

Author: Zachary Breitenbach, Ph.D.

Paper Title: “A Case for How Eschatological and Soteriological Considerations Strengthen the Plausibility of a Good God”

\*Note: The full text of this article can be found in *Philosophia Christi* 22 (2) 2020.

Email: [zpbreitenbach@lincolnchristian.edu](mailto:zpbreitenbach@lincolnchristian.edu)

Affiliation: Associate Director of Room for Doubt (an apologetics ministry of Lincoln Christian University, [www.RoomForDoubt.com](http://www.RoomForDoubt.com)) and also an adjunct professor at Lincoln Christian University

Abstract:

This article contends that considerations of continued human existence beyond this earthly life are advantageous both for defending against a key challenge to the existence of a good God (the evidential problem of evil) and for making a positive moral case for theism. On the defensive side, I address the charge that the amount and apparent gratuitousness of evil render God’s existence unlikely. On the offensive side, I leverage postmortem considerations to bolster a positive case for a good God by springboarding off of a few moral arguments made by Immanuel Kant, A. E., Taylor, and Clement Dore to offer new arguments that God and an afterlife are key to making sense of moral rationality and morality’s overridingness.

## **Sentence Outline of Paper**

### **I. Postmortem Considerations and the Problem of Evil**

- A. Alvin Plantinga’s Free Will Defense (FWD) is widely regarded, even by many atheists, as having undermined the logical problem of evil (POE).
  1. Logical POE = God and evil are logically incompatible.
  2. The FWD shows that, if humans have libertarian freedom, God may not be able to actualize a world of sinless free creatures.
- B. But the evidential POE is alive and well.
  1. Evidential POE = The amount and apparent gratuitousness of evil render theism unlikely.
  2. This is the more modest claim that evil does not disprove God, but counts strongly against God’s existence.

- C. Against the evidential POE, I argue that the possibility of an afterlife and considerations of God's possible eternal aims help alleviate concerns that evil casts doubt upon the likelihood of theism.
1. Eschatological considerations blunt the force of the claim that the amount (intensity and number of instances) of evil casts doubt upon God's goodness and existence.
    - a. Plantinga's FWD defends *theism in general* against the charge that God is incompatible with the amount of evil observed in the world.
    - b. But it is possible to bolster the defense of *Christian theism* against concerns about the amount of evil in the world by expanding Plantinga's focus to consider not only earthly goods and evils but all goods and evils and all good and bad states of affairs that will ever come about.
      - i. God may choose to permit a worse balance of goods and evils in this earthly life than He could feasibly achieve.
      - ii. Permitting this might be integral to accomplishing what is most important: an optimal balance of good and evil over the course of eternity (focusing on eternal outcomes concerning the balance of saved vs. lost).
  2. Eschatological considerations also reduce the force of the claim that gratuitous evil makes theism unlikely.
    - a. I argue that we cannot be confident that the following claim made by the atheist William Rowe is true: "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."
    - b. I argue that God may allow for a suboptimal balance of good relative to evil in this earthly life in order to achieve the best *eternal* outcomes.
      - i. Instances of suffering that appear to us to be gratuitous may be "pseudo-gratuitous." That is, there may be instances suffering that do not *in themselves causally lead* to any greater good or the prevention of any equally bad or worse suffering, yet either (1) the circumstances in which they occur lead to a justifying benefit or (2) multiple instances of "pseudo-gratuitous sufferings" collectively allow a justifying good.
      - ii. Since God is plausibly more concerned about soteriological optimality and the overall (eternal) balance of good and evil, we ought not cast doubt upon God's goodness or existence simply because the amount of evil in this earthly life seems to exceed what is necessary in order to have as much good as is found in this earthly life or because there appear to be many evils that do not causally lead to any greater good or the prevention of a worse (or equally bad) evil.

## II. Postmortem Considerations as Moral Evidence for Theism: Moral Rationality

- A. Immanuel Kant argued that, in order for morality's aim—the *summum bonum*—to be possible, we must postulate that there is a God who ensures in an afterlife that one's happiness is ultimately in proportion to one's virtue.

- B. A. E. Taylor similarly argued that one who rejects God and the afterlife cannot rationally justify adhering to the demands of the moral law whenever doing so will not be repaid in this life.
- C. In the spirit of these arguments from Kant and Taylor, I propose an existential sort of argument that an afterlife is important to moral rationality.
  - 1. It is crucial for moral rationality that one can believe that life itself has ultimate meaning and purpose and that our deepest existential needs will be fulfilled.
  - 2. It would not seem rational to hold that it is crucial to uphold morality if we also believe that life itself is absurd and meaningless.

### **III. Postmortem Considerations as Moral Evidence for Theism: Moral Accountability & Overridingness**

- A. Clement Dore offered a moral argument that centers on the importance of morality being overriding.
  - 1. If the moral law is to have any real bite or force to it, we must have an overriding reason to uphold it. Nobody ought to be able to disregard morality without experiencing harm.
  - 2. God and the afterlife, he contends, are needed for this.
- B. Drawing upon insights from Dore, I give an argument that God and an afterlife are needed if humans are to be held accountable for their thought life, internal motivations, and the level of understanding they have when they do wrong.
  - 1. In this life, Dore rightly points out that one sometimes gets away with immoral actions either by being shrewd enough to avoid being caught or by being in a position of power so that one is able to avoid being harmed by acting immorally. Nevertheless, few of us are actually in such a position of power.
  - 2. But I argue that it is much easier getting away with having wrong thoughts, attitudes, and motivations. One does not need great power or cleverness to do this.
  - 3. If God and an afterlife exist, then having right thoughts, attitudes, and motivations would be of overriding importance to everyone.