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THE CREATION OF A SURPASSABLE WORLD: A REPLY TO DANIEL AND FRANCES HOWARD-SNYDER

Jihwan Yu

In this essay, I closely examine the role of the screening criterion in the Howard-Snyders' thought experiment. Jove's use of a screening criterion plays a crucial role in preserving his moral status. It allows him to take significantly less moral risk in selecting a world for creation. It also helps him resolve the problem of moral luck in his favor. However, it is plausible that a highest screening criterion may not exist, and that for a given screening criterion, a higher one may exist. If this is the case, then Jove faces an infinite regress in selecting a screening criterion, making it impossible for him to use the randomizer.

Typically, contemporary theists assume that an omnipotent and omniscient being surveys possible worlds with different axiological properties and then selects one world for actualization. They also assume that the axiological properties of the possible worlds are comparable such that some possible worlds are better or worse than others. They disagree, however, on whether an unsurpassable world exists.[1] Some believe that only one unsurpassable world exists. Leibniz, for instance, holds this view, arguing that God, due to his supreme wisdom and goodness, cannot but have chosen to create the unsurpassable world, which is the actual world. Others deny that only one unsurpassable world exists; they believe instead that for any given world, a world exists that is trivially different from and yet as good as the original world. For example, a world that differs from the given world by having one more tree would be as good as the given world. They therefore believe that multiple unsurpassable worlds exist. Still others believe that an unsurpassable world does not exist (call this view NUW): for any given world, a better world always exists. They thus believe in the existence of an infinite hierarchy of increasingly better worlds.

In "How an Unsurpassable Being Can Create a Surpassable World," Daniel and Frances Howard-Snyder assert that on NUW, an omnipotent, omniscient, and morally unsurpassable being could create a world inferior

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[1]For a discussion of different views, see Klaas Kraay, "Can God Choose a World at Random?" in *New Waves in Philosophy of Religion*, ed. Y. Nagasawa and E. Wielenberg (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 22–35.

to some other world that it or another being could have created.[2] To defend this assertion, the Howard-Snyders conduct a thought experiment in which Jove, an omnipotent, omniscient, and morally good being, uses a randomizer to select a world for creation. Jove first divides the possible worlds into acceptable and unacceptable ones; in acceptable worlds, every creature is at least as happy on the whole as it would have been in any other possible world, and no creature has a life so miserable on the whole that it would have been better for the creature had it never existed. Let us call this screening criterion the "Adams World Criterion" and the possible worlds that satisfy this screening criterion "Adams Worlds."[3] Jove ranks Adams Worlds according to their goodness, assigning a positive natural number to each one: the worst world receives "1," the second worst "2," and so on. He then creates a device that, at the push of a button, randomly selects a number and produces the corresponding world. When he pushes the button, the randomizer selects World Number 777.

The Howard-Snyders then consider how other beings in Jove's situation might create worlds. Juno, another omnipotent and omniscient being, uses the randomizer to create a world as Jove has. Her randomizer, however, selects World Number 999, a better world than Jove's World Number 777. The Howard-Snyders contend, however, that Juno is not morally superior to Jove; neither Jove nor Juno have any control over which worlds their randomizers select. Therefore, the fact that Juno's randomizer selects a better world by luck is not a good reason to infer that Juno is morally superior to Jove.

The Howard-Snyders also consider Thor, who does not use the randomizer to select a world but chooses to create World Number 888. According to the Howard-Snyders, one cannot judge Thor as morally superior to Jove based solely on the qualities of the worlds that they have created.[4] Given that Jove and Juno are morally equivalent, if Thor is morally superior to Jove, then Thor is also morally superior to Juno. Yet, Thor's created world is inferior to Juno's created world.

After comparing Jove with other beings, the Howard-Snyders conclude that Jove is not morally inferior. In other words, they conclude that on NUW, an omnipotent and omniscient being could create a world surpassed by some other world and yet be morally unsurpassable.[5]

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[2]Daniel and Frances Howard-Snyder, "How an Unsurpassable Being Can Create a Surpassable World," *Faith and Philosophy* 11 (1994), 260–268.

[3]The notion of an Adams World was introduced by Robert M. Adams, "Must God Create the Best?," *Philosophical Review* 91 (2009), 317–332. He argues that if God creates an Adams World, no wrongdoing or unkindness towards creatures is involved in creation.

[4]Jeremy Gwiazda argues that the probability that Jove randomly selects a number less than or equal to 888 is infinitesimal, while the probability that he selects a number greater than 888 is certainty minus this infinitesimal. Since Jove is almost certain to select a larger number than Thor, Jove morally surpasses Thor. See Jeremy Gwiazda, "Remarks on Jove and Thor," *Faith and Philosophy* 25 (2008), 79–86.

[5]Stephen Grover raises an interesting point that a less-than-omnipotent being named Freya can create a better world. Suppose Freya weeds out the unacceptable worlds and then

In this essay, I closely examine the role of the screening criterion in the Howard-Snyders' thought experiment. Jove's use of a screening criterion plays a crucial role in preserving his moral status. It allows him to take significantly less moral risk in selecting a world for creation. It also resolves, in his favor, the problem of moral luck; such a problem arises when one correctly treats an agent as an object of moral judgment even though an important part of that judgment depends on factors beyond the agent's control. And yet, although Jove's use of the screening criterion plays an important role in preserving his moral status, it is doubtful whether he can choose a particular screening criterion. A highest screening criterion may not exist, and for a given screening criterion, there may be a higher one. If this is the case, then Jove faces an infinite regress in selecting a screening criterion: selecting a screening criterion turns out to be as problematic as selecting a world for creation. This fact makes it impossible for him to use the randomizer to choose a world for creation, undermining the coherence of the Howard-Snyders' thought experiment.[6]

The Role of the Screening Criterion: Risk Reduction

Although Jove uses the Adams World Criterion to divide the possible worlds into acceptable and unacceptable ones, it is not the only screening criterion that he could have used.[7] The Howard-Snyders suggest several other screening criteria:

a. No world in which beings live lives that are not worth living is acceptable.

b. No world in which beings experience gratuitous suffering is acceptable.

c. No world in which beings live lives that are not as happy and fulfilled as those lives could possibly be is acceptable.

d. No world empty of sentient and rational beings is acceptable.

Screening criterion c seems to convey a standard similar to that of the Adams World Criterion. According to the Howard-Snyders, some of these screening criteria express higher standards than others. They say that screening criterion b, for example, is higher (i.e., more exclusive) than screening criterion a, for some worlds that would be unacceptable under screening criterion b would be acceptable under screening criterion a. For example, a world in which the inhabitants experience gratuitous suffering

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ranks the acceptable worlds in terms of their goodness and then creates the best world she is capable of creating, say, World Number 1000. This world is better than the worlds created by Jove, Juno, and Thor. See Stephen Grover, "This World, 'Adams Worlds,' and the Best of All Possible Worlds," *Religious Studies* 39 (2003), 145–163.

[6]I note that Howard Sobel makes a similar point in his book. See J. Howard Sobel, *Logic and Theism: Arguments for and against Beliefs in God* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 476.

[7]Frances and Daniel Howard-Snyder, "The *Real* Problem of No Best World," *Faith and Philosophy* 13 (1996), 424.

as well as overwhelming joy would be acceptable under screening criterion a, but not screening criterion b.

In comparison to other screening criteria, the Adams World Criterion allows Jove to take less moral risk. Consider, for instance, what would happen if Jove used a screening criterion that was much more lenient than the Adams World Criterion. Suppose that Jove uses screening criterion d, the most lenient of the four screening criteria. If he divides the possible worlds using this screening criterion, the randomizer can select among a wide range of worlds including, for example, a world in which the inhabitants live mundane lives, a world in which the inhabitants are in dire need of food and shelter, or a world in which the inhabitants experience so much suffering that they prefer death to life.

On the other hand, the randomizer might not select any of these undesirable worlds; in fact, it might luckily select a world in which every inhabitant lives a happy life. If Jove were to use screening criterion d, however, he would be taking the *risk* of selecting an undesirable world. Jove is an omnipotent and omniscient being, so he can choose any screening criterion. And yet, taking such a risk would undermine his moral goodness, for one could ask: why would a morally unsurpassable being use screening criteria d and run the risk of creating an undesirable world when it could easily use the Adams World Criterion?

One might object that, even when he uses the Adams World Criterion, Jove cannot eliminate the risk of creating a less desirable world. Adams Worlds are ranked according to their goodness, the worst world receiving "1," the second worst "2," and so on. If the randomizer selects the number 1, then Jove creates a world less desirable than any of the remaining worlds.

A reply to this objection is that Jove takes significantly less risk by using the Adams World Criterion, and that the degree of risk he takes matters when one assesses his moral goodness. Imagine the worst-case scenario with the use of the Adams World Criterion: the creation of World Number 1. Although World Number 1 is the least desirable of all the Adams Worlds, it is nonetheless an Adams World—a world in which everyone is at least as happy on the whole as he would have been in any other possible world, and in which no one has a life so miserable on the whole that it would have been better for him had he never existed. Compare World Number 1 with a world that could be created if Jove used screening criterion d—a world in which the inhabitants experience so much suffering that they prefer death to life. By using the Adams World Criterion, Jove takes no risk of creating such a world and guarantees the creation of a world acceptable to the inhabitants. These considerations suggest that Jove's use of the Adams World Criterion helps him protect his goodness by allowing him to take less moral risk.

The Role of the Screening Criterion: the Problem of Moral Luck

In addition to helping him protect his goodness, Jove's use of the Adams World Criterion also helps him protect his moral status by resolving the

problem of moral luck in his favor.[8] The problem of moral luck occurs when one correctly treats an agent as an object of moral judgment even though an important part of the moral judgment relies on factors beyond the agent's control. In the paradigmatic case illustrating the problem of moral luck, two truck drivers forget to have their brakes checked and experience brake failure. In one case but not the other, a child runs in front of the truck and is killed. Since neither driver has control over the child's running into the street, it appears that one should not blame the driver who runs over the child more than the one who did not. On the other hand, the driver who runs over the child is at least partly responsible for the child's death, for he failed to have his brakes checked. So, the driver who runs over the child seems to deserve a harsher moral assessment.

One can frame the problem of moral luck as a conflict between two moral principles. One principle holds that an agent should be morally judged based on factors under the agent's control. Let us call this the "Control Principle."[9] This principle implies that one should treat both drivers on equal moral terms; neither has control over the child's running out. On the other hand, the "Moral Luck Principle" holds that an agent should be treated as an object of moral judgment even though an important part of the moral judgment depends on factors beyond the agent's control. This principle implies that the driver who runs over the child deserves a harsher moral assessment. The Control Principle and the Moral Luck Principle thus point to conflicting moral judgments.

The problem of moral luck arises in the Howard-Snyders' thought experiment when they compare Jove and Juno. Both used randomizers to select worlds for creation and therefore did not have control over which worlds they would create. Yet their randomizers selected different outcomes: Jove created World Number 777, while Juno created World Number 999. The Moral Luck Principle implies that Jove deserves a harsher moral judgment because he created an inferior world. The Control Principle, on the other hand, implies that Jove and Juno deserve the same moral judgment because they had no control over which worlds their randomizers would select.

The Howard-Snyders claim that Juno is not morally superior to Jove even though she created a better world. They write,

> Factors outside of one's control can make a difference to how much good one brings about without making a difference to how good one is. Jove has no control over what number his randomizer will deliver. Thus, given his resolve to let the device do its thing, it is not up to him which of the worlds to his right is actualized. And precisely the same can be said about Juno. Thus,

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[8]The problem of moral luck was introduced by Bernard Williams, *Moral Luck* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982) and Thomas Nagel, *Mortal Questions* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1979).

[9]This term is used in Dana K. Nelkin, "Moral Luck," in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. E. Zalta (2008). http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2008/entries/moral-luck/.

even if a better world results from Juno's using the device, that's no reason
to infer that she is morally better than Jove.[10]

This passage suggests that the Howard-Snyders resolve the problem of
moral luck by rejecting the Moral Luck Principle and upholding the Con-
trol Principle. They believe that Jove should not receive moral blame for
producing a worse outcome because he had no control over which world
his randomizer would select.

It is debatable whether the Howard-Snyders' solution to the problem is
plausible. Philosophers have offered different solutions to the problem of
moral luck. Some deny the existence of moral luck and explain away the
appearance of moral luck.[11] They argue, for example, that our differing
treatment of the two truck drivers indicates how we are influenced by
different epistemic situations. We do not know for certain the drivers'
mental states at the time of the accident. The fact that one driver and not
the other runs over the child provides epistemic evidence that the first
driver is more negligent than the second. Therefore, it is the availability
of epistemic evidence that influences our differing moral judgments of the
drivers. Other philosophers, in contrast, accept the existence of moral luck
and reject the Control Principle.[12] They might point, for instance, to our
common practices of blaming people for their racist attitudes even though
we do not believe that such people are in complete control of their at-
titudes; their upbringing, we reason, may have influenced their attitudes.
These philosophers argue that these practices reveal our implicit rejection
of the Control Principle.

Although philosophers take different approaches to the problem of
moral luck, one can make an insightful observation about it: the severity
of the consequence resulting from an agent's action tends to influence
one's moral judgment of the agent's action. Consider, again, the case of
the two truck drivers. Suppose that instead of a child, a dog runs in front
of each truck and is killed in one case, but not in the other. Killing a dog
is not good, but it is not as severe in consequence as killing a child; most
people would grant that a human life is more morally significant than a
canine life. Given that the drivers do not have control over the dog's run-
ning out, when the truck driver runs over a dog instead of a child, it is less
difficult to accept that both drivers deserve the same moral assessment. A
less severe consequence tends to bolster the Control Principle and weaken
the Moral Luck Principle.

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[10]Snyder and Snyder, "How an Unsurpassable Being can Create a Surpassable World,"
263.

[11]For this perspective, see Norvin Richards, "Luck and Desert," *Mind* 65 (1986), 198–206
and Brian Rosebury, "Moral Responsibility and Moral Luck," *Philosophical Review* 104 (1995),
499–524.

[12]For this perspective, see Robert M. Adams, "Involuntary Sins," *Philosophical Review* 94
(1985), 3–31 and Michael S. Moore, *Placing Blame: A Theory of the Criminal Law* (Oxford: Clar-
endon Press, 1997).

Suppose, on the other hand, that five children run in front of each truck and are killed in one case, but not in the other. Killing five children creates a serious consequence; it takes away their future experiences, activities, and joys, and impacts the lives of those close to the children. Given the severity of the consequence, one is more inclined to blame the driver who ran over the children; one feels that the driver deserves a harsher moral judgment for failing to have his brakes checked. A more severe consequence tends to bolster the Moral Luck Principle and weaken the Control Principle.

One can make the same observation about the comparison between Jove and Juno. The Howard-Snyders claim that Juno is not morally superior to Jove because neither had control over which worlds their randomizers would select. Their claim sounds plausible in part because the difference between the worlds that Juno and Jove created is, relatively speaking, not great. Although Jove's World Number 777 is worse than Juno's World Number 999, both are Adams Worlds—worlds in which everyone is at least as happy on the whole as he would have been in any other possible world, and in which no one has a life so miserable on the whole that it would have been better for him had he never existed. Since the worlds that they created are good (or at least acceptable to most of the inhabitants), and given that Jove did not have control over which world his randomizer would select, one is hesitant to blame him for creating a worse world. In this case, the Control Principle seems more appealing than the Moral Luck Principle.

Suppose, however, that Jove's randomizer selects a world in which the inhabitants experience so much suffering that they prefer death to life, whereas Juno's randomizer selects one of the Adams Worlds. In this case, the Howard-Snyders' claim sounds less plausible. The striking difference of consequences makes Jove appear more blameworthy than Juno. Jove is an omniscient and omnipotent being and yet has created a world of misery; it seems that he should bear some moral responsibility for the consequence. So in this case, the Moral Luck Principle appears more appealing.

These considerations suggest that Jove's use of the Adams Criterion helps him protect his moral status by resolving the problem of moral luck in his favor. His use of the Adams Criterion prevents the creation of a world of misery and guarantees the creation of an Adams World. This fact bolsters the Control Principle and weakens the Moral Luck Principle, rendering support for the claim that Juno is not morally superior to Jove.

The Problem of Selecting a Screening Criterion

Up to this point, I have shown that Jove's Adams World Criterion plays a crucial role in protecting his moral status. Yet questions naturally arise concerning his use of the screening criterion: Could he have used a higher (i.e., more exclusive) screening criterion? Does a highest screening criterion exist? If so, must he use it in order to be morally unsurpassable?

The Howard-Snyders believe that a highest screening criterion exists. They write, "But why suppose that for every such principle, there is a higher? It seems odd to say the least that there should be infinitely many such general principles. At least we see no reason to accept that there are."[13] They also write, "It is not reasonable to believe that there are infinitely many principles [screening criteria]."[14] The Howard-Snyders, however, do not seem to offer evidence for these assertions: they do not provide convincing reasons to believe that a highest screening criterion exists.

Concerning these assertions, Klaas Kraay comments, "By themselves, these claims do not constitute an *argument* for (14) [a highest screening criterion exists]."[15] According to Kraay, the Howard-Snyders' reasons are dialectical rather than philosophical. Yet for a different reason, he also maintains that a highest screening criterion does *not* exist. Each screening criterion points to a certain property that, if instantiated, tends to make the resulting world good. He calls this property the "world-good-making property," or WGMP. Consider the screening criterion, "No world in which the inhabitants live lives that are not worth living is acceptable." The WGMP of this screening criterion is the lives worth living. This WGMP, however, cannot be maximally instantiated in a given world. For any given number of lives worth living, one can imagine a greater number of lives worth living. Since there is no unsurpassably great number, no unsurpassable world based on this WGMP exists. Kraay believes that most plausible WGMPs are degreed properties: they are instantiated in degrees just as are the lives worth living. Therefore, a highest screening criterion does not exist.

Kraay's argument, however, is not convincing. If a screening criterion's WGMP is a degreed property, then it seems that a highest screening criterion does not exist. Yet he does not clearly show what makes a WGMP plausible, why most plausible WGMPs are degreed properties, and why a plausible WGMP cannot be an all-or-nothing property instead of a degreed property. These are important and relevant questions, and yet he does not directly address them.

One can make a more convincing argument that a highest screening criterion does not exist: if one accepts NUW, then one is compelled to accept that a highest screening criterion does not exist.[16] NUW assumes that the axiological properties of the possible worlds are comparable such that some possible worlds are better or worse than others. Many contemporary theistic philosophers share this view. They believe that God is unsurpassable in power, knowledge, and goodness, and is the creator and sustainer of the world. Before God creates the world, he surveys the

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[13]Snyder and Snyder, "The *Real* Problem of No Best World," 424.

[14]Ibid.

[15]Klaas Kraay, "William L. Rowe's *A Priori* Argument for Atheism," *Faith and Philosophy* 22 (2005), 220.

[16]I do not have to prove that the screening criteria have hierarchical orders. The Howard-Snyders assume this. So my argument still works against their view.

set of possible worlds and freely selects exactly one for actualization on the basis of its axiological property. Given that the possible worlds have axiological status, three views on the existence of an unsurpassable world emerge. One view holds that only one unsurpassable world exists; another holds that multiple unsurpassable worlds exist; and the last holds that an unsurpassable world does not exist (i.e., NUW).

The Howard-Snyders' thought experiment assumes that the possible worlds can be evaluated based on an axiological property. For example, Jove ranks the possible worlds according to their goodness, an axiological property: "Then he orders the right hand worlds according to their goodness and assigns to each a positive natural number, the worst of the lot receiving '1,' the second worst '2,' and so on."[17] Another passage confirms that an axiological property is the basis of how the possible worlds are evaluated: "Thor is not better *qua rational agent* than Jove since on this retelling of the story Thor selects world no. 888 not because of its goodness but because he simply prefers it, say, because it has simpler laws or lots of waterfalls and jagged peaks and he likes those things."[18]

Those advocating NUW typically argue that since one can evaluate possible worlds based on an axiological property, one cannot maximally actualize in a given world whatever axiological property one chooses. Bruce Reichenbach, for example, argues that for any world exhibiting a particular axiological property, one can conceive of another world exhibiting a greater amount of the same axiological property.[19] He writes,

> What sorts of states of affairs are counted as the most beneficial or opitimific? Hedonism suggests states of affairs which produce pleasure; utilitarianism suggests utility; eudaimonism, happiness. Other possibilities would include most virtue, moral goodness, or goodwill in the world. But no matter which of these be accepted, whether individually or in combination . . . one could imagine an infinite series of optimific states in which for any amount of optimific states of affairs n, one could conceive of n + 1 states of affairs, or considered qualitatively for any degree of optimificity in the world one could conceive of even more optimificity. . . . Thus there could be no best possible world, since for any world which we could name there would always be another which was more optimific.[20]

Reichenbach suggests several axiological properties by which one might evaluate the possible worlds: pleasure, utility, happiness, virtue, moral goodness, or goodwill. These are all degreed properties. Consider, for example, the property of pleasure. For any world where inhabitants experience a given level of pleasure, one can conceive of another world where the inhabitants experience a higher level of pleasure. Therefore, an unsurpassable world with a highest level of pleasure does not exist.

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[17]"How an Unsurpassable Being can Create a Surpassable World," 260.

[18]Ibid., 265.

[19]Bruce Reichenbach, *Evil and a Good God* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1982).

[20]Ibid., 127–128.

Since Jove bases his evaluation of a world for creation on an axiological property, it is only natural that he bases his screening criterion on an axiological property as well. Jove uses the screening criterion as a means to choose an acceptable world for creation: using the screening criterion, he screens out unacceptable worlds before applying the randomizer. Whether or not a world is acceptable for creation, however, is also an axiological question. Consider, again, what the Howard-Snyders propose as Jove's screening criteria:

a. No world in which beings live lives that are not worth living is acceptable.

b. No world in which beings experience gratuitous suffering is acceptable.

c. No world in which beings live lives that are not as happy and fulfilled as those lives could possibly be is acceptable.

d. No world empty of sentient and rational beings is acceptable.

All of these screening criteria are based on axiological properties. Screening criterion a divides the possible worlds based on the lives that are worth living; screening criterion b, on the experience of gratuitous suffering; screening criterion c, on happiness; and screening criterion d, on the lives of sentient and rational beings. It is no accident that these screening criteria incorporate axiological properties. They all serve the purpose of screening out unacceptable worlds, and the question of whether or not a world is acceptable for creation is an axiological one.

The fact that a screening criterion is based on an axiological property leads to the conclusion that a highest screening criterion does not exist; the argument for NUW applies to the non-existence of a highest screening criterion. Since an axiological property is a degreed property, one cannot maximally actualize it in a given world. The possible worlds are evaluated based on an axiological property. Therefore, an unsurpassable world does not exist. Likewise, a highest screening criterion does not exist because a screening criterion is based on an axiological property; no matter what axiological property one uses to rank the possible screening criteria, a highest screening criterion does not exist.

One might object that this argument assumes that every axiological property is a degreed property. This assumption, however, is refutable, for one can conceivably devise a screening criterion incorporating an all-or-nothing axiological property. It is not clear what such an axiological property is, but one might speculate that it would be like the property of being bald or pregnant. One is either bald or not bald, and there are, one might presume, no degrees of baldness. Likewise, one is either pregnant or not pregnant but cannot be half-pregnant. If one devises a screening criterion incorporating an all-or-nothing property, then this screening criterion would be superior to any other screening criterion not incorporating the same property. Obviously, in addition one needs to show that the screening criterion incorporating the all-or-nothing axiological property is higher than any other

screening criterion incorporating a degreed axiological property. To show this may not be an easy task. But assuming that one can accomplish it, one cannot completely rule out the possibility of a highest screening criterion.

This is an objection, however, that those accepting NUW cannot raise; the objection would undermine their own view. If an all-or-nothing axiological property exists such that one can devise a screening criterion incorporating it, then one might as well use that same axiological property to rank the possible worlds. It is implausible to believe that one can use an all-or-nothing axiological property to devise a screening criterion, but cannot use the same property to evaluate a world. It seems completely arbitrary to say that an axiological property is appropriate for evaluating the possible screening criteria but not for evaluating the possible worlds, and the axiological property happens to be an all-or-nothing property. If one uses an all-or-nothing axiological property to evaluate the possible worlds, then the world where the property is actualized could qualify as unsurpassable. These considerations suggest that one cannot argue for the use of an all-or-nothing axiological property as a screening criterion without undermining NUW.

The issue of whether a highest screening criterion exists has an important implication for the Howard-Snyders' thought experiment. The fact that a highest screening criterion does not exist would crucially undermine the coherence of that thought experiment. Call the view NUS or "no unsurpassable screening criterion," which holds that a highest screening criterion does not exist and that a higher screening criterion always exists for any given screening criterion. On NUS, Jove must choose a screening criterion before using the randomizer. In order to use the randomizer, he must assign natural numbers to the possible worlds. And in order to assign natural numbers to the possible worlds, he needs a screening criterion to fix the World Number 1 mark. How would Jove choose a screening criterion on NUS?

The Howard-Snyders advocate the use of a randomizer on NUW. If they are right, consistency requires that they should do the same on NUS. Although NUW involves the possible worlds and NUS involves the possible screening criteria, they share important similarities: they concern an infinite number of components; they represent hierarchies of increasingly better standards; and how one chooses a particular component affects his or her moral status. These similarities suggest that the same argument for the use of randomizer on NUW should apply to NUS.

What alternative action could Jove take on NUS? It appears that, as in the Howard-Snyders' thought experiment, he has three available options. He could decide to do nothing, in which case no world would be created. He could use the randomizer which may happen to select a higher screening criterion. Lastly, he could decide to select a higher screening criterion without using the randomizer. According to the Howard-Snyders' view, however, Jove would not be morally superior by virtue of taking any of these actions.

On NUS, however, a problem arises with Jove's use of a randomizer. He needs a secondary screening criterion to choose a screening criterion. In order to use the randomizer, he must assign natural numbers to the possible screening criteria. And in order to assign natural numbers to the possible screening criteria, he needs a secondary screening criterion to fix the Screening Criterion Number 1 mark. The use of a screening criterion is indispensable whether Jove numbers the possible worlds or the possible screening criteria.

But Jove then encounters an infinite regress: he must use the randomizer once again to select a secondary screening criterion. A screening criterion screens out unacceptable possible worlds, while a secondary criterion screens out unacceptable screening criteria. Since whether a screening criterion is acceptable is an axiological question, the same argument for the non-existence of a highest screening criterion should apply to the non-existence of a highest secondary screening criterion.

A close examination of the Howard-Snyders' thought experiment thus reveals that whether Jove can use the randomizer to select a world for creation depends on whether a highest screening criterion exists. On NUW, it is plausible that a highest screening criterion does not exist; if one accepts NUW, then one is compelled to accept NUS. On NUS, however, Jove needs a secondary screening criterion to select a screening criterion. Jove thereby faces an infinite regress in selecting a screening criterion, making it impossible for him to use the randomizer to select a world for creation.

Conclusion

I have argued that Jove's use of the screening criterion plays an important role in preserving his moral status. It allows him to take significantly less moral risk in selecting a world for creation. It also helps him resolve the problem of moral luck in his favor by bolstering the Control Principle and weakening the Moral Luck Principle.

Although Jove's use of the screening criterion plays an important role in preserving his moral status, it is doubtful whether Jove can choose a particular screening criterion before using the randomizer. The Howard-Snyders assert that a highest screening criterion does not exist, but they do not offer good reason for their assertion. I have argued that if one accepts NUW, then one is forced to accept NUS, because the possible worlds and the possible screening criteria are evaluated based on axiological properties. On NUS, however, Jove faces an infinite regress in choosing a screening criterion since he needs a secondary screening criterion to choose a screening criterion: selecting a screening criterion turns out to be as problematic as selecting a world for creation. This fact makes it impossible for him to use the randomizer to select a world for creation, critically undermining the coherence of the Howard-Snyders' thought experiment.

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