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PHLA10

14 March 2021

The Duality of God and Evil

The Argument from Evil is an *ad reductio absurdum* which states:

1. If God were to exist, that being would be all-powerful(omnipotent), all-knowing(omniscient) and all good(omnibenevolent)(all-PKG).
2. If an all-PKG being existed, there would be no evil.
3. There is evil.

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Thus, there is no God(Sober 107).

This deductively valid argument, if sound, does seem to provide a good start to disproving the all-PKG God defined above. This paper will introduce the premises of the argument, explore possible counter arguments, and analyze stronger alternative arguments.

The argument states that if God exists, by the definition provided by premise 1, he would be all-powerful, all-knowing, and all-good (Sober 107). If such being did exist, he would know of all evil as he is omniscient; want to prevent all evil as he is omnibenevolent; and can prevent all evil as he is omnipotent. But since evil does exist in our world, by assumption of the argument, there is a clear absurdity and thus the *ad reductio absurdum* concludes that God does not exist.

The argument seems to rest on the existence of evil in premise 3, which brings up the question, how is evil defined? Evil is defined as suffering caused by humans or natural events(Sober 108). This definition seems to be subjectively based on the point of view of human ethics and morals. A good perceived by one being could be an evil to another. It is possible that objective evil does not truly exist with respect to the universe as a whole.

To continue, premise 1 is a set up for premise 2. Premise 1 defines God as all-PKG(Sober 107). Rejecting premise 1 would be another debate in itself because rejecting “God is all-PKG” would imply God is of another nature. In other words, the Argument from Evil, if sound, only disproves the existence of an all-PKG God; a God of another nature could exist and explain the existence of evil.

Assuming premise 1 and 3 are true, the argument lies in the the duality of God and evil in premise 2. Can an all-PKG god exist with evil? Some argue that God allows some evil because not all evil causes suffering. Sober defines, “soul-building evils are ones that make us better people” (Sober 109). An example would be a toddler touching a hot light bulb after their mom told them not to. If the toddler touched the hot light bulb, it would cause pain, but it would also teach the toddler a valuable lesson, which is to listen to their parents. A critique of this argument is, why could God not create humans with “strong souls” so humans do not need to endure the soul-building suffering in the first place. If God created humans with strong souls, then humans would not need go through suffering, like in the toddler example. To re-phase, is suffering necessary for a strong soul? Since there exists a possible world where that toddler did not touch the light bulb and had the same exact life, suffering does not seem necessary. Still, soul-building evil does not account for all existing evil. There are natural events and people who do horrible things to other humans that are not soul-building.

Theists argue that God created humans with free will (Sober 111). Sober explains, “A consequence of this freedom is that there is more evil than would be strictly necessary for soul-building” (Sober, 111). If evil is a side product of free will, and there is someone who does not sin, does that mean they are not free? This argument can be countered with, why could God not create humans with free will without the need to commit evil or sin? Evil seems to be sufficient for free will, but not necessary.

With the last two points about soul-building evil and free will, Sober presented another argument that states:

1. If God were to exists, that being would be all-powerful, all-knowing and all good(all-PKG).
2. If an all-PKG being existed, there be no more evil than the minimum required for soul-building and as a consequence of human freedom.
3. The quantity of evil found in human history exceeds the minimum required for soul-building and as a consequence of human freedom.

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Thus, there is no God. (Sober 112)

Indeed, there seems to be more evil than just soul building and free will, like the suffering caused by Covid-19 or an earthquake. These evils are not soul-building because they do not build character and are not directly caused by human freedom. Sober defines this as natural evil, evil caused by natural events (Sober 108). A possible argument of natural evil is that if God exists, and is all-PKG, then only a being on the same level of God can comprehend what God’s plan is. That is, humans, who are not all-PKG cannot understand the plans of a being that is all-PKG. This is not deductively valid as there’s no guarantee that humans with limited intelligence cannot comprehend God’s plan.

It is hard to present deductively sound arguments against the existence of God because there is always a counter-argument that states, “how can we know what God has planned”? Assuming that God does exist and did plan for a particular amount of evil, why assume humans cannot understand? Just because humans have not found a way to understand God’s plans, does not mean humans never will. This leads to the testability of an argument. These last resort arguments theists present seem to involve around having faith in God or in religious scriptures such as the Bible. Having faith in something is perfectly fine, as people should be confident in their beliefs. However, belief alone is not sufficient for knowledge. Humans should not blindly follow something purely based on faith and should seek evidential justification for true knowledge. Since the argument “whether a human can or cannot know what God has in store” is not testable, it is not a strong counter-argument.

To conclude, it seems that the Argument from Evil is not a sound argument. It assumes the nature of God, what God would do given that nature, and how God perceives evil, which can all be debated to be false and is hard to test. However, it does seem to be heading to the right direction. Instead of trying to deductively prove God does not exist, given the Surprise Principal that states the hypothesis that is least surprising is the best explanation, there is a new proposition in the form of:

Given the assumption that evil exists

H0) An all-PKG God exists

H1) An all-PKG God does not exist

Since the best hypothesis is the hypothesis that is least surprising. Given that evil exists, it would be less surprise if an all-PKG God does not exist. The Surprise Principal does not provide a definite answer and does not prove God nonexistent but it picks the more likely hypothesis. Hopefully in the future, humans can obtain more information on the ethics of God and evil to create and test a stronger argument with a definite conclusion.

Works Cited

“The Argument from Evil.” *CORE QUESTIONS IN PHILOSOPHY*, by ELLIOTT SOBER, 7th ed., ROUTLEDGE, 2021, pp. 107–112.