

**BRAD WARNER'S APOLOGETICS
A REPLY TO HIS "GOD, EVIL, AND PROFESSOR BRADLEY"**

[Brad Warner was responding to my debate with Paul Chamberlain on the topic "Can there be Objective Morality without God?"]

I: INTRODUCTION: ON THE ART OF APOLOGETICS

I was about twelve years old, and the elders of our Baptist church had urged me to take THE PLEDGE. I had been told to swear upon the Bible never to let a drop of alcohol pass my lips. But why, I asked? Why should I commit myself irrevocably to a stance on an issue I didn't fully understand? Besides, hadn't St. Paul advised taking a little wine for one's stomach's sake? And hadn't the Lord himself turned water into wine? If it was good enough for them, why shouldn't it be good enough for me?

My questions caused consternation. True believers don't like having the Bible quoted in support of views that don't fit their faith. And so it was explained to me that wine in biblical times was non-alcoholic, just plain grape-juice in fact. It never was explained to me why, in that case, the Old Testament patriarchs Noah and Lot got drunk on it, or why, when the Holy Ghost moved men to speak with unknown tongues on the day of Pentecost, observers accused them of having become drunk with new wine.

That was my first taste of Christian apologetics. And subsequent samplings have not improved in quality. I have been asked to believe, for example, that the patent inconsistency between II Samuel 24:1, which tells us that the Lord himself moved David to take a census of Israel and Judah, and I Chronicles 21:1, which tells us that it was Satan who provoked David to do it, can be removed by supposing - without scriptural warrant - that Satan "found the situation ripe for exploitation." I have been asked to believe that God was justified in killing 70,000 men in order to punish David for doing what God-cum-Satan had commanded because these men "must" have been guilty of "a high level of nationalistic pride".¹ I have been asked to believe that the Second Coming - Jesus's return "in the glory of his Father with his angels" [Matt. 16:28] to judge each man according to his works - which Jesus promised would occur within the lifetime of some of his disciples² "apparently referred to a preliminary phrase of His coming, rather than to the final and climactic phrase, when He will

¹ Gleason L. Archer, Jr., *Encyclopedia of Biblical Difficulties*, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, MacBible version, 1982).

² See also Matt. 24:34: "Verily I say unto you, This generation shall not pass, till all these things [including the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory] be fulfilled." No doubt I am to believe that "generation" here does not mean what evangelicals say it does in Gen. 7:1 or Gen. 15:16 or Gen. 50:23 or

be accompanied by His glorious angels."³ And I have been asked by some to believe that when Jesus repeatedly threatens, not just incorrigible sinners but nonbelievers also, with "eternal" burning in the fires of hell, his affront to our sense of justice can be assuaged by construing "burning in hell" as meaning only suffering the absence of God, or less comfortingly, that it means "a total, definitive destruction of unrepentant sinners . . . not eternal torture"⁴.

In theory, Christian apologetics consists in a reasoned defence of Christianity. Were the reasoning involved the kind that acknowledges logical inconsistencies, factual errors, and moral depravities, where they occur, apologetics would not itself be in need of apology. But when reasoning is made slave to intransigent faith - especially faith in biblical inerrancy - it amounts to nothing more than specious rationalization. In practice, apologetics has become the art of divining one's own preferred meanings in the words of an ancient text. Those who practice this art are a presumptuous lot. Faced with the evident fact that God neither means what he says nor says what he does mean, they try to compensate for his incompetence by putting their own words in his mouth. Yet they still insist that the Bible is the Word of God, not the word of men.

II: THE OCCASION FOR WARNER'S EXERCISE IN APOLOGETICS

In a debate with Dr. Paul Chamberlain⁵ on the question whether there can be objective morality if God doesn't exist, I argued not only that objective moral truths don't require the existence of the biblical God but further that they require the nonexistence of such a God.

In order to give content to my reasoning I enunciated six moral principles which I took to be paradigm cases of objective moral truths. They were:

- P1 It is morally wrong to wantonly slaughter innocent men, women, and children**
- P2 It is morally wrong to provide one's troops with young women captives so that they can be used as sex-slaves.**
- P3 It is morally wrong to take revenge on your enemies by having their wives raped and their children dashed to pieces before their parent's eyes.**
- P4 It is morally wrong to demoralize people by making them cannabilize their own children.**
- P5 It is morally wrong to offer people as sacrifices, by burning or otherwise.**

³ *Encyclopedia of Biblical Difficulties*.

⁴ Professor Hector Hammerly, e-mail Jan. 29, 1996.

⁵ Publicized as "Can You be Good without God?", the debate - sponsored by the Campus Crusade for Christ - took place at Simon Fraser University on January 25, 1996. Dr. Paul Chamberlain teaches philosophy at Trinity Western University.

P6 It is morally wrong to torture people for holding beliefs different from your own.

I then argued:

(a) that their truth can be accounted for in terms of the moral properties which familiar non-religious ethical theories allow us to attribute, on occasion, to persons and acts that have those properties;

and

(b) that their truth can not be accounted for in terms of the biblical theory of ethics since the biblical God violates each of them.

No party to the dispute, neither Dr. Chamberlain nor others such as Professor Hammerly and Brad Warner⁶ who have subsequently entered the fray, has explicitly disputed the truth of principles P1 through P6. And no-one has provided arguments against claim (a). Hence the issue between us turns on whether or not I am correct in asserting (b).

As to that, I gave chapter and verse from the Bible showing that the God who is supposed to reveal himself therein violates each of P1 through P6. Hence, those believers who think of the biblical God as the foundation of objective morals are faced with an inconsistent quadruple [a set of four statements any three of which are incompatible with the fourth]. They cannot, without contradiction, believe each of the following four statements:

- (i) Anything that God, in accordance with his holy nature, commands us to do, we are morally obliged to do.
- (ii) God's holy nature and his commands to us are revealed in the Bible.
- (iii) It is immoral [morally forbidden] for us to perform acts that violate moral principles such as P1 through P6.
- (iv) The Bible tells us that God commands/permits us to perform acts that violate moral principles P1 through P6 [and many more].

The question, I pointed out, is: Which statement should they give up? To deny (i) would be to abandon the theory that God is the ground of objective moral truths. To deny (ii) would be to abandon a biblical basis for moral epistemology. To deny (iii) would be to embrace moral nihilism since, if the acts envisaged in P1 through P6 are permissible, it is hard to see what would not be. Hence the

⁶ Brad Warner, "God, Evil, and Professor Bradley", privately circulated manuscript, July 1996.

dispute about the truth of my claim (b) turns entirely on whether or not I am correct in asserting proposition (iv) of the above quadruple. It turns, that is, on the exegetical question whether the chapter-and-verse passages I cited mean what they say.

This is why, in his paper "God, Evil, and Professor Bradley", Brad Warner tries to avoid inconsistency by giving alternative accounts of the biblical passages that I cited.

Warner, however, carves out a slightly different territory for discussion. He understandably defers, for future discussion, the particularly troublesome principle P6, promising to deal with it in his forthcoming paper "The Logic behind Damnation".⁷ And, in order to enable us the better to focus on the general issue of God's own morality, he formulates a new principle:

P0 It is morally wrong to be the source of evil

In what follows I shall comment on some of the more important apologetic ploys that Warner invokes regarding evidence of God's having violated principles P0 through P5.

III: A CRITIQUE OF WARNER'S APOLOGETIC PLOYS

re Principle P0: It is morally wrong to be the source of evil.

One of the incidental conclusions supported both by my reasoning and implicit in the evidence I adduced from the Bible itself is that the biblical God, notwithstanding his role as a source of good, is *also* a source of the kinds of evil that result from violations of P1 through P6 (not to mention numerous other moral principles). Hence, given P0, it follows that God is morally reprehensible.

Moreover, I pointed out, God himself explicitly acknowledges that he is a source of evil when he asserts, in the words of the Authorized Version [the King James Version]:

I form the light, and create darkness: I make peace, and create evil: I the LORD do all these things. [Isaiah, 45:7]

and again when he poses the rhetorical question:

⁷ I take this opportunity to hazard the hope that he will also deal with the ethics behind damnation.

Out of the mouth of the most High proceedeth not evil and good?
[Lamentations 3:38].

I was prepared to take God at his word. Warner, however, is not.

In this section the principal question under discussion will be: "Do Isaiah 45:7 and Lamentations 3:38 teach that God creates evil?"

Warner offers several arguments for saying that the answer is "No".

(a) Alternative translations of Isaiah 45:7

Warner thinks the AV translators may have made a mistake when, in these passages, they translated the Hebrew word "rah" as "evil". He points out that the more modern translations provided in the New American Standard Bible (NASB, 1971), the New Revised Standard (NRSV, 1989), the New International Version (NIV, 1978), and the New King James (NKJV, 1982) all translate "rah" as something other than "evil". He takes comfort, for instance, in the fact that the New American Standard substitutes the expression "causing well-being and creating calamity" for "create evil" in Isaiah.. The problem posed by earlier talk of God creating evil seems to have been conjured away. God doesn't create evil ; he merely creates calamity.

But wait! Mindful of Shakespeare's remark "A rose by any other name would smell as sweet", and its cynical correlate "Shit by any other name would smell as foul", we ask ourselves what it means to talk of calamity. I turn to my *Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary* and find "calamity" defined thus:

a state of deep distress caused by major misfortune or loss; an extraordinarily grave event marked by great loss and lasting distress and affliction.

Unlike Warner, I am not much comforted by the euphemistic change of expression. Telling me that God creates "deep distress caused by major misfortune or loss" or "great loss and lasting distress and affliction" troubles me just as much as it does to be told that God creates evil. Loving fathers don't "create" calamity for the children they love. On the contrary, they do everything in their power to prevent its occurrence. And God, I'm told, has limitless power.

Besides, I now find myself asking the obvious question: In what way, if at all, does creating calamity differ from creating evil?

Searching for an answer, I consult my *Webster's* again, look up the noun "evil", and find it defined thus:

something that brings sorrow, distress, or calamity; the fact of suffering, misfortune, and wrongdoing; a cosmic evil force.

I therefore conclude that since God, on the preferred translation, is the creator of sorrow, distress, and calamity, he is, by definition, the author of evil, not just of peace and well-being.

The shallow sophistries of translational semantics have got us nowhere. They leave us with a God who not only permits but also creates⁸ such things as major misfortune, great loss, lasting distress, affliction, sorrow, distress, calamity, suffering, and perhaps even wrongdoing.⁹ They leave us where we started in the Authorized Version. They leave us with a God who, by any name or description, is still a cosmic evil force - and, in Isaiah 45:7, boasts of it to boot.

(b) Paraphrase of Isaiah 45:7.

The tactic of alternative translation demonstrably fails. But other tactics remain. One is to resort to the gloss of a paraphrase rather than to a euphemistic translation. This apologetic ploy is systematically exploited in *The Book*¹⁰. For instance, it enables problematic verses such as Exodus 34:14, whose second part reads "the Lord, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God", to disappear behind the verbal smokescreen of the paraphrase "he is a God who claims absolute loyalty and devotion."

Warner wants to protect God from the self-incriminating admissions found in Isaiah and Lamentations. He therefore proposes a paraphrase. Instead of allowing God to say, in Isaiah 45:7, that he is the creator of evil as well as good, he proposes to have him say only that he is "sovereignly in control of history."

⁸ On page 5 Warner writes: "If Bradley means that God permits but is not the direct cause nor accessory to evil, then the Scripture does support *that* view." Warner is wrong. As we have just seen, Scripture tells us explicitly that God "creates" calamity, also known as evil. And if Warner thinks that God can create evil without being its "direct cause", then it can only be because he wants to play sanctimonious but doctrinally difficult word-games once more. I say "doctrinally difficult" because he will then owe us an account of how God "created the heaven and the earth" [Gen. 1:1 (AV)] without being its direct cause. Or would he want to say that although God created the universe, someone else was its direct cause? [Note that the Hebrew word for "create" is "bara" in both Gen. 1:1 and Isa. 45:7.]

⁹ Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, argues convincingly that the Hebrew word "ra" embraces moral evil and sin as well as natural evil. See p. 326, fn. 7.

¹⁰ Wheaton, Illinois: Tyndale House, 1984. This is *The Living Book* in paragraph form. A highly readable paraphrase of the Bible, it is much favored by evangelical Christians.

That, at any rate, Warner submits, is all that the passages from Isaiah and Lamentations really teach.¹¹

Once again the words themselves may give initial reassurance as to God's innocence. But what do they mean?

A person who has "sovereign control" over other persons and the acts they perform has complete, not just partial, control. And a person who has sovereign control over the persons and events that feature in history is a person who has control over *all* the happenings - the evil or calamitous ones included - whose successive occurrence constitutes the course of history. In short, a person who has sovereign control over history is a person whose decrees determine everything that happens, including the sinful things others say and do. The book of Lamentations attributes just such sovereign control to God when it asks rhetorically: "Who can speak and have it happen if the Lord has not decreed it?" [Lam. 3:37]. So, too, does the Westminster Shorter Catechism when it states, without qualification, "He hath foreordained whatsoever comes to pass."¹²

It may be doubted whether any person other than God has ever been in complete control of events except as they have occurred within a restricted spatio-temporal domain. But let us consider some cases of persons whose powers have enabled them to exercise at least partial control, for a time, over the major events that have occurred within their territorial limits. Genghis Khan, I suppose, would be one. Hitler would be another.

Consider the latter case. Hitler, I imagine, might well at some time or other have boasted of having created suffering, sorrow, and wrongdoing. And his boast, had he made it, would have been true. At the very least there were places and times within which no-one could speak and have it happen unless Hitler had decreed it. That is why we vilify him, not just his subordinates.

Suppose, now, that neo-Nazi revisionists were to plead on Hitler's behalf that his boast was misunderstood and that all that Hitler meant was that he was in "sovereign control" of the events that took place in places like Auschwitz,

¹¹ Warner would do well to heed the following admonition to apologists: "That apologists have sometimes been guilty of diluting the faith in order to commend it to their hearers must not be denied; but unless acceptance of Christianity can be shown to be in accordance with basic human capacities to apprehend facts and values, it is hard to see why it should be preferred to any cognitive absurdity or moral monstrosity whatever." Hugo A. Meynell, on Apologetics in *The Blackwell Encyclopedia of Modern Christian Thought*, edited by Alister E. McGrath, Basil Blackwell Ltd., Cambridge, Mass., 1993, p. 11.

¹² Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., Fourth Revised and Enlarged Edition, 1993), 102.

Belsen, Buchenwald, and Dachau. Would this make him any the less guilty or in any way lessen the legitimacy of our reproach?

If we wouldn't accept this revisionist ploy in Hitler's case, why should we in God's?

(c) The Free Will Defence.

One of the most sophisticated forms of apologetics is that known as theodicy: the attempt to reconcile claims about God's perfect goodness, omnipotence, and omniscience with the evident fact that evil, both natural and moral, abounds in the world for which he - we are told - is responsible as creator. And one of the most sophisticated forms of theodicy is that known as the Free Will theodicy.

As a way of justifying the ways of God, the Free Will theodicy is widely held by philosophers to be a failure. As Alvin Plantinga has admitted, it isn't at all intelligible why God should have acted as he did in creating beings such as Satan who would, of their own free will, cause natural calamities; or why he would create beings such as us who would, again of their own free will, bring about the moral calamities that Christians call sin.

Nevertheless, Plantinga has come up with what he calls a "Defence" - the Free Will Defence - which supposedly entitles God to lay all the blame for evil at the feet of others.

Warner helps himself to the Free Will Defence. He writes:

In what sense is God behind evil? Certainly, God permits evil and suffering. Further he knew that angels and mankind would sin and could have prevented it. However, if God actualizes libertarian free agents (and actualizing libertarian free agents is a greater good than not), it may not be possible for him to create a world that is non-sparsely populated and has a better balance of evil and good than the 'actual' world. (9-10)

He would have us believe that God really was doing his level best when he created the actual world so that, of all feasible worlds, this is either the best or at least one than which there could be no better.

But the Free Will Defence is a scriptural fraud. So far as I can determine, there isn't a single passage in the Bible which subscribes to the doctrine of libertarian freedom. I agree, therefore, with evangelical theologian Wayne Grudem when he writes:

Scripture nowhere says that we are "free" in the sense of being outside of God's control or of being able to make decisions that are not caused by anything. (This is the sense in which many people [Plantinga, Craig, and Warner, for example] seem to assume we must be free . . .) Nor does it say we are "free" in the sense of being able to do right on our own apart from God's power. But we are nonetheless free in the greatest sense that any creature of God could be free - we make *willing* choices, choices that have *real effects*.¹³

Like Grudem, I find the notion of libertarian or incompatibilist freedom unintelligible as well as unscriptural, and at odds with the scripturally well-founded doctrines of God's providence, predestination, and grace as they are taught in such passages as Lamentation 3:37 [quoted above], Daniel 4:35, and Romans 8:39. I also agree with Grudem in holding that it is because we are free in the compatibilist sense that we may justly be held responsible for our free acts. There is no more doubt in my mind than in that of God that when a person, angel, or any other being whatever, freely and knowingly brings about an evil state of affairs that person is culpable.

The Free Will Defence is also a philosophical fraud. I say that for two kinds of reasons: one logical, the other ethical.

The logical reasons are those that I gave in my reply to William L. Craig during our 1995 debate over the question "Can a Loving God send people to Hell?".¹⁴ Craig sought to adapt Plantinga's defensive strategy to the purpose of theodicy and hence thought he could explain why God can justly violate P6 by torturing nonbelievers eternally in the fires of hell. It may not be possible, he explained, for God to create a non-sparsely populated world which has a better balance of evil and good than the actual world. This, of course, is essentially the strategy that Warner, too, adopts in the passage quoted above.

What I called my "Heavenly Refutation" of the Free Will Defence, and therewith also of all Free Will theodicies, consists in pointing out that heaven - as conceived by Jews, Christians, and Muslims alike - comprises a world which is both non-sparsely populated and has a better balance, by far, of good over evil since in it there is nothing but good and a total absence of evil. To be sure, heaven is usually conceived of as a future stage of the actual world. Yet all by

¹³ Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: an Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House; and Leicester, England: InterVarsity Press) 331.

¹⁴ Publicized as "The Hell Debate" and sponsored by the Campus Crusade for Christ, our confrontation took place in the West Gym of Simon Fraser University on January 20, 1995.

itself, as it were, it satisfies all the conditions for being a genuinely possible world - indeed a feasible one. And since whatever is possible is necessarily possible, the Plantinga/Craig/Warner assumption that it is possible that such a world is unfeasible for God to create is not only false but necessarily false. Hence this assumption cannot play the required role in reconciling God's existence with the existence of evil in the present rather unheavenly world that he in fact chose to create.

My ethical grounds for rejecting the Free Will Defence have to do with the arguments for supposing that our being responsible for our free actions absolves God of responsibility for his.¹⁵ These arguments are seriously flawed no matter which account - compatibilist or incompatibilist - one gives of freedom.

One is the argument - which Warner repeatedly invokes - to the effect that since we and the fallen angels are the ones who are the "direct" causes of moral evil, God himself bears no responsibility whatever. Call this the Indirect Cause Ploy. Clearly the conclusion doesn't follow. If it did, we would be entitled to exonerate Hitler from responsibility for the atrocities in the death-camps on the grounds that he himself didn't pull the levers that released the poisoned gases and that those who did were acting of their own free will.

The other argument - also repeatedly invoked by Warner - is to the effect that since God only permits us to perform moral evils, while not performing them himself, he is not responsible for the outcome. Call this the Passive Permission Ploy. Again the conclusion does not follow. If it did, then any commander who watches his troops perform atrocities could once more be excused on the grounds that his own role was merely a passive one and that his soldiers didn't have to do what they did. The argument, in short, turns an eye blinded by faith to the following moral principle:

¹⁵ Warner seems to rely on this assumption when he writes: "the Biblical story argues that agents other than God are directly and completely responsible for the origination of sin and moral evil. Thus God is neither the direct cause of sin nor accessory to sin." (9).

That the principle Warner here invokes is mistaken is easily demonstrated. For suppose that a person X has freely performed an evil act A. Does it follow that X is the only person responsible for A? Obviously the answer is "No" since if it did follow then there would be no such phenomenon as shared responsibility or the phenomenon of being an accessory to a crime. Yet manifestly there are many circumstances in which more than one person is culpable. There are of course, many circumstances in which a person X, and X alone, is blameworthy for evil act A. Roughly, these are those circumstances in which there is no other person Y both who knew what X was doing or planning to do and could have prevented X from performing A. But there are also circumstances in a person Y must be said to share responsibility for A even if it is X, not Y, who is direct cause of A. Roughly, these are cases in which person Y knows what X is doing or plans to do, and Y could have prevented X from performing A but didn't do so.

P0.5 It is morally impermissible to permit what is morally impermissible.¹⁶

This principle, I submit, holds for both that sense of "permit" which means "hold morally permissible" and that sense of "permit" which means "knowingly not prevent". It also holds for cases of natural evil as well as moral evil, as is evident from the fact that we hold someone who knowingly permits the construction of a flawed building or dam, for instance, responsible for any disasters that result from its failure.

Neither of Warner's arguments would be thought even remotely sound if offered in exculpation of anyone other than God.

What is more, their unsoundness is easy to demonstrate on theological, and Scriptural, grounds as well as ethical ones.

As for God not being the "direct cause" of our freely chosen actions, here is what Grudem has to say under the heading "Events Fully Caused by God and Fully Caused by the Creature as Well":

For any of these foregoing events (rain and snow, grass growing, sun and stars, the feeding of animals, or casting of lots), we could (at least in theory) give a completely satisfactory "natural" explanation. A botanist can detail the factors that cause grass to grow, such as sun, moisture, temperature, nutrients in the soil, etc. Yet Scripture says that *God* causes the grass to grow. A meteorologist can give a complete explanation of factors that cause rain (humidity, temperature, atmospheric pressure, etc.), and can even produce rain in a weather laboratory. Yet Scripture says that *God* causes the rain. A physicist with accurate information on the force and direction a pair of dice was rolled could fully explain what caused the dice to give the result they did - yet Scripture says that *God* brings about the decision of the lot that is cast.

This shows us that it is incorrect for us to reason that if we know the "natural" cause of something in this world, then God did not cause it. Rather, if it rains we should thank him. If crops grow we should thank him. In all of these events, it is not as though the event was partly caused by God and partly by factors in the created

¹⁶ P0.5 is a deontic correlate of the S5 thesis that if P is impossible then it is not possible that P is possible, where for "P" we substitute sentences of the form "Act A should be done". Note that the modal auxiliary "should" in sentences of this form may be read as neutral between moral, legal, prudential, and other senses of that word. The sentence "It is obligatory that A should be done" is far from being a tautology; and likewise the sentence "It is forbidden [impermissible] that A should be done" is far from being an oxymoron.

world. If that were the case, then we would always be looking for some small feature of an event that we could not explain and attribute that (say 1 percent of the cause) to God. But surely this is not a correct view. Rather, these passages affirm that such events are entirely caused by God. Yet we know that (in another sense) they are entirely caused by factors in the creation as well.

The doctrine of concurrence affirm that God *directs, and works through*, the distinctive properties of each created thing, so that these things themselves bring about the results that we see. In this way it is possible to affirm that in one sense events are fully (100 percent) caused by God and fully (100 percent) caused by the creature as well. However, divine and creaturely causes work in different ways. The divine cause of each event works as an invisible, behind-the-scenes, directing cause and therefore could be called the "primary cause" that plans and initiates everything that happens. But the created thing brings about actions in ways consistent with the creature's own properties, ways that can often be described by us or by professional scientists who carefully observe the processes. These creaturely factors and properties can therefore be called the "secondary" causes of everything that happens, even though they are the causes that are evident to us by observation. (319)

Obviously, according to Grudem, the doctrine of God's concurrence holds God to be the primary cause of all that happens, including whatever we do of our own free will; we are merely secondary causes. True, our being secondary causes doesn't mean that we aren't direct causes of our own actions. But I know of no moral principle which would get God - the primary cause - off the hook on that score.

Warner claims that the Bible teaches that "agents other than God are *directly* and *completely* responsible for the origination of sin and moral evil", and concludes that "God is neither the direct cause of sin nor accessory to sin". (9). But the argument is unsound for two reasons. The first is that our being, on occasion, "directly" responsible for sin is not in dispute, but that this fact is perfectly compatible with God's being a primary cause of that sin. The second is that his claim that we are "completely" responsible for sin is ambiguous. If it means that we are 100% causes of the sins we perform, this fact is compatible with God's also being 100% a cause of our sin. But if it means that we are solely responsible for our sins, then his claim is inconsistent with the doctrine of concurrence. Whichever it means, his argument collapses.

As for God's permissive will to allow us to commit whatever moral evils, including whatever atrocities, we, Genghis Khan, or Hitler, freely choose, here is what theologian L. Berkhof has to say:

It is customary to speak of the decree of God respecting moral evil as permissive. By His decree God rendered the sinful actions of man infallibly certain without deciding to effectuate them by acting immediately upon and in the finite will. . . . [T]his permissive decree does not imply a passive permission of something which is not under the control of the divine will. It is a decree which renders the future sinful act absolutely certain, but in which God determines (a) not to hinder the sinful self-determination of the finite will; and (b) to regulate and control the result of this sinful self-determination. Ps. 78:29; 106:15; Acts 14:16; 17:30.¹⁷

Obviously, according to Berkhof, the doctrine of God's permissive decrees allows God to permit the impermissible, something which we certainly wouldn't allow neo-Nazis to get away with in defence of their hero. For it is something which - by any description or none - reeks of immorality.

It is worth noting, if only in passing, that the neo-Arminian doctrine of middle knowledge, as espoused by the likes of philosophical sophisticate William L. Craig, doesn't help the apologists out of their moral predicament. Once more I recruit a theologian in my support. Grudem quotes Craig as writing:

God's insight into the will of a free creature is of such a surpassing quality that God knows exactly what the free creature would do were God to place him in a certain set of circumstances. . . . By knowing what every possible free creature would do in any possible situation, God can by bringing about that situation know what the creature will freely do.... Thus he foreknows with certainty everything that happens in the world.¹⁸

Grudem's comment is very much to the point:

But Craig's view does not sustain a view of freedom in the sense Arminians usually maintain: that no cause or set of causes made a person choose the way he or she did. On Craig's view, the surrounding circumstances and the person's own disposition guarantee that a certain choice will be made - otherwise, God could

¹⁷ L. Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 4th Revised and Enlarged Edition, 1993), 105.

¹⁸ The passage is from Craig's "Middle Knowledge, a Calvinist-Arminian rapprochement?" in *The Grace of God, the Will of Man*, 141-64.

not know what the choice would be from his exhaustive knowledge of the person and the circumstances. But if God knows what the choice will be, and if that choice is guaranteed, then it could not be otherwise. Moreover, if both the person and the circumstances have been created by God, then ultimately the outcome has been determined by God.

The obvious points, although Grudem doesn't make them explicitly, are: (i) that the doctrine of middle knowledge is incompatible with the incompatibilist account of free will; (ii) that our making a free choice, in the compatibilist sense, is perfectly compatible with its being such that causally we couldn't have chosen otherwise; and (iii) that whatever we freely choose to do, the outcome has been determined by God. From all this, together with points previously made, I infer that God's not being the direct cause doesn't excuse him, and that his being the primary cause makes him a partner - along with us - in guilt.

(d) The alleged fallacy of selective evidence.

Warner points the finger of fallacy at me for having selected two passages from the Old Testament in which God himself declares that he is the author - the primary cause, if Grudem is correct - of evil. But this objection, if not frivolous, is methodologically misguided since it ignores the logic of the issue between us.

That issue, it will be recalled, has to do with God's nature from which, according to the biblical theory of ethics, all moral obligation is supposed to stem. The theory would have us believe that God's nature, as revealed in the Bible, is holy in a sense which entails his perfect goodness, where his perfect goodness entails his never doing anything evil. So the question is: Is there any evidence in the Bible which would falsify this universal claim?

Warner claims that "there is an overwhelming number of texts that declare that God is not evil (or its source) compared to those texts that suggests that He is not." I agree. He also claims that he can cite "over two thousand" such passages. (7). I take his word for it. But all this is beside the point.

Warner seems to have forgotten the simple methodological point that the test of the truth of a universal generalization is not to be found in the existence of confirming evidence but in whether or not there is any disconfirming evidence. As to that, I adduced evidence from the Bible itself that God's nature, as revealed in his reported acts, is far from perfectly good since he repeatedly commits, commands, or condones acts which any morally sensitive person would reject as unconscionable, viz., acts which violate principles P1 through P6.¹⁹ And I further adduced evidence, from Isaiah and Lamentations, that God himself was prepared

¹⁹ R. D. Bradley, "God and Ethics: a Reply to Hector Hammerly", SFUFA-forum, Feb. 6, 1996.

to acknowledge this fact by stating unequivocally that he creates evil [disaster, if you like] as well as well-being or good.²⁰ Warner thinks that God's word on this point is unreliable. I have argued the contrary. We can argue over the reliability or otherwise of such putatively falsifying evidence. But it is surely not a "fallacy" for me to cite it.

At this point I can imagine God's self-appointed defence attorneys invoking something like a Fifth Amendment clause striking down the admissibility of their client's self-incriminating confessions.²¹ They might say: Let's discount what God says about his primary authorship of evil and restrict our considerations to the evidence of what God - according to the Bible - actually does.

I am quite happy to play their game and let the case, from now on, rest on whether or not God - according to the Bible - does indeed violate the moral principles P1 through P5.

But first, let's remind ourselves what it means to say that P1 through P5 are moral principles, and that they are objectively true.

In calling them moral principles we imply that they are completely general in the sense of applying, as Philip Hanson has put it, "to all things of a certain sort - in this case all persons, past, present, and future - at all times and in all contexts."²² In other words, a moral principle is a universal generalization implicitly quantified over all persons, all times, and all places.²³ As such, a moral principle will be true if there are no exceptions to its applicability, and false otherwise. This is why, in my original paper, I argued that "It is morally wrong to kill" is not acceptable as a moral principle whereas P1 - "It is morally wrong to wantonly slaughter innocent men, women, and children" - is acceptable. The former is just plain false since there are clear exceptions to its claimed universality. Only when we take these exceptions into account and qualify it so

²⁰ Warner might well wonder how, if at all, the scriptural claim that God creates evil can be reconciled with the numerous passages that ascribe goodness to him? The answer should be obvious: We can take the Lord at His word when he tells us that he is the cause or creator of both.

²¹ I say "something like a Fifth Amendment clause" because the Fifth Amendment affords shelter to those only whose confessions are either involuntary or coerced. The passages from Isaiah and Lamentations would seem not to qualify for protection on this count.

²² Philip P. Hanson, "What Environmental Ethics Can Do For You", in *Environmental Ethics*, Vol. II, ed. Raymond Bradley and Stephen Duguid (Burnaby, B.C.: Institute for the Humanities, Simon Fraser University, 1989), 22.

²³ It is, of course, because of this feature of universalizability that someone whose life is lived in accord with moral principles is taken to be a role-model for others to follow.

as to yield P1, do we obtain a moral principle which, in my view at least, is true. In short, a putative moral principle which stands in need of qualification in order for it to apply universally is not an objective moral truth but an objective moral falsehood.²⁴ I shall have occasion to return to this point in a little while.

I submitted P1 through P5 as paradigm examples of such objective moral truths. And, as I have already pointed out, all parties to the dispute - Warner included - at least pay lip service to the view that they do indeed have this status.

re Principle P1: It is morally wrong to wantonly slaughter innocent men, women, and children.

Before discussing the evidence of God's violation of this principle, let me first clarify what I meant when formulating it. Warner thinks that by the adverb "wantonly" I meant "unjustifiably". But I did not. True, that is one meaning of the word. But for me to have used it in that sense when formulating P1 would have been to invite all sorts of question-begging replies since the whole issue surrounding P1 has to do with my claim that it is morally unjustifiable for God to violate it. I was using the word "wantonly" in the sense of "mercilessly", "inhumanely", "cruelly", or "heartlessly" - all senses sanctioned by the *Oxford English Dictionary*, *Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary*, and the *Thorndike - Barnhart High School Dictionary*. Construed in Warner's way, P1 becomes a trivial truth. Construed in my way, P1 becomes a substantive moral claim.

At all events, P1 - when construed as meaning "It is morally wrong to mercilessly, inhumanely, cruelly, or heartlessly, slaughter innocent men, women, and children" - is the moral principle for which I claim objective moral truth. Hence if I can show that God violates *this* principle, then my argument for denying that he is a paradigm of moral purity will be sustained.

I gave four examples of cases in which God violates P1 as thus understood:

- (a) Joshua chapter 11, in which Joshua and the Israelites obey God's command, through Moses, to "utterly destroy" the Canaanites.
- (b) Numbers chapter 16, in which the Lord himself first swallows up Korah, his friends, and their households, in an earthquake, then consumes with fire two hundred and fifty of Korah's supporters who were offering incense, and finally kills another 14,700 people with the plague.

²⁴ Talk of certain moral principles "over-riding" others obscures this point. If there are circumstances in which a principle P_m "over-rides" or "takes precedence over" principle P_n, then P_n stands in need of appropriate qualification and, in the absence of such qualification, will be false.

(c) Genesis chapter 7, in which the Lord himself drowns every living thing on the face of the earth other than Noah and his family.

(d) Ezekiel chapter 9, in which the Lord is reported as commanding the slaying of "old men, young men, maidens, little children and women".

Warner, in defence of his Lord, treats us to a series of unwarranted factual assumptions and a horror-show of moral reasoning. Among the points he makes are the following:

As to (a): Joshua and the Canaanites.

(i) He claims that "the wickedness of the Canaanites was exceedingly great, and their wickedness provoked severe punishment." (14). Despite having earlier agreed that P1 is a universal moral truth, Warner here commits himself to the view that there are exceptions to its universality, viz., circumstances in which the persons being inhumanely slaughtered are being punished for their wickedness. In short, he regards P1 as false. Call this the Punishment Exception.

(ii) He claims that "since the wages of sin is death, God has the right to give and take life." (14). Leave aside the morality of God's determination to make death the penalty of all sin, minor as well as major. Here, according to Warner, is a second class of exceptions to the universality of P1. Apparently it is not impermissible to slaughter people in an inhumane way if they are sinners. And since it is his, and the Bible's, view that all have sinned, we here to have a licence to slaughter indiscriminately. Call this the Sinners Exception.

(iii) He claims that "Sometimes the considerations of the many outweigh the lives of the few" (15), and goes on to say that "failure to destroy the Canaanites could have done irreparable spiritual damage to all mankind." (14). Leave aside the question why, alone among the races that practised child sacrifice, the Canaanites' survival should be thought to pose such a threat; though one wouldn't be overly cynical were one to reflect on the convenience of this supposed threat to humanity for the Israelites who wished to possess the Canaanites' land. For the fact is that once more Warner is producing a class of exceptions to P1 and so is committed to holding it false. P1, he thinks, doesn't hold if one belongs to a minority whose survival could do spiritual damage to the rest of us. The exceptions he finds to P1 would certainly give spiritual comfort to the Conquistadors who used them to legitimate their own God-inspired genocidal practices. Call this the Possible Damage Exception.

(iv) In answer to the question as to why not even innocent Canaanite children were spared in the Israelite conquest he claims that "if the children were spared, they would grow up to reinstate and rebuild the detestable religion of their parents", and explains that "given the cancerous state of the society in which they were born, they would have no chance to avoid its fatal pollution." (15).

Leave aside the fact that Warner here doesn't seem to place much reliance on the power of the children's free will to overcome the social determinants of their society. He here faults P1 on still another score, thus affording a licence to those who slaughter innocent children in case they grow up in the footsteps of their evil parents. This is precisely the licence that the Conquistadors availed themselves of while dashing out the brains of young Indian children. And analogous reasoning was employed by Hitler when he carried out his so-called "Final Solution" to the Jewish problem - a problem which he conceived in terms of the alleged "cancer" that they represented in German society. Call this the Cancer Exception.

If even one of the above exceptions to P1 were sound, P1 would not be a moral truth but a moral falsehood. I am therefore puzzled that Warner thinks P1 true when he has already provided four grounds for thinking it false.

As to (b): Korah and the Levite families.

(i) Warner claims that Korah and company - the adults at any rate - were "punished for insurrection." Leave aside the fact that he here goes well beyond anything the Bible itself tells us about the incident, viz., that the victims-to-be had merely protested at the way in which Moses and Aaron tried to "exalt" themselves and "lord it over" other members of the congregation. Once, more Warner invokes the Punishment Exception to P1.

(ii) So far as the children are concerned, Warner thinks that God "might" have known that the children would grow up to rebel in turn; that "perhaps" they would rebel; and that it is "possible" that irreparable moral and spiritual damage would have occurred had they too not been eradicated. Leave aside the fact that all this is mere unscriptural speculation. And leave aside, too, the fact that he moves illegitimately from talk about mere possibilities to the claim "Thus the destruction of innocent life *was* [my emphasis] necessary for an overriding good." Here he invokes a combination of classes of exception to P1, viz., the Possible Damage and Cancer exceptions, and subsumes them under a still more general heading: what I shall call the Overriding Good Exception. So now we have five kinds of exception to P1.

(iii) He concludes his discussion of Numbers 16 by telling us that "God is sovereign over life and can order its end according to His will and in view of the creature's ultimate good." (15). Leave aside the difficulty of understanding how the slaughter of the Levite infants could have been for the ultimate good of the infants themselves. Warner's claim that God "can" order the end of anyone's life since he is sovereign over all lives contains an ambiguity. It is trivially true that God, if sovereignly omnipotent, "can" do whatever he likes in the sense of having the power or might to do so. But might, we reflect, doesn't confer right. And since the question before us is precisely whether God has the moral right to kill,

i.e., whether he "can" violate P1 in the sense of being morally permitted to do so, it would be question-begging on Warner's part simply to assert, without sound argument, that God "can", in the relevant moral sense of the word, order the slaughter of the Canaanite innocents. In short, if Warner means "can" in the moral sense, he begs the question. But if he uses it in the sense of "has the power to" then he gives the OK to violations of P1 by any who have sovereign authority over their subjects and think that killing innocent children will be to the "ultimate good" either of the children themselves or of others. Here we have a sixth sort of exception to P1. I shall call this the Sovereignty Exception.

As to (c): The Great Flood.

Warner realizes that there is a special problem about the fact that the Bible reports God as having drowned the whole of the human race except for Noah and family; after all, the whole of the human race must be presumed to include innocent children. Once more, then, the problem of punishment for innocence raises its head. I had commented, in one of my replies to Hammerly, that "one must have a mind warped by myth to believe that infants and unborn children, and the whole of the human race other than Noah and his family, were beneficiaries of God's personal warnings or that they were 'utterly disobedient and corrupt'."

Clearly, there are two classes of prima facie innocents here: the children and unborn fetuses; and heathen peoples who were not beneficiaries of God's warnings. Warner deals with them in turn.

(i) So far as the former are concerned, he waives the Sinner Exception - that "all have sinned in Adam" - although this is the only defence that could reasonably be invoked to justify Hammerly's claim [from which Warner makes no attempt to distance himself] that they were "utterly disobedient and corrupt". Instead he invokes the Overriding Good Exception and then commits the fallacy of *argumentum ad ignorantiam* when he tries to dismiss the obvious objection that no overriding good could result from such universal destruction by saying that this is not known or proved to be false.

(ii) So far as the heathen are concerned, he argues that "the heathen possess knowledge of God's moral law, i.e., they were warned that wickedness is wicked." Leave aside the absurd suggestion that the tautology "wickedness is wicked" is the sort of thing that could form the content of a warning. Leave aside questions about how God's warnings were transmitted to the Australian Aborigines and other races far from Mt. Ararat. Leave aside, too, the implicit claim that knowledge of moral law is tantamount to a warning! If Warner's reply is to have any force it must be because he thinks that there is a seventh class of exceptions to P1, viz., the kind of case in which persons can legitimately be slaughtered if

they have been warned and don't immediately comply.²⁵ Call this the Warning Exception.

One further point deserves comment. In a passage whose relevance is far from obvious, Warner likens the human race to prisoners on death row - condemned because "the wages of sin is death" - and likens God to a warden who "immediately" carries out the death sentence on all but a few repentant ones. At least the imagery is apt. But then he comments: "It is also interesting (and sobering) to consider that perhaps God not only holds people accountable for the sin they *actively commit* but also for the sin they *passively permit*, i.e., they make no attempt to thwart." It is sobering indeed; and should be especially so for Warner. For here, paradoxically, Warner allows a glimmering of moral intuition to intrude in his reasoning. He allows the principle P0.5 - "It is morally impermissible to permit the impermissible" - to have the kind of universal application, in the moral deliberations of God and man alike, that I previously insisted on when arguing that God is accountable not only for the evil acts he actively commits but also for those he passively permits.

As to (d): Ezekiel's vision of slaughter in Jerusalem.

Warner claims that this is only a "symbolic vision" in which God "threatens to punish Israel". I don't dispute this. What is at issue is precisely God's threat to punish Israel by commanding an angel to slay all the "old men, young men, maidens, little children and women" who hadn't "sighed and groaned" about the sin in their midst.²⁶ For such a command, were it to be issued in such a cause, could only be "excused" were exceptions to P1 morally permissible, i.e., were P1 false. Apparently the exception that Warner has in mind here is the Punishment Exception, for he writes: "The passage teaches that God will punish *only* the individuals who are guilty".

re Principle P2: It is morally wrong to provide one's troops with young women captives so that they can be used as sex-slaves.

Warner takes a different tack in his defence of God against the charge that he commanded the soldiers who had slain the fathers, mothers, brothers, and sisters of 32,000 virgins to keep the latter for themselves. He seems to accept P2 itself as a moral truth, but thinks that, in keeping the 32,000 virgins "for

²⁵ It is worth noticing that Warner conveniently ignores the issues of environmental ethics raised by God's alleged destruction of every living thing other than the inhabitants of the ark. Or does he suppose that the birds and the bees, not to mention boa constrictors and bacteria, had been warned of the consequences of that dire tautology that wickedness is wicked?

²⁶ Perhaps Warner would like to explain how infants and unborn children still in their mother's wombs could be expected to sigh and groan about the iniquities of their parents.

themselves", neither God, who took a tenth of them for his own service, nor his soldiers, had violated it. They had, he confidently claims, only the intent of taking these unfortunate, and undoubtedly embittered, orphans as "wives or servants." It is lexically possible, he admits, that taking them "for themselves" could mean using them as sex-slaves. But, with naive disregard for what the scriptures themselves tell us, he assures us that sex-slavery was "impossible" in Israel. His reasons are two-fold: (i) "It was a capital offence in the Mosaic law to commit adultery"; or, as he puts it later, "the law of God was that anyone who had sexual relations outside of heterosexual marriage was put to death." (ii) "Any man who committed fornication . . . was forced to marry the woman and never divorce her."

Warner's argument is clearly fallacious. As we saw earlier, in discussion of the Sovereignty Exception to P1, he failed to distinguish between what is the case and what ought to be the case when he implicitly argued from might to right. Now he conflates "is" and "ought" again in arguing that because adultery and fornication ought not, on penalty of death, occur under Mosaic law, it follows that it never did occur without incurring the death penalty. In the one case he argues from "is" to "ought"; now he argues from "ought not" to "is not".

Not only is his argument fallacious; its conclusion is false. One doesn't have to look beyond the immediate context of the case of the Midianite virgins. As Warner himself reminds us, the main reason for the slaughter of the rest of their families was that "the men of Israel engaged in sexual immorality with Moabite and Midianite women". If this had indeed been the case, then - according to Warner's reasoning - these men must surely either have been put to death or forced to marry, and never divorce, the temple prostitutes whose services they apparently enjoyed. But in that case, one would have expected the death of the "Johns" to have sufficed as warning to the salacious. Why kill all the Midianite women - not just the prostitutes but their children and all other members of their race as well - while sparing only those virginal daughters from whom soldiers might hope to obtain the kinds of favors that their mothers were so skilled in bestowing?

In any case, if we look further afield we find numerous instances of so-called "men of God" who bedded the unwedded - or even the otherwise wedded - with impunity from man and God alike. Is Warner ignorant, for instance, of King David's adulterous liaison with Bathsheba or of King Solomon, product of that liaison, and his 300 concubines? Is he ignorant of the fact that being a concubine was akin to being a sex-slave - one who is totally at the service of her master? Or does intellectual integrity take back seat when the blind eye of faith is steering the course?

re Principle P3: It is morally wrong to take revenge on your enemies by having their wives raped and their children dashed to pieces before their parent's eyes.

Warner seems to think that the acts proscribed in P3 are indeed morally wrong but, following Hammerly's lead once more, says that the war crimes described in Isaiah 13 are merely a "prediction" of what will happen to the Babylonians, and concludes that "the Medes, not God, are responsible." We must, he says, distinguish between prescriptive and descriptive statements: God is merely describing what will happen, not prescribing that it should happen. Call this the Mere Prediction Ploy.

It would, of course, be a mere *ad hominem* for me to point out that Warner is here giving belated recognition to the very distinction between "is" and "ought" that he has hitherto contrived to ignore. But leave that aside. Is God, in the passages concerned, merely describing or "predicting" what others will do? Or does he play a role in prescribing what they will do?

Let's look at the passage itself. First we have a declaration of God's intent:

Wail, for the day of the Lord is near! It will come as destruction from the Almighty.²⁷ Thus I will punish the world for its evil, and the wicked for the iniquity, I will put an end to the arrogance of the proud, and abase the haughtiness of the ruthless.

Here God, speaking in the first person, tells us that he himself plans to punish the Babylonians.

Next God tells us some of the gruesome details of the punishment itself:

[Babylon's] little ones also will be dashed to pieces before their eyes; their houses will be plundered and their wives ravished.

Finally, God tells us how he is going to accomplish these war crimes. He won't perform them himself but will use the Medes as his criminal agents:

I am going to stir up the Medes against them.

Shades of Hitler and his plans for the Holocaust!

Strangely enough Warner seems not to find any incongruity in his claim that "when God judges, He frequently takes *credit* [my emphasis] for various disasters of human origin, such as wars". I'd have thought "discredit" the better

²⁷ Warner devotes a whole paragraph to the second sentence, pointing out - correctly enough - that a destruction which comes "as" a destruction from the Almighty need not be from the Almighty himself but only "like" such a destruction. But this is irrelevant, since God goes on in the very next sentence to identify himself as the primary cause of the destruction.

word. But leave that aside. Warner doesn't tell us how God can take credit for a war without taking credit therewith for any war crimes that it involves. Nor does he explain how can take credit for a war, and all that it involves, without being in any way accountable for it.

What he does tell us is that God merely "permits" or "condones" the rape and brain-spattering that the Medes would carry out as his agents. He conveniently forgets P0.5 and his own earlier insight that "perhaps God not only holds people accountable for the sin the they *actively commit* but also for the sin they *passively permit*, i.e., they make no attempt to thwart."²⁸ Or would he - going beyond any scriptural warrant - claim that God, after recruiting the Medes to do his dirty work, then made an attempt to thwart their actions, and so attempted to falsify his own "predictions" of what they would do?

Earlier I said that Warner "seems" to think that P3 is a moral truth. But some of his comments suggest the contrary. He acknowledges that the punishment wreaked on the Babylonians by the Medes is from God himself, and that this punishment - as God foresaw and predicted - would entail a gross violation of P3. His thinking seems to that this sort of violation of P3 is permissible after all since it forms part of the divinely conceived plan for punishment. It seems as though he thinks that there are exceptions to P3's universality, viz., circumstances in which rape and brain-spattering are part of God's punishment of sinners. In short he seems to be invoking what I called the Punishment Exception. Yet, if this be his reasoning, he must regard P3 as false.

re Principle P4: It is morally wrong to demoralize people by making them cannabilize their own children.

Warner summarizes his reply to my charges on this score thus:

[T]he Bible teaches that God caused the cannibalism in the city of Jerusalem in a secondary manner²⁹ by allowing the free choice of the invaders and the Israelites to be actualized. God withdrew His restraining influence on the evil of Babylon and removed His divine protection from Israel and allowed the Israelites to choose to eat their children because of their unrepentant extreme wickedness.

²⁸ Warner writes: "Bradley would need some argument (that he has not provided) to support that God is evil if He permits evil." It is true that I did not provide such argument in earlier, briefer, discussions of the issue. But the argument from P0.5 - as given above and as formulated by Warner himself - should now suffice.

²⁹ It isn't clear to me what Warner means by "God causes cannibalism . . . in a secondary manner". If he were alert to the doctrine of God's concurrence he might have wanted to say rather that God was the primary cause of the incidents of cannibalism and that these were carried out in a secondary manner by the Israelites.

Thus God neither commands nor endorses cannibalism and is not evil.

And later he says:

The Leviticus and Jeremiah passages are merely predictions of what will happen, i.e., famine due to enemy siege will provoke cannibalism, if and when Israel is punished for her sins.

Here he presents us with a mish-mash of covert appeals to excuses - the Free Will Defence, the Passive Permission Ploy, the Mere Prediction Ploy, and the Punishment Exception - whose unsoundness I have already demonstrated.

It remains only to comment on his conclusion: that God neither commands nor endorses cannibalism. On a strict construal of "commands" and "endorses" I suppose he is correct. But this is merely a diversionary tactic. After all, my general thesis was - and still is - that God either commits, causes, commands, or condones violations of principles such as P4. It will not advance Warner's exculpatory purpose to demonstrate that in the present instance God doesn't command or condone cannibalism if the evidence is that he himself causes it. As to that the evidence is clear:

And I shall *make* [my emphasis] them eat of the flesh of their sons and the flesh of their daughters, and they will eat one another's flesh in the siege . .

Little wonder that Warner himself feels constrained to allow that "God made or caused the Israelites to cannibalize their children." (29). To be sure, Warner avails himself of the Indirect Cause Ploy in pointing out that God caused the acts of cannibalism "in a secondary manner". But this is only to say that God himself didn't do the devouring. It no more exonerates God from responsibility for the cannibalizing of Jews than does Hitler's failure to pull the levers exonerate him from responsibility for the gassing of their descendants.

re Principle P5: It is morally wrong to offer people as sacrifices, by burning or otherwise.

The claim I made in my original paper was expressed thus: "In violation of P5, God made people sacrifice their children by fire in order to demoralize them." This seemed to me a reasonable construal of Ezekiel 20:26 which reads [in the NIV]:

I [the Lord] let them become defiled through their gifts - the sacrifice of every firstborn - that I might fill them with horror so that they would know that I am the Lord.

Now I concede that this was perhaps a slight overstatement of the case. Strictly speaking what the passage says is only that God "let", i.e., allowed or permitted, the Israelites to sacrifice their firstborn by fire. But, mindful of the doctrine of concurrence - according to which God is the primary cause of everything that happens and his creatures, e.g., the sacrifice-offering Israelites, are only secondary causes - I expressed this by saying that God "made" or "caused" the Israelites to sacrifice their firstborn. Moreover, lending plausibility to this construal is the fact that God expressly tells us what his motivation was in causing [or allowing if you wish] the sacrifices to be performed. It was to fill them with horror, or make them desolate, so that his sovereignty would be recognized. It makes sense to declare the motivation for one's own acts - whether these be acts of commission or acts of permission. But it does not make sense to declare one's motives for someone else's acts.

Be this as it may. The essential point remains that, as Warner himself puts it, "God permitted the Israelites to sacrifice their offspring." (34). Clearly, he thinks the talk of permission is explanation, and justification, enough. In short, he clearly thinks the Passive Permission Ploy is good enough to exonerate God even though, as we saw earlier, he doesn't think that God would allow it to exonerate anyone else.

Interestingly enough, the child sacrifices permitted by God in the passage from Ezekiel is only one such instance. Another poignant case is that of Jephthah and his daughter as related in Judges 11:30-39. Shortly after the spirit of the Lord had "come upon him" the following events took place:

And Jephthah made a vow to the LORD: "If you give the Ammonites into my hands, whatever comes out of the door of my house to meet me when I return in triumph from the Ammonites will be the LORD's, and I will sacrifice it as a burnt offering." . . . When Jephthah returned to his home in Mizpah, who should come out to meet him but his daughter, dancing to the sound of tambourines! She was an only child. Except for her he had neither son nor daughter. When he saw her, he tore his clothes and cried, "Oh! My daughter! You have made me miserable and wretched, because I have made a vow to the LORD that I cannot break." . . . After the two months, she returned to her father and he did to her as he had vowed.

True, in this case God's motivation in permitting Jephthah to fulfill his vow isn't even hinted at in the Bible itself, though some have taken it convey an important lesson about the need to think carefully before making a potentially disastrous vow. But whatever God's motivation may have been, the upshot for Jephthah and his daughter was morally abhorrent: sacrifice as burnt offering to a

God who did nothing whatever to prevent it.³⁰ At least that is what the Bible clearly says when it says that Jephthah "did to her as he had vowed."

For the case of the Israelites whose firstborn God allowed to be burnt in tribute to him, Warner offers the reassurance that "those who had done so should have been put to death." (34). It isn't clear whether he means the "should" of moral obligation or the "should" of expectancy. But whichever he means it is clear that in Jephthah's case God seems not to have thought him deserving of any penalty at all. On the contrary, God himself subsequently listed him as one of the great men of faith who, according to Hebrews 11:2, "gained approval". For my own part, I disapprove of those who give approval to what ought to be disapproved. But apparently Warner does not.

Once more, then, I am constrained to ask whether Warner really believes the moral principle at issue - P5 in this case - to be a genuine moral truth. On the face of it he thinks that there can be exceptions to P5, namely circumstances in which one merely permits violations of P5 as distinct from commanding those violations or committing them ones' self. But if this is his position, then he must think that P5 is false, not true. More than that, if this is his position then he must also think that P0.5 is false. He must think, in other words, that it is quite permissible to permit what is impermissible. And if he thinks that, then he must also think that it is permissible for leaders of the Bosnian Serbs, for instance, to allow the ethnic cleansing and other genocidal practices that certain of their followers have pursued. The War Crimes tribunals set up to judge them have no moral right to do so, for the leaders themselves were perfectly within their own moral rights to permit these atrocities.

Here, as elsewhere, I find that both my standards of intellectual integrity and my moral intuitions are seriously at odds with Warner's. His, I fear, would open the flood-gates of apologetic casuistry in defence of anything and everything that is morally abhorrent. In the fervent hope that the world might become a better place than God has apparently seen fit to make it, I urge their repudiation.

³⁰ The author of *Encyclopedia of Biblical Difficulties* goes so far as to confess: "The understanding of the event involves an intolerable theological difficulty, for it hopelessly compromises the integrity of God Himself." But, needless to say, he finds a way out. With only the warrant of his own wishful thinking, certainly none from scripture, he concludes that Jephthah's daughter "was devoted to the service of the Lord as a virgin attendant in tabernacle worship for the rest of her life", i.e., that she was a "living sacrifice" to the Lord, not - as the Bible says - a "burnt offering".