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Why No Classical Theist, Let Alone Orthodox Christian, Should Ever Be a Compatibilist

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I

Any fair-minded philosopher is bound to acknowledge that there are powerful arguments in favor of both libertarian and compatibilist views of human freedom. One of the more fascinating discussions of this conflict that I have read is by the atheist philosopher John Searle, in a book he wrote several years ago in which he attempted to reconcile his commonsense conceptions of reality with his scientific beliefs about our world. In the last chapter of that book, Searle expressed the judgment that he succeeded in this task except in one area, namely, where his commonsense conceptions about human freedom run up against the picture of reality largely accepted among scientists. On the one hand he says, science tells us that nature consists of particles standing in certain relations with each other, and since everything can be accounted for in those terms, there is no room for freedom of the will. On the other hand, we have all sorts of experiences everyday in which we choose to do things for reasons, and we have an immediate certainty that in many cases we could do other than we do.

Despite this vivid and immediate sense of free will, Searle thought it would require too radical a revision of his picture of reality to accept it as straightforwardly veridical. In order to accept libertarian freedom, he contended, we would have to accept the idea that there is a self inside of us that is capable of interfering with the causal order of the natural world, indeed,

ABSTRACT: I argue that no classical theist, and even more no orthodox Christian, should affirm compatibilism in our world. However plausible compatibilism may be on atheistic assumptions, bringing God into the equation should radically alter our judgment on this ongoing controversy. In particular, if freedom and determinism are compatible, then God could have created a world in which all persons freely did only the good at all times. Given this implication of compatibilism, three issues that are already challenging become extraordinarily more difficult, if not insuperable, namely: moral responsibility, the problem of evil, and the orthodox doctrine of eternal damnation.

that “was capable of making molecules swerve from their paths.” For him, such a notion is just too outlandish to give serious consideration: “I don’t know if such a view is even intelligible, but it’s certainly not consistent with what we know about how the world works from physics. And there is not the slightest evidence to suppose that we should abandon physical theory in favor of such a view.”¹

Searle resorts, not surprisingly, to a version of compatibilism, while recognizing that doing so does not resolve the conflict between freedom and determinism in a way that fully satisfies our instinctive conception of freedom. He concludes his discussion of this conundrum as follows.

. . . and finally, for reasons I don’t really understand, evolution has given us a form of experience of voluntary action where the experience of freedom, that is to say, the experience of the sense of alternative possibilities, is built into the very structure of conscious, voluntary, intentional human behavior. For that reason, I believe, neither this discussion nor any other will ever convince us that our behavior is not free.²

Now I find particularly fascinating Searle’s frank admission that his picture of reality so sharply conflicts with what we seem to know from immediate experience, and his willingness to concede that our sense of undetermined freedom may be hardwired into our experience of voluntary action for reasons he finds inexplicable.³ Of course, sociobiologists can no doubt supply us with some reasons why evolution has given us this form of experience, but so long as they agree with Searle that ultimate reality is composed of particles standing in certain relations, they at least have some reason to agree that our sense of freedom is illusory. I say only “some reason,” for a materialist could be a libertarian,⁴ but it is still the case that Searle’s picture of ultimate reality meshes more easily with the view that all our actions are determined by forces outside our control.

1. John Searle, *Minds, Brains and Science* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1984), 92.

2. *Ibid.*, 98.

3. Searle, is not, I take it, saying that we are hardwired to believe any sort of highly theoretical view of libertarian freedom, only that our immediate experience inclines us to believe we are not determined in our free choices. A compatibilist, after all, who embraced a conditional analysis of what it means to say “I could have done otherwise” (“I would have done otherwise if I had wanted to do so”) might explain this experience in such a way that it would be consistent with compatibilism.

4. Timothy O’Connor, for instance, argues that agent causation and libertarian freedom do not require substance dualism. On his view, strong property dualism is consistent with substance monism, and the relevant properties that account for agent causation allegedly emerge in a sufficiently complex physical configuration. See his *Persons and Causes* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 108–25. For critical assessment, see J. P. Moreland, “Timothy O’Connor and the Harmony Thesis: A Critique,” *Metaphysica* 3 (2002): 5–39.

Now insofar as I can empathize with an atheistic view of things, which is probably not very well most of the time, I must admit that I find myself sympathetic to Searle's basic line of thought. If I did not believe in God, I suspect I might be inclined to accept determinism and then go on reluctantly to embrace compatibilism, despite my own clear intuitions to the contrary. Unguided evolution might well produce some deeply misleading beliefs that still serve some sort of purpose for human survival and adaptation. Perhaps our instinctive beliefs about the nature of freedom are among them. And if everything is indeed composed of particles standing in certain relations to each other, it is admittedly difficult to conceive how we could be free in the libertarian sense, to say the least.

Moreover, I admit that the case for libertarian freedom is less than conclusive when defended in detail by its philosophical adherents. For instance, consider the Principle of Alternative Possibilities, which most libertarians affirm, and the important debate over whether Frankfurt-style counterexamples undermine this principle. This debate has gone through several rounds, with neither side appearing to convince the other.⁵ I am very much in sympathy with arguments that defend libertarian freedom, but I feel the force of objections by critics who think the whole notion is mysterious, and at times even seems to be incoherent. Compatibilists, moreover, like Pharaoh's magicians, seem capable of duplicating in their own terms every power and ability that libertarians claim their view distinctively grants to agents.⁶ Again, as with Pharaoh's magicians, I think there are limits to what compatibilists can do in this regard, but that is not central to my argument here. At any rate, the debate often seems to reach an impasse,⁷ with each side claiming their opponents rely on assumptions that are question begging or claims they find unintelligible.

What I want to argue in the following, however, is that when we pass beyond purely philosophical arguments of the metaphysical and epistemic variety, and bring God into the picture, things change dramatically. At this point, the tricks of Pharaoh's magicians begin to fall flat and are exposed for what they are. Indeed, it will be my contention that no one who is a serious theist, let alone an orthodox Christian, should accept compatibilism. My intuitions here, moreover, apparently align with many other Christian philosophers. In an article published several years ago, Lynne Rudder Baker noted in her opening paragraph that a surprising number of Christian philosophers

5. For a recent defense of the principle I find convincing, see Stewart Goetz, "Stump on Libertarianism and the Principle of Alternative Possibilities," *Faith and Philosophy* 18 (2001): 93–101.

6. Thanks to Mike Rea for pressing this point in conversation, thereby firing me up enough to make me freely want to write this paper.

7. Cf. David M. Ciochci, "Suspending the Debate about Divine Sovereignty and Human Freedom," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 51 (2008): 573–90. Ciochci argues that the debate should be suspended because we do not have a clear grasp of what sort of freedom is necessary for moral responsibility.

not only affirm a libertarian understanding of free will, but also see such freedom as important for Christian belief and practice. A few paragraphs later, she goes further in expressing the view that it is “astonishing that almost all contemporary Christian philosophers, even those who see themselves in the Protestant and Reformed traditions of Luther and Calvin, also affirm free will as libertarians construe it.”⁸

Baker’s astonishment is due, no doubt, not only to the fact that historically believers in the Reformed traditions have rejected libertarian freedom,⁹ but also to the fact that libertarian freedom has been for some time a minority, if not a distinct minority position not only among philosophers and scientists, but in most other academic circles as well. So on this score, Christian philosophers represent something of a sociological anomaly. Baker might take comfort, however, in the fact that libertarian freedom is still rejected in certain quarters of the broader Christian community, particularly among Reformed biblical scholars, systematic theologians, and church historians. So here we might note the curious fact that atheistic philosophers and scientists are bedfellows with Reformed theologians in their common cause of defending compatibilism, even though they do so for very different reasons and motivations.¹⁰

So why does bringing God into the picture change things dramatically, as the great majority of Christian philosophers seem to recognize? Let us begin with a couple of preliminary considerations to get the ball rolling. Then I will turn to focus at more length on what I think are the truly decisive points that should settle the matter for theists.

II

First, consider the difference theism makes in how we might think about the curious fact that we seem to be hardwired to believe we are undetermined in our free choices as we choose between “alternative possibilities.” Of course, not all share the libertarian intuition, but it is common enough that Searle admits that he is puzzled by this, and cannot understand why

8. Lynne Rudder Baker, “Why Christians Should Not Be Libertarians: An Augustinian Challenge,” *Faith and Philosophy* 20 (2003): 461.

9. Richard Muller argues that not all Calvinist theology is thoroughly deterministic. With respect to everyday decisions, we may have libertarian freedom, even if it is true that God’s choice to save some but not others entails a “certain determinism in the order of grace.” See his “Grace, Election and Contingent Choice: Arminius’s Gambit and the Reformed Response,” in *The Grace of God, the Bondage of the Will*, ed. Thomas R. Schreiner and Bruce A. Ware (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1995), 2:270, 277.

10. Cf. John Feinberg, “And the Atheist Shall Lie Down with the Calvinist: Atheism, Calvinism and the Free Will Defense” *Trinity Journal* 1 (1980): 142–52. Feinberg is a Calvinist who acknowledges that the “free-will defense” is unavailable to Calvinists as a solution to the problem of evil.

evolution has given us such a thing. By contrast, a theist who holds that God is perfectly good and that he is the ultimate designer of human nature should be much more reluctant to think that God has implanted within us the tendency to believe deeply misleading things. This is not to deny that we are fallen, or that sin distorts our perceptions, nor is it to trust our intuitions uncritically. Nor again, am I claiming that our intuitions here are as certain as, say *modus ponens* or $3 + 7 = 10$. However, if our clearest, most vivid perceptions and intuitions are fundamentally misleading where they bear on morally significant matters such as freedom and personal responsibility, this is hard to square with God's perfect goodness. If Mother Nature was acting alone in the evolutionary process, then perhaps she cannot be trusted to prevent Cartesian-style demons from haunting us with deeply illusory beliefs. But if God is the ultimate Creator and director of the evolutionary process (assuming one accepts evolution), we have much more reason to think our most fundamental intuitions are reliable and point to truth.

There is another reason theists have more reason to trust their immediate experience of freedom than atheists like Searle have, namely, because they have metaphysical resources that readily allow for possibilities that naturalists naturally find unthinkable. Recall that Searle thinks libertarian freedom requires us to believe that there is a self "inside" each of us that is capable of interfering with the order of nature, of making molecules swerve from their paths, and the like. Now admittedly, the way he puts this is a bit tendentious, and may be seen as a mischievous invitation to his fellow critics of libertarian freedom to join him in a group smirk, but apart from that, I see no reason why theists should demur. If libertarian freedom requires the belief that molecules can be made to swerve from their paths by something nonphysical, theists can cheerfully admit that such a scenario is perfectly possible on their premises. For it is just basic theism that ultimate reality is not particles and their relations and that all such particles and their relations owe their very existence to an intelligent being who is himself a free being who is not composed of physical particles. He was free not only to bring such particles into existence or not, but also free to move them as he wills.

A defender of Searle might object that this is beside the point, at least so far as human freedom is concerned. For his dilemma arose from the fact that human beings are physical in their constitution, and subject to natural laws like all other physical beings. Even if one granted that libertarian freedom might be possible for a non-physical being like God, this does nothing to show that human beings could be free in that sense.

In response to this, theists can go on to point out that it should not be in the least incredible to think that a being like God should create beings in his image, and that those creatures should consist in part of a substance that is not part of the physical nexus, but can freely interact with it and change it in certain respects. Indeed, theistic compatibilists may well agree that God has

created beings in this fashion, and that it would be possible for such beings to be free in the libertarian sense, even if they do not think the latter is in fact true. So again, what is unthinkable for Searle should be clearly within the realm of possibility, if not plausibility, for theists, and give them another reason for taking at face value their experience of freedom of the will.¹¹

III

Those are the preliminary considerations, and I take them only as suggestive and do not want to rest too much weight on them. Now let us turn to the more decisive considerations, which are overtly moral in nature. To put the point most bluntly, if compatibilism is true, it is all but impossible, in the actual world, to maintain the perfect goodness of God, and altogether impossible to do so if orthodox Christianity is true. Let me emphasize the qualifier about the actual world. I am inclined to think that genuinely free actions are essentially undetermined, so a free being cannot possibly be determined in all his actions. If I am wrong about this, there are possible worlds in which persons are both free and fully determined by God. What I want to insist on, however, is that the actual world cannot reasonably be thought to be such a world.

Before arguing this point, it may be worthwhile to state explicitly what I mean by theological determinism, and to say what distinguishes the corresponding theological compatibilism from compatibilism simpliciter. By theological determinism I mean the view that everything that occurs happens exactly as God intends because he has ordered all things in such a way that there are sufficient determining causes for everything, including human actions. By theological compatibilism, I mean the view that rational beings who are determined by God in all their actions, can still be fully free and responsible for those actions. Later, we shall examine a particular account of freedom as suggested by a contemporary theological compatibilist, but for now let us simply note that such compatibilists, like compatibilists simpliciter, insist that freedom and responsibility are entirely compatible with complete determinism. The Westminster Confession, a classic theological statement in this tradition, famously puts these claims as follows.

God from all eternity did by the most wise and holy counsel of his own will freely and unchangeably ordain whatsoever comes to pass:

11. Baker disagrees, for reasons that are reminiscent of Searle: "Given what is known about the physical world today, I do not believe that we can make sense of libertarian free will in any detail in a way that allows us to be the ultimate sources or originators in the intended sense of our actions" ("Why Christians Should Not Be Libertarians," 470). It is also worth noting that Christian materialists, who hold that human beings are essentially purely physical beings, would demur from the claim that God could have created us partly from a substance that was not part of the physical nexus.

yet so as thereby neither is God the author of sin, nor is violence offered to the will of creatures, nor is the liberty or contingency of second causes taken away, but rather established.¹²

A particularly striking, and poignant, aspect of classic theological determinism is the doctrine that God has determined from all eternity who will be saved and who will be damned. Again to cite the Westminster Confession: “By the decree of God, for the manifestation of his glory, some men and angels are predestined unto everlasting life, and others ordained to everlasting death.”¹³

The confession goes on to explain that God determines means as well as ends. “As God hath appointed the elect unto glory, so hath he, by the eternal and most free purpose of his will ordained all the means thereunto.”¹⁴ He moves upon these elect persons in such a way that he enlightens their minds and changes their hearts, thereby “renewing their wills, and by his almighty power determining them to that which is good, and effectually drawing them to Jesus Christ, yet so as they come most freely, being made willing by grace.”¹⁵

Now what I want to highlight about theological determinism is that it is underwritten and scripted by a personal God who determines all things according to “the most free purpose of his will.” God was under no necessity to determine things in the specific way he did, nor to choose to save or damn the particular people he did, nor perhaps to save or damn anyone at all. Indeed, in agreement with the majority of the theistic tradition, theological determinists typically hold that God did not need to create at all, so his very choice to create anything is most free, not itself determined in any way.¹⁶

This notion that all things are “unchangeably” determined, yet radically contingent upon the will of a personal being who causes them is what distinguishes theological determinism from naturalistic determinism, and theological compatibilism from compatibilism simpliciter. Not only is everything determined, *everything is intended*. The determining cause of our actions that preceded our birth by countless years is not merely impersonal forces of nature, but an intelligent agent who executes his intentions in every detail

12. Westminster Confession, III, 1.

13. *Ibid.*, III, 3.

14. *Ibid.*, III, 6.

15. *Ibid.*, X, 1. The Westminster Confession, is not, of course, intended as a fully precise philosophical document. The authors alternately speak of God’s predestining, ordaining, and determining things, and it is arguable that they were claiming only that God always executes his intentions, without necessarily saying he causally determines everything. However, the deterministic reading is also defensible, indeed more so in my judgment, and it is clearly true that many leading spokesmen for this tradition are causal determinists. See note 17 below.

16. Some theists hold that God’s nature of love necessitates not only that he create a world, but one that includes creatures like us, who can accept and return his love. For a recent example, see Thomas Talbott, “God, Freedom and Human Agency,” *Faith and Philosophy* 26 (2009): 378–97, esp. 380 and 385n19.

of what happens as well as every human choice. It is the difference between being determined by blind forces and being determined by the most perspicacious sight possible.¹⁷

For the rest of this paper, I shall assume that if one is both a theist and a compatibilist that he is a theological compatibilist. While it may be possible to be both a theist and compatibilist without being a theological compatibilist as I have defined the term, it would be an odd position to hold and I shall not consider it further in this paper.

Now why does theological compatibilism pose enormous difficulties that are distinctively different from any problems that compatibilism of the naturalist variety must face? Precisely because of the central theistic doctrine that God is good, indeed perfectly good. To see why this entails serious problems, we need to get firmly in hand a fairly straightforward implication of compatibilism that has enormous consequences. Unfortunately, this implication is seldom fully appreciated or kept clearly in view by theological compatibilists. Here it is.

(CI) If freedom and determinism are compatible, God could have created a world in which all persons freely did only the good at all times.

Notice, this would not be merely an innocuous possible world, many of which need not trouble us because they may not be creatable. It would be a fully creatable world, one that God really could have actualized.¹⁸

I said above that CI is a “fairly straightforward implication of compatibilism,” but before proceeding we need to take note of an objection that can be raised from “manipulation” arguments that have been recently deployed against compatibilism.¹⁹ These arguments begin by describing a person who has been unknowingly determined by another agent in such a way that he

17. For argument that John Calvin, John Gill, and Jonathan Edwards were not only determinists, but compatibilists, see Paul Helm’s essay “Calvin the Compatibilist” in his book *Calvin at the Centre* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 227–72. Helm points out that while Calvin had certain sympathies with the Stoic view of necessity, he emphasized against the Stoics the personal nature of God’s determining control (see 240–52). For the purposes of this paper, it does not matter exactly how God determines all things, whether by arranging things from the beginning so that all things, including human actions, flow necessarily from those initial conditions, or by directly controlling things as they unfold.

18. Compatibilists may deny that God could create this world because of other things they believe about God. In particular, they may hold that God’s justice would not be sufficiently manifested in a world with no sin, and consequently no punishment. I shall defer considering this claim until section VI. For a fascinating argument that God could create a nondeterministic world without evil, see Josh Rasmussen, “On Creating Worlds without Evil—Given Divine Counterfactual Knowledge,” *Religious Studies* 40 (2004): 457–70.

19. It is worth noting that Antony Flew highlighted this sort of issue decades ago. He wrote: “Certainly it would be monstrous to suggest that anyone, *however truly responsible in the eyes of men*, could fairly be called to account and punished by the God who had rigged his every move. All the bitter words which have ever been written against the wickedness of the God of predestination—especially when he is also thought of as filling Hell with all but the elect—are

will willingly perform certain particular actions. It is precisely the notion that the determinism in question is due to an intelligent agent who determines things for reasons of his own that lends the “manipulation” label to these cases. The determinism here is the specific design of a personal agent who very much takes a “hands on” approach with the persons he manipulates for his own purposes.

The point of such cases is to draw out the intuition that such persons are not free and responsible for their actions. Alfred Mele, who has discussed several such cases, articulates at least part of the intuition involved here when he argues that these cases show that free agency is in some way “history-bound,” that how persons come to have their psychological profile is crucial in our assessment of their freedom.²⁰ If that profile was created by manipulation, then many are inclined to think the person is not really free. Now with this intuition in hand, the larger strategy is to argue that such manipulation cases are not significantly different from the sort of determinism assumed by compatibilism, so if one rejects the claim that manipulated persons are free and responsible, then one should reject compatibilism as well.

Clearly, what is at issue here are which sorts of causal determinism are compatible with freedom and responsibility and which are not. Not all causation is due to personal agents who specifically and particularly design it, so causation cannot be equated with manipulation. The debate here, even among compatibilists, hinges on whether the differences are sufficient to rule out manipulation cases, while holding that other forms of causal determinism can leave freedom intact.

Consequently, some compatibilists respond to manipulation cases by agreeing that such persons would not be free or responsible, while insisting that there are indeed relevant differences between these cases and the sort of determinism they contend is compatible with freedom. And this is why it may be contested that CI is a straightforward implication of compatibilism. Anyone who judges that manipulation cases are relevantly different from cases featuring nonmanipulated but determined agents will likely be inclined to deny CI. However, it is also important to note that other compatibilists take the “hard line” approach and deny that there are relevant differences, and admit that the persons in manipulation cases are indeed free. Alleged differences between manipulation and other forms of causal determinism collapse on their view.²¹

amply justified” (“Divine Omnipotence and Human Freedom,” in *New Essays in Philosophical Theology*, ed. Antony Flew and Alasdair MacIntyre (New York: Macmillan, 1955), 163).

20. Alfred R. Mele, *Free Will and Luck* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 166. For examples of manipulation cases, see 167–72, 188–9.

21. For an example of the hard-line response, see Michael McKenna, “A Hard-line Reply to Pereboom’s Four-Case Manipulation Argument,” *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 77 (2008): 142–59.

Having noted this objection, I want to argue that manipulation cases do not pose a serious problem for CI. Indeed, I very much share the intuition behind these cases, as will be apparent in the arguments below. And indeed, the relevance of such cases to theological compatibilism is likely already apparent. But here is the point to make clear for now. Either these cases show that at least certain forms of manipulation are incompatible with freedom and responsibility or they do not. If they do, then CI will be false, but this will hardly help the theological determinists (however much it may help other sorts of determinists), for this would imply that those who are determined by God are not free or responsible, a conclusion theological determinists generally want to resist.²² On the other hand, if manipulation cases are not relevantly different from the sort of determinism compatibilists affirm, as the “hard liners” insist, then CI is unscathed by such cases.

IV

Now then, if CI is sound, it has profoundly troubling implications if theological determinism is in fact true in this world. Let us look at three issues to see more clearly why this is so. First, consider more fully the fundamental issue of moral responsibility, one of the central driving forces behind a libertarian view of freedom, and perhaps the most powerful consideration that gives manipulation cases their intuitive force. My understanding of moral responsibility that I am assuming here is rather ordinary, even homely. A person is morally responsible for a given action if it pertains to a morally significant matter, and the person may be rightly praised or blamed for the action, and held accountable, which may require punishing him, perhaps even severely.

Now theological determinism, I want to suggest, is not only the most metaphysically majestic account of manipulation ever devised, but all the more interesting because it is not put forward as a mere hypothetical example, but rather as a sober proposal believed by many philosophically sophisticated persons. And while some theological determinists may object to the term “manipulation,” the notion that a supremely powerful and intelligent being “from all eternity did by the most wise and holy counsel of his own will freely and unchangeably ordain whatsoever comes to pass” including human choices, qualifies as a paramount instance of manipulation as the term is used in the current discussion. So theological determinism is a fascinating test case for compatibilists, because it may bring into sharpest focus whatever reservations and qualms many compatibilists feel as to whether manipulated persons are really free and responsible for their actions.

22. Not all theological determinists are compatibilists of course. Some are hard determinists who deny freedom and responsibility.

As already noted, however, theological determinists typically want to affirm human freedom and responsibility, unlike hard determinists, so as compatibilists are wont to do, they have been most willing to supply us with analyses of how persons can be morally responsible for their actions even though those actions are entirely determined by causes beyond their control. Baker, for instance, offers this account: "A person is morally responsible for willing an action X if (i) S wills X, (ii) S wants to will X, (iii) S wills X because she wants to will X, and (iv) S would still have willed X even if she had known the provenance of her wanting to will X."²³ Particularly interesting here is condition (iv), which she goes on to illustrate with a case of a man who was convicted of a bombing that killed four black girls in a church in Birmingham in 1963. She claims the man "would still be proud of his participation, and would participate again, even if he knew that his willing to participate in the bombing had been caused by his racist upbringing. ('Damn right,' he might have said, 'and I am bringing up my boys the same way.')

Condition (iv) is, I would agree, an essential component of a satisfactory account of moral responsibility. Taken at face value, it is a counterfactual, and if we take it this way, it may lead to conflicting judgments about responsibility.²⁴ It is not clear, however, that Baker intends it to be taken strictly in this sense, and in any case, I think her point can be made in other terms. For instance, I think her point can be cast in terms of Mele's notion that agency is in an important sense "history-bound," that understanding how someone has come to have the psychological profile that he does is highly relevant to whether he is free and responsible. So understood, we can take her point to be that an agent in the actual world who learned the history of his psychological profile would still will to perform the action and consider himself responsible for it.

However, I think this sort of condition points up why theological compatibilism cannot provide an adequate account of moral responsibility. Baker's example is an interesting one, but makes her task relatively easy. A defiant racist is an easy target to blame for his actions and provides a fairly convincing example of how condition (iv) might be met. But many, if not most, examples of moral actions that we would need to account for to make

23. Baker, "Why Christians Should Not Be Libertarians," 471.

24. Here is why condition (iv) may lead to conflicting judgments about responsibility if taken as a counterfactual. Suppose Jessie is manipulated by an expert hypnotist so that he wills to kill Bubba, and that he in fact willingly does so in a way that satisfies Baker's first three conditions. In this case, many persons would likely not judge him responsible for the killing, and moreover, if he had been made aware of why he willed to kill Bubba, it is doubtful if he would still have willed to do so. Now suppose that in one of the possible worlds closest to the actual world Jessie is not manipulated, but is determined to will to kill Bubba, again in a way that satisfies Baker's first three conditions. Suppose that part of the chain of events leading to the murder is that he is paid a large sum of money to do so and he willingly accepts the money. In this case, many more persons would likely judge him responsible for his action, and moreover, it is more likely he would still have willed to do so.

sense of moral responsibility are not nearly so simple. To see this, let us stick for the moment with the example of racists. Not all who engage in racist activity willingly are of the defiant variety. Some are ambivalent or conflicted and come to reassess their racist attitudes, and sometimes come to repudiate their racism, precisely because they come to see that their upbringing led them to hold views they later come to see as objectionable, if not indefensible. When a formerly racist person comes to this conclusion, would he still be proud of his actions and want to participate in them again? Even if he is only ambivalent to some degree, having come to see his racist attitudes as produced by his upbringing, would he be proud and eager to repeat his actions? I think not, but in any case it is hardly obvious that he would. Indeed, if he understood his racist attitudes to be fully determined by his upbringing in such a way that conditions precluded his doing otherwise, it is even less likely he would view them in the same light.

What this shows is that condition (iv) poses problems for a compatibilist view of freedom, particularly once we move beyond the simple sort of case she points to for support. Indeed, in many other examples, understanding the provenance of our actions, if determinism is true, would incline us to doubt that we were free or responsible for the actions in question.

To see this more clearly, let us reflect further on condition (iv) by considering a scenario that more closely approximates things if theological compatibilism is true. Imagine a preschool that is run by a woman who is psychologically savvy, and deliberately does various things to condition the children, unknown to their parents. Some of the children she conditions to grow up and behave as virtuous persons typically do, and to live productive lives. Others, she conditions to behave in a perverse manner, some of whom even become rapists or child molesters themselves. Let us assume she completely succeeds in her project and each of the children turns out just as she intends. Somehow she manages to avoid detection, and a few years later, she decides to go to law school and several years later still she becomes a judge.

Now consider the case of one of the abused children who becomes a child molester. He wills to molest children and does so because he wills to do so. Let us suppose he even engages in his behavior with a sort of relish, but eventually, he is caught and arrested. Before his trial, however, he sees a court appointed psychiatrist who examines him to determine whether he is sane enough to be tried for his crimes. Under hypnosis, he is able to recall that he was abused as a small child, and his psychiatrist concludes that those experiences inclined him powerfully toward his practice of child molestation, and helps him come to see this and understand why.

Now, having come to know the provenance of his actions in this fashion, would he not view them in an entirely different light than he did before? Would he still own those actions in the same way, or be likely to be “proud” of his previous behavior like Baker’s defiant racist? More likely, would he

not find his previous behavior shameful, or at the very least find himself baffled as to how he was responsible for it?

Suppose furthermore that when he was tried for his crimes, the judge eloquently condemns his behavior as a menace to society that deserves severe punishment, and she accordingly sentences him to life in prison, with no chance for parole. After he is imprisoned, he comes to the ironic realization that his judge was his preschool teacher years ago. He now reflects on the fact that not only was he conditioned toward his perverse behavior by the same person who was his judge, but that she just as easily could have conditioned him to become a well adjusted person who behaved in a perfectly upright fashion. Again, it seems clear that such further knowledge of the provenance of his actions would further unsettle his previous sense of ownership for those actions, and he would think there was something profoundly unjust in his being held accountable for them and punished with life in prison.

Now I think this discussion surfaces a general principle, which we can call the provenance principle.

(PP) When the actions of a person are entirely determined by another intelligent being who intentionally determines (manipulates) the person to act exactly as the other being wishes, then the person cannot rightly be held accountable and punished for his actions.

I am inclined to think something like this principle holds for any morally significant actions, whether those actions are positive or negative. A person who is manipulated in this fashion should no more deserve moral credit for doing good than he should be blamed for doing evil. However, the intuition that a manipulated agent is not truly free or accountable for his actions may be stronger when the actions are alleged to be grounds for punishment. I am not sure why this is the case, but “evil” actions that call for punishment seem to elicit a stronger sense that the agent should not be held responsible if he has been manipulated.²⁵

This observation is pertinent to an objection that may be raised at this point. It may be suggested that CI is in tension with PP, or more strongly, urged that anyone inclined to accept CI will be inclined to reject PP. I have already argued that theological determinists can hardly deny CI. Consequently, they may be accordingly prepared to deny PP, especially if they follow the “hard line” response to manipulation arguments. Indeed, that is just what theistic compatibilists should do if they want to maintain consistency.

The price of such consistency, however, is quite steep in terms of moral plausibility, as I hope the case I have just described makes evident. Once that price is clear, theistic compatibilists may balk at paying it, and if they find it too costly, they have good reason to question whether freedom and determinism are in fact compatible. That is, they have good reason to affirm

25. Mele shares this perception. See *Free Will and Luck*, 193.

PP and to deny CI, which requires of course that they give up theological determinism.²⁶

The case I described above is even more troubling (and provides further incentive to give up theological compatibilism), because it has profoundly disturbing implications for the character of the manipulator of evil actions. To whatever degree we judge the actions to be bad, we will likewise be inclined to think the manipulator of those actions is bad. We can call this the evil manipulator principle.

(EMP) A being who determines (manipulates) another being to perform evil actions is himself evil. It is even more perverse if a being determines a being to perform evil actions and then holds him accountable, and punishes him for those actions.

Again, I think this shows why compatibilism should be deeply objectionable to theists in a way that it may not be for atheists. If there is no God, and the only force determining our choices are impersonal forces of “particles and their relations,” then no one is being deliberately caused to perform the actions they do. In such a universe, if we have strong reason to doubt libertarian freedom, but we have a strong sense that we must be responsible for our actions, or that we need to hold this for good practical reasons, then we may simply have to swallow hard and embrace compatibilism. Human beings, after all, would in this case be the only clear instance of beings who have any sort of conscious will, so they would be the most viable candidates to hold responsible for their actions.

26. Thomas Talbott has proposed to me (in correspondence) that a theological compatibilist who took the “soft line” toward consistency by accepting PP and denying CI could still be a consistent compatibilist. Suppose, he says, that God built into his creation a good deal of indeterminism and random chance, starting at the quantum level and percolating into our brains. God starts us off as children in a context of ambiguity, ignorance and undeveloped cognitive faculties in such a way that severs us from his direct control, and the sort of manipulation that represents the wrong kind of determinism. Given this scenario, God neither directly controls what we experience, nor our responses to our experience. This indeterminism, however, does not represent genuine freedom, but rather, the context for true freedom to evolve as our desires, judgments, and maturing beliefs—some of which may be due partly to random chance—begin to determine our actions. Eventually, our character would form to the point that it would determine our choices in a compatibilist manner. Thereby a theist could be a compatibilist, but not a theological determinist, and thus avoid the problems of the latter position.

I find Talbott’s suggestion an intriguing one, but it represents at best a highly qualified or limited version of compatibilism. I agree that one may, by his free choices, shape his character in such a way that his future choices will flow out of that character. Indeed, following James Sennett, I have endorsed a similar suggestion with respect to the freedom of saints in heaven. See my *Heaven: The Logic of Eternal Joy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 61–2. But this sort of compatibilism is very much limited in the sense that one’s character only determines the *kind* of choices one will make, not one’s specific choices. A person whose character is fully formed in goodness will make only good choices, but the exact choices are not determined, nor are many other morally indifferent choices. So this account of “compatibilism” falls far short of the comprehensive determinism more typically affirmed by compatibilists, including theological compatibilists.

For theists, however, things are very different, and they have decidedly stronger reasons to reject compatibilism than naturalists do, starting with the fact that on their view, human beings are not the only beings with a conscious will. Theists believe they have a conscious will because they have been created in the image of God, to whom they are morally responsible for their actions. As argued above, theists have resources from their worldview to make sense of libertarian freedom in ways naturalists do not. Moreover, as just argued, theistic determinism puts a sharper edge on the common conviction that we are not responsible for our actions if all our actions are determined by causes outside our control. This common intuition is more pronounced on the scenario that all our actions are deliberately determined by an intelligent being, a being who could have determined us to act differently, and for many people it is especially strong where evil actions are concerned.

V

The intuition elicited by immoral or destructive actions leads to the second issue that shows overwhelmingly why theists should not be compatibilists, namely, the problem of evil. While there is an obvious connection with the previous point, the larger problem of evil is a towering difficulty that raises the issue to enormous heights. In very general terms, skeptics often put the problem by contending that the world could have been made so much better than it is. The appeal to free will has been so popular in the history of theodicy precisely because it undercuts easy claims about what sort of world even an omnipotent God could have created. Free will and its associated values radically call into question our first blush guesses about the kinds of worlds a perfectly good, omnipotent, omniscient God could, and perhaps would, create. If compatibilism is affirmed, however, critics are much better positioned to press the issue of what sort of worlds God could have created.

To spell this out further, I want to revisit an argument that I advanced several years ago. This argument was addressed to the strategy of the free-will defense, particularly as espoused by Alvin Plantinga. Plantinga's well known version of this defense, of course, insists that the free-will defender need not actually believe that we are free in the libertarian sense, only that it is possible that we are. I argued in reply that any free-will defender should hold that we are in fact free in the libertarian sense if God is in fact necessarily perfectly good, as well as essentially omnipotent and omniscient. Plantinga holds that God's perfect goodness requires that he properly eliminate all evil that he can in all possible worlds, which is all evil that he can eliminate without either eliminating an outweighing good or bringing about a greater evil. With these assumptions in place, I argued as follows.

- (1) If God is necessarily perfectly good, He eliminates all evil He can properly eliminate in all possible worlds.

- (2) In all possible worlds in which persons are not free or are only free in the compatibilist sense, God could properly eliminate all moral evil.
- (3) Therefore there are no possible worlds in which persons are free only in the compatibilist sense, and in which there is moral evil.
- (4) Our world contains much moral evil.
- (5) Therefore, in our world persons are free in the libertarian sense.²⁷

In his response Plantinga contended that this argument does not succeed in showing that we must be free in the libertarian sense since our world has moral evil. In particular, he challenged premise (2) above. It is perhaps the case, he suggested, among the really good possible worlds are worlds in which there is no libertarian freedom, but in which the denizens of that world are capable of knowledge. Perhaps those creatures could not properly appreciate the value of the world without the contrasting experience of evil, including evil of the moral variety as performed by creatures who are free only in the compatibilist sense.

Perhaps. Possibility, after all, roams widely in the world of perhaps. So perhaps I overstated the case in premise (2). However, the essential argument can be restated, taking into account Plantinga's criticism, as he himself suggested.

When it comes to some of the terrible evils that in fact disfigure our world, however, things are different. It might be plausible to hold that *some* evil is necessary for creatures properly to appreciate good; it isn't plausible, however, to think that the appalling evils we do in fact find are necessary for us to appreciate the world's good, and it isn't clear that those evils wouldn't in any event be too heavy a price to pay for the value involved in creatures' being able to appreciate that good. . . . The only reasons God could have for *those* evils, one is inclined to think, must involve creaturely freedom of one sort or another.²⁸

Accordingly, Plantinga thinks that the analogues of (2) that involve reference to the actual evils in this world are true. So let us restate the argument taking his qualifications into account.

- (6) If God is necessarily perfectly good, He eliminates all evil He can properly eliminate in all possible worlds.
- (7) In all possible worlds in which persons are not free or are only free in the compatibilist sense, God could properly eliminate all moral evil except that evil necessary for creatures properly to appreciate good (or similar purposes).

27. Jerry L. Walls, "Why Plantinga Must Move from Defense to Theodicy," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 51 (1991): 376.

28. Alvin Plantinga, "Ad Walls," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 51 (1991): 623.

- (8) Therefore there are no possible worlds in which persons are free only in the compatibilist sense, and in which there is moral evil beyond what would be necessary for creatures properly to appreciate good (or similar purposes).
- (9) Our world contains much appalling moral evil that could not plausibly be thought necessary for creatures properly to appreciate good (or similar purposes)
- (10) Therefore, in our world persons must be free in the libertarian sense.

Even here, of course, it is possible to put aside considerations of plausibility, and say, yes, but perhaps God has reasons for determining evil that have nothing to do with freedom, reasons we could never imagine or understand.²⁹ So we do not *have* to accept libertarian freedom or be committed to it on pain of utter irrationality.

Perhaps not. Perhaps even though God could have determined Nero, Attila the Hun, Stalin, Hitler, Pol Pot, Idi Amin, and others of their ilk in such a way that they would *freely* have chosen to live in a productive manner and been remembered for notable deeds on behalf of humanity, he has inscrutable reasons for determining them to perform the atrocities they did. The same could be said for serial killers, rapists, child molesters, racists and economic oppressors. God could have determined them to have *freely* nurtured and loved their fellow human beings, but may have inscrutable reasons for determining them to perform the sort of actions that make our blood run cold.

I am more than happy to concede that we may not be very good predictors of what a perfectly good God might do. And all of us who believe in such a God have the challenge of dealing in some way with these problems. No theist gets a free pass on Nero, Hitler, and Ted Bundy. But I fully concur with Plantinga's judgment that it is highly implausible to think such things would occur if we are not free in the libertarian sense, and that there are goods essentially related to such freedom that are worth the awful price of such evil.

We may underline this point by noting that compatibilists face another difficulty that libertarians do not when acknowledging the limits of our understanding as to why evil occurs. Whereas libertarians face the puzzle of explaining why God *allows* the sort of moral evil just noted, compatibilists have the more difficult challenge of explaining why he *causes or determines* it to happen and in so doing, they seem to be endorsing moral consequentialism. Since no one has libertarian freedom on their view, God need not allow or permit anything he does not prefer to happen, as he may have to do on the libertarian scheme.

Of course, compatibilists sometimes use language of "allowance" and "permission" when they speak of evil actions, suggesting that God permits evil ultimately to achieve his good purposes. The problem is that permission language does not make much sense on compatibilist premises. Typically, to

29. And indeed, Plantinga does so in "Ad Walls," 623–4.

say an action is permitted is imply that one is not controlling that action. For instance, parents may permit their children to make bad decisions that they would prefer them not to make. A father, for instance, may permit his son to buy a certain car that he knows is a bad investment. He may do so because he has simply chosen to leave the choice to his son (even though he is not yet of legal age) or perhaps because he thinks it is a good way for his son to learn a valuable lesson. He would prefer his son already understand this lesson, or learn it some other way, but he permits the choice, even though he would rather see him choose differently.

Now this sort of permission does not make sense on compatibilist assumptions, for God determines everything, including all choices, exactly as he wishes. If he does not wish a given action to be taken, he can determine things so it will not be. Given the compatibilist understanding of freedom, God can determine all persons to freely do precisely as he wishes, and need not ever “permit” them to do what he does not prefer.³⁰

Presumably then compatibilists believe God has good consequentialist ends in mind, even though they are likely beyond our ken, that he will achieve by causing the evil choices and the terrible things that flow from them in our world. Libertarians, by contrast, may resist this conclusion by insisting that causing or determining such things is intrinsically wrong, and could never be justified by any sort of good ends. While their view is not without its own difficulties, to be sure, they are not saddled with consequentialism since on their view God does not cause or determine such horrors to occur.³¹

So the problem of evil is intensified to the point that it is all but insuperable if the only freedom we have is of the compatibilist variety. Compatibilism strengthens the skeptics’ hand in making the case that God could have made the world in such a way that it would be free of at least much of the horrific evil that scars our world. Indeed, for a theist engaged in theodicy to affirm compatibilism is akin to a soldier inadvertently handing critical intelligence information to a determined enemy of his country that will enable that enemy to infiltrate and destroy his country’s civil defense system.

30. For more on why “permission” does not make sense for compatibilists, see Jerry L. Walls and Joseph R. Dongell, *Why I Am Not a Calvinist* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2004), 125–34.

31. It might be objected that a libertarian who embraces a Molinist scheme has a parallel problem to that of a compatibilist, for on the Molinist account God intends certain very particular outcomes. I am inclined, however, to think the Molinist can appeal here to the principle of double effect to blunt this charge. That is, God does not intend negative uses of free will that he knows will occur as a result of his instantiating free beings in certain situations. He intends the positive uses of free will, but the negative uses may be an unavoidable consequence of his instantiating those states of affairs in which positive choices are made. God does not, recall, have control over the counterfactuals of freedom for the Molinist. It is more doubtful that the compatibilist can appeal to the doctrine of double effect for, again, God can determine people “freely” to choose exactly as he wishes.

Compatibilism undercuts any substantive claim that God wants to eliminate as much evil as he can, or is working to do so, in a way consistent with the freedom he has bestowed upon us. And it makes altogether understandable why skeptics would be completely dubious of the notion that any God could be good, let alone perfectly good, who would create a world full of misery and intense suffering when he could just as easily have made one relatively, if not altogether, free of evil.

By contrast, libertarian freedom gives us at least plausible reasons for much of the evil in our world. Not only is it the case that much of the evil is directly due to human choices, but it is also worth emphasizing that natural evil is connected in intimate ways with human choices in both of the dominant classical theodicies, namely, the Augustinian and the Irenaean. In the Augustinian account, the Fall, typically conceived as a free libertarian choice, led to natural evil, whereas in the Irenaean scheme, natural evil exists for the purpose of “soul-making” through free libertarian choices. The Augustinian view is far more difficult to defend if it is held that God could have determined Adam and Eve to have freely obeyed him, but chose instead to determine them to fall, and then punished the fall by cursing the world with all manner of natural evil and suffering. Likewise, the soul making theodicy loses its traction if natural evil is not thought to be a necessary, or least very effective, part of the arena God has designed for the purpose of eliciting and developing moral virtues in human creatures, virtues that essentially require freedom in order to be genuine.³²

Defending these claims in detail would require at least another paper, but as a general observation, we can assert that while libertarian freedom gives us at least working material to construct plausible rebuttals for skeptical arguments from evil, compatibilism makes arguments from evil far more difficult to deflect. Indeed, if theists keep CI fully in view, the problem appears all but insuperable. This is a significant consideration in favor of accepting libertarian freedom, and another powerful reason why no classical theist should be a compatibilist.

VI

Now we come to the third reason, which I think is the breaking point for any sort of plausibility compatibilism might hold for theists, especially orthodox Christian theists. The third point has to do with the orthodox doctrine of divine judgment, particularly the ultimate judgment of damnation

32. In his classic defense of the soul making theodicy, John Hick rejected compatibilism as inadequate, and defended a libertarian view of freedom. At the heart of such freedom for him is our freedom with respect to loving God, a freedom that is comprised partly of our initial “epistemic distance” God. Natural evil is an essential part of this epistemic distance for Hick. See *Evil and the God of Love*, rev. ed. (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1977), 253–61, 265–91.

that falls on the finally impenitent. The issue of eternal damnation brings both of our two previous issues together, and elevates them to new heights. The doctrine of eternal punishment for sinful actions is the ultimate test case for the notion that a person whose actions are determined (manipulated) by another agent can plausibly be thought responsible for those actions. Eternal damnation, moreover, has often been seen as the most intractable form of the problem of evil because it is never redeemed. Furthermore, damnation is the worst thing that can befall a rational creature, and because of its eternal nature, it is incomparably worse than any evil of this life, however terrible.

To get an accurate perspective on the doctrine of judgment, we must begin by situating it within the larger Christian picture of a God who is overflowing with love and grace. Indeed, Christian theology offers a distinctively rich account of divine mercy and goodness with its picture of a triune God, whose eternal nature is love, and who has demonstrated that love most vividly in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus, the incarnate Son of God, the second person of the Trinity. The love of God as revealed in Jesus is an expensive love as well as an expansive love. God is shown to be like a shepherd who is not content with having ninety-nine sheep safely in the fold. Rather, his love is such that he pursues the one sheep that is lost, and is the sort of love that incites rejoicing in heaven when a single sinner repents.³³

As we broach the matter of divine judgment, it is also important to see this issue in light of the points made above about how the provenance of a person's actions bears on his moral responsibility for those actions. In that light, consider an Old Testament passage in which the prophet Jeremiah is called to pronounce God's judgment on the people of Judah. In this passage, God rehearses the sins of the Judeans, and reminds them that he spoke to them again and again but they did not listen, not unlike the Israelites had been doing ever since God delivered them from Egypt. "From the time your forefathers left Egypt until now, day after day, again and again I sent you my servants the prophets. But they did not listen to me or pay attention. They were stiff-necked and did more evil than their forefathers."³⁴ As anyone who has read the Bible is aware, this passage is hardly distinctive or unique in the Old Testament, or in scripture as a whole for that matter.³⁵ The Bible has numerous passages, particularly in the prophetic literature, in which God warns his people, urges them to repent, expresses frustration for their hardness of heart, and pronounces judgment on them for their persistent refusal to heed his word.

The obvious question demanding an answer here is how to make sense of these large stretches of scripture if one assumes compatibilism. There are, of course, difficult texts for both sides of this debate, but the large number

33. Luke 15:1-10.

34. Jer. 7:25-6.

35. A comparable New Testament text is Matt. 23:37-9.

of texts similar to the one I cited seem to fly directly in the face of a compatibilist reading. Remember, on compatibilist assumptions, God could have determined his people to have repented freely and heartily at the preaching of any of his prophets and faithfully obeyed and worshiped him thereafter. Or perhaps better yet, he could have determined them to have been faithful all along.

This is not to deny, of course, that compatibilist free agents can be determined in such a way that they are sensitive to reasons.³⁶ Consequently, it makes perfect sense that God should send prophets to such people, warn them, give them good reasons to repent and so on. Nothing I have said denies that agents who are compatibilistically free can be determined in such a way that they reason, reflect, weigh things, and then choose in a way that accords with their beliefs and values.

The point remains, however, that if God has determined all things as theological determinists claim, then he determined the Judeans of Jeremiah's day in such a way that they persisted in sin and disobedience. He could have determined them in such a way that they would have been sensitive to the warnings of the prophets, and responded positively to their preaching, but he did not do so. The notion that God is angry at sins he himself determines, when he could have determined things otherwise, and then pours out his wrath on those same actions is puzzling in the extreme, to say the least. Indeed, if EMP above is correct, it is perverse.

Now let us apply this basic point about divine judgment to the ultimate judgment against sin and disobedience, eternal damnation. Compatibilism yields interesting results in this connection if combined with claims about the expansive love of God for all persons, as described above. Consider the following argument.

- (11) God truly loves all persons.³⁷
- (12) If God truly loves all persons, then he does all he can properly do to secure their true flourishing.³⁸
- (13) Therefore, God does all he can properly do to secure the true flourishing of all persons.
- (14) The true flourishing of all persons is only secured in a right relationship with God, in which their nature as free beings is respected and they freely accept his love and are saved.

36. See Mele, *Free Will and Luck*, 164-173.

37. If there are other persons besides human persons, God also loves them and does all he can properly do to secure their true flourishing. In this argument, however, "persons" refers to human persons.

38. The "properly" qualification is needed in case one faced a situation where one could promote the flourishing of a person *P* only by harming person *Q*, or diminishing her flourishing, or by losing some other good of equal or greater value. In that case, one might love *P* but not promote her flourishing as much as one could. While this sort of limitation might hold for those with limited means or creativity, I doubt that it applies to God, at least in the long run.

- (15) God does all he can properly do to secure the true flourishing of all persons, and the true flourishing of all persons is only secured in a right relationship with him.
- (16) If God does all he can properly do to secure the true flourishing of all persons, and the true flourishing of all persons is only secured in a right relationship with him, then God does all he can properly do to secure a right relationship with all persons.
- (17) Therefore, God does all he can properly do to secure a right relationship with all persons.
- (18) Freedom and determinism are compatible.
- (19) If freedom and determinism are compatible, then God can properly secure a right relationship with all persons by determining all to freely accept his love and be saved.
- (20) Therefore, God can properly secure a right relationship with all persons by determining all to freely accept his love and be saved.
- (21) God does everything he can properly do to secure a right relationship with all persons, and God can properly secure a right relationship with all persons by determining them to freely accept his love and be saved.
- (22) If God does everything he can properly do to secure a right relationship with all persons, and God can properly secure a right relationship with all persons by determining all to freely accept his love and be saved, then God will determine all persons to freely accept his love and be saved.
- (23) Therefore, God will determine all persons to freely accept his love and be saved.
- (24) If God determines *p*, then *p*.
- (25) Therefore, all persons will freely accept God's love and be saved.

This argument is interesting because it supports a conclusion that is at odds with orthodox Christianity, namely, that all persons will accept God's love and be saved. In recent decades there has been something of a resurgence of universalism as a minority position, but this view is at odds with the broad consensus rejecting universalism that holds among Christians of all three branches of the church. Although sometimes universalism is defended as definitely true, or even more strongly as the only position that is compatible with love and power of God, more common is the relatively modest claim that Christians should at least hope and pray for universal salvation.³⁹

Notice that the argument above is a deductive one that supports the stronger position that universalism is definitely true, even necessarily true if all the premises are. Given the nature of the argument, which appears clearly

39. Thomas Talbott is a notable example of the view that universalism is the only position that is even possibly true. The Roman Catholic theologian von Balthasar is a noted example of the view that we should hope for universal salvation.

to be valid, one must reject one or more of the premises in order to reject the conclusion. Now it is obvious which premise will be rejected by philosophers and theologians who hold a libertarian view of freedom, namely, (18). But what is an orthodox Christian compatibilist to do? It seems clear that, at least insofar as their understanding of freedom is concerned, they must accept not only (18), but also (19) as an obvious implication of compatibilism. It would be very odd indeed if the sovereign God could not determine all persons to freely accept his gracious love and be saved. The whole notion of election as theological compatibilists typically understand it is that God can elect whomever he will to be saved, with no limits on whom he may or may not choose to save or how many he may choose to save. Premise (14) also seems to be an essential claim of any orthodox Christian account of humanity, and is common ground for theological libertarians and compatibilists alike.

At first glance, some may think theological compatibilists might reject the part of premise (14), which says that the true flourishing of human persons requires their nature as free beings to be respected, taking that as a distinctive claim of libertarianism. However, such compatibilists also believe that God respects the nature of free beings in promoting their true flourishing, for God does not determine them against their will, their beliefs, and so on when he moves them to repentance and saves them. Rather, he moves upon their minds and their wills in such a way that they embrace salvation freely, in the compatibilist sense. Recall how the Westminster Confession describes those who are effectually called to salvation. It famously describes God as “determining them to that which is good, and effectually drawing them to Jesus Christ, yet so as they come most freely, being made willing by grace.”⁴⁰ Theological compatibilists do not, then, disagree with the claim that God respects our nature as free beings. But given their understanding of freedom, God can do so while entirely determining our actions.

Moreover, premises (12), (16), (19), (22), and (24) seem to be clear conceptual truths that can hardly be denied, and the other premises follow from well known rules of inference. Theological compatibilists appear to be left then with premise (11), which does not seem to be a very attractive option to deny, since it is a basic theological truism. Indeed, the claim that God loves the whole world, all persons without exception, appears to be one of the clearest teachings of the Bible, as well as one of the most compelling components of the gospel, so understandably, compatibilists are not typically anxious to deny this claim, at least forthrightly. While some may be prepared to do so, more often compatibilists are anxious to assure us that they believe in the universal love of God and his compassion for lost sinners as much as anyone else.

So when push comes to shove, if compatibilists want to affirm (11), their only remaining option may be to deny (12). The problem with this of course,

40. Westminster Confession, X, 1.

is that (12) seems to be essential to any meaningful account of genuine love. So to deny (12), while affirming (11), compatibilists must resort to radical equivocation, by smuggling in an account of love that is profoundly at odds with the conviction that God desires the true flourishing of all persons.⁴¹

For instance, theological compatibilists claim that God loves even those he has not chosen to save since he provides material blessings for them in this life. God shows his love for such persons by sending the rain to fall on the just and the unjust, along with other provisions that are available to the inhabitants of this good earth. There are glaring difficulties, however, with this account of God's love, for temporal blessings cannot begin to underwrite a sober claim of divine love for persons who are determined to damnation by God's unconditional choice.

Consider an analogy. Suppose a scientist wants to do some experiments on human subjects that will be physically taxing and painful, and will lead to the agonizing deaths of those subjected to them. To execute these experiments successfully, the scientist needs extremely healthy persons thirty years old. So, for thirty years, he gives each of his subjects (who are not aware of his plans for them) the best of physical care. They eat the most nutritious and delicious food, they sleep in expensive beds, they have access to the best in recreation and exercise, and so on. Could anyone say with a straight face that the scientist loved his subjects?

Of course, no analogy is perfect. Damnation is far worse than any painful fate an evil scientist could impose on his unhappy subjects. But the point is that true love must seek the true flourishing and ultimate well being of the beloved as much as it properly can. If theological compatibilists want to insist that God loves unbelievers he may not have elected for salvation, then they must deny this, which means they will be using the concept of love in a deeply idiosyncratic sense. Again, they must radically equivocate on premise (11) if premise (12) is denied.⁴²

It is, I think, most telling that theological compatibilists often make claims and engage in rhetoric that naturally lead people to conclude that God loves them and desires their salvation in ways that are surely misleading to all but those trained in the subtleties of Reformed rhetoric. They assure their hearers that "whosoever will" may come when they preach the gospel, believing that only the elect can actually come or truly want to come. Untutored

41. For more on Calvinist equivocation and related problems, see David Baggett and Jerry L. Walls, *Good God: The Theistic Foundations of Morality* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 65–81.

42. By contrast, libertarians can affirm the love of God for all persons without being disingenuous, even if some persons are damned. For God extends his love to such persons in such a way that they are truly enabled to respond. Indeed, it is my view that God gives all persons "optimal grace," which means they have every opportunity to accept the gospel and be saved. Despite this, some may resist grace decisively and be lost. To argue this would take us far beyond the scope of this paper, but I have done so elsewhere, most notably in *Hell: The Logic of Damnation* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1992), esp. chaps. 4–5.

hearers no doubt will take that language to mean that God truly desires that all may come, and all in fact can come.

What this suggests, I think, is that many theological compatibilists are themselves embarrassed at the thought that God does not truly love all his creatures in the sense that he does all he can to secure their true well being and flourishing. Perhaps deep down they believe that God does love all persons in this fashion, but they do not clearly see that this is incompatible with their compatibilism.⁴³ So they employ language that implies that he does, forgetting CI, and talk as if God sincerely prefers everyone to repent, and it is only their stubborn refusal to repent that keeps unbelievers from being saved. Such language loses all meaning, not to mention all its rhetorical force, when we remember that on compatibilist premises God could determine the impenitent to freely repent, but has chosen instead to determine things in such a way that they freely persist in their sins.

There is, however, another option for compatibilists who are reluctant to deny God's love for all or to equivocate on the nature of love. They may dispute premise (19), but for reasons that have nothing to do with the compatibility of freedom and determinism. They may agree that, *so far as the nature of freedom is concerned*, God could determine all persons to freely accept a right relationship with himself and be saved. However, God has other goals that are incompatible with his saving all persons, perhaps goals of which we have no idea, or goals we could not even begin to fathom or understand.

The notion that there could be such goals is a rather desperate ploy to save compatibilism, and I am rather "skeptical" of it. Such incomprehensible goals, obviously, are hard to address or assess. However, one classic suggestion that has been offered specifies that goal rather than leaving it totally mysterious. This classic line of thought begins with the unobjectionable claim that God's purpose is fully to glorify himself. It goes on to suggest that he would not be fully glorified if all were saved, so God's saving all persons is actually incompatible with his larger goal of receiving full glory. If this is so, he cannot properly secure a right relationship with all human persons by determining all to freely accept his love and be saved.

This notion goes back at least to Aquinas and Calvin, the latter of whom wrote that the reprobate "have been given over to this depravity because they have been raised up by the just but inscrutable judgment of God to show forth his glory in their condemnation."⁴⁴ The basic idea here seems to be that God's full glory could not fully be displayed unless he manifested

43. I do in fact think this is likely the case, which explains why many persons accept theological compatibilism who would not do so if they clearly recognized its implications. For further examples of how compatibilists are inconsistent on this score, see Walls and Dongell, *Why I Am Not a Calvinist*, 153–215.

44. John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeil, trans. Ford Lewis Battles (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1960), 3.24.14. For Aquinas, see *Summa Contra Gentiles*, trans. Vernon J. Bourke (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1975), 3:161, 1.

his justice, which requires sin to occur, along with fitting punishment. Some must even be eternally damned for the full force of his just wrath against sin to be displayed.

Now this is a striking claim to be sure, but we need a preliminary clarification to even begin to assess it. Is the compatibilist saying it is *necessary* for God to display his justice in this fashion, or does he simply choose to do so as a matter of *preference*? Or as a third option, is he saying that this is a *fitting or appropriate* way for God to show his justice? If God chooses to do so, but it is not necessary that he do so, then it still seems to be the case that he could have determined all persons to freely accept a right relationship with himself, but he chose to do otherwise. So unless it is necessary that he display his justice by punishing sin in order fully to glorify himself, then premise (19) remains intact.

The claim that God must display his justice in this fashion raises a number of disconcerting issues. In the first place, it is highly dubious that justice in the form of punishing sin is essential to God, rather than an entirely contingent expression of his nature. What is essential to God is holy love, and that is what must be fully displayed for God to be revealed. Wrath as expressed in just punishment, however, is merely the form holy love takes in response to sin and evil. Were there no sin and evil, God would never show wrath or punish anyone. If, contrary to this, it is insisted that God must display justice by punishing evil in order fully to manifest his glory, then sin and evil must occur for God's full glory to be demonstrated. The disconcerting consequence here is that God needs evil or depends on it fully to manifest his glory. This consequence undermines not only God's goodness, but his sovereignty as well.⁴⁵

But even if it is granted that God needs evil fully to glorify himself (which I do not grant), the question still remains why he must punish anyone by eternal damnation. Could not God express his wrath in terrifying and striking ways, if necessary, by punishing those he has determined to sin with intense and spectacular misery for some finite duration? He could then determine them to repent in response to his punishment and glorify him by worshiping him.

Those who reject this suggestion would presumably insist that the full range of God's justice would be manifested most fittingly only if some eternally reject God and thereby incur eternal punishment. So far as the nature of freedom is concerned, again, God could determine all persons to freely accept his grace and be saved. But for the sake of manifesting his justice, he must determine some to reject him forever so he can justly damn them eternally.

45. For a penetrating critique of the notion that God must display his wrath in damnation fully to glorify himself, as defended by contemporary Calvinist John Piper, see Tom McCall, "I Believe in Divine Sovereignty," *Trinity Journal* 29 (2008): 205–26. This issue also includes a response by Piper and a rejoinder by McCall on 227–46.

Now at this point we face a clash of fundamental intuitions, and as always when such a clash is involved it is hard to identify anything more clear or fundamental to adjudicate the dispute. Anyone who is sympathetic to my argument in earlier sections of this paper will surely find the scenario just described a moral outrage. The notion that God determines persons to sin, and then punishes them for his glory is objectionable for the same sort of reasons the preschool-director-turned-judge I described above is objectionable. Indeed, a being who would determine such actions and then punish them with eternal misery would be far more perverse than our preschool programmer. What one side sees as necessary, or at least fitting, to manifest God's justice is seen by the other side as an outrageous perversion not even remotely recognizable as justice.

Perhaps the best we can do in the face of such a dispute is to continue to be as clear as we can in articulating these intuitions and teasing out their implications. Perhaps as we do so, one of them will come to be seen by both sides as more plausible than the other. As already indicated, I think it is a telltale sign that theological compatibilists often engage in misleading rhetoric, which suggests that when their position is perspicuously displayed, even they hesitate to own it. So I call their bluff with a test. If I am wrong, let them openly and without equivocation declare that it is the need to manifest God's very justice that requires, or at least makes it fitting, that he determine some, perhaps many, to resist him forever, and then punish them with eternal misery, persons he could otherwise determine to freely accept his grace and joyfully worship him forever. Let them forthrightly say God is more glorified and his character more fully manifested in determining those persons to hate both him and each other than he would be in determining those same persons to gratefully adore him and love their neighbor as themselves. Let them insistently refuse to obscure matters with misleading rhetoric that implies that God loves the nonelect in a way that he does not on their view, as well as language that suggests their sinful choice to reject him is anything less than fully determined by God in order to display what they call justice.

The perplexity all of this generates becomes even more pronounced when we recall the Christian doctrine of atonement as it is understood by many theological compatibilists. I refer to the penal substitutionary theory of atonement, according to which Christ suffered and bore the wrath of God in his death on the cross so that sinners could be forgiven of their sins and escape the punishment they deserve. This is, of course, only one theory of atonement, and not all Christians accept it. I am not assuming that all those within the Reformed tradition accept this theory, although it is surely the dominant view there. My point, however, is that for those who do, it is even more puzzling that God would have to damn anyone to display his glory, even on the assumption that he must display his just wrath against sin in order to be fully glorified. But to reject premise (19) requires some such

account of why God could not end up saving all persons if compatibilism is true.

This brings us to a final option for theological compatibilists. They could simply accept the argument above and embrace universalism. And indeed, this is the move some compatibilists are inclined to make. Baker, for instance, proposes that Christians should maintain an Augustinian styled version of compatibilism but “consider the possibility of universal salvation, perhaps after periods of various lengths of purgation.”⁴⁶ This is a mildly curious move for Baker to make since part of her case for compatibilism is that it fits better with orthodox theology than libertarianism. Her claim is a dubious one however, for the doctrine of eternal hell has much more of a claim to orthodox consensus than compatibilism. No doubt compatibilism represents an impressive tradition in theology, and can count among its adherents in addition to Augustine such figures as Luther, Calvin, Edwards, and perhaps Aquinas. However, there has never been an orthodox stance on the nature of free will, and the libertarian side includes its own notable figures ranging from most of the pre-Augustinian church fathers and many medieval theologians to Arminius to the Wesleys.⁴⁷ While I would not go so far as to say that universalism is inconsistent with orthodoxy, the fact of the matter is that universalism represents a departure from a broad orthodox consensus, whereas libertarian freedom does not.⁴⁸

My main point here is not to draw the boundaries of orthodoxy so as to exclude universalists, but only to insist that compatibilism poses a particularly severe problem for anyone who defines orthodoxy in these traditional terms. Indeed, the problem holds even for those who hold the minimal position that it is possible that some will be damned. This point is quite germane to compatibilists since most of those who have held this position, both historically and today, reject universalism and affirm not only the possibility but the actuality of eternal damnation. So this presents something of a dilemma for compatibilists who want to affirm the universal love of God but who also want to be orthodox. If one is such a compatibilist, he should be a universalist. But an orthodox Christian should not be a universalist. So, an orthodox Christian should not be a compatibilist.

46. Baker, “Why Christians Should Not Be Libertarians,” 472.

47. On freedom in the pre-Augustinian fathers and medieval theology, see Richard Swinburne, *Responsibility and Atonement* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1989), 139. It is also worth noting that Pelagianism is of course ruled out, but the free will affirmed by say, Wesley, is a graciously restored freedom that enables us to make an undetermined free choice to accept (or reject) God’s grace.

48. There are of course exceptions to this broad consensus, such as Gregory of Nyssa, an explicit universalist. I do not define orthodoxy here as doctrine clearly taught in scripture, as this would beg the question against universalists such as Gregory, as well as contemporary proponents such as Tom Talbott, who has defended his views on exegetical grounds. I simply define orthodoxy in terms of broad consensus among the classical theologians in all three main branches of the Church.

Suppose, however, that a Christian is a convinced compatibilist, but does not think it plausible that God must, of necessity, damn some persons, and moreover, finds it morally intolerable to think God would determine things this way if he could just as easily determine all persons freely to accept salvation. Such a compatibilist should then depart from the broad orthodox consensus and embrace universalism. He should do so, moreover, in a definite, principled way instead of the tentative, half-hearted way Baker does in her proposal. If God truly loves all persons, and there is no reason why he cannot save all of them without overriding their freedom, then it is not only reasonable to think he will certainly do so, it is necessarily the case that he will. Christian compatibilists who have a substantive view of divine love, and believe God truly loves all persons, should draw this inference cleanly and clearly.

Doing so, however, presents its own problems. The obvious question this raises is why, if God can determine all persons freely to accept salvation eventually, he could not do so now. Or why would he not do so now? In the same vein, why could he not determine all persons freely to do good and love him and each other at all times? Going back to our discussion in section V, perhaps there are some kinds of knowledge God wants us to have that we can gain only if he determines a certain amount of evil to occur. But recall, what is at issue here are the actual horrific evils in this world. Is it plausible to think God would have determined *these* evils to occur, that he preferred a world with these crushing evils rather than a world with much less evil? Unless compatibilists think that God could not have determined things so there would have been less evil than there is, that is what they must be prepared forthrightly to affirm.

VII

I have been developing a series of arguments for why no classical theist, let alone orthodox Christian, should ever be a compatibilist. I want to conclude by saying a word about how the word “should” functions in my title. As will be evident by now, my argument hinges on several moral judgments, particularly PP, EMP, as well as premises (6), (9), and (12). These judgments pertain to what is required for moral responsibility as well as assessments about what a perfectly good God would do, such as eliminating as much evil as he properly can, promoting the true well being and flourishing of all persons as much as he can, and so on.

I believe these moral judgments are not only plausible, but also true. Moreover, as a libertarian, I believe we are not only free to accept such moral principles, but that we should do so. It is in this sense that I judge that no classical theist, let alone orthodox Christian, should be a compatibilist.

Those who reject these moral principles will likely reject the claim that they should not be compatibilists. If these moral principles are rejected, the stalemate between compatibilism and libertarianism is likely determined to continue. Whether it should remain at a stalemate is another matter altogether.⁴⁹

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