermissible, obligatory, or amoral. Now imagine, further, that divine foreknowledge ensures that these agents can never choose to do or do otherwise, and because of their inability ever to do otherwise, all their choices and overt actions are amoral for them (and they know that their actions are amoral for them). If blameworthiness requires belief in impermissibility (*BRI*), and praiseworthiness requires belief in permissibility or obligation (*PRBP*), no agent in this world is ever

blameworthy or praiseworthy for anything. God would not be able to judge these agents on the basis of their overall degree of praiseworthiness or blameworthiness. (Analogously, suppose that *Enlightened World* is a world at which determinism is true, no agent in this world can ever do otherwise because all their actions are causally determined, and agents in *Enlightened World* always act on the basis of the true belief that their choices or actions are amoral for them; these agents never have false beliefs about the normative statuses of their decisions or overt actions. Then no human agent in *Enlightened World* is ever blameworthy or praiseworthy for anything).

To conclude, it may preliminarily be thought that the sort of divine Frankfurt example I have advanced, which seemingly shows that God can be praiseworthy for bringing about various states of affairs that are unavoidable for God, enjoys advantages over conventional Frankfurt examples involving human agents. One putative benefit is that the divine case eliminates all alternatives, whether of a robust or etiolated variety. Paying attention to conceptual connections between, on the one hand, blameworthiness and impermissibility or belief in impermissibility, and on the other hand, praiseworthiness and permissibility or belief in permissibility, reveals what some may take to be troubling results regarding whether God can be praiseworthy or blameworthy for various states of affairs that are supposedly unavoidable for God. These conceptual connections (encoded in the bridge principles) also unearth shortcomings of Frankfurt cases involving mundane agents; the cases are less convincing than one may initially have judged.¹

پیشگاه علوم انسانی و مطالعات فرهنگی
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