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## Response to “Evil & Omnipotence paper by Mackie”

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### **Abstract:**

This paper is an attempt to study Mackie's arguments on Evil and Omnipotence and his arguments on the fallacious solutions given by theists. Mackie says that there is Incompatibility between Omnipotent, Omniscient and Omni benevolent God. So he gives few arguments to theists. In the first section there will be Introduction. In the second session, presenting Mackie's view on Evil and Omnipotence. The consecutive section is my critique to Mackie's arguments with the topic on how this Evil and Omnipotence is useful in contemporary times and finally befitting with conclusion. By reading the responses given by theists', argues Mackie and tries to explain his point of view.

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### **Introduction:**

The paper Evil and Omnipotence is presented by Mackie and he gave different views on the problem of Evil countering Omnipotence. Omnipotent means *unlimited power or Power of Everything*. Omniscient means *Knowing Everything*. Omni benevolent means *Unlimited Goodness*. He says that if God is Omni benevolent then why doesn't he take out the evil? Why should it exist? He argues that God cannot be Omnipotent, Omni benevolent and Omniscient at the same time. Many theists argue that these 3 qualities of God exist and even evil exist. There seems to be a contradiction in these statements, God is omnipotent, God is wholly good, and yet evil exists. So he tries to give various counter arguments to this problem and says that there is incompatibility between Omnipotent, Omni benevolent and Omniscient. Any one in that might be true but not all at the same time. In this paper I'm going to speak on Mackie's Fallacious solutions of arguments which various theists gave to Mackie.

### **Mackie's View:**

The problem here is that if there is Evil then how God can be Omnipotent,

Omni benevolent and Omniscient at the same time. Why can't he take out the Evil if he has Omni benevolent? As god is Omni benevolent (Wholly Good) why doesn't he take out the Evil entirely? We are seeing Evil therefore God with 3 qualities doesn't exist. The argument is like this (1).

**P1:** Some terrible things are happening.

**P2:** If there were an Omnipotent, Omni benevolent and Omniscient God then no terrible things happen.

**C:** Therefore there is no Omnipotent, Omni benevolent and Omniscient God. This is a valid argument but to see whether it's Sound argument we have to check the Truth of the premises.

### **Fallacious solutions arguments by Mackie:**

He gave arguments to theistic camp where 3 qualities of God don't exist. Those are given below. His responses to the theists' arguments are:

- "Good cannot exist without evil  
"or "Evil is necessary as a counterpart to good."

Sometimes it is suggested that evil is necessary as a counterpart for good, that if there is no evil then there could be no good either, and that this solves

the problem of evil. It is true that it shows an answer to the question "Why should there be evil?" Some statements that constitute a problem. God cannot create good without simultaneously creating evil, and this means that either God is not omnipotent or that there are few limitations to what an omnipotent being can do.

Secondly, it disagrees that evil is opposed to good in our original sense. If good and evil are counter to each other, a good thing will not "eliminate evil as far as it can" (Mackie 1995:238). In this way he presented the argument.

- "Evil is necessary as a means to good."

Sometimes evil is necessary for good not as a counterpart but as a means. It can be a causal law that cannot have a certain end without a certain means, so that if God wants to introduce evil as a means of good, he must be subjected to at least some causal laws. This conflict with what a theist generally means by omnipotence. So we can see that if one quality of Omni is satisfied but other is getting countered.

- "Evil is due to human freewill."

The main important solution of the problem of evil is that evil should not be connected to God at all, but to

independent actions of us. The freewill solution also involves the preceding solution at a higher level. To explain why and how a wholly good God gave all men freewill although it would lead us to some important evils, it should be argued that it is better on the whole that men should freely act.

### **My Response to Mackie's arguments:**

The paper presented by Mackie is fair enough by his assumptions. But the problem here is he didn't define the term Evil and while presenting different arguments, one has to define those terms, and otherwise the presenter may change the definition of Evil from argument to argument or point to point. I would like to start defining these terms and start with the argument which was presented.

**Evil** - One which gives sorrow by doing/ happening.

**Goodness** - One which gives joy by doing/ happening.

These Goodness and Evil are opposite to each other. Mackie is not saying that God does not exist but says that there is incompatibility between Omnipotent, Omni benevolent and Omniscient. If

there is one quality then another quality is missing. But here I disagree with him. Let's start with the argument in Mackie's view (1).

My response to his view is that:

**P1'**: If Good things happen then there must be Omnipotent, Omni benevolent and Omniscient God.

**P2'**: Good things happen.

**C'**: Therefore Omnipotent, Omni benevolent and Omniscient God exist.

Even this is a valid argument and it is Modus Ponens. Primarily the argument in Mackie's View (1) is not a good argument because for example *analogy* is like if we are playing on a badminton court, even if we play Good badminton or terrible badminton the Court exists. Similarly Good things happen or terrible things happen then how can we question the existence of God? God is a substratum of both good and evil. As there is a God, there is a court.

#### **My critique on Mackie's Fallacious responses:**

- "Good cannot exist without evil" or "Evil is necessary as a counterpart to good."

This is true that Evil is a counterpart for Good. The question arises in this part is why should there be Evil? My question is why shouldn't there be Evil? Here the arguer's assumption is that Evil is bad and it should be prevented. Why?

One answer is that it gives sorrow to others, so it should be completely eliminated by God. Suppose Omnipotent God eliminated the Evil in this world, then where does the word goodness come from? Which means that if there is Evil then only we call it the opposite to Goodness. If there is no Evil at all then there is no differentiation. Where does differentiation come from? As he is Omnipotent he gave everything including Evil. One who gives everything is called Omnipotent? Then what is the point in eliminating Evil?

- "Evil is necessary as a means to good."

This is also true that Evil is necessary for means of Good. If someone is doing terrible things then there is someone who does good things also. It is that if evil is for means of good then there must be some causal laws which he is bound to (J.L. Mackie, 1955). The response to this is that, yes there are

some causal laws which Omnipotent God created and he follows those laws. As he is Omnipotent he can create all the laws and do whatever he wants. The *analogy* is like this: I created some rules for myself and followed those rules. By following those rules one cannot say that I'm controlled by it because I created those rules and I can remove those rules when I want. (I can control those rules / laws).

- "Evil is due to human freewill."

It is that humans have free will so that they can do Evil or Good things. One who does Evil things gets suffering and one who does Good things gets Joy. One may argue that if a person kills a good person then it's an Evil action and that Good person is affected. One of the causal laws is Karma. Based on the person's *karma* one gets a result. (Based on his previous actions '*prarabdha*' he/she got the result). This is a Law of Karma.

Let me give an *analogy*, if I deposit 1 crore in others bank account and take away the options to withdraw and transfer. Is this called Free will? What is the use of that money? Similarly as that entity is Omnipotent God and gives everything. One who gives (One who has only gives

everything) everything is called Omnipotent and he also includes Free will. With the human Free will one can decide whether to do Good or terrible things. Omnipotent God knows this but he won't eliminate it.

### **Evil & Omnipotence relevance to contemporary times:**

Many people have different opinions on God. Some believe God, some don't believe, while some are neutral and few people have strong opinions and sets of beliefs in God and few others say all those are superstitions. Whatever everyone may think but Reality/Truth cannot be changed. Many schools of thoughts are there in Indian philosophy, they are divided on the basis of people who believe the authenticity of Vedas are called *Astikas* and people who don't believe the authenticity of Vedas are called *Nastikas*.

In these modern times as told earlier many people have different opinions but if one has belief on any particular thing/entity that they can achieve or attain they will get it. This is called determination or *Sankalpa*. In Bhagavad Gita 4.39 also it is mentioned that *śhraddhāvān labhate jñānam* which

means that those who have faith in that divine knowledge will attain that supreme state. (Gita, 2011:375)

### **Conclusion:**

Evil and Goodness both exist. God is there everywhere (Omnipotent). He doesn't want to take out anything from this universe. He gave everything. Omnipotent - With his unlimited power he gives anything and everything. He can take out Evil, but he doesn't because he who gives everything is Omni and Evil and goodness both are given.

Omniscient - Knows everything. As he knows everything so he doesn't want to change anything. The analogy for this is like

*"A movie director knows the story and how it progresses till the end. In a movie, the heroine is falling down from the steps. We can think it's sorrow for her and it's Evil, why can't the director stop? He knows everything about the movie but he doesn't want to stop".*

Similarly Omnipotent God knows everything but he doesn't stop. Omni benevolent - Is wholly good and gives everything. In a way sometimes Evil things by others may do good to

people. That Omni benevolent entity knows what is to be done. He has his own ways to destroy the Evil if required.

If there was nothing called Evil then there won't be any differentiation. As there is the term Goodness there is Evil. If there is no such thing like Evil then people don't use to think about that because they don't know what it is. Good is necessary for evil and evil is necessary for Good. So there is no problem in the existence of Evil because Evil is also required.

Omnipotent God doesn't want to take this because he should give everything. In this way the problem of Evil and Omnipotent, Omni benevolent and Omniscient God is addressed.

**References:**

1. Mackie, J. L. (1955). Evil and omnipotence. *Mind* 64 (254):200-212.
2. Gita. 2011. **The Bhagavad Gita with Eight Commentaries.** Critically edited by "Shastri Jivaram Lallurama". Parimala Publications. Delhi.

