

# OMNIPOTENCE, EVIL AND WHAT'S IN GOD: REPLIES TO OPPI, BOHN AND FORREST

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My thanks to the symposiasts for their attention to my work. I reply to their points mostly in the order they make them, often without rehearsing their arguments: I assume that you have read them.

OPPI

Oppy had kind words for my book in the *Times Literary Supplement*, and I thank him for them; here he just steams ahead with all guns blazing.

## *Section one*

Oppy reads the definition's RHS correctly.<sup>1</sup> Oppy's argument against my definition rests on the premise that

O. if God is omnipotent, for any action A, either God does not will to have the power to do A, or God has the power to do A.

To get (O), Oppy reasons, 'If God does not have the power to do A, then ... as a consequence of his omnipotence, God does not will to have the power to do A.' Oppy thinks, that is, that if God is omnipotent, then if He wills to have a power, He gets it; if this is so, then if He does not have it, He must not have willed to have it. But omnipotence doesn't preclude irrational or ignorant willing. An irrational or ignorant omnipotent being might will to have the power to make a contradiction true. As I don't follow Descartes on omnipotence, I think there is no such power.

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<sup>1</sup> Note, most basically, that this is a definition, in perfectly ordinary terms. Thus I am simply puzzled that Sam Cowling can say that my 'in God' talk is just 'unanalysed primitive concepts ... primitive ideology' (Review, *Australasian Journal of Philosophy*, 91 (2013), 612).

So if it willed to have the power, it would not get it. Again, an irrational or ignorant omnipotent being could will to have the power to change the past. Plausibly there is no such power; again, if it willed to have the power, it would not get it. So *if* God could not try and fail to get a power, that would not be because non-Cartesian omnipotence<sup>2</sup> guarantees Him whatever He wills. It would be because His necessary omniscience and perfect rationality kept Him from trying to get what He could not get.

I emphasized the ‘if’ just above for a reason. Suppose that God the Father and God the Son are omnipotent, the Father wills to have a power, and the Son simultaneously wills that the Father lack that power. It is hard to say what would happen. It is not at all clear that the Father would get the power. We have before us three claims,

- (1) There can be two divine omnipotent willers,
- (2) Necessarily, if there are two divine omnipotent willers, they can simultaneously will contradictory things, and
- (3) Necessarily, any such willer brings about whatever it wills to bring about,

which jointly imply the falsehood that contradictions are possibly true. Christians must accept (1): the Father and the Son are two divine omnipotent willers, even if both use God’s will to do their willing.<sup>3</sup> And if we ignore (2) and (3), (1) seems true. G&N argues that the sort of deity Western theists ascribe to God is His individual essence. (As I parse it, the doctrine of the Trinity is compatible with this.<sup>4</sup>) But we easily conceive lesser divinities than God (e.g. Zeus). We can conceive some of them as omnipotent. This is reason to think that other omnipotent deities are possible, and so that the property of being a divine omnipotent willer is not an individual essence even if God’s deity is. If we leave (2) and (3) aside – we are considering (1)’s initial *prima facie* plausibility *apart from* its connection to them, and so they can’t yet count against (1) – seemingly an omnipotent Zeus and an omnipotent Odin could co-exist.<sup>5</sup> (2) and (3)

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<sup>2</sup> From now on, understand ‘non-Cartesian’ to prefix all tokens of ‘omnipotent’ unless directed otherwise.

<sup>3</sup> In the Trinity, God’s haecceity and all it endows Him with are shared among (somehow-) distinct subjects. Despite appearances, this is not a contradiction: see my ‘A Latin Trinity’, *Faith and Philosophy*, 21 (2004), 304-33.

<sup>4</sup> See again ‘A Latin Trinity’.

<sup>5</sup> If God exists necessarily, as I think, then these would also have to co-exist with God, and He would have made them. I doubt that God would turn an omnipotent being with

aside, the bare, religiously neutral theism philosophers discuss does not rule against (1), as it is neutral with respect to the Trinity and the gods. In favour of (2), if the mere existence of one omnipotent willer kept another from being *able* to will certain things, the other would not be omnipotent after all. Its power to will would be limited; so then would what it could bring about. In fact, arguably the two would be impotent, unable even to will – neither able to will that P, for any P, since if it could, it would be possible that the other simultaneously will that not-P. So (1) seems to imply (2). If (1) is true and implies (2), (3) must go. The consensus medieval account of omnipotence found e.g. in Aquinas, Scotus and Ockham defines it strictly in terms of a range of possible effects; most contemporary accounts do too.<sup>6</sup> These definitions do not require (3), and as bare omnipotence doesn't bring perfect rationality or omniscience with it, we have no reason to believe (3) unless some definition of omnipotence which builds (3) in – there are a few<sup>7</sup> – is clearly superior to any which does not. This is not so, I believe, but showing it would take a paper of its own. Without (3), Oppy has no argument for (O).

(O) looks to be necessary if true. If that is so, plausibly (O) is false. Suppose that God promises little Johnny a pony for his birthday. As impeccable, He does not have the power to break promises without suitable reason, and it's hard to see how omnipotence and omniscience leave room for suitable reasons. So quite plausibly God cannot break a promise. God could demonstrate the firmness of His word to Johnny by saying 'I will now show you that even *I* can't find the power to break My word to you. I now attempt to have the power not to give you the pony. I say: "let there be this power in me." I'm trying. I'm trying. You know I'm trying if I say I am: I can't lie. Look! No power!' In this case God would be trying to do something He knows to be impossible, but His attempt would be rational because He would have a purpose other than achieving what He knows to be impossible.

Again, orthodox Christology gives reason to reject (O). For orthodoxy, Jesus was God the Son incarnate. Jesus could have pumped

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Zeus' character loose on the world; if God made an omnipotent Zeus, my guess is that He would implant in him a very different character than the one Greek myth ascribes to him, one with overwhelming urges toward virtue and co-operation with God.

<sup>6</sup> See my 'Omnipotence', in Thomas Flint and Michael Rea, eds., *The Oxford Handbook of Philosophical Theology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), pp. 167-98.

<sup>7</sup> See e.g. Kenneth Pearce and Alexander Pruss, 'Understanding Omnipotence', *Religious Studies*, 48 (2012), 403-14.

iron, trying and so willing to develop naturally in His human natural endowment the power to bench-press 300 lbs., and failed to gain the power. As omnipotent, God the Son already has the bench-press power in His divine natural endowment. But He at the least does not always have it in His human natural endowment – He did not have it there at birth. My claim is that the Son could have tried and failed to develop by purely natural, human means an instantiation of this power located in His human natural endowment. This would be the Son trying and failing to develop a power, since the endowment and effort would be His. You might counter: if the Son would fail, He is not omnipotent. There is a power He lacks, to develop by purely natural means the stated power in Jesus' human natural endowment. Well, perhaps not, because perhaps there is no such power. We each have both a human nature we share with others and a current individual makeup. Some things by absolute necessity are beyond the natural power of my current human makeup: no matter how I trained and tried, I could not get an unaided world-record bench-press on the earth's surface under normal conditions out of these muscles. The world record is within the reach of general human nature, but not of human nature instanced just this way in just these muscle fibres. What Jesus was trying to accomplish by pumping iron could well fall into this category: His muscles might not have had it in them to bench 300, and if they did not, there is no such thing as a power naturally to develop this power in them – no power for an omnipotent being to have. But if Jesus was acting only out of the knowledge available to a first-century Jew, save by occasional revelation from other divine Persons, He would not have this knowledge available for practical reasoning even though as divine and omniscient He in fact had it, and so could rationally pump iron in search of an impossible goal. So any who take orthodox Christology to be possibly true should reject (O). Any who take what I've said here to be at least not *a priori* false should also reject (O), because (O) would be *a priori* if true, and if (O) were *a priori* true, my stories about Jesus and God's promises would be *a priori* false.

These cases also tell further against (3). Oppy therefore has not shown that something is amiss with my definition. Turning to Oppy's argument about my second case, omnipotence does not elide the distinction between having power to acquire a power and having a power. For God could be omnipotent even if Prior was right about singular possibility. On Prior's view, before I existed, there were no singular possibilities for

precisely *me*.<sup>8</sup> There were just purely qualitative general possibilities for persons just like me qualitatively. If this was true, then before I existed, God did not have the power to promise *me* a pony. There was no such power, because there was no such content as being me to help constitute it. But God had the power to acquire this power, because He had the power to will to make someone just like me, and if I resulted, He would acquire that power. I reiterate that Prior's scenario is compatible with God's being omnipotent. If God is omnipotent, then at any time *t* He can bring about (let's say, to a first approximation) all states of affairs it is metaphysically possible to bring about at *t*. If the range of states of affairs available to bring about changes over time, as Prior thought, then a temporal God can be omnipotent at all times even if at some times, all He has is power to acquire powers later, not those powers themselves. Applying this to my views, even if God could add further kinds later, it would be one thing to have the power to think up an 11<sup>th</sup> kind (this contributes to the power to have a power), and another to have actually done so and given Himself the power to instance it. The distinction between the two remains clear. It is a function of that between not having done and having done a particular thing.

For Prior, by not creating, God affects the content of omnipotence. By not creating Schmian Leftow, God brings it about that omnipotence does not include power to promise Schmian anything. For me, God does the like at the level of kinds. By not thinking up an 11<sup>th</sup> kind, God settles it that omnipotence does not include power to make an 11<sup>th</sup> kind of thing. When it comes to such specific creature-regarding powers, God has by nature only the power to acquire powers, and the powers He acquires are due to something He does.

Oppy thinks that omnipotence guarantees God 'the power to think up more kinds of things and to make things of those kinds.' But it is one thing to be able to think kinds up, and another to be able to think more up later. The latter supposes that God is temporal. If God is atemporal, one shot is all He gets. Divine temporality is controversial, as Oppy notes. In any case omnipotence hardly guarantees it. And even if God is temporal, omnipotence hardly guarantees that there is not an S5 modal universe. If there is one, then there necessarily are just the possible kinds there are, and a necessarily omniscient God must always know that all and only these are possible, even if He is omnipotent.

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<sup>8</sup> See e.g. A.N. Prior, 'Identifiable Individuals', *Review of Metaphysics*, 13 (1960), 684-96.

I argue that God has put in place an S5 modal universe, in which the possible is necessarily just what it is. If He has, He has denied Himself the power to acquire further powers. Powers defined relative to the S5-possible are the only ones there can be, and He is necessarily omnipotent only if He necessarily has all and only an omnipotent God's proper share of them.<sup>9</sup> Absent some spelling-out of a paradox, it seems open to an omnipotent being who sets the limit of the possible to will that the possible necessarily contain what it does. That it sets the limits of the possible does not entail that it might do otherwise. One can be causally responsible for what it is not possible that one avoid. Nor does its omnipotence entail that it could have set up possibility otherwise. There need not be a possible alternative to the content of an omnipotent being's will; if it wanted to leave creating up to chance, it could will 'let it be that either some universe now appears or none does.'<sup>10</sup> I think an omnipotent being can deny itself powers. It seems possible to cease to be omnipotent. (Why not? – Wouldn't a contingent, not necessarily eternal omnipotent being be able to kill itself?) If this is possible, there is a power to give up omnipotence. For if there is not, the only way a being could cease to be omnipotent is to have its omnipotence taken away against its will. Why should we believe *that*? An omnipotent being able to give up omnipotence can deny itself powers, as it can will not to be omnipotent.<sup>11</sup> A necessarily omnipotent being can deny itself powers if it is up to it what omnipotence contains: if Prior's God creates only ten humans, He denies Himself an eleventh power to bless a specific human, though He has the power to acquire it.

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<sup>9</sup> This share is not all of them. If possibly I exist, there is a power to bring it about that I initiate a certain action with libertarian freedom. I have this, I believe, but an omnipotent God cannot: if He brings it about that I initiate the action, I do not do it with that sort of freedom.

<sup>10</sup> For the disjunctive-volition approach to chance, see Peter van Inwagen, 'The Place of Chance in a World Sustained by God', in Thomas Morris, ed., *Divine and Human Action* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1988), 211-35.

<sup>11</sup> If it is possible to give up omnipotence, some might think that nothing can be necessarily omnipotent, since a necessarily omnipotent being would lack this power. But I define omnipotence in terms of states of affairs to be brought about, not in terms of powers (see my 'Omnipotence'). Neither a contingently nor a necessarily omnipotent being can make something necessarily omnipotent cease to be omnipotent. Both can make something that can cease to be omnipotent do so. So with a state-of-affairs definition of omnipotence, something necessarily omnipotent ties something contingently so in this respect, and so there is no case that contingent omnipotence would be more powerful than necessary.

As to Oppy's argument about my third case, standard deliberation is over which possible states to make actual, and the divine case is over which modally indeterminate states to make possible. In each case, the decision concerns which states to (so to speak) raise to a higher ontological status. So far, they're exactly parallel. In the standard case, one decides by considering the values to be realized. So too in my divine case. There is value in having possibilities of a certain sort. That's why a ticket in a fair lottery to be drawn next week can be a genuine gift. In the standard case there are many possible outcomes of trying to realize a particular state of affairs, and one weighs the value of an attempt in terms of value to gain and probability of gaining it. In the divine case there is just one outcome for a particular attempt – that a certain amount of possibility-value is realized – and if God so acts, that outcome follows. The decision matrix is not radically different than ours. I suggest, then, that my special locution withstands Oppy's critique. I discuss the locution further below.

### *Section two*

The member-set relation yields one kind of real dependence between necessary existents.<sup>12</sup> Take any necessary being A and its singleton. Both exist necessarily, but if {Socrates} depends on Socrates, {A} depends on A in the same way, and {A}'s existing depends on A's. Further, A's existing non-causally explains {A}'s, just as Socrates' existing explains {Socrates}'s. {A} is 'from' A just as {Socrates} is 'from' Socrates. Further, if Socrates is in this non-causal way the source of {Socrates}, *source* is a wider kind than *cause*, and my claim that causes are a kind of source stands.

Plausibly this real dependence is not intrinsically modal, and so 'modally flat'. Socrates' existing grounds {Socrates}'s. Plausibly, grounding is not modal. It seems a non-modal relation that grounds modal relations (e.g. necessary co-presence). Grounding has a converse: if Socrates grounds {Socrates}, {Socrates} is grounded by Socrates. If grounding is non-modal, so is its converse. Now if Socrates grounds {Socrates}, {Socrates} really depends on Socrates. I identify this dependence with grounding's converse: for {Socrates} really to depend on Socrates *just is* for it to be grounded by Socrates. This fits intuition – the real dependence is present *because* Socrates grounds {Socrates}, it is necessary because the

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<sup>12</sup> If there are no sets, something parallel will hold for what does duty for them.

grounding is, and these things hold of the converse. Why not explicate that ‘because’ by identifying the dependence with being grounded? The identity is also economical. If the dependence is the being grounded and the latter is non-modal, the dependence is non-modal. If some real dependence is modally flat, this provides some reason – of simplicity or homogeneity – to seek a theory on which all is.<sup>13</sup>

I do not claim to offer a theory of causation. The most I try to do is indicate what *sort* of theory I would defend given space. I think I say enough to indicate that. Add to what Oppy cites a primitive causal relation of production (pp. 256-7, 508), or rather (given my nominalism) production facts irreducible to any other sort of fact. Then, modal flatness aside, the picture is a fairly standard anti-Humean one. Humeans don’t allow primitive, irreducible causal facts. When speaking sober metaphysical truth, they do not say that causes literally produce or are sources of their effects. They speak instead of constant conjunction, counterfactual dependence, etc. I suggest things my posit would explain because this is a standard way to defend philosophical posits.

If causation is not modally flat, it is intrinsically modal. I can see just three broad sorts of modal proposal. Two are counterfactual and necessitation analyses. Both are analyses. If causation is primitive, it has no analysis. So both are ruled out. On the last sort of proposal,

C. causation is primitively (i.e. without analysis) a kind of necessitation.

If on (C) ‘As cause Bs’ asserts in sober metaphysical truth that As produce Bs in a certain set of worlds, (C) introduces production as distinct from and more basic than necessitation- as modally flat. If on (C) ‘As cause Bs’ asserts that A-type events lead to B-type in some set of worlds, (C) spreads a constant-conjunction analysis across worlds as well as times. If you substitute other conditions as constant across worlds, you spread a different sort of analysis across worlds as well as times. (C) then after all analyzes causation, and so primitivists about causation must reject (C). So a primitivist who held (C) would have to say that its necessitation has no ‘worlds’ analysis. This would give up the great advantage of a uniform treatment of modality in terms of worlds. More importantly, it would be open to a question: if what I mean by

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<sup>13</sup> This requires me to say that counterfactual dependence as such is not in my sense real: it may be e.g. a sign of real dependence, but the real dependence it signals is something else. I find this plausible, but I cannot discuss it further here.



'modally flat' is not involving the sort of modality we use worlds to express, have you just granted that causation is modally flat? In short, belief in primitive causal facts, or that causation is a primitive relation of production, may really bring modal flatness with it. And there are many reasons independent of my theory to be a primitivist. One, for instance, is just a sort of induction from the failure of analyses to date.

### *Section three*

Much of this section merely registers disagreement, and these disagreements deserve more discussion than I can give here. As to things I *can* discuss here, it is more parsimonious of *fundamental entities* to posit the solipsist and his thoughts than to posit infinities of abstract substances. In the one picture, only the solipsist is fundamental. In the other, infinities of abstracta are. It is a virtue in an ontology to posit less that is fundamental and explain more in terms of it, rather than posit more and explain less. It is also more parsimonious in another way: it eliminates more and higher-level ontological categories. The context in the paragraph Oppy discusses is an argument about what to add to an ontology of ordinary concreta to produce an adequate modal metaphysics: 'theists can do without abstracta ... They *add* not a highest level kind but a sub-kind: a deity is a kind of person. Of course, for every abstract world a Platonist might *add*, there will be something in God ...' (p. 550).<sup>14</sup> My main point is that the ontologies that result with these additions differ in parsimony. The last quoted sentence tells us, as Oppy insists, that adding theism and adding Platonism to ordinary concreta yield the same number of tokens. But the ordinary concreta + theism ontology lacks the kind *abstract entity* and all its sub-kinds. It has as many tokens as the ordinary concreta + Platonism ontology, but many fewer types, and that makes it more economical, as are other sorts of nominalism compared with other sorts of realism.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> I have added the emphases on 'add'; they are not in the original text.

<sup>15</sup> There is more to be said here. I replace abstracta with divine mental events, and the Platonist could counter by arguing that I cannot give an adequate account of events without abstract resources, or by eliminating events. I cannot get into theories of events here. But as to the second move, events are a lower-level kind than *abstract entity* - they are a sub-kind of concrete entity. So dropping them is a lesser gain in parsimony. Further, it might prove hard to do without events without positing something else an event ontology can do without, e.g. substantial times. If that's the case, there might be no net gain in parsimony by eliminating events.

Oppy's point that philosophers' modal judgments disagree does not tell at all against my story about God and hardwiring. It is not part of that story that professional philosophers agree. It *is* part of that story that there is a causal route from necessary truths' truthmakers to whatever knowledge of the necessary we have, as cannot be the case on a Platonist account of such truthmakers. And the fact that professional philosophers disagree about philosophy does not entail that The Folk do not know non-philosophical necessary truths.<sup>16</sup> I do not say that God's goodness guarantees that we have largely correct beliefs about modal ontology hardwired into us. I say that

General belief in God's goodness favors the claim that He would want us to have largely correct beliefs. If ... God ... contains or creates all modal ontology and wants us to have largely correct beliefs about the necessary, this is reason to take our methods of modal belief fixation as reliable and to think we can know necessary truths. (p. 75)<sup>17</sup>

Oppy might have derived the modal ontology claim by adding the premise that truths about modal ontology are necessary, but that God provides for largely correct modal beliefs doesn't entail that He provides for largely correct beliefs on any one modal subject. My story is viable if ordinary people tend in ordinary contexts to form mostly correct beliefs about which necessary propositions about ordinary, non-philosophical matters are true. I rather suspect that they do.<sup>18</sup>

As to Oppy's last words on evil, the most sceptical theism requires metaphysically, apart from God, is that possibly there are unknown goods aiming at which would justify God's permission of actual evils. The concept of an unknown good should be acceptable to the most austere naturalist, and few naturalists if any would claim that necessarily, all goods or even all kinds of goods are known. As far as I can see, then, adding sceptical theism to theism is an ontological and ideological free lunch; it does not disadvantage theism in a comparison with naturalism. Sceptical theism works for moral as well as natural evil if it works at

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<sup>16</sup> *Pace* some prominent views on disagreement, it may not even entail that no professional philosophers have knowledge about the modal matters on which they disagree.

<sup>17</sup> This needs filling in, of course; I'm gesturing at an account of knowledge on which a proper causal route from a truthmaker to a reliable belief-forming mechanism (however reliability be cashed out) would help yield knowledge.

<sup>18</sup> This does not imply that they recognize the necessity of these propositions.

all, so if it works, theist responses to evil need carry no ontological or ideological cost at all. If the theist offers a free will defence, that requires no positing of anything actual: as Plantinga showed, the metaphysical possibility of the needed entities is enough.<sup>19</sup> The metaphysical possibility of an afterlife can be made naturalistically kosher save for God's involvement: just combine some materialist take on survival (e.g. van Inwagen's)<sup>20</sup> with full re-embodiment in appropriate but fully physical surroundings. Even angels could be forms of life strangely embodied: 'He makes his angels winds, his servants flames of fire' (Hebrews 1:7). Surely naturalists must allow the possibility of strange forms of life. So theists can assert the possibility of angels while not committing even to there possibly being more things in heaven and earth than are dreamt of in naturalist philosophy – save God. So theist responses to evil may have no cost naturalism does not itself pay – save God.<sup>21</sup>

#### BOHN AND FORREST

I thank Bohn for his kind words, but unfortunately much that he says is not quite right. *Contra* (2), I hold that it's in God to do things He does not let Himself do – e.g. think up the 11<sup>th</sup> kind, in the passage Oppy quotes. *Contra* (3)-(5), I hold that God lets Himself think of things He does not render possible – e.g. horrors too bad to permit in any circumstance (pp. 263, n. 19; 412). Further, I argue that the necessities Bohn mentions are *not* brute (pp. 494-6): Bohn even mentions the way I explain (iii) a bit further on. It's not true, moreover, that all facts about what it's in God to do are brute. It's in God to do whatever He has the power to do – see what Oppy cites above – but I give a detailed account of how He comes to have many of His powers. If this is explained, it is not brute.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> By cutting off the quotation where he did, Oppy might inadvertently have made it seem that I endorse the details of Plantinga's free will defence. The rest of the quoted passage makes clear that I do not. All I am endorsing *here* is his claim that a possibility suffices to defeat the 'logical' problem of evil.

<sup>20</sup> Peter van Inwagen, 'The Possibility of Resurrection', *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion*, 9 (1978), 114-121.

<sup>21</sup> One final small point: Oppy misreads my token of 'prior epistemic probability' (p. 547): his point would be apt if I were talking about ultimate priors, but what I meant there was simply the probability assigned prior to considering the new argument I offer.

<sup>22</sup> Further, while I argue that God is the source of all secular *modal* truth, I don't hold that He is the source of all secular truth or that 'God is the source of all truths'. Created free agents initiate their own actions, and so are the source of all secular truths these establish.

I do explain metaphysical in terms of causal modality. But I do not identify causal modality and what it's in God to do. Bohn quotes my definition of  $\langle \text{God has it in Him to do } A \rangle$  in n. 3. It is one short sentence. It does not imply that God has the power to do A. It is in fact intended to cover cases in which God does not have it (p. 252). It does not mention powers or opportunities. My definition of causal possibility (pp. 352-3) takes almost a full page and is in terms of complex combinations of actually possessed powers and opportunities. The two notions are very different.

This mis-identification seems to lie beneath Bohn's main argument. Three things suggest this. Where Bohn writes 'to the extent it is brute, it is not a necessity ... it's ... in God to have done differently', n. 10 then adds 'Leftow might object that this worry equivocates on "could"'. 'Could' is nowhere in Bohn's text. It comes into understanding Bohn's text only if you explicate 'in God to have done' as 'could have done'. Further on, we get 'it's in God to have ... made p false; so God could ... have made p false' and '(iii) ... could be false (because) it's in Him to have had other thoughts'. I expressly disallow inference from 'in God to make it false' to 'God could have made it false' (e.g. p. 253) – but it might seem warranted if you identify what it's in God to do with what it's causally possible for Him to do.

As far as I can see, only this identification lets Bohn infer from God's having it in Him to do what He has made it metaphysically necessary that He not do, to the contingency of what would otherwise seem a metaphysical necessity. As I do not make the identification, his argument fails, at least so far. It needs substantive showing that 'in God' locutions express a sort of possibility, because if they do, they do so in spite of me: I do not mean them to.

I discuss this in one passage. Its key point is that its being in God to bring something about is

necessarily equivalent to a disjunction of ordinary modalities, and if (it) does introduce a distinct modal status, a 'modal collapse' immediately negates this: its character as a distinct modal status collapses away. (p. 253)

'Collapse' is what iterated modal operators do in S5. In S5,  $\Box\Box\Box P$  and  $\Box P$  are distinct sentences, but do not express distinct modal statuses. Rather, the first is just another way to express the modal status the second expresses: iterated modal operators 'collapse' to the inmost

operator. Thus in S5, there are really just the modal statuses ‘ $\_$ ’, ‘ $\square$ ’ and ‘ $\diamond$ ’.<sup>23</sup> Given S5, the text just quoted asserts that

$$IP \leftrightarrow (P \vee \square P \vee \diamond P \vee \neg \diamond P)^{24}$$

and that ‘IP’ has no *modal* content not expressed by the RHS – the RHS expresses the same modal status as the LHS, just as in S5, ‘ $\square\square\square P$ ’ expresses the same modal status as ‘ $\square P$ ’. Why use ‘I’, then? As I see it,

What is left when (modal collapse) occurs is a point about God’s endowments. It is in God to think up a kind He has not actually thought up. It is ... impossible that He do so ... but He is so endowed as to do it, and the only reason it is impossible is that He has not done so. Its impossibility is a result of His action rather than an external constraint upon it ... its bearing the status ‘I’ just indicates that its impossibility is a product of something God has done ... It notes a way ... His natural endowment runs beyond the realm of possibilities He has established.  
(p. 253)

If He is so endowed as to do it, the *only* full reason He did not do otherwise was His actual choice – His natural endowment does not explain the possible’s running out where it does. What He has creatively thought up does not exhaust His nature in this respect. ‘Explain’ and ‘exhaust’ are not modal. Similarly, if  $\diamond P$  or if it is not yet decided whether  $\diamond P$ , ‘ $I\diamond P$ ’ tells us that God is so endowed intrinsically as to bring it about that  $\diamond P$ . Again, nothing modal there.

Oppy is not happy with my explaining the locution this way, and Bohn might say with exasperation, ‘what can “it’s in God to do it” or “He is so endowed as to do it” *mean*, if not that He might have done so?’ So let us consider a move in the debate over determinism and free will. Kadri Vihvelin argues that given determinism, even if you choose to do A at t, you may still be able at t to choose otherwise. She bases this on the following analysis of abilities:

S has the narrow ability at time t to do R (by) trying iff, for some intrinsic property B that S has at t, and for some time t’ after t, if S had the

<sup>23</sup> See e.g. G.E. Hughes and M.J. Cresswell, *Modal Logic* (London: Methuen, 1968), pp. 47, 49–50.

<sup>24</sup> ‘Given S5’ implies that what does duty for possible worlds in my scheme is in place. I distinguish three contexts in which one might use ‘I’, and in one of them, the world-substitutes are not yet in place. So in that context, this equivalence does not hold. Its RHS does not even have a determinate sense; there is nothing for the modal operators to quantify over.

opportunity at  $t'$  to do R and S tried to do R while retaining ... B until ...  $t'$ , then in a suitable proportion of these cases, S's trying to do R and ... having ... B would be an S-complete cause of S's doing R.<sup>25</sup>

Let us examine this. Narrow abilities are abilities we have even if we do not have the chance to exercise them: if you are manacled to a wall at  $t$  but your legs work, you have the narrow but not the all-things-considered ability to walk away at  $t$ . An S-complete cause is one complete with respect to S' havings of intrinsic properties. Vihvelin's thought is basically this: narrow abilities are clusters of intrinsic dispositions. Things have intrinsic dispositions due only to intrinsic bases. So if you have a narrow ability's basis at  $t$ , you have the narrow ability at  $t$ , even if the past and the laws of nature together manacle you, denying you the chance to use it at  $t$ . Lacking a chance doesn't entail lacking an ability you would have used had you had the chance. You have an intrinsic disposition just if you have its intrinsic base, whatever your opportunities. If external circumstances affected having the disposition, it wouldn't be intrinsic. Given opportunities, if you tried, you would manifest your disposition in a suitable proportion of cases, by successfully using it.

I find this account plausible. A disposition is at a first pass the *in re* correlate of a function from 'triggering' situations to final effects. In the case of a narrow ability – a particular sort of disposition – the triggering situation is having its base, having a chance to use it and trying to bring about what it brings about. You do not cease to have a disposition because you are not in a triggering situation – diamonds are hard even when not pressed – and lack of a chance suffices to not be in a trigger-situation. Thus Vihvelin's account is little more than an application of plausible general ideas about dispositions. The 'function' idea is only a first pass because there are complications of the sort Vihvelin's 'suitable proportion' gestures at. Presence in human bloodstreams triggers (we may suppose) a poison's disposition to poison. But sometimes, the victim is immune or has taken an antidote, and so though the disposition is triggered, it does not produce its final effect. Instead, it produces initial or very local progress toward the final effect, which overall conditions then stamp out.<sup>26</sup>

<sup>25</sup> Kadri Vihvelin, *Causes, Laws and Free Will* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), p. 187. In the original, the second occurrence of ' $t$ ' is not primed, but this has to be a typo.

<sup>26</sup> If an antidote surrounded every molecule of the poison from the moment it hit the bloodstream, the disposition would not fire at all: it would produce nothing. We can handle such cases by complicating our description of trigger situations: these must include that the antidote is not so-positioned.

Now note a consequence of Vihvelin's story. On her account, you are narrow-able at *t* to do *A* even if it is not (given the past and natural law) metaphysically possible that you do *A* at *t*, provided that your intrinsic endowment at *t* and your choice would *S*-fully account for your doing *A* at another time if you were still so endowed. The modality here is indeed metaphysical. Though there are possible worlds in which you do *A*, there are none in which the past and laws are as they actually are and you do *A*; the past and the laws jointly entail that you do something else. You are able to do *A* just because of your intrinsic endowment, independent of whether it is metaphysically possible in your actual circumstances that you do *A*. If the laws and the past guarantee that you never try, 'if you tried, you would sometimes succeed' is a counterpossible, but a significant one.<sup>27</sup>

Suppose that Vihvelin is on the right track, and let's apply the definition to God. In His case we can simplify it. To begin, we can delete the 'suitable proportion' clause. Narrow abilities are intrinsic. If God is omnipotent, then if He tries to do what use of an intrinsic ability suffices to do,<sup>28</sup> He succeeds unless He runs up against logic, mathematics or another omnipotent will. But a God necessarily omniscient and necessarily perfectly rational cannot will contra-logically or -mathematically. Further, Christian theology has it that the Persons of the Trinity cannot will to oppose one another, and plausibly, if God is by necessity omniscient and perfectly rational, then if He created another omnipotent will, He would also assure that it could not contradict Him.<sup>29</sup> So if God tries to do what use of an intrinsic ability suffices to do, He succeeds: period.

We can also delete 'as a result of trying' – God cannot act unintentionally, and so can only act by trying. We can use my 'is intrinsically such that' as a verbal variation on 'has some intrinsic property *B*', etc. Here *B* is the intrinsic divine endowment, and so reference to retaining *B* later drops out: God has *B* eternally. We now have

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<sup>27</sup> See G&N, pp. 221-2, with n. 13.

<sup>28</sup> This excludes goals attaining which requires free creatures' co-operation. If God sets out to do something He succeeds in doing only if we co-operate; God can try and fail, due to our not co-operating.

<sup>29</sup> Swinburne has a story about relations between the triune Persons that could be adapted to this: see his *The Christian God* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), pp. 174-5.

V. God has the narrow ability at time  $t$  to do  $R$  iff He is intrinsically such that for some time  $t'$  after  $t$ , if God had the opportunity at  $t'$  to do  $R$  and tried to do  $R$ , God's trying and being as He is intrinsically would be a God-complete cause of God's doing  $R$ .

This gives a legitimate sense of divine ability if Vihvelin's account is on target. But like Vihvelin's, it does not imply that God possibly tries at  $t$  or at  $t'$ . It provides a sense in which God is able to do otherwise even if it is not possible that He do so.

On my account of 'I', God has it in Him to do  $A$  just if He has a relevant narrow ability. We can see this by surveying 'I's three contexts of use. It is obvious where God has the power to do  $A$  (p. 252). Where  $I(\text{God does } A)$  and God does not have the power to do  $A$ , the only reason for this is His choice. His intrinsic endowment left it entirely up to Him whether to have this power, and He chose not to. It has not changed, though the circumstances have (it is now impossible that He do  $A$ ). So if He had the opportunity to choose anew, it would again be entirely up to Him. (This is a counterpossible, but a significant one.) Thus if He so chose, His choice and His intrinsic endowment would be a God-complete cause of His having the power: (V)'s RHS applies. Finally, when  $I(\text{God does } A)$  and God is considering whether it is to be possible that He do  $A$  but has not yet decided (p. 252), then again, it is wholly up to Him, He has the opportunity, and so if He chooses to have the power, that plus His endowment will give Him the power: again, the RHS applies. In all three 'I' contexts, God has the narrow ability to have the intrinsic power to do  $A$ . In one, He has the power; in another, He is passing up or has passed up His chance to have it, but still has the narrow ability; in the last, He has the opportunity and the narrow ability.

If we let  $R$  be having an intrinsic power to do  $A$ , we can further simplify (V). In such cases God has the opportunity eternally – from all eternity, there is nothing to deny it to Him. Thus we need not conditionalize on opportunity, or mention times at which He has opportunities. So we get

$V^*$ . God has the narrow ability at time  $t$  to have the intrinsic power to do  $A$  iff He is intrinsically such that if God tried at  $t$  to have this power, God's trying and being as He is intrinsically would be a God-complete cause of God's acquiring it.

Let's now compare ( $V^*$ ) with my definition of 'God has it in Him to do  $A$ ' as quoted by Oppy. ( $V^*$ )'s time-index is clearly doing no work; it is



inessential. Willing in my definition either is trying or is its first stage, which in this case would be infallibly followed by the rest. If God wills to have a power, it is His intrinsic endowment that makes the willing effective, and it does so by constituting with it a God-complete cause; so we can treat this aspect of (V\*)'s RHS as an expansion of my *definiens*. (V\*)'s RHS applies unproblematically to non-natural powers. The RHS of my *definiens* yields unproblematically that God has it in Him to do whatever He has the natural power to do. To get natural powers out of (V\*)'s RHS, note that it is impossible that a necessarily omniscient, perfectly rational God try to cause Himself to have powers He already has. Given all this, the only substantial difference between (V\*)'s RHS and my *definiens* is that (V\*)'s conditional is counterfactual, not material.

Had I been content to speak from the standpoint of the modal realm God establishes, so that the requisites for counterfactual semantics were in place, I could have used a counterfactual in my definition. I could in fact treat a counterfactual version as an alternate account of what it is for God to have it in Him to do something, from that standpoint. Again, use of a counterfactual would be fine without the restriction to that standpoint if I gave a purely power-based counterfactual semantics, and defined 'in Him to do' by a counterfactual based on the natural powers God has explanatorily prior to His giving Himself non-natural powers. I am committed to a power-based semantics for counterfactuals, since I substitute divine powers for possible worlds. But G&N did not develop one – the book was long enough already! – and I wanted an account of God's 'ability beyond the possible' that would come out true from a standpoint explanatorily prior to the modal realm God establishes. So I went with a material rather than a counterfactual conditional. Still, given all this, I suggest that my account of what it is in God to do differs only inessentially from (V\*). So if the Vivhelin account is broadly on the right track, provides a legitimate sense for being able to do otherwise, and yet does not entail that in one's actual circumstances one might do or might have done what one is able to do – if it is not *in this way* modal – then my account of 'in Him' locutions equally does not entail this and yet provides a legitimate sense of ability. It provides a species of divine ability in actual circumstances which does not entail a possibility in actual circumstances. This sort of account of ability, then, lets me say that God is able to – 'in some sense ... had the capacity to' (Forrest) – acquire different powers, without entailing that it is possible that He do so.

You may at this point be bursting to make the following objection: there is a large difference. Vivhelin's talk of ability is warranted partly by there being other possible worlds in which your circumstances differ, you therefore are able to exercise your ability, and you do. Vivhelin does not ascribe an ability it is not possible that you exercise. On my account, it is not possible that God's exercise His 'ability' to think up an 11<sup>th</sup> kind (though again, this was His doing). That God do otherwise in His actual circumstances is impossible, and in God's case (as I see it), no other circumstances are possible. But suppose that God had a puckish sense of humour, and assured that though it is not part of what it is to be human to be accompanied by a genie, in every possible world, every human had a personal genie with one function: when we ingest cyanide, the genie magically makes an antidote appear in our bloodstreams, so that no human is possibly poisoned by cyanide. Even so, cyanide would be poisonous for humans – why else the need for a genie? In this story, it is not possible that cyanide exercise its intrinsic power. It cannot get a chance to do so. Yet intuitively, the intrinsic power is still there regardless. That were there no genies, humans could die of cyanide poisoning is a *significant* counterpossible. So is the one about God, trying and an 11<sup>th</sup> kind.

Forrest insists that unwanted possibility nonetheless lurks. God freely chose some of His powers. He had it in Him to do otherwise (p. 461). So (writes Forrest) there might have been different secular possibilities. Thus these are possibly possible. As whatever is possibly possible is possible, then, it is possible for God to have had different powers, 'contrary to the use of divine powers as substitutes for secular possibilities'. I don't see why this would be contrary. It's not a case where we have or could have a secular possibility but not a divine power, as it's not a *secular* possibility (it is a possibility for God), and I don't claim that divine powers provide all ontology for all possibilities about God (p. 436). Further, what licenses the move from 'otherwise is in Him' to 'might have been otherwise'? Not my definition of the first, nor the three contexts in which I use it, nor what I use it to express in those contexts (see above). The 'in God to do' locution is there to let me talk non-modally about points in a story of how we get secular modal status which are prior to its conclusion, at which we finally get secular modality, and about consequences of what occurs at these points (pp. 252-3). Consider Forrest's (old?) view, on which possible

worlds are rich properties entire universes can exemplify.<sup>30</sup> Why is each such world possible? Presumably, just as what it is to be a dog makes it possible that there be dogs, the property's intrinsic content makes it so. A definition of a world-property would state that content: we might say being  $W$  =df. being such that only  $P, Q, R \dots$  are the case. My talk of what is in God is at the same explanatory level as this definition, that of non-modal facts lying beneath and explaining modal status. Claiming that it just has to be modal is like claiming that '=df.' just has to be.

Forrest argues further that if it is in God to have other powers, this is consistent with the divine nature, hence possibly possible, hence possible. G&N avoided speaking in this context of consistency or compatibility with the divine nature,<sup>31</sup> or of the divine nature permitting or not preventing, precisely to avoid the modal freight of these terms. What I do permit in this vicinity are such non-modal claims as that if it is in God to have other powers, that God has His nature plus other powers is not a contradiction, not contra-logical and not contra-mathematical. Impossibilities that are not contradictory, contra-logical, etc., are not news.

Now to some smaller points from Bohn. Bohn writes,

that  $p$  is true in *all* possible worlds is just a way of saying that ... there just are no possible ways for the world to be such that  $p$  is false. But on Leftow's account, there *is* a way for the world to be such that secular  $p$  is false, namely the way it would have been if God had just thought differently.

It's one thing for there to be a way for the world to be, another for there to be a *possible* way for the world to be. Impossible ways for the world to be are not problematic – any impossible proposition expresses one. Again, Bohn finds it odd that I say that it's not in God to make it the case that  $a \neq a$ . But that  $a \neq a$  would violate the reflexivity of identity, which I take to be a truth of logic, and I hold that it is not in God to violate logic: again, I am no Cartesian. Nor is this necessity brute. I ground it on God's nature, and I argue that the necessity that God have that is not brute. I simply do not see how Bohn gets from the text he cites the view that for me, it is in God to have Socrates be a number. And I answer n. 9's question about divine suicide at pp. 441-2 and 182-3.

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<sup>30</sup> Peter Forrest, 'Ways Worlds Could Be', *Australasian Journal of Philosophy*, 64 (1986), 15-24.

<sup>31</sup> Speaking this way is the only slip in Sam Cowling's account of my views: *op. cit.*, p. 611. Unfortunately he makes it the basis for a criticism at p. 612.

On two points, however, Bohn has caught me out. He's right that (contrary to p. 253) its being in God to bring it about that P and its being in God to bring it about that Q do not entail that it is in Him to bring it about that P and Q. Again, I had suggested that pure logic and mathematics are non-secular because their universal quantifiers are unrestricted and so range over God. Bohn (n. 7) notes that many other truths also involve such quantifiers, some of them secular. He's right. It still seems to me that logic and mathematics are not secular, but I need a different account of why.<sup>32</sup> One relevant intuition is this: logical and mathematical truths really are about absolutely everything. It is integral to their content that their quantifiers are absolutely unrestricted. Because they really are about *everything*, they really do provide information *inter alia* about God, if He exists, and so really are non-secular. But consider

RB. nothing can be red and blue all over at once.

It is not integral to (RB)'s content that its quantifier be unrestricted. (RB) is really just about colours, or coloured things. Intuitively, nothing would be lost if we tacitly restricted the domain of 'nothing' to possibly coloured things – which would exclude God. But something would be lost if we restricted the quantifier domains in logic or mathematics. Informally and as a first pass, then, we might seek a fix along these lines: a universally quantified truth is non-secular just if absolute generality is integral to its content.<sup>33</sup>

#### FORREST

I thank Forrest for his kind words, and for adding 'zoggenic' to my vocabulary. In sec. 1, I comment only on two things.

One is Forrest's failure to see 'how the mere lack of extra worlds explains anything unless we can explain that lack in turn.'<sup>34</sup> Lack of

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<sup>32</sup> 'Need' might be a bit strong. I use the notion of the secular only to pick out a class of propositions excluding logic, mathematics and claims about God, about which I offer a theory. I *could* simply stipulate that the theory does not cover logic, mathematics and claims about God.

<sup>33</sup> If (as some argue) the notion of absolute generality is in some way incoherent, one could re-do this in terms of whatever substitute philosophers of logic offer.

<sup>34</sup> Also a very small point: by a secular proposition I *mean* (*pace* Forrest) one that is not in the right way about God, His distinctive attributes, etc. (pp. 248ff.). If there were abstracta, there would be secular truths about them; it's only because I am a nominalist that Forrest's description is (at least extensionally) correct. Forrest's second

extra worlds gives us the closure condition we need to have a necessity: necessarily P just if P in  $W_1, W_2 \dots$ , and  $W_1, W_2 \dots$  are all the worlds, i.e. there are no others. Whether further explained or not, what helps a proposition satisfy the conditions for being necessary contributes to a truthmaking sort of explanation of its being necessary. Forrest continues, 'but according to Leftow it is just God's free decision and so not explained'. First, if the decision causes the lack, the decision explains the lack, even if the decision itself is unexplained. Further, a decision's being free hardly entails that it is not explained. Reasons explain some free decisions. They do so even if they incline without determining (probabilistic explanation explains, and explanation that P does not require explanation that P rather than not P). I suspect that some decisions can be free even if so completely explained by reasons that they could not have been decided otherwise.

The other is Forrest's dilemma about possible worlds. Forrest does not consider the option that in whatever sense there are possibilities, there are possible worlds, whether we need them or not. That is actually my view (p. 38). Possibilities are part of reality, in some sense, and they have a natural maximum size, world-sized. Given that we have worlds, it's prudent to make use of them – e.g. in giving an account of necessary truths – rather than expand our ideology by adding analyticity. I wish

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description also mischaracterizes the concept. I do not say that secular propositions 'do not presuppose theism'. I do not say this because non-secular propositions do not presuppose theism either. A non-secular sentence provides information about God *if it is true* (pp. 248-9). Thus 'God exists' is non-secular whether or not God exists. But 'God exists' does not presuppose theism. No sentence presupposes itself, intuitively. And this case falls out of at least two classic approaches to presupposition (there are many accounts of presupposition, and Forrest does not say which he favours). On a Strawson-style account, P presupposes Q iff  $\langle P \text{ is true} \rangle$  and  $\langle P \text{ is false} \rangle$  both imply Q. Clearly this needs reworking to deal with necessary truths, but leaving aside paradoxes of implication (which would yield that everything presupposes all necessary truths), if it is false that God exists, it does not follow that God exists. Maybe the Strawson notion is *supposed* to yield that everything presupposes all necessary truths. In that case, on Forrest's claim, I'd be holding that all propositions are non-secular. But I do not mean to hold that. On Stalnaker's approach, a sentence 'Q' pragmatically presupposes that P just if a speaker would normally expect people uttering 'Q' in discussion to have in common an assumption that P. Logic and mathematics are non-secular, but no-one involved in discussing these would expect theism to figure among the common assumptions people discussing these would usually share. It is just not relevant to or needed for these; even if all people were theists, a Stalnaker-style account should not yield the result that logic and mathematics presuppose theism.

I had space adequately to discuss Forrest's modal ideas. Here I can only raise one matter. Forrest writes, 'those truths that no human being can ... suppose false, are absolutely necessary'. Either this is because our powers determine that this is necessary, or it is a remarkable coincidence. If the first is so, trouble ensues. It seems contingent what supposing-false powers actual humans actually have. It seems quite possible that other humans have been a bit better at it. If so, then if for Forrest actual abilities to suppose false determine the limits of the necessary, it turns out contingent what is necessary – which violates the S5 Forrest wants to build into this modality. I suppose Forrest could say that actually, our powers set the limits, but had there been others with different powers they would not have done it – but that would seem implausible. What Forrest needs is that the necessary be what no *possible* human can suppose false. But this is just another way to say that the necessary is that which necessarily, no human supposes false. The explication involves the *explicandum*: not good. Yet if it is just coincidence – good luck – that our supposing powers get the limits of possibility right, this seems to endanger our modal knowledge.

Turning to sec. 2, Forrest's replacement for omnipotence<sup>35</sup> faces a McDesire objection: imagine someone who can only desire to do one thing, and is able to do it. This person would have the perfection of will Forrest describes, yet be able to do just one thing. This makes the replacement on its own an inadequate substitute for omnipotence. Things don't improve much if we add divine goodness; a good being is not guaranteed to be able to want much. Forrest must add a clause: not just goodness, but (say) ability to desire all that is good. Either way, though omnipotence should be what gives God His range of action, Forrest's replacement does not do this.

The second premise of Forrest's argument for evil possible worlds is that whatever a creature can bring about freely, God could cause it to bring about unfreely. This seems false. I can freely bring it about that I initiate an action. God cannot cause me to bring that about; if He causes me to act, He initiates the action, not I. If I am ultimately responsible for any act of a certain sort that I do, and A is an act of that sort, then by

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<sup>35</sup> Forrest's n. 6 threatens to contradict the claim that God has this perfection: God could wish fervently to have the ability to make everyone freely accept Him, but n. 6 tells us that even if He did, He wouldn't get it. But perhaps what Forrest means to do here is to indicate that there will have to be complicating clauses to give a full account of this perfection, as there are in many accounts of omnipotence.

doing A, I bring it about that I am ultimately responsible for doing A. God can't cause me to bring that about; if He causes me to act, He gets ultimate responsibility.<sup>36</sup>

Forrest does not say what redeeming a predestinarian Adam/Eve world involves. If it goes as far as making each evil turn out to be a necessary condition of a good great enough to justify it, a perfect God might well be able to cause such a world. Either God redeems each evil in this way or it is not a world God could justifiably cause: God could not justifiably cause even one evil that despite His best efforts would have to remain pointless, save perhaps when some evil is needed to execute a particular good purpose but there is no precise minimum amount needed. Now a morally perfect God's deciding from all eternity to cause a predestinarian Adam/Eve world is part of such a world. So if God could not justifiably cause such a world, the first-pass answer to when  $w^*$  ceases to be possible is 'from all eternity'. But more carefully, if from all eternity, at any time,  $w^*$  is already not possible,  $w^*$  never was possible. So either  $w^*$  is not possible or it is a world God can bring about. Either way, we do not have an evil possible world beyond God's power to effect.

It's not clear just what Forrest packs into the charge of trivializing omnipotence.<sup>37</sup> On one parsing, it would be that standard definitions of omnipotence become trivial, something like 'God is omnipotent =df. God has the power to do whatever God gives Himself the power to do'. My own account of omnipotence includes more than a clause about range of action.<sup>38</sup> So even if this were the consequence for a range-of-action clause, it wouldn't follow that the whole definition had become trivial. But God gives Himself the power to do A just if He has it in Him to do so and on balance wants to, so I'd prefer to see the consequence as something like 'God is omnipotent only if God has the power to do whatever He both has it in Himself and all-things-considered desires to give Himself the power to do'. That doesn't seem vacuous, and leaves us able to add to our definition of omnipotence a clause which specifies the range of what God has desired to give Himself power to do. In any case, Aquinas considered a similar objection, and I can adapt his reply:

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<sup>36</sup> Perhaps Forrest's n. 7 is intended to exclude this sort of thing - but reading it that way would be a bit stretched. A more natural reading would take it as asserting e.g. that I cannot freely bring it about that if I do any actions of a certain sort, I am ultimately responsible for doing them.

<sup>37</sup> I discuss one trivialization charge at pp. 132-4.

<sup>38</sup> See again my 'Omnipotence'.

even if in fact, the range of the absolutely possible just is the range of certain divine powers, one can *define* absolute possibility in other terms, or treat it as primitive. Either way, it would then be non-trivial to define omnipotence in terms of (roughly) being able to bring about every absolutely possible state of affairs. The other parsing of the trivialization charge would be that it lets a being with too small a range of power count as omnipotent. But this just doesn't follow. It's compatible with the claim that God chooses the precise range of omnipotence that His nature constrain Him to choose a range large enough not to violate our intuitions about (roughly) how much an omnipotent being ought to be able to do.

Forrest takes me to assert truth-value gaps for modal propositions. What I wrote is this:

there is no such property as being a zog... (So) it is not possible or impossible that something be a zog, i.e., have a property which neither is possible nor is impossible because it does not exist to bear either modality. As I see it, if God does not think up elephants, being an elephant no more names a property than *being a zog* now does. There are then no facts about elephants – not even that God has not thought them up. (p. 151)

If no facts, no propositions about them either, since that there are propositions about them would be a fact about them. On Prior's view, I think, before I existed, there was no singular proposition for 'possibly Brian exists' to express.<sup>39</sup> So there was no singular proposition with a truth-value gap. Once I existed, there was a singular proposition and it was true. Similarly, as there is no kind <zog>, I think there are no zog-propositions, and so no gappy ones. 'Possibly all zogs are perky' does not express a proposition. It is just a sentence containing a letter-string without determinate meaning. If we use 'zog' as a placeholder for 'member of a natural kind God has not conceived,' then it expresses a proposition, which has a truth-value.

Turning to Forrest's third objection, the ordinal-time hypothesis, however intriguing, doesn't deal with my divine waiting point. Even if God's time involves nexts, the next moment is later than this one. So if God does not do something at this moment, He waits till the next – and all the same questions about divine waiting apply. As to his (2), I do not make the move Forrest ascribes to me 'implicitly' – in fact, *per* what's

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<sup>39</sup> See Christopher Menzel, 'The True Modal Logic,' *Journal of Philosophical Logic*, 20 (1991), 331-74 (esp. p. 341).



above, I suggest that God's nature guarantees that the range of power that winds up constituting omnipotence will not be small (however we parse 'small' (p. 133)). But nor do I see that his rejoinder deals with that move: how could the fact that a small range of power, or a large range of the wrong kind, is inadequate for God tell against the claim that He gives Himself a very large range of the right kind and then says 'no more than this'? *Per* what we've seen, if it were in God to have additional powers, that would not entail that He could. Perhaps Forrest just takes this to follow, but it does not. Further, if it is in God to give Himself powers, it is also in Him not to give Himself further powers, as any given set of powers doesn't contain further powers. So it is also in Him to deny Himself further powers. One way to do so would be to deny Himself the power to acquire them. As to whether He would give or deny Himself this power, why think there is a *presumption* either way? We can hardly *presume* that God wouldn't get the powers to have right the first time; theists at all sympathetic to divine perfection will think that we ought to presume He would; if He did, He would have no use for the power to add more powers – but we can hardly presume either way when it comes to whether God would be tidy enough to want not to have a particular power He knows He would never use. I think the best Forrest can really claim is that at the level of presumption we might be agnostic about a power to add further powers.