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Article in *Sophia* · May 2004

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Discussion

RIVAL CREATOR ARGUMENTS AND THE BEST
OF ALL POSSIBLE WORLDS

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'Rival creator' arguments suggest that God must have created the best of all possible worlds. These arguments are analyzed and evaluated, and Leibniz's position defended.

Orthodox philosophical theists believe that this world was created by a God that is perfect: perfect in knowledge, perfect in power, perfect in will. If creation is choice among possible worlds, perfect knowledge entails that God knows everything there is to know about all the possible worlds, and perfect power entails that God can create any possible world God chooses to create. But what about perfect will? According to Leibniz, God's perfect will entails that God would create only the best among possible worlds. Were there no best, or more than one best, God would not create at all.¹

In 1988, in a brief note in *Analysis*, I defended Leibniz.² Were there no best possible world but rather an infinite series of worlds, each marginally better than its predecessor in the series, God must create a world less good than some other. Whichever world God creates, we can imagine another being – a 'weak god' – capable of creating a world better than the one that God created. This possibility, I claimed, was inconsistent with God's perfection. If God's action is surpassable by a possible being distinct from God, God is not unsurpassably good. As the easiest way to ensure that God's action in creation is unsurpassable by any other possible being is to maintain that this is the best possible world, I concluded that either this is the best possible world, or God is not perfect in power, not perfect in will, or does not exist.

My note soon provoked replies from Eric Kraemer in *Analysis*, and James Petrik in this journal.³ More recently, it has attracted criticism from K. H. A. Esmail, also in this journal.⁴ Arguments similar to mine have been discussed and rejected by Daniel and Frances Howard-Snyder.⁵ Despite these objections, I still think my argument important. But I no

longer think of it as mine. For the element that I thought original – the strategy of invoking beings distinct from God – had already been used by others, including Kant and Philip Quinn.⁶ In section 1, I summarize these earlier arguments and a later one from William Rowe.⁷ These arguments and mine are all *reductios* of the assumptions that (i) there is a God that is perfect in power, knowledge and will; and (ii) there is no best possible world, because every possible world is bettered by another. All these arguments appeal to possible beings distinct from God – ‘rival creators’ – in order to generate absurdity. But differences between these arguments mean that some may succeed even if others fail. If any succeed, we must conclude either that this is the best possible world or that orthodox theism is, at least partly, false.

1. ‘Rival Creator’ Arguments

1.1 *Leibniz*

In the Theodicy, Leibniz does not appeal to possible rival creators. For Leibniz, the absurdity of supposing there is no best possible world is the absurdity of supposing that God might have done better:

Now this supreme wisdom, united to a goodness that is no less infinite, cannot but have chosen the best. For as a lesser evil is a kind of good, even so a lesser good is a kind of evil if it stands in the way of a greater good; and there would be something to correct in the actions of God if it were possible to do better. As in mathematics, when there is no maximum nor minimum, in short nothing distinguished, everything is done equally, or when that is not possible nothing at all is done: so it may be said likewise in respect of perfect wisdom, which is no less orderly than mathematics, that if there were not the best among all possible worlds, God would not have produced any.⁸

This argument works only for those already convinced that it is absurd to think that God might have done better. Anyone who thinks that God’s goodness merely implies that no other possible being might have done better than God will be unpersuaded. The point of invoking rival creators is to show that the conclusion of Leibniz’s *reductio* is not so easily evaded.

1.2 Kant

In 1988, I had not read Kant's Lectures in Philosophical Theology. There we find the following argument, which invokes a being other than God in order to drive the *reductio* home:

That the world created by God is the *best* of all possible worlds, is clear for the following reason. If a better world than the one willed by God were possible, then a will better than the divine will would also have to be possible. For indisputably that will is better which chooses what is better. But if a better will is possible, then so is a being who could express this better will. And therefore this being would be more perfect and better than God. But this is a contradiction; for God is *omnitudo realitatis*. (Kant, *Lectures on Philosophical Theology*, p. 137)

It is puzzling, given this endorsement of Leibniz's position, that the claim that we live in the best possible world is seldom associated with Kant. Kant even goes on to argue that, 'independent of all theology and without it being necessary to resort to the wisdom of a creator', we must accept that this is the best possible world:

In the whole of organized nature it must be assumed as a necessary maxim of our reason that in every animal and plant there is not the least thing which is useless and without purpose; on the contrary, it must be assumed that everything contains a means best suited to certain ends—But the same law is valid also for organized creatures and for the mineral kingdom, for the sake of the necessary harmony in which everything is combined under the supremely necessary principle of unity. For reason's sake, therefore, we can and must assume that everything in the world is arranged for the best, and that the whole of everything existing is the best possible one. (pp. 138–39)

Whatever we think of this second argument – apparently a 'transcendental deduction' of the claim that this is the best possible world – it is clear that Kant held, on the basis of the first argument, that the unsurpassability of God implies the unsurpassability of God's creation.

Kant makes a stronger claim than I made in 1988. Kant thinks that if it were possible for a being to do better than God, that being would be 'more perfect and better than God'. I claimed only that such a being would *act* better than God, not that it would *be* better than God. This is an important difference, as we shall see.

1.3 Philip Quinn

Just as I had not read Kant's Lectures in 1988, so I was unaware of Philip Quinn's 1982 article, 'God, moral perfection, and possible worlds', which presents an argument that resembles Kant's:

An omnipotent moral agent can actualize any actualizable world. If he actualizes one than which there is a morally better, he does not do the best he can, morally speaking, and so it is possible that there is an agent morally better than he is, namely an omnipotent moral agent who actualizes one of those morally better worlds. (p. 213)

Quinn is here explicit that God's possible rival is omnipotent. I suspect this is also what Kant had in mind. And like Kant, Quinn infers the superiority of the rival who might outdo God from the superiority of the act it might perform.

Quinn's argument was endorsed in 1993 by William Rowe:

If a being creates a world when there is some morally better world that it could have created, then it is possible that there be a being morally better than it The existence of the theistic God who creates a world is inconsistent with the supposition that among the worlds he can create there is no morally unsurpassable world. (p. 230)

Here Rowe does not require that the rival be omnipotent. But he introduces the argument by referring to 'reasons . . . already uncovered', and in an earlier argument, addressing the question whether God might create a world other than the best, supposing that there is a best possible world, Rowe does require omnipotence in God's rival: 'For it would be possible for there to be an omnipotent being who creates the best world that the first being [i.e., God] could create but did not.' (p. 229).

Quinn's argument, in its original form and as restated by Rowe, has generated some discussion. In particular, it has been criticised by the Howard-Snyders, who also assume that God's imaginary rivals are omnipotent. I have argued against the Howard-Snyders elsewhere, and shall touch lightly on their criticisms and my responses below. But first it is useful to classify the arguments mentioned so far.

1.4 Classification

The structure of these 'rival creator' arguments is that of *reductio ad absurdum*. But two different absurdities are involved. One – which Kant and Quinn employ – is the possibility of a being better than God. The other –

employed by me and also by Kant and Quinn – is the possibility that a being act better than God. Kant and Quinn establish the first possibility on the basis of the second, but it is clear that they regard the first as the deep absurdity. This is obviously right; God's perfection surely entails that there is no possible being better than God. It is less obvious – though I think obvious enough – that it rules out the possibility of acts better than God's acts, when those acts are performed by agents besides God. On the other hand, the Kant-Quinn argument relies on an inference from the superiority of the act to the superiority of the agent. If this inference is unreliable, as has been claimed, their argument fails.

Besides different absurdities, there are different mechanisms for generating them. My argument involves a less-than-omnipotent rival; Quinn's requires a rival that is omnipotent; Kant probably had omnipotent rivals in mind as well. This too is an important difference. Anyone who believes that no possible being besides God is omnipotent can reject the Kant-Quinn argument but might be vulnerable to mine. On the other hand, anyone who believes that only an omnipotent being can create a world will be untroubled by my argument, but might still be worried by Kant's and Quinn's.

2. Objections and Responses

2.1 James Petrik: *What's a God to Do?*

Leibniz claimed that were there no best possible world, God would not create. I defended Leibniz by showing that the assumption that there is no best possible world together with the assumption that God nevertheless creates leads to an absurdity: that some possible being besides God might act better than God. James Petrik points out that from the same assumptions by the same reasoning it can be shown that God must nevertheless create. He thinks this is a problem for my argument. I think he is wrong.

The point of a *reductio* is to expose inconsistency, here that of divine perfection with the surpassability of every possible – and so the actual – world. From inconsistent assumptions, one can prove what one likes. Petrik is thus right to observe that the assumptions from which it can be proved that God would not create also allow us to prove that God must nevertheless create. For if God refrains from creating, God's action – or inaction – is surpassable. If God had not created, it would be all the easier for a possible being besides God to do better; the creation of any world better than nothing would be better than the inaction of God.

So far, so good. Petrik then suggests that when contradictory conclusions flow from the same assumptions by the same reasoning, an argument ‘gives no direction. It is an argument upon which we cannot rely.’ (p. 32) But this is not so. Unless the reasoning is faulty, such arguments give precise direction: give up at least one assumption. I characterized my argument as a defence of Leibniz’s claim that God would not create were there no best possible world; my goal was to force the reader to give up one of the assumptions that generated the consequence that God might be outdone by another, lesser rival. Petrik, by showing that this consequence follows whether God creates or not, only helps me toward that goal. It is not true that the argument gives no direction; it directs the reader, on pain of the absurdity of admitting that God might have been bettered by another, either to abandon belief in divine perfection or to accept that this is the best possible world.

Petrik recognizes as much by identifying my primary interest as showing that the following propositions are inconsistent:

- (1) This is not the best of all possible worlds
- (2) God is omnipotent
- (3) God is perfectly good
- (4) God exists

He then proposes a way in which (1) – (4) can be reconciled. All that is required is that we sacrifice God’s omniscience: ‘we can account for the possibility of God’s creative activity being surpassed without sacrificing His goodness or power by stating that God simply didn’t think of the better world which we can imagine a demi-god to be creating’. (p. 32).

How is dumbing God down any help here? The point of invoking rival creators is to close off an obvious escape from Leibniz’s argument. Leibniz’s *reductio* stops once he has arrived at a conclusion that he takes to be absurd: the claim that God could have done better than God in fact did. This *reductio* can be evaded by denying that this claim is absurd. In contrast with Leibniz but in his defence, I argued that in order to preserve divine perfection the possibility that some agent besides God might act better than God must be closed off. This possibility remains open no matter how few worlds God contemplates.

Presumably Petrik’s idea is that, if God never thinks of a world better than the actual world, it is only divine omniscience and not also divine goodness that is called into question. But more argument is required here. Petrik’s suggestion does nothing to preclude the possibility that God might be bettered by another, and in fact he concedes that this is possible. If God’s perfect

goodness is incompatible with the possibility that some other being might do better than God, a defence of God's perfect goodness must show that this possibility is apparent but not real. Petrik's suggestion does not do this; it concedes that a demi-god might have done better than God, and offers a feeble excuse on God's behalf. I do not think this is a promising line of argument if we wish to preserve divine perfection.

Petrik may have in mind the idea that, if we can explain why God created a world less good than a world that some rival might have created, and do so by appealing to factors beyond God's control, we can still claim that God is perfectly good. Agents are not to be thought less good on the basis of factors over which they have no control. I think there is great merit in this suggestion, and a version of it lies behind the Howard-Snyders' arguments in support of the claim that an unsurpassable being can create a surpassable world. But Petrik's particular variant of this suggestion, which requires abandoning divine omniscience, seems to me to have no more to recommend it than the more straightforward strategy of denying that God is perfectly good. Nor do I think, as Petrik does, that once omniscience is in play alongside the other divine perfections, the problem of the best possible world collapses into the traditional problem of evil (pp. 32–3). The problem of evil is a distinct problem concerning the existence, quantity, and quality of pain, suffering, and other bad things in the world. Many possible worlds contain no evil at all but are nevertheless not particularly good – lifeless worlds are an example. If God had created one of these worlds there would be no problem of evil. There would still be the problem of why God did not choose a better world (though no-one besides God would be around to think about the problem).⁹

2.2 Eric Kraemer: Is the Best Really Necessary?

Eric Kraemer delivers a more damaging blow to rival creator arguments like mine. I suggested that the easiest way to disarm the threat to divine goodness posed by 'weak gods' was to accept that this is the best possible world. Kraemer proposes instead that we claim that no being besides God could create a world better than this, because every world as good or better is such that only God can create it.

Leibniz would have accepted this claim, defending it with the ontological argument, showing that a perfect God necessarily exists, and the cosmological argument, showing that no world could exist unless there is a perfect God who creates it. More generally, anyone who believes that no world could exist unless created by an omnipotent being can easily sidestep

my argument. But Kraemer's response leaves Kant and Quinn untouched: they invoke possible omnipotent rivals that can do anything it is logically possible to do. To overturn their argument, it must be shown that omnipotent beings besides God are impossible. This can be done if it can be shown that God necessarily exists and is necessarily omnipotent, and that there can be at most one omnipotent being. Of these, I think the last is most easily shown. The issues here parallel those raised by the traditional paradoxes of omnipotence: can God create a rock too heavy for God to lift? Or tie a knot that God cannot untie? And so on. Can God create an omnipotent being? If so, that being will be able to do anything it is logically possible to do. But what happens when God and this other being set out to do incompatible things? Although there are many complex issues here, I think it is plausible to hold that there can be at most one omnipotent being. But this will only overturn the Kant-Quinn rival creator argument if demonstrations of the necessary existence and omnipotence of God are appended. Unless God necessarily exists and is necessarily omnipotent, rival omnipotent beings remain possible, and so it remains true that the world might have been better had one of those rivals existed instead of God. The Kant-Quinn argument still has life in it, even if there can be at most one omnipotent being and omnipotence is required in order to create any world whatsoever.

But why think omnipotence is required in order to create? On standard accounts of omnipotence as the ability to do anything it is logically possible to do, there is no connection between omnipotence and the ability to create beyond inclusion. Kraemer's response to my argument requires that there be things that only God can do, but this is not entailed by God's omnipotence. On non-standard accounts of omnipotence, for example, those which claim that less-than-omnipotent beings can do nothing and everything is done by God, the claim that there are things that only God can do is defensible. But these accounts are unlikely to find many supporters, for they imply an occasionalism that is, to say the least, unfashionable.

Rather than claim that only God can create, we might claim that only God can create a world as good or better than this one. To defend this claim we will have to give reasons for believing that this world and all better worlds are such that only God could create them. Although this is an interesting suggestion, it will not succeed unless we characterize this world as exceedingly good by ascribing to it most of the virtues that Leibniz ascribes to the best possible world. So I do not think this line of argument offers a real alternative to a broadly Leibnizian position.

2.3 K. H. A. Esmail: Grover and the Creation of a World by God

In the Kant-Quinn rival creator argument, the absurdity that follows from God's choice of a world less good than some other is that there might be a being better than God. Both Kant and Quinn draw this consequence from the possibility that some being might act better than God. K. H. A. Esmail, objecting not to the Kant-Quinn argument but to mine, runs the inference in the other direction, inferring the unsurpassability of God's act from the unsurpassability of the agent. Or that is what I think is going on. Here is the relevant passage:

The series of possible worlds in question here – the one in Grover's argument – is such that God can create all of its members Now, were he to create a member from that series, he would, of course do so – for he is, and must be, morally perfect – in a way that is morally perfect. So, a *being*, another being, *could not* act here in a way that is better than God. But it is Grover's claim that another being *could* act here in a way that is better than God. (pp. 228–9)

Esmail apparently distinguishes between two aspects of God's creative activity. The first is the object of God's choice: the member of the series of possible worlds that God selects. The second is the 'way' that God creates that member. As I do not understand how God creates – I do not understand what it means to create from nothing, or to will anything into existence by *fiat* – I do not know what this second aspect is. But I am willing to concede that, if there are better and worse ways of creating some particular world, God employs the best of these ways. (Though I worry that, if there is no best way of creating some particular world but rather an infinite series of ways of creating it, each of which is marginally better than the last, we will be in danger of regress here.)

With this concession made, what follows? We have an infinite series of possible worlds that are the possible objects of divine choice; each is bettered by another. And we have a separate issue concerning the way in which any particular world might be created. It seems to me to remain true, whichever world God selects, that it is possible that another being might have selected another and better world, and so done something that was, at least in respect of the object selected, better. If there are better and worse ways of creating any particular world and God creates a particular world in the best possible way, there is no possible being that could create that particular world in a way better than the way that God created it. But this does nothing to close off the possibility that some possible being other than God might have created a world better than the world God created, even if it did

so in a way that was, by comparison with the way that God would have created that better world, clumsy and imperfect.

Perhaps Esmail is not relying on a distinction between ways of creating and worlds created, but instead is appealing to God's unsurpassability as reason enough in itself to deny that God's action in creation can be surpassed: God is perfect; whatever God did could not have been done better. But unless this is just question-begging, there must be something to say in order to dispel the *prima facie* incompatibility between the unsurpassability of God and the surpassability of the world God creates. And Esmail does have something to say here, for the series of possible worlds mentioned above is not the series generated by ranking all possible worlds in order of goodness, but only a segment of that series. Esmail thinks there are possible worlds which God cannot create because they are bad and so not creatable by a perfect being. He therefore suggests that my argument be restated on the basis of 'an infinite series of possible worlds each of which is better than its predecessor in the series and each of which is (at least) good'. (p. 228) I am happy to accept this restatement. What makes me unhappy is a further recharacterization of the series, the result of which is not only to set a level below which worlds are not good enough to be worthy of creation but also to introduce a level above which worlds are all so good that it makes no difference which is chosen:

... it is Grover's claim that another being could act here in a way that is better than God. (It could do so, for Grover, if it could create a member which is better than the member that God creates. But, even if another being could create such a member, it could not, as I have noted, act in a way that is better than God. It could not do so, for example, if the members in the series are of such a goodness that it is of no matter that another member, one which is better than the member God creates, can be created.) (p. 229)

I am puzzled by this argument. An infinite series of possible worlds each of which is better than its predecessor in the series and all of which are good presumably contains worlds at every possible level of goodness. I am unsure whether we should say that for each world in the series there is a world that is infinitely better, but it does seem plausible that for each world in the series there are worlds that are very much better. How could it be 'of no matter' that one of these much better worlds be created rather than the much worse world that God chose to create? But perhaps, rather than improving by steady increments, the members of the infinite series of good possible worlds approach but never reach some upper limit, so that, among worlds that are 'close' to this limit (whatever 'close' means here) the differences in

goodness are insignificant.¹⁰ It still seems to me that a version of the rival creator argument can be deployed to show that God must have chosen to create a world so very good that all the worlds better than it are only trivially better. And if that is so, then I think the spoils go to the Leibnizians: this world is about as good as any world God might have created instead.

I doubt that I have done justice to Esmail here; I am unsure about the principles underlying the arguments I have discussed. The bald assertion that God, being perfect, must have acted in a way that is perfect and so unsurpassable by another being, begs the question. It also relies upon a tight connection between the goodness of the agent and the goodness of the action that agent performs, of the sort that underlies the Kant-Quinn version of the rival creator argument. But this connection has been questioned by the Howard-Snyders, and by a number of other writers not discussed here.¹¹

2.4 The Howard-Snyders: How an Unsurpassable Being can Create a Surpassable World

Daniel and Frances Howard-Snyder, responding in part to Quinn and Rowe, argue that God's unsurpassable goodness is not impugned by the possibility that some other omnipotent being might have created a world better than the one that God created (p. 37). They conduct a thought-experiment in which omnipotent beings exclude from consideration worlds that are unacceptable candidates for creation and then use a 'randomizing device' to choose among the remainder (pp. 35–8). Because even omnipotent beings cannot control the output of a randomizing device, no such being should be thought less good just because it chooses whichever surpassable world the device selects: 'Factors outside of one's control can make a difference to how much good one brings about without making a difference to how good one is' (p. 37). If this is right, the inference from the possibility that some omnipotent being might create a better world than God to the possibility of an omnipotent being better than God is blocked, and the Kant-Quinn rival creator argument fails.

This argument has merits, but also raises several puzzles. The puzzles concern the coherence of the notion of a randomizing device (something Leibniz would not have allowed) and the limitations placed upon God's power (lack of control over the output of randomizing devices) and knowledge (ignorance of the output of randomizing devices ahead of their operation). These limitations render the Howard-Snyders response to the rival creator argument incompatible with orthodox philosophical theism. If we restore God's omnipotence, the randomizing device no longer provides a

factor beyond God's control to which we can appeal; if we allow God to know the outputs of randomizing devices before they operate, we can replace the infinite series of ever-improving acceptable possible worlds with a series of devices ordered according to the worlds they would randomly select, and so end up back at square one. I have considered these puzzles elsewhere, and shall not discuss them here.¹²

Turning to the merits, the conclusion that the Howard-Snyders draw from their thought-experiment – that a being is not to be thought less good because of factors beyond its control – seems to me right. If there is no best possible world, that is a factor beyond the control of any being, omnipotent or not. Omnipotent beings cannot do their best when there is no best to do, and are not to be thought less good for not so doing. Less-than-omnipotent beings that are capable of creating only some worlds can do their best, if there is a world as good or better than any other world they can create. Such beings, if they were good, might create a world better than the world that some omnipotent being, using a randomizing device of the sort invoked by the Howard-Snyders, would create. But the Howard-Snyders need not be troubled by this possibility, for just as an omnipotent being has no control over the device, so it has no control over the fact that it is omnipotent. If an omnipotent being is not to be thought less good because it under-performs relative to some other omnipotent being, it is not to be thought less good because it under-performs relative to some less-than omnipotent being either.

But here it is important to recall the differences between the Kant-Quinn rival creator argument and mine. I think the possibility that some less-than-omnipotent being might out-perform God is itself troublesome, even if it does not imply the possibility of a being better than God. The Howard-Snyders, if their arguments succeed, prevent us from inferring the inferiority of God from the possibility that another being might bring about more good than God has brought about. If the only absurdity we are worried about is the possibility that some being might be better than God, the *reductio* fails. But besides the issue of how good God is, there is also the issue of how much good is brought about. The Howard-Snyders' arguments give us no reason to deny that the world might have been better had its creator been less-than-omnipotent. And this seems to me an unacceptable consequence for orthodox philosophical theism; God's omnipotence must have made a difference for the better, not for the worse. Thinking of the issue in this way makes it clear what is really at stake. The question at the heart of these rival creator arguments is not: could some rival be better than God? Nor is it really the question: could some rival have acted better than God? Instead, it is a question that does not have to invoke rival creators at all: might the world have been better had God not existed?

3. Conclusion: Might the World have been Better had God not Existed?

I have mentioned three different absurdities: that God might have done better than God (Leibniz); that some omnipotent rival might have (Kant, Quinn); or that some less-than-omnipotent rival might have (me). Suppose it can be shown that the only possible beings that can create a world, or a world better than this, are all omnipotent. My argument fails. Suppose it can also be shown that God is the only possible omnipotent being. The Kant-Quinn argument fails as well. Only the first absurdity remains, and I have said that it is open to us to deny that this is absurd. But whilst I do think that God's goodness is not impugned by the fact that God might have done better than God, this is not the end of the matter. For when we have dispatched all God's possible rivals we are still left with the possibility that things might have been better. If no world better than this could exist unless created by God, this possibility is closed off. But if any world better than this might have existed even if God had not created it, this possibility remains open. And this is, at least, uncomfortable for theism. It is an unusual sort of theist who can admit that the world might have been better had God not existed. This possibility sits unhappily with God's perfect goodness. Rival creators are merely a way, admittedly rather melodramatic, of giving substance to this possibility.

Leibniz could dismiss the thought that the world might have been better had God not existed. He accepted the ontological argument and a strong, deductive version of the cosmological argument: the former guaranteed God's existence, the latter proved that no world could exist except at God's will. In Leibniz's system it is the Principle of Sufficient Reason (PSR) that directs God to choose the best among possible worlds. If we could preserve the ontological argument and a strong, deductive version of the cosmological argument without appeal to the PSR we could dispense with the requirement that God choose only the best. But Leibniz's cosmological argument relies on the PSR, so we will either need to justify the PSR in one context whilst dispensing with it in another, or find a different but deductive cosmological argument that does not appeal to the PSR. I think the former will be hard; I doubt the latter can be done at all.

Most contemporary philosophical theists reject the ontological argument; preferred versions of the cosmological argument are now typically inductive rather than deductive, assigning low rather than zero probability to the existence of a world as good or better than this on non-theistic hypotheses. So most contemporary philosophical theists cannot deny that it is possible – even if unlikely – that the world might have been better had God not existed. I think this ought to make them feel extremely uncomfortable, even if it does not render them guilty of self-contradiction. For it is odd in

the extreme to regard the world as the creation of an all-powerful, all-knowing and all-loving God and yet admit that things might have been better had that God not existed. The easiest way for theists to raise their comfort-level is to accept that this is the best possible world. If theists prefer a harder way, they will have to rehabilitate a strong, deductive version of the cosmological argument. Otherwise, they must give up one or other of the central commitments of orthodox philosophical theism – the belief that there is a God who is perfect in power, perfect in knowledge, perfect in will.

Endnotes

1. In this discussion, I shall ignore Leibniz's claim that God would not create were there more than one best possible world. I discuss Leibniz's claim that God will not choose in cases of 'indifferent advantage' in 'West or Best? Sufficient Reason in the Leibniz-Clarke Correspondence', *Studia Leibnitiana* 28:1 (1996), pp. 84–92.
2. 'Why Only the Best is Good Enough', *Analysis* 48:4 (October 1988), p. 224.
3. E. R. Kraemer, 'Is the Best Really Necessary?', *Analysis* 50:1 (January 1990), pp. 42–3; James Petrik, 'What's a God to Do?' *Sophia* 30:2–3 (1992), pp. 31–3.
4. K. H. A. Esmail, 'Grover and the Creation of a World by God' *Sophia* 39:1 (March–April 2000), pp. 227–30.
5. Daniel & Frances Howard-Snyder, 'How an Unsurpassable Being Can Create a Surpassable World', *Faith and Philosophy* 11:2 (1994), pp. 260–68; reprinted in E. Stump & M. J. Murray, eds., *Philosophy of Religion: The Big Questions* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1999), pp. 35–41. References are to the reprint.
6. Immanuel Kant, *Lectures on Philosophical Theology*, ed. and tr. A. W. Wood & G. M. Clark (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1978); Philip L. Quinn, 'God, Moral Perfection, and Possible Worlds', in *God: The Contemporary Discussion*, ed. Frederick Sontag & M. Darrol Bryant (New York, NY: The Rose of Sharon Press, Inc., 1982), pp. 197–213.
7. William Rowe, 'The Problem of Divine Perfection and Freedom,' in E. Stump, ed., *Reasoned Faith* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1993), pp. 223–33.
8. G. W. Leibniz, *Theodicy: Essays on the Goodness of God, the Freedom of Man, and the Origin of Evil*, ed. A. Farrer, trans. E. M. Huggard (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1951; reprinted La Salle, IL: Open Court, 1985), § 8, p. 128.
9. This point is well made by Quinn, p. 199.
10. I discuss some issues relating to upper limits on the value of possible worlds in 'Mere addition and the best of all possible worlds', *Religious Studies* 35 (1999), pp. 173–90. The suggestion that value might approach some upper limit asymptotically is made by Quinn, in the context of a discussion of the happiness of creatures; see Quinn p. 202.
11. See Robert M. Adams, 'Must God create the best?', *Philosophical Review* 81 (July 1972), pp. 317–32; Thomas V. Morris, 'Perfection and Creation', in E. Stump, ed., *Reasoned Faith* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1993), pp. 234–47. I discuss some of Adams's arguments in the article mentioned in the next note.
12. *Religious Studies* 39:2 (2003), pp. 145–63.