

Reply to Richard Davis

Davis (2008) is a critique of Oppy (1993). I think that Davis' critique fails to touch the argument of my early paper, because it is based on serious misunderstanding of that argument. Perhaps this misunderstanding is my fault: perhaps I failed to write with sufficient clarity. In any case, my aim here is to give a clear account of the argument of Oppy (1993), and then to explain why there is nothing in Davis (2008) that threatens this argument. I shall also discuss criticisms that Davis makes of some of my other writings; there are some things that he says about my account of begging the question in Oppy (1995) that are worthy of further investigation.

1

In Oppy (1993), I argued for the conclusion that there are no good modal theistic arguments. For the purposes of that paper, I *defined* modal theistic arguments to be 'proofs of the existence of God that make use of the premise that God is a being who exists in every possible world'. While that definition is unsatisfactory—since it doesn't fit the two examples that I give of modal theistic arguments—what I had in mind is made pretty clear by those examples: Plantinga's 'victorious modal ontological argument'¹ and Leftow's 'Leibnizian cosmological argument'². In each of these arguments there are two premises, one of which says [when fully translated into the language of possible worlds] that, *if a certain kind of being exists in one possible world, then it exists in all possible worlds*, and the other of which says [when fully translated into the language of possible worlds] that *the kind of being in question exists in at least one possible world*. From these two premises, it follows that *the kind of being in question exists in all possible worlds*—and, from there, it is an easy inference to the conclusion that *the kind of being in question exists in the actual world*.

In the taxonomy of Oppy (1995), these arguments—i.e. the arguments of Plantinga and Leftow, and anything else that fits the same pattern—are modal ontological arguments involving necessity. (Leftow calls his argument a 'cosmological' argument. But fully translated into the language of possible worlds, it runs like this: *If a being which causes the existence of abstract beings (e.g. numbers) exists in one possible world, then it exists in all possible worlds. A being which causes the existence of abstract beings exists in at least one possible world. So a being which causes the existence of abstract beings exists in all possible worlds*. I now think that this argument is more properly characterised as a modal ontological argument for the existence of a being which causes the existence of abstract beings. However, at the time of writing Oppy (1993), I allowed Leftow's terminology to guide my characterisation of the argument.)

The key thought that motivates the argument of Oppy (1993) is that no modal ontological argument involving necessity can achieve any useful argumentative end. Suppose we hold fixed the assumption that, if a certain kind of being exists in one possible world, then it exists in all possible worlds. Clearly, if I believe—and hold fixed my belief—that there actually is no being of that kind, then I can infer that there is no possible world in which a being of that kind exists. Similarly, if I am genuinely undecided—and hold fixed my indecision—about whether there actually exists a being of the kind in question, then I shall be equally undecided about whether there is at least one possible world in which there is a being of the kind in question. So, in

itself, an argument of this kind is simply powerless to move either reasonable atheists or reasonable agnostics to come to believe that God exists.

In Oppy (1993), I tried to give a picturesque encapsulation of the situation that is described in the previous paragraph. If we think about the conceptions of modal space that are held by ‘necessary being’ theists and those who are not ‘necessary being theists’, then the most obvious difference is that, on the former conception, the God of the ‘necessary being’ theist exists in every possible world, while on the latter conception, either the God of the ‘necessary being’ theist exists in no possible world (this is the view of those who deny that the God of the ‘necessary being’ theist exists), or else there is indecision between the two conceptions of modal space already described, so that the God of the ‘necessary being’ theist exists in every possible world in only one of two conceptions of modal space that are held to be viable, or live, or whatever (this is the view of those who are undecided on the question whether the God of the ‘necessary being’ theist exists).

Moreover, in Oppy (1993), I claimed that a ‘decision’ between these two different conceptions of logical space—one in which the God of the ‘necessary being’ theist exists in all possible worlds, and one in which the God of the ‘necessary being’ theist exists in no possible worlds—plainly reduces to a ‘decision’ about a purely non-modal question, namely whether the God of the ‘necessary being’ theist exists in the actual world. If you think that the God of the ‘necessary being’ theist exists in the actual world, then—at least given minimal rationality—you will think that the God of the ‘necessary being’ theist exists in all possible worlds. If you think that the God of the ‘necessary being’ theist does not exist in the actual world, then—at least given minimal rationality—you will think that the God of the ‘necessary being’ theist exists in no possible worlds. If you are undecided whether the God of the ‘necessary being’ theist exists in the actual world, then—at least given minimal rationality—you will be undecided whether the God of the ‘necessary being’ theist exists in all possible worlds or in no possible worlds. But, if all of this is right, then there is just no way for modal ontological arguments to gain traction on reasonable interlocutors: insistence on the pair of premises of a modal ontological argument simply begs the question against those who reject—or fail to accept—that pair of premises.³

In hindsight, given the above account of the argument of Oppy (1993), it is not clear to me that the argument of Oppy (1993) is acceptable as it stands. In particular, one might worry that the argument fails to consider all of the kinds of reasonable people to whom a modal ontological argument might be addressed. Suppose that such an argument was addressed to someone who had never previously entertained the idea of the God of the ‘necessary being’ theist—and hence of whom it could not properly be said that there were undecided whether the God of the ‘necessary being’ theist exists in all possible worlds or in no possible worlds. Might such a person be properly convinced of the existence of the God of the ‘necessary being’ theist by such an argument? In particular, mightn’t it be the case that a reasonable person simply had the disposition to accept the premises of a modal ontological argument upon hearing those premises—and thereby came to believe in the existence of the God of the ‘necessary being’ theist as the result of being offered that modal ontological argument?

Even if we suppose that a reasonable person *could* reasonably have the disposition to accept the premises of a modal ontological argument simply upon hearing those

premises—and hence that such a person could reasonably come to believe in the existence of the God of the ‘necessary being’ theist as a result of exposure to that modal ontological argument—it seems to me that this would not be a case in which we would have grounds to say that the argument in question is a successful *argument*. Given that the person in question is reasonable, it seems natural—if not mandatory—to suppose that they would also have the disposition to accept the claim that the God of the ‘necessary being’ theist exists simply upon the basis of exposure to that claim. But, if that’s right, then it would just be an *accident* that they came to believe that the God of the ‘necessary being’ theist exists on the basis of argument rather than on the basis of mere assertion: there is nothing in the virtues of the argument qua argument that plays an essential role in the formation of the belief. (By contrast, the use of a *reductio* argument to show that someone’s beliefs are inconsistent will rely on the virtues of that argument qua argument in bringing the person to recognise that there is an inconsistency among their beliefs.) Hence, even if we suppose that a reasonable person *could* reasonably have the disposition to accept the premises of a modal ontological argument simply upon hearing those premises, that won’t give us a case in which we can reasonably think that a modal ontological argument turns out to be a good *argument*.⁴

There is more to say to complete the case that is developed in Oppy (1993). Some of what needs to be said is said in Oppy (1995) and Oppy (2006). Doubtless, there is more to be said that I have not yet said elsewhere. However, given the purposes of the present paper, I don’t propose to try to give further development of the case here.

2

In the previous section, I omitted some details of my ‘picturesque encapsulation’ of the differences in the modal beliefs of ‘necessary being’ theists and their opponents. In particular, I failed to mention that, in section 1 of Oppy (1993), I set out what I took to be a version of Lewis’ modal realism that would be acceptable to a ‘necessary being’ theist. If I had developed a version of Lewis’ modal realism that was acceptable to ‘necessary being’ theists, then I would have had two *vivid* theories of the layout of modal space, one consonant with the intuitions of ‘necessary being’ theists, and one consonant with the intuitions of those who deny the existence of the God of ‘necessary being’ theism. Of course—as I pointed out in Oppy 1993—I was not supposing that Lewis’ modal realism provides the correct or preferred metaphysics for modality: it might well be that ersatzism, or combinatorialism, or modal fictionalism, or primitivism, or something else again, provides a better metaphysics for modality.⁵ But, for the purposes of illustrating divergent conceptions of logical space, it seemed to me that there was an advantage in working with Lewis’ modal realism simply because of the vivid picture that it presents of the metaphysics of modality (and, in particular, of the nature of logical space).

It might seem that there could hardly be a difficulty in developing a version of Lewis’ modal realism that is acceptable to ‘necessary being’ theists, provided only that those ‘necessary being’ theists accept that modal talk can be properly translated into possible worlds talk. After all, one might think, the key idea in modal realism is that each way that things might have been—each possible world—*exists*. So, to get a modal realist version of the conception of logical space held by a ‘necessary being’ theist—on whatever conception of the metaphysics of modality that ‘necessary being’

theist may happen to hold—we just suppose that each of the worlds that is possible according to that conception *exists*. True enough, there are accommodations that need to be made, since, on the modal realist account, entities are world-bound: but we can use the modal realist’s counterpart relation to model what, in other conceptions, would be identity across possible worlds.

The proposal in Oppy (1993) went beyond this simple suggestion. In particular, the proposal in Oppy (1993) begins with some of Lewis’ detailed views about the nature of possible worlds—in particular, that worlds are distributions of properties over connected space-time points—and then asks how that view might be modified in order to accommodate the views of ‘necessary being’ theists. My proposal was that there are essentially three modifications to make: *first*, God exists in the actual world and there is exactly one counterpart of God in each of the other possible worlds; *second*, somehow, Lewis’s view that worlds are distributions of properties over connected space-time points must be amended to allow God and his counterparts to belong to worlds; and, *third*, if there are Lewis worlds that are not worlds that could have been made by God—because, perhaps, they contain too much unmitigated evil—then those will not be possible worlds on the ‘necessary being’ theist’s version of Lewis’s modal realism.⁶

The proposal in Oppy (1993) might conceivably be acceptable to *some* ‘necessary being’ theists, but it seems unlikely that it would be acceptable to many. In particular, if you think that God does more than bring our universe into existence, then you’ll likely think that you won’t get all of the worlds that are possible just by grafting God onto the worlds that Lewis thinks is possible. But, if you can’t get all of the worlds that are possible just by grafting God onto the worlds that Lewis thinks is possible, then nothing like the proposal in Oppy (1993) is acceptable: a ‘necessary being’ theist’s version of modal realism will just look very different from Lewis’ particular version of modal realism.

Given the purpose for which the detailed proposal in Oppy (1993) was developed, it might be argued that it doesn’t matter whether it is an acceptable proposal. After all, what was wanted was a *vivid* picture of logical space as it is conceived by ‘necessary being’ theists and by those who reject ‘necessary being’ theism. A picture in which some of the details are wrong might still be serviceable, so long as the important details are correct: and, in the present case, what matters is whether there is exactly one counterpart of God in all of the possible worlds. However, even if all of this were right, it would remain the case that the fact that the detailed proposal is wrong provides a serious distraction for readers: I certainly would not retain the detailed proposal in a revised version of the paper.

3

On Davis’s reading of Oppy (1993), I argue that ‘modal theistic arguments’ are question begging because they presuppose that Lewis’s particular version of modal realism is false⁷. After arguing that Lewis’s particular version of modal realism is inconsistent with theism⁸, Davis goes on to argue that it need not be question-begging for a theist to reject Lewis’s particular version of modal realism and yet to go on to offer a modal argument for God’s existence⁹. After that, Davis gives ‘a brief sketch of how a modal proof for theism might unfold such that non-Concretism is assumed, but

without begging any questions in favour of theism'¹⁰, and offers defences of the sketched proof against some possible objections¹¹.

Given my account of Oppy (1993) in the previous two sections of this paper, it should be obvious that I reject the suggestion that I argued that 'modal theistic arguments' are question begging because they presuppose that Lewis's particular version of modal realism is false. I certainly did not believe then—and nor do I believe now—that 'modal theistic arguments' are question begging because they presuppose that Lewis's particular version of modal realism is false. Moreover, it is clear that, even at the time of writing Oppy (1993), I agreed with Davis that Lewis's particular version of modal realism is inconsistent with theism: that fact helps to explain why I entered into a discussion of how Lewis's account would need to be *modified* in order to accommodate the beliefs of a 'necessary being' theist. Finally, quick inspection is enough to establish that the 'modal proof for theism' that Davis offers is manifestly not a modal ontological argument, i.e. it is manifestly not the kind of argument that Oppy (1993) set out to criticise¹². So—as I claimed in the introduction to this paper—there is nothing in the *main* lines of Davis's argumentation that even engages with the position developed in Oppy (1993).

However, even if there is nothing in the main lines of Davis's argumentation that engages with the position developed in Oppy (1993), it is still the case that there are some points of details that are worthy of further discussion. In the remaining two sections of this paper, there are two issues that Davis raises that I wish to discuss. The first concerns the extent of the incompatibility between Lewis's particular version of modal realism and theism; the second concerns the analysis of the argumentative fallacy of begging the question.

4

Davis provides a number of arguments for the claim that theism is inconsistent with 'concretism', i.e. with the claim—attributed by Davis to Lewis—that 'possible worlds are maximal physical objects' (39).

First, Davis observes that, since God is an immaterial substance, it is *prima facie* reasonable to suppose that God could not exist in any of Lewis's possible worlds. Perhaps we might try saying that God exists everywhere: but, in that case, 'God will be identical with each [world ... and so] there will either be a single possible world ... or we shall be forced to say that every world is identical with a distinct God' (40). Perhaps we might try saying that God exists outside space-time in each world but is nonetheless its creator: but, in that case, 'every world will be causally related to every other by virtue of being causally related to God' (40). Perhaps we might try saying that God exists outside of space: but 'to exist outside space is to exist outside a world ... and if something is outside a world (in this respect) then it cannot also be inside it (in that same respect)' (41). Since all options seem to be foreclosed, we conclude that it is not merely *prima facie* reasonable to suppose that God could not exist in any of Lewis's possible worlds: 'there is no vacancy in Lewis's 'logical space'; all the rooms are fully occupied' (41).

Lewis (1986:71) certainly does say that the claim that things are world-mates iff they are spatiotemporally related is 'more or less the doctrine that I propose'. Ignoring the

qualification, if it were true that God would bear no spatiotemporal relation to any universes that God created, it would seem to follow that God could not figure in any of Lewis's possible worlds. However, we shouldn't ignore the qualification: Lewis fusses a lot about whether he needs to invoke analogically spatiotemporal relations, or natural external relations that are not spatiotemporal relations. Moreover, it seems to me that theists should reasonably insist that God's relationship to worlds that God creates is a natural external relation: whence there is a simple adjustment to Lewis's preferred scheme that will accommodate God. Worlds are maximal aggregates under natural external relations: as far as we know, the only natural external relations are spatiotemporal relations and the relation that exists between God and God's creation.¹³

Second, Davis claims that there is a more direct argument for the incompatibility of theism and concretism. According to Davis, concretism entails that the sole necessary proposition is the set of all possible worlds, i.e. the set of all maximal physical objects. However, according to theism, the creation of concrete, physical reality is a contingent affair: God could have refrained from creating anything physical. 'But necessarily, if he had, then S would not have contained anything; that is to say, S would have been the empty set. Thus the conjunction of theism and concretism implies that it is actually possible that a necessary truth ... could have been false and in fact necessarily false. And of course this is not possible.' (42)

Given our previous proposal about natural external relations, it is easy to see how to reply to this argument. If we combine theism with concretism, then it isn't true that worlds are maximal physical objects: rather, worlds are mereological sums, of which at most one part is a maximal physical object. Theists who agree with Davis that God might not have created will suppose that there is at least one possible world in which there is no physical part; theists who think that God could not have failed to create will suppose that there are no possible worlds that have no physical part.¹⁴

Davis's arguments for inconsistency between theism and concretism fail. While it is true that Lewis's preferred version of concretism is not theistic, it is easy enough to see how to modify Lewis's concretism in order to get it to yield all of the standard theistic modal claims. Of course, you might think that the fact that translating from the language of counterpart theory to ordinary modal language yields all of the ordinary modal claims that theists wish to make is insufficient recommendation of Lewis's concretism. But that's a whole different question.

5

Davis distinguishes between what he calls 'logical circularity' and 'epistemic circularity'. On the one hand, 'an argument is logically circular if its conclusion is included among its premises' (44); on the other hand, an argument is 'epistemically circular if we must presuppose its conclusion in order to ascertain the truth of the premises or be justified in accepting them' (44). Moreover, Davis notes that, in Oppy (1995), I claimed that 'the charge of logically begging the question merits no attention at all, since every valid argument begs the question in this way' (44n33). But, says Davis, this claim is false: 'a simple little argument such as P, (P→Q) therefore Q is not [logically circular]' (44n33).

What assumptions might support the claim that $P, (P \rightarrow Q)$ therefore Q is logically circular?

Well, one assumption that might do the trick is given, at least *inter alia*, on the page from which Davis draws the quote: we assume that merely logical manipulation of the premises or conclusion of an argument makes no difference to the question of its logical circularity. The argument P_1, \dots, P_n therefore Q , should count as logically circular just in case the argument R therefore Q counts as logically circular, where R is any sentence that is logically equivalent to the conjunction $(P_1 \& \dots \& P_n)$. However, if the argument P_1, \dots, P_n therefore Q is valid, then the conjunction $(P_1 \& \dots \& P_n)$ is logically equivalent to the conjunction $(Q \& (P_1 \& \dots \& P_n))$. Since the argument $(Q \& (P_1 \& \dots \& P_n))$ therefore Q is logically circular, we can then conclude that the argument P_1, \dots, P_n therefore Q is also logically circular.

There is another assumption, not discussed in Oppy (1995), that might also do the trick: we assume that there is such a thing as the logical difference between any two propositions. If it is true that Q follows logically from R , then it will also be true that Q is logically equivalent to the conjunction of R and the logical difference between Q and R —call it $\text{diff}(Q, R)$. (Of course, the logical difference between Q and R can be null. In that case, $(R \& \text{diff}(Q, R))$ is just R .)

Given this assumption, we can get by with a weaker version of our first assumption: we can claim that an argument P_1, \dots, P_n therefore Q should count as logically circular just in case the argument $(Q \& \text{diff}(P_1 \& \dots \& P_n, Q))$ is logically circular and $(Q \& \text{diff}(P_1 \& \dots \& P_n, Q))$ is logically equivalent to $(P_1 \& \dots \& P_n)$. But, of course, on this criterion, any *valid* argument P_1, \dots, P_n therefore Q turns out to be logically circular, because the argument $(Q \& \text{diff}(P_1 \& \dots \& P_n, Q))$ therefore Q is always logically circular, and in any valid argument with conclusion Q and premises P_1, \dots, P_n , $(Q \& \text{diff}(P_1 \& \dots \& P_n, Q))$ is logically equivalent to $(P_1 \& \dots \& P_n)$.

On this second approach, we can certainly show that *any* argument in the *propositional* calculus is logically circular. Consider the argument that Davis gives: $(P \& ((P \rightarrow Q)))$ is logically equivalent to $(Q \& P)$ (which also shows that the logical difference between Q and $(P \& ((P \rightarrow Q)))$ is P). However, a key question here is whether the second approach is plausible for logical systems other than the propositional calculus. In the predicate calculus, the argument $Ax(Fx \rightarrow Gx), Fa$ therefore Ga would be judged logically circular, because the argument $(Ga \& Ax(((x \neq a) \& Fx) \rightarrow Gx))$ therefore Ga is plainly logically circular. But, at the very least, it is not obvious that we can *always* perform this trick, i.e. it is not obvious that, for any pair of sentences in the predicate calculus, there is always a third sentence that is the logical difference between those two sentences. And, if we cannot always perform this trick—in at least some logical system in which we might happen to be working—then this second approach won't yield the result that every valid argument is logically circular.

Should we suppose that merely logical manipulation of the premises or conclusion of an argument makes no difference to the question of its *logical* circularity? I guess I'm inclined to think so. Why should we think that an arguer dodges a significant bullet if his argument is $\sim(\sim Q \vee \sim P)$ therefore P that he fails to dodge if his argument is $(Q \& P)$ therefore P ? Or that someone who would otherwise have had the argument Q

therefore Q gains theoretical advantage by instead having the argument
 $((Q \& P) \vee (Q \& \sim P))$ therefore Q ?

Davis claims that ‘epistemic circularity’ is what I have in mind when I claim that all modal ontological arguments are question-begging (44). But that’s definitely *not* right. Recall that, on Davis’s account, an argument is epistemically circular just in case we must presuppose its conclusion in order to ascertain the truth of the premises or be justified in accepting them. Consider the argument A therefore A , a question-begging argument if ever there was one. Is it true that I must presuppose that A in order to ascertain that A ? Is it true that I must presuppose that A in order to be justified in accepting that A ? Surely not! Indeed, in the normal case, presupposing that A will likely be in conflict with justified acceptance of A (and with proper attempts to ascertain that A).

Davis also writes:

Now here Oppy might say that he is not interested in logical or epistemic circularity, but rather in something quite different. All modal theistic arguments beg the question in a deeper, more revealing way. Suppose, says Oppy,

that I am committed to a claim that p as part of my perhaps tacit reasonable commitment to a broader consistent set of claims C . Suppose further that an opponent produces an argument of the form ‘ Q_1, \dots, Q_n therefore not p ’, where the negations of one or more of the Q_i are claims that belong to C . then that argument begs the question against me. Moreover, this is true even if I cannot provide a clear characterisation of the set of claims C .

Let us call this ‘Oppy’s Characterisation’ (OC, for short). Oppy tells us that it is an ‘adequate partial characterisation’ of what it means to beg the question against someone. But I cannot see that this is so. All that Oppy has done, it seems to me, is to neatly insulate himself (by stipulative definition) against any argument employing premises leading to conclusions with which he disagrees. It matters not whether these premises are more reasonable to believe than his own, or even that his own reasons for disagreement are unclear. You have begged the question against him. Talk about stacking the deck in your own favour. I can only speak for myself here: but I believe I have good reasons for rejecting (OC). (I will not trouble you with a clear account of these, since on Oppy’s view it really doesn’t matter.) It now follows, by (OC) itself, that any attempt on Oppy’s part to make use of (OC) against the position I have been advancing will beg the question against me. And so I think we must say that Oppy’s Characterisation, while admittedly partial, is nowhere near adequate; it fails to serve for present purposes.¹⁵

Let me begin with some clarificatory comments. *First*, I called the characterisation ‘partial’ because I claimed only that it provided a sufficient—but perhaps not necessary—condition for begging the question. *Second*, it is obviously not the case that this characterisation stacks the deck in my favour; the characterisation is meant to be one that applies to every person: *Suppose that someone is committed to a claim that p as part of his or her perhaps tacit reasonable commitment to a broader consistent set of claims C , etc.* *Third*, it isn’t true that the characterisation insulates

people against arguments that lead to unwelcome conclusions. In particular, if you believe P_1, \dots, P_n , and I show that $\{P_1, \dots, P_n\}$ is logically inconsistent, then my characterisation gives you nowhere to hide. (And, of course, this point generalises to non-deductive arguments, if such there be: if I use an argument to show that your beliefs—*your* beliefs—suffer from some kind of probabilistic incoherence or explanatory incoherence or whatever, then, again, my characterisation leaves you with nowhere to hide.) *Fourth*, the idea behind the final quoted sentence is to try to take account of the fact that our systems of belief are very likely not to be fully transparent to us: at the very least, it seems possible that we could have tacit reasonable commitments to broader sets of claims in circumstances in which we are not able to give clear and complete characterisations of those broader claims. In those circumstances, it might be reasonable to criticise me on the grounds that I can't give a clear and complete characterisation of my beliefs; but it certainly won't be reasonable to criticise me by appeal to claims that you accept but which I tacitly reject (particularly if you know that these are claims that I tacitly reject).

It may be that Davis has good reasons for rejecting (OC). However, his telling us that he has such reasons doesn't make it so. If he doesn't have good reasons for rejecting (OC), then it may well be that his beliefs on this matter are logically (or perhaps probabilistically or explanatorily) inconsistent. And, if they are logically (or perhaps probabilistically or explanatorily) inconsistent, then there is no barrier to the use of non-question-begging arguments to criticise his views. Of course, if he doesn't tell us what he believes about these matters, then we can't criticise his beliefs: but that's just not interesting.¹⁶

I now think that (OC) isn't quite right as a partial characterisation of begging the question. However, my most recent thoughts on this topic can be found in Oppy (2006: 6-15), so I won't recapitulate them here. Perhaps it suffices to say that I continue to think that, in the context of questions about what it takes for arguments to be question-begging, little interest attaches to the notions of 'logical circularity' and 'epistemic circularity'; moreover, I also think that, whatever its flaws may be, (OC) is at least in the ballpark of the main action in this domain.

References

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¹ Plantinga (1974)

² Leftow (1989)

³ See, especially, the last paragraph in section II of Oppy (1993), for a clear statement of the argument that is set out in this paragraph.

⁴ Of course, one might well want to dispute the claim that a reasonable person *could* reasonably have the disposition to accept the premises of a modal ontological argument simply upon hearing those premises. And, if one doesn't want to dispute *that* claim, then one will surely want to insist that a reasonable person could reasonably have the disposition to accept the premises of a modal ontological argument for the non-existence of the God of 'necessary being' theists simply upon hearing those

premises. (If the God of ‘necessary being’ theism fails to exist in at least one possible world, then the God of ‘necessary being’ theism fails to exist in all possible worlds. But the God of ‘necessary being’ theism does fail to exist in at least one possible world. So the God of ‘necessary being’ theism exists in no possible worlds.) Whatever virtues ‘necessary being’ theists might reasonably claim for modal ontological arguments for the existence of their God, their opponents can reasonably claim exactly the same virtues for opposing ‘parallel’ argument for the non-existence of that God.

⁵ See, especially, the second paragraph in section I of Oppy (1993) for a clear statement of this point.

⁶ See the last five paragraphs of section I of Oppy (1993) for the account that is sketched here.

⁷ See Davis (2008:38, 43). At 38, it is not clear what it is that I am supposed to be alleging is presupposed about the nature of possible worlds by proponents of modal theistic arguments; at 43, it is made clear that it is the falsity of Lewis particular version of modal realism (‘concretism’) that I am supposed to be alleging is presupposed by proponents of modal theistic arguments.

⁸ Davis (2008:38-42)

⁹ Davis (2008:43-5)

¹⁰ Davis (2008:46-50), the quoted passage is from p.46

¹¹ Davis (2008: 50-4)

¹² Davis (2008:46n38) claims that his arguments belongs to none of the four categories of modal ontological arguments that I distinguished in Oppy (1995). But—at p.38—he also effectively commits himself to the claim that modal theistic arguments all belong to the category that I labelled ‘modal ontological arguments involving necessity’.

¹³ There are also replies that could be made to the various parts of Davis’s argument against Lewis. *Ad1*: If we say that God exists everywhere—i.e. if we identify worlds with God—then each world will be a counterpart of every other world. Translating from the language of counterpart theory to standard modal language, this will give us the result that it is necessarily true that God exists, and that it is necessarily true that God is identical with the world, but it will not be true either that there is more than one God, or that there is only one possible world. *Ad2*: If we suppose that each possible world is the sum of God and God’s creation, then we can hold that God exists outside of space-time in each world while nonetheless being causally responsible for God’s creation in that world, even though there is no causal relation between distinct worlds. *Ad3*: Lewis himself speculates about the possibility that space and time might be so ‘separate’ that something could be outside of space while nonetheless being in time (as on many traditional accounts of God’s relation to his creation). If we allow that this is possible, then we certainly allow that things can exist outside space.

¹⁴ There are also other criticisms that might be made of Davis’s argument. Just because God doesn’t create, it does not follow that it is not possible for God to create. The contents of the set S are independent of what God actually does: it is only if you forget that the modal realist scheme requires that objects are world-bound that you might be inclined to think otherwise.

¹⁵ Davis (2008: 53-4)

¹⁶ I’d also like an account of what Davis means when he claims that someone else’s ‘premise’ might be more reasonable than one’s own. I understand well enough the idea that one person’s beliefs in a particular domain might be more reasonable than another person’s beliefs in that domain: there are various virtues of collections or systems of belief that can be captured by talk about reasonableness and the like. But I don’t understand at all what sense is supposed to attach to the claim that a single premise that someone else offers might be more reasonable than the premise that you’d be inclined to offer instead (unless those claims are supposed somehow to inherit their ‘reasonableness’ from the wider systems to which they belong).