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Personal Theism vs. Impersonal Axiarchism

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Abstract: Traditional theism affirms the existence of God as a personal being that is omniscient, omnipotent, omnibenevolent and necessarily existent. According to this view, the world exists because God chose to actualise it. Axiarchism is a novel, non-personal alternative to traditional theism. According to this view, the world exists because it is better that it be actualised than that it not be actualised. In other words, the existence of the world is ethically required. Axiarchism is initially attractive because, by replacing a personal God with the impersonal, creatively effective ethical requirement, it appears to explain the existence of the world without facing the great challenges that traditional theism faces, such as the problem of evil, the modal problem of evil, the problem of no best possible world and the modal problem of no best possible world. I argue, however, that traditional theism is, overall, more compelling than axiarchism. First, I explain that axiarchism cannot avoid the abovementioned four problems because there are versions of the same problems that apply to it as well. Second, I argue that, unlike traditional theism, axiarchism cannot successfully respond to these problems. Third, and finally, I argue that if defenders of axiarchism try to respond to the problems by assimilating theistic responses the view collapses into traditional theism. That is, there will be no difference between axiarchism and traditional theism.

1. Introduction

Traditional theism affirms the existence of God as a personal being that is omniscient, omnipotent, omnibenevolent and necessarily existent. According to this view, the world exists because God chose to actualise it. Axiarchism is a novel, non-personal alternative to traditional theism. According to this view, the world exists because it is better that it be actualised than that it not be actualised, that is, the existence of the world is ethically required. Axiarchism says that this impersonal, creatively effective ethical requirement, rather than God, is the ultimate explanation of the existence of the world.¹ Axiarchism appears initially attractive because, by replacing a personal God with the impersonal ethical requirement, it appears to explain the existence of the world without facing the great challenges that traditional theism faces, such as the problem of evil, the modal problem of evil, the problem of no best possible world and the modal problem of no best possible world. I explain in this paper, however, that axiarchism cannot avoid these four problems because there are versions of the problems that apply to it as well. I argue, moreover, that traditional theism has the advantage over axiarchism in responding to these problems.

This paper has the following structure. In Section 2, I briefly explain traditional theism. In Section 3, I introduce the four problems that traditional theism faces. In Section 4, I introduce axiarchism and explain how it initially avoids the four problems. In Section 5, I argue that axiarchism is not better positioned than traditional theism because it faces its own versions of the four problems. In Section 6, I introduce one of the four existing responses to the four problems and argue that while this response is compatible with both traditional theism and axiarchism its counterintuitiveness makes the response problematic. In Sections 7, 8, and 9 I

¹ The term ‘creatively effective ethical requirement’ is due to John Leslie. See Leslie (2015), p. 54.

introduce the three further responses and argue that they are compatible with traditional theism but not with axiarchism. In Section 10, I consider axiarchists' attempts to develop two unique responses to the problems and argue that neither of them succeeds. I argue, moreover, that if proponents of axiarchism try to assimilate theists' approach to answer the question axiarchism collapses into traditional theism. That is, there is then no point in pursuing axiarchism because it will be identical with traditional theism. In Section 11, I conclude.

2. Traditional theism

The core thesis of traditional theism can be expressed as follows:

The greatest-God thesis: God is the greatest possible being.²

This thesis is an amended form of what Anselm defends in the *Proslogion*: God is that than which no greater can be conceived (Anselm 1965, originally 1077–1078). According to the greatest-God thesis, God is the only being that achieves the maximal overall greatness. I take it that most Judaeo-Christian-Islamic monotheists (perhaps except those who believe that God is ineffable in a radical sense) accept the greatest-God thesis as a correct characterisation of God.

In this paper I focus on the greatest-God thesis as well as the following three theses which are considered to be entailed by the greatest-God thesis:

The omni-God thesis: God is an omniscient, omnipotent and omnibenevolent being.

The necessary-God thesis: God is a necessary being.

The personal-God thesis: God is a personal being.

The majority of traditional theists accept the omni-God thesis.³ They typically derive this thesis from the greatest-God thesis as follows: If the greatest-God thesis is true, God must have important great-making properties, such as knowledge, power and benevolence, at the highest degree of intensity. Therefore, God is an omniscient, omnipotent and omnibenevolent being.⁴

² In my earlier work, I presented the core of traditional theism as follows:

The perfect God thesis: God is the being than which no greater is metaphysically possible. (Nagasawa 2017, p. 9).

In this paper, however, I rely on the greatest-God thesis, which is slightly different, because it is easier to see the parallel structure between this thesis and Leibnizian optimalism, according to which the actual world is the best possible world.

³ I argue elsewhere that traditional theists should replace the omni-God thesis with the following more modest thesis, which I call the 'maximal God thesis': God is the being with the maximal consistent set of knowledge, power and benevolence. I argue that in this way they can avoid many arguments against traditional theism and establish the modal ontological argument for the existence of God (Nagasawa 2017). In this paper, however, for the sake of simplicity, I set aside the maximal God thesis and assume that traditional theists are committed to the omni-God thesis.

⁴ Daniel J. Hill presents the entailment from the greatest-God thesis to the omni-God thesis as follows: 'possession of [the property of being maximally great] implies possession of the traditional properties of a divine being: omnipotence, omniscience, omnipresence, perfect goodness, eternity, maximal beauty, as well as possession of some properties that divine beings share with many other beings' (Hill 2005, p. 246). To take another example, Thomas V. Morris

The majority of traditional theists also accept the necessary-God thesis. They derive this thesis from the greatest-God thesis in several ways. For example, some argue that God, as the being than which no greater is metaphysically possible, is the ultimate cause or ontological foundation of all contingent beings. Since a contingent being cannot be the ultimate cause or ontological foundation of all contingent beings God is a necessary being. To take another example, some argue that if God exists only contingently then we can conceive of a being that is greater than God, namely, the same being that exists necessarily rather than contingently, which is contradictory. Hence, God exists necessarily.⁵

The personal-God thesis can be derived directly from the greatest-God thesis but perhaps it is easier to derive it via the omni-God thesis. If, as the omni-God thesis says, God is omnibenevolent, then God has to be a morally concerning free agent, which means that He is a personal being who has beliefs, volition and free will. This thesis can engender disputes about how to understand morality, personhood and freedom but I set them aside as these details are not directly relevant to our discussion here.

3. Four Problems for Traditional Theism

We have seen that traditional theism is committed to four main theses: the greatest-God thesis, the omni-God thesis, the necessary-God thesis and the personal-God thesis. By appealing to these theses, traditional theists typically explain the existence of the actual world as follows: As a personal being that is omnibenevolent, God decided to actualise this world containing sentient free human beings with whom He can hold communion. He then used His omniscience and omnipotence to actualise the world. This is an ultimate explanation of all there is because, as a necessary being, God does not require an explanation of His own existence. Critics have challenged traditional theism, however, by introducing the following four problems: the problem of evil, the modal problem of evil, the problem of no best possible world and the modal problem of no best possible world.

The problem of evil

The problem of evil is a familiar challenge to traditional theism which focuses on the omni-God thesis. If the thesis is correct in saying that God is an omniscient, omnipotent and omnibenevolent being, then the actual world should be free from evil. If God is omniscient, He should know that there is evil in the actual world. If God is omnipotent, He should be able to

writes: ‘Standardly employed, perfect being theology issues in a conception of God as a necessarily existent being who has such properties as omnipotence, omniscience, perfect goodness, eternity, and aseity as essential properties’ (Morris 1987, p. 25).

⁵ Morris argues for God’s necessary existence as follows:

Why have theists endorsed the necessary existence of God? The reasoning from the side of perfect being theology is simple. We live in a world where many things have a very fragile and tenuous existence. Things come to be, things pass away. Many things that could have been never are, and most things that do exist could have failed ever to appear on the stage of reality. We live in a world of contingent beings. But contingency is not the greatest mode of existence imaginable. We can at least conceive of a being who could not possibly cease to exist, whose existence could not have appeared “from nothing”, and whose anchorage in reality is so great that it is not even possible for the being to have failed to exist. Surely it is only this necessary existence, this firmest possible foothold in reality, which is appropriate for a maximally perfect being. (Morris 1991, p. 108)

For further arguments for God’s necessary existence see Pruss and Rasmussen (2018).

eliminate evil in the actual world. If God is omnibenevolent, He should be willing to eliminate evil in the actual world. Yet the actual world contains many instances of evil, such as the Holocaust, the Rwandan genocide and the boxing day Tsunami in Southeast Asia. This appears to suggest that the omni-God thesis is incorrect in saying that God is an omniscient, omnipotent and omnibenevolent being. Hence, traditional theism is false. The problem of evil arises from an apparent conflict between our observation of the actual world and the omni-God thesis. Our observation shows that there is evil in the actual world but the omni-God thesis appears to imply that there should be no evil in the actual world.⁶

The modal problem of evil

The modal problem of evil, which was explicitly defended for the first time by Theodore Gulerseian (1983), focuses on the omni-God thesis and the necessary-God thesis. If the omni-God thesis is correct in saying that God is an omniscient, omnipotent and omnibenevolent being and if the necessary-God thesis is correct in saying that God exists necessarily, that is, God exists in all possible worlds, then there should be no possible world in which there is ‘appalling evil’, an extreme form of evil that is worse than any instance of evil in the actual world, such as millions of innocent people being tortured eternally for no good reason. There are, however, possible worlds that contain appalling evil; such worlds are metaphysical possibilities. This appears to suggest that, contrary to what the omni-God thesis and the necessary-God thesis jointly entail, there is no necessarily existing God who is omniscient, omnipotent and omnibenevolent. The modal problem of evil arises from an apparent conflict between our modal intuitions and the conjunction of the omni-God thesis and the necessary-God thesis.⁷ Here our modal intuition says that there are all sorts of possible worlds including worlds that contain appalling evil but the conjunction of the omni-God thesis and the necessary-God thesis appears to imply that there should be no possible world that contains appalling evil.

The problem of no best possible world

The problem of no best possible world focuses on the greatest-God thesis. If the greatest-God thesis is correct in saying that God is the greatest possible being, then the actual world should be the best possible world. God should not actualise any world that is inferior to the best possible world. However, it seems obvious that the actual world is not the best possible world. We can easily conceive of a world that is better than the actual world, for instance, a world that is nearly identical to the actual world except that a certain minor mishap, such as my stubbing a toe, is not realised. This appears to suggest that the greatest-God thesis is incorrect in viewing God as the greatest possible being. The problem of no best possible world arises from an apparent conflict between our observation of the actual world and the greatest-God thesis. Our observation shows that the actual world is not the best possible world but the greatest-God thesis appears to imply that the actual world should be the best possible world.

⁶ There are primarily two versions of the problem of evil. The logical problem of evil, which is formulated in terms of the apparent logical inconsistency between the existence of God and the existence of evil, and the evidential problem of evil, which is formulated in terms of the evidential value of evil against the existence of God. The distinction between the two is not crucial here because my arguments apply equally to both.

⁷ The term ‘modal intuition’ was introduced by Kraay. He presents the modal problem of evil in terms of our modal intuitions and what he calls the ‘moral intuition’ according to which ‘it is not morally acceptable that, in w , God permits the overall bad world w to be actual when it is within God’s power to prevent this’ (Kraay 2011, p. 362).

The modal problem of no best possible world

I am not aware of anyone who explicitly defends the modal problem of no best possible world but if the problem of evil can be ‘modalised’ the problem of no best possible world can be modalised as well. The modal problem of no best possible world focuses on the greatest-God thesis and the necessary-God thesis. If the greatest-God thesis is correct in saying that God is the greatest possible being and if the necessary-God thesis is correct in saying that God exists in all possible worlds, then there should be no possible world that is inferior to the best possible world. However, there are possible worlds that are inferior to the best possible worlds, for example worlds that contain some mishaps; such worlds are metaphysical possibilities. This appears to suggest that, contrary to what the greatest-God thesis and the necessary-God thesis jointly entail, God is not the greatest possible being that is necessarily existent. The modal problem of no best possible world arises from an apparent conflict between our modal intuitions and the conjunction of the greatest-God thesis and the necessary-God thesis. Our modal intuition in this instance says that there are all sorts of possible worlds, including worlds that are not the best possible world, but the conjunction of the greatest-God thesis and the necessary-God thesis appears to imply that there should be no possible world that is not the best possible world.

4. Axiarchism as an Alternative to Traditional Theism

As we have seen, traditional theism affirms the existence of God as the greatest possible being or as a personal being that is omniscient, omnipotent, omnibenevolent and necessarily existent. According to traditional theists God constitutes the ultimate, personal explanation for the existence of the actual world.

Axiarchism is a radical, impersonal alternative to traditional theism.⁸ According to this view, the actual world exists because it is better that it be actualised than that it not be actualised. In other words, the actualisation of the world is an ethical requirement. Axiarchism is not a mainstream view but it has been defended or favourably considered by such distinguished philosophers as John Leslie (1989, 2001, 2015, forthcoming), Derek Parfit (1992, 1998), Nicholas Rescher (1984, 2010) and Tim Mulgan (2015, 2017). According to Leslie, Plato was an axiarchist as well. Plato suggests in Book Six of the *Republic* that although the Good lies ‘far beyond existence in dignity and power’ it gives existence to all known things (Leslie forthcoming).

Mulgan contends that axiarchism can be motivated mainly in three ways (Mulgan 2017, pp. 2-3). First, it can be motivated by appealing to the reasoning typically adopted by traditional theists: God exists because it is better that God be actualised than that He not be actualised. Similarly, axiarchists can claim that the world exists because it is better that the world be actualised than that it not be actualised. In both cases, concrete existence is derived from abstract existence by reference to value (Leslie 2015). Second, axiarchism can be motivated by appealing to science. Science seems inherently axiarchic because such valuable features as simplicity, beauty, and elegance are commonly considered reliable guides to true scientific theories. Here scientists seem to assume that the world itself is simple, beautiful and elegant. This assumption can be taken further to develop an axiarchic inference that the world exists because it is simple, beautiful and elegant (Rescher 2010). Third, axiarchism can be motivated

⁸ Mulgan distinguishes two types of axiarchism: ‘substantive axiarchism’, which posits an impersonal entity or force that makes this physical universe actual, and ‘formal axiarchism’, which does not posit any new entity or force (Mulgan 2017, p. 2). It is important to note that both substantive axiarchism and formal axiarchism deny the existence of a personal force. Leslie (2001, 2015, forthcoming) incorporates the concept of God in his axiarchism but what he means by ‘God’ differs radically from what traditional theism means by the term.

by appealing to reasoning that we typically adopt in metaphysics. Only a world among *possible* worlds can be actual. An impossible world cannot be actual because it is *logically*, rather than causally, required that an actual world be a possible world. Axiarchism says analogously that only a world among overall *good* worlds can be actual. An overall bad world cannot be actual because it is *ethically*, rather than causally, required that an actual world be an overall good world. I do not assess any of these ways of motivating axiarchism or any general arguments for axiarchism because in this paper I focus mainly on the cogency of axiarchism in comparison with traditional theism only with respect to the four problems that we have seen, i.e., the problem of evil, the modal problem of evil, the problem of no best world and the modal problem of no best possible world.

On the face of it, the four problems for traditional theism are irrelevant to axiarchism because these problems are concerned only with the existence of God understood as the greatest possible being or as an omniscient, omnipotent, omnibenevolent and necessarily existent being. J. L. Mackie makes a relevant point in reference to the problem of evil: ‘The problem of evil, in the sense in which I shall be using the phrase, is a problem only for someone who believes that there is a God who is both omnipotent and wholly good’ (Mackie 1955, p. 200). Similarly, Michael Martin, another critic of traditional theism, writes, ‘[T]he problem of evil presumably does not show that God does not exist when “God” refers to some being that is either not omnipotent or not completely benevolent’ (Martin 1974, p. 232).

We can make parallel claims about all three of the other problems: The modal problem of evil arises only for those who hold that God is an omniscient, omnipotent, omnibenevolent being that exists necessarily (the omni-God thesis and the necessary-God thesis); the problem of no best possible world arises only for those who hold that God is the greatest possible being (the greatest-God thesis); the modal problem of no best possible world arises only for those who hold that God is the greatest possible being that exists necessarily (the greatest-God thesis and the necessary-God thesis). Since axiarchism does not postulate the existence of God it appears to be free from the four problems.

5. Four Problems for Axiarchism

We have seen that axiarchism appears to be an attractive alternative to traditional theism because it explains why the world exists without facing the four intractable problems for traditional theism. However, even though axiarchism does not face the identical problems it faces the following versions of the same problems.

The problem of evil for axiarchism

Axiarchism says that this world is actual because the actual world is good and the impersonal, creatively effective ethical requirement actualises what is good. This seems to suggest that axiarchism guarantees that there are only good things in the actual world. Clearly, though, the actual world contains many instances of evil. This appears to suggest that axiarchism is incorrect in saying that there is a creatively effective ethical requirement. This is a version of the problem of evil for axiarchism arising from an apparent conflict between our observation of the actual world and axiarchism. Our observation reveals evil in the actual world but axiarchism appears to imply that there should be no evil in this world.

The modal problem of evil for axiarchism

Axiarchism is considered a fundamental metaphysical principle that is necessarily true. If it is only contingently true, it is unclear how it can constitute the ultimate explanation of contingent facts such as the existence of the actual world. If axiarchism is necessarily true, then there should be no possible world that contains appalling evil. There are, however, possible worlds that contain appalling evil; such worlds are metaphysical possibilities. This appears to suggest

that axiarchism is incorrect in saying that there is a necessarily true creatively effective ethical requirement. This is a version of the modal problem of evil for axiarchism arising from an apparent conflict between our modal intuitions and axiarchism. Here our modal intuition says that there are all sorts of possible worlds, including worlds that contain appalling evil, but axiarchism appears to imply that there should be no possible world that contains appalling evil.

The problem of no best possible world

Axiarchism says that the creatively effective ethical requirement works as an ‘axiological filter’ which filters out evil things. Suppose that there are two alternative worlds, one of which is good and the other of which is evil. The axiological filter should filter out the evil world and select the good world to be actualised. Suppose now that there are two other alternative worlds, one of which is good and the other of which is *better*. Assuming that they are not co-actualisable, the axiological filter should prefer that the better world be actualised. Otherwise the creatively effective ethical requirement fails to actualise any world. In this way, the creatively effective ethical requirement should necessitate the actualisation of the best possible world. However, the actual world is not the best possible world. As noted earlier, we can easily conceive of a world that is better than the actual world. This appears to suggest that axiarchism is incorrect in saying that there is a creatively effective ethical requirement. This is a version of the problem of no best possible world for axiarchism arising from a conflict between our observation of the actual world and axiarchism. Our observation shows that the actual world is not the best possible world but axiarchism appears to imply that the actual world should be the best possible world.

The modal problem of no best possible world

If axiarchism is necessarily true and it works as an axiological filter, then there should be no possible world that is inferior to the best possible world. However, there are possible worlds that are inferior to the best possible worlds; such worlds are metaphysical possibilities. This appears to suggest that axiarchism is incorrect in saying that there is a necessarily true creatively effective ethical requirement. This is a version of the modal problem of no best possible world arising from a conflict between our modal intuitions and axiarchism. Our modal intuition in this instance says that there are all sorts of possible worlds including worlds that are not the best possible world but axiarchism appears to imply that there should no possible world that is not the best possible world.

6. Responses 1: The Actual World is the Best Possible World

We have seen that although axiarchism does not face the four problems (i.e., the problems of evil, the modal problem of evil, the problem of no best possible world and the modal problem of no best possible world) that *traditional theism* faces they do face versions of the same problems. How can axiarchism and traditional theism respond to these problems? In this and the following three sections, I introduce and assess four existing responses to the problems. I argue that traditional theism has an advantage over axiarchism because the latter cannot pursue any of the responses I will discuss.

Response 1 makes three claims: (i) Leibnizian optimalism, according to which the actual world is the best possible world; (ii) total modal collapse, according to which the best possible world is the only possible world (Krray 2011, p. 364); and (iii) modal actualism, according to which only the actual world exists.

Consider Leibnizian optimalism first. Leibniz writes:

It is therefore not a question of a creature, but of the universe; and the adversary will be obliged to maintain that one possible universe may be better than the other, to

infinity; but there he would be mistaken, and it is that which he cannot prove. If this opinion were true, it would follow that God had not produced any universe at all: for he is incapable of acting without reason, and that would be even acting against reason. . . . It is thus one must think of the creation of the best of all possible universes, all the more since God not only decrees to create a universe, but decrees also to create the best of all. (Leibniz 1710/2009, p. 249)

Leibniz refers to a ‘universe’ but we can construe it as equivalent to a ‘world’ according to contemporary metaphysics. Again, it seems intuitively obvious that there could have been a world that is better than the actual world. Leibniz, however, rejects such a claim. Given that God is the greatest possible being, Leibniz contends, He must have chosen to actualise the best among all possible worlds. Hence, Leibniz concludes, the actual world must be the best possible world. Leibniz is a traditional theist but Leibnizian optimalism is compatible with axiarchism. Axiarchists, such as Rescher (2010), argue that the creatively effective ethical requirement allows only the best possible world to be actualised and that, hence, the actual world is the best possible world. Rescher contends that the existence of evil in the actual world does not undermine Leibnizian optimalism because *optimalism* is distinct from *optimism*. Optimism is the view that things will go well and optimalism is the view that things will go as well as *possible* (Rescher 2010, p. 41). Optimism demands that the actual world be perfect even if it is impossible for a perfect world to be actualised. On the other hand, optimalism demands only that the actual world be as good as possible. According to Leibnizian *optimalism*, the actual world is the best possible world even though it might not be a perfect world.

The actual world contains some things that are evil and does not contain everything that is good. This suggests that God and the axiarchic requirement are meant to evaluate the overall axiological value of *worlds* rather than the axiological values of individual *items* or individual *states of affairs* within worlds. Consider what I call the ‘Leibnizian hierarchy’, a hierarchy of all possible worlds that are ranked in accordance with their overall axiological values. We can picture that, referring to this hierarchy, God or the axiarchic ethical requirement selects the best possible world that sits on the top of the hierarchy and actualises it. Given that the actual world is, by definition, the world that has been actualised, Leibnizian optimalism infers that the actual world must be the very best possible world on the top of the hierarchy. By appealing to this reasoning traditional theism and axiarchism reject the problem of evil and the problem of no best possible world. The actual world is compatible with traditional theism and axiarchism because, despite its appearance, it *is* the best possible world.

As mentioned above, Response 1 subscribes to total modal collapse, which says that the best possible world is the only possible world and that there are no other possible worlds. Total modal collapse is so called because it collapses all apparently possible worlds into a single possible world, i.e., the best possible world, which is, according to Leibnizian optimalism, the actual world.⁹ Traditional theists can defend total modal collapse by arguing as follows: Given that God is the greatest possible being (the greatest-God thesis) and that He exists necessarily (the necessary-God thesis) He cannot even in principle actualise a world other than the actual world, i.e., the best possible world. Hence, this world is the only possible world. Similarly, axiarchists can defend total modal collapse by arguing as follows: Given that the creatively effective ethical requirement is necessarily true, it cannot even in principle actualise a world other than the actual world, i.e., the best possible world. Hence, this world is the only possible world. Somewhat paradoxically, total modal collapse makes Leibnizian

⁹ By ‘apparently possible worlds’ I mean possible worlds whose existence is normally considered to be metaphysically possible.

optimism trivially true: this world is the best possible world not because it is the best among many possible worlds but because it is the only possible world.

By appealing to total modal collapse as well as Leibnizian optimism, Response 1 undermines the modal problem of evil and the modal problem of no best possible world. Leibnizian optimism entails that the actual world is the best possible world. Total modal collapse entails that the actual world is the only possible world. Therefore, there is no possible world that contains appalling evil or that is not the best possible world.

Response 1 is, however, unconvincing because it is doubly counterintuitive. First, it sacrifices the intuitively plausible thesis that the actual world is not the best possible world. Leibnizian optimism is often considered a desperate attempt by a traditional theist to preserve the greatest-God thesis by denying what is obviously true: the actual world is not the best possible world. Second, it sacrifices the intuitively plausible thesis that there are possible worlds other than the actual world (or the best possible world). Claiming that the actual world is the only possible world creates problematic consequences for modal semantics. I conclude, therefore, that even though Response 1 is compatible with both traditional theism and axiarchism it should not be adopted by either of them.

7. Response 2: All Possible Worlds, Including the Actual World, Exist

Response 2 makes three claims: (i) Anti-Leibnizian optimism, according to which the actual world is *not* the very best possible world; (ii) anti-total modal collapse, according to which the best possible world is *not* the only possible world; and (iii) modal realism, according to which all possible worlds exist to the same extent that the actual world does even though these worlds are all causally and spatiotemporally isolated from one another.

Response 2 says that Leibnizian optimism and modal collapse are false because it is obvious that this world is neither the best possible world nor the only possible world. We can conceive of possible worlds other than the actual world, some of which are better than the actual world. Response 2 is an extreme opposite of Response 1. Response 1 says that only one world, which is both the best possible world and the actual world, exists. Response 2 says, on the other hand, that all possible worlds, including all sorts of worlds that are not the best possible, exist. Modal realism, to which Response 2 subscribes, says that all possible worlds exist to the same extent that the actual world does. Each possible world is spatiotemporally isolated but they are all as real as the actual world. There is no ontological difference between the actual world and other possible worlds because actuality is merely indexical. The actual world is special for us only because it is *our* world, just as some other possible world is special for the inhabitants of that world.

As a traditional theist, Almeida (2011) defends Response 2. Given modal realism, all possible worlds are ontologically on a par. If God's existence is necessary, then He must exist in all possible worlds, including possible worlds that contain appalling evil and that are not the best possible. Almeida argues, however, that this does not undermine theism. Lewis says that modal realism entails that the net amount of evil in the totality of all possible worlds cannot be increased or diminished (Lewis 1986, p. 127). If God does not make person p_1 suffer from evil in her world w_1 He has to make her counterpart p_2 , who is as real as p_1 , suffer from evil in w_2 , and vice versa. Given that we and our counterparts are morally equivalent and ontologically on a par, there is no reason for one to suffer instead of another. Almeida claims that this is comparable to a situation in which a rescuer can rescue either person p_1 or p_2 but not both. If the rescuer rescues p_1 she cannot rescue p_2 , and vice versa. In such a situation, it is not legitimate to blame the rescuer for not rescuing p_1 instead of p_2 , and vice versa. Similarly, it is not legitimate to blame God for not eliminating evil for p_1 in w_1 instead for p_2 in w_2 , and vice versa (Almeida 2011, p. 9).

Given modal realism, an eliminable instance of evil is eliminable from one world but not eliminable from the totality of all possible worlds. Hence, eliminating such an instance of evil from all possible worlds is not a logical possibility. The so-called ‘ought implies can’ principle says that if p ought to do q then p can do q . The contrapositive of this is that if p cannot do q then it is not the case that p ought to do q . In the situation under consideration, God cannot eliminate appalling evil from the totality of all possible worlds. It then follows that it is not the case that God ought to eliminate appalling evil from the totality of all possible worlds. This does not undermine the doctrine of divine omnibenevolence, which requires that God does everything that He ought to do (and hence can do) but not that God does everything even including what He cannot (and hence ought not to do). Almeida concludes, therefore, that our modal intuition does not undermine the theistic view.

This reasoning applies to all four formulations of the problem of evil: As the problem of evil says, the actual world contains evil and, as the problem of no best possible world says, the actual world is not the best possible world. Moreover, as the modal problem of evil says, there are possible worlds that contain appalling evil and, as the modal problem of no best possible world says, there are possible worlds that are not the best possible. However, these facts do not undermine traditional theism because God cannot increase the axiological value of the totality of all possible worlds by eliminating evil from the actual world or some other possible world or by making the actual world or some other possible world the best possible world.

We saw above that Response 1 is unconvincing because it is doubly counterintuitive. It sacrifices the intuitively plausible theses that the actual world is not the best possible world and that there are possible worlds other than the actual world (or the best possible world). Response 2 does not sacrifice these theses. It affirms that the actual world is not the best possible world and that there are possible worlds other than the actual world and the best possible world. Response 2, however, makes another counterintuitive claim, which is based on modal realism: all possible worlds are as real as the actual world. While modal realism is a matter of dispute Response 2 seems to be compatible with traditional theism. Response 2, on the other hand, is not compatible with axiarchism because modal realism makes axiarchism redundant. Modal realism says that all possible worlds exist to the same extent that the actual world does. We do not then need here the creatively effective ethical requirement of axiarchism which filters out less-than-good worlds because no possible world is filtered out in modal realism. Modal realism says that *all* possible worlds, whether they are good or bad, exist, so the axiological value of a world is irrelevant to the existence or non-existence of that world. Moreover, according to modal realism, there is nothing special about the actual world because actuality is mere indexicality. Hence, Response 2 is available for traditional theism but not for axiarchism.

8. Responses 3: The Actual World is One of the Overall Good Possible Worlds

Response 3 makes three claims: (i) Anti-Leibnizian optimalism, according to which the actual world is *not* the very best possible world; (ii) anti-total modal collapse, according to which the best possible world is *not* the only possible world; and (iii) modal actualism, according to which only the actual world exists.

Response 3 says that Leibnizian optimalism is false because it is obvious that this world is not the very best possible world. Response 3 also rejects total modal collapse and replaces it with ‘partial modal collapse’, according to which only overall good worlds are possible worlds.¹⁰ Partial modal collapse is so called because it collapses all apparently possible worlds into a smaller subset, which consists of all possible worlds that are overall good.

¹⁰ The term ‘partial modal collapse’ was introduced by Kraay (2011), p. 364.

Traditional theists defend Response 3 as follows: Given that God is the greatest possible being (the greatest-God thesis) and an omniscient, omnipotent and omnibenevolent being (the omni-God thesis) He actualises only one of many possible worlds that are overall good, such as the actual world. Moreover, given that God exists necessarily (the necessary-God thesis) there is no possible world that is not overall good. All possible worlds are overall good worlds. Thomas V. Morris is a traditional theist who defends Response 2 in relation to the modal problem of evil. He claims that God is ‘a delimiter of possibilities’. By this he means that apparently possible states of affairs that ‘all non-theistic tests of logic and semantics’ deem possible are ‘strictly impossible in the strongest sense’ if they are ‘divinely precluded from the realm of real possibility’ (Morris 1985, p. 48). In other words, certain states of affairs and worlds are impossible because they conflict with the nature and existence of God. I am not aware of any axiarchist who defends Response 3 but axiarchists might try to parallel Morris’s reasoning. The creatively effective ethical requirement actualises only a possible world that is overall good, such as the actual world. Moreover, given that axiarchism is necessarily true there is no possible world that is not overall good.

Response 3 initially appears to allow both axiarchists and traditional theists to respond to the problem of evil and the problem of no best possible world. The existence of evil or the fact that the actual world is not the best possible world does not undermine traditional theism or axiarchism because the actual world is among the overall good worlds. Response 3 also initially appears to allow both traditional theists and axiarchists to respond to the modal problem of evil and the modal problem of no best possible world. There is no possible world that includes appalling evil because all possible worlds are overall good. There are possible worlds that are not the best possible but that does not undermine traditional theism or axiarchism because they are still overall good worlds.

Response 3 seems to strike a good compromise between Response 1 and Response 2, which occupy the opposite ends of the spectrum. Response 1 says that no apparently possible world except the actual world is possible or existent. Response 2 says that all apparently possible worlds are possible and existent. Response 3 says that some but not all apparently possible worlds are possible and only the actual world is existent. Possible worlds are, according to Response 3, those that are overall good and the actual world is among them. Our modal intuition is, hence, only partly correct. Response 3 also does not require infamous Leibnizian optimalism. The actual world is an overall good world but it is not the very best possible world.

Response 3 says that God or the creatively effective ethical requirement delimits possibilities in such a way that only one among the overall good worlds can be actualised. It is, however, unclear why God or the ethical requirement actualised the actual world rather than the best possible world. To answer this question, we have to consider two possible scenarios: a scenario in which there is no best possible world and a scenario in which there is the best possible world. I argue that consideration of these scenarios shows that Response 3 is available to traditional theism but not to axiarchism.

In the first scenario, where there is no such thing as the best possible world, it is easy to answer the question why the actual world rather than the best possible world has been actualised: it is impossible for the best possible world to be actualised because there is no such world in the first place. Here for any possible world there is always a world that is better than that world. Again, the contrapositive of the ‘ought implies can’ principle says that if it is impossible for x to do p then it is not the case that x ought to do p . It is not the case that God or the ethical requirement ought to create the best possible world because it is impossible for either of them (or anyone or anything else) to create such a world. They need only to actualise one of the possible worlds that are overall good. Whichever world God or the ethical requirement actualises there is always a better possible world but this fact does not undermine

traditional theism or axiarchism. This is analogous to the following situation: Smith, an infinitely rich person, decides to donate some money to a charity. Assuming that it is impossible to donate an infinite amount of money, what she ought to do is to randomly select a finite number that is quite large and donate that amount of money to a charity. Whatever amount of money she donates there is always a larger amount that she could have donated but that does not make her a bad person because it is impossible for her to donate an infinite amount of money.

Traditional theists can say that God is comparable to Smith. God can randomly select and actualise any world among all possible worlds that are overall good. Whichever world God chooses and actualises there is always a better world that He could have created but that does not make Him a bad being as it is impossible for Him to create the best possible world. Since God, according to traditional theism, is a personal being with intention and will He can decide to randomly select and actualise one of the overall good worlds. Axiarchism cannot make a parallel claim, however, because the creatively effective ethical requirement alone cannot randomly select one of the overall good worlds. A randomiser is not imbedded in the axiarchic requirement, which is based on a Platonic moral ideal. This means that if there is no such thing as the best possible world Response 3 is not available for axiarchism.

Consider, then, the second scenario where there *is* the best possible world. In this scenario too, Response 3 is available for traditional theism but not for axiarchism.

If, as axiarchism says, the creatively effective ethical requirement works as an axiological filter to select good worlds over bad worlds and better worlds over merely good worlds and so on, then no world other than the best possible world should be actualised. Given the assumption of the scenario under consideration that there is the best possible world, the creatively effective ethical requirement should not actualise any possible world other than the best possible world. However, the actual world is not the best possible world. Hence, Response 3 is incompatible with axiarchism.

Traditional theism, on the other hand, can offer a reason that the actual world is not the best possible world even in the scenario in which there is the best possible world. It can appeal to the idea that, unlike an impersonal ethical requirement, a morally concerning *personal* creator can choose not to act as an axiological filter to select and actualise the best possible world. Robert Merrihew Adams's response to the problem of no best possible world is an elaboration of such an idea. Adams argues that God can choose to create a world other than the best possible world if the following assumptions are met:

- (1) None of the individual creatures in it would exist in the best of all possible worlds.
- (2) None of the creatures in it has a life which is so miserable on the whole that it would be better for that creature if it had never existed.
- (3) Every individual creature in the world is at least as happy on the whole as it would have been in any other possible world in which it could have existed. (Adams 1972, p. 320)

Given these assumptions, if God actualises a world that is not the best possible world He does not thereby wrong any creature in it or treat any creature with less than perfect kindness because none of them would have been benefited if God had chosen to actualise some other possible world instead of the actual world. If God had actualised the best possible world, then He would have actualised creatures other than us. It does not therefore make sense for us to blame God that He could have actualised a better world. Adams defines grace as 'a disposition to love which is not dependent on the merit of the person loved' (Adams 1972, p. 324). 'The gracious *person*', he says, 'loves without worrying about whether the person he loves is worthy of his love' (Adams 1972 p. 324, emphasis added). A gracious God, hence, may well choose to create

and love less excellent creatures than He could have created. A gracious God does not choose to create creatures because of their axiological values. Even if God had created the best possible creatures it would not have been because any of them had the highest possible axiological value. In this way, we can see that God may not act as an axiological filter to choose the best possible world even though He is the greatest possible being. Adams writes:

Grace, as I have described it, is not part of everyone's moral ideal. For instance, it was not part of Plato's moral ideal. The thought that it may be the expression of a virtue, rather than a defect of character, in a creator, not to act on the principle of creating the best creatures he possibly could, is quite foreign to Plato's ethical viewpoint. But I believe that thought is not at all foreign to Judeo-Christian ethical viewpoint. (Adams 1972 p. 324)

This suggests that grace is foreign to axiarchism too because axiarchism is a form of Platonism. The details of Adams's account are of course disputable but we can see that there are ways for traditional theists to argue that God does not actualise the best possible world even if there is the best possible world, and these ways are not available to axiarchists.

In summary: Response 3 says that God or the creatively effective ethical requirement delimits possibilities in such a way that only one of the overall good worlds can be actualised. I have argued that, whether or not there is the best possible world, this response can be adopted only by traditional theists because axiarchists lack the resources necessary to underpin Response 3, such as a personal agent like God who selects one of the overall good worlds on the basis of a random decision or divine grace.

9. Response 4: All Overall Good Possible Worlds, Including the Actual World, Exist

On the surface, Response 4 is identical to Response 1 as it makes the same three claims: (i) Leibnizian optimalism, according to which the actual world is the best possible world; (ii) total modal collapse, according to which the best possible world is the only possible world (Kraay 2011, p. 364); and (iii) modal actualism, according to which only the actual world exists. Response 4's implicit understanding of the actual world is radically different, however, from Response 1's implicit understanding. According to Response 4, the actual world is identical with what I call the 'optimal multiverse', a set of *universes* that includes all possible universes that are overall good.¹¹ The shift in focus from worlds to universes makes Response 4 unique. The optimal multiverse is optimal in the sense that by including all possible universes that are overall good it yields the highest possible overall axiological value. Response 4 initially appears to be compatible with both traditional theism and axiarchism. Traditional theists can say that, given that God is the greatest possible being (the greatest-God thesis) or an omniscient, omnipotent and omnibenevolent being (the omni-God thesis), He actualises all and only possible universes that are overall good, which means that He actualises the optimal multiverse. Axiarchists can similarly say that the creatively effective ethical requirement filters out all possible universes that are not overall good and actualises the optimal multiverse which includes all and only possible universes that are overall good. In both cases, the optimal multiverse corresponds to the actual world and the best possible world.

In response to the problem of evil and the problem of no best possible world, Response 4 says that the fact that the actual universe contains evil or is not the best possible universe does not undermine traditional theism or axiarchism. Our universe, which contains evil, is not

¹¹ Kraay (2011) calls the multiverse containing all possible universes that are overall good the 'theistic multiverse'. I use the more neutral term 'optimal multiverse' as I consider it in relation not only to traditional theism but also to axiarchism.

the very best possible *universe* but it is still an overall good universe that constitutes the very best possible *world*. The distinction between universes and worlds does the job here. Kraay (2011) defends Response 4 as a traditional theist and Leslie (2001, 2015) defends it as an axiarchist.

In response to the modal problem of evil and the modal problem of no best possible world, Response 4 says that there is no possible world other than the actual world that contains appalling evil or that is not the best possible world because the actual world, which contains the optimal multiverse, is the only possible world and the only existing world.

Kraay explicitly equates the optimal multiverse with the actual world. He says that traditional theists ‘should maintain that the actual world is a multiverse featuring all and only universes worthy of being created and sustained by God’ and that they should ‘embrace modal collapse: the claim that this multiverse is the only possible world’ (Kraay 2011, p. 361). If the optimal multiverse is indeed identical with the actual world, then Response 4 initially appears to be compatible not only with traditional theism but also with axiarchism. Referring to the Leibnizian hierarchy, which ranks all possible worlds in terms of their overall axiological values, the creatively effective ethical requirement selects and actualises the best possible world, that is, according to Response 4, the optimal multiverse, which includes the actual universe.

Unfortunately, however, axiarchism faces two problems here. First, it is not clear if there is such a thing as the optimal multiverse, which Response 4 equates with the best possible world. In relation to Response 3, we have discussed a scenario in which there is no such thing as the best possible world because for any possible world there is always another possible world that is better. Similarly, it might be the case that for any possible multiverse there is always another possible multiverse that is better. If so, Response 4, like Response 3, is incompatible with axiarchism, which misses theistic resources such as a personal God who can select one of the overall good multiverses (or worlds) on the basis of a random decision.

Suppose then that, in favour of axiarchism, there *is* the optimal multiverse. Does this mean that axiarchists can pursue Response 4? My answer is negative because, contrary to what Kraay says, the optimal universe should not be equated with a world. Again, the optimal multiverse includes all possible universes that are overall good. As Kraay says, each of these universes ‘is a spatiotemporally inter-related, causally closed aggregate’. However, many metaphysicians reject the possibility of ‘island universes’, universes that exist in the actual world but are causally and spatiotemporally isolated, within the same possible world (Bigelow and Pargetter (1987). Lewis himself says, ‘I cannot give you disconnected spacetimes within a single world’ (1986, p. 72). If so, it is more appropriate to think that what are considered to be universes here, are in fact *worlds*. Hence, we have a set of all possible worlds that are overall good, rather than the optimal multiverse containing all possible universe that are overall good. The three claims of Response 4 should consequently be replaced with the following: (i) Anti-Leibnizian optimalism, according to which the actual world is *not* the very best possible world (the actual world is one of many overall good possible worlds that exist but it is not the best possible world); (ii) anti-total modal collapse, according to which the best possible world is not the only possible world (all possible worlds that are overall good are possible worlds); (iii) ‘positive modal realism’, according to which only all possible worlds that are overall good exist.

We can now see that this revised Response 4 is similar to Response 3 because they both accept (i) and (ii). The only difference between the two responses is (iii). Response 3 holds modal actualism while revised Response 4 holds positive modal realism. This means that they disagree over whether Response 3 is correct in saying that only one of all the overall good possible worlds (i.e., the actual world) exists or whether revised Response 4 is correct in saying that all of the overall good possible worlds, including the actual world, exist. Under this

interpretation, Response 4 is compatible with traditional theism but not with axiarchism. Traditional theism can maintain that, referring to the Leibnizian hierarchy of possible worlds, God chooses to make existent all and only possible worlds that are overall good, that is, all possible worlds on the Leibnizian hierarchy that are above a certain axiological threshold. (I say ‘make existent’ instead of ‘actualise’ because only one actual world can exist.) On the other hand, the creatively effective ethical requirement of axiarchism, which is based on the Platonic ideal and lacks a randomiser or divine grace, cannot choose to make existent worlds other than the best possible world. The fact that the actual world is not the best possible world hence suggests that axiarchism is false.

At this point, one might reformulate axiarchism as a view about *realities* rather than *worlds* and say that the creatively effective ethical requirement actualises the best possible reality, which consists of all possible worlds that are overall good. Here ‘the actual world’ or ‘the optimal multiverse’ in Kraay’s account is replaced with ‘the actual reality’ or ‘the best possible reality’. However, this approach faces that same old problem: there might not be the best possible reality because for any possible reality there might always be another possible reality that is better. Moreover, even if there is the best possible reality, axiarchism still faces a problem. The creatively effective ethical requirement of axiarchism can actualise only a single best possible reality, if not a single best possible world, in the Leibnizian axiological hierarchy. Yet there seems no way to construe a reality, which is understood to consist of distinct possible worlds, as a single organic whole that the creatively ethical requirement can choose to actualise. There has to be some mechanism for binding distinct possible worlds to form a single reality. If there is a personal God, for example, then one could argue that distinct possible worlds are bound in a single reality through God’s psychological unity (Forrest 1997, p. 312). This option is not available for axiarchism, however, because axiarchism does not postulate the existence of God as a personal being. I conclude, therefore, that Response 4 is compatible with traditional theism but not with axiarchism.

The responses that we have discussed can be summarised as follows:

	View of the Actual World	Modal Intuition	View of possible worlds
Response 1 (The actual world is the best possible world)	Leibnizian optimalism	Total modal collapse	Modal actualism
Response 2 (All possible worlds, including the actual world, exist)	Anti-Leibnizian optimalism	Anti-modal collapse (plenitude)	Modal realism
Response 3 (The actual world is one of the overall good possible worlds)	Anti-Leibnizian optimalism	Partial modal collapse	Modal actualism
Response 4 – Kraay’s formulation (All overall good possible universes,	Leibnizian optimalism	Total modal collapse	Modal actualism

including the actual universe, exist)			
Response 4 – My formulation (All overall good possible worlds, including the actual world, exist)	Anti-Leibnizian optimalism	Partial modal collapse	Positive modal realism

10. Axiarchic Rebuttal

We have seen the following: Response 1 is available to both traditional theism and axiarchism but it should be rejected as it is highly counterintuitive. Responses 2, 3, and 4 are available to traditional theism but not to axiarchism. This seems to show that traditional theism enjoys an overall advantage relative to axiarchism with respect to the four problems. What can axiarchists do at this point? I consider two options to save axiarchism but argue that they fail.

The first option to save axiarchism is to exclude human-centred values from axiarchism. Tim Mulgan (2015, 2017) proposes a novel version of axiarchism which he calls ‘anarthropocentric purposivism’. Mulgan contends that common forms of axiarchism take for granted the assumption that traditional theists make: the best possible world should be the best possible *for human beings*. According to this assumption, the axiological value of a given world is determined at least partly by how good the world is for human beings. Here the existence of evil is thought to undermine the axiological value of a world. Ananthropocentric purposivism rejects this assumption and holds instead that the universe has a purpose but that humans are irrelevant to that purpose. What matters to the purpose are more general, non-human-centred features of the world, such as beauty, mathematical elegance, complexity and suitability for the emergence of conscious life (Mulgan 2017, p. 7). Ananthropocentric purposivism can be construed as a unique attempt to save axiarchism from the four problems. Ananthropocentric purposivism says that Leibnizian optimalism, according to which the actual world is the best possible world, is correct but *only with respect to non-human-centred values*. This move is uniquely available to axiarchism because traditional theists cannot detach human values from divine purpose; traditional theists believe that human-centred value plays an essential role in God’s actualisation of the world.

Does ananthropocentric purposivism succeed in saving axiarchism? I think it does as far as avoiding the four problems is concerned. The four problems are all concerned with a mismatch between the expected magnitudes of human-centred values according to axiarchism (or traditional theism) and the actual magnitude of human-centred values according to our observation of the actual world. If human-centred values are not part of our axiology then we can set aside good and evil and the four problems disappear. Yet ananthropocentric purposivism is unconvincing because the exclusion of human-centred values undermines the initial motivation to pursue axiarchism as an alternative to traditional theism.

Axiarchism is introduced as an attempt to explain why our universe is fine-tuned without assuming the existence of God. Broadly speaking, the fine-tuning in question is concerned with the very small chance that sentient beings could have arisen in the universe. More narrowly speaking, it is concerned with the even smaller chance that morally significant free human agents, who are capable of performing morally good or bad actions by their own will, could have arisen in the universe. If good and evil are excluded from the explanation of creation, then ananthropocentric purposivism cannot explain the most pressing part of the fine-tuning problem. If ananthropocentric purposivism is correct, then pain and suffering are only

by-products of non-human-centred features of the world; they exist only by chance. Ananthropocentric purposivism can then explain the fine-tuning of the universe only on a surface level where only non-human centred values are considered. Also, it seems arbitrary that ananthropocentric purposivism includes non-human-centred features, such as simplicity and beauty, but excludes human-centred features, such as moral value, because axiology is normally thought to include moral as well as aesthetic values. Excluding human concerns only for the purpose of avoiding the problem of evil makes ananthropocentric purposivism an ad hoc view. Hence, I conclude that axiarchism cannot be saved by focusing on non-human-centred features of the world.

Another option for saving axiarchism is to maintain that any resources needed to respond to the four problems, including theistic resources such as the personal concept of God who can act as an agent to make a random decision or the doctrine of divine grace, *are* available to axiarchists. According to this strategy, axiarchism is a fundamental creatively effective ethical requirement, which allows virtually *anything*—natural or supernatural, personal or impersonal—to be actualised as long as it is better that it be actualised than that it not be actualised. If, for example, Response 3 is right in saying that God, who selects one of the overall good worlds on the basis of a random decision or divine grace, is necessary and the existence of such a being contributes to the overall axiological value of the world, then the creatively effective ethical requirement guarantees the actualisation of God. This means that axiarchists can take advantage of whatever response traditional theists develop to address the four problems. This option, however, is untenable because it makes axiarchism vacuous: we can name whatever resources are valuable and axiarchism guarantees their actualisation through the creatively effective ethical requirement. This makes axiarchism unreasonably almighty. Consider the following claim by Mulgan:

Many theists argue that, while the physical universe exists because it was created by God, God exists because God's existence is (*perfectly*) good. . . Ontological arguments, and other claims that God cannot fail to exist, can also be given an axiarchic reading. Why does the best possible God exist? Why is there a being than which none greater can be thought? Because that is itself for the best . . . Ontological arguments use value to move from the abstract existence of the divine nature to the concrete existence of God. (Mulgan 2017, p. 2; emphasis in the original)

We can exaggerate this axiarchic reading of traditional theism. On such an exaggerated reading, axiarchism is a fundamental principle that underlies even traditional theism and, hence, it can respond successfully to any problems that traditional theism can. Unfortunately, such a claim makes axiarchism no longer a serious alternative to traditional theism. On this reading, *axiarchism collapses into traditional theism*. Here, there will be no point in pursuing axiarchism instead of traditional theism.

11. Conclusion

What we have seen in this paper can be summarised as follows. Traditional theism faces four problems that pose great challenges: the problem of evil, the modal problem of evil, the problem of no best possible world and the modal problem of no best possible world. Axiarchism initially avoids the four problems as stated but faces alternative versions of the same problems. There are four responses to these problems: Responses 1–4. Response 1 should be rejected as it is highly counterintuitive. Responses 2, 3, and 4 are available to traditional theism but not to axiarchism. There are two unique strategies that purport to save axiarchism but neither of them succeeds. One of them in particular collapses axiarchism into traditional theism.

I conclude therefore that it is better to embrace traditional theism than axiarchism.¹²

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¹² I presented an earlier version of this paper at the ‘Personal and A-Personal Concepts of God’ conference at the University of Innsbruck in 2018. I would like to thank the audience for helpful feedback. I am particularly grateful to John Leslie, Eric Steinhardt and x for fruitful discussion on the topic of the paper.

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