Plantinga, Presumption, Possibility, and the Problem of Evil

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My topic is Alvin Plantinga's "solution" to one of the many forms that the problem of evil takes: the modal abstract form.[1] This form of the problem is abstract in that it does not deal with the amounts or kinds of evil which exist, but only with the fact that there is some evil or other. And it is modal in that it concerns the <u>compossibility</u> of the following propositions, not any evidential relation between them:

> (1) God is omnipotent, omniscient, and wholly good

and

> (2) There is evil in the world.

Plantinga construes the "atheologian" as claiming that "the conjunction of these two propositions is necessarily false, false in every possible world," while Plantinga "aims to show that there is a possible world in which (1) and (2) are both true."[2]

While Plantinga's attempts to solve <u>other</u> forms of the problem of evil are considered by almost all students of them to be controversial, his solution to the modal abstract form of the problem of evil is, at least in some (fairly wide) philosophical circles,

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[1] For some helpful distinctions between various forms of the problem of evil, see Robert M. Adams, "Plantinga on the Problem of Evil," in J.E. Tomberlin and P. van Inwagen, eds., <u>Plantinga</u> (Dordrecht: D. Reidel 1985). Note that Adams calls this form of the problem the "logical abstract" form. I prefer the terminology I have introduced for reasons that will soon become apparent. (Adams has told me that he also prefers my terminology.)

[2] <u>The Nature of Necessity</u>, hereafter abbreviated as 'NN' (Oxford: Oxford University Press 1974),165

thought to be a complete success. Robert Adams, I think, is expressing a fairly commonly held opinion when he writes of the modal abstract problem of evil: "I think it is fair to say that Plantinga has solved this problem."[3] In fact, I think it is not an exaggeration to say that in some circles, Plantinga is thought to have scored a victory over the "atheologians" with respect to this form of the problem of evil that is about as decisive as philosophical victories get. I will argue that Plantinga has <u>not</u> shown that (1) and (2) are compossible.

But I should first say a bit about the type of modality at issue and the relation of the modal problem of evil to the more traditional issue of whether or not there is a <u>contradiction</u> or <u>inconsistency</u> involved between (1) and (2).

II. The Modalization of the Problem of Evil

In discussing the modal abstract problem of evil, Plantinga certainly did not take himself to be debating a merely imaginary opponent. He felt, rather, that modal atheologians (those who claim that the conjunction of (1) and (2) is false in every possible world) were all too real. Plantinga includes among their ranks "some of the French Encyclopedists, J.S. Mill, F.H. Bradley, and many others."[4] J.L. Mackie is also cited as an instance of such an atheologian. I think, however, that Plantinga underestimated the boldness of Mackie and some other actual atheologians.

The philosophers listed above, according to Plantinga, "have claimed that there is a <u>contradiction</u> involved in asserting, as the theist does," both (1) and (2) (GFE, 11). Plantinga quotes a passage in which Mackie also makes the closely related charge that there is an <u>inconsistency</u> between (1) and (2).[5] Plantinga construes these remarks in a modal way: what the atheologian <u>means</u> by such charges is that the conjunction of (1) and (2) is <u>necessarily</u> false (NN, 165). In order to show that (1) and (2) are in this sense contradictory, the atheologian "must produce a proposition that is at least plausibly thought to be necessary and whose conjunction with [(1) and (2)] formally yields a

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[3] Adams, "Plantinga on the Problem of Evil," 996. Adams goes on to show why Plantinga's responses to the other forms of the problem are not as satisfying.

[4] <u>God, Freedom, and Evil</u>, hereafter abbreviated as "GFE" (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdman's, 1974), 11; cf. NN, 164.

[5] GFE, 12; NN, 164.

contradiction" (NN, 165). Plantinga thinks that Mackie is setting just this task for himself in the following passage:

> However, the contradiction does not arise immediately; to show it we need some additional premises, or perhaps some quasi-logical rules connecting the terms "good" and "evil" and "omnipotent." These additional principles are that good is opposed to evil, in such a way that a good thing always eliminates evil as far as it can, and that there are no limits to what an omnipotent thing can do. From these it follows that a good omnipotent thing eliminates evil completely, and then the propositions that a good omnipotent thing exists, and that evil exists, are incompatible.[6]

I think, however, that Mackie's "quasi-logical rules" were meant to be more than mere necessary truths, and that by calling (1) and (2) incompatible, Mackie intended to be making a much stronger charge that their conjunction was not possible, at least in the sense of "necessary" and "possible" under discussion in Plantinga's works.

The type of necessity and possibility at issue is Plantinga's "broadly logical" necessity and possibility, which seems to be a not-too-distant relative of Kripke's "metaphysical" necessity and possibility.[7] Plantinga, quite understandably, does not define these "broadly logical" modalities, but rather introduces them largely through the use of examples. What is important for our discussion is that the class of broadly logically necessary truths is quite a bit wider than the class of analytic truths, under any plausible reading of "analytic." Plantinga, for instance, apparently thinks that A

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[6] Mackie, "Evil and Omnipotence," Mind 64 (1955), 200-1; quoted by Plantinga in GFE, 16.

[7] See NN, especially 1-9, for Plantinga's characterization of "broadly logical" modality. Plantinga equates his notion of "broadly logical" modality with "metaphysical" modality in Does God Have a Nature? (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 1980), 102.

It is important to note that while Plantinga often follows the common philosophical practice of (mis)using the sentence form "It is possible that P" with the embedded P in the indicative mood – a form which in ordinary English expresses an epistemic possibility that P (see Ian Hacking's "Possibility," The Philosophical Review 76 (1967), 143-68; his "All Kinds of Possibility," The Philosophical Review 84 (1975), 321-37; and my "Epistemic Possibilities," The Philosophical Review, forthcoming) – to express his "broadly logical" possibilities (see, for example, proposition (11) in NN, 202), these "broadly logical" possibilities are not in any way epistemic. They are a species of ways things could have been, not a species of ways things may (for all we know) be. I will often follow Plantinga in this practice of (mis)using modal expressions in this way, but the reader should be careful not to let Plantinga's claims of possibility gain any illicit support from how acceptable these claims sound in normal English.

<u>maximally excellent being exists</u> is necessarily true in the sense under discussion.[8] Thus, although the very meanings of the terms do not guarantee that the above italicized proposition is true, Plantinga thinks that, in the relevant sense, it is <u>impossible</u> that it should have been false.

Now, when Mackie calls such principles as that <u>there are no limits to what an omnipotent thing can do</u> "quasi-logical rules connecting the terms 'good' and 'evil' and 'omnipotent,'" I think he means something like that they are analytic truths, truths in virtue of meaning, or, as they are sometimes called, meaning postulates. And, thus, when he says that there is an <u>inconsistency</u> or <u>contradiction</u> involved between (1) and (2), he means more than that their conjunction is impossible in anything close to Plantinga's sense. It is, in fact, a very strangely weak use of "contradiction" to say that, if Plantinga is right in claiming that a maximally excellent being necessarily exists, then there is a <u>contradiction</u> involved in <u>No maximally excellent being exists</u>. Likewise, even if Plantinga were right about such a necessary existence, should we say that the atheist who asserts that no maximally excellent being exists is being <u>inconsistent</u>? This seems to me to be too weak a use of "inconsistent," and I doubt that Mackie meant anything so weak by the term.

Still, <u>if</u> Plantinga wins his struggle against the modal atheologian, then, given that analytic truths are necessary, he will thereby defeat the analytic atheologian as well. If Plantinga shows that (1) and (2) are compossible, he thereby also shows that there is no contradiction involved in conjoining them. Plantinga could then be seen as going above and beyond the call of duty, as having shown not merely that there is no contradiction between (1) and (2), but that they are compossible to boot. And this going above and beyond the call of duty would allow Plantinga to obtain the result that there is no sound argument for the non-existence of God whose only <u>contingent</u> premise is that there is evil – a result that would not follow if he had merely defeated the analytic atheologian.

Plantinga's struggle against the modal atheologian can be divided into two stages. As we've seen, Plantinga writes that the atheologian, in order to make his case, "must produce a proposition that is at least plausibly thought to be necessary and whose conjunction with [(1) and (2)] formally yields a contradiction." Stage I is a <u>defensive</u>

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[8] See Plantinga's discussion of the Ontological Argument in NN, 196-221.

stage in which Plantinga considers many of the candidates for such a proposition and argues that they are not really necessarily true. Plantinga concludes that "it is extremely difficult to find any such proposition" (NN, 165), and that the atheologians have, at best, made "scarcely a beginning" toward finding such a proposition (GFE, 23-4). Thus, the atheologians have not successfully made their case. In Stage II, Plantinga attempts to make a positive case for the compossibility of (1) and (2). Stage II is the heart of Plantinga's case against the atheologian: he does not even go through Stage I in The Nature of Necessity, but refers the reader to another of his books for this part of his case.[9] It is the value of Stage II of Plantinga's defense that I will question in this paper.

III. PPP and Its Restrictions

In a very interesting passage, Plantinga, after having completed Stage I of his defense, pauses to consider the possibility of declaring victory before going on to Stage II:

> Now we might think we should simply declare set A [the set of propositions (1) and (2)] implicitly consistent on the principle that a proposition (or set) is to be presumed consistent or possible until proven otherwise. (GFE, 24)

Plantinga is considering invoking what I shall call "The Principle of the Presumption of Possibility," or "PPP," for short. Let us call the conjunction of (1) and (2) "Q." Plantinga and the atheologian are arguing over whether or not Q is possible. According to PPP, the atheist must come up with some good reason[10] for claiming that Q is impossible and if he cannot do that, Plantinga wins by default. The possibility of a proposition is presumed until the proposition is shown to be impossible.

Plantinga decides that he cannot invoke PPP because it "leads to trouble." He explains:

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[9] In NN, 165, n. 1, Plantinga refers the reader to God and Other Minds (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1967), ch. 5, for Stage I. GFE contains both Stage I and Stage II.

[10] Of course, it would be silly to require that PPP always be defeated by an argument. In some cases (e.g. 2+2=5, and even much less clear cases), PPP could be defeated by the intuitive plausibility of the impossibility of the proposition itself.

The same principle would impel us to declare the atheologian's claim – that set A is <u>in</u>consistent – possible or consistent. But the claim that a given set of propositions is implicitly contradictory, is itself either necessarily true or necessarily false; so if such a claim is <u>possible</u>, it is not necessarily false and is, therefore, true (in fact, necessarily true). If we followed the suggested principle, therefore, we should be obliged to declare set A implicitly consistent (since it hasn't been shown to be otherwise), but we should have to say the same thing about the atheologian's claim, since we haven't shown <u>that</u> claim to be inconsistent or impossible. The atheologian's claim, furthermore, is necessarily true if it is possible. Accordingly, if we accept the above principle, we shall have to declare set A both implicitly consistent and implicitly inconsistent. (GFE, 24)

Plantinga therefore concludes that "all we can say at this point is that set A has not been shown to be implicitly inconsistent" (GFE, 24). He then proceeds to Stage II of his defense.

Now Plantinga is, of course, right that PPP is useless if it is taken to apply to all propositions. We can generalize Plantinga's above argument to show why this is so. Take <u>any</u> proposition p which someone wants to declare to be possibly true by invoking PPP. Now, if PPP is to be applicable to all propositions, then it is applicable to <u>necessarily not-p</u>. Thus, <u>necessarily not-p</u> is to be presumed possible until it is shown to be impossible. But if <u>necessarily not-p</u> is possible (as we are presuming), then p is impossible. Thus, PPP leads us to presume that p is impossible as well as leading us to presume that p is possible. (The same result, of course, can be obtained by assigning presumption of possibility to <u>impossibly p</u>.) To use PPP to establish successfully a presumption of p's possibility, then, one has to defeat the presumption attaching to <u>necessarily not-p</u>. That is, one must give some reason for thinking that <u>necessarily not-p</u> is impossible. But this looks to be <u>very</u> similar to – and no easier than – the task of giving some reason for thinking that p is possible. But we could have done that right from the beginning, without invoking PPP. PPP, if it is taken in an unrestricted form, then, seems to be of no help in establishing any presumption of possibility.

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To be acceptable, then, PPP must be restricted so that it does not apply to all propositions, and one restriction that would have to be made would be to the effect that PPP cannot be applied to any proposition of the form necessarily... or impossibly... . Perhaps it would be more accurate to call it the Principle of the Presumption of Contingency (rather than of Possibility). Propositions of the above forms could not receive the presumption, then, because, by logical necessity, they cannot be contingently true.[11] Still broader restrictions will be needed. Consider the proposition At least one glumph exists, where a "glumph" is defined to be a necessarily existing lion. Although this proposition is not of the form necessarily... or impossibly..., it, like propositions of those forms, by logical necessity, cannot be contingently true. Thus, applying PPP to it will be quite problematic, for we could equally well presume that It is not the case that at least one glumph exists is possibly true, and thereby be led to presume that At least one glumph exists is impossible. At the very least, PPP must be restricted so that it cannot be applied to any proposition whose possible truth logically entails its necessary truth. If either of the above restrictions were made, then Plantinga could perhaps declare victory after Stage I of his defense. He has, he thinks, shown that none of the reasons why one might think that Q is not possibly true turn out to be good reasons. He could perhaps then invoke PPP to declare Q to be possibly true, without worrying that the atheist could just as well invoke PPP in order to presume impossible that Q to be possible, because impossible that Q does not meet the restrictions discussed above.

So perhaps Plantinga could successfully apply PPP to Q. But, on the other hand, perhaps other restrictions would have to be made on PPP before it would be acceptable, and some of them might restrict Q from receiving the presumption. Jonathan Bennett, for example, has endorsed a restriction that is quite a bit stronger than either of the two discussed above. He claims that PPP "is correct only in application to possibilities that do

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[11] I am assuming, as Plantinga does, that all the inferences allowed by S5 are valid inferences when the type of necessity and possibility involved is Plantinga's "broadly logical" type. If S5 inferences are allowed, then it can be proven that no proposition of the above forms can be contingent. Of course, we do not want simply to say that only contingent propositions can receive the Presumption, because whether a proposition is contingent is precisely what we are trying to decide by applying the Presumption to it. The point I am making is that it is logically impossible (strictly logically impossible, as opposed to Plantinga's notion of "broadly logical" modalities) that a proposition of one of these forms be contingent. For a discussion of restricting the presumption to those propositions that can be contingently true, see Robert M. Adams, "Presumption and the Necessary Existence of God," NOUS 22 (1988), 21-2.

not themselves have modal concepts nested within them."[12] Q may well run afoul of this restriction because (1) contains terms ("omnipotent," for example) that may have to be modally defined.[13] And perhaps no form of PPP would be acceptable. Thus, it is not yet clear that Q (or any other proposition) is an appropriate recipient of the Presumption of Possibility. Therefore, if Plantinga thinks he can show Q to be possibly true, it looks like a good idea, for two reasons, not to bother with PPP. First, it is a difficult task to formulate PPP in an acceptable way and to argue that it is a plausible principle so formulated. Second, even if PPP could be successfully formulated and defended, it would in any case be better to show Q to be possibly true, rather than just relying on a presumption of possibility.

So it appears that Stage II is an indispensable part of Plantinga's case and that he does well not to rely on PPP. But does he really avoid all reliance on PPP? I think that if we look closely at Plantinga's free will defense, it is not clear what he gains by going through Stage II.

IV. A Brief Look at Plantinga's Free Will Defense

Plantinga's strategy for showing that (1) and (2) are compossible is to come up with some proposition, r, which is compossible with (1) and which, together with (1), entails (2).[14] Of course, (2) itself, Plantinga must believe, is such a proposition. What is clearly needed for anything to be accomplished is a proposition which is obviously compossible with (1)

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[12] See Bennett, A Study of Spinoza's Ethics (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1984), 72. Bennett's restriction is stronger than the preceding restrictions because not all propositions with modal concepts nested within them are such that their possible truth entails their necessary truth. Consider At least one glimph exists, where a "glimph" is defined as a lion which is essentially brown – a lion that is such that it is necessarily true that if it exists, then it is brown. Since "glimph" is a modal concept, Bennett would not allow PPP to apply to At least one glimph exists. But since that proposition's possible truth does not entail its necessary truth, it would escape the preceding restrictions.

      Bennett admits that he has no argument for the view that PPP is correct only when restricted in his strong way (72). Robert M. Adams describes a plausible rationale for restricting PPP in this way in Adams, "Presumption and the Necessary Existence of God," 25-6. Adams goes on to register an objection to PPP so restricted (26-7), and, in the end, concludes that presumptions of possibility should not play a role in metaphysical and theological arguments (27-31).

[13] This issue will be discussed in Section V, below.

[14] NN, 165; cf. GFE, 26.

– at least more obviously compossible with (1) than (2) itself is. Plantinga's main candidate[15] for r is the conjunction of the following two propositions:

> (31) Every essence suffers from transworld depravity

and

> (32) God actualizes a world containing moral good. (NN, 189)

To understand (31), those who are already familiar with Plantinga's technical terms like "largest state of affairs" and "strong actualization" need only be reminded that Plantinga defines transworld depravity as follows:

> An essence E suffers <u>from transworld depravity</u> if and only if for every world W such that E entails the properties <u>is significantly free in W</u> and <u>always does what is right in W</u>, there is a state of affairs T and an action A such that
>   (1) T is the largest state of affairs God strongly actualizes in W,
>   (2) A is morally significant for E's instantiation in W,
> and
>   (3) if God had strongly actualized T, E's instantiation would have gone wrong with respect to A. (NN, 188)

For those not familiar with his technical terminology, Plantinga's picture is this. There necessarily exists a set of essences such that there could not possibly be something that is not an instantiation of one of the essences of that set. Instead of speaking of essences, we may, for convenience, speak of possible creatures. Now God can put a creature in a situation in which the creature is free to do what is right and free to do what is wrong, but God cannot <u>cause</u> the creature to freely do what is right. (This is based upon the strong version of incompatibilism with respect to free actions that Plantinga accepts.) Still, there is a fact of the matter about what any possible free creature would freely do in any possible situation in which it free to do right and free to do wrong, and God knows what that fact of the matter is. But these are contingent facts: if it were necessary that the

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[15] Plantinga mentions some other candidates, but criticisms very similar to those below would apply to these as well.

creature would do one thing rather than the other, it would not be free to do one thing rather than the other. (This, again, is based upon Plantinga's view of what freedom entails.) So God knows what every possible creature would do in every possible situation, but, in the situations in which the creature is free, it could have been the case that the creature would have done the opposite. God's choice of which of the possible worlds to actualize is constrained by <u>contingent</u> facts about what possible creatures would freely do.[16] If it happens that I would freely read <u>The Nature of Necessity</u> if I were put in situation S, then even though there are possible worlds in which I am put in situation S and freely abstain from reading <u>The Nature of Necessity</u>, these worlds are <u>unrealizable</u>: God cannot actualize any such possible world. And one broadly logically possible way the facts about what I would freely do in different situations could have turned out would have it that no matter what God did, if he actualized me and allowed me to be free in some situations in which my choice is morally significant, I would go wrong at least once. If the facts about what I would freely do are like this, then I suffer from <u>transworld depravity</u>, and all the worlds in which I do good but no evil are unrealizable. But if I do suffer from transworld depravity, I suffer from it contingently: the facts <u>could</u> have been such that God would have had the ability to actualize me, have me freely do what is right, and never go wrong.[17] In asserting that (31) is possible, Plantinga is saying that one broadly logically possible way for the facts about what free creatures would freely do to turn out would have it that <u>all</u> possible creatures suffer from transworld depravity. If this were so, God would not be able to actualize a world containing moral good but no moral evil, for all such worlds would be unrealizable.

But <u>is</u> (31) possible? Plantinga introduces the possible truth of (31) as an "interesting fact" (NN, 188) which apparently is not in need of support. But I certainly do not have any clear intuition that (31) is possibly true. Why should we think that it is?

Well, why <u>wouldn't</u> it be possible? One way (31) could turn out to be impossible is if there were certain necessary relations among facts about what possible free creatures would do in certain situations. Suppose that there is a possible situation S in which I am

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[16] This is thought not to jeopardize God's omnipotence since it is not possible to cause a creature to freely do what he wouldn't do.

[17] And if it is a fact that all the worlds in which I do good but no evil are unrealizable, this is a contingent fact.

free to read or not to read <u>The Nature of Necessity</u>, but in which my reading or not reading is morally significant because I have a moral obligation to read it (perhaps because I have promised to read it). Suppose further that there is a possible situation T in which Bill is free to burn or not to burn my copy of <u>The Nature of Necessity</u>, but in which it is morally wrong for Bill to burn it. But now suppose that there is a necessary relation between what I would do if I were in S and what Bill would do if he were in T. Specifically, suppose that there are no possible worlds in which it is both true that I would not read it and true that Bill would burn it. Then, in every possible world, at least one of the following two conditionals would be true:

> I would read <u>The Nature of Necessity</u> if I were in S.

> Bill would refrain from burning my copy of <u>The Nature of Necessity</u> if he were in T.

Note that both Bill and I could still be free with respect to the given actions. It is not necessarily true that I would do what is right and it is not necessarily true that Bill would do what is right; it is only necessarily true that either I would do what is right if I were in S or that Bill would do what is right if he were in T. (Remember that these things can be true even if neither Bill nor I exists.) Now suppose that S and T are such that they can be incorporated into "minimal" worlds. Suppose that God can actualize a possible world in which I am in S, and in which my reading or refraining from reading <u>The Nature of Necessity</u> is the only morally significant action taken in that world. Likewise, God can actualize a possible world in which Bill is in T, and in which Bill's burning or refraining from burning the book is the only morally significant action taken in that world. Given these suppositions, it is impossible that both Bill and I suffer from transworld depravity. In every possible world, it is true that God could have actualized a world (albeit a minimal one) in which there is moral good and no moral evil,[18] and, in every possible

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[18] Thus these suppositions would also tell against another of Plantinga's candidates for r, which is the conjunction of (32) and
  (28) God is omnipotent and it was not within his power to create a world containing moral good but no moral evil.

world, it is either true that I do not suffer from transworld depravity or that Bill does not suffer from transworld depravity.

Now, of course, many quibbles could be raised about this argument. For instance, perhaps some essential fact about me precludes the possibility of my existing in a minimal world such as I described above. (Likewise, it may be questioned whether any book in such a minimal world could be The Nature of Necessity.) But it seems possible that there be creatures capable of making such a morally significant choice in such a minimal world (couldn't God have actualized such a world?), whether or not one of them could be me. And I think my argument makes it clear how (31) may very well be impossible if there were necessary relations between the facts about what possible creatures would freely do. And if there were enough such necessary relations between such facts, then God would have the power to actualize a not-so-minimal world (perhaps even a world with as much moral good as the actual world) containing moral good but no moral evil no matter which of the possible ways for those facts to turn out is actual.[19]

But why should we suppose that there are necessary relations among the facts about what possible creatures would freely do? There is, let us assume with Plantinga, a fact of the matter as to whether or not I would freely read The Nature of Necessity if I were put in situation S. There is also a fact of the matter as to whether or not Bill would freely burn my copy of The Nature of Necessity if he were put in situation T. Why suppose that there is any necessary relation between what I would do in S and what Bill would do in T? Perhaps there is a relation between Bill's burning my copy of The Nature of Necessity and my being in situation S: Perhaps S includes the fact that my copy has not been burned. But even if my copy were burned, there would still be a fact, according to Plantinga, about what I would freely have done if I had been in situation S. And why should we suppose that that fact bears any necessary relation to the fact about what Bill would do in T? Indeed, according to Plantinga, there would be facts about what I would do in S and what Bill would do in T even if neither I nor Bill ever existed. In some

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In fact, in GFE, this conjunction is Plantinga's main candidate for r. In GFE, (28) and (32) are numbered (35) and (36) respectively.

[19] Thus, the possibility of another of Plantinga's candidates for r, the conjunction of (33) and (34) (see NN, 190), could also be called into question by the supposition that there are necessary relations between facts about what possible creatures would freely do.

worlds in which I do not exist, it is true that I would read <u>The Nature of Necessity</u> if I were actual and in situation S, and in some such worlds I wouldn't. Likewise for Bill and his burning of the book if he were in situation T. If these facts are so "free-floating" as to be true in some worlds in which we do not exist and false in other (perhaps otherwise identical) worlds, then why suppose that there is any necessary relation between the facts? Why couldn't all the combinatorial possibilities be possible? It seems that here would be some possible worlds in which it is true that I would read <u>The Nature of Necessity</u> if I were in S and in which it is true that Bill would burn my copy if he were in T. But there are other worlds in which it is true that I would read it in S but in which Bill would <u>not</u> burn it if he were in T. And, it seems, of the worlds in which it is true that I would not read it in S, some of them would include the fact that Bill would burn it in T and some of them would include the fact that Bill would not burn t in T. And why couldn't <u>all</u> the facts about what possible creatures <u>would</u> freely do be independent of each other in this way? Why couldn't ach of the combinatorial possibilities be represented in some worlds?

Thus, I do not see any reason why there would be necessary relations between these facts about what possible free creatures <u>would</u> freely do in non-actual situations, so if I did believe that there were such facts at all,[20] I might still agree with Plantinga that (31) is possible. And while other, perhaps far more serious, problems with Plantinga's case could be raised here, it seems to me that if (31) is possible, then Plantinga may well be right that (1), (31), and (32) are compossible. And since they together entail (2), it seems that (1) and (2) may well be compossible.

V. Assessment: Has Plantinga Advanced the Case in Stage II?

But what has been gained? It is not, I have claimed, intuitively obvious that (31) is possibly true. I, for one, have <u>nothing close</u> to a clear intuition that it is possibly true, and there are too many murky issues involved (e.g., the one I raised in the section above), too many possible worlds, too many possible free actions, I think, for any human to do so. If

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[20] I don't.

anyone can clearly see that (31) is possibly true, it is God himself. Why, then, might I be inclined to agree that (31) is possibly true? Because there doesn't seem to be anything threatening its being possibly true. And I think that this is the best that anybody can do.[21] (Plantinga, at least, hasn't provided any better reasons for thinking that it is possible.) Thus, in accepting the possibility of (31), I seem to be implicitly relying on something like PPP.

If there were necessary relations between facts about what possible creatures would freely do, this, I have argued, would threaten the possibility of (31). But I see no reason for thinking that there are such necessary relations. Still, when I consider how many combinatorial possibilities there are of facts regarding what every possible creature would do in every possible situation in which it is significantly free, it seems very bold to make the supposition that all of these combinatorial possibilities are metaphysical possibilities – that each and every of these combinatorial possibilities really could have been[22] the array of facts that confronted God as He decided which of the realizable worlds to actualize. I cannot in any way positively see or intuit that this supposition is true, but as long as there doesn't seem to be anything threatening its truth, I feel some pull towards accepting it. But my willingness to accept it, then, is based on something like PPP: I feel pulled to maximize possibilities and to limit necessities in the absence of any perceived threat to the possibilities. (31) doesn't require for its possible truth this strong supposition that all the combinatorial possibilities are metaphysical possibilities, but as I argued in the previous section, certain necessary relations among facts about what possible creatures would do in certain situations would have the result that (31) is impossible. Thus, to accept (31) as possible, we must take it that none of these necessary relations obtain.

And what of the compossibility of (1), (31), and (32)? Even more is involved here, and I think the best one could hope for in the way of showing that they are compossible is to look at the reasons why one might think that they're not compossible

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[21] And, in fact, I think that most of what pass for intuitions of metaphysical possibility are really no more than our not being able to see anything threatening the possibility of a proposition. I believe that our intuitive access to modal facts is largely through intuitions of necessity and impossibility.

[22] On a "broadly logical" or "metaphysical" reading of "could have been," where more is required than a mere lack of contradiction in supposing otherwise (see Section II, above). I suppose there is no contradiction involved in any of these combinatorial possibilities, so they are all "analytically possible."

and try to show that they are not good reasons, or to look at what might appear to threaten their compossibility and to show that the appearance is deceiving.

So it seems that in the end, if we are going to make the case that (1) and (2) are compossible, we are going to have to either (a) content ourselves with showing that there aren't any good reasons for supposing that some proposition is impossible and achieving a tie, or (b) rely on PPP with respect to some proposition. So why not take the direct approach and pursue one of these two options immediately with respect to Q (the conjunction of [1] and [2])? Why not either content ourselves with Stage I, or combine Stage I with the direct invocation of PPP?

It may be claimed that Q would fail to meet one of the restrictions that would have to be placed on the recipients of PPP, since one of its conjuncts, (1), implies the existence of God,[23] and we find out later in his treatment of the ontological argument that Plantinga thinks that if it is possible that God exists, then God exists necessarily.[24] Perhaps the possible truth of Q is in trouble, not because of some possible conflict between (1) and (2), but because (1) by itself is impossible if God does not exist. But if possibly God exists is seen as logically entailing that God exists necessarily, then Plantinga's own case for the compossibility of (1), (31), and (32) is doomed. The atheologian can all too easily object that (1) by itself may be impossible. Plantinga's assessment of his ontological argument is that it shows "that if it is even possible that God, so thought of, exists, then it is true and necessarily true that he does."[25] And in the ontological argument, God is being thought of in such a way that he exists necessarily, if it is possible that he exists. But Plantinga must not be thinking of God in this way in his treatment of the problem of evil. If God were so thought of in (1), then after having clearly shown the compossibility of (1) and (2), as Plantinga thinks he has done, he would have been only a couple of deductively valid steps away from clearly showing the existence of God. For if (1) and (2) are compossible, then (1) is possible. And if God exists necessarily if it is possible that he exists, then if (1) is possible, God exists (actually and necessarily). If Plantinga were so close to showing so clearly that God exists, it

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[23] Plantinga construes (1) such that this implication holds; see NN, 165.
[24] See NN, especially 213-17.
[25] NN, 216; my emphasis.

would be strange that he takes such a more cautious attitude toward the power of his ontological argument.[26]

Still, one might think that Q may run afoul of the restrictions that would have to be placed on PPP, because (1) contains terms ("omnipotent," for example) that may have to be modally defined. But if the trouble with Q is located in (1), then it will also infect Plantinga's case for the compossibility of (1), (31), and (32). As far as comparing the direct approach with Plantinga's excursion through the use of (31) and (32) with respect to what is conjoined with (1), Plantinga's (31) looks like it is far more likely to run afoul of the restrictions that would have to be placed on PPP than is the relatively innocent (2). (2) requires for its possible truth only that there be one possible world in which a relatively simple, non-modal proposition is true. Thus it is the kind of proposition that one might plausibly presume to be possible in the absence of an argument for its possibility.[27] But, given the meaning of "transworld depravity," the same cannot be said for Plantinga's (31). To say that it is possibly true is to say that there is a possible world which bears a certain complex relation with infinitely many other possible worlds. Specifically, one is saying that there is a possible world, such that all the possible worlds which contain moral good but no moral evil are unrealizable with respect to it.[28] One might do well to think twice before presuming anything that would involve one in so many possible worlds.

Again, it may be claimed that no form of PPP would be acceptable. If this is so, then I think the theist must either content himself with something like Stage I of Plantinga's defense, or come up with a better positive case than Plantinga does for the compossibility of (1) and (2).

Perhaps some positive reasons can be given for the possibility of (31). If so, I would like to see them. And perhaps some have a clear, positive intuition that (31) is possible. But I doubt that. If, in the end, we're going to have to rely on the lack of any apparent threat to the possibility of some proposition, then I don't see what has been gained by moving our attention from Q to the conjunction of (1), (31), and (32), and

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[26] See NN, 216-21.
[27] Of course, we do have a good reason for thinking that (2) is possibly true: it is actually true!
[28] More expansively, one is saying that there is possible world such that, if it were actual, then it would have been the case that God was unable to actualize any of the possible worlds which contain moral good but no moral evil.

there's plenty of room to suspect that ground has been <u>lost</u> by this move. Something may have been gained if one can sense a possible threat to the possibility of Q but not to the possibility of (31). But these apparent threats to Q are supposed to have been taken care of in Stage I. Supposing Stage I to be successfully completed,[29] I feel much better about supposing that Q is possible than I feel about making the same supposition with respect to (31): given the meaning of "transworld depravity," (31) is <u>far</u> too modally involved for it to be modally safe.[30]

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[29] And I do think that Stage I of Plantinga's case is quite impressive.
[30] This paper was first presented at a Fall 1987 seminar at UCLA on the problem of evil. I am grateful to the co-leaders of that seminar, Marilyn McCord Adams, and Robert Merrihew Adams, for their help and advice on this project.