

Article

God, Evil, and Infinite Value

Marshall Naylor

Camino Santa Maria, St. Mary's University, San Antonio, TX 78228, USA; marshall.scott.naylor@gmail.com

Received: 1 December 2017; Accepted: 8 January 2018; Published: 11 January 2018

Abstract: Prominent approaches to the problems of evil assume that even if the Anselmian God exists, some worlds are better than others, all else being equal. But the assumptions that the Anselmian God exists and that some worlds are better than others cannot be true together. One description, by Mark Johnston and Georg Cantor, values God's existence as exceeding any transfinite cardinal value. For any finite or infinite amount of goodness in any possible world, God's value infinitely exceeds that amount. This conception is not obviously inconsistent with the Anselmian God. As a result, the prominent approaches to the problems of evil are mistaken. The elimination of evil does not, in fact, improve the value of any world as commonly thought. Permitting evil does not, in fact, diminish the value of any world as commonly thought.

Keywords: god; evil; infinite value; the problem of evil; Anselmianism

1. Introduction

Prominent approaches to the problems of evil assume that even if the Anselmian God exists, some worlds are better than others, all else being equal. One proponent, J.L. Mackie, argues that all possible evils are pointless evils. A world where God prevents pointless evils from occurring would be a better world than if he had not prevented it. An opposing view by Alvin Plantinga challenges Mackie and argues that it is possible that some evils are not pointless. God permits evil because preventing evil makes a better possible world. In his own approach to the problems of evil, William Rowe argues that God has a reason to prevent pointless evils but not evils that at least entail greater goods. It is worlds where he prevents pointless evils from occurring that are better than if he had permitted them.

But the assumptions that the Anselmian God exists and some worlds are better than others cannot be true together. Indeed, if the Anselmian God exists, it is necessarily false that any possible world is better than any other possible world. The Anselmian God is conceived as omnipotent, omniscient, omnibenevolent, and a necessarily existing being. One description, by Mark Johnston and Georg Cantor, values God's existence as exceeding any transfinite cardinal value. For any finite or infinite amount of goodness in any possible world, God's value infinitely exceeds that amount. This conception is not obviously inconsistent with the Anselmian God. As a result, the prominent approaches to the problems of evil are mistaken. The elimination of evil does not, in fact, improve the value of any world as commonly thought. Permitting evil does not, in fact, diminish the value of any world as commonly thought.

In Section 2, I discuss the Anselmian conception of God as it figures into Mackie, Rowe, and Plantinga's approaches to the problems of evil. Section 3 explains the assumption that it is possible that worlds differ in overall value from one another as Mackie, Rowe, and Plantinga assume. Section 4 introduces and defends the view that God's omnibenevolent nature is such that it exceeds any transfinite cardinal value and that this conception does not contradict the Anselmian conception of God. Section 5 argues that if the Anselmian God exists, the prominent approaches to the problems of evil are mistaken, as no world is better than any other world. As a result, the standard reason why God permits or prevents evil—for the betterment of a world—is also false is presented in Section 6.

2. Traditional Conception of God

The initial assumption in the problems of evil is that God is, necessarily, omnipotent, omnibenevolent, omniscient and necessarily existing.

TCG. Necessarily, God is omnipotent, omnibenevolent, omniscient, and a necessarily existing being.

TCG is the traditional conception of God. God is perfectly powerful, all-good, knows everything there is to know, and exists in every possible world. It is a divine being that is maximally great. This conception of God is found in early Christian thinkers including Saint Anselm.

According to Anselm, God is a being than which none greater can be conceived. The greatest conceivable being has the properties of omnipotence, omnibenevolence, omniscience, and necessary existence as a matter of conceptual fact.

And surely that than which a greater cannot be thought cannot exist only in the understanding. For if it exists only in the understanding, it can be thought to exist in reality as well, which is greater. So if that than which a greater cannot be thought exists only in the understanding, then the very thing than which a greater cannot be thought is something than which a greater can be thought.¹

And it so truly exists that it cannot be conceived not to exist. For it is possible to conceive of a being which cannot be conceived not to exist; and this is greater than one which can be conceived not to exist. Hence, if that, than which nothing greater can be conceived can be conceived not to exist, it is not that than which nothing greater can be conceived. But this is a contradiction. So truly, therefore, is there something than which nothing greater can be conceived, that it cannot even be conceived not to exist.

And this being thou art, O Lord, our God.²

Anselmian arguments are familiar. Consider two divine beings: DB_1 and DB_2 . DB_1 is certainly divine. He possesses all the omni-properties but exists merely in the understanding. But another divine being, DB_2 , possesses all the omni-properties but exists, as Anselm puts it, in reality. Assume that existence is a positive property of a being. DB_1 , though divine, is not a maximally great being. DB_1 is surpassable in greatness. There is another being, DB_2 , which is greater than DB_1 . Furthermore, God—as a conceptual fact—cannot be conceived as not existing. It is a logically necessary truth.³

Anselm's conception of a maximally great being says that there is no conceivable being as great as God.

1 Necessarily, a being is maximally great if and only if that being is omnipotent, omnibenevolent, omniscient, necessarily existing and there is no conceivable being B^* such that B^* is greater than or equal to TCG.

If it is possible that there is a conceivable being B^* whose properties equal or surpass that of TCG, then B^* is TCG. But, according to Anselm, it is impossible to conceive of a being B^* that is as good as or greater than TCG. Necessarily, God is a maximally great being such that there is no conceivable being who possesses omnipotence, omniscience, omnibenevolence, and necessary existence which is as good as TCG. TCG is a maximally great being (1) according to Anselm.

In their approaches to the problems of evil, Mackie, Rowe, and Plantinga assume the same equivalency. Mackie conceives God as TCG who is such that, necessarily, God eliminates evil as far as

¹ (Williams 2007).

² (Williams 2007).

³ (Malcolm 1960, p. 45).

he can and that there are no limits to what God can do. Mackie is sometimes of the view that God can do even what is logically impossible.⁴ The possible existence of any evil, then, is inconsistent with the existence of God. If there is an instance of evil in some possible world then there is no TCG, and theists should revise their belief in the traditional God.

There may be other solutions which require examination, but this study strongly suggests that there is no valid solution of the problem which does not modify at least one of the constituent propositions in a way which would seriously affect the essential core of the theistic position.⁵

One way to resolve the problem is to modify or weaken the conception of God found in TCG. Perhaps there is no divine being that is both at least omnibenevolent and omnipotent. But then, as Mackie concludes, the traditional God does not exist.

Rowe explicitly conceives God as TCG at the outset of his evidential problem of evil. His argument is against those who believe in the traditional God.

By theist in a narrow sense I mean someone who believes in the existence of an omnipotent, omniscient, eternal, supremely good being who created the world . . . In this paper I will be using the terms “theism” . . . in the narrow sense.⁶

And in his famous response to the logical problem of evil, Plantinga makes it clear that his concern is with the consistency between God as a TCG and evil.

The Free Will Defence is an effort to show that (1) God is omnipotent, omniscient, and wholly good (which I shall take to entail that God exists) is not inconsistent with (2) There is evil in the world. That is, the Free Will Defender aims to show that there is a possible world in which (1) and (2) are both true.⁷

These prominent approaches, and most other approaches to the problems of evil, share the same conception of the Anselmian God. It is indeed the traditional conception of God that seems to generate the problems of evil. As Mackie observes, genuine solutions to the problems of evil require us to weaken our conception of the most perfect being.

3. Diversity of Value Assumption

The prominent approaches to the problems of evil assume that some worlds are better than others. More specifically, there is diversity of overall value among possible worlds.

DVA. Necessarily, there is a diversity of value in the full in range of possible worlds.

DVA entails that the overall value of possible worlds varies. There are possible worlds with very little value and possible worlds with an abundance of value. Value would have to include at least moral and aesthetic value. Moral value in a world might include instances where significantly free beings exercise such qualities as compassion, care, generosity, concern, sympathy, and so on. It also could include the deontic features of a world.

The good-making properties might include the fact that the requirements of justice are always observed in a world or the fact that basic rights are always respected in a world. Justice might require a distribution of social goods according to need or merit. Justice might

⁴ (Mackie 1955, p. 203).

⁵ Ibid., p. 212.

⁶ (Rowe 1970).

⁷ (Plantinga 1974, p. 165).

require an equal distribution of social goods. Justice might also require that no inhabitants of a world benefit excessively from the chance possession of natural or social goods. Of course, the good-making and bad-making properties will also include the overall value of a possible world or the proportion of value to disvalue in the traditional axiological sense of value.⁸

Mackie relies on DVA to defend his logical problem of evil when he claims that God's failure to avail himself of making a morally perfect world serves as strong evidence against the proposition that God exists.

[I]f 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 on 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.⁹

According to Mackie, it is not the case that, necessarily, God was in a situation in which he could actualize only one of two sorts of worlds. Possible worlds in which automata-beings always do the right thing but are not significantly free-exist, or possible worlds in which significantly free beings exist but sometimes do wrong. Instead, Mackie urges that it is broadly logically possible that God had available to him the opportunity to actualize a better sort of world, in which every significantly free being always do the right thing.

Minimally, DVA affords Mackie the metaphysical picture that at least possible worlds with differing overall value exist. Without DVA, Mackie could not construe a situation in which God fails to create a morally perfect world that he might have created.

William Rowe relies on DVA in order to argue that we have reason to believe that God has good reasons to permit some evil in a world but not all evil in every possible world.

An omniscient, wholly-good being would prevent the occurrence of any intense evil it could, unless it could not do so without thereby losing some greater good or permitting some equally bad or worse evil.¹⁰

This standard formulation is Rowe's definition of gratuitous or pointless evil. God permits only evils such that they entail greater goods, the prevention of worse evils, or the prevention of evils equally bad. The first condition implies that Rowe relies on DVA in his evidential problem of evil.

According to Rowe, God permits evil if, necessarily, evil E entails a greater good G, and G & E is overall more valuable than $\sim G$ & $\sim E$. There is a possible world, w_1 , in which God permits E and, necessarily E entails G, and the occurrence of G & E is overall more valuable than a possible world, w_2 , where $\sim G$ & $\sim E$ occur, all else being equal. Let $>$ signify greater in overall value. So it is true that $w_1 > w_2$, in spite of the evil that occurs. God is justified in permitting the lesser evil E for G because G is unobtainable without E.¹¹

DVA affords Rowe opportunities to explain various circumstances across a diversity of possible worlds in which God permits evil. In possible worlds in which lesser evils entail greater goods,

⁸ (Almeida 2017).

⁹ (Mackie 1955, p. 209).

¹⁰ (Rowe 1970, p. 336).

¹¹ (Rowe 1970).

God permits the lesser evil. It is a better overall world than a world in which it had not occurred, all else being equal. In possible worlds in which a lesser evil entails the prevention of a greater evil, God permits the lesser evil.

Rowe does go on to argue that it is reasonable to believe there is some actual evil that does not entail greater goods, nor prevents evil. It is this justified belief that makes it the case that God probably does not exist. However, without DVA, Rowe could not explain why it is the case that pointless evils, not all evils, are a problem for the belief that God exists.

In his famous Free Will Defense, Alvin Plantinga relies on DVA in order to argue that God is justified in permitting some evil, against Mackie's argument that no evil is justified. Plantinga argues that it is possible that it is necessary that in all worlds free beings exist in, they sometimes do what is wrong. It is also true that it is not within God's power to cause them to always choose to do what is right. There is no world God could actualize in which every significantly free being always does what is right. However, there are possible and actualizable worlds where significantly free beings overall do more right actions than wrong actions. Additionally:

A world containing creatures who are sometimes significantly free (and freely perform more good than evil actions) is more valuable, all else being equal, than a world containing no free creatures at all.¹²

So, God is justified in actualizing a possible world with some evil in it. The lesser evil of significantly free beings choosing to do what is wrong entails the greater overall good of those significantly free beings' existence and those beings mostly doing right. A possible world in which significantly free beings perform more good than evil actions is overall more valuable than if they did not exist.

DVA provides an opportunity for Plantinga to formulate a response to Mackie's problem of evil. There are at least two possible worlds with differing overall value. One possible world, w_1 , contains significantly free beings who perform more right actions than wrong actions overall. In possible world, w_2 , there are no significantly free beings performing more right actions than wrong actions. The existence of and actions of significantly free beings are among the good-making properties of w_1 . These are goods that w_2 lacks since no significantly free beings exist there, all else being equal. On Plantinga's view, it is the case that $w_1 > w_2$. God is justified in permitting evil.

DVA is an important initial assumption in the problems of evil. Mackie uses DVA to argue that God could have created a morally perfect world such that its overall value exceeds the value of other possible worlds. Rowe uses DVA to argue that God is justified in permitting some evils. Worlds which lack those lesser evils that entail greater goods are, overall, less valuable than they could have been. Plantinga uses DVA to argue that God is justified in permitting the evil that significantly free beings create. The existence of those significantly free beings in spite of the moral evil that they create contributes positively to the overall value of that world such that its value exceeds that of possible worlds had they not existed.

4. Unsurpassable Value Assumption

But the initial assumptions of DVA and TCG both cannot be true. If TCG is false and DVA true, then there might not be any problem of evil. Mackie is direct when it comes to this possibility.

If you are prepared to say that God is not wholly good, or not quite omnipotent, or that evil does not exist, or that good is not opposed to the kind of evil that exists, or that there are limits to what an omnipotent thing can do, then the problem of evil will not arise for you.¹³

If God is not wholly good, then it is possible that there is evil in a possible world such that God would not prevent it. He may be sufficiently powerful but not morally perfect and therefore fails to

¹² (Plantinga 1974, p. 169).

¹³ (Mackie 1955, p. 200).

prevent evil. However, if God is not omnipotent, then it is possible there is some evil in a possible world such that God could not eliminate or prevent that evil. God would not be morally required to do the impossible. These solutions acquiesce in the existence of evil. But rejecting TCG is not an outcome many theists would readily agree to. But if TCG is true, then DVA is false. Indeed, DVA is necessarily false.

But exactly how is it that DVA is necessarily false? It certainly seems plausibly true. If there are possible worlds w_1 and w_2 , and E occurs in w_1 but not w_2 , all else being equal, w_1 has an instance of disvalue that w_2 lacks. The lowering of value of w_1 makes it such that $w_1 < w_2$, or w_1 is overall less valuable world than w_2 . Consider the value of a very great good G that occurs in world w_1 but not in the nearly identical world w_2 , which lacks that G. The increase in value of w_1 over w_2 makes it such that $w_1 > w_2$ or that w_1 is overall more valuable than w_2 . DVA does not preclude the possibility of duplicate worlds.¹⁴ DVA does not preclude worlds have identical overall value *in toto*. It seems that DVA is true.

Recall that TCG entails that God is a maximally great being and a maximally great being is maximally great if it meets the conditions of (1).

- 1 Necessarily, a being is maximally great if and only if that being is omnipotent, omnibenevolent, omniscient, necessarily existing and there is no conceivable being B* such that B* is greater than or equal to TCG.

There will be no conceivable being that surpasses God's omnipotence, omniscience, and omnibenevolence, according to Anselm. Additionally, it is a plausible characterization of (1) that a maximally great being at least entails possessing goodness that it is both unsurpassable and undiminishable.

UNG. Necessarily, God's goodness is unsurpassable and undiminishable.

This assumption has found support by Thomas Aquinas, Mark Johnston, Georg Cantor, and in some similar degree, Alvin Plantinga.

Aquinas conceives God as supremely good.

Since it is as first source of everything not himself in a genus that God is good, he must be good in the most perfect manner possible. And for this reason we call him supremely good . . . he alone exists by nature, and in him there are no added accidents (power, wisdom, and the like which are accidental to other things belonging to him by nature, as already noted). Moreover, he is not disposed towards some extrinsic goals, but is himself the ultimate good of all other things. So it is clear that only God possesses every kind of perfection by nature. He alone therefore is by nature good.¹⁵

Johnston is explicit about the Anselmian conception of God as an absolutely, infinitely good being.

God is absolutely infinite goodness. Accordingly, he has by his essence every positive value or perfection it is possible for him to have simply (i.e., not in virtue of some relation to other things) and in manner that is unsurpassable and undiminishable. Moreover, his goodness considered *in toto* is unsurpassable and undiminishable.¹⁶

This is the view of God that is reminiscent of Cantor's philosophical work on the conception of the *Absolute*.

The transfinite with its abundance of formations and forms, points with necessity to an Absolute, to the "truly Infinite," to whose Magnitude nothing can be added or

¹⁴ (Monton 2010).

¹⁵ (Aquinas 1964), Question 6, Article 3.

¹⁶ (Johnston 2015, p. 4).

subtracted and which therefore is to be seen quantitatively as an *absolute* Maximum. The latter exceeds, so to speak, the human power of comprehension and eludes particularly mathematical determination.¹⁷

What surpasses all that is finite and transfinite is no ‘Genus’; it is the single and completely individual unity in which everything is included, which includes the ‘Absolute’ incomprehensible to the human understanding. This is the ‘Actus Durissimus’ which by many is called ‘God’.¹⁸

This view also is found in very recent work of Plantinga.

... We are considering just the worlds in which God exists; for present purposes, let’s assume that traditional theism is true, and that these are all the worlds there are. The first thing to note, I think, is that all of these worlds—all possible worlds, then are very good. For God is unlimited in goodness and holiness ... [b]ut what is the force of ‘unlimited’ here? I take it to mean that there are no nonlogical limits to God’s display of these great-making properties: no nonlogical limit to his goodness, love, knowledge and power. From this it follows, I believe, that any state of affairs containing God alone—any state of affairs that would have been actual had God not created anything at all—is also in a sensible sense infinite in value ...^{19,20}

Aquinas conceives God as supremely good and the source of all goodness overall. Johnston conceives God’s goodness as essentially, unsurpassable and undiminishable. They are part of his property of being perfect in virtue of the kind of being he is. Cantor, too, sees God’s value is such that nothing can either be added or subtracted from it. His value exceeds any finite and transfinite. Plantinga conceives God at least as a being of unlimited goodness—without at least finite limit, presumably—regardless of the states of affairs that obtain and with no non-logical limitations to his great-making properties including his goodness.²¹ According to Anselm, God is a being than which none greater can be conceived. Plantinga, Cantor, Aquinas, and Johnston’s view of God as UNG is consistent with TCG, the Anselmian God. TCG is a maximally great being such that no being is greater than it which is consistent with (1). UNG is a plausible description of God’s *omnibenevolent* nature.

UNG entails that there is no finite amount in which the absolute value of God can be diminished. Consider some transfinite cardinal \aleph_n , and suppose the cardinality of God’s value = \aleph_n . It is true that compared to even very large finite numbers n , the transfinite cardinal \aleph_n is infinitely larger. God’s value therefore exceeds every finite value. But it is also true that for every transfinite cardinal \aleph_n , there is an even larger transfinite cardinal \aleph_{n+1} . So, God’s value is infinite, but also surpassable. And, of course, for a \aleph_{n+1} there is an even larger $2^{\aleph_{n+1}}$. So, no matter what infinite cardinality measures God’s value, it is a surpassable value. Now, according to Cantor, God is a being who transcends all finite and infinite measures. God’s value is unsurpassable and undiminishable. Consider the possibility of some finite value n added to God’s value \aleph_j .

$$(i) \aleph_j + n = \aleph_j$$

$$(ii) \aleph_j \times n = \aleph_j$$

¹⁷ (Cantor 1994). See a letter from Georg Cantor to A. Eulenberg, February 28, 1886. This account of Cantor’s conception is endorsed by Michael Almeida and Mark Johnston, as well. See (Almeida 2017, p. 157; Johnston 2015, p. 4).

¹⁸ (Dauben 1979).

¹⁹ (Plantinga 2008, p. 6).

²⁰ Ibid., 6.

²¹ Though Plantinga conceives God greatness as unlimited, it is notable feature of his view that the Incarnation and Atonement are among the greatest contingent states of affairs that can occur in any possible world. If the view I argue for is correct, even worlds with Incarnation and Atonement are overall equally good as worlds without them.

No n is such that it increases the value of God. For any finite n , God's value infinitely exceeds that n . Arithmetic is uneventful between God's absolute infinite value and some finite value n . But the same can be said for the infinite amounts \aleph_i subtracted from God's value.

$$(iii) \aleph_j - \aleph_i = \aleph_j$$

$$(iv) \aleph_j / \aleph_i = \aleph_j$$

It is also true that no \aleph_i is such that it decreases the value of God. For any infinite \aleph_i , God's value infinitely exceeds that \aleph_i . Arithmetic is uneventful given God's absolute infinite value and the infinitely smaller infinite value. God's absolute infinite value surpasses any value whatsoever. It has no upper bound.

Though the functions of addition and subtraction are employed to explain God's value, the Cantor/Johnston view does not entail that God's value is conceived merely quantitatively. It is true that Cantor sees God's magnitude as immeasurably infinite that nothing can diminish or surpass it. But recall that it is also true that Cantor conceives God as the source of all things and lacking no perfection. Johnston also conceives God as having every possible perfection such that they are unsurpassable and undiminishable *en toto*. The Cantor/Johnston view is consistent with Thomist and Anselmian conceptions of God. God is the greatest conceivable being and has every perfection perfectly. God is the source of all things and, by nature, good. God's omnibenevolence is an absolute infinite value. God's goodness is such that it is unsurpassable and undiminishable. No finite or infinite value—quantitative nor qualitative—can increase or decrease it.

5. DVA is False

Recall that it has been argued that TCG is consistent with (1). It has also been argued that the value of God is UNG. UNG is consistent with both TCG and (1). Note that because God is necessarily existing, God exists at every possible world. It is also true then that DVA is necessarily false and prominent approaches to the problems of evil are mistaken.

Mackie argues that one way the problem of evil arises is because God failed to avail himself the option of creating a better world where free creatures that always do right exist in contrast to a world where they sometimes do right, or a world where there are automata. There is a world w_1 where automata exist rather than significantly free beings. In world w_2 , there are significantly free creatures that sometimes go wrong. And in world w_3 , there are significantly free creatures that always go right freely. The existence of and the actions of these creatures bear on the overall value of the world. As a result, Mackie assumes DVA is true and argues that $w_3 > w_2$ or w_1 . God's failure to create w_3 is evidence of his non-existence.

But Mackie is mistaken. Among the valuable beings in these worlds is God. As a necessarily existing being, God's existence also bears on the overall value of a world. That value is an absolute infinite value. Furthermore, no finite or infinite value can either surpass or diminish God's value. It is not the case $w_3 > w_2$ or w_1 . The prevention of any finite or infinite evil cannot either increase or decrease the overall value of any world. So, it is impossible that God was in a situation in which he failed to avail himself the option of creating a better world, as Mackie argues.

Recall that Rowe assumes DVA is true and argues that there are evils God permits because they entail greater goods. These are greater goods that God would want to occur rather than prevent. Take w_1 where some justified suffering occurs, E , and world w_2 where God prevents that E . It is also true that E entails a greater good G . w_1 is an overall better world than w_2 in spite of E because of G . So God permits that E .

But, necessarily, DVA is false. w_1 is not an overall better world than w_2 . As a necessarily existing being, God's existence also bears on the overall value of a world, all else being equal. That value is an absolute infinite value. Furthermore, no finite or infinite value can either surpass or diminish God's value. w_1 does not yield any greater value if God permits E than in w_2 where God prevents it.

Likewise, the prevention of a pointless evil does not yield a better world compared to a world where it occurs. But then Rowe's approach to the problems of evil is mistaken. The reason Rowe gives for God permitting or preventing evil is necessarily false.

Recall Plantinga's famous defense and his assumption of DVA. God is permitted to create significantly free beings that sometimes do evil because they do more right than wrong, overall. It is a better world with significantly free beings existing than if they did not exist. Take w_1 where significantly free beings exist and world w_2 where they do not. It is true on Plantinga's view that these worlds differ in value. It is true on Plantinga's view that w_1 is greater in overall value than w_2 .

But Plantinga is mistaken. DVA is necessarily false. As a necessarily existing being, God's existence also bears on the overall value of a world, all else being equal. That value is an infinite absolute value. Furthermore, no finite or infinite value can either surpass or diminish God's value. There is no world w_1 where significantly free beings sometimes go wrong but overall do what is right that is better than a world without them. Counter to Plantinga, God does not have a reason to permit significantly free beings for its added value to the world.

The prominent approaches to the problems of evil are mistaken. If TCG is true, UNG is also plausibly true. But if UNG is true, then DVA is necessarily false.²² But DVA is a crucial assumption when engaging the problems of evil. The prominent approaches to the problems of evil then are mistaken.

6. Preventing or Permitting Evil

Recall that the prominent approaches to the problems of evil argue that God's reasons for preventing or permitting evil are based on the overall value of those possible worlds evil creates. But if UNG is true, no world is overall better than any other world regardless of whether God permits or prevents any evil. The reasons Mackie, Rowe, and Plantinga attributed to God for permitting or preventing evil are necessarily false. The prevention or permission of evil are not justified as Mackie, Rowe, and Plantinga see it.

Mackie urges that if God were to exist, his reason to prevent evil would be that he could actualize a morally perfect world such that it is overall better than a world where automata exist or where evil exists as the product of human free actions, all else being equal. Not creating that morally perfect world, Mackie urges, is inconsistent with God's omnipotence and being wholly good. But if UNG is true, no world is overall better than any other world. It is impossible that God could actualize a morally perfect world such that it is overall better than a world where automata exist or where evil is the product of human free actions. The world with automata or significantly free beings that sometimes go wrong have the same infinite absolute value as a world where humans always freely act rightly. It is true that God could actualize a world where significantly free beings always go right; however, that world would not even be overall slightly better than a world with automata instead. Indeed, a world where significantly free beings always go right would not even be overall slightly better than any world whatsoever. It is necessarily false that God's reason to prevent evil is to actualize a morally perfect world that is overall better than any world. The existence of evil then is not inconsistent with God's omnipotence and being wholly good with respect to Mackie's approach to the problems of evil.

Rowe argues that God has good reason to permit evil because of the great goods it creates or the equally bad or worse evils it prevents. Any instance of evil that does not meet at least one of

²² It is also true that we can rank worlds from better or worse while granting that their overall value is the same, as an anonymous referee observes. For example, it is true that the contingent, created part of world w_{34} with much more evil in it is intuitively worse than an otherwise similar world, w_{85} , with less evil in it. Or, similarly, it is true that w_{34} might have less contingent, good-making properties than w_{85} such that w_{34} is ranked worse than w_{85} . But it is also consistent to say that w_{34} and w_{85} have the same overall value with respect to the existence of God. God is one of the good-making properties in those worlds. Klaas Kraay has briefly suggested that a problem of evil might then be refocused on deriving an inconsistency between the existence of God and the existence of evil in the contingent, created part of worlds. See (Kraay 2017).

these conditions is evidence that God does not exist. But if UNG is true, no world is overall better than any other world. It is impossible that God could permit or prevent evil such that it makes any world overall better. It is impossible that God could permit evil E such that the entailing great good G results in an overall better world than a world where $\sim E$ & $\sim G$ occur. It may be true that God could actualize a world where E entails G but it would not be even overall slightly better than any world whatsoever. It is necessarily false that God has a reason to permit evil because of the great goods it creates. Furthermore, the prevention of evil would not make any world even overall slightly better. It is not the case that the prevention or permission of any evil makes any world overall better or worse. It is necessarily false that God's reason to permit evil or prevent evil is to the betterment of any world. The existence of evil then is not inconsistent with God's omnipotence and being wholly good with respect to Rowe's view of the problems of evil.

Plantinga argues that God has a reason to permit evil because, in spite of the evil that it creates, a world with significantly free beings is a better world than without them. Furthermore, Plantinga recognizes that the worlds in which God exists are very good worlds and, since God exists at every world, all the worlds are very good. But if UNG is true, all worlds are more than very good; they are of absolute infinite value. No world is overall better than any other world. It is impossible that there is a world in which significantly free beings are mostly doing right that is overall better than a world where those significantly free beings do not exist. It may be possible that God could actualize a world with significantly free beings, but that world would not even be overall slightly better than a world without those beings or any world whatsoever. It is necessarily false that God has a reason to permit evil because, in spite of the evil that they create, a world with significantly free beings is a better world than without. It is impossible for God to have created significantly free beings for the overall betterment of any world.

The reasons the prominent approaches to the problems of evil attribute to God in preventing or permitting evil are mistaken. No world is overall better than any other world regardless if God permits or prevents any evil. Unlike Mackie's view, God does not have a reason to prevent evil for the betterment of any world. Unlike Rowe's view, God lacks the reason to permit and prevent any evil for the betterment of any world. Unlike Plantinga's view, God lacks the reason for permitting evil perpetuated by significantly free beings for the betterment of any world.

7. Conclusions

In this paper, I argue for the thesis that the prominent approaches to the problems of evil are mistaken. The Anselmian God is TCG, a maximally great being as described in (1). The Anselmian God is consistent with UNG, a conception found and defended by Aquinas, Anselm, Johnston, Cantor, and (to some degree) Plantinga. But if God is UNG, then DVA—a common assumption across the prominent approaches to the problems of evil—is false. There is no possible world with overall greater value than any other possible world. The standard reasons God prevents or permits evil as supposed by the prominent approaches to the problems of evil are mistaken.

Conflicts of Interest: The author declares no conflicts of interest.

References

- Almeida, Michael. 2017. *Theistic Modal Realism*. San Antonio: University of Texas at San Antonio, p. 155, forthcoming.
- Aquinas, Thomas. 1964. *Summa Theologiae: Volume 2*. Translated by Timothy McDermott. New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company.
- Cantor, Georg. 1994. On the Theory of the Transfinite. *Fidelio* 3: 104.
- Dauben, Joseph Warren. 1979. Georg Cantor, Letter to G. C. Young, June 20, 1908. In *Georg Cantor: His Mathematics and Philosophy of the Infinite*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Johnston, Mark. 2015. *Why Did the One Not Remain in Itself?* New Brunswick: Rutgers University, forthcoming.

- Kraay, Klaas. 2017. God and Infinite Value. Paper presented at 2017 Brackenridge Symposium, San Antonio, TX, USA, October 12–13.
- Mackie, John L. 1955. Evil and Omnipotence. *Mind* 64: 200–12. [[CrossRef](#)]
- Malcolm, Norman. 1960. Anselm's Ontological Arguments. *The Philosophical Review* 69: 41–62. [[CrossRef](#)]
- Monton, Bradley. 2010. Against Multiverse Theodices. *Philo* 13: 113–35. [[CrossRef](#)]
- Plantinga, Alvin. 1974. *The Nature of Necessity*. Oxford: Claredon Press.
- Plantinga, Alvin. 2008. Superlapsarianism or 'O Felix Culpa'. In *Christian Faith and the Problem of Evil*. Edited by Peter van Inwagen. Grand Rapids: Eerdmanns, pp. 1–25.
- Rowe, William L. 1970. The Problem of Evil and Some Varieties of Atheism. *American Philosophical Quarterly* 16: 335.
- Williams, Thomas. 2007. *Anselm: Basic Writings*. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company.



© 2018 by the author. Licensee MDPI, Basel, Switzerland. This article is an open access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY) license (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).