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COMPATIBILISM AND THE SINLESSNESS OF THE REDEEMED IN HEAVEN

Steven B. Cowan

In a recent issue of *Faith and Philosophy*, Timothy Pawl and Kevin Timpe seek to respond to the so-called “Problem of Heavenly Freedom,” the problem of explaining how the redeemed in heaven can be free yet incapable of sinning. In the course of offering their solution, they argue that compatibilism is inadequate as a solution because it (1) undermines the free will defense against the logical problem of evil, and (2) exacerbates the problem of evil by making God the “author of sin.” In this paper, I respond to these charges and argue that compatibilism can offer a satisfactory explanation for the sinlessness of the redeemed in heaven. I also raise some problems for Pawl’s and Timpe’s incompatibilist solution.

It is a relatively uncontroversial item of Christian orthodoxy that the redeemed in heaven are incapable of sinning. Having been finally and fully glorified, purged of all remaining corruption and filled with only holy desires and dispositions, doing evil is not just something that the redeemed will not do, but is something that they simply cannot do. The question immediately arises, then: Is there free will in heaven? For the libertarian, who believes that human freedom and responsibility are incompatible with determinism, the impeccability of the redeemed in heaven creates a serious tension. For if the redeemed in heaven cannot sin, then one might conclude that there is no (or at least no morally significant) free will in heaven. And if there is no morally significant free will in heaven—where humans are at their best and are, we might say, most fully human—then we might also wonder what is so important about free will on earth.

In a recent article, Timothy Pawl and Kevin Timpe address this so-called *Problem of Heavenly Freedom*.¹ As they put it, “One may wonder: how can someone be free and yet incapable of sinning? If the redeemed are kept from sinning, their wills must be reined in, at least in some way. And, if their wills are reined in, it doesn’t seem right to say that they are *free*.”² Pawl and Timpe believe that it is part of traditional orthodoxy that the redeemed in heaven *are* free, and it is this belief that creates the tension

¹Timothy Pawl and Kevin Timpe, “Incompatibilism, Sin, and Free Will in Heaven,” *Faith and Philosophy* 26.4 (October 2009): 398–419.

²*Ibid.*, 399 (emphasis in original).



for the libertarian. The problem is to defend the consistency of the following claims:

- (1) The redeemed in heaven have free will, and
- (2) The redeemed in heaven are no longer capable of sinning.

Pawl and Timpe discuss five possible solutions to the Problem of Heavenly Freedom, four of which they reject in favor of their own preferred solution. The first solution they reject is *compatibilism* which, at face value, offers the simplest and most straightforward resolution. The dilemma posed in the Problem of Heavenly Freedom is generated only on the assumption that the freedom mentioned in (1) above is *libertarian* freedom. The compatibilist, of course, understands human freedom in a way that is compatible with determinism. Specifically, a compatibilist contends that an agent is free (and morally responsible) just in case his actions are the result of his own desires and intentions exercised without external coercions or constraints. Or, as Lynne Rudder Baker puts it, a person is appropriately free if she "has the will that she wants to have."³ On this view of freedom, the Problem of Heavenly Freedom evaporates. For the redeemed in heaven, having characters that are perfectly formed to want only what is good and right, will consistently *freely* choose only what is good and right and will be incapable of choosing what is wrong. Their perfectly formed characters will prevent them from choosing what is wrong because they prevent them from wanting what is wrong.

As simple and straightforward as the compatibilist solution is, Pawl and Timpe nevertheless reject it. In this paper, I want to examine the reasons offered by Pawl and Timpe for rejecting the compatibilist solution to the Problem of Heavenly Freedom. I believe that the compatibilist solution can be adequately defended against their (and other related) objections. Secondarily, I also intend to raise a few problems for their preferred libertarian solution.

Does Compatibilism Undermine the Free Will Defense?

An interesting feature of Pawl's and Timpe's objection to the compatibilist solution is that it is not exactly the objection that one might expect. More typical would be an attack on the coherence of compatibilist freedom, or the charge that compatibilism makes God the author of evil. These are standard reasons for objecting to compatibilism in general and to compatibilist solutions to theological problems like the one under discussion here. But rather than focus on these standard kinds of problems, Pawl and Timpe reject the compatibilist solution to the Problem of Heavenly Freedom primarily because it would undermine their preferred solution

³Lynne Rudder Baker, "Why Christians Should not Be Libertarians: An Augustinian Challenge," *Faith and Philosophy* 20.4 (October 2003): 460–478. This characterization of freedom finds its origin in Harry Frankfurt, "Freedom of the Will and the Concept of a Person," *Journal of Philosophy* 68 (1971): 5–20.

to the logical problem of evil, namely, the Free Will Defense (FWD). As Pawl and Timpe explain,

According to the Free Will Defense, the reason that moral evils do not contradict God's essential goodness is that it is possible that the existence of free will . . . is such a great good that it justifies the existence of the moral evil that it makes possible.⁴

Pawl and Timpe have a hard time seeing how compatibilism can be squared with the FWD, and it's not hard to see why they might think so. For on the assumption that humans have compatibilist freedom, it would seem logically possible for God to create a world in which creatures were (compatibilistically) free and yet never do evil—because God creates them with characters such that they never desire and thus never choose to do evil. The FWD works only if we assume that creatures have a kind of freedom that is incompatible with determinism—libertarian freedom—so that God cannot create a world in which free creatures never go wrong unless those creatures consistently and freely choose to cooperate with God in never choosing to go wrong. In other words, the FWD works only if creatures have the libertarian freedom that makes it possible for them to sin.

Now I think that all of this is right as far as it goes. In order to utilize the FWD, one must assume a libertarian notion of freedom at least as a working hypothesis. However, I do not believe that this admission would disallow me, a compatibilist, from utilizing the FWD and claiming that it actually works—as a *defense*. It would only be necessary for the compatibilist to deny that it works as a theodicy. Indeed, I do not think that the FWD works as a theodicy whether one is a compatibilist or a libertarian. Let me explain.

It has become standard fare in discussions of the logical problem of evil to distinguish between a defense and a theodicy. A theodicy is an attempt to explain what God's actual reasons are for allowing moral evil, reasons that putatively justify God's allowing it. A *defense*, by contrast, does not seek anything so ambitious as to state what God's actual reasons are for allowing evil. Rather, a defense is a strategy that seeks to take the proposition that

(3) God is omnipotent, omniscient, and omnibenevolent

and add additional propositions to it that are jointly possible with (3), and which together with (3) entail

(4) Moral evils exist,

thus demonstrating that (3) and (4), despite appearances, are logically consistent. It does not matter whether these additional propositions are actually true. What matters is whether or not they describe some possible state of affairs. The Free Will *Defense*, then, suggests that it is the good of

⁴Pawl and Timpe, "Incompatibilism, Sin, and Free Will in Heaven," 401.

creaturely free will and God's desire to actualize that good that provides us with the other propositions we need. In point of fact, though, there are two different ways that the FWD can be developed. What I will call the *Strong Version of the FWD* (FWD_s) goes something like the following:

- (5_s) Free will is a great good that justifies the existence of the moral evil that will occur if it exists.
- (6_s) God desires to bring about a world that contains the great good of free will.
- (7_s) God cannot bring about a world that contains free will but contains no evil.

Following Plantinga, (5_s) and (7_s) could be motivated by surmising that God already knows (perhaps via middle knowledge) that, in any possible world he could create that contains free creatures, at least some of those creatures go wrong. So, any world he creates that contains free will also contains some moral evil. And, by (5_s), that moral evil is justified. Thus, we have a pretty rigorous demonstration that (3) and (4) are not logically contradictory, but are in fact consistent.

It is, in my mind anyway, impossible to disagree with this. Yet it might be objected that, since a compatibilist likely thinks that libertarianism is not only false but *necessarily* false, he will say that (7_s) is necessarily false as well. And this will mean that (3) and (4) have *not* been shown to be compossible as far as compatibilism is concerned. Fair enough. Still, a compatibilist could either (i) say that the FWD is successful insofar as one lays aside the question of whether libertarianism or compatibilism is the better account of free will, or (ii) say that, *for all we know*, libertarianism is true, and thus the FWD shows that (3) and (4) are compossible *for all we know*.⁵

Of course, what is central to FWD_s is that free will is viewed by God as *intrinsically* good, and God creates a world containing free creatures in part for the sake of free will itself. So, according to (5_s), it is free will itself that justifies God in allowing for the possibility (and eventual reality) of moral evil. When Pawl and Timpe write that "free will . . . is such a great good that it justifies the existence of the moral evil that it makes possible" (cited above), it would appear that FWD_s is the version of the FWD they hold.⁶

However, when we consider the question of *theodicy*, in contrast to a defense, we will begin to see not only that a bare appeal to free will can never be suitable for the former, but also why Pawl's and Timpe's concern about compatibilism vis-à-vis the FWD is misguided. For starters, note

⁵Thanks to an anonymous referee for this last point.

⁶Swinburne appears to think that Plantinga originally understood the FWD this way, too (see Richard Swinburne, "Evil Does not Show that there Is No God," in *Philosophy of Religion: A Guide and Anthology*, ed. Brian Davies [Oxford University, 2000], 599–613). Michael Tooley also appears to construe the FWD this way (see his article, "The Problem of Evil" in the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* [accessed at <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/evil/#The>]).

that proposition (5_s) is almost certainly false. It is at least far from obvious that free will is a great good that justifies the existence of the moral evil that it brings about. To prove the point, suppose that I am sitting on my front porch watching my ten-year-old son playing in the front yard with one of his friends. And let us suppose that I continue watching as he picks up a rather large stone with the evident intent of smashing his friend on the head with it. And then I watch in horror as he in fact does smash his friend on the head with the stone, killing him. Let us further suppose that I could have intervened in such a way as to prevent my son from hitting his friend with the stone. Maybe I am fast enough that I could have jumped up and closed the distance between us and grabbed the stone from his hand before he could swing it. But, despite my anguish and horror at what I foresaw happening, I did not so intervene, but allowed my son to make this lethal choice. Later, you ask me why I didn't intervene and stop him. I answer, "Free will." Somewhat confused, you ask, "What do you mean?" I reply, "Free will is a great good that justifies the existence of the evil that results from it. My son exercised his free will when he smashed his friend on the head and that freedom justifies my allowing him to do it." To which you rightly respond, "That's crazy!"

My point is that libertarian freedom, if it exists, may be a good, and it may even be a good that justifies *some* tiny, insignificant amount of evil. But it is not a good that comes anywhere near justifying the amount or kind of evil that actually exists.⁷ If I'm right about this, the FWD_s may be an interesting exercise in logic, and, offered strictly as a defense, it may be enough to silence the obstreperous likes of J. L. Mackie, but when it's all said and done, we know for a fact that the mere good of free will is *not* the reason why God allows evil in the world. That is, even granting that a bare appeal to free will makes for an adequate defense, we know that it is not sufficient for the purpose of theodicy. We know it because of our

⁷An anonymous referee of an earlier draft of this paper objected to the above thought experiment used to make this point, writing that "the author invites us to compare the value of a single exercise of freedom with the moral evil that it brings about (or is). To show that (5_s) is false a global comparison would be needed. It would have to weigh all moral evil, on the one hand, against the value of libertarian freedom in general, including those exercises of freedom that result in great goods." In response, I think the referee has misunderstood the point in context. With regard to the strong version of the FWD, we are considering whether or not libertarian freedom is an *intrinsic* good that is good enough to outweigh the moral evils that are produced by it. If our intuitions tell us (as I argue) that the intrinsic good of free will does not justify my (or God's!) allowing my son to kill his friend, then it is hard to see how multiplying the examples of evil free acts to the global scale is supposed to help. That is, if *one* seriously evil act cannot be justified by the intrinsic good of free will, then neither can millions of seriously evil acts be so justified. When the referee suggests that I need also to consider "those exercises of freedom that result in great goods," he is confusing the strong version of the FWD with the weak version discussed below. Certainly, if, on the global level, exercises of libertarian freedom produce sufficiently weighty greater goods, then such freedom may be justified even in the face of the moral evil it also produces. But in that case, we are no longer discussing (5_s) or the strong version of the FWD which have to do with whether or not libertarian freedom is *intrinsically* good enough (*sans* any resultant extrinsic goods) to justify the evils that will occur. And it is fairly obvious that it is not.

intuitions regarding the scenario I just painted. We know it every time we stop a person from exercising his free will to commit suicide. We know it every time we lock up criminals who exercise their freedom to do bad things. We simply don't think that the intrinsic good of free will is worth it. This is likely what prompts Paul Helm to remark, "The objections to the exercise of human libertarian freedom being the only or supreme aim and end of creation are too obvious to need spelling out."⁸

Obvious or not, I've stated the objection here because it goes to the heart of Pawl's and Timpe's rejection of the compatibilist solution to the Problem of Heavenly Freedom. They believe that compatibilism undermines the FWD. But, why is that? As a defense, the FWD_s is unobjectionable to the compatibilist, as I indicated above. The only problem that compatibilism raises for the FWD_s is that the compatibilist, when seeking to give a theodicy rather than a defense, is going to reject either proposition (5_s) or (6_s) above (or both). The only way I can make sense of Pawl's and Timpe's objection is to take them to mean that the FWD_s depends upon something like (5_s) actually being true. But, not only is the truth of (5_s) not a requisite for the FWD_s, we all know that (5_s) is in fact not true.

The second version of the FWD I will call the *Weak Version of the FWD* (FWD_w). On this version, it is not the good of free will *per se* that justifies God in permitting evil. Rather than speaking of free will as an intrinsic good, some defenders of the FWD speak of it as an *instrumental* good. That is, they speak of certain moral goods that are *produced* by free will as being what justifies God in permitting evil. Alvin Plantinga, for example, could be interpreted to espouse something like FWD_w when he states that the "heart of the Free Will Defense is the claim that it is possible that God could not have created a universe containing moral good (or as much moral good as this world contains) without creating one that also contained moral evil."⁹ Elsewhere he writes, "If [God] aims to produce moral good, then he must create significantly free creatures upon whose cooperation he must depend."¹⁰ Though the content of the "moral good" that Plantinga refers to in these quotes is not specified, it would seem that it is not simply the intrinsic good of free will itself that is in view, but some further goods to which free will is merely instrumental. Such goods might include morally significant actions, or the possession by agents of certain moral virtues such as courage and mercy, or human happiness, and so on.

But once one stipulates that it is such *further* goods that are God's ultimate aim in allowing evil and not simply the intrinsic good of free will

⁸Paul Helm, "God, Compatibilism, and the Authorship of Sin," *Religious Studies* 46 (2010): 115–124.

⁹Alvin Plantinga, *God, Freedom, and Evil* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977), 31.

¹⁰Alvin Plantinga, *The Nature of Necessity* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977), 190. Those who are more explicit in portraying the FWD in terms of FWD_w include Eleonore Stump, "The Problem of Evil," *Faith and Philosophy* 2.4 (October 1985): 392–423, and Michael L. Peterson, "The Problem of Evil," in *A Companion to Philosophy of Religion*, ed. Philip L. Quinn and Charles Taliaferro (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 1997), 394.

itself, then to be precise we have to replace propositions (5_s) through (7_s) with something like these:

- (5_w) Free will is a necessary condition of certain moral goods that justify the existence of the moral evil that will occur if it exists.
- (6_w) God desires to bring about a world that contains these moral goods.
- (7_w) God cannot bring about a world that contains these moral goods without creating creatures with free will who will do the moral evil that will occur if it exists.

Once one understands the FWD this way, though, it seems the so-called FWD is simply a version of the Greater Good Defense (GGD), according to which God allows evil in the world in order to bring about some good or goods that require moral evil as a precondition and which, all things considered, outweigh the evils that are their precondition.¹¹ Those goods might consist in the production of particular kinds of virtues, human happiness, etc.—some of the very same kinds of things that the FWD_w advocate sees as the justification for allowing free will and the evil that comes from it. What distinguishes the FWD_w from other versions of the GGD is the addition of proposition (5_w), the idea that free will is necessary to bringing about the further goods that God wants to produce in the world.

Now, it may very well be the case that (5_w), or something like it, is true (though as a compatibilist I deny it). But, I cannot see why, from the standpoint of making a defense as opposed to a theodicy, the FWD_w is so much more preferable to, or superior to, other versions of the GGD (versions perhaps friendly to compatibilism) so as to warrant a rejection of a compatibilist solution to the Problem of Heavenly Freedom. The fact that the FWD has been influential in recent years in laying the logical problem of evil to rest is really beside the point. That laudable task simply requires, as stated above,

¹¹One might wonder why the strong version of the FWD should not also count as a version of the greater good defense. After all, on the FWD_s, God allows evil in order to bring about the (putatively) greater good of free will itself. No doubt all responses to the logical problem of evil will have some such similarities in that they all, in one way or another, are attempts to show that God has a morally sufficient reason for allowing evil. Nevertheless, many authors routinely distinguish between free will defenses/theodicies and greater good defenses/theodicies, and I am simply following that convention. (See, e.g., William J. Wainwright, *Philosophy of Religion* [Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, 1988], 66–89; Daniel Howard-Snyder, “God, Evil, and Suffering,” in *Reason for the Hope Within*, ed. Michael J. Murray [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999], 76–115; Brian Davies, *An Introduction to the Philosophy of Religion*, 3rd ed. [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004], 208–219; John S. Feinberg, *The Many Faces of Evil: Theological Systems and the Problem of Evil* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994], 54–98, 106–111; *New Dictionary of Christian Apologetics*, ed. W. C. Campbell-Jack and Gavin McGrath [Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2006], s.v. “Evil,” by H. A. G. Blocher.) Moreover, free will defenders of both the strong and weak versions focus their attention primarily on the value of free will in distinction from other goods extrinsic to free will. My point here is that the FWD_w because it sees the value of free will in its ability to produce the same kinds of goods that greater good defenders promote, is more relevantly like the GGD than the FWD_s that has no interest in goods extrinsic to free will. If one insists here on greater precision, then what I am claiming is that the FWD_w is simply a (not clearly preferable) version of the Greater *Extrinsic* Good Defense (GEGD), where “extrinsic” means “extrinsic to free will.”

a logically consistent set of propositions that contains the proposition (3) and that jointly entails (4). And the FWD_w does not seem any better off than other versions of the GGD in this regard. If anything, the FWD_w adds an unnecessary complication to the GGD by requiring what might be taken to be the superfluous (and, might I add, controversial) (5_w). For an adequate response to the logical problem of evil requires no more than the following:

- (3) God is omnipotent, omniscient, and omnibenevolent.
- (4) Moral evils exist.
- (8) An omnibenevolent being desires to bring about certain goods (such as a state of affairs that maximizes human happiness or well-being, or certain moral virtues like courage and mercy).
- (9) Some of the goods that an omnibenevolent being desires to bring about require moral evil as a precondition, and these goods outweigh the value of the evil that is their precondition.

This set of propositions is no less logically consistent than that offered by the advocates of either version of the FWD, and (8) and (9) together with (3) entail (4). Moreover, this set has the virtue of being neutral regarding the question of libertarian freedom. Why, then, should we not prefer this more generic GGD over the FWD_w ? The only reason I can think of is that one thinks that the only kinds of goods that *could* justify God in allowing evil are goods that are brought about by human agency and that libertarian freedom is the only view of freedom that coherently allows for the possibility of those goods. But, even if this is true, it seems to me that these would be matters for a theodicy and not a defense, since in a defense one would want to make as few controversial metaphysical assumptions as possible. In any case, we would need some very powerful arguments for such theses before dismissing compatibilism as a solution to the Problem of Heavenly Freedom on the grounds that it undermines the FWD.

To reiterate my main points under this heading: First, compatibilism simply does not provide *any* challenge to the FWD understood as a defense. Compatibilists can happily embrace the FWD as providing a set of propositions that make coherent God's permission of evil, even though (as the compatibilist believes) one or more of those propositions is actually false. Second, it is not clear that the FWD is philosophically superior to other defenses against the logical problem of evil, especially when one realizes that a commonly-held version of the FWD—i.e., FWD_w —is simply a complex version of a more simple (and perfectly adequate) generic GGD. For these reasons, Pawl and Timpe need other more serious reasons to reject compatibilism as a response to the Problem of Heavenly Freedom.

Does Compatibilism Make the Problem of Evil More Acute?

No doubt Pawl and Timpe *do* think they have stronger reasons to reject compatibilism. They allude to such reasons in their discussion of compatibilism

and its relation to the FWD. It is not just that compatibilism is (in their view) inconsistent with the FWD, but also that compatibilism “makes the logical problem of evil even more acute than it already is” and that “there are good philosophical reasons to reject compatibilism.”¹² For the latter, they footnote a reference to the well-known Consequence Argument defended by Peter van Inwagen and others.¹³ I agree that there are forceful philosophical concerns raised for compatibilism. It is not my purpose in this article, however, to address the coherence and adequacy of compatibilism in providing an account of human freedom and responsibility.¹⁴ My primary concern is over whether or not compatibilism (taken as given vis-à-vis a theory of freedom and responsibility) can adequately handle the Problem of Heavenly Freedom.

More closely related to this objective are the theological concerns that Pawl and Timpe raise. So, regarding the former point, all that Pawl and Timpe state in the article under consideration about how it is that compatibilism makes the logical problem of evil “more acute” is their claim that a compatibilist view of freedom makes it possible that “God could actualize the good of free will . . . without the possibility of moral evil by determining all free creatures never to do evil.”¹⁵ Elsewhere, Kevin Timpe elaborates on the point being made here:

If humans have libertarian free will, then God cannot create a world containing such [libertarian] agents and unilaterally guarantee that that world contains no evil. Libertarians can therefore maintain a distinction between possible worlds and feasible worlds. Compatibilism, on the other hand, cannot so easily make the claim that God cannot create a world containing such agents and unilaterally guarantee that that world contains no evil.¹⁶

Part of what Timpe says here is true. I readily grant that God cannot create a world containing creatures with libertarian freedom and guarantee that there be no evil. And it is this point which allows the defender of the FWD to make his crucial distinction between possible and feasible worlds. But I deny that the compatibilist cannot make a similar distinction in response to the problem of evil. For while it is true that God can make creatures with compatibilist freedom and at the same time guarantee that they never do evil, it is *not* possible for God to make creatures with compatibilist freedom, *desire to bring about greater goods that require moral evil as a precondition*, and at the same time guarantee that they never do evil. If God

¹²Pawl and Timpe, “Incompatibilism, Sin, and Free Will in Heaven,” 401.

¹³See Peter van Inwagen, *An Essay on Free Will* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983).

¹⁴But see John Martin Fischer, *The Metaphysics of Free Will* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994); John Martin Fischer and Mark Ravizza, *Responsibility and Control: A Theory of Moral Responsibility* (Cambridge University, 1999); Lynne Rudder Baker, “Why Christians Should not Be Libertarians”; and Steven B. Cowan, *Divine Sovereignty and Human Responsibility: A Compatibilist Reconciliation* (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Arkansas, 1996).

¹⁵Pawl and Timpe, “Incompatibilism, Sin, and Free Will in Heaven,” 401.

¹⁶Kevin Timpe, “Why Christians Might Be Libertarians: A Response to Lynne Rudder Baker,” *Philosophia Christi* 6.2 (2004): 279–288.

wants to create a world that maximizes some good or set of goods, and those goods require that human agents (understood as having compatibilist freedom and that freedom being adequate for moral responsibility) do evil, then God cannot bring about those goods unless he creates creatures who do the requisite evils. So, a distinction is available to the compatibilist (let's call it the distinction between *possible* worlds and *goal-fulfilling* worlds) that is analogous to the distinction between possible worlds and feasible worlds utilized by the libertarian.¹⁷ And this distinction between possible worlds and goal-fulfilling worlds, though a weaker one, can do the same work vis-à-vis the problem of evil that the possible worlds/feasible worlds distinction does for the libertarian. So, it is hard to see how compatibilism makes the logical problem of evil more acute on that score.

Elsewhere, however, Timpe raises a different reason for why compatibilism exacerbates the problem of evil. He writes, "If God is the ultimate cause of all human actions . . . , then He bears some direct responsibility for every action that occurs. . . . To say that God is not the author of some evil act appears to many to be doublespeak."¹⁸ Here is the main worry that usually comes up in discussions about the theological adequacy of compatibilism. On a compatibilist view of freedom, it seems difficult if not impossible to exonerate God from moral culpability in our evil actions since God ultimately determines (in some way) everything that we do.

My response is to suggest, *per ad hominem*, that if there is a worry at all here, it infects most libertarian answers to the problem of evil just as severely.¹⁹ In other words, compatibilism doesn't make God any more culpable for our sin than most libertarian views do; so, if making God the author of sin is a problem for compatibilism, it is equally a problem for the libertarian. To see this, let us lay aside any purely philosophical worries about the adequacy of compatibilism as a theory of agency and/or moral responsibility. Let us assume that agents with compatibilist freedom *are* morally responsible for their actions. Let us also lay aside any parallel concerns over libertarianism (such as whether it implies that human actions are uncaused or arbitrary). Furthermore, let us assume, as compatibilist theists and most libertarian theists do, a traditional, classical version of theism that holds that God exercises a strong providence over his creation, and that God has perfect knowledge of future contingents including the future actions of his free creatures (whether that freedom is compatibilist or libertarian).

¹⁷Thanks to Tom Flint for helping me to clarify the similarities and differences between these two distinctions. While both distinctions have the effect of "tying God's hands" with regard to a subset of possible worlds that he can actualize, they are nevertheless not the same. For infeasible worlds, as the libertarian is using the term, refers to worlds that are not available to God regardless of his desires and goals, while non-goal-fulfilling worlds are unavailable to God only in virtue of his goals and desires.

¹⁸Kevin Timpe, "Why Christians Might Be Libertarians," 283–284.

¹⁹Here I am following a line of argument presented by Paul Helm in "God, Compatibilism, and the Authorship of Sin," 121–122.

It follows on these assumptions, that if God accomplishes his providential goals through agents with compatibilist freedom, then there is a sense in which he is responsible for what his creatures do. He is responsible in the sense that he plays a *causal role* in what his free creatures do (though what causal role may differ among various compatibilist philosophers). Nevertheless, the human agents involved are morally responsible for what they do and *God's* intentions for why they do what they do will, in many cases, differ from the intentions of the human agents (e.g., “You meant it for evil, but God meant it for good”—Gen. 50:20). So, God has some responsibility in what his creatures do even when they do evil. The really salient question, though, is whether or not this “authorship of sin” is such as to make God morally *culpable* or *blameworthy*. This is a question that will have to await another occasion.

What I want to do now is to say that on the libertarian account God is no less the “author of sin,” at least not in any way that is morally relevant. For it follows on the same assumptions that if God accomplishes his providential goals through agents with libertarian freedom, there is a serious sense in which God is responsible for what his creatures do. Even though on the libertarian account God lacks the direct causal involvement that he has on the compatibilist account, it is still the case that everything that happens—good and evil—happens because God at least consciously permits it. A God with perfect foreknowledge is not caught off-guard by sin. He can anticipate every evil act of every free creature and he has the power and wisdom to intervene and prevent those evil acts if he wants to. Moreover, even for the libertarian, God plays a strong causal role in enabling evil actions. For a free creature to perform an evil action, God must causally sustain that creature’s existence and all of his causal powers. As Paul Helm puts it, even on the libertarian account, “God knowingly created and sustained the person of Adolph Hitler, infallibly knowing that Auschwitz would follow, while retaining the power to cut short this devilish regime at any time.”²⁰ Why doesn’t God intervene to prevent such horrors and lesser evils? The libertarian answer can be no different than the compatibilist answer: because God intends (or at least intends to permit) those evil things to happen—though his intentions are different than the intentions of the human agents. God allows these things to bring about a greater good. But, he allows them just the same.

To bring out more clearly the fact that there is no morally significant difference in the libertarian and compatibilist views on this matter, consider the following two theses (where S is some human agent, X is some evil act, and G is some overriding good that X brings about) which I will call, respectively, the *Compatibilist Greater Good Thesis* and the *Libertarian Greater Good Thesis*:

(CGGT) God compatibilistically causes S to do X to bring about G.

(LGGT) God knowingly permits S to do X to bring about G.

²⁰Ibid., 121.

As Helm would say, there are differences between CGGT and LGGT, but “is there much of a *moral* difference?”²¹ I don’t think so. Where the intentions of God are the same in both cases (to bring about a greater good), and where the agents in both cases are morally responsible, there is no morally significant difference between God’s causing S to do X and God’s knowingly permitting S to do X. If there is such a difference, it is incumbent on the libertarian to tell us what it is. If there is no difference, as I suggest, then any objection to theistic compatibilism on the grounds that it makes God the author of sin is likewise an objection to classical theistic libertarianism.

All the points in this section imply that there is no serious objection to compatibilism as a solution to the Problem of Heavenly Freedom that is independent of the purely philosophical objections to compatibilism. Those objections aside, there would seem to be no clear reason to prefer another solution to the Problem of Heavenly Freedom to the simple and straightforward solution offered by compatibilism.

Do Pawl and Timpe Solve the Problem of Heavenly Freedom?

But what about Pawl’s and Timpe’s solution to the problem? Is it a viable alternative to the compatibilist solution? In this section of the paper, I would like to offer a couple of problems that call that suggestion into question. To do that, however, I need to provide a brief sketch of their view of the matter.

Their solution to the Problem of Heavenly Freedom is a variation on that offered by James Sennett a few years ago.²² The gist of Sennett’s solution is that there is, strictly speaking, no libertarian free will in heaven. Instead, the saints in heaven have a kind of compatibilist freedom in which their characters, made perfectly holy, determine what they do. However, their holy characters are, in part, the result of libertarian choices made in this life. In other words, though granting that there is only a compatibilist sort of freedom in heaven, Sennett believes that it is a necessary condition of heavenly saints’ moral responsibility that they once exercised libertarian freedom and that that exercise of freedom played a significant role in their formation of their characters. This allows that the redeemed in heaven are morally responsible, in libertarian terms, for their *characters*, so that it can make sense (again, in libertarian terms) to say that they are responsible for their actions in heaven.

Pawl and Timpe like aspects of Sennett’s solution, but they do not like his idea that there is nothing like libertarian freedom in heaven. They attempt to improve on Sennett’s view by arguing that there can be libertarian choices in heaven even though there cannot be sinful choices in heaven. So, Pawl and Timpe agree with Sennett that “during pre-heavenly

²¹Ibid. (emphasis mine).

²²James F. Sennett, “Is There Freedom in Heaven?” *Faith and Philosophy* 16.1 (January 1999): 69–82.

existence a person has the ability to form a moral character which later precludes that person from willing certain things.²³ Nevertheless, they go on to argue that there would still be libertarian choices. They claim that “even if one’s character determines that one not perform certain actions, it doesn’t determine all the actions that one does perform.”²⁴ The idea here is that one could still make choices between alternative *good* options. For instance, one could make a libertarian choice between singing in the heavenly choir or playing the harp. More significantly, one could also do what they call “morally relevant” actions in which one good action is morally better than alternative good actions. Pawl and Timpe specifically have supererogatory actions in mind here. If A is an ordinary good action and B is some supererogatory action that is mutually exclusive of A, then, say Pawl and Timpe, an agent who does B is morally better than an agent who does A even though the agent who does A is not morally bad in any way (since supererogatory actions are not obligatory).

My first objection to Pawl and Timpe’s view would be equally a challenge to Sennett’s view. On both accounts, it is argued that to make moral sense of the limitation on the freedom of the redeemed in heaven, it must be the case that the redeemed have libertarian freedom at some earlier time, the exercise of which was causally relevant to the formation of their later choice-limiting characters. My problem with this idea has to do with the analogy of being that exists between God and his human creatures. God, presumably, has the very same limitation on his actions that Sennett, Pawl, and Timpe envision for the redeemed in heaven. God has a perfectly good character such that he is incapable of doing evil. I don’t know if Sennett would cash out God’s “freedom” in the compatibilist terms that he suggests for the redeemed in heaven, but I’m pretty confident that Pawl and Timpe would say basically the same thing about God that they do about the redeemed, namely that God, though incapable of doing evil, can choose between multiple good options including those that have moral relevance as defined above. But, here is the rub. God’s impeccability is an *essential* characteristic of him. This means that there never was (nor could there ever have been) a time in the past in which God had the “full-blown” kind of libertarian freedom that Sennett, Pawl, and Timpe say is a necessary condition for the appropriateness of the choice-limiting characters had by the redeemed in heaven. But why this asymmetry? Why not say, instead, that what’s good for God is good for the creature—especially given that we are created in *God’s image*?²⁵ In other words, I can see no

²³Pawl and Timpe, “Incompatibilism, Sin, and Free Will in Heaven,” 409.

²⁴Ibid., 410.

²⁵Tom Flint has alerted me to the fact that Anselm (among others) has attempted to answer this question. According to Anselm, if a creature’s actions are always caused ultimately by the creator, they could not have the kind of genuine internal origination necessary for freedom. But God’s character can determine his free actions, since no one or nothing gave him that character. (See the discussion of Sandra Visser and Thomas Williams in *Anselm* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009], 171–192; Anselm’s own account may be found in

good reason why, given our beliefs about God and his freedom, it must be a necessary condition for the choice-limiting characters of the redeemed in heaven that they once had a more full-blown kind of libertarian freedom (or any kind of libertarian freedom, for that matter!).

Interestingly, Pawl and Timpe are aware of this asymmetry, but they seem to make nothing of it. They write, "On the view we are advancing, if a non-divine agent is free and has a moral character that precludes sin, there must have been a prior time when the agent was free and didn't have a moral character that precludes sin."²⁶ In a footnote, they admit, "The qualifier 'non-divine' here is needed due to issues arising from the freedom of God Himself."²⁷ Exactly! The qualifier is "needed" given what we believe about God's own freedom and their need to defend libertarian freedom for human beings. But from a compatibilist perspective, an insistence on this asymmetry can only be seen as question-begging. A compatibilist can say (this one *does* say) that God's kind of freedom is a model for our freedom and God's freedom doesn't look a whole lot like libertarian freedom, at least not the "full-blown" kind that includes the ability to sin. Moreover, it does not even seem clear that Pawl and Timpe are right that *non-divine* agents have to meet their stipulated condition. Are we to imagine that, if God had decided to *not* allow moral evil to enter his creation and had created Adam and Eve in the Garden with perfectly holy characters (like his own) so that they could not sin but had the kind of freedom that Pawl and Timpe envision for the redeemed in heaven, they would not be morally responsible for their choices? How could they not be morally responsible for their choices? It appears completely mystifying (to me anyway) to think that they would not be morally responsible.

My second objection is aimed at Pawl's and Timpe's account of morally relevant actions in heaven. They argue that the redeemed in heaven can have libertarian freedom despite not being able to sin as long as they can freely choose between multiple good options that are morally relevant in a way that makes the one who does them morally better than one who doesn't. Pawl and Timpe suggest that *supererogatory actions* would fit the bill. They say, "[O]ne can rightly judge someone to be a better person for choosing to perform a supererogatory action, even if refraining wouldn't make her a morally bad person in any way."²⁸ A supererogatory action, of course, is one that is not obligatory but is especially praiseworthy. Put

De libertate arbitrii, De casu diaboli, and Cur Deus Homo 2.5.) In response, a compatibilist may wonder if Anselm's point about creatures simply begs the question against compatibilism. The compatibilist at least has strategies designed to mitigate that worry. Also, one may question whether or not the fact that God's character doesn't originate from an external source is a strong enough point to make a relevant moral difference. It would still be the case that God's character is "given" to him involuntarily—i.e., he has no choice about what his character is. And it seems to me anyway that this fact is enough to make plausible the symmetry between God and creatures that I'm advocating here.

²⁶Pawl and Timpe, "Incompatibilism, Sin, and Free Will in Heaven," 415.

²⁷*Ibid.*, 415n49.

²⁸*Ibid.*, 416.

simply and imprecisely, it is an action that goes “above and beyond the call of duty.”

However, I don’t think supererogatory actions will do for Pawl and Timpe the work they want them to do. First, it needs at least to be mentioned that the nature and value, even the existence, of supererogation is a matter of some controversy.²⁹ But let’s leave those problems aside for now. More important for our purposes is the way that Pawl and Timpe respond to an objection to their appeal to supererogation. Here’s how they describe the objection:

Now, if someone’s in heaven, we already know that he has a perfect moral character, for that’s a necessary condition of his being in heaven. But if one of the redeemed, say, Andrew, has a *perfect* moral character, how could he be judged “a better person” if he chooses to perform A rather than B, where neither A nor B is evil but A is better than B? And how can the choices he makes affect his character if he *already*, as one of the blessed in heaven, has a *perfect* moral character? How can he become better, by making more supererogatory choices, if he has already attained moral perfection?³⁰

In response to this objection, Pawl and Timpe distinguish two ways of being morally perfect. One way is illustrated by a person who acquires the virtue of temperance, which entails his occupying the mean between gluttony and insensibility. Once one is precisely on this mean, one cannot get any *more* on the mean. So, this way of being morally perfect has an upper limit. However, Pawl and Timpe suggest that it is plausible to think that a person on the mean of temperance can grow to “cling more tightly to the mean.” He can, that is, be more tenaciously committed to or grounded in that condition of character called temperance. Pawl and Timpe contend that this kind of moral perfection may not have an upper limit and would thus provide the basis for meaningful acts of supererogation among the redeemed in heaven. Perhaps they are right about this. But they go on to say that “if we think about clinging to the good rather than clinging to the mean, we can say that through the everlasting years that the blessed spend with God, they are neverendingly coming closer to Him, who is Goodness itself, ever clinging more tenaciously to Him.”³¹ It is these last comments that raise to the surface the reason why Paul’s and Timpe’s appeal to supererogation won’t work.

I think we can take it for granted that *every one* of the redeemed in heaven will strongly desire to be ever closer to God and cling ever more tenaciously to him as Pawl and Timpe suggest. All of the redeemed in heaven will undoubtedly echo the sentiments of the Psalmist who

²⁹For a detailed discussion of the various views and issues related to supererogation, see *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward N. Zalta, s.v. “Supererogation,” by David Heyd, <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/supererogation>.

³⁰Pawl and Timpe, “Incompatibilism, Sin, and Free Will in Heaven,” 418 (emphasis in original).

³¹*Ibid.*

declared, "The LORD is the portion of my inheritance. . . . You will make known to me the path of life; in Your presence is fullness of joy; in Your right hand there are pleasures forever" (Psalm 16:5, 11). Who among the redeemed in heaven won't desire to experience the happiness of the knowledge of God to its fullest? Indeed, assuming that such a pursuit of the knowledge of God honors and glorifies God, we might even consider this pursuit obligatory (cf. 1 Cor. 10:31). In either case—whether out of a sense of obligation or an overriding desire for beatitude, or both—it would follow that none of the redeemed in heaven could refrain from "neverendingly coming closer to Him" by performing the supererogatory actions that Paul and Timpe describe. If this pursuit is obligatory (as I suggest it might be), then the so-called "supererogatory" actions turn out not really to be supererogatory after all. But, even if they are not obligatory and are truly supererogatory, they cannot be libertarianly free actions. For no redeemed person in heaven, given his morally perfect character (in Pawl's and Timpe's *first* sense), could conceivably refrain from doing them.

About the best that Pawl and Timpe can do, I think, is claim that a redeemed person in heaven might have the option to choose between multiple, equally valuable supererogatory actions. But those choices, like the choice between whether to sing in the heavenly choir or play the harp, would be morally irrelevant choices. In that case, to paraphrase Ed Wierenga, the only time the redeemed in heaven are free "is when it doesn't matter what they do."³² I submit that if that is all that the freedom of the redeemed in heaven comes to, then it is insignificant and cannot provide a strong libertarian alternative to the compatibilist solution to the Problem of Heavenly Freedom.³³

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³²Edward Wierenga, "The Freedom of God," *Faith and Philosophy* 19.4 (October, 2002): 425–436. An anonymous referee suggested that those sympathetic to Paul's and Timpe's view could offer a different kind of response as follows: "One kind of choice a redeemed person might face is whether to perform a supererogatory action that occurs to her or come up with a plan to perform an even better action (incompatible with the one she now has in mind). Even a person who approached this decision with the mindset of a glory-maximizer would not face a clear choice here." However, it would seem to me that such a choice would be appropriate *only if* she had some very reasonable expectation that a better supererogatory action would be available to her if she gave the matter careful deliberation. And in that case, as a glory-maximizer, she could not refrain from seeking to fulfill that expectation. Further, if the issue is simply a matter of her being uncertain as to which of a set of options would be most glorifying to God, then she might very well have libertarian freedom to choose in such a situation, but again, I would suggest that she is making a libertarian choice only "when it does not matter what she does." For while one of the supererogatory options might be objectively better (when considering the action itself or its consequences), it cannot make her a better *person*—she is, after all, making a choice between options that are, as far as she knows, morally equivalent.

³³I want to thank James Sennett, Justin Barnard, Keith Loftin, Thomas Flint, and two anonymous referees for helpful comments on earlier drafts of this paper.