# APPENDIX F
# A DETAILED ANALYSIS OF THE THEOLOGICAL OBJECTION TO DIVINE DETERMINISM

The theological objection to divine determinism is an objection raised in the context of Judaeo-Christian conceptions of God and reality. The relevant question could be framed as follows: given that the Judaeo-Christian God exists and given that reality contains evil, does this God determine and control absolutely everything in reality (as divine determinism would maintain) or not?

It is assumed by the theological objection to divine determinism that everyone who is party to this discussion would agree on four basic assumptions:

**1.** GOD EXISTS.

**2.** THE GOD WHO EXISTS IS PERFECTLY GOOD.

**3.** THE GOD WHO EXISTS IS SO POWERFUL AS TO BE ABLE TO TOTALLY CONTROL AND DETERMINE EVERYTHING IN REALITY.

**4.** EVIL EXISTS IN THE WORLD.

It is further assumed that the single difference between those who would subscribe to divine determinism and those who would not is as follows: the proponent of divine determinism would add the following assumption to the list of basic assumptions above; the opponents of divine determinism would not—

**5.** THE GOD WHO EXISTS DOES, IN FACT, TOTALLY CONTROL AND DETERMINE EVERYTHING IN REALITY.

There are now a total of five different propositions that are relevant to the discussion. The crux of the theological objection to divine determinism is its contention that the five propositions above are logically incom-

patible. Logically, the incompatibility of these five propositions could be attributable to any one (or more) of these five assertions being false. Temporarily abandoning the context of Judaeo-Christian belief, people have challenged each of these different propositions at various times. Here are the five different logical possibilities for identifying the source of the alleged logical incompatibility of these five propositions:

### A. THE ILLUSION ARGUMENT
—*a rejection of the validity of proposition (4), a rejection of the existence of evil.*

This position maintains that propositions (1), (2), (3), and (5) are all true and, hence, that the false assumption is proposition (4). Evil does not, in fact, exist. The apparent existence of evil is explained as some sort of illusion. (Christian Science doctrine takes this or a similar position.)

### B. THE ARGUMENT FROM EVIL AGAINST THE EXISTENCE OF GOD
—*a rejection of the validity of proposition (1), a rejection of the existence of God.*

This position is a popular atheistic argument against the existence of God. It maintains that proposition (4) is true, but that proposition (1) and, hence, (2), (3), and (5) are all false. God does not, in fact, exist. (Many atheists subscribe to this argument.)

### C. THE EVIL GOD ARGUMENT
—*a rejection of the validity of proposition (2), a rejection of the goodness of God.*

This position maintains that propositions (1), (3), (4), and (5) are all true and, hence, that the false assumption is proposition (2). God is not perfectly good. (Many atheists fallaciously point to this alternative as the only valid alternative to (B) above.)

### D. THE FINITE GOD ARGUMENT
—*a rejection of the validity of proposition (3), a rejection of the omnipotence of God.*

This position maintains that propositions (1), (2), and (4) are all true

and, hence, that the false assumptions are propositions (3) and, therefore, (5). God is not capable of totally controlling and determining all that occurs in reality. God is small, limited, weak, and finite rather than omnipotent and infinite. (Various versions of Process Theology take this position.)

## E. THE SELF-LIMITING GOD ARGUMENT
*—a rejection of the validity of proposition (5), a rejection of divine determinism.*

This position maintains that (1), (2), (3), and (4) are all true and, hence, that the false assumption is proposition (5). God does not control everything that happens. One is forced to this conclusion if he affirms the validity of propositions (1)–(4) and yet believes that (1)–(5) are logically incompatible. God is omnipotent and infinite and capable of controlling reality absolutely [proposition (3)]. Therefore, we must assume that God has, for whatever reasons, purposely limited his own control and determination of reality. The net result is that God does not determine the whole of reality and that proposition (5) is not true. (This is the typical position of most Christians who reject divine determinism.)

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Now, as we said above, the theological objection to divine determinism is raised in the context of Judaeo-Christian belief. The proponents of this objection, holding a Judaeo-Christian worldview, view propositions (1)–(4) above as a logically coherent whole (and a coherent whole to which (5) is not admitted). Therefore, in the context of universally-accepted Judaeo-Christian belief, we can frame the options as such:

**I.** DIVINE DETERMINISM [proposition (5)] IS FALSE

**II.** THE FOUNDATIONAL ASSUMPTIONS OF THE JUDAEO-CHRISTIAN WORLDVIEW [propositions (1)– (4)] ARE FALSE

**III.** THE FIVE PROPOSITIONS [propositions (1)–(5)] ARE NOT LOGICALLY INCOMPATIBLE.

In terms of these three options, position (E), the self-limiting God argument, is an instance of option (I) above. All the other four logical

possibilities, (A)–(D), are instances of option (II).

The force of the theological objection as an argument against divine determinism, therefore, hinges on the fact that both the proponents of divine determinism and its detractors share a common set of assumptions. Namely, they share the set of assumptions that forms the foundation of the Judaeo-Christian worldview, propositions (1)–(4). If, as the theological objection assumes, there can be no doubt but that the five propositions are logically incompatible, then the divine determinist is placed on the horns of a dilemma: either divine determinism is not true after all [I], or the foundations of the Judaeo-Christian worldview are false [II]. The theological objection rests on the fact that no one will easily reject his foundational beliefs, nor should he do so. This argument assumes that the Judaeo-Christian worldview forms the divine determinist's most foundational beliefs. So, when faced with the option of choosing between his Judaeo-Christian worldview in general and his doctrine of divine determinism in particular, there can be little doubt but that he will choose his Judaeo-Christian worldview over his commitment to divine determinism. Thus, by suggesting to the divine determinist that he is faced with exactly this dilemma—either his Judaeo-Christian worldview or his divine determinism—the theological objection is urging the rejection of divine determinism in favor of the foundational beliefs of Christianity. Obviously, therefore, the theological objection has no real force in discussion with one who would readily jettison the Judaeo-Christian worldview, or who has never subscribed to it in the first place.

There remains one important question: if, as the above anaysis suggests, the dilemma that the theological objection tries to create is between one's Judaeo-Christian worldview and divine determinism, then why does my presentation of the theological objection in chapter 9 present the dilemma as between divine determinism and the goodness of God?

I explain the theological objection as I do in chapter 9 precisely because that is the way the theological objection is most popularly presented. But why is it popularly framed in this way?

We can understand why, I think, if we consider carefully what the force of the objection is intended to be. The force of the theological objection results from creating a dilemma between the Judaeo-Christian worldview and divine determinism. It creates a dilemma of the following form:

*If divine determinism is true, then it is not logically possible for X to be true.*

The emotional and subjective power of this argument rests on X being equal to the Judaeo-Christian worldview. So, the dilemma reads:

*If divine determinism is true, then it is not logically possible for the Judaeo-Christian worldview to be true.*

But when the dilemma is stated in this form, it is not immediately apparent that it is true and, therefore, it is not rhetorically forceful enough. Why should it be the case that if divine determinism is true, the Judaeo-Christian worldview cannot be true? To increase rhetorical force, it is strategic to state the dilemma as between divine determinism and a specific belief foundational to the Judaeo-Christian worldview wherein the incompatibility with divine determinism seems apparent. The four fundamental assumptions that comprise the Judaeo-Christian worldview, (1)–(4), leave us four possibilities:

**a)** If divine determinism is true, then it is not logically possible for the existence of God to be true.

**b)** If divine determinism is true, then it is not logically possible for the omnipotence of God to be true.

**c)** If divine determinism is true, then it is not logically possible for the existence of evil to be true.

**d)** If divine determinism is true, then it is not logically possible for the perfect goodness of God to be true.

The first two will not create the desired dilemma. Divine determinism is certainly not logically incompatible with God's existence. It logically requires it. Hence, (a) would be absurd, not persuasive. Furthermore, divine determinism is clearly not logically incompatible with God's omnipotence. Rather, it requires it. So the second option, (b), is just as absurd as the first.

We are left then with options (c) and (d). The popular presentation of the theological objection to divine determinism amounts to creating a dilemma between these two options:

**e)** If divine determinism is true, then one or the other of the following must be the case: (i) it is not logically possible for the existence of evil to be true, or (ii) it is not logically possible for the perfect goodness of

God to be true.

If we were to insist that evil does truly exist, then dilemma (e) gets reduced to the fatal dilemma (d) above—

**d)** If divine determinism is true, then it is not logically possible for the perfect goodness of God to be true.

On the other hand, if we insist that God is perfectly good, then dilemma (e) gets reduced to the fatal dilemma (c) above—

**c)** If divine determinism is true, then it is not logically possible for the existence of evil to be true.

Either way, we are forced to make a choice between divine determinism and one of the beliefs that is foundational to the Judaeo-Christian worldview. So, either way I must choose between divine determinism and the coherence of the Judaeo-Christian worldview. As we saw above, this essential dilemma—between divine determinism and the Judaeo-Christian worldview—is the ultimate strategy being employed by the theological objection to divine determinism.

Popularly, the strategy typically takes for granted the Judaeo-Christian assumption that evil does in fact exist and then maintains that one must therefore (in the light of that assumption) reject the perfect goodness of God. However, the same goal could be achieved by accepting the Judaeo-Christian assumption that God is perfectly good and then maintaining that one must therefore (in the light of God's perfect goodness) reject the reality of evil. From a logical point of view, the fact that the former is the more usual strategy is strictly arbitrary. Both would accomplish exactly the same thing. Both would force a dilemma between divine determinism and the Judaeo-Christian worldview and thereby make divine determinism objectionable and implausible.