God and counterpossibles

RICHARD BRIAN DAVIS

Faculty of Philosophy, Tyndale University College, Toronto, Canada, M2M 4B3

Abstract: **In this paper I critically examine Brian Leftow's attempt to construct a theistic semantics for counterpossibles, one that can be used to make sense of the fact that propositions, which exist necessarily, nevertheless depend on God as their cause. I argue that the impressive theoretical framework erected by Leftow cannot guarantee an asymmetrical dependence of propositions on God, and ultimately leads to a semantic collapse in which every counterpossible comes out false. I end by defending an alternative account of God and propositions – what I call 'theistic existentialism'. It is shown how this account underwrites a semantics for counterpossibles that conveniently avoids the problems attending Leftow's theory.**

Introduction

According to contemporary philosophical lore, counterpossibles – that is, counterfactual conditionals with impossible antecedents – are one and all trivially true. Thus saith the canonical Lewis-Stalnaker semantics for these unusual items. But consider the following pair of claims:

(1)   If God were to cease existing, the world would not outlive Him.
(2)   If God were to cease existing, the world would outlive Him.

If classical theism is true, then both (1) and (2) are counterpossibles. For the classical theist, God's existence isn't a matter of contingent happenstance. On the contrary, God is a necessary being; His non-existence is impossible, and thus the antecedents of (1) and (2) are necessarily false. However, while there will no doubt be widespread agreement that (1) is true, I am quite confident that most theists will resist paying the same compliment to (2). And the reason perhaps is not hard to find. As J. N. Findlay – certainly no friend of theism – notes: 'We can't help feeling that the worthy object of our worship [i.e. God] can never be a thing that merely *happens* to exist, nor one on which all other objects merely *happen* to depend. … the existence of other things [must] be unthinkable without him.'[1] To dress things up in modal language: if God – the greatest possible being, the being

most deserving of our worship – really does exist, He exists of necessity; and everything else is essentially dependent upon God for its existence. Call this Findlay's thesis. If true, this thesis makes it very plausible to suppose that (1) 'reflects the way things are', but (2) is just plain 'paradoxical'.[2] As Findlay says, the world is 'unthinkable without Him'. In the presence of classical theism, therefore, it is at least sensible (maybe even desirable) to partition the counter-possible terrain, recognizing that some counterpossibles are non-trivially true (e.g. (1)) while others are non-trivially false (e.g. (2)).

Still, what if, among these 'other objects', we should happen to find necessary non-divine beings – such things as propositions, relations, properties, and the like – the so-called Platonic horde? What then? Material objects, of course, are deplorably contingent, so it's not terribly difficult to entertain the idea of their being dependent. But don't things go differently for necessary beings? They cannot fail to exist; presumably then, they would exist regardless of the circumstances. Hence, letting p stand for any proposition, isn't it the case that

> (3)   If God were to cease existing, then p would not exist,

is false (since p would have existed *in any case*), and,

> (4)   If God were to cease existing, then p would still exist,

is true (since by hypothesis p cannot not exist)? Well, if so, then Findlay's thesis isn't universally valid. For these 'other objects' we are presently considering seem to enjoy an independent existence; and this fact about them surely flouts the divine sovereignty.

It seems to me, therefore, that what the classical theist may want is some principled basis for assigning non-trivial truth to (1) and (3), and non-trivial falsity to (2) and (4). What we need, perhaps, is a theistic semantics for counterpossibles. Fortunately, Brian Leftow has a well-developed proposal on offer here.[3] Leftow's semantics is grounded in the fact that when 'a conditional's antecedent involves God's not existing, special rules apply in virtue of God's special relation to propositions'.[4] In what follows, I examine these 'special rules' in some detail. I argue that the theoretical framework Leftow erects for presenting his rules is fraught with considerable difficulty. In particular, it cannot be put to the task of showing that propositions are asymmetrically dependent on God, and it ultimately leads to a semantic collapse in which every counterpossible comes out false. I end with some suggestions for any future theistic account of counterpossibles.

The 'null-world' semantics

According to Leibniz, the 'essences or possibles' depend on the ideas in God's understanding in such a way that if God did not exist, then 'not only would nothing exist, but also nothing would be possible'.[5] Leftow sees in this remark the

clue to the sense in which propositions (though necessary) can be said to causally depend on God. To make this sense explicit, he advances a rather novel account of the nature of possible worlds. The details go roughly as follows.

Leftow is a self-professed actualist; he believes that 'the *actual cosmos* contains all there is, including all abstract entities'.[6] Here 'the actual cosmos' refers to the entire set of concrete and abstract objects. If we let C be that set, then actualism is the view that everything there is is a member of C. Now among C's members are worlds – sets of atomic propositions. A 'non-null world' is a maximal set of atomic propositions: a set that includes, for every atomic proposition p, either p or its denial. A 'possible world' is a non-null world whose members are individually and jointly capable of being true. Naturally, if a world is not possible, it is impossible. Impossible worlds, however, come in two varieties. An 'impossible non-null world' is a non-null world for which there is at least one atomic proposition q, such that both q and its denial are included in that world. This doesn't preclude maximality, says Leftow, since a world W could be perfectly consistent with respect to every proposition it included except for, say, a single proposition q. If W included q, and W also included $\sim q$, then of course it would include q or $\sim q$; in which case W would be a set of propositions that was both maximal and inconsistent.

Now it is important to distinguish worlds of this sort from what Leftow calls the 'null world' – that is, the null set of propositions. These are wholly distinct: 'Any impossibility except for God's non-existence, including the non-existence of necessary beings other than God, occurs in some set of inconsistent worlds. But God's non-existence occurs only in the null world. Any world containing God's non-existence is ipso facto identical with the null world.'[7] For Leftow, then, *there is* such a thing as the null world – call it $\varnothing_w$. Presumably, $\varnothing_w$, like any other set, is one of the many abstract members of C – the actual cosmos, which, we may suppose, contains only existing things. But the null world is unique among impossible worlds; for it alone contains God's non-existence, the remaining impossible worlds being of the inconsistent non-null variety. The question at once arises: If $\varnothing_w$ *contains* God's non-existence would it not also have to include the proposition that God does not exist? It seems that it would. But not so, says Leftow. On the contrary,

> That God's non-existence occurs in the null world does not entail that the proposition 'God does not exist' exists in the null world. It does not exist there. In the null world, no propositions exist, and so none are true (or false). God's non-existence is a logical 'black hole', sucking all the propositions of a world into itself.[8]

Here we must be careful not to confuse $\varnothing_w$ with, say, Stalnaker's so-called 'absurd world' (called 'λ'). In Stalnaker's model-theoretic semantics for counterfactuals, λ is a member of the set of all worlds; it is 'the world in which contradictions and all their consequences are true'.[9] λ's function is to provide truth conditions for counterpossibles.[10] But notice how this is accomplished: by having

things turn out so that every impossibility is true in λ, which seems to imply that there are propositions *existing* therein. Leftow's null world, however, is a different kettle of fish altogether, for $\varnothing_w$ is propositionless. Nothing whatsoever exists in $\varnothing_w$, including the proposition 'God does not exist'. This is initially perplexing. How could God's non-existence occur *in* $\varnothing_w$, if $\varnothing_w$ fails to include the proposition 'God does not exist'? Here Leftow draws upon an idea from Robert Adams. According to Adams, 'A [possible] world that includes no singular propositions about me constitutes and describes a possible world in which I would not exist. It represents my possible non-existence, not by including the proposition that I do not exist but simply by omitting me.'[11]

Take, for example, the proposition 'Wiles does not exist'. In order for this proposition properly to represent Wiles's non-existence in a world W, it need not be true *in* W; that is to say, W need not include the proposition 'Wiles does not exist'. It suffices, instead, that this proposition be true *at* or *of* W, which is just the case when W omits Wiles, when (in other words) Wiles is not among the denizens of W. In the same way, says Leftow, we can maintain that $\varnothing_w$ represents God's non-existence, not, of course, by including the proposition 'God does not exist', but merely by 'omitting' God. As a logical 'black hole', it seems perfectly suited to do that.

With this modal machinery in place, we are now in a position to set out Leftow's 'special rules' for counterpossibles. There are two such rules. Consider impossible propositions. These appear to fall into two distinct classes. A proposition p is an ordinary impossibility, we might say, if there is an impossible non-null world W such that p is true in W. Leftow is a little shy on examples, but he does give us a hint about what an ordinary impossibility looks like when he says that it doesn't 'involve' God's not existing.[12] Presumably then, the denials of mathematical truths and logical theorems are in view here, and perhaps even more exotic impossibilities such as 'Andrew is a cleverly disguised prime number', or 'the colour red weighs six pounds'. These impossibilities seem ordinary enough, I suppose, if by 'ordinary' we mean 'not mentioning God's non-existence'. And now for the rule: since an ordinary impossibility 'entails everything', says Leftow, 'we usually assign trivial truth to all [subjunctive] conditionals with ordinarily impossible antecedents'.[13] For ease of reference, call these 'ordinary counterpossibles'.

That's rule number 1; but there is another. If an ordinary impossibility is an impossible proposition that doesn't 'involve' God's non-existence, then an extraordinary impossibility is one that does. More exactly, an impossible proposition p is extraordinary just in case (necessarily) if p were true, then $\varnothing_w$ would have obtained, so that nothing would have existed. Let's call a conditional whose antecedent is an extraordinary impossibility an 'extraordinary counterpossible'. Each such conditional makes a claim about what would have been the case had $\varnothing_w$ obtained. Accordingly, if the consequent of an extraordinary counterpossible

implies that something exists – which is clearly the case in (4) – then it is false (and non-trivially so), since nothing exists in the null world. If, on the other hand, it doesn't entail the existence of anything – as in the case of (3) – we can rightly hold that it is non-trivially true. Call this the 'null-world rule'. This rule seems to be a simple corollary of Findlay's thesis. For if God is the sole necessary cause of a proposition p, then in the absence of this cause (say, through its causal inactivity or its non-existence), we would expect a corresponding absence of its effect: p's existing. And this is just what we get. Leftow's semantics assigns non-trivial truth to (3) and non-trivial falsehood to (4), perfectly tracking theistic intuitions along these lines. What more could a theist want?

Much ado about nothing

Substantially more, it turns out. I want to suggest that there are at least three serious impediments to our accepting the proposal before us: first, it appears to undercut Findlay's thesis; secondly, it fails to secure an asymmetrical dependence of propositions on God; and finally, it collapses all distinctions between counterpossibles, so that they all turn out to be false. Let's examine each of these in turn.

The crucial plank in Leftow's modal platform is this interesting claim that the proposition 'God does not exist' exhibits 'semantic peculiarities'.[14] It counter-factually implies some things but not others, and this in consequence of the fact that God's non-existence is this logical 'black hole', 'sucking all the propositions of a world [W] into itself'. The question is: how does it manage to do a thing like that? The idea, I gather, is that for any world W, if God did not exist therein, then W would be propositionless, and in effect collapse into the null world. Therefore, we can safely say that:

(5)   Necessarily, if God did not exist, then $\varnothing_w$ would have obtained.

However, (5), along with other seemingly obvious truths, leads to an apparent denial of Findlay's thesis. To see this, let's first consider a proposal that spells out what it would take for the null world to obtain:

(6)   Necessarily, $\varnothing_w$ obtains if and only if nothing exists.

This proposition tells us that the necessary and sufficient condition for the null world's obtaining is that nothing exist. That seems relatively unobjectionable. But surely it's also the case that,

(7)   Necessarily, nothing exists if and only if it is true that nothing exists.

And now from (5)–(7) we can infer:

(8)   Necessarily, if God did not exist, then it would have been true that nothing exists.

Notice, however, that the proposition 'It is true that nothing exists' – the consequent of (8) – is true if and only if the proposition 'Nothing exists' is true; hence, (8) is broadly logically equivalent to

(9)   Necessarily, if God did not exist, then the proposition 'Nothing exists' would have been true,

which poses a certain difficulty for Leftow's semantics. For instance, it is quite clear that (9) contradicts the null-world rule. For (9) is an extraordinary counterpossible; its antecedent clearly involves God's non-existence, and therefore makes a claim about the null world. Furthermore, the consequent of (9) entails that something exists, assuming what seems obvious: that 'Nothing exists' could have been true only if it existed.[15] What (9) tells us therefore is that if the null world had obtained, there would have been at least one thing that existed: the proposition 'Nothing exists'. Thus, given the null-world rule, not only is (9) an extraordinary counterpossible, it is non-trivially false. So Leftow cannot accept it.

One general sort of complaint against the argument I have just advanced is that it invalidly slides from talking about propositions and their having an attribute of truth in *possible* worlds – 'necessarily', after all, is a quantifier over possible, not impossible worlds – and then illicitly concludes in (9) that truth continues to work this way in an *impossible* world.[16] But what if truth is 'deflated', not only in the null world, but right across the board? That is, what if there is no such (relational) property as truth in possible or impossible worlds? Then even if it were true that nothing exists in the null world, we couldn't rightly infer that there would be a proposition – namely, 'Nothing exists' – that had the property of being true.

Unfortunately, Leftow cannot take this position. For his modal theory is premised on the fact that all non-null worlds – whether possible or impossible – are such that they 'would tell a *true* story about the actual cosmos were the appropriate events to occur'.[17] This makes it clear that we are dealing with an ontology of truth-bearers (propositions) and their corresponding truth-makers (events). What makes a non-null world possibly true is that 'all its member propositions can be *true* together'.[18] But of course only one such world is actually true: the one *made true* by how things stand in the world, by the way things happen to be arranged. On this way of looking at things, then, every proposition will have a truth-value: either 'true' if things are arranged the way it represents them as being, if the appropriate events occur; and 'false' otherwise. In either case, truth is anything but 'deflated'. Indeed, it is clear that even an impossible non-null world owes its basic inconsistency to the fact it includes at least one member proposition p such that truth is ascribed to both p and its negation, $\sim p$.

So plumping for deflationism here just isn't a viable alternative unless Leftow is prepared to abandon his theory as stated. Our initial problem therefore remains. We are confronted with a number of necessary truths about the null world which,

taken together, imply (9): a proposition that commits us to there being truths in $\varnothing_w$. Accordingly, if Leftow wants to reject (9) – and I think he must – one or more of the premises will have to be denied. I take it that (5) and (6) are un-controversial, as these propositions are direct implications of the theory proper. (8) follows from (5)–(7) by the widely endorsed counterfactual rule $[(p > q)\ \&\ (q \leftrightarrow r)] \to (p > r)$.[19] And (9) follows from (8) by conceptual analysis of (8)'s conse-quent. The most likely candidate for denial, therefore, will be (7). But how can this be properly denied? For example, if we deny (7), we are obliged to affirm its negation, namely

> (not-7) It is possible that either (a) nothing exists and it is false that nothing exists,[20] or (b) it is false that nothing exists and it is true that nothing exists.[21]

Now the right disjunct here is an explicit contradiction and is therefore logically impossible. So it follows – by the elementary modal rule $[\mathrm{M}\ (p \vee q)\ \&\ \sim\mathrm{M}q] \to \mathrm{M}p$ – that

> (10)   It is possible that (nothing exists and it is false that nothing exists).

But if the sense of 'possibility' in view is alethic (that is, if it concerns a mode of truth), then (10) is most accurately rendered as

> (10*)   It is possibly true that (nothing exists and it is false that nothing exists),

which, in turn, implies

> (11)   It is possibly true that nothing exists,

provided that the possibility of the conjunction in (10*) distributes over its con-juncts.

And now don't we have a problem? If (11) is true, then there is a possible world W such that 'Nothing exists' is true in W. But then (necessarily) if W were actual, the proposition 'Nothing exists' would have been true, in which case nothing would have existed, including God himself. Not only, then, would God's non-existence occur in the impossible null world, there would be a possible world in which it occurred, thereby demoting God to the ranks of contingent being and contradicting Findlay's thesis. Of course, there is also the further complication that if 'Nothing exists' really were true, then nothing would exist, including the proposition that nothing exists, in which case that proposition would not have been true in the first place.

Perhaps, however, Leftow would reply that I am begging the question against him. I assume that a proposition p is possibly true if and only if there is a world W such that p is true *in* W. Why not say, instead, that possible truth requires only that p be true *at* W, where a proposition is true at a world W just in the event that

W represents things as being the way that proposition says they are?[22] If this notion of truth-at-a-world is in order, then perhaps we could say that 'Nothing exists' is possibly true because there is a world W such that (i) 'Nothing exists' is true at W, and (ii) W represents the state of affairs consisting in there not being anything. If, as Adams says, a world in which I do not exist represents my possible non-existence, then surely a world in which nothing exists represents the possibility of there being nothing.

It is important to see that there are significant obstacles to Leftow's pressing this objection. For his is a set-theoretic world theory: worlds are set-theoretical constructions on propositions. But the fact is that sets lack the intentional properties of propositions; sets do not represent things (in particular, their members) as being a certain way or any way for that matter. As Plantinga notes,[23] they are entirely silent on this score as on every other. Thus, for example, {Wiles} does not represent Wiles as being a mathematician or not being a mathematician; it makes no claim or assertion about him whatsoever. Accordingly, Wiles's unit set is neither true nor false. And the same thing goes for every other set, including {'Nothing exists'} and other maximal sets of propositions. Hence, W cannot represent the possibility of there being nothing, in which case 'Nothing exists' cannot be true *at* W, so that it is not possible (in the present sense) after all.

Someone might object, however, that Leftow's claim is not that the proposition 'Nothing exists' is true at some possible world, but rather that it is true at the null world. Let's agree, for the moment, that a set (and therefore a Leftow world) can be true. A set, we might say, is true just in case each of its members is a true proposition. A Leftow world, then, represents things as being a certain way just if its members both individually and collectively represent reality (or some aspect of it) as being thus-and-so. Still, how can we properly speak (in this sense) of the null world's being true and thus representing things? $\varnothing_w$ has no members! Hence it cannot possibly represent there being nothing. In order to do *that*, it would have to include the proposition 'Nothing exists'. But, by definition, the null world is empty, so that is out of the question.[24]

I think it is pretty clear, therefore, that Leftow cannot affirm (11): that the proposition 'Nothing exists' is possibly true. Could he retreat, perhaps, and claim merely that

> (12)   Nothing exists

is possible but not that it is possibly true (as (11) has it)? Perhaps so; but how are we to make sense of this? How could a proposition be possible but not possibly true? The only answer I know of goes as follows.[25] We begin by distinguishing strong from weak possibility. Roughly speaking, a proposition is strongly possible if it could have been true (possible truth); and it is weakly possible if it could have failed to be false (possible non-falsehood). Strong possibility is of course a familiar modal notion. The idea behind the notion of weak possibility is simply

this: just as Wiles could have failed to be wise either by being unwise or by failing to exist, so too a proposition could have failed to be false either by possessing truth or by simply not existing.

Now, as we've just seen, (12) could not have been true; it is not possible in any strong sense. And of course, if it were, that would land us in the unhappy position of having to admit that God is a contingent being who could have failed to exist (thereby contradicting Findlay's thesis). Perhaps, however, (12) is possible in the sense that it could have failed to exist. This sense of 'possibility', it might be said, is theologically benign, for from the fact that (12)'s existence is contingent, it doesn't automatically follow that there is no God. Still, there are problems. For one thing, why should we think that (12) could have failed to exist? This is not, after all, just obvious. To defend the idea that some propositions are contingent beings, proponents of weak possibility have typically invoked the so-called existentialist thesis – that singular propositions cannot exist unless the contingent individuals they involve exist. For example, if we say that 'Wiles is wise' is ontologically dependent upon Wiles himself, then in all those worlds in which Wiles fails to exist, the proposition 'Wiles is wise' doesn't exist either (and therefore qualifies as weakly possible).

Now Leftow may, in fact, endorse the existentialist thesis so defined. For example, he points out that the Platonist ontology with which he is working assumes that 'most [abstracta] exist by ''broadly logical'' necessity' – that is, they exist in every possible world – noting only two possible exceptions: sets with contingent members (e.g. {Quine}), and '[p]ropositions whose truth-conditions involve contingent entities', as is the case, he says, with the proposition 'Charles Schulz is the creator of ''Peanuts'''.[26] In any event, the question is whether we should conclude that (12), like 'Wiles is wise', could have failed to exist. This is far from clear. For it is not evident that there even *is* a contingent individual involved in (12). But if not, then what grounds are there for thinking that there are possible worlds in which (12) doesn't exist?

Furthermore, it can be shown that the existentialist thesis coupled with the fact that there are contingent individuals leads to the following absurdity.[27] Consider:

(13)   Wiles is wise and Wiles is not wise.

According to the existentialist, (13) would have failed to exist if Wiles had; and since Wiles could have failed to exist, it follows that (13) is weakly possible. But then if weak possibility is sufficient for possibility *simpliciter*, it turns out that (13) – an explicit contradiction – is possible. And surely this is a mistake.

Still further, there is reason to doubt whether (12) is even weakly possible on Leftow's working assumptions. For he is on record as endorsing Findlay's thesis: God is a strongly necessary being; He exists in every possible world.[28] But if so, then won't (12) be necessarily false? That is to say, will it not be the case that for every possible world W, (12) will have the property of being false (and therefore

existing) in W? If this is the case, then (12) cannot possibly not exist, and therefore cannot be weakly possible. Appeals to the existentialist thesis will not avert this conclusion. Given all that we have said, therefore, it just doesn't appear that Leftow is in a position to say that (12) is either weakly or strongly possible.

It needs to be made clear that the fundamental problem here does not lie with the denial of (7). In order to avoid commitment to (9), I certainly agree that (7) should be denied. The problem, rather, is the lack of resources within Leftow's theory for handling the difficulties attached to this denial – in particular, the difficulty of accounting for the possibility of (12) given that God is a strongly necessary being. Clearly, something more is required. The theory is inadequate as it stands.

Counterpossible crisis

Before suggesting a tentative way forward for the theist, I want to mention briefly two further difficulties for the null-world semantics. The first concerns the original purpose for which Leftow's theory was devised. At the outset, we noted that if propositions are to depend on God in some non-trivial sense, then to capture this dependence it must be the case that:

(3)   If God were to cease existing, then p would not exist,

is true while,

(4)   If God were to cease existing, then p would still exist,

is not. In principle and setting aside the aforementioned difficulties, Leftow's semantics assigns the correct truth-values here. And yet if this is what it takes to underwrite a non-trivial dependence of necessarily existing propositions on God, then it wouldn't be desirable, I take it, to make the very same truth-value assignments to the converses of (3) and (4):

(3c)   If p were to cease existing, then God would not exist.
(4c)   If p were to cease existing, then God would still exist.

For by parity of reasoning, then, if (3c) were true and (4c) false, God would turn out to be non-trivially dependent on propositions for His existence, which is wholly unacceptable if He is a perfect being and exists *a se*. So the question is: how *does* Leftow's semantics handle these converses?

As follows: assuming that propositions are necessary beings, and in view of God's special relation to them (namely, His being their necessary cause), the claim that p ceases to exist implies that God doesn't exist. For here p's ceasing to exist could only result from one thing: God's ceasing to cause p's existence. But on Leftow's view, this is impossible, since causing p to exist is an essential property of God. Thus, God's failing to cause p implies that He doesn't exist. And this

means that (3c) and (4c) are extraordinary counterpossibles, since their ante-cedents involve God's non-existence.

So far, so good. According to the null-world rule, however, (3c) is true since it lacks an existence entailing consequent; and (4c) is false because its consequent entails the existence of at least one thing: God. But then if we are committed to using counterpossibles to forge our links of dependence between God and propositions, Leftow's semantics churns out the wrong semantic result, and forces us to say that God is no less dependent on propositions than they are on him. This is no Findlay-style classical theism.

The second difficulty I have in mind has to do with the stability of the distinc-tion between ordinary and extraordinary impossibilities. On Leftow's official view, you recall, there are ordinary impossibilities – impossibilities not 'involv-ing' God's non-existence – such as 'There are round squares', and 'Wiles is wise and Wiles is not wise'. Furthermore, there is, he says, a connection between an impossible proposition's entailing everything and its counterfactually implying everything. Thus Leftow: 'From an ordinary impossibility, anything whatsoever follows. Thus if any ordinary impossibility were actual, all states of affairs would be actual and possible.'[29] In fact, this perfectly encapsulates Leftow's first semantic rule: that any counterpossible whose antecedent logically entails everything is trivially true.

It seems to me, however, that this leads to trouble. Following standard practice, let's use 'entails' to express the converse of 'follows from'. Now Leftow tells us that 'anything whatsoever' follows from an ordinary impossibility. That means that on his view an ordinary impossibility entails every proposition. So it looks as though Leftow is assuming what is known as the 'strict implication' account of entailment: that p strictly implies q just in case $\sim M\, (p\ \&\ \sim q)$.[30] And of course, where p is an impossible proposition, its conjunction with any proposition q is going to be impossible. But then any ordinary impossibility is such that it 'involves' God's non-existence; for each such impossibility entails or strictly implies the proposition 'God does not exist'.[31] Leftow's working notion of entailment therefore yields the unexpected conclusion that every impossibility is extraordinary, thereby collapsing the distinction between kinds of impossibilities.

There is a related problem. If every impossibility does turn out to be extra-ordinary, then every counterpossible will be an extraordinary counterpossible. As I say, this is a bit unexpected. Still, perhaps we can live with the result. For as long as we have the desired semantic division between non-trivially true and non-trivially false extraordinary counterpossibles, we can still assign the proper truth-values to the likes of (3) and (4) in keeping with Findlay's thesis. But is this really true? Can we in fact do this? According to the null-world rule, 'any counterfactual whose consequent entails that something exists in the null world will be non-trivially false'.[32] But then if entailment is strict implication, as Leftow assumes, won't any consequent whatsoever entail the proposition 'Something exists'? It

certainly looks like it. For if classical theism is true, the proposition 'Nothing exists' is a necessary falsehood, in which case 'Something exists' is a necessary truth. But now consider the fact that one of the so-called paradoxes of strict implication is that any proposition entails any necessary truth.[33] If this is so, then every extraordinary counterpossible has an existence entailing consequent – a consequent that entails 'Something exists', a necessary truth. It doesn't matter what this consequent is; it will entail this truth. We are therefore forced to say (on the basis of Leftow's second rule) that every counterpossible is non-trivially false. And thus we must face a theory-wide semantic collapse.

A way forward?

In spite of the objections I have raised about the specifics of Leftow's proposal, I think he has greatly assisted us in charting the counterpossible terrain. In particular, I think that the fundamental thrust of his theory correct: if God did not exist, there would be nothing at all – no space-time universe, no matter, no energy, no truths or falsehoods (whether necessary or contingent), no propositions at all. What I want to do now, however briefly, is to propose a different way forward. I have three suggestions.

First, it seems to me that the set-theoretical apparatus Leftow uses to state his case is more a hindrance than a help. The problem, as we noted, is that worlds are intentional objects; they represent reality as being thus-and-so. Sets, however, have no intentional properties at all. But then worlds can't be sets. Nor must there be sets of propositions for there to be worlds (as traditionally conceived). Corresponding with any world W, there may very well be a set of just those propositions that are included in W. Still, at best, W's existence seems only to require that there *be* those propositions, not that there be a set containing them. In spite of this, however, I suspect that there may well be theoretical advantages to doing away with propositions altogether in theistic attempts to define worlds. I'll say more about this in a moment.

There are also special difficulties attached to Leftow's null world, which, I submit, is a dispensable technical device. It functions to stake out a plot of logical space at which (but not, of course, in which) extraordinary impossibilities can be true. However, it's not clear to me that this is even possible. David Lewis, for example, considers the null set to be 'a little speck of sheer nothingness'.[34] This immediately raises the question of whether anything could be true at a 'speck of sheer nothingness'. There's nothing there for anything to be true at! If a reason is wanted, perhaps it is this.[35] The identity conditions of a set are determined by the identity conditions of its members. (This is a widely recognized point.) But as we all know, none of the members of $\varnothing_w$ exists; it has no members. But then why think that it *is* a set? After all, there are plenty of things that lack (set theoretic) members: books, dinosaurs, philosophers, and even God. None of these is a set of

course. What principled reason could there be, then, for thinking that $\varnothing_w$ is a set? What is it about the null world that *makes* it a set? It can't be its lack of members. So what is it? I cannot see that there is a decent answer forthcoming here. It seems to me, therefore, that we can make our point just as effectively by saying that if God didn't exist, nothing would exist. There is no need to call up something as metaphysically suspect as $\varnothing_w$.

Secondly, in order to avoid counterpossible collapse, a much more fine-grained analysis of what it is for one proposition to 'involve' another is required. I don't think we want every impossible proposition to 'involve' God's non-existence. This is the way of total collapse. We want to avoid, if at all possible, committing ourselves to saying that 'Wiles is the Pope and Wiles is not the Pope' somehow 'involves' 'There is no God'. To be sure, the former strictly implies the latter; and yet as far as their content goes, these propositions hardly seem related. How then could one 'involve' the other? What's needed, I think, is an account of 'involvement' parsed in terms of relevant (non-strict) implication. Fortunately, Keith Yandell has done some useful work on this in the pages of this journal.[36] According to Yandell, for any necessary propositions p and q, p relevantly or non-vacuously implies q if and only if q's truth-conditions constitute all or part of p's truth-conditions. So consider

> (14)   Three is the sum of two even numbers.

This proposition is necessarily false. Nevertheless, we can still see it as having certain (not possibly obtaining) truth-conditions. These conditions are the states of affairs that would have to obtain to make (14) true; they also seem to me (though Yandell doesn't say this) to provide a counterpossible explanation of (14)'s truth. Now suppose – contrary to what is possible – that 'Three's being evenly divisible by two' had obtained. Then this state of affairs would not only make (14) true, it would explain why in fact it was true. Accordingly, we can say that (14) relevantly implies (hereafter, Ⓡ-implies)

> (15)   Three is evenly divisible by two.

But while (14) strictly implies every proposition whatsoever, it doesn't Ⓡ-imply each such proposition. For example, unlike (15), none of

> (16)   There is a moon orbiting the earth;
> (17)   All triangles are three-sided;

or,

> (18)   There is no God,

expresses the (not possibly obtaining) truth-conditions for (14): what would make (14) true, if that were the case. None of these claims, even if their truth-making conditions obtained, would explain why (14) was true.

There are distinct advantages to this account. For one thing, since (14) fails to ℝ-imply (18), we can classify (14) as an ordinary impossibility. And since it ℝ-implies some propositions but not others, we can claim further that some ordinary counterpossibles are non-trivially true and others non-trivially false. (This isn't altogether bad, as this appears to track our pre-theoretical intuitions anyway. However, it will require some touching up of Leftow's first 'special rule' for counterpossibles.) For example, on Leftow's account each of the following counterpossibles is trivially true:

> (19)   If Saul Kripke were a prime number, then he would be divisible by himself and one.
>
> (20)   If Saul Kripke were a prime number, then he would be a prime minister.

And yet our pre-theoretical intuitions forbid these truth-value assignments. We find ourselves strongly inclined to think that (19) is true and (20) false – and non-trivially so. The reason for this, I submit, is that we implicitly recognize that 'Saul Kripke is a prime number' ℝ-implies the consequent of (19) but not (20). And this is as it should be.

An additional advantage concerns the distinction between true and false extraordinary counterpossibles. Yandell's account nicely preserves it. For example, given Findlay's thesis, it allows us to say that (18) ℝ-implies that nothing exists; but it blocks any attempt to have the consequent of an extraordinary counterpossible ℝ-imply the existence of anything. And this despite the fact that it is necessary that something does exist. So we are in an excellent position to affirm the truth of Leftow's dependence capturing counterpossibles: (3) and (4) above. But what about:

> (3c)   If *p* were to cease existing, then God would not exist,

and,

> (4c)   If *p* were to cease existing, then God would still exist,

– their converses? Leftow's theory, as we noted, assigns truth to (3c) and falsity to (4c), leaving the impression that God is dependent on *p* for His existence. Ideally, to put this impression to rest, it would be nice to have a principled basis for claiming precisely the reverse: namely, that (3c) is false and (4c) is true. Can relevant implication lend a hand?

Well, not obviously. For whether we see the antecedents of (3c) and (4c) as ℝ-implying their respective consequents is going to depend more on our understanding of God's relationship to propositions than on the nuts and bolts of relevant implication. Leftow sees God as necessarily causing the existence of propositions, so that if they didn't exist neither would He. Hence, that God doesn't exist expresses the truth-conditions for any proposition's failing to

exist; and *p*'s not existing therefore Ⓡ-implies the consequent of (3c) but not, of course, (4c). I understand and sympathize with this intuition. Its only flaw is that it saddles us with problematic truth-value assignments for these counterpossibles. Here, I believe, the solution lies not in tightening up our analysis of relevant implication, but rather conceiving of God's relation to propositions in a slightly different way.

So, a third suggestion is this. If we think of God's grasp of reality as consisting in His taking appropriate epistemic attitudes toward an untold multitude of discrete propositions, which we then identify with (say) divine thoughts, then clearly if there were no propositions, God couldn't have any knowledge and hence couldn't exist. But why think that God's knowledge is mediated by way of propositions? Ours is, to be sure; but perhaps an infinite being who is maximally perfect with respect to knowledge has no need of propositions. William Alston, for example, has suggested that God's knowledge of reality is simple and unmediated, and proceeds wholly without the aid of propositional beliefs, which serve to represent portions of reality as being this or that way.[37] I see no reason why this model couldn't be extended to cover non-actual, comprehensive possibilities; perhaps these are grounded in God's direct intuition of His own power to create alternate states of affairs. This is not the place to defend this proposal in detail; that would obviously require a paper in its own right. For the sake of argument, however, let's temporarily agree that this is possible and see what good (if any) comes of it.

At this point, the question naturally arises: Why should there be any propositions at all? Strictly speaking, if God doesn't need them to have knowledge, then why do they exist? What purpose do they serve? (I am assuming, of course, that propositions do exist.) Well, perhaps the truth is this: God produces propositions by thinking them, and He does this so that finite knowers, whose epistemic powers are limited to grasping reality in 'bite-sized' chunks, can hold true beliefs about the world and acquire knowledge. It is not necessary, however, that God do this; it's not one of His essential properties. For in a world without finite knowers, perhaps God wouldn't produce any propositions at all. There simply wouldn't be any need for them in that case. Now if this is possible, then propositions – like concrete, physical objects – are contingent beings that nevertheless depend on God. It is therefore false that if propositions didn't exist, neither would God. For if there were no propositions, then (on the present way of thinking) this would be because God (who would exist in any event) had no reason to produce them –perhaps because He didn't create any beings capable of possessing propositional knowledge. Interestingly enough, this would mean that *contra* Leftow, (3c) and (4c) are not, after all, extraordinary counterpossibles, and therefore don't fall under the null-world rule. Indeed, if the present suggestion is correct, there is a principled basis for treating (3c) as false and (4c) as true, thereby undercutting the charge that these conditionals disclose an unacceptable dependence of God on propositions.

Let's call the view I am proposing theistic existentialism (hereafter TE). Unlike the familiar existentialist thesis, TE maintains not just that *some* propositions are contingent beings; they *all* are. Furthermore, the basis for the contingency of propositions is wholly different; it doesn't lie in their ontological dependency on the individuals they involve. Rather, it resides in God's (contingent) decision to bring about their existence by thinking them. In contrast to Leftow's theory, therefore, TE can help us with the thorny problem of explaining just how the proposition 'Nothing exists' – which includes no contingent individual at all – is possible. It's possible in the weak sense that it could have lacked falsehood; and according to TE, it would have lacked this property had God not created it, which is entirely possible.

Two objections

Objection 1

'You claim that (12) is possible because it could have failed to exist, and hence could have lacked falsehood. But then on your view *every* proposition is possible; for each is essentially such that God could have refrained from creating it. Thus, even explicit contradictions are possible. Surely this is going too far.'

Reply: I don't say that propositions (in general) or contradictions (in particular) are possible *simpliciter*, nor that they are possibly *true*; this is indeed 'going too far'. On the contrary, I merely claim that propositions could have failed to exist. They are weakly possible. Plantinga, however, has suggested that existentialists are committed to the idea that a proposition's being possibly non-false is sufficient for its being possible (without qualification).[38] Here, I believe Plantinga has uncharacteristically erred. For consider this closely related counter-argument. It seems to me quite obvious that I have properties of various sorts, and further that some of these properties are contingent; that is, I have them but could easily have existed without them. Still further, not all of my properties are contingent. Such properties as *being human*, for example, or *depending on God for my existence* are properties that I could not have lacked without ceasing to exist; they are among my non-contingent or necessary properties.

But here's the rub. How shall we parse my having a property P necessarily? We can't say that it involves my having P in every possible world *whatsoever*. For then, of course, I should have to exist in every world, in which case I (like God) would be a necessary being, which doesn't seem quite right. And it won't do to retreat to the view that I have no non-contingent properties; for clearly, I do have some. The solution – one that Plantinga himself endorses – is to distinguish two ways in which an object can have a property necessarily.[39] A property P is *strongly necessary* for an object x just in case for every world W, x has P in W. Now, if this is what it is for you and I to have a non-contingent property, then of course we have none. We therefore need a weaker notion of necessary property possession. Thus

we might say that P is *weakly necessary* for *x* just in case *x* has P in every world in which *x* exists. And happily enough, each of us has non-contingent properties in this sense.

Now my point here is this. Those who endorse this distinction typically don't think of having a property in a weakly necessary way as being sufficient for having a property necessarily (and without qualification). Nor can I see that they are committed to doing so. What they are committed to is a distinction between two carefully qualified, modal notions. This is perfectly in order. But then surely from the fact that the proponent of TE draws a similar distinction with respect to a proposition's being weakly possible (possibly non-false) versus its being strongly possible (possibly true), it scarcely follows that she must also say that possible non-falsehood is possibility enough, that it's sufficient for a proposition's being possible *simpliciter*. For the proponent of TE, there are just the two modal notions in play here – weak and strong possibility – and they are to be confused neither with each other, nor with any of the other (ill-defined) notions lurking in the nearby modal bushes.

Objection 2

'If, as you say, propositions are contingent beings, then there are no necessary truths – no propositions that have the property of being true in every world. But then even the proposition ''God exists'' isn't necessary, in which case it would appear that God himself is a contingent being. This contradicts Findlay's thesis.'

Reply: Obviously, if there is a world in which God creates no propositions, then 'God exists' won't be true in that world; after all, it can't be true if it doesn't exist. But it doesn't follow that God wouldn't exist – only that there would be no proposition correctly describing His existence. For the proponent of TE, it's not as if God must have cognitive contact with that proposition for, say, the purposes of knowing that He exists. So why think that God can't *exist* unless there are correct *descriptions* of Him? This seems no more than a basic category mistake.

But then what about the notion of necessary truth? Given TE, it's clear that we cannot define it as truth in every possible world. For propositions don't exist in every world. Does that mean we must drop the very idea of strongly necessary truths altogether, and opt instead for saying that (at best) propositions – some of them, anyway – are weakly necessary in that they are true in only those worlds in which they exist? We could say this, I suppose. But then there would be the following residual worry. Let S be the set of all possible worlds, and let S* be a proper sub-set of S – namely, the set of just those worlds in which God creates propositions. Then consider a proposition that is contingent – say, that Socrates is wise. Now what if it turns out that God creates this proposition in some of the worlds in S* but not all? And suppose, for the sake of argument, God just happens to arrange things such that in each of these worlds Socrates exists and is wise.

Then an indisputably contingent proposition turns out to be weakly necessary – true in every world in which it exists. Clearly, something has gone awry.

What's needed here, I think, is some fine-tuning. The proponent of TE should add the following two codicils to her theory. First, she should say that in any world in which God creates propositions, He creates all the propositions that there are, so that the same propositions exist in each world that is a member of S*. This isn't necessarily ad hoc. For perhaps in each of these worlds there are finite knowers, and God therefore creates the full complement of propositions to ensure that they are epistemically available to these individuals. Secondly, a proponent of TE should retain the distinction between strongly and weakly necessary truths, but should define strong necessity as truth (/falsity) in *every world in which God creates any propositions*. This gives more substance to the claim that some truths are strongly necessary; they are true (/false) in every world in which any proposition could be. But surely it is unreasonable for us (and indeed impossible) to require of them that they be true (/false) in worlds in which they don't even exist!

Now this last suggestion presupposes that there are propositionless worlds. And how can this be? How can there be a world without propositions, if worlds *just are* propositions? The answer is: worlds aren't propositions, even maximally consistent ones. At least, they can't be, if TE is correct. So then, what precisely are they? As David Lewis has instructed us, possible worlds are 'ways things could have been' – total and complete ways.[40] I think this insight is essentially correct. But notice that it tells us very little about what worlds are. It assumes, of course, a basic distinction between between '*ways* things could have been' and the '*things* that could have been that way'.[41] Possible worlds are an example of the former and not the latter. But it doesn't tell us whether worlds are propositions, properties, states of affairs, concepts, sentences, or what have you. It does assume (or so I think) that they are intentional objects of some sort; the ways things could have been are presumably *of* or *about* the things that could have been that way. This is why one world can be said to obtain (given that it correctly represents the things it is about) while all the others fail to obtain. And yet there is nothing in the Lewis insight that requires a world to be a complex construction on any of these items – a 'big conjunctive fact', for example.[42]

It seems to me, therefore, that the theistic existentialist has a bit of conceptual elbow-room here. She might hold that worlds are in fact constituentless. Perhaps, for example, they are divine thoughts or graspings of things: simple, indivisible, and yet fully comprehensive and consistent. If this is so, then there could be a world (taken as a simple comprehensive divine thought) even if there wasn't a plurality of discrete propositions to collectively represent what that thought was about. No doubt it is convenient for us to *describe* such thoughts by way of proposition inclusion; it doesn't follow, however, that they are sets or bundles or conjunctions of propositions. Naturally, much more remains to be said on this

score. But for now, perhaps, we can agree that TE is at least possible for all we know, and that it enjoys some crucial theoretical advantages.

By way of conclusion, then: Leftow's theory of counterpossibles faces a number of serious challenges. As it stands, the theory falls short of its purpose: making sense of how necessarily existing abstracta might depend on God. What is needed is an entirely new approach to the problem – the development of a theory in which our standard conceptions of entailment and even the nature of possible worlds are radically revised. But we must go further still. For in the end, it seems to me that it is only by embracing theistic existentialism (or something very like it) that we have any reasonable hope of erecting a theistic semantics for counterpossibles – one that can underwrite an asymmetrical dependence of propositions on God in keeping with the central insights behind Findlay's thesis.[43]

Notes

1. J. N. Findlay 'Can God's existence be disproved?', *Mind*, **57** (1948), 180.
2. Brian Leftow 'On a principle of sufficient reason', *Religious Studies*, **39** (2003), 269–286, 281.
3. See Brian Leftow 'A Leibnizian cosmological argument', *Philosophical Studies*, **57** (1989), 135–155; *idem* 'God and abstract entities', *Faith and Philosophy*, **7** (1990), 193–217.
4. Leftow 'God and abstract entities', 196.
5. G. W. Leibniz 'Monadology', in R. Ariew and D. Garber (tr.) *G. W. Leibniz: Philosophical Essays* (Indianapolis IN: Hackett Publishing Company, 1989), 219.
6. Leftow 'A Leibnizian cosmological argument', 148.
7. *Idem* 'God and abstract entities', 197.
8. *Ibid*. Apparently, the 'black-hole' metaphor has suggested itself to others. Lewis describes the reigning concept of the null set as follows: it is 'a most extraordinary individual, a little speck of sheer nothingness, a sort of *black hole* in the fabric of Reality itself'; David Lewis *Parts of Classes* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991), 13 [emphasis added].
9. Robert Stalnaker 'A theory of counterfactuals', in Nicholas Rescher (ed.) *Studies in Logical Theory, American Philosophical Quarterly*, Monograph Series, No. 2 (Oxford: Blackwell, 1968), 103.
10. Recent defenders of impossible worlds for precisely this purpose include William Lycan 'Two – no, three – concepts of possible worlds', *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, **91** (1991), 215–227; Edwin Mares 'Who's afraid of impossible worlds?', *Notre Dame Journal of Formal Logic*, **38** (1997), 516–526; Daniel Nolan 'Impossible worlds: a modest approach', *Notre Dame Journal of Formal Logic*, **38** (1997), 535–572; Graham Priest 'Sylvan's box: a short story and ten morals', *Notre Dame Journal of Formal Logic*, **38** (1997), 573–582; Nathan Salmon 'Impossible worlds', *Analysis*, **44** (1984), 114–117; David Vander Laan 'The ontology of impossible worlds', *Notre Dame Journal of Formal Logic*, **38** (1997), 597–620; and Takashi Yagisawa 'Beyond possible worlds', *Philosophical Studies*, **53** (1988), 175–204.
11. Robert Adams 'Actualism and thisness', *Synthese*, **49** (1981), 22.
12. See Leftow 'A Leibnizian cosmological argument', 149.
13. *Idem* 'God and abstract entities', 197.
14. *Idem* 'A Leibnizian cosmological argument', 149.
15. Here I assume the doctrine of serious actualism: the view that (necessarily) an object can have a property only if it exists to have that property. See Alvin Plantinga *Essays in the Metaphysics of Modality*, Matthew Davidson (ed.) (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 198–203.
16. I owe this objection to an anonymous referee for this journal.
17. Leftow 'A Leibnizian cosmological argument', 148.
18. *Ibid*., (emphasis added).
19. Here ' > ' is the counterfactual connective, and ' → ' represents the relation of strict implication.

20. It might be suggested that the denial of 'It is true that nothing exists' is not 'It is false that nothing exists', if one allows for truth-value gaps. This is correct but presently irrelevant. For as we have already noted, on Leftow's modal theory there won't be any such gaps for propositions. For further discussion, see Plantinga *Essays in the Metaphysics of Modality*, 193.

21. Strictly speaking, the right disjunct (b) should read: 'It is not the case that nothing exists and it is true that nothing exists'. But notice that 'It is not the case that nothing exists' mutually entails 'Something exists', which, in turn, mutually entails 'It is false that nothing exists'.

22. Christopher Menzel makes this suggestion while shoring up Robert Adams's concept of truth at a world. See Menzel 'Singular propositions and modal logic', *Philosophical Topics*, **21** (1993), 132.

23. See Plantinga *Essays in the Metaphysics of Modality*, 208.

24. Objection (from an anonymous referee): 'You say that propositions represent things as being a certain way, and that this is connected with their having the truth values that they do. Still, we can represent things in other ways. For example, a replica (model) of the Eiffel Tower isn't a proposition, but it can represent the actual monument perfectly well. In the same way, what the null world contains seems to be a perfect replica of what things would be like if there were nothing.'

    Reply: let's suppose that replicas can represent things, or what seems more accurate, that they can be *used* to represent things. Still, how is sheer nothingness anything like a proper replica? I can see how a statue or a model or a map might represent. I can even understand how we might represent something that doesn't exist (Pegasus, let's say) by means of a replica. But of course the thing doing the representing here actually exists even though what it represents does not. The problem with the null set is that it contains sheer nothingness; its contents haven't the slightest grip on reality. They have no features, contours, parts, or pieces to even get the task of representation off the ground.

25. For detailed discussion, see Plantinga *Essays in the Metaphysics of Modality*, 151–157.

26. Leftow 'God and abstract entities', 193, 214.

27. See Plantinga *Essays in the Metaphysics of Modality*, 155, 173.

28. See Brian Leftow 'Anselm's neglected argument', *Philosophy*, **77** (2002), 335–338.

29. *Idem* 'God and abstract entities', 197. Compare Lewis: 'it seems that a counterfactual in which the antecedent logically implies the consequent ought always to be true; and one sort of impossible antecedent, a self-contradictory one, logically implies any consequent'; David Lewis *Counterfactuals* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1973), 25.

30. An anonymous referee suggests that we needn't see Leftow as being committed to taking 'entailment' as 'strict implication'. Why can't Leftow say instead that 'p entails q' simply means 'q is deducible from p' – say, in first order logic? Then as C. I. Lewis has taught us, we can deduce any proposition we please from a syntactical contradiction of the form p & $\sim p$. Unfortunately, however, not every ordinary impossibility has this form. For example, the proposition, 'Saul Kripke is a prime number', is clearly impossible, and yet not only does it lack the requisite contradictory form, it also fails to qualify as one of Leftow's extraordinary impossibilities. For all that we can see, it is a bona fide ordinary impossibility. But then if the deducibility account of entailment is correct, there are ordinary impossibilities that don't entail everything. The fact of the matter is that if Leftow's semantics requires that *every* ordinary impossibility entail *every* proposition, nothing less than the strict implication account will do.

31. This was originally drawn to my attention by Paul Owen Martin. That Leftow parses 'involvement' as 'entailment' is also clear. For example, where p is any proposition, he points out that the proposition 'God does not create p' 'involves' God's non-existence, since when conjoined with 'Necessarily, God does not create p if and only if God does not exist', it 'entails' that 'God does not exist'. See Leftow 'A Leibnizian cosmological argument', 150; *idem*, 'God and abstract entities', 197–198.

32. *Idem* 'A Leibnizian cosmological argument', 149.

33. If q is a necessary truth, then $\sim q$ is impossible; in which case the conjunction of any p with $\sim q$ will be impossible. And this is just what is meant by saying that p strictly implies q.

34. Lewis *Parts of Classes*, 13.

35. My argument here follows E. J. Lowe. See his *The Possibility of Metaphysics: Substance, Identity, and Time* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), 254.

36. See Keith E. Yandell 'The most brutal and inexcusable error in counting?: Trinity and consistency', *Religious Studies*, **30** (1994), 201–217.

37. See William P. Alston 'Does God have beliefs?', *Religious Studies*, **22** (1986), 287–306.

38. See Plantinga *Essays in the Metaphysics of Modality*, 155–156.

39. See *idem The Nature of Necessity* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1974), 60.
40. See Lewis *Counterfactuals*, 84.
41. This is noted in Peter van Inwagen *Ontology, Identity, and Modality: Essays in Metaphysics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 169.
42. See Richard M. Gale and Alexander R. Pruss 'A new cosmological argument', *Religious Studies*, **35** (1999), 461–476, 462.
43. Thanks to Ronald Weed, Jennifer Hart Weed, Bill Vallicella, and two anonymous referees for this journal for helpful comments and penetrating criticism.