

A baker's dozen and a half compossibles

Or: Molinism, libertarian free will, predestination, evil, hell, a sin-free heaven, God being omnibenevolent, omniscient, omnipotent, and perfectly just, this world being replete with injustice, this being 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, transworld depravity, irresistible grace and Arminian human choice are all compossible.

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1 Introduction

Religious world-views tend to make a many claims that non-believers tend to find 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 actualised².

This possible world does not reflect my beliefs, and it may well have properties that make it unsuitable as part of a practical belief system. All it intends to do is to show compossibility.

2 The world

Let's suppose a certain (maybe infinite) number of potential souls, whom God has given both freedom (i.e. they rather than God are the ultimate source of their choices) and the right to be actualised.

God Himself is completely free, as there is literally nothing to constrain Him (hence the omnis). He freely chooses to be good, just, loving, and so forth. Being at the root of existence, He *is* the good.

Initially, souls are only constrained by Him, so freedom of will merely means that God refrains from steering. Many of these souls would never reject the good, but a finite number would, given the chance (they are free, after all, so their behaviour is not deducible from external factors)³. Of this second group, some would repent under certain circumstances, but others wouldn't. God, of course, knows this in full detail.

God, in His love, wants every soul to find eternal bliss, so His aim is as many as possible of those, that is: all the non-sinners and all those who may repent. He intends to grant those a heavenly paradise.

Being perfectly good, God can't be in communion with sinners; being perfectly just, he would never allow a non-sinner other than Himself to suffer; and being perfectly loving, he would minimise the suffering even of sinners.

So what does He do: He plans an initial stage, which He organises so as to make it the best of possible worlds.

1. All souls are actualised, as denying actualisation to some souls would be unjust.
2. The non-sinners are actualised (as angels) in heaven, but the sinners are actualised (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, which takes away the power really to choose - we can only choose "for now". This prevents sinners from irrevocably choosing against God, and so makes repentance possible: even if they choose against Him now, at some later point they may still change their choice.
4. All potential repentors do undergo the circumstances (including the call of the Holy Spirit) under which they will, in fact, repent - thus maximising the number of enjoyers of the infinite bliss He has in store for repentors.
5. Beyond that, He uses some just measure (is the suffering of repentors worse than the suffering of non-repentors?).

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² There are more compossibles that are orthogonal to this model. For instance, the compossibles of God's timelessness and His acting in time, as described in my [How to Speak about a Supreme Being](#) can be mixed in as well.

³ Maybe a finite number out of an infinity, the probability of a soul choosing thus being zero.

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

3 The compossibles

Obviously, given that this scenario is possible, all its features are compossible. Here we shall look at some pairs and triples that are often considered impossible.

I am not arguing for the *individual* possibility of any claim – some non-self-contradictory shape of notions such as omnipotence is assumed here.

3.1 Freewill and (molinist) foreknowledge

God's having middle knowledge means that there is a function from situations to creature choices. This does not thwart freewill, though, as correlation does not imply causation. A simple model showing how God can have middle knowledge without infringing on the freedom of the souls is as follows: logically prior to any actualisation, all souls make a free choice for every possible situation. God can use His knowledge of those choices in His logically posterior actualisation decisions.

3.2 Freewill and constancy

How can God be almighty and yet unable to do evil? The answer is that He freely, timelessly, chooses to be good. 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 things 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 – the way parents may be constant in their choice to let their child stay up later once she reaches ten years of age.)

How can people with free will go to heaven without them endangering heaven's goodness? This too hinges on the notion of choice. Unless banned from heaven, souls also have the possibility to make true, eternal/timeless, choices. For souls that would choose against the good, God takes away this ability, and leaves us with choices in the temporal now only – which will prevent them from making an *eternal* choice against the good.

Souls at the final judgment will regain this ability, and those that choose for the good will end up in heaven, and be freely, eternally, good there⁴. Those who definitely choose against the good will be fully separated from it, according to their wish.

3.3 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. If that (hard to evaluate) claim is true, it is unclear why God, knowing their wish through His foreknowledge, still brought them into existence, unless He knows that in the end they will be grateful to exist – which probably would imply their being saved. If not, maybe they mislead themselves in so thinking, but are still attached to the world, e.g. by hopes and fears. And in any case, existence being good, the genuine choice not to exist⁵ is a choice against the good – and those rejecting the good have no basis for complaint if things aren't good.

3.4 Freewill, fallenness, and predestination

How can it be given that all men will sin if they have free will? The answer to that is like the answer to the Texas sharpshooter conundrum: only souls that will sin become men. And Adam sinned before procreating, because God chose a soul that would be Adam. If He had chosen a soul that would first have procreated, there would have been a mix of fallen and unfallen people on this earth, and the unfallen ones would have suffered unjustly.

4 Another way to look at this is that a choice for the good is necessarily final: once good, there is no rejecting the good – because that wouldn't be good.

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

Predestination has a like answer: God chooses us according to His foreknowledge. All souls that are potential repentors He chooses to turn into actual repentors by bringing them in precisely those circumstances in which they will repent.

3.5 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”.

3.6 Evil and God’s goodness

God Himself is perfectly good in all freedom because He timelessly chooses to. This is why His goodness is laudable – because it is His free choice.

God is also clearly not responsible for any evil, and none who chose the good are subject to any evil. Those who choose against the good do so in full freedom, and are fully responsible.

Clearly, God is good towards all who choose the good – they are in heavenly bliss. It is part of God’s goodness to allow souls to exist even if they choose against the good. He even saves all that are potentially saveable, by putting them in precisely those circumstances that would make them choose for the good. He Himself paying the full price for the restoration makes Him perfectly good.

Being good towards potential repentors may include bringing them in the (possibly extreme) circumstances that will make them actual repentors. 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 distress⁶. Others might need to experience *active* evil – such as being a murderous psychopath – before they will come to their senses and choose the good.

3.7 This world’s injustice and God’s justice

In this universe, suffering is not proportional to guilt: many evil-doers 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 there is no injustice right now already: 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 chose⁷, 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 we undergo is the direct result of our moral choice against goodness – had we chosen otherwise, we should not have been in this universe.

3.8 God’s grace for the godly and the prospering of the godless

Since what is best (and recognised as such 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 those who are transworld depraved, on the other hand, 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.

6 We could add that all saved repentors will be thankful for being saved – otherwise they wouldn’t have repented under those circumstances. On the other side we may assume that any non-saved potential repentors would 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.

7 And there is a self-contradiction in such a complaint, because someone who rejects goodness has no grounds for complaint if he is not treated fairly – in this case by receiving too much goodness.

3.9 Suffering, justice, and God's love

No soul who chose the good suffers – none of them is in this universe. Souls that choose against the good have chosen evil, and suffering is part of that. Any good that is 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 grace⁸.

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 – and this universe gives ample opportunity for that.

3.10 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.

So while heaven is already worth any finite suffering in the simple sense that it outweighs it, it also is worth that suffering in the sense that having experienced that is compensated by an *increase* in bliss that already outweighs it, and 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.⁹

3.11 Suffering and this being the best of all worlds¹⁰

While this universe is far from the best of all possible universes, it is the best universe in which repentors can live, and together with heaven it makes for the best possible world. For non-repentors, each day here is a day of unmerited bounty, as some of God's goodness reaches them indirectly through the repentors.

So, doubting that this is the best of all possible worlds 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.

3.12 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 precisely 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 that 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 case reminiscent of Newman's paradox¹¹.

8 And just a thought: maybe in order to create a situation in which anyone savable would in fact be saved, God added 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.

9 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, χιόζω, 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 *never having been* valid. So if God is above physical and logical laws, He can *retroactively* undo all our suffering. This option is currently not in our intellectual grasp, and God being above logic makes *everything* compossible if He wills it, so it is not considered in the main text.

10 Kraay (2010) gives another solution: 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 wrong.

11 Frankfurt (1969); Nozick (1969).

4 Conclusion

I am definitely not claiming this scenario as truth – for one thing it makes God improbably anthropomorphic, and the theodicy is woefully facile. However, to constitute a proof of compossibility it merely needs to be possible. In being possible it shows the compatibility of Molinism, libertarian free will, predestination, evil, a sin-free heaven, a maximally great (omniscient, omnipotent, omnibenevolent and perfectly just) God, gross injustice, this being the best of all possible worlds, heinous suffering, and no-one unjustly suffering. On top of that it partially explains divine hiddenness: why show oneself to those who would not repent (James 1:6), or at a time where it would be suboptimal in bringing the person to acceptance of the good?

(This model is also compossible with the co-existence of determinism and true freedom, and with the co-existence of truth as correspondence and truth as coherence, described by me elsewhere.)

5 References

Frankfurt, Harry (1969). Alternate possibilities and moral responsibility. *Journal of Philosophy* 66 (23). pp. 829–39. JSTOR 2023833

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Robert Nozick (1969). Newcomb's Problem and Two Principles of Choice. In Rescher, Nicholas (ed.). *Essays in Honor of Carl G Hempel*. Springer.