

GOD, MORAL PREFERABILITY AMONG WORLDS, AND THE ACTUAL WORLD

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The problem of evil has been a perennial issue in Christianity. I will spare the well-known details of its origins, other than to say it is one of the chief objections against the existence of an omnibenevolent God. Underlying the objection and often expressed is the question: “why?” Why did God allow the world to be this way?

I saw a “demotivator” poster which had a picture of a boxer receiving a vicious blow to the face which presumably left him staggered and beaten. Underneath was the (slightly) humorous caption, “not all pain is gain.” Most if not all of us grasp the meaning of this quite experientially. The world *does* seem to have pointless suffering; it *does* seem to have senseless violence.

William Lane Craig points out even if evil is gratuitous, God may be justified in allowing it. However, Craig believes that “the evil [that is actually in the world], though objective, wouldn’t be gratuitous.”¹⁶⁰ In either case, then, the evil allowed by God does not necessarily count against his moral worth or character. This paper will suggest God is morally justified in creating this actual world over other worlds which he could have created.

Possible Worlds

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¹⁶⁰ William Lane Craig, “Question #196,” <<http://www.reasonablefaith.org/site/News2?page=NewsArticle&id=8605>>, accessed April 14, 2011.

First, if one is to understand God's moral justification in creating the actual world then he must understand the concept of a possible world. A possible world is "a maximal description of reality, or a way reality might be."¹⁶¹ Possible worlds are governed, in general, by broad logical possibility.¹⁶² For instance, there is a possible world in which I choose not to write this paper. There is a possible world in which one's parents never meet and so one is never born. It is also notable that what is physically impossible may nonetheless be logically possible, as these are not identical.¹⁶³

It follows then that the actual world in which we live was itself one of these nearly-infinite possible worlds.¹⁶⁴ From these, God could have chosen to instantiate any he so desired. In relation to creating conscious creatures as his image-bearers (Gen. 1:26), it would have been important to endow such creatures with the ability to make moral choices. This follows from God being a moral agent himself (as the objective grounds of morality).

¹⁶¹ William Lane Craig, *Reasonable Faith* (3rd ed., Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2008), 183. It is also important to note that whatever appears in a possible world can be either contingent or necessary (and in either case it is *necessarily* possible), and what appears in *no* possible world is of necessity impossible (e.g., married bachelors, square triangles, $2+2=97$, etc.).

¹⁶² Bob Hale, "Absolute Necessities," *Philosophical Perspectives, Metaphysics*. 30.10 (1996): 93-117. Broad logical possibility means two or more propositions are internally consistent. In strict logical possibility something must be both internally consistent and compatible with other truth. So, while "the U.S. president is a prime number" is *broadly* logically possible, there nonetheless is no possible world where the U.S. president is a prime number (because of the truth that U.S. presidents are persons), and hence it is not *strictly* logically possible.

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁴ I say "nearly-infinite" because any world which contains logical impossibilities is by definition not a possible world; if there are logically-impossible worlds then these reduce the number of the set of all possible worlds to something less than infinite (an infinite series has no end).

It is this ability to make free and morally-responsible decisions/actions that tends to delimit possible worlds into *feasible* worlds. Kenneth Keathley puts it this way: “He [God] knows what reality would be like if He had created a world without you or me in it. . . God possesses a perfect knowledge of all feasible worlds—all possibilities which *would* accomplish what He wanted to have happen.”¹⁶⁵

Craig notes, “so long as people are free, there is no guarantee that everybody in such a world would be freely saved.”¹⁶⁶ So it seems, given free actions, certain worlds are logically possible but not feasible (or able to be put in actualization by God [who is bound by his nature, which grounds logic and truth]).

Craig gets even more specific in a different article. “He [an objector] must show that the circumstances under which various individuals would freely receive Christ are compossible, so that all persons in some possible world would freely receive Christ and be saved.”¹⁶⁷ The worlds inaccessible to God in a feasible sense are just those worlds which contain non-compossible truths; worlds which contain truths about moral decisions/actions that cannot both be true. If Gary chooses to act morally right at time t-1 in circumstances C₁, but C₁ entails Lisa does what is morally right at t-1 only in the case that Gary does what is wrong there, then a world in which both Gary and

¹⁶⁵ Kenneth Keathley, *Salvation and Sovereignty: A Molinist Approach* (Nashville, TN: B&H Academic, 2010), p. 17-18. While Molinism is a distinctive approach in this paper, it is not necessary to the argument of the paper as a whole. So long as any consistent account of the argument proffered is given, it matters not the methodology. Developing an argument for Molinism or any other interpretive framework is not the goal of this paper.

¹⁶⁶ William Lane Craig, “How Can Christ Be the Only Way to God?” <<http://www.reasonablefaith.org/site/News2?page=NewsArticle&id=5347>>, accessed April 14, 2011.

¹⁶⁷ William Lane Craig, “No Other Name: A Middle Knowledge Perspective on the Exclusivity of Salvation Through Christ,” *Faith and Philosophy* 6 (1989): 172-88.

Lisa do right simultaneously given C_1 is not feasible. C_1 is a *broadly* logically possible world, but it is infeasible for God to create given morally-free and responsible actions.

Some allege God is responsible for circumstances in which people make moral choices (both with good and bad applications). The problem with such a view, according to Baggett and Walls, is that "it presumably involves people's genuinely free choices and their consequences. Just because God foreknows the content of our decisions doesn't mean he's responsible for determining that content, nor does it preclude the ability to do otherwise."¹⁶⁸

Both the ideas and implications of possible and feasible worlds will come into play throughout this paper. It is easy to think of alternative possible worlds; simply imagine the events of the world until now remaining uniform with one miniscule difference. However, considerations as to feasible worlds are much more difficult epistemologically.

Moral Preferability Among Worlds

Imagine no constraints on one's knowledge as to feasible worlds. At a minimum, consider the possibility there are multiplied possible worlds which are also feasible, so that many complete descriptions of reality were available to God for creation. What standard should be used to judge the moral preferability of one world to another? That is, what makes it true that W_1 is better than W_2 in a moral sense? An analysis of certain proffered axioms should take place concerning moral preferability among worlds.

An Analysis of Proffered Axioms

1. Any world W_1 is morally preferable to any other world W_2 provided W_1 contains more morally-good acts than W_2 .

¹⁶⁸ David Baggett and Jerry L. Walls, *Good God: The Theistic Foundations of Morality* (New York: Oxford, 2011), p. 244 n27.

This particular axiom enjoys a sort of intuitive support found from the “ordinary person.” In fact, it is a common refrain one hears when discussing matters of spirituality and ethics in regards to salvation. “If my good deeds outweigh my bad deeds, then I will get into Heaven.” In much the same way, if more good deeds than bad deeds are preferable for salvation, then surely they are for choosing among worlds as well.

The potential problem is this seems to open the door for any number of odd-world scenarios. First, consider this: suppose in W_2 there is, on average, one good act done for every man, woman, and child on earth every day. If this were our actual world this would equate to over six billion good acts per day. However, in this case it would seem that W_1 would be preferable only if there were more people (in total) existing throughout the world’s history (provided it was identical in every other respect). Preferring a world almost purely on the basis of its being more populated seems arbitrary.

Second, this axiom does not account for the moral evil and wrong done between two or more worlds. Suppose W_1 has the most morally-good actions of any possible world. Further suppose this entails also the most morally-evil or wrong actions done among any worlds that are feasible. In that case should one be so quick to label W_1 as a morally preferable world to the world with the second-most morally-good actions?

Third, this axiom fails to account for salvation. It is true Heaven and final salvation are part of this actual world, so the number of those saved counts toward the overall moral good in each case. However, since God is just, the number of those sent to Hell is good in each case as well. In this case, such a world may be morally preferable to another world even in the case that *all* of its members ended up in Hell.¹⁶⁹ God would not and

¹⁶⁹ Alexander Pruss holds a great but brief discussion on why even the people in Hell owe thanks to God; it is because of the moral good of existence itself! Alexander Pruss, “No One Would be Better Off Not Existing,” < <http://alexanderpruss.blogspot.com/2011/04/no-one-would->

does not view that world as morally preferable to one in which there are indeed saved people (1 Tim 2:4; Ezek 33:11). Such an axiom must be incomplete at best and false at worst.

2. Any world W_1 is morally preferable to any other world W_2 provided W_1 contains more morally-good acts and saved individuals than W_2 .

This axiom appears quite within the range of biblically-minded people's comfort. This combines the axiom above with an answer to one of the objections against it. Since God prefers the salvation of individuals to their damnation, and a good God prefers good acts to bad ones, their conjunction provides a way of achieving God's goals in accordance with moral preferability.

However, it seems there may be a problem with this axiom as well. Craig points out this type of world may preclude worlds we would consider to be better. "As a loving God, He wants to minimize the number of the lost: He wants hell to be as empty as possible."¹⁷⁰ An objector may be confused on this point. He may be tempted to think, "Is this world not such a world? Maximizing the saved automatically reduces the lost." This would be confused. The axiom merely states any world containing more saved people and good actions is preferable to any world which contains less of both; it specifies nothing of the number of those who are in Hell.

As a thought experiment, consider W_1 to be a world in which, throughout history, four billion people come to a saving relationship with God. Consider W_2 to be a world in which 3,999,999,999 come to know God. Further suppose both W_2 and W_1 to contain the same number of morally good acts.¹⁷¹ Now suppose W_1 contains three billion souls in Hell, while W_2 has two billion. Are we really willing to say W_1 is *better* than W_2

be-better-off-not-existing.html>, first accessed April 4, 2011.

¹⁷⁰ Craig, "No Other Name," 182.

¹⁷¹ This would be possible if the number of saved performed more good acts than they would in the other world. In any case, this is not logically impossible.

after all? While this axiom is likely on the right track, it seems it too must be rejected as incomplete.

Axiom in Light of God's Grounding of Objective Morality

Now an axiom must be presented that will be acceptable with respect to moral preferability among worlds. Moral preferability of any non-relativistic stripe will be objective and independently binding; one is trying to establish what *really* is better given a set of circumstances. The question of whether or not God is constrained to create such a world will be discussed later. What follows is suggested as the Axiom of Moral Preferability (AMP).

3. Any world W_1 is morally preferable to any other world W_2 provided W_1 contains an optimum number and balance of saved individuals in comparison to W_2 .

This axiom will almost certainly entail many morally-good actions in light of free will. The AMP differs from (2) in that it does not simply promote the number of saved individuals in a given world but the optimum balance as well.¹⁷² Craig alludes to this when he says, "It is possible that in order to create the actual number of persons who will be saved, God had to create the actual number of persons who will be lost. It is possible . . . any other possible world which was feasible for God the balance between saved and lost was worse."¹⁷³

In theism and Christianity, God is the absolute standard for objective morality. God is so inextricably tied to moral

¹⁷² Additionally, it is worth noting that focusing only on the *balance* between saved and lost while ignoring the number of those saved is to miss the point of preferability as well. As Craig notes in "No Other Name," "Even if we grant that God could have achieved a better ratio between saved and lost, it is possible that in order to achieve such a ratio God would have had to so drastically reduce the number of the saved as to leave heaven deficient in population (say, by creating a world of only four people, three of whom go to heaven and one to hell)," pp. 182-83.

¹⁷³ Craig, "No Other Name," *ibid.*

problem of evil it is sometimes asserted there is no logical contradiction in stating “a possible world exists in which everyone freely chooses the good and is saved.” Plantinga frames it this way: “Surely it is possible to do only what is right . . . it is possible, in that broadly logical sense, that there be a world containing free creatures who always do what is right. There is certainly no contradiction or inconsistency in this idea.”¹⁷⁷

The idea of whether or not God could create such a world (that is, if such a world is feasible to create given free will) has been the general focus of the debate. Some grant the assumption that such a world is both possible *and* feasible. These people would assume this actual world is therefore the best possible world. The argument for this will be explored.

Leibniz' Argument

Gottfried W. Leibniz (1646-1716) made amazing contributions to Christian philosophy. Leibniz embraced the “best possible world” argument. His argument was summarized by Plantinga as follows.

Before God created anything at all, He was confronted with an enormous range of choices . . . Being perfectly good, He must have chosen to create the best world He could; being omnipotent, He was able to create any possible world He pleased . . . Hence, this world, the one He did create, must be the best possible.¹⁷⁸

For Leibniz, a being who does not create the best possible world is not acting consistently “with supreme wisdom and goodness,” and therefore is not the best himself.¹⁷⁹ Such an

¹⁷⁷ Alvin Plantinga, *God, Freedom, and Evil* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1977), p. 32.

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 33. It should be noted the atheist J.L. Mackie agreed with Leibniz' line of thought up to the conclusion: it was there Mackie said this was not the best possible world; therefore, God does not exist.

idea was scandalous to Leibniz. Perfect being theology entailed there existed a Perfect Moral Being (PMB). Without the PMB, God, as he was known, did not really exist. The argument looks like this:

1. If the PMB creates, then the PMB must create the best world possible for him to create.
2. The PMB is omnipotent.
3. Therefore, the PMB can create the best logically possible world.
4. The PMB created this actual world.
5. Therefore, the actual world is the best logically possible world.

The conclusion strikes some as absurd *prima facie*. For instance, Voltaire wrote *Candide* specifically against this idea.¹⁸⁰ However, since the argument is logically valid a premise must be denied in order to avoid the conclusion. Atheists will deny (4) and substitute their own premise. Others may deny (2) or amend it to exclude the ability to actualize just any logically possible world.¹⁸¹ ¹⁸² One may also deny (1), saying God may have no obligation to create the best possible world. Others

¹⁷⁹ Gottfried W. Leibniz, *Theodicy* (ed. Austin Farrer, trans. E.M. Huggard. LaSalle, IL: Open Court, 1985), section 201, 154.

¹⁸⁰ Voltaire, *Candide* (New York: Pocket Books, 2005), 4. In fact, Voltaire wrote satirically of proving “there is no effect without a cause, and that, in this best of all possible worlds, the Baron’s castle was the most magnificent of castles, and his lady the best of all possible Baronesses” (ibid.).

¹⁸¹ Plantinga, *God, Freedom, and Evil*, p. 37. In this he discusses certain states of affairs’ being consistent with one another; the entire conjunctive state of affairs of everyone’s freely coming to Christ or refraining from evil may not be feasible given free will of each individual creature.

¹⁸² Another route to take is simply to deny (2) *simpliciter*. This is the option of the Open Theist; God, while very powerful, cannot do everything.

argue from the implicit assumption that there even is a best possible world. It is to this consideration this paper will turn.

Is There a Best Possible World?

Plantinga questions whether there even is such a thing as a best possible world. “No matter how marvelous a world is—containing no matter how many persons enjoying unalloyed bliss—isn’t it possible that there be an even better world containing even more persons enjoying even more unalloyed bliss?”¹⁸³ For Plantinga, the idea is whatever world postulated will always have another world with at least one better feature.

Daniel and Frances Howard-Snyder have also argued this. They postulated a world-randomizer that selected a world to actualize for a God-like being. Much like Plantinga, for any world, say number 297, there exists a better world (numbered higher in proportion to each world’s value) 298. 299 is better than 298, and so on *ad infinitum*. In that case, however, there just is no best possible world. Each successive world is better than the last (and in turn, all others before it). Just as natural numbers are not exhausted, so the goodness of each world also is not exhausted. “Although he can create any of them, he can’t create the best of them because there is no best.”¹⁸⁴

The Howard-Snyders argue, “there is no contradiction in supposing that an essentially morally unsurpassable, essentially omnipotent and omniscient being could create a world inferior to some other world he, or some other possible being, could have created.”¹⁸⁵ The best possible world is never attained precisely because that which cannot be attained does not actually exist.

¹⁸³ Plantinga, *God, Freedom, and Evil*, 34.

¹⁸⁴ Daniel and Frances Howard-Snyder, “How an Unsurpassable Being Can Create a Surpassable World,” *Faith and Philosophy* 11 (April 1994): 260-68.

¹⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

God's Free Will as it Pertains to Actualizing a World

Now the discussion must turn to God's free will in actualizing the world. Even granting Leibniz' assumption of a best possible world, is God constrained to create it? This paper contends that the PMB is not constrained to create any particular world.

First, the PMB cannot be asked to create a world that is logically impossible. Since standard PMB theology asserts logic and truth are within the grounds of his nature, he cannot act contrary to that.¹⁸⁶ So worlds which have *broad* logical possibilities may nonetheless actually be impossible, logically, for God to create.

Second, Plantinga discusses the difference between creating and actualizing a particular world. According to Plantinga, in order for God to be said to create, it must be the case that whatever is being created first did not exist.¹⁸⁷ Hence, God must be viewed in terms of actualizing a particular world that already has certain features.

Next, Robert Adams argues that it is God's nature alone that may limit him, if anything at all.¹⁸⁸ No one thinks God is not free in the relevant sense when we say he cannot sin. Therefore, no one should think God is not free by not creating a bad world where everyone always does evil.

Perhaps one may object that this misses the point. Yes, God may be said to be free to create other worlds and not particularly constrained to create this actual world. Yet it seems

¹⁸⁶ Note that even if an objector insists the PMB does not also ground truth and logic, he is at least beholden to them, so that he cannot act contrary to *that* standard.

¹⁸⁷ Alvin Plantinga, "Which Worlds Could God Have Created?" *The Journal of Philosophy*, LXX (October 1973): 539-52. Whatever God created did not first exist because of two things: first, possible worlds already exist as abstract objects. Second, since God is a maximally great being, he exists in all possible worlds; meaning there are no vacuous worlds.

¹⁸⁸ Susan Wolf, "A World of Goods," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* LXIV, 2 (March 2002): 467-74.

nonetheless God must create this actual world (if the best possible world exists).

The Howard-Snyders argue since any world, even if deliberately chosen, will be a world than which some omnipotent PMB could have done better, it is only incumbent upon the PMB to actualize a good world.¹⁸⁹ Even on the assumption the best possible world exists, it seems that such a world could never be instantiated. It seems the PMB is not morally required to actualize the best after all.

Is the Best Possible World Achievable?

Not every world that is possible is achievable. Norman Geisler argues even if a best possible world is conceivable it may be such a world cannot be achieved. "It may be that God in His infinite foreknowledge foresaw that no such world [a world of free creatures who never choose to sin] would actually materialize."¹⁹⁰

It is entirely plausible that the best logically possible world containing free creatures is simply not feasible to create. Plantinga views this as forming a sort of "delimiter" to the worlds that God can actualize. He maintains, "Whether or not it is within God's power to actualize depends upon what Maurice would do if he were free in a certain situation . . . It is, of course, up to God whether or not to create Maurice . . . but if He creates Maurice and creates him free with respect to this action, then whether or not he actually performs the action is up to Maurice, not God."¹⁹¹

God and Moral Obligation

¹⁸⁹ Daniel and Frances Howard-Snyder, 268.

¹⁹⁰ Norman L. Geisler, *If God, Why Evil?* (Minneapolis, MN: Bethany House, 2011), p. 64.

¹⁹¹ Plantinga, *God, Freedom, and Evil*, p. 44.

One must ask whether God has any moral obligations whatsoever. Craig answers in the negative, writing, "I don't think God has any moral duties. For moral duties are constituted by God's commands, and presumably God doesn't issue commands to Himself. Therefore, He has no obligations to live up to."¹⁹²

Indeed, with respect to the discussion over whether God is actually *constrained* to create this, or any other, possible world, Craig believes one cannot claim that, either. "If God is essentially good, then there is no possible world in which He does evil . . . God acts in the complete absence of any causal constraint whatsoever . . . That God is acting freely is evident in the fact that His will is not inclined necessarily toward any particular finite good."¹⁹³ Leibniz' PMB axiom (the first premise) has some potential difficulties.

The Perfect Moral Being Axiom Problems

There are three major issues with respect to the PMB axiom.¹⁹⁴ First, there is the difficulty of the "ought implies can" problem. This idea is that one cannot be held morally culpable for acting (or refraining to act) in a situation in which he cannot act or refrain from acting as he does. One does not bear moral responsibility unless he is able to act and able to understand that act. If God cannot actualize the best possible world (because it does not exist or has overriding features [such as free will]), then he cannot be held morally culpable for not creating such a world. In that case the PMB axiom is false.

Second, the best possible world is one in which no one exists but God himself. The Howard-Snyders point out,

¹⁹² William Lane Craig, "Question #114"

<<http://www.reasonablefaith.org/site/News2?page=NewsArticle&id=7227>> accessed April 27, 2011.

¹⁹³ Ibid.

¹⁹⁴ As a reminder, the PMB axiom is that any essentially good and perfect moral being must create the best possible world.

referring to the PMB as “Jove,” that “Jove doesn’t have the option of making it the case that there is no actual world . . . if he refrains from using his creative powers, a world will nevertheless be actual . . . That world will have no concrete being other than Jove in it.” In other words, even a world with only God in it is nonetheless a world.

It is here where I must part company with Geisler. In his discussion on options for creating, he mentions “[not creating being better than creating] assumes that nothing is better than something. This is a gigantic category mistake.” Since God is a necessary being, any and every possible world will be populated at least by God. Craig agrees, saying, “In a possible world in which God creates nothing, there is only He Himself, the paradigm and locus of goodness . . . That’s a pretty good world, to say the least!”

If every world is populated by at least God, then the worlds with the greatest balance of morally good acts to bad are worlds in which God creates either nothing at all or worlds with no free creatures. The best possible world is one in which God simply exists with nothing else whatsoever. This is the point, and this is the problem. If the PMB axiom is correct, it seems the best possible worlds for which God would be responsible for actualizing are worlds in which nothing moral exists but God himself.

The third problem for the PMB axiom is that if the second issue is not a problem and if there is a best possible world, then God could have created creatures who never sin or refrained from creating at all. It is simple to imagine another world with one more good acts and one fewer evil one; a world where one more is saved and one fewer is lost. In this case, the only options are that the PMB axiom is false, our intuition about broad logical possibility is false (which is impossible to prove without question-begging), or the PMB does not exist. Since the latter two seem quite unacceptable this paper opts for the falsehood of the PMB axiom.

Steinberg argues God must always choose to do his best (as opposed to doing the objectively best).¹⁹⁵ In this case, we

see no reason God cannot choose in accordance with his goals. So long as the world he does choose to actualize is also good, then what God has done is good.

Standard for the PMB

An argument for God's moral justification in creating the actual world will be presented in this section. First, ought implies can. This is extremely relevant, as any standard one may place upon the PMB must include this idea. Second, creations which bear God's image have intrinsic good. The logic is as follows: A. God is good (PMB assumption). B. Whatever God creates is good extrinsically (Gen 1:31). C. Because of A, anything created in God's image is intrinsically good. D. Humans were created in God's image. E. Therefore, humans have intrinsic and extrinsic good.

Third, one must grant in worlds that contain actions for which God is not causally responsible that God does not bear any moral responsibility or culpability for those actions in those worlds. Therefore, any world in which God is not directly causally responsible for sin is intrinsically good given that creatures bearing God's image exist. Because God is good and there are creatures that are intrinsically good, we can call a world good so long as God avoids moral culpability for the actions of those creatures.

If this actual world meets the aforementioned standard and the AMP, then God is morally justified in creating this actual world. If this is the case, the problem of evil is at best mysterious and not an objection against God. Syllogistically, the argument is as follows:

1. God is intrinsically good.
2. Whatever God creates is extrinsically and intrinsically good if and only if it is in God's image.

¹⁹⁵ Jesse R. Steinberg, "Leibniz, Creation, and the Best of All Possible Worlds," *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 62 (2007): 123-33.

3. Humans are created by God in his image.
4. Therefore, humans are intrinsically good.
5. Any world bears intrinsic good in which God is not directly causally responsible for sin.
6. God is not directly causally responsible for sin.
7. Therefore, this actual world is intrinsically good.
8. If this world is good and meets the AMP, then God is morally justified in creating this actual world.
9. This world is good and meets the AMP.
10. Therefore, God is morally justified.

Critics may cry foul at (9), but (8) seems very plausibly true. If (8), the objector must beg the question against the conclusion unless he has some external, overriding reason to think God is not morally justified in creating this actual world. However, without positive evidence, the objector has no case and no reason to think that the AMP is not met in this actual world.

Conclusion

The problem of evil is not merely a logical or evidential one. It is one that is very emotional as well. For as moral beings we are rightly outraged at the evil existing in this present world. Randy Alcorn notes of evil's affect on a person, "Logical arguments won't satisfy you . . . You need help with the emotional problem of evil."¹⁹⁶ Apologists must always be sensitive not to minimize the real hurt and suffering moral evil has caused in the lives of others—even if the hurt is self-inflicted.

We must show these people there is a God who brings good out of bad; he is the one who will cause his people to praise him through eternity.¹⁹⁷ Genesis 50:20 states the evil meant for Joseph was meant by God for good.

¹⁹⁶ Randy Alcorn, *If God is Good* (Colorado Springs, CO: Multnomah, 2009), 3-4.

This paper offered an argument for God's moral justification in light of free will. It also examined criteria for determining moral preferability among possible worlds, including good ones.¹⁹⁸ The approach of possible worlds suggested God needs only to provide a good world that allows him to show his benevolence. Even a world containing as much freely performed evil as this one meets this definition. The problem of evil in the hearts and minds of people is not going away any time soon. Apologists have a wonderful arsenal to bear on this problem, and they may assert boldly there is no need to call God evil.

¹⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 282.

¹⁹⁸ While it was not discussed, it seems quite extreme to claim evil as necessarily existing in this possible world. The idea is that certain things we find virtuous, such as courage, are only possible in the face of some evil. However, I would contest that a world in which courage is exemplified is not inherently morally preferable to a world in which no evil exists. Further, one's character may be such that if he were to encounter evil, he would have courage. Since this character is formed by his actions, one may find such a counterfactual admirable, even in the lack of such evil.

