

A Logical Problem of Evil

In this paper I offer a logical argument from evil against the existence of the God of standard philosophical theism, that is, a God who is conceived as a perfect being. I then support a controversial and crucial premise in the argument by means of an original sub-argument. Next, I examine two objections to the sub-argument, and two rejoinders that may be made to other premises of the argument itself, which will be found wanting. I conclude that standard philosophical theism is untenable.

Groundwork for an Argument

I begin by picking up a thread of inquiry which Alvin Plantinga follows in *God, Freedom, and Evil*¹. There we find Plantinga examining the logical argument from evil, as expounded by J.L. Mackie in his 1955 paper, *Evil and Omnipotence*. As Plantinga explains, Mackie takes the following propositions to form an inconsistent set.

- (1) *God is omnipotent.*
- (2) *God is wholly good.*
- (3) *Evil exists.*
- (19) *A good thing always eliminates evil as far as it can.*
- (20) *There are no limits to what an omnipotent being can do.*

..all of which seem plausible on theism. Yet if the set is inconsistent, a thinker aware of this must reject at least one of these propositions on pain of irrationality. Since (3) is obvious, while (19) and (20) appear to be solid definitions, it seems that either (1) or (2) must go, or both, if the presupposition of God's existence is false. Instead, Plantinga contests (19) on several grounds, guiding a cascade of revisions, his most important criticism being that, supposing some evils are logically required for the existence of a greater good, we would rather expect that a good being would *not* eliminate the evil, as doing so would also eliminate the good. Eventually, he settles on an inconsistent set of propositions from which a valid argument from evil may be constructed:

- (1) *God is omnipotent.*
- (2) *God is wholly good.*
- (2') *God is omniscient.*
- (3) *Evil exists.*
- (19c) *An omnipotent and omniscient good being eliminates every evil that it can properly eliminate.*
- (20) *There are no nonlogical limits to what an omnipotent being can do.*
- (21) *If God is omniscient and omnipotent, then he can properly eliminate every evil state of affairs.*

So, having constructed this set, why does Plantinga doubt that a logical argument succeeds? Because, he tells us, (21) is possibly false, whereas it needs to be a necessary truth in order to ensure that the existence of God and the existence of evil are incompatible. I aim to show, *pace* Plantinga, that something like (21) is necessarily true, though I shall first reformulate Plantinga's set into an argument proper, making two improvements along the way.

The first change I make to the set above is to replace talk of God's *properly eliminating* evil with talk of his *denying* evil, where, according to Plantinga, "*a being properly eliminates an evil state of affairs if it eliminates that evil without either eliminating an outweighing good or bringing about a greater evil*"². The reason for the change is that the notion of proper elimination isn't going to be nearly strong enough to use in a logical argument from evil. For consider: to say that every evil is properly eliminated is not yet to say that superfluous evils are prevented, nor that superfluous evils are not allowed to exist for some lengthy but finite time, only to be eliminated in the end. But in that case, Plantinga's notion of proper elimination isn't going to be useful in constructing a logical argument at all, as it fails to validate the inference from the existence of evil to the falsity of theism. By contrast, talk of God's denying evil does validate this inference, for to deny evil is to prevent it from becoming actual.

A second adjustment is needed. Plantinga indicates that a premise like (21) can easily be falsified, since there might be some state of affairs S, such that S is good overall, but where a constituent of S is an unrelated evil – for example, S might represent the conjunction of "Alvin is ecstatic" with "Paul has the sniffles". Could God properly eliminate this arbitrary evil? Apparently not, because to eliminate Paul's sniffles would be to eliminate S, and S is a good whose value outweighs the disvalue of mere sniffles. Many other examples will obviously do – so long as *some* good outweighs *some* evil with which it is compossible, then we'll be able to construct a counterexample – and so (21) needs modification in order to rule out this

¹ Plantinga, p. 12-29.

² Plantinga, p. 20.

mereological gerrymandering.

It is clear what is needed here: we require a more fine-grained way of talking about goods and evils than in terms of 'states of affairs'. We need to individuate the good *qua* good, the evil *qua* evil, and to leave aside anything which might be accidental to either. The problem for the atheist is that it is obscure just what does make the good good and evil evil, and so, even were she to take a stand on the loci of good and evil, this proposal would still be controversial and could be rationally denied by the theist. Fortunately, there is a way to set aside this extraneous issue: so long as we can construct adequate descriptions of what it is we want to individuate, we will be able to formulate stipulative definitions which incorporate these descriptions, and with them construct an argument from evil without worrying about what, in material terms, might satisfy those definitions. This will make for an abstract sort of argument, but its rational force will be no less for that. Certain descriptive elements suggest themselves for our purpose. The kinds of good and evil we want to individuate will not be merely apparent, nor relative to particular observers; instead they will be objectively good or evil. Further, their value will be non-instrumental, for whatever is instrumentally good cannot *itself* justify the existence of any evil, and neither can the instrumentally evil *itself* be a mark against the existence of God – in both cases only the *final* good or evil, on which the instruments depend for their value, will determine the scope of what God would justifiably create or allow to persist. As the notions of intrinsic goodness and intrinsic evil efficiently imply both objectivity and finality of value, they'll be ideal for the task. Next, we need to find a way of specifying our goods and evils on the level of goodness and evil itself. This is not nearly so difficult given our stipulative method: the job can be done by defining as ineligible those prospective items in which the value of the item is dependent upon a good or evil constituent that it has, leaving us with the atoms of value. Finally, we need something to attach our descriptions to, and if possible, something which is neutral between various possible kinds of existant our descriptions may apply to. I suggest that properties are suitable here, as properties are ascribable to beings of all kinds. These desiderata yield the following definitions for use in a logical argument from evil:

Good-Making Property: A property (i) which is intrinsically good, and (ii) which cannot be decomposed into constituent properties in virtue of which it is intrinsically good.

Evil-Making Property: A property (i) which is intrinsically evil, and (ii) which cannot be decomposed into constituent properties in virtue of which it is intrinsically evil.

For brevity's sake, I'll often call these 'GMPs' and 'EMPs' respectively. With the above adjustments, and some minor tweaks to presentation, I can now advance this essay's main argument.

An Argument from Evil

(1) *If God exists, then God is an omnipotent, omniscient and wholly good being.*

(2) *An omnipotent, omniscient and wholly good being denies the instantiation of every evil-making property whose instantiation is not entailed by the instantiation of some greater good-making property.*

(3) *Every evil-making property is such that its instantiation is not entailed by the instantiation of some greater good-making property.*

(4) *Therefore, if God exists, every evil-making property is such that God denies the instantiation of it.*

(5) *Some evil-making property is instantiated (since evil exists).*

(6) *If God exists, then some evil-making property is instantiated and it is the case that God denies the instantiation of it (which would be contradictory).*

(7) *Therefore, God does not exist.*

(NB: References to numbered premises will henceforth be to this argument). The argument is valid. But is it sound? Well, (1) is a uncontroversial statement of traditional theism, and (2) seems to capture the intuition that God would only allow evil for the sake of some greater good. (5) has as good a claim to truth as any other moral assertion. (4), (6) and (7) are logical consequences. That leaves (3), which makes an audacious, even outrageous claim. And yet I can argue that standard philosophical theism is committed to this claim.

A Sub-Argument for (3)

(A) *It is possible that God should exist, without any other thing existing. That is, there is some possible world in which God alone exists.*

(B) *In any possible world where God exists, he instantiates all good-making properties, and no evil-making properties.*

(C) *So, in the possible world where God alone exists, God instantiates all good-making properties and no evil-making properties.*

(D) *If some property is instantiated in the absence of another, instantiation of that property does not entail the instantiation of the other property.*

(E) *Then, there is no good-making property whose instantiation entails instantiation of an evil-making property.*

(F) Therefore, every evil-making property is such that its instantiation is not entailed by the instantiation of some good-making property.

(3) Every evil-making property is such that its instantiation is not entailed by the instantiation of some greater good-making property.

Let's examine the premises. (A) makes a claim to possibility, one which I think has *prima facie* plausibility for theists and atheists alike. But it also appears to be inherent in the very concept of God, once we notice two aspects of traditional stress. The first of these is God's free creativity, by which I mean God's having created the world not of necessity, but as the result of free choice. Picturesquely, creation is an *acte gratuit*, a gratuitous act in which the divine will is exercised without requirement or stimulus, and it is because God freely so willed that he is deserving of our worship as creator. The second aspect is God's absolute sovereignty, by which I mean both God's non-dependence on other beings for his existence, and the dependence of every other being on God. Taken together, these aspects of the concept of God lead us to (A): supposing that God freely creates commits one to the possibility that God may have refrained from creating, and supposing that God is absolutely sovereign commits one to saying that if God refrains from creation, nothing other than God could exist³.

(B) explicates a plausible interpretation of God's being wholly good: of any GMPs that he must have them, and of any EMPs that he must lack them⁴. The strongest way one can endorse this premise is by taking God to be goodness itself, so that 'God' and 'good' are interdefinable. Since goodness itself cannot be in any way evil, God would have no EMPs, and since goodness itself cannot fail to include some GMP (else that property would not be good), neither would God lack any GMPs. An adherent of this view is William Lane Craig, here responding to the Euthyphro dilemma:

*"God's character is definitive of moral goodness; it serves as the paradigm of moral goodness. Thus, the morally good/bad is determined by reference to God's nature; the morally right/wrong is determined by reference to his will... If the non-theist should demand, "Why pick God's nature as definitive of the Good?" the answer is that God, by definition, is the greatest conceivable being, and a being which is the paradigm of goodness is greater than one which merely exemplifies goodness."*⁵

Notice that Craig appeals to perfect-being theology as justifying his identification of God with the good, an orthodoxy with distinguished luminaries (Anselm, Aquinas, Leibniz.. many more⁶). But even leaving aside tradition, (B) is compelling: we understand God as being without flaw (hence without EMPs), and as being good in every way that something *can* be good (hence possessing every GMP).

(C) puts (A) and (B) together, adding to our description of the lone God world what was already implicit in the concept of God. (D) states a logical platitude, and together with (C), yields (E). For, if every GMP can be instantiated (as God) in the absence of every EMP, then it cannot be necessary for an EMP to exist whenever a GMP exists. But entailment is a necessitating relation, and consequently no GMP entails any EMP. Similarly, (F) is a deductive consequence of (E). Suppose the contrary, that there is some evil-making property whose instantiation is entailed by the instantiation of a GMP. Then there would be a GMP which entailed it, whereas (E) states that no GMPs entail EMPs. If (F) is false, (E) is false, so (E) entails (F). And (3) is just a special case of (F) – if every EMP is not entailed by a GMP, then *a fortiori*, they are not entailed by greater GMPs. So there we have it, support for (3). And with it, I believe, a successful argument from evil.

Objections to the Sub-Argument

(I) I deny (A): it is *not* possible for God to exist on his own, at least in the sense required for your argument – that is, for a lone God world to be possible as opposed to a world in which God merely pre-exists his creation. My reason is that I take the act of creation to be a supreme good, and so to be an act which an essentially good God would've performed in any possible world. What (A) describes may be *conceptually* possible, but it is not *metaphysically* possible.

³ A Platonistic worry: abstract objects exist necessarily, and so it is false that God could exist alone. The objection is easily enough handled, for I need only modify (A) such that it is possible for God to exist in the absence of other concreta, and add as a premise: "Only concrete objects can instantiate evil-making properties". One could also reply, on behalf of the theist, that traditional Platonism violates God's absolute sovereignty – a non-traditional Platonism can be maintained which would identify abstract objects with ideas in God's mind, but this would provide no grounds for rejecting (A).

⁴ This may not be obvious if one is thinking of moral goodness alone. However, it is said that God's goodness does not merely consist in how he acts, but in what he is: goodness has a metaphysical sense. "God is said to be good in a wider or narrower sense; wider, when this indicates the fullness and completeness of his being, his self-sufficiency and freedom from want or deficiency of any kind. In this sense of "perfect goodness" it has the same reference as "perfect being," though a different sense. Divine perfection provides the conceptual link between being and goodness in God's case; God alone is, and can be, good. In the narrower sense God's goodness is an aspect of his moral character, and he communicates this goodness to his creatures in acts of creation and redemption." (Paul Helm, 'Goodness', in The Blackwell Companion to the Philosophy of Religion, p. 263).

⁵ Craig, p. 182. Though Craig is here identifying God and moral goodness, the last sentence quoted makes clear he would extend the identification to God and goodness generally, as the same reasoning applies.

⁶ Anselm: "Now, one thing is necessary, viz., that one necessary Being in which there is every good – or better, who is every good, one good, complete good, and the only good" (Proslogion, Ch. 23). Aquinas: "All the perfections of all things are in God" (1964, pt. 1, q. 4, art. 2). Leibniz: "41. Whence it follows that God is absolutely perfect; for perfection is nothing but amount of positive reality, in the strict sense, leaving out of account the limits or bounds in things which are limited. And where there are no bounds, that is to say in God, perfection is absolutely infinite. (Theod. 22, Pref. [E. 469 a; G. vi. 27].)".

Reply: I earlier argued that God's free decision to create committed one to the possibility that God does not create, and so to the possibility of the lone God world. In fact, this is so only if the 'principle of alternate possibilities' is true – i.e., if it were true that moral responsibility for an act entailed the possibility of refraining from the act. But perhaps this is not so, for so-called 'Frankfurt-type cases' purport to show that moral responsibility can attach to actions even where it is not possible for the actor to refrain. It is not my intention to discuss whether such examples are successful. I'll assume that they are, and ignore any wider repercussions that they might have for the theist. What I argue instead is that, even granting that (A) is strictly false, a parallel argument can be made that is equally potent.

Recall that one of the two aspects of God's nature I used in arguing for (A) was God's absolute sovereignty, meaning both that God depends on no other being for his existence, and that every other being depends upon God for their existence. Yet if it is true that God does not depend on other beings for his existence, it is likewise true that none of the essential properties which God has depend upon other beings for their existence either. But God essentially instantiates all GMPs, so no GMPs depend for their existence on any other beings than God. And God essentially instantiates no EMPs, so, if GMPs do depend on God for their existence, this cannot be because of some EMP he instantiates. Hence, there is no GMP whose instantiation depends on the instantiation of an EMP.

True, this last is not quite the same as the proposition (E) – we have traded non-entailment for independence. But it seems to me that making the appropriate changes throughout the rest of the main argument is going to do little to weaken it. A revised (2) (which substitutes “*is not entailed by*” with “*is not dependent on*”) will be just plausible as our original (2).

(II) I disagree with (B): God does not instantiate every good-making property, but on the contrary, only most good-making properties – those which are compossible.

Reply: No argument from evil covers every conception of God, and this one is no exception⁷. Nevertheless, I believe the arguments here cover standard philosophical theism, which endorses the thesis that God is a perfect-being⁸. This is because God's perfection seems to entail the having of every GMP:

(I) *God is a perfect-being.*

(II) *A perfect-being instantiates every absolute perfection.*

(III) *For each and every intrinsic evaluative dimension, there corresponds an absolute perfection, which is identical to the optimal fulfillment of that intrinsic evaluative dimension.*

(IV) *So, God optimally fulfills every intrinsic evaluative dimension.*

(V) *If some being optimally fulfills every intrinsic evaluative dimension, then that being also instantiates every good-making property.*

(VI) *So, God instantiates every good-making property.*

(I) states the central claim of perfect-being theology. (II) is a Cartesian elucidation of the term “perfect-being”⁹. So far as I'm aware, it is accepted by all perfect-being theologians, as only if it is true would one be able to infer from God's general perfection that he has the perfections of tradition - necessary existence, omnipotence, immutability, and so on. However, the qualifier “absolute” is serving an important function here, and I need to explain why I include it on behalf of the theologians.

Suppose that instead of (II), we characterize the Cartesian claim of perfect-being theology as “A perfect-being instantiates every perfection”. This claim will be falsified if there are any perfections which we think a perfect-being would not have. Yet, despite the air of paradox here, there are in fact many perfections which we would *not* expect a perfect being to have – a perfect being is not perfectly malevolent, nor perfectly spherical, nor perfectly feline – and at least some of these sorts of perfection appear to incompatible with the perfections traditionally ascribed to God. This being so, it looks as though there is no deductive path from the notion of a perfect-being to any of the particular aspects of God's nature. However, perfect-being theologians can avoid this problem by introducing a distinction which separates the perfections worthy of worship and admiration from those that are merely remarkable: they can distinguish between 'absolute' and 'relative' perfections.

All sorts of items may count as *relatively* perfect – a perfect circle is perfect relative to our criteria for circles, a perfect holiday is perfect relative to our criteria for holidays, *et cetera* – and, for any meaningful expression of the form “a perfect ___”, there will be some criteria of ___'s by which we can judge their relative perfection. Why? Because for any ___, there will always be some semantic criteria according to which we apply the term “___”, and the more fitting an exemplar is to those criteria, the closer to being a perfect ___ the exemplar will be. But *absolute* perfection is different. What is absolutely perfect is perfect in a way which transcends local interests in the satisfiability of semantic criteria. Absolute perfection has nothing to do with

⁷ As Jordan Howard-Sobel tells us, “*The logical problem of evil is a problem for perfect-being theologies only*” (p. 479).

⁸ “*According to traditional Western theism, God is the greatest being possible in virtue of possessing a complete set of great-making qualities or perfections*”. Hoffman & Rosenkranz, p.15.

⁹ I advert to Descartes version of the ontological argument found in his *Meditations*, where he argues roughly: God is a perfect being; a perfect being possesses all perfections; existence is a perfection; therefore God possesses existence (i.e. he exists).

semantic fittingness, and everything to do with intrinsic value. Though it looks as though the phrase “a perfect-being” is another instance of the schema ‘a perfect ___’, it really isn’t – the term ‘being’ is not here some concept to which perfection is being relativized, but is instead a term with minimal content which is used in reference to absolute perfection because it satisfies a grammatical requirement that ascriptions of perfection should have a subject¹⁰.

(III) explains why absolute perfections have everything to do with intrinsic values: they are linked by identity. To possess an absolute perfection is just to be maximally good in some way, a way in which it is intrinsically good to be. Again, this kind of claim is crucial to perfect-being theology: without it, we have no bridge from the concept of a perfect-being to any of usual maximal qualities which are said to follow from God’s perfection. To see that (V) is true, recall that GMPs are intrinsically good. As they are intrinsically good, they imply some intrinsic evaluative dimension by which they are to be described as such – in the very least, the binary dimension which concerns the possession or non-possession of the GMP – and so to optimally fulfill every intrinsic evaluative dimension would be to instantiate every GMP. (IV) and (VI) are logical consequences, the latter confirming the suspect fragment of (B).

So much for the truth of the premises; what about validity? Well, suppose that (IV) is false, but that (I)-(III) are true. If (IV) is false, then there is some intrinsic evaluative dimension that God does not optimally fulfill. According to (III), there corresponds to this intrinsic evaluative dimension an absolute perfection, which is identical to the optimal fulfillment of that dimension. But if the absolute perfection here is identical to the optimal fulfillment of said dimension, then it follows from God’s not optimally fulfilling that dimension that he fails to instantiate the absolute perfection. Yet (I) and (II) together entail that there is no absolute perfection which God does not instantiate, and so we have our contradiction and proof of the validity of the inference. The validity of the inference from (IV) and (V) to (VI) is obvious. For better or worse, (B) is an implication of perfect-being theism.

Objections to the Argument

(I) Theodicy/defense X solves the logical problem of evil. Since your argument does not deal with theodicy/defense X, you have not made your case.

Reply: Supposing the argument and sub-argument are sound, I have indeed made my case. For a sound deductive argument necessitates its conclusion, and so, whatever else there may be to say about why a particular theodicy fails, the arguments here make it given that it does so. But since I realize that readers will likely want more of an explanation before they feel convinced, I will offer some general remarks.

The conspicuous premise of the argument is (3), and it is conspicuous precisely because it is designed to cover theodicean possibilities: every viable theodicy purports to cite a greater good for whose sake evil may be justified. So my general reply to those who wonder why their pet theodicy fails is given in the support for (3), the sub-argument. That argument works by exploiting a double standard inherent in theodicies: on the one hand, theists claim the existence of a perfect-being, who has every perfection and is without flaw; on the other hand, a theodicy claims the regrettable but unavoidable imperfectibility of the created world. But whatever is actual is possible, therefore, if perfection is actual in the form of God, perfection is possible. Since an omnipotent God can bring about any states of affairs which are logically possible, God can bring about a perfect creation. And so theodicies are destined to fail.

The free-will defense may be thought to an exception to this rule. One may believe that, contrary to the usual form of a theodicy where the greater GMP straightforwardly entails an EMP, free-will merely makes evil *possible* – a denial of (2) rather than (3). However, if mere possibility is all that follows from the instantiation of a GMP, then it seems an omnipotent being would be able to instantiate that property in the absence of any EMP. But still, doesn’t the free-will defense present a special case? Doesn’t the very nature of free-will logically prohibit God from exercising his omnipotence to ensure that free-will does not bring evil into the world?

No. A first reply begins by pointing out that advocates of this view tend to endorse the existence of counterfactuals of freedom. Such counterfactuals are conditional statements concerning the actions of free-beings at a possible world in a given set of circumstances – so, for example, the statement “If George W. Bush is elected US president in 2000, then he will cut taxes for the wealthy” is a true counterfactual at this possible world (the actual world), whereas “If John Kerry is elected US president in 2000, he will cut taxes for the wealthy” is likely false at this possible world. What makes these counterfactuals of *freedom* is that each of them is non-trivially contingent, i.e., each counterfactual of freedom is non-trivially true at one possible world, and non-trivially false at another. Indeed, the free-will advocate sees them as brute contingent facts, set in advance of the creative activities of God, and so placing a logical constraint on his abilities. However, if such counterfactuals are contingent facts, and if an omnipotent being can bring about any logically possible state of affairs, then God can bring about the logically possible state of affairs in which the counterfactuals of

¹⁰ Notice that if we take the perfection as relativized, anything which exists would satisfy the description of ‘a perfect being’, as everything existing perfectly fulfils our criteria for the application of the term ‘being’, and so the description would be trivial.

freedom are aligned with his preference for good over evil. So the free-will defense fails because it is inconsistent with God's omnipotence¹¹.

A second reply runs along the lines already suggested, that the differential treatment of God and humankind amounts to an inconsistency in the free-will defense. On the one hand, the theist wants to say that human free-will opens up the possibility of evil; but on the other hand, the theist wishes to maintain that this possibility is not really open to God, since he would never avail himself of it. But if God does not have free-will, then free-will can't be a GMP, since God instantiates all GMPs. Alternatively, if God has free-will, but of a different sort to our own, then God's free-will is a GMP, and human free-will is only good insofar as it approximates God's sort of free-will. Either way, God need not create beings who would freely choose evil for the sake of some greater good.

This dilemma is inescapable for the standard free-will defense. The next objection advances a more recent version of the free-will defense which aims to break the symmetry on which I have been relying.

(II) I contend that your (2) is false. It requires us to believe that there need be no essential difference between the creator and what he creates, such that the non-entailment of evil-making properties by good-making properties would obtain just as well in the case of created beings as in their creator. But, in fact, there is an essential difference here: created beings instantiate the property of being created, and God instantiates the property of being uncreated. The property of createdness, perhaps together with other good-making properties, does entail evil.

Reply: Quentin Smith offers an argument temperamentally similar to my own, in *A Sound Logical Argument from Evil*. He begins by distinguishing three different varieties of freedom..

A person is externally free with respect to an action A if and only if nothing other than (external to) herself determines either that she perform A or refrain from performing A.

A person is internally free with respect to an action A if and only if it is false that his past physical and psychological states, in conjunction with causal laws, determine either that he perform A or refrain from performing A.

A person is logically free with respect to an action A if and only if there is some possible world in which he performs A and there is another possible world in which he does not perform A. A person is logically free with respect to a wholly good life (a life in which every morally relevant action performed by the person is a good action) if and only if there is some possible world in which he lives this life and another possible world in which he does not.¹²

.. and notes that, whilst God has internal and external freedom, his omnibenevolence precludes logical freedom. From this infers he that logical freedom is not metaphysically valuable (else God would have it), though internal and external freedom may be. He then constructs an argument from evil asserting that God could've created necessarily good (thus logically unfree) but internally and externally free beings like himself, and therefore need not and would not have created a world in which moral evil exists¹³. Alexander Pruss, in *The Essential Divine-Perfection Objection to the Free-Will Defence*, takes up our objection and extends it:

The initial form of my argument is very simple. If Patricia is a creature who lacks logical freedom with respect to a wholly good life, then by Smith's definition either it is a necessary truth that if Patricia exists, Patricia leads a wholly good life, or it is a necessary truth that if Patricia exists, Patricia does not lead a wholly good life. For concreteness, take the first case: that Patricia exists entails that Patricia leads a wholly good life [...] Then, that God creates Patricia entails that Patricia exists. Therefore, that God creates Patricia entails that Patricia leads a wholly good life. But surely that means that Patricia is determined to lead a wholly good life by something external to her, namely by God's creating her. Hence, she is not externally free with respect to leading a wholly good life.¹⁴

At first pass this response looks decisive. It is undeniable that God has the property of being uncreated, whereas any of his creations must have the property of being created by God. It seems undeniable that, as God is part of a causal chain leading to any particular of Patricia's actions, God qualifies as a cause of them.

¹¹This reply is due to Raymond Bradley, and is well worth reading in full. It is implied in the essay that, not only does God have a choice with regard to which free beings he creates, he also has a choice with regard to the counterfactual permutations of such beings. So I take it that Bradley conceives God as having a choice e.g., whether to create a Hitler whose counterfactuals are such that he freely chooses to become an artist, as opposed to a Hitler whose counterfactuals are such that he freely chooses to become a dictator. This view makes sense of what might otherwise seem mysterious: God's ability to bring about the existence of free-beings with the desired counterfactuals of freedom.

¹² Smith, p. 149. (Emphasis added).

¹³ On Smith's view, such necessarily good beings are not humans who have been restricted to the good, nor are they humans whose counterfactuals of freedom just happen to ensure their perfect goodness in the actual world. Instead, they are to be understood as a class of beings over and above humans, internally-externally free but logically determined, but who might qualify as 'human' in a loose sense as being similarly rational persons. Though Smith doesn't say so directly, his reference to a class of necessarily good beings suggests that their goodness is essential to them, as it is to God. Pruss (see below) does not always observe this difference between Smith's 'humans' and ourselves in arguing for his position, crucial though it is: "[Patricia] has a certain nature, and God has created Patricia as having that nature. But surely then God has determined her to act rightly." (Pruss, p. 441, emphasis mine).

¹⁴ Pruss, p. 435-6.

And it further appears that *some* notion of libertarian free-will will support the idea that causal origination in God would be freedom-canceling. However, Pruss's argument fails because it applies indiscriminately to all creatures, whether logically free or not.

To begin with, notice that God's entailment of Patricia's virtuous behavior proceeds by way of her counterfactuals of freedom. Pruss tells us that Patricia's existence entails her leading a wholly good life, and this is only true if Patricia's existence entails those counterfactuals that ensure every morally relevant action she performs is good. So we can gloss Pruss's argument in a way which makes this salient: God creates Patricia in circumstances C, she has certain counterfactuals of freedom specifying a good action A in C, and so God determines her doing of A in C. But since the same is true of every action Patricia performs, and since every action Patricia performs is good, it is (surely!) the case that God determines that she lead a wholly good life. Hence, she is not externally free with respect to leading a wholly good life.

Yet if this is how the entailment is derived, then it is not just necessarily good creatures who are determined by God, but creatures of every stripe. For consider Manuel, a person-essence whose counterfactuals of freedom support a mixture of right and wrong actions. That God creates Manuel in circumstances C, having counterfactuals of freedom specifying his doing A in C, means that God determines his doing of A in C. The same is true of every action Manuel performs. To complete the symmetry, we can let 'M-life' denote the kind of life that Manuel would live in C given his counterfactuals of freedom – then, that God creates Manuel in C (surely!) determines that he lead an M-life. Hence, Manuel is not externally free with respect to leading an M-life. Thus, Pruss's counter to Smith would lay waste to the external freedom of God's creation generally. Of course, if even logically free creatures cannot have external freedom, then the preservation of external freedom cannot be a reason to create such beings over necessarily good beings.

On the other hand, it's not hard to see where the your standard free-will defender will think this goes awry. The free-will defense is usually explained by distinguishing between strong and weak actualization, where to strongly actualize a state of affairs is to be the cause of that state, and to weakly actualize a state of affairs is to strongly actualize (cause) a subset of some state of affairs containing free beings, who complete that state with the free acts described by their counterfactuals of freedom. The point of such a distinction, as I understand it, is to allow us to separate the issue of entailment (which both kinds of actualization imply) from causal responsibility (which only strong actualization implies). But if the distinction is to do its job it must be the case that, though God's bringing about C would counterfactually entail some person-essence's action A, this entailment is not sufficient for God himself to be causally responsible for A. Plausibly this is so: despite the entailment, we think that God only controls an initial segment of the causal chain specified in C, and that consequently he does not determine the outcome of the process in the relevant sense – his creatures do. But then, by creating necessarily good beings, God need not control all parts of the causal chain either – he can leave the counterfactuals of freedom to be determined by his necessarily good beings^{15 16}. So it would seem that creaturehood cannot be used to support the free-will defense after all – if we take the arguments against the possibility of necessarily good but externally free creatures seriously, we are led to deny the good which was supposed to explain moral evil, but if we instead take external freedom seriously, we will be led to deny the reasoning which would rule out necessarily good but externally free creatures.

So much for the free-will defense, then. But might there be some other defense/theodicy which utilizes the essential difference of creaturehood? I have no argument that proves the contrary. All I can say here is that the free-will defense appears to be the only apologetic which might put the difference to use. This being so, I take my argument for the non-existence of God to be complete.

Conclusion

I began this essay by looking at Alvin Plantinga's *God, Freedom, and Evil*, wherein we find a suggested form of a successful argument from evil. I made two adjustments to this form: first, by eschewing 'proper elimination' talk in favor of 'denial' talk; and second, by bringing in the notions of good-making and evil-making properties. With these changes, I proposed a valid argument from evil. I then noted that, as the other premises seemed unobjectionable, the weight of the argument fell on premise (3), the proposition that "*Every evil-making property is such that its instantiation is not entailed by the instantiation of some greater good-making property*". I offered a sub-argument for this premise, using the possibility of God's existing alone,

¹⁵ Pruss further argues that creaturehood and a lack of logical freedom entails a lack of internal freedom, chiefly from the plausible idea that logical determination would have to be grounded in the internal dispositional states of an agent. I think this line of argument also fails, for two reasons. (i) The grounds Pruss appeals to in favor of such dispositional states appear to apply equally well to logically undetermined beings also, and so even granting his arguments, he only succeeds in establishing that internal freedom is impossible, and is therefore not a greater good; (ii) Pruss needs to show that his arguments against internal freedom in logically determined creatures do not also apply to God. Pruss realizes this, and gestures towards the Thomistic doctrine of simplicity as standing in contradiction to determination of God's behavior by internal states, but this is inadequate: by making an exception of God, he undermines his earlier arguments which appeal to the mysteriousness of logical determination being ungrounded for an agent.

¹⁶ Spelled out: Let "P c Q & Q c R" symbolize "P causes Q, and Q causes R". Then, that God causes Patricia, who in turn causes action R fits this form. Pruss derives from God's causing Patricia, and Patricia's causing R, that therefore God causes R, i.e. from "P c Q & Q c R" that "P c R", which is perfectly valid – causation is transitive, and so the predecessor in a causal chain will always be a (not necessarily *the*) cause of a later event in the chain. However, this is not the strong causation required for canceling freedom. What is needed instead is that God causes *Patricia to cause action R*, for him to cause her counterfactual of freedom. So, what Pruss really needs to deduce from "P c Q & Q c R" is "P c (Q c R)". But this derivation is fallacious. For example, though true that "smoking causes cancer, and cancer causes death", it is not true that smoking causes the causal relation between cancer and death itself, for the causal relation between cancer and death obtains regardless of whether there is anybody who smokes. Likewise, it does not follow from God's causing Patricia, and Patricia's causing action R, that God causes Patricia to cause that action.

together with his perfection to show that (3) is true. But if (3) is true, then the proposed argument from evil succeeds.

Four objections were considered – two each for the sub-argument and main argument. The first of these denied that the lone God world was a genuine possibility, and I responded to it by pointing out that the argument could be recast in an equally powerful form, based on God's independence from other beings. Next came an objection to the premise stating God would instantiate every good-making property, and no evil-making property. I conceded to this objection the point that my argument would not disprove every conception of God, but bolstered my argument that it would apply to God conceived as a perfect-being, and thereby to the God of orthodox philosophical theism. I then considered the objection that my argument ignores the various attempts to reconcile evil and the existence of God, making it inadequate. My reply here was to give a general answer, grounded in the sub-argument, such that by its lights any theodicy would have to be guilty of a double-standard. Lastly, I considered a denial of (2), in the form of a property which all of God's creation must have, but which God himself would not have – that of being created by God. Because God does not have this property, we cannot use the sub-argument to show that it does not entail evil, nor that its combination with other good-making properties would not entail evil. In this vein I consider the response of Pruss to Smith's logical argument from evil, and assess Pruss's counter as failing to support the free-will defense. Given the failure of these objections, and being unaware of any others, I conclude that the theist must accept the soundness of the argument from evil. Standard philosophical theism is untenable.

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