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Tyron Goldschmidt (ed.): ***The Puzzle of Existence: Why Is There Something Rather Than Nothing?*** **Routledge 2013, 295pp.**

1. Introduction

Why is there anything at all? *The Puzzle of Existence* offers a treasure of cutting-edge answers to this classic question. The answers are diverse, as are the philosophical approaches. Yet this sixteen-author volume is remarkably unified: each chapter puts in place a different piece of a big puzzle. The result is new groundwork for inquiry into our most ultimate 'why?' question.

There is much to like about the book. The writing is impressively clear. Meanwhile, the material is sophisticated, innovative, and rigorous. Seasoned philosophers and interested students alike will learn much. Readers will also appreciate the careful tone of the book: the authors, all of them, display the twin virtues of intellectual humility and clear-mindedness.

The most intriguing and impressive feature of the volume is its synergy. Every chapter contributes in some significant way to assessing what Goldschmidt (the editor) calls 'the most traditional answer', which is in terms of a supreme, necessary being. That answer divides into several pieces: (i) there is something (rather than nothing) because there *couldn't have been nothing*; (ii) there couldn't have been nothing because there is something that *must be*; and (iii) there are *contingent, concrete* things (rather than none) because the necessary being created some. In this review, I shall consider some of the significant issues and arguments the authors bring up in connection with these explanations.

2. Necessary Existence

There is something because there *must be*. That's the simplest answer. Why believe it? The volume offers at least six reasons. First, O'Connor gives a nuanced argument from contingency: basically a necessary concrete reality empowers the best ultimate (most complete) explanation of why there are contingent (non-necessary) things (chapter 2). Notably, O'Connor allows there to be brute, unexplained contingent facts. He argues that there is still

a certain (defeasible) *theoretical advantage* to having a complete explanation of contingent existence. Second, Oppy marks out an ingenious pathway from his preferred theory of modality to a necessary reality (chapter 3). The gist of it is that, if we have a necessary reality in hand, then we may analyze *possible* states as ones that have an objective chance relative to a prior actual state (cf. pp. 46-50). Third, Leslie artistically explains why he thinks ethics requires existence — and why a non-reason-less reality, such as ours, would include a necessary axiological foundation (chapter 8). Fourth, Heil challenges the very intelligibility of the alternative — i.e., that there could be nothing (chapter 10). Fifth, Lowe marks out a pathway from the necessity of abstracta to the necessity of concreta (chapter 11). Lowe's argument appeals to those who think abstracta are *dependent* entities and that there must be some. Finally, there is McDaniel's argument: if there were no things, then there would be their *absence*, which has some grade of being (p. 277). Each argument provides a pathway from a significant metaphysical framework to a necessary something (or to the necessity of something).

What about the Subtraction Argument, which purports to show that *concrete* things could be subtracted, one by one, until there are none? Rodriguez-Pereyra defends a nuanced version (chapter 12), and Efird and Stoneham back the argument with a plural-criteria theory of modality (chapter 9). The Subtraction Argument crucially requires that every concrete thing be *contingent*. That requirement is not implausible on Rodriguez-Pereyra's definition of 'concrete thing' as 'spatiotemporal thing.'

Even still, the Subtraction Argument leaves unaddressed the question of whether a *non-spatial* thing (even a *causally-powerful* one) could be necessary. Therefore, the argument, even if sound, does no immediate damage to the above arguments for a necessary (concrete) reality.

3. Contingent Existence

Several authors develop important objections to certain *reasons* to believe in a necessary reality. More exactly: they challenge the role of necessary existence in explaining why there are *contingent things*. I'll review those objections and consider some replies.

First, there is the difficulty of seeing how a necessary reality *could* produce a contingent thing. Lange expresses a related difficulty: 'I do not see

what necessary fact might explain [the totality of contingent facts]...' (p. 239). Thus, Lange motivates a different theory: contingent reality is ultimately explained in terms of that which is *naturally* necessary — i.e., necessary given the basic laws.

Interestingly, there are materials for a response elsewhere in the volume. Oppy, for example, motivates a theory of modality that implies that a necessary thing(s) could *indeterministically* cause contingent things (pp. 49-50). Moreover, O'Connor offers the theistic theory that a necessary reality could have non-necessitating *reasons* for creating certain contingent things (p. 25), where those reasons may explain (to some extent, at least) why a necessary thing creates certain contingent things. In a similar way, perhaps a naturalist could appeal to probabilistic tendencies that are essential to a necessary foundation. Lange doesn't address these options.

Second, there are objections to a sufficiently general *principle of explanation* that would apply to contingent reality. For example, Goldschmidt points to a familiar problem of circularity (else: modal collapse) that arises from supposing that that there is an explanation of every contingent fact, including the alleged fact that a necessary being causes things (p. 8). Kleinschmidt poses additional, 'mereological' counterexamples to this general principle of explanation (pp. 64-76). Her arguments are clever and display depth of insight into the metaphysics of mereology. The objections here are significant because without a *general* principle of explanation, it is unclear why we should think there is any explanation of contingent reality.

Kleinschmidt and O'Connor offer ways forward, however, by motivating weaker principles of explanation. Kleinschmidt (pp. 64-76) argues that theories with greater explanatory power are to be preferred, other things being equal. O'Connor argues that contingent truths or events have an explanation unless there is an explanation of why they don't. Both principles allow there to be an explanation of contingent existence, and each constitutes a defeasible reason to think there is one, or so one may argue.

Third, there are objections to the *inference* from 'each contingent reality has an explanation' to 'there is a necessary reality'. Ross, for example, argues that there is no contingent *totality* (such as a conjunction of all contingent facts or a set of all contingent things), and that therefore no necessary reality *explains* a contingent totality.

Maitzen also challenges the inference to a necessary first cause: he argues we can explain why there are any contingent concrete things by mundane facts about *certain* contingent, concrete things, such as the fact that there are penguins. You object: but surely no F could explain why there are *any Fs at all*. Maitzen is ready with a reply: if *being F* is explained by a more fundamental property, *being G*, then surely the fact that there are Gs explains why there are Fs, *even if* every G is an F (cf. p. 264). He effectively deals with several other tempting objections, too.

Another way to block the inference to a necessary first cause is to suppose that contingent reality is adequately explained by its sheer *likelihood*. Then no necessary reality is required to play the explanatory role. Kotzen offers an innovative evaluation of this option by investigating the probability of an empty world in terms of 'measure theory' (chapter 13). He concludes that we aren't in a position to see that a world with (contingent concrete) things is indeed vastly more likely than an empty world — but it's still a live option.

The volume contains resources for addressing the above considerations. For example, Lange (chapter 14) argues for a 'distinctness-condition' that is inconsistent with Maitzen's proposed explanation — though Maitzen may reject the distinctness-condition.

More significantly, no damage has been done to the proposal that there is an explanation of the 'plural-referring' fact that there are *all these* actual contingent concrete things. This proposal avoids Ross's set-theoretic worries because there need not be a *totality* of all contingent things; and it sidesteps Maitzen's observation that certain Fs can explain why there are any Fs — because even so, surely no Fs can explain why there are *those very* Fs. O'Connor (chapter 2) and Hughes (chapter 5) each propose something in this neighbourhood.

On the other hand, Hughes expresses healthy scepticism about such a principle. Why think, for example, that for any contingent *x*s, there is a cause or explanation of their existence? In reply, Kleinschmidt's principle of explanatory power may supply at least *some* reason to prefer an explanation in any given case. After all, the plural principle of explanation is a simple principle that accounts for the many *apparent* cases of causation (deterministic or indeterministic) as well as the many *unapparent* 'cases' of uncaused happenings. Perhaps, then, a 'plural' principle of explanation is reliable enough to

shift the burden of proof to the sceptic of a necessary causal foundation, just as Rodriguez-Pereyra's principle of subtraction may shift the burden of proof to the sceptic of an empty spatiotemporal world.

Finally, McDaniel complicates the entire inquiry by proposing that there are many *ways* or *modes* of being (chapter 16). He argues, furthermore, that our English 'is' expresses a non-fundamental mode of being, and that therefore, our question, 'why *is* there something rather than nothing?' is not about fundamental reality and is not fundamentally interesting.

Nevertheless, it seems we can still make sense of the question: why are there the contingent causally-capable non-absences? And we can still appreciate the significance of an answer in terms of a necessary causally capable non-absence. That remains so even if being a causally-capable non-absence isn't a fundamental way to be.

4. What Must Be?

Several authors address questions about the *nature* of a necessary foundation of contingent things. For example, Oppy motivates a naturalistic account because it enables a simpler theory. The simpler theory is preferable, he argues, other things being equal. Leslie, on the other hand, argues that not all else is equal: he is persuaded by an 'ethical' intuition that the deepest, most satisfying ultimate explanation of concrete reality is the *value* of existence (chapter 8). This axiological explanation implies that the necessary foundation is maximally great, says Leslie. Oppy isn't convinced. He rejects Leslie's framework because he doubts that the *goodness* of a thing could explain its existence (p. 58).

Even still, Oppy's preferred theory of modality arguably implies that a necessary causal foundation would at least be *maximally powerful*, since it would have the power to head every possible causal chain. That's one step in the direction of maximal greatness. Someone might motivate further steps using Oppy's preference for simplicity: the simplest theory of a necessary foundation, one might think, is that it is, in total, *maximal* with respect to great-making features. Of course, a greatest *possible* being isn't necessarily the same as a *perfect* being. Still, it would be significant if the necessary foundation were maximally great, whether it is a 'natural' reality or not.

There is another route to maximal greatness. Suppose a necessary causal foundation (as a whole) would lack *arbitrariness*: so, for example, the necessary reality wouldn't be shaped like a bike — why *that* shape rather than another? Then, if the least arbitrary degree of greatness is *maximal* (else: *perfect*), one might infer that a necessary causal foundation (as a whole) would be maximally great. On this proposal, while Conee may be right that a certain type of Ontological Argument fails to show that a maximally great being must, in fact, exist (chapter 7), there may be reason to think that a reality that must exist would, in fact, be maximally great. Oppy doesn't break this line of thought.

Finally, the Subtraction Argument, if sound, would show that a necessary foundation is not spatiotemporal.

5. Conclusion

Intriguingly, one finds threaded across the chapters a novel assessment of a traditional, broadly Anselmian answer to the ultimate 'why' questions. Each chapter has a key piece — such as important objection, an answer to an objection, or reasons to accept a certain premise or inference. What is especially fascinating, and ironic, is that most of the authors aim for targets that, by themselves, have little to do with defending a traditional answer. It's as though no piece contains the whole picture, but fitted together they display new materials for thinking about an old solution to the puzzle of existence.

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Adam Green and Eleonore Stump (eds.): *Hidden Divinity and Religious Belief: New Perspectives*. Cambridge University Press 2016, 295pp.

Crudely stated, the problem of divine hiddenness (hereafter PDH) asks why God, if there is a God, is not more evident or apparent or obvious. In 1993, J.L. Schellenberg published *Divine Hiddenness and Human Reason* (Cornell Univ. Press; hereafter *DHHR*) which helped spur an entire subsection of philosophy of religion devoted to PDH, spanning several books and