

Organic Unities: A Response to the Problem of Evil

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Abstract: the principle of organic unities is a metaphysical claim regarding the nature of moral value. It states that the value of the whole is not equal to the summation of its parts. I wish to consider this principle in relation to the problem of God and evil and claim that the theist can utilize the principle of organic unities to undermine the problem of evil. First, I explain the principle of organic unities and how it affects one's understanding of moral value. Next, I explicate the two major historical versions of the problem of evil: the logical argument from evil and the evidential argument from evil. Lastly, I argue that the principle of organic unities demonstrates that God may logically co-exist with evil and that the atheist lacks rational warrant appealing to gratuitous evil against God's existence. As a result, both problems fail.

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The problem of evil is quite possibly the greatest weapon used by atheists against belief in God, particularly the Christian God. The problem of evil, in all of its variants, exploits the existence of evil as a reason to reject the existence of God. While much ink has been spilled defining and responding to the problem of evil, the issue remains a dynamic force in the philosophy of religion as well as religious apologetics. I argue, however, that the problem of evil fails. I claim that the theist can utilize the metaphysics of value and value possession to undermine the problem of evil. The metaphysical principle that I have in mind is the principle of organic unities.¹ First, I explain the principle of organic unities and how it affects

¹The concept of organic unities is similar to arguments regarding the existence of evil and God in the form of the greater good theodicy. This theodicy claims that God permits evil to exist either to obtain a greater good or to avoid a worse evil. In *Meditations* 4, Rene Descartes (1998), for example, argues that he is subject to error in his mental abilities, and God could have created him without that penchant for error. Descartes, however, concludes that the world as a whole might be more

one's understanding of the nature of moral value as well as the assertion of value. Next, I explicate two major versions of the problem of evil: the logical argument from evil and the evidential argument from evil. The logical argument from evil attempts to show that God's existence is logically incompatible with the existence of evil. The evidential argument attempts to show that the existence of gratuitous and pointless evil is a reason to reject the existence of God. Lastly, I argue that the principle of organic unities demonstrates that God may logically co-exist with evil and that the atheist lacks evidence to which he may appeal to provide rational warrant against God's existence. As a result, both problems of evil fail.

1. The Principle of Organic Unities

Theism faces a pernicious problem from the existence of evil. The mere existence of evil is supposedly incompatible with the existence of such a God leading to the conclusion that theism is irrational. With this issue in mind, I wish to examine a concept that I believe leads both the logical argument from evil and the evidential argument from evil to falter. The concept I have in mind is the principle of organic unities. Organic unities are wholes (objects or states of affairs) that have good, bad, or indifferent valued parts. These parts contribute to the existence of the whole but do not determine the value of the whole. As a result, the value of a whole bears no regular proportion to the sum of its parts; therefore, an organic whole may have bad or indifferent parts but still possess the value of goodness.

While the principle of organic unities has links back to ancient Greek philosophy, Franz Brentano and G. E. Moore are the first to formally define the principle as it is known today. As interpreted by Roderick Chisholm (1986),

perfect as it is with this possibility for error than if it did not. Gottfried Leibniz (1990, 2005) famously argues that God must and has created the best possible world; therefore, the evil the actual world contains is justified. Each philosopher is claiming that the combination of certain good and bad parts produces a whole that is greater in goodness than not having the evil parts and which justifies the evil. Another similar kind of argument is that evil is necessary to obtaining certain good things or states of affairs. These types of arguments ultimately may not differ from the greater goods theodicy. For examples, see John Hick (1966) and Richard Swinburne (1996). My argument, however, makes no appeal to obtaining greater goods or avoiding worse evils as a means of justifying God. I claim merely that the principle of organic unities implies certain metaphysical truths about the possession of moral value that affect the co-existence of God and evil as well as the possible existence of gratuitous evil that allow the theist to reject both problems of evil. The argument also does not appeal to any particular good thing as the reason for God permitting evil. Further, these arguments appear to imply a mean-end relationship between evil and good things or states of affairs. The principle of organic unities, as will be seen, rejects the notion that evil parts are a means to a good whole.

Brentano noted that goodness is not merely a function of the value of the parts of the whole. Goodness lies in the order that the parts exhibit within the whole. This claim is exhibited three ways. First, the principle of *bonum variationis* states that all things being equal it is better to combine two dissimilar goods than two equal goods. Combining two different goods that have the same value (a beautiful painting and a beautiful piece of music) is better than having two goods of the same value (two beautiful paintings). Variety is better than uniformity. Second, the principle of *bonum progressionis* states that for two similar situations A and B if the amount of goodness increases in A but decreases in B, then A is preferable to B even if their value ultimately is equal. It is better to increase goodness than to decrease it, to go from good to better than to go from better to just good. Third, the law of retribution states that the sorrow that is involved in punishment or remorse when combined with an evil act is better than the lack of sorrow. Though sorrow is bad, it is better that sorrow exist as punishment or remorse alongside an evil act than that it be absent with the evil act.

These principles are all contrary to the principle of summation Chisholm states. The principle of summation claims that the value of the parts outweighs or counterbalances the value of the other parts. The two paintings and the piece of music all have the same value. According to the principle of summation, the combination of either painting with the piece of music has the same value as the combination of the two paintings. The principle of *bonum variationis* claims that this conclusion is false. It is better to have a variety of good things than to lack or miss out on other goods; however, this greater value cannot be obtained simply by adding the value of the parts of the whole. This value is obtained only through the relation that the parts have with each other. The relation shared between the painting and the piece of music confers a greater value due to one having a variety of things rather than two of the same thing. The same conclusion follows with the principle of *bonum progressionis*. Even though the sum of the parts of A and B are equal, it is better to increase goodness than to decrease it. Due to this relation between the parts, A (painting, music) is intrinsically better than B (two paintings) because A increases in goodness (variety). Lastly, this conclusion is upheld by the law of retribution. The sum of an evil action along with sorrow is certainly bad, but if that sorrow comes from remorse or punishment, the combination of the evil act and sorrow can actually be good or better than the evil that is not punished. Evil should never go unpunished, and one should always feel remorse over doing evil. Thus, the principle of summation is false and not a valid means to determine the value of a whole. The number of good or bad things in a whole does not necessarily determine the value of the whole.

As Moore claims, it is plausible for one to assert any of the following: (i) that the combination of two good things lead to a greater value; (ii) that the combination of two bad things lead to a worse value; (iii) that the combination of a good and an indifferent thing leads to a greater value; (iv) that the combination of a bad and indifferent thing leads to worse value; (v) that the combination of two indifferent things leads to either greater or worse value. On the other hand, asserting that the combination of a bad and a good part leads to greater value or that two bad things leads to a whole with greater value is difficult, but not impossible (Moore, 2004). Noah Lemos (1994) argues that righteous indignation is an instance of organic unities that combine good and evil parts to create a good whole.² Events, such as World War II with its quest to stop Nazi aggression, could be an example of an organic unity that is good on the whole but contains evil parts depending on one's beliefs concerning the morality of war. Farming and hunting are something that could be considered a good organic unity with evil parts with the survival of human life due to the death of plant and animal life. Brentano's law of retribution is also a possible example of how evil parts can combine to form a good whole; therefore, there is reason to believe that organic unities of all kinds are not only logically possible but also that they do in fact exist.

As Moore (2004) further explains, the concept of an organic whole is different from the concept of a means to an end in three ways. First, the existence of any such part of an organic unity is a necessary condition for the existence of the good constituted by the whole. The means is not part of the end, but the part is part of the whole. As a result, the end may exist without the means and still be a good end, but the whole may not exist without the part and still be a good whole. The means has no intrinsic value, but the part does have such a value which relates to the value of the whole. The whole is connected to the part by a metaphysical relation while the means is connected to the end by a causal relation. Second, the part has no more value when it is a part of one or another whole. The value of the part does not change according to the whole to which it belongs. The value of the part remains constant no matter to which whole it belongs. This claim is not true

²Lemos notes that there are six examples of organic unities: (i) pleasure in the good, (ii) displeasure in the good, (iii) pleasure in the bad, (iv) displeasure in the bad, (v) indifference in the good, (vi) indifference in the bad. He also notes that *Schadenfreude* (taking pleasure in suffering) and amorality are instances of organic unities. The former has a good part but is evil on the whole. The latter has an indifferent part but is evil on the whole. Still, Lemos's claims might be questionable. Does my righteous indignation at a person being tortured form an organic whole that is good? Possibly since the value of the parts do not determine the value of the whole, but such a claim might strike some as strange and lead them to reject Lemos's suggestion.

of a means. The value of a means may change depending on the end to which it is connected. Third, the value of the whole cannot be transmitted to the part. This claim is not true of a means, whose value may change depending on circumstances. A means sometimes does and sometimes does not lead to a good end. One is justified in saying that it is good that some things exist under certain circumstances if they lead to a greater whole. Because of these differences, one must be careful to distinguish the concept of organic wholes from the concept of means and ends.

Moore expands on this claim while rejecting other understandings of the principle of organic unities. As Moore states, there have been different senses of the term "organic whole": (1) each part is related to the others and to itself as means to an end as in a mutual dependence relation; (2) they have a property described as they have no meaning apart from the whole; (3) a value property belonging to a whole in the sense that Moore defines it. These definitions are not identical, Moore claims. Using the body as an example, Moore argues that one can see that there are certain parts of the body such that the continued existence of the one is a necessary condition of the continued existence of the other, and vice versa. This relation is a relation of mutual dependence. Each part is both the means and the end to the other parts, all the parts are means to the whole, and the whole is the means to the parts. Moore objects to this application stating that it is possible that none of the parts of such a dependence relation may have intrinsic value. In fact, one part may have value while another lacks it. As a result, these parts are only an "end" where such a term implies "effect." The relation between part and whole, however, is different from the relation between part and part. The latter relation implies causal connection: the one cannot exist without the other. The former relation does not imply causal connection, and the relation may exist even if the parts are not causally connected. Further, the whole cannot be an end for the parts since the whole logically cannot exist without the parts, and the parts are not the cause of the whole since the parts are necessary and cannot cause themselves. As a result, such a mutual dependence relation implies nothing of the value of the objects that have it, and even if those objects have value, this relation cannot hold between part and whole. Mutual dependence is a false definition of organic unity.

Another understanding of an organic unity Moore claims is that the parts possess a property which the parts of no whole can have. Just as the whole cannot be what it is without the parts, the parts cannot be what they are without the existence of the whole. The part is no distinct object of thought; therefore, the whole to which it belongs is part of the understanding of the part. Part and whole are tautologies. Moore claims that such a notion is false. No part analytically

contains the whole to which it belongs or any other parts of that whole. The relation of part to whole is not the same as whole to part. The relation of whole to part does analytically contain the part. The part is part of the whole, but it cannot be asserted that the whole is a part of itself. The claim *this is a part of that whole* has a specific meaning such that both subject and predicate must have different meanings, not the same. Therefore, the claim that the part cannot be understood or have meaning apart from the whole is incoherent and false.

As a result, the best way to think of the principle of organic unities implies only that the value of the whole is different from the sum of the value of its parts. The principle does not imply causal connections between the parts or that the parts are inconceivable except as parts of the whole. Further, the principle does not imply that when the parts of one whole belong to a different whole that those parts now possess a different value than they originally had (Moore, 2004). Value is a property that belongs not just to the parts but to the whole. The value of the whole may be quite different from the sum of the value of the parts, and the value of the whole may be different from the value of individual parts. As the examples above demonstrate, there is good reason to believe that the principle of organic unities is true.

2. The Logical Problem of Evil

Having explained the principle of organic unities, we can now proceed to seeing how this principle affects the logical argument from evil. I contend that the principle of organic unities shows that the logical problem of evil ultimately fails. My argument against the logical problem of evil focuses on J. L. Mackie's version (1971). Mackie argues that the existence of an omnipotent, wholly good God is logically incompatible with the existence of evil. His argument is written as follows:

- (11) God is omnipotent.
- (12) God is wholly good.
- (13) Evil exists.³

Alvin Plantinga points out that this argument is not explicitly or formally contradictory (1977). Plantinga states that Mackie needs additional premises for his

³I have changed Mackie's numbering so as to avoid confusion with the numbering of the premises in the evidential argument from evil.

argument to succeed, and Mackie implicitly provides these extra propositions with some modifications by Plantinga. As Plantinga states, they are:

- (19c) An omnipotent and omniscient good being eliminates every evil that it can properly eliminate.
- (20) There are no non logical limits to what an omnipotent being can do.
- (21) If God is omnipotent and omniscient, then he can properly eliminate every evil state of affairs.

These propositions, when combined with (11), (12), and (13) produces the implicit contradiction that Mackie desires.

Does Mackie's argument succeed? While Plantinga offers his own argument for why Mackie's argument fails, I argue that Mackie's argument fails due to the combination of Mackie's premises with the principle of organic unities. To see this claim, one must first draw some logical implications from Mackie's premises. From proposition (12), one may infer the following proposition.

- (22) It is logically possible for God to co-exist with anything that is good.

If God is perfectly good, then God is able co-exist with anything that is good without any problems. As proposition (20) states, God's power is limited only by the boundaries of logic, and there is nothing illogical about a divine being co-existing with what is good. In fact, this is part of the crux of the logical problem of evil. The atheist objects to the idea that a perfectly good God would co-exist with evil; therefore, God can only co-exist with what is good. As a result, proposition (22) follows from Mackie's premises.

Having established this implication from Mackie's premises, one is now in a position to see how the logical problem of evil falters. Consider the following proposition derived from the definition on organic unities.

- (23) It is logically possible to have an organic unity that is good on the whole and contains evil parts.

As was demonstrated in the previous section, it is logically possible to have a good organic whole that contains evil parts. Some types of these organic unities are demonstrated in moral virtues, such as mercy, forgiveness, self-sacrifice, remorse, courage, and even justice. Each one of these virtues contains both good and evil

parts but is still good on the whole. If proposition (23) is true, then the following proposition may be logically inferred from the combination of (23) with (22).

(24) It is logically possible for God to co-exist with an organic unity that is good on the whole and contains evil parts.

Since these organic unities are logically possible and good, then there is nothing to prevent an omnipotent and perfectly good God from co-existing with them. They are completely compatible with the existence of God. These organic unities, however, have evil parts. Since God may co-exist with these organic unities, the following proposition is also true.

(25) It is logically possible for God to co-exist with evil things.

Since these organic unities contain evil parts and God is logically able to co-exist with the good organic unities that contain these parts, then God may also logically co-exist with the existence of evil things, namely the evil parts of the organic unity.

Consequently, one final implication may be drawn from these premises showing that the logical problem of evil fails to succeed. From (25), the following proposition can be inferred.

(26) God's existence is logically compatible with the existence of evil.

God may co-exist with that which is evil as was stated in (25); therefore, God's existence is logically compatible with the existence of evil. This conclusion, however, is the exact opposite of what Mackie claims. Mackie claims that his premises demonstrate that the existence of God and evil are not logically compatible. God can properly eliminate all evil and must do so as a perfectly good being; however, his premises produce the opposite conclusion when combined with the principle of organic unities.

As it stands, the logical problem of evil fails. Where then does the problem lie? The theist will argue that the problem lies with proposition (21). It is simply false that an omnipotent and omniscient being can and must properly eliminate every evil. The theist's claim is proven by the truth of the principle of organic unities and the falsehood of the principle of summation. It is clear that the value of a whole cannot be determined by the sum of its parts. Any situation involving God and evil is an organic unity, and there are good organic unities that contain evil parts. Further, these unities cannot exist without their parts. Since it is possible that there

are good organic unities that contain evil parts and God is logically able to co-exist with these unities, then God is not required to eliminate all evil. He needs that evil to get the good whole. Not only may he exist alongside evil but if he eliminated the evil parts of these organic unities he would lose the good whole. Even if such organic unities should never exist, it is still true that God may co-exist with them and is not required to eliminate them. Thus, both evil and God may co-exist with each other. As a result, proposition (21) is false.

How might the atheist respond to the threat that the principle of organic unities presents to the logical problem of evil? The atheist could attempt to deny proposition (23) and reject the possible existence of good organic unities that contain bad parts. If no such unities are possible, then it is not possible that God co-exist with such unities. This move would require the atheist to demonstrate that such unities are not logically possible; however, there is very good reason to believe that such unities are logically possible. As was shown, states of affairs that involve mercy, courage, and self-sacrifice are all good organic unities that contain evil parts. Even more mundane states of affairs like farming and hunting are instances of such unities. Farming involves good parts (human beings, plants) as well as evil parts (the death and destruction of plant life). Even though unities such as farming contain evil parts, these unities are intrinsically good on the whole. In fact, God's elimination of evil is itself a good organic unity with evil parts; therefore, there is good reason to believe that good organic unities that contain evil parts are not only logically possible but also actual and that the atheist is committed to their existence. Thus, the rejection of proposition (23) is not available to the atheist.

Another potential move for the atheist is to argue that there is no such thing as evil. While this move may seem strange at first, it cannot be denied that some philosophers have argued for moral relativism, which denies the existence of objective morality. If there is no objective morality, then there can be no objective moral value. Consequently, what is called evil cannot actually be evil nor can anything else that may possibly exist. Notions of good and evil are opinions relative to the individual; therefore, the atheist need not worry about God's existence being logically compatible with what is evil if relativism is true. This move, however, completely undermines the logical problem of evil. The entire problem is predicated on the notion that there is something that is actually evil in the world that God may not exist alongside. Without the notion of objective morality and objective moral value, all notions of evil are merely the opinions of individuals, and such opinions can have no logical force against another individual, like God. Such a move is not available to the atheist.

The only move left for the atheist in order to save the logical problem of evil is to reject proposition (22). The atheist could claim that it is false that a perfectly good God can co-exist with *anything* that is good. God can only co-exist with *some* things that are good, and good organic unities with evil parts are not on the list of things that God may exist alongside. As a result, the atheist need not worry about God co-existing with such organic unities that have evil parts. Unfortunately, this argument has troubling consequences. First, good organic unities with evil parts would be rendered immoral and evil on the whole. If these organic unities are logically possible, then the only reason that God could not co-exist with them would be because they violate the divine perfect goodness. As a result, such organic unities must be immoral and evil on the whole instead of good. Such a claim is patently inconsistent with the claims of the principle of organic unities. As the principle state, it is quite possible to have unities that are good on the whole and contain evil parts. One cannot conclude that an organic unity is evil on the whole simply because it contains evil parts. There are no logical grounds on which to make this conclusion, and there are many examples against such a claim.

Second, many virtues would be rendered vices. For example, being courageous must be considered vicious since the organic unity that is courage contains both good parts (the agent, his righteous attitude) and evil parts (some danger or suffering to face). Similarly, justice would also be vicious since it involves rectifying through punishment an evil injustice which has occurred. The same is true as well with virtues, such as mercy, forgiveness, remorse, and self-sacrifice. As a result, no one (not even God) could express these virtues for they are actually vicious. Anyone who expressed these virtues would be immoral since he would be violating morality by doing what is evil. Such a conclusion is false for these moral virtues are foundational to the concept of morality. Third, the atheist's claim that God can properly eliminate all evil would be false since this claim outlines a good organic unity (God's elimination of evil) that contains an evil part (the evil to be eliminated). As a result, God could not properly eliminate *any* evil since to do so would be to bring about an organic unity that contains evil parts and is inconsistent with the divine goodness. Thus, the logical problem of evil would undermine itself. God both can and cannot properly eliminate all evil, which is false. God cannot be required to do both nor faulted for failing to do what is logically impossible.

Since none of these potential moves is available to the atheist, the atheist has no means by which to reject the logical implication that the existence of God and evil is logically compatible due to the logical possibility of good organic unities that contain evil parts. An omnipotent and perfectly good God may co-exist with such

unities and thus may co-exist with evil. As a result, proposition (21) must be false. It is the only way to remove the inconsistency of combining Mackie's argument with organic unities. Since an omnipotent and perfectly good God may co-exist with evil, it cannot be true that such a God can and must properly eliminate all evil. Thus, the principle of organic unities demonstrates that the logical problem of evil presented by Mackie is spurious.

Mackie, however, might dispute this conclusion by comparing the principle of organic unities to what he considers to be fallacious responses to his argument. Mackie considers the idea that evil is necessary as a means to good to be such a response. If God must use the evil to get the good, then God is either not really omnipotent or omnipotence is being redefined. Mackie also considers the claim that the universe is better with some evil in it than without that evil problematic as well. According to Mackie, one is claiming that out of the combination of some first-order evil with some first-order good emerges a second-order good, and this second-order good is more important because it outweighs the first-order evil. Mackie thinks that ultimately this argument fails for two reasons. First, God would only be concerned with promoting good and not minimizing evil, which might concern some theists. Second, it could be claimed that second-order evils that outweigh first-order goods are possible. As a result, the logical problem simply re-emerges at a higher level and one is off to an infinite regress of higher-level goods and evils. Are not these fallacious responses what the principle of organic unities is claiming?

Mackie's criticisms, however, do not succeed. First, the principle of organic unities rejects the notion that evil parts are a means to a good whole. The value of the whole is not determined by such a relationship but is intrinsically held. Second, the principle of organic unities does not imply that second-order goods are more important because they outweigh first-order evils. The principle only implies that the intrinsic value of the whole is not equated with a summation of the parts. A second-order good is more important than first-order evils only in the sense that the whole consists of the parts and is what unites the parts together in a kind of ontological priority. Further, the claim of an infinite regress of higher goods and evils is false. The hierarchy of organic unities terminates with the whole of all reality, whatever that may be, because that is the highest-level organic unity. The question for Mackie then is whether or not the whole of all reality is evil such that God cannot exist. Theists, however, include God in the whole of all reality which would make reality not evil on the whole. As a result, whether or not the whole of all reality is evil depends on whether or not God exists which depends on the existence of evil making this potential response circular. Third, it is false that the

principle of organic unities would make God uninterested in minimizing evil. Minimizing evil is one way of promoting good, but God is not required to always minimize evil to promote the good as the principle of organic unities demonstrates.

A benefit of the argument from organic unities against the logical problem of evil is that it presents the theist with an alternative to Plantinga's modal free will defense. In some ways, Plantinga's argument depends on the notion of organic unities to make its case implying that the argument from organic unities is more foundational. Possible worlds are organic unities that contain good and evil parts. When Plantinga states that God creates a world that contains evil and has good reason for creating that world, Plantinga is essentially arguing that such a world is an organic unity with evil parts and that the goodness of this unity is a partial reason why God choose to create it since a good God cannot create any evil world (Plantinga, 1977). The argument from organic unities, however, differs in many ways from what Plantinga offers in his argument.

First, Plantinga appeals solely to the organic unities of possible worlds in his argument; however, proposition (23) allows the theist to appeal to any logically possible or actual organic unity that is good on the whole and contain evil parts. It is not just good possible worlds that contain evil which God's existence is compatible with but also any organic whole that is good on the whole and contains evil. The theist need not get bogged down in arguments over the logical possibility of certain sets of possible worlds that meet certain conditions from which God may choose. He can simply point to less complex organic unities in possible worlds or in the actual world that are good on the whole but contain evil parts to make the argument work.

Second, Plantinga's argument relies on the logical possibility of human libertarian freedom and trans-world depravity. The argument from organic unities need not appeal to either of these concepts. There are possible organic unities that are good on the whole and contain evil parts that do not involve human libertarian freedom or the depravity of an agent. Further, such organic unities allow for a broader set of possible worlds from which God may choose. Instead of God only being able to choose between worlds that contain human libertarian freedom and trans-world depravity, the supporter of organic unities can argue that God has access to good worlds that do not contain these parts. So long as the organic unity is good, it is consistent with God's existence regardless of the parts the unity contains.

Third, the argument from organic unities is simpler and more elegant than what Plantinga offers because it avoids the complex issues previously mentioned. One does not need to concern himself with the logical possibility of certain sets of

possible worlds from which God may choose, the logical possibility of human libertarian freedom, or the logical possibility of trans-world depravity. All that matters is that it is logically possible for an organic unity to be good on the whole and contain evil parts. The specificity of the parts that make up the organic unity is ultimately irrelevant to the argument from organic unities. As a result, the theist is not forced to appeal solely to Plantinga's free will defense in order to escape the logical problem of evil. He has another route of escape should he disagree with Plantinga's concepts.

3. The Evidential Problem of Evil

Let's look now at how the principle of organic unities affects the evidential argument from evil. As developed by William Rowe (1996), the evidential argument from evil states the following:

- (1) There exist instances of intense suffering which an omnipotent, omniscient being could have prevented without thereby losing some greater good or permitting some evil equally bad or worse.
- (2) An omniscient, wholly good being would prevent the occurrence of any intense suffering it could, unless it could not do so without thereby losing some greater good or permitting some evil equally bad or worse.
- (3) There does not exist an omnipotent, omniscient, wholly good being.

Richard Swinburne (1998) provides another more in-depth version of the evidential argument. It is as follows:

- (4) If there is a God, he is omnipotent and perfectly good.
- (5) A perfectly good being will never allow any morally bad state *E* to occur if he can prevent it, unless (i) allowing *E* to occur is something he has a right to do, (ii) allowing *E* (or a state of affairs as bad or worse) to occur is the only morally permissible way in which he can make possible the occurrence of a good state of affairs *G*, (iii) he does all else that he can to bring about *G*, and (iv) the expected value of allowing *E*, given (iii) is positive.
- (6) An omnipotent being can prevent the occurrence of all morally bad states.
- (7) There is at least one morally bad state of affairs *e* which is such that *either* God does not have a right to allow *e* to occur, or there is no good state *g*, such that allowing *e* (or a state at least equally bad) to occur is the only morally permissible way in which God can make possible the occurrence of *g*, that

God does all else that he can to bring about g , and that, given the latter, the expected value of allowing e is positive.

So : There is no God.⁴

In both arguments, the evidential problem from evil claims that the existence of a certain type of evil (gratuitous and pointless evil) provides a rational reason for denying the existence of God. God's existence is compatible with some evils, but not gratuitous and pointless ones. God either has no right to allow this evil to exist, has no good state of affairs that this evil is necessary to achieve, has other means for obtaining that good state of affairs without the evil, or the state of affairs obtained by allowing this evil is not actually good. Rowe's famous example of the fawn caught in the forest fire is supposed to serve as rational evidence (not logical proof) that such evils do exist and justify the atheist in his unbelief.

Traditionally, the critical premise has been considered to be premise (1) of Rowe's argument, which corresponds to premise (7) of Swinburne's argument. If such instances of gratuitous and pointless suffering do not exist, then the evidential argument fails. Using the principle of organic unities, the theist can defend his position by claiming that the atheist in fact has no evidence to warrant his acceptance of premise (1), and the argument fails. As the principle states, organic wholes can be good while containing evil parts. As a result, organic unities of supposed gratuitous and pointless suffering, like the example of the fawn, could actually be good on the whole. The evil parts of this whole could fit together in such a way that the whole they form is actually good. If these states of affairs are good on the whole, then they do not count as gratuitous and pointless evils. In fact, they would not count as evils at all since they are good. Further, the atheist cannot point to the evil parts present in the whole and conclude that the whole is also evil. Neither the evil parts nor all of the parts together necessarily provide reason to believe that the whole is evil. The probability that the whole is evil is downgraded such that the atheist cannot tell whether the whole is evil or good. Since wholes with a majority of evil parts and wholes with nothing but bad parts can both be good, one cannot conclude that a whole is more likely to be evil than good. It could go either way. Nor is it apparent that wholes with evil parts or a majority of evil parts are preponderantly evil rather than good. How could the atheist ever demonstrate such a claim since he has no access to all of the organic unities that have been in existence much less those unities that contain evil parts?

⁴I have changed the numbering of Swinburne's argument so as not to confuse with the numbering in Rowe's argument.

Thus, the theist can argue that supposed unities of gratuitous and pointless evil are not actually evil on the whole. The evil is a part of a whole along with other objects and is necessary to the existence of that whole. Further, the whole's value cannot be determined via the principle of summation since summation is not a valid way to determine the value of a whole. Any supposed existence of gratuitous evil, therefore, is an organic unity whose value is not determined by the value of the parts. They can actually be good on the whole. The theist does not need to understand what God's purposes are for these unities or know what greater goods might be obtained by the organic whole in question as Rowe claims. As long as the whole in question is good, it is not a gratuitous and pointless evil and is compatible with God's existence. If these supposed instances of gratuitous evil are actually good, the evidential argument would collapse. The theist can argue that God would ensure that there were no instances of gratuitous and pointlessly evil organic unities, and this truth provides reason to reject premise (1). Further, the theist can argue that the atheist has no rational means to assert that any particular whole is gratuitous and pointlessly evil. He simply lacks warrant to make such a conclusion. The atheist has no means to sufficiently establish his claim causing the argument to fail.

The theist, however, need not make this move. He need not argue over whether organic unities are good or evil on the whole. The theist can point out that each part of an organic unity contributes to the existence of the organic unity. The unity simply cannot exist without the part. Consequently, the evil parts have a purpose within the whole and are not pointless even if the parts are evil. It is tempting to conclude that though the whole might not be a gratuitous and pointless evil the parts are; however, this conclusion is simply not the case. The parts themselves cannot be considered gratuitous and pointless evil because of the purpose they play in constituting the whole. No whole can exist without its parts. Such a relationship gives purpose to the parts that function to form the whole.

Further, the theist can point out that organic unities are hierarchical. Organic unities are comprised of parts, and organic unities can be parts for larger, more complex organic unities. For example, an instance of courage on the battlefield is an organic unity that is itself a part of a larger, more complex organic unity: the battle itself. As a result, the organic unity of the soldier's courage fits within the larger, more complex organic unity of the battle and contributes to the existence of the battle. Thus, the less complex organic unity has purpose within the more complex organic unity as the less complex unity is necessary for the existence of the more complex unity. The same is true of instances of supposed gratuitous and pointless evils like the fawn. Organic unities like these are themselves parts of

larger, more complex organic unities; therefore, they have a purpose within the existence of the more complex organic unity. Consequently, these supposedly gratuitous and pointlessly evil organic unities have purpose after all even if they are evil. As a result, the theist can maintain that such organic unities like the instance of the fawn are evil yet not gratuitous and pointless due to their position in the hierarchy of unities as parts of higher-level wholes. As a result, the theist can argue that the atheist's evidence against God's existence does not count as evidence at all. The theist, therefore, may claim that he has rational warrant for believing that there are no gratuitous and pointless evils either in the parts or the wholes due to the principle of organic unities and that the atheist's appeal to rational warrant is incorrect.

The atheist may object here. He might admit that there are no gratuitous and pointless evils in the parts, and he may admit that no lower-level organic unity is gratuitously and pointlessly evil. Is it not possible, however, that the highest-level organic unity is gratuitously and pointlessly evil? Cannot the evidential argument be saved by arguing that God could and would have prevented the highest-level organic unity from existing but has not? This argument depends on how one understands what the highest-level organic unity is. The theist will certainly argue that the highest-level organic unity is the combination of the natural world with all supernatural entities. God's existence is just as much a part of the highest-level organic unity as is the natural world and will make the highest-level organic unity good. The atheist is sure to object to the inclusion of God as a part of the highest-level organic unity. Only natural entities can comprise the highest-level organic unity since there is no God. Consequently, the natural world is the highest-level organic unity.

Here again the atheist runs into trouble. In order to justify his atheism, the atheist must appeal to the existence of gratuitous and pointless evil. The only gratuitous and pointless evil possible given the argument from organic unities is the highest-level organic unity, and the atheist's understanding of the highest-level organic unity already implies the truth of atheism. The argument is circular and unusable. The atheist cannot use the evidential argument from evil combined with the principle of organic unities without already assuming his conclusion. He cannot determine that the natural world is a gratuitously evil organic unity devoid of God without assuming the non-existence of God. The atheist will have to argue for God's non-existence on other grounds than gratuitous evil. As a result of the principle of organic unities, the atheist has no rational warrant for his disbelief based on gratuitous evil. All evil parts have purpose within the wholes they instantiate, all lower-level organic unities have purpose within the higher-level

organic unities they instantiate, and the atheist's definition of the highest organic unity assumes the position for which he is attempting to argue. Even if the highest-level organic unity is reduced to the natural world, the theist will claim that God would not create a gratuitous and pointlessly evil world. As a result, there is no reason to believe that the natural world is gratuitously evil without assuming atheism in the first place. Further, one cannot presume that the natural world is evil at all if atheism is true. The natural world might still be good on the whole due to the principle of organic unities. There is simply no means for the atheist to demonstrate his case.

As a result, the theist will conclude that premise (1) is unwarranted due to the principle of organic unities, and the argument fails. The atheist cannot demonstrate that any instance of gratuitous and pointless evil is actually gratuitous and pointless due to the purpose that any instance of evil plays in the hierarchy of organic unities. The evidential argument is insufficient to establish the atheist's claim. In fact, there can be no instance of gratuitous evil unless one assumes atheism. Any rational appeal by the atheist against this claim leads to a circular argument forcing the atheist to argue for his disbelief in God on other grounds than gratuitous evil. Further, the argument from organic unities demonstrates that God does have a right to being about a supposed gratuitous and pointless evil because that evil is part of a good organic unity, and that unity is not possible to obtain without the evil in question. The evil, therefore, cannot be gratuitous and pointless as it serves a purpose. Lastly, the value of these organic unities is expected to be positive given the hierarchy of unities, the purpose laden within it, and the existence of God. The atheist, consequently, lacks warrant for his disbelief from the appeal to gratuitous evil alone, and the evidential argument from evil fails.

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