

White

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Rowe, W.L. (1979). "The Problem of Evil and Some Varieties of  
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- be true, then that plus P's being in C would determine P to do A, and again P would not do A freely in C (Adams, 1985, pp.229-31).
7. It is here that there is an ongoing debate between theists and atheists. I think there are lots of common ground between Christians and Muslims. Therefore we can learn a lot from this debate. But there are also significant differences between these two great traditions. Unfortunately Muslims are almost completely absent from this very important scene.

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negative attitude towards theodicies, tells us that: "so if a theodicy is an attempt to explain why God permits evil, what we have here is a theodicy- and, if I'm right, a successful theodicy" (2004, p.12).

I as a Muslim cannot accept God's incarnation and atonement. So I do not admit Plantinga's theodicy. Islamic theodicies, that have been proposed by Muslim thinkers, including philosophers and theologians, have valuable insights. But I think, in the light of new discussions, they have to be reconsidered and reinforced by such disciplines as epistemology and modal logic. I will argue for this, God willing, in far future.

### Endnotes

1. This problem was "deeply baffling" (Plantinga, 1985, p.34) for him. Now he does not think so (2000, pp.458-481).
2. He also mentions other kinds of the problem. For example the problems of preventing evil, and that of alleviating it (2000, p.462).
3. To this conclusion can be drawn it is not necessary that actual states of affairs satisfy the specified condition. He also gives an artificial possible example. Suppose *E* is Paul's suffering from a minor abrasion and *G* is your being deliriously happy. The conjunctive state of affairs, *G and E*, all else being equal, is a good one. And it is a necessary truth that the conjunction includes *E*. (1977 [1996], p.262)
4. Flew was known for several decades as a prominent atheist, first publicly expressed deist views in 2004. See <http://www.biola.edu/antonyflew/index.cfm>
5. Does evil provide us with an opportunity for spiritual growth, so that this world can be seen as a vale of soul-making? Perhaps some evils can be seen this way, but, Plantinga thinks, much leads not to growth but to apparent spiritual disaster. It is suggested that the existence of evil provides the opportunity for such goods as the development and display of mercy, sympathy, self-sacrifice in the service of others. Again, he says, no doubt some evil can be seen this way. But much evil seems to elicit cruelty rather than sacrificial love.
6. Counterfactuals of freedom are logically contingent; for if (CF) were logically necessary, then P would be logically necessitated to do A by his being in C and would not be free in doing A in C. And God does not cause counterfactual of freedom to be true, for if he caused (CF) to

Some philosophers have contended that the existence of evil *logically inconsistent* with the existence of the theistic God. No one, I think, has succeeded in establishing such an extravagant claim. Indeed, granted incompatibilism, there is a fairly compelling argument for the view that the existence of evil is logically consistent with the existence of the theistic God. (For a lucid statement of this argument see Alvin Plantinga, *God, freedom, and Evil*. (Rowe, 1979, p.335)

Having said that I should add that although a *defense* is necessary to defend theism, but it is not sufficient. Firstly, when the argument is evidential<sup>7</sup> (for example Paul Draper's argument in "Evolution and the Problem of Evil," (1997)), I think that most theists have to have a theodicy, although Plantinga disagree. I will argue for this, God willing, in near future.

Secondly, Plantinga lately says:

But in addition to rebutting these arguments [from evil], Christian philosophers should also turn to a different task: that of understanding the evil of our world displays from a Christian perspective. (Plantinga, 2004, pp.4-5)

Here I quote a summary of his proposed understanding:

God considers all the possible worlds: he proposes, of course, to create a really good one. Now what are the good-making characteristics in the case of worlds: what makes one possible world better than others? No doubt it is hard to give a general answer; but certainly one good-making characteristic would be divine *incarnation* and *atonement*. In worlds with this characteristic, the second member of the Trinity endures unimaginable suffering and even pain of separation from God himself ("My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" Matt. 27:46) in order to redeem guilty creatures who have turned their backs upon God- what could match this for good-making? ... So the existence of evil is only to be expected if theism is true. (2002, p.237)

This *is* a theodicy. Plantinga after referring to his previous

(a) God strongly actualizes  $T$  in  $W$  and  $W$  includes every state of affairs God strongly actualizes in  $W$

(b)  $A$  is morally significant for  $P$  in  $W$

and

(c) If God had strongly actualized  $T$ ,  $P$  would have gone wrong with respect to  $A$ .

Furthermore it is possible that every significantly free creature suffers from transworld depravity. So it is possible that God could not have actualized a morally flawless world (pp.185-6).

Without the assumption of middle knowledge, says Plantinga, it is much harder to formulate a plausible deductive atheological argument from evil; and it is correspondingly much easier to formulate the Free Will Defense on the assumption that middle knowledge is impossible. If no counterfactuals of freedom are true, then God could not have known in detail what would have happened for each of the various courses of creative activity open to him. He would not, in general, have known, for a given world  $W$ , which world would be actual if he were to strongly actualize  $T(W)$  – a largest state of affairs God strongly actualizes in  $W$ . He would have had detailed acquaintance with each possible world  $W$ , but he would not have had detailed knowledge, for any such world, of what would happen if he were to strongly actualize  $T(W)$ . But this should make defense easier. Perhaps, for example, God had no middle knowledge, but knew that no matter which free creatures he created and no matter how they used or abused their freedom, it would be within his power so to respond that there would be enormously more good than evil. (Plantinga, 1985, p.379)

## 6. Conclusion

As I said even contemporary proponents of the (evidential) argument from evil against the existence of God agree that Plantinga has shown that there is no logical inconsistency between theism and the existence of evil. William Rowe, one of the leading figures of these proponents, has this to say:

as follows: if God is omnipotent, then God could have actualized just any possible world.

But Plantinga rejects this. Because if God creates free creatures and *freedom* is defined incompatibilistically, then God does not *cause it to be the case*, either that they take an action or refrain from that action. He neither causes this to be so through the laws he establishes, nor by direct intervention, nor in any other way. For in those cases they are not free with respect to that action. Then it follows that there are plenty of contingent states of affairs such that it is not within the power of God to cause them to be actual. Therefore the contention that God could have actualized just any possible world he pleased is a mistake, which Plantinga calls it *Leibniz's lapse* (1974, pp.169-172; 184).

### 5-3. Transworld depravity

Plantinga in response to the third objection, tries to show the possibility that among the world's God could not have actualized are all the morally flawless worlds. Consider  $W$ , any one of these worlds. There is a state of affairs  $T$ , such that God strongly or causally actualizes  $T$  in  $W$  and  $T$  includes every state of affairs God strongly actualizes in  $W$ . Furthermore, since  $P$  is significantly free in  $W$ , there are some actions that are morally significant for him in  $W$  and with respect to which he is free in  $W$ . But maybe among these actions there is one, say  $A$ , such that if God had actualized  $T$ ,  $P$  would have gone wrong with respect to  $A$ . Then it follows (by the argument of 5-2) that God could not have actualized  $W$ .  $W$  was just any of the morally flawless worlds. It therefore follows that it was not within God's power to actualize such a world. In other words it is possible that no matter what circumstances God places  $P$  in, so long as he leaves him significantly free, he will take at least one wrong action. Plantinga calls this *transworld depravity* and defines it as follows:

(TD) A person  $P$  suffers from *transworld depravity* if and only if for every world  $W$  such that  $P$  is significantly free in  $W$  and  $P$  does only what is right in  $W$ , there is a state of affairs  $T$  and action  $A$  such that:

isn't causally determined with respect to a given person, then necessarily it is a matter of mere chance that he performs it. For it is *possible* that there exists a person who freely performs and is responsible for actions with respect to which he is not causally determined, namely God. He adds that an appeal to what God does and does not do may not move the atheist, but presumably he will concede that the existence of such a person is *possible*. And if he insists that the theistic conception is impossible just *because* it involves the idea of a person who is free but not causally determined, then his real quarrel with theism is not that God's existence is incompatible with that of evil; it is instead that God's existence is impossible *simpliciter* (1985, pp. 46-7).

### 5-2. Leibniz's lapse

To answer the second objection, Plantinga asks a prior question: Which worlds could God have created? And to answer this question he clarifies the notion of *creation*. He says a thing is created only if there is a time before which it does not exist. Then God has not created the actual world, call it  $\alpha$ , because it contains numbers, propositions, properties, or states of affairs, and these have no beginnings. God *actualizes* them.

Furthermore, while it is proper, according to Plantinga, to say that God actualizes  $\alpha$ , it does not follow that he actualizes every state of affairs that  $\alpha$  includes. He does not actualize his own existence, nor does he actualize his own properties, such as omnipotence, and omniscience. Plantinga also thinks that God does not actualize necessary state of affairs. Then perhaps God actualizes every *contingent* state of affairs included in  $\alpha$ .

Again he thinks that this is not correct. His argument runs like this: take any time  $t$ ; at  $t$  there will be any number of worlds in which things go differently before  $t$ . So God cannot actualize any of those worlds. But perhaps God *could have* actualized such worlds. Then perhaps it should be said that God could have actualized a world  $W$  if and only if for every contingent state of affairs  $S$  included by  $W$ , there is a time at which it is (timelessly) within his power to actualize  $S$ . Therefore the claim that God's omnipotence means that he can create just any possible world, must be modified



theologian Luis de Molina. Molina held that God, in his omniscience, knows with complete certainty what every possible free creature would freely do in every situation in which that creature could possibly have occasion to act freely. The knowledge thus ascribed to God was called "middle knowledge" (*scientia media*) by Molina, because it was seen as falling between his knowledge of the merely possible and his knowledge of the actual, and between his knowledge of necessary truths and his knowledge of truths that he causes to be true. Plantinga accepts that God does have middle knowledge.

Now an opponent of the Free Will Defense might argue that an omnipotent and omniscient God must be able to *weakly actualize* a *morally flawless world*. "Weak actualization" is Plantinga's term which means that God (or any other agent) may be said to "bring about" or "actualize" a state of affairs, by employing the free, causally undetermined action of another free agent. A "morally flawless world" is a possible world in which no one ever does wrong although there are creatures who freely (in the incompatibilist sense) do right on occasion when they are also free to do wrong.

The argument goes like this: God being omniscient could search his infinite understanding for possible free creatures who would freely do right, and never do wrong, if placed in certain circumstances. Then he being omnipotent could weakly actualize a morally flawless world by creating those creatures, and placing them in those circumstances (Adams, 1985, pp. 229-31).

## 5. Responses

Plantinga rejects compatibilism by a counterexample. Therefore in reply to the second objection he can say that if God creates significantly free creatures, although He is omnipotent He will not be able to create them such that they never do morally bad action. The last objection is met by arguing for the possibility of *transworld depravity*.

### 5-1. A counterexample

Plantinga does not accept the compatibilist claim that if an action

creatures such that they never do anything wrong. Here is his argument:

[I]f 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 a man's freely choosing the good on one, or on 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 both omnipotent and wholly good. (1955 [1996], pp.250-1)

Mackie's objection can be reconstructed in terms of *possible worlds*: Was it within the power of an omnipotent God to create just any logically possible world?

We all know that Leibniz insisted that the actual world, must be the best of all possible worlds. God is perfectly good. Therefore he must have chosen to create the best world he could. Being omnipotent, he was able to create just any possible world he pleased. Hence this world, the one he did create, must be the best possible.

#### 4-3. God's knowledge of *counterfactuals of freedom*

The third objection is related to the second one. Robert M. Adams points out that the Free Will Defense depends on God's knowledge of *counterfactuals of freedom*. A typical counterfactual of freedom is like this:

(CF) If  $P$  were in  $C$ ,  $P$  would (not just probably but definitely) freely (in the incompatibilist sense) do  $A$

where  $P$  is a possible free agent,  $C$  is a possible situation, and  $A$  is a possible free action or omission.<sup>6</sup> This type of knowledge was first clearly articulated at the end of the sixteenth century by the Jesuit

evil actions, is more valuable, all else being equal, than a world containing no free creatures at all. God can create free creatures but, he cannot *cause* or *determine* them to do only what is right. If he does so, they do not do what is right *freely*. God did in fact create significantly free creatures; but some of them went wrong in the exercise of their freedom, and this is the source of moral evil (Plantinga, 1974, pp.165-7).

Plantinga treats *natural* evil like moral one. It is *possible* that all natural evil is due to the free activity of non-human persons (for example Satan and his cohorts). There is a balance of good over evil with respect to the actions of these non-human persons; and there is no world God could have created which contains a more favorable balance of good over evil with respect to the free activity of the non-human persons it contains (p.192)

#### 4. Three objections

The Free Will Defense faced some objections. Here I mention three of them that were based on these theses: compatibilism, God's omnipotence, and God's knowledge of counterfactuals of freedom.

##### 4-1. Compatibilism

Plantinga's defense is based on the possibility of causally undetermined freedom. On the contrary compatibilists like Flew and Augustine believe that it is impossible. This is how Plantinga states their claim. The proposition "*S is free with respect to A*" entails that *S* is causally determined with respect to *A* – that there are causal laws and antecedent conditions that together entail that *S* performs *A* or that *S* does not perform *A*. If *S* is not thus determined with respect to *A*, then, necessarily, it is merely a matter of *chance* that *S* does *A*, in which case either *S* does not really do *A* (*A* is instead something that happens to him), or at any rate *S* does not do *A* freely. And then *S* is not responsible for performing *A*, so it becomes implausible to think that God should especially value good resulting from such actions (1985, p.46).

##### 4-2. God's omnipotence

Mackie thinks that if God is omnipotent, then He can create free

One way to show that P and Q are consistent is to find some other proposition R such that P and R are consistent, and such that P and R together entail Q. R need not be true, or probable, or plausible, or anything of the sort. It needs only to be such that its conjunction with P is possible and entails Q. R can be extraordinarily improbable or known to be false. And this is the main difference between a defense and a theodicy (p.42).

The central idea of the Free Will Defense is this: It is *possible* that God (who is omnipotent, omniscient, and wholly good) thought it good that there be free creatures with respect to morally significant actions. But He was not able to create such creatures in such a way that they always exercise their freedom to do good. For if He *causes* them always to do only what is right, then they don't do what is right *freely*. If so then it is possible that there be evil even though God is omnipotent, omniscient, and wholly good.

Now Plantinga gives some preliminary definitions and distinctions. This is how he defines *freedom*: "if a person S is free with respect to a given action, then he is free to perform that action and free to refrain; no causal laws and antecedent conditions determine either that he will perform the action, or that he will not." He points out that from this definition does not follow that what S will do is in principle unpredictable or unknown.

An action is *morally significant*, for a given person at a given time, if it would be wrong for him to perform the action then but right to refrain, or vice versa. And a person *goes wrong with respect to a morally significant action* if it is wrong for him not to and he does not. Furthermore, a person is *significantly free*, on a given occasion, if he is then free with respect to an action that is morally significant for him.

Finally, he makes a distinction between *moral* evil and *natural* evil. When evil results from some human beings going wrong with respect to an action that is morally significant for him, that is a moral evil; any other evil is natural evil.

Given these definitions and distinctions, he states the Free Will Defense as follows. A world containing creatures who are sometimes significantly free, and freely perform more good than

is contradictory make no attempt to show that it is (p.263).

### 3. Free Will Defense

#### 3-1. Defense defined

Plantinga defines a *defense* as opposed to a *theodicy*. A *theodicy* wants to answer in some detail *why* our world, with all its ills, would be better than others we think we can imagine, or *what*, in any detail, is God's reason for permitting a given specific and appalling evil. A *defense*, however, is just an argument to show that there is no inconsistency between what theists believe (1985, p.35; 42).

Ironically Plantinga first encountered this conception of "defense" not in the work of theistic apologists but in the writings of such atheists as Anthony Flew<sup>4</sup> and John Mackie. In fact he first came across the name "Free Will Defense" in a paper by Flew:

It is really logically possible for an action to be freely chosen and yet fully determined by caused causes, then the key stone argument of the Free Will Defense, that there is contradiction in speaking of God as arranging the laws of nature that all men always as a matter of fact freely choose to do the right, cannot hold. (Flew, 1955, p.153/ qtd. Plantinga, 1967, p.133)

Augustine sometimes seemed to Plantinga that gave something like a free will defense. But he was not entirely clear on this matter. And he was a theological *compatibilist*: the view that human freedom and divine determinism *are* compatible (Plantinga, 1985, p.41).

Plantinga once said about theodicies that: "most attempts to explain *why* God permits evil – *theodicy*, as we may call them- strike me as tepid, shallow, and ultimately frivolous"<sup>5</sup> (p.35). However, we will see at the end of this paper that he has changed his mind.

#### 3-2. Defense stated

A simple theorem of modal logic gives the key:

$$(\diamond(P \& R) \ \& \ ((P \& R) \rightarrow Q)) \rightarrow \diamond(P \& Q).$$

Therefore Plantinga suggests these six premises to repair Mackie's argument:

- (1) God is omnipotent
- (2) God is wholly good
- (2') God is omniscient
- (3) Evil exists
- (4a) An omnipotent and omniscient good being eliminates every evil that it can properly eliminate

and

- (5) There are no nonlogical limits to what an omnipotent being can do (pp, 256-61).

But this set is not formally contradictory. Specifically (1), (2), (2'), (4a), and (5) do not formally entail that: (3') There is no evil. What they formally entail is: (3'') there is no evil that God can properly eliminate.

Then to get a formally contradictory set that entails (3'), this proposition must be added:

- (6) If God is omniscient and omnipotent, then he can properly eliminate every evil state of affairs.

#### Now is (6) necessarily true?

Plantinga argues that it is not. He says suppose that a certain evil *E* is *included in* some good state of affairs *G* that outweighs it, and it is impossible that *G* be actual and *E* fail to be actual. Then not even an omnipotent being could eliminate *E* without eliminating *G*. He thinks that certain familiar kinds of good states of affairs cannot exist apart from evil of some sort. For example, there are people who display a sort of creative moral heroism in the face of suffering, a heroism that inspires others and creates a good state of affairs out of a bad one. It is a necessary truth that if someone bears pain magnificently, then someone is in pain. Therefore (6) is not a necessary truth<sup>3</sup> (1977 [1996], p.262).

Plantinga concludes that at the very least it is not an easy matter to find necessarily true propositions that yield a formally contradictory set when added to what theists believe. Therefore he wonders why the many atheists who confidently assert that this set

propositions to make those three propositions contradictory:

However, the contradiction does not arise immediately; to show it we need some additional premises, or perhaps some quasi-logical connecting the terms "good" and "evil" and "omnipotent." These additional principles are that good is opposed to evil, in such a way that a good thing always eliminates evil as far as it can, and that there are no limits to what an omnipotent thing can do. From these it follows that a good omnipotent thing eliminates evil completely, and then the proposition that a good omnipotent thing exists, and that evil exists are incompatible. (p.244)

So he adds two additional "quasi-logical rules":

- (4) A good thing always eliminates evil as far as it can
- and
- (5) There are no limits to what an omnipotent being can do.

Again Plantinga first clarifies and then criticizes. He makes a distinction between *narrow* and *broad* logical necessity. Those propositions that can be established by the laws of logic alone are of the first kind. Truths of mathematics and propositions like these: "red is a color," "no numbers are persons," and "bachelors are unmarried," are of the second kind. It is evident that the necessity in question is broadly logical.

He does not accept the necessity of (5), and adds a qualification to initially suppose its necessity. When the theist says that God is omnipotent he typically means that there are no *nonlogical* limits to what He can do. God cannot create married bachelors.

Two qualifications are added to (4) to be initially acceptable. It must be added that the good thing *knows about* every evil state of affairs. Most theists do believe that God is omniscient. Also evils must be eliminated *properly*, that is without either eliminating an outweighing good or bringing about a greater evil. Again omnipotence of God helps strengthening (4). Hence:

- (4a) An omnipotent and omniscient good being eliminates every evil that it can properly eliminate.

Plantinga utilizes modal logic in his *Free Will Defense* to defeat this claim. He has been so successful that atheists no longer see any logical problem around. Instead they typically argue for an evidential problem.

## 2. The Logical Problem

Mackie formulates the problem this way:

In its simplest form the problem is this: God is omnipotent; God is wholly good; and yet evil exists. There seems to be some contradiction between these three propositions, so that if any two of them were true the third would be false. But at same time all three are essential parts of most theological positions: the theologian, it seems, at once *must* adhere and *cannot consistently* adhere to all three. (pp.243-4)

So he sees a contradiction between these three propositions:

- (1) God is omnipotent
- (2) God is wholly good

and

- (3) Evil exists.

Plantinga asks a prior question, what exactly is a contradiction? He mentions three kinds of contradictions: *explicit*, *formal*, and *implicit*. A set of propositions are *explicitly* contradictory if one of the members is the negation of another. *Formally* contradictory set is one from whose members an explicit contradiction can be deduced by the laws of logic. If there is a necessary proposition *P* such that the result of adding *P* to a set of propositions, makes that set formally contradictory, then that set is *implicitly* contradictory (1977 [1996], pp.254-7).

Those three propositions mentioned by Mackie are not explicitly contradictory. None of them is the negation of the other. Also they are not formally contradictory, because no laws of logic permit us to deduce the negation of one of them from the other. So they can only be implicitly contradictory.

Mackie himself admits this and tries to find some necessary



## 1. Introduction

Alvin Plantinga (born 15 November 1932), a leading American analytic philosopher of religion, puts emphasis on knowing modal logic for theologians as well as philosophers. He says:

It is obvious, I think, that a working knowledge of these modal matters is absolutely essential to clear thinking on most philosophical topics; nearly all philosophical topics, if pushed far enough, wind up crucially involving matters of modality. What is less obvious but equally true is that the same goes for theology; a certain amount of modal logic and the lore and distinctions that go with it is essential for decent work on many of the main topics of theology. (1985, p.25)

One of these theological topics is the *problem of evil*.<sup>1</sup> He distinguishes between at least three kinds of the problem.<sup>2</sup> The first kind is the *logical problem*. It is argued from evil for the conclusion that there is a *logical inconsistency* in believing in God and also that there is evil in the world. The second kind is the *evidential* or *probabilistic* problem. Proponents of this kind claim that the facts of evil offer powerful *evidence against* the existence of God. These arguments are also typically probabilistic. They claim that the existence of God is *improbable* with respect to the facts of evil together with the rest of our background knowledge. Lastly is the *spiritual* or *pastoral* problem. Here there is neither logical nor epistemological problem. Nevertheless one may resent God, fail to trust him, and so on (2000, pp.459-62).

Until 1960s nearly all atheists thought that there is a logical inconsistency between theism and evil. J. I. Mackie for a late example says:

I think, however, that a more telling criticism can be made by way of the traditional problem of evil. Here it can be shown, not that religious beliefs lack rational support, but that they are positively irrational, that the several parts of the essential theological doctrine are *inconsistent* with one another. (1955 [1996], p.243)

## Plantinga and the Logical Problem of Evil

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### Abstract

*The "logical problem of evil" is one kind of the "problem of evil." It is claimed that there is a logical inconsistency between belief in the existence of an omniscient, omnipotent, and wholly good God and belief in the existence of evil. Alvin Plantinga argued by his "free will defense" that they are consistent. In this paper I present his argument. Then three objections against his argument are mentioned. They are based on compatibilism, God's omnipotence, and God's knowledge of counterfactuals of freedom. Plantinga's responses to these come next. They are based on a counterexample, Leibniz's lapse, and transworld depravity. It is nearly accepted by all parties that Plantinga's defense is successful. Now the problem is the evidential one. For this problem to be solved, there must be a theodicy. And Plantinga gives one. But this is not successful at all. Muslims have to pay attention to this neglected area.*

**Keywords:** *theism, evil, logic, consistency.*

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