

The Moral Argument, Existential Problems of Evil, and a Non-Existential Alternative

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## Abstract

Within this paper, it is shown that certain ethical assumptions are implicit within the claim that certain kinds of evil exist. When taken in tandem with the moral argument for the existence of God, these assumptions can be arranged in such a way as to provide a contradiction. To avoid this contradiction, I posit a non-existential alternative to direct inductive arguments from evil, but the non-existential alternative gives rise to novel objections. When considering their respective ethical implications, both the existential and non-existential variations of direct inductive arguments fail. Since any direct inductive problem of evil must be either existential or non-existential, without an adequate response to such objections, the success of direct inductive arguments is greatly diminished.

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### **Introduction**

If an omnipotent and omnibenevolent being were to exist, are there conditions under which it would be morally permissible for this being to allow the existence of evil? For millennia, philosophers such as Epicurus, Augustine, Aquinas, and Hume have investigated this question. Towards the middle of the twentieth century, the reconciliation of such a being with the existence of any evil – let alone a given subset of evils – seemed unlikely. However, in recent decades, contemplation of this question has given rise to at least some conditions under which the existence of such a being might be logically consistent with the existence of particular evils or instances of horrible suffering. In response to such progress, the original question has been rephrased so as to offer scenarios beyond the scope of these newfound conditions. In particular, direct inductive arguments from evil propose that there exists a subset of evils for which the conditions exonerating God's actions are not met.

With this being said, reformulations of the original question bring with them unforeseen objections and problems. Within this paper, I offer three primary contentions. First, I demonstrate that a particular subset of variations of the problem of evil (existential variations) possess inherent ethical assumptions that place such variations at odds with elements of a generalized version of the moral argument for the existence of God. Second, to bypass the issues produced by the moral argument, I provide an abstract, non-existential formulation of the evidential argument given by William Rowe (1979). Finally, I demonstrate that such a revision of any existential argument from evil gives rise

to novel objections, and ultimately, these objections are sufficient to deem the non-existential alternative unsuccessful.

### **Exposition**

#### **The Problem of Evil**

The first of the major philosophical issues with which I am concerned is the problem of evil. Broadly speaking, any particular argument from evil is an argument attempting to demonstrate that the existence of a theistic God is incompatible or unlikely with respect to the existence or prevalence of evils within the world. The problem of evil has a rich history. Epicurus is typically considered to be the progenitor of the problem, since he offers a version of the argument from evil in the third century B.C. (Konstan, 2005). However, since its conception, the problem of evil has evolved to account for a multitude of significant rebuttals. In this section, I will offer various basic formulations of the argument from evil and proceed to categorize these formulations in order to discern precisely which arguments are within the scope of the argumentation contained within this paper.

**Various formulations.** The first argument to be addressed is given by J. L. Mackie (1955). Mackie attempts to demonstrate that the fundamental qualities of the theistic God are logically inconsistent with the existence of evil. To do so, he presents three propositions, two of which relate to the nature of God, and the other to evil. The propositions are as follows:

- (1) God is omnipotent.
- (2) God is omnibenevolent.

(3) Evil exists.

After introducing a few assumptions regarding the expected activity of an omnipotent and good God, Mackie (1955) writes, “the propositions that a good omnipotent thing exists, and that evil exists, are incompatible” (p. 201). In other formulations of this version of the problem of evil, philosophers have added the proposition, “God is omniscient”, since a powerful God may not be capable of preventing the occurrence of evil if He is unaware that it will occur. Nevertheless, because omniscience is a widely accepted theological proposition, the argument maintains its integrity with the addition of this fourth proposition.

The thrust of Mackie’s argument rests in the logical inconsistency of the three (later four) propositions. If they are in fact inconsistent, the reader is rationally obligated to reject the truth of one of the propositions. However, all three/four of the propositions are fundamental to the majority of theistic theologies. From here, if one holds that each proposition is essential to the basic set of theistic beliefs, it follows that a theistic God does not exist.

The next two arguments were originally given by William Rowe. The first is given in an important paper in which Rowe (1979) claims that the existence of a good and omnipotent God is incompatible with the existence of what he terms “pointless evils” (p. 79). As Rowe (2006) defines it, a pointless evil is “an evil that God (if he exists) could have prevented without thereby losing an outweighing good or having to permit an evil equally bad or worse” (p. 79). Rowe argues that if the existence of God is inconsistent with the existence of pointless evils, and if the existence of pointless evils is probable,

then probably, God does not exist. In syllogistic form, the argument can be written as follows:

- (1) Probably, there exist pointless evils.
- (2) If there exist pointless evils, then God does not exist.
- (3) Probably, God does not exist.

Rowe's variation of the problem of evil is distinct from Mackie's variation in two ways. First, Rowe (1979) reduces the set of evils with which the existence of God is incompatible. While Mackie (1955) claims that the existence of any evil is incompatible with the existence of God, Rowe (1979) accounts for the possibility that God is justified in allowing particular evils to occur and formulates the definition of a pointless evil accordingly. Second, evils sufficient to demonstrate the non-existence of God are said to *probably* exist. The introduction of probability is a result of the notion that correctly identifying a pointless evil is beyond the scope of human cognition.

Years after publishing the first argument, Rowe (1996) published a probabilistic argument from evil. The argument is significantly more technical and supports a more modest conclusion. In this argument, Rowe (as cited in Dougherty, 2011) seeks to show that the existence of some events, *E1* and *E2*, for which no justificatory good *is* known relatively disconfirms the existence of "an omnipotent, omniscient, perfectly good being" (p. 560). In other words, Rowe (1996) merely seeks to show that the probability of the existence of God given *E1* and *E2* is less than the probability of the existence of God otherwise. Since the probabilistic argument better acknowledges the epistemic limitations

of the human mind, it is stronger than Rowe's original argument, but as a result of this concession, the conclusion of the argument is more modest.

The last argument presented here has its origin in the work of David Hume. In *The Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*, after demonstrating the failure of the teleological argument as presented by Cleanthes, Philo foreshadows the development of another formulation of the problem of evil (Hume, 2008). Philo posits that if one is to conduct theology evidentially, then he must infer the qualities of God from the characteristics of the world around him. However, if this is the case, then it is difficult for one to present an evidential argument for the infinite goodness of God, since the world as we experience it appears morally neutral at best. In this way, Hume (2008) argues not from the existence of a subset of evils to the non-existence of the theistic God, but rather from the absence of significant quantities of good to the non-existence of the theistic God.

Paul Draper is one modern proponent of such a view. In a paper in which Draper (2004) examines how the teleological argument and terrestrial suffering present analogical problems for naturalism and theism, Draper writes, "other known facts appear to be (antecedently) much more probable on naturalism than on theism. To begin with, it is worth noticing that human moral agents are not, to say the least, of the highest conceivable quality" (p. 311). Here, Draper (2004) is not appealing to the suffering of rational beings or the instantiation of particular evils, but rather the wide chasm between the actual rational being and the ideal rational being.

**Categorizing the set of formulations.** With the few basic formulations of the problem of evil given above, we may identify the essential properties of each argument. In later sections we will use these distinctions to determine the scope of the first of the two primary arguments contained within this paper.

***Logical and evidential.*** The formulations can first be categorized with respect to the nature of the premise concerned with the existence of evil. In the argument presented by Mackie (1955), he has no need to offer evidential justification for the premise that evil exists since the premise is assumed within theism. He is solely concerned with the logical consistency of particular theistic propositions. Arguments of this form are formulations of the logical problem of evil. The arguments given by Rowe (1979) and Draper (2004), however, involve “evaluating propositions about God in terms of the facts of evil” (Peterson, 1998, p. 17). In other words, these arguments relate the moral nature of certain elements of reality to theistic propositions. Because these arguments utilize observations of reality (evidence) and determine the implications of these realities, these arguments are termed *evidential* formulations of the problem of evil.

***Existential and non-existential.*** This second categorization is unique to this paper, but I present the partition here as it will become useful in a later section. Although the term *existential* is traditionally used to refer to a variation of the problem of evil concerned with subjective experience, I intend to use the term differently within this paper. By *existential variations of the problem of evil* I am referring to those arguments that affirm the existence of evil. By *non-existential variations of the problem of evil* I am referring to those arguments that do not affirm the existence of evil. With respect to these

definitions, Rowe's (1979; 1996) arguments would qualify as existential while any logical problem of evil is non-existential. Since Draper's (2004) argument focuses on a deprivation of goods as opposed to the presence of evil, the argument is also non-existential. In addition to Draper's argument, we can construct another non-existential and yet evidential problem of evil. This construction will be the focus of the latter half of this paper.

### **The Moral Argument**

The second argument with which I am interested is the moral argument, the argument moving from moral considerations within the actual world to the existence of God. The moral argument, much like the problem of evil, has seen its greatest influence over the past few centuries, though prototypes of the argument have certainly existed for millennia (Davis, 1997). Just as in the previous section, I will present a few basic formulations of the moral argument and proceed to categorize these arguments in an attempt to determine which moral arguments are suited to support the first major conclusion of this paper.

**Various formulations.** The first argument I would like to offer is given by C. Stephen Layman (2009). His argument for the existence of God is founded in the concept that the existence of individual motivation to act morally at all times necessitates the existence of God or the existence of an afterlife. Layman (2009) posits that in every situation, "one has most reason to do what is morally required" (p. 377). Furthermore, if there is no afterlife, then one's performance of certain moral actions leads to a great sacrifice conferring "modest benefits" (Layman, 2009, p. 377). However, if one is

sacrificing greatly and receiving only modest benefits then he does not have most reason to perform this action, in which case he does not have most reason to act morally. Hence, an afterlife is required for one to always act morally and yet always act rationally. From here, Layman moves from the existence of an afterlife to the existence of God.

C.S. Lewis (1952), in his book, *Mere Christianity*, presents a different formulation of the moral argument. Within his argument, Lewis (1952) moves from the human experience of moral truths to the existence of some universal standard to which each individual is accountable for his actions. After the existence of this standard is supported, Lewis posits that the best explanation for the existence of this standard is the existence of God. Lewis' second step is supported by the claim that the existence of a law necessitates the existence of a law giver, and because a law giver must be intelligent, powerful, and good, one is justified in identifying this being as God. W.R. Sorley (as cited in Martin, 1992), a Scottish philosopher, offers a syllogism that – although formulated independently of Lewis' argument – captures the essence of Lewis' argument well.

- (1) If morality is objective and absolute, then God exists.
- (2) Morality is objective and absolute.
- (3) Therefore, God exists. (p. 213)

This argument, when viewed as a syllogism, is deductive, though one could easily alter the premises slightly to reach a more modest abductive argument.

The last variation of the argument is that given by David Baggett and Jerry L. Walls (2016) in the book, *God and Cosmos*. The argument given is abductive, and it

incorporates four different aspects of morality to offer a cumulative case for the existence of God. Although the argument is difficult to summarize briefly, it demonstrates that the existence of moral facts, the possibility of moral knowledge, instances of moral transformation, and moral rationality are together best explained by classical theism. While the variations of the moral argument in line with the argument given by Lewis (1952) are of more utility for this paper, a cumulative argument of this kind will prove useful in response to Rowe's probabilistic argument.

**Categorizing the set of formulations.** The arguments above provide a cover for the most prevalent variations of the moral argument. Any form of the moral argument that moves from moral obligation or motivation to necessary theistic propositions grounding the existence of such an obligation will be termed a *practical* variation of the moral argument. Layman's argument is an example of this variation, and although not mentioned here, Kant's (1788) moral argument would lie in this group as well. A moral argument that moves from the existence of objective moral truths to the existence of God will be termed an *objective* variation of the moral argument. The arguments of Lewis (1952) and Sorley (1918) both act as representatives of this type of argument. Lastly, variations of the moral argument that reach broadly to find evidence and offer an abductive argument for God's existence will be termed *cumulative* variations of the moral argument. This type would include arguments such as that given by Baggett and Walls (2016).

**Evil and God**

In light of the previous sections, we can begin to discuss precisely how morality and the concept of a theistic God relate to one another. A fundamental characteristic of the theistic God is goodness, often phrased as omnibenevolence, meaning that God is infinitely good or morally perfect. In this section, I will examine necessary and sufficient conditions for the proposition *God is not omnibenevolent* to be true. I will then determine which variations of the problem of evil, if valid, succeed in refuting the possibility of an omnibenevolent God.

**Evil and divine morality.** For the vast majority of theists, goodness is essential to the character of God. In fact, it is for this very reason that evil is problematic for the theist. As Mackie (1955) explains, if the theist were to reject either the omnipotence or omnibenevolence of God, then the existence of evil would offer no objection to his set of beliefs. However, Mackie is aware of the fact that the goodness and omnipotence of the theistic God are indispensable qualities. If Mackie (1955) is correct and these qualities are essential – and I am inclined to think that they are – then the theist must show that the inference from an omnibenevolent and omnipotent being to the impossibility of evil is mistaken.

Fortunately, Mackie (1955) offers additional propositions to reveal the inconsistency of the first three premises. Mackie (1955) first writes, “a good thing always eliminates evil as far as it can,” and he later adds, “there are no limits to what an omnipotent thing can do” (p. 201). However, Mackie gives little reason to believe that these additional propositions are true. To begin, it is misleading to claim that an

omnipotent being can do absolutely anything; nearly every theologian understands the strongest tenable definition of omnipotence to be a property of God whereby any *logically possible* action is within his power. Hence, Mackie (1955) must either show that it is logically possible for God to create a world in which evil does not exist, or he must show that omnipotence ought to be understood as a property whereby a being may perform even logically impossible actions. This is precisely the distinction that will lead to Plantinga's (1974) refutation of Mackie's (1955) logical problem of evil, and this refutation will be discussed briefly in the next section.

If one understands the property of omnipotence in the traditional sense, then it becomes abundantly clear that the truth of Mackie's first additional principle is far from trivial. Throughout the history of the Church, theologians (e.g. Augustine) have maintained that God allows certain evils to exist because these evils are necessary for the existence of an even greater good. For example, consider that merciful and gracious actions are virtuous. However, if one defines mercy to be the forgiveness of debt and defines grace as unmerited favor, then in order for mercy or grace to exist, it is logically necessary that there exists a debt to be forgiven. Moreover, we tend not to view debt as a positive element of existence, yet debt must exist for greater goods, mercy and grace.

Mackie (1955) rejects this solution since he believes it "sets a limit to what God can do, saying that God cannot create good without simultaneously creating evil" (p. 203). But this objection neglects that the existence of some goods is logically dependent on the existence of certain evils, and if one adopts the traditional interpretation of the

property of omnipotence, then even God is unable to bring about mercy devoid of the existence of debt.

Granted, Mackie may reply by claiming that it is immoral for a being to allow the existence of evil in any degree in order to bring about a greater good, but this seems to presuppose a deontological ethic, whereas a consequentialist ethic would permit this activity, and consequently, preserve omnibenevolence. If an omnipotent being can perform only logically possible actions, then it is immensely difficult to justify Mackie's first additional principle.

**Which evils are incompatible with the existence of God?** In the previous section, I have demonstrated that the mere existence of some evil event is insufficient – *prima facie* – to negate the omnibenevolence of God. Nevertheless, one might still respond that God can be both merciful and gracious without creating a world in which he must *manifest* these properties. Thankfully, Alvin Plantinga (1974;2004) has given a refutation of Mackie's argument that is not subject to such a rebuttal. Although Plantinga, in his paper "O Felix Culpa," gives a theodicy similar to the greater good theodicy above, he is better known for his presentation of the free will defense given in his book, *God, Freedom, and Evil*.

Within the latter work, Plantinga (1974) attempts to demonstrate that *possibly*, it is impossible for an omnipotent God to create a world in which creatures are free, there exists moral good, and there does not exist moral evil. Hence, if the good of freedom and its consequences justify the existence of some evils, then God is justified in allowing some evils to exist to bring about the greater good, free creatures. The technicalities of

this argument lie beyond the scope of this paper, but it is worth noting that a multitude of philosophers believe Plantinga to have buried Mackie's argument (Dougherty, 2011). Of course, one might construct an alternative logical problem of evil that avoids Plantinga's rebuttal, but I am unaware of such a construction.

So with the knowledge that God may be morally justified in allowing the existence of some evils, which evils are sufficient to negate the proposition *there exists an omnibenevolent and omnipotent being*? In light of the above discussion, it seems that it is inconclusive whether any evil that brings about a greater good is such an evil. Notice that I am not positively asserting that an omnipotent being can ethically allow the occurrence of any evil that brings about a greater good. Rather, I am passively stating that for one to demonstrate that an omnibenevolent being cannot allow some evil for the purpose of bringing about a greater good is difficult.

Moving forward, I will define evils that are insufficient to negate the proposition that there exists an omnibenevolent and omnipotent being to be morally justified evils (MJE). Of course, the set of evils for which God is not morally justified ( $\sim$ MJE) is simply the complement of the set of MJE. While I assume it is impossible to identify each condition that is both necessary and sufficient for an evil to be a  $\sim$ MJE, it is rather simple to identify a subset of evils that are  $\sim$ MJE. In fact, this is the motivation behind Rowe's (2006) definition of a pointless evil: it is an evil that fails to lead to some greater good. Therefore, by definition, Rowe's argument avoids the type of objection given by Plantinga (1974) in the free will defense. For this reason, pointless evils (PE) are particular examples of  $\sim$ MJE.

### **The Relationship Between the Moral Argument and the Problem of Evil**

In the previous section, it was shown that the mere existence of evil is insufficient to negate the existence of an omnipotent and omnibenevolent being. For this reason, we defined ~MJE to be the collection of evils that are sufficient to negate the existence of an omnipotent and omnibenevolent being. While PEs are, by definition, a subset of the set of ~MJE, we may also explore the implications of the existence of a ~MJE. Within this section, I argue that if there exists some ~MJE, then there exists an objective evil (OE). From here, I demonstrate that the existence of an OE, when taken in tandem with the objective variation of the moral argument, presents a serious problem for existential variations of the problem of evil.

**Objective evils.** Just as we constructed a set of MJE in the previous section, we will construct a set of objective evils in this section. In order to define an objective evil, it is appropriate to discuss the distinction between moral relativism and moral objectivism. Of course, one may also place moral nihilism on this list, but it will become evident why moral nihilism need not be addressed.

We can distinguish each ethical position in terms of its domain of influence, by which I mean the population for which a moral principle pertains. For example, within moral subjectivism, any moral system is valid for the individual and the individual alone. Within cultural relativism, the domain of influence becomes larger; any moral system is valid for an entire society of people. Within moral objectivism, there are at least some moral principles that apply to every human being, regardless of cultural background or group membership. However, the existence of objective moral principles does not entail

moral absolutism, as one may view moral objectivism as a form of cultural relativism in which some particular moral principles apply to all of humanity. Louis Pojman (1996), in his article, "A Defense of Ethical Objectivism," mentions that this is one way in which one can view the existence of objective moral principles.

I define an objective evil to be a violation of a moral principle contained within a moral system that applies to every existing moral agent. Notice that this is a stronger condition than the moral objectivism given above. Given this definition, I will attempt to support the claim that the existence of a  $\sim$ MJE implies the existence of some OE. First, notice that in order for one to claim that any being is not omnibenevolent, he must appeal to some moral principle. For example, we may use Rowe's (1979) example of the fawn being horribly burned due to a forest fire and suffering needlessly for five days before death. It seems that if one asserts that an omnipotent and omnibenevolent being could not allow evils of this kind to exist, he is implicitly stating that for an omnipotent being to allow such an event negates its moral perfection. However, in determining that some action is inconsistent with the moral perfection of a being, he may only appeal to those moral principles to which the being is subject.

Second, a transcendent being is subject only to moral principles that apply to every existing moral agent. Moral relativism and moral objectivism – if understood along the lines suggested by Pojman (1996) – are insufficient ethical theories to evaluate the moral perfection of a transcendent being. A transcendent being is outside of the domain of influence of relativism and Pojman's objectivism. In the same way that the cultural relativist and moral subjectivist do not claim that culturally acceptable moral behaviors

are immoral, the cultural relativist or moral subjectivist may not evaluate the moral perfection of a transcendent being with respect to his own set of moral principles. If this were not the case, then a transcendent being could be both morally perfect and morally imperfect. A man in India might find that some transcendent being is morally perfect while a man in Sweden might find the same being reprehensible. Moreover, Pojman's (1996) version of moral objectivism appears to be insufficient to evaluate the moral nature of a transcendent being in that there is no reason to think moral principles pertaining to each human also pertain to a non-human entity. Nonetheless, if we include that there are some moral principles that apply to each rational or moral agent, then these moral principles seem sufficient to evaluate the moral status of even a transcendent moral agent. However, if the reader would like to reject this last statement and maintain that a transcendent being could not be subject to such a moral principle, this is no harm to my argument, as the objection denies the possibility of any evidential problem of evil.

Therefore, if there exists a  $\sim$ MJE, it has been demonstrated that an omnipotent and omnibenevolent being must violate some moral principle in allowing the evil to exist. Furthermore, this moral principle must be one to which an omnipotent and omnibenevolent being is subject. Hence, such a moral principle must be an element of a set of moral principles with a domain of influence encompassing every existing moral agent. As a result, there exists an OE, and we have shown that the existence of a  $\sim$ MJE implies the existence of some OE.

Lastly, I want to mention that it is certainly possible for some behaviors to be evil relative only to cultural moral principles or subjective moral principles. In other words, if

there exist objective evils, it does not entail that every evil is objective. There may still exist behaviors that one wishes to label as evil although these behaviors fail to violate an objective moral principle. These evils are simply insufficient to negate the possibility of an omnipotent and omnibenevolent being. Also, because Sorley's (1918) moral argument does not account for this possibility, we may alter Sorley's argument to account for the possibility that some evils are objective while others are subjective. To do so, we simply alter his first premise to read *if a subset of moral principles are objective and absolute, then God exists*. It seems clear that if even one moral principle is objective and absolute it would maintain the integrity of his argument.

**The inconsistency of objective moral arguments and existential problems of evil.** In this section, we are finally prepared to collect various premises from the moral argument and the problem of evil to derive a contradiction. It ought to be noted that the discovery of an intimate relationship between the problem of evil and the moral argument is not novel. In fact, Baggett and Walls (2016), towards the end of *God and Cosmos*, propose that the moral argument and the problem of evil are "locked in a zero-sum game" (p. 279). With this being said, I am unaware of a rigorous argument that identifies precisely the relationship between morality and the problem of evil. As will be shown, claiming that the moral argument and the problem of evil are locked in a zero-sum game may be true, but it is not obvious, and with respect to some variations of the problem of evil (e.g. the logical argument), the moral argument offers no rebuttal.

In order to demonstrate that objective moral arguments and existential problems of evil offer contradictory premises, we can consider the following five propositions.

- (1) If there exists a  $\sim$ MJE, then an omnipotent and omnibenevolent being does not exist.
- (2) There exists a  $\sim$ MJE.
- (3) If there exists a  $\sim$ MJE, then there exists an OE.
- (4) If there exists an OE, then a subset of moral principles are objective and absolute.
- (5) If a subset of moral principles are objective and absolute, then an omnipotent and omnibenevolent being exists.

It is clear that one can derive the conclusion that an omnipotent and omnibenevolent being does not exist from propositions (1) and (2). Moreover, from propositions (2) through (5), one can derive that an omnipotent and omnibenevolent exists. Hence, these five propositions yield contradictory conclusions, and therefore, they are inconsistent. This demonstration of inconsistency will be termed *the inconsistency argument* for the remainder of the paper.

It is now clear to see why only the premises of existential variations of the problem of evil are inconsistent with the premises of the moral argument. Non-existential arguments never affirm premise (2). Also, the inferences between propositions (3) through (5) are closely related to objective variations of the moral argument. However, this in no way diminishes the importance of the cumulative and practical variations. Upon closer inspection, one finds that these two variations may be utilized to support proposition (5). For example, if either the practical or cumulative argument is strengthened with the addition of the proposition that a subset of moral principles are

objective and absolute, then it is appropriate to import both the practical and cumulative arguments in support of proposition (5). Lastly, although Rowe's first argument, and many other existential arguments posit that probably a  $\sim$ MJE exists, inserting probabilistic premises does nothing to detract from the contradiction derived above.

**Which premise ought we reject?** The contradiction does nothing in and of itself to defeat existential problems of evils. Rather, we must look at the strength of each proposition and determine which proposition ought to be rejected. Because proposition (4) is true by definition, the inconsistency must be resolved by rejecting proposition (1), (2), (3), or (5). If any one of these propositions is rejected, then the remaining four propositions are consistent. Of course, if one rejects proposition (1) or (2), then any existential problem of evil fails, while if one rejects proposition (5), then any objective moral argument fails. Typically, proposition (1) is held to be true by both theists and atheists alike, while proposition (2) is more controversial. Nonetheless, a few theists reject proposition (1). For example, Peterson (2008), in an article titled "C.S. Lewis on the Necessity of Gratuitous Evil," argues that Lewis may have rejected proposition (1). Regardless, casting doubt on proposition (1) is beyond the scope of this paper as well as unnecessary for the success of the inconsistency argument.

Proposition (2), unlike proposition (1), is highly contested. Stephen Wykstra (1984), along with a multitude of other theistic philosophers, have doubted proposition (2) in light of the cognitive limitation defense, by which they argue that cognitive limitations prevent humans from identifying PEs – and I would add  $\sim$ MJEs – with any accuracy. Lastly, it would be foolish to claim that proposition (5) is *clearly* more

probable than proposition (2), since there may be naturalistic explanations for the existence of objective moral principles. Yet proposition (5) does appear to have a fair amount of support even among naturalistic philosophers. For example, Mackie (as cited in Martin, 1990) has claimed that the existence of objective moral principles is inconsistent with naturalism. Of course, Mackie goes on to reject the existence of objective moral principles, but if the argumentation given above is correct, he consequently negates the possibility of a successful existential problem of evil.

Although I would hold that it is more reasonable to reject proposition (2) than proposition (5), demonstrating that proposition (5) is true is unnecessary for the inconsistency argument to be successful. Rather, it is sufficient for proposition (5) to cast doubt on proposition (2). The inconsistency argument demonstrates that if one holds proposition (5) to be true, then he has good reason to reject proposition (2). Moreover, as long as it is difficult to determine whether proposition (2) or proposition (5) is more probable, any existential argument from evil fails to be compelling.

**The probabilistic argument.** Just as Rowe (1996), after presenting his first argument, demonstrates that the apparent existence of pointless evils relatively disconfirms the existence of an omnipotent and omnibenevolent being, I will demonstrate that the existence of any  $\sim$ MJE (including PEs) relatively confirms the existence of an omnipotent and omnibenevolent being. I will first present a formulation of Rowe's argument taken from Dougherty (2011), though I add a set of propositions,  $k$ , that is the set of all background knowledge. In addition to  $k$ , we need the following propositions,  $G$  and  $P$ , as well.

*P*: “No good we know of justifies an omnipotent, omniscient, perfectly good being in permitting *E1* and *E2*” (Dougherty, 2011, p. 560).

*G*: An omnipotent, omniscient, perfectly good being exists.

Within proposition *P*, *E1* and *E2* are instances of some sufficiently horrendous suffering.

As the argument is given in Dougherty’s article, Rowe posits that  $\sim G$  entails *P* by definition. This entailment is the result of Rowe’s (as cited in Tooley, 2015)

interpretation of *P*, whereby he finds *P* to say that “it is not the case that there is an

omnipotent, omniscient, and perfectly good being together with some known good that

justifies that being in allowing *E1* and *E2*” (“3.4 William Rowe’s Bayesian-Style,” para.

7). If *P* can be interpreted this way, then it is clear that  $\sim G$  entails *P*. However, if Rowe

interprets *P* in this way, he fails to meet the total evidence requirement. Moreover, if one

reformulates *P* to mean that “no good we know of *would* justify God, (*if he exists*) in

permitting *E1* and *E2*,” then it is clear that  $\sim G$  no longer entails *P*, and hence, Rowe’s

argument is unsound (Tooley, 2015, “3.4.2 The Flaw in the Argument,” para. 12).

Even after removing the proposition that  $\sim G$  entails *P*, one might reformulate the argument to maintain that *P* relatively disconfirms *G*. But with respect to this weaker

formulation, one could construct a similar argument to show that *P* relatively confirms *G*.

We will say that a proposition *A* relatively disconfirms a proposition *B* if  $\Pr(B/(A\&k)) <$

$\Pr(B/k)$ . A reformulation of Rowe’s (1996) argument could rely on intuition, and one

could posit that  $\Pr(P/(G\&k)) < \Pr(P/k)$  without utilizing his derivation. For, even without

the rest of Rowe’s argumentation, this inequality still appears reasonable at first glance.

Then, using Bayes’ Theorem, as Rowe (1996) does in the original argument, we may still

conclude that  $\Pr(G/(P\&k)) < \Pr(G/k)$ . Unfortunately, the beauty of Rowe's original formulation is that the first inequality was derived from seemingly trivial propositions, but if it is not true that  $\Pr(P/(\sim G\&k)) = 1$ , then this derivation is no longer possible.

Ultimately, reformulating Rowe's (1996) argument in this manner is problematic in that the justification for the first inequality fails to account for the strength of moral arguments for God's existence. The support for the first inequality of the reformulation appears to draw from two propositions. The first proposition is merely the theological premise of the evidential argument. The second proposition is that if  $P$ , then probably there are no goods justifying an omnipotent, omniscient, perfectly good being in permitting  $E1$  and  $E2$ , in which case, there really does exist a  $\sim$ MJE. But this line of support clearly fails to account for the inconsistency argument, since any evidence for the existence of a  $\sim$ MJE also acts as evidence for an OE. Thus, when considering some set of evidence and presuppositions, the first inequality appears to be justified, but if one adds that  $\Pr(\text{OE}/\sim\text{MJE}) = 1$ , then it could just as easily be argued that  $\Pr(P/(G\&k)) > \Pr(P/k)$ , in which case  $\Pr(G/(P\&k)) > \Pr(G/k)$ . In other words, if one appeals to some other set of presuppositions,  $P$  might relatively confirm  $G$ . For this reason, it seems most reasonable to claim that  $P$  neither confirms nor disconfirms  $G$ , and conclude that the probabilistic argument results in a kind of zero-sum game.

### **A Non-Existential Alternative**

Through the previous two sections, I have argued that existential problems of evil have a difficulty accounting for the existence of  $\sim$ MJEs, because  $\sim$ MJEs seem to necessitate the existence of OEs. In this section, I offer a non-existential formulation of

Rowe's (1979) argument given by a colleague of mine, Samuel Estep (Personal communication, n.d.). Such a non-existential argument avoids the difficulties arising from the inconsistency argument. For the remainder of this paper, the following non-existential problem of evil will be termed the *hypothetical* problem of evil.

While the existential version of Rowe's (1979) argument argues from the actual existence (or probable existence) of some set of ~MJE's, the non-existential version of the argument uses a counterfactual to avoid claiming that ~MJE's in fact exist. Consider the following five propositions.

- (1a)  $X$  is an objective and absolute moral principle if and only if an omnibenevolent and omnipotent being exists.
- (2a) There exists some event  $E1$  (e.g. some occurrence of seemingly pointless suffering) such that if  $X$  were an objective and absolute moral principle, then  $E1$  would be a ~MJE.
- (3a) If there exists a ~MJE, then an omnibenevolent and omnipotent being does not exist.
- (4a) If there exists a ~MJE, then there exists an OE.
- (5a) If there exists an OE, then a subset of moral principles are objective and absolute.
- (6a) If a subset of moral principles are objective and absolute, then an omnipotent and omnibenevolent being exists.

Within proposition (1a), the proposition  $X$  can be any moral proposition one chooses, as long as proposition (1a) and proposition (2a) are true with respect to  $E1$ . From here, if

one assumes that an omnipotent and omnibenevolent being exists, it is easy to derive a contradiction. However, if one assumes that an omnipotent and omnibenevolent being does not exist, then these five propositions are consistent. Hence, if these five propositions are true, we can conclude that an omnipotent and omnibenevolent being does not exist.

The fact that the proposition  $X$  is not specified makes this form of argumentation sufficiently abstract to be adapted to any existential argument. In the case of Rowe's (1979) argument,  $E1$  is simply a PE, for example, the unnecessary suffering of a fawn. Then,  $X$  would be the proposition *if a moral agent is able to prevent a fawn from suffering unnecessarily, then he ought to do so*. With  $X$  defined, it is simple to conclude that there does not exist an omnipotent and omnibenevolent being. Another example might have  $E1$  as the act of purposelessly deceiving another rational being. Consequently,  $X$  might be the proposition *if he is able, a moral agent ought not allow one to purposelessly deceive another rational being*. In the same way, if we maintain the truth of the five propositions with these substitutions, then we may conclude that an omnipotent and omnibenevolent being does not exist.

### Analysis

#### Moral Relativism

Although I have touched briefly on the impact of moral relativism in previous sections, in this section, I attempt to determine precisely how an argument for moral relativism might interact with the inconsistency argument. One argument for the truth of moral relativism can be given as follows.

(1b) If there exists an objective moral standard, then this objective moral standard is held by all societies.

(2b) There does not exist an objective moral standard held by all societies.

(3b) Therefore, there does not exist an objective moral standard.

Ultimately, any argument for moral relativism seeks to show that there do not exist any objective moral principles. Consequently, if the existence of a  $\sim$ MJE entails the existence of some OE, then moral relativism and the existence of some  $\sim$ MJE are inconsistent.

With respect to the hypothetical argument, the truth of moral relativism appears to be consistent with each of the premises. However, as will be shown in a future section, the hypothetical argument possesses a close relationship with the first premise of the argument offered above. Any rebuttal to premise (1b) above may similarly be offered in refutation of the hypothetical argument.

### **Objections to the Inconsistency Argument**

There are certainly a multitude of objections that might be raised in response to the inconsistency argument, but I choose to focus on three objections that I expect to be the most prevalent. The first objection is concerned with the success of the argument; the second is concerned with the truth of the propositions; the third is concerned with the scope of the argument.

**Rejecting the moral argument.** After deriving the contradiction that exists between existential problems of evil and objective moral arguments, one is required to reject one of the five propositions. If one is not careful, one might state that any objective moral argument is significantly less convincing than certain existential problems of evil,

and consequently, conclude that he is perfectly justified in rejecting the propositions taken from the moral argument. With this reasoning, as long as some existential problem of evil is sufficiently persuasive in comparison to any objective moral argument, then the existential argument remains convincing.

Such an objection seems to fail for the following reason: the inconsistency argument is not reliant on each premise from the objective moral argument. Rather, it is reliant upon only the premise that moves from the existence of some set of objective moral principles to the existence of an omnipotent and omnibenevolent being. While a premise positing that these objective moral principles exist is required within an objective moral argument, it is simply irrelevant to the inconsistency argument. The power of the argument lies precisely in the fact that one need not give any justification for the existence of objective moral principles (if proposition (3) is correct, that is) in order for the argument to be successful. Hence, the objector cannot merely show that the entirety of any objective moral argument is unpersuasive; he must show that specifically the major premise of any objective moral argument is unpersuasive. Historically, the vast majority of objections to objective variations of the moral argument attack the minor premise. For example, for the moral relativist, the truth of his position entails the falsity of the minor premise. Therefore, any compelling argument for moral relativism will serve to defeat an objective moral argument.

Fortunately for the theist, the existential problem of evil actually provides the existence of objective moral principles. For this reason, any argument to deny the minor premise of the moral argument serves to defeat any existential problem of evil as well.

The objector may respond by claiming that the truth of even the major premise of the moral argument is far less probable than the existence of some  $\sim$ MJE. To prove that this is the case, the objector must construct scenarios in which objective moral standards exist while an omnibenevolent and omnipotent being does not exist. Such scenarios might exist, but because – at least for Rowe – the existence of a  $\sim$ MJE is only *probable*, it is insufficient for the objector to merely prove that it is *possible* for both objective moral principles to exist and for an omnipotent and omnibenevolent being to not exist. Rather, if the existential problem is to maintain its integrity, the objector must show that  $\Pr(\sim\text{MJE}) \gg \Pr(G/\text{OE})$ . Again, this may in fact be the case, but it is far from trivial to show.

**$\sim$ MJEs and OEs.** Another objection might be that arguments similar to Rowe's never actually posit that a  $\sim$ MJE exists. It is possible that Rowe (1979), from the first offering of his argument, intended for PEs to be interpreted in the manner in which the hypothetical argument interprets PEs. For this reason, the inconsistency argument is attacking a variation of the problem of evil that no philosopher actually endorses, in which case it is useless.

On the contrary, even if existential arguments, as I have defined them, fail to have adherents within the philosophical community, the inconsistency argument serves to demonstrate the necessity of a hypothetical argument such as the one I have given. If one claims that I have interpreted Rowe's original argument incorrectly, this does little to diminish the force of my argument. Rather, the inconsistency argument still determines criteria that any successful problem of evil must meet. Also, as will be seen in the

evaluation of the hypothetical argument, interpreting Rowe's argument as non-existential has detrimental consequences. Hence, for such an objector, the inconsistency argument may simply hold the objector accountable to his non-existential position, and furthermore, derive consequences for such a position.

It is likely that the strongest objections to the inconsistency argument are responses to the claim that the existence of a  $\sim$ MJE entails the existence of an OE. I suppose there are a multitude of objections that could be raised, but for the sake of space, I will respond to only one such objection. I have argued that in order to determine that a being  $x$  is not morally perfect, one must appeal to some standard of moral perfection, and this standard must have a domain of influence containing  $x$ . Hence, if  $x$  is some transcendent, omnipotent, and omnibenevolent being, then one must appeal to a standard with an appropriate domain of influence. However, an objector might claim that this is a misinterpretation of what one means when one states that such a being is not morally perfect. The objector could maintain that the moral perfection of such a being is evaluated within some particular moral system for which  $x$  is not within the domain of influence. Hence, when one claims that  $x$  is not morally perfect he is only stating that  $x$  does not adhere to some moral principle within the moral system to which he himself is obligated. If this is the case, then it is clear that the existence of some  $\sim$ MJE does not entail the existence of an OE. Rather, it would only entail the existence of some valid moral principle within a given moral system.

My response to such an objection is two-fold. First, with respect to at least a few moral systems, the objection appears to clearly fail. For example, if the statement that  $x$  is

not morally perfect simply means that  $x$  fails to meet one's subjective moral principles, the objection is unsuccessful, for the existential problem of evil is sound for one individual and unsound for another. In other words, person  $A$  could be perfectly justified in positing that  $x$  is morally perfect, while person  $B$  could be rationally required to conclude that  $x$  is not morally perfect. If this is the case, any existential problem of evil can be safely ignored. Assume person  $B$  offers person  $A$  an existential problem of evil to persuade person  $A$  that a particular evil entails that  $x$  is not morally perfect. Then person  $A$  may respond by claiming that the particular evil of which person  $B$  speaks is in fact not evil within person  $A$ 's moral system. Hence, if one evaluates the moral perfection of  $x$  in terms of his own subjective moral system, there is little reason for another individual to find his argument persuasive.

However, would it make sense to evaluate  $x$ 's moral perfection with respect to a set of moral principles common to the human race as a whole? If this were the method for determining the moral status of  $x$ , then with respect to at least some moral principles, it would be impossible for person  $A$  to correctly judge that  $x$  is not morally perfect and for person  $B$  to correctly judge that  $x$  is morally perfect. In this way, if the moral system is large enough, it avoids my first response. Ultimately, this consideration was the motivation for maintaining that an objective evil must have a domain of influence containing every moral agent. Even if each human were to agree upon the moral perfection of  $x$ ,  $x$  could still be morally perfect to some rational being in principle. However, what if there does not exist a moral principle applying to every moral agent? If this were the case, then the problem of evil fails, but the theist has a difficulty as well. If

$x$ 's moral perfection can only be denied by the existence of such a set of moral principles, then  $x$ 's moral perfection can only be affirmed by the existence of such a set of moral principles. The theist escapes the denial of  $x$ 's moral perfection, but he is still unjustified in claiming that  $x$  is in fact morally perfect. For this reason, it appears that the philosopher, if he were to claim that there do not exist moral principles applicable to each moral agent, would have good reason to withhold judgment on the existence of  $x$ .

**The scope of the argument.** The last objection might be that the inconsistency argument fails to account for a problem of evil such as that given by Draper (2004). As was mentioned early in the paper, Draper's argument, in addition to the hypothetical argument I have proposed, is a non-existential evidential argument. Therefore, if one holds to Draper's argument, the inconsistency argument requires no rebuttal.

The argumentation within this paper is concerned with a specific subset of variations of the problem of evil. Just as the inconsistency argument in no way refutes the logical problem of evil, since the logical problem is non-existential, the inconsistency argument fails to disconfirm indirect inductive arguments. Again, this objection, though true, merely demonstrates that it is difficult for one argument to cover any large set of variations of the problem of evil. I readily admit this fact. Moreover, the argumentation within this paper in no way denies the success of the problem of evil as a whole; it merely identifies a particular subset of formulations and seeks to demonstrate unique obstacles for such formulations.

### **Tools Needed for the Hypothetical Problem of Evil**

If one examines the hypothetical argument, there are a few distinguishing qualities with respect to the existential variation of Rowe's (1979) argument. The most obvious difference is the very motivation for the creation of a hypothetical argument: a pointless evil, in the case of the hypothetical argument, would be a  $\sim$ MJE if some sufficient objective moral principle exists. In the case of the original existential argument, a pointless evil is in fact a  $\sim$ MJE. The second distinction lies within proposition (1a) of the hypothetical argument wherein – ignoring the introduction of a particular moral principle  $X$  – proposition (5) of the inconsistency argument is given as a biconditional. The third and final distinction is a consequence of this added biconditional. In the inconsistency argument, the need to determine a particular objective moral principle,  $X$ , was unnecessary. This is because the argument moves from the existence of an OE that by construction corresponds with the  $\sim$ MJE that is stated to exist. However, in the hypothetical argument, it is not guaranteed that any  $X$  satisfying proposition (1a) is an OE corresponding with the pointless evil from proposition (2a).

For example, suppose that  $E1$  is the example of the fawn given by Rowe (1979). For the purpose of the inconsistency argument, if  $E1$  is a  $\sim$ MJE, then the OE corresponding to the major premise of the moral argument is itself derived from the existence of the  $\sim$ MJE. However, for the hypothetical argument, assume that the set of objective moral principles entailed by the existence of an omnipotent and omnibenevolent being does not include the proposition *if a moral agent is able, he ought to prevent a fawn from suffering needlessly*. If this were the case, then  $E1$  would not serve

to demonstrate the non-existence of an omnipotent and omnibenevolent being. Hence, if one would like to maintain that it is possible for a proper subset of moral principles to be objective, then it is necessary to ensure that the OE corresponding to *E1* is contained within the set of moral principles that are objective as a consequence of the existence of an omnipotent and omnibenevolent being.

### **Evaluation**

#### **Weaknesses of the Hypothetical Problem of Evil**

In the final section of the paper, I intend to examine how the distinguishing features of the hypothetical argument impact the argument's effectiveness. Particularly, I will demonstrate that holding to a non-existential formulation of Rowe's (1979) argument warrants a few objections to which the existential formulation was immune. Furthermore, if these objections appear to be successful in casting doubt on the success of the hypothetical argument, then it would seem that the inconsistency argument provides a conundrum for existential arguments as a whole.

**Does God's existence entail the existence of particular objective moral principles?** The first objection to the hypothetical argument can be given in response to the biconditional introduced in proposition (1a). If one is to omit the biconditional, then it becomes clear that he is unable to derive the non-existence of an omnipotent and omnibenevolent being. However, it is simply unclear whether the general conception of the theistic God would support the addition of the reverse implication. Can one conceive of a possible world in which an omnipotent and omnibenevolent being exists without the existence of some moral principle common to every moral agent? Consider a being that is

both omnipotent and omnibenevolent but also declines to create any additional moral agents. If this were the case, is it appropriate to state that moral principles would exist at all? In fact, there are a handful of ethicists who maintain that morality necessitates the existence of a multitude of moral agents. If they are correct, then the truth of the reverse implication of proposition (1a) is unclear, as this thought experiment has shown objective moral principles do not follow from the existence of an omnipotent and omnibenevolent being alone. Of course, the reverse implication might still be true, as it does not claim that in every possible world, the existence of an omnipotent and omnibenevolent being entails the existence of certain objective moral principles. However, the fact that such a possible world was easily created demonstrates that for proposition (1a) to be true, there must be some aspect of the actual world that, in tandem with the existence of an omnipotent and omnibenevolent being, entails the existence of objective moral principles.

Upon such an objection, a response is looming. In an earlier section, I proposed that if a set of objective moral principles is needed to disconfirm the omnibenevolence of some being, then a set of objective moral principles is needed to confirm the existence of the same being. This raises the question, *is it possible for an omnibenevolent being to exist apart from the existence of objective moral principles?* This is an intriguing question, and I expect that one may only posit the existence of a being that would be omnibenevolent if certain moral principles were to exist.

For this reason, consider the following possible world. Consider a possible world in which every moral principle is subjective. As in the first thought experiment, assume that within this possible world there exists only an omnipotent being (in addition to the

moral principles). With these given conditions, might the omnipotent being also be omnibenevolent? For the relativist, the moral status of each moral agent is determined within the context of the agent's respective moral system. Hence, although moral systems vary from one person (or one culture) to the next, any given action performed by a moral agent is either right or wrong; relativistic ethics satisfy the law of non-contradiction. For this reason, if the omnipotent being within such a possible world perfectly adheres to even a set of subjective moral principles, the proposition *there exists an omnipotent and omnibenevolent being* is meaningful. Therefore, it would seem that the most fundamental characteristics of the theistic God are consistent with the proposition *there exist no objective moral principles*.

Although the biconditional as it is given in the hypothetical argument appears to be unjustified, one may import certain theological premises in such a way as to make the hypothetical argument problematic for specific forms of theism. For example, is the Christian consistent in rejecting the biconditional? If biblical propositions are added to the hypothetical argument, one could likely support the proposition *the Judeo-Christian God exists if and only if there exists some set X of absolute and objective moral principles*. If this is the case, then the hypothetical argument is still successful in refuting the existence of the Judeo-Christian God. Similarly, one could likely offer support for the analogous proposition with respect to the Islamic God. Therefore, although the argument appears to fail to refute theism generally, it may still be successful in refuting particular forms of theism.

**Can we identify hypothetical objective moral principles if such principles do not exist?** The second objection relates to the counterfactual that must be introduced within the hypothetical argument. If the hypothetical argument is successful, then it implies that, in fact, every moral principle is not objective nor absolute. However, in order to affirm the truth of proposition (2a) one must be able to identify at least some propositions that would be objective moral principles if an omnipotent and omnibenevolent being existed. How is it that void of the existence of such an objective standard, one remains capable of identifying such propositions? In the case of the existential argument, one is implicitly claiming that some objective moral principles exist, in which case, it is no surprise that one is capable of identifying these principles. But for the hypothetical argument to make sense, one must admit that, through the faculties of reason, one is able to construct the moral principles of which an objective moral standard would consist. What form of reasoning might one utilize to construct such a set of principles?

The first and most obvious response is that one is able to identify the objective moral principles because these principles in fact exist. For obvious reasons, this response will not suit the hypothetical argument. Instead, one might respond by stating that if some set of objective moral principles were to exist, then each person would assert the truth of such a principle. Hence, we may know that if certain objective moral principles exist, then the principles to which we currently hold would be equivalent to these objective principles. This response appears to make sense, but it is undercut by two fatal objections closely related to the argument for moral relativism.

Recall the argument for moral relativism given previously. If the argument is successful, then premise (2b) is true, in which case there are no moral principles held by every society. Therefore, one is unwarranted in claiming that the moral principles one currently holds to be true would be objective moral principles in another possible world. This is because upon constructing hypothetical objective principles, the construction would yield a different result depending on the social background of the constructor. Hence, if premise (2b), also referred to as *the diversity thesis*, is true, one could give no support for the counterfactual within the hypothetical argument.

Assume the responder considers this problem and concludes that the diversity thesis is false. Remember from a previous section, the majority of rebuttals leveled against the moral argument reject the minor premise. If the argument for moral relativism is unsound, then rejecting the minor premise becomes difficult. Therefore, in rejecting the diversity thesis, the objector surrenders his greatest weapon against the moral argument, in which case the strength of the moral argument is nearly equivalent to the strength of the major premise alone. This ought to sound familiar to the reader. In the section *Rejecting the moral argument* I posited that the inconsistency argument is successful precisely because it relies upon only the major premise of the objective moral argument. In the same way, if one relinquishes the tools needed to refute the minor premise of the moral argument, the moral argument becomes quite persuasive. In this case, demonstrating that the existence of some *E1* is more probable than the success of the moral argument (independent of the problem of evil) also becomes difficult. With the

rejection of the diversity thesis, there is good reason to maintain that the hypothetical argument and the moral argument are locked in a stalemate.

Second, premise (1b) of the argument for moral relativism appears to be false. The premise fails to account for the possibility that humans could simply be mistaken when attempting to identify objective moral principles. For example, assume that some moral principle could be derived through purely rational considerations if an individual was sufficiently intelligent to identify this principle. Moreover, assume that every existing individual is not sufficiently intelligent to identify the principle immediately, but they are intelligent enough to reach this truth after much trial and error. If this were the case, then the individual could hold to a mistaken moral principle for a significant period of time. In this scenario, the moral principle is objective and yet there would exist a period of time during which no individual would correctly adhere to the principle. Therefore, premise (1b) of the argument for moral relativism is false.

Notice that premise (1b) of the argument for moral relativism is inherent within the response to my objection that one cannot know that some moral principles would be objective in some possible world unless these moral principles are in fact objective in the actual world. The responder claims that if an objective moral principle were to exist, then every individual would acknowledge this principle. However, for the reason given above, the claim that one may construct hypothetical objective moral principles by appealing to the non-objective moral principles that one in fact holds is mistaken.

**Impracticality.** Unlike the previous two weaknesses of the hypothetical argument, the impracticality of the argument is unrelated to the construction of the

argument as a whole. Rather, the impracticality is the result of maintaining that existing horrendous events are not in fact evil, but rather are evil in only the hypothetical sense. Such a view of suffering is simply incompatible with the natural human response to such events. Upon seeing heinous acts, one does not conclude that such an action would be evil in some other world. No, one concludes that within the actual world such a heinous act is actually evil; the heinous act is *intrinsically* evil. In the same way, upon seeing some *E1*, such as the suffering fawn, one does not maintain that *allowing a fawn to needlessly suffer* would be a violation of a moral principle in some other world. Rather, one concludes that *allowing a fawn to needlessly suffer* is immoral in this very world.

Ultimately, this is a problem concerning any direct inductive variation of the problem of evil. The proponent of the argument presents some horrific event to guarantee that the reader is sufficiently angered by the concept of some omnipotent and omnibenevolent being allowing such an occurrence. Yet, if his argument is successful, the reader must admit that for an omnipotent and omnibenevolent being to allow such an occurrence is only wrong relative to an arbitrary set of moral principles. If the atheist is correct, then he is hard-pressed to justify the existence of real, absolute evil. Thus, how might someone persuaded by the problem of evil simultaneously explain the very sense of righteous anger that led him to deny theism?

### **Conclusion**

Within this paper, I sought to demonstrate the manner in which the inherent ethical presuppositions needed for the success of an existential problem of evil serve to support the negation of its conclusion. It is clear that the existence of some  $\sim$ MJE entails

the existence of some OE, and when taken in tandem with an objective variation of the moral argument, this entailment negates the proposition *an omnipotent and omnibenevolent being does not exist*. The hypothetical argument – given in response to the inconsistency of existential arguments – acts as one possible, and likely the most intuitive, non-existential formulation of a direct inductive problem of evil. Finally, the introduction of an unsupported implication, the inability to explain how one might identify non-existent objective moral principles, and the objection from impracticality provide good reasons to reject the success of the hypothetical argument. When considering each of these three demonstrations, it appears that they coalesce to form one primary conclusion: direct inductive variations of the problem of evil (whether existential or non-existential) are ridden with deeply problematic ethical assumptions. I posit that until there exists a solution to such problems, direct inductive variations of the problem of evil are unsuccessful.

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