

The free will theodicy

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Abstract. The Free Will Theodicy (FWT) attempts to defeat the Argument from Evil by claiming that the suffering of the innocent (SOI) is justified by the existence of free will (FW). I argue against the FWT by demonstrating that there are at least three logically possible worlds, one without FW and two with it, such that, if given a choice, all conscious beings would act rationally in choosing to live in any of those three worlds rather than in the current world. This choice outcome undermines the FWT's contention that FW adequately justifies the quantity and severity of the SOI in this world.

I. INTRODUCTION

Briefly put, the Argument From Evil (AFE) states that an omnipotent, omniscient and omnibenevolent God, would have the power, knowledge and desire to prevent the suffering of the innocent (SOI). Yet the innocent suffer. Thus, the AFE concludes that there is no omnipotent, omniscient and omnibenevolent God.

Theists have responded to the AFE with theodicies which attempt to explain rationally why God permits or causes the innocent to suffer. The Free Will Theodicy (FWT), favoured by a number of prominent philosophic theists,¹ claims that, contrary to God's commands, humans misuse their free will (FW) and thereby cause the SOI known as 'moral evil'. The rest of the SOI which results from events such as accidents, diseases and natural disasters not caused by human choice is called 'natural evil'. One well-known philosophic theist, Alvin Plantinga, has even suggested that FW may also account for natural evil as the result of the misuse of the FW of fallen angels.²

A major difficulty for the FWT is to explain why God would give FW to some of his creatures in the first place, knowing that they would certainly, or at least very likely, misuse it to produce the great amount of SOI found

¹ See Richard Swinburne, *The Existence of God* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979), Chapter 11; also his article 'Natural Evil', *The American Philosophical Quarterly*, 15, no. 4 (October 1978), pp. 98–107. See also John Hick, *Evil and the God of Love*, rev. ed. (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1978), Parts 3 and 4. Therein he describes what has been called 'an Irenaean theodicy' which claims that God permits moral (and natural) evil in order to achieve certain salutary 'soul making' effects in humans. In so far as Hick's Irenaean theodicy holds that FW is instrumental in soul making, I take it to be a form of the FWT.

² Alvin Plantinga, *God, Freedom and Evil* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1977), p. 58. It should be noted that even prominent philosophic theists such as Richard Swinburne have acknowledged the ad hoc flavour and implausibility of Plantinga's conjecture. If Plantinga's fallen angel postulate is flawed, then, minus a plausible explanation for natural evil, the FWT would, at best, only account for moral evil.

in this world. FWT proponents respond that the SOI is, in effect, a regrettable but justified price that even God must accept in order to realize a greater good than could otherwise be realized in a world without FW, specifically, having free-choosing beings in the created order who can freely respond to God's invitation to stand in a relation of love, trust, and obedience to Him.³

Atheologians have disputed the FWT on a number of fronts.⁴ In this paper I shall argue against the FWT by demonstrating that there are at least three logically possible worlds, one without FW and two with it, such that, if given a choice, all conscious beings would act rationally in choosing to live in any of those three possible worlds rather than in the current world. These choices would undermine the FWT's contention that FW adequately justifies the quantity and severity of the SOI in this world. This, in turn, would parry the FWT's challenge to the AFE.

II. POSSIBLE WORLD DESCRIPTIONS

Consider the following descriptions of four possible worlds.

W₁ is the current world from the perspective of most proponents of the FWT. In **W₁** God gives humans contra-causal FW. When people exercise such FW, their choices are not causally determined by antecedent factors.⁵ In addition, in **W₁** the deity issues rules for proper human behaviour. If humans adequately follow those rules by making and acting on appropriate FW decisions, they will graduate after death to an existence of eternal exalted happiness (they will go to heaven). However, if humans use their FW to choose and act against the deity's rules for behaviour, they will be punished in a post-mortem state of eternal acute suffering (they will go to hell).

W₂ is similar to **W₁** but with the following three specifications: (i) no human beings have FW in their earthly existence; (ii) God so arranges things that no human beings knowingly or intentionally harm the innocent; and, (iii) after death all human beings go to heaven.

W₃ is similar to **W₂** except that all normal humans do have FW. However, God arranges the nomological details of **W₃** so that, although people may will anything, no willing results in harm to the innocent. In short, people

³ See John Hick, *Evil and the God of Love*, Parts 3 and 4.

⁴ See Antony Flew, 'Divine Omnipotence and Human Freedom,' in *New Essays in Philosophical Theology*, Antony Flew and Alasdair MacIntyre, eds. (New York: Macmillan, 1955); Keith M. Parsons, *God And The Burden Of Proof* (Buffalo, N. Y.: Prometheus Books, 1989), pp. 113–25; J. L. Mackie, 'Evil and Omnipotence', in Nelson Pike, *God and Evil*, ed. Nelson Pike (Englewood Cliffs, N. J.: Prentice-Hall, 1964), pp. 46–60; J. L. Mackie, *The Miracle of Theism* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982), Chapter 9; Michael Martin, *Atheism A Philosophical Justification* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1990), Chapter 15.

⁵ See Alvin Plantinga, *God, Freedom and Evil*, p. 30. I need not enter into the contentious dispute between FW compatibilists and libertarians about the cogency and truth of contra-causal FW. For the sake of argument I grant the FWT's required libertarian interpretation. Subsequent references to free will will be to contra-causal free will.

existing in W_3 could not cause moral evil. If one holds that an intention to harm, even without the possibility of realizing what is intended, constitutes moral evil, then one could say that there would be moral evil in W_3 , but only of a sort we may call non-harmful. In any event, such intentions would be quite rare, given that people would understand that realizing intended harm would not be possible in W_3 . This would be similar to the situation in W_1 where, for example, people may will to draw a round square but virtually none do because they realize the futility of the enterprise.

W_4 is similar to W_1 , except that each normal human being has a ‘morally enlightened intellect’ by means of which the correct moral principles and their proper application are as self-evident as are the basic principles of logic (such as Identity, Excluded Middle, and Non-Contradiction) and their proper application.⁶

III. THE CHOICE OF WORLDS

Consider a thought experiment in which a hypothetical human being, P , has three decisions to make, to wit, whether to exist in:

- (1) W_1 or W_2
- (2) W_1 or W_3
- (3) W_1 or W_4 .

In all three choice situations assume that P is rational and has interests, although he does not know what those interests are. In short, think of P as choosing under a Rawlsian ‘Veil of Ignorance’.⁷ He knows that in all four worlds he will have an unspecified life span on earth during which he will experience an unknown mix of suffering and happiness, and will eventually die. Finally, P has no knowledge of the probabilities of whether heaven or hell will be his post-mortem fate in W_1 and in W_4 .

I shall attempt to show that in all three choice situations it would be rational for P to reject existence in W_1 , or, in other words, to prefer existence in W_2 rather than W_1 , W_3 rather than W_1 , and W_4 rather than W_1 . I shall then transform these preferences into a challenge of the FWT in two ways. First, P ’s preference for W_2 over W_1 will show that there is at least one possible world (W_2) which invalidates the FWT’s claim that FW has such value that it justifies the deity’s causing or permitting the acute and extensive SOI in this world (W_1). Second, P ’s preferences for W_3 and W_4 over W_1 will show that there are at least two possible worlds (W_3 and W_4) in which

⁶ Some forms of petitionary prayer in which an orant asks God to help the orant succeed in a difficult task such as taking a test could be a precedent for the idea of God enlightening intellects. For, it must be supposed that the orant is asking God to enlighten her (her intellect) in such a way that she may then freely choose, say, correct choice ‘A’ rather than incorrect choice ‘B’.

⁷ See John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1971), pp. 136–42.

humans have FW but in which there would be significantly less moral evil than in W_1 . This would undermine the FWT's implicit claim that W_1 is the best world with respect to FW that God could have actualized for the number of free moral agents it contains. In short, my critique of the FWT comes down to the claim that it is difficult to understand how W_1 can somehow be more valuable than alternative worlds, $W_2/W_3/W_4$, if all value sensitive beings that could exist either in W_1 or $W_2/W_3/W_4$ would act rationally in preferring to exist in the latter three.

I stipulate that the rational decision criterion for P in each of these three choice situations is to choose existence in the world which would more likely maximize his happiness.⁸ Supporters of the FWT may counter that this criterion is too narrow in its consequentialist emphasis on maximizing happiness. But those supporters already accept the criterion in maintaining that God, Himself, acts rationally in deciding to actualize W_1 because the value associated with having creatures with FW in that world outweighs the harm associated with its misuse. On the other hand, if FWT proponents somehow deny that God operates under this sort of consequentialist criterion, then the meaning of 'more valuable' at the heart of the FWT's view that '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'⁹ becomes exceedingly opaque.

I turn now to an examination of the most salient utility advantages and disadvantages relevant to P's choice of whether to exist in W_1 or W_2 . This will be followed by an analysis of P's other two choices, W_1 versus W_3 and W_1 versus W_4 .

IV. ADVANTAGES AND DISADVANTAGES OF W_1 AND W_2

(1) Two major advantages for P in W_2 are that he is guaranteed that his post-mortem existence will not involve eternal suffering but will consist of eternal sublime happiness. Neither of these can be guaranteed in W_1 since they are always contingent on the FW decisions and actions of P in that world.

(2) Another advantage for P in W_2 is that he would not suffer from moral evil. This is very unlikely to be the case in W_1 where there is abundant and acute moral evil.

(3) On the other hand, one could argue that in W_1 , but not W_2 , P would enjoy a set of empowerment advantages including the ability freely to direct his destiny and to acquire a sense of individuality and self-esteem stemming from his freely exercised creativity and effort. P could also freely develop

⁸ Happiness or utility here need not be construed merely as physical pleasure, but may include such elements as relationships of intimacy, aesthetic appreciation, episodes of creativity and achievement, possession of certain kinds of knowledge and so forth.

⁹ See Alvin Plantinga, *God, Freedom and Evil*, p. 30.

positive character traits such as heroism, courage, dedication, and compassion. P's FW in W_1 would also give him the right to take justifiable credit for his accomplishments and would accord him the dignity of free personhood claimable by beings with FW. In contrast, it could be said that, lacking FW in W_2 , P would be reduced to the status of a puppet or an automaton in that world.

However, whatever advantages W_1 may have here can be attenuated in three ways. First, there is always a potential downside to P's having FW in W_1 . He could end up freely directing his destiny to 'the agony of defeat', that is, to failure, frustration and suffering, as well as to the development of moral vices and their often concomitant corrosive psychological states such as despair, remorse, shame and guilt.

Second, although P has FW in W_1 and not in W_2 , we may stipulate that it could seem to him in W_2 that he has FW. This is not an unreasonable specification given that most people in our world are already quite certain that they have FW, even though proof of its existence is problematic. Under this stipulation P would sense no difference between W_1 and W_2 with regard to experiencing FW. On the other hand, if one holds that P would actually be in a better condition if he were to correctly believe that he lacks FW in W_2 , rather than being under the illusion that he has it, then we may specify that P would have the former non-illusory belief instead.

Third, we need not hold that P has *no* FW in W_2 , but only that he has limited FW. That is, we may designate that P would lack FW during his earthly existence, but would have it as part of the bundle of goods God gives to all humans in the heavenly afterlife.

V. THE OUTCOME OF P'S CHOICE BETWEEN W_1 AND W_2

Although in W_2 P would have FW only in the afterlife, whereas in W_1 he would have it in both his earthly and afterlife, this advantage would be mitigated by the fact that P would not know that he lacks FW in W_2 and by the fact that the advantage would become as vanishingly small as the ratio of P's finite earthly existence to his unending afterlife existence. Of course, this invites a similar response from the FWT proponent that the disadvantage of W_1 with respect to W_2 in terms of suffering from moral evil could also be said to become as vanishingly small as the difference between an everlasting existence and an everlasting existence plus x years of earthly tenure. This apparent parity of preferability of the two worlds to P can be resolved in favor of W_2 over W_1 by noting that only the former guarantees that P will not experience earthly moral evil or the eternal post-mortem suffering of hell, and will experience the eternal post-mortem ecstasy of heaven.

Now let us turn to P's second choice, that between W_1 and W_3 .

VI. ADVANTAGES AND DISADVANTAGES OF W_1 AND W_3

(1) In W_3 , as in W_2 , P would suffer no harmful moral evil and would still be guaranteed that he would avoid the eternal torments of hell and attain the eternal ecstasies of heaven.

(2) P's ability to make many free choices in W_3 would take much of the sting out of the charge that, because God makes it impossible for him to inflict harmful moral evil in W_3 , he would still be, in effect, a programmed robot in that world. After all, *some* restrictions on what FW can effect must exist in all possible worlds due to the logical and physical laws operating in those worlds. For example, in this world one cannot draw a round square, or travel faster than the speed of light, despite what one may will. FWT partisans accept such restrictions on behaviour without thinking that FW has thereby been compromised, or that humans have been reduced to marionettes or automata. Thus, there is no reason why P could not use his FW to live a reasonably satisfying life in W_3 even though God arranges the natural laws of that world to prevent the commission of harmful moral evil.

(3) There would be no reason in principle why in W_3 P could not freely develop many of the positive character traits he could in W_1 . Keep in mind that there would still be natural evils in W_3 to which P may freely respond or not in a supererogatory manner. In addition, W_3 would present various challenges to the satisfaction of P's desires that could only be overcome by the development and free exercise of various positive character traits such as sagacity, creativity, perseverance, self-control, humour, insight, affection, autonomy and courage.

(4) W_1 would still have what FWT advocates might claim is the comparative advantage of affording P existence in a world where he would have a greater range of attainable decisions; that is, in W_1 he could commit or refrain from committing moral evil. As a result, if he were to refrain from committing moral evil in W_1 , he could take justified credit for that restraint—a credit which would be impossible in W_3 .

On the other hand, that impossibility is more than balanced in W_3 by the absence of all harmful moral evil in that world. In W_3 the goal of protecting the innocent from harmful moral evil is perfectly realized by the divinely determined structure of that world, whereas in W_1 it is only imperfectly addressed by the less than universal restraint of individual moral agents. If P is tortured or worse in W_1 , he is not much comforted by the response that at least in W_1 his torturer had the opportunity to demonstrate her moral restraint.

Finally, although P could not take justifiable credit for moral restraint in W_3 , he can still freely attempt to achieve a wide range of other goals for which he could take justifiable credit, and, in the process, establish and

enhance his dignity of free personhood. Such dignity is not necessarily tied to the ability to harm the innocent.

VII. THE OUTCOME OF P'S CHOICE BETWEEN W₁ AND W₃

For the same reasons that W₂ was rationally preferable to W₁ in terms of P's expected utility, W₃ would likewise be preferable to W₁ for P. W₃ would guarantee that P would not experience earthly harmful moral evil or the eternal post-mortem suffering of hell, and that he would experience the eternal post-mortem rapture of heaven. In addition, W₃ would give P an autonomy comparable in most respects to what he would have in W₁.

Finally, let us now consider P's choice between W₁ and W₄.

VIII. ADVANTAGES AND DISADVANTAGES OF W₁ AND W₄

(1) W₄ would have the simple but telling advantage of containing less moral evil than W₁ due to the condition which distinguishes it from W₁, specifically, the existence of a morally enlightened intellect by means of which the correct moral principles and their proper application are as self-evident as the basic principles of logic and their proper application. There are two major obstacles to living a morally exemplary life. First, one must know what actions are morally right and wrong and, second, one must have the strength of will to act accordingly. A morally enlightened intellect would eliminate the first obstacle and that, in turn, would make overcoming the second at least somewhat easier. Although obviously not a panacea for the elimination of all moral evil, morally enlightened intellects would surely result in some, and perhaps many, people freely refraining from committing moral evils that they would otherwise commit without an enlightened intellect, given that enlightened intellects would very clearly reveal immoral behaviour as such in a way that W₁ intellects do not always do. The result would be a reduced amount of SOI in W₄ compared to W₁.

For example, consider such morally disputed issues as abortion, euthanasia, sexual behaviour, or economic justice. These give rise to significant disagreement even among conscientious human moral agents. If a theistic God exists, then there are morally correct solutions to such issues. Let us say that the correct moral position on the issue of economic justice is X. It seems unobjectionable to say that many people (although not necessarily all) who endorse not-X do so because they firmly and sincerely, albeit incorrectly, believe that not-X is morally correct. It seems equally unobjectionable to hold that many such people (although not necessarily all), being morally conscientious, would freely endorse X, if they knew it to be morally correct. In W₄ they would know this, and, therefore, we may reasonably conclude that many people in W₁ who hold and act on incorrect moral beliefs would

not likely do so in W_4 . If so, and if morality is associated with the defence of the innocent in some fashion, then a distinct advantage of W_4 over W_1 would be that there would be less harm to the innocent due to incorrect moral perceptions in W_4 than W_1 .

(2) There would be no significant disadvantages for P in choosing to exist in W_4 rather than W_1 , nor any evident advantages for P to choose to exist in W_1 rather than W_4 .

IX. THE OUTCOME OF P 'S CHOICE BETWEEN W_1 AND W_4

Given that there are substantial felicitic advantages and no apparent disadvantages for P 's existing in W_4 rather than W_1 , and that there are felicitic disadvantages with no compensating advantages for P 's existing in W_1 rather than W_4 , I conclude that W_4 would be the clear rational preference for P .

X. RAMIFICATIONS AND SIGNIFICANCE OF P 'S CHOICE OUTCOMES

The following four points associated with P 's three choice outcomes are the foundation for my challenge to the FWT.

(1) Although the choice of worlds was cast as the choice of individual, P , it should be clear that P is in fact everyone.¹⁰ Thus, the broadest interpretation of P 's choices of worlds is that *all* humans would act rationally in accepting existence in W_2 , W_3 or W_4 in preference to W_1 .

(2) Existing in W_2 , W_3 or W_4 rather than W_1 would also be in the better interest of all conscious non-human beings, since in W_2 , W_3 or W_4 they would either be exempt (W_2 , W_3), or stand a diminished chance of suffering (W_4), from moral evil. This is not an insignificant concern if you happen to be, for example, a mink or a veal calf in certain circumstances.

(3) As far as the non-divine supernatural order is concerned, assuming angels exist, we may suppose that, being exceedingly good, they would opt to inhabit the world which would contain the least amount of suffering and the greatest amount of happiness for its inhabitants. In terms of P 's options, this means they too would choose W_2 , W_3 and W_4 over W_1 .

Assuming that Satan and the fallen angels exist, they would presumably prefer to exist in W_1 rather than W_2 , W_3 or W_4 because of W_1 's greater earthly suffering and afterlife damnation. However, given their penchant for malevolence, their choice of W_1 could be taken as back-handed support for the rational preferability of W_2 , W_3 and W_4 over W_1 for morally sensitive beings.

(4) Finally, God would prefer W_2 , W_3 or W_4 to W_1 for two related reasons. (i) His creatures would rather inhabit W_2 , W_3 or W_4 rather than

¹⁰ Refer again to Rawls's description of people in the Original Position choosing behind the Veil of Ignorance in *A Theory of Justice*, Chapter III, §24.

W_1 , and, being omnibenevolent, God would want to grant their non-immoral wishes; and (ii) an omnibenevolent deity would not want to actualize a world of lesser happiness and more suffering for its inhabitants (W_1) than others (W_2, W_3, W_4) He could actualize instead.

The conclusion I draw from points 1–4 is that the actualization of W_1 in preference to W_2, W_3 or W_4 would not be the choice, nor in the better interest, of any individual or group except the supernatural malevolents. I conclude, therefore, that there are no unique advantages that FW brings to W_1 sufficient to justify an omnibenevolent God actualizing it and the vast amount of moral SOI it contains in preference to W_2, W_3 or W_4 . If so, then FW does not serve the exculpatory function for the SOI that the FWT requires. Hence, the FWT fails.

XI. OBJECTIONS AND RESPONSES

Objection (1)

The argument developed against the FWT assumes that all humans are either eternally rewarded or punished by God in the afterlife. But this view is not unanimously held within monotheism. Thus, even if the argument against the FWT were sound, its conclusion would only apply to those traditions which accept the eternal reward/punishment afterlife theology.

Response

First, the limitations on the applicability of the argument's conclusion are small since some variety of the eternal reward/punishment afterlife theology is, in fact, orthodox in most versions of monotheism, especially the two most populous and influential, Christianity and Islam.

Second, if W_1^*, W_2^*, W_3^* and W_4^* are worlds like W_1, W_2, W_3 and W_4 respectively except that in the * worlds there is no eternal reward or punishment in an afterlife, a strong case against the FWT still remains. It would be strongest in terms of the preferabilities of W_4^* over W_1^* and W_3^* over W_1^* , but could also be made even in terms of the preferability of W_2^* over W_1^* . The reasons for these preferabilities would be the same as those given earlier for the preferability of W_4 over W_1, W_3 over W_1 , and W_2 over W_1 , minus any references to post-mortem rewards or punishments.

Objection (2)

The argument claiming P's preference for W_2 over W_1 assumes that P acts more rationally in valuing happiness over freedom, but, in fact, many people have thought themselves quite rational in valuing freedom as a part of, or even as more important than, happiness.

Response

Granting that freedom may be considered intrinsically good would not alter the rational preferability of W_2 over W_1 , for, as I indicated above, if freedom is so intrinsically valuable, then we may assume that it would be part of heavenly satisfactions. If so, the advantage of W_1 over W_2 in terms of the possession of freedom would become as vanishingly small as the difference between an everlasting existence and an everlasting existence plus x years of earthly tenure.

Second, P would know that if he were to choose to exist in W_1 he may turn out to be one of the many inhabitants of that world who never get to exercise their FW at all or in any significant sense. Among these would be prenatals, neonatals, small children who die as such, as well as certain mentally handicapped people.

Third, all the other advantages given above for W_2 (no moral evil or eternal torment, the guarantee of eternal sublime happiness, P 's inability to experience his lack of FW) would still obtain. These utilities would outweigh W_1 's very small advantage of earthly FW and would still confirm W_2 as the clear rational preference for P . Incidentally, P 's choices involving W_3 versus W_1 and W_4 versus W_1 would be unaffected by this objection.

Objection (3)

In W_2 if P were not to have FW in his earthly existence, but be granted it in his post-mortem existence, then there would be serious doubt that the earthly-existing P and the post-mortem P would be the same person.

Response

Philosophers have considered a number of criteria for delineating personal identity, for example, bodily continuity, psychological continuity (especially memory), and spiritual distinctiveness (presence of an immortal soul). For proponents of the FWT, the latter criterion would seem to be most appealing. Under this criterion P 's identity is established by God's action of infusing a unique immortal soul into P at the moment of conception or at some point shortly thereafter. Under this spiritual criterion of identity P is the same being (person) in his pre- and post-mortem existence. His identity determination would be the same as that which holds for prenatals, babies, young children, and the severely mentally handicapped who die as such. That is, just as the latter are considered to be the same beings (persons) before and after death because of their immortal souls, so also would P . What we should want to say about P and the others, and what most theists do say, is not that their identities change after death, but, rather, that their capacities for FW change.

Objection (4)

Even if W_1 is not more preferable than W_2 to P , it is to God because in W_1 , but not W_2 , people can freely respond to God's invitation (GI) to stand in a relation of love, trust, and obedience to Him. The value that God places on such a free response to GI outweighs other considerations and fully explains why God actualized W_1 .

Response

Although W_2 people cannot freely respond to GI in their earthly existence because they lack FW there, many people in W_1 (prenatals, neonatals, young children and mentally impaired who die as such) also cannot freely respond to GI. Their inability to respond to GI is apparently not so important to God that it sullies them in His eyes nor discounts their heavenly enjoyment. Furthermore, what responses there are in W_1 are less than pristine since they are heavily influenced by the reward of heaven and the threat of hell. What is more, W_2 people, by stipulation, have FW in their heavenly existence and could, therefore, freely respond to GI there.¹¹ So with respect to GI W_1 's advantage over W_2 in effect reduces to the fact that *some* W_1 people will have the opportunity to make technically free, although heavily coerced, responses to GI which W_2 people would not be able to make in their earthly existence, although they could make them in their afterlife. I submit that this advantage is insufficient, especially when compared to the major W_2 advantages for all conscious beings described above, to adequately support the claim that an omnipotent, omnibenevolent creator would actualize W_1 in preference to W_2 .

Nevertheless, for the sake of argument, assume that my response so far to the objection is not probative. There are at least two other possible worlds, W_3 and W_4 , associated with the present critique of the FWT, which would still be preferable to W_1 from the perspective of the potential inhabitants, and which would also be indistinguishable from W_1 with respect to the inhabitants' ability to respond to GI.

I conclude, therefore, that the objection that God actualized W_1 because the ability to freely respond to GI has insuperable value and can only be realized in W_1 is not convincing.

Objection (5)

Without FW in W_2 or the ability to harm the innocent in W_3 , W_2 and W_3 would be worlds without moral evil, which in turn would make them worlds

¹¹ W_1 and W_2 people have FW in the heavenly afterlife and presumably would overwhelmingly accept GI and continue to endorse it indefinitely there. Given this, it may be asked why an omnipotent and omnibenevolent God would not have arranged earthly conditions to elicit the same sort of overwhelming free acceptance of GI that He receives from those in the heavenly afterlife.

without respondent moral goodness. But God may so value moral goodness as to make W_1 preferable to W_2 and W_3 .

Response

First, as earlier indicated, W_3 need not be a world with no moral goodness, since there would still be the possibility of free supererogatory choices and actions.

Second, moral goodness functions more appropriately as an instrumental rather than an intrinsic good. Its principal value is to advance happiness and alleviate suffering, especially of the innocent. The standards of behaviour associated with moral goodness are designed to enhance prospects for survival and prosperity in a world of limited scarcity in which there is inevitable competition and conflict among people for desired goods. Thus, there would be less moral goodness in W_2 and W_3 than in W_1 for the very good reason that there would be less need for moral goodness, given that these two worlds lack moral evil. The tradeoff would be quite tolerable, as any soup kitchen attendant, for example, would readily confirm. *Ceteris paribus*, if moral goodness were trump in terms of what is preferable, then, contrary to reason, God would have to prefer genocide over peace and W_1 over W_2 , W_3 and W_4 because genocide and W_1 contain more moral evil and, therefore, greater opportunity for respondent moral goodness than their alternatives.¹² But the Judeo-Christian-Islamic worldviews, for example, have never held that idyllic states such as the Garden of Eden or heaven are less preferable in God's eyes than, say, a concentration camp or a sweat shop simply because the former states, with no moral evil, afford less opportunity for moral goodness than the latter exploitive states.

Objection (6)

The analysis emphasized that P would not *experience* the difference between having freedom in W_1 and lacking it in W_2 . However, even if that were true, it would still not belie the fact that he *has* freedom in W_1 and not in W_2 . In short, the appearance is not the reality.

Response

True, but the point of the analysis was to underscore the fact that P 's happiness in W_2 would be unaffected by his mistaken view. Moreover, even if all P 's mistaken beliefs are corrected in heaven, the exalted nature of his heavenly bliss would insulate him from any negative utility repercussions.

¹² Remarkably, this seems to be the view of at least one contemporary Christian apologist. See Philip E. Dion, 'Does God Will It', *The Priest*, March 1978: 19. 'As St. Augustine said, "There would be no martyrs if there were no tyrannical persecutions." Hence it is that by the wickedness He *permits* in some men, God stimulates others to goodness and virtue and sanctity. For example, God willed to permit the evil of guilt in Hitler and so many Nazis and communists [?] who ran the concentration camps in World War II.... Because of that suffering, many of them [victims] are saints before the throne of God today who would not be there had God not permitted the evil will and sin of their persecutors.'

Objection (7)

The specification that after death all human beings will go to heaven in W_2 and W_3 does not comport with the behaviour of a just God. Justice in this situation requires that humans should merit their post-mortem rewards from God by freely doing good and refraining from harming the innocent. They should not simply have eternal happiness given to them gratuitously.

Response

First, within the two most influential monotheistic traditions, Christianity and Islam, there are well-known views which hold that humans do not and, in fact, cannot earn their eternal rewards or punishments, but that these are predestined by God and are not directly connected with one's earthly behaviour.¹³

Second, most FWT proponents who eschew divine predestination do not believe it is unjust for God to exempt some (prenatals, neonatals and young children who die as such in W_1) from hell and to grant them heaven, even though they lacked the ability to freely do good or refrain from harming the innocent during their earthly existence. By parity of reasoning, it would not be unjust for God to exempt P and other humans from hell and to grant them heaven in W_2 and W_3 even though they too do not have the ability to harm the innocent.

Objection (8)

In W_3 it would be difficult to arrange matters so that the innocent would be kept from suffering moral evil while still preserving the nomological coherence of that world. For example, it may require that the hammer I use to hit a nail into the wall become soft and ineffective when I want to use it to inflict a blow on an innocent person.

Response

Indeed it may seem to us to be difficult for God to so arrange the nomological details. However, the present argument only requires that it be logically possible to actualize W_3 . Nothing in the objection shows that W_3 is not logically possible. A world actualizer who is the most perfect being possible could presumably work out the necessary details. For example, God may arrange matters so that the hammer would become ineffectual as described in the objection if used to harm the innocent, or He could arrange some other method to obviate harm, perhaps bad aim, sufficient warning, an inability to complete the swing of the hammer etc. In fact, arranging all this in W_3 should not be very complicated, since, as was mentioned earlier, the

¹³ This can be read in various passages of the Koran and is characteristic of the Protestant Christian tradition traceable to Luther and Calvin. Those theists advocating such views would not seem to be in a strong position to appeal to the FWT.

inability to harm the innocent would be an easily recognized law of W_3 which most W_3 people would not waste effort trying vainly to thwart; just as, for example, in this world few, if any, people try to poison others by splashing water on them.

Objection (9)

Some theistic philosophers, notably Alvin Plantinga, eschew the FWT and instead rely on what Plantinga calls a Free Will Defence which holds that the atheologian cannot deductively demonstrate that the existence of God and the existence of evil are inconsistent.¹⁴ According to the Free Will Defence, one cannot logically rule out that God might have sufficient reasons for preferring W_1 over W_2 , W_3 and W_4 that the current analysis has simply overlooked. So the conclusion about the preferability of the latter three worlds over W_1 does not, in fact, deductively demonstrate the FWT fails.

Response

Even if the argument establishing the preferability of W_2 , W_3 , and W_4 over W_1 does not deductively demonstrate that the FWT fails, it does claim to make a good inductive case. The FWT critic has put an atheological argument on the table. If philosophical dialogue on this issue is to progress, then it seems incumbent upon the theist to respond by explaining why it is reasonable to reject the conclusion of that argument, and why it is reasonable to affirm both the existence of the theistic God and the quantity and quality of evil found in this world. It is not sufficient for the theist to respond by simply pointing out that it is logically possible that the critic's conclusion could be false. The latter is a necessary, but not a sufficient, condition for the reasonableness of believing that the critic's conclusion is false. If it were sufficient, then, by parity of reasoning, it would also be reasonable to reject, for example, the conclusions of arguments supporting the major principles of modern science such as those involving evolution, relativity, quantum mechanics, and genetic biochemistry, since it is logically possible that they, too, could be false.

XII. CONCLUSION

If the argument developed here is probative, then the FWT does not solve the problem of the SOI in a world such as ours created and sustained by an omnipotent, omniscient, omnibenevolent God who metes out eternal post-mortem rewards and punishments to his free-choosing creatures.¹⁵

¹⁴ Alvin Plantinga, *God, Freedom and Evil*, pp. 7–59.

¹⁵ In fact, if my rejoinder to Objection 1 is accepted, the FWT also does not solve the problem of the SOI even in a world created and sustained by an omnipotent, omniscient, omnibenevolent God who does *not* mete out eternal post-mortem rewards and punishments to his free-choosing creatures.