

The Problem of Evil

The Problem of Evil as an Argument Against the Existence of God

- (1) There is evil.
- (2) If an omnipotent (=all powerful) benevolent (=all good) being existed there would be no evil.
- (3) An omnipotent benevolent being does not exist.

Mackie's Assumptions:

Good is opposed to evil – a good thing always eliminates evil as far as it can, the more good a thing is the less evil it is and vice versa

Proposed Solutions:

Objection to Premise (1): There is no evil in the world

Objections to Premise (2): If good and evil are in some intertwined, there's some sense in which you can't have one without the other. We shouldn't assume that an omnipotent benevolent being would prevent the existence of evil.

(a) Evil is needed to bring about good, just as water is needed to bring about plant growth.

Mackie: Then God is not omnipotent.

(b) The idea of a world without evil is incoherent (Schlesinger)

An omnipotent being isn't assumed to be able to do what's logically impossible.

(c) Having some evil in the universe makes it better

If goodness is opposed to evil (as in Mackie's assumption), then how could something evil make the world more good?

Mackie proposes understanding the proposal as follows: On the first level are:

Evil1 = pain/misery

Good1 = pleasure/happiness.

Distinct from Good1 is Good2 which requires a combination of Evil1 and Good1:

Version 1

Good2 = sympathy with suffering, heroism in facing danger, gradual decrease of Evil1 and increase of Good 1

Problem: Evil2 = Malevolence, cruelty, callousness, cowardice, states in which Good1 is decreasing Evil1 is increasing.

Version 2

Good2 = Free will

Problem: We can have free will without Evil1. Presumably we can imagine a single individual who has the freedom to bring about evil but never does. So we can imagine that all people are such that they have the freedom to bring about evil but never do.

Objection – if God set things up such it was impossible to act wrongly we wouldn't *actually* be free.

Mackie's Response 1: This requires thinking that free will requires some form of indeterminacy, or randomness. But what's good about that?

Mackie's Response 2: Free will of this sort is incompatible with omnipotence.

Also: What about animal suffering or suffering that has nothing to do with free will?

(d) *Good without evil is a logical impossibility.*

Analogy 1: There couldn't be something big in the universe without something small.

"Bigness" is a relative term that only makes sense in comparison to smallness.

Mackie's Response: "Relative greatness can be promoted only by a simultaneous promotion of relative smallness. I feel sure that no theists would be content to regard God's goodness as analogous to this – as if what he supports were not the *good* but the *better* and as if he had the paradoxical aim that all things should be better than other things." [I don't understand this].

Analogy 2: There could be no redness in the world unless some things weren't red.

Something can only exist if its opposite exists.

Mackie's Response: False. Maybe if everything were red, we wouldn't notice redness, but it would still be true that everything is red.

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