Can God Choose a World At Random?

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On what basis does God choose a possible world to make actual? Theists typically claim that God freely selects exactly one world on the basis of its axiological characteristics. But suppose that (a) there are infinitely-many *unsurpassable* worlds from which to choose; or else that (b) there are no unsurpassable worlds, but instead an infinite hierarchy of increasingly-*better* worlds. On each of these scenarios, philosophers have alleged that God is unable to *rationally* choose a world for actualization. In the former case, God lacks sufficient reason to select any particular world, since there are infinitely-many other *equally-good* candidates. In the latter case, God lacks sufficient reason to select any particular world, since for any world there are infinitely-many *better* candidates. These considerations generate arguments for atheism, as follows. On theism, God is supposed to be the explanation for this world's being actual, and God requires sufficient reasons for action. So, on either scenario (a) or (b), since there is an actual world, it was not actualized by God. In response, defenders of theism have urged that God need not have *sufficient* reason for choosing a world on (a) or (b): God may defensibly choose a world *at random*. In what follows, I evaluate this reply. In conclude that it succeeds only on the enormously-implausible assumption that there is *exactly one* randomizer available to God.

1. Creation and the Axiological Status of Worlds.

Theism holds that there exists a being who is unsurpassable in power, knowledge, and goodness, and who is the creator and sustainer of all that is. In contemporary analytic philosophy of religion, the act of creation is construed like this: God surveys the set of actualizable worlds,[1] and freely selects exactly one for actualization on the basis of its axiological properties. Discussions of creation, then, typically assume that worlds have axiological status, and that they can (at least in principle) be evaluated: some are good, others are bad; some are better, others are worse.[2] I will proceed on these assumptions. While philosophers disagree about what the axiological properties relevant to worlds are, they can be divided into two kinds: *world-good*-making properties (WGMPs) and *world-bad*-making properties (WBMPs). The overall axiological status of a world, *ceteris paribus*,

depends on these properties.[3] To simplify matters, let's assume *necessitarianism*: membership in the actual set of WGMPs and WBMPs could not possibly have been different than what it is.[4] Finally, let's assume, again for simplicity, that all worlds are both *commensurable* and *comparable* with respect to these properties.[5]

2. Three Hierarchies of Worlds; Three Arguments for Atheism.

The axiological considerations from Section 1 suggest that there are three candidate hierarchies of actualizable worlds worth considering:

(1) Famously, Leibniz and others have held that there is exactly one unsurpassable world. (Hereafter, I'll call this view EOUW.)

(2) Alternatively, one might agree that some actualizable world is unsurpassable, but deny that *just* one is.[6] On this view, it is generally thought that for any world w having axiological status s, there is a trivially-different variant w' that also has axiological status s. Moreover, it is typically thought that there are infinitely-many such variants.[7] On this view (hereafter IMUW), there are infinitely-many unsurpassable worlds.

(3) Some philosophers have claimed that there are no unsurpassable worlds (hereafter NUW).[8] On this view, there is an infinite hierarchy of increasingly-better worlds.

Objections to theism have been leveled on each hierarchy:

(1) Famously, on EOUW it has been urged, *a priori*, that a perfect being would actualize the unique best world, and *a posteriori*, that this expectation has not been met. In short, it is claimed that the actual world is surpassable, and that this disconfirms theism.[9]

(2) It has been claimed, *a priori*, that IMUW is inconsistent with theism. If there are infinitely-many unsurpassable worlds, God would not have *sufficient* reason to actualize any particular one.[10] But on theism, God is supposed to be the explanation for this world's being actual, and God requires sufficient reasons for action. So, since there is an actual world, it was not actualized by God.[11]

(3) Finally, it has been suggested, *a priori*, that NUW precludes theism. If there are no unsurpassable words, God cannot have *sufficient* reason for actualizing any particular world, since there are infinitely-many *better* worlds that could be actualized instead. But again, on theism, God is supposed to be the explanation for this world's being actual, and God requires sufficient reasons for action. So, since there is an actual world, it was not actualized by God.[12]

Since the three hierarchies are mutually exclusive and jointly exhaustive,[13] these three objections constitute an unpalatable trilemma for theism. Recently, however, two ways out have been suggested for the theist: on both IMUW and NUW, philosophers have urged, God can defensibly select a world to actualize *at random*. In Section 3, I set out the motivation for this move, and in the remainder of the paper, I evaluate it.[14]

3. Sufficient Reasons and Randomization.

The objections to theism on IMUW and NUW both concern God's choice of which world to actualize. They both allege that, in the face of these respective hierarchies, God's choice of a world cannot be rational, since God cannot have sufficient reason to actualize any particular world. On IMUW, it is claimed, God has insufficient reason to select any particular world, since there are infinitely-many *equally-good* candidates. And on NUW, it is claimed, God has insufficient reason to select any particular world, since for any world there are infinitely-many *better* candidates.

It is sometimes thought that the problem for theism here is this: granting that God could have no principled reason for selecting a world in these scenarios, God would be paralyzed, stymied, or hamstrung – unable to actualize *any* world.[15] This is a mistake. No matter which hierarchy of worlds is correct, if theism is true, God cannot fail to actualize some world or other. On theism, which world is actual depends upon God. God may freely decide to create, say, creatures or a universe. If God *creates*, then God is responsible for the resulting world's being actual. If, on the other hand, God creates nothing, the resulting world is *bare* – populated only by whatever necessary existents there are. But here, too, God is responsible for this world's being actual. Accordingly, on theism, it is impossible that God fail to actualize some world or other. The problem for theism on IMUW and NUW,

then, is *not* that God – while existing – is somehow frustrated in his desire to actualize a world. The problem is much more serious: if God must have a *sufficient reason* for selecting a world to actualize, then IMUW and NUW are both logically incompatible with theism.

In response, philosophers have denied that God must have a sufficient reason for selecting a world to actualize on IMUW and NUW.[16] They point out that in ordinary human affairs, when rational choice is thwarted by the absence of sufficient reasons, practical considerations suggest that we choose *at random*. These philosophers urge that God may do the same, while remaining unsurpassable in all relevant respects.[17] If this is defensible, then the objections to theism on IMUW and NUW are defanged. In Section 4, I consider whether God could choose a world at random on IMUW, and in Section 5, I consider the same question on NUW. In both cases, I conclude that this is a defensible strategy for God only on the enormously implausible assumption that there is *exactly one* randomizing device or procedure available.

4. Randomization on IMUW.

Suppose that IMUW is correct. Lloyd Strickland (2006) urges that, on this view, God need not have sufficient reason for his choice of world: God can defensibly choose at random. In this section, I consider the merits of his claim. Suppose that there is exactly one possible randomizing device or procedure that God could use. If so, then provided that the principle of sufficient reason admits an exception here, this seems like a satisfactory solution for the theist.[18] But Strickland says that "… *prima facie* it seems possible that there will be *more than one* such [device or] procedure available to God, and if there are many …then it seems possible, even quite likely, that some, or even all, of them will be *equally good* but not bettered by any other" (2006, 153). Strickland offers no defence of either claim. Let's take each in turn.

Why think that there could be more than one randomizing device or procedure on IMUW? Randomizing *devices* are physical objects which output a random number. It is well known that there are numerous indeterministic features or processes in the actual world. Accordingly, theists should not find it difficult to imagine that God could construct a variety of indeterministic devices to generate random numbers.[19] As for non-physical randomization *procedures*, if there are any, there are many. The reason is simple: for any randomization procedure *r*, it's possible to construct a different randomization procedure *s* which uses *r*, and then performs a mathematical operation on the deliverances of *r* to generate a new result. Perhaps, for example, *s* takes the result of *r* and adds one (or indeed any other number). This new result is every bit as random as the deliverances of *r*, although the procedure is different. Equally, *hybrids* are possible: combinations of *devices* and *procedures*. Accordingly, it seems reasonable to suppose that there is more than one randomizer on IMUW.

I now turn to Strickland's second undefended claim: that some randomizers are *unsurpassable*. How might one defend such a claim? Randomizers, like other things, are presumably to be evaluated with respect to their axiological properties, like *good-making* properties and *bad-making* properties.[20] Certain plausible good-making properties of randomizers seem to have intrinsic maxima. Perhaps, for example, *simplicity of construction or method* is a good-making property of randomizers. Perhaps *speed of operation* is another. These properties both seem to have intrinsic maxima, and reflection on them might suggest that there is at least one unsurpassable randomizer. (The alternative, after all, is difficult to imagine: surely there couldn't be more and more ever-*simpler* or ever-*faster* randomizers, *ad infinitum*![21]) On the other hand, it is less clear that other good-making properties of randomizers have intrinsic maxima: consider, for example,

aesthetic properties. Here it might seem difficult to imagine how some randomizer could be *unsurpassably* beautiful.

The overall axiological status of a randomizer, *ceteris paribus*, depends on the axiological properties it exhibits.[22] But it is difficult to tell exactly what role any given property plays in the overall axiological status of a randomizer, and how the various properties work together to shape the overall axiological status. Accordingly, it is far from clear that Strickland is entitled to assume that some – let alone all! – randomizers are unsurpassable. In what follows, I consider both alternatives: I first consider the issue on the assumption that there are unsurpassable randomizers (4.1) and I then consider the issue on the assumption that there are no such randomizers, but instead an infinite hierarchy of increasingly-better randomizers (4.2).

4.1. Unsurpassable Randomizers on IMUW.

Suppose that, on IMUW, the idea of an unsurpassable randomizer is coherent. This suggests three possibilities: either there is *exactly one* such randomizer, or else there are *multiple but finitely-many* such randomizers, or else there are *infinitely*-many. I'll take each in turn.

Suppose that there is *exactly one* unsurpassable randomizing device or procedure available to God on IMUW. If so, it is reasonable to expect that God would use it. (After all, it is available for use, and surely God would be surpassable for using a surpassable randomizer when an unsurpassable one is available.) This might seem like another satisfactory solution for the theist. But, it is implausible to think that there is exactly one unsurpassable randomizer: it is likely that for any unsurpassable randomizer, there is a trivially-different randomizer which has the same axiological status.[23] If there are multiple

unsurpassable randomizers, there are either *finitely*-many or *infinitely*-many. I consider these scenarios next.

Suppose that there are *multiple but finitely-many* unsurpassable randomizers available to God. One might expect that God would be entitled to select any *one* of these: they're equivalent, after all. But, as Strickland points out, it's difficult to see how God could rationally select exactly one for use. God's choice of a randomizer will itself either be random or non-random. A non-random choice cannot be rational, since there is no sufficient reason for selecting any one randomizer from such a set. But a *random* choice of randomizers cannot be rational either: this way regress lies.[24] (Since this argument will be appealed to again below, it will be helpful to name it: Argument A.)

In the face of this dilemma, Strickland suggests that God should use *all* of the finitely-many unsurpassable randomizers:

> … if God is faced with ten different-but-equally-good random-selection procedures [or devices] to choose from, there is nothing to prevent Him from selecting them all in the way that there is something preventing Him from selecting all equally best worlds. And the decision to select all available selection procedures can hardly be said to be irrational either, unlike the remainder of God's options, which are to choose none of the procedures, or just one of them (for which He would of course have no reason at all). So if there are ten procedures God can simply select and run them all, and then pool the results. If one of the equally best worlds is selected more often than any other, then that is the world He [actualizes], and if the combined results of all the random procedures do not favour any one world over the others, then God can simply run all of them again until a clear winner does emerge (2006, 154).

Strickland's pooling method represents an attempt to do something in the face of a difficult choice between randomizers: choose them *all*. But difficulties beset this method. First, it is not evident what it would take for a "clear winner" to emerge: how much does a world need to be "favoured", exactly, before clarity is achieved? Second, even if the necessary and sufficient conditions for clarity could be established, it remains possible that these conditions never be satisfied, even over infinitely-many poolings. And even if we waive

these difficulties, a third, more serious one, remains. Strickland offers no reason for thinking that this pooling method is a *principled* method of world-selection for God. He offers no grounds for thinking that it is more desirable to use *all* of the finitely-many randomizers, rather than just one, nor does he offer any reason for thinking that it is desirable to actualize a world that is "the clear winner" of such a process. Absent an argument for either claim, it is difficult to see why this method should be thought preferable to any other method. (Since these three objections will be appealed to again below, it will be helpful to give them a collective name: Argument B.)

Nor is there a defensible *via media*, such as pooling the results of more than one but not all of the finitely-many unsurpassable randomizers. (Strickland fails to consider this alternative). For this to work, God would require a principled method of selecting this proper subset of randomizers, whose outputs are to be pooled. No non-random selection method is rational, since there can be no sufficient reason for selecting any particular proper subset: all randomizers in the set are equivalent, after all. And no random method can rational either, for this way regress lies. (Since this argument will be appealed to again below, it will be helpful to name it: Argument C.) I conclude, then, that if there are multiple but *finitely*-many unsurpassable randomizers on IMUW, God cannot select a world for actualization at random.

Suppose, finally, that there are *infinitely-many* unsurpassable randomizers. One might then think that God has three alternatives: he might choose (a) *one* from the infinite set; (b) *every* member of the set; or (c) more than one but not every member of the set. Unfortunately, none of these alternatives is acceptable. God cannot select *one* randomizer from the infinite set of unsurpassable randomizers, for the reasons given above as Argument A. Nor can Strickland's suggestion be redeployed in this context: God cannot

hope to arrive at a rational choice by selecting *every* member of the infinite set of equivalent randomizers, and pooling the results. Such pooling is impossible: given that this procedure would generate infinitely-many results, the combined results could not possibly favour any one world. (Moreover, even if this *were* possible, the objections offered above as Argument B would still apply.) And there is no acceptable *via media* between these extremes: God cannot rationally select more than one but not all of the unsurpassable randomizers from this infinite set, in order to then pool the results. Such a method would involve selecting either a finite or an infinite proper subset from the set of all randomizers, and in either case, Argument C would apply.

4.2. No Unsurpassable Randomizers on IMUW.

One alternative remains: suppose that there are *no* unsurpassable randomizers on IMUW: for every randomizer *r*, there is an axiologically-superior randomizer *r*+1.[25] Again, three choices seem to be available: God could (a) use *one* of the randomizers; (b) use them *all* and pool the results; or (c) use a *proper subset* and pool the results. Unfortunately, none of these is defensible.

First, God cannot select *one* randomizer from this set. God's selection must either be random or non-random. The former leads to regress, as noted in Argument A. The latter is indefensible: no non-random selection of a randomizer can be rational, since, no matter which randomizer is selected, there is always *more reason* to select another, better one. Second, God cannot use *all* members of an infinite set of randomizers and pool the results, for reasons given in 4.1. Third, God cannot use a *proper subset* of randomizers and pool the results. After all, God's selection of a proper subset must either be random or non-random. The former alternative leads to regress, as noted in Argument C. The latter alternative is indefensible: no non-random selection of a proper subset of randomizers can be rational,

since, no matter which subset is selected, there is always *more reason* to select another, better subset of worlds.[26]

I have considered various proposals for God's random selection of a world on IMUW, first on the hypothesis that there are multiple unsurpassable randomizers (4.1), and then on the hypothesis that there are none (4.2). In both cases, I have urged that randomization is not a defensible strategy for God. Accordingly, the only scenario on which God can rationally select a world for actualization on IMUW is the one I've urged is extremely implausible: the view that there is *exactly one* randomizing device of procedure available to God. I now turn to a randomization proposal on NUW.

5. Randomization on NUW.

NUW holds that there is an infinite hierarchy of increasingly-better actualizable worlds. As noted above, it has been suggested, *a priori*, that NUW precludes theism. Daniel and Frances Howard-Snyder (1994: 260-267) reply with the following thought-experiment: [27]

> Jove is an essentially unsurpassable being who desires to actualize a world, but who is unable to actualize a best actualizable world, there being none. Jove divides the set of all actualizable[28] possible worlds into two subsets based on certain axiologically-relevant criteria.[29] Worlds in the better subset are given unique integer ordinals: the worst of the lot is '1', the second-worst '2', and so on.[30] Jove selects from the better subset at random, and world no. 777 is actualized.

The Howard-Snyders claim that in this story, Jove's "…creating a world inferior to one he or some other possible being could have created does nothing to impugn his status as essentially …unsurpassable *in any respect whatsoever*" (1994, 261).[31] In other words, the Howard-Snyders think that God can defensibly select a world at random on NUW.

On the Howard-Snyders' model, *world-actualizing-actions* involve two steps: (1) God selects a *partition principle* to bisect the set of all actualizable worlds; and (2) God decides on a logically-subsequent *decision method* – randomization – to select a world for

actualization from the better subset. The Howard-Snyders claim that it is plausible to suppose (or at least not clearly plausible to deny) that there is a unique *best partition principle*, and they stipulate that God acts on it (1996, 423). They further claim that, for all we know, there is a unique best randomizer, and they stipulate that God uses it (1994, 266). Elsewhere, I have criticized the Howard-Snyders' claim that it is plausible to suppose that there is a best partition principle (Kraay 2005). Here, however, I set aside this worry, and consider only what the Howard-Snyders say about randomization.

Suppose that there is *exactly one* possible randomizing device or procedure that God could use on NUW. If so, then this seems like a satisfactory solution for the theist. But it is extremely implausible to think that there is just one possible randomizer available to God on NUW (for the reasons offered in Section 4). Accordingly, it is reasonable to suppose that there are multiple randomizers on IMUW. In the final section, I distinguish four multiple randomizer scenarios, and I suggest that none is defensible.

5.1. Four Randomizing Scenarios on NUW.

Suppose, on NUW, that the idea of an unsurpassable randomizer is coherent (as the Howard-Snyders suppose). If so, it seems that there are three possibilities: either there is *exactly one* unsurpassable randomizer; multiple but *finitely*-many such randomizers; or else *infinitely*-many such randomizers. I take up each in turn. Afterwards, I consider a fourth scenario: perhaps there are *no unsurpassable randomizers* on NUW.

If there is *exactly one* unsurpassable randomizer on NUW, as the Howard-Snyders' thought-experiment stipulates, it is reasonable to expect that God would use it. (After all, it is available for use, and God would surely be surpassable for using a surpassable randomizer when an unsurpassable one is available.) But as I argued in 4.1, there is reason to think that if there is one unsurpassable randomizer, there are multiple such

randomizers. Accordingly, the Howard-Snyders are not entitled to stipulate that there is exactly one unsurpassable randomizer, and so we must turn to the remaining possibilities.

Suppose that there are *multiple but finitely-many* unsurpassable randomizers. Three alternatives seem to be available: God could (a) use one of the randomizers; (b) use them all and pool the results, in the spirit of Strickland; or (c) use a proper subset and pool the results. Unfortunately, none of these alternatives is defensible. God's selection of *one* randomizer from a finite set of unsurpassable randomizers must either be non-random or random. But, as Argument A shows, neither is acceptable. Similarly, God cannot use them all and pool the results, for the reasons given as Argument B. And, as Argument C shows, God cannot rationally choose a proper subset of unsurpassable randomizers in order to then pool the results.

Next, suppose that there are *infinitely-many* unsurpassable randomizers available on NUW. Again, three alternatives seem to be available: God could (a) use one of the randomizers; (b) use them all and pool the results; or (c) use a proper subset and pool the results. Unfortunately, none of these alternatives are defensible. The first and third alternatives are ruled out by Arguments A and C, respectively, and the second is precluded an argument advanced in 4.1: it's impossible to pool the results of an infinite set of randomizers (and even if it were possible, the considerations advanced in Argument B would apply).

Finally, suppose that there are *no unsurpassable randomizers* on NUW: for every randomizer r, there is an axiologically-superior randomizer r+1. This view, in fact, is extremely plausible on NUW. Consider what I urged in Section 4: for any randomization procedure r, it's possible to construct a different randomization procedure s which uses r, and then performs a mathematical operation on the deliverances of r to generate a new result. Perhaps, for example, procedure s takes the result of r and adds one (or indeed any

other number). Procedure *s* is just as random as procedure *r*, and there is good reason for thinking it *better than r*: in every case, *s* will deliver a better result than *r*. On the plausible view, then, that there are no unsurpassable randomizers on NUW, three alternatives again seem to be available: God could (a) use one of the randomizers; (b) use them all and pool the results; or (c) use a proper subset and pool the results. Unfortunately, none of these alternatives is defensible, for the reasons given in Section 4.2.

I conclude, then, that on the extremely plausible assumption that there are multiple randomizers on NUW, no defensible randomizing scenarios are available to God.

6. Conclusion

In Section 2, I set out a trilemma for theism: either there is exactly one unsurpassable world, or infinitely-many, or none, and in each case, there is an argument for atheism. On IMUW, it is claimed that God has insufficient reason to select any particular world, since there are infinitely-many *equally-good* candidates. On NUW, it is claimed that God has insufficient reason to select any particular world, since for any world there are infinitely-many *better* candidates. Philosophers have suggested that on both scenarios, God need not have a sufficient reason: God can defensibly select a world at random. Lloyd Strickland makes this case on IMUW, and Daniel and Frances Howard-Snyder urge it on NUW. These proposals, then, are attempts to defang two of the arguments which comprise the trilemma. In Section 4, I argued that randomization is a defensible strategy for God on IMUW only on the extremely-implausible view that there is exactly one randomizer available for use. In Section 5, I made the same case on NUW. I conclude, then, that these randomization proposals fail to show how God could defensibly select a world for actualization on IMUW and NUW, respectively. Accordingly, these proposals fail to defang the trilemma facing theism. If the theist wishes to block the arguments for atheism on IMUW and NUW, a different account of God's world-choosing activity is needed.

Notes

[1] It has been plausibly argued that not every possible world is within God's power to actualize (Alvin Plantinga 1974, 169-174). Since I aim to determine what sort of world it is reasonable to expect a perfect being to actualize, in what follows I restrict my focus to the set of *actualizable* worlds.

[2] States of affairs can bear axiological properties: properties which, *ceteris paribus*, tend to make these states of affairs good or bad. Since *worlds* can be understood to be (maximally-compossible) states of affairs, it is reasonable to suppose that worlds can bear axiological properties too.

[3] The *ceteris paribus* clause is important, because it may be that certain good-making properties cease to make worlds better past a certain point, or in certain combinations. The same goes, *mutatis mutandis*, for WBMPs. So, while the goodness of a world depends on its axiological properties, this dependency may not be simple.

[4] The rival view, which I call *contingentism*, holds that the actual set of WGMPs and WBMPs might have had different members.

[5] One might deny that all worlds can be *evaluated* with respect to a stable set of WGMPs: this is to hold that there are *incommensurable* pairs of worlds. Alternatively, one might deny that all worlds can be *compared*. This can be done in two ways: (1) one might hold that there are pairs of worlds which are both incommensurable and (hence) *incomparable*; and (2) one might hold that there are pairs of *commensurable* worlds that are nevertheless incomparable. For simplicity, I set these niceties aside.

[6] For a thorough list of philosophers who hold this view, see Lloyd Strickland (2006, 141).

[7] For example, suppose that w' differs from w by having one more grain of sand on one beach than w does (and whatever is required for this, and whatever ensues from this). It seems reasonable to suppose that for any world w, there are infinitely-many such minor permutations. Each is a distinct world, and, since the permutations are sufficiently minor, all have the same axiological status.

[8] See, for example, Richard Swinburne (1979, 114).

[9] This is, of course, a version of the problem of evil. In response, some theists (notably, Robert Adams 1972) have rejected the *a priori* claim, while others – too many to mention here – have denied the *a posteriori* claim, or at least suggested that it has not been (or cannot be) justified.

A small qualification: while I here suggest that arguments for the surpassability of the actual world are *a posteriori*, Ian Wilks has offered a plausible counterexample: *a priori* introspection of one's own thoughts, desires, intentions, and the like, might well convince one that the actual world could be better. (In slogan form: *male cogito ergo malum est*.) In what follows, I ignore this special case.

[10] Blumenfeld (1975, 166; 1995, 396) and Strickland (2006, 142-3) attribute this worry to Leibniz.

[11] For more on this charge, see Blumenfeld (1995, 396) and Donald Turner (2003, 147).

[12] To put the point differently, no being can be unsurpassable on NUW, since no matter what world a putatively-unsurpassable being actualizes, that being could be surpassed by a being who actualizes a better world. For arguments in this vein, see Philip Quinn (1982), Stephen Grover (1988), William Rowe (1993, 2004), and Jordan Howard Sobel (2004).

[13] I here assume that there is no principled middle ground between claiming that there is exactly one unsurpassable universe, and that there are infinitely-many.

[14] In what follows, I set aside EOUW and the argument for atheism that it generates.

[15] Blumenfeld expresses this idea (on NUW) as follows: "The nature of such a continuum apparently would keep God fixed eternally on the brink of decision, stymied by the endless and ever more attractive objects of possible choice" (1975, 170). Later, Blumenfeld calls this "… the collapse of the possibility of decision, the metaphysical paralysis of the divine motivational system" (1975, 172).

[16] Lloyd Strickland (2006) makes this case on IMUW, and Daniel and Frances Howard-Snyder (1994) urge it on NUW. As Grover (2003, 148) notes, such a position is untenable if the principle of sufficient reason holds exceptionlessly.

[17] Nicholas Rescher (1969, 156-7) maintains that it is, in principle, objectionable for God to use a randomizer, since, as given his essential omniscience, God would *foreknow* the deliverances of the device or procedure. Strickland (2006, 151) replies that it is reasonable to suppose that there are *no truths* concerning the deliverances of randomizers. The Howard-Snyders (1994, 266) agree. If so, then there is simply nothing for God to foreknow, in which case God's lack of knowledge on this point does not count against his omniscience. This is a reasonable reply. Another reasonable reply is to take Rescher head-on and argue that, even if there are truths about the results of randomizers, God's knowledge of them presents no problem here. Space does not permit an exploration of this, but such a reply could be modeled on some of the theistic responses to the problem of divine foreknowledge and human freedom.

[18] *En passant*, I register a small worry: does God have sufficient reason to use the *first* result produced by the randomizer? A critic might object that God has just as much reason to use the result produced by the randomizer on its *second* running, and on its *third*, etc. This, of course, leads to regress. I'm not convinced that this worry is decisive, but there is no space to argue so here.

[19] Any such device, it should be noted, would be part of the world selected for actualization on the basis of that device's use. This will serve to fix certain parameters of that world: for example, nothing logically inconsistent with the existence of this device could be part of the resulting world.

[20] I assume, for simplicity, that all randomizers are commensurable and comparable with respect to a stable set of axiological properties.

[21] To argue otherwise, one would have to show that randomizers *asymptotically* approach the relevant limits (of *perfect* simplicity and *instantaneous* operation).

[22] The *ceteris paribus* clause is important, because it may be that certain good-making properties cease to make randomizers better past a certain point, or in certain combinations. The same goes, *mutatis mutandis*, for bad-making properties. So, while the goodness of a randomizer depends on its axiological properties, this dependency may not be simple.

[23] The argument for this claim is parallel to the argument for IMUW: for any entity having axiological status *s*, it seems reasonable to suppose that there is a trivially-different entity which has the same axiological status. If I'm wrong about this claim (or wrong about its application to randomizers) then I must concede that this provides another defensible randomization scenario for the theist.

[24] Strickland (2006, 153-4). The Howard-Snyders (1994, 266) also note this.

[25] The Howard-Snyders deem this to be an epistemic possibility (1994, 266). In Section 5.1., I will deem this view plausible on NUW.

[26] A better subset might be a set comprised of *wholly* better members, for example, or a set comprised of better members *on average*. Of course, any such subset could in turn be surpassed by another, *ad infinitum*.

[27] Their stated targets are Quinn (1982) and Rowe (1993). Random selection on NUW is also endorsed by Swinburne (1979, 115) and Leftow (2005, 275).

[28] The Howard-Snyders appear to assume that every possible world is actualizable: "Out of his goodness, Jove decides to create. Since he is all-powerful, there is nothing but the bounds of possibility to prevent him from getting what he wants" (1994, 260). But see note 1.

[29] The Howard-Snyders say little about what the sorting criteria might be – they merely offer candidates: "For example, he puts on his left worlds in which some inhabitants live lives that aren't worth living and on his right worlds in which every inhabitant's life is worth living; he puts on his left worlds in which some horror fail to serve an outweighing good and on his right worlds in which no horror fails to serve an outweighing good. (We encourage the reader to use her own criteria)" (1994, 260).

[30] The Howard-Snyders assume for simplicity that there are no ties: each world has a unique axiological status. If there are ties (as is plausible to suppose) then I presume that the Howard-Snyders would say that God should use the randomizer *twice*: once to select a world ordinal, and then once more to select a world from the set of worlds having that axiological status.

[31] The Howard-Snyders here speak of 'creating' possible worlds, but, strictly speaking, possible worlds are states of affairs which can neither be created nor destroyed, so 'actualizing' is a better term.