

## DOES THE CREATOR PRACTICE PLANNED BIRTH CONTROL?

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Insisting that the Creator is omnipotent, omniscient, and perfectly good, classical theism adds that he creates only according to his own pleasure and not by compulsion (Psa. 111:2). Since in his "original position" he is not required to create at all, a question arises regarding the selection criterion by which he determines that some "possible persons" are brought into existence and some are not. (I will not explore the question of the ontological status of possible persons, who seem to be regarded by Plantinga as a kind of original "gene pool" in the Creator's mind.)

I wish in this article to bring certain forms of theodicy face to face with the following question: In rejecting certain "possible worlds" (Plantinga) as unworthy of bringing into existence, is the Creator submitting his own creative acts to an autonomous moral criterion? This question may be sharpened by asking: If the Creator should cause to exist just any possible world, would his deed be regarded as good solely on the ground that he (the omnipotent Creator) is the one who brings it into existence?

More specifically, I wish to offer a few criticisms of the theodicy of Alvin Plantinga and similar Arminians, a theodicy which leaves open the possibility that the Creator caused to exist a world of persons all of whom might well have ended their lives in hell (i.e., in a state of human misery than which none worse can be conceived). But before pursuing this further, I should point out something that philosophers of religion and theologians often forget. When Alvin Plantinga and Charles Hartshorne appear to agree on the ontological argument for the existence of God, they are actually speaking of *radically different* concepts of God, so different that Hartshorne could not regard Plantinga's God—with his putative essential attributes—to be God at all. Plantinga's God sustains hell and Satan, both of which Hartshorne rules out as impossible for God to sustain if he is to be designated as 'God.'

In his uncompromising defense of the "free will" of possible persons who are elected to receive existence, Plantinga surrenders the right to argue that each individual might have some practically relevant trait or disposition inclining him toward either good or evil. (The distinction between essential traits and accidental traits turns out to be relative when we are forced to ask, "Essential to what?")<sup>3</sup> If there is any inclination in either direction (and therefore necessarily against its opposite), then Plantinga's theodicy and free will defense breaks down, having submitted its virgin neutrality to a predisposition or bias.

Plantinga and many Arminians like him are in the position of asserting that either the Creator *gambled* with the lives and eternal happiness/misery of his human creatures or he *knew precisely and infallibly* who of his creatures would end in everlasting happiness and who would end in everlasting misery. If we assume for the moment that this Creator did not gamble with his creatures, the remaining option leaves Plantinga having to acknowledge that the Creator instantiated a very large number of human beings who would end their lives in hopeless agony so intense and severe as to overshadow the concentration camps of Hitler and Stalin. Now either the omnipotent Creator could have prevented this unsurpassed atrocity or he could not. If he chose not to prevent it, then there must be either some rational/moral explanation or the choice was arbitrary/immoral. This must be pursued.

It is crucial to ask: Does Plantinga's theology allow that there might be in the Creator's mind a number of potential persons whom the Creator elected *not* to bring into existence, persons who, if created, would have suffered endless misery? The camel's nose which I wish to bring under this theological tent may be stated as follows: If the Creator could refrain from causing *some* potential persons to exist because they would end their lives in hopeless and endless misery, why would he not refrain from creating *any and all* who would so end?

In some of his writings, Augustine comes very close to saying that in producing the best possible end, God had of necessity to make mental use of at least some of those whom he knew would be reduced to endless agony (*Enchiridion*). Of course, there still remains the question of the best possible end *for whom*? It is conspicuously not for those who were knowingly instantiated by the Creator because their endless suffering was needed to enrich and perfect the Cosmic Stew. Not only Augustine (probably), but Aquinas and Calvin (certainly) hold that the endless suffering of some persons is required for the total good (for whomever). Aquinas and Calvin in particular seem to believe that God is in himself complete, needing nothing. Hence, if consistent, they would be forced to conclude that the endless agony of many persons is not for the enrichment of either the Creator or those who suffer the agony. Presumably, the benefactor is the other created persons. I wish to stress here that although knowing that his grand scheme could not function without the happiness of a vast number of human persons being ruthlessly sacrificed for its perpetuation, the traditional Christian's Creator chose with clear premeditation to bring about this unparalleled atrocity. Many Christians regard this choice to be in some sense an essential part of divine providence.

Christians of the traditional view, including Plantinga, have made much of the sacrifice and suffering of Jesus Christ. But I wish to argue that this putative sacrifice has been highly exaggerated even if we accept the prem-

ises of traditional Christianity. First, according to traditional theological and biblical sources, Jesus is said to have known that his own death would last for at most three days and nights—hardly a suffering to be compared to even one of those instantiated possible persons who will presumably suffer misery forever. Second, these same sources insist that Jesus Christ will be (or has been) restored to a position of such preeminence and endless bliss as to overshadow his brief interlude of suffering during his Incarnation. Indeed, it is no exaggeration to say that when compared to the endless suffering of any single individual among the damned, the temporary suffering of Jesus must be regarded as trivial.

According to the traditional doctrine, however, Christ received great esteem (Phil. 2:6–11) for his sacrifice, whereas those who suffer everything in endless torment, receive no esteem, not so much as a word of appreciation. In this strange outcome, we are able to observe how a theological position—as a relatively autonomous cultural reality—is driven by its own inner structure and momentum to conclusions which the believers would themselves shudder to embrace. Christianity thus becomes unwittingly one of the most cynical, brutal, and ungrateful religions that the species has yet known.

Working from the traditional Christian framework, is it not morally relevant to ask why the Creator failed to practice birth control in light of his foreknowledge of the endless suffering of what would appear to be the vast majority of his human creatures? We are thrown back to our earlier dilemma. Either the Creator was gambling with his creatures or he chose to instantiate those whom he knew infallibly would suffer endlessly and as a sacrifice necessary to sustain his cosmic scheme. If he was gambling, he can hardly be regarded as omniscient in any traditional sense of the term. (It may be that Plantinga will eventually undermine classical and traditional theology, especially if he qualifies the Creator's omniscience in a manner similar to his qualifications of omnipotence—the death of a few critical, if not a thousand, qualifications). And given the stakes accompanying the gambling, the moral integrity of such a Creator is compromised severely. Indeed, if such a Being existed—a Being whom Plantinga says exists of necessity—none would compare to him in the need to be forgiven for his incomparable irresponsibilities and recklessness. It is a curious paradox that Plantinga argues for a Being whose existence is necessary, but who, when he creates, is reduced to trusting in Luck! Despite Plantinga's wish that his free will defense contribute at least indirectly to the glory of the Creator, the defense seems instead to portray a cosmic solo gambler who, while running at most only a trivial and brief risk for himself, pays for his gambling largely from the funds of a large portion, and perhaps even the majority, of his finite creatures.

In the hundreds of pages in which he makes his celebrated free will defense, Plantinga has never explicitly raised the following critical question: If each potential person were instantiated only for the purpose of previewing his future, especially his final state (either utter bliss or utter misery), would he choose to be instantiated if he *genuinely foreknew* that his final state would be utter misery? I suggest that the answer is no. But such a *choice* is not given them.

Most traditional Christian apologists contend, however, that a similar choice is given to every individual each day of his life. It is here that such apologists—including Plantinga—reveal how crucial and imperialistic their free will defense is. The upshot is that their theology and its theodicy of sweeping voluntarism rules out every statement to the effect that any created person can have *honest intellectual disbelief in, or disagreement with*, the crucial doctrines of traditional Christianity. That choice or option is not open to any instantiated possible person. In his several books and articles on the free will defense, Plantinga has never seen the fundamental point necessary to any theodicy, namely, that the value of free choice can be no greater than the options it affords. In a subsequent article I will try to show in further detail why traditional Christianity options are unworthy of rational moral agents.

#### NOTES

1. See Charles Hartshorne, *The Logic of Perfection* (La Salle, IL: Open Court, 1962), p. 255; Alvin Plantinga, *God and Other Minds* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1967), pp. 149f.
2. See Plantinga, *God, Freedom, and Evil* (New York: Harper & Row, 1974), pp. 45–57.