

## TWO DOZEN COMPOSSIBLES

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We present a simple model to show the compossibility of middle knowledge, grounded truth, libertarian free will, predestination, evil, hell, a sin-free heaven, 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, transworld depravity, irresistible grace, and Arminian human choice. The model is not intended to be realistic, but its possibility argues for the possibility that a realistic model containing such compossibles could exist – and even be actual.

### *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.

Apart from a small transcendent basis, covering mainly existence and freedom, our model is immanent, allowing inspection for possibility. I am not defending all the subsidiary claims I make here (such as *existence being good*). Their (com)possibility is

an assumption, and might need additional defence. 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.

Section 2 describes the transcendent assumptions, and section 3 the model. Section 4 describes and defends the compossibilities, and section 5 concludes.

## *2 The transcendent backdrop*

While keeping the transcendent side to a minimum, to allow checking for possibility, some transcendent starting point is necessary.

### *2.1 Existence and character*

We assume freedom where constraints are absent. 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. Being at the root of existence, He *is* the good.

Creaturely freedom exists precisely where God refrains from constraining, and the metaphysically first free choice of a soul is a character – where, for our discussion, a character is a function from (potential) situations to choices made<sup>2</sup>.

## 2.2 Choices

The choice of a character is *transcendent* – taken outside of time, in an eternal now. Since the choice 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<sup>3</sup>.

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.

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 factors<sup>4</sup>. 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<sup>5</sup>.

## 3 The model

God, in His love, wants every soul to find eternal bliss in a heavenly paradise, but that requires irrevocably choosing the good – either a good character or repentance. Being perfectly good, God can't be in full 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.

### 3.1 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 (*counterfactual truths < creation < existence < choices & actions*) doesn't hold in our model. Instead the explanatory order is *soul creation < choices<sup>6</sup> < 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<sup>7</sup>.

### 3.2 The actual world

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

1. God separates the souls in non-sinners, repenters, and non-repenters. For each repentor 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: a choice against Him now may still be reverted later.
4. God determines the set of possible worlds where all repenters undergo a life sequence<sup>8</sup> leading to repentance<sup>9</sup> – 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?)<sup>10</sup>.

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.

#### *4 The compossibles*

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

#### *4.1 Freewill and constancy*

The act of choosing, whether transcendent or immanent, is an act exercising our freedom – not an act implying lack of freedom. Just as an immanent choice to do A instead of  $\neg A$  does not imply a lack of freedom to do  $\neg A$  – but rather an *exercising that very freedom* by choosing to do A –, a transcendent choice to do A rather than  $\neg A$  does not imply a lack of freedom to do  $\neg A$ .

##### *4.1.1 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<sup>11</sup>. 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.)

##### *4.1.2 God's necessary goodness and praiseworthiness*

Since, unlike us, God didn't exercise the option to reject the good, 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<sup>12</sup>.

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 choice) is, the answer would be “No”.

#### *4.1.3 Man’s freedom and goodness in heaven*

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 made a final choice for goodness<sup>13</sup>.

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.

#### *4.2 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.

##### *4.2.1 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. Had He chosen a soul that would first have procreated, a mix of sinners and non-sinners on this earth would have resulted, and the non-sinners would have suffered unjustly.

Likewise predestination: God chooses us according to His foreknowledge. All repenters He leads to repentance by bringing them in precisely those circumstances in which they will repent<sup>14</sup>.

#### *4.2.2 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 committing our first sinful act or thought in this world: we freely chose a sinful character<sup>15</sup>.

#### *4.2.3 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 case reminiscent of Newman's paradox<sup>16</sup>.

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

#### *4.3 Suffering and this being the best of all worlds*

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”. Two 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 another saved soul.

This universe is the best universe in which repenters can live, and together with heaven it makes for the best possible world. 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.

An ancient question in this area 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. 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<sup>17</sup>, whereas increasing the number of souls in the universe would mean bringing sinless souls in this place of suffering<sup>18</sup>.

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.

#### *4.3.1 Evil and God's goodness*

As discussed in section 4.1.2 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<sup>19</sup>. 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<sup>20</sup>. Others might need to experience *active* evil – such as being a murderous psychopath – before they

will come to their senses and choose the good. He Himself paying the full price for the restoration makes Him perfectly good.

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

#### *4.3.2 Suffering, justice, and God's love*

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<sup>21</sup>.

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.

#### *4.3.3 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 chose<sup>22</sup>, 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.

#### *4.3.4 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: non-repenters persisting before stronger evidence would only make the world worse.

#### *4.4 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*<sup>23</sup>. 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. If the choice to exist is part of the initial choice of a character, no soul exists without having chosen to<sup>24</sup>. 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.

#### *4.5 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 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<sup>25</sup>.

### 5 Conclusion

I am definitely not claiming this scenario as truth: it makes God improbably anthropomorphic and almost henotheistically immanent, and its theodicy is woefully facile. However, to constitute a proof of compossibility it merely needs to be possible (and making the model mostly immanent helps confirming its coherence).

This model is also compossible with God being non-physical yet acting in the physical world<sup>26</sup>; 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<sup>27</sup>; with God both *being* good and *defining* the good<sup>28</sup>; with God being both completely free and necessarily and essentially perfect, and His being both timeless and acting in time<sup>29</sup>; and with the co-existence of determinism and true freedom<sup>30</sup>.

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

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- 2 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.
- 3 The effects – including on one's self – may be regretted too, of course. These may include restrictions on choice options, such as addiction.
- 4 Maybe a finite number 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 it is good*. (Conversely, a soul choosing against God *because it is evil* – say, in order to be independent – would form a counterexample to Pruss' hypothesis.)
- 5 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.
- 6 That is: the character from which the choices follow.
- 7 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\*](#).
- 8 Including the call of the Holy Spirit, and possibly answered prayers – another compossible. <<References to Stump vs. Hoffman?>>

9 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  $s_{ij} \in S_i$ .

10Souls choose their character without knowing in what world they will appear.

11Choosing 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 most of the house is quite clean.

12This is akin to logic being both necessarily true and being chosen freely by God – the difference is one of accessibility in the modal logic. 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). All this is speculating about the transcendent level, however, which we try to minimise in this paper.

13See note 4 for the notion “final choice”.

14This also answers the question why not all have access to believers, arguments, and so on that bring others to faith – another Texas sharpshooter instance.

15Not unlike Kant’s (1793) *Hang zum Bösen*.

16Frankfurt (1969); Nozick (1969).

17The number of souls could be countably infinite, with higher numbers making no sense for souls, i.e. individuals. 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.

18Kraay (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 nonidentity view – that the people in those worlds can only exist there, and are worth existing.

19God is consequentialist here, but, being almighty, without trolley-problem-like choices. In fact, many ethical approaches merge under omnipotence.

20We could add that once saved, repenters 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 repenters 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. Regarding those who reject their faith because of the presence of suffering – possibly they reject a false god image, and at death will be shown God as He is – the good itself – and given the option to accept or reject Him.

21And 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.

22 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.

23 As opposed to the wish not to exist *in one's current situation*, for instance. Possibly God refrained from creating all those who *genuinely* would never want to exist.

24 Just as God's eternal choice may be *I am*.

25 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” (ἐξάλειψω) 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, χιῶζω, would mean that the text crossed out was no longer valid, ἐξάλειψω 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 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. 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.

26 As described in my [Transcendent Mediocrity is the Neutral Position](#).

27 As described in my [Knowing in the Teeth of the Diallelus](#).

28 As described in my [From Is to Ought in One Easy Step](#).

29 As described in my [How to Speak about a Supreme Being](#).

30 As described in my [Freedom in a physical world](#).