

On the Impossibility of Omnimalevolence: Plantinga on Tooley's New Evidential Argument from Evil

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I. Introduction

In the recently published book, *Knowledge of God*, co-authors Michael Tooley and Alvin Plantinga are something more than mere sparring partners as they attempt to sort out the questions, "How can we know about God?", and "Can we know, or justifiedly have grounds for, the non-existence of God?" After surveying many of the traditional reasons drawn from analytic philosophy of religion for thinking that God doesn't exist, including the claim that the concept of God is incoherent, unsurprisingly Tooley offers an evidential argument from evil. And it is a doozy: of Tooley's positive presentation for the justification of the belief in the non-existence of God, Tooley's new evidential argument from evil takes up about 53-54 pages (pp. 97-150 or so). Perhaps this is a sort of touché to Plantinga's 1979 "The Probabilistic Argument from Evil," weighing in at about 53 pages (pp. 1-53). Nonetheless, Tooley had developed the first iteration of this argument in 1991 (In *Philosophical Perspective 5: Philosophy of Religion*), and now he presents a more advanced version of the argument from evil that hinges much more explicitly upon a certain interpretation of inductive logic. Tooley declares that William Rowe's modified non-Bayesian version of the evidential argument from evil from 1991 is not successful, and he tries to show why he thinks that, as well as to give his own version that supposedly goes beyond Rowe's and corrects it or avoids some of its pitfalls.

There simply are too many points in Tooley's main presentation (stretching over some 70 pages) of his atheological arguments to lay out and critique here. So, I will focus on Tooley's new evidential argument from evil, and especially on a central key aspect of it. One main component of Tooley's multi-layered, complex argument is Tooley's reliance upon a principle he calls *Symmetry Principle with respect to Unknown, Rightmaking and Wrongmaking Properties* (p. 129). I intend to summarize Tooley's argument, show that Plantinga's quickly dispatched "agnostic" probability assignment to Tooley's principle (p. 173) is probably sufficient to dispel Tooley's argument. However, I go further here to offer two (brief) critiques against Tooley's argument. Tooley speaks of rightmaking and wrongmaking properties counterbalancing each other. This argument seems to ignore the conclusion that Chisholm taught us long ago, viz., that the issue of how good, evil or neutral states of affairs might come together to justify God's allowance of some evil is a matter of *defeat*, that is, of the total value of an organic whole is not necessarily equal to the sum of the value of the constitutive parts in the whole. I will try to develop this and show why this insight from G. E. Moore is so valuable here. Second, there is no reason to accept Tooley's premise (a) (p. 132), that there are always opposing principles of good and evil that could counterbalance each other. This doesn't follow at all for the theist because it is reasonable to believe that it is impossible that there be an omnipotent, omnimalevolent being; and, because, I shall argue, of the conception of *God* as a good, and omnipotent, being.

II. Assumptions

It is important to lay out a number of assumptions as we begin. When Tooley speaks of God in the context of his evidential argument from evil, he intends to limit his conception of the classical God to mean a being who has the classic 3 omni-properties, viz., a being who is

omnipotent, omniscient, and morally perfect. It is common here to mention as well that God has the property of being 'creator of the world.' It may be that Tooley thinks that some theists will perhaps say that God is not the creator of the world (perhaps he has Deists like Antony Flew in mind here, but even in Deism, God is still *creator* of the world but simply not the *providential power within the history of the world*). More likely Tooley is reasoning that the Pr (OOMP/Evil in the world) is going to be higher than any other top-heavy theoretical elements you build in, since whatever one builds in, there is going to be less than a probability of 1 that that property is had by God. So, $\text{Pr (OOMP/Evil)} > \text{Pr (OOMP\&C[where C=Creator of the world]/Evil)}$.

But there is another basic, often thought to be essential property of the classical Theistic concept of God that Tooley doesn't mention--but Plantinga surely does. This property is that God enjoys **necessary existence**, that is, that God exists at all possible worlds. In other words, God is not contingent, but God is a necessary being: this means that God is not just a being who happens to exist in a few worlds, and we happen to be at a world in which God also exists. Rather, it's the notion that God couldn't so much as not exist; His non-existence is impossible. But if God exists necessarily, this will likely have a vast affect on the way in which we view *probabilities* since the logical probability that God exists would either be $\text{Pr}=1$ or $\text{Pr}=0$. As we will see in Tooley's new evidential argument from evil, God's being necessarily existent would throw a wrinkle into things, because if God were necessarily existent, then God would be necessarily existent and necessarily good, since if God had essential properties in all worlds, then it seems to follow that to be God (the same referent in all worlds), God would have to have all those properties in each world. I rather gather from Tooley's examples that he conceives of the concept and being of God in some fundamentally different ways from the Theist. E.g. when

Tooley treats the so-called Paradox of Omnipotence, note his statements about what is possible with God and the very heavy stone:

The fourth [a priori] argument [against God's existence] attempted to show that the concept of omnipotence gives rise to contradictions. This argument seems to me clearly unsound, and this can be seen if one simply makes explicitly the times at which the being acts, or possesses some property. For suppose A is omnipotent at a specific time t_1 . The A can act at that time to bring it about that there is a rock that no one can lift. But at what time does the latter state of affairs first exist? It cannot be time t_1 , since, I would argue, a cause cannot be simultaneous with its effect. So let us suppose that A acts at time t_1 to bring it about that there is, at some later time t_2 , a rock that no one can lift. It then follows that A either no longer exists at time t_2 , or does exist at time t_2 , but is no longer omnipotent. So to bring it about that there is a rock that no one can lift, -- including himself--an omnipotent being must either commit suicide, or at least bring it about that he is no longer omnipotent at the relevant time. This is not, presumably, something that a sensible person--let alone a morally perfect one--would be likely to do. But there is no contradiction in the proposition that A, who is omnipotent at time t_1 , either does not exist at some later time t_2 , or else exists at that time, but is not omnipotent. Accordingly, there is no paradox of omnipotence.¹

I take it that it is logically impossible for an essentially necessarily existent, omnipotent person to commit deicide. Let us merely bear some of these points in mind as we proceed, for they will help us understand some of our criticisms of Tooley's objective probability later on.

III. Tooley's Propadeutic: An *A Priori* Argument against Theism?

In this section, I discuss Tooley's evidential argument from evil, which takes up a big bulk of his 70 page section of his first presentation, as I have mentioned. Before the argument, however, Tooley tries to give an argument to establish that *Atheism is the default position*, and thus that any Theist has to give some positive grounds for believing in Theism. He argues in this fashion. The following three propositions are all equally likely:

a) an omnipotent, omniscient, and perfect good being [exists];

¹ Michael Tooley, "Does God Exist?", in Alvin Plantinga and Michael Tooley, *Knowledge of God* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2008), 87.

b) an omnipotent, omniscient, and perfect evil being [exists];

c) an omnipotent, omniscient, and morally indifferent being [exists].

Tooley realizes that there would be a continuum of shading of levels of goodness and evilness from fully good to indifferent to fully evil. But Tooley thinks that these other concepts are more theoretically top-heavy and thus would have a lower prior probability. He thinks these 3 big possibilities are the 3 to really look at. Tooley writes, "But if this is right, then the *a priori* probability that God exists cannot be greater than one-third, and so the *a priori* probability that God does not exist must be at least two-thirds. Consequently, in the absence of a positive reason in support of the existence of God, it is reasonable to believe that God does not exist. Atheism is the default position."² There are many lines of response we may pursue here, including wondering about the particular (and particularly strange and wonderful) concept of *a priori* probability that Tooley is pursuing here. However, the first shot one could fire would be to wonder whether b) is even logically possible, for that matter, whether c) is even logically possible. First on b): What does Tooley mean by his phrase, and is it possible for there to be an omnipotent, omniscient, perfectly *evil* being?

As to what Tooley means by 'perfectly evil' person, he says that he doesn't mean a person who has a full manifestation of all the vices as traditional virtue ethicists identify them, e.g. "complete cowardliness, perfect slothfulness, and total weakness of will."³ Rather, he has something like a Lex Luthor type of person in mind, but with the qualities infinitized as it were *in excelcis*: The perfectly evil person is one who is "perfectly malevolent." Of this concept,

² Tooley, *Knowledge of God*, p. 90.

³ Tooley, *ibid.*, p. 90.

Tooley reports, “And, on the fact, of it, that concept does not seem any more problematic than the concept of a person who is perfectly benevolent.”⁴

But I disagree with Tooley here. I do believe that the concept of a perfectly evil being, interpreted as a perfectly malevolent person, is *logically incoherent*, because it appears to my lights that if being B were perfectly evil, He would be bent on destroying all things, including himself. If he had all-power, he would in fact, when measured from any particular time, t_1 , in the space of time surrounding this being's life history, have already destroyed himself. If he were perfectly evil and had all knowledge and all power, then He would have destroyed himself as close to his beginning as one wishes: in fact, it appears that such a being would have destroyed himself from eternity past (if he is eternal), or in the first moment at his existence (if he is everlasting or comes into being). For if the being destroyed himself after x number of years only, then I can imagine an even more evil being, who destroys himself even more quickly than that. And, importantly, given Tooley's argument for the coherence of the notion of ‘omnipotence,’ cited above, he seems to think it is coherent that a perfectly evil person could in fact bring about his own destruction (even though, as omnipotent, one might pause to affirm that this is really a live possibility). Thus, the concept seems to fall in upon itself, so that it becomes impossible for an omnipotent, omniscient, perfectly evil being to exist at all, or, at least, for anything but one insignificant, temporal moment. We should keep in mind here--and this is a not insignificant point against Tooley's prior probability argument we are now criticizing--that if a being is to be truly "omnipotent," it means that that being must have direct access to the things or events or persons that exists *at all times*. If to be omnipotent, in other words, is (in Aquinas's terminology, with slightly implicit things made explicit) for a being to be able to do all things

⁴ Tooley, *ibid.*, 90.

that are logically possibly able to be done, and that are not inconsistent with other essential attributes, then one could not be omnipotent without having access to such metaphysical states, substances, persons, or events at all times unless one exists either *at all times, or, in an eternal now that had access to all times from one's atemporal standpoint*. So, if this line of reasoning is right, then for any being to be omnipotent, it follows that being must be omnitemporal, or everlasting, or atemporally eternal (or some best conceivable mixture of these temporal/eternal options).

Thus, if the old saying that 'Power corrupts, and absolutely power corrupts absolutely' is correct and applies to omnipotent, omniscient, non-morally perfect beings--covering Tooley's omnipotent perfectly *evil* being as well as his omnipotent morally *neutral being*, it seems to follow that in any state in which one did not have a steady, morally perfect reason for not ending one's own existence, that sooner or later there would be a sufficient reason for ending one's existence. In the case of a morally perfectly evil being, this being would be bent on destruction, including of one's own being, and thus would use one's omnipotent power to destroy oneself (and would do so immediately--in at most a split second after one's existence). In the case of a morally neutral being one wonders if a non-morally perfect being wouldn't again enter into a path of moral regression that would inevitably lead one into the moral and in turn the ontological destruction of oneself. For a morally neutral being, this might result from not having an omnipotent, morally perfect means and will to remain morally steadfast and non-destructive, or, it could simply mean that such a being would not see the *intrinsic good* of surviving, the worth of surviving--which could lead to the destruction of that being, since the being would not have a sufficient reason to exist, but would have sufficient power to bring about its own non-existence. Here a modal distinction may be enough to prove the point, since (supposing such a concept to

be logically coherent for the moment) a morally neutral omnipotent being would at least have the *possibility of bringing about its non-existence*. But it seems that we can strengthen our reasoning above. For an omnipotent being would not only have to exist at all times to be omnipotent, but it would, arguably, also have *necessarily* to exist at all times (or over all times in an eternal now). For, if it did not have this modally necessary qualitatively rich property of necessary omnipotence, then it would lack some power, and thus not be omnipotent, viz., it would lack the power of having power over (which minimally is being translated as having metaphysical 'reach' to, or access to) all actual *and possible* persons, states of affairs, events, and times, and thus would fall short, in essence, in omnipotent power.

This means that we now have a *reductio* argument against Tooley's *a priori* argument which tries to show that Atheism is the default position. For on the assumption that any omnipotent being would in fact necessarily exist at all times (or over all times), it follows that no necessarily omnipotent being can be less than morally perfect. What follows from all of this?

The point to see is that Tooley's reasoning that God's existence has an overall logical probability of no more than 1/3 seems questionable at least and downright logically incoherent at worst. Tooley himself is bent on trying to establish that Atheism is therefore the default position as a result of his *a priori* logical probability argument. But we must ask: where is the rule that says that one's default position is *not* to be based on one's *total background knowledge*, and is only to consult one's use of *a priori* logical possibilities, rather than one's propositional evidence, as well as non-propositional cognitively-related evidence (such as the productions of the *Sensus divinitatis*) for belief in one's starting point? No reasons are given for this, and I don't think Tooley can provide any reasons, besides what are imposed by the rules he derives from his particular version of Carnapian logical probability. But why should we think that *that version of*

logical probability should be the dominant one we accept? I see no reason why--and no compelling reason given by Tooley at all why--this should be the version of probability that we use. But suppose we play along with Tooley, and allow him his view of Carnap's logical probability and then wonder about the *a priori* probability of the existence of an omnipotent, omniscient, morally perfect being. I would be warranted to say, in light of my objections so far, that God's prior probability is 1, since it seems (as I've just argued above) that a) the logical probability of a hypothesis that is logically incoherent and thus logically impossible is 0, and b) the prior probability of an omnipotent, omniscient, *perfectly malevolent* being must therefore be 0, since the concept is incoherent and it is impossible for such a being to exist (or to exist for more than a certain very brief moment of time). Since any omnipotent being O must exist at all times, and the only way for this to occur is for O to possess moral perfection at all times of its existence, it therefore follows that Tooley's claim that Atheism is the default position is wrong. Actually, it appears that Theism, in contrast to Tooley's bold claim, is the default position, and that it is in fact incoherent to think that it is even logically possible for any omnipotent being to be less than morally perfect, and to be so at all times (or through all times) of its existence.

This means that there are already significant trouble brewing for Tooley's treatment of theism and atheism and the attempt Tooley makes to establish a pivotal step in his propaedeutic for his evidential argument from evil. Already the timbers are threatened; the lineaments of the structure seem already in danger of collapse. At any rate, Tooley's initial argument that Atheism is the default position is way off base, relying on two incoherent hypotheses, and thus is faulty.

IV. Tooley's New Evidential Argument from Evil

In Tooley's new formulation of a now-popular type of argument, Tooley distinguishes between abstract and concrete formulations of the evidential argument from evil (now "EAE"),

and says he favors the concrete formulations. He says this is something that William Rowe contributed to the history of the presentation of the EAE, and he also says that he doesn't like that Plantinga dwells too much on the abstract presentations of the EAE. Plantinga's own conviction is that whenever you have concrete evils in one's life that one considers, that that is issue is not a rational issue, but rather a matter for the existential or 'religious' problem of evil, calling not for philosophical arguments or reason, but rather for pastoral counseling.

Tooley's formulation of the EAE is concrete, inductive, and deontological.⁵ It is concrete in that he elects to look not at "evil in general," or "the amount of evil in general," which would be only an abstract consideration of evil in any possible world, but rather to point out that a single instance of an evil that appears to us is such that if God exists, God would not allow the evil to occur. Yet, the evil occurs, and therefore--what are we to conclude from that? In the 1950's and 60's, the conclusion was that of a deductively valid argument: If God exists, then there is no evil. But there is evil. Therefore, God does not exist. But Plantinga showed in the 1970's in his famous Free Will Defense that the logical or deductive argument from evil fails: you cannot deduce from 1 single evil (e.g. one prideful glance or a nick on one's skin while shaving) that it is *impossible* for God to exist. However, Tooley, following Rowe, argues that given some particularly horrendous evil, it is *likely* that God does not exist. Tooley will follow William Rowe in several points, and this is another point of mimicry: One presents the EAE as a deductively valid argument, but then one realizes that in order to justify at least one of the premises, there must be a "factual premise," and there will be an inductive move in trying to show that it is reasonable to believe that, based on things known and unknown to us, there does not exist a Theistic God since God did not intervene to stop this particular (concrete) evil action

⁵ Ibid., 98.

or event or state of affairs. Finally, Tooley's argument is deontological. Tooley intends to show that some action or event or state of affairs has an "oughtness" about it, namely, that it is an action or event that an all-good God ought not permit to happen if He exists and is all-good. Again, by making the argument deontological, Tooley hopes to diminish the theist's retort to the EAE that God may have reasons, unbeknownst to us, as to why He had to allow (e.g.) the Lisbon earthquake to happen. For consider. Suppose the theist is committed ahead of time to certain moral principles that state when a moral agent ought to, and ought not to, intervene in the affairs of others. How would this principle apply to God? This fact would help Tooley, perhaps, to force the Theist to acknowledge that if these basic moral principles were true, then this would severely limit the ways in which God could be justified in allowing certain evils.

Tooley started this 'deontological' argument in his 1991 paper. In his 2008 presentation, he reshapes it and has obviously tried to reformulate the idea significantly in the intervening 18 years or so. Tooley in effect is trying to use what the theist says he is committed to--what we are committed to morally--in order to limit the possibilities of God's having good reasons *unknown to us that* are sufficient to justify the allowance of the concrete evil. Then, by using logical probability, Tooley will maintain that it is *a priori* improbable that there is some unknown rightmaking properties so attached to the evil at hand that God would have been justified in allowing that evil to transpire.

In the past, many proponents of the evidential argument from evil, including Rowe, each of which gave what he calls an 'axiological' formulation of the argument, failed because such an argument is "typically incomplete in a crucial respect," says Tooley. He continues, saying these axiological formulations usually fail in making explicit "*how* a failure to bring about good states of affairs, or a failure to prevent bad states of affairs, entails that one is acting in a morally wrong

way."⁶ Then, Tooley declares, the issue becomes that one such as Rowe must at that point refer to questionable moral principles or claims, and the Theist can simply beg off at that point and claim that the principle is false, or manœuvre around the principle.

So, Tooley's insight is to build right into the relevant act descriptions of God's allowing a certain evil act (without intervening to stop it from occurring) that since the action itself has known wrongmaking qualities, then this sets the action already on a trajectory against the moral perfect of God. Now Rowe and others have all acknowledged that God's allowance of any particular evil act, if the Theist believes, for example, is a traditional "greater-good" approach to God's allowance of evils, will always be matched up with some God-justifying reason--perhaps unknown to us--as to why God allowed that evil to occur.

Tooley sees that if he builds in the wrongmaking quality of an action, then he can avoid getting waylaid by the theist who might stop to talk about abstract notions of ethical goodness or conceptions of intrinsic evil and intrinsic goodness and never get back onto the main particular evils again. The argument might get derailed in this fashion, Tooley thinks. He intends to impose the wrongmaking quality of the action, deontologically, from the get-go, so that no matter what moral theory the Theist holds, Tooley will be saying that God ought to prevent any action with known wrongmaking properties, unless there are outweighing unknown rightmaking properties that might justify God in permitting the evil in question. Tooley also holds (116) that the occurrence of an earthquake, presumably one that takes innocent human lives, is one that has a wrongmaking property attached to it, which means that God would be *prima facie* morally wrong to allow such an event to occur.

⁶ Tooley, "Does God Exist?", 105.

In his concrete formula of the EAE, then, Tooley chooses to dwell on the Lisbon earthquake of 1755 in which some 60,000 people--men, women, and children--died. Tooley's argument in itself, and then the justification of that argument, are as follows. First, Tooley's argument:

(1) It is logically necessary that, for any possible state of affairs S, if the action of choosing not to prevent S is morally wrong, all things considered, then an omnipotent, omniscient, and morally perfect person would never perform that action.

All assumptions in the proof are marked with an '*':

(2*) (Assumption) The Lisbon earthquake occurred, and the action of choosing not to prevent the Lisbon earthquake is morally wrong, all things considered.

(3) For any possible state of affairs S, if the action of choosing not to prevent S is morally wrong, all things considered, then an omnipotent, omniscient, and morally perfect person would never perform that action.

(4)* An omnipotent, omniscient, and morally perfect person would never perform the action of choosing not to prevent the Lisbon earthquake.

(5) It is logically necessary that if the Lisbon earthquake occurred, and if an omnipotent, and omniscient person existed at the very start of the Lisbon earthquake, then that omnipotent and omniscient person must have chosen not to prevent that earthquake.

(6)* If an omnipotent, omniscient, and morally perfect person existed at the very start of the Lisbon earthquake, then that omnipotent and omniscient person was not morally perfect.

(7) It is logically necessary that, for any person P, if P is God at time t, then P is omnipotent, omniscient, and morally perfect at time t.

(8)* God did not exist at the very start of the Lisbon earthquake.

(9) If the Lisbon earthquake occurred, and the action of choosing not to prevent the Lisbon earthquake is morally wrong, all things considered, then God did not exist at the very start of the Lisbon earthquake.

(10) It is logically necessary that if the Lisbon earthquake occurred, and the action of choosing not to prevent the Lisbon earthquake is morally wrong, all things considered, then God did not exist at the very start of the Lisbon earthquake.

(11) Its being the case that the Lisbon earthquake exists, and that any action of choosing not to prevent the Lisbon earthquake is morally wrong, all things considered, *logically entails* that God did not exist at the very start of the Lisbon earthquake.

(12) The property of choosing not to prevent an event that will cause the death of more than 50,000 ordinary people is a wrongmaking property of actions, and a very serious one.

(13) The Lisbon earthquake killed approximately 60,000 ordinary people.

(14) Any action of choosing not to prevent the Lisbon earthquake has a very serious wrongmaking property.

(15) No rightmaking properties that we know of are such that we are justified in believing both that an action of choosing not to prevent the Lisbon earthquake would have had those rightmaking properties, and that those properties are sufficiently serious to counterbalance the relevant wrongmaking property.

(15, more compact) (p. 120): Any action of choosing not to prevent the Lisbon earthquake has a known wrongmaking property such that there are no rightmaking properties that are known to be counterbalancing.

(16) For any action whatever, the logical probability that the total wrong making properties of the action outweigh the total rightmaking properties--including ones of which we have no knowledge--given that the action has a wrongmaking property that we know of, and that there are no rightmaking properties that are known to be counterbalancing, is greater than one half.

(17) It is a logically necessary truth that, for any action C, if the total a wrongmaking properties of the action outweigh the total rightmaking properties--including ones of which we have no knowledge--then action C is morally wrong, all things considered.

(18) If the logical probability of q, given p, is greater than one half, and if q logically entails r, then the logical probability of r, given p, is also greater than one half.

(19) For any action whatever, the logical probability that the action is morally wrong, all things considered, given that the action has a wrongmaking property we know of, and that there are no wrongmaking properties that are known to be counterbalancing, is greater than one half.

(20) The logical probability that an action of choosing not to prevent the Lisbon earthquake is morally wrong, all things considered, given that choosing not to prevent the Lisbon earthquake has a wrongmaking property that we know of, and that there are no rightmaking properties known to be counterbalancing, is greater than one half.

Tooley then concludes that it then follows from (11)--the conclusion of the first part of his long argument--and from premises (18) and (20), the grand conclusion that:

(21) The logical probability that God did not exist at the time of the Lisbon earthquake, given that choosing not to prevent the Lisbon earthquake has a wrongmaking property we know of, and that there are no rightmaking properties known to be counterbalancing, is greater than one half.

The argument, Tooley claims, is valid. Now, to check for soundness, one must check whether we have good reason to believe each premise. The main premises to check are premises (1), (5), (7), (12), (13), (15), (16), (17), and (18), according to Tooley.⁷

The justification for Tooley's argument: in the second part of his extended EAE, Tooley employs the concept of logical probability. Tooley seems to be eager to employ whatever means possible to say that God is morally to be impugned for not having prevented the Lisbon earthquake, and thus, by implication, that God does not exist. There is still, however, the issue of the possibility of an unknown right making property that God's action (his choosing not to intervene and stop the earthquake from happening) of permitting the earthquake may have such that that rightmaking property would be sufficient robust to make the action of God's allowing the earthquake to occur overall a morally permissible action. Here is where Tooley likes to employ his logical conception of probability:

He claims that with respect to the Lisbon earthquake, this action of God's permitting the earthquake has known wrongmaking properties, and no known right making qualities. In his reply, Plantinga says that there is, pace Tooley's judgment, a very great rightmaking quality to the Lisbon earthquake, and that is that of God's having permitting the earthquake to happen. (170-1) The old saying seems very apropos here: "One many *modus ponens* is another man's *modus tolens*." Plantinga's response brings out the main reason why Tooley was trying to argue that Atheism is the default position. By so arguing Tooley was attempting to stop the Theist from employing theoretical elements within the Theistic view of things *without first* giving good reasons for thinking that Theism is true, or at least without first showing that one is justified in believing that Theism is true. One can also detect how Plantinga's commitment to God as a

⁷ Tooley, 121.

necessary being means that for any action A God performs (e.g., the action of God's permitting an earthquake to transpire), there *must be* some rightmaking property p that makes God's performing A overall right, allowable, something the allowance of which will in no way objectively impugn God's goodness. (For it really would follow that if God were to perform some action A by which, *per impossibile*, God would fail to be morally perfect, this would mean that God would cease to be God, or, more perspicuously, the person currently holding the office of God (say, Yahweh) would at that point no longer hold the office of God. No one would then hold that office, though Yahweh may continue to be, albeit not as a morally perfect being.) So, as a generalization, for any evil allowed to transpire in this world, there would be a *known* rightmaking property, then, found in God's permission of any action with known wrongmaking properties attached to it, and there will likely be unknown rightmaking properties, as well, enough of which would allow God, with impunity, to choose to allow that evil to transpire.

Tooley's deontological argument from evil, then, uses the notion of logical probability at this point. By referring to the Lisbon earthquake, Tooley says that there are known wrongmaking properties attached to the action of allowing the earthquake to occur. Now, what are the possibilities with respect to what is unknown? There are four of them concerning the earthquake:

a) the earthquake has known wrongmaking properties = KW of value -k; and unknown rightmaking properties = UR of value +n, such that -k is stronger negatively than UR n-value is positively. In this scenario, then, the unknown rightmaking qualities were not enough to make the action of allowing the earthquake overall a morally permissible thing.

b) the earthquake has KW of value -k but a UR value of +n with n+ being more counterbalancing than -k, and driving the overall value of the action into the realm of being a morally permissible action.

c) the earthquake has KW of value -k, and the UR value is itself -n, and thus the action is even worse off than our already negative judgment of it.

d) the earthquake has a KW value of -k, but it turns out there are not any relevant UR properties (or for that matter, UW properties). The principle "What you see is what you get" would apply in this possibility. So, in this case, the objective judgment would be that God's allowing the earthquake has an objective *a priori* probability of 1/4. Therefore, granting all this machinery Tooley manipulates, and the descriptions he gives, it would be overall improbable that God existed at the time of the Lisbon earthquake, and thus, at any other time, as well.

In order for this view of logical probability to have any grounding, Tooley realizes that a principle must be affirmed, and he calls this the *Symmetry Principle with Respect to Unknown, Rightmaking, and Wrongmaking Properties*. It states:

[SP] Given what we know about rightmaking and wrongmaking properties in themselves, for any two numbers M and N, the probability of there being an unknown rightmaking property with a moral weight between M and N is equal to the probability of there being an unknown wrongmaking property with a (negative) moral weight whose absolute value is between M and N.

What reasons are we given to accept SP?

V. Plantinga's Replies to Tooley

What does Plantinga say in reply to Tooley's presentation of the EAE, and especially of Tooley's Symmetry Principle? Of the latter, Plantinga says in rather short order, two things. First, of Tooley's Symmetry Principle, that "it doesn't seem particularly *implausible*. But of course that's not at all the same as its seeming *plausible*. I can't see how we could have any reason at all for thinking it true--or, for that matter, for thinking it false. How would we know?"⁸ Tooley's conclusion, according to the text, is housed in what Tooley eventually called his (C1), which is:

(C1) If A is an action that, judged by known rightmaking and wrongmaking properties, is *prima facie* very seriously wrong, then the probability that action A is morally wrong, all relevant

⁸ Plantinga, "Reply to Tooley's Opening Statement," *ibid.*, 173.

rightmaking and wrongmaking properties considered, both known and unknown, is greater than one half.⁹

Of this Plantinga remarks, "The right answer, I think, is that (abstracting from any evidence, inferential or noninferential, for G) C1 might be true and it might be false; we don't have any way of telling. The right attitude, here, is abstention, withholding belief."¹⁰ But this means, then, Plantinga concludes, that "Tooley's argument from evil doesn't succeed. It doesn't succeed in showing that (abstracting from whatever justifying evidence there is for G) the logical probability of G on the occurrence of the Lisbon earthquake is less than 1/2."¹¹

VI. Further Critiques of Tooley's Argument

So, we see that Plantinga's rejection of Tooley's Symmetry Principle [SP] comes down to Plantinga's saying that while there is nothing in the principle that seems particularly *implausible*, still that is a far cry from seeing positive reasons for thinking Tooley's SP *is in fact* plausible. This reasoning is probably enough to turn Tooley's argument aside. I shall, however, go considerably further, providing a counter-instance to Tooley's SP that I believe shows the principle to be false.¹²

In essence, my reply here is that from the Theistic point of view, and perhaps even to the lights of certain pre-Christian pagan authors such as Plato and Aristotle, *goodness* is the

⁹ Plantinga, *ibid.*, 173, which is citing Tooley's section, 130.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 173.

¹¹ Plantinga, *ibid.*, 173-4.

¹² Is there a parallel between Plantinga's weak approach here and his "Reformed epistemology"—in which it is enough to show that Christian faith is philosophically *rational* but never *factually demonstrable*? See the essays on Plantinga's apologetic in prior issues of the *Global Journal*: Vol. 8, No. 1, and Vol. 9, No. 2.

primitive, and evil is the falling away or the 'privation' of good. Evil is always derivative: one cannot have evil without good present, but one can have goodness without evil present. This is yet another reason why an omnipotent, omniscient omni-*good* person seems a perfectly coherent concept, while an omnipotent, omniscient omni-*evil* person seems, again, as above, incoherent. If it is a good (and all camps seem to acknowledge this moral fact) for a person to preserve their own lives, then an omni-evil person would as quickly as possible end his own life. Being omnipotent, he's have the ability to do it, and being omniscient, he's have the know-how to do it, as well. And so for a theistically-charged world in which the eternal theistic God exists, God is the originative good, and it is logically impossible that there should be an "opposite" of God and His goodness. As Tooley himself says, there cannot be two omnipotent beings, for that is logically impossible. I take it that all probability conceptions worth their weight will agree that if some hypothesis is logically impossible, and we have good reason to think that it is, then the logical probability of that hypothesis is $Pr=0$. (It doesn't follow that the epistemic probability is = 0, or that everybody agrees on the probability of such an hypothesis.)

But Tooley would say: Yes, but my symmetry principle is only referring to the deontological principle of a rightmaking property, and saying that there is always an equal and opposite wrongmaking property in each instance of a right making property.

I challenge this, then, by saying there is a good we know of, a good we can conceive of, namely, face to face fellowship with God, or, even better, the Beatific Vision, and God's permission of this action could have extraordinary rightmaking properties that, for all we know, would counterbalance any wrongmaking action at all. And, of the Beatific Vision, we *know* it is logically impossible that there be a sort of "Spiderman-Venom", counterpart evil and thus a counterpart, wrongmaking property of some being's allowing this counterpart evil to transpire.

But perhaps I have read the situation wrong here. Perhaps the issue is not whether there is a Super-Duper-Good, G1, being in the Beatific Vision of God almighty, which would counterbalance any conceivable evil and perhaps even any conceivable string of evils that any one human (or possibly, any sentient being whatsoever) might endure during whatever time duration (t_1 through t_n). Perhaps the issue is rather whether there is a very weighty rightmaking property of God's permitting the Beatific Vision to some finite moral agent, and a counterpart wrongmaking property, not consisting of God's not allowing the Beatific Vision to some finite moral agent, but God's allowing the Beatific Vision to some maximally undeserving agent? I will return to this case just below. First, however, let's carefully analyze Tooley's SP (Symmetry Principle). In the opening phrases of his SP, he states, "Given what we know about rightmaking and wrongmaking properties themselves..."¹³ The point I would like to make here goes back to a similar devastating criticism that Paul Draper has made of William Rowe's evidential argument from evil: in response to Rowe's statement that 'no goods *we know of* are such that they would justify God in allowing E1 (say, some terrible instance of moral evil), Draper replies that not only do we not know that our sampling of goods (i.e, 'the goods we know of') is representative of all the goods there are, but in fact we know that the sampling of goods we know of is *not representative*. In a similar way, Tooley opens his SP by referring to "what we know about rightmaking and wrongmaking properties themselves." And so I ask: yes, and so why would we think, based on the limited amount of rightmaking and wrongmaking properties of which we are aware, that we have them all, or that principles we construct regarding *all such properties, based only on "rightmaking and wrongmaking properties we know about,"* would in

¹³ Tooley, *ibid.*, 129.

fact be representative of all the rightmaking and wrongmaking properties there are *simpliciter*? Tooley seems to have overstepped his boundaries here.

Second, let's return to my example of the Beatific Vision. I claim it provides a potential rightmaking property with no corresponding wrongmaking property, showing Tooley's SP to be not true. But what of, say, Kant's point in the *Grounding*, that it would be wrong for an undeserving agent--say, a perennially cruel and distastefully unhappy person--, to be showered with good, and bounty, and blessings when really he should receive bane and punishment. Do not our intuitions agree with Kant¹⁴ and say that it is possible for there to be a counterpart to the rightmaking property of a deserving agent being in the Beatific Vision of God, viz., there being an undeserving agent in the Beatific Vision of God?

If one says that God reveals Himself to whomever He wills, and drawing near to God would cause repentance and moral and spiritual cleansing to the n-most level, then it would be logically impossible for God to reveal Himself in the Beatific Vision to a person *unprepared for the Beatific Vision*. All who experience God in such an intimate way are undeserving; only God is essentially and originatively holy and necessarily so! (Any other being, say a great angel, might be holy, but only because made so by God through an act of fiat.) So, anyone who has an intimate Beatific vision of God will be there *solely* on the merit of God's grace and love and other-directed alterity. "Against such things there is no law." And once again aid from an earlier point might be gotten. For, just as to be truly omnipotent seems to entail being necessarily omnipotent, so also with morally perfection: to be morally perfect, one cannot have some part of

¹⁴ In the opening bars of Kant's *Grounding for the Metaphysics of Morals*, at 393, "the sight of a being who is not graced by any touch of a pure and good will but who yet enjoys an uninterrupted prosperity can never delight a rational and impartial spectator." In *Grounding*, trans. James W. Ellington (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Co., 1981), p. 7.

one's moral perfection that is willy nilly accidentally the case: rather, to be morally *perfect* entails that one is necessarily morally perfect: i.e., that one would have morally perfect intentions and thoughts, minimally, in every conceivably possible way the world could have gone, i.e., at every possible world, i.e. one has one's moral perfection essentially, and, has power over (in the sense of control over in such a way that it would not cause the possessor of moral perfection to cease being morally perfect) every possible person, event, state, condition, or time.¹⁵ Therefore, there is not, nor could there be, any logically corresponding opposite state to the now-existing logically necessary conditions for a created person to come into the Beatific Vision, to come into Union with God. This follows, for, in effect, there is no opposite moral property that is the logical counterpart of God's grace. In effect, there is *no other logically possible way* to come to behold God in the Beatific Vision *except* that God actualizes all the necessary conditions. And, all those conditions turn on God's graciously allowing the created person to be transformed in order to enjoy that Beatific Vision. However, there is only one set of conditions; God must provide them to the created person to enjoy the Vision; and, since God is necessarily morally perfect, He cannot allow the Beatific Vision except by meeting the gracious conditions, and, being necessarily omnipotent, He cannot be overpowered by any other being to allow the vision on some other set of conditions. So, I feel that this counterexample shows Tooley's SP is not true. As I said above, if it were logically possible that there be an all-powerful, all-evil Being, then perhaps such a being could provide the greatest conceivably bad counterpart of the Beatific

¹⁵ I leave it to the reader to see the connection between perfect moral goodness and omniscience: they both seem to presuppose omnipotence. To have control over a situation such that one was ensured that he would not go wrong necessarily seems to imply a requisite omnipotence to stay on track morally without any possibility of swerve. But this would not necessarily do away with the freedom of others, so long as God knew with perfect clarity what people *will* freely do, and, in the spirit of the doctrine of divine middle knowledge, in light of what I said above, viz. how the property of omnibenevolence, when examined, is modally charged, also of what people *would* freely do, i.e. knowledge even of counterfactuals of creaturely freedom.

Vision. However, such a being is impossible, for reasons I've stated, above. Therefore, this counterexample seems successful to show that Tooley's SP is false. But, Tooley needed SP to be true in order for his EAE as stated to be sound. Thus, I conclude that Tooley's new EAE is unsound.

VII. Conclusion

What Tooley's use of logical probability's approach to figure out prior probabilities is simply what it would be for the probability of an event, given that it has a known wrongmaking properties attached to it, would have an overall balance of wrongmaking or right making properties *given that the Theistic God does not exist*. As Plantinga says, Tooley's argument only has any chance of getting off the ground by assuming that G (God) is contingent. But the Theist, at least those of the Anselmian variety, holds that God is necessarily existent. And, there can be no doubt that a corollary of God's necessary existence is that God is the delimiter of logical possibilities. God's modal status is the determiner of the modal status of certain other propositions, but Tooley doesn't account for this Theistic theoretic point. The point itself seems legitimate and is not something just *ad hoc* to avoid Tooley's logical probability argument.

When one asks, what is the probability of God's allowing the Lisbon earthquake given that God exists, it is clear that the situation has substantially changed. For we know that there is, solely by virtue of God's allowing the earthquake to transpire, as Plantinga says, a rightmaking property attached to that allowance. This means in effect that God has some good reason for allowing this event to take place, whether that good is a known or unknown rightmaking property. By definition, God has a morally sufficient reason for any evil He allows.