

International Journal for Philosophy of Religion 43: 29–64, 1998.
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Free will defence with and without Molinism

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Alvin Plantinga's formulations of the Free Will Defence have relied on the possibility of true counterfactuals of freedom and God's (middle) knowledge of them.¹ The notion of middle knowledge has, of course, come under some heavy fire in recent years. Though Plantinga himself has said that he believes that God has middle knowledge (and, hence, that there are some true counterfactuals of freedom), he suggests that this was a (mere) concession to atheologians.² It's they, not Free Will Defenders, who really need the assumption of middle knowledge. He says, 'Without the assumption of middle knowledge it is much harder to formulate a plausible deductive argument from evil; and it is correspondingly much easier, I should think, to formulate the free will defence on the assumption that middle knowledge is impossible'.³ The main aim of this paper is to investigate this important claim. I will argue that the atheologian's 'task' may be no harder (and might even be easier) without the assumption of middle knowledge; and, correspondingly, Free Will Defence without middle knowledge may fare no better (and might even fare worse) than its Molinist counterpart in solving 'the problem (s) of evil'.

1. Introduction

Every argument from evil claims that some fact about evil (suffering) in the world either logically precludes or renders improbable the existence of an omnipotent, omniscient, perfectly good God. Versions of the Argument differ depending on which fact about evil allegedly does the trick. I presume that it's common ground among friends and foes of theism that the following are (minimal) constraints on any adequate reply to the Argument from Evil (regardless of its formulation): on the one hand, God must be sufficiently God-like; on the other hand, God must not be blameworthy for the (fact about) evil in question. Theists and their critics differ, both among