

Article

What Can God Do? What Should God Do?

Amir Horowitz

Department of History, Philosophy, and Judaic Studies, Open University of Israel, Ra'anana 4353701, Israel; amirho@openu.ac.il

Abstract: The aim of this paper is to defend James Sterba's version (2019) of the logical argument from evil against the existence of God from two objections that have been raised against it: that God cannot "logically" prevent all evils and that the moral requirements that the argument poses for God may not apply to God. I argue that these objections do not refute the claim that God can prevent and should prevent any evil and do not undermine Sterba's argument from evil to the effect that God does not exist.

Keywords: God; evil; Sterba; logical argument from evil

1. The Logical Argument from Evil

The aim of this paper is to defend James Sterba's (2019) version of the logical argument from evil against the existence of God from two objections that have been raised against it. The general idea of the logical argument from evil is simple. The argument can be presented as an argument from two premises. First, if God exists, then—being omnipotent and omnibenevolent—God would prevent the existence of any evil in the world. Second, evil exists in the world. Ergo, God does not exist. Presented in this way, the argument is an application of *modus tollens*, and so is deductively valid. This argument, and its first premise, in particular, require an elaborated defense, which is provided in Sterba's version of the argument. Sterba deals with the question "Is there a greater good justification for God's permitting significant and especially horrendous evil consequences of immoral actions" (Sterba 2020, p. 204).¹ By considering the various goods that could be provided to us, he answers this question negatively. He argues for three moral principles, which, according to him, require an all-powerful God to prevent such evil consequences ("Moral Evil Prevention Requirements"):

- I. Prevent rather than permit significant and especially horrendous evil consequences of immoral actions without violating anyone's rights (a good to which we have a right) when that can easily be done.
- II. Do not permit rather than prevent significant and especially horrendous evil consequences of immoral actions simply to provide other rational beings with goods they would morally prefer not to have.
- III. Do not permit rather than prevent significant and especially horrendous evil consequences of immoral actions (which would violate someone's rights) in order to provide such goods [goods to which we do not have a right] when there are countless morally unobjectionable ways of providing those goods.²

Thus, the general scheme of the argument is this:

1. There is an all-good, all-powerful God (assumed for *reductio*);
2. If there is an all-good, all-powerful God then necessarily he would be adhering to Moral Evil Prevention Requirements I–III;
3. If God were adhering to Moral Evil Prevention Requirements I–III, then necessarily significant and especially horrendous evil consequences of immoral actions would not be obtaining through what would have to be his permission.



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4. Significant and especially horrendous evil consequences of immoral actions do obtain all around us, which, if God exists, would have to be through his permission.

Therefore, it is not the case that there is an all-good, all-powerful God. (Sterba 2020, p. 208)

Steps 2 and 3 of this four-step argument provide substance to the first premise of the above modus tollens form of the argument, the premise that God's existence implies the non-existence of evil. Most of the objections that have been raised against the logical argument from evil target this premise, that is, they deny that God's existence is incompatible with the existence of evil, and, similarly, most of the objections that have been raised against Sterba's version of the argument from evil target its premises 2 and 3. Section 2 will focus on an objection to premise 3, and Section 3—on an objection to premise 2.

2. Can God Prevent All Evils?

Let me start with Hendricks's (2022) claim that Sterba's argument is ineffective against skeptical theism. Sterba discusses a case where some evil (a person being tortured) is the only way to avoid a worse evil (three people being tortured in the same way). The Pauline Principle—that one is forbidden from performing actions that are wrong in themselves—does not hold in such cases. If one's action prevents the triple torture by bringing about the single torture, one's action is justified. What makes it justified, according to Sterba, is human limitations, that is, the fact that human beings cannot prevent the worse evil but by bringing about the lesser evil. However, argues Sterba, such a justification does not apply to God's actions in comparable situations, since God can always prevent both moral evils. It follows that God is never justified in permitting significant evil (Sterba 2019, pp. 177–78).

Hendricks agrees that God is always *causally* able to prevent evil (that is, evil in itself), for God can prevent the causal consequences of any action. However, he claims that there can be cases in which God is not *logically* able to do so. What Hendricks means is that there can be cases in which God's preventing evil entails violating a different constraint. To illustrate this, Hendricks asks us to imagine the following scenario:

ZEUS: God creates a powerful creature, Zeus, and God has made an agreement with Zeus that he may create a mini-world as he sees fit—God promises not to interfere with Zeus's world.

Thus, Hendricks's idea is that, for Sterba's argument to be effective, it must establish not only that God is not causally constrained in preventing people from evil actions, but also that God is not thus "logically" constrained. Only then would accusing God of evil be justified. However, Hendricks argues, Sterba fallaciously infers a lack of logical constraints from a lack of causal constraints. It is possible that God is thus "logically" constrained, as illustrated by the Zeus scenario, and so Sterba's argument fails.

Before turning to the general point that this scenario is supposed to convey, let me address the scenario itself. Is there a good reason to accept that God would be justified in preferring adherence to such agreements over the prevention of horrendous evils? Note that we should assume that the evils in question are as horrendous as may be, since extremely horrendous evils occur, and the agreement under consideration is *carte blanche*. We can look at this point from another direction. According to one view of agreements and promises, they come (or at least may come) with built-in *ceteris paribus* conditions. In this vein, God's promise to Zeus may be taken to involve a *ceteris paribus* clause to the effect that this promise does not commit God to abstain from preventing horrendous evils. If so, God could act contrary to the expectations that are built on God's promise to Zeus, without in fact breaking this promise. We may ask what the sense of the claim that promises have *built in ceteris paribus* conditions is. If this claim is a factual presumption, then it cannot be used to rebuff the Zeus objection, since a skeptical theist may claim that we cannot rule out the possibility of a Zeus scenario in which God's promise involves no *ceteris paribus* conditions, i.e., that it constitutes a reason for God to abstain from intervening in any human action, regardless of its circumstances, consequences, etc., thus resembling an oath (which typically is not taken to involve a *ceteris paribus* clause). However, this claim can also be a normative claim, to the effect that one is not required to keep one's promise under

certain conditions, e.g., when one's breaking one's promises would prevent great evils. Such a normative claim—which expresses the idea that the duty to keep promises is a *prima facie* rather than absolute duty—sounds very plausible, and it may plausibly be taken to justify God's allowing horrendous evils.³ However, rebuffing the Zeus objection in this way relies on a specific normative judgment, and it is better to rebuff it in a normatively neutral way. The following reply to this objection is normatively neutral—it may be said to be meta-ethical—and as we shall see, it has the additional advantage of undermining not only the specific Zeus objection but also the general idea behind it.

Here goes. Moral agents are morally responsible for the consequences of their actions if they know that these consequences are possible, and, assuming that God is a moral agent,⁴ then God is morally responsible for the fact that this agreement confronts God with a destructive moral dilemma, that is, one in which every choice would involve evil in itself. In other words, by entering such an agreement God has created an evil situation—one which necessarily involves an evil (either that of breaching the agreement or that of preventing the torture)—and so is morally responsible for the lesser evil. Indeed, the torturer is also responsible for the situation in which one of the two evils is necessary, but this fact does not discharge God of responsibility since God has unnecessarily made such situations possible.⁵

Is it possible that God has a morally justified reason to enter the agreement in question? Whether or not such a *carte blanche* agreement, which binds God to refrain from preventing any horrendous evil whatsoever, can be justified, God could not have any morally justified reason to enter such an agreement, since an omnipotent God can prevent any evil (or, for that matter, endow any good) without entering any agreement. Can there be a relevant moral reason of another kind? The alternative relevant reason is that some actions on God's part put God under some commitment (e.g., God made a promise to make that agreement), and then God is not "logically" able to refrain from entering the agreement. However, then, we are back to square one: what could justify such an action on God's part? One might think that other events (not Godly actions) might have put God under some commitment. I do not know what other events may serve such a role, but the important point is that no other events could differ from Godly actions in the relevant respect, for an omnipotent God could have prevented them both causally and "logically".

It appears that this reply to the Zeus objection also constitutes a reply to Hendricks's general point, namely to the claim that God might have had some moral reason that makes God's preventing some evil (in the above torture case, preventing both the lesser evil and the worse one) morally unjustified. We may say that the challenge Hendricks presents to Sterba is to rule out the very possibility of God having such a reason. If the argument from evil does not rule this possibility out, it fails to rule out the existence of an omnipotent and omnibenevolent God. However, insofar as God's having such a moral reason is rooted in the occurrence of some event (whether it is a Godly action or not), an omnipotent God could have prevented the occurrence of this event, and thus escaped the destructive moral dilemma in question.

According to Hendricks (p. 668), for Sterba's argument to be sound, it must rely on an inference from the claim that we recognize no evils that are logically entailed by God's preventing evil actions to the claim that there probably are no such evils. However, Hendricks argues, this inference conflicts with the skeptical theistic claim that "the fact that we don't know of any good or evil standardly connected to some state of affairs is not good reason to think it is likely that there is no such connection" (p. 669). Sterba addresses a possible objection of this sort (2019, pp. 178–79), and Hendricks replies to Sterba (pp. 668–69), but we need not discuss this specific debate between these philosophers. This is because the reply suggested above to Hendricks's complaint regarding God being "logically" constrained to prevent the evil in question, also undermines the objection from skeptical theism. For on this reply no such "logical" connection is at all possible. To put it differently, an omnipotent God can always (causally) prevent the situation in which God's preventing an evil is "logically" constrained. Therefore, the atheists' case does not depend

on any inference from a lack of knowledge. For them, no possible fact can justify God's not preventing an evil action, since God would be unjustified in allowing any such putative fact to obtain.

At this point, it becomes important to clarify the dialectic of the debate. The skeptical theist argues that there is reason to doubt that humans are aware of the various reasons God has for permitting various evils. My reply to this claim is that we cannot be missing any such reason that is compatible with an omnipotent and all-good God, for such a God would have prevented the situation in which God has a reason to permit evils. In other words, we cannot be missing such a reason because there is no such reason. This is shown not by an epistemological discussion, but by the above meta-ethical discussion. Now it might be thought that I beg the question against skeptical theism since skeptical theism denies the possibility of meta-ethical and ethical-normative knowledge regarding God. Note that the claim that denies this knowledge is different from, and is not entailed by, the claim that we cannot know what reasons God has for permitting various evils (or, for that matter, for doing or permitting anything). The latter claim concerns factual knowledge, e.g., that we do not know whether God has entered a certain agreement, whereas the former claim has nothing to do with supposedly hidden facts related to God. Rather, it concerns the moral implication of what God did or could do (e.g., enter some agreement, interfere in some human actions), an implication that relies on nothing but the principle that evil should be prevented. This skeptical claim can be supported by appealing to global skepticism regarding moral knowledge. However, if theists adopt global moral skepticism, they do not at all need the Zeus objection or anything along the lines of this objection in order to undermine the logical argument from evil, since trivially this argument cannot get off the ground if we are not entitled to employ the principle that evil should be prevented, and adopting such skepticism straightforwardly implies that we are not. Raising objections such as the Zeus objection presupposes that moral knowledge is allowed.

Obviously, the skeptical view regarding moral knowledge that concerns God does not depend on global moral skepticism. However, it will appear that the former view is false. As we shall see in the next section, the moral requirements of preventing evil apply to God. The reasoning to this effect is purely meta-ethical reasoning, showing that God does not escape general moral requirements. If this reasoning is sound, we do have, and a fortiori can have, moral knowledge that concerns God—at least that knowledge that is relevant to the debate over the logical argument from evil.⁶

Let us turn to another way in which skeptical theists may be taken to undermine the argument from evil. They can argue that we cannot rule out the possibility that the evil that God permits is the source of some greater good.⁷ Philosophers have argued that securing various goods (or features that enable the securing of goods) depends upon the existence of evil. Skeptical theists would be satisfied even with merely showing that we cannot rule out the existence of such connections between such goods and certain evils. However, just as a truly omnipotent God need not choose between two evils but can (in both the causal and the "logical" sense) prevent both, a truly omnipotent God can (in both the causal and the "logical" sense) create any good without permitting any evil. Thus, we undermine the epistemic claim that we cannot rule out those supposed necessary connections between goods and evils by showing that such necessary connections cannot obtain, and so an omnipotent God need not and therefore should not be constrained by them.

Still, it might seem that the claim that a truly omnipotent God can (in both the causal and the "logical" sense) create any good without permitting any evil should be qualified. Plantinga's (1974, 1977) free will objection to the argument from evil appears to undermine this claim. Like other opponents of the argument from evil, Plantinga points out some good that appears to be incompatible with the prevention of any possible evil. The supposed good, or value, is that of people's freedom to make the right moral choice; to freely opt for good over evil. The ingenuity of this move consists in the fact that, according to it, any intervention is wrong *in itself*. It is not that the prevention of some event would involve some other moral cost, e.g., that of breaching some agreement or of harming another

individual. Rather, any intervention is wrong in itself, according to this move, for any intervention undermines the possibility of freely choosing the good.

Sterba addresses the free will objection to the argument from evil, and an exhaustive treatment of the issue does not belong in this paper. However, I wish to make a comment that will have implications for the above argument in favor of the claim that God can prevent any evil in both the causal and the “logical” sense. We should note that the principle that lies at the heart of the free will objection—the one that attaches value to the ability to freely make the morally right choice—is a normative-moral principle. Moreover, this moral principle is extreme in two respects. First, it takes the opportunity to freely choose the good to require the possibility not only of choosing evil but also of successfully executing this choice, without God’s severing the connection between the choice and the evil (which, being omnipotent, God is able to do). Indeed, perhaps a Godly policy of intervening when one chooses evil means that one cannot truly be said to freely choose the good, for then what is often taken to be a necessary condition for free will, namely that one have the opportunity to do otherwise, does not obtain. However, in the case of one’s making the right moral choice, the fact that God would have intervened had one made the wrong choice is both extra-mental and counterfactual, and it is unclear why such a fact should decrease the worth of one’s choice; all the more so, that it should decrease it to the extent of justifying allowing evil to obtain. This brings us to the second respect—the more significant one for our concern—in which the moral principle in question is extreme. To fulfill its justificatory role, this principle must involve a particularly extreme normatively quantitative aspect, since in order to justify God’s not preventing evil actions, the value under consideration must override the value of preventing evil even when the evil is extremely horrendous. Horrendous evils occur, and God can causally prevent the consequences of any action.⁸ Therefore, the principle in question must attach an extremely high moral value to free choice. I wish to point out that given that the free will objection depends on such an extreme normative principle, which does not have a parallel in any other moral domain, we may well wonder why accept it. How can giving one the opportunity to freely make the right moral choice justify the possibility of hurting *another person*? Additionally, suppose that it justifies the possibility of hurting another to some extent—can it justify the possibility of hurting another *to whatever extent*? Can it justify the possibility of making another person suffer horrendously? Can one’s truly having a free choice between good and bad be a good reason for allowing one to be as cruel as possible to another person? Employing such a principle appears to be an ad hoc maneuver whose sole rationale is the role it plays in the (supposed) rebuff of the argument from evil.⁹ This principle is in conflict with morality: no moral system would justify abstaining from preventing significant harm to people on the sole grounds that it is immoral to intervene with the potential harmer’s action *no matter what harm is at stake*. On the assumption that evil and suffering are morally bad, at least one who can avoid them effortlessly and without inflicting on oneself or on another any price is morally required to prevent them at least when they are horrendous. The negative value of the very fact of intervening, if it has such a negative value, cannot provide a *carte blanche* justification for allowing evil. If I can prevent murder or terrible torture, it would be ridiculous for me to justify my choice not to prevent it on the grounds that interfering with the potential murderer’s or torturer’s action is morally bad. Even if it is bad, it cannot be so bad as to allow even the most horrendous suffering. It would be similarly ridiculous to thus justify God’s choice not to prevent horrendous suffering. (In Section 3, I argue against the view that the Moral Evil Prevention Requirements do not apply to God.)

Still, the free will objection has an implication for the above argument in favor of the claim that God can prevent any evil in both the causal and the “logical” sense. This argument was based on the claim that God can (causally) prevent the obtaining of any situation that involves a destructive dilemma, one in which God should choose between two evils, hence God should never be “logically” forced to refrain from preventing evil. However, the free will objection points out that God’s prevention of evil might be morally wrong not only for a reason that has to do with the obtaining of any specific circumstances,

such as those involved in the Zeus scenario (which God could causally prevent) but also for the reason that any such intervention on God's part is, in itself, wrong. It is wrong simply by virtue of interfering with the agent's free choice, or, in other words, simply in being an intervention. The above argument has not taken this option into consideration. What it has, in fact, established is that God can prevent any evil in both the causal and the "logical" sense *unless God's intervention is morally wrong* per se. Yet, as we saw, the idea that God's intervention is morally wrong per se has to be rejected. Thus, we can stick to the claim that God can prevent any evil not only in the causal sense but also in the "logical" sense.

A few more words about the dialectic of the discussion. According to skeptical theism, we cannot know that God has no reason to allow evil. Plantinga's free will defense suggests such a reason. This reason can be characterized as the reason not to intervene in people's free actions—mere intervention is morally wrong. As part of the task of atheists who appeal to the logical argument from evil to show that under no possible scenario is it justified to allow those horrendous evils that exist in the world, the burden is upon them to rule out the possibility that interventions aiming at preventing horrendous evils are morally wrong. I indeed argued for this idea: I argued that interventions in people's actions do not possess moral values that are negative to the extent of justifying allowing evils regardless of how horrendous they may be. Thus, I hope to have carried out this burden. (The other part of that atheist task that I hope to have carried out is that of showing that God cannot have a moral reason for allowing evil that is rooted in the occurrence of some event, such as a promise made by God, since an omnipotent God could have prevented the occurrence of this event.)

Additionally, the fact that the logical argument from evil rules out the possibility that intervention in people's actions is so wrong—which means that this argument relies on a specific moral judgment—does not affect the status of the argument from evil as a logical argument. As noted, I assume here that we can have moral knowledge—that we can reason effectively about moral issues and arrive at moral conclusions. This should be anything but surprising since the argument from evil presupposes that global skepticism about moral knowledge is false—it is a moral argument. It employs the specific moral judgment that evil and suffering are morally wrong. This does not make the argument non-deductive. Of course, our moral reasoning and so our moral judgments might be wrong, but all reasoning—including paradigmatically "logical" reasoning—might be wrong. Moral claims can be legitimate links in valid reasoning.

3. Do Sterba's Requirements Apply to God?

Some critics of the logical argument from evil argue that some moral requirements that apply to us do not apply to God (or, at least, that we do not know that they do). Are the moral requirements to prevent the evil that is at the center of Sterba's argument such? The view that moral requirements that apply to human beings do not apply to God may be understood in several ways. First, it may be understood as a (partial) expression of the view that God is not a moral agent. I will not discuss this view here since (besides practical reasons), like Sterba and most proponents of the argument from evil, I treat this argument as an argument against the existence of the God of traditional theism, who is a moral agent. If God is not a moral agent, then no moral attribute, such as that of being morally good, can be true of God.¹⁰ Second, the view that some moral requirements that apply to us do not apply to God may be understood as an instance of discriminative morality, which does not apply moral requirements equally to all moral agents even under identical circumstances. Such a view encounters enormous meta-ethical difficulties in rejecting the universal character standardly attributed to morality (see Hare 1952). This universal character means that all moral requirements apply to all moral agents under the relevant circumstances, and so, assuming that God is a moral agent, God cannot escape the universal net of moral requirements.¹¹

A third understanding of the view that some moral requirements that apply to us do not apply to God is along the normative rather than the meta-ethical dimension. On this

understanding, the same moral norms apply to both human beings and God (indeed to all moral agents), it is just that God's unique circumstances change how those norms should be respected, if at all. Some norms that apply to human beings may not apply to God in the sense in which the norm of keeping promises does not apply to one who makes no promises. We should ask, then, whether the requirements that figure in Sterba's version of the logical argument from evil apply to God. To show that they do, Sterba appeals to an analogy of an ideally just and powerful political state. He assumes that "states, like individuals, would be required to abide by Moral Prevention Evil Requirements I–III [. . .] Since we know that such a state would be actively engaged in the prevention of significant and especially horrendous harmful consequences of immoral actions, we know that God, if he exists, would have to be doing the same." (Sterba 2019, p. 152)

Now there certainly are morally significant differences between the relation of God to people and the relation of such a state to its citizens. Toby Betenson (2021), for example, points out such a difference. According to him, while part of the essence of an ideally just state is its sovereign authority having been granted by the people, the sovereign authority of God is different, for the former's authority is rooted in the fact that people make up the state and people do not make up God. Thus, the grounds for the obligations of God and for those of an ideally just political state—and so those obligations themselves—differ. I leave it here open whether such a difference and others,¹² undermine Sterba's analogical reasoning. For I wish to suggest that Sterba need not appeal to this analogy to establish that the requirements in question apply to God. While there may be exceptions to the very requirement to prevent evil, such exceptions are irrelevant to this issue, since Sterba's requirements are concerned with evils that, in the final analysis, should be prevented if they can be prevented, and such evils exist. One might think that they should be prevented only if they can be prevented *without inflicting a higher moral cost*, but we should ignore this proviso since, as the previous discussion should have made clear, God could prevent any evil that should be prevented while avoiding any moral cost. Therefore, no circumstances that are unrelated to the mere identity of the moral agents in question can make a difference and exempt God from those requirements of preventing evil. What about circumstances that are related to the very identity of the moral agents in question? Well, any such circumstances that are supposed to make a moral difference with respect to the requirements to prevent evil, if there are such, would work in the atheist's favor. Nothing that does not exempt a weak and vulnerable being from moral requirements concerning the well-being of others can exempt an all-powerful being for whom acting justly is first nature from those requirements. A human being may enjoy various privileges owing to her or his moral record, and perhaps such privileges include exemption from various (*prima facie*) moral duties (e.g., "She has done enough. Let others contribute this time."), and the omnibenevolent God of traditional theism is supposed to have the highest moral record. However, God's moral status does not exempt God—as omnipotent and all good—from preventing evil, since God is supposed to be able to prevent any evil effortlessly and without paying any price. The idea of an exemption seems to be simply inapplicable to God.

I mentioned three understandings of the claim that the moral demands in question are inapplicable to God: the option that God is not a moral agent, the option of discriminative mortality, and the option of different circumstances. One might think of another option, namely that God is a moral agent *of a unique kind*. Murphy (2017, 2021) seems to advocate this idea. God, according to him, is motivated to act in different ways as far as human welfare is concerned: God would take human welfare to provide justifying reasons but not requiring reasons. Murphy endeavors to show that due to this aspect of the nature of the perfect being, the existence of this being is compatible with the existence of evil. I will not delve into the details of this argument. I wish to point out that the crucial issue for the defense I present here for the logical argument from evil is the question of God's moral responsibility. We should ask about Murphy's conception, and about any other conception of the way God is motivated, whether according to it God is morally responsible for the occurrence of the evils that God allows, under the assumption that it would have been

morally better that those evils had not occurred. There is no middle way, and answering this question settles the issue for the purpose of this paper. For if the answer is negative, then God is not a moral agent at least insofar as that aspect of human welfare is concerned. As noted, this paper is concerned with a God who is a moral agent, and so objections to the logical argument from evil that deny that God is a moral agent are irrelevant to it. If the answer to this question is positive, and God is morally responsible for the occurrences of those evils under the said circumstances, then, as I argued, the Moral Evil Prevention Requirements do apply to God, and the problem of evil persists.

4. Conclusions

I hope to have shown that Sterba's logical argument from evil can avoid two of the critiques that have been raised against it: that God cannot "logically" prevent all evils, and that the moral requirements that the argument poses for God may not apply to God. These objections do not refute the claim that God can prevent and should prevent any evil, and do not undermine Sterba's argument from evil to the effect that God does not exist.¹³

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Notes

¹ So Sterba's argument does not deal with cases of natural evil, and neither will my discussion.

² These requirements appear in different places of both Sterba (2019) and Sterba (2020).

³ Note that the factual presumption raises the "horizontal" issue of the universality of the reason in question—whether it applies under all possible circumstances or not—whereas the normative presumption raises the "vertical" issue of the strength of this reason—whether it is an absolute reason or merely a *prima facie* one.

⁴ I will refer to this issue below.

⁵ Since God has unnecessarily made such situations possible, then, similarly, God would not be discharged of this responsibility even on the assumption (which forms a compromise on God's omniscience) that when entering the agreement God did not foresee the actual dilemmas that would be produced.

⁶ Of course, I do not argue here against global moral skepticism, but rather assume the possibility of moral knowledge. My claim is that if moral knowledge is possible—as the logical argument from evil presupposes—then the skeptical view regarding moral knowledge that concerns God should be rejected.

⁷ See Coley's (2021) discussion of an objection to Sterba's argument along these lines. Coley criticizes Sterba's reply to this objection but argues that skeptical theism has unacceptable moral-epistemological implication. Sterba (2021) replies to Coley's critique.

⁸ Sterba's reply to Plantinga's free will objection concerns its quantitative aspect: "God can promote more significant freedom over time by sometimes interfering with our free actions" (Sterba 2019, p. 27).

⁹ Plantinga does not provide justification for the moral principle in question. He simply declares that "A world containing creatures who are significantly free (and freely perform more good than evil actions) is more valuable, all else being equal, than a world containing no free creatures at all." (Plantinga 1974, p. 166).

¹⁰ See Sterba's discussion of the question whether God is a moral agent in chapter 6 of Sterba 2019. Of course, different philosophers may have different Gods in mind, and there are theists who take God not to be a moral agent (see, e.g., Davies 2006). Sterba's logical argument and my defense of it do not undermine the existence of such a God. I believe that they do undermine the existence of a God who is a moral agent. What matters is that one's argument from evil applies to God as one characterizes God, and that it is important to know whether *such a God* exists or not. It is certainly important to know whether a God who is a moral agent exists or not for various reasons. For example, there may be good reasons for worshiping and obeying such a God.

¹¹ Trivially, the view that God is subject to unique moral requirements is in conflict with the universal character of morality even if it is based on the view that morality ensues from God. This conflict pertains to the view itself, regardless of its source.

¹² For another disanalogy between Earthly heads of state and God see Michael Beaty (2021). Sterba (2021) replies to Beaty.

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