

Logical Arguments from Evil and Free Will Defences

Leftow (2012: 547) writes:

If you think that evil currently provides any very strong argument against the existence of God, you have not been paying attention. Purely deductive ('logical') versions of the problem of evil are widely conceded to be 'dead', killed off by Plantinga's free-will defence. ... Once one sees the sort of thing a defence has to be to work, it seems pretty clear that some kind of free-will defence has to be available and adequate. The debate has shifted to 'evidential' versions of the problem of evil, and my own view, which is not uncommon, is that these are pretty thoroughly on the ropes—what's called sceptical theism provides an effective counter.

Leftow's view is widespread amongst 'perfect being' theists. Nonetheless, it seems to me to be evidently mistaken. In particular, while it is plausible that the official logical argument from evil of Mackie (1955) is 'dead'—and while it might reasonably be contended that considerations about free-will are one amongst several sets of considerations that suffice to 'kill' it—it is obvious that there are other logical arguments from evil that are not 'killed' by considerations about free-will. Moreover, it is equally obvious that we have not examined all logical arguments from evil, and that we have no neutral—'non-question-begging'—grounds for claiming that those logical arguments from evil that we have not yet examined can be 'killed'.

1. Logical Arguments from Evil

A logical argument from evil contains three distinctive kinds of premises. The exemplars of the first kind of premise collectively make up **the characterisation**: a claim about properties that God possesses if God exists. The sole member of the second kind of premise is **the datum**: a claim about the existence of suffering in our universe. The exemplars of the third kind of premise collectively make up **the link**: a claim that, in concert with the characterisation and the datum, entails—or is alleged to entail—that God does not exist.

The Characterisation: There are different claims that can serve as the characterisation in a logical argument from evil. A typical characterisation might be something like this:

C1: If God exists, God is the omnipotent, omniscient, perfectly good, perfectly free, creator *ex nihilo* of our universe.

Of course, this characterisation can be broken down into a collection of independent—or apparently independent, or putatively independent—claims:

C1a: If God exists, God is omnipotent.

C1b: If God exists, God is omniscient.

C1c: If God exists, God is perfectly good.

C1d: If God exists, God is perfectly free.

C1e: If God exists, God is sole creator *ex nihilo* of our universe.

Many logical arguments from evil do not include all of C1a-C1e in their characterisation. (Some logical arguments from evil make do with just C1a and C1c.) There is no reason why logical arguments from evil should not include independent claims other than C1a-C1e. The standard target of logical arguments from evil is perfect being theism: and there are many other perfections that are

standardly attributed to God by perfect being theists. Of course, we require that the datum is a *non-redundant* premise in a logical argument from evil: if the characterisation and the link *alone* jointly entail that God does not exist, then we do not have a logical argument *from evil*.

The Datum: There are many different claims that can serve as the datum in a logical argument from evil. Here are some candidates:

- D1: There is suffering in our universe.
- D2: There is suffering in our universe that is due to human agency.
- D3: There is suffering in our universe that is not due to human agency.
- D4: There is *this* particular instance of suffering in our universe that is due to human agency.
- D5: There is *this* particular instance of suffering in our universe that is not due to human agency.
- D6: There is a massive amount of suffering in our universe that is due to human agency.
- D7: There is a massive amount of suffering in our universe that is not due to human agency.
- D8: There is horrendous suffering in our universe.
- D9: There is horrendous suffering in our universe that is due to human agency.
- D10: There is horrendous suffering in our universe that is not due to human agency.
- D11: There is *this* particular instance of horrendous suffering in our universe that is due to human agency.
- D12: There is *this* particular instance of horrendous suffering in our universe that is not due to human agency.
- D13: There is a massive amount of horrendous suffering in our universe that is due to human agency.
- D14: There is a massive amount of horrendous suffering in our universe that is not due to human agency.
- D15: There is *all of this* horrendous suffering in our universe that is due to human agency.
- D16: There is *all of this* horrendous suffering in our universe that is not due to human agency.

None of these claims is controversial; none is denied by perfect being theists. Since D15 and D16 are the strongest claims on the list, one might think that it would make most sense always to work with them (or with claims that are even stronger than D15 and D16, so long as those stronger claims are also uncontroversial). But many discussions of logical arguments from evil take the datum to be a weaker claim than D15 or D16: indeed, in many cases, the datum is taken to be D1.

I have formulated D1-D16 in terms of ‘suffering’; in many logical arguments from evil, the datum is instead formulated in terms of ‘evil’. I shall write ‘ $D_i(E)$ ’ for the adjusted versions of the D_i framed in terms of ‘evil’. So, for example, $D1(E)$ is the claim that there is evil in our universe. There are other terms—e.g. ‘imperfection’—that could also figure as the key term in arguments of this kind.

The Link: There are many different claims that can serve as the link in logical arguments from evil. Obviously enough, variation in the characterisation may need to be accompanied by variation in the link. Perhaps slightly less obviously, variation in the *interpretation* of the characterisation may need to be accompanied by variation in the link.

Mackie (1955), working with a characterisation that included only C1a and C1c, took the link to consist of the following two claims:

- Lm1: Good is opposed to evil in such a way that a good thing always eliminates evil as far as it can.

Lm2: There are no limits to what an omnipotent thing can do.

As Mackie says:

From these it follows that a good omnipotent thing eliminates evil completely, and then the propositions that a good omnipotent thing exists, and that evil exists, are incompatible.

In Mackie's official logical argument from evil, the datum is D1(E).

Rowe (1979), working with a characterisation that included C1a, C1b and C1c, can be interpreted as taking the link to consist of the following two claims:

- Lr1: An omnipotent, omniscient being could have prevented the truth of the datum without thereby losing some greater good or permitting some evil equally bad or worse
- Lr2: An omniscient, wholly good being would prevent the truth of the datum unless it could not do so without thereby losing some greater good or permitting some evil equally bad or worse

In Rowe (1979), the datum is plausibly D7(E) (though some of the discussion makes it appear that the datum is D5(E)). If the datum is D7(E), then the link would be better framed in terms of non-arbitrarily reducing the amount of suffering or evil that there is, rather than in terms of preventing the truth of the datum without thereby losing some greater good or permitting some evil equally bad or worse.

An argument working with all of C1a-C1e might take the link to consist of something like the following pair of claims:

- Lo1: If a being that is omnipotent, omniscient and perfectly good makes a universe, then, up to arbitrary choice, that being makes a best universe.
- Lo2: If datum is true in all of the best universes from amongst which an omnipotent, omniscient and perfectly good being could otherwise make an arbitrary selection, then that being does not make any universe.

To construct the strongest form of this argument, the datum should be taken to be D15 or D16, or the conjunction of D15 and D16, or some even stronger claim, if there are stronger claims that entail D15 and D16, and that are no less evidently true. (Oppy (2006) discusses an argument of this kind in which the datum is taken to be D2(E).)

2. Logical Problems of Evil

Many philosophers talk about logical *problems* of evil rather than about logical *arguments* from evil. However, when philosophers talk about a logical problem of evil, the 'problem' that they have in mind is closely related to a logical argument from evil.

Suppose that we have a logical argument from evil involving a particular characterisation, datum and link. The characterisation is conditional; the consequent of the conditional is a set of claims about God. For example, the consequent of C1 is the claim that God is the omnipotent, omniscient, perfectly good, perfectly free, creator *ex nihilo* of our universe. Call the consequent of the characterisation 'the characterising claim'. Then the problem of evil that arises from the logical

argument with which we began is that the characterising claim, the datum and the link are—or are alleged to be—jointly inconsistent. (Here, I take it for granted that, for example, ‘God is omnipotent’ entails ‘God exists’. If – for whatever reason – this is denied, then the further claim that God exists is also needed in order to generate inconsistency.)

Plantinga (1974a: 165) says:

[P]resumably the atheologian ... never meant to hold that there was a formal contradiction here; he meant instead that the conjunction of [the characterising claim and the datum] is necessarily false. ... To show that he is right, therefore, he must produce a proposition that is at least plausibly thought to be necessary and whose conjunction with [the characterising claim and the datum] formally yields a contradiction.

I don't think that this is *exactly* right. What the atheologian ought to have been saying is that there is a formal contradiction between claims to all of which the theist is committed. It is irrelevant whether the link is plausibly thought to be necessary, even if it is also true that any plausible candidates for the link are necessary if true: what matters is whether the theist is committed to the link. If the link can be reasonably rejected by the theist—if there is a formulation of theism in which the link is denied that, all else being equal, could be reasonably believed—then, at least by my lights, the logical argument that goes by way of the link is unsuccessful.

3. The Link in Mackie (1955)

The link in the argument of Mackie (1955) is obviously controversial. I expect that most theists will reject both Lm1 and Lm2.

I think that it is pretty clearly not true that good is opposed to evil in such a way that a good thing always eliminates evil as far as it can. It seems reasonable to accept that a good thing will have two aims: it will aim to promote that which is good, and it will aim to defeat that which is evil. Given these twin aims, it does not follow that a good thing will eliminate evil as far as it can. Rather, what is true is that a good thing will do what it can to advance both of its aims: insofar as those aims must be considered together, a good thing will do what it can to promote the best balance of good over evil.

Whether a good thing would endorse the goal of eliminating evil completely depends upon how good and evil are related. If there are goods that a good thing might promote that can only obtain if there are evils, then whether a good thing would endorse the goal of eliminating evil completely depends upon whether the best realisable balance of good over evil is one in which there are goods that can only obtain if there are evils. If there are goods that a good thing might promote, but only at the cost of not ensuring that there is no evil, then whether a good thing would endorse the promotion of those goods—at the cost of leaving it open that the goal of eliminating evil completely is not fulfilled—depends upon the judgment that the good thing makes about the balance of good over evil that is most likely to ensue (or some other judgment in that neighbourhood).

Depending upon other parts of their worldview, theists will typically suppose that there are certain goods whose realisation is such that either God could have knowingly permitted the existence of *some evil* in order for those goods to be realised, or God could have knowingly risked the existence

of *some evil* in order to have those goods realised. On the one hand, God might have knowingly permitted the existence of some evil, in order to allow for freedom, moral responsibility, empathy, sympathy, benevolence, love, and so forth. On the other hand, God might have knowingly risked the existence of some evil in order to allow for freedom and moral responsibility (and, perhaps, for various other goods as well).

I think that it is even more obviously true that there are limits on what an omnipotent being can do. Moreover, there are limits on what an omnipotent being can do that are relevant to Mackie's logical argument from evil. An omnipotent being cannot do the impossible: it cannot do what is logically impossible and it cannot do what is metaphysically impossible. An omnipotent being cannot act in ways that contravene logic, or mathematics, or at least some parts of metaphysics. An omnipotent being cannot change the past, or make it that case that $4+5=17$, or make it that case both that Vin is strictly taller than Fred and that Fred is strictly taller than Vin. If the instantiation of certain goods requires the instantiation of certain evils, then an omnipotent being cannot bring about the instantiation of those goods in the absence of instantiation of those evils. If the instantiation of certain goods requires leaving it open that certain kinds of evils are instantiated, then an omnipotent being cannot bring it about that those goods are instantiated without leaving it open that the evils are also instantiated.

Theists will typically suppose that there are certain evils that God could not have eliminated without eliminating some greater goods whose realisation depends upon the realisation of the evils in question. Perhaps, for example, God could not have eliminated certain kinds of evil from our universe without thereby also eliminating freedom, or moral responsibility, or empathy, or sympathy, or benevolence, or love from our universe.

Putting together the preceding threads: theists might reasonably suppose that (a) God could not have eliminated certain kinds of evil from our universe without thereby also eliminating freedom, or moral responsibility, or empathy, or sympathy, or benevolence, or love from our universe; and (b) either God might have knowingly permitted the existence of some evil, in order to allow for freedom, moral responsibility, empathy, sympathy, benevolence, love, and so forth, or else God might have knowingly risked the existence of some evil in order to allow for freedom and moral responsibility (and, perhaps, for various other goods as well). Hence, theists have a satisfactory response to the logical argument from evil involving C1a, C1c, D1(E), Lm1 and Lm2.

Given the foregoing response, it is pretty clear that the 'official' argument of Mackie (1955) is 'dead'. Theists typically do not accept Lm1 and Lm2, and reasonably so. Moreover, while the discussion in Mackie (1955) suggests—or hints at—alternative versions of datum and link, it must be observed that Mackie (1955) does not provide an *explicit* presentation of any other logical argument from evil. (It should be noted that the considerations rehearsed—and the conclusions reached—in this section are entirely familiar: see, for example, Plantinga (1974b).)

4. Plantinga's Free-Will Defence

Plantinga (1974a) explicitly formulates his free-will defence as a response to logical arguments from evil in which the datum is taken to be L1(E) and the characterisation is taken to be the conjunction of C1a, C1b and C1c. (He cites Mackie (1955), Aiken (1957-8), McCloskey (1960), as well as Epicurus,

Hume, some of the French Encyclopaedists, Mill, Bradley, McTaggart, 'and many others' (164.) However, he goes on to say that 'what is really characteristic and central to the free-will defence is the claim that God, though omnipotent, could not have created just any possible world he pleased' (168), which suggests that we should also take something like C1e to be part of the characterisation. Moreover, while the initial datum that he considers is really D2E, he goes on to consider extensions of this argument in which the datum is taken to be D6E, D7E, and the conjunction of D6E and D7E.

According to Plantinga (1974a), the aim of the free-will defence is to find a proposition which satisfies the following two conditions: (1) the conjunction of the proposition with the characterising claim is logically consistent; and (2) the conjunction of the proposition with the characterising claim entails the datum. By Plantinga's lights, the proposition need not be known to be true, or true, or even plausible: all that matters is that the proposition is logically consistent with the characterising claim (165).

I think that Plantinga's aim is misguided. As noted above, any logical argument from evil contains three premises: the characterisation, the link, and the datum. Moreover, corresponding to any logical argument from evil there is a logical problem of evil generated by the (alleged) inconsistency of the characterising claim, the link, and the datum. Given that the characterising claim and the datum are non-negotiable for theists, the challenge that is posed to theists is that, if there really is inconsistency, they are obliged to reject the link. If the link is something that they are independently inclined to accept, then it is *obviously* of no avail to note that there are other *implausible* claims that are consistent with the characterising claim and jointly entail the datum.

Think about it this way. We are supposing that {the characterising claim, the datum, the link} is logically inconsistent. That is, we are supposing that the characterising claim and the datum entail the negation of the link. Moreover, we are supposing—if only for the sake of argument—that {the characterising claim, the datum} is logically consistent: we need the link in order to have logical inconsistency. So, on our assumptions, {the characterising claim, the datum, the negation of the link} is logically consistent. But then, whatever the link might be, the conditional whose antecedent is the characterising claim, and whose consequent is the conjunction of the datum and the negation of the link, will always be a proposition that qualifies for the role that Plantinga identifies. However, that conditional is obviously of no use to theists who suppose that it is less plausible than the link. And any theists who judge that the link is more plausible than the negation of the link will judge that this conditional is less plausible than the link (at least given that they accept that datum is more or less certain).

Plantinga (1974a) claims that {C1a, C1b, C1c, D1(E)} and {C1a, C1b, C1c, D2(E)} are consistent with the further claim:

(TD) God actualises a world containing moral good, and every essence suffers from transworld depravity;

and that {C1a, C1b, C1c, D6(E)} is consistent with the further claim:

(UE) God actualises a world containing moral good, and it was not within God's power to actualise a morally better world;

and that {C1a, C1b, C1c, D7(E)} is consistent with the further claim:

(FA) God actualises a world containing moral good; all natural evil is due to the free activity of non-human persons; there is a balance of good over evil with respect to the actions of these non-human persons; and there is no world God could have created that contains a more favourable balance of good over evil with respect to the free activity of the non-human persons that it contains.

But whether these are good and effective responses to logical arguments from evil involving the characterisation and datum in question depends upon whether theists can reasonably prefer (TD), (UE) and (FA) to the links that feature in those logical arguments from evil. And that's not a matter that can be assessed in the absence of serious comparison of (TD), (UE) and (FA) with those links.

The point just made has significant implications for the distinction that Plantinga (1974a: 192) draws between 'defences' and 'theodicies'. In the face of a (valid) logical argument from evil, where the characterisation and the datum are held to be non-negotiable, the theist is required to reject the link. For the theist to note that some other claim that the theist takes to be implausible is consistent with the characterising claim and jointly entails the datum—which is all that Plantinga requires of a 'defence'—is manifestly insufficient to justify the theist's rejection of the link. Of course—at least by my lights—it would be sufficient for the theist to believe that the link is false, at least given that the theist is reasonable in so believing. That the theist must be reasonable in rejecting the link need not require that the theist has a fully developed theodicy; it could be that the theist reasonably rejects the link on 'sceptical theist' grounds, or the like.

To probe the weakness of Plantinga's free-will defence, it may be helpful to consider a logical argument from evil with the following premises:

C2: If God exists, God is the perfect *ex nihilo* creator of our universe.

Dp: Our universe is imperfect.

Lp1: The actions of a perfect being cannot decrease the degree of perfection of the world.

Lp2: If God exists, then, prior to all creation, the world is perfect.

In this argument, the datum is weaker than—because entailed by—D1(E). Moreover, Lp1 seems obvious: how could it be consistent with the possession of perfection that a being acts to make the world less perfect than it was previously? And Lp2 is justified by the observation that, prior to creation, the world consists of nothing but God, and God is perfect. But, given C2, Dp and Lp2, we infer that, if God exists, then, post creation, the degree of perfection of the world is less than it was prior to creation. And, from this claim, together with Lp1, we infer that God does not exist.

This argument has perhaps the weakest datum that can be used in a logical argument from evil, and yet it is obvious that reasons for rejecting the link in this argument cannot turn on considerations about freedom. I take it that these considerations serve to show that there is much more to be said even about logical arguments from evil with D1(E) or something weaker than D1(E) as the datum. There are theorists—e.g. Gleeson (2012)—who think that serious arguments from evil must appeal to horrendous evils, and that there is something deeply problematic about supposing that the slightest toothache is evidence against the existence of God. But, if I am right, even the slightest toothache is a *prima facie* intellectual problem for perfect being theists.

5. Rowe (1979)

Rowe (1979) thinks that, while Lr2 is relatively uncontroversial, and accepted by most theists, Lr1 is clearly controversial, and something that many theists reject. This view is borne out in the subsequent literature, most of which focuses only on Lr1.

Anticipating that the argument with Lr1 and Lr2 as link is unsuccessful as it stands, Rowe (1979) suggests an alternative argument in which Lr1 is replaced with something like:

Lr1*: We have thus far been unable to identify any greater good that would have been lost, or any equally bad or worse evil that would have been permitted, had an omnipotent, omniscient being acted on its power to prevent the truth of the datum.

Since the characterisation, the datum and the revised link do not form—and were not taken by Rowe to form—a logically inconsistent set of claims, the revised argument is not a logical argument from evil. Discussion of this revised argument is thus beyond the scope of the present paper (but see Oppy (2013) for some of my thoughts about it).

For theists who reject Lr1 because they think that some greater good would have been lost had an omnipotent, omniscient being acted on its power to prevent the truth of the datum, there are two options which preserve consistency: either they can identify the greater good that they suppose would have been lost had an omnipotent, omniscient being acted on its power to prevent the truth of the datum, or they can insist that it is perfectly reasonable to reject Lr1 even if one cannot identify the greater good that would have been lost had an omnipotent, omniscient being acted on its power to prevent the truth of the datum.

A free-will response to the logical argument of Rowe (1979) says that freedom is the greater good that would have been lost had an omnipotent, omniscient being acted on its power to prevent the truth of the datum. This looks wrong. On its face, the suffering of other animals has nothing to do with freedom and moral responsibility, a fact that many theists will acknowledge. Perhaps there may be *some* theists who think that the suffering of other animals, where not the result of the actions of human agents, is all due to the malicious behaviour of demons and other malevolent supernatural beings. But, quite apart from the implausible and *ad hoc* nature of this hypothesis, there is an assumption here that would require further justification: namely, that the freedom of those demons and other malevolent supernatural beings suffices to justify the often excruciating suffering that other animals have experienced for at least the past two hundred million years. Could the freedom of demons and other malevolent supernatural beings really be worth that much?

We have laws which make provision for the imprisonment of people who are found guilty of inflicting pain and suffering upon other animals. That is, we are prepared to take away from people their freedom to inflict pain and suffering on other animals rather than to allow them to go on inflicting pain and suffering on other animals. The value judgment that is implicit in these laws is that the disvalue of the pain and suffering of other animals outweighs the value of the freedom to inflict that pain and suffering on other animals. But, given that we make this value judgment, it seems that we are committed to the further claim that the value of the freedom of demons and other malevolent supernatural beings to inflict pain and suffering on other animals does not outweigh the

disvalue of the pain and suffering of those other animals. Even if the suffering of other animals, where not the result of the actions of human agents, were all due to the malicious behaviour of demons and other malevolent supernatural beings, the logical argument of Rowe (1979) would pose a challenge to theists that is not answered merely by appealing to the value of freedom.

Of course, even if I am right in claiming that a free-will response to the logical argument of Rowe (1979) is inadequate, there are still two avenues of response that remain open to theists. On the one hand, perhaps they can identify some *other* greater good that would have been lost if all suffering—or all sufficiently severe suffering—of other animals not due to the actions of human agents were prevented. And, on the other hand, perhaps they can claim that, while we do not know what greater good would have been lost if all suffering—or all sufficiently severe suffering—of other animals not due to the actions of human agents were prevented, it can nonetheless be reasonably believed that there is some such greater good.

It is perhaps worth emphasising the point that even Rowe's *logical* argument from evil might properly motivate consideration of sceptical theism. If you deny Lr1, then you are committed to the claim that, were an omnipotent, omniscient being to prevent the truth of the datum, some greater good would be lost (or some evil equally bad or worse would ensue). If you cannot say what is the greater good that would be lost (or what is the evil equally bad or worse that would ensue), then it seems to me that sceptical theism is likely to be an attractive option for you. For, plausibly, you need *some* explanation of how you come to accept an existential quantification when you are not prepared to point to a witnessing instance of that existential quantification. ('There is some greater good that would be lost, were an omnipotent, omniscient being to prevent the truth of the datum.')

6. Horrendous Evil

Earlier, I argued that there appears to be life left in logical arguments from evil based on quite weak data (e.g. the datum that there is evil, or the datum that our universe is imperfect). I now turn attention to an argument that works with much stronger data. Consider *all* of the horrendous suffering in our universe that results from the actions of human agents, and *all* of the horrendous suffering in our universe that does not result from the actions of human agents. Consider *all* of the horrendous suffering caused by floods, fires, tsunamis, tornadoes, earthquakes, hurricanes, droughts, viruses, and bacteria. Consider, too, *all* of the horrendous suffering caused by war, genocide, torture, rape, sexual assault, and forced prostitution. Don't overlook the horrendous suffering caused by mental illness, addiction, family violence, starvation, illness, poverty, injury, and on and on. In short, take as our datum (D15 & D16).

Take as our characterisation some reasonably strong claim that is accepted by perfect being theists—e.g. that, if God exists, God is the omnipotent, omniscient, perfectly good, perfectly free sole creator *ex nihilo* of our universe: (C1a & C1b & C1c & C1d & C1e).

Suppose, first, that, if God is to create a universe, then God's creative act involves the selection of a universe with its entire history: there is a range of universes with complete histories that are presented to God as feasible choices, and God selects from that range. On this way of thinking about things, God knows exactly how a chosen universe will unfold once it is selected: creation occurs with full knowledge of any horrendous evils that belong to the created universe. In this case, the intuitive

basis for a logical argument from evil is that, if no feasible universes were non-arbitrarily better than one in which (D15 & D16) are true, then God would choose not to create any universe. In this case (Lo1 & Lo2) is a candidate for the link in our logical argument from evil.

Perhaps we can support this argument by drawing an analogy between God and human parents. It seems quite compelling to think that, if human parents had foreknowledge that, were they to have a child, their child would be raped, tortured and murdered before the age of two, then those human parents would choose not to have a child. How, then, could it be acceptable for God to choose to have *lots* of children in full knowledge that they will be raped, tortured and murdered before the age of two?

Suppose, instead, that, if God is to create a universe, then God's creative act involves only the selection of an initial stage of the universe: there is a range of initial stages of universes that are presented to God as feasible choices, and God selects from that range. On this way of thinking about things, at creation God has merely probabilistic knowledge about how chosen initial stages of universes will evolve: the evolution of universes is chancy, and not even an omniscient being can know in advance how a chosen initial stage of a universe will develop. This might seem to leave a loophole for God: perhaps God made a world in which it was unlikely that (D15 & D16) would turn out to be true, and was simply the victim of incredibly bad luck.

The problem with this proposal is that it seems manifestly untrue that it was unlikely that (D15 & D16) would turn out to be true given that creatures capable of suffering appeared in our universe. On the contrary, even if our universe is, in some respects, chancy, it seems more or less inevitable that, once creatures capable of suffering appeared in our universe, something like (D15 & D16) would become true. This suggests something like the following link:

Lq1: If an omnipotent, omniscient, perfectly good, perfectly free being made our universe, then it made a universe in which it was near enough to certain that the facts about the distribution of evil would turn out as they did.

Lq2: If an omnipotent, omniscient, perfectly good, perfectly free being makes a universe, then it does not make a universe in which it is near enough to certain that (D15 & D16) will turn out to be true.

In this case, too, we can support the argument by drawing an analogy between God and human parents. It seems pretty compelling to think that, if human parents recognised that it was near enough to certain that, were they to have a child, their child would be raped, tortured and murdered before the age of two, then those human parents would choose not to have a child.

One central focus of contention between theists and their critics, in connection with these logical arguments from horrendous evil, concerns the value judgments implicit in Lo2 and Lq2. The mooted analogies notwithstanding, I take it that theists will insist that there *are* goods that outweigh the evils described in (D15 & D16). Some theists may claim that they know what these goods are; other theists will maintain that it is perhaps impossible for us to form any conception of these goods, even though we can know that there are such goods. But I do not believe that any theists could seriously suggest that considerations about *freedom* suffice to justify the evils described in (D15 & D16). When it comes to a choice between the freedom of those who would be raping, torturing and

murdering young children, and the protection of young children from such people, we unhesitatingly agree that those who would be raping, torturing and murdering young children may be legitimately deprived of their freedom to act in that way. Freedom just isn't worth that much.

7. Comparison with Logical Arguments for Theism

Although it may seem to be flogging a dead horse, it is, I think, worth giving some more attention to the attitude, widely shared among contemporary theists, that logical arguments from evil are 'killed' by Plantinga's free-will defence. In order to think effectively about this claim, it will be useful to take a wider perspective. Rather than focus simply on theism, we shall think about the 'contest' between theism and naturalism. In particular, we are interested in the question whether there are logical arguments that advantage one particular side in the 'contest' between theism and naturalism.

If we think about the 'contest' between theism and naturalism as a matter of theory choice, then we should see this choice as a two-stage matter. The first question to be addressed is whether either theory can be decisively knocked out of the 'contest' on *non-comparative* grounds: is one of the theories such that, either taken on its own, or taken in conjunction with data, it can be shown to be logically inconsistent, or probabilistically inconsistent, or the like? The second question to be addressed, assuming a negative answer to the first, is whether either theory is favoured on *comparative* grounds of theoretical virtue: does one theory score better than the other on an appropriate weighting of simplicity, explanation of data, fit with other established theory, explanatory scope, predictive accuracy, and so forth?

Clearly enough, logical arguments bear on the first, non-comparative, question: a successful logical argument would show that the theory that it targets is either internally logically inconsistent, or else logically inconsistent with data. Of course, a given logical argument will address a particular formulation of a worldview; even if a given logical argument succeeds against a particular formulation of the theoretical content of a worldview, it remains open that proponents of the worldview may produce a revised theory that is not defeated by the logical argument in question. Nonetheless, if a particular theoretical formulation is widely held, then an argument which shows that that particular formulation is internally inconsistent or inconsistent with data does give *those* proponents of the worldview some intellectual work to do (and that seems to be the most that is likely to be achieved by a logical argument in this area).

In the 'contest' between theism and naturalism, there is no dearth of logical arguments involving data. On the naturalist side, apart from logical arguments from evil, there are logical arguments from divine hiddenness, logical arguments from unbelief, logical arguments from scale, logical arguments from cosmology, and so forth. On the theist side, there are logical cosmological arguments, logical teleological arguments, logical arguments from consciousness, logical arguments from reason, logical moral arguments, logical evolutionary arguments, and so on.

What is the current state of play with respect to this large body of logical arguments? In particular, what is the current standing of logical arguments from evil *in comparison with* the current standing of, say, logical cosmological arguments and logical teleological arguments? Is there *more* reason to say that logical arguments from evil are 'dead' than there is to say that logical cosmological

arguments, and logical teleological arguments, and logical moral arguments, and logical evolutionary arguments are 'dead'?

Suppose we think—as many contemporary theists do—that Plantinga's free-will defence 'kills' logical arguments from evil. The take-away lesson here would have to be that, in order to defeat a logical argument in which we can distinguish between characterising claim, datum and link, it is sufficient to find a claim, no matter how implausible you take it to be, that is consistent with the characterising claim and that entails the datum.

Consider logical cosmological arguments. In order to apply the strategy of Plantinga's free-will defence, we need to divide the premises of such arguments into characterising claim, data and link.

The characterising claim in logical cosmological arguments against naturalism might be some variant of the following claim: there are none but natural causes involving none but natural entities.

The data in logical cosmological arguments against naturalism are uncontroversial claims: e.g. that some things are caused; and/or that there is a sum of natural causes; and/ or that things do not cause themselves.

The link in logical cosmological arguments against naturalism is the remaining premises, i.e. the premises that, together with the characterising claim and the data generate—or are supposed to generate—logical inconsistency. Since we shall be following the strategy of Plantinga's free-will defence, we don't need to worry about exactly what these premises are. Nonetheless, it might be useful to have a particular example in front of us. So let's suppose that we have the following argument:

1. If naturalism is true, then there are none but natural causes involving none but natural entities. (Characterisation)
2. Some things are caused. (Datum)
3. Things do not cause themselves. (Datum)
4. There are no circles of causes. (Datum)
5. There are no infinite regresses of causes. (Datum)
6. There is no more than one first cause. (Datum)
7. If there is exactly one first cause, then that first cause is not natural. (Link)
8. (Therefore) Naturalism is false (From 1-7)

Of course, not all naturalists will accept that all of 2-6 are data. However, the more that is conceded to be data, the harder it will be for naturalists to defeat the argument.

Following the strategy of Plantinga's free-will defence, all that we need to do, in order to pronounce this argument 'dead', is to find a claim that is logically consistent with the characterising claim and which entails the data. Consider the conjunction of the following set of claims: *There is a network of global natural states. These global natural states are linearly ordered under the causal relation. There is an initial global natural state that has no cause; all other global natural states are caused by prior global natural states, and by nothing other than prior global natural states. Local causal relations all align perfectly with global causal relations.* Since the conjunction of this set of claims is plainly logically consistent with the characterising claim, and entails all of the data, the conjunction of this set of claims satisfies the conditions that Plantinga says suffice for a defence against a logical

argument. Moreover, it doesn't matter whether naturalists suppose that the conjunction of this set of claims is plausible, though it may be that many naturalists will suppose that it is.

Perhaps it might be said that Plantinga himself is no friend of logical cosmological arguments, and that he might be perfectly happy to have logical cosmological arguments pronounced 'dead'. However, in Plantinga (2007), there is a sketch of a cosmological argument from contingency that looks as though it is probably a logical cosmological argument. And, in any case, there are certainly *other* contemporary theists who promote logical cosmological arguments, and yet who also endorse Plantinga's free-will defence against logical arguments from evil. To give just one example, in Craig and Sinnott-Armstrong (2004), Craig enthusiastically endorses Plantinga's free-will defence (113), and also enthusiastically defends the following logical cosmological argument (recast to fit the format of the present paper) (5):

1. If naturalism is true, then Natural Reality has no cause.
2. Natural Reality began to exist.
3. Whatever began to exist has a cause.
4. [Therefore] Naturalism is not true.

No naturalists will treat both 2 and 3 as data. Perhaps some will treat neither 2 nor 3 as data. Those naturalists who treat 2 as data can observe that the claim that Natural Reality began to exist uncaused is consistent with 1 and (when conjoined with 1) entails 2. And those naturalists who treat 3 as data can observe that the claim that everything other than Natural Reality both began to exist and had a cause, while Natural Reality neither began to exist nor had a cause is consistent with 1 and (when conjoined with 1) entails 3. Again, for the purposes of defence, it doesn't matter whether naturalists suppose that the specified claims are plausible, though perhaps many naturalists will suppose that they are.

While I have only considered a couple of examples here, I think that the discussion to this point already establishes that, if it were true that Plantinga's free-will defence 'kills' logical arguments from evil, then the general strategy of that defence, suitably redeployed, also 'kills' logical arguments from data *for* the existence of God. Those many contemporary theists who suppose both that Plantinga's free-will defence 'kills' logical arguments from evil and that there are 'live' logical arguments for theism from data are simply kidding themselves. Moreover, *this* conclusion would stand even if Plantinga's free-will defence were in good order. But, in fact, as we have seen in the previous sections of this paper, it is actually not true that Plantinga's free-will defence 'kills' logical arguments from evil. So, even if there were something wrong with my claim that the strategy of Plantinga's free-will defence can be applied equally successfully to logical arguments for the existence of God, it would still be true that Plantinga's free-will defence does not 'kill' logical arguments from evil. And so, for all of the considerations that have been advanced thus far, it may be that logical arguments *about* the existence of God remain 'live', or it may be that logical arguments *about* the existence of God are 'dead'.

For what it's worth, my own view—which I have argued for at length elsewhere, including in Oppy (2006) and (2011)—is that, while we currently have no good reason for thinking that there are successful *logical* arguments—or successful logical arguments from data—on either side of the dispute between naturalists and theists, we also currently have no good reason for thinking that it is

impossible that we will someday come into possession of successful logical arguments—or successful logical arguments from data—on one side in this dispute. While logical arguments about the existence of God are not dead, all of the ones that we know about show no genuine signs of life.

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