The Free Will Dilemma
On Human and Divine Freedom and the Existence of God

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Introduction

Both human and divine freedom are important topics in philosophy of religion. When it is asked how God, as an omniscient, omnipotent, and omnibenevolent being, can possibly coexist with what appears to be evil in the actual world, it is often responded that human free will is valuable to God, and that in order to actualize a world containing free creatures, God was forced to permit *moral evil*—that is, evil caused or brought about by the actions of free creatures. Divine freedom is also frequently discussed, and important questions arise regarding whether or not God, as a necessarily existing and necessarily omniscient, omnipotent, and omnibenevolent being, can be perfectly free. Is it possible for God to refrain from choosing to perform morally perfect actions? If not, can we reasonably call him perfectly free?

In his excellent new book *Can God Be Free?*, William Rowe argues that if God necessarily exists and is necessarily omniscient, omnipotent, and omnibenevolent, and we assume that the best possible world exists and that refraining from actualizing a possible world is morally inferior to actualizing a non-evil possible world, then it would be logically impossible for God to refrain from choosing to actualize the best possible world, and so he would choose to actualize the best possible world of necessity and not freely.[1] In this article, I examine Rowe's argument, borrowing from it in order to develop a formulation of divine freedom. I then raise an objection to Rowe's argument on the basis of this formulation of divine freedom, arguing that it is logically possible for God—as a necessarily existing and necessarily omniscient, omnipotent, and omnibenevolent being—to satisfy this formulation of divine freedom with respect to actualizing the best possible world although it is logically impossible for him to refrain from choosing to actualize the best possible world.

After raising this objection, however, I argue that if the objection is successful—that is, if the objection refutes Rowe's argument and demonstrates that God as described can be perfectly free—then any attempt to solve the problem of moral evil through the free will defense fails. I argue that our formulation of divine freedom can serve as a formulation of human freedom as well, and so if it is logically possible for God to be perfectly free and yet be such that it is logically impossible for him to refrain from choosing to actualize the best possible world, then it is logically possible for God to create free creatures such that those free creatures freely perform only morally right actions in every possible world in which they exist. And if this is the case, then the free will defense fails to solve the problem of moral evil. Even if we grant that free will is metaphysically valuable such that God would actualize a possible world containing free creatures, this does not account for moral evil in the actual world. It is logically possible for God to create free creatures such that those creatures freely perform only morally right actions in every possible world in which they exist, in which case there would be no moral evil in the actual world. And given that there is moral evil in the actual world, it follows that God does not exist.

I title this article 'The Free Will Dilemma' because that is exactly what it presents: quite simply, if we formulate divine freedom such that God can be perfectly free, then we can argue that the free will defense fails to account for the moral evil in the actual world, and so it follows that God does not exist. On the other hand, if we argue that the free will defense does succeed in accounting for moral evil because it is logically impossible for there to be free creatures such that those creatures freely perform only morally right actions in every possible world in which they exist, then we can argue that perfect freedom is incompatible with the other divine properties typically attributed to God, and so if perfect freedom is a necessary property of God, then it follows that God does not exist. In either case, we reach the conclusion that God does not exist.

God and Possible Worlds

Before setting out to examine Rowe's argument, we must first make explicit some assumptions made in this article. First, it should be noted that *God* refers to a necessarily existing and necessarily omniscient, omnipotent, and omnibenevolent, perfectly free being. This is reasonable because these properties are commonly attributed to God by theologians, and it could be argued that a being possessing anything less than these properties would be undeserving of the appellation *God*. If one or more of these divine properties is given up, however—for example, if one argues that perfect freedom is not a necessary property of God—then it is possible to side-step the conclusions reached in this article. We do not address any such attempts in this article, but only remark that depriving God of any of the divine properties included here would severely restrict him in one or more important ways.

It is important to make explicit what we mean by *possible world* in this article. We follow Rowe—who in turn follows Plantinga—in defining a possible world as a *maximal state of affairs*. A state *S* of affairs is a maximal state of affairs if and only if, for every other state *S′* of affairs, *S* either *includes* or *precludes S′* (Rowe 76). A state *S* of affairs includes a state *S′* of affairs just in case it is logically impossible for *S* to obtain—become actual—and *S′* not to obtain. On the other hand, a state *S* of affairs precludes a state *S′* of affairs just in case it is logically impossible for *S* to obtain and *S′* to obtain (Rowe 76). From this definition it follows that a possible world is not a world *apart* from God which he creates. Instead, each possible world includes the necessary state of affairs consisting of God's existing in the case that God necessarily exists. If God exists, he *actualizes* or makes actual contingent states of affairs in possible worlds, and so we refer to him as a *world actualizer*.

In light of this definition of a possible world, the issue arises as to how we measure the goodness of a possible world. It might be objected that if God exists in all possible worlds and God is infinitely good, then each possible world contains, from the outset, an infinite amount of good, and so it makes no sense to distinguish one possible world from another in terms of goodness. Rowe nicely handles this objection by making a distinction between *quantitative goodness* and *qualitative goodness* among possible worlds. While quantitative goodness refers merely to the *amount* of goodness in a possible world, qualitative goodness refers to other important aspects such as what type of goodness is quantitatively measured, how many creatures are enjoying it, how it is distributed among

them, and so on (Rowe 42). Rowe argues that 'if two worlds contain an infinitely perfect being (God) it is a mistake to think that one of them can be *quantitatively better* than another. It is a mistake because each world contains an infinite amount of good in the person of God' (Rowe 51). 'But,' Rowe continues, 'the fact that one world is not quantitatively better than another does not mean that it is not a better world than another. For one of the worlds may still be qualitatively better than the other' (Rowe 51). Rowe suggests that 'once we allow that God (an infinitely good being) is included in every possible world we should then rank worlds not in terms of the quantity of good they contain but in terms of the quality of good they contain' (Rowe 51).

We borrow this excellent distinction from Rowe in this article, and when we refer to the goodness of a possible world, we are referring to the qualitative goodness of that possible world, assuming that the quantitative measures of goodness for each possible world are equal if God necessarily exists.

It is assumed in this article both that a unique best possible world exists as well as that refraining from actualizing a possible world is morally inferior for a world actualizer than actualizing a non-evil possible world. Rowe operates under both of these assumptions in the argument of his that we are examining in this article.[2] Again, if either or both of these assumptions are rejected, it is possible to side-step the conclusions reached in this article.[3] It is important to note that in assuming that there exists a unique best possible world, we are in effect assuming that there exists a unique possible world possessing an *intrinsic maximum* of qualitative goodness (Rowe 42).

Divine Freedom

With these assumptions made explicit, we can begin our examination of Rowe's argument and develop our formulation of divine freedom. Rowe briefly outlines his argument as follows:

> Given his necessary perfections, if there is a best world for God to create then it appears he would have no choice other than to create it. For, as Leibniz tells us, 'to do less good than one could is to be lacking in wisdom or in goodness'. Since it is strictly impossible for God to be lacking in wisdom or goodness, his inability to do otherwise than create the best possible world is no limitation on his power. But if God could not do otherwise than create the best world, he created the world of necessity and not freely. (Rowe 2)

In other words, Rowe is arguing that, given that God exists and is omniscient, omnipotent, and omnibenevolent—and given the assumptions regarding possible worlds mentioned in the previous section—God would have no choice other than to actualize the best possible world. Since it would be contradictory to God's nature for him to refrain from actualizing the best possible world, it is logically impossible for him to do so. This does not contradict God's omnipotence, because omnipotence does not include the power to do what is logically impossible. But since God would have no choice other than to actualize the best possible world, he would actualize the best possible world of necessity and not freely.

Rowe considers several attempts to solve this problem of divine freedom. He considers the objection that divine freedom could be viewed analogously to human freedom in the sense that merely possessing the *freedom* to refrain from performing a morally good action does not thereby preclude one from being morally good with respect to that action. Only if one *exercises* this freedom does he or she fail to be morally good. Analogously with God, his merely possessing the *freedom* to refrain from actualizing the best possible world does not contradict his omnibenevolence. Only if he were to *exercise* this freedom and actually refrain from actualizing the best possible world would he fail to be omnibenevolent. But merely possessing the freedom to do so is compatible with being omnibenevolent. Rowe responds to this objection:

> This solution fails because, although a human person *can* become less good or even bad, God *cannot* become less than absolutely perfect... God, *by his very nature*, is omnipotent, omniscient, and perfectly good. He *cannot* become weak, ignorant, or ignoble... So, while we may be free to diminish our degree of goodness by using our freedom to pursue the bad, God is not free to lose his perfections by using his freedom to pursue the bad. Indeed, he is not free to pursue the bad. For if he were free to pursue the bad, then he could become less than perfect. And that is simply impossible. (Rowe 14)

In other words, Rowe argues that the objection fails because, while humans can be free to perform morally wrong actions because they have the power to make themselves less morally good, this is not the case for God. Because God is *necessarily* omnibenevolent, it is logically impossible for him to be less than morally perfect, and so he does not have the power to make himself less than morally perfect. But in order for him to have the freedom to perform morally wrong actions, he would need to have the power to make himself less than morally perfect. So he does not have the freedom to perform morally wrong actions.

This response is important, and there are several subtleties within it that will become extremely important later on. It should first be noted that Rowe is arguing that since it is logically impossible for God to be less than morally perfect—because he is necessarily omnibenevolent—it is not within his power to make himself less than morally perfect. In other words, God does not have the power to do something that is logically impossible—namely, make a necessarily morally perfect being less than morally perfect. It is, of course, not uncommon to hold that God's omnipotence does not include the power to do what is logically impossible. But this will become a point of contention in our objection to Rowe.

Secondly, in his response, Rowe does not make a clear distinction between *possessing* the freedom to perform a morally wrong action and *exercising* the freedom to perform a morally wrong action—something that was an important distinction in the original objection. I think that there is in fact some equivocation occurring in the last few sentences of his response with respect to these two distinct items, and this will become important later in our objection to Rowe.

Rowe also considers other attempts to solve the problem of divine freedom. One important response provides a clear formulation of what exactly it means to be free with

respect to an action. This response says that God is free with respect to actualizing the best possible world just in case nothing *outside* of himself determines him to actualize it. Clearly, nothing outside of God would determine him to actualize the best possible world, and so he would be free with respect to doing so on this account. We call the formulation of freedom presented here *external freedom*. But Rowe rejects the view that possessing external freedom with respect to an action is sufficient for possessing genuine freedom with respect to that action. He argues that by possessing external freedom, a being is *autonomous*, but he notes that 'we believe that a human being may not be free in performing a certain action even when it is clear that the person was not determined to perform that action by external forces' (Rowe 15). We also must rule out *internal* passions that may determine a person to act one way or another. We say that a person is *internally free* with respect to an action just in case no internal passions determine him or her to perform or refrain from performing that action.

It might then be argued that God is clearly externally free with respect to actualizing the best possible world as well as internally free with respect to doing so because his perfections preclude him from being subject to any internal passions. This can be granted. But is possessing both internal and external freedom with respect to an action sufficient for possessing genuine freedom with respect to that action? Rowe argues that it is not in the case of God. Rowe says that 'this will be so only if there are no other features God has that both necessitate his actions and are not within his control' (Rowe 16). Rowe argues that God's omnibenevolence is precisely one such feature.

In order to develop a better formulation of divine freedom, we borrow from Rowe's coverage of Clarke and Reid. Clarke locates freedom squarely at the level of choice. A person is free with respect to an action just in case he or she has the power to choose to act and the power to choose to not act. It is a secondary concern for Clarke whether or not the person has the power to *act*—that is, carry out the action in question. For a person to possess freedom with respect to an action requires only that he or she have the power to *choose* to act and the power to *choose* to not act (Rowe 23).

Rowe argues that God does not possess this freedom with respect to performing morally perfect actions. He poses this question:

> Does God ever freely choose *not* to do evil? I think we can see that Clarke's own views commit him to a negative answer to this question. For God chooses freely *not* to do something only if it is in his power to choose to do that thing—choosing freely, Clarke insists, logically requires the power to choose otherwise. But it cannot be in anyone's power to make a certain choice if it is logically impossible that the person make that choice. Therefore, since it is logically impossible for God to choose to do evil, it is not in God's power to choose to do evil. And since it is not in God's power to choose to do evil, it cannot be that God's choice not to do evil is a *free* choice. (Rowe 26)

This response is extremely important, particularly Rowe's remark that it cannot be in anyone's power to make a certain choice if it is logically impossible that the person make that choice. In fact, Rowe adds in a footnote that 'if there is no possible world in which a person makes a certain choice, it cannot be that the person, nevertheless, has it within his

power to make that choice' (Rowe 26). This is precisely what we will argue against in our objection to Rowe.

Rowe also advances the following forceful argument in support of his conclusion:

1. If *p* logically implies *q*, and *q* is false, it is in an agent's power to bring it about that *p* only if it is in the agent's power to bring it about that *q*.
2. That God chooses to do evil logically implies that God is not perfectly good.
3. It is false that God is not perfectly good.

   Therefore,

4. If it is in God's power to bring it about that he chooses to do evil then it is in his power to bring it about that he is not perfectly good.
5. It is not in God's power to bring it about that he is not perfectly good.

   Therefore,

6. It is not in God's power to choose to do evil.

   Therefore,

7. If God chooses not to do evil, God chooses not to do evil of necessity, not freely.

We return to this argument in our objection to Rowe later on.

Reid provides a much more sophisticated account of agent causation, and we adopt his account in this article. Instead of requiring for freedom with respect to an action that a person must have the power to choose to act and the power to choose to not act, Reid only requires that a person have the power to choose to act and the power *not* to choose to act. This is an extremely subtle but important distinction. On Clarke's account of freedom, a person requires the power to *choose to refrain* from acting, whereas on Reid's account a person requires only the power to *refrain from choosing* to act. In other words, on Clarke's account, a person must have the power to choose to do the opposite of the action in question, whereas on Reid's account, a person must have only the power to refrain from choosing to do the action in question (Rowe 32).

Reid formulates *choosing* more formally as the causing of a volition. So, on his account of freedom, a person is free with respect to an action *A* just in case he or she has the power to cause a volition to perform *A* and has the power to refrain from causing that volition.[4] We adopt this refined formulation of freedom as our formulation of divine freedom—and later human freedom—for this article, and state it explicitly here:

8. A being *B* is free with respect to an action *A* at a time *t* just in case *B* has the power at *t* to cause a volition *V* to perform *A* and *B* has the power at *t* to refrain from causing *V*.

Rowe argues that even this more sophisticated account of agent causation does not solve the problem of divine freedom. Rowe makes the important point that 'since nothing can prevent God from causing or not causing a decision to create or a decision not to create [the best possible world], God's exercising his power not to create the best world amounts to his causing his decision not to create the best world' (Rowe 34). In other words, God's omniscience and omnipotence make it such that his refraining from causing a volition to perform an action *A* is equivalent to his causing a volition to refrain from performing *A*. And if this is the case, then Rowe's remarks against God's freedom on Clarke's account stand against God's freedom on Reid's account as well. Rowe concludes:

> If doing less good [than] one could is to be lacking in wisdom or goodness, surely deliberately doing nothing as opposed to doing what is best is also to be lacking in wisdom or goodness. So, even on Reid's sophisticated understanding of what it is to have power to cause or not cause, the conclusion seems inevitable: if there is a best world, God is not free not to will to bring it into being. (Rowe 35)

The implications of Rowe's argument, then, are that God is not perfectly free. Rowe argues that this raises serious doubts as to God's praiseworthiness for actualizing the best possible world, since being praiseworthy for performing an action typically presupposes having had the freedom to do otherwise. We should not be grateful or thankful to God for actualizing the best possible world since he was not free to do otherwise (Rowe 2). Of course, if we hold that perfect freedom is a necessary property of God, then it follows that God does not exist.

But is Rowe's argument successful? Is there no way to escape the conclusion—given our assumptions—that God is not perfectly free? We now raise an objection to Rowe's argument.

An Objection to Rowe's Argument

At the heart of Rowe's argument is the premise mentioned earlier as appearing in one of Rowe's footnotes, that

9. If there is no possible world in which a person makes a certain choice, it cannot be that the person, nevertheless, has it within his power to make that choice.

This premise is central to Rowe's argument because, since God is necessarily omnibenevolent, there is no possible world in which he chooses to perform less than morally perfect actions. And by (9), if there is no possible world in which he chooses to perform less than morally perfect actions, it is not within his power to do so. But if this is the case, then he is not free with respect to performing morally perfect actions—he chooses to perform those actions of necessity and not freely. This premise seems reasonable *prima facie*, especially if we rephrase it to the equivalent premise that

10. If it is logically impossible for a person to make a certain choice, it cannot be that the person, nevertheless, has it within his power to make that choice.

It perhaps seems obvious that a person cannot have the power to do what is logically impossible, and that this applies to God as well. If it is logically impossible for God to make a certain choice, then it cannot be in his power to make that choice. Rephrasing it in terms of Reid's more sophisticated account of agent causation: if it is logically impossible for God to cause a certain volition, then it cannot be in his power to cause that volition. Or, conceding Rowe's point that God's refraining from causing a volition is equivalent to his causing a volition: if it is logically impossible for God to refrain from causing a certain volition, then it cannot be in God's power to refrain from causing that volition.

But perhaps we are wrong in thinking this to be so obvious. The question of central importance here is this: is it logically possible[5] for an agent to both have the power to refrain from causing a volition and yet be such that it does not exercise this power in any of the possible worlds in which it exists? Rowe's (9) commits him to the negative answer to this question: if there is no possible world in which the agent exists and refrains from causing the volition, then it is not within the agent's power to refrain from causing that volition. But we are arguing the opposite here, namely that

11. It is logically possible for an agent to both have the power to refrain from causing a volition and yet be such that it does not exercise this power in any of the possible worlds in which it exists.

If (11) is true, then God could be both necessarily omnibenevolent and free with respect to performing morally perfect actions. He could have the power to refrain from causing volitions to perform morally perfect actions and yet be such that he never exercises this power in any possible world.

Of course, we must have reason to believe that (11) is true, and I think that we can find such reason in Rowe's own remarks. At one point in his coverage of Clarke, Rowe considers a situation posed by Clarke in which God promises on a given day to not destroy the world. Clarke makes a distinction between what he calls *moral necessity* and *physical necessity*, arguing that God's promise morally necessitates his refraining from destroying the world, but of course it does not physically necessitate his doing so: God still has the physical power to destroy the world, despite the fact that he is morally necessitated to refrain from doing so (Rowe 28). Rowe responds that 'because God *cannot* choose to break his solemn promise, there is no need to deny him the physical power to destroy the world on that day. A being can have the physical power to perform an act, even if that being cannot perform that act owing to his not being able to *choose* to perform that act' (Rowe 28).

What is important here is that Rowe allows God's omnipotence to include the power to perform less than morally perfect actions despite the fact that it is logically impossible for God to perform less than morally perfect actions. In other words, it seems that Rowe would allow the premise that

12. It is logically possible for an agent to both have the power to perform an action and yet be such that it does not exercise this power in any of the possible worlds in which it exists.

This premise looks remarkably similar to (11), a premise that Rowe is committed to rejecting. Of course, Rowe would argue that in the case of God, his being *such that* he does not perform a morally wrong action in any of the possible worlds in which he exists owes to the fact that he never chooses to perform a morally wrong action in any of the possible worlds in which he exists, and his choosing to perform morally wrong actions is necessary for his performing them.

But could we not argue in a similar manner for (11)? In the case of God, his being *such that* he never exercises his power to refrain from causing volitions to perform morally perfect actions in any of the possible worlds in which he exists owes to the fact that he is necessarily omnibenevolent—omnibenevolent in every possible world in which he exists. His being less than omnibenevolent would be necessary for his *exercising* this power in a possible world, but not for his *possessing* it in all possible worlds. Just as Rowe argues that God's never exercising his power to perform a morally wrong action owes to his never choosing to do so, similarly we are arguing that God's never exercising his power to refrain from choosing to perform only morally perfect actions owes to his omnibenevolence.

It also seems that we have reason to reject (1) in Rowe's argument above. Suppose that we revise (2) in the argument to produce the following similar argument: clearly, that God *performs* a morally evil action logically implies that God is not perfectly good. And it is false that God is not perfectly good. But, contrary to what would follow from (1), it is not the case that it is in God's power to bring it about that he performs a morally evil action only if it is in his power to bring it about that he is not perfectly good—as we have seen, Rowe allows that God has the power to perform morally evil actions despite the fact that it is not in his power to bring it about that he is not perfectly good. So it seems that we should reject (1).[6]

We can replace (1) with the following premise:

13. If p logically implies q, and q is false, it is logically possible for an agent to bring it about that p only if it is logically possible for an agent to bring it about that q.

If this premise is used in place of (1) in Rowe's original argument, we do not reach the conclusion that it is not in God's power to choose to do evil, but only the conclusion that it is logically impossible for God to choose to do evil—that is, that there are no possible worlds in which God chooses to do evil. But, if we accept (11), then this is compatible with his having the power to choose to do evil.

This premise also allows God's omnipotence to include the power to perform morally evil actions. That God performs a morally evil action logically implies that God is not perfectly good. And it is false that God is not perfectly good. So, by (13), it is logically impossible for God to perform a morally evil action—that is, there is no possible world in

which God performs a morally evil action. But this is compatible with God's having the power to perform a morally evil action.

It seems, then, that if we reject (9) in favor of (11) and reject (1) in favor of (13), then we can side-step Rowe's conclusion that God is not perfectly free. God can have the power to refrain from causing volitions to perform morally perfect actions—thereby satisfying the formulation of freedom outlined in (8) with respect to his morally prefect actions—and yet be such that he does not exercise this power in any possible world—thereby being necessarily omnibenevolent. In other words, God can be both perfectly free and necessarily omnibenevolent.

Implications on the Free Will Defense

If we reject Rowe's argument and hold that God can be both perfectly free and necessarily omnibenevolent, however, there are serious implications of doing so on the free will defense as a response to the problem of moral evil. Before looking at these implications, we briefly review the problem of moral evil and the free will defense.

The problem of evil in general has several variants. There is first the *deductive* or *logical* problem of evil which asserts a logical contradiction between the existence of God and the existence of evil. Mackie outlines this problem:

> 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... However, the contradiction does not arise immediately; to show it we need some additional premises... These additional premises 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. (Mackie, 'Evil' 62)

In other words, Mackie argues that it is logically impossible for God to coexist with the evil in the actual world because, being omnipotent and omnibenevolent, God could and would eliminate all evil from the actual world. But since evil exists in the actual world, it follows that God does not exist.

There is also the *inductive* or *evidential* problem of evil which asserts only that it is probable that God does not exist based on the existence of what appears to be evil in the actual world, although it is logically possible for God to coexist with evil. Rowe presents this problem.[7]

There are also two different types of evil that are commonly distinguished in discussions of the problem of evil: *natural evil* or *physical evil* and *moral evil*. Natural evil refers to the evil that arises in the very constitution of the of the world—natural dangers and disasters, birth defects, diseases, and so on—while moral evil refers to evil brought about by the actions of humans.[8] Here we will be focusing on the problem of moral evil, or more specifically the logical problem of moral evil—the problem which asserts that the existence of God is logically incompatible with the existence of moral evil in the actual world.

This problem has, no doubt, received much response. One of the most important responses to the logical problem of moral evil is in the form of the *free will defense*, which attempts to attribute the moral evil in the actual world to the misuse of free will by humans such that this evil does not tell against God's omnibenevolence. The free will defense attempts to demonstrate on these grounds that it is logically possible for God to coexist with evil—thus solving the logical problem of moral evil.

Plantinga presents an excellent outline of the free will defense:

> A world containing creatures who are significantly free (and freely perform more good than evil actions) is more valuable, all else being equal, than a world containing no free creatures at all. Now God can create free creatures, but He can't *cause* or *determine* them to do only what is right. For if He does so, then they aren't significantly free after all; they do not do what is right *freely*. To create creatures capable of *moral good*, therefore, He must create creatures capable of moral evil; and He can't give these creatures the freedom to perform evil and at the same time prevent them from doing so... The fact that free creatures sometimes go wrong, however, counts neither against God's omnipotence nor against His goodness; for He could have forestalled the occurrence of moral evil only by removing the possibility of moral good. (Plantinga 177)

Here *significantly free* means free with respect to *morally significant actions*—that is, actions that are either morally right or wrong to perform (Plantinga 176). Plantinga argues that a possible world containing significantly free creatures that are on the whole good is more metaphysically valuable than a possible world containing no significantly free creatures. In addition, Plantinga argues that God cannot cause or determine significantly free creatures with respect to their morally significant actions so that they freely perform only morally right actions—if he did so, they would fail to be significantly free. In other words, it must be logically possible for significantly free creatures to perform morally wrong actions. If these two premises are granted, then it follows that it is logically possible for God to coexist with moral evil in the actual world—in other words, the logical problem of moral evil is solved.

There is, of course, the objection that even if it must be the case that it is logically possible for significantly free creatures to perform morally wrong actions, surely there exist possible worlds in which they all happen to freely *not* perform any morally wrong actions—that is, there exist possible worlds in which they freely perform only morally right actions. And God could actualize one of these possible worlds. So the existence of moral evil in the actual world is still logically incompatible with the existence of God.

Plantinga responds to this objection by introducing the notion of *transworld depravity*:

> A person P suffers from transworld depravity if and only if the following holds: for every world W such that P is significantly free in W and P does only what is right in W, there is an action A and a maximal world segment S' such that

1. S' includes A's being morally significant for P.

2. *S′* includes *P*'s being free with respect to *A*.
3. *S′* is included in *W* and includes neither *P*'s performing *A* nor *P*'s refraining from performing *A*.

   and

4. If *S′* were actual, *P* would go wrong with respect to *A*.

Here a *maximal world segment* is a state of affairs such that if any compatible, non-included state of affairs is added to it, a complete possible world results (Plantinga 184). Plantinga argues that it is logically possible that all significantly free creatures suffer from transworld depravity. And if this is the case, then it is logically possible that God could not have actualized a possible world containing significantly free creatures that happen to freely perform only morally right actions (Plantinga 185). And this is all Plantinga needs to solve the logical problem of moral evil.

We can grant Plantinga the premise that a possible world containing significantly free creatures that are on the whole good is more metaphysically valuable than a possible world containing no significantly free creatures. And we can also grant that God cannot cause or determine significantly free creatures with respect to their morally significant actions, lest they fail to be significantly free. But if our objection to Rowe's argument is successful—that is, if God can be both necessarily omnibenevolent and perfectly free—then this presents a serious difficulty for Plantinga's argument.

We must first note that our formulation of divine freedom in (8) can apply to significantly free creatures as well—that is, the being *B* in (8) can be a significantly free creature. If this is the case, and (11) is true, then it is logically possible for a significantly free creature to have the power to refrain from causing volitions to perform only morally right actions and yet be such that it never exercises this power in any possible world in which it exists. In other words, it is logically possible for a significantly free creature to freely perform only morally right actions in every possible world in which it exists. And God could and would have actualized a possible world containing only such creatures. And if this is the case, then the logical problem of moral evil remains unsolved—the existence of moral evil in the actual world is still logically incompatible with the existence of God.

It is important to note that we are not making the same objection that Plantinga attempted to refute with the possibility of transworld depravity. We are not arguing that there are possible worlds in which significantly free creatures *happen to* freely perform only morally right actions. We are arguing that, in light of (11), it is logically possible for a significantly free creature to freely perform only morally right actions *in every possible world in which it exists*. This is a much stronger objection, and is recognized by Mackie:[9]

> If God has made men such that in their free choices they sometimes prefer what is good and sometimes what is evil, why could he not have made men such that they always freely choose the good? If there is no logical impossibility in 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. (Mackie, 'Evil' 69)

A similar point is made by Smith.[10]

Of course, Plantinga could respond that the possibility of transworld depravity still applies to these significantly free creatures as well. It is logically possible that for every possible world in which they exist—because they freely perform only morally right actions in every possible world in which they exist—if God attempted to actualize any one of those possible worlds, those creatures would *still* go wrong with respect to at least one morally significant action. And if this is logically possible, then it is still logically possible for God to coexist with moral evil in the actual world.

In order to respond to this objection, we must point out the fundamental flaw in Plantinga's asserting that it is logically possible that all significantly free creatures that were available for God to create suffered from transworld depravity. Mackie points out this flaw:

> But how is it possible that every creaturely essence suffers from transworld depravity? This possibility would be realized only if God were faced with a limited range of creaturely essences, a limited number of possible people from which he had to make a selection, if he was to create free agents at all. What can be supposed to have presented him with that limited range?...It is not logically impossible that even a created person should always act rightly; the supposed limitation of the range of possible persons is therefore logically contingent. But how could there be a logically contingent state of affairs *prior to the creation and existence of any created beings with free will*, which an omnipotent god would have to accept and put up with? This suggestion is simply incoherent. (Mackie, *Miracle* 174)

In other words, contrary to Plantinga's premise, it is *not* logically possible that all significantly free creatures that were available for God to create suffered from transworld depravity because this possibility would only be realized if God were faced with a limited selection of significantly free creatures to create—which is not the case. Plantinga's premise should therefore be rejected.

With the possibility of transworld depravity out of the way, then, the rest of our argument still holds: God clearly could and would actualize a possible world containing significantly free creatures that freely perform only morally right actions in every possible world in which they exist. And if this is the case, then the logical problem of moral evil remains unsolved. The existence of moral evil in the actual world is logically incompatible with the existence of God. And given the existence of moral evil in the actual world, it follows that God does not exist.

Conclusion

We have examined, then, Rowe's argument that God is not perfectly free—and assuming that perfect freedom is a necessary property of God, God does not exist. We have objected to this argument on the grounds that God can satisfy the formulation of freedom outlined in (8) with respect to his morally perfect actions and still be necessarily omnibenevolent. We have also examined the implications of our objection on the free will defense as a response to the logical problem of moral evil. We have seen that, if God can be both perfectly free and necessarily omnibenevolent, then God can create free creatures that freely perform only morally right actions in every possible world in which they exist. And if this is the case, then the existence of moral evil in the actual world demonstrates that God does not exist.

It seems, then, that we are truly faced with a free will dilemma: on the one hand, if God can be perfectly free, then the existence of moral evil in the actual world demonstrates that he does not exist. On the other hand, if perfect freedom is incompatible with the other divine properties, then since perfect freedom is a necessary property of God, God does not exist. It seems we cannot avoid the same conclusion in either case: God does not exist.[11]

Notes

1. Rowe concludes from this that either God is not perfectly free, or that we must revise our notion of divine freedom in order to account for the conclusions reached in his argument. In this article, I assume that perfect freedom is a necessary property of God, and so in the case that perfect freedom is incompatible with the other divine properties, God does not exist.
2. Rowe operates under the first assumption only in the argument of his that we are examining in this article. In his book, he considers three positions: Leibniz's position that there is a unique best possible world, Aquinas's position that there is an infinite set of increasingly better worlds, and the position that there is a set of *prime worlds*—possible worlds such that there are no other possible worlds better than those worlds. Rowe concludes that 'it is perhaps a mistake to think that Aquinas has established that there is no best possible world. On the other hand, I certainly do not think we can prove that there is a best world among possible worlds. Nor do I think that we can prove that there is a world so good that no world is better than it, although some other worlds may be as good as it' (Rowe 52). In light of this, Rowe applies his argument to each case, only the first of which we are examining in this article.
3. Rejecting the first assumption is not recommended, however. Rowe presents a very powerful argument against God's existence in the case of an infinite set of increasingly better worlds. Briefly, if there were an infinite set of increasingly better worlds, then no matter what world a world actualizer were to actualize, say W_i, it would *always* be logically possible for there to be a world actualizer morally superior to him—namely, a world actualizer that rejected as acceptable for actualization all possible worlds W_j, where j is less than or equal to i. So there would exist no morally unsurpassable world actualizer, or no God (Rowe 91). In the case of a set of prime worlds, we might be able to rescue God's perfect

freedom, but only because it does not matter which one of the prime worlds he actualizes (Rowe 140).

4. It is important to note that an agent's refraining from causing a volition is not its causing the non-occurrence of that volition. If an agent refrains from causing a volition, it is not causing anything with respect to that volition (Rowe 32). It should also be noted that when an agent causes a volition, this is not a result of another of one of the agent's volitions, lest we enter an infinite regress of volitions. The causing of a volition is something that the agent does internally, an exercising of the agent's power, but it is not the result another one of the agent's volitions (Rowe 71).
5. In the transworld sense, not in the possible world sense. In other words, the question is not referring to one possible world, but to all possible worlds in which an agent exists.
6. We could instead, of course, deny that God's omnipotence includes the power to perform morally evil actions. But this seems to be a severe restriction on God's omnipotence, and perhaps tells against the compossibility of omnipotence and omnibenevolence in general.
7. See Rowe, William L. 'The Inductive Argument from Evil Against the Existence of God.' *Philosophy of Religion: An Anthology*, 4th ed. Ed. Louis P. Pojman. Stamford: Wadsworth, 2003. 186-93.
8. For an excellent coverage of both the problems of natural and moral evil, see McCloskey, H. J. 'God and Evil.' *Critiques of God.* Ed. Peter A. Angeles. Amherst: Prometheus, 1997. 203-224.
9. Mackie is commonly interpreted as arguing only that there exist possible worlds in which free creatures happen to perform only morally right actions. This is, in fact, how Plantinga interprets him. But I think that Mackie in fact raises the stronger objection that I am presenting here.
10. See Smith, Quentin. 'A Sound Logical Argument from Evil.' *The Impossibility of God.* Eds. Michael Martin and Ricki Monnier. Amherst: Prometheus, 2003. 106-15. Smith argues that a being can be internally and externally free but *logically determined* with respect to morally right actions. Of course, we have followed Rowe in this article in denying that possessing internal and external freedom with respect to an action is sufficient for possessing genuine freedom with respect to that action.
11. I would like to thank Matt McCormick for his comments on this paper as well as the editors and reviewers at *The Dualist* for their time and input.

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