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Defending Divine Freedom

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INTRODUCTION

In a series of articles and most recently in his book *Can God Be Free?*, William Rowe has argued that the traditional theistic view of the nature of God is fundamentally incoherent. In particular, Rowe believes that:

(i) God is essentially omnipotent,
(ii) God is essentially omniscient,
(iii) God is essentially perfectly good, and
(iv) God creates freely

constitute an inconsistent tetrad. Furthermore, Rowe argues, the theist should not be prepared to give up (iv) because if God's creative acts are not free, then God is not praiseworthy and it is not the case that God is properly thanked for his goodness towards his creatures. In this paper, I'll examine Rowe's argument for this inconsistency. While there is little doubt that there is a prima facie problem here for the classical theist, Rowe's argument can be shown to be unsuccessful, or so I will argue. In the next section of this paper, I will expound Rowe's position. Having done that, I will explain the three ways I think the argument is vulnerable. The three sections after that will be dedicated to giving each objection its voice.

I. ROWE'S ARGUMENT

Rowe begins his discussion by considering the correspondence between Gottfried Leibniz and Samuel Clarke in which, among other things, the two

eminent philosophers discuss the nature of divine freedom and its relation to creation. In what turns out to be a crucial component of his overall argument, Rowe writes the following:

Following Leibniz, we can imagine God considering a variety of worlds he might create. One might be a world in which there are no conscious creatures at all, a world composed solely of dead matter. Another might be a world composed (at some stage in its history) of living, conscious creatures whose lives are meaningful, morally good, and happy. Assume, as seems evident, that the second world is the better world ... If God were limited to these two worlds, he would face three choices: creating the inferior world, creating the superior world, creating no world at all. For God to decide to create no world over creating a world that is, all things considered, a very good world, would be for God to do less than the best that he can do. If so, it seems that God's perfect goodness would *require* him to create the very good world. But if God's perfect goodness requires him to create the very good world, rather than creating the inferior world, or not creating a world at all, what are we to make of that part of the idea of God that declares that he created the world *freely*? To say that God *freely* created the good world seems to imply that he was free not to do so, that he could have created the inferior world, or refrained from creating either world. But if his perfect goodness *requires* him to create the good world, how is it possible that he was free to create the inferior world or not to create any world? This is a simple way of picturing the problem of divine perfection and divine freedom.[1]

A few pages later, Rowe states his Leibnizian argument somewhat more formally:

[ARG 1]:

1. If God exists and is omnipotent, perfectly wise and perfectly good, then he chooses to create the best of all possible worlds.
2. God exists and is omnipotent, perfectly wise and good.

Therefore,

3. God chooses to create the best of all possible worlds.[2]

In order to get a good handle on Rowe's overall argument, two points need to be made.

First, as the argument stands, the conclusion is not a threat to divine freedom. For it says only that God *will* choose the best world, not that God *must* choose the best world (or that, necessarily, God will choose the best world). Although in the text it is clear that Rowe understands the premises to be not merely true but necessarily true, the fact that this isn't explicit in

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[1] Rowe (2004: 12–13).   [2] Rowe (2004: 16).

the premises as they appear in the argument is problematic. So let's make their modal status explicit as follows:

[ARG 2]:

1. Necessarily, if God exists and is omnipotent, perfectly wise and perfectly good, then he chooses to create the best of all possible worlds.
2. Necessarily, God exists and is omnipotent, perfectly wise and good.

Therefore,

3. Necessarily, God chooses to create the best of all possible worlds.

Although this version of the argument does give us a conclusion that is plausibly inconsistent with divine creative freedom, its weakness is that it works only against the theist who accepts God's necessary existence and essential omnipotence, wisdom, and goodness. However, none of these assumptions are central to the main thread of Rowe's argument. Here's a version in the spirit of the Leibniz/Rowe argument that does not depend on the modally strengthened theistic claims:

[ARG 3]:

1. Necessarily, if God exists and God exemplifies omnipotence, perfect wisdom, and perfect goodness in a stable manner, then God chooses to create the best creatable world in every world accessible to God.
2. God exists and God exemplifies omnipotence, perfectly wisdom, and perfect goodness in a stable manner.
3. Therefore, God chooses to create the best creatable world in every world accessible to God.
4. If S does X in every world accessible to S, then S doesn't do X freely.
5. Therefore, God doesn't freely bring about the best creatable world.

The argument depends on the idea of a being's having a property in a stable manner. Property P is *stable* for a being B at a world W iff (a) B exemplifies P at all times in W[3] and (b) there is nothing B can do to make it the case that B ceases to exemplify P in W. Put somewhat differently, if a person has a property in a stable way, there are no worlds accessible to her in which she doesn't have it. Exemplifying a property in a stable way is, for all practical purposes, as limiting as having that property essentially. For example, suppose that in world W, Ray has the stable (but accidental)

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[3] In order to make property stability friendly to atemporalists, the first condition can be recast as : (i) B exemplifies P in W and there is no time when B fails to exemplify P in W.

property of being blind. Then not only does Ray not see—Ray *can't* see in W, even though there are other worlds in which Ray has 20/20 vision.

The second point that should be made about Rowe's Leibnizian argument is that it presupposes that there is a best of all possible worlds.[4] But it is by no means obvious that such an assumption is right. For it's epistemically possible that rather than there being a single best world, there is an infinite hierarchy of better worlds so that for any world, there is a world better. In such a case, one might suppose, God's hands are not tied by his perfect goodness. We will go into more detail about this in a subsequent section, but for now the point needs to be made that Rowe's broader argument doesn't depend on this controversial assumption. For Rowe contends that if there is no best world, then there is another serious problem lurking: God might be free but God wouldn't be perfectly good. For, if there is no best world, then for any world that God creates there is a better world that God could have created. And if God creates a world when there is a better world that God could have created instead, then God could have done better than he did. But if God could have been better than he did, then he is not perfectly good.

Here, then, is Rowe's broader argument (although this particular presentation is mine):

[ARG 4]:

1. Either there is a best world or there is an infinite hierarchy of better worlds
2. If there is a best world, then the Creator is not free with respect to either creating at all or creating the world he creates.
3. If there is an infinite hierarchy of better worlds, then the Creator is not perfectly good.

C1. Therefore, either the Creator is not free or he is not perfectly good.

4. The Creator is God only if the Creator is a perfectly good being.

C2. Therefore, either God doesn't exist or the Creator is not perfectly free.

This argument is valid. In the sections that follow, we shall have a look at each of the premises of ARG 4. We will begin with the fourth premise and work backward.

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[4] For those familiar with what Alvin Plantinga (1974: Ch. 9) calls 'Leibniz's Lapse', the above argument doesn't crucially depend on the claim that God is able to bring about the best possible world. For Rowe's purposes, it is enough that there is a best feasible world, i.e., a best world that God is able to actualize. Having made this point, I will now generally ignore it and speak as though if there is best possible world, God can bring it about.

II. PREMISE FOUR—'THE CREATOR IS GOD ONLY IF THE CREATOR IS PERFECTLY GOOD'

We will spend considerably more time on the first three steps of the argument than we will on this fourth premise. Although Rowe doesn't state the premise in quite this way, the text makes it clear that he is committed to it as stated in 4.[5] What he has in mind is plain and common in the circles in which analytic philosophers of religion run. In as much as the concept of God is the concept of a being with all perfections, and perfect goodness is a perfection, then if there is no perfectly good being, then there is no God, i.e., God doesn't exist. However, there is something very artificial about all this. For my money, there are two good, related options for deciding the content of 'God' and neither entails that if there is no perfectly good being, then there is no God. First, we might treat 'God' as a proper name, and then if the theist is a Kripkean direct reference-theorist about names (as I think she should be), she'll think that the term has reference but no sense. And the reference will be secured by an initial baptism that dates back to the ancient Hebrews, and a successful causal chain that links up that (those) baptismal acts with our current use.

Alternatively, the theist might think of 'God' as a kind term. It is presumably something like this that Rowe has in mind when he says if there is no perfectly good being then God doesn't exist: nothing is of the divine kind if nothing is perfectly good. Now I think the most natural way of making sense of the way standard theists (as opposed to philosophers of religion) understand 'God' when they aren't using the term as a name is again along Kripkean lines: God is a supernatural kind with the intensional content of the term 'God' being like 'the personal creator who revealed himself to the Hebrew people',[6] and with the extension being fixed (again) in a Kripkean, causal manner.[7]

As I said, though, I think 'God' is generally used as a name by worshippers in churches, synagogues, and mosques. Of course, it is true that theists make lots of other claims about the essence or nature of this being, but none of these assertions is such that 'God' fails to refer if one or more aren't true.

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[5] For example, Rowe (2004: 89) writes: '[I]f the actual world is not the best world that an omnipotent omniscient being could create, God does not exist.'

[6] As I have the intension stated, it does contain some descriptive content so this isn't a pure Kripkean theory. I take it that if the Hebrew prophets were suffering from hallucinations, the causes of which were the roots of a type of plant they had consumed, we should think that the theistic God doesn't exist, not that it is a hallucinogen.

[7] For more on these issues, see Senor (1992).

To deny this is akin to thinking that when a child at age four conceives of her parents as all-knowing and morally perfect, and then at age seven has those illusions dashed, she should conclude that Mom and Dad don't exist. But that, of course, is silly. Learning of her parents' fallibility does not make her an orphan. Now, of course, Rowe doesn't think that if his argument is successful, he's shown that there is no Creator of Heaven and Earth, but only that there is no 'God'. So in a sense, my point is, as they say, 'merely semantic'. However, when philosophers conclude that there is no God because they take themselves to have shown that no being could have one or more of the properties historically attributed to God, they are gaining a rhetorical advantage they have not earned in the argument they've provided.

III. PREMISE THREE—IF THERE IS AN INFINITE HIERARCHY OF BETTER WORLDS, THEN GOD IS NOT PERFECTLY GOOD

One might be tempted to respond to Rowe's Leibnizian argument by claiming that there is no reason to think that there is a best world. For all we know, there might be an infinite hierarchy of very good worlds. If so, God would presumably have the freedom to create from among the infinite set of very good worlds. If God decides that it is better to create than not to create, and God recognizes that there is a hierarchy of infinitely many very good worlds, then God will freely chose from among those possible creations. Hence God's creative freedom is secured by an infinite hierarchy of very good worlds.

Not so fast, thinks Rowe. If the Creator were to create a very good world in such a circumstance, then the Creator is not God. Why not? Because a perfectly good being will always do the best that it is able to do. However, in the above circumstance, no matter how good a world the Creator produces, he will not have done his best since there will be infinitely many better worlds that he could have created but chose not to. Rowe's precise statement of his crucial principle is this (Rowe calls it 'Principle B'):

If an omniscient being creates a world when there is a better world it could have created, then it would be possible for there to be a being morally better than it.[8]

Such a being would not be perfectly good because it isn't possible for there to be a being better than a perfectly good being. Therefore, if there is an

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[8] Rowe (2004: 89).

infinite hierarchy of good worlds and the Creator chooses to create one of them, the Creator is not God (who by definition is perfectly good).

Daniel and Frances Howard-Snyder have argued against Principle B by telling a story comparing two creators who find themselves having to choose among the infinitely many good worlds.[9] Jove and Juno both decide that since among the very good worlds, every world is such that there are infinitely many very good worlds better than it, the only reasonable way to choose a particular world to create is to first create a randomizing device that will choose among the very good worlds. Suppose, the Howard-Snyders suggest, we begin with the minimally good very good world and assign to it the first positive integer and assign the second positive integer to the second minimally good very good world and continue this way, thus making a one-to-one correspondence between very good worlds and positive integers. Jove uses the randomizing machine to choose the world to create, and it spits out the number 777; Jove then creates that world. Juno's randomizer spits out 999 and Juno creates that world. Now the Howard-Snyders argue that Jove and Juno are morally equivalent since they have followed precisely the same method for creating a world. The only difference between the two concerns the results of the randomizing machine. But if that is correct, then Principle B is false, since it would have us conclude straightaway that Jove is not perfectly good.

Rowe agrees that Jove and Juno are morally equivalent, but he thinks that neither one is morally perfect. Rowe contrasts Jove and Juno with another god used in another example by the Howard-Snyders (although the example is amended by Rowe). Thor also creates with the help of a randomizer, but Thor's standard of minimal goodness in a world he might create is higher than that of Jove and Juno. Worlds 1–800 are deemed by Thor as not good enough to create given the infinity of better worlds. So Thor's randomizing device has world 801 as the least good world and the machine selects world 888 for creation. Rowe argues that even though the world that Thor creates is inferior to that created by Juno, Thor is morally superior to both Jove and Juno because Thor has a higher standard of world acceptability; that is, some of the worlds deemed good enough to create by Jove and Juno are deemed not good enough by Thor. Hence, Rowe insists, Thor is better.

Better, but not morally perfect because Thor doesn't create the best world he's capable of (he could have brought about any one of the worlds in the infinite hierarchy). Therefore, the bottom line is that Rowe thinks because Principle B is correct, if there is an infinite hierarchy of good worlds, then the Creator isn't perfectly good so God doesn't exist.

[9] Howard-Snyder (1994, 1996).

There is a tempting reply to Rowe's use of Principle B that can be found (or is at least suggested) in the writings of several prominent philosophers.[10] The objection is roughly that if, necessarily, there is no way to avoid creating a world than which there is a (creatable) better, then God's creating a world than which there is a better doesn't count against God's moral perfection.

There is a weaker and a stronger way to understand this claim. The weaker reading is that, in the circumstances described, God would not be *culpable* for creating a surpassable world—that is, God doesn't do anything for which he is to blame. Here's the principle that could be appealed to in support of this claim:

P1: If, S necessarily does X, then S is not to blame for doing X.

Although Rowe will grant the truth of P1 and its application to the case in question, the objection understood this way isn't sufficiently strong as a response to Rowe's argument. For, while never being culpable for an action is a necessary condition for perfect goodness, it surely isn't sufficient; that is, perfect goodness is more than perfect blamelessness. Suppose Adolf's essential moral character is such that committing murder on a massive scale is something he does at every world at which he has the chance. In such a case, Adolf is not to *blame* for his murderous ways. So Rowe can accept P1 and insist that it poses no problem for him: he isn't claiming that in the present 'no best world' scenario God is *blameworthy* for creating a world that is surpassable, but only that God is not morally perfect if God does so.

The stronger reading of this objection is not subject to this response but it also is not so clearly right. According to the strong reading, creating a world that is not as good a world as the being might have created does not count against *perfect goodness* when there is simply no way to avoid it. Here's the general principle:

P2: If S necessarily does X, then S's doing X does not count against S's moral perfection.

Even apart from the considerations that drive us here, there is reason for doubting P2. Think back to Adolf. Although he can't be blamed for an essential defect in his character, Adolf's having that essential defect guarantees that he will never be completely good at any given world. For having a murderous character rules out the possibility of moral perfection.

[10] Objections along these lines can be found in Hasker (forthcoming); Wainwright (1999); Morris (1993); and Kretzman (1990).

That P2 is a fair understanding of the reasoning behind at least some of those objecting in this manner can be seen clearly in this quotation from William Wainwright (as quoted by Rowe):

> But … a type of complaint which is always in place is never in place. A complaint is only legitimate when the person whose conduct is criticized could have acted in such a way that he or she would not be exposed to a complaint of that type.[11]

Yet we see in the case of Adolf that we should agree with the above sentiment only when it is culpability that is at issue. That a person couldn't possibility have avoided a bad course of action can show that the person is not perfectly good even if she isn't blameworthy for performing it. So what if we amend the principle slightly to avoid cases like that of Adolf. To wit.

P3: If in a given circumstance C, it is logically impossible for any person who finds herself in C to avoid taking a certain course of action A, then doing A does not count against A's perfect goodness.

The problem with P3 is that without some helpful, further description of C, it is clearly false. For instance, suppose I have promised to return your bicycle this afternoon, but having desperately wanted to buy a couple new games for my Xbox 360, I hawked it where upon it was immediately mistakenly destroyed in a trash-compacting accident. Now no one in my circumstances would be able to avoid taking the course of action of failing to give you back your bike after promising to return it. However, surely my being in this position counts against my being perfectly good.

Suppose we were able to find a principle, call it 'P4', in the spirit of P3 but that was apparently unassailable. Would that settle the matter against Rowe? Rowe doesn't think so. For suppose P4 is true—i.e., that since God's creating a world that is surpassable is necessary or unavoidable for anyone, having created a surpassable world is not a sign of God's moral imperfection. (Again, because doing what no one could possibly avoid can count against one's moral perfection.) Nevertheless, suppose there is an infinite hierarchy of worlds and that, as things go, God creates very good world W1 when he could have created even-better world W2 (or even-better-than-that world W3, etc.). Then God has done something that is not necessary (create W1) and such that he could have done better (create world W2 or a better world than that). And this much seems undeniable. But if it is right, then given Principle B (i.e., If an omniscient being creates a world when there is a better world it could have created, then it would be possible for there to be a being morally better than it), we get the conclusion that God is not morally perfect (and hence is not God). In other words, Rowe wins.

It must be granted that Principle B has significant initial plausibility. However, as Rowe himself points out,[12] the plausibility of a principle must be judged (at least in part) by the plausibility of that with which it is inconsistent. And if it is more plausible that the infinite hierarchy of worlds thesis is consistent with the possibility of a perfectly good, omnipotent being than it is that Principle B is true, then we have some reason to doubt the truth of the latter.

One point that Edward Wierenga (2002) makes rather quickly but that I think deserves a more thorough hearing is the difference infinity makes. Whereas Principle B might be very plausible *given the existence of a best world (or worlds)*, when the possibility of an infinite hierarchy of good worlds is introduced, its plausibility drops dramatically.[13] That this should be the case isn't too surprising: the logic of infinite series is rather different than that of finite series. To see this illustrated rather dramatically, let's briefly consider an exchange between William Lane Craig and Paul Draper on the Kalam argument for God's existence.[14] Craig has argued that there cannot be an actually infinite set of real objects because such sets bring with them absurd consequences. Craig discusses Hilbert's Hotel and other well-known implications of actual infinities. For example, if you add a blue book to a set of infinitely many red books, you end up with a set with the 'same number of members' (i.e., infinitely many) that you had before you added the blue book. Furthermore, if instead of adding a single blue book, you were to add infinitely many blue books to the set of infinitely many red books, you'd still end up with a set of infinitely many members even though that is precisely 'the number' of books you had in the first place.

In his response, Draper claims that Craig's position amounts to noting that the following triad of propositions is inconsistent, and to resolving the inconsistency by rejecting the third. The propositions in question are:

S1: A set has more members than that contained by any of its proper subsets.
S2: If the members of two sets can be placed in a one-to-one correspondence, then neither set has more members than the other.
S3. There are actually infinite sets.

Each of these propositions is initially plausible. But when one sees that the truth of S3 implies that either S1 or S2 is false, one realizes that one of these initially credible propositions will have to go. If we accept S3, then we'll have to dump S1 and S2. Now the key to seeing how to reasonably

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[11] Rowe (2004: 118); taken from Wainwright (1999: 92).

[12] Rowe (2004: 120–1).   [13] Wierenga (2002).
[14] Craig (2003) and Draper (2003).

do this is to see that S1 and S2 are unquestionably true *when applied to finite sets*. So we needn't deny either if we were to so limit their domains of application to the finite. When we apply S1 and S2 to infinite sets, however, we should immediately sense that something is amiss because there isn't a natural, rational or real number that is 'the number of members' of an infinite set; rather the set contains infinitely many members. So if 'more' means 'a greater number' then S1 is clearly false for infinite sets. However, as Draper points out, there is surely a straight-forward intuitive sense in which, for the example, the set of *all* positive integers 'has more members' than the set of *even* positive integers; every member of the latter set is also a member of the former set, but the former set has members that are not in the latter set. Now if 'has more members' can be understood as 'has every member and then some', then we have a way of making sense of S1, and we can see that S1 is true even of infinite sets. However, on this understanding of 'has more members', S2 will turn out to be false. For the set of all positive integers can put into a one-to-one correspondence with the set of all even positive integers even though the former clearly 'has more members' in this second sense of the phrase.

What is the point of this aside into the Kalam argument and actual infinities? I believe this provides us with a good illustration what's wrong with Rowe's steadfast conviction that Principle B is true. Principles S1 and S2 are not only prima facie plausible but are obviously true if we confine their domain to finite sets. However, if we assume the existence of actually infinite sets, then they cannot both be true. My claim is that something similar is going on regarding Principle B. Suppose that there is an omniscient Creator and a single best, creatable world. Now if in this circumstance, the Creator fails to produce the best creatable world, then he could have done better (i.e., made a better world) than he has in fact done. What could account for this? Well, contrary to the claims of Robert Adams and William Wainwright, it can't be that the perfectly good Creator valued something other than goodness/perfection in a world. For what makes a world the *best world* is its overall value and not simply its *moral* goodness or general perfection; if there is a single best world, it will be a world which exemplifies whatever other goods an omniscient, perfectly good being values. Given that the single best world is creatable by the Creator, it would seem that the only explanation for its not being produced is a defect in the will of the Creator. He lacks the volition to do his best. But if the Creator lacks the volition to do his best, then he could have been better (as Principle B says). Hence the Creator is not perfectly good in this scenario.

Consider now the situation in which there is no best world but an infinite hierarchy of very good worlds. If the Creator, recognizing his predicament,

decides to use the Howard-Snyders' randomizing machine and thereby produces a very good, but surpassable world, shall we say that he's done his best? This is admittedly a hard question to answer unequivocally, and that is because in these circumstances there is no such thing as *doing one's best*. On the one hand, we might grant, this method for choosing a world to create is, in principle, as good as can be had in the (necessary) circumstances; on the other hand, no matter what world the machine randomly selects, the Creator could have brought about a better world. Yet unlike the situation in which there is a best world that the Creator nevertheless does not bring about, the problem here isn't with his volition or nature. For he is aware of his situation and so knows that it is logically impossible for him to produce an unsurpassably good creation. And it is logically impossible for him to do his best not because of an imperfect will or a flaw in his essence, but because of the external, necessary circumstances. In this case, it is impossible for him to produce an unsurpassably good creation because it is impossible for *anyone in these necessary circumstances*— including the being than which none greater is possible—to do it. Note that this is a different point than that which Wainwright et. al. are making: they claim that if doing X is not possible for a particular person, then that person's failure to do X doesn't rule out her being perfectly good. But the Adolf example shows this is mistaken. The principle I am appealing to is this: if doing X is logically impossible even for a person with a nature as morally perfect as is logically possible, then that person's failure to do X doesn't rule out her being perfectly good. If there is an infinite hierarchy of increasingly good worlds, then the creative product of a morally perfect (i.e., a perfectly good) Creator will be surpassable. Thus, while Principle B is true if there is a best world (or worlds), if there is an infinity of increasingly good worlds, then this prima facie principle turns out to be false.

IV. PREMISE TWO—IF THERE IS A BEST WORLD, THEN GOD IS NOT FREE WITH RESPECT TO EITHER CREATING AT ALL OR CREATING THE WORLD GOD CREATES

We've already looked at the major component of the justification for the premise; it is the Liebniz-inspired argument I have outlined three versions of above. Let's focus on the second version, viz., ARG 2.

1. Necessarily, if God exists and is omnipotent, perfectly wise and perfectly good, then he chooses to create the best of all possible worlds.
2. Necessarily, God exists and is omnipotent, perfectly wise and good.

Therefore,

3. Necessarily, God chooses to create the best of all possible worlds.

Note that the conclusion of this argument doesn't explicitly say that God is not free with respect to bringing about the best of all possible worlds. To get that conclusion explicitly we need an additional premise:

4. If God necessarily chooses to create the best of all possible worlds, then God doesn't freely choose to create the best of all possible worlds.

The justification for this premise is given by Rowe in the following passage:

> Thus far we have supposed with Leibniz that among possible worlds there is one that is best. And we have argued that given God's absolute perfection, he would of necessity create the best world. If the reasoning for this conclusion is correct, then in the matter of creating among possible worlds, God cannot be free.[15]

The point, then, is this: if God's creating the best world is necessary, then God is not able to refrain from creating the best world (since there is no world at which God doesn't create the best world). But if one can't refrain from a given action, then one isn't free with respect to that action. Therefore, God isn't free with respect to creating the best world.

One might think that while it might be somewhat disappointing if it turned out that God isn't free with respect to creating, the theist could give up divine freedom with respect to creation without sacrificing anything terribly significant. Rowe, however, disagrees. He thinks that if God is not free with respect to creation, then God isn't free generally. And, if God isn't free, then God is not to be thanked for the good things God does, nor is God worthy of praise since both thanks and praise require the agent's ability to refrain from the relevant actions.[16] Surely, we must agree with Rowe that if the necessity of God's creating the best world entails that God is neither to be thanked nor praised, then the necessity of God's creating the best world would entail some substantial changes in the way the theist sees God.

There are, then, three questions that need addressing with regard to the expanded ARG 2: (i) Does God's essential nature, together with the assumption that there is a single best creatable world entail that God will bring about that world?; (ii) If the answer to (i) is 'yes', does that imply that God doesn't freely bring about that world?; and (iii) If that answer to both (i) and (ii) is 'yes', does that imply that God is not to be thanked or praised for his beneficial actions?

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[15] Rowe (2004: 74).

[16] On Rowe (2004: 2), Rowe claims that if God is not free, then 'it can be argued' that God is not praiseworthy, nor worthy of our thanks and gratitude.

IV.A. Does God's nature entail that God will create the best if there is a best?

Although Robert Adams and William Wainwright are officially on record with a negative answer to this question,[17] I'm inclined to agree with Rowe here. Given that we understand the 'best' world as the world that has the greatest overall combination of value, then it seems to me that if God is essentially perfectly good, then God will want to bring about the best overall state of affairs that he can. Now perhaps the best overall world is not the world with the happiest or most beautiful and or supremely gifted inhabitants; perhaps the best overall world is a world in which there is ample room for grace and unmerited love (as Adams and Wainwright think). But on the assumption that some creatable world contains uniquely the best overall combination of value, then God's perfect goodness would seem to insure that God would have the will to bring that world about. In any event, for the purpose of this paper, I don't intend to deny this.

IV.B. If, necessarily, God brings about the best creatable world, does that imply that God isn't free?

Rowe is upfront about his incompatibilist sensibility: the fact that God cannot refrain from creating the best world guarantees that God is not free with respect to creating that world. However, despite Rowe's careful reasoning, I find that if I am not keeping his argument firmly in mind, I can lose my grip on just how it is that God lacks the requisite freedom.

In an effort to look at the issue from another angle, let's think about what the theist says about how divine acts are produced.[18] Being omniscient, God knows in any given situation what the best thing is for God to do.[19] Being perfectly good, God will want to do the action that is best. Furthermore, God's omnipotence surely requires that God will have the ability to bring about the best that God can do in a given situation. Suppose, then, in circumstance C, doing X is the best thing that God can do. Then God will know that doing X is the best available action, and God will want to perform it. Since God will have no competing desires (say from inclination or simple self-interest) to thwart God's desire to do the best thing, and since

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[17] Adams (1972) and Wainwright (1996).

[18] Points similar to some of those I am making in the discussion that follows can be found in Wierenga (2002).

[19] Strictly 'the best' here is the best that the being is able to do at the time.

God is perfectly rational, God will form the volition to do X. And since
nothing external can stop God from doing what God intends, God will do
X. So we've deduced that God will do X from the assumption that God
is omniscient, perfectly good, omnipotent, and rational. Now so far our
only conclusion is simply that God will do X, and from that proposition
no immediate inferences can be drawn about God's freedom.

As we have seen above, the problem is that a stronger conclusion can
be argued for. For, if it is the case that given God's essential attributes,
there is no world at which God fails to bring about the best creation that
he can, then it is *necessary* that God bring about the best world he can.[20]
Furthermore, even if God exhibits these properties in only a stable manner,
then there will be no worlds accessible to God at which God refrains from
doing God's best. And from that conclusion, together with the libertarian
assumption that freedom requires the ability to refrain in precisely the same
circumstances, a conclusion about God's lack of freedom apparently does
follow.

While recognizing the strength of the intuition that lead philosophers
to claim that freely doing A requires the ability to refrain from doing A in
the very circumstances of the action, I can also feel the pull of thinking
of God's actions as free even though God fails the 'can refrain' condition.
Perhaps a little reflection on the reasons for the 'can refrain' condition will
help us understand why God's failing that condition might not be so prob-
lematic.

There are, I think, three kinds of cases that strongly motivate the 'can
refrain' condition. They are: (a) the problem of past causally sufficient
conditions for the action that not only pre-date the volition to perform
the action but pre-date the existence of the actor; (b) concerns about
manipulation by other agents; and (c) worries about internal compulsions
(e.g., addiction/psychological disorder cases).

Regarding (a): if events that occur billions of years before I was born,
together with laws of nature that were also in place billions of years before
I was born, conspire to set in motion a sequence of events that are causally
sufficient for my performing A, the claim that I am nevertheless doing A
freely seems far fetched. Why? Because I did not exist when the matter of
my doing A was settled. Notice, however, that in the case of God's doing
X, there are no conditions or events spatially or temporally prior to God
which determine God's actions. Yes, God couldn't refrain from X-ing in
circumstance C but there is no set of past series of events and causal laws
that is responsible for this.

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[20] Keep in mind that we are assuming in this section of the paper that there is a best
world and that there is not an infinite series of increasingly good worlds.

Regarding (b): This discussion can be very quick. If my performing
a certain action is the result of my being manipulated by a nefarious
neurosurgeon, devious hypnotist, or controlling creator, then the ultimate
cause of my actions is the intentional state the agent who has programmed
me. My actions aren't free because another agent is the source of them.
Needless to say, this freedom-compromising condition isn't relevant to the
volitions and actions of the omnipotent Source of Being.

Regarding (c): Since God is perfectly rational and his volitions and actions
are produced by his recognition of the best course of action and his desire
to do the best, there can be no worry that God's actions are the result of
analogues of human cognitive malfunction brought on either by addiction
or psychological disorder. Notice too that the claim that God always does
the best because it is the best isn't to be understood as God's having some
kind of non-rational, knee-jerk response to the goodness of the action
in question. Rather, God's reason for having the volition God has, and
for performing the action God does, is God's recognition of the reasons for
performing the action in question, God's knowing and appreciating all the
reasons for refraining from that action, and God's seeing that the reasons
for performing the action are weightier than the reasons for refraining. It's
God's understanding of the reasons that leads God to act as God does.

So three primary motivations that lead libertarians to insist that our
freedom requires the ability to refrain are simply out of place where God is
concerned. That is to say, God's volitions and actions will pass those three
tests even though God lacks the ability to refrain from doing what God sees
as the best thing to do.

While a libertarian will typically insist that freedom requires the ability
to refrain, she will not offer that as a complete analysis of free action. In
fact, I can see no reason for a libertarian to not agree with the compatibilist
that what we might call 'effective choice' is a necessary condition for free
action. One has effective choice regarding an action A if and only if one
can do A *if one so wills* and refrain from doing A *if one wills*.[21] A free action
would seem to require that my action be able to reflect my volitions. Yet
libertarians believe that it's not enough that a person be able to do A if

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[21] This phrasing comes from Jonathan Edwards (among others). See Edwards (1957).
Unrelated to Edwards, a referee commenting on an earlier version of this paper has
noted that this condition needs the addition of the requirement that it be possible that
either one will A or that one will that one not do A. For without that condition, one has
effective choice over actions one can neither will to do nor will to refrain from doing,
and that is (to say the least) implausible. I agree with the reader but make the point only
in a footnote in order to keep in focus the condition in the text. Of course, in the case
at hand, this addition is not a problem: there is no question about it being possible for
God to have the relevant will.

she wills and refrain from doing A if that's what she wills. For, if her will is determined by events outside her control, then her action won't be free even if she would be able to act on a different will if she had one.

So, even if God's creating the best world is necessary (or at least unavoidable) given God's nature, the theist can still claim that God's creative act satisfies the following conditions:

(i) God has effective choice over his creative decision (i.e., compatibilist freedom);

(ii) Neither the volition to create nor the creative act is strictly the result of an antecedent causal condition that predates God's existence;

(iii) God's creative action is not the result of a non-rational internal force.

Notice that regarding human agents in a deterministic world, the best that could be said is that conditions (i) and (iii) would hold. That is, the three conditions could not be satisfied by an agent in a deterministic world; so a more general account of the nature of freedom along the lines of (i)–(iii) would be libertarian. However, the addict who can't resist the temptation to take drugs and persons with psychological compulsions are not free with respect to volitions/actions produced by their addictions/compulsions, since those actions are the result of non-rational, internal forces. The same goes for various unfortunate (although fictitious) individuals whose volitions and actions are the result of nefarious neurosurgeons or hypnotists.

The upshot of all of this is that given that God's creative act satisfies the above three conditions, why should God's inability to refrain require us to deny that God's act is free? For what does the 'inability to refrain' come to here other than the inability to act against what he has the best reason to do? Can we really say God would only be free in this context if God were to be able to act against what God sees as the clearly best thing to do, the thing that he has every reason to do and no good reason not to do? That is, that divine freedom would entail the possibility of divine irrationality?

IV.C. If God is not free, is God not appropriately thanked or praised?

Even if what I've suggested above is wrong and its being necessary that God performs an action entails that God is not free with respect to that action, I don't think it follows that God is not to be thanked or praised. In particular, I think that the idea that God's praiseworthiness depends on God's having the freedom to refrain from the good God does is plausible only if one has a needlessly narrow view of what praiseworthiness comes to.

I'm perfectly willing to grant that *moral* praiseworthiness for an action A requires that the agent who performs the action was not caused to do the action by events independent of her character and motivations. As we have seen in the last part of this section, however, this condition of praiseworthiness can be satisfied by God even if God necessarily does the best (and they are not satisfied by anyone whose actions are determined by the past and laws of nature).

Now it might be argued that there is another condition of moral praiseworthiness that God can't satisfy: that an agent who is praiseworthy might have done things that are wrong or at least not the best the agent could do. Given what I said above, I think there is cause to be dubious of this condition. But let's waive such scruples and suppose that this condition is right. If it is, then God is not *morally* praiseworthy. But it hardly follows from this that God is not praiseworthy in some other sense. And I believe that it is another sense of praiseworthiness that is paramount in the theist tradition.

When theists claim that God is to be praised, they often distinguish this from saying that God is to be thanked. Why? Because God is to be praised for *who God is*; God is to be thanked for what *God has done*. Now God's praiseworthiness is surely not just a function of our helplessness before God, of God's ability to do with us as God will. If God were a finite, although very powerful, tyrant, God would be able to dispose of us according to his pleasure but God would not be thereby praiseworthy. What makes God praiseworthy includes his awesome power—the fact that not only is there no being as powerful as God but that there could not be a being as powerful since God is the source of all power. While sheer power might make a being literally awesome, it wouldn't make it praiseworthy. What makes God praiseworthy is God's power together with God's nature as fair, merciful, and loving—God's embodying all that is valuable. God's nature as both the source of all that is and as a benevolent Creator is what makes God worthy of our praise. This sense of praiseworthiness does depend on God's naturally treating us a certain way, but it does not depend on God's *freely* treating us that way—at least not if such freedom requires the ability to refrain from treating us as God does. Even if God isn't strictly speaking a *moral agent* because God isn't strictly speaking a fitting subject of moral praise because God isn't free regarding the good things God does, God is nevertheless metaphysically praiseworthy if he is the ground of all being and power and yet treats such finite, flawed beings as ourselves with love, kindness, and mercy. I submit that when theists offer their praise to God in worship, they are not intending to praise God as a moral agent but as the loving, benevolent source of all being and power. Offering praise to the hero who saves the small child's life at great peril to her own well-being,

and offering praise to God for being the loving Creator of the Heavens and Earth is not to offer the same thing to different individuals. The human hero has done something for which she is praiseworthy; God is praiseworthy in virtue of being Who God is.

So much for praiseworthiness. What about thankfulness? Should we think that if God does not have the power to refrain from the blessings God bestows on us, then God is not to be thanked? I think the answer to this is 'clearly not'. Suppose that you have a benevolent aunt who frequently sends you gifts. Suppose you knew that this woman did what she did was because of her upbringing and very strong religious convictions. Indeed, suppose you knew that given your relative need and her relative plenty, her relationship to you, and her belief in the importance of giving (particularly to family) she was not really able to resist giving you generous gifts. Would your understanding of her situation release you of a duty to thank her for her kindness toward you? Of course not. We owe our beneficiaries a debt of thanks when, motivated by a concern for our well being, they bestow benefits upon us. In fact, it might be that the condition that the gift is given out of a 'concern for our well being' is overly restrictive. If I have a self-serving uncle who gives me a gift primarily because it will provide him with a significant tax write off, I still have a duty to thank him provided that he was able to see that the gift would benefit me. His action needn't be praiseworthy; it must only be an undeserved benefit to me.

I conclude, then, that it is not evident that God's inability to refrain from creating makes God unfree; still less is it evident that God's lack of creative freedom (if God indeed does lack such freedom) is inconsistent with God's praiseworthiness or the appropriateness of our offering thanks for his tender mercies.

V. PREMISE ONE—EITHER THERE IS A BEST WORLD OR THERE IS AN INFINITE HIERARCHY OF BETTER WORLDS

In fairness to Rowe, let me begin by noting that he never asserts premise one. In fact, Rowe mentions briefly a third option and credits Thomas Morris with suggesting a fourth. However, Rowe spends almost no time elaborating either of these other two possibilities, or on exploring their implications for his argument. The first he dispenses with in a footnote and the second gets no discussion at all after being mentioned. In this section, we'll look at what can be said for each of these possibilities and what impact they have on Rowe's conclusion.

V.A. The best worlds: a tie

In addition to the two options mentioned in the first premise, there is the possibility that there is no uniquely best world because there is more than one world with precisely the same, unsurpassed level of goodness. That is, there might be a tie at the top. Recognizing that this is an epistemic possibility, we should ask two questions: how plausible is the claim that there is a tie for best world that, if it were true, would help the theist out of Rowe's problem?

One reason for thinking there might be a tie is discussed by Rowe when he considers Aquinas' view that there is an infinite hierarchy of good worlds.[22] One might think, Rowe says, that such a series is impossible since each world will contain God, who is infinitely good and absolutely perfect. So every world (or at least every world with God) will be infinitely good. So there is a massive tie—every world with God is precisely as good as every other: each is infinitely good.

Rowe's reply to this line of reasoning depends on making a distinction between quantitative and qualitative goodness, and then claiming that, while every world with God will contain an infinite *quantity* of goodness, worlds might yet differ with respect to the *quality* of goodness. I haven't the space here to get into the details, but I will say that I find Rowe's reply very unconvincing. For, however compelling is the claim that any world with God contains an infinite (and so equal) *quantity* of goodness will be matched equally, I would think, by the claim that any world with God contains an infinite (and so equal) *quality* of goodness. Rowe denies this and thinks it plausible that worlds with a greater diversity of kinds of beings will contain a greater quality of goodness than worlds with fewer kinds of beings, even if all worlds also contain God. Therefore, Rowe thinks, the claim that all worlds are equally good because all contain the infinite goodness of God can be reasonably resisted.

Whether I'm correct that there is just as much reason to think that the presence of God guarantees a tie in quality of goodness as it does a tie in quantity of goodness, or Rowe is correct in thinking that greater ontological diversity can account for an increase in quality is, in the end, not of great importance. For there is, I believe, a better response to the argument we are now considering for the Tie at the Top thesis. Although there is no doubt that in adding up the total goodness of a world that includes God, God's goodness must be part of the equation, there is no reason to include God's goodness when comparing the worlds that God can bring about since

[22] This discussion begins near the bottom in Rowe (2004: 39) and runs through the top half of page 44.

every world God can bring about is, obviously, a world that includes God. So there is simply no reason to include (and good reason to exclude) God's goodness when evaluating and comparing worlds.

Another way to make this point is to say that the relevant unit of comparison is 'possible creations' rather than 'possible worlds'.[23] Leibniz's claim that God would bring about the best possible world can (and probably should) be recast as the claim that God would produce the best possible creation. Since theism insists on the transcendence of God, and on God's being distinct from creation, there is here no concern that all possible creations will be infinitely good because they each contain God; no possible *creation* includes the Creator as a part. And with the God out of the picture (so to speak), there is no worry (at least as far as I can tell) that all creations will contain the same quantity and quality of goodness. Because the phrase 'best possible world' is so entrenched in the discussion of the issues we are concerned with here, I will not avoid using it in the remainder of this paper. But it should be understood that, e.g., the claim 'God will bring about the best possible world' is shorthand for 'God will bring about the best creation he is capable of bringing about (i.e., the best *feasible* creation)'.

So we are back where we started at the beginning of this section: can we rule out the apparent epistemic possibility that there is no single best world because there is more than one world with unsurpassed goodness. Even if it is not true that every world is tied for the 'best world' title, why should we assume that either a single world is best or else every world is surpassable? Is there any reason to rule out the possibility that there are two or more unsurpassable worlds?

One might think that, while it can't be entirely ruled out, the claim that there is a tie for the 'best world' designation is pretty implausible. I take it that Rowe thinks this and that is why he only briefly mentions this possibility and in the end discusses it only in a footnote. However, I want to defend the tie possibility as being every bit as plausible as the best world hypothesis. In fact, I want to say something stronger: if both the infinite hierarchy thesis and the fourth possibility (which we will discuss in the next part of this section) are false, then the tie hypothesis is true. That is, the one possibility that seems very, very unlikely is that there is a single best world. Here's why.

What it would take for a world to be the best world is for the amount of value at that world to be greater than that at every other world. The best world isn't the world with the greatest volume or densest mass or the one that lasts longest; the criterion for 'best' world is a function of world value. Now

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[23] In keeping with an earlier point, it is actually 'feasible' rather than 'possible' creations that are relevant here.

one would assume that moral value is a major player here, but there is no good reason to think it is the only one. That is, given the plausible assumption of value pluralism (i.e., there is more than one irreducible kind of value), the best world would likely include whatever other kinds of value there might be as well. That is, it would be the world that contained the highest amount and quality of value or values possible. Now, as I understand it, this is the sole criterion on which worlds are judged in the 'best possible world' competition. Any aspect of a world that doesn't make a value difference is irrelevant. But now suppose there is a world W1 that is a prima facie candidate for being the best world: it has an extremely large quantity of extremely high-quality goodness, and very little (if any) evil. In fact, let's stipulate that W1's net goodness is unsurpassed. Let's go one step further. W1 is not only unsurpassed in net goodness, but there is no possible way of combining values in a world that is equal to the way those values are combined in W1. Put slightly differently, any way of combining values other than the way they are combined in W1 will produce lower net value than that found in W1. So we are supposing (for the sake of discussion) that there is a unique best way to combine values to get the ultimately valuable world and that W1 is it.

So far, it looks as though W1 has a good claim to be the best possible world. However, consider world W2: W2 is just like W1 in every way except that W2 contains one more item than W1 contains, and this item makes no value difference in W2. (W2 may contain an extra elementary particle, say, or maybe an extra chair or blade of grass.) Or consider W3, again the value equivalent of W1 and W2, but whose underlying non-normative 'stuff' is a different kind than what is found in W1 and W2. That is, W3 realizes all and only the value properties that W1 and W2 realize, but these properties supervene on a different type of realizing base. If either W2 or W3 is possible, then although the value of W1 will be unsurpassed, and it will represent the best possible instantiation of value properties, it will not be the uniquely best possible world since W2 and W3 are equally as good. It would be helpful if I knew of a proof for the general thesis that for any world W, if W exhibits the specific combination of realized value properties V, there is another world W* that also exhibits V but which differs from W in some non-normative aspect. However, I know of no such argument. Neverthess, the claim that the best combination of value could be had by worlds that differ in trivial, non-normative ways is highly plausible, and we should conclude that it is more likely that there is more than one unsurpassably good world than it is that there is a single, best world.

What is the impact of this on Rowe's argument? One the one hand, it seems potentially significant. For Rowe apparently thinks that the two

primary options are those mentioned in the first premise. And were those options to have exhausted the possibilities, Rowe has arguments in place that either God is not free or not perfectly good (i.e., that there is no God). But, if there are multiple best worlds, then God's perfect goodness, wisdom, and power will not guarantee that actuality of any particular world. God's freedom, it would seem, will not be in jeopardy. Although Rowe spends very little time considering the Tie at the Top hypothesis, he doesn't ignore it completely. He makes two points in response. Here's the first:

> [I]f there is a best action for God to perform (e.g., creating the best world), God creates the best world of necessity not freely. And just as clearly, if there are alternative best worlds for God to perform, he will of necessity, not freely, create one of them.[24]

On the assumption that a null creation (i.e., a world at which God doesn't create anything) wouldn't be among the alternative best possible creations, Rowe is certainly correct that God's creating that world is necessary (or at least unavoidable). Whether it is therefore not free is not so obvious (as I argued in the last section). And as we'll see in the next part of the next section, it isn't clear that the null world is not as good as other worlds God could make.

The second point Rowe makes about the Tie at the Top hypothesis is found in a footnote. Here's what Rowe says:

> Even though there being several creatable worlds than which there are none better appears to leave God free to create any one of these worlds, Swinburne and other proponents of this view are still burdened with having to defend the rather implausible claim that the actual world with all its evil is a world than which it is logically impossible that there should be a better world than it.[25]

It should be noted that, for reasons that have already surfaced, the theist who adopts the Tie at the Top hypothesis is not necessarily saddled with this consequence. A Molinist can follow Plantinga in claiming that it is possible that the best worlds are not feasible worlds because the true counterfactuals of freedom make them such that even an omnipotent being cannot weakly actualize them. So, at most, the Molinist is committed to the claim that the actual world is one of the best feasible worlds.

There is a related concern for the theist if the Tie at the Top hypothesis is correct because the best combination of values can be instantiated in more than one world. God's 'free choice' among the various best worlds would be analogous to the freedom one would have if, needing a box of breakfast cereal, one went to the town's only store to find that there were a great

many different boxes of the same size of Cheerios and nothing else. True, one would did not have to buy the box of cereal one bought, but one's freedom is strictly superficial.

Now if the Tie at the Top hypothesis is true not because there is a single best combination of values that can be instantiated in more than one world, but because there is more than one possible combination of values that lead to maximal value in a world, then God's choice among the worlds would be more significant. For example, suppose there are exactly two unsurpassable worlds X and Y, and that both are equal in overall value. X, however, contains slightly more instances of autonomy (which I assume is component of overall value) but fewer instances of altruism (which I assume is also a component of overall value) than Y contains. Now God's choice between X and Y seems more significant than it would be if there is a single combination of value that can be instantiated either in worlds that don't contain precisely the same objects or in worlds with value-supervenience bases that are distinct while the supervenient values are precisely the same. For although X and Y are equally good worlds, the value difference between them is not trivial. God might prefer worlds with greater altruism to worlds with greater autonomy even though God recognizes that the overall value of the worlds is the same. So a tie of this sort does not lead to insignificant choices or to a freedom that is essentially meaningless. It's the difference between having only the choice of which of many exactly similar boxes of Cheerios to buy on the one hand, and having a choice between your two favorite cereals on the other. You might think the two are equally as good, but on a given day have a preference for one. Given your preference, your freedom here is not trivial.

V.B. Incommensurate worlds

Premise one of Rowe's argument is false if two or more worlds are tied for having the greatest value. However, there is another way that this premise could be false: there might be worlds that are simply incommensurate. If that is the case then there is neither a best world nor an infinite hierarchy of good worlds.

How plausible is the thesis that there are incommensurable worlds? That depends, I would think, on whether or not value monism is true. If there is at bottom one type of value, then it would seem that for any worlds A and B, A would be better than, worse than, or equal to B. For example, if Millian utilitarianism is true, then happiness is the only irreducible value. So the value of a world is strictly a function of the net happiness at that world. If that is right, then surely there are no two worlds that are incommensurate.

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[24] Rowe (2004: 132).   [25] Rowe (2004: 43).

Value monism, however, is not a very plausible thesis. And, if it is false, if value pluralism is true, then there would seem to be the possibility of incommensurability. That's not to say that very instance of different value would always been incomparable to other instances. For example, if we were to compare the value of the doodle on my page of notes with that of the sacrifice a war hero makes for his country, there would be little doubt that the doodle would lose: the value of the war hero swamps the insignificant value of my doodle. Still, arguably, the value of a great work of art and the value of a morally very good (but not truly heroic) action might well be thought to be incomparable—even if the value of a great work of art loses out to that of a truly heroic action. Although both the great work of art and the morally very good (but not heroic) action are instances of significant value, since their values are of fundamentally different types, it's plausible to think that they cannot be put on the same scale. There is, of course, a sense in which they can be compared since they can both be seen to have significant value. However, from the recognition that each is greatly valuable it does not follow that either is better, worse, or equal to the other.

Given value pluralism, there are a number of fundamental, irreducible, intrinsic values. I assume that any best world candidate will be a world that exemplifies all the sorts of fundamental value that there are. In many cases, both with respect to world segments and even whole worlds, these segments/worlds are commensurate—i.e., the state of affairs of John's constructing a somewhat artistic doodle is less good than that of John's saving the life of a child. But not all cases are like this. Perhaps in situations where the quantitative and qualitative values of values of fundamentally different types reach a certain threshold, there just is no way of comparing the state of affairs on a better than/less than/equal to scale. So there is a whole host of ways that values can be combined to get the overall value of a world. Indeed, given the finitude of human powers of conception, there are likely possible values that we simply don't have the conceptual wherewithal to appreciate. Given a non-trivial number of distinct intrinsic values (including those, if any there are, that either aren't instantiated in our world or that we don't have the capability of recognizing) and all the ways that these values can be instantiated in a world, why shouldn't we think that there will be many possible total combinations that are incommensurate? Indeed, perhaps there are an infinite number of incommensurably good worlds. And even if that seems unlikely, this much can be said: we have no good reason for thinking that there are not any number of very good but incommensurate worlds. If there are even two, then it's neither the case that God's choice between them is forced nor that for any world God creates, God could have made one that was better.

Now, even if all the above were to work, it might be thought that we've still got the general problem of creation: was God free with respect to creating at all? If there are, say, a dozen incommensurate, very good creatable worlds, then won't God necessarily bring about one of those? As far as I can see, the answer to this last question is 'yes'. But that doesn't bring along the conclusion that God necessarily creates unless it is also true that the null creation is not one of the very good incommensurate worlds. But why shouldn't it be? Perhaps a world in which the only existent is a necessary, absolutely perfect being is incommensurate with a very good world that includes such a being but that also includes causally-dependent, contingent, non-perfect entities. Even if this claim doesn't strike one as self-evident or obviously true, what reason do we have for thinking that it is false? And if we think we can *just see* that a world with just God is of less value (is less good) than at least some worlds with God and contingent, created things, what is this confidence based on? I'm not suggesting value scepticism in general. Perhaps what I have in mind could be called something like 'epistemic humility regarding the value of worlds'. While the judgement that a world that includes an overwhelming amount and quality of pain and suffering with relatively few (if any) off-setting goods is inferior to a world in which the same inhabitants have little pain and suffering, much deep happiness, and there are a great number of other goods each had in abundance is unassailable, the more standard worlds each with a wide variety of different goods and 'bads' will be much more difficult to judge. One reason for this, of course, is the vastness of worlds and the puniness of the human mind. We might not be in a position to make reliable judgements even when there are facts of the matter regarding the relative value of worlds. There is, however, a second potential reason for the difficulty we have in judging the comparative goodness of worlds. My proposal is that one reason for our inability to make judgements in many of these cases is that such worlds are in fact incommensurable.

So if there are two or more incommensurate, very good, creatable worlds, and one of those worlds is a world with only God, then God can be free (in the strong, libertarian sense) both with respect to creating at all and with respect to which world to create if God creates. For God's nature, together with God's options for creation will leave open the possibility of God's not creating at all, and they will also be consistent with God's bringing about any of the incommensurable creations. Notice too that if God does have a choice between multiple, incommensurable creations, then God's choice is significant. For there can be substantial value differences in incommensurable worlds. The example of the values of the great work of art and the morally good action serves to illustrate this. If each is valuable (or even very valuable), but because their values are of such different kinds, they

are incommensurate, there is a basis for a preference, even a value-based preference. This is the point we discussed in the last paragraph of Section V. A regarding the possibility of distinct-but-equal combinations of overall value. Only the possibility in this section seems considerably more plausible: its not that there is a tie at the top, but that there are very good worlds whose value is incomparable. In such a case, God has the freedom to choose among these worlds and his choice can be grounded in what he happens to prefer. Now if his preferences are necessary, then we will have a problem parallel to that of the best world scenario. Although there will not be a single best world, if there is a world that is necessarily preferred by God, then God will necessarily create it. But there is no reason to build such preferences into the nature of God. So his creating one of the very-good-incommensurate worlds can be free and yet substantial.

CONCLUSION

William Rowe's argument that God must either not exist or not be free is without a doubt very powerful. It richly deserves the significant attention it has received. However, I believe that there is some reason to doubt each of the argument's premises, and to also be suspicious of Rowe's claims about the consequences of the Creator's being either not free or not perfectly good. Furthermore, I believe that the incommensurate worlds possibility is rather plausible, and if it turns out to be right, then God's creating the world God created, as well as God's having created at all, can be free and significantly so in a way that does not compromise God's perfect goodness.

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