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## Theistic Modal Realism?\*

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### I. INTRODUCTION

In good Leibnizian tradition Phil Quinn maintained that a strong improbability principle must govern the choices of perfect beings:

If an omnipotent and superlatively good moral agent were to actualize a possible world he would actualize some . . . world of unsurpassable moral goodness.<sup>1</sup>

Since it is impossible for a perfect being to actualize more than one possible world, theists in the Leibnizian tradition are committed to the unlikely proposition that the actual world, with all of its evil, is as good as any other actualizable world.<sup>2</sup> Call that the *Less-than-Best Problem*.

One theistic response to the *Less-than-Best Problem* is to maintain that every possible world is a *real, concrete universe*.<sup>3</sup> Theistic modal realists might take the position that our world is simply one among an infinite plurality of concrete universes actualized in logical space. It makes no important moral difference that, from our point of view, our world is actual. If there is a best possible world, theistic modal realists can argue, there is no moral reason why *ours* should be that world. There is no moral reason why the individual inhabitants of our world should enjoy the best possible experiences rather

\* My thanks to Ross Cameron, John Greco, Jon Kvanvig, Chris Menzel, and Stuart Rosenbaum for discussion, comment, and criticism of various issues in this paper. I thank also two referees from Oxford and the participants in the *Third Annual Baylor Philosophy of Religion Conference*.

<sup>1</sup> Quinn (1982: 212).

<sup>2</sup> Phil Quinn is not especially clear on this issue. He defines an actualizable world as a world that an omnipotent being could actualize. Since that definition is nearly trivial, it remains unclear whether an omnipotent being could actualize every logically possible world. On the other hand, he is explicit in wanting not to decide the issue either way. See *ibid.* 205 ff).

<sup>3</sup> See Nolan (2005: 55 ff.).

than the individual inhabitants of other real concrete universes. And if there are some bad possible worlds then there is no reason why ours should not be among them. In the “multiverse” that includes our universe there is the greatest total amount of value possible. In section 2, I briefly describe some features of modal realism. In sections 3–8, I argue that theistic modal realism has the resources to resolve a series of problems derived from the *Principle of Plenitude*, including the *Modal Problem of Evil* and the *Less-than-Best Problem*. I offer some concluding remarks in section 9.

## II. SOME FEATURES OF GENUINE MODAL REALISM

Mark Heller offers this initial characterization of genuine modal realism:

Modal realists . . . believe that the actual world is a concrete object of which you and I are literal parts, and he believes that other worlds are also concrete objects some of which literally include other people as parts. Merely possible worlds and merely possible people *really exist* despite their lack of actuality.<sup>4</sup>

Suppose there is an infinite plurality of possible worlds. Every possible world is a real, concrete universe and each world is a causally and spatio-temporally closed individual. None of the infinite plurality of possible worlds stands in any causal or spatio-temporal relation to any world other than itself. And no world stands in a causal or spatio-temporal relation to the parts of any worlds other than its own parts.<sup>5</sup>

We are parts of the actual world, or *world-mates*, because we stand in spatio-temporal relations to one another. And for any possible world *w* the individuals in *w* are parts of *w* because they stand in literal spatio-temporal relations to one another. All individuals are worldbound. No individual exists in more than one world. Among other things, this entails that our world does not overlap any other world with respect to people, quarks, leptons, water molecules, or any other part of the world. But for any individuals at any world there is some world containing duplicates of those individuals and many worlds containing counterparts of those individuals.

Suppose that at each concrete, spatio-temporally isolated universe there is an Anselmian perfect being that actualized that universe.<sup>6</sup> The Anselmian

<sup>4</sup> See Heller (2003: 1–22).

<sup>5</sup> See Divers (2002: 46 ff.).

<sup>6</sup> Anselmian eternalism is assumed here to be compatible with God’s omnipresence. Since we stand in a spatio-temporal relation (or a close analogue of a spatio-temporal relation) to a God that is omnipresent, even if that being is atemporal, we are to that extent world-mates with God.

perfect being necessarily exists, so each world includes a world-bound perfect being that has the property of necessarily existing.<sup>7</sup> For every valuable experience that an individual could have there is some individual that does have that experience in some world. And for every valuable thing that could exist there is some world at which that valuable thing does exist.

### III. PLENITUDE PROBLEMS FOR THEISTIC MODAL REALISM

According to David Lewis's initial formulation of the *Principle of Plenitude*, absolutely every way that a world could be is a way that some world is and absolutely every way that a part of a world could be is a way that some part of some world is.<sup>8</sup> To express the plenitude of possible worlds, Lewis appeals to a *Principle of Recombination*:

... according to [the principle of recombination] patching together of parts of different possible worlds yields another possible world. Roughly speaking, the principle is that anything can coexist with anything else, at least provided that they occupy distinct spatiotemporal positions. Likewise anything can fail to coexist with anything else. Thus if there could be a dragon and there could be a unicorn, but there couldn't be a dragon and unicorn side by side, that would be an unacceptable gap in logical space, a failure of plenitude.<sup>9</sup>

The *Principle of Plenitude* is supposed to ensure that there are no gaps in logical space. There is some real concrete universe for every way a world could be. Of course it is difficult to know exactly how many ways a world could be, but the plurality of worlds would presumably include some worlds that are on balance bad.<sup>10</sup> Otherwise there would again be an unacceptable gap.

Suppose then that  $w$  is an on balance a bad world. It is of course true at  $w$  that  $w$  is actual, and presumably the perfect being at  $w$  could have prevented  $w$

<sup>7</sup> Compare note 19 below. It is sometimes complained that Anselmianism is incompatible with Lewisian modal realism (plus counterpart theory) since the latter entails that God is world-bound. As far as I can tell, the objection confuses being world-bound with not necessarily existing. The Anselmian view of God does not entail that God is not world-bound. Rather Anselmianism entails that God is *necessarily existing*, and that is perfectly compatible with Lewisian modal realism together with counterpart theory.

<sup>8</sup> See Lewis (1986: 86). <sup>9</sup> Ibid. (87–8).

<sup>10</sup> It is not clear that the *Principle of Plenitude* entails that there would be an infinite number of worlds or, as Peter van Inwagen has objected, that there would be more than seventeen possible worlds. It is an important problem, but I do not address it here. See Lewis (1986: 86).

from becoming actual. Anselmian perfect beings have all of the attributes of perfection including essential perfect goodness, essential omnipotence, essential omniscience, and necessary existence. Here is Theodore Guleserian:

Presumably, an omnipotent being has the power to prevent any possible world from becoming actual, since all one has to do to prevent a world from becoming actual is to bring about some state of affairs that is not included in that world.<sup>11</sup>

But if it is true at  $w$  that a perfect being either brings about  $w$  or allows  $w$  to be actual, then it must be true at  $w$  that a perfect being is morally permitted to actualize  $w$ . Anselmian perfect beings are essentially morally perfect and cannot perform any impermissible actions. But then an Anselmian perfect being is not permitted to actualize  $w$ . Here is Guleserian again:

There is a possible world  $w$  such that necessarily [there is a perfect being in  $w$ ] only if it is *not* morally permissible for [that being] to allow  $w$  to be actual.<sup>12</sup>

Theistic modal realism entails that each possible world is a real concrete universe that a perfect being has actualized.<sup>13</sup> But the *Principle of Plenitude* entails that at least some of those worlds are so bad that no perfect being could actualize them. Theistic modal realism is therefore inconsistent with the *Principle of Plenitude*.

#### IV. PLENITUDE PROBLEMS RECONSIDERED

Theistic modal realists might decide to abandon the *Principle of Plenitude*. Thomas Morris has urged, for instance, that Anselmian theists should conclude that there are no possible worlds that a perfect being could not actualize:

... [An Anselmian] God is a delimitter of possibilities. If there is a being who exists necessarily and is necessarily omnipotent, omniscient, and good then many states of affairs which otherwise would represent genuine possibilities, and which by all non-theistic tests of logic and semantics do represent possibilities, are strictly impossible in the strongest sense.<sup>14</sup>

But the modal position Morris describes seems to beg the central question at issue. Even a modest position on the deliverances of modal intuition urges that

<sup>11</sup> See Guleserian (1983: 221–38).      <sup>12</sup> Ibid. (224).

<sup>13</sup> Of course, strictly, each world is a real concrete universe that a perfect being has actualized *at that world*.

<sup>14</sup> See Morris (1987: 42–69).

at least some possible worlds are on balance bad. Morris's position is that, for committed Anselmians, the otherwise credible deliverances of modal intuition are not reliable guides to what is genuinely possible. But one of the questions at issue is whether anyone ought to be a committed Anselmian in the first place. And certainly our considered intuitions should play a role in delimiting possibilities for those considering the possibility of an Anselmian God.

Theistic modal realists might urge instead that since God creates the multiverse—that is, every possible world in logical space—the sum total of value across the vast pattern of possible worlds must be *on balance positive* or, at least, *on balance neutral*. According to this view, there are many real concrete universes that are on balance bad and there are many real concrete universes that are on balance good, but the sum total of value across all possible worlds is positive; the sum total of all God has created is positive. And this position is consistent with the *Principle of Plenitude*. Theistic modal realists might then conclude that the existence of a perfect being is compatible with a multiverse that is on balance positive.

But a theistic modal realist must concede that the multiverse includes many spatio-temporally independent possible worlds each of which a perfect being actualizes. Some of those independent universes are on balance bad. Certainly theistic modal realists need some explanation of how a perfect being might actualize a universe that is on balance bad.

## V. PLENITUDE PROBLEMS RESOLVED

Since the *Principle of Plenitude* entails that there are at least some worlds that are on balance bad, we are forced to conclude that the traditional Anselmian God exists in some worlds on balance bad. Let  $w$  be on balance a bad world. According to theistic modal realism,  $w$  is no different from the actual world in ontological kind. Both are concrete worlds containing various parts instantiating various properties. The pain and suffering endured in  $w$  is no less bad than the pain and suffering endured in our world. It is true at our world that the suffering endured is genuine, but the suffering endured at  $w$  is also genuine. The strong atheological claim is that no Anselmian perfect being actualizes any world like  $w$  that is on balance bad. Call the strong atheological claim SA.

SA. If an Anselmian God exists, then there are no on-balance bad worlds. To make the problem more concrete, suppose Smith is a moral agent in  $w$  and

Smith is suffering some affliction. Suppose it is true in  $w$  that Smith is a good and just person. He is undeserving of the suffering he has endured, and his suffering is preventable without moral cost. Smith's suffering seems to be a clear instance of gratuitous evil.<sup>15</sup> So, according to SA, it is false that the Anselmian God exists in  $w$ . No perfect being allows good and just moral agents to suffer undeserved and preventable afflictions.

A theistic modal realist should concede that a perfect being could have prevented Smith's undeserved suffering. But they should note that, had Smith's suffering been prevented, it would have been true that another moral agent no less good and just than Smith—a morally equivalent counterpart of Smith—endured the same preventable suffering that Smith endured in  $w$ . No one, including an Anselmian God, could ensure that there is no on-balance bad world at which a morally equivalent counterpart of Smith endures undeserved suffering. Call that the preventable evil thesis (PE).

PE. It is impossible that there should fail to be a bad world at which a good and just counterpart of Smith endures undeserved and preventable suffering. According to PE, no matter what anyone might have done in  $w$ , it would be true that there's a world in which a counterpart of Smith endures undeserved and preventable suffering.

So we know that either Smith endures undeserved and preventable suffering or some counterpart of Smith endures undeserved and preventable suffering. The suffering is equally bad whether Smith or some counterpart of Smith endures it. Suppose that an Anselmian perfect being exists in Smith's world. How could a perfect being allow Smith to endure the undeserved suffering? The theistic modal realist argues that, necessarily, the Anselmian God prevents Smith's suffering only if some counterpart of Smith endures undeserved suffering. An Anselmian God is not permitted to actualize the world in which Smith suffers undeservedly only if there is some moral reason why another counterpart of Smith ought to endure the suffering instead. But the relevant counterparts of Smith are no less good than Smith. So there is no moral reason why any of the relevant counterparts ought to endure the suffering rather than Smith.

The moral position of the Anselmian God is in perfect analogy to the moral position of a rescuer that can prevent each good and just person from drowning, but cannot prevent all good and just persons from drowning.

<sup>15</sup> See Rowe (1996: 1–11): "An omniscient, wholly good being would prevent the occurrence of any intense evil it could, unless it could not do so without thereby losing some greater good or permitting some evil equally bad or worse."

Call that a *Rescue Situation*. In Rescue Situations a rescuer is morally permitted to allow one person to drown if the loss of that life is necessary to preventing another person from drowning. Theistic modal realists urge that the Anselmian God is morally permitted to allow Smith to suffer undeservedly if doing so is necessary to preventing another equally good person from suffering.

## VI. THE MODAL REALIST'S FORMAL ARGUMENT

It is definitive of Rescue Situations that some person R *can* save person S and *can* save person S' but *cannot* save both S and S'. Since it is impossible for R to actualize a world in which both S and S' are saved, R is permitted to save S at the necessary cost of not saving S'. It is difficult to find a thoughtful and well-informed person that is unwilling to accept that justification for saving one person and allowing another to drown.

But theistic modal realists have an analogous argument that justifies God in allowing Smith to suffer undeservedly.<sup>16</sup> The representation of the analogous Anselmian argument requires a domain that is suitably large. Counterpart theory provides a domain of quantification that includes every possible world and everything in every possible world. We include, among the existing objects, every possible object. We retain the familiar assumptions that properties are sets of possible objects and propositions are sets of possible worlds.

Theistic modal realists begin with the assumption that there is a set of worlds  $W$  in which God prevents the undeserved suffering that Smith actually endures. Each of these worlds includes a counterpart of Smith. Those counterparts are the representatives of Smith in those worlds. The relevant counterparts are moral equivalents of Smith. They are indeed Smith himself *according to* each of those worlds. Each of these counterparts is the person Smith would have been had Smith's suffering been prevented in some way.<sup>17</sup> Further, these worlds exhaust the possible ways in which God might have prevented the undeserved suffering that Smith actually endures.

The premises of the argument are set out in the language of counterpart theory. Let  $Wy$  state that  $y$  is a world,  $Iyx$  state  $x$  is in world  $y$ ,  $Cxa$  state  $x$  is

<sup>16</sup> Compare Garcia (1984: 378–88).

<sup>17</sup> See Lewis (1983: 28 ff.).

a counterpart of  $a$ ,  $Mxa$  state  $x$  is a moral equivalent of  $a$ , and  $Ga$  state that God prevent the suffering of  $a$ . Let Smith take the name  $a$  and suppose Smith exists in the actual world @. We assume that God necessarily exists and possesses all of the traditional divine attributes in every world.

The first premise in the argument states that Smith endures preventable suffering. Let  $Sa$  symbolize “Smith endures preventable suffering.” Tom Morris and Alvin Plantinga both reject the idea that any moral agent might endure pointless and preventable suffering.<sup>18</sup> The position of Plantinga and Morris leads to the conclusion that it is impossible that Smith suffer needlessly. But I side with the strong evidence that some actual moral agents do suffer needlessly.

1.  $\Box(\exists x)(\forall z)(Izx \equiv Az) \ \& \ Sa$

(1) is the translation of  $Sa$ —Smith (actually) endures preventable suffering—in the primitive notation of counterpart theory. In the logic of counterpart theory, all closed sentences are governed by Brouwer’s Principle, which states  $\Box(p \supset \Box\Diamond p)$ . It follows from (1) and Brouwer’s principle that it is *necessarily possible* that Smith endures preventable suffering.

2.  $\Diamond Sa$

But that is just to say that it’s necessary that some morally equal counterpart (or other) of Smith endures needless suffering. So, if God prevents the suffering of all of Smith’s non-actual and morally equal counterparts, then God cannot also prevent the suffering of Smith.

Now, suppose for reductio that God prevents the suffering of every morally equal counterpart of Smith. In that case (3) is true.

3.  $\forall y_1 \forall x_1 (Wy_1 \ \& \ Iy_1x_1 \ \& \ Cx_1a \ \& \ Mx_1a \supset Gx_1)$

In modal talk, (3) states that God necessarily prevents Smith from suffering needlessly, or  $\Box Ga$ . It follows immediately that it is not possible that Smith endures preventable suffering, or  $\sim\Diamond Sa$ . But we know from premise (2) that it’s necessarily possible that Smith endures preventable suffering. So premise

<sup>18</sup> This needs qualification. Plantinga of course allows that God might permit moral agents to act freely in ways that are harmful to other moral agents. The classic source is his *The Nature of Necessity* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1974). But the value in exercising freedom, or the value of beings that can exercise freedom, is supposed to counterbalance those moral evils. The account is of course much more complex and subtle. Plantinga’s account is plausible in its explanation of how it would be worse overall were God to prevent moral evil. In the cases I’m discussing, it would not be worse overall in Smith’s world were God to prevent Smith from suffering. It would indeed be better overall in that world.



(3) is necessarily false, or  $\sim\Box Ga$ . God simply cannot prevent the suffering of every morally equal counterpart of Smith.

But if (3) is necessarily false, then we know that (4) is necessarily true.

4.  $\forall y_1 \forall x_1 (Wy_1 \& Iy_1x_1 \& (y_1 \neq @) \& Cx_1a \& Mx_1a \& Gx_1) \supset \sim Ga$

Premise (4) states that if God prevents the unnecessary suffering of all of Smith's morally equal counterparts in every non-actual world, then God does not prevent the actual suffering of Smith. We take as the relevant counterparts of Smith all of those who are, like Smith, good and undeserving of the suffering they endure.

Suppose it's permissible that God prevents the unnecessary suffering of all of Smith's morally equal counterparts in every non-actual world.

5.  $P(\forall y_1 \forall x_1 (Wy_1 \& Iy_1x_1 \& (y_1 \neq @) \& Cx_1a \& Mx_1a \& Gx_1))$

It is difficult to see how (5) could be false. Certainly, it would seem, God is permitted to prevent the needless suffering of all of Smith's morally equal counterparts. But if premises (1)–(5) are true, then God is morally permitted not to prevent the unnecessary suffering of Smith.

6.  $P\sim Ga$

The argument has the structure of the arguments offered in *Rescue Situations*. Recall that if a rescuer can save each of two persons, S and S', but cannot save both S and S', then he is permitted to save at least one. Similarly, if God can prevent the suffering of each of Smith's counterparts, but cannot prevent the suffering of all of Smith's counterparts, then God is permitted to prevent the suffering of all of Smith's counterparts except Smith himself.

The theistic modal realist assumes that it is possible that Smith suffers needlessly. That assumption seems reasonable. If Smith can suffer needlessly, then God simply cannot prevent every relevant counterpart of Smith from suffering in that way. The theistic modal realist does not assume that it is possible for God to *cause* suffering. That assumption is clearly unreasonable; God does not strongly actualize such states of affairs. So there is no world, the theistic modal realist should insist, in which a perfect being causes moral agents to suffer needlessly.

It might be objected that the Anselmian God ought not to be concerned about every moral agent that exists, but only about moral agents that *actually exist*. An Anselmian God that permits an actual moral agent to suffer undeservedly in order to prevent an existing, non-actual moral agent from suffering, does something morally wrong.

But this objection is unmotivated. The suffering of other concrete universes is no less genuine than the suffering in our universe. We perhaps have special obligations to our world-mates. But certainly God's concern is with the multiverse as a whole.

The objection also undercuts the *Plenitude Problem* for theism. It entails that in non-actual worlds an essentially morally perfect being need not have a reason to allow a moral agent to suffer undeservedly and preventably. But of course it is false that in non-actual worlds an essentially morally perfect being may simply allow undeserved and preventable suffering. Unlike the rest of us, the Anselmian God is morally perfect in every world.

We should conclude that an essentially morally perfect being can permit undeserved and preventable suffering if it is the necessary cost of preventing equally bad suffering. In particular, an essentially morally perfect being is permitted to let Smith suffer undeservedly, if it is necessary to preventing his equally good, non-actual counterparts from suffering undeservedly.

## VII. LESS-THAN-BEST PROBLEMS RESOLVED

The theistic modal realist's solution to the *Less-than-Best Problem* makes the reasonable concession that our world is not the best possible world. But it should be obvious that the theistic modal realist will again respond that a perfect being is morally permitted not to make the lives of actual rational and sentient beings better. Certainly, a perfect being *can* improve the lives of every actual rational and sentient being, and certainly it would be a moral improvement if he did. But we know that, necessarily, if he or she does so, then some group or other of morally equivalent rational and sentient counterparts is such that their lives are not improved. It is impossible that a perfect being should improve the lives of every morally equivalent group of rational and sentient counterparts in every world. There is therefore no moral reason why a perfect being must improve the lives of all actual rational and sentient beings rather than improve the lives of their morally equivalent counterparts.

## VIII. OTHER WORRIES FOR THEISTIC MODAL REALISM

An Anselmian God is a necessarily existing being, a being that exists in every possible world. Genuine modal realists are counterpart theorists. We all have counterparts in other worlds, but no one is identical to his or her

counterparts. In particular, God has counterparts in other worlds, but God is not identical to any of his counterparts. But then it appears that God—the greatest possible being in our world—actually exists, but does not necessarily exist.<sup>19</sup>

This worry is misplaced. It is true that God has counterparts in every world and it is true that each of those beings is world-bound.<sup>20</sup> But the Anselmian claim that God necessarily exists is also true. Indeed, that God has a counterpart in each possible world is just what it means to say that God necessarily exists. The worry that God does not necessarily exist simply reflects a global concern about the counterpart-theoretic equivalents of our familiar modal talk. It is not a particular concern for theistic modal realists.

It is true that God exists in a world  $w$  if and only if God is related to the parts of  $w$  in the right way. Among the best candidates for the right relation is standing in a spatio-temporal relation to the other parts of  $w$ . But other candidates are also reasonable. We assume that God is omnipresent, even if eternal. Since we can stand in a spatial relation to a God that is omnipresent, we are reasonably called world-mates with God.<sup>21</sup>

But suppose Anselmian perfect beings are essentially sole creators of everything that exists.<sup>22</sup> It is true that God essentially actualizes the world, but it is not true that God created everything unrestrictedly. God did not create all of the possible objects that exist, for instance; he possibly created the possible objects that exist. So there are objects that the Anselmian God did not create.

I don't find this is an especially large obstacle for theistic modal realists. The Anselmian God essentially actualizes the world. This is to say that the Anselmian God essentially weakly actualizes every contingent state of affairs that obtains. He creates the inhabitants of every world, so in some sense he creates necessarily existing objects as well—objects that have counterparts

<sup>19</sup> Compare note 7 above. The objection was raised by Stuart Rosenbaum and Jon Kvanvig in discussion, but it is a familiar one. It is also raised in Sheehy (2006: 315–28). For a cogent response to many of the worries raised in Sheehy's paper, see Cameron (2009: 95–100). Cameron proposes several ways in which a modal realist might accommodate a necessarily existing being. As far as I can see, Sheehy is concerned with a pseudo-problem based on a misunderstanding of the reductive project of counterpart theory and genuine modal realism. Genuine modal realism offers a way to say everything we have wanted to say about the necessary existence of the Anselmian God.

<sup>20</sup> I sidestep concerns about the number of counterparts God might have in any particular world.

<sup>21</sup> For other possibilities, see Lewis (1986: 73 ff.).

<sup>22</sup> Ross Cameron suggested in correspondence that this might be a problem for the Anselmian God in my conception.

in every world. Indeed, since he creates all actual objects and all actual objects necessarily exist, God creates large numbers of necessarily existing beings.<sup>23</sup> But there is no conceptual problem in claiming both that the Anselmian God is essentially sole creator and that there exist some non-actual objects that he did not actually create.

The Anselmian God is also essentially omniscient. It is typical to analyze omniscience in terms of propositional belief and knowledge. The natural proposal is that an omniscient being is one that believes all and only true propositions and knows every proposition he believes. But that can't be quite right since there are true propositions that are *not definitely* true and there are definitely true propositions that are not definitely, definitely true, and so on.<sup>24</sup> The problem is more pronounced for modal realists who countenance transworld objects. It will be indeterminate whether an object is actual when many, but not all, of its parts are actual. For all such transworld objects  $x$ —and there will be infinitely many for the unrestricted compositionalist—it is true, but not definitely true that  $x$  is actual. An Anselmian God would not know that any of those objects are actual objects.

This again is not a problem for theistic modal realism. First, theistic modal realists need not endorse unrestricted composition. Second, even if they do, it is not a large concession that an omniscient being does not know any proposition that is indefinite at any order of vagueness. For any object  $x$ , if  $x$  is on any borderline of the property  $F$ , then an omniscient being does not know that  $Fx$  is true.<sup>25</sup> It is perfectly reasonable to hold that omniscient beings know all true propositions, modal and non-modal, that are neither higher nor lower order vague.

There is also a worry about true, necessarily false propositions. Propositions stating that a transworld object exists can be true, though false in every possible world. Since the object does not exist (restrictedly) in any world, it is not true that “object  $O$  exists” is possibly true. Yet, it is true that there exists (unrestrictedly) the transworld object  $O$ . Does God know that the object unrestrictedly exists?<sup>26</sup> I don't think theistic modal realists have any problem in answering affirmatively, God does know some true propositions that are necessarily false.

<sup>23</sup> See Lewis (1983: 26–54). Lewis notes, p. 31 ff., that  $\forall x \Box (\exists y)(x = y)$  come out true, given his translation schemes. Of course, counterpart theory is a *theory*, so such schemes are certainly subject to modification.

<sup>24</sup> For a nice discussion of related points, see Hawthorne (2005: 1–25). For problems with Hawthorne's proposal, see Almeida (2008: 3.10).

<sup>25</sup> See Almeida (2008: 3.9–3.11).

<sup>26</sup> Compare, for instance, Hudson (1997: 77–82).

Theistic modal realism can also handle the long-standing objection that since Anselmian perfect beings are *impeccable* they cannot also be essentially omnipotent.<sup>27</sup> An omnipotent being would be able to perform any possible action including immoral actions.

There are several responses to the impeccability objection including arguments from necessarily unmanifested powers.<sup>28</sup> None of these is especially plausible. But theistic modal realists needn't concede that an Anselmian perfect being cannot perform an immoral action. Indeed, there is nothing inconsistent in the claim that an impeccable being *can* perform an immoral action.

Compare the possibility of a time-traveler killing his own grandfather. To say that a time-traveler can kill his own grandfather is just to say that his doing so is compossible with certain facts. According to counterpart theorists, determining which compossible facts are relevant is a contextual matter. To suppose that Tim were to kill his own grandfather is to suppose that Tim does so in some set of relevantly similar worlds. The similar worlds are certainly not ones in which a contradiction is true.

Let *A* be the immoral action of harming Smith. What would have to be the case were an Anselmian perfect being to perform *A*? It certainly would not be the case that God is both impeccable and not impeccable. No contradiction would follow. It would not be the case that God fails to be perfectly good, since God is essentially perfectly good. So, were God to perform *A*, it *would not* be an instance of immorally harming Smith. Perhaps it would be an instance of not harming Smith at all, or an instance of justifiably harming Smith. In any case, it is true that *A* is an instance of immorally harming Smith and it is possible for an impeccable being to perform *A*.<sup>29</sup> Theistic modal realists therefore have a solution to the long-standing objection to Anselmian accounts of omnipotence that allows perfect beings to perform immoral actions.

## IX. CONCLUSIONS

Theistic modal realists have the resources to explain how God might allow a moral agent to suffer needlessly. God may allow Smith to suffer needlessly, for instance, if God prevents the suffering of every morally equivalent counterpart of Smith. God's situation is what I have called a *Rescue Situation*. The very same reasons that justify a rescuer in saving some, but not all,

<sup>27</sup> See Funkhouser (2006: 409–22).

<sup>28</sup> Compare, for instance, Senor (2006: 423–31).

<sup>29</sup> Compare Cameron (2009: 1–16).

drowning persons, justify God in preventing the suffering of some, but not all, counterparts of Smith.

Theistic modal realists also have the resources to explain how God might actualize a less-than-best world. It is necessarily true that some world  $w$  is less than the best possible world. So, it is necessary that, if God improves the lives of every sentient member  $S$  of  $w$ , then he fails to improve the lives of the counterparts of  $S$  in some world  $w'$ . But there is no moral reason why the sentient members of  $w'$  should have lives that are less good than the sentient members of  $w$ . So God has no moral reason to improve the lives of the sentient members of  $w$ .

We considered, finally, some of the traditional attributes of the Anselmian God in the context of theistic modal realism. We found that theistic modal realists can offer some intriguing accounts of the attributes of necessary existence, essential omniscience, essential omnipotence, essential perfect goodness, and being essential sole creator. It seems reasonable to conclude that theistic modal realism offers a fascinating new avenue for illuminating Anselmian perfection.

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