

Review of: "A Priori Arguments for Determinism/Universal Necessity – and the Leibnizian Theodicy"

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Potential competing interests: No potential competing interests to declare.

I thought the paper was excellent: I enjoyed it a lot and learned from it. My comments here will develop one particular objection that I see another reviewer has raised. (The objection occurred to me independently.) After I set out my version of the objection, I will consider how the author responded to the issue when it was raised by the other reviewer, and then will use the author's response to further develop my own version of the objection.

My objection says that there is no unique best possible world. Consider two possible worlds that are otherwise indiscernible but in one I choose to scratch my head with my left hand while in the other I choose to scratch it with my right hand, where there is no moral significance to the choice either way. It seems plausible that these could be equally good worlds. But then, why couldn't there be a class of equally good *best* possible worlds that differ just in this sort of trivial, head-scratching way?

Now, in their comments on the author's paper, reviewer Aldo Frigerio also raises the suggestion that there is no unique best possible world. (It is Frigerio's 2nd comment.) The author responds to Frigerio by contending that according to Leibniz, if there is not a unique best possible world, it will follow that God cannot be a perfect being. The reason this follows is that God cannot rationally choose to make one of the equally best worlds actual instead of another. But then it follows that God cannot create any world at all. But creating no world at all would contradict God's perfect Goodness. Therefore, God's perfect goodness entails that there must be a unique best possible world.

I think this is an ingenious line of argument. However, it seems to me that surely something is off here. Even if I grant for the sake of argument that it is irrational to choose between two options when they are equally good, it seems like what should follow from this is that it would be irrational *for me* to choose between scratching my head with my left hand versus scratching it with my right hand (in the above scenario), not that it would be irrational for God to create a world in which I face such a choice—the irrationality is mine and mine alone.

Or, to try to build this thought into a reductio, does the author's reasoning rule out that any actual agent ever faces a choice between two equally good options, since if any actual agent faces such a choice it would seem to follow that the possible world in which the agent chooses one option will be equally as good as the possible world in which the agent chooses the other option, contradicting the claim that the actual world is the unique best possible world?

Here is one more way to develop the intended reductio. The familiar objection to Leibniz's view says that if you consider something like the Lisbon earthquake, you'll realize that the evil we find in the actual world shows that it is not the best

possible world after all. But if the author is correct, the Leibniz critic doesn't need the Lisbon earthquake to create problems for Leibniz, or really any form of evil at all. Instead, the Leibniz critic can just point out that scratching your head with your left hand is as good as scratching it with your right. Given that the two options are equally good, it follows that we do not live in the unique best possible world, which in turn entails that God does not exist (given the premise that God's nature entails that we do live in the unique best world).