Thirty and some compossibles

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Abstract *Religious world-views tend to make many seemingly contradictory claims. A well-known pair is God's absolute goodness and the existence of intense evil. We present a simple model to show the compossibility of middle knowledge, grounded truth, libertarian free will, physical laws, deism, theism, predestination, evil, hell, a heaven with freedom and without sin, God being perfectly just, free, praiseworthy, and necessarily omnibenevolent, omniscient, and omnipotent, this world being both replete with injustice and the best of all possible worlds, heinous suffering, no-one unjustly suffering, God's grace for the godly, the prospering of the godless, original sin, human responsibility, man's limitedness, trans-world depravity, irresistible grace, and Arminian human choice. Besides that, the model also features an open future, fully grounded tensed facts, and bivalence, and allows for a kind of universalism and a principle of sufficient reason.*

Keywords compossibility of religious claims – best of all worlds – argument from evil – freedom – divine perfection – human responsibility.

1 Introduction

Religious world-views tend to make many claims that may seem contradictory. A well-known pair is God's absolute goodness and the existence of intense evil. This paper shows the compossibility of a largish number of such claims, by a constructive existence proof: a possible world in which they all are actualised. Since the stress is on breadth, there will only be minor excursions into discussions of objections.

Apart from a small transcendent basis, covering mainly existence and freedom, our model is immanent, allowing inspection for possibility. Qualifiers relating to belief systems (Arminian, Calvinist, Molinist) do not mean that the notions as described here would seamlessly fit in those belief systems, but merely that they share salient characteristics with the beliefs of those systems.

This possible world does not reflect my beliefs, and may well be unsuitable as part of a practical belief system. All it intends to do is to show compossibility, given the *individual* possibility of any claim – some non-self-contradictory shape of notions such as omnipotence or freedom is assumed.

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After section 2 describes the transcendent assumptions, and section 3 some of the false notions that may lead us to assume incompossibility, section 4 gives the model. Then section 5 shows that some claims are individually possible under the model, and section 6 describes and defends the compossibles. Finally, section 7 lists some residual issues, and section 8 concludes.

2 The transcendent backdrop

While keeping the transcendent side to a minimum, to allow checking for possibility some transcendent starting point is necessary. A minimal one seems the following:

Underdetermination, i.e. the absence of external constraints that force a certain situation, produces *freedom*. As reality is one way or another, with this freedom there is a *choice*, and to the extent that the external constraints do not furnish a sufficient ground for the outcome of this choice, the choice itself does[2], so the act of choosing grounds its outcome. We take *mind* to be a generalisation of choice, so we have mind freely choosing.

2.1 God

At the metaphysical "root" there are no constraints at all, so we have a mind freely choosing to exist, and *how* to exist[3]. This mind we call God. God is omnipotent in the sense that he could have chosen non-existence, or any state for existence. The state actually chosen includes his own nature and his creating, hence the existence of space and time, and morality. God Himself is completely free, as there is literally nothing to constrain Him (hence the omnis), and has freely chosen to exist as a fully good being – He chose his essence, his nature, to be good, i.e. obeying the moral law he created. Being at the root of existence, He *is* the good.

2.2 Souls

Where God refrains from constraining, *souls* (creatures with minds) freely exist. Since their freedom is restricted to the extent God refrained, they may not be able to

2 This minimal model of course leaves many questions, primarily: *if nothing is constrained, then how can there be a principle that freedom produces choice and mind?* We do not intend to solve the final *Why?* question here, though. Any other option providing the required freedom is compatible with our model. Here we simply chose the minimal one for the sake of exposition; to establish aseity and more rigorous forms of omnipotence and omniscience a more elaborate transcendent backdrop would be required.

3 See my *Transcendent Mediocrity is the Neutral Position* for more about this root. In this model a state of "nothing" is not just, in the words of Krauss (2012), unstable – it is *impossible*: the non-existence of anything would be the choice of a (transcendently) existing mind.

choose a complete essence or nature. Yet, their first[4] act is freely choosing to exist with a freely chosen *character* – which, for our discussion, is a total function from (potential) situations to choices made[5].

The choice of a character is *transcendent* – made outside of time, in an eternal now.

God chose to create a world with time, and continuity of creaturely identity through time, so that the various *immanent* choices each of us makes belong to the same mind – they are all defined by our character. What we see as "development of character" is merely the effect of situations of more experienced people including more memories and habits, which form the input to our character, i.e. our choice function.

2.3 Characters

This once-for-all choice of a character should not be seen in a restricting way. It is quite possible to choose a character that will, say, make grumpy choices in all situations that do not involve a life sequence including having an act of love bestowed on one, and friendly choices in all situations that do. In a temporal context, that would mean that the act of love had a transformative effect on the soul. As we shall see, repentance is an instance of precisely such a transformative event.

Since the choice of character is timeless, there is no future in which to regret or deny it, though choices made *according to* that character may act out in time, and be regretted. Likewise the effects – including on one's self – may be regretted. These may include restrictions on future choice options, such as addiction.

2.4 The moral choice

God's choice to be good encompasses His choice to create all souls in the best possible world, with freedom, i.e. they rather than God are the ultimate source of their choices. Once a soul exist (and has therefore chosen its character) God knows its character, and hence all its potential choices.

Most of these souls would choose a good character, but a finite number (the "sinners") would not – they are free, after all, so their choice is not deducible from external

4 In a less "immanentised" model this would be merely *metaphysically* first, and not a single act but a collection of all choices relevant to their life. Here we model it as a *temporally* first act, the formation of the essential counterpart to the existential coming-into-being: God causes *that* there is coming-into-being, and the beings-in-becoming choose *what* comes into being.

5 Freewill requires attributability – choices should be the being's, not arbitrary. While a mystery remains regarding the choice *of* character, choices *according to* character provide this attributability.

factors[6]. Of this number, some (the "repenters") would repent under certain circumstances, but others (the "non-repenters") wouldn't.

Repentance here means a *final* choice, i.e. a choice *for all future*, for the good[7].

3 Some strategies

Before continuing, it may be good to describe some modelling strategies, both techniques used in our model, and assumptions implicitly made by those who claim incompossibility of certain claims.

3.1 Making immanent

In order to make the model testable, we choose for immanent options wherever possible.

3.1.1 Priority

Metaphysical priority is modelled as temporal priority. This leads to some stilted constructions, such as the choice of a character at the moment of a soul's creation, but the gain is a clear description and examination of the precise nature of human freedom and its relation to e.g. God's foreknowledge.

3.1.2 God's atemporality

A harder issue is God's atemporality, especially his eternal choice. We model this as a temporal choice at the first moment of time, with the caveat that this choice does not constitute a restriction for him in subsequent moments of time. This is less than satisfactory, but we have not found a better option.

3.2 False assumptions

If we present a model sporting a large number of features, why is it that many people have declared those features incompossible? The reason is in many cases that auxiliary assumptions are made, which are not necessarily true. Here we list a few of those assumptions.

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6 Maybe out of an infinity, the probability of a soul thus choosing being zero. Pruss' (2012) hypothesis that God could make the world such that people would freely choosing the good doesn't apply: being good means choosing the good, whatever it is, *because doing so is good*. (Conversely, a soul choosing against God *because doing so is evil* – say, in order to be independent – would form a counterexample to Pruss' hypothesis.)

7 Such a *final choice* may require an "end time" offering the option to choose at once for all future (a kind of sum or integral of all future choices). Or possibly a true choice for the good is necessarily final: once good, there is no rejecting the good – because that wouldn't be good. Or merely every choice after this point will happen to be one for goodness.

3.2.1 Conflating choice and action

The discussion regarding freedom of will is often marred by the unwarranted equating of willing and acting, or at least the metaphysical joining of the act of willing and the act of acting. In our mostly immanent model, that would correspond to a *temporal* unification of the two. As we shall see, our model temporally separates willing and acting, or at least *choosing* and acting on that choice.

3.2.2 The Texas sharpshooter[8]

Several seeming incompossibilities are the result of an assumed direction of causality, which may be incorrect. In our model, causality will at times be in the direction opposite to that supposed by arguments against compossibility.

4 The model

God, in His love, wants every soul to achieve what it wants, which for most souls would be eternal bliss in a heavenly paradise[9], something that requires irrevocably choosing the good – either a good character or repentance. Being perfectly good, God won't be in full communion with sinners; being perfectly just, he would never allow a non-sinner other than Himself to suffer (and in general never allow suffering beyond guilt); and being perfectly loving, he would minimise the suffering even of sinners.

4.1 The actual world

God plans an initial stage, which He organises so as to make it the best of possible worlds.

1 God, fully knowing each soul's character, separates the souls in non-sinners, repenters, and non-repenters. For each repenter he determines the life sequences leading to repentance.
2 The non-sinners are placed (as angels) in heaven, and the sinners (as angels or humans) in another realm, the universe – so that no non-sinner unjustly suffers under the effects of the sins of the sinners.
3 The universe is temporal, making transcendent choices impossible – we can only choose "for now". This allows repentance, by preventing sinners from irrevocably choosing against God: any choice against Him now may still be reverted later.

8 A man travelling through Texas saw a barn on which a large number of shooting targets were painted, each target sporting a single bullet hole, in the bull's eye. He asked the farmer about it, who told him that he had shot those bullets themselves, from 300 ft distance. What the farmer didn't tell was that he would paint the target *after* shooting the bullet.

9 Of course God would not want any soul to be in that bliss *unwillingly* – that is the point missed by Talbott (1990) that invalidates his conclusion that universalism is the only consistent Christian doctrine.

4 God determines the set of possible worlds in which all repenters undergo a life sequence[10] leading to repentance[11] – thus maximising the number of enjoyers of the infinite bliss He has in store for repenters.
5 From this set, He selects the optimal world according to some just measure (is the suffering of repenters worse than the suffering of non-repenters?), and runs that world[12].

4.2 The future world

After this initial stage, the non-repenters are moved to a space outside of all communion with God, and the repenters, having actualised their repentance, enter heaven.

5 The possibles

Before showing that facts can be compossible, it is good first to show that some facts are possible at all.

5.1 Sufficient reason

Obviously, there is no pervasive principle of *deductively* sufficient reason, as such a principle would be incompossible with freedom. There is, however, a weaker principle, where in the case of full determination there is a deductive reason, and in the case of underdetermination the reason for the state is a mind having chosen that way (and to which the choice may be attributed – that mind *being* the choice made), and the reason for the mind being the very underdeterminedness. This principle is pervasive, apart from the very start: *Why is the metaphysically initial state fully undetermined?* This may be *necessarily* so, however, as any other state would have a sufficient reason, i.e. a metaphysically prior state to explain it. So **if** there is an initial state, it must be fully undetermined[13].

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10 Including the call of the Holy Spirit, and possibly answered prayers – another compossible. <<References to Stump vs. Hoffman?>>

11 That is, if for any soul i there is a non-empty set of possible initial life segments S_i such that any choice made by i in a segment following any $s_{ij} \in S_i$ will be a choice for the good, then in such a world that soul i lives some initial life segment $s_{ij} \in S_i$. This could be seen as a kind of character building.

12 Souls choose their character without knowing in what world they will appear. Theoretically it is possible that God runs various worlds, dividing up the souls among them, if that is optimal.

13 A principle that fixes the finitude of all chains of explanation would be needed to establish the existence of a metaphysically first state. One candidate might be an analogue to the principle that an explanation is a compression – the way Newton's laws together with the initial positions and velocities of all objects is shorter than the description of the full trajectories of all objects. If there is only one fully undetermined state, then that existence would follow, as would a solution

5.2 A fixed past

At the moment a choice is actuated, there is precisely one past – but that is not the relevant issue with regards to the fixed past. The character of a soul is a function from complete pasts (a complete backward causal cone in spacetime) to a decision, so that each decision is taken in the context of one, whole and fixed, past. When the soul appears in "the" world, it is precisely the fixed past of each of its decisions in that world that will inform its decision, so we have the following fact:

Necessity of the past: if one lives a certain choice, the causal cone for that choice is fixed.

It is important to realise, however, that a virtually identical choice might have a different causal cone, e.g. only differing in places unknown to the soul – corresponding to Plantinga (1986)'s carpenter ant example.

We may add as much as we want to the input of the character function, including beliefs of other souls[14]. The one thing we cannot add without running into problems is God's foreknowledge, as an obstinate soul, one who chooses counter to God's foreknowledge, would create a contradiction.

5.3 God's foreknowledge

So is God without foreknowledge in this model? The answer is a qualified no. God chooses the world to actualise from all possible worlds respecting the characters of each soul, and in his thus choosing he can make true most things that he wants to happen[15].

So when God chooses a world, and *a fortiori* when that world "plays out", God knows *how* it will play out, because he knows not merely what each soul will actually choose, but also what each soul *would* choose in each situation – the soul's character.

5.4 An open future

Souls are genuinely free in choosing their character, and the world will develop in accordance with the choices encoded in that character. A soul that would never turn left at a fork in the road will not encounter a state in which it is on the left prong of a

for the problem of the one and the many.

14 An exception might be made for choices precisely on the surface of the causal cone, as those could lead to contradictions: soul X always choosing the same as soul Y whereas soul Y always chooses opposite to soul X. One could stipulate that no two choices are ever simultaneous, or simply, in accordance with experience, that some time is needed for an experience to influence one's behaviour.

15 In an immanent setting, this might come in the form of some kind of robinsonisation (Hofstadter 1985). Through transcendent compatibilism, God can make *all* things he wants to happen true.

fork in the road (though it may find itself in a world without forks in the road at all, or in a world where all that is good for it is on right prongs of forks in the road) – and m. m. if it had chosen never to take the right prong – a choice that was genuinely open to it.

5.5 Man's freedom

The question of freedom can be approached on two levels: the choice of a character, and the outworking in spacetime of choices implied by the character.

This choice of character is, within wide limits, fully free. This is shown by the fact that even though all souls are make their choice in precisely the same circumstances (which include the presence of an all-good God), they *do* make different choices. Each soul could *at least* have chosen what any of the other souls in fact *did* choose. So the *principle of alternate possibilities* is upheld. Likewise the *principle of fixity of the past* us upheld, for the simple reason that the moment a soul chooses its character is the moment it chooses itself into being, so the (empty) past is obviously fixed.

More interesting is the unfolding of the choices in spacetime. Here the principles are not fully applicable, as God, knowing the choice man would make, might have decided not to place man in a life where a given choice option would actually occur.[16] (It is a good thing God has chosen not to place most of us in a life where we would be driven to the point that we murder someone, even if there most probably would be such worlds.) But *if* we would have chosen a character that implies a different choice at point x (and no differences that would imply earlier incompatible choices in that life), *and* God would have placed us in the same life line where that choice occurs, we would indeed at point x with precisely the same past make the other choice, making both principles valid.

The relevant reference frame for the principle of alternate possibilities is the set of all causally prior facts. If God's knowing my choice is causally prior to that choice, then I am not free, as I am unable to choose differently; but if it is causally posterior, even if possibly *temporally* prior, then it won't feature in the reference frame, and will not constitute a restriction on my choice: if I am able to choose differently, even if that means God has different foreknowledge, then the principle is upheld. In our model, this is the case.

For the compossibility of freedom and the laws of nature, see footnote 28 below.

16 This is slightly more subtle, but I believe also more plausible, than Plantinga (1986)'s scenario, where he gives the example of a choice we can make such that Abraham would never have existed. If history were that different, how likely would it be for us both to exist and be in the situation to make that choice?

5.6 Middle knowledge

From a soul's character God can deduce what free (as "following from a freely chosen character") choice any soul would make in any given circumstance.

This grounds God's middle knowledge: God knows that confronted with situation X soul Y would make choice Z because He knows Y has a (freely chosen) character that would.

This model is immune to Robert Adams' anti-Molinist argument (Hasker, 2000), which is based on an unwarranted conflation of choice and action. The explanatory order assumed by that argument is *counterfactual truths* ≺ *creation* ≺ *existence* ≺ *choices & actions*, whereas in our model the explanatory order is *soul creation* ≺ *choices*[17] ≺ *counterfactual truths* ≺ *world creation* ≺ *in-world existence* ≺ *actions*. The proper freedom principle then becomes "*If I freely (choose to) do A in C, no truth that is strictly inconsistent with me refraining from A in C is explanatory prior to my choosing to act as I do in C*" – which our model respects[18].

5.7 The best of all worlds

An ancient question is whether there isn't for every world W_i a better one W_{i+1}, derivable from W_i by adding something good – maybe another happy soul, so that no best world can exist. But possibly heaven contains all non-sinning souls, whereas the number of souls in the universe is determined by the number of souls choosing against the good. Increasing the number of souls in heaven would be impossible[19], whereas increasing the number of souls in the universe would mean bringing sinless souls in this place of suffering[20]. Diminishing the (finite) number of *un*saved souls is a way to increase goodness, and God does precisely that.

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17 That is: the character from which the choices follow and which "encodes" them as it were.

18 Alvin Plantinga's pro-Molinist argument as given in Hunt (2002) would succeed in its A-form in a transcendent model as described in my *Transcendent Mediocrity is the Neutral Position*.

19 Possibly there is a maximum cardinality for the number of souls – maybe countably infinite, with higher numbers making no sense for souls, i.e. individuals, or some other cardinality, such as that of the Cantor set. Theoretically, Rowe's (2002) argument might apply to heaven, but his reasoning is flawed. If it is theoretically impossible for a being to create a world so that no better world is possible, then that being is not imperfect for creating a world such that a better world is possible. But why assume a limitless series of worlds? If perfect bliss is possible, then perfect bliss for each soul in heaven is possible – and it can't get any better than that.

20 Kraay (2010) gives another solution, accepting Rowe's (2002) *No Best World* hypothesis: the world is the multiverse of precisely those universes that are worth creating. That would mean, however, that God intentionally creates worlds with flaws, which to me seems only tenable under some non-identity view – that the people in those worlds can exist only there, and are worth existing.

Given that there is a finite number of sinners, who each live a finite time in the universe, presumably having a finite number of experiences, each chosen from a finite number of possibilities (being finite, we are unable to distinguish an infinity of experiences), there is no series as presupposed by the argument.

5.8 Evil

Our model does not allow for deontic evil – states such that a good God would avoid them. Likewise it contains no gratuitous evil. It *does* allow for axiologic evil, states seen *in themselves* as undesirable, and does allow for lots of it .

As to non-actual evil – evil in non-actual possible worlds – it is important to consider the accessibility relation used in the modal model. With a sufficiently wide accessibility, worlds in which God did not make the choice for the good are included[21], and then non-actual evil of all kinds may be found. Restricting accessibility to worlds in which God took on the nature He did leaves no non-actual evil of other kinds than actual evil, as God would only have made those other worlds if, given the character choices souls would have made in those cases, those worlds would have been best.

Any argument against God from evil would have to start from evil that cannot be accommodated in our model. In section 6.5 below we shall see that many kinds and intensities of evil *can* be accommodated, though.

5.9 Universalism

There are a few ways to fit universalism into this model.

5.9.1 Repenting natures

One would be that God limits the freedom in character choice – say it is our nature to seek the good, and because of that all souls will eventually turn to God. This option creates some severe questions about our freedom and the value of our "love": isn't this a kind of forced love, akin to the (much coarser) situation in which God programs us to love and seek Him. And once God starts restricting our nature, why not restrict it to the non-sinners only, avoiding all sinning and suffering altogether?

5.9.2 Limited creation

Another is that God would prevent the creation of non-repenters. This would lead to a logically interesting situation, since in that case the situation that "there be an action I can perform such that if I were to do so, then I would never have existed" (Plantinga

21 Which evokes the question of trans-world identity. Would that have been the same God?

1986) becomes almost possible. There is an action (non-repenting) I can perform such that if I *would have been to do so*, then I would never have existed.

This creates another set of questions. First, doesn't this show a conditional love: only those souls passing some bar of minimal goodness have the right to exist? Another is akin to the question in the previous section: why, once one starts limiting creation, one doesn't ensure only non-sinners are created. After all, if preventing some creations does not diminish the goodness of the world, why not eliminate all sin and suffering that way, and end up with a strictly better world?

5.9.3 Separation

More defensible seems the option that God ensure only repenters become human beings (non-repenters becoming demons, say), so that all human beings will in fact end up repenting and being saved.

5.9.4 Immediate perdition

The most unobjectionable form of universalism achievable seems to be that God offer those who will never choose the good their timeless choice immediately (symmetric to His offering the same to those choosing the good). Then none of them will appear in the universe, so that all those who *do* appear will be saved.

6 The compossibles

How does the model just described allow the compossibles it depends on, and the ones mentioned in the abstract? Here we shall look at some pairs and triples often considered incompossible.

6.1 God's perfections

It is not always obvious that God's perfections are compossible.

6.1.1 God's freewill and constancy

The act of choosing, whether transcendent or immanent, is an exercising of our freedom – not an act implying lack of freedom. Just as an immanent choice to do A instead of ¬A does not imply a lack of freedom to choose (either A or) ¬A – but rather an exercising that very freedom by choosing *against* ¬A –, a transcendent choice to do A rather than ¬A does not imply a lack of freedom to do ¬A. (Of course, an *immanent* choice for A means that *afterwards* the freedom to *have* chosen ¬A is lost.)

For choices that determine our existence, it makes sense to use an accessibility relation that makes only options under this choice possible, making the choice

necessary. So, *given* that God has chosen to be good, His goodness is necessary. *Given* that He chose the logic He did, our logic is necessary[22]. And God chose the actual world as the best possible world *given* our choice of character. With a wider accessibility, all these become contingent.

6.1.2 God's eternal goodness and omnipotence

How can God be almighty and yet unable to do evil? The answer is that He freely, timelessly, chooses to be good[23]. Such a choice doesn't limit God, the way the choice to follow a diet may limit me subsequently, because for God there is no "subsequently". There is no such thing as regret about a choice, because that choice is being made *right now*, in the eternal *now*. (His timeless choices may concern specific times in His creation, of course – somewhat analogous to the way parents may be constant in their choice to let their child stay up later once she reaches ten years of age.)

6.1.3 God's goodness and freedom

If God is perfectly good, He is bound to maximise any choice for maximal goodness. This seems to leave Him little freedom. Again, this impression is false, as God freely *chooses* to be good – and it is this free choice that encompasses all choices where goodness is in play. God *could* have chosen, say to minimise goodness instead, but, thanks God, He didn't.

6.1.4 God's necessary goodness and praiseworthiness

Since, unlike us, God didn't exercise the option to reject the good[24], He is praiseworthy for His choice – and since His choice is timeless, extending from eternity to eternity in all possible worlds that would encompass us, His goodness is necessary[25].

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22 It would obviously be very hard to model the contingency of logic.

23 Choosing for the good would also be the overly obviously "best" choice. If it sometimes seems different to us, that is because we live in a very exceptional part of the world, where all evil has been gathered. To a bug living in the trash can it may likewise seem unrealistic to assume that its condition is part of what makes the house so clean.

24 Stronger still: whereas we were presented with the good as the preferred option, God "out of nowhere" decided to be good, in complete freedom.

25 We could add that His goodness is *essential*, despite the fact that He could have chosen differently: since His transcendent choice *to be* included His being good, another choice would simply have resulted in the eternal existence of another, essentially different, type of being. This would answer the problem stated in Bergmann and Cover (2006). This is speculating about the transcendent level, however, which we try to minimise in this paper.

Included in His transcendent choice to be good is His choice to create the best of all worlds. God is transtemporally free not to create, or to create any number of worlds of any quality – but He uses that freedom to choose for the good, which includes the creation of precisely the best of all possible worlds. So the answer to Rowe's (2002) question "Can God be Free?" depends on the scope of the accessibility relation implied in the modal verb "can". If taken wide enough, the answer is clearly "Yes", but if accessibility remains within God being Who He (by free choice) is, the answer would be "No".

6.2 Man's freedom and goodness in heaven

As Nagasawa (2004) states it: *if a perfect being is unable to choose to make a universe in which everyone always freely chooses the good, then how is it that a perfect being is able to choose to make a heaven in which everyone always freely chooses the good?*

The issue here is the same as in section 6.1.1 above, as in heaven man is supposed to be both free and constant, and the answer is the same as well. People with free will going to heaven does not endanger heaven's goodness, since only non-sinners and repenters go there – and both have freely chosen never to sin (any more), either by having a good character or by having repented[26]. In other words, it is the Texas sharpshooter again: only those that (God knows) will actually always choose the good enter heaven.

The non-repenters will never choose the good, not even in the worst circumstances, and will be fully separated from it, according to their choice.

Nagasawa (2004) contains another remark, that the likelihood of a free person always choosing the good is vanishingly small. In our model, which involves a timeless choice, this objection is no longer valid.

6.3 All turned astray

A set of seeming contradictions follows from the fact that, given a (perfect) correlation, people tend to assume causality in a given direction. This may be the Texas sharpshooter fallacy, however.

6.3.1 Responsibility and laws of nature

Does the lawfulness of the world preclude free will? Only if our acts are determined by this world – if the causal chain starts at the world. However, the chain actually starts at our choice of character. God then creates a world accommodating our choices, i.e. a world in which we act precisely according to our choices. So we have

26 See note 4 for the "final choice" involved in repentance.

free will even though our brains may be wired to make us do what we do, because, knowing our choices, God created a world producing brains that would make precisely those choices[27] – an example of what William James (1917[28]) hints at in his first Gifford lecture: in his words, *medical determinism* tells nothing about meaningfulness. And likewise for all determinism[28].

Our freedom is limited by the limits of our understanding or abilities, and those limits differ per situation (they are more constraining in babies or the mentally or physically handicapped). God will do this if it leads to a better world. Such limitations limit our responsibility correspondingly.

6.3.2 Freewill, fallenness, and predestination

All men will sin even though they have free will – simply because only sinners become men. And Adam sinned before procreating, because God chose a soul that would to be Adam[29].

Likewise predestination: God chooses us according to His foreknowledge. All repenters He leads to repentance by bringing them in precisely such circumstances as will make them repent[30].

6.3.3 Deism and Theism

If deism means God not intervening in the course of the world, and theism means God reacting to human circumstances and actions (such as hearing prayers, and performing miracles), then both are true for the model. God "tunes" the world such that precisely happens what he wants to happen at any moment – including miracles happening and prayers being heard. Quantum theory makes very few things absolutely impossible (as opposed to vanishingly unlikely), and the "knowledge

27 This also makes for a triple of compossibles from another field: p-zombies are possible, *and* our speaking about our consciousness is grounded *and* consciousness is not a mere epiphenomenon. P-zombies are possible in the sense that God could (and may have) let bodies exist to which no soul corresponds. Obviously, when such a p-zombie speaks about its consciousness, that is merely the effect of what its neuron wiring makes it do. However, in the case of a non-p-zombie, the state of our body corresponds precisely to the state of our soul, so our body will utter the sentences our soul *intends* it to utter. The grounding goes soul → God's creative act → body.

28 See my *Freedom in a physical world*.

29 Had He chosen a soul that would first have procreated, a mix of sinners and non-sinners on this earth could have resulted (and the non-sinners would have suffered unjustly), but God could have prevented that. A possible reason for this choice is simply our limited understanding: grasping "before the fall" and "after the fall" is way easier than having to make that distinction for every soul.

30 This also answers the *religious luck* question: why haven't all access to believers, arguments, and so on that bring others to faith – another Texas sharpshooter instance.

barrier" of quantum mechanics implies that if the underlying system is deterministic (e.g. Bohmian), then the initial state can be set up so that precisely when wanted the (from our point of view) vanishingly unlikely event will happen[31]. Having a huge lifeless universe as a source of potential particles influencing the course of things on earth would facilitate such setting up.

6.3.4 Original sin and human responsibility

This also explains the compossibility of original sin and human responsibility. Precisely those who, freely, choose against the good both are "tainted" by that choice, exemplified in Adam's first sin, and end up in the universe. As descendants of Adam we are sinners, but the causality runs from the latter to the former. And since that choice is free, we are fully responsible for it.

Saying "God cannot blame me for sinning – I am human, and all human beings are sinners" is like saying: "The judge cannot condemn me for being a criminal – I am an inmate, and all inmates are criminals".

It also explains our being sinful before[32] committing our first sinful act or thought in this world: we freely chose a sinful character[33].

6.3.5 Calvinist irresistible grace and Arminian free choice

Since God is free to offer or refrain from offering the call of the Holy Spirit to those who He knows will even under grace reject the good, He has good reason to offer it to only those who will use it to choose the good. In that case all who are called will actually accept His offer, so in that sense grace is irresistible. Yet it is also true that our salvation fully depends on our *free* choice to use that grace for the good – Arminianism –, though the case where we make the other choice does not occur, since in that case we wouldn't have received the call. This is a kind of Frankfurt (1969) case reminiscent of Newman's paradox (Nozick, 1969). As mentioned in 5.9.3 above, a form of universalism can be achieved this way as well[34].

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31 This can include even personal intervention, up to the incarnation of God into this world. The same way material beings corresponding to our souls don't clash with deterministic laws of nature, so likewise a being corresponding to God wouldn't.

32 In a less immanent model: metaphysically prior to.

33 Not unlike Kant's (1793) *Hang zum Bösen*.

34 If God has made all non-repenters into demons and repenters into human beings, this would also allow universal salvation of a kind: all *human* souls will be saved. Another way in which universalism could be true is that in some way total depravity is impossible: there is no being such that is would under no circumstance choose the good. This poses some deep questions about true freedom, though.

This also answers the related worries that God be a respecter of persons in taking some, but not all, human beings in His grace, or that irresistible grace be incompatible with the freedom requirement for genuine love.

6.4 Freedom under God

God's perfections seem to conflict with our freedom of will in several ways.

6.4.1 God's omniscience and man's free will

God's foreknowledge of man's choices is based upon His observation of our character (which is an encoding of our possible choices), which we chose freely, plus His knowledge of which world He has created (and so which of those possible choices will be actual when). (As we saw in section 5.6 above, this foreknowledge includes middle knowledge.) This observation provides a mechanics of the kind Byerly (2012) requested, and I believe a less "heavy" one than the *Ordering the Times* proposal described in Byerly (2014).

6.4.2 God knowing the future and the future being open

A common objection is that if God knows the future, there is a fact of the matter regarding all details of the future, and hence the future is fixed. During the existence of the world this is true, but before we choose our character there is no fact of the matter regarding what character we will choose, hence *that* future is open – and that suffices for our choices being genuine: at the moment we decide which choice to make (whether, say, to eat a fruit or to refrain from doing so), i.e. at the moment of character definition, there is no fact of the matter whether we will decide the one or the other. (When we *make* the choice, i.e. in the world, there is, and God knows that fact.) It is by God's free choice that there is no fact of the matter, and thus by His choice that He doesn't know it at that moment[36].

6.4.3 Fully-grounded tensed truths and an open future

Given an open future, the grounding of tensed truths about that future seems problematic. Two common models hold that either no, or several equally possible futures exist, and in either case, *now* there is no fact of the matter regarding some statements about the future. Correia and Rosenkranz (2018) propose a weaker form of grounding, according to which the fact that *in the future* there will be a fact of the matter suffices to ground statements about that fact *now*. This is problematic, however, despite the heroic attempt of Grandjean (2022), chapters 2.9 and 3.4. If some statement S about a future possibility P is currently true (or false), even if we

36 This is a "moment" only because for the sake of immanence we have made our choice of character a moment in time – see footnote 4 above.

may not know which it is, then S *is* a fact of the matter P, and the future is no more open with regards to P. Distinguishing truth and *necessary* truth does not help: if S holds in the actual world, the future for the actual world is not open with respect to P, whatever possible worlds one's accessibility relation may allow. One cannot have it both ways – either the truth or falsehood of some S is a fact of the matter, or the future is open, but not both.

In our model there is a fact of the matter for each statement about the state of the world at any placetime[37], and this fact grounds the truths about that placetime. Nevertheless the future is open at the moment we decide how to choose, as explained in 6.4.2 above.

6.4.4 An open future and bivalence for tensed statements

If some statement is neither true nor false, then a logic with more than two values is needed – but constructing such logics has proven difficult. Simply adding one or more generic values wreaks havoc with axiom schemes, e.g. if some value *unknown* were added, one should have to accept that *unknown* ∨ *unknown* = *unknown*, but given a statement S with unknown truth value, this would lead to S ∨ ¬S = *unknown*, counter to the axiom scheme A ∨ ¬A = *true*. A subtle system, with complex unknown truth values, is needed, where those unknown truth values encode their origins, and evaluation rules inspect those complex values in order to calculate the truth value of their negations and combinations.

As shown in the two preceding sections, our model has fully grounded tensed truths, such that no statements are other than true or false on synthetic grounds[38].

6.4.5 God's omnipotence and man's free will

Man only has freedom to the extent that God freely refrains from determining, so God's giving freedom is itself an exercise of His omnipotence[39].

6.4.6 God's choosing the best of possible worlds and man's freewill

Meyer (2016) claims that a Leibnizian best world implies the absence of freewill. This is wrong if "possible" means "given our characters": none of our choices will frustrate God's creation of this best of all possible worlds, as they have already been taken into account in His plan.

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37 I intend this word to mean a fixed point or area in (probably relativistic) spacetime, so as to avoid being incorrect because of relativity, or whatever theory may turn out to be true.

38 In many logics, it is impossible to assign a true or false value to some statements on *analytical* grounds – the liar's paradox being the stock paradigm here.

39 A more thorough form of omnipotence would require a more elaborate transcendent backdrop.

6.5 Suffering and this being the best of all worlds[40]

Exceedingly likely, this is not the pleasantest of all possible universes. But is it the best? Two main senses of "goodness" are "ethical perfection" and "fitness for its purpose". Both of those would *for the universe* translate into "maximising the number of saved souls". Three principles are important here:

- People with pleasant lives tend not to abhor evil – including the evil in themselves.
- There is no finite evil so horrible that it isn't outweighed by the good of salvation of the soul having suffered it.
- No finite evil suffered by a saved soul is so horrible that is is not outweighed by the joy of knowing that it led to the salvation of another soul, that could not have been saved without it (or without worse suffering).

This universe is the best universe in which repenters can live, and together with heaven it makes for the best possible world[41]. Doubting that would be like inmates doubting that they lived in the best of all possible worlds – whereas the existence of their prison would precisely be what made the world optimal.

6.5.1 Evil and God's goodness

As discussed in section 2.1 above, God Himself is perfectly good because He timelessly chooses to. He clearly is good towards all who choose the good – they are in heavenly bliss. Sinners choose against the good in full freedom, and are fully responsible. It is part of His goodness to allow them to exist, and to save all repenters, by putting them in precisely those (possibly extreme) circumstances that would make them choose for the good[42]. Some people won't accept the good as long as there is a single other seeming option: they need to experience the true nature of evil – so saving them may include bringing them into the greatest pain and distress[43]. Others might need to experience *active* evil – such as being a murderous psychopath – before they will come to their senses and choose the good. Others again may need a strong

40 This section lays the basis for a both a greater-good theodicy and a soul-making theodicy.

41 This also makes for a partial answer to Nicholas Everitt's question about our "species-wide weakness"es (Everitt 2004, p. 187): they are part of our being geared, *as sinners*, to God. Those very weaknesses may prevent us from understanding all this in full detail.

42 God is consequentialist here, but, being almighty, without trolley-problem-like choices. In fact, many ethical approaches merge under omnipotence. Likewise, love and justice merge under omnipotence, and it would be possible to add *divine simplicity* as understood by Brower (2008) to the list of compossibles.

43 And once saved, repenters will be thankful for being saved – otherwise they wouldn't have repented under those circumstances, whereas any non-saved repenters would presumably end up blaming God for the (even more) extreme pain and distress that rejecting the good implies, given that it is exactly under such circumstances that they would have repented, had they occurred when repentance was still possible.

reason to *do* good – and our world full of suffering provides many such reasons[44]. Yet others may need to experience evil to reject a false, happy-clappy god image, and at death will be shown God as He is – the good itself – and given the option to accept or reject Him. God Himself paying the full price for the restoration makes Him perfectly good[45].

This also avoids the justified criticism of utilitarian theodicies by McKenzie (1984).

6.5.2 Suffering, justice, and God's love[46]

No non-sinner suffers – none of them is in this universe. Sinners have chosen evil, which includes suffering. Any good still here is unmerited grace for them. Even the extreme distress some may suffer here (including the extreme distress some souls need to repent) is way less than what they have truly chosen by rejecting the good – even there is grace[47].

What about babies who suffer and die from birth defects soon after birth? Well, maybe some souls merely need to experience evil in order to recant and choose the good after all. No need for a longer life in this universe is needed for them. For other people it may suffice to *observe* evil, rather than undergo it – for which this universe gives ample opportunity.

6.5.3 God's perfection as a creator and man's severe limitedness

If almighty and all-good God has created us, then why are we often so helpless, unable to do what we should like to do? Often even unable to prevent the suffering of others? The reason is that those limitations are part of what makes this world the best, i.e. the one in which most souls are saved. As we are sinners, power is

44 And God built the world taking into account who will do good when, so the "don't interfere because the suffering is God's will" objection doesn't apply: if we do good, the best world will be a better one than if we don't. If none would sin, the best world would be eternal bliss for all.

45 Transcendently, Jesus does not pay for *our* sins, but for the sins that He took from us and are now His. This fulfils perfect justice. An immanent model would be this: *solidarity* defines the units of moral attribution – if my hand steals a cookie, my head may receive the punishing blow. Jesus offers solidarity with us; if we accept it, we become one body, and His suffering becomes: the collective *us* receiving the punishment for what *we* have done.

46 The observations in this section may sound flippant to those suffering, as all we do is an existence proof.

47 If life has gotten better through the ages, and that trend continues, possibly the fraction of people suffering horribly is low – with God having those souls that need horrible suffering come early in human history. And just a thought: maybe in order to create a situation in which anyone savable would in fact be saved, God added p-zombies to the mix, people without qualia. Their seeming suffering (even in perdition) would not be real. This would also provide a cheap (but in an existence proof acceptable) way out of the problem of animal suffering.

dangerous for us, and in some cases maybe the prevention of suffering would not be the overall best. And since we live in a world where we can reason and plan, consistency in power is important too – if abilities came and went inexplicably for us, we would be unable to learn, understand, and plan – up to a point. Understanding an planning increase power, and that may not always be desirable (the "tower-of-Babel effect").

6.5.4 This world's injustice and God's justice

In this universe, suffering is not proportional to guilt: many evildoers lead easy lives (often because of their evil), and many people doing good suffer. The traditional answer – that the afterlife will redress the balance so that in the end perfect justice will be done – is one side of the answer: those rejecting God will get what they want. There is, however, a stronger argument why even now there is no injustice: each of us has rejected God and has no claim to any goodness. We all receive more goodness than we deserve, and none of us is unjustly deprived of it. So unless someone complains for having more goodness than he chose[48], there is no injustice involved.

Often *natural evil* is seen as problematic: it seems independent of our moral choices, and therefore unfair. However, any evil here is the direct result of our moral choice against goodness – had we chosen otherwise, we should not have been in this universe, and none of it is gratuitous, as it is there to help repenters being saved.

6.5.5 God's grace for the godly and the prospering of the godless

Since what is best (as recognised in hindsight) for someone and what makes a person currently happy are two wildly divergent things, God in his grace may bring suffering over those who may (and thus will) in the end accept the good.

Such reasons do not in general exist for the non-repenters, however, those who under no circumstance would accept the good. There may be extrinsic reasons to let them suffer – to the extent that that helps others to find salvation –, but no intrinsic reason. They face an eternity of suffering that suffices for any claim of justice, so God can show His love to them by giving them all possible happiness, up to the point where this would go against His justice or love towards others.

This also partially explains divine hiddenness: sinners persisting in the face of stronger evidence would only make both the world and their guilt (and thereby possibly their future suffering) worse.

48 And such a complaint of unfairness, by someone who rejects goodness, would be inappropriate.

6.6 Hell and God's love

So hell (in the sense of the eternal state outside heaven) exists out of freewill, and only contains those who choose to be there. Would it be loving to force any of the people in C. S. Lewis' *The Great Divorce* who choose hell to spend eternity in heaven instead?

But some claim they would much rather not exist *at all*[49]. That is a hard to evaluate claim, and there are plenty of cases where people retracted their claim when circumstances changed – e.g. under the influence of psychopharmaca. Maybe they mislead themselves in so thinking, but are still attached to the world, e.g. by hopes and fears. Since in our model existence is a free choice, all such claims would be false – no soul exists without having chosen to[50]. In any case, existence being good, the genuine choice not to exist is a choice against the good – and those rejecting the good have no basis for complaint if things aren't good.

6.7 Suffering and eternal happiness

Some forms of light suffering are actually good in hindsight. Being thirsty on a hot day is often more than compensated by the extra pleasure one gets when drinking a cool drink afterwards. "It was worth it", we say in such cases. Possibly, greater goods justify greater previous suffering – with the infinite good of heaven justifying every finite suffering we may undergo here on earth – so that those who have chosen the good will actually be grateful for the amount of suffering they have undergone, however atrocious, as it increases their eternal enjoyment.

So while heaven is already worth any finite suffering in that it outweighs it, it *also* is worth that suffering in the sense that the *increase in* bliss it yields already outweighs it, an increase that could not have been obtained without the suffering.

Finally, a sure expectation of the future bliss, and the knowledge to live within the good God's will can turn an objective suffering into a subjective joy (as shown by Paul in e.g. 2 Corinthians 4:17). This would solve the problem at least for those beings sufficiently advanced to enter into such a relationship with God[51].

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49 As opposed to the wish not to exist *in one's current situation*, for instance.

50 Nor does God, Whose transcendent choice is *I am*.

51 A typical Christian solution – and one that depends on God's radical transcendence – is given in Revelation 7:17, 21:4. There a word for "removing" (ἐξαλείφω) is used that has a very strong legal meaning. It is also used in Acts 3:19 and Colossians 2:14 (and negatively in Revelation 3:5). Whereas the normal word for cancelling (a clause in) a legal document, χῑάζω, would mean that the text crossed out was no longer valid, ἐξαλείφω refers to a laborious process of dissolving the ink in oil and removing it that would lead to the offending text legally *never having been* valid. So a God above physical and logical laws can *retroactively* undo all our suffering. This option is currently not in our intellectual grasp, and God being above logic makes

7 Residual problems

Not everything is smoothed out by this model. Some remaining questions regarding fairness include:

- Animal suffering. If we reject the cheap answer that all animals might be p-zombies and not suffer at all (or more likely variants, such as an absence of second-order suffering), another answer needs to be found.
- Psychopaths – people who *genuinely* don't recognise the concepts of good and evil. How are they ever to choose the good, and why were they in that state in the first place?
- People who want never to have existed, or no longer to exist. If we reject the answer that this wish may be false (even if sincerely believed to be genuine), another answer needs to be found.

8 Conclusion

I am definitely not claiming this scenario as truth: it makes God improbably anthropomorphic and almost henotheistically immanent, and its soul-making+greater good theodicy is woefully facile. As such, the model is not sound. However, to constitute a defence, a proof of compossibility, it merely needs to be possible, and making the model mostly immanent helps confirming its coherence and validity.

For instance, the notion of a character that was chosen at creation and encoded all possible choices was merely introduced to replace a metaphysical priority with a temporal one, in order to allow for straightforward coherence checking of the related claims. In a transcendent setting, both free choice under foreknowledge and middle knowledge can be achieved in what seem less stilted ways.

This model is also compossible with God being non-physical yet acting in the physical world[52]; with knowledge requiring grounding and human knowledge of the external world being possible, and with the co-existence of truth as correspondence and truth as coherence[53]; with God both *being* good and *defining* the good[54]; and with God being both completely free and necessarily and essentially perfect, and His being both timeless and acting in time[55].

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everything compossible if He wills it, so it is not considered in the main text. One option that does not go beyond logic is the *nightmare defence* (Citron, 2015) – that as seen from above our reality is only a dream, and the saved ones will wake up from it.

52 As described in my *Transcendent Mediocrity is the Neutral Position*.

53 As described in my *Knowing in the Teeth of the Diallelus*.

54 As described in my *From Is to Ought in One Easy Step*.

55 As described in my *How to Speak about a Supreme Being*.

An obvious refutation would be to show that the model's compossibles don't translate to more realistic scenarios.

9 Competing interests

The author declares none, other than his interest in God's greatness being recognised, and people (including himself) being saved.

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