THEN I SHALL KNOW EVEN AS I AM KNOWN: AN ANALYSIS OF THE LOGICAL STRUCTURE OF THE PROBLEM OF EVIL

ENTÃO CONHECEREI PLENAMENTE, COMO TAMBÉM SOU PLENAMENTE CONHECIDO: UMA ANÁLISE DA ESTRUTURA LÓGICA DO PROBLEMA DO MAL.

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Abstract: This paper introduces a novel approach to interpreting the problem of evil, centred on a dynamic interplay between pre-formalised notions and their formal representations. Our thesis posits that the resolution to the problem lies in comprehending the underlying intentions of the premise set, rather than resorting to ad hoc, syllogistic rebuttals to the perceived contradictions. By applying this reasoning to the historical dialectic of the problem, we observe that certain resolutions to the problem of evil are more effective than others. The most effective solutions are those that maintain the integrity of the accumulated pre-formalised notions, while less effective ones either confront the contradiction head-on or disregard it entirely. Moreover, we discover that the process of striving and failing in this context yields valuable insights, enhancing our understanding and broadening the scope of our initial pre-formal notions about the problem of evil.

Key-words: Problem of evil; contradiction; metaphilosophy.

Resumo: Este artigo apresenta uma abordagem inovadora para interpretar o problema do mal, centrada em uma interação dinâmica entre noções pré-formalizadas e suas representações formais. Nossa tese propõe que a resolução do problema reside na compreensão das intenções subjacentes ao conjunto de premissas, em vez de recorrer a refutações ad hoc e silogísticas das aparentes contradições. Aplicando esse raciocínio à dialética histórica do problema, observamos que certas soluções para o problema do mal são mais eficazes do que outras. As soluções mais eficazes são aquelas que preservam a integridade das noções pré-formalizadas acumuladas, enquanto as menos eficazes ou confrontam diretamente a contradição ou a ignoram completamente. Além disso, descobrimos que o processo de tentativa e erro neste contexto gera entendimentos valiosos, ampliando nossa compreensão e o escopo de nossas noções pré-formais iniciais sobre o problema do mal.

Palavras-chave: Problema do mal; contradição; metafilosofia.

6

Revista Brasileira de Filosofia da Religião, v. 10, n. 1, 2023.

INTRODUCTION

No syllogism can resolve a contradiction because no contradiction can be resolved. By resolved, we mean showing that there is no contradiction. The only way forward is to dissolve the contradiction by rectifying the premises. By dissolve, we mean grappling with the definitions to show that, under the given definitions, a contradiction does not obtain. Of course, a contradiction can never definitively be shown not to be the case. Yet once the dissolution is done, it becomes apparent that the specific argument that purported the contradiction fails.

The problem of evil is a contradiction that challenges the existence of God. It follows from the alleged inconsistency of the following four premises:

1. God exists.
2. God is omnipotent.
3. God is omnibenevolent.
4. Evil exists.

The first articulation of the problem begins with the argument attributed to Epicurus:[1]

> Is God willing to prevent evil, but not able? Then he is not omnipotent. Is he able, but not willing? Then he is malevolent. Is he both able and willing? Then whence cometh evil? Is he neither able nor willing? Then why call him God?

An historically popular solution to the problem has been to block Epicurus' argument by re-framing what it means to be evil, omnibenevolent, and/or omnipotent. For instance, Augustine says that evil is not a created thing but rather is the absence of the Good (see (Augustine, 2013, VII: V, 7; VII: XII, 18); (Augustine, 1956, XI, CHAP. 9)):

> Evil has no positive nature; but the loss of good has received the name 'evil'.

He denies that there is any good reason to accept (4) if the premise means that evil exists and is created by God. Does Augustine's solution fully engage with the *pre-formalised notions* that support the premise? A formalised notion is a proposition that is rigidly interpreted and subject to logical scrutiny.[2] By a pre-formalised notion, we mean a proposition that is loosely interpreted and has the following properties: it must be in simple language, uncommitted to only a particular formalisation, and have a truth-priority over the formalised notion. The idea might be identified with what some philosophers refer to as intuitions, although unlike the ordinary sense of intuition, one need not *feel* it. The main

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1 This quote is attributed to Epicurus, however, there is no direct reference available.
2 Rudolf Carnap distinguishes between observational language and theoretical (see Carnap (1967, 1975)). Observational language ought to be simple and taken as more concretely true, while theoretical language deals with representations that fit observational language. We draw inspiration here from Carnap for our own divide between what we have called pre-formalised notions and formalised notions. The pre-formalised notions can be accumulated for our background investigation in a similar manner that observation of nature adds to scientific investigation.

7

Revista Brasileira de Filosofia da Religião, v. 10, n. 1, 2023.

structure of an example that we have is that a pre-formalised statement φ is either literally true, or it requires from the formalisation a reason for why it seems literally true but is only indirectly true. In line with the philosophical tradition, to be indirectly true means something has to be perceived as true, even though it is not in fact true. One example is an idea defended by advocates of a B theory of time: the idea that past, present, and future all exist at once. Philosophers in this tradition have always considered it crucial that we explain why we perceive the flow of time. They are committed to accounting for the pre-formalised statement 'we observe the flow of time'. We would consider them remiss in their philosophical duties if they ignored this pre-formal notion. This is an experimental account,[3] so we are not committed to a particular and definitive story about what pre-formalised notions are. However, a theory explaining how to connect the pre-formalised and the formalised is important, as it is an aspect of the dialectic that advances philosophical discussions. So, we are committed to the idea that philosophical analysis ought to be conducted with reference to this interplay between the formalised and pre-formalised of notions. This is not to say that necessarily philosophical problems must be approached this way, however, we suggest there is value in employing the approach.

We consider the initial four propositions of the Epicurean formulation—God exists 1, God is omnipotent 2, God is omnibenevolent 3, evil exists 4—all to be pre-formalised notions. However, they are not equal in regards to their intuitive force: 4 is the locus of the intuitive force behind the contradiction. Regardless, while one might not feel the same compulsion to accept the other three premises, and although they may be false, they are necessary conditions for set-up of the problem of evil. Hence, we cumulatively add these three premises to the list of formalised notions because they explain the origin of the problem, not because one intuitively ought to accept them.

Returning to Augustine's example, he will not be successful if he simply states that premise (4) is false. In order to satisfy the philosophical community—and this is an empirical observation— Augustine's answer should be that the premise is somehow true in the loose sense that evil exists— capturing the pre-formalised notion—while not in the specific sense that would produce the contradiction— the formalised notion. In Augustine's case, evil still exists, in the sense that we can gesture at evil, however, it is not discoverable in the same way that the sun or tables and chairs are. These latter things exist in some constitutive sense, not as mere absence. Similarly, darkness is an absence of light, yet there is a pre-formalised notion that we can gesture at darkness. Augustine could argue that for premise (4) to produce a contradiction it must be interpreted as there being evil which is discoverable, in the ordinary sense. We will return to Augustine's account in section 4.

Therefore, the optimal approach to the problem of evil is to point out that the pre-formalised versions of these four premises, taken together, do not constitute a con-

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3 see Ryan (2024b) for an example of how this methodology is applied to the concern that physicalism cannot account for consciousness. See also Ryan (2024a) for an application of the methodology to the concept of belief.

8

Revista Brasileira de Filosofia da Religião, v. 10, n. 1, 2023.

tradiction in the first place, when they are properly formalised. So, when one asks 'What it is to be a a solution to the problem of evil?' the answer cannot be the presentation of a syllogism, nor an argument to block an Epicureanstyle syllogism. For our purposes, we understand syllogism to be an argument for which the solution is deduced from given premises, i.e. logic broadly conceived.[4] Rather, one should understand the logical structure of the interplay between formalised and pre-formalised notions. In this way, we can strive toward generality, and thereby, come to understand that no possible argument from these premises will lead to such a contradiction.

We will proceed with our analysis as follows. At Section 2 we present the challenge involved in resolving a contradiction; one must change the logic or change the premises, and yet, one ought to have a good case for connecting new premises to the original problem and also preserve the pre-formalised notions that motivate the premises. The premises, therefore, ought not to be changed, but rather approached as having bipartite levels: as a formalisation and as a pre-formalised notion. Then, at Section 3, we analyse how some solutions to other contradictions have been approached, and consider them as case studies for bad and good approaches to resolving contradictions. Using the framework from the first section, we observe that some solutions are better than others; good solutions preserve the pre-formalised notions, while less optimal solutions bite the bullet on the contradiction or disregard the pre-formalised notions. Thirdly, at Section 4, we apply this logic to the historical dialectic of the problem of evil. In doing so, we appeal to the history of the dialectic to elaborate upon proposed pre-formalised notions and invite further pre-formalised notions to be considered, and thereby advance our understanding of the problem. Finally, at Section 5, we strive toward generality by philosophically improving the pre-formalised environment in which we formalise the contradiction that is the problem of evil.

CONTRADICTIONS AND THE EPISTEMIC CHALLENGE

What does it mean for a contradiction to obtain? How does one resolve a contradiction? Logically, neither question presents a problem, because: (i) a contradiction obtains when one derives a logical impossibility from the premises; and (ii) no contradiction can be resolved. If one's logic is correct and the premises are taken as true, then a contradiction will follow. Thus, the solution is not like solving an equation, because to solve an equation means to find a missing natural number or expression that fulfils the requirements of the mathematical equation. However, dissolving the problem of evil is not about finding an argument because an argument can only establish that the contradiction obtains. The problem of evil is thus dissolved by establishing the underlying consistency of the correct premises, hence why no syllogism can ever resolve the alleged contradiction.

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4 We choose to use syllogism in this sense because this is how logical arguments are often referred to in the philosophy of religion literature.

9

Revista Brasileira de Filosofia da Religião, v. 10, n. 1, 2023.

Let us explain this procedure in further detail. What is the solution? The obvious answer is that one must either (i) change the logic—that of proceeding from premises to conclusions—or (ii) change one or some of the premises. Although (i) is a legitimate option, that is not our approach here: changing the logic will complicate the paper with little added value for our conceptual analysis. Practically speaking—aside from logicians—changing one's logic is an uncommon move in philosophy in response to a problem. Our primary motivation for not taking the change-in-logic approach is that it would add an additional layer of analysis that is not needed to make our point, not that we reject it in principle. Thus, we will approach the method proposed by option (ii).

In the case of the alleged contradiction of the problem of evil, one rather obvious solution is to reject premise (1), and say God does not exist. One could also say that (3), omnibenevolence, is extensionally the same as whatever God wants. In the case of (1), all the other conditions for arriving at the contradiction are embedded in the premise. In the case of (3), (4) becomes an impotent premise, because anything that exists is what God wants, and what God wants is good. These are, of course, logically valid solutions. However, while each of these premises might be changed, this does not eliminate the *pre-formalised notions* one might have for proposing the premises in the first instance. Thus, to account for these pre-formalised notions, it is not enough to simply change the definition or deny one of the premises, because the pre-formalised notion still remains. A solution should avoid the contradiction without eliminating these pre-formalised notions. Here is our conception of a solution:

> To dissolve the problem of evil, as with any contradiction, one must either make a change in the logic, or for our purposes, re-frame the premises such that the contradiction is avoided and the pre-formalised notions are captured.

Capturing the pre-formalised notions is a daunting task because any proposed solution can be rejected for not aligning with them without proper characterisation. What is important to us is understanding the logical structure of proposed solutions to the problem of evil. To do this, we need only acknowledge that a premise captures a pre-formalised notion, not how exactly it does so nor how to cash them out.

Before addressing the problem of evil, let us explain our approach with reference to a historical contradiction: Russell's paradox. According to Bertrand Russell, Basic Law V of Gottlob Frege's logical system—which implies the notion that every concept has an extension—leads to the following contradiction:

> Let ω be the predicate[concept]: to be a predicate[concept] that cannot be predicated of itself[cannot be in the extension of itself] (Russell, 1967).[5]

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5 Frege employs the terms 'concept' and 'being in the extension' while Russell translates these to 'predicate' and 'being predicated'. We prefer the Fregean terminology for our purposes.

10

Revista Brasileira de Filosofia da Religião, v. 10, n. 1, 2023.

It follows from this that ω is in the extension of 'ω' if and only if, it is not. Hence, there is a contradiction. The traditional solution to Russell's paradox is to limit the scope of the extension of Basic Law V. This limitation states that Basic Law V ranges over concepts that do not make reference to the extension of those concepts, and so the range of a concept cannot be all extensions. In this conception, a new extension must be built by a collection of basic operations or be obtained as the extension of a concept ranging over an already obtained extension. What is the pre-formalised notion at play here? It is the notion that every concept has an extension. In the traditional solution, this pre-formalised notion is not being eliminated, rather, what is happening is that some things that one at first takes to be extensions of concepts, are in fact, not. For the extension of a concept can only be obtained once we fix the range where we are extracting the new extension. Therefore, in this case, the concept that led to the contradiction is deficient because it has a self-reference. The elimination of self-referential formulations of concepts, of course, must have a justification. In this case it does: that a good definition is a predictive definition, and is not grounded in a further, unobtained concept. We can see from this example how something is a properly proposed solution to a contradiction if it is a re-framing of the premises, while still retaining the pre-formalised notions behind the them.

The question now is whether this proposed solution avoids a contradiction, and if so, in what sense? In the Russell case, the contradiction is avoided because one of the steps of the derivation of the contradiction does not hold. Does this mean, however, that the new re-framed theory is free from contradiction? No. What it means is that one cannot derive the original contradiction, but of course there might be others. In this way one can never resolve a contradiction, but only show when a particular argument cannot be made. The fact that the Russell-style system is well-accepted as a solution is evidenced by the fact that many logicians have extensively worked in these systems and have yet to encounter any further contradictions arising from these premises.

There are other proposed resolutions to Russell's paradox:

1. The Paraconsistent Solution: For some philosophers, the villain is not the contradiction itself, but that from a contradiction we can obtain anything, which is trivial. This is what is called the principle of explosion. Paraconsistent systems are precisely those systems that do not trivialize in the face of any given contradiction, since they deny the principle of explosion. Building a set theoretical system with a paraconsistent logic thereby allows us to preserve the original formulation of the Basic Law V (see (Irvine and Deutsch, 2021) and (Priest et al., 2022) for more details).

2. Quine's Solution: Similar to the traditional response, this solution restricts the kind of properties that are in fact legitimate (Quine, 1937). This is not done so in the same way as in Russell's type theory or in Zermelo's set theory axioms, both of which require that we concretely have an initial concept over which further new concepts are built. Quine takes a different approach where he lim-

11

Revista Brasileira de Filosofia da Religião, v. 10, n. 1, 2023.

its the formulation of the concepts to what he terms 'stratified sentences' (see (Forster, 2019) for more details).

In each instance the problem is dissolved, even though there is a further question about which solution is preferable. The method by which one ought to judge the preferred solution—in addition to the already presented notion that it avoids the contradiction—is whether it maintains the preformalised notions behind the allegedly inconsistent premises. Although most set-theorists accept Russell's solution to the paradox, there are alternative solutions available. Now it is no longer the question of whether there is a paradox, but what is the correct conception of the premises: the problem of the paradox is left behind.[6]

Has a similar collection of resolutions to the problem of evil been offered? Clearly not. A proper solution to the problem of evil will avoid the Epicurean contradiction while maintaining the preformalised notions. While it is permissible to propose multiple solutions to the problem, the issue is that historically there is no set of solutions which philosophers agree do not entail further possible contradictions. Regarding the problem of evil, each proposed solution is not accepted as a definitive solution because it gives rise to new problems or contradictions. When we compare the traditional solution, the paraconsistent solution, and Quine's solution, to Russell's paradox, the discussion is about which is the preferable solution of the three. Yet when we address solutions to the problem of evil, we lag somewhat behind in the dialectic, for we are still debating whether a proposed solution is a solution at all. To obtain for the problem of evil what has been achieved for Russell's paradox is what is hoped for. It might prove challenging to win this goal, but striving in this direction is what we seek to encourage by this discussion.

In the next section, we shall see that philosophers engaged in the traditional dialectic have not approached the problem of evil in the manner in which philosophers approached Russell's paradox.

THE LOGIC OF HOW TO APPROACH A CONTRADICTION

HOW NOT TO APPROACH A CONTRADICTION

Before we discuss how one ought to approach dissolving a contradiction, let us consider some examples from the literature on the problem of evil. The cases we present are examples of responses that approach the contradiction in the wrong way. It is important to note that even though we find these cases to be mistaken, that does not mean that they cannot be restructured in a more meaningful manner. Indeed, this is what this paper contributes; we argue that it provides a clarification of the problem of evil that can improve the way in which philosophers approach the problem.

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6 In the current literature, we find many alternatives even within what can be called the 'traditional' solution to Russell's paradox. This is the discussion of the universe and multiverse conceptions of set theory, see Hamkins (2012); Freire (2024).

12

Revista Brasileira de Filosofia da Religião, v. 10, n. 1, 2023.

Let us consider the following two insufficient arguments for addressing the problem of evil. Firstly, we have what we call the *Necessary Evil Solution*. One method for addressing the problem of evil is to contend that evil is built into creation. For instance, this is a fundamental tenet of Buddhism, which teaches that one ought to overcome *duḥkha* (द:खु) through *dharma* (धमर्), thereby achieving *moksha* (मोक्ष), and thus escaping *saṃsāra* (ससारं) (Olivelle, 1996). What this means is that the only way to escape misery is to become free from a cycle of suffering by cultivating a lifestyle prescribed by the Buddha, Gautama Siddhartha, thereby ceasing to exist otherwise than in the impersonal state of nirvāṇa (निवार्ण). In other words, this solution is to accept that evil is inescapable, in this world.

For many Buddhists the problem of evil never arises, because they deny the existence of an omnipotent and omnibenevolent creator. In this case, there is no contradiction to address. This is the equivalent to rejecting 1, 2, and 3, were they to be presented with the contradiction. Of course, historically some Buddhists have directly considered the contradiction, including Siddartha Gautama himself, who appears to deny that God is the only cause of evil because humans have the power to act or abstain from action (Thera, 2006, 268-269):

> So, then, owing to the creation of a supreme deity, men will become murderers, thieves, unchaste, liars, slanderers, abusive, babblers, covetous, malicious and perverse in view. Thus for those who fall back on the creation of a god as the essential reason, there is neither desire nor effort nor necessity to do this deed or abstain from that deed.

As we can see, the proposal that evil is a necessary consequence of creation simply reiterates one of the premises that leads to the contradiction. It counts as a response to the problem of evil, in the sense that it accepts that there is such a contradiction. Hence, it could motivate some Buddhists to be agnostic or deny a creator.[7] It does not, however, dissolve the contradiction in any meaningful sense. Returning to Russell's paradox, it would be similar to saying that because Russell discovered a paradox, that therefore, sets are unreal. This is the wrong way to approach the argument, for it simply denies that the contradiction arises by denying one of the premises. The *Necessary Evil Solution* is an example of what someone who wishes to dissolve the problem of evil should not do, because they do not engage with the pre-formalised notions from which the contradiction is derived. Of course, this is an appropriate philosophical answer, but it does not advance a resolution to the problem of evil, rather it employs the contradiction as a *reductio ad absurdum* argument against the existence of a theistic God.

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7 Some scholars think (most forms of) Buddhism reject the possibility of a creator, and certainly not always because of the problem of evil (Harvey (2013)). Of course, there is long history of theistic Buddhism. Two examples include forms of Vajrayāna Buddhism, and Chinese philosophical reconciliation of Buddhism with the supreme god *Shangdi*. There are also ongoing arguments for theistic Buddhism Duckworth (2013); Hodge (2003); Norbu and Clemente (1999); Sangharakshita (2023); Smith (1987); Studholme (2002); Wallace (2010); Westerhoff (Forthcoming); Yamamoto (19992000); Zappulli (2023).

13

Revista Brasileira de Filosofia da Religião, v. 10, n. 1, 2023.

The second approach to addressing the problem of evil we call *The Ontological Solution*. This approach concludes that God necessarily exists—for instance because one accepts Anselm's conclusion in his ontological argument (of Canterbury, 1078)—and so it resolves the contradiction by saying there is no contradiction, because God necessarily exists (Plantinga, 1974b,a, 1977). The basic preformalised notion behind this is that, if something is real, it cannot be described by a contradictory theory; therefore, the scenario described by the contradiction must not exist. For this argument to work in any meaningful sense, one must argue that the proof for the necessary existence of God is better than the proof that follows from the problem of evil. We could not find any reference for philosophers making such an additional argument, but it is implicit that the premise of the positive arguments for the existence of God should be better supported or justified, e.g. by simplicity, evidential burden, logical entailment, etc. However, even if the positive arguments are successful, as well as the additional argument that the positive arguments have better support than the contradiction, this amounts to ignoring the problem. This is obviously also not the correct way to approach the contradiction, for again it simply denies that there is a contradiction in the first place, so it does not dissolve it.

The value for a theist in this case is that it commits to there being a solution to the contradiction; if one has strong reasons to believe that God's existence is necessary, then evil must be compatible with his attributes. Even if this is true, still nothing has been said about resolving or dissolving the contradiction. Rather, it is a denial that the problem of evil challenges God's existence. Having good reasons to believe that there is a solution is not the same as having provided a solution. This approach applies to other proposed solutions throughout the literature.[8]

HOW TO APPROACH A CONTRADICTION

The logical aspect of the solution to the problem of evil is similar to proposing a mathematical theory and then arguing that this theory is consistent.[9] As logicians will know, the difficult part lies in establishing the consistency of a mathematical theory: blocking one undesirable conclusion cannot be used as a definitive argument against the derivability of all other particular instances of undesirable conclusions. At the heart of the matter is that consistency ultimately cannot be argued for.[10] So, we ought to navigate through the particular cases where a contradiction allegedly arises, while aiming for generality. This task is similar to that of finding a pattern.

Let us observe the structure of this logical problem in a simple example involving a

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8 One example is Plato's argument that the Good necessitates evil because evil is necessarily the opposite of the Good, and the existence of some form implies its opposite (Bostock, 1988).
9 See Freire and Peluce (2022) for a discussion on the concept of consistency in mathematical platonism.
10 This is a consequence of the conclusion of Gödel's second incompleteness theorem Gödel (1932); (Detlefsen, 1986, 77-92).

14

Revista Brasileira de Filosofia da Religião, v. 10, n. 1, 2023.

number series. Take the numbers: 1,2,3,4,5. Can you predict the next number? 6? Actually, the next number in the chain is 7. Let us continue the sequence: 1,2,3,4,5,7,9,11,13,15. What is the next number? It is not 17. The answer is 30. So, the sequence is: 1,2,3,4,5,7,9,11 ,13,15,30,45,60,75,90. And the next number in the sequence? And so on. What is the problem here? The problem is that one can identify a pattern that might elucidate a sequence of numbers. However, simply identifying a sequence does not necessitate that one has actually found *the* solution to the problem. In this case, with imperfect knowledge, the proposed answers are mistaken.

Try again with another number series: 3,1,4,1. What should the next number be in this sequence? 5? This is an intuitive pattern. The answer is 5, in fact. And after 5, what number? 1? No. The next number is 9. It might be the case that the pattern is related to the fact that 9 is the sum of 5 and 4, but it might not be. The next number in this sequence is 2: 3,1,4,1,5,9,2. One can always find a pattern in this sequence—even if it is difficult—by analysing the sequence. In other words, one can always find a story that fits the data. In order to really find the solution, one must know a pattern that is above any of the individual numbers, not just a pattern that fits the initial sequence. Of course, how to do this is not a simple method to explain. And yet there is an explanation here, and that is the decimal expansion of the number π. There is a clear method for providing the next correct number in the sequence, but nothing in the initial sequence will ever give this with certainty. One must reach beyond the initial data-set and understand the intention behind the sequence, and this requires full knowledge of the entire sequence.

It is this mode of analysis that we wish to bring to bear on the logical aspect of the problem of evil. The problem of evil has been traditionally dealt with in the same manner as one initially would approach the sequence of π, as was shown in our two examples. We claim that the answer sought by those who pose the problem of evil lies in understanding the intention behind the premise-set, and not in an ad hoc, syllogistic response to the alleged contradiction. For just as it is impossible to prove that the sequence is π with imperfect knowledge, it is impossible to resolve a contradiction. By striving for a more general view, rather than fixating on one or two particular arguments, one can appreciate that there may not be a contradiction in the first instance to be resolved. This is how one ought to approach the logical aspect of the problem of evil.

Does this mean we have reached a dead-end? One might find solace in Plato: understanding the sequence lies in knowing the rationale behind the sequence, or to put it Platonically, *remembering* the rationale. We can only know because we have always known, and we can only ever dissolve a contradiction when we have full knowledge. As Paul puts it (dou, 2011, 1 Corinthians 13:12):

> We see now through a glass in a dark manner: but then face to face.
> Now I know in part: but then I shall know even as I am known.

The problem remains, how can we know even as we are known, how can we remem-

15

Revista Brasileira de Filosofia da Religião, v. 10, n. 1, 2023.

ber as Plato thinks we remember? Plato says that we battle and suffer with a concept until we grasp the memory. For Paul, we will not know until we reach the next world. Perhaps we want to know now: how can those of us without a strong connection to the realm of the forms then deal with the problem? Again, our solace is found in Plato. His remedy is the therapy of dialectic. Here we understand dialectic as going through the history of the problem of evil with a strong desire to understand the contradiction and thereby reach generality.

The history of the solution to the problem of evil, when looked at outside of the dialectical mode we propose, is a story of striving but failing. What we propose then, is that every time one strives and fails, we learn something new about the problem, and this something new that we learn is a greater understanding and expansion of the pre-formalised notions behind the contradiction. This is more of an art than a method, in that it involves repetition and practice. Similarly, when one strives and fails to determine the pattern behind the sequence 3,1,4,1,5,9,2 they learn that the specific pattern failed, however, as they proceed in searching for a new pattern they need not start from scratch. They might formulate ideas about what kinds of patterns seem not to work. For instance, in this case, finding a recursive code between the previous numbers does not seem to work. Moreover, one may formulate ideas about what kinds of things are behind the pattern. In this case, the idea that there is a geometrical response to the sequence. In looking for a solution, these general ideas play the role of what we called the pre-formalised notions. For instance, in another case one might conclude that there is no apparent recursive pattern that arises from the previous numbers. Yet later on, one realises that the correct solution seems to be exactly a kind of recursion on the previous numbers. Now, one ought to explain why it appeared before that the solution was not recursive, when it now seems to be. Thus, in the following section, we will analyse some historical arguments and show how one can use them to leverage a better understanding of the problem of evil, an understanding that allows for greater generality.

APPLYING THE LOGIC OF HOW TO APPROACH A CONTRADICTION TO THE HISTORICAL DIALECTIC

How does one derive a contradiction in a problem such as the problem of evil? The four basic premises do not directly give us the contradiction. There is a sense that they may indeed produce a contradiction, but this only becomes apparent when we formalise these premises in more detail. For instance, we should lay down what exactly it means for something to be omnibenevolent. Does it mean being morally optimal at all possible times and places? Does it mean conforming to the laws, intentions, and desires of a morally optimal being? These definitions hint at something correct, although they are built over concepts that are difficult to grasp. As philosophers, we are aware that analysis has to stop at some point, so there is nothing necessarily wrong with conceptual difficulty. However, these

16

Revista Brasileira de Filosofia da Religião, v. 10, n. 1, 2023.

definitions do not help with understanding the conflict between the four premises of the contradiction. So, we ought to start by looking at how the contradiction was first conceived. How did Epicurus bring about the contradiction? Epicurus implicitly defines omnibenevolence as a willingness to prevent *all* evil. Likewise, he implicitly defines omnipotence as an ability of God to do all that He is willing to do. Already, we have an important piece of the dialectic. The starting point for obtaining the contradiction lies in making sufficiently precise definitions of the terms occurring in the premises.

What do we learn from the Epicurean account of the problem? We learn about the kind of work we want our definitions to do. We might define concepts with various criteria in mind and various degrees of specificity. When determining the correct definition, we have a goal. For example, in the case of omnibenevolence, the definition must have something to say about God's actions and inaction. Similarly for omnipotence, we are asked to be concerned about an alignment between an action and the willingness behind the action. God must want to do what He does. Preventing evil by accident just doesn't cut it. Hence, for Epicurus, omnibenevolence means a willingness to prevent evil wherever and whenever possible. Therefore, we can now include two pre-formalised notions with new premises in the problem, which are derived from the historical account:

5.   Omnipotence implies everything that God wills to do He does.
6.   Omnibenevolence implies that God is willing to prevent evil.

There is still a more profound problem that was not on Epicurus' radar, but which is nonetheless important for how theologians have dealt with the contradiction. We learn about this problem from Augustine's account. The Epicurean problem is that there is evil and God is somehow unable or unwilling to prevent it. The Augustinian problem is that God is causally responsible for the existence of evil in the first place. Not only ought He be willing and able to eliminate evil, He ought not to be creating it in the first place! Augustine's solution to the problem of evil, therefore, is to show that evil does not originate from God. And yet, if God is the only uncreated entity, then there is an inference that every created entity is created by God, and this should include evil.

FROM WHENCE COMES EVIL?

Here is an historical example of the Augustinian concern. According to Zoroastrianism (Mazdayasna), Āhurā Mazdā (Ohrmazd) is perfect: he is omnipotent, omniscient, perfectly benevolent, immutable, incorruptible, and timeless. Since life cannot coexist with non-life, light cannot coexist with darkness, and creation cannot coexist with privation, Āhurā Mazdā created the material realm, *getig*, to lure in Angra Mainyu (Ahriman) and thereby defeat him. Angra Mainyu is an evil god that corrupts the substances of creation. On Zoroastrianism, therefore, the diseases, parasites, and predators that make us question a perfectly good god, are explained by an evil god that can corrupt the substances of creation (Clark, 1998). The Zoroastrian response to the problem of evil is that Āhurā Mazdā

17

Revista Brasileira de Filosofia da Religião, v. 10, n. 1, 2023.

is able and willing to prevent evil, but has decided to do so only at the end of time. He uses human free will to choose virtue as an instrument by which to destroy evil (De Sena, 2023, 3). Thus, humanity's free will is part of Āhurā Mazdā's omnipotent arsenal. In another instance, Manes, the founder of Manicheanism, held that matter was essentially partly evil, and therefore, a consequence of creation: evil necessarily follows from a world created by both God and the Devil (Schlesinger, 1964). On this account, God is willing to prevent evil and is capable of doing so, but He contends with an omnimalevolent rival who is the originator of evil.[11]

From a perspective outside spacetime—such as God's—evil defeated at the moment of creation or a trillion years hence, is still evil overthrown by the power of God. Therefore, God is willing and capable of preventing evil. The important point is that there is a difference between God preventing evil and God creating evil. If God cannot prevent evil then He is not omnipotent. If He can prevent it but still is the source of evil, then He is omnipotent but not omnibenevolent. Thus, the concern about evil here goes beyond the Epicurean case. In the Epicurean case, the concern is with God's power and goodness at the present, with the Zoroastrian case the concern is with God's power and goodness across all time.

The Zoroastrians are on the right path when they say that evil should not be created by God. We can appreciate how their responses adds another piece to the dialectic, it provides a modified definition of 'omnibenevolence'. However, they come up against the problem that one of the two gods must be omnipotent, and whichever is omnipotent is truly greatest; truly God. This is Al-Ghazali's *argument from omnipotence* (al Ghazali, 1965, p.40): necessarily one of the all-powerful gods must defeat the other, because when it comes to omnipotent beings, there can be only one. If it is Angra Mainyu, then God is not omnipotent, and if it is Āhurā Mazdā, then God is the creator of the evil Angra Mainyu, and thus the originator of evil. The problem of evil thereby returns, because if Āhurā Mazdā created Angra Mainyu, who in turn created evil, then God is in the causal chain of evil.

Thus, we ought to pivot to Augustine's point that evil can in no way be created by God. We thereby have yet another implicit pre-formalised premise that can be made explicit in the contradiction:

7.   There can be only one truly omnipotent being.

In response to this new pre-formalised notion, Augustine says that evil cannot be created at all, lest it contradict God's omnipotence.[12] Augustine, therefore, addresses the contradiction by denying premise (4). But, our pre-formalised notions are indicative of

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11 This is similar to *Rex Mundi* and the demiurge in certain Gnostic movements such as Catharism (Barber, 2000).
12 Siddartha Gautama also rejected the following proposition put to him (Thera, 2006, 268-269): *Whatever happiness or pain or neutral feeling this person experiences, all that is due to the creation of a supreme deity (issaranimmāṇahetu).*

18

Revista Brasileira de Filosofia da Religião, v. 10, n. 1, 2023.

something, and we ought not to simply dismiss them, rather we ought capture the pre-formalised notion even if the premise turns out to be false. The value of the dialectic lies in its eliminating certain explicit meanings and discerning these implicit ones.

We can appreciate that on our methodology, pre-formalised notions ought not be eliminated, and that they are accumulative. To deny the pre-formalised notions is to avoid philosophically engaging with the contradiction. Consider an example: we can have a pre-formalised notion that someone has blue eyes, and yet there is strong evidence that there is no blue pigment found in mammals. Should we deny that this person has blue eyes and call it a day? No! We have to address how this person somehow has blue eyes, and reconcile this with our understanding of mammalian biology. The blue of the human eye is, in fact, caused by the way light reflects off the lens of eye. This phenomena is called Rayleigh scattering, which also explains the blue of the sky. We see blue because there is blue, but it is not caused by blue pigment (i.e. what colour the surface of the iris reflects). Likewise, when Augustine concludes that premise (4) is false, this is not the end of the story; one might still have a pre-formalised notion that there is evil in the world. Similarly, Augustine concludes that evil does not have existence in its own right, but is by definition an absence of good: it is not a created thing, rather it is a corruption of creation (Menn and Menn, 2002). This denies (4), and yet this is not the end of the story, for the pre-formalised notion that 'evil exists' remains, just as denying blue mammalian pigment does not remove the suspicion that there are blue human eyes.

Was Augustine's investigation fruitless? No, because now we can provide reasons for premise (4), rather than simply positing it. And we can apply this story to each premise, so that we have preformalised reasons to reinstate a precise formulation of the premises. In this way, we are making progress. Even if we deny premise (4) and say that there is no contradiction, the premise can be redefined to revive the contradiction. Even so, we still have learned much. From Augustine, we have learned that God's omnipotence is separate from the idea that God is the only uncreated entity: omnipotence does not mean God must be causally connected to everything we see in the world, even if being the only uncreated thing indicates that God is the origin of all that is created. We can appreciate how this procedure can be applied to each premise. For example, from Augustine's rejection of premise (4), we can modify the setup used together with the premise (2) to produce the statement 'Everything is created by God':

8.   Everything that is created is directly or indirectly created by uncreated beings.

What have we done here? We specified the kind of interpretation of the premises that leads to the problem of evil. The omnipotence of an existing God gives us the notion that He is the unique uncreated being on Augustine's account; and, because every created thing is created by (or is in the causal chain of) uncreated things, then everything is created by God. We then added an additional premise to make a stronger version of the contradiction, which is also an explicit articulation of what many theists implicitly have in mind when they posit such a contradiction. The stronger version is that the existence of evil

19

Revista Brasileira de Filosofia da Religião, v. 10, n. 1, 2023.

produces a contradiction with God's omnibenevolence not because He was unwilling to prevent it but because He would be directly or indirectly responsible for such evil.

In other words, after rejecting a solution to the problem of evil, we should learn something about the pre-formalised notions, and the more pre-formalised notions we understand, the more insight we have into the mistaken formulation of the original contradiction. This is like the Russell paradox. In what sense? We understand the nature of the problem, adding to our pre-formalised notions about the cause of the problem in pre-formalised terms. And this is the reason why we believe this is a good solution. Remember, the paradox is dissolved not because we found the solution but rather because we are no longer concerned with the theories being inconsistent. We are now solely focusing on what is a better theory.

Let's consider two kinds of cases, in brief, to further illustrate the point.

EDUCATIVE EVIL

Thomas Aquinas was unsatisfied by Augustine's proposed solution to the problem of evil. For although Augustine said that evil is uncreated—there are no evil objects—Aquinas worried that evil events still occur, because objects are corrupted by evil occurrences. Aquinas' solution is to accept that there is evil, but that these evil events occur as instruments of a higher purpose such as by bringing about maximal good (Aquinas, 1920, Ia, 2, 3):

> This is part of the infinite goodness of God, that He should allow evil to exist [occur], and out of it produce good.

Here Aquinas admits that evil occurs, yet that evil events do not contradict God's benevolence, on a better interpretation of what it means to be perfectly benevolent. According to Aquinas, benevolence is not about avoiding evil at all cost, but about producing as much good as possible. Thus, we have another premise:

9.   Omnibenevolence implies producing as much good as possible.

It is not inconceivable that some evil may exist to produce a better good. Free will is an example of good from which evil may follow, but the cumulative good of the existence of free will outweighs the cumulative evil that flows from it. Free will even allow us to gesture at evils in the world that are not caused by God. Michael Peterson (Peterson, 1998, 39) writes:

> If a person is free with respect to an action A, then God does not bring it about or cause it to be the case that she does A or refrains from doing A. For if God brings it about or causes it to be the case in any manner whatsoever that the person either does A or does not do A, then that person is not really free.

Likewise, Alvin Plantinga argues (Plantinga, 1974b, 190):

> The essential point of the Free Will Defence is that the creation of a

20

Revista Brasileira de Filosofia da Religião, v. 10, n. 1, 2023.

> world containing moral good is a cooperative venture; it requires the
> uncoerced concurrence of significantly free creatures. But then the
> actualisation of a world W containing moral good is not up to God
> alone; it also depends upon what the significantly free creatures of W
> would do.

Notice that the existence of free beings allows us to justify the good of education: the education of free beings to make better choices is a good that permits certain evil. In this context, it becomes apparent how some evil can be outweighed by the good consequences of said evil. This is a response in the style that a punishment can prevent a free being from committing evil, such as when one chastises a child that misbehaves. And evil can be used as an instrument in more subtle and profound ways, such as salvation.

Abstracting from free will to all educative evil, the general idea is that Aquinas' account avoids the derivation of a contradiction *in the terms presented* because it denies a strict reading of (6) that omnibenevolence implies preventing *all* evil. At first pass, this appears to be a denial of Epicurus' preformalised notion—and recall that we cannot exclude pre-formalised notions without good reason—so a proper response is to accept that (6) is somehow true. Aquinas' solution is to say that God is willing to prevent evil, but not if it undermines other aspects of his omnibenevolence, such as producing the most good possible (as well as preventing as much evil as possible). Thus, God is willing to prevent evil, but both these factors of omnibenevolence must be balanced for the optimal definition.

Aquinas has his own pre-formalised notion that evil exists (4) without contradicting God's omnibenevolence (3) (nor his omnipotence (2)) because evil can exist as a tool for producing maximal good. Indeed, without evil, according to such an account, God would not be omnibenevolent, because He must be freely choosing not to bring about the maximal good! Aquinas is not explaining exactly what such evil looks like, so his claim is speculative: if there is such a kind of evil e, it is not the kind of evil that produces the contradiction for the problem of evil. We can see the same dialectical pattern occurring here: Aquinas proposes a better definition for premise (3), one which captures a pre-formalised notion of what it means to maximise the good, in order to dissolve the contradiction. In this way, we can appreciate how the dialectic cumulatively progresses, as Aquinas expands upon Augustine's proposed solution. Here is yet another premise:

10. If some evil is required to produce more good than evil, then omnibenevolence requires that this evil occurs.

And the pattern continues, there may be a way to derive a new contradiction. (10) accounts for evil e, but what if there is another kind of evil, e', that is not accounted for by the premise? There may in fact be such evil. What is the good produced by suffering such as hunger, thirst, and heartbreak? It seems like there is none, and even if some good were produced by the evil event, was more good produced than evil? What instrumental good could be produced from them that outweighs the evil that occurred? Again, the dialectic progresses, and yet another philosopher proposes a pre-formalised notion that can alleged-

21

Revista Brasileira de Filosofia da Religião, v. 10, n. 1, 2023.

ly account for evil e'. Basil proposes that evil is educative (Basil, 1895, (Hexaem., Hom. ii)):

> 11. Evil can be educative: there may be cases where the good produced from education outweighs the evil that brought forth the education.

In the words of Eleonore Stump (Stump, 1985), a world full of evil and suffering is "conducive to bringing about both the initial human [receipt of God's gift of salvation] and also the subsequent process of sanctification" (Stump, 1985, p.409). Evil e' must be allowed by an omnibenevolent being as it is a necessary condition for salvation, and therefore, the Good. Similarly to Aquinas, God can be causally responsible for evil so long as more good comes from it. In this case, the presence of educative evil produces more good, or less harm, than its lack.

The final point here is that premise (4) is not incompatible with the other premises. For it to be incompatible, we need to be more specific about the kind of evil that exists. For instance, we saw that if evil is required for greater good then it does not contradict God's omnibenevolence. Upon further analysis there is not one kind of evil that is allegedly problematic for (3), but not all evil that we take to occur. So, premises (1), (3), (4) are incompatible with the evil that we see, not one kind of idealised evil. This leads us to an investigation of the different kinds of evil, and whether all of these types of evil can be accounted for without entailing a contradiction.

EVIL AND THE BEST POSSIBLE WORLD

Perhaps education is not sufficient to explain what are sometimes called 'global evils' like natural disasters (Adams, 1988).[13] Of course, some educative value might attach to evil, such as a new gratitude for life or a charitable response to suffering, but it seems difficult to fathom, in some cases, how the good generated could outweigh the evil of the event. Again, philosophers have proposed a modified understanding of omnibenevolence to answer the challenge. Leibniz held that we ought to understand omnibenevolence from the perspective of all of creation, and that from such a perspective, it is apparent that evil is a necessary consequence of the good. The idea that the world cannot be created any better than it has been is touched upon by Abelard, Aquinas, and Avicenna (Strange and Zupko, 2004). Contained in the view are the following ideas: (i) nothing exists in isolation; (ii) when evaluating the good and bad, we cannot neglect an ultimate purpose that can only be understood in the totality of time and space.

Returning to Leibniz, who is the most famous proponent of this line of thought, he famously argues that (Leibniz, 134. XIX):

> God cannot refrain from offering other remedies which he knows men will reject, bringing upon themselves all the greater guilt: but shall one wish that God be unjust in order that man may be less criminal?

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13 Marilyn Adams also refers to such evil as global 'horrendous suffering' or 'horrendous evils'.

22

Revista Brasileira de Filosofia da Religião, v. 10, n. 1, 2023.

> Moreover, the grace that does not serve the one may serve the other, and indeed **always serves the totality of God's plan, which is the best possible in conception** [emphasis added]. Shall God not give the rain, because there are low-lying places which will be thereby incommoded? Shall the sun not shine as much as it should for the world in general, because there are places which will be too much dried up in consequence? […] God's object has in it something infinite, his cares embrace the universe: what we know thereof is almost nothing, and we desire to gauge his wisdom and his goodness by our knowledge.

Could God have made the sun shine other than it does? Perhaps, but with the full knowledge and goodness of God, it may be clear that the current condition of sunshine is part of the perfection of the totality of existence. Hence, all evil and good produced must necessarily be produced in the degree to which they occur, as they are necessary events for maintaining the greatest possible creation.

Malebranche also accounts for the compatibility of the existence of evil and God's omnibenevolence in this manner. He wrote to Leibniz that ((Malebranche and Leibniz, 1955, 14 December 1711, MLRP, 417)):

> I am persuaded as you are […] that God gave to creatures all the good that he can give them [and that] his work is the most perfect that it can be.

According to Malebranche, God chose simple laws according to which He produces as much perfection as possible, even though such laws imply evil consequences. He puts it thus (Robinet, 1958-1984, V, 28):

> God, discovering in the infinite treasures of his wisdom an infinity of possible worlds […] determines himself to create that world […] that ought to be the most perfect, with respect to the simplicity of the ways necessary to its production or to its conservation.

In short, this created world is the best possible one for the purpose for which it was created, that is for the manifestation of the attributes of God. We have yet another premise derived from a pre-formalised notion:

12. Evil is an aspect of the whole universe: the scope under which (10) should be evaluated is the whole of creation at once.

As with Aquinas' solution to the problem of evil, this solution teaches us something, and yet is it also vague. It cannot be understood as properly a solution to the problem of evil. If it is understood as a solution, then it cannot account for an individual person why they have a pre-formalised notion that there is unjustified evil. Indeed, in his novel *Candide* (Voltaire, 1975), Voltaire critiques Leibniz's solution by arguing that this totalist explanation for evil provides little comfort for finite creatures undergoing unbearable suffering. Tell the downtrodden and unwanted that their suffering holds all of creation in the balance, and see what comfort it is to them. There is a pre-formalised notion that it is unfair to dismisses

23

Revista Brasileira de Filosofia da Religião, v. 10, n. 1, 2023.

anyone's complaint about evil as incorrectly motivated by a narrow perspective. Yet the solution does teach us something, and that is the idea that we must see the universe as an interconnected totality, to properly account for evil.

STRIVING TOWARDS GENERALITY

Logic can never bring one to a definition. Thus, although a helpful tool, logic is not the only instrument available. There is a Platonic concept of philosophy, that characterizes the discipline as a struggle for definitions. Logic can give one the idea that they ought to struggle for generality and structure to 'carve nature at its joints', but we need definitions to explain what those joints are, and what is carved. Certainly logic is not the only tool, there is also definition, and definition is needed to understand contradictions.

Let us briefly recapitulate what we have thus far covered. Traditional responses to the problem of evil address one of the pre-formalised notions in the original set-up of the contradiction, and show that the formalisation of the pre-formalised notions is wrong. They argue that the initial formalisation was missing something, and thus, the pre-formalised notion ought to be captured in a new formalisation. Pre-formalised notions ought to be accounted for, whether that be by accepting them and showing how they are correct, or at least by a cautious and considered approach to rejection. What we have done here is to put all these formalisations regarding the problem of evil in a larger scheme, where each step adds a pre-formalised notion that must be accounted for. All these philosophers have operated in this manner; our task has been to explicitly show the procedure. This is how we did so: Firstly, we showed how not to approach a contradiction. Secondly, we discussed what the proper way to approach a contradiction is. Then, thirdly, we applied this logic to the historical dialectic of the problem of evil. Our last task is to strive toward generality, and to achieve a solution in a similar manner as the solution to Russell's paradox which has entailed that few philosophers now hold that the concept of 'set' is contradictory.

How ought we strive toward generality? One must look at the dialectic of the solutions, and use them to extract more pre-formalised notions. By doing so, we are adding to the number of preformalised notions, not only to the formalisations. And unless we have every pre-formalised notion accounted for, we cannot formalise a correct account of the problem of evil. How could we ever have every pre-formalised notion accounted for? From a human perspective it seems improbable that we can—maybe impossible—just like knowing every number in the series of π. And so, as we hinted earlier, the solution to the problem of evil lies, rather poetically, in *The Bible* (dou, 2011, 1 Corinthians 13:12):

> We see now through a glass in a dark manner: but then face to face.
> Now I know in part: but then I shall know even as I am known.

The problem of evil arises because we have incomplete knowledge: now we see as

24

Revista Brasileira de Filosofia da Religião, v. 10, n. 1, 2023.

if through a glass darkly. God has complete knowledge. Were we to have complete knowl-edge—to know even as God knows us—we would understand that there is in fact no contradiction derivable, and therefore, no syllogism is needed to resolve what is not there. Of course, this does not and need not eliminate the pre-formalised notions one may have from a limited epistemic standpoint. For this inability to resolve the contradiction does not mean that we cannot make progress of answering the problem.

The history of addressing the problem of evil is characterised by continuous efforts that ultimately fall short. Our proposal is that each attempt, though unsuccessful, enhances our understanding of the contradiction, because they shed light on the deeper, pre-for-malised notions underlying the contradiction. As in the example of π, rather than trying to discern a pattern through a glass darkly by predicting the next number from the finite data at hand, we ought instead to understand the general mechanism that produces the entire sequence; at least until such a time when we know even as we are known.

25

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27

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28

Revista Brasileira de Filosofia da Religião, v. 10, n. 1, 2023.

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29

Revista Brasileira de Filosofia da Religião, v. 10, n. 1, 2023.