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DOES THE ARGUMENT FROM EVIL ASSUME A CONSEQUENTIALIST MORALITY?

Eric Reitan

In this paper, I argue that the some of the most popular and influential formulations of the Argument from Evil (AE) assume a moral perspective that is essentially consequentialist, and would therefore be unacceptable to deontologists. Specifically, I examine formulations of the argument offered by William Rowe and Bruce Russell, both of whom explicitly assert that their formulation of AE is theoretically neutral with respect to consequentialism, and can be read in a way that is unobjectionable to deontologists. I argue that, in fact, this is not the case. Finally, I look at the implications of the consequentialist assumptions of AE for theodicies based on free will.

Introduction

In this paper, I argue that the Argument from Evil (AE), at least in its most popular formulations, makes a controversial and hence unwarranted assumption about the nature of morality, and hence about what it means for God to be morally perfect.¹ In particular, I argue that a key moral premise of AE, put forward by some of the strongest advocates of the argument, assumes an essentially consequentialist understanding of morality. The tendency to adopt (or leave unchallenged) such a consequentialist premise is widespread in scholarship on AE, perhaps because most recent philosophical attention has been directed towards the epistemic issues surrounding AE.² My broader objective, then, is to encourage more serious philosophical attention to the moral dimensions of the problem of evil.³ My suspicion, which I will not defend in any detail here, is that AE can be properly evaluated only from the standpoint of a clearly articulated moral framework, and that theists who are in the business of responding to the problem of evil should therefore evaluate AE in the light of the moral system they embrace.

The Moral Underpinnings of the Argument from Evil

For my purposes, the Argument from Evil (AE) will refer generically to any argument which purports to show that

(E) Evil exists in the world

counts against



(G) There exists an omnipotent, omniscient, morally perfect being, or "God."

The evil referred to in E may be either evil as such or some or all of its particular real-world manifestations. It should be noted that there is not just one argument against theism based on the existence of evil, but rather a cluster of such arguments, and to refer to this cluster as *the* Argument from Evil may be a bit misleading. Nevertheless, for the sake of simplicity I will do so here, and refer to specific arguments which fall under the heading of AE as *versions* or *forms* of AE.

Contemporary scholarship on AE tends to distinguish between the "logical" AE (LAE) and the "evidential" AE (EAE). LAE refers to any argument which purports to show that E is *incompatible* with G. EAE refers to any argument which purports to show that E counts as compelling evidence against G, such that not-G is the most reasonable conclusion to draw based on the evidence.⁴

LAE is perhaps the oldest and most traditional form of the argument. More than forty years ago, J.L. Mackie, in defending LAE, rightly pointed out that G and E are not logically incompatible by themselves. Rather, taken together with certain other (unstated) premises, they imply a contradiction.⁵ In particular, one must add premises which logically link omnipotence and moral perfection to evil. We can, for example, render the argument valid by adding the following premises:

(O) An omnipotent, omniscient being is capable of eliminating all evil
 (MP) A morally perfect being would eliminate all evil that He is capable of eliminating.

G, O, and MP jointly imply that no evil exists. But, according to E, evil does exist. If we assume that O and MP are necessarily true, then the contradiction can be avoided only by rejecting either G or E—but, since we know from experience that E is true, the argument concludes that we must reject G. Hence, God as defined does not exist. This, then, constitutes at least one version of LAE.

It is not my intention here to offer an exhaustive critique of this argument. As stated the argument is fatally flawed in a number of ways: both O and MP are problematic premises.⁶ LAE has been critiqued and refined in the light of criticism, and, more recently, has been replaced by EAE in the light of telling objections.⁷ What I want to call attention to here is the dependence of LAE on MP or *some premise like MP*. No valid version of AE can get by without some premise that explicates moral perfection in terms of a propensity to eliminate evil. And this is true even if one is offering an "evidential" AE—an argument to the effect that the truth of E gives us *good reason* to believe that G is probably false, even if E and G are not strictly incompatible.⁸ Clearly, E would give us *no* reason, probabilistic or otherwise, to believe that G is false unless we assume that part of what it means to be morally perfect is to have some kind of propensity to eliminate evil. MP does not rightly capture that propensity, since it is clear that a morally perfect being might have morally compelling reasons to let some particular

evil persist.⁹ On the basis of such criticisms of MP, defenders of AE have adopted an alternative moral premise which, today, has become an almost universal presupposition in current versions of AE.¹⁰ That premise can be articulated as follows:

(MPE): A morally perfect being would eliminate, as far as He was able, all evils that could be eliminated without producing a greater evil or losing a greater good; that is, He would eliminate all pointless or gratuitous evil.

While there are a variety of contemporary versions of AE, it seems that each of them relies on an assumption substantially the same as MPE. This assumption is typically put forward as uncontroversial, and critics of AE do not usually challenge the argument on this point. Hence, responses to AE have tended to focus either on whether the evils in the world are genuinely gratuitous,¹¹ or, more recently, on what kind of epistemic warrant the apparent pointlessness of some evils lends against theistic belief.¹²

To see the centrality of MPE in discussions of AE, it is useful to look at William Rowe's article, "The Problem of Evil and Some Varieties of Atheism," which has come to be widely acknowledged as a seminal articulation of EAE.¹³ In the article, Rowe summarizes AE as a two premise argument, using "intense suffering" as a specific instance of evil on the basis of which he seeks to challenge God's existence. The argument as put forward by Rowe is as follows:

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.¹⁴

Rowe takes (2) to be obviously true, almost a kind of definitional explication of what it means to be wholly good (or, in my terms, morally perfect). He then proceeds to provide a probabilistic argument for (1). In effect, he gives us (non-conclusive) reasons to believe (1). He then goes on to argue that, in the absence of equally or more compelling reasons to believe G, the probability that (1) is true means that it is more reasonable to believe not-G (or [3]) than it is to believe G. Most subsequent discussion of AE has turned on either the strength of the non-conclusive reasons for (1) or the legitimacy of the epistemic assumptions that lead us to consider such a probabilistic argument compelling.¹⁵

But this discussion leaves (2) untouched. Indeed, Rowe goes so far as to say that (2) is so obviously compelling that "it's clear that the theist can reject this atheistic argument only by rejecting its first premise."¹⁶

Premise (2) of Rowe's argument is substantially the same as MPE, any

differences being explicable in terms of the contextual demands of the argument. In any event, the similarity between (2) and MPE is such that the critical comments I have to make with respect to MPE would apply as well to (2).

Rowe has developed and refined his version of EAE in subsequent articles, but has not backed away from (2). For the sake of simplicity, however, both Rowe and his commentators have taken "losing some greater good" to include "permitting some evil equally bad or worse," thereby simplifying the formulation of (2). Subsequent discussion of the evidence for (1) has likewise been simplified, and the key question in the debate has become whether, for every evil that exists, there are goods we know of which "justify" these evils, or whether there are no such goods and hence no reason to think that (at least some of) these evils are anything but gratuitous. "Goods" in such discussion are intended to include such things as evil prevention and elimination.¹⁷

The Consequentialist Nature of MPE

The tendency for theists and other critics of AE to leave MPE unchallenged strikes me as a mistake. If we look closely, we will see that MPE is not as uncontroversial as it might at first appear to be.

One fairly uncontroversial way to characterize a morally perfect being would be to say that, at the very least, such a being would never do, either by commission or omission, what is morally impermissible (and hence would always do what is morally obligatory). In more theological terms, such a being would never sin. Typically, however, we would add to this that morally perfect beings would practice all acts which it is morally *better* to do than not to do (and of which they were capable)—all acts which it would, so to speak, be morally *nice* to do, even if not strictly obligatory. Likewise, morally perfect beings would eschew acts which it is morally better to avoid. For example, while it might be morally *permissible* to ignore the plight of a beggar one encounters in the street, a morally perfect being would not do so, because it is morally better to help. Adherents of MPE, then, presumably have one of two reasons for believing that a morally perfect God would eliminate all gratuitous evil: first, because it is morally obligatory to eliminate gratuitous evils that one knows about and can eliminate (and morally impermissible not to do so), and a morally perfect being always does what is morally obligatory; or second, because it is morally better to eliminate such an evil than to let it persist, and a morally perfect being always does what is morally better. This second interpretation of MPE is broader than the first, since every action that is obligatory is also an action that it is morally better to do than not do, but not vice versa. Under the second interpretation of MPE, a perfect God would do all those things that are obligatory *and* all those things that are morally better but not obligatory. Hereafter, I will assume the broader second interpretation of MPE.

By all surface appearances, MPE assumes an essentially consequentialist view of morality. Consider Rowe's claim that his version of MPE follows from a complex disjunctive conditional spelling out the necessary conditions for an omniscient, morally perfect being (OG) to refrain from prevent-

ing an evil (s1) that OG could prevent. Rowe claims that OG would fail to prevent s1 only if

Either (i) there is some greater good, GG, such that GG is obtainable by OG only if OG permits s1,
or (ii) there is some greater good, GG, such that GG is obtainable by OG only if OG permits either s1 or some evil equally bad or worse,
or (iii) s1 is such that it is preventable by OG only if OG permits some evil equally bad or worse.¹⁸

Here, Rowe is roughly saying that the moral status of evil-preventing acts is evaluated by reference to the overall balance of good over evil which such acts produce. If the evil-preventing act improves the overall balance of good over evil, then it is morally better to do than not (the evil in this case would be a gratuitous evil); if it worsens that balance (by producing a greater evil or leading to the loss of a greater good), it is morally better not to do it (the evil in this case might be regarded as a necessary evil). It is this presupposition about the nature of morality which leads us to conclude that a morally perfect being would act as indicated in MPE.

In short, MPE presupposes that the moral status of evil-eliminating acts is determined by the overall balance of good over evil that such an act produces. And this certainly *sounds* like a consequentialist perspective. As such, it is open to being rejected by deontologists, who hold that there exist nonconsequentialist moral constraints on action which remain in force even when violating those constraints is necessary in order to achieve the best results.¹⁹ While there are a variety of deontological moral theories, what these theories have in common is that producing the best results is not the only relevant moral consideration in assessing the rightness of an act—that the moral rightness of an action, while it may be *influenced* by considerations of the overall goodness produced by the act, is not always wholly *determined* by this overall balance of good over evil, because, at least sometimes, there are other morally relevant factors that may override the consideration of consequences.²⁰

Put another way, a deontological moral theory is one which holds that, at least sometimes, there is something about the act itself, apart from the overall goodness of its consequences, that is decisive in assessing the action's moral rightness. For most deontologists, this decisive factor is that the action is of a certain type, a type of which all instances are subject to a moral rule which applies even when violation of that rule would produce the best results.²¹

While the classification of an action as being of a certain *type* may depend upon some of the consequences of which it is immediately productive (for example, whether the act of shooting one's neighbor is to be classified as murder depends upon whether the neighbor dies), these consequences may be regarded as *intrinsic* features of the act, in the sense that they help to define what kind of act it is, and should be distinguished from those consequences which do not go into the classification of the act as being of the given type.²² In a certain sense, then, deontologists do attend to some of the consequences of an act in order to determine its moral right-

ness. But while a consequentialist moral theory determines the rightness of an act by reference to *all* the consequences, a deontological theory holds that the rightness of at least some acts is determined exclusively by reference to those consequences which are intrinsic features of the act in the indicated sense. Hereafter, for the sake of brevity, I will characterize deontology as the view that, at least sometimes, an act has an *intrinsic moral character* that overrides consequentialist considerations in determining the action's moral rightness. By the "intrinsic moral character" of an act, I mean the character that an act has of falling under a moral rule by virtue of its intrinsic features. An act is "intrinsically right (obligatory)" if, by virtue of its intrinsic features, it falls under a moral rule requiring the performance of the act. It is "intrinsically wrong" if it falls under a rule prohibiting its performance.

From a deontological moral perspective, then, there might be acts which it is morally worse to do because they are intrinsically wrong, even though they eliminate gratuitous evil. And yet MPE appears to deny this possibility by implying that the moral status of evil-eliminating acts is entirely determined by the overall balance of good over evil which these acts produce.

Nevertheless, Rowe and other advocates of MPE have denied that MPE need be read in this consequentialist way, maintaining that it is theoretically neutral with respect to consequentialism. In a footnote, Rowe instructs us to include moral *principles* in the extension of "good," such that, for example, "the satisfaction of certain principles of justice may be a good that outweighs the evil of s1."²³ Presumably, Rowe thinks that if we read "good" in such a way, MPE is rendered theoretically neutral and unobjectionable to deontologists (because it incorporates the deontologists' concern for moral rules).

Rowe is not the only one to notice that MPE can easily be read as assuming a consequentialist perspective, and to attempt to stave off possible objections by explicitly allowing deontological considerations to count as "outweighing goods." Bruce Russell, in "The Persistent Problem of Evil," constructs an EAE based on a very specific evil: the brutal murder of a little girl in Flint, Michigan.²⁴ A crucial premise in his argument, identified as premise 11 in Russell's article, is the following:

- (11) If there was no outweighing good that morally justified letting the little girl in Flint be brutally murdered, then God should have prevented that murder from happening.²⁵

Russell takes (11) to be a necessary truth, presumably following from some principle like MPE. To be precise, the sense of moral perfection implicit in (11) is the following:

- (R) A morally perfect being would prevent an evil He knew about and could eliminate unless there was some outweighing good that morally justified letting it happen.

When "outweighing good" is construed to include the prevention or elimi-

nation of greater evil, as is typically done in these discussions (and as Russell explicitly asks us to do), R is obviously tantamount to MPE.

Russell recognizes that someone might criticize MPE on the grounds that "it can be permissible to allow an evil to occur where allowing it is needed in order to fulfill a duty or to satisfy some other deontological requirement."²⁶ Russell, however, does not see this objection as problematic. "I accept this anti-teleological objection," he says, "and simply ask the reader to construe 'outweighing good' broadly enough to include deontological considerations."²⁷ With this "expansion" of the meaning of "outweighing good," Russell, like Rowe, thinks he has satisfactorily undercut the objection. But is this move sufficient?

I think that it is not. So long as we continue to use terms such as "greater good" or "outweighing good" to characterize what is going to count as a satisfactory moral justification for permitting evil, our tendency will be to evaluate a proposed moral justification by asking whether the moral consideration raised genuinely "outweighs" the evil that is allowed in its name, and by rejecting as inadequate each moral consideration that does not outweigh the evil. But this procedure is appropriate only from an essentially consequentialist moral perspective.

To see this, let us consider what it would mean to follow Rowe's and Russell's suggestion and construe "outweighing good" so as to "include deontological considerations." The most obvious way to go about including deontological considerations would be to say that the intrinsic moral character of an act should be one of those goods which can, sometimes, outweigh the goodness of eliminating an evil. In terms of MPE, one of the "greater goods" that might warrant a perfect being in refraining from eliminating an evil would be avoiding the intrinsic wrongness of the evil-eliminating act. Why isn't this a simple clarification of MPE so as to make it more theoretically neutral?

As noted above, to embrace a deontological moral perspective is to hold that, at least sometimes, an action possesses what I am calling an intrinsic moral character, and that this intrinsic character *overrides* any consequentialist considerations which might be offered for or against performing the action. Thus, if an action is intrinsically immoral, it is immoral no matter how much good it does (or how much evil it eliminates).

In interpreting the claim that the intrinsic immorality of an action overrides its good effects, it is a mistake to hold that "overrides" means the same as what is ordinarily meant by "outweighs." Understood in any act *outweighs* its good effects is to say that the intrinsic immorality of an act is an evil which is greater than the good produced by the act. But to say this is, in effect, to turn the intrinsic immorality of the act into one of the consequences to be considered in evaluating whether or not the act produces the best results. It turns deontology into a species of consequentialism, one that happens to include in the scope of consideration the intrinsic moral character of acts (and therefore doesn't demand that the relevant consequences be temporally subsequent to the act itself).

But when the intrinsic immorality of an act is just one consequence of the act to be weighed against others, it then becomes possible, at least in

theory, for the other good consequences of the act to outweigh its intrinsic immorality, thereby rendering the action moral—an outcome that violates the definition of a deontological moral perspective as laid out above. This outcome could be avoided only if we assume that the intrinsic immorality of an act is such a great evil that it could never be outweighed by any of the act's external consequences, no matter how good. But this assumption is unreasonable for a number of reasons, the most important being this: We can conceive of cases in which performing an intrinsically immoral act would prevent several others from performing the *very same act*. In any such case, the evil consequences of not performing the act would outweigh the intrinsic evil of the act no matter how great we took that evil to be, since that intrinsic evil would be magnified in the consequences.

Hence, to say that the intrinsic immorality of an act *overrides* its good effects is not to say that it *outweighs* these effects. Rather, it is to say that, given the intrinsic immorality of the act, all consequentialist considerations for or against the act become *irrelevant*, even if those considerations would be utterly compelling in the absence of the intrinsic immorality. For a deontologist, if an action is intrinsically immoral, then it is wrong even if the evil intrinsic to such an action being done is far less serious than the evil which would be prevented by its performance.²⁸ From a deontological perspective, then, it is quite possible for an evil-eliminating action to be immoral even though there is no *outweighing* good served by refraining from the act. Hence, it is quite possible for a morally perfect being to refrain from eliminating evils even when the "good" served by such restraint is a rather modest good compared to the evil that could have been eliminated. From a deontological perspective, this kind of comparison is irrelevant.

And it is the irrelevance of this kind of comparative weighing procedure which is missed when we adopt Rowe's and Russell's suggestion of construing "outweighing good" broadly enough to include deontological considerations among the goods in question. So long as we think of deontological considerations as factors that are to be "weighed" against others, we miss the point of deontology. It may well be true that no deontological rule is such that the good of obeying it outweighs the horrible evils in the world. A deontologist could readily accept that the horrible evil of the little girl in Flint being murdered *outweighs* the good of God's obedience to whatever moral principle kept Him from intervening. But, the deontologist would continue, even though the good of obedience to the principle is modest compared to the evil that could have been prevented by disobedience, the principle is not the sort that can be outweighed by such teleological concerns: the action prohibited is intrinsically wrong no matter what the consequences, and so a morally perfect God would refrain from performing the action no matter how much it might pain Him to watch the evil continue. Whereas a less perfect being might break down and violate the principle because the consequences of doing so are appealing, it is God's very perfection which causes Him to let the evil continue, even though the evil is gratuitous and permitting it serves no greater good.

In short, even if we follow the advice of Rowe and Russell, and construe "good" in such a way as to include deontological moral principles, we will still be embracing an essentially consequentialist moral perspective so long

as the question we ask about these deontological principles is whether obedience to them is so great a good as to outweigh the evils permitted in the name of obedience. For a deontologist, this is the wrong sort of question to ask. And for a theodacist, therefore, the search for “outweighing goods” to explain why God permits the evils He does is too restrictive. If one adopts a deontological morality, there is a whole class of possible moral justifications which theodacists tend to overlook.

Put another way, the question most frequently asked in connection with AE is this one: “Is there some outweighing good which justifies God in permitting each of the evils in the world?” And this question amounts to asking whether or not there is some evil in the world which is pointless—which is such that no outweighing good is served by it. Advocates of AE have tended to hold that if we have good reason to believe that there is pointless evil, then we have good reason to believe that there is no God. A deontologist would object to this inference on the grounds that, even if we have good reason to believe that there is pointless evil, there is a further question we need to ask. That question is this: “Is there any non-consequentialist moral obligation which prevents God from intervening to prevent or eliminate the pointless evil in the world?” It is this further question which is obscured by Rowe’s and Russell’s quick treatment of deontology. So long as we *speak* in terms of outweighing goods, our tendency will be to *think* in terms of outweighing goods—and the mere inclusion of the intrinsic moral character of actions among the candidates for outweighing goods does nothing to change this. In order to think deontologically, we need to start asking the further deontological question that remains to be answered even once we have concluded that no outweighing good justifies permitting a given evil.

The Case of Free Will

One might be tempted to dismiss the significance of this oversight if one fails to consider the impact it has had on some actual discussions. Consider, as an example, the theodicies based on free will. Essentially, these theodicies seek to show that at least some of the evils that exist in the world (the moral evils) are not pointless, because these evils cannot be eliminated without eliminating the free will of those who are responsible for them, and permitting the free exercise of their wills is a greater good. The good of free will, in short, *outweighs* these evils. But a defender of AE can argue that the goodness of free will is not so obviously great that it outweighs all of the horrific moral evils in the world.

This is precisely what Bruce Russell has done, in responding to Swinburne’s version of the free will theodicy. Russell quite rightly notes that, while free will may well be seen as valuable, it is hardly “so valuable that it could justify someone in permitting suffering like that endured by the little girl in Flint.”²⁹ More precisely, Russell argues that while a world where people have significant freedom to act may well be better than a world without significant freedom, it doesn’t follow that a world in which God never intervenes to prevent the evils brought on by human freedom is better than a world in which God does so intervene. And even if we

assume that God does sometimes intervene to prevent the evils that would otherwise result from free acts, it seems that God could certainly intervene more often than He does without significantly undermining human freedom and making the world a worse place. In particular, preserving the free will of the man who brutally murdered the little girl in Flint can hardly be viewed as so great a good as to justify that little girl's suffering.³⁰ Again, was the free will of the Nazis so valuable that the good of preserving their free will outweighed the evil of the Holocaust? There is no good reason to think so. Hence, there is no good reason to think that, in every case where free will is exercised, the good of preserving it outweighs the evil that is permitted in its name.

The fact that Russell takes this response to be sufficient demonstrates quite plainly that, for all his willingness to include deontological considerations among the "outweighing goods" that could justify allowing some evil, he does not see what it means to think deontologically about the subject. A deontologist is not primarily concerned with whether or not the free will of moral agents is so great a good as to outweigh the evils that one must permit in order not to interfere with the exercise of their free will. That is consequentialist thinking.³¹ What the deontologist wants to know, simply put, is this: Is it intrinsically morally permissible to interfere with some person's free will in order to prevent some evil, or is the act of interfering with that person's free will intrinsically immoral, such that no amount of evil prevention could even in theory justify it? Of course, what is intrinsically morally permissible may be a function of the nature of one's relationships or other subject-specific considerations, such that, for the purposes of theodicy, the key deontological question becomes whether it is intrinsically permissible for *God* to interfere in *His creatures'* exercise of their free will, given their nature and the telos for which He made them.³² If not, then in circumstances where the only way for God to prevent an evil would be through interference with someone's free will, God, as a morally perfect being, would permit the evil even if it were unimaginably horrible.³³ If, as seems plausible, some interference in the exercise of human free will would be necessary in order to prevent the Holocaust,³⁴ then God would permit the Holocaust *even though no greater good is served by it*.

In short, in order to evaluate the free will theodicy, we do not merely need some account of the value of free will, but also some account of which deontological moral principles (if any) regulate actions, especially divine actions, that affect the exercise of human free will. Such an account cannot be provided without explicating one's moral theory. For example, it seems likely that a strong version of Christian Pacifism would put greater deontological constraints on the intrusion into free will than would the moral theory underlying the Just War tradition.³⁵

Conclusion

It seems, then, that no treatment of AE should be divorced from some explication of the moral theory according to which one spells out what a morally perfect being would do. We have seen that, despite their efforts to the contrary, advocates of AE adopt moral premises which, in their word-

ing and application, imply a moral perspective that is not theoretically neutral, but in fact consequentialist. Simple instructions to construe these premises as theoretically neutral are insufficient. A better formulation of the key moral premise of AE would be the following:

(MPE'): A morally perfect being would eliminate, as far as He was able, all evils that could be eliminated without producing a greater evil, or losing a greater good, or *violating any active deontological moral requirements*.

But even MPE' is not entirely satisfactory, since in order to fully understand what a morally perfect being would do we would need a moral theory to tell us which deontological principles can and do influence the morality of God's evil-eliminating acts. The most obvious source for such a moral theory would be the religious traditions which are the target of AE. Indeed, the extent to which a religious tradition's moral theory limits the scope of the problem of evil may well be one measure of its acceptability.

In any event, it is clear that if we replace MPE with MPE', a valid version of AE would have to include the additional premise that there are no active deontological moral requirements that God would violate by preventing all gratuitous evil. This is a premise that is not obviously true, and hence deserves careful philosophical scrutiny. Thus, by clearing away the consequentialist presuppositions of the argument we open up a new line of inquiry, one that ought to occupy an important place in future dialogue concerning AE.

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NOTES

1. In saying that the assumption is "unwarranted," I do not mean to suggest that the assumption is false, and it is not my intention here to critically examine this assumption to assess its credibility. Rather, I mean merely that the assumption is controversial, that there are many who do not accept it (including many theists, against whose views the argument is directed), and that for these reasons it is inappropriate to make such an assumption without justification.

2. See Daniel Howard-Snyder, *The Evidential Argument from Evil* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996), for an excellent collection of essays focusing on the epistemic issues pertaining to AE.

3. Not all recent scholarship on the problem of evil has ignored moral issues in favor of epistemic ones. See, for example, Peter van Inwagen, *God, Knowledge and Mystery* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1995); William Hasker, "The Necessity of Gratuitous Evil," *Faith and Philosophy* 9 (1992), pp. 23-44; and David McNaughton, "The Problem of Evil: A Deontological Perspective," in *Reason and the Christian Religion*, ed. Alan Padgett (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994). While none of these essays make the point that I do here, they do take seriously the moral dimensions of the argument from evil. Scholarship of this sort, however, is the exception rather than the rule, and deserves a more prominent place in current philosophical discussions.

4. Howard-Snyder gives a useful account of the distinction between LAE and EAE in his introduction to *The Evidential Argument from Evil* (hereafter referred to as *The Evidential Argument*). See especially pp. xii-xvi.

5. J.L. Mackie, "Evil and Omnipotence," in *Mind* 64 (1955), pp. 200-12.

6. For an excellent discussion of the difficulty of developing unproblematic premises of this sort, see Alvin Plantinga, *God and Other Minds: A Study of the Rational Justification of Belief in God* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1967), ch. 5.

7. *Ibid.*, ch. 6; and Plantinga, *God, Freedom, and Evil* (New York: Harper & Row, 1974) pp. 29-59. See also Nelson Pike, "Hume on Evil," *Philosophical Review* 72 (1963), pp. 180-97.

8. As noted above, the evil referred to in E may be either evil as such or some or all of its particular real-world manifestations. In evidential versions of the argument, E is typically formulated in terms of one or more particularly horrific evils.

9. See Pike, pp. 182-3.

10. Despite its prevalence, there are some who do not presuppose MPE. See, for example, Howard-Snyder, "The Argument from Inscrutable Evil," in *The Evidential Argument*, esp. pp. 286-91; and Theodore Drange, *Evil and Nonbelief* (Buffalo, NY: Prometheus, 1998), pp. 37-8.

11. John Hick's theodicy in *Evil and the God of Love* 2nd ed. (New York: Harper & Row, 1978) is an example of a systematic attempt to show that the evils in the world are necessary for ultimately realizing a greater good, and hence are not gratuitous.

12. See for example, Alvin Plantinga, "Epistemic Probability and Evil" *Archivio de filosofia* 56 (1988), reprinted in *The Evidential Argument*, pp. 69-96.

13. William L. Rowe, "The Problem of Evil and Some Varieties of Atheism," *American Philosophical Quarterly* 16 (1979) pp. 335-41. Reprinted in both *The Evidential Argument*, pp. 1-11, and in Marilyn McCord Adams and Robert Merrihew Adams, eds., *The Problem of Evil* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), pp. 126-37.

14. *Ibid.*, p. 336.

15. For a particularly insightful discussion of the latter issue, see William P. Alston, "The Inductive Argument from Evil and the Human Cognitive Condition," in *The Evidential Argument*.

16. Rowe, p. 338

17. See, for example, William L. Rowe, "Evil and Theodicy," *Philosophical Topics* 16 (1988), pp. 119-32.

18. Rowe, "Problem of Evil", p. 336.

19. This articulation of deontology in terms of the recognition of overriding nonconsequentialist constraints is articulated nicely by Shelly Kagan in *Normative Ethics* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1998), pp. 70-74.

20. My formulation here is intended to allow for deontological theories, such as the one discussed and developed by Alan Donagan, in which an overall assessment of consequences may be relevant and even *sometimes* decisive in determining an act's moral rightness, because of an imperfect duty of beneficence. The difference between a theory such as this and a consequentialist one is that the imperfect duty of beneficence is constrained by perfect duties. See Donagan, *The Theory of Morality* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1977), esp. p.209. See also W.D. Ross, *The Right and the Good* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1963), esp. p. 18. This formulation is not intended to exclude stricter forms of deontology which may entirely exclude consequences from consideration. See, for example, Paul Taylor's strong formulation of deontology in *Principles of Ethics* (Encino, CA: Dickenson Publishing Company, 1975),

p. 83.

21. The classic formulation of this view is found in Kant's argument that it is wrong to lie even to protect an innocent from potential murderers. See Immanuel Kant, "On a Supposed Right to Lie from Altruistic Motives (1797)," in *Immanuel Kant: Critique of Practical Reason and Other Writings in Moral Philosophy*, ed. Lewis White Beck (New York: Garland Press, 1976).

22. In order for a consequence of an action to be an intrinsic feature of the act, it is not sufficient that the consequence be intended, since intended consequences need not be part of the *definition* of an act-type. For a deeper discussion of this issue, see my distinction between inherent and purposive ends in Newton Garver and Eric Reitan, *Nonviolence and Community* (Wallingford, PA: Pendle Hill, 1995), pp. 31-2.

23. *Ibid.*, p. 336, fn.

24. Bruce Russell, "The Persistent Problem of Evil," *Faith and Philosophy* 6 (1989), pp. 121-39.

25. *Ibid.*, p. 124

26. *Ibid.*, p. 129

27. *Ibid.*

28. Again, Kant's discussion about lying in order to prevent an innocent from being murdered exemplifies this aspect of deontology. Kant does not hold that telling a lie is a more serious evil than committing murder. On the contrary, Kant's view that murder deserves the most serious punishment (death, a punishment to which he would presumably not condemn liars) implies that he views murder to be a more serious offense than lying. Nevertheless, he believes it is wrong to tell a lie in order to prevent a murder. Truth-telling is right in this case not because it promotes a greater good (clearly, lying would promote the greater good, even if we include among relevant goods the supposedly deontological good of moral rules being obeyed), but because it is an instance of an act-type that is morally required by the exceptionless rule against lying.

29. *Ibid.*, p. 126

30. *Ibid.*, p. 128

31. Such consequentialist considerations are certainly relevant in answering the broad question of why God might have created a world in which free will exists, rather than a world in which free will does not exist. But once free agents do exist, there arises the further deontological question of whether it is intrinsically permissible to interfere with the exercise of their free wills.

32. The possibility that divine obligations may differ from human obligations is exemplified by Simone Weil's argument that, in order for creatures to exist as independent beings, God must withdraw His presence from them, and that this withdrawal, as a precondition for the independent selfhood of the creature, is necessary to express divine love for the creature. It is a sign of God's moral perfection. But the moral necessity of withdrawal as an expression of love does not apply in the same way to creatures; it follows from the particular features of the God-creature relationship. See Simone Weil, *Gravity and Grace* (Lincoln, NA: University of Nebraska Press, 1997), p. 78.

33. My intention here is not to *assert* that interference in the exercise of His creatures' free will is intrinsically wrong for God, but rather to point out that how one answers this deontological question, and other questions like it, has significant implications for the assessment of AE. To the extent that the consequentialist assumptions of AE have been overlooked, deontological questions like this one have been overlooked as well.

34. By "the exercise of human free will" I refer not only to the mental act of willing, but to those concomitant actions which are meant to carry out what

has been willed. Most free will theodicies assume that it is the exercise of human free will in this broad sense which is the good that justifies God permitting the evils that he does. If we had in mind only the mental act of willing, God could presumably have prevented the evils of the Holocaust without interfering with that (by, for example, systematically rendering the Nazis' wills impotent to affect the world). But if we adopt the broader sense of free will that is presupposed by free will theodicians, then it would seem to be impossible for God to have prevented the Holocaust without such interference.

35. For example, a Christian pacifist might hold that the obligation to love one's neighbor implies *perfect* duties of nonviolence but only *imperfect* duties of benevolence, such that obedience to the law of love entails that one refrain from doing violence to any neighbor, even when doing so would be of greater benefit to a greater number of neighbors. Following Weil (fn 32), one might argue that because of God's unique relationship to His creatures, any intrusion into free will by God would be an act of violence against the creature (because it would destroy or damage their independent selfhood), and would therefore be absolutely prohibited by the law of love *even when* such an intrusion would generate more good overall. Just warists clearly reject a perfect duty of nonviolence, and could therefore not support the free will theodicy in the same way.