



CANDIDATE

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TEST

General Philosophy

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1 General Philosophy collection TT24

Please type all your answers in the box below, clearly indicating the question number.

Candidates should answer either one or two questions from the General Philosophy section. If answering two questions, you have 1 hour and 30 minutes; if answering one question, then you should submit your answer after 45 minutes.

Fill in your answer here

13. No, it is not true that the problem of evil is only a problem if we lack free will. In particular, the evidential problem of evil poses challenges to theists even if humans do free will. It is, however, true to say that the *logical* problem of evil is only a problem if we lack free will. In this essay, I will first set out the logical problem of evil, and demonstrate that it can be resolved with free will, **but is otherwise intractable**. Next, I will formalise the evidential problem, distinguishing it from the logical one. Finally, I show that even with free will, the evidential problem ought to lead religious believers to be less sure of their belief, and thus it is not only a problem for theism if we lack free will.

The logical problem of evil seeks to demonstrate that there is a logical inconsistency between the presence of evil in the world, and the existence of an omniscient, omnibenevolent, omnipotent being such as the Christian God. In other words, it is an attempt to prove that if there is evil in the world, it is logically impossible for such a God to exist. We can formalise the argument as follows, drawing on Mackie:

P1: There is evil in the world

P2: Evil is morally bad

P3: If God existed, there would not be moral bads

C: God does not exist

Since the argument is plainly valid, a theist wishing to dispute the conclusion must object to the soundness of one of the premisses. As Mackie's argument attempts to prove that God does not exist, the theist need not show that the premiss is certainly false, but merely that it might be so. The burden of proof thus lies on Mackie's side.

In theory, a theist could object to any one of the three premisses. However, objecting to P1 or P2 would be rather undesirable, and open the door either to external world scepticism (by denying that we know that there is evil in the world, when that seems common-sensically apparent), or a form of moral anti-realism (by denying that evil is morally bad). Defences of this sort might allow the theist to rescue the existence of God, but at the price of giving up ground that they might have hoped was firm in epistemology or meta-ethics. Therefore, in order to satisfactorily address the logical problem, P3 must be shown to be **unsound**.

Plantinga's free will defence is a powerful way to do this. In it, he argues that:

(a) it may be true that all worlds with free will are better than any world without free will, because free will is of great moral value;

(b) it may be true that no world God could have created with free will was without moral bads.

Taken together, these two premisses open up the possibility that an omnipotent, omnibenevolent God would have actualised a world that went on to contain moral bads, showing that P3 is not necessarily true. Again, note that Plantinga does not need to show that it is, in fact, the case that God couldn't have created a world with free will and without moral bads. To show the logical problem to be unsound, he must merely identify a way in which its premisses *might* be false. The transworld depravity argument -- that it may be true that, for all

possible creatures with free will, were they to be actualised by God, they would perform moral bads -- does this successfully, and motivates part (b) of his defence. Therefore, if we have free will, the logical problem of evil can be successfully countered.

However, if humans did not have free will, it would be extremely difficult to challenge P3 in Mackie's argument. Free will, and specifically the possibility that the ability to do otherwise is required for free will, is central to Plantinga's argument. If it were the case that humans did not have free will, then there would be nothing of moral value to be lost from God interfering in (or controlling) our lives. As a result, there would be no reason for God not to intervene in the world by miracles, to rid it of all evil. So, if humans do not have free will, there is no plausible story for why there would be moral bads in a world where an omnipotent, omnibenevolent being existed. In sum, it is true that the *logical* problem of evil is only a problem if we lack free will.

The evidential problem of evil is less ambitious than the logical one. Rather than disproving the existence of God given moral bads, it only tries to show that they make it relatively less likely that God does exist. We can formalise Rowe's version of this argument as follows:

P1: There is extreme suffering in the world

P2: We can see no good reason for there to be extreme suffering in the world

I: It is likely that there is no good reason for there to be extreme suffering in the world

C: It is likely that God does not exist

where "I" is an inductive inference step.

Here, the theist must either show that the inference of I from P2 is *invalid*, or that P2 is unsound (denying P1 would be problematic for the same reasons as described above). Objecting to the inference of I from P2 is undesirable, because it opens the door to inductive scepticism by objecting to the legitimacy of generalisations from our observations. P2, meanwhile, appears sound. Although Plantinga's free will defence presents a story that might possibly be true, few (if any) theists would say that they believe it to actually be the case. In other words, whilst the plausibility of the defence is unimportant when resolving the logical problem, if the only arguments available to a theist against the evidential problem are ones which seem extremely unlikely to be true, then that provides evidence against the existence of God. Therefore, the evidential problem is an issue for theists even if we have free will.

To conclude, it is not true that the problem of evil is a problem only if we lack free will. Whilst that is a correct statement as far as the logical problem is concerned, it fails to hold for the evidential problem, which is a challenge to likelihood of God existing whether or not humans have free will.

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Answered.