

= Alvin Plantinga 's free will defense =

Alvin Plantinga 's version of the free will defense is an attempt to refute the logical problem of evil : the argument that the existence of an omnipotent , omniscient , omnibenevolent God in an evil world is a logical contradiction .

The core of the argument is the definition of " omnipotence " . Plantinga argues that God , in spite of being omnipotent , has some limitations on his power .

Plantinga 's argument is that " It is possible that God , even being omnipotent , could not create a world with free creatures who never choose evil . Furthermore , it is possible that God , even being omnibenevolent , would desire to create a world , which contains evil if moral goodness requires free moral creatures . " While Plantinga 's free will defense has received fairly widespread acceptance among theologians , many still contend that it fails to adequately resolve the problem of evil , or that it only addresses moral evil , not natural evil , or that it requires an incompatibilist libertarian view of free will in order to be effective .

= = Logical problem of evil = =

The logical problem of evil emerges from four core propositions :

An all @-@ powerful (omnipotent) God could prevent evil from existing in the world .

An all @-@ knowing (omniscient) God would know that there was evil in the world .

An all @-@ good (omnibenevolent) God would wish to prevent evil from existing in the world .

There is evil in the world .

As J. L. Mackie has highlighted , there would appear to be a contradiction between these propositions such that they cannot all be true . Given that the fourth proposition would appear to be undeniable , it can be inferred from the above that one of the other three must be false , and thus there cannot be an all @-@ good , all @-@ knowing and all @-@ powerful God . To put it another way , if God does exist , He must be either " impotent , ignorant or wicked " .

The problem , and various solutions to it , have been debated by philosophers since at least the time of Epicurus in the fourth century BC . One of the most historically significant replies to the problem is the free will theodicy of Augustine of Hippo , which has been extensively criticized .

= = Plantinga 's argument = =

As opposed to a theodicy (a justification for God 's actions) , Plantinga puts forth a defense , offering a new proposition that is intended to demonstrate that it is logically possible for an omnibenevolent , omnipotent and omniscient God to create a world that contains moral evil . Significantly , Plantinga does not need to assert that his new proposition is true , merely that it is logically valid . In this way Plantinga 's approach differs from that of a traditional theodicy , which would strive to show not just that the new propositions are sound , but that they are also either true , prima facie plausible , or that there are good grounds for making them . Thus the burden of proof on Plantinga is lessened , and yet his approach may still serve as a defense against the claim by Mackie that the simultaneous existence of evil and an omnipotent and omnibenevolent God is " positively irrational " .

As Plantinga summarised his 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 . As it turned out , sadly enough , some of the free creatures God created went wrong in the exercise of their freedom ; this is the source of moral evil . 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 's argument is that even though God is omnipotent , it is possible that it was not in his power to create a world containing moral good but no moral evil ; therefore , there is no logical inconsistency involved when God , although wholly good , creates a world of free creatures who chose to do evil . The argument relies on the following propositions :

There are possible worlds that even an omnipotent being can not actualize .

A world with morally free creatures producing only moral good is such a world .

Plantinga refers to the first statement as " Leibniz 's lapse " as the opposite was assumed by Leibniz . The second proposition is more contentious . Plantinga rejects the compatibilist notion of freedom whereby God could directly cause agents to only do good without sacrificing their freedom . Although it would contradict a creature 's freedom if God were to cause , or in Plantinga 's terms strongly actualize , a world where creatures only do good , an omniscient God would still know the circumstances under which creatures would go wrong . Thus , God could avoid creating such circumstances , thereby weakly actualizing a world with only moral good . Plantinga 's crucial argument is that this possibility may not be available to God because all possible morally free creatures suffer from " transworld depravity " .

= = = Transworld depravity = = =

Plantinga 's idea of weakly actualizing a world can be viewed as having God actualizing a subset of the world , letting the free choices of creatures complete the world . Therefore , it is certainly possible that a person completes the world by only making morally good choices ; that is , there exist possible worlds where a person freely chooses to do no moral evil . However , it may be the case that for each such world , there is some morally significant choice that this person would do differently if these circumstances were to occur in the actual world . In other words , each such possible world contains a world segment , meaning everything about that world up to the point where the person must make that critical choice , such that if that segment was part of the actual world , the person would instead go wrong in completing that world . Formally , transworld depravity is defined as follows :

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

S ' includes A 's being morally significant for P

S ' includes P 's being free with respect to A

S ' is included in W and includes neither P 's performing A nor P 's refraining from performing A

If S ' were actual , P would go wrong with respect to A.

Less formally : Consider all possible (not actual) worlds in which you always choose the right . In all those , there will be a subpart of the world that says you were free to choose a certain right or wrong action , but does not say whether you chose it . If that subpart were actual (in the real world) , then you 'd chose the wrong .

Plantinga says that " What is important about the idea of transworld depravity is that if a person suffers from it , then it wasn 't within God 's power to actualize any world in which that person is significantly free but does no wrong ? that is , a world in which he produces moral good but no moral evil " and that it is logically possible that every person suffers from transworld depravity .

= = Reception = =

According to Chad Meister , professor of philosophy at Bethel College , most philosophers accept Plantinga 's free will defense and thus see the logical problem of evil as having been sufficiently rebutted . Robert Adams says that " it is fair to say that Plantinga has solved this problem . That is , he has argued convincingly for the consistency of God and evil . " William Alston has said that " Plantinga [...] has established the possibility that God could not actualize a world containing free

creatures that always do the right thing . " William L. Rowe has written " granted incompatibilism , there is a fairly compelling argument for the view that the existence of evil is logically consistent with the existence of the theistic God " , referring to Plantinga 's argument .

In Arguing about Gods , Graham Oppy offers a dissent , acknowledging that " [m] any philosophers seem to suppose that [Plantinga 's free will defense] utterly demolishes the kinds of ' logical ' arguments from evil developed by Mackie " but continuing " I am not sure this is a correct assessment of the current state of play " . Concurring with Oppy , A.M. Weisberger writes ? contrary to popular theistic opinion , the logical form of the argument is still alive and beating . ? Among contemporary philosophers , most discussion on the problem of evil presently revolves around the evidential problem of evil , namely that the existence of God is unlikely , rather than illogical .

= = Criticisms = =

Derk Pereboom while acknowledging that " many of those involved in this debate agree that Plantinga has provided a successful response to the abstract logical problem of evil " , delineates a number objections , including the following :

Michael Tooley insists that the more pressing problem is the logical compatibility of the existence of God with the actual evils in the world , a problem referred to as " the logical problem of horrendous evil " by Marilyn McCord Adams .

David Lewis argues that even if each person would go wrong for some world segments , it would be possible for God to cause the person to do the right thing in just these cases , preserving selectively some significant moral freedom .

= = = Incompatibilist view of free will = = =

Critics of Plantinga 's argument , such as philosophers J. L. Mackie and Antony Flew , have responded that it presupposes a libertarian , incompatibilist view of free will (free will and determinism are metaphysically incompatible) , while their view is a compatibilist view of free will (free will and determinism , whether physical or divine , are metaphysically compatible) . The view of compatibilists such as Mackie and Flew is that God could have created a world containing moral good but no moral evil . In such a world people could have chosen to only perform good deeds , even though all their choices were predestined . Plantinga dismisses compatibilism , according to which a person is free if , and only if she could have done otherwise if she wanted to do otherwise by saying that it is " altogether paradoxical " . He thinks that " this objection ... seems utterly implausible . One might as well claim that being in jail doesn 't really limit one 's freedom on the grounds that if one were not in jail , he 'd be free to come and go as he pleased " . Regarding Flew 's criticism Plantinga concludes that " his objection is in an important sense merely verbal and thus altogether fails to damage the free will defense . "

= = = The problem of natural evil = = =

Another issue with Plantinga 's defense is that it does not address the problem of natural evil , since natural evil is not brought about by the free choices of creatures . Plantinga 's reply is a suggestion that it is at least logically possible that perhaps free , nonhuman persons are responsible for natural evils (e.g. rebellious spirits or fallen angels) . This suggestion assigns the responsibility for natural evils to other moral actors .

= = = " Omnipotent God " of Alvin Plantinga has limited power = = =

A recent objection to the defense is due to Geirsson and Losonsky , who question the interpretation of the fourth assertion in the definition of transworld depravity (" If S ´ were actual , P would go wrong with respect to A ") . This is a contingent fact : it is true in the actual world , but false in the world W. So one may ask if this contingent fact was up to God or not . If it was caused to be true by

God , one may wonder why God actualized a world in which this person is transworld depraved when God could have actualized a world where this person , at least with respect to this action , would not suffer from such conditional depravity . If on the other hand , the fact is not up to God , we must accept that an omnipotent God has no power over contingent facts about the world ; after all , there do exist possible worlds where the conditional statement in question is not true . Geirsson and Losonsky note that Mackie 's reasons for rejecting Plantinga 's defense were quite similar :

But how could there be logically contingent states 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 .

Despite these objections , many philosophers consider Plantinga 's defense , with its implicit libertarianism , to be a strong reply to the logical problem of evil . However , other philosophers argue that Plantinga 's defense is unsuccessful .