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The Logical Problem of Evil: Mackie and Plantinga

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It is customary to distinguish the logical problem of evil from the evidential problem of evil. An instance of the logical problem of evil is an argument from evil against the existence of God that has a premise that says the existence of God and some known fact about evil are incompatible, whereas an instance of the evidential problem of evil is an argument from evil against the existence of God that lacks such a premise. Consequently, an instance of the evidential problem of evil will either lack a premise that says that the existence of God is incompatible with some fact about evil, for example, Draper (1989) (see Chapter 5), or it will have such a premise but the putative fact about evil will be unknown but arguably probable or reasonable to believe or some such thing, for example, Rowe (1979) (see Chapter 4). The argument of Mackie (1955) is at present the most famous instance of the logical problem of evil.

The plan of the chapter is as follows. Section 1 states Mackie's argument and sketches a response to it in the spirit of what is badly named "skeptical theism" in contemporary philosophy of religion, a response suggested in Pike (1963) (see Chapter 29). Section 2 summarizes Plantinga's Free Will Defense, followed by a rehearsal of several objections to it in Section 3. One line of thought is developed at length in the remainder of Section 3 and in Section 4. In Section 5, I assess two published objections to that line of thought, one from Rowe and one from Plantinga.

Mackie's Logical Problem of Evil

According to Mackie, not only can it be shown that "religious beliefs lack rational support," it can be shown that

> they are positively irrational, that the several parts of the essential theological doctrine are inconsistent with one another, so that the theologian ... must be prepared to believe, not merely what cannot be proved, but what can be *disproved* from other beliefs that he also holds. (Mackie 1955, 200)

The putative disproof to which Mackie alludes is the problem of evil. As Mackie (1955, 200) conceived of it, the problem of evil is "a logical problem, the problem of clarifying and reconciling a number of beliefs" that were "essential parts of most theological positions." The three "beliefs" he had in mind were these: "God is omnipotent; God is wholly good; and yet evil exists." Mackie was aware that there was no obvious inconsistency here. Thus, he said,

> to show it we need some additional premises, or perhaps some quasi-logical rules connecting the terms "good," and "evil," and "omnipotent." These additional principles are that good is opposed to evil, in such a way that a good thing always eliminates evil as far as it can, and that there are no limits to what an omnipotent thing can do. From these it follows that a good omnipotent thing eliminates evil completely, and then the propositions that a good omnipotent thing exists, and that evil exists, are incompatible. (Mackie 1955, 200–201)

Nearly 60 years have passed since Mackie published his "logical problem" of evil, as he called it. But what, exactly, is the argument? And what should we make of it?

At the most general level, it is this:

G: God is omnipotent and God is wholly good,

is incompatible with

E: Evil exists.

But E is true; so G is false. As for the incompatibility of G and E, Mackie said that all we needed to "show" it was

MP1:   A good thing always eliminates evil as far as it can,

and

L: There are no limits to what an omnipotent thing can do.

The idea is that the conjunction of G, MP1, and L entails the denial of E; alternatively, in any possible world in which G, MP1, and L are true, E is false.

We can begin to see the failure of Mackie's argument by noting that the conjunction of G, MP1, and L entails the denial of E only if L and MP1 are both necessary truths. For if they are not both necessary truths, it is left wide open whether the goodness of a wholly good God requires Him to prevent evil as far as He can, or whether the power of an omnipotent God might not be enough to prevent evil entirely. MP1 and L are not both necessary truths, however.

Consider MP1. What if a wholly good thing had a morally justifying reason to permit some evil? In that case, it might well not eliminate evil as far as it can. MP1, therefore, is not necessarily true. A more plausible moral principle that avoids this objection and serves Mackie's purposes is something along these lines:

MP2:   A wholly good thing eliminates evil as far as it can, unless it has a morally justifying reason to permit evil.

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It too, however, is objectionable. For MP2 can serve Mackie's purposes only if its conjunction with G and L preclude E; but that's the case only if it is a necessary truth that

N: There is no morally justifying reason for a wholly good thing to permit evil.

Nothing we know, however, precludes the possibility that

J: There is a morally justifying reason for God to permit evil, a reason we do not know of, and He permits it for that reason, and evil results.

Notice that J entails ~N. So nothing we know of precludes the possibility of ~N. But if nothing we know of precludes the possibility of ~N, the incompatibility of G and E are hardly "shown" by way of MP2, L, and N. Furthermore, since nothing we know of precludes the possibility that G and J are both true, and the conjunction of G and J entails E, nothing we know of precludes the possibility that G and E are both true.[1] Consequently, for all we know, G and E are compatible.

The objection just stated targets MP1 of Mackie's original argument. Plantinga, however, targets L, arguing in various ways that L is false. But, as Plantinga saw, even if there are limits to what an omnipotent thing can do, it does not follow that G and E are compatible. To show that they are compatible, one must do something more. One must offer a defense.

Plantinga's Free Will Defense

Plantinga identifies an attempt to show that G and E are compatible as a *defense*. A defense is like a theodicy – it specifies reasons that would justify God's permitting evil – but, unlike a theodicy, it does not aspire to specify reasons that involve good states of affairs that *in fact* obtain; rather, the reasons specified in a defense need only involve good states of affairs that *might* obtain (see Chapters 27 and 28).[2] More accurately, a defense aims to show that G and E are compatible by producing a proposition that specifies a justifying reason for God to permit evil, is compatible with G, and entails E in conjunction with G. Plantinga aims to find such a proposition in the following familiar story:

> A world containing creatures who are significantly free (and freely perform more good than evil actions) is more valuable, all else being equal, than a world containing no free creatures at all. Now God can create free creatures, but He cannot cause or determine them to do only what is right. For if He does so, then they are not significantly free after all; they do not do what is right freely. To create creatures capable of moral good, therefore, He must create creatures capable of moral evil, and He cannot give these creatures the freedom to perform evil

1 Mackie eventually gave up on the logical problem of evil contained in Mackie (1955). Instead, he offered a version of the evidential problem, what he called "the problem of unabsorbed evils," evils that would not be justifiedly permitted by God. See Mackie (1982, 150–176, especially 155).

2 This is not quite the way that Plantinga draws the distinction. He says that a theodicist aims "to tell us what God's reason for permitting evil *really* is," while a defender aims, at most, to say "what God's reason *might possibly be*" (Plantinga 1974b, 28). This way of drawing the line between theodicy and defense implies that God exists; the one in the text does not.

and at the same time prevent them from doing so. As it turned out, sadly enough, some of the free creatures God created went wrong in the exercise of their freedom; this is the source of moral evil. The fact that free creatures sometimes go wrong, however, counts neither against God's omnipotence nor against His goodness; for He could have forestalled the occurrence of moral evil only by removing the possibility of moral good.[3] (Plantinga 1974b, 30)

This free will story – and the explanation of God's permission of evil that goes along with it – is subject to a devastating objection: even if some of the creatures God created were such that they would freely go wrong – indeed, even if *all* of them were such that they would freely go wrong – why could he not have just created other possible creatures who in the exercise of their freedom would always freely go right? Surely that was within his power (Mackie 1955, 209).

To meet this objection, Plantinga introduces transworld depravity (TWD) and applies it to individual essences:[4]

TWD: An essence E suffers from TWD if and only if for every world W such that E contains the properties *is significantly free in W* and *always does what is right in W*, there is an action A and a maximal (or "initial") world segment T such that

(1) T includes *E's being instantiated* and *E's instantiation's being free with respect to A* and *A's being morally significant for E's instantiation,*

(2) T is included in W but includes neither *E's instantiation's performing A* nor *E's instantiation's refraining from A,* and

(3) if T were actual, then the instantiation of E would have gone wrong with respect to A.[5]

(As Plantinga notes at 1974b, 48, we are to remember that (3) is not true at any world W that the definition quantifies over.) We can put this definition more briefly. Let "$E+$" be the instantiation of an essence E, let an "E-perfect world" be a world at which E is instantiated and $E+$ is significantly free and always does what is right, and let "T(W)" be the maximal world segment T described by (1) and (2) in world W. Then:

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3 Some definitions of Plantinga's (1974b, 29–30) will be useful here. (1) If a person is *free with respect to a given action*, then he is free to perform that action and free to refrain from performing it; no antecedent conditions and/or causal laws determine that he will perform the action, or that he would not. It is within his power, at the time in question, to take or perform the action and within his power to refrain from it. (2) An action is *morally significant*, for a given person, if it would be wrong for him to perform the action but right to refrain or *vice versa*. (3) A person is *significantly free*, at a time, if he is then free with respect to a morally significant action.

4 According to Plantinga, each thing that exists in any possible world has a unique (and perhaps complex) property that distinguishes that individual from every other possible thing. That property is an "individual essence." Since an individual essence – or "essence," for short – is a property, and properties necessarily exist, each essence exists at every possible world. Many individuals are contingent things, they do not exist at every possible world; nevertheless, their essences do.

5 Plantinga (1974b, 52–53); cf. Plantinga (1974a, 188). Plantinga confesses not to be entirely clear about how to spell out this notion of a maximal (or initial) world segment. A rough-and-ready expression of the idea is this: imagine a person who is free to do A at t and who is free to refrain from A at t. If she does A at t, then she brings it about that a certain world, W, is actual; however, if she refrains from A at t, she brings it about that another world, W', is actual. Note that both W and W' share a segment of a world up until the time she acts or refrains from acting. A maximal (or initial) world segment is that segment of each of W and W' that is (intrinsically) the same up until t. For more on the matter, see Plantinga (1974a, 175–76; 1974b, 46; 1985, 50–52).

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TWD: An essence E suffers from TWD if and only if for every E-perfect world W, there is an action A and a maximal world segment $T(W)$ such that if $T(W)$ were actual, $E+$ would have gone wrong with respect to A.

With TWD in hand, Plantinga puts forward the following proposition:

R: God created a world containing moral good; but, it was not within His power to create a world containing moral good without creating one containing moral evil since every essence suffers from TWD.

According to Plantinga, since R specifies a justifying reason for God to permit evil, is compatible with G, and entails E in conjunction with G, G and E are compatible.

What should we make of R? This much is true: *if* every essence suffers from TWD, then it was not within God's power to create a world containing moral good without creating one containing moral evil. For suppose there is a world W at which every essence suffers from TWD. Then, if W were actual, God would find Himself in this unfortunate situation: to create a world containing moral good but no moral evil, He must actualize $T(W)$; but, if God does that, then "no matter which essences [He] instantiates, the resulting persons, if free with respect to morally significant actions, would always perform at least some wrong actions."[6]

Assessing Plantinga's Free Will Defense

According to Robert Adams (1985, 226), "it is fair to say that Plantinga has solved this problem. That is, he has argued convincingly for the consistency of [G and E]." And William Alston (1991, 49) writes that "Plantinga . . . has established the *possibility* that God could not actualize a world containing free creatures that always do the right thing." William Rowe (1979, 335, note 1) agrees:

> Some philosophers have contended that the existence of evil is logically inconsistent with the existence of the theistic God. No one, I think, has succeeded in establishing such an extravagant claim. Indeed, granted incompatibilism, there is a fairly compelling argument for the view that the existence of evil is logically consistent with the existence of the theistic God. (For a lucid statement of this argument, see Alvin Plantinga, *God, Freedom and Evil*.)

And James Beebe writes: "As an attempt to rebut the logical problem of evil, [Plantinga's FWD] is strikingly successful"; indeed, according to Beebe (2005, section 4) "all parties admit that Plantinga's [FWD] successfully rebuts the logical problem of evil as it was formulated by atheists during the mid-twentieth-century."

Beebe exaggerates, as do the others. Compatibilists, for example, deny the very possibility of incompatibilist freedom that Plantinga's FWD invokes. Furthermore, R is compatible with G only if G is possibly true; but G is possibly true if and only if it is possible that a *necessarily existing* and essentially omnipotent, omniscient and morally perfect being exists

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6 Plantinga (1974b, 53). Since essences are necessary beings, God does *not* have the power to create essences other than those that exist and instantiate them.

(at any rate, that's the sort of God Plantinga has in mind for his FWD). To date, however, no one has ever shown that it is possible that such a being exists. In addition, Plantinga's FWD succeeds only if R is possibly true, and R is possibly true only if

D: Possibly, every essence suffers from TWD.

But here one might observe that D, with its explicit reference to TWD, is much less intuitive than the proposition in whose defense it is called to serve, that is, that G and E are compatible. Thus, on the general principle that the less intuitive cannot serve to show the more intuitive, R is useless in a defense of the compatibility of G and E (DeRose 1991). Finally, Richard Otte has demonstrated (Otte 2009), and Plantinga (2009, 183) concedes, that R is not only false, it is necessarily false: "on my original definition of TWD, R is necessarily false and therefore not compatible with anything, let alone G." Otte offers a new definition that skirts the objections he raises, and Plantinga adopts it for R. In what follows, I will stick to the original definition since the concern I want to express about Plantinga's FWD applies to it on either definition, and it would take us too far afield to summarize Otte's objections and new definition.

A defense aims to show that G and E are compatible by producing a proposition that specifies a justifying reason for God to permit evil, is compatible with G, and entails E in conjunction with G. This is insufficient for the purpose, however. For to show that G is compatible with E is in part an epistemological task; one succeeds at it only if it meets certain epistemic standards. Specifically, a defense succeeds only if it is not reasonable to refrain from believing the claims that constitute it. In the case of Plantinga's FWD, the central claim is that R is compatible with G. But, as noted earlier, R is compatible with G only if R is possible, and R is possible only if D is true, that is, only if, possibly, every essence suffers from TWD. But why suppose that's possible? Because, says Plantinga (1974a, 186, 188; 1974b, 53), it is "clearly" true.

In a nutshell, my objection to Plantinga's FWD is this: D is not at all "clearly" true; indeed, few things are more *unclearly* true than D (if it is true at all). In fact, it is reasonable to refrain from believing D; hence, Plantinga's FWD fails.

The reason why it is reasonable to refrain from believing D is that there is a proposition that we know is incompatible with D, and it is no more reasonable to believe D than it. That proposition is

S: Necessarily, some essence or other enjoys transworld sanctity (TWS),

where

TWS: An essence E enjoys *transworld sanctity* (TWS) if and only if for every world W such that E contains the properties *is significantly free in W* and *always does what is right in W*, there is **no** action A and **no** maximal world segment T such that

(1)   T includes E's *being instantiated* and *E's instantiation being free with respect to A* and *A's being morally significant for E's instantiation*,

(2)   T is included in W but includes neither E's *instantiation's performing A* nor *E's instantiation's refraining from A*, and

(3)   if T were actual, then the instantiation of E would have gone wrong with respect to A.

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(Caution: S is *not* the proposition that some particular essence enjoys TWS essentially, which is impossible.) Using previous definitions, we can simplify:

TWS: An essence E enjoys TWS if and only if for every E-perfect world W, there is *no* action A and *no* maximal world segment T(W) such that if T(W) were actual, E+ would have gone wrong with respect to A.

And why believe that S is incompatible with D? Well, suppose they are compatible. Then there's a world at which every essence suffers from TWD and some essence enjoys TWS. That is, there's a world at which some essence, E, both suffers from TWD and enjoys TWS. Now consider any E-perfect world W. By TWD, there is some action A and some maximal world segment T(W) such that if T(W) were actual, E+ would have gone wrong with respect to A, but by TWS, there is no such action and no such maximal world segment. The supposition that S and D are compatible entails a contradiction; thus they are incompatible.

Of course, even if S is incompatible with D, it might be more reasonable to believe D than S. Why suppose it is not? In short, because suggestions to the contrary fail. For example, one might suggest that it is more reasonable to believe D than S since D is a possibility claim and S is a necessity claim. But, as Plantinga (2009, 185) agrees, "it is not the case that possibility claims automatically enjoy a leg up here. *Necessarily, 2 + 1 = 3* is much less venturesome than *possibly, human beings are material objects*." A similar judgment falls on other suggestions.[7] What follows is a more positive case for the claim that it is not more reasonable to believe D than S, a case initially stated in Howard-Snyder and O'Leary-Hawthorne (1998).

Interworld Plenitude and Intraworld Plenitude

Recall that each individual essence is a complex property and, as such, exists at every possible world, although no *creaturely* essence is instantiated at every world. Among the creaturely essences are those of which counterfactuals of freedom would be true or false of their instantiations. These are the essences with which we are concerned. Now consider any combination of counterfactuals of freedom, C, provided that it is possible for an essence to have C and C is sharable. (I leave this qualification tacit from here on out.) Here's a natural question: how many essences have C? There are different ways to answer this question, ways that reveal incompatible overarching pictures of the distribution of counterfactuals of freedom to essences.

One way begins by acknowledging that it is difficult, indeed, practically impossible to say exactly how many essences have C, but what can be said is this: there is some world at which *no* essence has C, there is some world at which *some but not all* essences has C, and there is some world at which *every* essence has C. Indeed, for every permutation between none and every, there is some world at which that's how many essences have C. We can put the picture of the distribution of counterfactuals of freedom to essences on offer a bit more precisely as follows:

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7 Howard-Snyder and O'Leary-Hawthorne (1998: 8–13).

Weak Interworld Plenitude: For any combination of counterfactuals of freedom, C, and for any quantifier Q, there is some world W such that Q-many essences at W have C.

Worlds can differ in a lot of ways other than how many essences have C. Suppose that, at W, n essences have C. Might not there be another world, W′, such that, at W′, n essences also have C, but W′ differs from W in some other way? Indeed, if we countenance seriously the variety of ways in which worlds can differ independently of how many essences have C, we might naturally hypothesize that there are infinitely many worlds at which there are Q-many essences with C. That is,

Strong Interworld Plenitude: For any combination of counterfactuals of freedom, C, and for any quantifier Q, there are infinitely many worlds W such that Q-many essences at W have C.

Interworld Plenitude, whether weak or strong, is not the only answer to the question of how many essences have C. When for some combination of counterfactuals of freedom, C, we ask how many essences have it, we might wonder whether, for any difference with regard to counterfactuals of freedom that could hold between a pair of essences, there is at least one pair of essences at each world such that that difference holds between them. If we pursue this line of thought, a quite different answer to our question will come to mind, one that displays a plenitude of essences *at each and every* world rather than a plenitude of essences *across* worlds, as was the case with Interworld Plenitude. We can put this alternative picture of the distribution of counterfactuals of freedom to essences a bit more precisely as follows:

Weak Intraworld Plenitude: For any combination of counterfactuals of freedom, C, and for any world W, some essence at W has C.

(Weak Intraworld Plenitude was first introduced in Howard-Snyder and O'Leary-Hawthorne 1998, 13.) Of course, essences can differ in a lot of ways other than having C. Suppose that, at W, E has C. Might not there be another essence, E′, such that, at W, E′ also has C while differing from E in some other way? Indeed, if we countenance seriously the variety of ways in which essences can differ independently of C, whether qualitatively or haecceitistically, we may well hypothesize that there are infinitely many essences at each world that have C. That is,

Strong Intraworld Plenitude: For any combination of counterfactuals of freedom, C, and for any world W, infinitely many essences at W have C.

Interworld Plenitude and Intraworld Plenitude constitute incompatible overarching pictures of the distribution of counterfactuals of freedom to essences.[8] With these different pictures in mind, let us return to S and D:

S: Necessarily, some essence or other enjoys TWS.
D: Possibly, every essence suffers from TWD.

8 I owe the distinctions here to John Hawthorne.

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Notice that whether an essence enjoys TWS or whether it suffers from TWD depends on what combination of counterfactuals of freedom it has. If it has a combination that includes a counterfactual according to which its instantiation would go wrong in the relevant conditions, then it suffers from TWD; if it includes no such counterfactual, then it enjoys TWS. Notice two other things as well: first, if Intraworld Plenitude accurately represents the distribution of counterfactuals of freedom to essences, then S is true and D is false; second, if Interworld Plenitude accurately represents the distribution of counterfactuals of freedom to essences, then S is false and D is true.

And now an important question arises: which picture (if either) accurately represents the distribution of counterfactuals of freedom to essences? Each picture is internally consistent, and each is consistent with everything we know or reasonably believe. So which is it? I submit that none of us is in a position to answer that question. We are in no position to tell which picture (if either) is accurate. But in that case, we are in no position to tell whether S or D is true. And if we are in no position to tell whether S or D is true, then it is no more reasonable for us to believe D than S and, therefore, it is reasonable for us to refrain from believing D, in which case Plantinga's FWD fails.

Two Objections

Rowe and Plantinga beg to differ (Rowe 1998; Plantinga 2009). At any rate, they have said some things against S and in favor of D.

According to Rowe, we have good reason to think that S is false. The reason is this. Begin with a toy model: "suppose that there are only two creaturely essences, E1 & E2" (Rowe 1998, 118). Suppose further, as is no doubt true, that no essence has either TWS or TWD essentially. In that case, says Rowe, · (E1 suffers from TWD) and · (E2 suffers from TWD). He continues: if at every world, some essence or other enjoys TWS, then, in our toy model, it is necessary that, if E1 is TWD, E2 is not TWD. "But clearly such a conditional cannot be necessary. For if it were and E1 were to suffer from TWD, it would not be up to E2 whether it suffers from TWD." The idea is that E1+'s freely doing wrong in the relevant initial world segment cannot entail E2+'s freely doing right in the relevant initial world segment; for, by definition of TWD, it is up to E2+ in the relevant initial world segment whether E2 suffers from TWD. Therefore, given our toy model, · (E1 suffers from TWD & E2 suffers from TWD); moreover, since there are no other essences in the model, it follows that, on the model, it is possible that every essence suffers from TWD. Rowe continues:

> Now this may be all well and good. But what if it is not just two creaturely essences we are considering? What if there are many, perhaps infinitely many, essences we are considering? How can we be confident that · (every essence suffers from TWD)? (Rowe 1998, 119)

Good question. Here's Rowe's answer:

> no matter how many conjuncts of the form "Ex suffers from TWD" fall within the scope of the possibility operator, the addition of any number of other such conjuncts cannot make it the case that the resulting conjunction is not logically possible. That being so, we can conclude that · [Every (creaturely) essence suffers from TWD].

Rowe's argument here is this: suppose that there are infinitely many propositions of the form · (Ex suffers from TWD). Then, for infinitely many essences, · (E1 suffers from TWD & E2 suffers from TWD & E3 suffers from TWD & . . . & En suffers from TWD & . . .). Thus, · (Every (creaturely) essence suffers from TWD).

What should we make of this argument? Well, this much is true: given Intraworld Pleni- tude, the second inference is obviously invalid. That's because the possibility that infinitely many essences suffer from TWD (Rowe's premise) is compatible with Intraworld Plenitude, and Intraworld Plenitude entails that it is not possible that every creaturely essence suffers from TWD (the denial of Rowe's conclusion). Indeed, the strong version of Intraworld Plenitude entails both that infinitely many essences suffer from TWD and that infinitely many essences do not suffer from TWD. So, Rowe's second inference is valid only on the assumption that Intraworld Plenitude inaccurately represents the distribution of counter- factuals of freedom to essences. Rowe is not entitled to that assumption, however; he is no position to say that Intraworld Plenitude is inaccurate.

Plantinga argues against S in a similar fashion. He writes:

> Let {E} be the set of essences, and pick out any particular essence E^* you like. If (S) is true, then
>
> Necessarily, if none of the members of $\{\{E\}-E^*\}$ enjoy TWS, then E^* enjoys TWS.
>
> But this seems paradoxical. E^*, of course, doesn't *essentially* enjoy TWS; but then why should the fact that these other essences don't enjoy TWS entail that E^* does? What does their having or lacking that property have to do with E^*'s having or lacking it? (Plantinga 2009, 187–188)

From the point of view of Intraworld Plenitude (the strong version), nothing here is the least bit paradoxical since, from that point of view, {E} has infinitely many members that enjoy TWS, and so $\{\{E\}-E^*\}$ has infinitely members that enjoy TWS as well. So from the point of view of Intraworld Plenitude, the antecedent of the conditional that Plantinga asks us to consider is impossible, that is, it is impossible that "none of the members of $\{\{E\}-E^*\}$ enjoy TWS." There are different views about how to interpret conditionals with impossible antecedents and what truth-values to assign them. Whichever view you like best, use it here as you do elsewhere. No paradox in that; at least no paradox above and beyond the view you use. As for the questions Plantinga asks in an effort to induce an air of paradoxicality, note that, from the point of view of Intraworld Plenitude, the first question – "why should the fact that these other essences do not enjoy TWS entail that E^* does?" – employs a false presupposition, namely that it is a fact that these other essences do not enjoy TWS; and the second question – "What does their having or lacking that property have to do with E^*'s having or lacking it?" – is properly and unparadoxically answered by: nothing at all.

Plantinga (2009, 187) also adduces against S the thought that "There is no structural reason why at least one of the essences must enjoy TWS." Plantinga does not make plain what he means by a "structural reason," but it is clear that, from the point of view of Intraworld Plenitude, there's a plain old vanilla reason why at least one of the essences must enjoy TWS, namely this: whether an essence enjoys TWS depends on what combina- tion of counterfactuals of freedom it has, and for any combination of counterfactuals of freedom, C, and for any world W, infinitely many essences at W have C.

So far as I can see, Rowe's and Plantinga's reasons against S assume that Intraworld Plenitude inaccurately represents the distribution of counterfactuals of freedom to essences. Neither of them is entitled to that assumption, however.

Plantinga goes further, however. He claims not only to have provided reasons for denying S; he claims that "(S) has no intuitive support" and that "its denial (~S) . . . enjoys intuitive support." In defense of the first claim, he writes:

> True: it certainly seems *possible* that some essence enjoys TWS. Further, perhaps some essence actually has that property; but why think it's *necessary* that this be so? This proposition simply doesn't *seem* to be necessary. (Plantinga 2009, 188)

What should we make of these words? Four observations are pertinent.

First, from the point of view of Intraworld Plenitude, there is a perfectly good reason why it is necessary that some essence enjoys TWS.

Second, the claim that "the proposition that *some essence enjoys TWS* does not seem necessary" is ambiguous between (i) it is not the case that the proposition that *some essence enjoys TWS* seems necessary and (ii) it seems that the proposition that *some essence enjoys TWS* is not necessary. The placement of the negation operator matters. Since Plantinga is defending the claim that S *lacks* intuitive support, I take it that he means (i) and not (ii).

Third, when a charitable interpreter hears someone claim something of the form "it's not the case that p seems necessary," she will not hear "it's not the case that p seems necessary *to the citizens of the grand State of Washington*"; nor will she hear "it's not the case that p seems necessary *to the general public*." No, what she'll hear is this: "it's not the case that p seems necessary *to me*." I take it that when Plantinga claims that it is not the case that *some essence enjoys TWS* seems necessary, he is not attributing a lack of certain seeming states to the citizens of Washington, or the general public, or some such thing; rather, he's attributing a certain lack of a seeming state to himself: "it's not the case that the proposition that *some essence enjoys TWS* seems necessary *to me*."

Fourth, a claim of the form "it's not the case that *p* seems necessary to x" is primarily a claim about x. A claim of the form "*p* has no intuitive support" is a claim primarily about *p*; it attributes to p the lack of a certain property, or the logical complement of the property of enjoying intuitive support. Now, Plantinga claims that "(S) has no intuitive support." What he gives us is "it's not the case that *some essence enjoys TWS* seems necessary to me," that is, to Plantinga himself. Here we must exercise caution. An introductory logic student does not grasp the necessity of the corresponding conditional for *modus ponens*. "It doesn't seem necessary to me!" he exclaims with exasperation. Should we infer that *it* – the proposition that, *necessarily, if p and p only if q, then q* – lacks intuitive support? Hardly. The same goes for Plantinga. Fair enough: it is not the case that the proposition that *some essence enjoys TWS* seems necessary to him. But let us not get carried away. It hardly follows that S fails to enjoy intuitive support.

Now, despite what Plantinga has to say in defense of the claim that S fails to enjoy intuitive support, I expect that he is right. That is because I expect that nearly no one with competence to understand S would be the least bit intellectually attracted to it. So I concede Plantinga's first claim.

What about his second claim: "(~S) . . . itself enjoys intuitive support"? As with his first claim, we must exercise caution. It is one thing for a particular proposition to seem true *to you*; it is quite another for *it* to have a certain property, the property of enjoying intuitive

support. We meet a resident at the local psychiatric ward who claims to be Napoleon Bonaparte. No doubt it seems to him that the proposition that *he is Napoleon Bonaparte* is true. But do you really want to say that *that* proposition thereby enjoys intuitive support? Of course not. Likewise for Plantinga. No doubt it seems to him that the proposition that *possibly, no essence enjoys TWS* is true. But let us not jump to conclusions. In particular, let us not jump to the conclusion that *possibly, no essence enjoys TWS* thereby enjoys intuitive support.

Here is what Plantinga says on behalf of his claim that ~S enjoys intuitive support:

> Why couldn't it be that no essence enjoys this property? That wouldn't require, of course, that any essence suffer from TWD; it requires only that for each essence *E* there is a world *W* and [initial world segment T(*W*)] such that if [T(*W*)] were actual, *E*+ would have gone wrong on at least one occasion. More simply, what it requires is that for each essence *E* there is some set *S* of circumstances such that if *S* had been actual, *E*+ would have done something wrong. Doesn't that seem possible? (Plantinga 2009, 188)

I have two things to say about these words.

First, as for the initial question – Why could it not be that no essence enjoys TWS? – the answer from the point of view of Intraworld Plenitude is this: it could not be that *no* essence enjoys TWS because whether an essence enjoys TWS depends on what combination of counterfactuals of freedom it has, and for *any* combination of counterfactuals of freedom, C, and for *any* world W, at least *some* essence at W, perhaps even infinitely many, has C. Of course, I'm not suggesting that this answer is correct. I am merely pointing out that it is an answer to Plantinga's question. Perhaps a more important question than Plantinga's initial question is this: what reason does Plantinga, Rowe, or anyone else for that matter, have to presuppose that Intraworld Plenitude inaccurately represents the distribution of counterfactuals of freedom to essences?

Second, Plantinga reminds us that all it takes for it to be possible that no essence is TWS is for it to be possible that "for each essence *E* there is a [n *E*-perfect] world *W* and [initial world segment T(*W*)] such that if [T(*W*)] were actual, *E*+ would have gone wrong on at least one occasion." Then he asks: "Doesn't that seem possible?" Notice that Plantinga is not asking whether it seems possible that for *some* essence *E*, there is an *E*-perfect world *W* and initial world segment T(*W*) such that if T(*W*) were actual, *E*+ would have gone wrong at least once. Rather, he is asking whether it seems possible that for *each and every* essence *E*, there is an *E*-perfect world *W* and initial world segment T(*W*) such that if T(*W*) were actual, *E*+ would have gone wrong at least once. Moreover, he is *not* asking whether it is an epistemic possibility. That is, he is not asking whether *for all anyone one knows* – or, perhaps, whether for all you, his reader, knows – every essence is such that there is an *E*-perfect world *W* and initial world segment T(*W*) such that if T(*W*) were actual, *E*+ would have gone wrong at least once.[9] No, Plantinga is asking a question about how the counterfactuals of freedom might be distributed to individual essences. In particular, he is asking whether it seems that there is a possible world at which the following is true: for each and every essence *E*, there is some world *W* such that *E* contains the properties *is significantly*

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9 That sensible option was offered to him in Howard-Snyder and O'Leary-Hawthorne (1998, 14–18), but he rejected it.

free in W and *always does what is right in W*, and there is some initial world segment T(W) and some action A such that

(1) T(W) includes *E's being instantiated* and *E+'s being free with respect to A* and *A's being morally significant for E+*,

(2) T(W) is included in W but includes neither *E+'s performing A* nor *E+'s refraining from A*, and

(3) if T(W) were actual, E+ would have gone wrong on at least one occasion.

Well, each of us will have to answer Plantinga's question – "Doesn't that seem possible?" – for himself. For my own part, I can assure you that it is not the case that it seems to me that there is a world at which every single essence satisfies Plantinga's description. (Of course, neither is it the case that is seems to me that there is no such world; but that is beside the present point.)

The more important point here is this. Plantinga's bare appeal to intuition is a bit lagging behind the times. That's not to say that intuition *per se* is a bad thing. Rather, it is to say that at this point in the conversation we need some reason, *any reason at all*, to suppose that counterfactuals of freedom fall out in such a way that it is possible that no essence is TWS. For if Intraworld Plenitude accurately represents the modal terrain in this area, then it is necessary that some essence or other is TWS and its seeming to Plantinga that it is not necessary leads him to falsehood. But Plantinga has no good reason to suppose that Intraworld Plenitude is inaccurate. If he did, he would have told us about it. No, the fact is that, like the rest of us, he is completely in the dark about the matter. Consequently, like the rest of us, he should refrain from believing ~S on the basis of its seeming to him that it is possible that no essence enjoys TWS.

So much for Plantinga's case against S. What does he have to say on behalf of D? Forty years ago, he declared it "clearly" true and left it at that. He has a bit more to say now. Here it is in its entirety:

> When I think hard about (D) it seems to me to be true. Doesn't it seem possible that the counterfactuals of freedom should fall out in such a way that each essence E is such that for every E-perfect world, there is some initial segment of that world such that if that segment were actual (if God weakly actualized it) E would go wrong with respect to some action? What would prevent them from falling out that way? (D) does have intuitive support. And it isn't as if (D) is one of those peculiar propositions such that both they and their denials seem to have intuitive support:
>
> > (~D) Necessarily, some essences do not suffer from TWD
>
> does not have intuitive support. There seems no reason at all to think it must be the case that some essences do not display TWD.
>
> So I say (D) has intuitive support; it seems true (Plantinga 2009, 188).

Do these words constitute an advance over Plantinga's 1974 declaration that D is "clearly" true?

Unfortunately, they do not. For, first of all, nobody in the conversation ever suggested that "(D) is one of those peculiar propositions such that both they and their denials seem to have intuitive support." Second, we see twice more Plantinga's predilection to the "p

seems to me true; so, p has intuitive support" fallacy. Perhaps if he made a case for thinking that D seemed to be true to a representative sample of humanity (or even a representative sample of those competent to understand it), that would go some way toward supporting his claim that D has intuitive support. But, absent evidence like that, we have no reason at all to suppose that D enjoys intuitive support. Third, we see a new way to declare that D is "clearly" true, a way that deploys the currently fashionable jargon of seems-talk: "it seems to me to be true." No advance there. We already knew that. Finally, we are offered a question in an apparent effort to pump our intuitions: what would prevent the counterfactuals of freedom from falling out in such a way that, possibly, every essence suffers from TWD? But the answer to that question should be clear: Intraworld Plenitude. That is what would prevent the counterfactuals of freedom from falling out that way.

What we need at this point in the conversation is some good reason to favor Interworld Plenitude, or something functionally comparable with it, over Intraworld Plenitude. That would advance the conversation. But Plantinga gives us no such thing. Instead, he dolls up his 1974 line that D is "clearly" true in a chic new skirt: "D seems to me to be true." At best, that is a conversation stopper.

Further Reading

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