

GOD'S MORAL JUSTIFICATION IN CREATING THE ACTUAL WORLD

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Introduction

The problem of evil has been an issue in Christianity for as long as anyone, seemingly, can remember. I will spare the well-known details of its origination other than to say it is one of the chief objections against the existence of an omnibenevolent God. Underlying the objection and often expressed is the question: “why?” Why did God allow the world to be this way?

I saw a “demotivator” poster which had a picture of a boxer receiving a vicious blow to the face which presumably left him staggered and beaten. Underneath was the (slightly) humorous caption, “not all pain is gain.” Most, if not all of us, would grasp the meaning of this quite experientially. This is precisely why the problem of evil can be a problem. The world *does* seem to have pointless suffering; it *does* seem to have senseless violence. But does it really?

William Lane Craig points out that even if evil is gratuitous, God may be justified in allowing it. Further, Craig also believes “the evil, though objective, wouldn’t be gratuitous.”¹ In either case, then, the evil allowed by God does not count against his moral worth or character. This paper will suggest God is morally justified in creating this actual world over other worlds which he could have created.

The paper will first examine the concept of a possible world. It then will assess criteria for moral preferability among different possible worlds. A brief look at Gottfried Leibniz’ conception of the best possible world will follow, along with God’s moral obligation to create such a world, if it exists. Finally, a positive argument will be presented to show God is morally justified in creating this actual world.

¹ William Lane Craig, “Question #196,” <<http://www.reasonablefaith.org/site/News2?page=NewsArticle&id=8605>>, accessed April 14, 2011.

Possible Worlds

First, if one is to understand God's moral justification in creating the actual world then he must understand the concept of a possible world. A possible world is "a maximal description of reality, or a way reality might be."² Possible worlds are governed, in general, by broad logical possibility.³ For instance, there is a possible world in which I choose not to write this paper. There is a possible world in which one's parents never meet and so he is never born. There is a possible world in which every Thursday every person on planet Earth shaves his right arm, and so on. It is also notable that what is physically impossible may itself be logically possible, as these are not identical.⁴

It follows then the actual world in which we live was itself one of these nearly-infinite possible worlds.⁵ From these, God could choose to instantiate any he so desired. In relation to creating conscious creatures as his image-bearers (Gen. 1:26), it would have been important to endow such creatures with the ability to make moral choices. This follows from God's being a moral agent himself (as the objective grounds of morality).

It is this ability to make free and morally-responsible decisions/actions that tend to delimit possible worlds into *feasible* worlds. Kenneth Keathley puts it this way: "He [God]

² William Lane Craig, *Reasonable Faith* 3rd ed. (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2008), 183. It is also important to note that whatever appears in a possible world can be either contingent or necessary (and in either case it is *necessarily* possible), and what appears in *no* possible world is of necessity impossible (e.g., married bachelors, square triangles, $2+2=97$, etc.).

³ Bob Hale, "Absolute Necessities," in *Philosophical Perspectives, Metaphysics*. Vol. 30, 10, (1996:), 93-117. This means they are internally consistent. In strict logical possibility something must be both internally consistent and compatible with other truth. So, while "the U.S. president is a prime number" is *broadly* logically possible, there nonetheless is no possible world where the U.S. president is a prime number (because of the truth that U.S. presidents are persons), and hence it is not *strictly* logically possible.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ I say "nearly-infinite" because any world which contains logical impossibilities is by definition not a possible world; if there are logically-impossible worlds then these reduce the number of the set of all possible worlds to something less than infinite (an infinite series has no end).

knows what reality would be like if He had created a world without you or me in it. . . God possesses a perfect knowledge of all feasible worlds—all possibilities which *would* accomplish what He wanted to have happen.”⁶ (emphasis in original)

Further explaining the concept of feasible worlds in relation to Christian particularism, Craig notes, “so long as people are free, there is no guarantee that everybody in such a world would be freely saved.”⁷ So it seems, given free actions, certain worlds are logically possible but not feasible (or able to be put in actualization by God [who is bound by his nature, which grounds logic and truth]).

Craig gets even more specific in a different article. “He [an objector] must show that the circumstances under which various individuals would freely receive Christ are compossible, so that all persons in some possible world would freely receive Christ and be saved.”⁸ The worlds inaccessible to God in a feasible sense are just those worlds which contain non-compossible truths; that is, worlds which contain truths about moral decisions/actions which cannot both be true. If Gary chooses to act morally right at time $t-1$ in circumstances C_1 , but C_1 entails Lisa does what is morally right at $t-1$ only in the case that Gary does what is wrong there, then a world in which both Gary and Lisa do right simultaneously given C_1 is not feasible. C_1 is a *broadly* logically possible world, but it is infeasible for God to create given morally-free and responsible actions.

⁶ Kenneth Keathley, *Salvation and Sovereignty: A Molinist Approach* (Nashville, TN: B&H Academic, 2010), 17-18. While Molinism is a distinctive approach in this paper, it is not necessary to the argument of the paper as a whole. So long as any consistent account of the argument proffered is given, it matters not the methodology. Developing an argument for Molinism or any other interpretive framework is not the goal of this paper.

⁷ William Lane Craig, “How Can Christ Be the Only Way to God?” <<http://www.reasonablefaith.org/site/News2?page=NewsArticle&id=5347>>, accessed April 14, 2011.

⁸ William Lane Craig, “No Other Name: A Middle Knowledge Perspective on the Exclusivity of Salvation Through Christ,” in *Faith and Philosophy*, Vol. 6 (1989:), 172-188.

Some allege God is responsible for circumstances in which people make moral choices (both with good and bad applications). The problem with such a view, according to Baggett and Walls, is that “it presumably involves people’s genuinely free choices and their consequences. Just because God foreknows the content of our decisions doesn’t mean he’s responsible for determining that content, nor does it preclude the ability to do otherwise.”⁹

Both the ideas and implications of possible and feasible worlds will come into play throughout this paper. It is easy to think of alternative possible worlds; simply imagine the events of the world until now remaining uniform with one miniscule difference. However, considerations as to feasible worlds are much more difficult epistemologically.

Moral Preferability Among Worlds

Imagine no constraints on one’s knowledge as to feasible worlds. At a minimum, consider the possibility that there are multiplied possible worlds which are also feasible, so that many complete descriptions of reality were available to God for creation. What standard should be used to judge the moral preferability of one world to another? That is, what makes it true that world W_1 is better than W_2 in a moral sense? Should the standard be what is ultimately best for all moral agents? An analysis of certain proffered axioms should take place concerning moral preferability among worlds.

An Analysis of Proffered Axioms

1. Any world W_1 is morally preferable to any other world W_2 provided W_1 contains more human flourishing or well-being than W_2 .

This is not a typical theistic axiom when it comes to discussions of moral preferability. Indeed, this is the domain of atheistic naturalists who also believe in objective morality, such as

⁹ David Baggett and Jerry L. Walls, *Good God: The Theistic Foundations of Morality* (New York: Oxford, 2011), 244 n27.

Sam Harris.¹⁰ Because of this it would be unfair for an atheist or skeptic of God to press this axiom as incumbent upon the theist in any defense against the problem of evil. That said this axiom does not resist critical analysis.

First, there are *internal* problems with the “well-being” axiom. An unfortunate result can be illustrated by the famous “utility monster” (UM) thought experiment.¹¹ While proponents of the well-being axiom (and certainly Harris) would object to this axiom’s characterization as old-line utilitarianism, it nonetheless remains that well-being entails happiness on some level. Even if it were not the same problem attending utilitarianism would do so to the well-being axiom as well.

All one must do to engender this result is to alter the thought experiment a little bit. Instead of the UM’s consuming greater and greater amounts of happiness by killing, torturing, destroying, and maiming, suppose the UM consumes greater and greater amounts of well-being. By doing these aforementioned actions, the highest level of overall well-being is achieved (so long as the UM is a human or group of humans). Such a scenario is logically possible (even if not likely). Nozick asks, “Is it all right...?”¹² Our moral intuition, which is itself a good source of moral epistemology, recoils at the thought.¹³ Of course it is *never* “all right” to harm and murder and maim, even if it increases the overall state of human well-being!

¹⁰ William Lane Craig and Sam Harris Debate, “Is Good from God?” at the University of Notre Dame, April 7, 2011. Also, see Harris’ book, *The Moral Landscape: How Science Can Determine Human Values* (New York: Free Press, 2010), 6.

¹¹ Robert Nozick, *Anarchy, State, and Utopia* (n.p.: Basic Books, 1974), 41. “Utilitarian theory is embarrassed by the possibility of utility monsters who get enormously greater gains in utility from any sacrifice of others than these others lose. . .Maximizing the total happiness requires continuing to add persons so long as their net utility is positive and is sufficient to counterbalance the loss in utility their presence in the world causes others.”

¹² *Ibid.*, 41-42.

¹³ One may question if intuition is a good source of knowledge. For that, I shall provide a basic argument for intuition as *a priori* knowledge:

If it is never all right to harm others in this way to increase one's own well-being, even in the face of increasing the overall well-being of humans, speaks to this axiom's falsehood. Even if one were to amend the axiom's use of "overall" to mean "every human being" there remains a problem. For would not our moral intuitions be repulsed by a logically-possible world in which *everyone's* well-being and flourishing were increased by these acts?¹⁴ Another attendant problem on this view is that not only are such actions in these worlds preferable, they are also *obligatory*.¹⁵

Harris himself acknowledges a potential problem with this individualistic view when he writes, "It is clear that we face both practical and conceptual difficulties when seeking to maximize human well-being. . . [there are principles] that at their extremes. . . [are] hostile to the other."¹⁶ He goes on to say, "in this case, rapists, liars, and thieves would experience the same depth of happiness as the saints."¹⁷ In these cases, then, a world is morally preferable to another *even in the event* that the latter world has more well-being than the former.

Second, the well-being axiom has *external* problems. A Christian theist would not claim that God has, as the ultimate goal of morality, a paradigmatic well-being axiom. Paul Copan

1. If we can hold justified true beliefs independently of any process or perception, then we have intuitive knowledge.

2. We can hold justified true beliefs independently of any process or perception.

3. The laws of logic are justified upon their examination (application of empiricism).

4. Inference is an application of the laws of logic.

5. Inference must be used upon application of empiricism.

6. If (3-5), then the laws of logic must be justifiably known.

7. If (3-6), then the justification is known logically prior to empiricism.

8. If (3-7), then (2) is true.

9. Therefore, we have intuitive knowledge ([3-7, 8], MP from [1-2]).

¹⁴ To say this is not logically possible is question-begging.

¹⁵ Paul Copan, *When God Goes to Starbucks* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2008), 15.

¹⁶ Harris, *The Moral Landscape*, 187.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 189-190.

alludes to this, claiming, “a moral universe and human dignity are best explained in the context of a morally excellent, worship-worthy Being as their metaphysical foundation.”¹⁸ That is, the goal of life is not derived from human well-being but from conforming to a standard of morality (since the two are not identical). In that case, any world which contains a greater adherence to the objective moral standard of values (rooted in God’s nature) and commands (which flow in accordance with those values and not contrary to them) is actually preferable to a world of well-being without such adherence.

2. Any world W_1 is morally preferable to any other world W_2 provided W_1 contains more morally-good acts than W_2 .

This particular axiom enjoys a sort of intuitive support found throughout the world. In fact, it is a common refrain one hears when discussing matters of spirituality and ethics in regards to salvation. “If my good deeds outweigh my bad deeds, then I will get into Heaven.” In much the same way, if more good deeds than bad deeds are preferable for salvation, then surely they are for choosing among worlds as well.

The potential problem is that this seems to open the door for any number of odd-world scenarios. First, consider this: suppose in W_2 there is, on average, one good act done for every man, woman, and child on earth every day. If this were our actual world this would equate to over six billion good acts per day (at this present time). However, in this case it would seem that W_1 would be preferable if only there were more people (in total) existing throughout the world’s history (provided it was identical in every other respect [which is logically possible]). Preferring a world almost purely on the basis of its being more populated is, in moral terms, very nearly arbitrary.

¹⁸ Paul Copan, “God, Naturalism, and the Foundations of Morality,” in *The Future of Atheism* ed. Robert Stewart (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2008), 142.

Second, this axiom does not account for the moral evil and wrong done between two or more worlds. Suppose W_1 has the most morally-good actions of any possible world (for the sake of argument). Further suppose this entails also the most morally-evil or wrong actions done among any worlds that are possible. In that case should one be so quick to label W_1 as a morally preferable world to the world with the second-most morally-good actions?

Third, this axiom fails to account for salvation. It is true that Heaven and final salvation are part of this actual world, so that the number of those saved counts toward the overall moral good in each case. However, since God is just, the number of those sent to Hell is good in each case as well. In this case, such a world may be morally preferable to another world even in the case that *all* of its members ended up in Hell.¹⁹ God would not and does not view that world as morally preferable to one in which there are indeed saved people (1 Tim. 2:4; Ezekiel 33:11). In that case, then, such an axiom must be incomplete at best and false at worst.

3. Any world W_1 is morally preferable to any other world W_2 provided W_1 contains more morally-good acts and saved individuals than W_2 .

This axiom appears quite within the range of biblically-minded people's comfort. This combines the second axiom above with an answer to one of the objections against that axiom. Since God prefers the salvation of individuals to their damnation, and a good God prefers good acts to bad ones, their conjunction provides a way of achieving God's goals in accordance with moral preferability. But is this true?

It seems there may be a problem with this axiom as well. In dealing with a similar axiom, Craig points out this type of world may preclude worlds we would consider to be better. "As a

¹⁹ Alexander Pruss holds a great but brief discussion on why even the people in Hell owe thanks to God; it is because of the moral good of existence itself! Alexander Pruss, "No One Would be Better Off Not Existing," <<http://alexanderpruss.blogspot.com/2011/04/no-one-would-be-better-off-not-existing.html>>, first accessed April 4, 2011.

loving God, He wants to minimize the number of the lost: He wants hell to be as empty as possible.”²⁰ An objector may be confused on this point. He may be tempted to think, “is this world not such a world? After all, people are either saved or lost. Therefore, maximizing the saved automatically reduces the lost.” This would be confused. The axiom merely states that any world containing more saved people and good actions is preferable to any world which contains less of both; it specifies nothing of the number of those who are in Hell.

As a thought experiment, consider W_1 to be a world in which, throughout history, four billion people come to a saving relationship with God. Consider W_2 to be a world in which 3,999,999,999 come to know God. Further suppose both W_2 and W_1 to contain the same number of morally good acts.²¹ Now suppose W_1 contains three billion souls in Hell, while W_2 has two billion. Are we really willing to say W_1 is *better* than W_2 after all? While this axiom is likely on the right track, it seems it too must be rejected as incomplete.

Axiom in Light of God’s Grounding of Objective Morality

A discussion of insufficient axioms has taken place; however, now an axiom must be presented that will be acceptable with respect to moral preferability among worlds. Moral preferability of any non-relativistic stripe will be objective and independently binding; that is, one is trying to establish what *really* is better given a set of circumstances. The question of whether or not God is constrained to create such a world will be discussed later. What follows is suggested to be the Axiom of Moral Preferability (AMP).

4. Any world W_1 is morally preferable to any other world W_2 provided W_1 contains an optimum number and balance of saved individuals in comparison to W_2 .

²⁰ Craig, “No Other Name.”

²¹ This would be possible if the number of saved performed more good acts than they would in the other world. In any case, this is not logically impossible.

This axiom will almost certainly entail many morally-good actions in light of free will. The AMP differs from (3) in that it does not simply promote the number of saved individuals in a given world but the optimum balance as well.²² Craig alludes to this when he says, “It is possible that in order to create the actual number of persons who will be saved, God had to create the actual number of persons who will be lost. It is possible . . . any other possible world which was feasible for God the balance between saved and lost was worse.”²³

In theism and Christianity, God is the absolute standard for objective morality. So inextricably tied to moral values is God that Baggett and Walls remark, “The force of the moral argument is that theism is no more outlandish or outrageous than many of our most cherished moral convictions.”²⁴ Since God’s nature is the standard of objective moral value and God wants all men to be saved, any world with a higher number of saved individuals which contains an optimum balance of those individuals is preferable to a world with a lower number or containing a lesser balance.

Defeat of an axiom is possible if there is a counterexample. Is there such an example for the AMP? Suppose W_1 contained four billion saved out of six billion in a world’s history. Suppose also that W_2 held one less saved person than W_1 out of an identical number of those existing. It seems the AMP holds in this situation.

What if the parameters changed a little? Suppose W_1 contained the same number and ratio of saved-to-lost. Further suppose W_2 contained 4,000,000,001 out of six billion. Indeed, one

²² Additionally, it is worth noting that focusing only on the *balance* between saved and lost while ignoring the number of those saved is to miss the point of preferability as well. As Craig notes in “No Other Name,” “Even if we grant that God could have achieved a better ratio between saved and lost, it is possible that in order to achieve such a ratio God would have had to so drastically reduce the number of the saved as to leave heaven deficient in population (say, by creating a world of only four people, three of whom go to heaven and one to hell).”

²³ Craig, “No Other Name.”

²⁴ Baggett and Walls, 28.

would argue that W_2 fits the AMP now. Rather than a counterexample, we have simply swapped places between W_1 and W_2 .

As a final attempted counterexample, what if the proportions were only slightly different? Suppose W_2 contained 4,000,000,001 saved out of a world's history of 6,000,000,002.²⁵ Despite the balance still favoring W_1 there is one more precious soul saved (though one more goes to spend eternity in Hell). This is the most challenging to the AMP.

I would respond that such a decision between worlds is, at best, vague; it is not at all clear God would prefer W_2 to W_1 in this case. Vagueness counts *against* any objection as a defeater.²⁶ I also think it reasonable that God would prefer W_1 even in this circumstance, since W_2 involves sending a person to heaven and to hell in a sort of one-to-one correspondence; a balance that is in this scenario less than optimal. With the AMP firmly in place, this paper shall consider the argument from the best possible world.

The Best Possible World

The best possible world inherently involves moral perfection. That is, whatever is the greatest logically possible maximal state of affairs constitutes the best possible world. With respect to the problem of evil it is sometimes asserted there is no logical contradiction in stating “a possible world exists in which everyone freely chooses the good and is saved.” Plantinga frames it this way: “Surely it is possible to do only what is right . . . it is possible, in that broadly logical sense, that there be a world containing free creatures who always do what is right. There is certainly no contradiction or inconsistency in this idea.”²⁷

²⁵ Out of pure mathematical interest, W_1 holds a balance of saved-to-lost at 66.666666666666666666666666666667%, while W_2 has 66.666666661111111112962962962346%.

²⁶ At most, it may undercut some warrant we have for belief in the AMP. It would not be a defeater for such a belief, however. See Alvin Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief* (New York: Oxford, 2000), 366.

The idea of whether or not God could create such a world (that is, if such a world is feasible to create given free will) has been the general focus of the debate. There are those who would grant that assumption (such a world is both possible *and* feasible). These people would assume that this actual world is therefore the best possible world. The argument for this will be explored.

Leibniz' Argument

Gottfried W. Leibniz (1646-1716) made amazing contributions to the Christian philosophical community. He asked the famous question at the heart of the Leibnizian Cosmological Argument, “Why is there something rather than nothing?” Leibniz also embraced the “best possible world” argument.

This argument was summarized by Plantinga as follows.

Before God created anything at all, He was confronted with an enormous range of choices . . . Being perfectly good, He must have chosen to create the best world He could; being omnipotent, He was able to create any possible world He pleased . . . Hence, this world, the one He did create, must be the best possible.²⁸

For Leibniz, a being who does not create the best possible world is not acting consistently “with supreme wisdom and goodness,” and therefore is not the best himself.²⁹ Such an idea was scandalous to Leibniz (and indeed to all orthodox Christians). Perfect being theology entailed there existed a Perfect Moral Being (PMB). Without the PMB, God, as he was known, did not really exist. The argument, syllogistically, looks like this:

1. If the PMB creates, then the PMB must create the best world possible for him to create.
2. The PMB is omnipotent.

²⁷ Alvin Plantinga, *God, Freedom, and Evil* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1977), 32.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 33. It should be noted the atheist J.L. Mackie agreed with Leibniz' line of thought up to the conclusion: it was there Mackie said this was not the best possible world; therefore, God does not exist.

²⁹ Gottfried W. Leibniz, *Theodicy* trans. E.M. Huggard, ed. Austin Farrer (LaSalle, IL: Open Court, 1985), section 201, 154.

3. Therefore, the PMB can create the best logically possible world.
4. The PMB created this actual world.
5. Therefore, the actual world is the best logically possible world.

The conclusion very nearly strikes some as absurd *prima facie*. However, since the argument is logically valid a premise must be denied in order to avoid the conclusion. Atheists will deny (4) and substitute their own premise. Others may deny (2) or amend it to exclude the ability to actualize just any logically possible world.³⁰ ³¹ One may also deny (1), saying God may have no obligation to create the best possible world. Still others argue from the implicit assumption that there even is a best possible world. It is to this consideration this paper will turn.

Is There a Best Possible World?

Plantinga questions whether there even is such a thing as a best possible world. “No matter how marvelous a world is—containing no matter how many persons enjoying unalloyed bliss—isn’t it possible that there be an even better world containing even more persons enjoying even more unalloyed bliss?”³² For Plantinga, the idea is that whatever world postulated will always have another world with at least one better feature.

Daniel and Frances Howard-Snyder have argued that there is no best possible world. In a roundabout way, they postulated a world-randomizer that selected a world to actualize for a God-like being. Much like Plantinga, for any world, say number 297, there exists a better world (numbered higher in proportion to each world’s value) 298. 299 is better than 298, and so on *ad infinitum*. In that case, however, there just is no best possible world. Each successive world is

³⁰ Plantinga, *God, Freedom, and Evil*, 37. In this he discusses certain states of affairs’ being consistent with one another; the entire conjunctive state of affairs of everyone’s freely coming to Christ or refraining from evil may not be feasible given free will of each individual creature.

³¹ Another route to take is simply to deny (2) *simpliciter*. This is the option of the Open Theist; God, while very powerful, cannot do everything.

³² Plantinga, *God, Freedom, and Evil*, 34.

better than the last (and in turn, all others before it). Just as natural numbers are not exhausted, so the goodness of each world also is not exhausted. “Although he can create any of them, he can’t create the best of them because there is no best.”³³

In this case, the Howard-Snyders argue, “there is no contradiction in supposing that an essentially morally unsurpassable, essentially omnipotent and omniscient being could create a world inferior to some other world he, or some other possible being, could have created.”³⁴ The best possible world is never attained precisely because that which cannot be attained does not actually exist.

God’s Free Will as it Pertains to Actualizing a World

Now the discussion must turn to God’s free will in actualizing the world. Even granting Leibniz’ assumption of a best possible world, is God constrained to create it? This paper contends that the PMB is not constrained to create any particular world.

First, the PMB cannot be asked to create a world that is logically impossible. Since standard PMB theology asserts logic and truth are within the grounds of his nature, he cannot act contrary to that.³⁵ So worlds which have *broad* logical possibilities may nonetheless actually be impossible, logically, for God to create (such as those worlds which are not *strictly* logically possible [like John’s being an abstract object]).

Second, Roger Turner discusses the difference between creating and actualizing a particular world. According to Turner, “For God to create something in the strict sense, there must have been a time when that thing God creates did not exist. This is not true for any possible

³³ Daniel and Frances Howard-Snyder, “How an Unsurpassable Being Can Create a Surpassable World,” in *Faith and Philosophy* 11 (April 1994): 260-68.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ Note that even if an objector insists the PMB does not also ground truth and logic, he is at least beholden to them, so that he cannot act contrary to *that* standard.

world *W*.”³⁶ Hence, God must be viewed in terms of actualizing a particular world that already has certain features.

Next, Turner also argues it is God’s nature alone that may limit him, if anything at all.³⁷ No one thinks God is not free in the relevant sense when we say he cannot sin. Therefore, no one should think God is not free by not creating a bad world where everyone always does evil.

Perhaps one may object that this misses the point. Yes, God may be said to be free to create other worlds and not particularly constrained to create this actual world. Yet it seems nonetheless God must create this actual world (if the best possible world exists). What is the answer?

The Howard-Snyders argue since any world, even if deliberately chosen, will be a world than which some omnipotent PMB could have done better, and since there is no best possible world, it is only incumbent upon the PMB to actualize a good world.³⁸ Even on the assumption the best possible world exists, it seems such a world could never be instantiated. It seems the PMB is not morally required to actualize such a world after all, even if it exists.

Is the Best Possible World Achievable?

This idea was alluded to in the section on possible worlds. Norman Geisler argues even if a best possible world is conceivable it may be that such a world cannot be achieved. “It may be that God in His infinite foreknowledge foresaw that no such world [a world of free creatures who never choose to sin] would actually materialize.”³⁹

³⁶ Roger Turner, *Christ the Redeemer and the Best of All Creatable Worlds* (Lynchburg, VA: Liberty University, 2009), 9. This is because of two things: first, possible worlds already exist as abstract objects. Second, since God is a maximally great being, he exists in all possible worlds; meaning there are no vacuous worlds.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 17.

³⁸ Daniel and Frances Howard-Snyder.

³⁹ Norman L. Geisler, *If God, Why Evil?* (Minneapolis, MN: Bethany House, 2011), 64.

Because of the diversity of creatures and their free will, it is entirely plausible the best logically possible world containing free creatures is simply not feasible to create. Plantinga follows this viewing of free will forming a sort of “delimiter” to the worlds that God can actualize. He maintains, “Whether or not it is within God’s power to actualize depends upon what Maurice would do if he were free in a certain situation . . . It is, of course, up to God whether or not to create Maurice . . . but if He creates Maurice and creates him free with respect to this action, then whether or not he actually performs the action is up to Maurice, not God.”⁴⁰ In this sense, it seems the best possible world, if one exists at all, is not entirely achievable.

God and Moral Obligation

In our discussion of God and any moral obligations that may be incumbent upon him, we should consider possible/achievable worlds and moral preferability among worlds. Specifically, one must ask whether God has any moral obligations whatsoever. Craig answers in the negative, writing, “I don’t think God has any moral duties. For moral duties are constituted by God’s commands, and presumably God doesn’t issue commands to Himself. Therefore, He has no obligations to live up to.”⁴¹

Indeed, with respect to the discussion over whether God is actually *constrained* to create this, or any other, possible world, Craig believes one cannot claim that either. “If God is essentially good, then there is no possible world in which He does evil . . . God acts in the complete absence of any causal constraint whatsoever . . . That God is acting freely is evident in the fact that His will is not inclined necessarily toward any particular finite good.”⁴² God is not

⁴⁰ Plantinga, *God, Freedom, and Evil*, 44.

⁴¹ William Lane Craig, “Question #114” <<http://www.reasonablefaith.org/site/News2?page=NewsArticle&id=7227>> accessed April 27, 2011.

⁴² Ibid.

constrained to create any particular world. Leibniz' PMB axiom (as I call the first premise of his argument) has some potential difficulties.

The Perfect Moral Being Axiom Problems

There are three major issues with respect to the PMB axiom.⁴³ First, there is the difficulty of the “ought implies can” problem. This idea is that one cannot be held morally culpable for acting (or refraining to act) in a situation in which he cannot act or refrain from acting as he does. It is the same basic principle of moral responsibility that guides us not to punish the mentally disabled or young children; no one would think of trying a two-year-old for murder if it accidentally shot someone with a gun lying about. One does not bear moral responsibility unless he is able to act and able to understand that act. If God cannot actualize the best possible world (because it does not exist or has overriding features [such as free will]), then he cannot be held morally culpable for not creating such a world. In that case the PMB axiom is false.

Second, the best possible world is one in which no one exists but God himself. The Howard-Snyders point out, referring to the PMB as “Jove,” that “Jove doesn't have the option of making it the case that there is no actual world . . . if he refrains from using his creative powers, a world will nevertheless be actual . . . That world will have no concrete being other than Jove in it.”⁴⁴ In other words, even a world with only God in it is nonetheless a world.

It is here where I must part company with Dr. Geisler. In his discussion on options for creating (including God's refraining from creating), he mentions “[not creating being better than creating] assumes that nothing is better than something. This is a gigantic category mistake.”⁴⁵

⁴³ As a reminder, the PMB axiom is that any essentially good and perfect moral being must create the best possible world.

⁴⁴ Daniel and Frances Howard-Snyder.

⁴⁵ Geisler, 59.

Since God is a necessary being any and every possible world will be populated at least by God.

Craig agrees, saying, “In a possible world in which God creates nothing, there is only He Himself, the paradigm and locus of goodness . . . That’s a pretty good world, to say the least!”⁴⁶

If every world is populated by at least God, then the worlds with the greatest balance of morally good acts to bad (and the one with the least amount of damned) are worlds in which God creates either nothing at all or worlds with no free creatures.⁴⁷ The best possible world is one in which God simply exists with nothing else whatsoever. This is the point, and this is the problem. If the PMB axiom is correct, it seems the best possible world for which God would be responsible for actualizing are world in which nothing moral exists but God himself.

The third problem for the PMB axiom is that if the second issue is not a problem—that is, supposing the best possible world(s) does not contain only God—and if there is a best possible world, then God could have created creatures who never sin or refrained from creating at all. This is due to the fact this is clearly not the best possible world. That is, it is simple to imagine another world with one more good act and one fewer evil one; a world where one more is saved and one fewer is lost. In this case, the only options are that the PMB axiom is false, our intuition about broad logical possibility is false (which is impossible to prove without question-begging), or that the PMB does not exist. Since the latter two seem quite unacceptable this paper opts for the falsehood of the PMB axiom.

Steinberg argues God must always choose to do his best (as opposed to doing the objectively best).⁴⁸ In this case, however, we see no reason God cannot choose in accordance

⁴⁶ William Lane Craig, “Question #51,” <<http://www.reasonablefaith.org/site/News2?page=NewsArticle&id=6155>>, accessed April 27, 2011.

⁴⁷ There is an argument to be made, as Geisler does, that the good of free creatures outweighs the good of creating all non-moral creatures only. Geisler makes this argument on pp. 60-64.

with his goals, so long as the world he does choose to actualize is also good (which it already is, by definition).

Standard for the PMB

The standard for the PMB was hinted at in the preceding section. An argument for God's moral justification in creating the actual world will be presented in this section. First of all, ought implies can. This is extremely relevant, as any standard one places upon the PMB must include this idea. Second, creations which bear God's image have intrinsic good. The logic is as follows: A. God is good (PMB assumption). B. Whatever God creates is good extrinsically (Gen. 1:31). C. Because of A, anything created in God's image is intrinsically good. D. Humans were created in God's image. E. Therefore, (from A-D) humans have intrinsic and extrinsic good.

Third, one must grant in worlds that contain actions for which God is not causally responsible (or beyond his control because of free will) God does not bear any moral responsibility or culpability for those actions in those worlds. Therefore, any world in which God is not directly causally responsible for sin is intrinsically good given creatures bearing God's image exist. That is, because God is good and there are creatures that are intrinsically good, we can call a world good so long as God avoids moral culpability for the actions of those creatures.

If this actual world meets the aforementioned standard and the AMP, then God is morally justified in creating this actual world. Syllogistically, the argument is as follows:

1. God is intrinsically good.
2. Whatever God creates is extrinsically and intrinsically good if and only if it is in God's image.
3. Humans are created by God in his image.

⁴⁸ Jesse R. Steinberg, "Leibniz, Creation, and the Best of All Possible Worlds," in *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 62 (2007): 123-33.

4. Therefore, humans are intrinsically good.
5. Any world bears intrinsic good in which God is not directly causally responsible for sin.
6. God is not directly causally responsible for sin.
7. Therefore, this actual world is intrinsically good.
8. If this world is good and meets the AMP, then God is morally justified in creating this actual world.
9. This world is good and meets the AMP.
10. Therefore, God is morally justified.

Critics may cry foul at (9), but (8) seems very plausibly true. If that is the case, the objector must beg the question against the conclusion unless he has some external, overriding reason to think God is not morally justified in creating this actual world. However, without positive evidence, the objector has no case and no reason to think that the AMP is not met in this actual world, especially given free will.

Conclusion

The problem of evil is not merely a logical or evidential one. It is one that is very emotional as well. For as moral beings we are rightly outraged at the evil that exists in this present world. Randy Alcorn notes of evil's affect on a person, "Logical arguments won't satisfy you . . . You need help with the emotional problem of evil . . . You will not find relief unless you gain perspective."⁴⁹ Apologists must always be sensitive not to minimize the real hurt and suffering moral evil has caused in the lives of others—even if the hurt is self-inflicted.

⁴⁹ Randy Alcorn, *If God is Good* (Colorado Springs, CO: Multnomah, 2009), 3-4.

We must show these people there is a God who brings good out of bad; he is the one who will cause his people to praise him through eternity.⁵⁰ Genesis 50:20 states the evil meant for Joseph was meant by God for good. This is the reality we must proclaim.

This paper discussed the concept of possible worlds and various axioms for moral preferability among worlds. It also offered up its own principle of the AMP. We turned to a discussion on the best possible world and whether God was constrained to create it. We argued even if there were to be a best possible world, God need not create that one, so long as the world he created was intrinsically good.⁵¹ We then offered an argument for God's moral justification in creating the actual world. The problem of evil in the hearts and minds of people is not going away any time soon. Apologists have a wonderful arsenal to bring to bear on this problem, and they may assert boldly there is no need to call God evil.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 282.

⁵¹ While it was not discussed, it seems quite extreme to claim evil as necessarily existing in this possible world. The idea is that certain things we find virtuous, such as courage, are only possible in the face of some evil. However, I would contest that a world in which courage is exemplified is not inherently morally preferable to a world in which no evil exists. Further, one's character may be such that if he were to encounter evil, he would have courage. Since this character is formed by his actions, one may find such a counterfactual admirable, even in the lack of such evil.

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