

The Logical Problem of Evil Regained

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1. INTRODUCTION

John Mackie argued that God's perfect goodness is incompatible with his failing to actualize the best world that he can actualize. And God's omnipotence is incompatible with his being unable to actualize a morally perfect world. As Mackie put it:

If God has made men such that in their free choices they sometimes prefer what is good and sometimes what is evil, why could he not have made men such that they always freely choose the good? If there is no logical impossibility in his freely choosing the good on one or several occasions, there cannot be a logical impossibility in his freely choosing the good on every occasion. God was not, then, faced with a choice between making innocent automata and making beings who, in acting freely, would sometimes go wrong; there was open to him the obviously better possibility of making beings who would act freely but always go right. Clearly his failure to avail himself of this possibility is inconsistent with his being omnipotent and wholly good.¹

I'd like to suggest that Mackie was entirely right. In section 2 I argue in favor of Mackie's thesis that, necessarily, God can actualize a morally perfect world in

1. See John Mackie, "Evil and Omnipotent," in *Philosophy of Religion: An Anthology*, 5th ed. Michael Rea and Louis Pojman (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, 2008), 173–80.

which there are no evil states of affairs. In section 3 I show that the logical problem of evil reemerges in a more serious form. The new problem cannot be resolved by appeal to the possibility of God's limited power to actualize a morally perfect world that includes no evil states of affairs. It is necessarily true that God can actualize a morally perfect world that includes no evil states of affairs. The problem also cannot be resolved by appeal to God's limited goodness in actualizing possible worlds. It is necessarily true that God is essentially perfectly good. Any solution to the new logical problem of evil must be consistent with God's perfect power to actualize a morally perfect world that include no evil states of affairs and God's perfect goodness in actualizing a possible world.

In sections 4–5 I show that the new logical problem of evil is in fact unsound. I offer an impossibility argument showing that it's impossible that, necessarily, God actualizes a morally perfect world. I conclude in section 6 that it is a necessary truth that, possibly, God can actualize a morally perfect world and God does not actualize a morally perfect world.

2. WHICH WORLDS COULD GOD HAVE CREATED?

Alvin Plantinga has argued against the possibility that an omnipotent being can strongly actualize the state of affairs of there being an instantiated essence freely performing some action. At most, God can cause an instantiated essence to be free and know that, if he causes the instantiated essence to be free in certain circumstances, then that instantiated essence will freely perform or refrain from performing some action.²

Suppose we concede that not even God can cause it to be the case that I freely refrain from A. Even so, he *can* cause me to be free with respect to A, and to be in some set *S* of circumstances including appropriate laws and antecedent conditions. He may also know, furthermore, that if he creates me and causes me to be free in these circumstances, I will refrain from A. If so, there is a state of affairs he can actualize, cause to be actual, such that, if he does so, then I will freely refrain from A.³

According to Plantinga, there are two senses, in which God can bring it about that an instantiated essence E_n performs an action A. God can strongly actualize the state of affairs of E_n performing A as described in B0. And God can weakly actualize the state of affairs of E_n performing A as described in B1.

2. See Alvin Plantinga, "Which Worlds Could God Have Created?" *The Journal of Philosophy* 70, no. 11 (1973): 539–52. See also his *The Nature of Necessity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1974), chapter 9, section 4.

3. See Plantinga, *The Nature of Necessity*, 171.

- B0. Necessarily God can strongly actualize a state of affairs T including the instantiation E_n of essence E such that, (1) necessarily, God strongly actualizes T only if E_n performs action A; and (2) God causes the state of affairs of E_n performing A.

According to B0, necessarily, God can strongly actualize the state of affairs of E_n performing A. But if God strongly actualizes the state of affairs of E_n performing A, then E_n does not freely perform A. God can for instance cause E_n to perform A by direct intervention. But God can also cause E_n to perform A by putting E_n in a deterministic universe where the laws and history cause E_n to perform A.

- B1. Possibly, God can strongly actualize a state of affairs T including the instantiation E_n of essence E such that (1) possibly, God strongly actualizes T and E_n does not perform A; (2) were God to strongly actualize T then E_n would perform action A; and (3) God does not cause the state of affairs of E_n 's performing A.

According to B1, possibly, God can weakly actualize the state of affairs of E_n performing A. And if God weakly actualizes the state of affairs of E_n performing A, then E_n freely performs A. God can for instance create a significantly free being E_n in an indeterministic world where E_n would freely perform A.

But there are at least two other senses in which God can bring it about that an instantiated essence E_n performs an action A. Consider B2 and B3.

- B2. Possibly God can strongly actualize a state of affairs T including the instantiation E_n of essence E such that (1) necessarily, God strongly actualizes T only if E_n performs action A; and (2) God does not cause the state of affairs of E_n 's performing A.

God can strongly actualize a state of affairs T which includes, for instance, God announcing today the fact that E_n performed A yesterday. And, necessarily, God announces that E_n performed A yesterday only if E_n performed A. It might be urged that God cannot announce that E_n performed A yesterday in worlds where it is false that E_n performed A.⁴ But there's not much reason to believe that an omnipotent being could not make that announcement. There are actions we can perform now which are such that, were we to perform them, the past would have to have been different. So it would be very strange if there were nothing God could do now such that, were he to do it, it would have to have been the case that E_n performed A yesterday. Plantinga notes this possibility.

4. Ric Otte, "Transworld Depravity and Unobtainable Worlds," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 78, 165–77, 167. I'm unpersuaded that God cannot utter that S performed A yesterday in worlds where S did not perform A. As noted above, backtracking counterfactuals are true in certain special cases. The case of an omniscient being announcing that S performed A yesterday seems sufficient to make the backtracking counterfactual true.

It is possible (though no doubt unlikely) that there is something you can do such that, if you were to do it, then Abraham would never have existed. For perhaps you will be confronted with a decision of great importance—so important that one of the alternatives is such that if you were to choose *it*, then the course of human history would have been quite different from what in fact it is.⁵

But suppose that in such circumstances God cannot announce that E_n performed A yesterday in worlds where it is false that E_n performed A. Call that *restricted actualization*. Restricted actualization ensures that God can strongly actualize a state of affairs T such that necessarily, T only if God actualizes a morally perfect world. But God cannot strongly actualize T in every world unrestrictedly.

- B3. Necessarily God can strongly actualize a state of affairs T including the instantiation E_n of essence E such that (1) necessarily, God strongly actualizes T only if E_n performs action A; and (2) God does not cause the state of affairs of E_n performing A.

God can strongly actualize the state of affairs T that includes, for instance, the state of affairs of God's having *predicted or prophesied* that E_n will perform A. But if it is true that, necessarily, God can predict that E_n performs A, then it is true in every world that God can bring it about that E_n performs A without causing E_n to perform A. Call that *unrestricted actualization*. Unrestricted actualization ensures that God can strongly actualize a state of affairs T such that, necessarily, T only if God actualizes a morally perfect world. And God can actualize T in every possible world unrestrictedly.

According to Plantinga, God can weakly actualize a morally perfect world and God can also restrictedly actualize a morally perfect world. But God cannot unrestrictedly actualize a morally perfect world. Let's say that God can unrestrictedly actualize a morally perfect world only if UA is true.

- UA. God can unrestrictedly actualize a morally perfect world if and only if necessarily, for some world W and for each instantiation E_n of any significantly free essence E in W, there is a state of affairs T such that,

5. See Alvin Plantinga, "On Ockham's Way Out," *Faith and Philosophy* 3 (1986): 235–69. But see also David Lewis, "Counterfactual Dependence and Time's Arrow," in *Philosophical Papers Vol. II* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), 32–51. The counterfactuals that Plantinga discusses here are what Lewis calls "backtracking counterfactuals." Backtracking counterfactuals can be true, but only in extraordinary circumstances. Under the standard resolution of vagueness for counterfactuals, we assume that the past does not depend on what we do in the present or future. That the past remains unchanged is made an auxiliary assumption is determining which worlds are most similar to ours. So, under the standard resolution, backtracking counterfactuals come out false. The asymmetry between that past and the future that Plantinga discusses is, according to Lewis, the asymmetry of counterfactual dependence.

- (1) T is the largest state of affairs that God strongly actualizes in W,
- (2) Necessarily, God strongly actualizes T of W only if E_n always freely goes right, and
- (3) God can strongly actualize T.

God cannot unrestrictedly actualize a morally perfect world only if (2) or (3) is false. But God's omnipotence ensures that (3) is true. In particular, it is necessarily true that, prior to creating anything at all, God can utter the prediction that every significantly free instantiated essence that he creates will always go right. That is, it is necessarily true that God can strongly actualize a maximal state of affairs T that includes the state of affairs of his having predicted that every significantly free instantiated essence that he creates will always go right. And were God to utter that prediction he would actualize a world in which every significantly free essence that will be created has the contingent property of always going right.

Clause (2) is false just in case, possibly, for every morally perfect world W and for some instantiation E_n , God strongly actualizes the state of affairs T of W and E_n does not always freely go right. We know that included in T is that state of affairs of God's having predicted that every instantiated essence always goes right and, necessarily, God's predictions are perfectly accurate. But God's predictions are no more causal than are the predictions of an essentially perfect predictor. Compare a Newcomb paradox where the predictor is essentially perfectly accurate. His predictions are, necessarily, 100 percent accurate. There is no world in which an essentially perfect predictor makes a prediction and his predictions fail to be correct. So, necessarily, he predicts that you will one-box only if you will one-box. But the prediction does not *cause* you to one-box. You are free to two-box. Of course, were you to two-box, the essentially perfect predictor would have predicted that instead. What you will freely do depends counterfactually on what the essentially perfect predictor predicts. And what the essentially perfect predictor predicts depends counterfactually on what you freely do.⁶

6. Essential perfect predictors make the argument for one-boxing straightforward. The context is one in which calls for a non-standard resolution of vagueness for counterfactuals and the relevant counterfactuals backtrack. Here's the argument for one-boxing. Compare Terry Horgan, "Counterfactuals and Newcomb's Problem," *The Journal of Philosophy* 78, no. 6 (1981): 331–56. Horgan's argument does not assume essentially perfect predictors.

- (1) If I were to choose both boxes, then the being would have predicted this.
- (2) If I were to choose both boxes and the being had predicted this, then I would get \$1k.
- (3) So if I were to choose both boxes, then I would get \$1k.
- (4) If I were to choose box 2, then the being would have predicted this.
- (5) If I were to choose box 2 and the being had predicted this, then I would get \$1M.
- (6) So if I were to choose box 2, then I would get \$1M.
- (7) If (3) and (6) are true, then I ought to choose box 2.
- (8) So, I ought to choose box 2.

Recall that the essentially perfect predictor has already made his prediction prior to your choice of one-box or two-boxes. Suppose he predicted two boxes. In that case you should one-box, since (6) and (3) are true. Were you to choose one-box, then since the predictor is essentially perfect, and cannot make a mistake, it would not have been true that he mistakenly predicted two-boxes. Rather it would have been true that he predicted one-box and place the \$1M in the box.

God is an essentially perfect predictor. So, necessarily, God predicts that every significantly free essence always goes right only if every significantly free essence always freely goes right. But then Mackie's conclusion follows; necessarily, God can actualize a morally perfect world.

3. THE LOGICAL PROBLEM OF EVIL REDUX

The logical problem of evil then reemerges in a much more serious form. If, necessarily, God can actualize a morally perfect world, then, necessarily, God can actualize a world that includes no evil states of affairs at all. We can provide a proof that (1) and (2) are broadly, logically inconsistent. And the inconsistency cannot be resolved by rejecting the thesis that, necessarily, God can actualize a morally perfect world.

- (1) God is omnipotent, omniscient, and wholly good.
- (2) Evil exists.

Since, necessarily, it is within God's power to predict that every significantly free essence that he instantiates will always go right, it follows that (3) is true.

- (3) Necessarily, God can actualize a morally perfect world that includes no evil states of affairs.

Mackie's observation is that God's omnipotence and perfect goodness are inconsistent with his failing to avail himself of the possibility of actualizing a morally perfect world. Since God is essentially omnipotent, perfectly good and necessarily existing, Mackie affirms (4).

- (4) Necessarily, God can actualize a morally perfect world that includes no evil states of affairs only if God does actualize a morally perfect world that includes no evil states of affairs.

Since (5) follows from (3) and (4), we have derived a contradiction. (5) and (2) cannot both be true: there are no evil states of affairs in morally perfect worlds.

- (5) Necessarily God actualizes a morally perfect world that includes no evil states of affairs.

The logical problem of evil redux provides the sought-after proof of Mackie's atheological conclusion. It's not possible that God is omnipotent, omniscient, and wholly good and that evil exists. Obviously the problem cannot be resolved by appeal to the possibility of God's limited power to actualize a morally perfect world that includes no evil states of affairs. It is necessarily true that God can actualize a morally perfect world that includes no evil states of affairs. Just as obviously the problem cannot be resolved by appeal to God's limited goodness

in actualizing possible worlds. It is necessarily true that God is essentially perfectly good. Any solution to the logical problem of evil redux must be consistent with God's perfect power to actualize a morally perfect worlds that include no evil states of affairs and God's perfect goodness in actualizing a possible world.

4. GOD'S POWER AND MORALLY PERFECT WORLDS

The only premises in the logical argument from evil redux that are open to critical assessment are premises (3) and (4). But there is a strong argument for (3) based on God's power to predict that every significantly free essence that he instantiates will always go right. We have shown that an omnipotent being would have the power to make such a prediction in every world in which it exists. Since God exists in every possible world, premise (3) follows quickly.

But consider premise (4) that, necessarily, God *can* actualize a morally perfect world that includes no evil states of affairs only if God *does* actualize a morally perfect world that includes no evil states of affairs. Premise (3) and premise (4) together entail that one of the theses in (3.3)–(3.4) is true.⁷

- (3.3) Necessarily, an omnipotent, omniscient, wholly good being brings about *the best possible world* and the best possible world includes no evil states of affairs at all.
- (3.4) Necessarily, an omnipotent, omniscient, wholly good being brings about *a good enough world* and a good enough actualizable world includes no evil states of affairs.

Both (3.3)–(3.4) exhaust the sorts of possible worlds that might be morally perfect that include no evil states of affairs and many have believed that one or more of these is true. Nonetheless Nelson Pike urged that (3.3)–(3.4) might all be false. Pike's suggestion is that the best possible world might include some morally evil states of affairs.

A world containing instances of suffering as necessary components might be the best of all possible worlds. And if a world containing instances of suffering as necessary components is the best of all possible worlds, an omnipotent and omniscient being would have a morally sufficient reason for permitting instances of suffering.⁸

Pike's intuition is that (4) is not necessary, and that (3.3)–(3.4) are all false. God might actualize the best possible world and, possibly, the best possible world includes instances of suffering. That is, the best possible world is not a morally perfect world that includes no evil states of affairs. But if the best possible world

7. The thesis in (3.3)–(3.5) were presented in chapter (2), 59ff.

8. See Nelson Pike, "Hume on Evil," in *The Problem of Evil*, ed. Marilyn McCord Adams and Robert Merrihew Adams (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), 38–52.

might include instances of suffering there is little reason to believe (4) is necessary and no reason to believe that (3.3)–(3.4) are true.

John Wisdom adduced some interesting reasons to believe that a best possible world might include at least some evil states of affairs. According to Wisdom, the addition of evil states of affairs might increase the overall value of a world.

[Suppose] I believe (rightly or wrongly) that you are in pain and become unhappy as a result of that belief. The resulting complex [state of affairs] would appear to be better than it would have been had I believed you to be in pain [and became happy].⁹

Suppose that in the best possible world you are *not* in pain, but I nonetheless believe that you are. Feelings of unhappiness are intrinsically bad. But the complex state of affairs of my believing that you are in pain and my feeling unhappy about it is intuitively better than the complex state of affairs of my believing that you are in pain and my feeling happy or indifferent about it. If the best possible world might include states of affairs such as my believing that you are in pain, then it would be better if it also included evil states of affairs such as my feeling unhappy. But then there is at least some reason to believe that (4) is not true.

The suggestions in Pike and Wisdom provide some reason to doubt (4) and (3.3)–(3.4), but those suggestions certainly do not settled the matter. We can do better. It is true that, necessarily, God can actualize a morally perfect world. But it is not possible that, necessarily, God does actualize a morally perfect world. So premise (4) above is necessarily false and so are (3.3)–(3.4). The logical argument *redux* is unsound.

5. AN IMPOSSIBILITY ARGUMENT

The aim is to prove that premise (5) in the logical problem of evil is necessarily false. The proof directly shows that it is *impossible* that, necessarily, God actualizes a morally perfect world. It follows that, possibly, God does not actualize a morally perfect world and therefore possibly God does not actualize a morally perfect world that includes no moral evil. Therefore premise (5) is false and, indeed, necessarily false.

It also follows that premise (4) is necessarily false. The impossibility argument shows that it is impossible that, necessarily, God can actualize a morally perfect world that includes no evil states of affairs only if God does actualize a morally perfect world that includes no evil states of affairs. The logical problem of evil *redux* is therefore necessarily unsound.

Let's say that *W* is a morally perfect world if and only if (1) the largest state of affairs *T* that God strongly actualizes in *W* includes the instantiation of significantly free individual essences; (2) there are some actions that are morally

9. John Wisdom, "God and Evil," *Mind* 44, no. 173 (1935): 1–20. Wisdom is quoted in Pike, "Hume on Evil," 48.

significant for each instantiated essence; and (3) every essence that God instantiates in T always goes morally right in W. The first premise in the impossibility proof is that there are, of course, morally perfect worlds.

(1) There exist morally perfect worlds.

We have shown in chapter (4) that God can unrestrictedly actualize a morally perfect world. It follows that, necessarily, God *can* actualize a morally perfect world. So (2) is also true.

(2) Necessarily, God can actualize a morally perfect world.

According to Leibniz, Mackie, Rowe and host of others, necessarily, if God can actualize a morally perfect world, then God does actualize a morally perfect world. Let's assume for reductio that (3) is true.

(3) Necessarily, God does actualize a morally perfect world.

Of course, morally perfect worlds include some significantly free instantiated essences performing morally significant actions. But surely morally perfect worlds vary in the amount of moral value they include. A morally perfect world W_0 in which every instantiated essence always goes morally right with respect to the performance small acts of beneficence might include only a few instantiated essences each of whom performs only a few small acts of beneficence. W_0 might thereafter include no instantiated essences performing any morally significant acts. W_0 is a morally perfect world, but W_0 does not contain much moral value. Another morally perfect world W_1 might include every instantiated essence always going right with respect to many large acts of beneficence. W_1 is a morally perfect world that contains much more moral value than W_0 .

But most of the moral value of morally perfect worlds is the result of instantiated essences observing *moral prohibitions* against the violation of individual rights or fulfilling the (typically negative) duties that form the fundamental requirements of justice. The demands of justice, even among consequentialists, are regarded as the weightiest or most important requirements of morality. Compare John Stuart Mill on justice.

It seems to me that this feature in the case—a right in some person, correlative to the moral obligation—constitutes the specific difference between justice, and generosity or beneficence. Justice implies something which it is not only right to do, and wrong not to do, but which some individual person *can claim from us as his moral right*. No one has a moral right to our generosity or beneficence, because we are not morally bound to practice those virtues towards any given individual. And it will be found with respect to this, as to every correct definition, that the instances which seem to conflict with it are those which most confirm it.¹⁰

10. See John Stuart Mill, *Utilitarianism, On Liberty, Essay on Bentham*, ed. Mary Warnock (New York; Penguin Books, 1974), 305ff., emphasis added.

Concerning the importance of the moral claim we have on others to observe the requirements of justice, to refrain from harming us or violating our moral rights, Mill notes,

... [T]he [moral] claim we have on our fellow-creatures to join in making safe for us the very groundwork of our existence, gathers feelings around it so much more intense than those concerned in any of the more common cases of utility that the difference in degree . . . becomes a real difference in kind . . . The feelings concerned are so powerful, and we count so positively on finding a responsive feeling in others (all being alike interested), that ought and should grow into must, and recognized indispensability becomes a moral necessity, analogous to physical, and often not inferior to it in binding force exhorted.¹¹

Of course, the view Mill expresses on the relative importance of the requirements of justice are forcefully expressed in moral thinkers as diverse as Kant, Rawls, Nozick, Hume, Gauthier, and Cohen.¹² The requirements of justice prohibit the violation of basic moral rights including, property rights, the right to life, rights to freedom, political rights, rights to security, and even extend to certain social and economic rights.

Consider a morally perfect world W_2 in which every instantiated essence always goes morally right with respect to observing the requirements of justice. W_2 might include many instantiated essences none of whom violates the moral rights of others. The essences instantiated in W_2 constrain their behavior in ways that always observes property rights, the right to life, the right to security and social or economic rights. Since the requirements of justice are the most important moral requirements, W_2 is a morally perfect world that is extremely morally valuable.

- (4) God can actualize the most valuable morally perfect worlds in which every moral agent observes the requirements of justice and never violates a moral right.¹³

We assumed for *reductio* that, necessarily, God actualizes a morally perfect world. But if necessarily, God actualizes a morally perfect world, then it follows immediately that, necessarily, there *exists no possible world* that includes an instance of moral evil. But how does that follow? If necessarily God actualizes a morally perfect world, then every possible world includes the state of affairs of its being morally perfect. But every possible world includes the state of affairs of its

11. *Ibid.*, 310.

12. G.A. Cohen, *Rescuing Justice and Equality* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008); John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1975); Robert Nozick, *Anarchy, State and Utopia* (New York: Basic Books, 1975); David Gauthier, *Morals by Agreement* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987).

13. It does not matter if there are no morally perfect worlds that are best. All we need assume is that God can actualize an extremely good morally perfect world in which moral rights are never violated.

being morally perfect only if no possible world includes an instance of moral evil. In short, morally perfect worlds have the essential property of containing no moral evil.

- (5) If, necessarily, God actualizes a morally perfect world, then necessarily there are no possible worlds that include a single instance of moral evil.

Any possible world that includes an instance of moral evil is a morally imperfect world. And from (2) and (5) it follows that necessarily there are no possible worlds which include moral evil.

- (6) Necessarily, there exist no possible worlds that include a single instance of moral evil.

In particular, there exists no possible world in which any instantiated essence violates a principle of beneficence and there exists no possible world in which any instantiated essence violates a principle of justice. It follows from premise (6) that it is metaphysically impossible for any moral agent *not* to fulfill the requirements of beneficence and justice.

- (7) It is metaphysically impossible for any moral agent not to fulfill the requirements of beneficence and justice.

It is metaphysically possible for any moral agent not to fulfill the requirements of justice and beneficence, only if there are possible worlds which contain at least some moral evil. But we know from premise (6) that there are no such worlds. But if it is metaphysically impossible for any moral agent not to fulfill the requirements of beneficence and justice, then it is metaphysically necessary that every moral agent fulfills the requirements of beneficence and justice.

- (8) It is metaphysically necessary that every moral agent fulfills the requirements of beneficence and justice.

But if it is metaphysically necessary that every moral agent fulfills the requirements of beneficence and justice, then no instantiated essence in any world exemplifies significant freedom with respect to any action A. Significantly free moral agents—significantly free instantiated essences—are libertarian free essences. An individual essence E_n is significantly free with respect to action A in maximal state of affairs T only if action A is morally significant and it is possible that E_n performs A in T and possible that E_n performs $\sim A$ in T.¹⁴ That is, in general, an individual essence E_n is significantly free with respect to morally significant actions only if E_n can fail to do what is morally right. If it is metaphysically necessary that every moral agent

14. Recall the conditions on significant freedom specified in S1.

S1: S has significant freedom in doing A at t if and only if (i) A is morally significant for S at t ; and (ii) $\sim(\text{God actualizes } T \supset S \text{ does A at } t) \ \& \ \sim(\text{God actualizes } T \supset S \text{ does } \sim A \text{ at } t)$.

fulfills the requirements of justice and beneficence, then no moral agent in any world is significantly free.

- (9) If it is metaphysically necessary that every moral agent fulfills the requirements of beneficence and justice, then it is metaphysically necessary that no instantiated essence is significantly free.

But, necessarily, no moral agent is significantly free only if no action has moral value. As Plantinga observes,

Now God can create free creatures, but he cannot cause or determine them to do only what is right. For if he does so, then they are not significantly free after all; they do not do what is right freely. To create creatures capable of moral good, therefore, he must create creatures capable of moral evil; and he cannot leave these free to perform moral evil and at the same time prevent them from doing so.¹⁵

Here's a useful example. Reconsider the world W_2 . Suppose Smith observes the requirement not to violate the property rights of Jones. Suppose, for instance, that Smith refrains from stealing Jones's bicycle at t in W_2 . The state of affairs of Smith's restraining himself from stealing Jones's bicycle at t in W_2 is morally valuable only if Smith freely restrained himself from stealing Jones's bicycle at t in W_2 . But Smith freely restrained himself from stealing Jones's bicycle at t in W_2 only if there exists a possible world W_3 in which Smith freely does not restrain himself from stealing Jones's bicycle at t . More exactly, Smith freely restrains himself from stealing Jones's bicycle at t in W_2 only if there is some world W_3 that shares the same past as W_2 until time t but diverges from W_2 at t and, perhaps, thereafter. At time t , we have one branch W_2 from past P in which Smith restrains himself from stealing Jones's bicycle and another branch W_3 from past P in which Smith steals Jones's bicycle.¹⁶

But if there are no morally imperfect worlds, then there is no possible world in which Smith steals Jones's bicycle at t . But then W_3 describes a metaphysically impossible world. It is therefore metaphysically necessary that Smith refrained from stealing Jones's bicycle at t . But of course if it is metaphysically necessary that Smith refrained from stealing Jones's bicycle at t , then Smith did not freely refrain from doing so. So, the state of affairs of Smith's refraining from stealing Jones's bicycle at t in W_2 has no moral value. The argument generalizes to every action of every moral agent.

- (10) If it is metaphysically necessary that no moral agent is significantly free, then it is metaphysically necessary that no action has moral value.

15. Alvin Plantinga, *The Nature of Necessity*, 166–67.

16. Of course P will vary with respect to "soft facts" (assuming there are soft facts) when branching respectively to W_2 and W_3 . If Leibniz's Law of the indiscernibility of identicals applies to relational properties, then no two distinct worlds branch from a single past.

Of course if it is metaphysically necessary that no action has moral value, then it is impossible that God actualizes a morally perfect world.

(11) It is impossible that God actualizes a morally perfect world.

The conclusion in (11) is not consistent with our assumption for reductio in (3) that necessarily God actualizes a morally perfect world. We have derived a contradiction.

But then premise (3) is false, indeed, it is necessarily false. And we have reached the conclusion of the impossibility argument.

(12) It is impossible that, necessarily, God actualizes a morally perfect world.

Since it is impossible that, necessarily, God actualizes a morally perfect world, the logical problem of evil redux is necessarily unsound. There is no world in which premise (5) in that argument is true. But recall that premise (5) is a logical consequence of premises (3) and (4) in the logical problem of evil redux.

(3) Necessarily, God can actualize a morally perfect world that includes no evil states of affairs.

(4) Necessarily, God can actualize a morally perfect world that includes no evil states of affairs only if God does actualize a morally perfect world that includes no evil states of affairs.

We showed that premise (3) is true. Therefore premise (4) in the logical problem of evil redux is necessarily false.

6. SOME STRIKING CONCLUSIONS

Premise (3) and premise (4) in the *Logical Problem of Evil Redux* together entail that one of the theses in (3.3)–(3.4) is true.

(3.3) Necessarily, an omnipotent, omniscient, wholly good being brings about *the best possible world* and the best possible world includes no evil states of affairs at all.

(3.4) Necessarily, an omnipotent, omniscient, wholly good being brings about *a good enough world* and a good enough actualizable world includes no evil states of affairs.

Each of (3.3)–(3.4) entails that necessarily God actualizes a morally perfect world. But the impossibility argument in section 5 shows that it's impossible that, necessarily, God actualizes a morally perfect world. Since we have been assuming that God is essentially omnipotent, essentially omniscient, essentially perfectly good and necessarily existing being, that conclusion is very surprising. The impossibility argument shows that it is impossible that, necessarily, an essentially omnipotent, essentially omniscient, essentially perfectly good and necessarily existing being

actualizes a morally perfect world. The thesis that an essentially perfect being fails to actualize a morally perfect world only if that being is not omnipotent or not omniscient or not perfectly good, is nothing more than philosophical dogma. It is perfectly possible that an essentially perfect being fails to actualize a morally perfect world. It follows that all of (3.3)–(3.4) are false and the logical problem of evil redux is necessarily unsound. The main consequences of the impossibility argument are: it is impossible that, necessarily, God actualizes a morally perfect world; and it is a necessary truth that, possibly, God can actualize a morally perfect world and God does not actualize a morally perfect world.