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William L. Rowe, CAN GOD BE FREE?

Michael Almeida

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evant inferences noted. This is, I grant, one reason why logical probabilities are only partially accessible, but not an objection if that is granted. The other objection is that, where the ground for the belief in question (that P) is not an experience but itself a belief (that J), then the adequacy of the grounds for P should not be identified with $\text{Prob}(P/J)$ for it also depends on the adequacy of J. I fail to see this as an objection. The standard formula would have it that the adequacy of the ground for P in these circumstances is the logical probability $\text{Prob}(P\&J/E)$ where E is the total, or the relevant, experience.

The third criticism follows from the way that, for good reasons, Alston explicates reliability not in terms of known frequency, or even actual frequency, but the frequency in a large run of actual or possible cases (p. 134). I interpret him as offering a counterfactual frequency account of reliability: what would occur if there were a large number of cases. But, precisely because this is a probabilistic situation, there is no fact of the matter as to what would occur. So we need an amendment: the reliability of a belief-forming process is the frequency of truths that would *probably* occur if there were a large number of occurrences of the type of process in question. What sort of probability is this though? It cannot itself be analyzed as reliability on pain of circularity. And it had better be objective if epistemology is to have teeth. It must be logical probability.

The point of these three criticisms is that we need not despair of a traditional epistemology, concerned with accessible means to be used when the end, truth, is not directly accessible. Within such an epistemology the truth-conducive epistemic desiderata, as expounded by Alston, play a key role.

Can God Be Free? by William L. Rowe. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004. Pp. vii + 173. \$45.00 (Hardback).

MICHAEL ALMEIDA, University of Texas at San Antonio

William Rowe's *Can God be Free?* is a nicely conceived and extremely well-written work. The focus on crucial conceptual relations between essential perfect goodness, divine freedom, divine responsibility, worship and praise has occupied Rowe's work for the last twelve years and the argumentation in *Can God Be Free?* is subtle and very polished. In chapter 1 Rowe provides some background on the famous series of exchanges between Gottfried Leibniz and Samuel Clarke on divine freedom and perfection. But Rowe's main focus in chapter (1) is to rebut Leibniz's well-known attempt to reconcile divine perfection and freedom. Leibniz's well-known proposal was that God both necessarily and freely actualized the best possible world. Rowe offers an interesting proof that this proposal cannot be true. Rowe's response takes the form of a simple two-premise argument.

1. If God exists and is omnipotent, perfectly wise and good, then He chooses to create the best possible world.

2. God exists and is omnipotent, perfectly wise, and perfectly good.
3. Therefore, God chooses to create the best of all possible worlds.

There is no question that for Leibniz premise (2) is absolutely or metaphysically necessary. Rowe's main line of argumentation is to show that Leibniz is also committed to the absolute necessity of (1). Here's Rowe.

[I]f we suppose that God chooses to create less than the best . . . it would logically follow that he is lacking in wisdom, goodness or power. Indeed Leibniz says that 'to do less good than one could is to be lacking in wisdom or goodness', that the most perfect understanding 'cannot fail to act in the most perfect way, and consequently to choose the best' (Theodicy, p. 252). . . . What Leibniz says about moral necessity implies that (1) is *absolutely necessary*. For he clearly holds that from the fact that a being does less good than it could it *logically follows* that the being in question is lacking in wisdom and goodness. And one cannot hold this without being committed to holding that the consequent of (1) . . . *logically follows* from the antecedent of (1). (17–18)

The argument is exactly what we might expect in response to Leibniz's proposal. Suppose Rowe is right that (1) and (2) express absolutely necessary propositions. It follows that (3) is also absolutely necessary. But importantly it does not follow that God could not have actualized a world other than our own. To reach that conclusion Rowe must assume that whatever is morally necessary is *necessarily morally necessary*. In short he must assume that the same moral standards (or broader standards, if you like) hold in every possible world. Certainly if the same moral standards hold in every possible world, then given the absolute necessity of (1) and (2), God could not have created a world different from our own. But suppose that moral standards might have been different. The best one can do relative to the standards of a *mercy world* might demand making exceptions to the requirements of justice. The best one can do relative to a *justice world* might demand no exceptions to the requirements of justice. If moral standards vary from world to world then what constitutes the best possible world will vary from world to world. There is no absolute ordering of worlds from the standpoint of every world. The actual world might therefore be the best possible world but not necessarily the best possible world. But then God might have actualized another. And this seems consistent with Leibniz's official position that the *Principle of the Best* is a contingent truth.

Rowe focuses in chapter 2 on Samuel Clarke, divine perfection and freedom. Rowe argues that Clarke's account places severe limitations on God's freedom. Here is Rowe.

Clarke readily sees that were a perfectly good, omniscient being to freely choose to do some evil deed, it would thereby cease to be perfectly good. . . . For the free choice to do evil is *itself* inconsistent with continuing to be a perfectly good, omniscient being. A being who freely chooses to do what it *knows* to be an evil deed thereby ceases

to be a perfectly good being. So if God were to freely choose to do an evil deed, he would cease to be perfectly good. In short, it is not logically possible for God both to freely choose to do evil and to continue to be perfectly good. (p. 26)

Since God has the traditional attributes of perfect beings Rowe concludes that it is impossible that God should choose to perform an evil action. But it is not at all clear why Rowe urges that "a being who freely chooses to do what it *knows* to be an evil deed thereby ceases to be a perfectly good being" (p. 26). Certainly in ordinary moral contexts no one would make such a claim. Suppose a being freely chooses to do what it knows to be an evil deed because it *necessarily* faces a moral dilemma. If an agent necessarily faces a moral dilemma then there is nothing the agent could have done to avoid the dilemma. Indeed there is nothing that an omnipotent being could have done to avoid the dilemma. The agent must choose some wrong action or other. It is difficult to see how the agent's choice might nonetheless be blameworthy or how that choice might reflect poorly on his character. Since blamelessly choosing to do wrong does not diminish moral perfection at all, it cannot be assumed that necessarily a perfect being does not choose to do wrong.

Much of the discussion in chapter 3 focuses on how an infinite series of possible worlds might be increasingly better on the assumption that God necessarily exists and is necessarily infinitely valuable. The focus is primarily on why St. Thomas Aquinas thought so. There is also some much-needed discussion of the principle of plenitude as an account of value. Are worlds better and worse in accordance with the kind and variety of beings they contain? Or should a perfect being prefer just the most valuable beings? Nothing definitive on the possibility of infinitely many improving worlds is established, as might be expected. But the stage is set for considering God's freedom under the assumption that for each world in an infinite sequence there is a better actualizable world.

Chapters 4 and 5 consider respectively the subtle defense of compatibilism in Jonathan Edwards and the much-discussed argument that God might create a less-than-best world in Robert M. Adams. The discussion leads directly to Rowe's most recent and fascinating work in chapter 6.

The contemporary debate in chapter 6 considers the possibility that God actualizes some world under the *No Best World* hypothesis. Rowe's formulation of the hypothesis states that "for any world creatable by God (if he exists) there is a better world he could create instead" (p. 88). The basic assumption is that there is an infinite sequence of possible worlds and for any possible world in the sequence there is some better *actualizable* world in the sequence. More precisely for any possible world in the sequence w_n there is some better world w_{n+1} that an essentially omnipotent, essentially omniscient, and necessarily existing being (OON) can actualize. The *No Best World* hypothesis is best formulated in (1).

1. $\Box(\forall O)(\forall x)(\exists y)((x < y) \ \& \ \Diamond(O \text{ actualizes } y))$

The variable O has as a domain the (possibly empty) set of OON's. The variables x and y have as a domain the set of possible worlds in the infinite sequence of worlds and $\Box$ and $\Diamond$ express logical necessity and possibility.

The proposition in (1) does not entail that there are OON's in any world and so *a fortiori* does not entail that there is a perfect being in any world. Further (1) does not entail that any being actualizes any possible world in the sequence. And (1) is perfectly consistent with the actual world being the product of pure chance. So there is no strong objection to the *No Best World* hypothesis as formulated in (1). But (1) together with Rowe's *Principle B* entails that an essentially perfectly good being actualizes no world in the sequence. *Principle B* states that necessarily if an omniscient being actualizes a world when there is a better world that it could have actualized, then that omniscient being is *not* essentially perfectly good.¹ The proposition expressed in *Principle B* is (2).

2. $\Box(\forall O)(\forall x)((O \text{ is essentially perfectly good}) \ \& \ (O \text{ actualizes } x)) \supset \sim(\exists y)((x < y) \ \& \ \Diamond(O \text{ actualizes } y)).$

Rowe urges that in addition to (1) and (2) it is also true that a perfect being must actualize some world in the sequence.

3. $\Box(\forall O)(\exists x)((O \text{ is essentially perfectly good}) \supset (O \text{ actualizes } x))$

And it does follow from (1)–(3) that it is impossible that there is an essentially perfectly good being.

4. $\Box\sim(\exists O)(O \text{ is essentially perfectly good})$

Rowe addresses some published objections to this argument from Thomas Morris, William Wainwright, Dan and Frances Howard-Snyder and William Hasker. And Rowe's responses are in general compelling. But there remains a serious problem for Rowe's argument. It is a theorem in every normal system of deontic logic that $\Box((OA \ \& \ OB) \supset \Diamond(A \ \& \ B))$. The theorem states that, necessarily, an agent is obligated to do *each* A and B only if the agent can do *both* A and B. The theorem is considerably stronger than the familiar ought-can principle and, more importantly, it is a direct consequence of the thesis that, necessarily, every essentially perfectly good being fulfills all of his obligations or $\Box(OA \supset A)$. And there is no question that Rowe endorses $\Box(OA \supset A)$ as a theorem governing essentially perfectly good beings.

The problem is that *Principle B* generates a set of obligations that violate the theorem $\Box((OA \ \& \ OB) \supset \Diamond(A \ \& \ B))$. Since no moral principle can generate a set of moral obligations that violate any theorem, it follows that *Principle B* must be false. Let $A_0, A_1, \dots, A_\infty$ express the propositions that an essentially perfectly good being actualizes respectively $w_0, w_1, \dots, w_\infty$. *Principle B* generates the following set of obligations ($O\sim A_0 \ \& \ O\sim A_1 \ \& \ \dots \ \& \ O\sim A_\infty$) or it is obligatory that an essentially perfectly good being does not actualize w_0 , it is obligatory that an essentially perfectly good being does not actualize w_1 and so on for every world in the sequence. Instantiating the theorem we get $\Box[(O\sim A_0 \ \& \ O\sim A_1 \ \& \ \dots \ \& \ O\sim A_\infty) \supset \Diamond(\sim A_0 \ \& \ \sim A_1 \ \& \ \dots \ \& \ \sim A_\infty)]$. But it is impossible that an essentially perfectly good being fails to actualize every world in the sequence and so $\sim\Diamond(\sim A_0 \ \& \ \sim A_1 \ \& \ \dots \ \& \ \sim A_\infty)$. *Principle B* therefore yields a set of obligations that violates this theorem. But no moral principle can generate a set of obligations that violates a deontic theorem. Therefore, the principle is false.

One obvious remedy for Rowe is to give priority to his moral principle over the theorem $\Box((OA \& OB) \supset \Diamond(A \& B))$. But the consequences of abandoning this theorem are drastic. First, Rowe would also have to abandon the thesis $\Box(OA \supset A)$.² But this is just to concede that an essentially perfectly good being *might fail* to fulfill a moral obligation. Rowe would almost certainly not find that consequence acceptable. But matters are worse. The theorem $\Box((OA \& OB) \supset \Diamond(A \& B))$ is also entailed by the familiar axiom that nothing impossible is obligatory $OA \supset \Diamond A$ together with the closure principle $\Box((OA \& OB) \supset O(A \& B))$. So conceding $\Box(OA \supset A)$ is not enough, we have to give up an additional theorem.

It is less damaging to abandon the closure principle. But in that case no inconsistency follows from the assumption that an essentially perfectly good being has the moral obligations (i) $O\sim A_0 \& O\sim A_1 \& \dots \& O\sim A_\infty$ and (ii) $O(A_0 \vee A_1 \vee \dots \vee A_\infty)$. From (i) it follows that an essentially perfectly good being has a moral obligation not to actualize any world in the sequence and from (ii) it follows that an essentially perfectly good being has a moral obligation to actualize some world or other in the sequence. An essentially perfectly good being therefore faces a moral dilemma. Indeed an essentially perfectly good being *necessarily* faces a moral dilemma. But abandoning the closure principle entails that moral dilemmas are perfectly possible. So none of this entails that there exists no essentially perfectly good beings.

If there is an infinite sequence of improving worlds then two conclusions are available. Either an essentially perfectly good being must fulfill all of its moral obligations (i.e., $\Box(OA \supset A)$ is a theorem) and *Principle B* is false or *Principle B* is true and an essentially perfectly good being need not fulfill all of its moral obligations. In neither case are we forced to the conclusion that there exists no essentially perfectly good being.

In the final chapter of *Can God Be Free?* Rowe considers a suggestion from Thomas Morris that God is the "delimiter of possible worlds." The suggestion promises a solution to many of the problems Rowe advances. Perhaps only those worlds are possible that are consistent with the necessary existence of an essentially perfectly good being. If an infinite sequence of improving worlds is inconsistent with a perfect being, then there is no infinite sequence. And if a best possible world is inconsistent with divine freedom, then there are many equally good and unsurpassed worlds. This is a solution that Rowe finds appealing, if not entirely satisfactory. But the argument for Morris's position is one worth worrying about. If w is a possible world that is on-balance bad and God is a necessarily existing, essentially perfectly good being, then it is *necessarily* possible that God actualizes w . So the fact that God can actualize w does not diminish God's essential perfect goodness *unless* there is a moral requirement that God do the impossible, viz., render himself unable to actualize w . But there cannot be a moral requirement that God do the impossible. So we might well conclude instead that the fact that God can actualize w does not diminish God's essential perfect goodness.

NOTES

1. Rowe introduces *Principle B* as stating that if an omniscient being creates a world when there is a better world it could have created, then it is pos-

sible that there exists a being morally better than it. (91) But the consequent entails that the omniscient being is not essentially perfectly good. And Rowe contends that the principle expresses a necessary truth. These modifications facilitate presentation of Rowe's argument.

2. Well, strictly he would have to give up $(OA \supset A)$ or $(A \supset \Diamond A)$. But it is hard to imagine anyone contending that some actual states of affairs are also impossible.

Science and the Study of God: A Mutuality Model for Theology and Science, by Alan G. Padgett. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003. Pp. 224. \$22.00 (paper).
Divine Action and Modern Science, by Nicholas Saunders. Cambridge University Press, 2002. Pp. 234. \$22.00 (paper).

PATRICK RICHMOND, St Catharine's College, Cambridge, UK

These two books deal with the relation of science to theology, one concentrating more on broad outlines and methodology, the other on a specific topic. Both take Christian faith as a given, at least provisionally, and both note that Christian faith sees science as investigating God's creation, so science and theology are both concerned with understanding the same cosmos.

Proceeding from this basic perspective, Padgett develops a collegial metaphor of mutuality, sketching what he terms "dialectical realism" between science and theology. Science and theology should both inform and be informed by our worldview, our basic framework for life that helps us understand the world and motivates our practice as well. Our worldview can affect the way we interpret the data and conclusions of academic disciplines. This "mutuality model" sees science and theology as more intimately related than mere dialogue partners but as still distinct and not fully integrated academic disciplines.

Padgett points out that many claims that science and religion are incompatible incorrectly assume that science is a worldview or that it presupposes a naturalistic worldview. In fact, science arose from a Christian intellectual environment: even Galileo was not antireligious.

Padgett argues for the existence of various levels of explanation, with disciplines like history using explanations that presuppose those used in the social and physical sciences. Theology likewise includes explanatory claims, such as that God somehow explains the existence of the cosmos. He argues that in the right circumstances one's worldview, including religious commitments, can rationally help one choose among various theories that are equally supported by the data and standards of other disciplines. Although the truth must be sought in each science according to the traditions of enquiry of that discipline, results in one field may be called into question by those in another if they do not cohere, as indeed happens amongst the sciences from time to time.

Next, Padgett argues for "dialectical realism." We learn in a community with a history and tradition. As with many post-modern approaches, there is a suspicion of grand systems and an attention to the particular and exceptional. Padgett also argues for critical realism in both theology and science.