THE FREE WILL DEFENSE
ANNOUNCEMENTS

There will be no class one week from today:
Thursday, February 18.

Your first paper is due in about 2 weeks.

The midterm exam will take place in about 3 weeks.
Mackie’s Thesis

The propositions *God is omnipotent*, *God is wholly good* and *evil exists* are logically inconsistent triad.

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. But at the same time all three are essential parts of most theological positions: the theologian, it seems, at once *must* adhere and *cannot consistently* adhere to all three. (The problem does not arise only for theists, but I shall discuss it in the form in which it presents itself for ordinary theism.)

Now, Mackie admitted that there is no obvious, or immediate, contradiction between these propositions.

But, Mackie said, we can supplement this set of propositions with some additional claims to establish the contradiction.

This gave us the following argument:
1. God exists.
2. If God exists, then God is omnipotent.
3. If something is omnipotent, it can do anything.
4. If God exists, then God can do anything. (2, 3)
5. If God exists, then God is wholly good.
6. If something is wholly good, it always eliminates as much evil as it can.
7. If God exists, then God eliminates as much evil as God can. (5,6)
8. If God exists, then God eliminates all evil. (4,7)
9. If God exists, then there is no evil. (8)
10. There is no evil. (1, 9)
11. Some evil exists.

* C. There is evil and there is no evil. (10, 11)

We considered some objections to this argument, e.g., the claim that good cannot exist without evil because evil is a necessary counterpart of goodness.

For various reasons these responses are unsatisfying.
THE LOGICAL PROBLEM OF EVIL

1. God exists.
2. If God exists, then God is omnipotent.
3. If something is omnipotent, it can do anything.
4. If God exists, then God can do anything. (2, 3)
5. If God exists, then God is wholly good.
6. If something is wholly good, it always eliminates as much evil as it can.
7. If God exists, then God eliminates as much evil as God can. (5,6)
8. If God exists, then God eliminates all evil. (4,7)
9. If God exists, then there is no evil. (8)
10. There is no evil. (1, 9)
11. Some evil exists.

Premise 11.

You might wonder whether evil really exists; i.e., you might deny premise 11.

If the theist can deny that there is any evil, then there would seem to be no problem of evil.

One advantage of denying premise 11 is that doing so doesn’t depend on controversial assumptions about the nature of omnipotence or omnibenevolence.

How would such an objection go?

* C. There is evil and there is no evil. (10, 11)
Premise 11: Some evil exists.

All nature is but Art, unknown to thee;
all Chance, Direction, which thou canst not see;
All Discord, Harmony, not understood;
all partial Evil, universal Good:
and, spite of Pride and erring Reason’s spite,
One truth is, “Whatever IS, is RIGHT.”


Pope’s Thesis
Maybe what seems evil to us, isn’t really evil.

So what?
If Pope’s Thesis is true, there is no problem of evil.

But is Pope’s Thesis true?
HORRENDOUS EVILS

The Mutilation:

*a true story.*

In 1978 a fifteen year old girl was walking to her grandfather’s house when a stranger offered her a ride. He raped her repeatedly, hacked off her arms at the elbows with an axe, and left her to die. Although she survived, she was terrorized by her ordeal, particularly because her attacker served only eight years in prison and told her during the trial that one day he would be back to finish the job.

van Inwagen: “No discernible Good came of this, and it is wholly unreasonable to believe that any good could have come of it that an omnipotent being couldn’t have achieved without employing the raped and mutilated woman’s horrible suffering as a means to it. And even if this is wrong and some good came into being with which the woman’s suffering was so intimately connected that even an omnipotent being couldn’t have got the good without the suffering, it wouldn’t follow that the good outweighed the suffering.”
DYSTELEOLOGICAL EVILS

Rowe’s Fawn

The story of a fawn that dies in agony in a forest fire before there were any human beings.

van Inwagen: “The degree of horror involved in the event is not what creates the special difficulty for theists in this case. What creates the difficulty is rather the complete causal isolation of the fawn’s sufferings from the existence and activities of human beings.”
HORRENOUS EVILS

It seems hard to deny the existence of horrendous evils.

This suggests that we might give the following argument for premise eleven:

1. If there are horrendous evils, then some evil really exists.
2. There are horrendous evils.

3. Some evil really exists.

There are two purposes for introducing the concept of horrendous evils. The first is to convince you that premise eleven of the LPE is true. The other purpose won’t become clear until the end of the lecture.
A Theist’s reply

“I will allow that events like the mutilation and Rowe’s fawn demand an explanation. Here is one:

maybe God must create the best world that he can possibly create; maybe his goodness thus constrains him. And maybe a world where human beings have freedom is better than any world without it - even worlds with horrendous evils.”

Let’s call this kind of reply

The Free Will Defense.
The Free Will Defense (I)

The basic idea: It’s good to create human beings with freedom. But if you give human beings freedom there is always the possibility that they will misuse it (perhaps in ways that are horrendously evil). Although these evils are bad things and, all things considered, the world would be better off without them, in order for God to have created creatures such as ourselves, he must allow their possibility.

**Question:**
What premise of Mackie’s argument is the theist challenging with the FWD?

**Answer:**
It seems unclear. We should make the basic idea more precise.

Before we do, however, it might seem that the atheist (and Mackie, in particular) has a ready reply to the FWD.
MACKIE’S CHALLENGE (I)

“... 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 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. Clearly, his failure to avail himself of this possibility is inconsistent with his being both omnipotent and wholly good.”
MACKIE’S CHALLENGE (II)

1. God can do anything that is possible and consistent with his nature.

2. **It is possible for human beings freely never to do evil.**

3. There is no inconsistency between God’s nature and creating human beings who never do evil.


5. If it is better for God to do $x$ than $y$, God would do $x$ instead of $y$.

6. It is better to create human beings who never do evil than to create human beings who sometimes do evil.

7. *Therefore*, if God existed, he would have created humans who never do evil instead of humans who sometimes do evil.

8. Human beings sometimes do evil

9. *Therefore*, God doesn’t exist. (5, 6)
A Questionable Assumption?

I call premise two of Mackie’s Challenge an assumption, but Mackie seems to think that he has an argument for it.

1. If people can freely choose the good on some occasions, they can freely choose the good on all occasions.
2. People can freely choose the good one some occasions.
3. People can freely choose the good on all occasions.

Premise two of this argument is obviously true.

But why should we think that premise one is true?

Is there any reason to believe that premise one is false?
A Questionable Assumption?

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2. People can freely choose the good on some occasions.
3. People can freely choose the good on all occasions.

Premise two of this argument is obviously true - but why should we think that premise one is true?

A similar argument seems obviously incorrect:

1. If people can correctly predict the outcome of a coin toss on some occasions, they can correctly predict the outcome of a coin toss on all occasions.
2. People can correctly predict the outcome of a coin toss on some occasions.
3. People can correctly predict the outcome of a coin toss on all occasions.
A QUESTIONABLE ASSUMPTION?

I call premise two of Mackie’s Challenge an assumption, but Mackie seems to think that he has an argument for it.

1. If people can freely choose the good on some occasions, they can freely choose the good on all occasions.
2. People can freely choose the good one some occasions.
3. People can freely choose the good on all occasions.

A prominent theistic response to the Logical Problem of Evil, and premise one of the above argument, is due to Alvin Plantinga, who is a philosopher here at ND.
Plantinga’s Free Will Defense

Let’s reintroduce some familiar ideas so that our terminology is consistent with Plantinga’s. Let’s call the following two propositions set A, or just A for short.

(P) God is omniscient, omnipotent, and wholly good.

(Q) There is evil.

Recall that Mackie’s Thesis is that (P) and (Q) are inconsistent.

Plantinga’s goal is to prove Mackie wrong by showing that A is, in fact, consistent. But how does he propose to do that?

**Strategy:** “To show that a set, S, is consistent you think of a possible state of affairs (it needn’t actually obtain) which is such that if it were actual, then all of the members of S would be true.” Plantinga calls this “giving a model of S,” and notes that there are various ways to do so.

What’s it all mean?

If two propositions are inconsistent, then there is no possible way for them to be true at the same time. So Plantinga is going to tell a story about how it is possible for propositions P and Q above both to be true, and thereby demonstrate that P and Q are consistent. Since Plantinga is only offering a defense, his story needn’t be the actual truth - it needn’t describe why God really does allow evil. Plantinga is only trying to refute the idea that there is no possible way for God and evil both to exist, so all he has to do is give an example of one possible way in which they could exist.
An Example of the General Strategy

One way to show that a proposition, $P$, is consistent with another proposition, $Q$, is to find some third proposition, $R$, whose conjunction with $P$ is both possible, in the broadly logical sense, and which entails $Q$.

What does it mean to say that a proposition is possible “in the broadly logical sense?”

A proposition is logically possible if and only if its negation, or denial, is not necessarily true.

**Example:**

“Conan O’Brien is President of Notre Dame” is logically possible because “It is not the case that Conan O’Brien is the President of Notre Dame,” although true, is not necessarily true, since there are possible situations in which Conan O’Brien is the President of Notre Dame.

On the other hand, “Conan O’Brien was a married bachelor for a period of his life” is not logically possible because its denial - the proposition “It is not the case that Conan O’Brien was a married bachelor for a period of his life” - is necessarily true, since nothing can be both married and a bachelor, and therefore there is no possible situation in which Conan is married and a bachelor.
An Example of the General Strategy

One way to show that a proposition, \( P \), is consistent with another proposition, \( Q \), is to find some third proposition, \( R \), whose conjunction with \( P \) is both possible, in the broadly logical sense, and which entails \( Q \).

Plantinga gives an example of this procedure:

conjective proposition \( p_1 \text{ and not } p_2 \) is necessarily false. Then one way to show that \( p \) is consistent with \( q \) is to find some proposition \( r \) whose conjunction with \( p \) is both possible, in the broadly logical sense, and entails \( q \). A rude and unlettered behaviorist, for example, might hold that thinking is really nothing but movements of the larynx; he might go on to hold that

\[ P \text{ Jones did not move his larynx after April 30} \]

is inconsistent (in the broadly logical sense) with

\[ Q \text{ Jones did some thinking during May.} \]

By way of rebuttal, we might point out that \( P \) appears to be consistent with

\[ R \text{ While convalescing from an April 30 laryngotomy, Jones whiled away the idle hours by writing (in May) a splendid paper on Kant’s Critique of Pure Reason.} \]

So the conjunction of \( P \) and \( R \) appears to be consistent; but obviously it also entails \( Q \) (you can’t write even a passable paper on Kant’s Critique of Pure Reason without doing some thinking); so \( P \) and \( Q \) are consistent.
The behaviorist believes that thought is movement of the larynx - that you cannot think if you are moving your larynx. So, the behaviorist thinks that the propositions:

(P) Jones did not move his larynx on May 1, and

(Q) Jones thought on May 1

are inconsistent. To prove that the behaviorist is wrong, we could show (i) that there is a proposition, $R$, that is consistent with $P$, and (ii) show that $R$ and $P$ together entail $Q$. If we succeed, then we have shown that $P$ and $Q$ are consistent. Here’s why:

What does it mean for a proposition to “entail” another proposition?

A proposition, $\alpha$, entails another proposition $\beta$, just in case it is impossible for $\alpha$ to be true and $\beta$ to be false.

Example: The proposition “Carmen believes (falsely) that Texas is the best state in the union, but Vince believes (truly) that New York is the best state in the union” entails the proposition that “Carmen believes (falsely) that Texas is the best state in the union.”

Here’s another helpful way of thinking about entailment. At the beginning of the semester, we talked about argument validity: the idea that, if all of the premises of an argument are true, then the conclusion must be true. We could have defined “validity” using the word “entailment:” an argument is valid just in case its premises entail its conclusion.
The behaviorist believes that thought is movement of the larynx - that you cannot think if you are moving your larynx. So, the behaviorist thinks that the propositions:

(P) Jones did not move his larynx on May 1, and

(Q) Jones thought on May 1

are inconsistent. To prove that the behaviorist is wrong, we need to show (i) that there is a proposition, R, that is consistent with P, and (ii) show that R and P together entail Q. If we succeed, then we have shown that P and Q are consistent.

So, if we show that R and P entail Q, then we have shown that it is impossible for R and P to be true without Q being true. In other words, every time R and P are true, Q is true. But if Q is true whenever R and P are true, then P and Q are consistent, since it’s possible for P and Q to be true at the same time.

What is the candidate proposition, R, that Plantinga offers in his dummy example for illustrating how this strategy is supposed to work?
Plantinga suggests that the following proposition is consistent with Q and entails P:

(R) After a laryngotomy in April, Jones wrote a philosophy paper.

Let’s recall what P and Q say:

(P) Jones did not move his larynx on May 1

(Q) Jones thought on May 1, and

Now, R is obviously consistent with P: there’s no way for you to move your larynx once it has been removed.

But, more importantly, R and P obviously entail Q: if Jones wrote a philosophy paper without moving his larynx in May, then Jones must have thought during May, since it is impossible to write a philosophy paper without thinking.

What this shows is that it is possible to think without moving your larynx, and therefore, that the behaviorist’s claim that it is impossible to think without moving your larynx is false.

Now let’s apply this strategy to the Logical Problem of Evil.
Proving that Set A is Consistent

For ease of exposition, let’s continue to use the three letters R, P and Q as abbreviations. The atheist, you will recall, claims that set A is inconsistent, i.e. that it is impossible for P and Q (below) to be true at the same time.

(P) God is omniscient, omnipotent, and wholly good.

(Q) There is evil.

So, Plantinga’s strategy is to find a proposition R, such that R is consistent with P and entails Q. If he finds such an R, he will have shown that P and Q are consistent; in other words, he will have shown that it is possible for God and evil to coexist. And if he has done this, then he will have refuted the Logical Problem of Evil.

Plantinga suggests that the following proposition is compatible with P and together with P entails Q:

(R) God has a good reason for creating a world that contains evil.

But what could such a good reason be?

“The heart of the Free Will Defense is the claim that it is possible that God could not have created a universe containing moral good... without creating one that also contained moral evil. And if so, then it is possible that God has a good reason for creating a world containing evil” (31).
Proving that
Set A is Consistent

Plantinga suggests the following R:

(R) God has a good reason for creating a world that contains evil.

But what could such a good reason be?

According to Plantinga, “The heart of the Free Will Defense is the claim that it is possible that God could not have created a universe containing moral good... without creating one that also contained moral evil. And if so, then it is possible that God has a good reason for creating a world containing evil.”

But why should we believe that it is possible that God could not have created a universe containing moral good without also creating one that contained moral evil?

Before we give Plantinga’s answer, let’s define the expressions “moral good” and “moral evil.”
Morality & Freedom

Morally Significant v. Morally Insignificant Actions

Actions that have moral consequences are **morally significant**; otherwise, actions are **morally insignificant**.

*Examples of Morally Significant Actions*: Whether to break up with your boyfriend; whether to euthanize your terminally ill pet; whether to tell a professor that one of your classmates plagiarized her essay.

*Examples of Morally Insignificant Actions*: Whether to tie your shoes right now; whether to eat at South or North; whether to start writing your philosophy paper on Tuesday or Wednesday of next week.

**Significant Freedom**

Someone is **significantly free** if and only if they are free with respect to morally significant actions.

Let’s use the expression *significantly free creature* (SFC) to refer to someone who has significant freedom.

**Moral Good & Moral Evil**

A SFC produces **moral good** whenever she goes right with respect to a morally significant action.

A SFC produces **moral evil** whenever she goes wrong with respect to a morally significant action.

Now, it seems obvious that moral good is valuable; even Mackie would concede that. So it would seem that God has a good reason for creating a world with moral good. But what if God couldn’t create a world with moral good without also creating a world with moral evil?
Plantinga suggests that we should think that it is possible that God couldn’t create moral good without also creating moral evil because it is possible that human beings suffer from transworld depravity.

A significantly free creature suffers from *transworld depravity* if and only if they produce moral evil at least once in every possible world in which they exist.

“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” (48).

You might think: if moral evil is the result of the actions of some SFCs, why wouldn’t God simply choose not to create those SFCs, but some other SFCs instead?

In other words: Maybe God should do as Mackie suggests, and create only those people who freely never do evil.
Global transworld depravity (GTWD) occurs whenever everybody suffers from transworld depravity.

It’s important to keep in mind two things about global transworld depravity:

1. By “everybody,” the thesis of GTWD refers to all possible people - not merely the ones that actually exist.

2. Plantinga does not claim that GTWD is true, or even that it is plausible. Rather, Plantinga claims that global transworld depravity is possibly true - in the “broadly logical sense” of possible.
Let’s recall where we are.

**First**, Mackie said that the propositions “God is omniscient, omnipotent, and wholly good” and “Evil exists” \((P \text{ and } Q)\) are logically contradictory.

**Second**, anticipating that the theist would argue that evil is the result of free will, Mackie said that it was possible for people freely never to do evil, that a world in which people freely never did evil would be better than a world with beings like ourselves, and therefore that if God existed, he would create those people instead of us; since we flawed human beings exist, God doesn’t.

**Third**, the Theist’s Reply to our discussion of horrendous evils was that it’s possible that free will is a sufficiently great good that its value outweighs the sufferings that are brought about by horrendous evils.

**Fourth**, Plantinga argued that it is possible that human beings suffer from transworld depravity, and since it’s possible that we all produce moral evil in every world in which we exist, then it is possible that God couldn’t create moral good without creating moral evil.

**Fifth**, Plantinga’s strategy was to find a proposition \(R\) that is possibly true and that is also compatible with \(P\); if \(R\) and \(P\) are compatible, the conjunction \(R \& P\) is possibly true; if \(R \& P\) entails \(Q\), then \(P\) and \(Q\) are consistent, and the Logical Problem of Evil fails.

We suggested that a good candidate proposition for \(R\) would be “God has a good reason to create a world with SFCs who do moral evil,” so let’s give an argument for the conclusion that our candidate proposition is possibly true.
The Free Will Defense (II)

1. If it is possible that everybody* performs at least one moral evil in every possible world in which they exist, then it is possible that it is impossible for God to create a world with SFCs without creating a world that contains some moral evil.

2. It is possible that everybody* performs at least one moral evil in every possible world in which they exist.

3. It is possible that it is impossible for God to create a world with SFCs without creating a world that contains some moral evil.

4. If a world, $w$, is more valuable than another world, $w'$, then God has a good reason to create $w$ instead of $w'$.

5. A world that contains SFCs who do some moral evil is more valuable than any world without SFCs.

6. God has a good reason to create a world with SFCs who do moral evil.

1. Assumption.

2. Global TWD.

3. From 1, 2.

4. Assumption.

5. Plantinga’s Strong Value Assumption

6. From 4, 5.
The conclusion of the foregoing argument, you will recall, is proposition R:

(R) God has a good reason for creating a world that contains evil.

R is possible (in the broadly logical sense) and consistent with P:

(P) God is omnipotent, wholly good, and evil exists.

And the conjunction of R and P entail Q:

(Q) There is evil.

But if R and P entail Q, then P and Q are consistent.

And if P and Q are consistent, then Mackie is wrong: there is no logical contradiction in believing that God and evil both exist, and it is not “positively irrational” to believe in God.
Plantinga’s argument seems to establish the logical consistency of theistic belief; but does it make it reasonable to believe that God exists?

There are reasons to think that it might not. These reasons involve horrendous evils and dysteleological suffering.
Plantinga’s Strong Value Assumption is the claim that a world that contains SFCs who do some moral evil is more valuable than any world without SFCs.

But you might worry that it’s not at all clear that the SVA is true. There are two kinds of arguments one might give against the SVA.

First, the value of moral good does not seem to outweigh the harm of horrendous evil. Events like the mutilation that we discussed make it reasonable for someone to believe that it would have been for them had they never been born. Of course, not everyone who experiences horrendous evil will feel this way, but if someone who did experience a horror told us they would rather not have born, what would we say in response?

Second, it seems like the FWD gives us the wrong type of explanation for why the value of free will is sufficient for God to create a world with moral evil. In particular, there is a difference between outweighing the evil that occurs in a person’s life, and defeating that evil.

To show that the value of freedom outweighs the evil that occurs to someone is to show that her life is good on the whole despite those evils (and even if the evils in question are terrible).

But it seems like the appropriate response is not to show that freedom outweighs evil, but that it defeats it.

Freedom defeats evil when a person’s life is better for having contained it, and it seems like at least some of the time the evils that a person experiences are not defeated by the value of human freedom.
Concluding Reflection

The expression “the problem of evil” is ambiguous. We have discussed the sense of the expression that is an objection to belief in the existence of God; in this capacity, “the problem of evil” is usually known as “the argument from evil.” But there are other ways to think about the problem of evil.

The argument from evil begins from two facts about human vulnerability: we are vulnerable to moral weakness, and we are vulnerable to natural harm.

In this sense, the argument from evil provides us with an opportunity for reflection on facts about human vulnerability.

It’s worth asking yourself what resources are at your disposal to address these facts of vulnerability if you are a theist. Upon reflection, they do not seem to be a threat, e.g., to Christian belief at all: if anything, these facts seem to be central to Christianity’s understanding of human nature and the relationship between humanity and divinity.

Similarly, it’s worth asking yourself how you would provide accounts of these vulnerabilities if you’re an atheist, for they would seem to be significant components of any worldview - even ones that don’t include God’s existence.

Larger point: You can regard reflection on philosophical arguments, in general, as an opportunity for reflection on broader questions.

We’ve seen this with arguments for the existence of God. We’ll see it when we consider arguments about the nature of human persons. We’ll see it when we consider arguments about the nature of knowledge. I find that the task of considering these arguments is made rewarding by keeping sight of these broader issues.