THEISM AND MODAL COLLAPSE

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God is traditionally taken to be a necessarily existing being who is unsurpassably powerful, knowledgeable, and good. The familiar problem of *actual* evil claims that the presence of gratuitous suffering in the actual world constitutes evidence against the existence of such a being. In contrast, the problem of *possible* evil claims that the possibility of bad worlds constitutes evidence against theism. How? It seems plausible to suppose that there are very bad possible worlds. But if God exists in every world, then God exists in those, too. And if God exists in very bad worlds, some say, God is culpable for not ensuring that they are better. This paper considers this argument, surveys some responses, and offers a novel solution. Along the way, it argues that theists should maintain that the actual world is a *multiverse* featuring all and only universes worthy of being created and sustained by God, and – more controversially – it recommends that theists embrace *modal collapse*: the claim that this multiverse is the *only* possible world.

1. GULESERIAN'S CHALLENGE: THE PROBLEM OF POSSIBLE EVIL

Traditional theism (sometimes called "Anselmian theism") holds that God is a necessary being for whom omnipotence, omniscience, and moral perfection are essential attributes. Theodore Guleserian (1983) thinks that careful reflection on certain modal intuitions about very bad possible worlds can show this idea of God to be untenable. He begins by marshalling some standard consequences of possible world semantics for theism. On theism, it is taken for granted that God exists in every possible world.[1] Each world, of course, is actual at itself. Theists also maintain that in each world, God allows that world to be actual.[2] Moreover, on theism, it is a necessary truth that God allows a world to be actual only if so doing is morally permissible. So it follows it is morally permissible for God to allow any world at all to be actual. But, says Guleserian,

> [t]his is a surprising and counterintuitive consequence of [theism]. It tells us that in *every* possible world there is an OOM [omniscient, omnipotent, morally perfect] being for whom it is *morally permissible* to allow *that* world to be actual. This implies that there is no possible world in which it is true that no OOM being ought to allow that world to be actual. But it surely is plausible to suppose that we can conceive of some possible worlds that are so full of misery and so lacking in redeeming value that, necessarily, no OOM being ought to – or would – allow them to be actual (p. 224).

The remainder of Guleserian's paper defends the inference from the conceivability of morally impermissible worlds to the claim that such worlds are indeed possible.[3]

Guleserian's argument may be expressed with reference to the following inconsistent set of propositions:[4]

(1) Necessarily, there exists a being (God) who is essentially unsurpassable in power, knowledge, and goodness.
(2) Every possible world is actual at itself.
(3) Necessarily, if w is a possible word, then it is true in w that God permits w to be actual.
(4) Necessarily, if it is true in w that God permits w to be actual, it is morally acceptable[5] for God to do so.
(5) There is at least one on-balance-bad world, w.[6]
(6) It is not morally acceptable that, in w, God permits the overall bad world w to be actual when it is within God's power to prevent this.

Guleserian thinks that there is good reason for the theist to maintain (2)-(6). Absent better reasons to believe (1), then the theist should reject this claim, and either eschew belief in God altogether, or at least revise her view of the divine attributes.

2. GARCIA AND TIDMAN ON JUSTIFIED MODAL DISAGREEMENT

All sides in this debate grant (2), (3), and (4). Laura Garcia (1984) and Paul Tidman (1993) appear to grant (6), and so they understand the disagreement between the theist and Guleserian to concern whether (1) or (5) is more plausible.[7] Garcia and Tidman appear to concede that, in the end,[8] there is about as much intuitive support for (1) as there is for (5).[9] Moreover, they both insist that the theist and her critic can rationally 'agree to disagree' in the absence of decisive arguments for either (1) or (5). Tidman appears to suggest that modal intuitions should be presumed innocent until proven guilty, and concludes that "[o]n this view each side would be free to continue to hold to their respective beliefs on the matter in the absence of a good reason to give up those beliefs" (p. 194). Similarly, Garcia suggests that "[o]ur intuitions give us no conclusive basis for choosing between [(1) and (5)], so that someone who opts for either one or the other is being intellectually responsible, is within his or her epistemic rights" (pp. 384-5).
    This is a very curious position. Suppose that two epistemic peers agree that (a) their respective claims logically preclude each other,[10] and that (b) no compelling arguments settle the matter, and furthermore, that (c) both claims are equally supported by intuition. Whatever the temptation for the disputants to maintain their original position, it seems that both have a *rebutting defeater* which precludes continued rational acceptance of their stance. The only rational response, absent further considerations,[11] is to suspend judgment.[12] It is implausible, then, for Garcia and Tidman to maintain that each side is rationally entitled to its original position. The next section consider different responses to Guleserian's argument.

3. MORRIS' REJECTION OF (5); ALMEIDA'S REJECTION OF (6)

Thomas Morris (1987) appears to agree that this set is inconsistent, and that (2), (3), (4), and (6) should be accepted by theists. Morris urges that the theist should maintain (1) and willingly sacrifice (5). Morris rejects Guleserian's meta-modal assumption that "genuine, broadly logical or metaphysical possibility is established by the consultation of logical and semantic intuitions alone" because, "[f]or the theist, Anselmian intuitions may rule out what logical and semantic intuitions alone do not" (pp. 51-2). Morris urges that the Anselmian God

...is a delimiter of possibilities. If there is a being who exists necessarily, and is necessarily omnipotent, omniscient, and good, then many states of affairs which otherwise would represent genuine possibilities, and which by all non-theistic tests of logic and semantics do represent possibilities, are strictly impossible in the strongest sense. In particular, worlds containing certain sorts of disvalue or evil are metaphysically ruled out by the nature of God, divinely precluded from the realm of real possibility (p. 48).[13]

Michael Almeida (2011) agrees that the set is inconsistent, and that (2), (3), and (4) are unimpeachable. But while Morris rejects (5), Almeida targets (6). Almeida considers w, a world in which Smith – a good and just person – suffers some undeserved, terrible affliction that God could have prevented without thereby permitting a greater evil or preventing a greater good. One might expect an unsurpassable being to prevent this affliction. But according to Almeida, this expectation is misguided:

> Suppose ... that the perfect being in w had prevented all of Smith's undeserved suffering. Would it then have been true that there is no bad world w in which a moral agent no less good and just than Smith endures the same preventable suffering that Smith endures in w? The unfortunate answer is no. It is necessarily true that there is a bad world w that includes a moral agent no less good and just than Smith that endures the same preventable suffering that Smith endures in w. So an Anselmian God simply could not ensure that there is no on-balance very bad world w at which good agents suffer undeserved evils ...No matter what the perfect being in w had done or prevented or changed, it would be true that there is a bad world w that includes a perfect being that actualizes w [or permits w to be actual] (p. 9).[14]

In short, since bad worlds necessarily exist, God cannot be blamed for their existence. Almeida says that God's predicament is tragically similar to that of a lifeguard who can prevent *each* of two persons from drowning, but cannot prevent *both* persons from drowning. The existence of just such situations inclines us to reject the following principle:[15]

(6*)   It is not morally acceptable for a lifeguard knowingly to permit someone to drown, when it is within the lifeguard's power to prevent this.

Just as reflection on 'lifeguard situations' teaches us that (6*) is too strict, Almeida argues, reflection on the necessity of bad worlds should incline us to reject (6).

4. MODAL INTUITIONS AND MORAL INTUITIONS

The Anselmian theist, of course, is committed to (1), and (2), (3), and (4) seem unimpeachable. Accordingly, the Anselmian must choose to follow Morris and reject (5), or follow Almeida and reject (6). Both alternatives have drawbacks for the theist. Morris' rejection of (5) is costly, since it requires him to deny that some possible worlds are bad overall. This claim does not appear to be extravagant. For one thing, many have held that the *actual* world is bad overall, from which it follows *a fortiori* that some possible world is bad overall. That aside, we seem readily able to conceive (for example) of a possible world – let's call it w – in which all creatures experience horrific, undeserved, unremitting, gratuitous suffering for the duration of their existence. And as Guleserian suggests, our ability to conceive of this suggests that w is indeed possible. One response is to deny that w is bad overall, but this strains credulity. Another response is to deny

that our conceivings are reliable (if defeasible) guides to genuine metaphysical possibility, but this seems an extreme form of modal skepticism.[16] A third response is to deny that we are really conceiving what we think we are conceiving, but there seems to be no motivation for this move.[17] So Morris' rejection of (5) comes at a price.

Morris is willing to sacrifice *modal* intuitions in favour of (5) in order to save *moral* intuitions in favour of (6). In contrast, Almeida trusts his *modal* intuitions in favour of (5), and is willing to sacrifice *moral* intuitions in favour of (6). For Almeida, it is utterly obvious that there are bad possible worlds, and since they exist necessarily, in those worlds God simply cannot be faulted for permitting them to be actual. But there are costs here too. Consider w, the world in which all creatures experience horrific, undeserved, unremitting, gratuitous suffering for the duration of their existence. In w, theism teaches that the creator is essentially, *unsurpassably* omnipotent, omniscient, and perfectly good, and (presumably) that these creatures owe their maker gratitude and praise for their horrible lives. Theism, on this view, maintains these things even though it is perfectly true that God could have prevented or alleviated these creatures' suffering.

If Almeida is right that bad worlds exist necessarily, then none of this counts against the existence of God, nor against the doctrine that God is essentially unsurpassable, in any way whatsoever. This is a highly surprising and counterintuitive consequence for theism. Theists have generally held that *no* possible amount of (divinely-permitted, divinely-preventable) gratuitous suffering is compatible with theism.[18] But on Almeida's view, *every* possible amount of such suffering is compatible with the existence of the Anselmian God.[19] Accordingly, Almeida's move requires theists to dramatically revise their understanding of God. To the extent, then, that theists are committed to the traditional view concerning gratuitous evil and God, Almeida's view will be considered costly.[20]

5. MODAL COLLAPSE: PARTIAL AND TOTAL

The Anselmian theist thus faces an unpalatable dilemma: reject (6) and accept the consequences just noted, or else reject (5) and accept *partial modal collapse*: the constriction of (what we thought was) logical space to exclude bad worlds. As will now be shown, matters are even worse for a particular sort of Anselmian theist: one who holds that there is a unique best of all possible worlds.

If there is a unique unsurpassable world, it is reasonable for the theist to expect that God would not permit any other world to be actual. In fact, there is good reason to think that it would be *morally unacceptable* for God to allow any other world to be actual.[21] This way of thinking suggests (6′) in the set below. But if it is morally unacceptable for God to permit any world other than the unique best to be actual, it seems that this is the *only* world that could be actual – which is just to say that it is the only possible world.[22] And this means that (if theism is true) nothing could possibly be otherwise than it is: *total modal collapse* ensues. This argument can be expressed with reference to the set below:

(1) Necessarily, there exists a being (God) who is essentially unsurpassable in power, knowledge, and goodness.
(2) Every possible world is actual at itself.
(3) Necessarily, if w is a possible word, then it is true in w that God permits w to be actual.
(4) Necessarily, if it is true in w that God permits w to be actual, it is morally acceptable for God to do so.
(5′) There is a unique best of all possible worlds.
(6′) It is not morally acceptable for God to permit a worse world to be actual when a better alternative is available.
(7′) There are possible worlds other than the unique best.

Notice that (1)-(4) in this set are the same as before. (5′) and (7′) are new claims which express the ontology now under examination, and (6′) captures the same moral intuition appealed to in (6). As before, the set is inconsistent. So the Anselmian theist who endorses (1), (2), (3), (4), and (5′) faces another dilemma: reject (6′) and give up compelling moral intuitions, or reject (7′) and accept total modal collapse.[23] Neither alternative seems particularly palatable.

  This may seem like a philosophical problem unlikely to worry very many (save, perhaps, Leibniz): defenders of the claim that there is one unique best world are scarce. But if it can be shown that theists *should* believe that there is a unique best world, then the importance of the problem for theists becomes evident. Section 6 offers just such an argument. Section 7 briefly explores one horn of the dilemma: the rejection of (7′). It will be seen that the consequences of accepting total modal collapse may well be less serious than might initially be supposed.

6. THE THEISTIC MULTIVERSE: THE BEST OF ALL POSSIBLE WORLDS[24]

A *universe* is a spatiotemporally interrelated, causally closed aggregate. It is sometimes taken for granted that there is a one-to-one correspondence between possible worlds and universes. But philosophers and scientists alike have suggested that this is unwarranted.[25] Suppose they are right: worlds may then comprise more than one universe. In other words, at least one possible world is a *multiverse*.

  On this view, possible worlds are not physical containers for universes.[26] Rather, a possible world is simply *comprised of* whatever universes there are in that world, together with whatever nonphysical entities there are. If a possible world comprises more than one universe, these universes may differ in many respects (e.g., different histories, different laws of nature), but they must be logically compossible: by definition, there can be no logical contradiction between different universes within one possible world. One consequence is that there can be no *exact copies* of universes within a multiverse.[27] Another consequence is that there is no trans-*universe* identity of individuals within a multiverse: individuals in one universe can perhaps have *counterparts* in other universes, but no individual can exist in more than one universe within a single possible world.

  How does all this bear on theism? Several philosophers have maintained that an unsurpassably powerful, knowledgeable, and good deity will create and sustain *all* and *only* those universes worth creating and sustaining.[28] This claim is suggested by following principles:

P1	If a universe is *creatable* by an unsurpassable being, and *worth creating* (i.e., it has an axiological status that surpasses some objective threshold *t*), that being will create that universe.[29]
P2	If a universe is *sustainable* by an unsurpassable being, and *worth sustaining* (i.e., it has an axiological status that surpasses some objective threshold *t*), that being will sustain that universe.
P3	If a universe is *not worthy of creation* (i.e., it has an axiological status that fails to surpass some threshold *t*), an unsurpassable being will not create that universe.
P4	If a universe is *not worthy of being sustained* (i.e., it has an axiological status that fails to surpass some threshold *t*), an unsurpassable being will not sustain that universe.[30]

  P1-P4 motivate careful consideration of a particular possible world, which may be termed the *theistic multiverse* (TM). In TM, God creates and sustains *all* and *only* universes which are worth creating and sustaining. Moreover, TM comprises no other universes: since theism maintains that God is the creator and sustainer of all that is, it follows that in TM, no universes are created or sustained by any being other than God, and no universes lack a creator or sustainer.

There seems no reason to deny that multiverses are logically possible. If the *theistic* multiverse just described is logically possible, then *at least* one possible world is TM. But it is also important to see that *at most* one world can be TM. Two sets, after all, can differ only in membership. The set of universes TM comprises could not have had different members while still remaining TM, since it is defined precisely by its comprising *all* and *only* the universes worth creating and sustaining.

Moreover, similar considerations can be offered in a plausible case for the claim that TM is the *best* of all possible worlds. If TM is not an unsurpassable world, it is surpassed by some other world. Any world distinct from TM must fail to comprise *all*, or fail to comprise *only*, universes worth creating and sustaining by God (or both). Let's take each in turn. Consider a world distinct from TM which fails to comprise *all* universes worth creating and sustaining. If principles P1 and P2 are plausible, the theist must hold that such a world could be improved by the addition of one or more universes worthy of creation and sustenance. Next, consider a world distinct from TM that fails to comprise *only* universes worth creating and sustaining. If principles P3 and P4 are plausible, the theist must hold that such a world could be improved by the removal of one or more universes unworthy of creation or sustenance. So it is difficult to see how the theist could hold that any world surpasses TM. Parallel considerations show that TM is the *unique* best of all possible worlds. If TM is *not* the unique best world, there must be a world distinct from TM which is equal in axiological status to TM. But again, any world distinct from TM must fail to comprise *all*, or fail to comprise *only*, universes worth creating and sustaining by God, and in either case, given P1-P4, it seems that such a world is surpassable.[31] On theism, then, there is indeed a unique best of all possible worlds: the theistic multiverse.

7. TOTAL MODAL COLLAPSE MITIGATED

If the argument in the foregoing section is plausible, theists should affirm that there is exactly one unsurpassable world: TM. This secures (5′) in the inconsistent set noted in Section 5. But if the theist maintains (1)-(4) and (5′), given that the set is inconsistent, the upshot is that she should reject one of the following:

> (6′) It is not morally acceptable for God to permit a worse world to be actual when a better alternative is available.
> (7′) There are possible worlds other than the unique best.

Almeida-style considerations could be brought to bear against (6′): one might urge that since worlds other than the unique best necessarily exist, it is logically impossible for God to fail to permit worse worlds to be actual (at those worlds) when better alternatives are available. And if it is logically impossible for God to fail to permit worse worlds to be actual when better ones are available, God's so permitting is morally acceptable.

But there are costs to this maneuver. Theists will be reluctant to relinquish the notion that it is not morally acceptable for an essentially unsurpassable being to permit a worse alternative when a better one is available – many will find this notion more plausible than the claim that these worse alternatives necessarily exist. So let us briefly explore the other alternative: the denial of (7′). Earlier, this was called *total modal collapse*, and it was suggested that it has an unpalatable consequence: nothing can possibly be other than it is. Once the theistic multiverse is introduced, however, this consequence must be handled carefully. If the only possible world is the theistic multiverse, the claim "nothing could possibly be other than it is" is ambiguous. Taken to mean that there could not possibly have been anything other than the array of universes worth creating and sustaining, this claim is true. But expressed from a vantage point *within* a universe, and taken to refer to that universe, it is false.

From this perspective, to say that things could be otherwise is just to say that there is another spatiotemporally distinct universe in which things *are* otherwise. Universes, as noted, can vary in all sorts of ways. They may differ in their laws of nature and in their histories, and these variances can perhaps anchor many of the familiar modal claims whose intelligibility seemed threatened by the claim that there is only one possible world.[32] In fact, this picture of modality – on which modal claims are understood to refer to concrete, spatiotemporally isolated universes – is strikingly similar to a well-known theory of modality: David Lewis' *modal realism*.[33] So while the claim that there is only one possible world on theism seemed an affront to our modal intuitions, once it is seen that this world is the theistic multiverse, it may be that familiar modal claims can be parsed in terms of universes instead of worlds.[34] Modal collapse may not be so bad after all.

CONCLUSION

Guleserian (1983) poses an important challenge to the Anselmian theist. He thinks that reflection on the inconsistent set displayed in Section 1 should force such an individual to give up or modify her theistic beliefs. As noted in Section 3, Morris and Almeida offer the theist two ways out: Morris recommends sacrificing the *modal* intuition that bad worlds are possible, while Almeida recommends sacrificing the *moral* intuition that it is unacceptable for the Anselmian God to permit a bad world to be actual. The costs of both sacrifices are detailed in Section 4. Section 5 shows that matters are worse for a particular sort of Anselmian theist: one who thinks that there is a unique best of all possible worlds. For such a theist, adopting Morris' strategy means accepting that there is exactly one possible world – and this seems a very high price to pay. Moreover, Section 6 urges that theists *should* maintain that there is a unique best of all possible worlds. But Section 7 shows that the theists need not thereby accept the unpalatable consequence that things could not possibly be otherwise than they are. Familiar claims about possible worlds can perhaps be expressed as claims about alternate universes within the theistic multiverse.

Much remains to be said, and there is little space to say it. It remains to be seen whether the project of reinterpreting familiar modal claims in the recommended fashion can indeed be accomplished (and a full defence of this is beyond the scope of this article). Furthermore, it must be conceded that this view is not without its drawbacks. Perhaps the most significant is its insistence that, on theism, bad *universes* are outright impossible. It might seem that this objectionably violates our intuitions to the contrary, just as Morris' rejection of (5) violates our intuitions that bad *worlds* are possible. But for the theist, this may be a price worth paying. Indeed, perhaps the theist should welcome a picture of reality in which divine creative activity is expressed in infinitely-many actual universes, and in which divine providence ensures that not one of these universes goes irredeemably wrong.

[1] This is just what it means to say that God is a necessarily existing being, or that God could not possibly fail to exist.

[2] Theists also tend to say that God *actualizes* a world. The notion of *allowing* a world to be actual is weaker, since it supposes only that if God wishes world some world w not to be actual, it is within God's power to ensure this. This is plausible, since all God needs to do to prevent w from being actual is to actualize some state of affairs not included in w, or fail to actualize some state of affairs that would otherwise be included in w. On theism, then, for any world w, if w is actual, God allows it to be so.

[3] He begins by noting that there are cases where our modal intuitions entitle us to think that states of affairs T and T′ are possible. Furthermore, our modal intuition may entitle us to think that these states of affairs are *consistent*, and hence *compossible* (p. 228). So, for example, we intuit that it's possible that there be one non-moral creature who leads a life full of suffering and misery. Then we intuit that it's possible that there be another such creature. We next intuit that these states of affairs are compossible, and finally, we use induction to arrive at the general result that there is a possible world in which "...the only sentient beings whose existence is contingent are nonrational animals of various sorts ...all of which suffer long spontaneous bouts of excruciating pain, and spend the few hours between bouts barely doing what is necessary to survive" (p. 226). Such a world, Guleserian plausibly supposes, is bad overall.

[4] This set is modeled after Garcia's exposition of Guleserian (1984, p. 379). An anonymous APQ referee suggested helpful refinements.

[5] Guleserian's 'permissible' has been changed to 'acceptable', to avoid giving the appearance of presuming a deontological framework here.

[6] Many theists hold that necessarily, God prevents *gratuitous* suffering. For such theists, (5) could be replaced with the claim that there are possible worlds featuring instances of gratuitous suffering. But (5) is a weaker claim, since not every world featuring gratuitous suffering is on-balance-bad.

[7] An anonymous APQ referee complains that this way of understanding the issue understates the problem for Anselmian theism. According to this referee, not only the *possibility*, but the very *conceivability* of on-balance-bad worlds threatens the coherence of theism, since such worlds are (or at least can plausibly be held to be) *a priori* impossible on theism. The goal of this paper is to engage the former issue as it has been discussed in the literature. (It is worth noting, however, that the conceivability of bad worlds can threaten theism in this way only if it is held that conceivability entails, or is equivalent to, *a priori* possibility in this context, and such a view would be contentious.)

[8] Garcia argues that Guleserian has failed to show that (5) is more plausible than (1). To do so, she offers intuition-based arguments for the claim that (1) is possible. Tidman agrees that Guleserian has failed to show that (5) is more plausible than (1), but instead of defending (1), Tidman criticizes Guleserian's argument for (5).

[9] See Tidman, pp. 193-4 and Garcia, pp. 384-5.

[10] If (2), (3), (4), and (6) are granted, (1) and (5) preclude each other, since this is an inconsistent set.

[11] Such considerations might include, for example, the knowledge that one disputant is prone to having poor intuitions, or especially acute ones. Such knowledge could cause us to deny (c).

[12] This, at any rate, is the traditional view of such disagreements. For a defence of it against recent objections, see Feldman (2006). For a dissenting view, see Kelly (2005).

[13] Alvin Plantinga expresses a similar view:

> [A]ll possible worlds ... are very good. For God is unlimited in goodness and holiness, as well as in power and knowledge; these properties, furthermore, are essential to him; and this means, I believe, that God not only has created [i.e. actualized] a world that is very good, but that there aren't any conditions under which he would have created a world that is less than very good ... The class of possible worlds God's love and goodness prevents him from actualizing is empty. All possible worlds, we might say, are eligible worlds: worlds that God's goodness, mercy, and love would permit him to actualize (2004, p. 8).

[14] In this passage, Almeida appears to assume that any instance of undeserved suffering is sufficient for making a world bad overall. There is no reason to grant this assumption, as mentioned in note 6. But Almeida's point can be made without recourse to this assumption.

[15] In the lifeguard analogy, it should be emphasized, both persons are actually drowning. But in the possible worlds case imagined by Almeida, only one of the persons at issue is actually suffering, since at most one world can be actual. (Thanks are due to an anonymous APQ referee for suggesting that this be emphasized.)

[16] Moreover, as Paul Sheehy says, "if [bad] worlds are impossible, then some account of the ease with which we conceive of them is owed" (2006, p. 325). Morris offers no such account, and it is difficult to see how a principled one could be given.

[17] On this, see Sheehy (p. 323).

[18] There are important exceptions, such as Hasker (1992) and van Inwagen (2006).

[19] In personal correspondence, Almeida denies that God can *cause* undeserved suffering, in which case there are no possible worlds in which this occurs (Aug 7, 2007). But this appears to be the only relevant restriction on logical space that Almeida is willing to countenance.

[20] A critic might deny that there is a genuine cost here. After all, one might say that there is no genuine cost to denying (6*), whatever its pre-reflective plausibility. And just as the lifeguard's inability to save both swimmers *in no way* impugns the lifeguard, equally, God's inability to prevent all gratuitous evil should *in no way* impugn theism. But there is an important difference between these two cases. Lifeguards can, and presumably do, simply *find themselves* in such situations, which are in no significant sense of their own making. But God is taken to be the creator and sustainer of all that is – *every* situation, on this view, is to some important extent of God's making. To assume that God simply finds himself in situations where he is permitting preventable gratuitous evil, in effect, is to side with Almeida against Morris. On Morris' view, it is precisely God's role as creator and sustainer of all that is which forecloses the possibility of on-balance-bad worlds. So to deny that there is a genuine cost here is, in effect, to beg the question in favour of Almeida.

[21] Famously, Robert Adams (1972) demurs. But Adams' view has been defeated by his critics, including Rowe (2004), who argues that even if God violates no duty, and harms no one, in actualizing a world other than the best, God would still be morally surpassable for doing so. (This, of course, is unacceptable on Anselmian theism.)

[22] This consequence is briefly noted in Gale (1991, pp. 31-32), Garcia (1992, p. 204), Wainwright (1996, p. 127) and Wierenga (2007, p. 208). More developed arguments are offered by Resnick (1973) and Heller (2001).

[23] Thomas Flint (1983, p. 260) appears to believe that (5′) entails (7′), in which case, given (5′), total modal collapse is impossible. But there is another way to understand the relationship between (5′) and (7′). The Anselmian theist who accepts (1)-(6′) can say that while worlds *other than* the unique best

seemed possible, on reflection it must be conceded that they are merely conceivable, and strictly impossible. On this reading, (5′) becomes trivially true.

24 Section 6 is an abbreviated version of an argument which appears in Kraay (2010). This material appears here with kind permission of Springer Science and Business Media.

25 Many philosophers have defended various versions of the multiverse. For a historical survey of many-universe hypotheses, see Munitz (1951). Those who take seriously the idea that *theism* suggests the multiverse include John McHarry (1978); Peter Forrest (1981, 1996); Michael Coughlan (1987); Donald Turner (1994 unpublished, 2003); Paul Draper (2004); Hud Hudson (2006), and Timothy O'Connor (2008). For good introductory surveys of arguments for the multiverse grounded in physics and cosmology, see Leslie (1989, Chapter 4) and Max Tegmark (2003).

26 See Turner (1994 unpublished, p. 59; 2003, p. 148).

27 Given the Identity of Indiscernables, at any rate, this is impossible. (See McHarry 1978, p. 133.) An anonymous APQ reviewer rightly notes that a *haecceiticist* could hold that two universes (or two individuals) could be qualitatively identical, but nevertheless have different haecceities.

28 See, for example, McHarry (1978, pp. 133-4); Forrest (1996, pp. 216-7); Turner (1994 unpublished, Chapter 8; 2003, pp. 147-9); Draper (2004); Hudson (2006, pp. 166-171); and O'Connor (2008, Section 5.1).

29 This threshold would be difficult to specify, but could presumably be described with reference to the good-making and bad-making properties of universes. (It is here assumed, for simplicity, that all universes can sensibly be evaluated and compared with respect to one stable set of universe-good-making and universe-bad-making properties). Van Inwagen (2006, pp. 95-112) offers an argument that could be deployed to suggest that talk of such a threshold is incoherent. Van Inwagen's argument is not without its critics, however. See, for example, Jeff Jordan (2003).

30 This sounds more dramatic than it is. God can fail to sustain a universe in a variety of ways. One method is to destroy it altogether. But another method is to add something to that universe that would not otherwise have existed.

31 An anonymous APQ referee raises the following objection to the claim that TM is uniquely unsurpassable. Suppose that TM comprises *infinitely* many universes worthy of being created and sustained. Now remove one such universe, *u*. The resulting multiverse, TM-*u*, still contains infinitely many universes worthy of being created and sustained. Surely, the referee concludes, TM-*u* has the same axiological status as TM, and accordingly, TM is not the uniquely unsurpassable world. While it is true that TM-*u* has infinitely many universes worthy of being created and sustained, one can plausibly deny that it has the same axiological status as TM. After all, Tm-*u* manifestly could be improved by the addition of the universe *u*. The overall axiological status of a multiverse is not merely determined by the number of universes it contains: other considerations, like *completeness*, come into play. TM-*u* is incomplete, relative to TM, since it fails to comprise *all* universes worthy of being created and sustained.

32 For this to work, there must be a defensible way of understanding universes (and their constituents) such that they can have counterparts *within* the actual world. This, of course, will be highly controversial, and a full defence of it lies outside the scope of this article. But for some attempts to defend just such a position, see Melia (unpublished manuscript).

33 To be sure, there are differences. Lewis denies that one possible world can consist of two or more completely disconnected spacetimes – although he concedes that he would prefer not to deny this (1986, p.71, p.74). But otherwise, Lewis' definition of a world is equivalent to what is here termed a 'universe': an isolated, spatiotemporally interrelated, causally closed, concrete object. For more on Lewisian modal

realism and the possibility of disconnected spacetimes, see Bricker (2001). For another attempt to use counterpart theory in the context of the theistic multiverse, see Turner (1994 unpublished, Chapter 8).

[34] An anonymous APQ referee complains that this view has unacceptable consequences concerning free will. The referee considers inhabitants of u, a universe above – but very near to – the threshold. The referee alleges that these individuals cannot perform any (or many) bad actions, since performing such actions would make the universe unworthy of being created or sustained – which is impossible, on this view.

Even if this were a consequence of the view under examination, it would not be disastrous. Perhaps there are universes which feature individuals who lack this particular sort of freedom. There is nothing untoward about this consequence, unless it is further supposed that no universe featuring creatures that lack this kind of freedom can be worth creating and sustaining – and no reason has been provided to think this. If *our* universe is one of these threshold universes, then this consequence might be thought serious (at least to the extent that we think our universe features just this sort of creaturely freedom), but it has not been shown that our universe is in fact so close to the threshold.

More importantly, however, what concerns the referee is not actually a consequence of the view under examination. There might be very many freely-chosen bad actions in threshold universe u, but these actions need not (individually or collectively) make that universe unworthy of being created or sustained. How could this be? Well, perhaps these bad actions are required for outweighing goods to be achieved, and this is why God permits them. Or perhaps God subsequently intervenes to ensure that, despite these bad actions, the universe is still worth sustaining. Moreover, if one thinks (as some theists do) that God can permit some *gratuitous* moral evil, then u might even feature some of this. The existence of one instance of gratuitous moral evil need not suffice for a universe's being unworthy of being sustained. (Consider a very minor instance of gratuitous moral evil.)

So what about actions that would, in fact, suffice to make a universe unworthy of being sustained? Perhaps the real concern is that these are somehow impossible in universes like u, on the view under examination, and that this constitutes a real threat to freedom. It's very difficult, of course, to know what such actions might be. But suppose they can coherently be described. It seems that nothing in the model under examination prevents an agent or agents from performing such actions, even in u. In principle, at least, human actions may be so bad that God decides that no providential intervention can 'salvage' or 'redeem' the universe, and so fails to sustain it. (A universe may be worth sustaining until time t, but not thereafter.) So even in this case, there seems to be no serious threat to freedom here.

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