

A Companion to David Lewis

Edited by

Barry Loewer and Jonathan Schaffer

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Editorial Offices

350 Main Street, Malden, MA 02148-5020, USA

9600 Garsington Road, Oxford, OX4 2DQ, UK

The Atrium, Southern Gate, Chichester, West Sussex, PO19 8SQ, UK

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Where (in Logical Space) Is God?

STEPHANIE R. LEWIS

David Lewis was one of your great correspondents. He kept very nearly every letter he received, and he kept copies of very nearly every letter he wrote. He never did use email, so there are no ephemera in his correspondence to worry about. Everything is there in the file cabinets, and a great deal of it has been scanned. Some of the letters he wrote, and received, were long and detailed discussions and arguments, and some of the ones he wrote amounted to drafts of papers.

The core of David Lewis's philosophy, at least his later work, is his metaphysics. A very great deal of his correspondence, over many years, concerned issues at the core of his (or any analytic philosopher's) metaphysics, that is, analytic philosophy dealing with, to give some examples, the fundamental issues of causation, future contingencies, the truth of counterfactuals, and necessity and possibility. And quite a lot of his correspondence bears, centrally or peripherally, explicitly or not, on the great issues in the philosophy of religion which center around these metaphysical matters.

This chapter falls into six sections:

- 13.1 Background and Scene-Setting
- 13.2 The God of the Philosophers
- 13.3 Free Will
- 13.4 Divine Evil
- 13.5 Atonement as Penal Substitution
- 13.6 The Many-Worlds Theodicy

I do not here discuss a seventh issue on which David had some correspondence: middle knowledge and counterfactuals of freedom.

13.1 Background and Scene-Setting

David wrote two papers squarely on issues in philosophical theology, "Evil for Freedom's Sake,"¹ and "Do We Believe in Penal Substitution?,"² left an outline of a third, "Divine Evil," turned from an

outline to a paper by Philip Kitcher after David had died,³ and wrote a fourth with an engaging title, “Anselm and Actuality,”⁴ but which does not have in it much attention to philosophical theology. In addition, there are some remarks in a paper mostly about broader issues in metaphysics, “Attitudes De Dicto and De Se,”⁵ and some more discussion in the book *On the Plurality of Worlds*.⁶

He was concerned with the problem of evil, and the free will defense to the problem of human-caused evil, over many years. There is a great deal of correspondence on the matter. He also, in his letters, discussed middle knowledge at length with many philosophers. Other letters concern atonement, the coherence of theism, and the justification of horrendous evils as a necessary part of great goodness. Other issues are discussed in the correspondence as well, including some dealt with in his published work either not at all or only briefly.

David was interested in philosophy of religion for its own sake, not just as a specialty within broader analytic metaphysics. He taught undergraduate seminars on philosophical theology and on the problem of evil. Indeed much of his metaphysics, especially his work on counterfactuals, is of consequence for philosophers working in analytic philosophy of religion.

This chapter is part of a project to collect David’s correspondence explicitly on topics in the philosophy of religion and arrange major threads by topic, tying the correspondence to his published work. He corresponded with 34 people on matters in philosophical theology.

This chapter confines itself to only a few letters on only a few topics. I think that a few letters set out in full (or nearly, with only irrelevant bits omitted) make for a more interesting discussion than a bunch of snippets. (A Snippet, in case you didn’t know, is a species of minor demon, not really dangerous but capable of being very, very annoying. Screwtape had hundreds of them at his command.)

It has in it an exchange between David and Alvin Plantinga on the free will theodicy, a letter from David to Michael Tooley on the possibility of divine evil, and letters to Phil Quinn and to and from Bruce Langtry on atonement as penal substitution. There is also a long interchange with Keith DeRose on knowing the truth values of counterfactuals of freedom.

At the end, the chapter departs from reporting the correspondence, and concludes with a discussion of the place which, say I, God must have in David’s logical space and also of the success of the many-worlds theodicy that David briefly discusses.

David was never a theist, and for most of his life was a “contented atheist,” as he described himself in a letter to Michael Tooley of July 20, 2000. He had sustained correspondences, sometimes over many years, with a number of his Christian friends, people whom he liked and respected. There were lots of points of agreement with them, either initially or after discussion, and also points of irresolvable disagreement about fundamental issues. Here’s what he says in print in “Evil for Freedom’s Sake”:

I am an atheist. So you might suspect that my purpose is to debunk free-will theodicy, and every other theodicy besides, so as to provide – at last! – a triumphant knock-down refutation of Christianity. Not so. I am convinced that philosophical debate almost always ends in deadlock, and that this case will be no exception.¹ When I argue that free-will theodicy meets with difficulties, I mean just what I say, no more and no less. I am not saying, and I am not slyly hinting, that these so-called difficulties are really refutations. In fact, I wish free-will theodicy success, or at least some modicum of success. I don’t want to have a proof that all the Christians I know are either muddle-heads or devil-worshippers. That conclusion would be as incredible as it is unfriendly. But I won’t mind concluding that a Christian must believe one or another of various things that I myself find unbelievable. For of course I knew that all along.

He adds, in a footnote, a further remark about philosophical debate that ends in deadlock:

1. That may suggest an “anything goes” attitude toward philosophical questions that I neither hold nor approve of. I would insist that when debate over a philosophical question – say, the question whether I

have hands – ends in deadlock, it does *not* follow that there is no truth of the matter; or that we don't know the truth of the matter; or that we ought to suspend judgement; or that we have no reason for thinking one thing rather than the other.

This is how David did philosophy, and how he conversed and corresponded with those with whom he agreed, more or less, and also with those with whom he could engage over fundamental disagreements.

David had a lot of time for philosophical disagreement, even nose-to-nose dispute, provided that it was all in good faith and all in the aid of the discussion. What he didn't have much time for was people who were presumptuous, or manipulative, or incorrigibly silly. And while he did have time for the more benign sort of ratbag, – he knew perfectly well that he was sometimes thought to be a bit of a ratbag himself – even that patience had its limits. Here is a letter that David wrote in 1998, taking a dim view of bibliomancy:

4 May 1998

Brendan McKay
Department of Computer Science
Australian National University
Canberra
ACT 0200

Dear Brendan McKay,

I much enjoyed the session on bibliomancy that Saul Kripke organized at Princeton. I have two suggestions for further experiments.

Suppose that instead of the Bible, you take a long initial segment of pi and convert pairs of digits into letters: 00 = A, 01 = B, . . . , 25 = Z, 26 = A, . . . 51 = Z, 52 = A . . . 99 = V; or any of many other codings. If message are found, this can be held to confirm Descartes' notion that God somehow created the eternal truths of mathematics.

Suppose that instead of the famous rabbis, you search for messages like ESSENDON, SHEEDY, ON YA DONS, CARN BOMBERS, PIES SUCK, and so on, and so forth. This would address a burning theological question: who does God barrack for? No doubt those of other faiths would get busy finding conflicting messages, helping prove just how abundant these messages really are.

Best wishes,
David Lewis

c: Maya Bar-Hillel
Department of Psychology
Columbia University
New York, NY 10027
Saul Kripke

But the rest of this paper, and indeed the whole of the "David and the Christians" project, is concerned not with this kind of stuff, but rather with philosophical engagement between philosophers who were far more similar, philosophically, than they were different, and who had a common view about how to do philosophy and about what was important.

David says to Bob Adams in 1994:

Dear Bob,

21 October 1994

Thank you for your good comments. It's really nice when philosophers who disagree as much as we do about the main issue can agree so well – perfectly, I think – about the shape of the disagreement. It does mean we won't have much by way of argy-bargy to offer at Notre Dame.

And, in the same spirit, from Peter van Inwagen, in a letter to David, dated December 22, 1981 (and no, Peter did not misrepresent David, either in this letter, or as far as I know, anywhere else.)

It really does amaze me how much agreement you and I can come to when we're applying possible-worlds language, considering the fact that we don't mean the same thing by it at all.

None of this letter is designed to convince you of anything, of course. You and I are both beyond being convinced by the other – about possible worlds, I mean. But I'd be interested to know if I've misrepresented you on any point.

13.2 The God of the Philosophers

The god that David thought most worth not believing in is a version of the Christian God, or the Judeo-Christian God, called by David, following Antony Kenny,⁷ “the God of the philosophers.” This God is a being who:

- is eternal;
- is omnipotent;
- is omniscient;
- is perfectly good;
- and in particular loves us all;
- is the creator and sustainer of all besides himself;
- is a rational agent;
- is a being whose nature is accessible to us;
- is a being whose actions are, or anyhow always could be, comprehensible to us;
- can, and perhaps also does, have causal impact on what he has created, and in particular on us.

This set of properties characterizes not just one god, but a whole very large set of them. For example, is God eternal by virtue of being *everlasting*, enduring through all time, or by virtue of being *timeless*, outside of time? If God is everlasting, is it that he sees time just as we do, and time passes for him just as for us? If this is how God is, there are two (at least!) ways to treat divine foreknowledge. On one view, divine foreknowledge really would be *foreknowledge*, and God has to wait and see what happens, same as the rest of us. This makes the problem of reconciling divine foreknowledge of the actions of free agents with the freedom of those agents much easier than for a God whose existence is timeless. On another view of an everlasting God, –that of Alvin Plantinga, for instance– God *nonetheless* has essential foreknowledge of free actions.

Metaphysics has immediate, major consequences for philosophical theology. We knew that. For example, I would very much like to find letters in David's file of correspondence explicitly discussing what sort of God a presentist could believe in.

13.3 Free Will

David's metaphysics sometimes takes the form of philosophical theology, especially in his correspondence about the free will theodicy. Here is an exchange with Alvin Plantinga from 1985.

The first letter is from David to Al, dated October 12, 1985: here is the relevant part of it, followed by an excerpt of a reply dated October 26, 1985 (reprinted by kind permission of Alvin Plantinga).

When we met in Wellington and Melbourne, I wanted to talk to you about Free Will Theodicy, but there seemed to be no very good occasion to talk at length.

I hope you won't mind if, for the sake of brevity, I speak as though you were committed to the truth of FWT. Of course I understand that you are not; the most you are committed to is (1) that FWT might be true, and (2) that if true it would explain how God and evil can coexist. So when I ask "Is it so that X?" take that as short for "Do you think a tenable version of FWT could hold that X?"

FWT holds that God values His creatures' exercise of significant freedom; and rightly so, since the exercise of significant freedom is a very good thing. I ask: is it good only sometimes, namely when the creature chooses rightly? Or is it good always, even when the creature chooses wrongly? If it's good always, then when Stalin or Satan freely chooses to inflict horrendous suffering, we do indeed have some evils, both of sin and of suffering, yet also we have something – the exercise of significant freedom – which is very good. Not *as* good, presumably, as an exercise of significant freedom which turns out right, but still a good of the very sort for the sake of which God permits sin and suffering to go on. If so, it would have detracted from this good if anyone, God or man, had rescued the victims. For then the stakes would have been less, so the freedom exercised by Stalin or Satan would have been less significant. The evil has to be there to confer significance on the choice. If an exercise of significant freedom is a good thing even when evil is chosen, then we have a Moorean "organic unity": the affair is good as a whole, but it has evil parts and it wouldn't have been so good if they had not been there. This version of FWT resembles the aesthetic sort of theodicy, in which the dissonant notes make the whole symphony of world history more glorious than it could have been without them. Is that the right direction for FWT to take?

If not, then I have a different question. God knew which exercises of significant freedom would go which way. We're not to suppose that God could have controlled the counterfactual truths about how any given exercise, if permitted to take place, would turn out – that would be for Him to remove the freedom. But He seems to be in a position to control which ones do and which don't take place. If the ones that would go wrong would not be of value, and would include sin and result in suffering, why doesn't He prevent just those ones? He could control the creatures and take away their freedom in just those cases where He foresees that their exercise of significant freedom would go wrong; or else He could at least rescue the victims, thereby removing not the freedom itself but the significance of the freedom. The only exercises of significant freedom that he'd prevent are the ones that *ex hypothesi* are of no value. The others, the ones that He foresees will go right, He may allow to go forward, entirely uncontrolled. They will be just as much exercises of significant freedom, and will have just as much value, as they would have had if He hadn't prevented the ones that were going to go wrong. Why not?

I think I know how you will answer. If I'm right, our disagreement about counterfactuals takes on theological significance in one more way than I'd previously expected.

Imagine that God has followed the course I suggested. Foreseeing which exercises of significant freedom would go right, He has allowed just those ones to go forward uncontrolled and prevented all the rest. Fred's choice was one of the ones that God foresaw would go right. So long ago (or outside of time) God made up His mind firmly to exercise no control over Fred; and also not to rescue the victims in case Fred chose wrongly. Whatever may happen, God will stand firmly by His decision. Now the time has come for Fred to choose. *Has* God left him free? I say yes. It's settled long ago (or outside of time) that God will neither control him nor detract from the significance of his choice by rescuing victims. When Fred chooses right, God will be unsurprised. If he chose wrong, God would be astounded – but would still stand by His decision not to suddenly put Fred under control or rescue victims. Fred and his surroundings, and God's intentions toward him, are exactly as they would have been in the comparison case in which God allows all the exercises of significant freedom to go forward, no matter how he foresaw that they would go. So Fred is no less free than in that comparison case.

I said that if Fred chose wrong, God would be astounded, but would stand by His decision not to interfere. But instead one might back-track, and I think from other discussions that you would. I think you might say that if Fred chose wrong, God would have foreseen that; so *ex hypothesi* God would *not* have permitted Fred's exercise of significant freedom to go forward, but rather would have made up His mind long ago (or outside of time) to prevent it; so if Fred had freely chosen wrong, then Fred would not have freely chosen wrong; which means that Fred could not have freely chosen wrong; which means that, after

all, God did not leave Fred free. By following the policy He did when He allocated significant freedom to some, and control or insignificance to others, He did after all take away Fred's significant freedom; although He did not interfere in any direct way. I think you might say that by taking my misguided advice, God not only took away the worthless exercises of significant freedom that were going to go wrong, but also took away the valuable ones that were going to go right.

As I think you'll expect, I say that there are two senses, or two resolutions of vagueness, of the relevant counterfactual. In the sense that matters for freedom, I say that if Fred chose wrong, God would be astounded but would not interfere, and so Fred would have exercised his significant freedom in choosing wrong. I'll give you a *different* sense, in which it's true that if Fred chose wrong, God would have foreseen it and followed His policy of not permitting the exercise of significant freedom in such a case; but I deny that this different sense is relevant to whether Fred has been left free. This brings us back to the disagreement we have discussed in connection with Newcomb's problem, and with the vulnerable ants.

Yours,
David Lewis

cc (pages 3–4 only): John Bishop

Now as to the second part of your letter: I find the issues here extremely interesting and am eager to work on them. Unfortunately I have had no time to do so; I have been trying to finish a paper (for a Central division symposium) that is already a month overdue. Furthermore I won't have any time during the next two weeks; I'm trying to finish another paper for the interAmerican conference in Guadalajara. So I'll write you about these matters in about three weeks.

In the meantime, however, I have a couple of questions.

First, let me see if I understand you. You speak of resolving an ambiguity in a certain counterfactual: "there are two senses, or two resolutions of vagueness, of the relevant counterfactual." Which counterfactual is this? Presumably

(1) If Fred were to go wrong, God would interfere

or its contrary

(2) if Fred were to go wrong, God would not interfere.

Now why do you say that there are really two senses of (1)? Do you mean to say that prior to our resolving the vagueness of (1) it has one sense while after the resolution of the vagueness it has two senses, neither identical with the original? What would the two senses be? Are there at least two propositions the sentence (1) could or would express after the resolution of vagueness? Is there some way of specifying or stating these counterfactuals (in other terms)? I'm not clear how you are thinking of this. Do you see resolving the vagueness involved as a matter of or something like a matter of adding conditions to the antecedent? So that under one resolution of the vagueness involved, (2) expresses what can be put more explicitly by something like

(2*) If Fred were to choose wrong, and God were to act on his intention of not interfering with Fred, God would be astounded but not interfere

which is true, while under another what it expresses is something like

(1)** If Fred were to go wrong and God were to follow his policy of interfering with those he has seen will go wrong, then God would not interfere

which is false? How are you thinking of this matter? And why would you think (if you do) that the truth of (1*) is relevant to the question of whether Fred is free, while the falsehood of (1**) is not?

Further: suppose we state the hypothesis in question: that God has and always has had a policy of interfering with those whom he foresees will go wrong and not interfering with those whom he foresees will go right (and would have had this policy no matter what Fred does), that he has foreseen that Fred will go right, and that he will not interfere with Fred: and suppose we add standard views about God (e.g., that he exists and is omniscient in at least all the worlds in which Fred exists, that he cannot change his mind, and the like). Won't there then be a straightforward argument from the hypothesis to the truth of (1) and hence to the falsehood of (2)? And wouldn't that be sufficient for showing that, under the hypothesis in question, it is not within Fred's power to do what is wrong, so that he does not have significant freedom?

I'm sorry that I can't work on these matters for the next couple of weeks, but as soon as I can, I will. In the meantime I'd certainly like to hear what you have to say in response to the above queries.

Yours,

There are many other discussions in David's correspondence of matters concerning free will. One such is an exchange with Edwin Curley, about the truth of counterfactuals of freedom. Do these counterfactuals, of form "If it were the case that p, it would be the case that q" have truth values? Curley says, as quoted by David,

...if indeterminism is correct, then for any possible world in which the agent freely chooses to do A, there is another possible world just like it, as regards its prior history and laws, in which the agent freely chooses not to do A. Indeterminism guarantees that the truth conditions for counterfactuals of freedom cannot be satisfied.⁸

In this discussion they agree that the worlds that we are concerned with are worlds which are the same up to the occasion of the indeterministic action, and differ thereafter. Future similarities don't count.

13.4 Divine Evil

Now we turn to the next of our selections of David's correspondence on topics in the philosophy of religion: a letter on evil, specifically on the possibility of divine evil, evil perpetrated by God. This is one of David's letters that amounted to the zero-th draft of a paper.

At what turned out to be very near the end of his life, David outlined a third paper in the philosophy of religion, "Divine Evil."⁹ This letter to Michael Tooley contains the substance of that outline and the argument it contains. Whether or not it succeeds as a step towards a knockdown, drag-out argument, an atheodicy putting all the theodacists that ever there were out of business once and for all, it is "as firm an anti-Christian manifesto as you could have."¹⁰

Princeton University

Department of Philosophy
1879 Hall

Princeton, New Jersey 08544-1006 U.S.A.

(609) 258-4289

FAX: (609) 258-1502

20 July 2000

Prof. Michael Tooley
Department of Philosophy
University of Colorado
Boulder
CO 80309-0232

Dear Michael,

I've come to think that the much-discussed problem of evil that we've both written about is something of a sideshow, and that the *real* problem of evil (for Christians, anyway) lies elsewhere.

Mind you, I still think the much-discussed problem of evil is a good objection to theism (unless one is such a sucker as to accept Plantinga's challenge to prosecute the case without benefit of any auxiliary premises except logical truths!) The only good way to dodge it is to doubt that the God of scripture, as opposed to the God of the philosophers, is really omnipotent, but that is more than a little bit heretical.

The much-discussed problem concerns the evil, both moral and natural, that God forbears to prevent. The real problem, I think, is the evil that Christians ascribe to God Himself. To punish insubordination with eternal torment would be, I take it, monstrously unjust, because the punishment would be entirely disproportionate to the crime. To do such a thing, or even to be disposed to do such a thing, is horrendously evil. It also flatly contradicts the contention that God loves His creatures.

It is not the omnipotence of the God of the philosophers that sets up the problem, but rather a central feature of Christianity: the redemption. Without the redemption, it wouldn't be Christianity. (Vague theism and uplift joined to a reverence for the life and teachings of Jesus, such as we might hear from Quakers or Unitarians, is not yet Christianity!) And without something pretty horrendous for us to be redeemed *from*, it wouldn't be the redemption.

The Christian universalists tell us that in the end, nobody will be damned. But is this because God will in the end be merciful and abandon His disposition to punish insubordination? Or is it because in the end, everyone will knuckle under? I think it's meant to be the latter. And if it is, God retains His horrendously evil disposition, even if He never has occasion to manifest it.

Sophisticated Christians may say that damnation doesn't really consist of eternal torment. Rather, it's a state for which eternal torment is an apt (or an inadequate) metaphor. I reply that if God is disposed to punish insubordination by inflicting a state for which eternal torment is an apt (or an inadequate) metaphor, that is no less unjust and evil than if the punishment had been eternal torment itself.

Sophisticated Christians may say that damnation is not a punishment inflicted by God, rather it is a state of alienation from God which the damned choose for themselves. (And perhaps they have the option at any time of ceasing to choose it and thereby ceasing to be damned.) I reply in two parts. First, as a contented atheist I can testify from personal experience that the state of alienation from God is *not* a state for which torment is an apt (or inadequate) metaphor. Second, if this state is so horrible, why doesn't God prevent His creatures from falling into it? To this the answer will be that He respects their free will. This now returns us to one aspect of the much-discussed problem. Anyway, I again reply in two parts. First, I reject the value judgement that incompatibilist freedom is worth so much. (And compatibilist freedom wouldn't prevent God from keeping His creatures out of trouble.) Second, it seems to me that God could have done plenty more than He does by way of gentle urging and luring without thereby removing the incompatibilist freedom of His creatures.

I end with a practical problem. If the God whom Christians worship is horrendously evil, what are we to say about the Christians themselves? Do they not share in divine evil by endorsing it? Are they devil-worshippers? I would like to go on thinking that I wholeheartedly respect and admire certain of my Christian friends, but I'm at a loss to see how that's possible.

Yours,
David Lewis

c: mj

13.5 Atonement as Penal Substitution

Now we turn to another topic: penal substitution. If one person volunteers (or is compelled) to be punished for another's offense, is that really punishment, and does it ever "render it permissible (or even obligatory) to leave the offender unpunished?"¹¹

David treats the Atonement as an instance of penal substitution. It has to be said that David, normally pretty ahistorical, is especially so in this case. It also has to be said that he treats the crucifixion as an instance of punishment. So far as I can tell, neither his published works nor his correspondence further considers the question of whether atonement is just another kind of punishment, or whether there is something that sets atonement apart from the kind of punishment visited on criminals or wayward children.

A letter from David to Phil Quinn states the issue:

Prof. Philip Quinn
Department of Philosophy
University of Notre Dame
Notre Dame, IN 46556

26 February 1996

Dear Philip,

I recently came upon your paper "The Traditional Understanding of the Atonement Must Be Modified" reprinted in an OUP book of readings. (The book where it appeared originally is not in our library. Can you tell me, please, whether OUP made any cuts or editorial alterations? Or whether they changed the title, as they seem to have done in other cases? Thanks.)

I've had in mind for a year or so that I would write a paper titled "Do We Believe in Penal Substitution?" The first half of my paper would have been redundant given yours, so it's just as well I never got around to writing it! I would have said, of course, that the leading Christian theory of the Atonement conflicts with what most of us – Christians and others alike – believe about just punishment in other sorts of cases.

My second half, however, might still be worth writing – though now it might best be written as a comment upon your paper. My point would be that it's not just Christians (some of them) who seem to be of two minds about penal substitution. More or less nobody thinks that a beneficent substitute can serve my prison sentence, or my death sentence; but more or less everyone does think that a beneficent substitute can pay my fine. If I'm sentenced to pay a fine, and you pay it for me, then it's been paid and I no longer owe it. Why this difference between fines and other punishments?

(1) Because fines are such small punishments? Well, often they are, but sometimes they aren't. Some fines are a more severe punishment than some prison sentences. Yet it seems to me that my opinion that penal substitution is OK in the case of fines applies to large and small fines alike. Or (2) because fines are really just fees, and carry no disgrace? Well, sometimes they don't, but sometimes they do. Yet it seems to me that my opinion applies alike to fines that are really just fees and to fines that carry disgrace. Or (3) because it's impractical to prevent you from paying my fine if you really want to? (We could scarcely run a system on which, if I'm sentenced to pay a fine, you are forbidden to give me a gift equal in value to the fine I must pay!) True; but if we whole-heartedly disbelieved in penal substitution, we ought to take that as an argument that fines are not a satisfactory punishment. Yet I think I've never heard any such argument made.

And, in addition there is an interesting interchange with Bruce Langtry on atonement as penal substitution (reprinted by kind permission of Bruce Langtry).

Dear David,

August 6, 1996

Thanks for your draft paper. I have only one comment: perhaps it would be more complete if it contained some discussion of substitution in collective punishment.

Sometimes a teacher detains a whole class after school, as a punishment for its misbehaviour. There are three categories of individual: (i) Those who participated directly and fully in the offence for which the punishment was imposed – eg., shouting and overturning desks (ii) Those who participated indirectly – they did not shout or overturn desks, but they did contribute to the unruly atmosphere immediately leading up to the main offences, or at least they contributed to the background unruly attitude of the class over preceding days, whether or not they were there at the time of the main offences (iii) Those who were completely uninvolved – eg., they are always well-behaved in class. I am inclined to think that the punish-

ment of the individuals in category (iii) is unjust, but punishment [o]f individuals in category (ii) sometimes just. At any rate, the chief point is that the punishment is collective.

The Roman army is said to have sometimes punished seriously misbehaving regiments or other military units collectively, by selecting 1 man in every 10 by lot, and executing those selected. The idea was not that the individual survivors were lucky enough to escape punishment; rather they participated in the punishment imposed on the whole regiment via the execution of those selected.

Suppose that we agree that this method of punishing a regiment was just – at least if it involved the execution of only individuals in categories (i) and (ii). Suppose now that one of the individuals who is not chosen by lot offers to take the place of his friend, who was chosen by lot to be executed. Would this strike the authorities as senseless? Would it undermine the functions of the punishment (according to the retributivist, expressivist, or deterrence theories, etc)? I think not.

Suppose further that the friend who volunteered was in category (iii) – eg., he was a member of the regiment, but had in no way contributed to the offence committed by the regiment. Here is a case in which an innocent person is executed in place of one who shared directly in the collective guilt.

There are many considerations which might lead the authorities to accept the offer. It is not clear that in doing so they would be acting unjustly or pointlessly. To the extent that you agree, you have intuitions favouring penal substitution which go well beyond the area of big fines.

One point made by some Christians is that Christ, while innocent because he had done nothing wrong, nevertheless identified himself with human beings collectively. He became a member of the human community. He was therefore in a position to volunteer to take upon himself the full penalty which the human race collectively deserved, and thereby to save individuals from the punishments to which they were (distributively) liable.

I don't want to develop this line of thought further; indeed I don't quite know how to. But it seems well worth considering in the context of your paper.

Regards,
Bruce Langtry

Here is David's reply:

7 August 1986

Dear Bruce,

Thank you for your letter.

I've written elsewhere about decimation of a mutinous regiment: "The Punishment that Leaves Something to Chance", *Philosophy and Public Affairs*, 1989, 53ff. I take the line that it is not a collective but an individual punishment: that it is a probabilistic punishment, a "penal lottery". "Each soldier is punished for his part in the mutiny by a one-in-ten chance of being put to death." p. 58. I agree that penal lotteries are unjust; although there's a sense in which the equally guilty are punished equally – their risks are equal – pretty clearly that's not the right sense.

You ask me to suppose, counterfactually, as I think, that decimation is just. Then would allowing substitution detract from its supposed justice? If forced to answer, I say yes. But I'd rather not answer. Because the initial supposition is so far-fetched, I lose control of it. Too much is up for grabs. Some of my moral opinions are to be held fixed, some suspended, and which are which? (Besides, maybe I'm supposed to imagine myself thinking as an ancient Roman would, and I don't know enough about how ancient Romans thought.)]

[Bruce's Melbourne Uni colleague Allen] Hazen made a different connection between penal substitution and penal lotteries. Insofar as it's a matter of luck whether the convicted offender can or can't find a willing substitute, a system that tolerates penal substitution is to that extent a penal lottery. And insofar as it's not a matter of luck but not a matter of desert either, that's if anything even worse: the rock star has his fans, he will surely find a substitute and go free: not so the logic lecturer.

Yours,
David

13.6 The Many-Worlds Theodicy

David considered a theodicy that only a modal realist can even attempt to run. (Peter Forrest once said that David was the most extreme modal realist going.) David says¹² to his old friend Jonathan Bennett:

I do think there are sometimes moves in analytic philosophy of religion that may look good to a puzzle-solving philosopher but are not religiously serious. Take, for instance, many-worlds theodicy:

Why didn't God make the best possible world? – He did. Whaddaya mean, best world? Lisbon Earthquake, AIDS, Pol Pot, I said God made the best possible world. I never said this was it. God made the best, He made the second-best, He made the third best, and so on down through all the worlds with a positive balance. We're down there somewhere.

I think this is a nifty solution to a philosophical problem (but not so nifty that it clearly works – maybe it plays on mixing two different notions of what it is to be a world). But I doubt that it could really be part of someone's religion. I'm not sure why not, and I could use some help from native informants. I know of three inventors, – independent so far as I know, – of many-worlds theodicy. Burnheim¹³, radicalized ex-priest, thought it was a joke (conversation, Sydney Harbour, 1971). McHarry¹⁴, who I know nothing about, writes as if in dead earnest (Analysis, 1978). With Nozick (Examined Life, 227 ff.) you can never tell.

Now here's what I think. I think that this theodicy can't be made to work in David's modal realism. Aside: it doesn't even begin to work in ersatz modal realism, in which the possible worlds – ersatz possible worlds – are made out of components of this world. In ersatz modal realism there really is only one possible world, this one. And there is (at most) one God, and the counterexamples to the premise that this is the best of all possible worlds bite just as hard as they do in the traditional atheodicies that turn on the presence of evil in this world.

I think David doesn't get to the real reason why his many-worlds theodicy doesn't work. This is a huge surprise to me: David always got to the real reasons. The problem isn't just that "maybe it [the many-worlds theodicy] plays on mixing two different notions of what it is to be a world." It's worse than that.

Why can't David run the many-worlds theodicy? For utterly fundamental reasons built into his modal realism.

For starters, let's look at David's description of our world:¹⁴

The world we live in is a very inclusive thing. Every stick and every stone you have ever seen is part of it. And so are you and I. And so are the planet Earth, the solar system, the entire Milky Way, the remote galaxies we see through telescopes, and (if there are such things) all the bits of empty space between the stars and galaxies. There is nothing so far away from us as not to be part of our world. Anything at any distance at all is to be included. Likewise the world is inclusive in time. No long-gone ancient Romans, no long-gone pterodactyls, no long-gone primordial clouds of plasma are too far in the past, nor are the dead dark stars too far in the future, to be part of this same world. Maybe, as I myself think, the world is a big physical object; or maybe some parts of it are entelechies or spirits or auras or deities or other things unknown to physics. But nothing is so alien in kind as not to be part of our world, provided only that it does exist at some distance and direction from here, or at some time before or after or simultaneous with now.¹⁵

What about other possible worlds? David says:

...absolutely every way that a world could possibly be is a way that some world is.¹⁶

Where in logical space is God? David says perfectly explicitly that God, if such there be, is a part of a possible world.

I too might be heard to say that there is only one world, that there are only finitely many donkeys, or that there is no God. But when I say such things, I am restricting my quantifiers, just as when I look in the fridge and say that there is no beer. I do not deny that there is beer outside the fridge, but I ignore it in my speech. Likewise I may ignore the other worlds, and the other-worldly donkeys and gods, without at all denying that – speaking unrestrictedly – they do exist.¹⁷

He also says:

The worlds are not of our own making. It may happen that one part of a world makes other parts, as we do; and as other-worldly gods and demiurges do on a grander scale. But if worlds are causally isolated, nothing outside a world ever makes a world; and nothing inside makes the whole of a world, for that would be an impossible kind of self-causation.¹⁸

Before we get down to work on the many-worlds theodicy, let me first clear away a distraction. There is another, completely distinct, set of arguments, the *no-best-world* arguments, supporting the conclusion that God could not have created the best of all possible worlds, because there isn't one. Robert Elliott¹⁹ and several others take the line that there is no best of all possible worlds: for every world there is a better one. So God, try as He might, could not create a possible world that is the best of all possible worlds.

Some versions of this argument, as do those just mentioned, turn on an argument that the ranking of possible worlds as ordered by goodness has no upper limit: for every possible world there is a better one. Another, and distinct, line of argument, which I do not discuss here, could turn on a premise that goodness consists of too many properties to allow for a single, well-ordered ranking of worlds as ordered by their goodness.

Still other no-best-world arguments, including Bradley Monton's,²⁰ rely on the truth of the claim that God can create many instances of qualitatively identical worlds. If God can do this, then there is no unique best of all possible worlds, though there might be a set of worlds, identical with one another in all respects, that rank highest in goodness.

The no-best-world atheodicy has legs. Bradley Monton's paper is recent, and he cites several other recent discussions of the no-best-world atheodicy. The discussion continues. But the no-best-world arguments, all of them, differ fundamentally from the many-worlds theodicy that David describes in his letter to Jonathan Bennett. The no-best-world arguments rely on the success of an argument that there just is no best of all possible worlds. Arguments of this sort can be made against any theodicy, or indeed any atheodicy, with a premise in it that says that God created, or must create, the best of all possible worlds. This is entirely independent of any theory about modal realism, or ersatz modal realism, or the view that there is exactly one world, namely, this one.

Now, back to business, and the many-worlds theodicy that David talks about in his letter to Bennett. There doesn't seem to be much discussion of this in the literature.

The McHarry paper is the best statement, all three pages of it, that I know of, of the argument. McHarry considers a world – a possible world – to be a collection of all things spatiotemporally related to one another. He and David agree about this. Two such disjoint collections do not constitute one world. He and David agree about this too, and indeed this is fundamental to David's treatment of possible worlds as causally insulated from one another. According to McHarry, on the assumption that there could be more than one such possible world, then the problem of evil dissolves, since God can, indeed must, actualize every world which is better than nothing. This is David's argument-sketch.

This is a stronger argument than David's. David has it that there *are* all those possible worlds. McHarry says only that if there *could be* possible worlds, then the theodicy works.

Now the troubles begin. First let's look at a little trouble, then at the big one.

The little trouble arises from David's claim, stated above, that nothing inside a world ever makes the whole of that world, for that would be an impossible kind of self-causation. This is a problem all right, but a problem not unique to modal realism that gives us a pluriverse of possible worlds.

Indeed, it looks as if David is not entirely committed to this claim. In the interchange with Ed Curley mentioned above, David says:

I say: there is an actual world. To be sure, most of it lies off in the future of the moment prior to the creation. There are truths about what will in fact happen, even though most of those truths are not yet predetermined. Only if we've made a case that similarities involving actual future contingencies don't count (and I don't object at all to that view, I just say it needs to be argued), or if instead we doubt that there are present truths about future contingencies, can we say that there's nothing yet to settle the truth of the conditional.²¹

We have a divergence between the God of the philosophers and the gods that are located in some, but not all, possible worlds. The God of the philosophers is the creator, and perhaps also the conservator, of all besides himself. If we restrict our quantifiers, as David would have us do, we can say that the God of *any possible world* is the creator of all the rest of *that* world, and only that world. But in order for this to work we have to abandon David's view about impossible kinds of self-causation. What happens if we do abandon this? Nothing very drastic. As a change to David's modal realism, this is pretty cheap. It loses nothing about the plurality of worlds, about the mechanics of the counterpart relation, or about the claim that some possible worlds have gods in them and some don't.

What *would* be drastic is to have to say that there is (at most) one and only God, the God of all possible worlds (or of none), not a member of any one possible world. And here, as Captain Hook²² said in the musical *Peter Pan*, is where the canker gnaws. I think that to run the many-worlds theodicy as David states it you need a single and unique God, one God, not a part of any world, not itself a world, but a third kind of thing, an entity all by itself. This kind of God looks like the God of the philosophers. But to have that status it must be an entity which has causal impact on every possible world.

Well, what if we try adding to logical space a single being, God, which is not the same sort of thing as a possible world, is a part of no possible world and, uniquely, has causal impact on *all* of them?

But Ludovician possible worlds are causally insulated from one another, with no common members, and are such that nothing has causal impact on more than one world. Each world has its contents, and nothing that is in one world is in another. Something in one world may have *counterparts* elsewhere, but no individual can be in more than one possible world. This is what makes them possible worlds, distinct from one another, and is fundamental to David's mad-dog modal realism.²³ To say that something out there in logical space can have causal impact on *all* the possible worlds, indeed, created them, but is itself a member of no single world, is profoundly, fundamentally, completely, and utterly inconsistent with David's modal realist metaphysics of possible worlds.

Notes

- 1 *Philosophical Papers*, 22 (1993), 149–72; reprinted in David Lewis, *Papers in Ethics and Social Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).
- 2 *Philosophical Papers*, 26 (1997), 203–9; reprinted in David Lewis, *Papers in Ethics and Social Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

- 3 In Louise M. Antony (Ed.), *Philosophers without Gods: Meditations on Atheism and the Secular Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).
- 4 *Noûs*, 4 (1970), 175–88. Reprinted with added postscripts in David Lewis, *Philosophical Papers*, Vol. I (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983).
- 5 *Philosophical Review*, 88 (1979), 513–43. Reprinted with added postscripts in David Lewis, *Philosophical Papers*, Vol. I (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983).
- 6 Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986, reissued by Blackwell, 2001.
- 7 Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979.
- 8 In a draft of a paper “The Incoherence of Christian Theism.”
- 9 “Divine Evil.” In Louise M. Antony (Ed.), *Philosophers without Gods: Meditations on Atheism and the Secular Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007). David wrote only an outline; Philip Kitcher fleshed out the paper for publication.
- 10 Richard Swinburne’s phrase. Swinburne here combines disagreement and respect.
- 11 “Do We Believe in Penal Substitution?” *Philosophical Papers*, 26 (1997), 203–9. Reprinted in David Lewis, *Papers in Ethics and Social Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).
- 12 In a letter to him dated May 26, 1992.
- 13 This is John Burnheim, of the philosophy department at Sydney University. Burnheim himself seems not to have published on the matter, and there is no mention of it in his correspondence with David.
- 14 *On the Plurality of Worlds* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986), 1.
- 15 It’s a pity that David didn’t include Heraplem the lollipop, its stick Paraplete, its redness Harlac, and its roundness Hamis. All this comes from Donald Cary Williams, “The Elements of Being,” *Review of Metaphysics*, 7 (2) (1953), 3–18, 171–92. David helped to get Williams’s tropes back into play, after years of undeserved neglect.
- 16 *On the Plurality of Worlds*, 2.
- 17 *On the Plurality of Worlds*, 136.
- 18 *On the Plurality of Worlds*, 138.
- 19 “Divine Perfection, Axiology and the No Best World Defence,” *Religious Studies*, 29 (1993), 533–42.
- 20 “Against Multiverse Theodicies,” *Philo*, 13 (2010), 113–35.
- 21 David to Ed Curley, March 3, 2000.
- 22 Played by the great Cyril Ritchard.
- 23 Bill Lycan’s way of putting it, in his review of Lewis’s *On the Plurality of Worlds: Journal of Philosophy*, 85 (1988), 42–7.