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Foreknowledge, Evil, and Compatibility Arguments

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Most arguments against God's existence aim to show that it is incompatible with various apparent features of the world, such as the existence of evil or of human free will. In response, theists have sought to show that God's existence is compatible with these features of the world. However, the fact that the proposition that God exists is necessary if possible introduces some underappreciated difficulties for these arguments.

Many of the most interesting, and most debated, issues in the philosophy of religion are framed as questions about compatibility. Most arguments against the existence of a necessarily existing, omniscient, omnibenevolent, and omnipotent being take the form of arguments from the incompatibility of the existence of such a being with various apparent features of the world, such as the existence of evil or of human free will. Understandably, then, believers in the existence of such a being have sought to show that the existence of such a being is, in fact, compatible with such features of the world.

However, certain features of the proposition that God exists—in particular, the fact that it is necessarily true if it is possibly true—introduce complications for such compatibility arguments which have been underappreciated by their proponents. I'll defend this claim by arguing, first, that two prominent compatibility arguments—Ted A. Warfield's defense of the compatibility of free will with divine omniscience, and Alvin Plantinga's defense of the compatibility of God's existence with the existence of evil—fail to establish their intended conclusions. After a brief discussion of the lessons which can be learned from consideration of these arguments, I will then turn to the question of what compatibility arguments like those of Warfield and Plantinga do show.

I. Warfield's Argument for Compatibilism

The claim that free will is compatible with divine foreknowledge, like any claim about the compatibility of two things, is a claim about joint possibility. It can be stated as follows:

Compatibilism

Possibly, an agent freely acts, and that free action is foreknown by a necessarily omniscient being.

Incompatibilism is the negation of compatibilism. By "a necessarily omniscient being" here and in what follows I mean "a being which exists necessarily, and necessarily knows every true proposition."[1]

Most of the debate over the relationship between free will and foreknowledge has focused on the question of whether compatibilists can offer a plausible response to the powerful arguments for incompatibilism.[2] Compatibilists have, by comparison, spent little time trying to develop positive arguments for their view. An important exception is the brief and intriguing argument offered in "Divine Foreknowledge and Human Freedom are Compatible" by Warfield, who, as he says, "prefer[s] an offensive strategy."[3]

Warfield's argument can be presented using the following propositions (I preserve the numbering of Warfield's originals, updating them only to preserve the future-tense status of the relevant claims):

(1)   God exists in all possible worlds and is omniscient in all possible worlds.

(2)   Plantinga will freely climb Mt. Rushmore in 2020 A.D.

(3)   It was true in 50 A.D. that Plantinga will climb Mt. Rushmore in 2020 A.D.

(5)   God knew in 50 A.D. that Plantinga will climb Mt. Rushmore in 2020 A.D.

Warfield first notes that most philosophers take there to be no incompatibility between (2) and (3) and then, using this assumption, gives the following argument for the compatibility of free will and divine foreknowledge:

> given (1), necessarily, (3) is true if and only if (5) is true. It follows . . . that (2) and (5) are logically consistent. This generalizes trivially to my claim that God's necessary existence and necessary omniscience are compatible with human freedom.[4]

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[1]So, for example, theists who qualify omniscience in the way suggested in Peter van Inwagen, *The Problem of Evil* (New York: Clarendon Press, 2006), 80–83, will not, in my terms, count as believers in the existence of a necessarily omniscient being. I set these views to the side only to simplify the discussion in what follows, and not because I have any objection to this view of what divine omniscience consists in.

[2]For clear presentations of such arguments, see: Nelson Pike, "Divine Omniscience and Voluntary Action," *Philosophical Review* 74.1 (1965); Alvin Plantinga, "On Ockham's Way Out," *Faith and Philosophy* 3 (1986); Linda Zagzebski, "Foreknowledge and Free Will," in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward N. Zalta, Fall 2008 edition, http://plato.stanford .edu/entries/free-will-foreknowledge; and Ted A. Warfield, "Ockhamism and Molinism— Foreknowledge and Prophecy," in *Oxford Studies in Philosophy of Religion* (forthcoming).

[3]Ted A. Warfield, "Divine Foreknowledge and Human Freedom are Compatible," *Noûs* 31.1 (1997): 81.

[4]Ibid., 82.

This suggests the following argument:

Warfield's Argument

(W1)   (1)

(W2)   ◊ [(2) & (3)]

(W3)   □ [(3) ↔ (5)] (from W1)

(C)   ◊ [(2) & (5)] (from W2 & W3)

Given our stipulation that omniscience entails knowledge of every true proposition, the inference from (W1) to (W3) is valid, and (W2) and (W3) clearly entail the conclusion. The conclusion of this argument says that the existence of a particular free action is compatible with foreknowledge of that action by an essentially omniscient and necessarily existing being—and this, by existential generalization, implies compatibilism. (In what follows I will sometimes simplify the exposition by saying that the conclusion of this argument *expresses* compatibilism, rather than that it has compatibilism as a trivial consequence.)

Warfield makes two claims about this argument. First, he says that the argument "show[s] that anyone who accepts that (2) and (3) are consistent must accept that human freedom is compatible with God's necessary existence and necessary omniscience." Second, he says that almost everyone *does* accept that (2) and (3) are consistent.

II. Why the Argument Fails to Show
That Free Will and Foreknowledge Are Compatible

Warfield's first claim about the argument is puzzling. The conclusion of his argument states the compatibility of free will and divine foreknowledge. He says that anyone who accepts that (2) and (3) are consistent—i.e., anyone who accepts premise (W2) of the above argument—must accept this conclusion. But this seems false, because premise (W2) is not the only independent premise of his argument. Why couldn't one accept (W2), but reject (W1), and for this reason *not* accept that human freedom is compatible with foreknowledge?

In response to a related criticism, Warfield says,

> The only sense in which I assume (1) to be true is in assuming it for conditional proof. I assume, for conditional proof, that (1) is true and show that the consistency of (2) and (5) follows. It follows that one view of God and omniscience is consistent with the existence of human freedom.[5]

That is, Warfield's argument is not intended as a "straight" argument for (C) given independent premises (W1) and (W2); instead, (W1) is a premise assumed only for conditional proof.

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[5]Ted A. Warfield, "On Freedom and Foreknowledge: A Reply to Two Critics," *Faith and Philosophy* 17.2 (2000): 256–257. Warfield is replying to criticisms from William Hasker, "No Easy Way Out: A Response to Warfield," *Noûs* 32 (1998).

But given this interpretation of the argument, Warfield's claim to have shown that free will is compatible with God's necessary omniscience is a mistake. If we understand Warfield's argument as a conditional proof, then what follows from its validity along with the truth of the second premise is the material conditional with the argument's first premise as antecedent and its conclusion as consequent, namely

If (1), then ◊ [(2) & (5)]

i.e.,

(6) ¬(1) ∨ ◊ [(2) & (5)]

But (6) does not express the claim that "human freedom is compatible with God's necessary existence and necessary omniscience." That claim is expressed by the conclusion of the above argument, namely

(7) ◊ [(2) & (5)]

(6), on the other hand, expresses the claim that *either* there is no necessarily omniscient being *or* the existence of such a being is consistent with the existence of human freedom.[6]

Before we move on to consider how serious this problem is, there are two points about Warfield's argument worth noting. The first is that if premise (W2) of Warfield's argument is true, then it is also necessary. Supposing for now that (W2) is true, it follows that his conditional proof establishes not just the material conditional stated above but the corresponding strict (i.e., necessitated) conditional, which is equivalent to the necessitation of the disjunction (6):

(☐6) ☐ (¬ 1 ∨ ◊ [(2) & (5)])

But this is irrelevant to the argument which follows, since, given that the disjuncts of (6) are necessary if true, (☐6) and (6) are equivalent. So in the text I just stick with the simpler (6), though it would not affect the argument which follows to discuss (☐6) instead.

The second point worth noting about Warfield's argument is that, given that the possible existence of a necessarily omniscient being is sufficient to ensure that (W3) is true, the first premise of Warfield's argument can be reformulated without loss as

(W1*) ◊ (1)

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[6]Warfield compares his use of conditional proof with the use of a conditional proof in standard presentations of the consequence argument for the incompatibility of free will and determinism. These arguments assume determinism for conditional proof and derive the conclusion that there are no free acts. It is noteworthy that the present objection to Warfield's argument has no application to the consequence argument, or other similar arguments for the incompatibility of two propositions. Setting aside the worries about the modal force of the conclusion of this sort of conditional proof which are rightly emphasized in Warfield's "Compatibilism and Incompatibilism: Some Arguments" (in *The Oxford Handbook of Metaphysics* [Oxford University Press, 2003]), conditional proofs are ideal for arguments for the incompatibility of two theses, since they establish that either the premise assumed for conditional proof is false, or the conclusion is true. But nothing parallel holds for compatibility claims.

This might appear to weaken the premise assumed for conditional proof; but, given that (1) is necessary iff it is possible, (W1) and (W1*) are equivalent, and so in what follows I'll keep to the simpler (W1).[7]

Let's return to the worry that Warfield's argument establishes the disjunction (6) rather than the target compatibility claim (7). The difference between (6) and (7) can be illustrated by comparison with debates about the compatibility of free will and determinism. Consider this claim:

(6*) Either determinism is false, or possibly (there are free actions and determinism is true).

This is surely a claim which one who takes free will and determinism to be incompatible might accept; indeed, most proponents of this view, believing that we have free will, think that determinism is false, and hence would accept this claim. Hence an argument which had (6*) as its conclusion would not be an argument for the compatibility of free will and determinism; to establish the compatibility of free will and determinism, we need an argument for the second disjunct, namely

(7*) Possibly (there are free actions and determinism is true).

Just as an argument for (6*) would not establish (7*), so Warfield's argument, which has (6) as its conclusion, does not establish (7).

A proponent of Warfield's argument might respond by saying that, given that it is a necessary truth that there *is* a necessarily omniscient being, (6) and (7) are necessarily equivalent; so, perhaps, even if we understand Warfield's argument as a conditional proof of (6), it still entails (7). Given that determinism is a contingent thesis, this would be a disanalogy with the example of (6*) and (7*).

But this is not a very plausible response to the objection. Most compatibilists think that compatibilism is not just a truth, but a necessary truth. (Any compatibilist who thinks that possibility entails necessary possibility must think this.) So compatibilists will think that compatibilism, like any necessary truth, is entailed by any set of premises. Presumably, what the defender of compatibilism should aim to provide when defending compatibilism is something more than what is provided by any randomly selected collection of premises. What is wanted, I think, is an argument whose conclusion not only entails compatibilism, but also *uncontroversially*, or *obviously*, entails this thesis. And, given this criterion, Warfield's argument fails as an argument for compatibilism, since, while (7) does uncontroversially imply compatibilism (by existential generalization), (6) does not (since it is not uncontroversial that there is a necessarily omniscient being).

So Warfield has not shown that anyone who accepts that (2) and (3) are consistent must accept the conclusion that divine foreknowledge is compatible with the existence of human freedom. He has only shown that

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[7]Here and in what follows I am assuming that S5 is correct, and hence that the accessibility relation is symmetric and transitive. While this assumption simplifies exposition, I think that the argument could be reconstructed without it.

anyone who accepts that (2) and (3) are consistent must accept that if there is a necessarily omniscient being, then that being's foreknowledge of our actions is compatible with those actions being free.

This might seem at first to be a small point; isn't the question of whether free will and foreknowledge are compatible of interest only to people who believe in a necessarily omniscient being, anyway? This would be a mistake because—among other reasons—one might think that the plausibility of belief in a necessarily omniscient being depends on whether the existence of such a being is compatible with the existence of human free will. One might come to the conclusion that there is no necessarily omniscient being on the basis of one's belief in the incompatibility of free will and divine foreknowledge, and one's belief in the existence of free actions. That is, one might have the following sort of view:

> Standard arguments clearly establish the inconsistency of the existence of free acts in a world in which there is a necessarily omniscient being. Since we have free will, these arguments therefore show that there is no such being.

(This might take the form either of a denial that God exists, or of a denial that God knows all true propositions.) The fact that the proponent of such a view would find in Warfield's conclusion nothing with which he would disagree is enough to show that Warfield's conditional proof of (6) falls short of what we should expect from an argument for compatibilism.

It is not surprising, on reflection, that Warfield's argument falls short in this way. An argument for the compatibility of free will and foreknowledge is an argument for the compatibility of the following two claims: that human beings have free will, and that some free actions are foreknown by a necessarily omniscient being. To argue for the compatibility of two claims is to argue that possibly, the conjunction of the two claims is true. That the conjunction of two claims is possible entails that each of the conjuncts is possible. It follows that any good argument for the compatibility of free will and foreknowledge must also be a good argument for the possible existence of a necessarily existing, necessarily omniscient being. Given that possible necessary existence entails necessary existence, it follows that any uncontroversially valid argument for compatibilism must also be an uncontroversially valid argument for the existence of a necessarily omniscient being.

So any direct argument for compatibilism must do something quite difficult: it must be a direct argument for (near enough) the existence of God. Once we see this, it is unsurprising that Warfield's argument—which makes no attempt to show that a necessarily omniscient being exists— fails to establish the compatibility of free will and divine foreknowledge.[8]

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[8]In response, some philosophers have asked: Couldn't this sort of objection be raised against any compatibility argument concerning claims which are necessary if possible? The short answer is: Yes. However, it's important to keep in mind that not all arguments which are called 'arguments for compatibility' really are; many would be better labeled

III. Plantinga's Free Will Defense

A problem similar to the one just discussed with respect to Warfield's argument for compatibilism also arises for Alvin Plantinga's well-known attempt to show that the existence of God is compatible with the existence of evil.[9] Plantinga states his strategy for showing the compatibility of God's existence with the existence of evil as follows:

> Suppose . . . you have a pair of propositions *p* and *q* and wish to show them consistent. . . . one way . . . is to find some proposition *r* whose conjunction with *p* is both possible, in the broadly logical sense, and entails *q*.[10]

The relevant *p* and *q* are, of course,

(8)   God is omniscient, omnipotent, and wholly good.

(9)   There is evil.

The relevant *r* is

(10) It was not within God's power to create a world containing moral good but no moral evil, and God created a world containing moral good.

Plantinga's strategy, as evidenced by the quote above, is to argue that the first and third of these are jointly consistent and jointly entail the second, which implies that the first and second are also consistent. The argument can then be laid out as follows:

Plantinga's Argument

(P1) $\Diamond$ [(8) & (10)]

(P2) $\Box$ ([(8) & (10)] $\rightarrow$ (9))

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(C) $\Diamond$ [(8) & (9)]

On the face of it, this argument shares the central defect of Warfield's argument for the compatibility of free will and foreknowledge. (P1) says that the conjunction of God's existence and (10) is possibly true; this trivially entails that it is possibly true that God exists. But if God possibly exists then God exists necessarily, and if God exists necessarily, then God actually exists. So (P1) trivially entails the existence of God. But use of this sort of premise can't be fair game if we are interested in the question

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as 'strategies for resisting arguments for incompatibility.' (I return to this below.) In other cases—as in arguments for the compatibility of free will and determinism—the relevant claims are not necessary if possible, so the present criticism would not apply.

[9]Thanks to Sam Newlands for pointing out the similarity between the arguments and for very helpful discussion of these issues.

[10]Alvin Plantinga, *God, Freedom, and Evil* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1974), 25. For similar descriptions of the strategy behind the free will defense, see: Alvin Plantinga, *God and Other Minds* (Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 1967), 147; Alvin Plantinga, "Which Worlds Could God Have Created?" *Journal of Philosophy* 70.17 (1974): 548; and Alvin Plantinga, *The Nature of Necessity* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1974), 165.

of whether God's existence is compatible with the existence of evil; given that the existence of evil is (pretty much) uncontroversial, it is simply too easy to show that God and evil are compatible if we permit the use of a premise which trivially entails that God exists.

Given this, one would expect Plantinga to provide an argument for (P1)—and Plantinga does provide such an argument, but not one which will help with the present problem. A central line of argument in Plantinga's development of the free will defense aims to show that it is possible that all creaturely essences are transworldly depraved. Plantinga points out, correctly I think, that if this is possible, then the first conjunct of (10) is possible as well. So far, this raises no problems, since the first conjunct of (10) does not entail the possible existence of God—one way in which God might have been unable to create a world containing moral good but no moral evil would have been for God not to exist, and hence unable to do anything. The key step is the move from this claim to the further claim that the conjunction of (10) and (8) is possible; one would think that to defend this inference, we'd need at least a defense of the claim that (8) is possible.

But this is not a claim that Plantinga ever directly defends. He does argue that various ways in which one might try to derive a contradiction from the conjunction of (10) and (8)—like arguments which assume that it is within God's power to actualize any possible world—are unconvincing. But this is clearly not the sort of the defense of the possibility of the conjunction of (10) and (8) which is going to convince anyone who is antecedently inclined to think that (8) is, all by itself, impossible, and hence compatible with nothing.

The reason *why* Plantinga never defends the premise that (8) is possible has less to do with his argumentative strategy than the philosophical context in which Plantinga articulated the free will defense. The premise that (8) is possible is problematic only if the possible truth of (8) entails its actual truth and, in the context in which Plantinga's classic papers on this topic were written—the debates over God and evil of the 1960s and 1970s—the existence of God was *not* taken to immediately entail God's necessary existence, as is shown by the fact that God's possible existence was often taken for granted not just by theists, but also by atheists.[11] Given

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[11]Thanks to Alvin Plantinga for helpful discussion of this point. This fact about the presuppositions of the philosophy of religion of the era comes to the surface at least once explicitly in Plantinga's discussion; after raising the question of whether God is a necessary being, he comments that "many, perhaps most, theists think that He is not." See *God, Freedom, and Evil*, 39.

One might wonder why this assumption was so common. One possibility—though this is just speculation—is that this was due to the tendency to talk about this possibility using the phrases "logically possible" and "consistent"—for it is surely not a formal logical truth that God does not exist, and so in this sense it really is indisputable that it is logically possible that God exist. This is not what Plantinga means by "possible" in his argument; he's consistently clear that he has a stronger sort of possibility ("broadly logical possibility") in mind. But perhaps the near-universal acceptance in these debates of the claim that it is possible that God exists is due to a general lack of clarity on the distinction between metaphysical/broadly logical possibility on the one hand, and a more narrowly logical sort of possibility on the other. Later I will return to the question of whether Plantinga's argument

this, the present line of argument should be read not as a criticism of Plantinga's argument as originally intended, but rather Plantinga's argument construed as a defense of the claim that the existence of God—a being with all of the traditional divine attributes, including necessary existence—is compatible with the existence of some evil. I think that, in contemporary philosophy of religion, Plantinga's argument is standardly taken to be a defense of this latter claim; my claim is that, taken in this way, the argument fails. (Below I'll consider some ways of revising Plantinga's argument which avoid, in different ways, the assumption that God exists necessarily if at all.)

In pointing out that anyone who does not believe that God actually exists should be unconvinced by Plantinga's argument—because she should deny that God possibly exists, and hence that premise (P1) is true—I am not just making the correct but uninteresting point that one who rejects the conclusion of a valid argument can always reject one of the premises. The point is not just that one can reject (P1), but that, given that the existence of evil in the world is nowadays pretty uncontroversial, it is only a slight overstatement to say that the proposition at issue in discussions of the relationship between God and evil just is the proposition that God exists. Given this, it is odd to attempt to present an argument for a view about the relationship between God and evil one of whose premises immediately entails that God exists.

A defender of Plantinga's argument might, of course, solve this problem by suggesting that (P1) is only a premise assumed for conditional proof. Then, given that premise (P2) is true, what would follow is the material conditional with (P1) as antecedent and the conclusion of the above argument as consequent:

$$\Diamond \,[(8) \ \& \ (10)] \rightarrow \Diamond \,[(8) \ \& \ (9)]^{12}$$

which is equivalent to the disjunction

$$\neg \Diamond \,[(8) \ \& \ (10)] \vee \Diamond \,[(8) \ \& \ (9)]$$

i.e.,

$$\Box \,[\neg (8) \vee \neg (10)] \vee \Diamond \,[(8) \ \& \ (9)]$$

Given that (8) is necessary if possible, this is in turn equivalent to

$$(11) \ (\neg 8) \vee [\neg \Diamond \,(10)] \vee \Diamond \,[(8) \ \& \ (9)]$$

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can be repaired by thinking of the possibility operators in his argument as expressing a weaker sort of possibility than metaphysical possibility.

[12]As in the case of Warfield's conditional proof, the only independent premise of the argument other than the premise assumed for conditional proof is necessary if true, making the conclusion a strict rather than material conditional. But, as in the case of Warfield's argument, we can safely ignore this complication since, given that both antecedent and consequent are necessary if possible, the material and corresponding strict conditionals will be equivalent.

Here we face the same dilemma as with Warfield's argument. If we avoid assuming that God's existence is possible by thinking of (P1) as a premise assumed for conditional proof, the claim established falls short of the intended compatibility claim. As with Warfield's conclusion (6), this point about (11) can be illustrated by pointing out that an atheist convinced that God does not exist by a demonstration of the inconsistency of God's existence with the existence of evil will happily accept (11) since, in his view, its first disjunct is true. Hence any argument which has (11) as its conclusion cannot be an argument for the compatibility of God's existence with the existence of evil. And we can't move from the conditional claim that if it is possible that God exists, then the existence of God is compatible with the truth of (10), and hence also with the truth of (9), to the advertised compatibility claim—that God's existence is compatible with the existence of evil—since the inference from $\lozenge\, p \rightarrow \lozenge\, (p\ \&\ q)$ to $\lozenge\, (p\ \&\ q)$ is not valid.

One might be inclined to reply to this objection to Plantinga's argument as follows:

> Of course Plantinga's argument does not show that it is possible that God exists; that was never the point. Rather, the argument was aimed at showing that there is no *special* problem about God and evil. That is, the argument was an attempt to show that if it is impossible that God exist, this fact can't be shown by the existence of evil in the world. And at this task, Plantinga's argument succeeds.

It must be admitted that it is intuitively plausible that we can show that there is no special problem about God and evil without showing that God actually exists; I'll return to this below. But it is hard to see how this thought could help with the preceding objection to Plantinga's argument. Consider the following analogy. Suppose that I show, on the basis of some known mathematical proposition p, that some further mathematical claim q is false. Mathematical claims being necessary iff true, I will then also have shown that q is impossible. Now suppose that some rival mathematician responds to my argument as follows:

> If we assume that q is possible, we can derive from this the result that p and q are consistent. Hence there can be no special problem about the relationship between p and q; if q really is impossible, which for all I've said might be the case, this can't be shown by p.

It should be clear that this would be a poor response. An argument for the compatibility of p and q which has an impossible proposition as a premise does not show that there is no special problem about p and q; like any argument with an impossible proposition as a premise, it shows nothing at all. And the same can be said about the attempted defense of Plantinga's argument just sketched: if (8) is not possible, and hence (P1) is not possible, the argument can't show *anything* about the relationship between (8) and (9), and so in particular cannot show that there is no special problem about God and evil.

One might give two sorts of responses to these arguments. First, one might argue that the foregoing criticisms miss their mark, and that the best interpretations of Warfield's and Plantinga's compatibility arguments avoid the problems outlined above. In §§ IV and V, I'll discuss two versions of this strategy—one which changes the claims whose compatibility is being shown, and one which changes the interpretation of "compatibility." Then, in §§ VI–VIII, I'll turn to a second sort of response to the present argument: one which says that Warfield's and Plantinga's arguments aren't, in the end, best thought of as arguments for compatibility claims at all.

IV. Reply 1: Changing the Subject

The problem with both Warfield's and Plantinga's arguments is that they assume the possible truth of some claim which trivially entails the existence of God. Since God exists necessarily if God exists possibly, each assumes the truth of a proposition which trivially entails that God actually exists. Since the existence of God (or, more specifically, a God with certain characteristics) is a proposition centrally in dispute in the relevant compatibility debates, this sort of assumption is a problematic one. One obvious way around this problem would be to change the intended conclusions of the two arguments so that they did not make any claims about God.

This strategy is not as absurd as it might initially sound. One might think, for example, that what is centrally at issue in disputes about the problem of evil is not the compatibility of evil with the existence of a necessarily existing God, but rather just the compatibility of evil with the existence of an omnipotent and omnibenevolent being—whether or not that being exists necessarily. A proponent of Plantinga's free will defense might, then, revise

(8)   God is omniscient, omnipotent, and wholly good.

to

(8*) Some being is omniscient, omnipotent, and wholly good.

giving us the following argument:

The Revised Plantinga Argument

(P1) ◊ [(8*) & (10)]

(P2) □ ([(8*) & (10)] → (9))

(C) ◊ [(8*) & (9)]

The advantage here is that (8*), unlike (8), is not (or at least not obviously) necessary if possible. So someone who denies that there actually is an omniscient, omnipotent, and wholly good being might without absurdity grant that (8*) is possible, and so might without absurdity grant that (P1*) is true. And this concession is just what Plantinga's free will defense needs to get off the ground.

This would, of course, weaken the conclusion of Plantinga's argument; that argument would then show that evil is compatible with the existence of an omniscient, omnipotent, and wholly good being, but would not show that evil is compatible with the existence of an omniscient, omnipotent, wholly good *and* necessarily existing being. But one might reasonably think that this difference needn't matter very much. After all, it is hard to see how there could be a special problem about the compatibility of evil with a necessarily existing being; if there is a problem about evil and God's existence, it surely turns only on God's omnipotence, omniscience, and omnibenevolence. This is presumably why standard presentations of the argument from evil never make use of the assumption that God exists necessarily.

While this version of Plantinga's argument does not assume that God possibly exists, it does assume that it is possible that an omniscient, omnipotent, and wholly good being exists. And the proposition that (8*) is possible is not an assumption that everyone will grant. Some philosophers have argued that the idea of an omnipotent being leads to contradiction, and others have argued the same about an omniscient being.[13] One might be inclined to say that we could simply bracket these concerns—since we're just concerned with the problem of evil, can't we just assume that there is some solution or other to the paradoxes of omnipotence and omniscience? But this is an instance of the same mistake discussed at the end of the previous section: if it is impossible for a being to be omnipotent, then premise (P1*) of the revised Plantinga argument is a necessary falsehood, and Plantinga's argument will fail for just the same reasons as our imaginary mathematical compatibility argument.

Further, it is worth noting that not all propositions which are necessary if true wear this property on their sleeves; theoretical identities of the sort discussed by Kripke in *Naming and Necessity* are a well-known example. It may be, for all we've said, that (8*) is such a proposition and that it, like (8), *is* necessary if true.[14] In this case, the revised Plantinga argument would face the same problems as the original.

All of this shows that the assumption that (8*) is possible is a substantial assumption; however, even so, it might seem that it is an assumption which (unlike the proposition that (8) is possible) at least some non-theists should be willing to grant. So the shift from Plantinga's argument to the revised Plantinga argument does offer some promise for resolving the problem discussed above. Unfortunately, an analogous fix for Warfield's argument is not available.

Recall that Warfield's argument, as presented above, assumes the possibility of

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[13]For discussion of the paradoxes of omnipotence, see van Inwagen, *The Problem of Evil*, Lecture 2; for discussion of the paradoxes of omniscience, see Alvin Plantinga and Patrick Grim, "Truth, Omniscience, and Cantorian Arguments: An Exchange," *Philosophical Studies* 71 (1993).

[14]Kenny Boyce has developed an interesting argument for just this conclusion, which he plans to develop in future work.

(1)   God exists in all possible worlds and is omniscient in all possible worlds.

which, of course, is necessary if it is possible. Were we to pursue the 'changing the subject' strategy, we should seek to replace (1) with some proposition which does not have this property, such as

(1*)   Some being is omniscient.

The switch from (1) to (1*) does have the virtue that someone who does not believe in the existence of a being which knows every true proposition might grant that (1*) is possible, which would help to get Warfield's argument off the ground. However, changing the first premise of Warfield's argument from (1) to (1*) would weaken the conclusion of Warfield's argument to an unacceptable degree. Warfield's argument would then entail the compatibility of free action with the existence of a being which knows every truth, but (for all the argument establishes) could have failed to know some truths.

But this is simply not the relevant compatibility claim. Standard arguments for the incompatibility of free will and foreknowledge depend essentially on some premise such as

Necessarily, if God believes that *p*, then it is true that *p*.[15]

These arguments would not survive weakening this necessitated conditional to a mere material conditional. So standard arguments for the incompatibility of free will and foreknowledge (unlike standard arguments for the incompatibility of evil and an omnipotent, omnibenevolent being) do depend essentially on the fact that God is supposed to not only have certain perfections, but also have those perfections in every possible world. Hence one can't offer a counter to those arguments by showing that free will is compatible with foreknowledge by a being which happens to be, but could fail to be, omniscient, and the problems with Warfield's argument can't be solved by switching from (1) to (1*).[16]

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[15]See, for example, the definitions of infallibility in Zagzebski's "Foreknowledge and Free Will" and Warfield's "Ockhamism and Molinism." See also § II.xii.4 of the classic presentation of the argument for incompatibilism in Jonathan Edwards, *An Inquiry into the Modern Prevailing Notions of the Freedom of the Will* (Edinburgh: Thomas Nelson, 1754/1933).

[16]One might suggest instead that we switch from (1) to (1**):

(1**) Some being is essentially omniscient.

This is stronger than (1*), and in a significant way, since (1**) but not (1*) would be enough to make it a necessary truth that if the relevant being believes some proposition, that proposition is true (the premise in standard arguments for incompatibilism cited above). (1**) might also seem to have the advantage over (1) that it is not obviously necessary if possible, so that a nontheist at least might grant that (1**) is possible without believing that an omniscient being actually exists. However, if one replaces (1) with (1**) throughout Warfield's argument, that argument is invalid: (W3) would no longer follow from the first premise, since there could be a world in which the relevant essentially omniscient being does not exist and for this reason does not know that (3) is true in that world. Thanks to Kenny Boyce for helpful discussion of these points.

V. Reply 2: Changing the Modality

Many philosophers will have the intuition that something is fundamentally wrong with the sort of worry being raised here about compatibility arguments: surely it is possible to show that two claims are compatible without showing that those claims are true, even if one or both of the relevant claims is necessarily true iff it is possibly true. If this line of thought is to make sense, we plainly need some interpretation of 'compatible' other than the one employed so far, according to which a pair of propositions is compatible iff the conjunction of the two is possibly true.

Here is one way to think in broad terms about this strategy. Both Warfield and Plantinga aim to show that a certain conjunction—the conjunction of free will and foreknowledge in Warfield's case, and the conjunction of the existence of evil and God in Plantinga's case—has a certain property. For their arguments to work, they must assume that the proposition that God exists also has this property.[17] The problems above all result from the identification of this property with metaphysical possibility (or, equivalently, broadly logical possibility). The present suggestion is that we find some *other* property of the relevant conjunction—other than the property of being metaphysically possible—which avoids these problems.

Let's think about this line of reply more concretely in connection with Plantinga's argument:

(P1) $\lozenge$ [(8) & (10)]
(P2) $\square$ ([(8) & (10)] $\rightarrow$ (9))

(C) $\lozenge$ [(8) & (9)]

The problem discussed above with Plantinga's compatibility argument stems from the interpretation of the "$\lozenge$" in (P1) as expressing metaphysical possibility. What we are looking for is, in effect, an interpretation of this "$\lozenge$" which is weaker than this, such that "$\lozenge$ (8)" (and hence "$\lozenge$ [(8) & (10)]") does not trivially entail that an omnipotent and omnibenevolent being actually exists, and does not assert a proposition which no non-theist who is not exceptionally confused should accept.

There are any number of such interpretations to choose from. Here are a few initially plausible candidates:

Narrow logical possibility: *p* is narrowly logically possible iff ¬*p* is not a formal logical truth.

Extended logical possibility: *p* is extendedly logically possible iff ¬*p* is not a formal logical consequence of a set of propositions, each of which is self-evident.

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[17]Here I'm assuming that whatever property is attributed to the conjunction distributes over conjunction. This will hold for any sort of possibility, since for a conjunction to be, in any sense, possible, the conjuncts must also be, in that sense, possible. I discuss an alternative in the final section of the paper.

Epistemic possibility: *p* is epistemically possible iff ¬*p* is not an a priori consequence of a set of propositions, each of which is known to be true.[18]

There are no doubt other possibilities; but each of these has the important virtue that saying that a proposition is possible in any of these senses does *not* imply that that proposition is metaphysically possible; it is very plausible that there are metaphysically necessary truths which are not logical truths, not logical consequences of self-evident propositions, and not a priori consequences of propositions known to be true. So asserting that the proposition that God necessarily exists is possible in any of these three senses does not obviously entail that it is metaphysically possible that it is necessary that God exists, and hence does not obviously entail that God does actually exist. This is all to the good.[19]

However, this benefit of the reinterpretation of the modal operator in (P1) comes at a cost. This is because whatever interpretation we give to the "◊" in (P1) will also have to be the interpretation we give to the "◊" in (C), on pain of making the argument invalid.

To see why, let's suppose, to fix ideas, that we interpret the "◊" in (P1) as expressing epistemic possibility and the "◊" in the conclusion as expressing metaphysical possibility. We also need to fix the interpretation of the modal operator in (P2); let's simply grant that this expresses epistemic necessity, to make the premise as strong as possible. Even given this, the inference from (P1) and (P2) to the conclusion would be clearly invalid, were we to interpret the "◊" of (P1) as expressing epistemic possibility and the "◊" of the conclusion as expressing metaphysical possibility. After all, the claim that the conjunction of (8) and (10) is epistemically possible says that there is some epistemically possible world in which their conjunction is true. But this does not—or had better not, if the shift to epistemic possibility is not to be pointless—imply that there is some metaphysically possible world at which this conjunction is true. So even if (P2) says that every epistemically possible world at which (P1) is true is also one at which the conclusion of Plantinga's argument is true, this does not entail that there is any metaphysically possible world in which the conclusion is true.

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[18]Here and in what follows, I'm being a bit sloppy about the use of variables over propositions vs. schematic sentence letters. Usually, I think, this is harmless—but it is worth flagging the fact that, in the above characterizations of these three modal notions, the value of 'p' is supposed to be the sort of thing which can be a formal logical truth (hence, one thinks, a sentence) and the kind of thing which can be known (hence, one thinks, a proposition). Here I'm just granting the defender of Plantinga's argument the assumption that this looseness can be fixed in some appropriate way.

[19]I'm not suggesting that either Plantinga or Warfield had any of these interpretations in mind. Plantinga is very clear that he has "broadly logical possibility" in mind, which is equivalent to the interpretation of "◊" as expressing metaphysical possibility which I've been employing (see Plantinga's *The Nature of Necessity*, 2–9). Warfield talks about propositions being "logically" consistent or equivalent, without specifying whether he, like Plantinga, has broadly logical possibility, or something like narrow or extended logical possibility, in mind.

The moral here is general. If we have two different interpretations of the "◊"s in (P1) and the conclusion, then the argument will be valid only if the interpretation given to the "◊" in (C) is weaker than or equivalent to the interpretation given to the "◊" in (P1).

This places a second constraint on our interpretation of the possibility claim in (P1): the sort of possibility ascribed to the conjunction of (8) and (10), and hence also to (8), must be strong enough to make the conclusion of Plantinga's argument a substantial, interesting claim. This second constraint, together with the first, leads to a sort of dilemma which might be put like this:

> The "change the modality" line of response to the foregoing objection to Plantinga's compatibility argument is successful iff we can come up with some interpretation of "◊" such that (i) (P1) does not assert a proposition which all non-theists are explicitly committed to rejecting, and (ii) the conclusion of Plantinga's argument is non-trivial.

The problem is that it is not obvious that there is any interpretation which satisfies both (i) and (ii).

Let's consider first the first, weakest, interpretation suggested above, according to which "◊" expresses narrow logical possibility. This interpretation has the virtue that even proponents of the argument from evil are likely to grant (P1); whatever doubts one may have about the proposition that God exists, its negation is clearly not a formal logical truth. Nonetheless, this interpretation pretty clearly fails, thanks to horn (ii) of the dilemma: it makes the conclusion of Plantinga's argument far too weak. On this interpretation, the conclusion of Plantinga's argument states that the negation of the conjunction of (8) and (9) is not a formal logical truth. But this is surely a claim which anyone should grant; of course it is not provable that the conjunction of (8) and (9) is false if we limit ourselves only to standard logical rules of inference and premises which are truths of first-order logic. And this is just to point out that the conclusion of Plantinga's argument, on this interpretation, does not express any sort of substantial or interesting claim about the relationship between God and evil. After all, the formula

$\neg$ (x is bright red all over and x is bright green all over)

is not a formal logical truth, but this hardly shows that the properties of being bright green and bright red all over are, in any interesting sense, compatible.

So let's consider instead the third (strongest) interpretation above, according to which "◊" expresses epistemic possibility. On this interpretation, the conclusion of Plantinga's argument is a bit weaker than one might have thought—it expresses not the claim that God and evil are genuinely compatible, but rather the claim that we can't deduce a priori, on the basis of propositions we know, that they are incompatible. But even if the conclusion is a bit weaker than one might wish, it is still surely a substantial claim: it is a claim which is denied by proponents of the argument from

evil, who think that all of the premises of their arguments for the incompatibility of God and evil are known, and that each inference required by the argument is a priori.

However, the problems with this interpretation are rather with horn (i) of the dilemma. Virtually all philosophers who are convinced by arguments for the incompatibility of (8) and (9) think that we can know that there is evil in the world; therefore, virtually any philosopher who thinks that we can know that (8) and (9) are incompatible will also think that we can know that (8) is false. Hence such philosophers are explicitly committed to the claim that we can know that there is no omnibenevolent and omnipotent being, and hence that (8) is not epistemically possible.

Again, it is important to stress that I am not here making the confused accusation that Plantinga's argument "begs the question" on the grounds that anyone who denies the conclusion must, on pain of contradiction, be committed to rejecting one of the premises. This is an accusation which could be brought against any valid argument, and hence can't be taken seriously as a criticism. The problem is rather that the debate about whether the argument from evil is convincing just is a debate about whether the conjunction of the claim that God exists and the claim that evil exists is epistemically possible. Given that the main players on both sides agree that it is epistemically necessary that there is evil in the world, it is at best dialectically odd to begin an argument on this topic by assuming that it is epistemically possible that God exists.[20]

While the preceding paragraphs illustrate the force of our dilemma for the "change the modality" response, they also illustrate that this dilemma is not quite airtight. After all, one might well be an agnostic about the relationship between God and evil: one might think (even granted that it is epistemically necessary that evil exists) that it is epistemically possible that there is an omnipotent and omnibenevolent being, and that it is epistemically possible that there is not. Such agnostics should accept (P1) on the "epistemic possibility" interpretation, and hence also should accept the argument's conclusion. This is all to the good. But this is of course a limited success: these agnostics will not be convinced by the argument to give up their agnosticism, and endorse the conclusion that God and evil are genuinely compatible, since the conclusion of the argument, on the present "epistemic possibility" interpretation, does not state that the existence of God and evil are genuinely compatible. Instead, it says (what our agnostics already believed) that *for all we know*, it is possible for God and evil to coexist.

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[20]What about the middle interpretation, on which $\Diamond p$ is true iff $\neg p$ is not a formal logical consequence of a set of propositions, each of which is self-evident? The problems here are a blend of the problems found with the interpretation of the modal operator as expressing narrowly logical and epistemic possibility. On the one hand, someone who thinks that the premises of some version of the argument from evil are all obviously true will of course reject (P1) on this interpretation, for familiar reasons. On the other hand, the conclusion of the argument seems unpalatably weak on this interpretation: all it says is that, even though it may be knowable that God and evil are incompatible, this conclusion falls short of being self-evident.

Parallel points about the re-interpretation of modal operators apply to Warfield's argument. One initial complication is that, on the formulation given above, the first premise of Warfield's argument contains no "possibility" operator. But, as noted above, given that (1) is true iff possible, the argument can be reformulated without loss as follows:

(W1*) $\lozenge$ (1)

(W2) $\lozenge$ [(2) & (3)]

(W3) $\square$ [(3) $\leftrightarrow$ (5)] (from W1*)

(C) $\lozenge$ (2 & 5) (from W2 & W3)

The relationship between (W1*) and the conclusion of Warfield's argument is, for present purposes, exactly parallel to the relationship between (P1) and the conclusion of Plantinga's argument. And hence exactly the same dilemma applies: one can weaken the modal operator in (W1*) but, on pain of making the argument invalid, one must also weaken the modal operator in the conclusion.

To see this, consider the relationship between (W1*) and (W3), which is supposed to follow from it. (W3) might as well be expressed as

(W3*) $\neg\lozenge\neg$ [(3) $\leftrightarrow$ (5)]

Our question is: if we interpret the "$\lozenge$" in (W1*) in one of the three ways sketched above, must we also interpret the "$\lozenge$" in (W3*) in this way, if the inference from (W1*) to (W3*) is to be valid?

Suppose as above that we interpret the "$\lozenge$" in (W1*) as expressing epistemic possibility and the "$\lozenge$" in (W3*) as expressing metaphysical possibility. We know that the biconditional of (3) and (5) is entailed by (1); let's also suppose, as is plausible, that this is a priori, so that the disjunction of the negation of (1) and the biconditional of (3) and (5) is epistemically necessary. Even given this, the inference from (W1*) to (W3*) would be clearly invalid, were we to interpret the "$\lozenge$" of (W1*) as expressing epistemic possibility and the "$\lozenge$" of (W3*) as expressing metaphysical possibility. After all, the claim that (1) is epistemically possible says that there is some epistemically possible world in which it is true that God is necessarily omniscient. But this doesn't imply that there is some metaphysically possible world at which this proposition is true. (If it does, then the proposed weakening of (W1*) is no weakening at all.) So even if (1) does imply the biconditional of (3) and (5) in the sense explained above, from this fact plus the epistemic possibility of (1) we get only the conclusion that there is some epistemically possible world in which the biconditional of (3) and (5) is true, which does not imply that it is true at any, let alone every, metaphysically possible world.[21]

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[21]I'm simplifying here for ease of exposition in a few ways which don't matter for the argument, but which are worth flagging. First, I am ignoring the question of how metaphysical and epistemic modal operators interact; the claim that it is epistemically possible that it is metaphysically necessary that God is omniscient presumably entails a bit more than

And, crucially, the same applies to the "◊"s in (W3*) and the conclusion of Warfield's argument, no matter what interpretation is given to the "◊" in (W2). Hence, as with Plantinga's argument, if Warfield's argument is to be valid, the interpretation of "◊" in his conclusion must be weaker than or equivalent to the interpretation given to the "◊" in his first premise. The trick, again as above, is to find some interpretation of these modal operators such that (W1*) does not state a proposition which would be clearly unacceptable to all non-compatibilists, and yet such that it does not trivialize the conclusion of Warfield's argument. The difficulties in satisfying these two constraints are analogous to those which surfaced in our discussion of Plantinga's argument.

To sum up: both Warfield's and Plantinga's compatibility arguments face the same problem. A proponent of either sort of argument might try to solve this problem by either changing the subject of the argument or changing the modality at work in the argument. The first line of response provides some help for Plantinga's argument, but none for Warfield's. The second, 'change the modality' line of response faces a dilemma which looks, at the least, difficult to resolve.

In what follows I will set these responses to the side, and assume that Plantinga's and Warfield's arguments fail to establish interesting compatibility claims. Given this, what might arguments like Warfield's and Plantinga's show?

VI. Conditional and Unconditional Compatibility Claims

In the case of Warfield's argument, the answer to this question is fairly clear. Even if, as emphasized above, one cannot validly infer ◊ (*p* & *q*) from ◊ *p* → ◊ (*p* & *q*), sometimes the latter, conditional, compatibility claim is itself a claim of great interest. This will be true in just those cases in which even those who agree about the possible truth of *p* disagree about the compatibility of *p* and *q*; and the case of free will and divine foreknowledge is such a case, since many philosophers who agree that there is a necessarily omniscient being disagree about the compatibility of free will and foreknowledge. So even if Warfield's argument establishes only the conditional compatibility claim expressed by (6) rather than the unconditional compatibility claim expressed by (7), the former is hardly a trivial claim.

Does Warfield's argument succeed in establishing this conditional compatibility claim? It succeeds in establishing this claim if premise (W2)

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that there is at least one epistemically possible world with respect to which it is true that God is omniscient, even if it is not quite clear what, exactly, it does entail. But what matters here is only that it does not imply that there is a metaphysically possible world at which it is true that God is necessarily omniscient. If it does, then the detour through epistemic possibility is pointless.

Second, once we introduce different sorts of modality, talk about "entailment" and "implication" becomes ambiguous. I specify what sort of entailment I have in mind where it matters; in the other places, I think that any of the relevant notions of entailment could be used.

of his argument is true. Warfield claims that almost all philosophers will accept this premise; as he puts it, "the problem of logical fatalism has been solved."[22] But, as Warfield notes, the assumption required by his argument is not merely that the arguments traditionally grouped under the heading of "arguments for logical fatalism" have all been shown to be unconvincing, but rather that logical fatalism is *false*: that, possibly, (2) and (3) are both true.[23] So the claim that logical fatalism is false is, like compatibilism, a claim about the possible truth of a certain conjunction. The conjunction of (2) and (3) is

> Plantinga will freely climb Mt. Rushmore in 2020 A.D. & it was true in 50 A.D. that Plantinga will climb Mt. Rushmore in 2020 A.D.

Just as compatibilism is the claim that an existential generalization of the conjunction of (3) and (5) is possibly true, so the negation of logical fatalism is the claim that an existential generalization of the conjunction of (2) and (3) is possibly true, namely

The Negation of Logical Fatalism

> Possibly, there is an agent and an action such that it was true at some time *t* that the agent will perform the action at some later time *t**, and the agent freely performs the action at *t**.

Since Warfield's argument is valid, if logical fatalism is false, then, if a necessarily omniscient being exists, foreknowledge and free will must be compatible. The key remaining question, then, is whether incompatibilist believers in a necessarily omniscient being should be worried about their commitment to the truth of logical fatalism.

Why might one be inclined to deny logical fatalism? One worry is that (given the existence of free actions) logical fatalism seems to involve giving up a principle of bivalence for propositions; a second (related) worry is that we're strongly inclined to say, after some free action has occurred, that past beliefs that that action would occur were true. But there is room for doubt about how strong these reasons are. As for the first worry, there are, plausibly, independent reasons to deny bivalence.[24] As for the second worry, one might doubt the reliability, in ordinary language, of the distinction between having believed a proposition which is now true and having believed a proposition which was then true.[25]

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[22]Warfield, "Divine Foreknowledge," 80.

[23]Warfield was explicit about this in his original paper. See "Divine Foreknowledge," note 3.

[24]These include the sorites and Liar paradoxes; for discussion see, among other places, Scott Soames, *Understanding Truth* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999).

[25]Alternatively, one might try to accommodate the intuition that past predictions were true while still endorsing logical fatalism by adopting the sort of relativist semantics discussed in John MacFarlane, "Future Contingents and Relative Truth," *Philosophical Quarterly* 53 (2003).

One might also be inclined to deny logical fatalism simply because there are no plausible arguments for the impossibility of the conjunction of free actions and future tense truths about those actions. (This seems to be the sort of reason that Warfield has in mind.) But, even if all of the arguments commonly thought of as "arguments for logical fatalism" are fallacious, there are reasons for endorsing logical fatalism which are not so easily dismissed.

It is by now a familiar point that if two propositions are compatible, then each must be possibly true. Given this, it is clear that anyone who denies that either of the relevant propositions is possible should deny the relevant compatibility claim. The negation of logical fatalism says that free actions are compatible with certain future tense truths and, as such, trivially implies that free actions are possible; so, anyone who thinks that free actions are impossible (or anyone who thinks that truths about the future are impossible) should be a logical fatalist. However, this is certainly a minority view, especially among theists, and in what follows I will set this motivation for logical fatalism to the side.[26]

But there are two more important reasons why one might be a logical fatalist. One is that, as Michael Rea has shown, a plausible case can be made that the conjunction of libertarianism about free will and presentism entails that there can be no true future tense propositions predicating free actions of agents. If presentism and libertarianism are not just truths but necessary truths, it follows that it is impossible that there be true future tense propositions predicating free actions of agents. And if it is not possible that propositions of this sort be true, it follows that logical fatalism is true.[27]

A second line of argument is closer to our present concerns. It would seem that any theological fatalist who believes in the existence of a necessarily omniscient being *should* think that there is a persuasive argument from the supposition that there are future tense truths about some action to the conclusion that that action will be unfree: if there are such truths, then they would be known by a necessarily existing and necessarily omniscient being; and foreknowledge by such a being is inconsistent with freedom because . . . (fill in your favorite argument for incompatibilism here) . . . therefore such actions would not be free. Given the availability of this sort of argument, the fact that some incompatibilists deny logical fatalism can only be due to the confused thought that the merits of logical fatalism should be evaluated independently of arguments for theological fatalism.

This sort of argument for logical fatalism brings out the sense in which Warfield's argument is toothless when confronted with standard arguments for the incompatibility of free will and foreknowledge. It isn't just

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[26]An exception is Derk Pereboom, *Living Without Free Will: The Case for Hard Incompatibilism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

[27]See Michael Rea, "Presentism and Fatalism," *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* 84 (2006).

that (as Warfield points out) his compatibility argument does not show where such arguments fail. It's that anyone who finds such an argument convincing will thereby be in possession of an argument which entails the falsity of a premise of Warfield's argument. And on this point there is no symmetry between arguments for incompatibilism and Warfield's argument for compatibilism, since the former use no premises against which Warfield has given us an argument.

On the other hand, we should not overlook the sense in which this sort of argument from theological fatalism to logical fatalism is just Warfield's argument in reverse; and this brings out the fact that, on one central point, Warfield's argument is unquestionably correct: if there is a necessarily omniscient being, then theological and logical fatalism stand or fall together. His argument is thus an example of how an argument which bills itself as an argument for the compatibility of two propositions, one of which is necessary iff it is possible, might fail as a compatibility argument, but succeed in demonstrating a weaker conclusion of interest.

VII. Two Uses of the Free Will Defense

Above I noted that, even if Warfield's argument fails to establish the compatibility of free will and divine foreknowledge, the corresponding conditional compatibility claim—that if a necessarily omniscient being exists, then free will and foreknowledge are compatible—is still an important and substantive claim. But we can't say the same thing about Plantinga's free will defense. After all, the conditional claim which Plantinga's argument does establish—that if God exists, then God and evil are compatible—is a claim which would be accepted by anyone who either denies the existence of God or affirms the existence of evil—and that is practically everyone.

I suggest that, for this reason, Plantinga's free will defense is best viewed not as a positive compatibility argument at all, but rather as a recipe for blocking arguments for the incompatibility of God and evil. For example, the version of the argument from evil against the existence of God defended in Mackie's "Evil and Omnipotence" pretty clearly contains an inference from a world w's being possible to its having been within God's power to actualize w.[28] Plantinga's discussion shows that, given some plausible assumptions about free will, this inference—Leibniz's Lapse—is a mistake.[29] This history of the argument from evil shows that this is no anomaly: it is difficult to formulate a formally valid version of the argument which doesn't include a premise which Plantinga has shown the theist how to resist. Shouldn't this be enough to count Plantinga's response to the argument from evil a success, even if he fails to show the compatibility of God and evil?[30]

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[28]J. L. Mackie, "Evil and Omnipotence," *Mind* 64 (1955): 209.

[29]See, among other places, Plantinga's *God, Freedom, and Evil*, 31–44 and "Which Worlds Could God Have Created?" 539–548.

[30]Though Plantinga himself (*God, Freedom, and Evil*, §I.a.3) seems not to be satisfied with this as a stopping point. Thanks to Sam Newlands for calling this passage to my attention.

After all, the argument from evil is essentially an argument *against* the existence of God. All that the believer in God should be expected to do, it would seem, is to show why the various versions of that argument should be unconvincing to either theists or agnostics.[31] By analogy, one doesn't require objectors to cosmological arguments for the existence of God to show that it is possible for contingent things to exist without God existing—after all, many object to cosmological arguments while still thinking that God exists necessarily, and they don't think that it is possible for anything to be the case without God existing, let alone for there to be contingent things.

Even so, there is an important difference between the view of the free will defense I am suggesting and the claims Plantinga makes on its behalf. Were Plantinga correct in claiming that he had shown that evil and the existence of an omnipotent and omnibenevolent God are genuinely compatible, he would have shown something which entailed the unsoundness of *any* attempt to demonstrate the incompatibility of evil and God's existence. On the present view, the free will defense provides no such guarantee. It may be that Plantinga's exposition of the free will defense provides the resources to resist all known formulations of the argument from evil; but that does not foreclose future attempts to formulate such an argument, which may or may not require new resources, and must be taken as they come.

So, as in the case of Warfield's argument, we can conclude that Plantinga's free will defense shows something of substance—it shows how to resist many of the most important arguments against the existence of God. But (as with Warfield's argument) to describe the free will defense as showing that God's existence is consistent, or compatible, with the existence of evil is to invite confusion.

VIII. Compatibility and Independence

The principal conclusion of this paper is a negative one: any argument for the compatibility of two propositions must also be an argument for the possibility of each of those propositions. Hence it is impossible to argue for the compatibility of two propositions, one of which is necessary if possible, without arguing for the truth of that proposition. Arguments which fail to establish the truth of the relevant proposition must therefore also fail to establish the relevant compatibility claim.

One way out of this problem is to replace propositions which are necessary if possible with closely related propositions which don't have this property; another is to scale back one's ambitions from demonstration of genuine compatibility to demonstration of some sort of epistemic or more narrowly logical possibility. As discussed in §§ 4–5 above, however, sometimes neither of these options looks especially promising. In this case, it

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[31]This is the way the free will defense is presented in, for example, van Inwagen's *The Problem of Evil*.

seems that compatibility arguments are best read either as arguments for conditional rather than unconditional compatibility claims (as in the case of Warfield's argument, as discussed in §6) or as providing the resources for rebuttal of attempted arguments for the incompatibility of the relevant propositions (as in the case of Plantinga's argument, as discussed in §7).

But one might reasonably be dissatisfied with these ways out. Surely, one might think, it should be possible to show that p and q are, in some important sense, independent of each other without showing that either is true—even if one or both is necessary if possible.[32] One might express this by saying that the truth of p doesn't *make* q true or false, or that q is not true or false *in virtue of* the truth of p. These locutions are not naturally understood as expressing claims about epistemic possibility, or as claims about narrowly logical possibility—they are naturally understood as expressing some metaphysical dependence relation between propositions which is more fine-grained than the relation of necessary consequence.

Perhaps claims about the compatibility of, for example, free will and foreknowledge should be thought of as dependence claims of this sort: as saying that, whatever the modal status of the conjunction of the claim that some actions are free with the claim that those actions are foreknown by a necessarily omniscient being, the claim that actions are foreknown by a necessarily omniscient being does not *make* the proposition that those actions are free false. Or, to put the same point another way: our actions are not unfree *in virtue of* their being foreknown by a necessarily omniscient being.

In the present context, the difference between these sorts of claims of metaphysical dependence and compatibility claims is crucial. Intuitively, proponents of (for example) the compatibility of free will and foreknowledge are interested in saying something about the metaphysical relations between two propositions without saying anything about the metaphysical status of either. But the idea that what we're after are compatibility claims makes nonsense of this intuitive idea. To say that p and q are compatible is to attribute to their conjunction a property—possibility—which distributes over conjunction, and so must also be a property that p and q have in their own right. This is so whether we're talking about metaphysical, epistemic, or narrowly logical possibility.

Metaphysical dependence claims seem to avoid this unwanted consequence. To say that q is not false in virtue of p is not to attribute any property to the conjunction of p and q—unlike compatibility claims, dependence claims predicate a non-symmetric relation of the relevant pair of propositions. And more importantly, the claim that the truth of p does not make q false does not seem to imply that p or q is metaphysically, or even epistemically, possible.

This is both good news and bad news for proponents of compatibility arguments. On the one hand, compatibility claims are naturally recast as

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[32]Thanks to Sam Newlands and Antony Eagle for pressing this point.

claims about whether one proposition makes another true, or is true in virtue of another. These claims seem intelligible, and seem to avoid the sorts of objections discussed above.

On the other hand, it is one thing for a proposition to seem intelligible, and something else for it to be well-understood enough for us to know how to construct an argument for a proposition of this sort. It is, to say the least, not obvious how compatibility arguments like Warfield's and Plantinga's might be recast so as to show that certain dependence claims are true. But if the foregoing argument is correct—and the fallback options discussed in §§ 6–7 are not satisfactory—this may be the direction in which the proponents of compatibility arguments should look.[33]

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