# THE PROBLEM OF EVIL AND REPLIES TO SOME IMPORTANT RESPONSES

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**Abstract.** I begin by distinguishing four different versions of the argument from evil that start from four different moral premises that in various ways link the existence of God to the absence of suffering. The version of the argument from evil that I defend starts from the premise that if God exists, he would not allow excessive, unnecessary suffering. The argument continues by denying the consequent of this conditional to conclude that God does not exist. I defend the argument against Skeptical Theists who say we are in no position to judge that there is excessive, unnecessary suffering by arguing that this defense has absurd consequences. It allows Young Earthers to construct a parallel argument that concludes that we are in no position to judge that God did not create the earth recently. In the last section I consider whether theists can turn the argument from evil on its head by arguing that God exists. I first criticize Alvin Plantinga's theory of warrant that one might try to use to argue for God's existence. I then criticize Richard Swinburne's Bayesian argument to the same conclusion. I conclude that my version of the argument from evil is a strong argument against the existence of God and that several important responses to it do not defeat it.

I will assume that God is at least all-knowing, all-powerful, and wholly good. God may have some additional attributes such as being the creator of the universe, but I will ignore them in this discussion. It's widely recognized that the problem of evil is a challenge to belief in the existence of any God who has these three attributes regardless of whether he has others too. Nearly everyone grants that suffering is in itself a bad thing, an evil. The moral premise in the argument from evil against the existence of such a God states that God would not allow certain evils. It has been modified in light of philosophical objections. Below I list different versions of that premise. They are ordered from the simplest to the more sophisticated.

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## I. THE MORAL PREMISE

(1A) If God exists, there would be no suffering.

(1B) If God exists, there would be no *unnecessary* suffering.

(1C) If God exists, he would not *allow* unnecessary suffering *unless* allowing it is needed to bring about a greater good or prevent a greater bad.

(1D) If God exists, he would not allow *excessive* unnecessary suffering.

J. L. Mackie based his argument on (1A), and Alvin Plantinga argued against it with his free will defense. The gist of Plantinga's argument is that it is good in itself for there to be creatures who can act of their own free will so a good God would want to create them. But God cannot cause such creatures always to do what is right, for then they would lack significant free will. Further, it is possible that there are no beings with free will that always do what is right. Maybe every such creature suffers from what Plantinga calls transworld depravity. But it is better to have free beings and the possibility that they will do wrong and cause suffering than no such beings at all. So it is possible that God exists and there is suffering, contrary to what (1A) asserts. The existence of God is compatible with suffering. So (1A) is false.

(1B) grants that the existence of God is compatible with suffering but says that it is incompatible with *unnecessary* suffering. Suffering is unnecessary if and only if *it* is not needed to bring about a greater good or prevent a greater evil. Suppose a dentist causes suffering by injecting a local anesthetic like novocaine into a child's gums and then drilling and filling her tooth in order to prevent more pain in the future. That suffering would be necessary to prevent more suffering later. But suppose the dentist does not first inject the child with the anesthetic, even though one is readily available, and then goes ahead and drills her tooth anyway. That would cause unnecessary suffering. If the child's parent could easily stop the dentist from doing this but does not, that parent would allow unnecessary suffering. It seems that no good person would either cause or allow unnecessary suffering if they could prevent it.

But consider a good parent who allows her teenage son to make some bad decision, say, to go out with his friends when he should rest and keep his

sprained ankle elevated. The suffering that results may be unnecessary since it may not contribute to some greater good or prevent some greater bad. The son might have had as much fun with his friends while staying at home with his ankle elevated, and he might not learn a lesson from the suffering caused by going out on his swollen ankle. He might have enough fun with his friends that in similar circumstances he would choose the same thing again. However, the exercise of her son's free will might be good enough in itself to justify the mother *allowing* him to choose to go out with his friends even though *the suffering* that results does not produce a greater good or prevent a greater bad, that is, even if *the suffering* is unnecessary. So (1B) is also false.

(1C) does not condemn the parent's allowing her son to go out with his friends because her *allowing* that makes possible something that is intrinsically good even if *the resulting suffering* is not necessary to produce a greater good or prevent a greater bad. But Peter van Inwagen has argued against (1C) on two different grounds. First, he offers examples. The first example is of a good judge who might sentence a criminal to 365 days in jail when 364 days would achieve the desired end, say, of deterring that sort of crime. Second, he gives the example of a good ship's captain who is faced with rescuing 1,000 people stranded on Atlantis as it is sinking. Each person he puts on board reduces the chances of reaching port safely by 0.1%. If he puts all aboard, the ship will definitely sink before reaching port. If he takes none aboard, all will drown as Atlantis sinks. Van Inwagen says that as long as the good captain takes at least a handful, or all but a handful, he does no wrong. Presumably, at the lower end of that range, some will be left behind and drown who could have been put aboard without the ship's sinking. So they will suffer unnecessarily. Still, van Inwagen maintains that a good captain could fail to save them.[1]

The trouble with the examples of the judge and the captain is that they involve finite human beings. We do not know exactly how many days in jail will deter a given criminal from committing similar crimes, and it is best for us to act according to general rules that are easy to remember and apply. So the good judge is morally blameless in sentencing the criminal to a year in jail and thereby imposing more suffering on him than is needed to achieve

1 The example of the ship's captain is in Peter van Inwagen, "Reflections on the Chapters by Draper, Russell, and Gale", in *The Evidential Argument from Evil*, ed. Daniel Howard-Snyder (Indiana Univ. Press, 1996), 234–35.

the desired end. His ignorance gives him a legitimate excuse for sentencing the criminal to a year in jail rather than 364 days. Similarly, the good captain does not know exactly how many people he can take aboard and still make it safely to port. So he, too, has a legitimate excuse if it turns out that within the relevant range he takes fewer than he could have and still arrived safely at port. But ignorance cannot be a legitimate excuse for God who is omniscient. So (1C) would seem to apply to God even if not to the judge and the captain.

But van Inwagen has a second argument to show that (1C) is false. Suppose a "dolor" is a unit of pain or suffering.[2] Suppose imposing a punishment of 100 dolors of suffering on a criminal would not achieve the desired end of, say, deterring commission of that sort of crime. Assume that imposing 101 dolors of suffering would deter the crime, but so would 100.5 dolors, and 100.25, and 100.125, and so on. Assume that there is no minimum amount of suffering that could be imposed that would achieve the desired end because there is always some lesser amount of dolors between any amount of them greater than 100 and 100 itself that will also achieve the relevant desired end. Then even a good God, not just a good human judge, could impose more suffering than is needed to achieve the desired end, for it would be permissible for God, or a good judge who understood the situation, to impose suffering that is close to 100 dolors even though even less suffering would achieve the same end. God could also *allow* some other person to impose suffering on a criminal as long as it is very near 100 dolors. So God could both cause and allow unnecessary suffering, contrary to what (1C) says.

Still, it seems that God could not cause or allow *way more* suffering than is needed to achieve some desired end. It would be wrong of him, or a human judge, to impose 200 dolors of suffering on a criminal when much less suffering would achieve the desired end. It would be wrong of the good captain to take only two people from Atlantis, less than a handful, and let the other 998 drown. As (1D) states, God would not allow *excessive* unnecessary suffering. I assume that (1D) is not open to criticism, and the strongest version of the argument from evil starts with it.

2 I take this terminology from Fred Feldman who uses the term "dolor" to stand for the standard unit of pain and "hedon" to stand for the standard unit of pleasure. See his *Introductory Ethics* (Prentice-Hall, 1978), 24.

## II. THE ARGUMENT FROM EVIL

Here is how that argument goes:

(1) If God exists, he would not allow *excessive* unnecessary suffering.

(2) But there is excessive unnecessary suffering.

(3) Therefore, God does not exist.[3]

In support of (2), we need only think of the enormous amount of suffering endured by innocent human beings and animals across the thousands of years that they have existed on earth. Many have died painful deaths due to disease, earthquakes, tsunamis, and forest fires. Many others have suffered at the hands of evil human beings such as Hitler, Pol Pot, and those who molest, and sometimes rape and kill, children. Animals raised on factory farms and then brought to slaughter houses, packed like sardines in trucks, to be cruelly killed, suffer terribly. Perhaps some of this suffering is needed to develop virtues such as compassion, patience, forgiveness, and perseverance, but it surely seems that there is *way more* than is needed for people to develop these virtues.

Skeptical Theists argue that we are in no position to judge that there is excessive, unnecessary suffering. Stephen Wykstra famously appealed to what he called CORNEA to make this point.[4] Roughly, CORNEA says that not seeing something (an elephant, a bacteria, a reason, etc.) gives you reason to

3 I first presented this version of the argument in my 2004 essay, Bruce Russell, "The Problem of Evil: Why Is There So Much Suffering?", in *Introduction to Philosophy: Classical and Contemporary Readings*, ed. Louis P. Pojman (OUP, 2004). See p. 209 where I write, "I believe that there is an *extreme* amount of suffering, *way more* than is needed to bring about any relevant good or to prevent some comparable evil." John Martin Fisher and Neal A. Tognazzini make the same point in their 2007 review of van Inwagen's *The Problem of Evil*. They call their argument the "Range Argument from Evil" because it holds that the amount of evil in the world falls outside an acceptable range. See John M. Fischer and Neal A. Tognazzini, "Exploring Evil and Philosophical Failure: A Critical Notice of Peter van Inwagen's The Problem of Evil", *Faith and Philosophy* 24, no. 4 (2007), esp. sec. V.

4 See Stephen J. Wykstra, "'The Humean Obstacle to Evidential Arguments from Suffering: On Avoiding the Evils of 'Appearance'", *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 16, no. 2 (1984) where he introduces CORNEA. Wykstra gives a summary of the idea behind CORNEA in his "Rowe's Noseeum Arguments from Evil", in *The Evidential Argument from Evil*, ed. Daniel Howard-Snyder (Indiana Univ. Press, 1996). He says the idea behind CORNEA is that, "we can argue from 'we see no X' to 'there is no X' only when X has 'reasonable seeability,'" (126) that is, only if we have reason to believe that we would "see" X if it existed.

believe it is not there if and only if you have reason to believe that you would "see" it if it were there. He then argues that we do not have reason to believe that, if God exists, we finite beings would "see" God's reasons for allowing the vast amount of terrible suffering that we observe. God may be aware of goods that are "beyond our ken," and we may not see how his allowing certain evils is necessary for certain counterbalancing goods to come into existence, or even worse evils to be prevented. So not seeing any reason why God, if he exists, allows all the suffering of innocents that we observe does not give us reason to believe that there are no reasons.

CORNEA may offer sufficient conditions for when not seeing something gives you reason to believe it's not there. If you have reason to believe you would see an elephant but then you don't, that gives you reason to believe that one is not there. However, it does not offer necessary conditions. Suppose I see no signs of being in The Matrix or a demon-world, but I have no reason to think I would see them even if I were in The Matrix or a demon-world. Still, I can have reason to believe that I am not in The Matrix or a demon-world because the best explanation of what I do see is that I am in the external world as we normally conceive it to be.

Suppose I look for Pierre in a restaurant and don't see him (to allude to Sartre's famous example). The best explanation is that he is not there, not that he is there but wearing a disguise and so I do not recognize him. Of course, in this situation CORNEA yields the same result. I have reason to believe that I would see Pierre if he were in the restaurant, but I don't see him. CORNEA implies that therefore I have reason to believe he is not there. CORNEA offers sufficient conditions for when not seeing something gives you reason to believe that it is not there, and so sufficient conditions for the best explanation being that it is not there given that you do not see it. But sometimes the best explanation of why you do not see something, say, some sign of being in The Matrix or a demon-world, is that the thing "isn't there" even though you do not have reason to believe that you would see some relevant "sign" of it if it were there, that is, even if the conditions of CORNEA are not met. Because CORNEA does not provide necessary conditions for what it is reasonable to believe on the basis of not seeing something, it cannot be used to argue that we cannot have reason to believe that there are no God-justifying reasons for allowing all the terrible suffering of innocents that we observe in the world based on our not seeing any.

Other Skeptical Theists argue that for us to have reason to believe that there is excessive, unnecessary suffering in the world we would have to have good reason to believe (a) that the goods and bads that we are aware of are a representative sample of the possible goods and bads that there are and (b) that allowing all the suffering of innocents that we see is not needed to bring about greater goods or to prevent greater bads.[5] They then claim that we do not have reason to believe either (a) or (b). So we do not have reason to believe that there is excessive, unnecessary suffering.

The trouble with this argument is that it implies skepticism where intuitively it seems unwarranted. I will call people who believe that the earth was created recently (six thousand years ago, one hundred years ago, or even five minutes ago) Young Earthers. An anti-Young Earthers argument can be constructed that parallels the argument from evil against the existence of God. It goes as follows.

(1*) If Young Earthism is true, then the earth was created recently.

(2*) But the earth was not created recently.

(3*) So Young Earthism is false.

The Young Earthers are Skeptical Theists and counter that we are in no position to judge that (2*) is true. When it comes to the problem of evil, the Skeptical Theists argue that there is some reason for God not to intervene to prevent suffering that is the result of freely chosen human actions because such actions are intrinsically good, or are necessary for people to develop their character ("to make their souls" in John Hick's famous phrase). So God would not prevent all such suffering; that would eliminate the possibility of significant freedom. So he would prevent some suffering that originates from the exercise of free will but not all of it. For all we know, he has prevented just the right amount. So despite the Holocaust and the enormous amount of suf-

5 See, for instance, Michael Bergmann, "Skeptical Theism, Atheism, and Total Evidence Skepticism", in *Skeptical Theism*: *New Essays*, ed. Trent Dougherty and Justin P. McBrayer (OUP, 2014) esp., 209-10 where Bergmann presents three conditions that he endorses as the bases for skeptical theism. Most critiques of Skeptical Theism argue that it leads to moral skepticism or to radical skepticism about the existence of the external world. My criticism is unique in that I argue that it leads to skepticism about the age of the earth. Even if the Skeptical Theists had adequate replies to the charge that their view leads to moral and external world skepticism, it would be a serious objection if it led to skepticism about the age of the earth.

fering of innocents today and over the millenia, we are in no position to judge that God has allowed excessive, unnecessary suffering that comes from the exercise of free will. Further, it may be necessary for God to allow so-called natural evils because they may be needed to awaken people and to "nudge" them back to re-union with God, that is, for all we know, they are part of his plan of redemption. For all we know, God must allow all the suffering we see for the sake of goods of which we are unaware or even for the sake of goods of which we are aware.

The Skeptical Young Earthers argue that a good God sees suffering as intrinsically bad and so is opposed to it. So he has reason to create the earth recently with only an apparent long history. That way people can learn the lessons of history both through the apparent records of science and of "experiments in living." God will create the earth so that those apparent records reflect the nature of the real world he has recently created and provide evidence of how best to live in that real world among real people and animals. The deception involved will concern when the earth was really created and what actions and events took place prior to that creation. That means that some people will have apparent memories of committing heinous acts when really they have not. But the Skeptical Young Earthers argue that it is better to have all this deception without the massive amount of suffering that would have occurred had there been an actual history than to have no deception but that massive amount of suffering. And they add, as Skeptical Theists do, that we are in no position to judge that God would not, for these and further reasons beyond our ken, commit this deception.

The reasons the Skeptical Young Earthers offer for their skeptical conclusion do not constitute a theodicy, that is, a story that provides justification for God, if he exists, to allow all the suffering we see, but a defense, that is, reasons for believing that we are in no position to judge that God would not deceive us in the way Young Earthers believe he has. In this regard, they are like the Skeptical Theists who sketch reasons why God would allow suffering that results from the exercise of free will and reasons why he would allow natural evils as part of a plan of redemption. Those Skeptical Theists do not offer a theodicy either; instead, they offer a defense. Ultimately, they say that we are in no position to judge that there is excessive, unnecessary suffering because, for all we know, God allows all the suffering we see for reasons beyond our

ken. The Skeptical Young Earthers seem to be able to defend their view in the same way that standard Skeptical Theists defend against the problem of evil.

Some people think that the situations are not analogous. They say that we have good reason to accept the conclusions of science, both epistemic and pragmatic reasons. There is a lot of evidence that the law of gravity holds, that the earth goes around the sun, and that the earth was created billions of years ago. There is not nearly as good evidence that there is excessive, unnecessary suffering. So, these people say, the skeptical considerations that the Skeptical Theists offer constitute good grounds for skepticism about there being excessive, unnecessary suffering but not about the age of the earth.

But often if skeptical considerations are good grounds for skepticism about certain sorts of claims, they are also good grounds for skepticism about other sorts of claims. Suppose someone argues that testimonial evidence cannot yield knowledge because knowledge requires certainty, and testimony never yields certainty. Someone else might extend this argument and conclude that perception cannot yield knowledge either because it also never yields certainty. I am not endorsing the idea that knowledge requires certainty. I only use this example to support a conditional which says that IF G (say, certainty) is a legitimate ground of skepticism for claims based on what intuitively seems to be relatively weak evidence for some claim, THEN G is also a legitimate ground of skepticism for claims based on what intuitively seems to be stronger evidence for some claim. I will assume that this conditional is restricted to claims about the way the world is, that it is not about mathematical or other claims about what is necessarily true.

This conditional can still be used to support the Skeptical Young Earthers because the claim that there is excessive, unnecessary suffering in the world is a claim about how the world is, just as much as the claim that the earth was created recently. Further, the ground that the standard Skeptical Theist bases his skepticism about excessive, unnecessary suffering upon is G* = (roughly), if God exists, for all we know, he would have reasons beyond our ken for allowing, or not preventing, all the suffering we see. Because the Skeptical Young Earthers base their skepticism upon G*, too, according to the conditional I offered above, it follows that we are in no position to judge that the earth was not created recently. I take the claim that we are in no position to judge that the earth was not created recently to be absurd. The basis of the Skeptical Theists' skepticism leads to absurd results and so should be rejected.

Skeptical Theists try to undercut the argument from evil against the existence of God. I have argued that their attempt is unsuccessful. But there is another strategy that theists might adopt: accept the moral premise in the argument from evil, argue that God exists, and conclude that there really is not excessive, unnecessary suffering. This has been called the G. E. Moore shift since Moore tried to defeat skepticism about the external world by arguing that we know we have hands and so know that the competing skeptical hypotheses are false. The skeptic argued that we cannot rule out the skeptical hypotheses and so we do not know we have hands. Moore turned the skeptic's argument on its head by arguing that we do know that we have hands. Theists might try something similar with the argument from evil.

## III. THE G. E. MOORE SHIFT

### *III.1 Alvin Plantinga*

According to Plantinga, warrant is what must be added to true belief to get knowledge. Someone might think that warrant then must be justification plus some anti-luck "fourth condition" to handle Gettier cases where a person has a justified true belief but lacks knowledge. But Plantinga's account of warrant does not require justification if justification is understood to be a function of evidence and evidence is taken to depend on some internal mental state. For Plantinga

> ...a belief has warrant *if* it is produced by cognitive faculties functioning properly (subject to no malfunctioning) in a cognitive environment congenial for those faculties, according to a design plan aimed at truth.[6]

He also says,

> ...a belief has warrant for me *only if* (1) it has been produced in me by cognitive faculties that are working properly (functioning as they ought to, subject to no cognitive dysfunction) in a cognitive environment that is appropriate for my kinds of cognitive faculties, (2) the segment of the design plan governing production of that belief is aimed at the production of true

6 Alvin Plantinga, *Warrant and Proper Function* (OUP, 1993), ix-x; my italics. See also the last page of this book (237) for a nearly identical formulation and pp. 19 and 46, quoted below.

> beliefs, and (3) there is a high statistical probability that a belief produced under those conditions will be true.[7]

In the first quotation, Plantinga offers sufficient conditions for warrant; in the second, necessary ones. In what he calls a "first approximation," he offers both necessary and sufficient conditions of warrant and in his Preface (p. x) notes that he intends to thereby capture the central or core concept of warrant.

> ...to a first approximation, we may say that a belief B has warrant for S *if and only if* the relevant segments (the segments involved in the production of B) are functioning properly in a cognitive environment sufficiently similar to that for which S's faculties are designed; and the modules of the design plan governing the production of B are (1) aimed at the truth and (2) such that there is a high objective probability that a belief formed in accordance with those modules (in that sort of cognitive environment) is true; and the more S believes B the more warrant B has for S.[8]

Plantinga believes that people have a *sensus divinitatis* that can satisfy his conditions of warrant when functioning properly in an appropriate environment, etc. Plantinga reports that when looking at a flower, a beautiful sunset, or majestic mountains, he sometimes immediately forms the belief that God created them; when he is ashamed of what he has done, that God disapproves of his action. If these beliefs are produced by his *sensus divinitatis* in a congenial epistemic environment and the other conditions of warrant are met, Plantinga's view implies that his beliefs have warrant. If it is true that God exists, Plantinga will know that God created the flower, etc., and can thereby know by deduction that God exists (if God created the flower, he exists).

Of course, according to Plantinga's theory, if there is a *sensus leprechaunitis* and someone forms the belief that there are leprechauns upon, say, looking at shamrocks in a congenial epistemic environment, (e.g., on the campus of The University of Notre Dame), etc., his belief that there are leprechauns will have warrant. Further, if there are leprechauns, according to Plantinga's theory, he will know there are. This seems absurd. If the person has no reason to think that he has such a sense, his belief does not have warrant, nor does he know that there are leprechauns if there are.

Plantinga's theory of warrant is an externalist theory because for him warrant is not a function of evidence understood in terms of a subject's be-

7 Plantinga, *Warrant and Proper Function*, 46; my italics.
8 *Ibid.*, 19; my italics.

ing in some internal mental state. Well-known examples against reliabilistic epistemic externalism include Laurence BonJour's example of Norman and Keith Lehrer's example, Truetemp. Norman is a reliable clairvoyant who lacks any evidence or reason to believe that he has such a cognitive power.[9] Then one day he comes to believe that the President is in New York on the basis of his clairvoyant powers. Unbeknownst to Truetemp, a type of thermometer has been implanted in his head during brain surgery that produces reliable beliefs about the temperature (originally about the ambient temperature and in a later essay by Lehrer, about the temperature of Truetemp's brain).[10]

Norman and Truetemp seem to be counterexamples to Plantinga's proper functionalism since they seem to satisfy his conditions of warrant but, intuitively, lack knowledge and even justification for what they believe. However, Plantinga thinks a defeater module is part of our properly functioning cognitive system and that,

> Truetemp has a defeater for his belief in the fact that (as he no doubt thinks) he is constructed like other human beings and none of *them* has this ability; furthermore, everyone he meets scoffs or smiles at his claim that he does have it.[11]

Something similar could be said of Norman.

### *III.2 Andrew Moon*

In a recent article, Andrew Moon argues that certain sorts of background beliefs serve as defeaters in cases like Norman and Truetemp. Alpha-beliefs are beliefs about what one is able to know in certain circumstances; beta-beliefs are beliefs about what *members of one's species* can know in various conditions and one's belief that one is of that species.[12] Moon thinks that Norman

9 See Laurence BonJour, *The Structure of Empirical Knowledge* (HUP, 1985), 41.

10 Lehrer's original example appeared in his *Theory of Knowledge* (Westview Press, 1990), 163–64; the more recent version is in Keith Lehrer, "Proper Function vs. Systematic Coherence", in *Warrant in Contemporary Epistemology*: *Essays in honor of Plantinga's Theory of knowledge*, ed. Jonathan L. Kvanvig (Rowman & Littlefield, 1996), 31–33. The later version is offered explicitly by Lehrer as a counterexample to Plantinga's view.

11 Alvin Plantinga, "Respondeo", in *Warrant in Contemporary Epistemology*: *Essays in honor of Plantinga's Theory of knowledge*, ed. Jonathan L. Kvanvig (Rowman & Littlefield, 1996), 333. His italics on "them." Plantinga does say something similar about Norman in note 48, 377.

12 Andrew Moon, "How to Use Cognitive Faculties You Never Knew You Had", *Pacific Philosophical Quarterly* 99, no. 6 (2018), esp. 259.

and Truetemp do not know what they are at least tempted to believe because they should believe that they are human beings and that human beings do not have the ability to know these things in the way that they have come to believe them (seemingly "out of the blue"). While Norman's and Truetemp's beliefs are reliably produced, they are defeated because they should not believe that the sources of their beliefs are reliable. They should either believe that they are not reliable or withhold judgment about the reliability of their sources. Justification and knowledge require non-defeat, not just reliable production, and the relevant beliefs of Norman and Truetemp are defeated on Moon's account.

I believe that an example I call Truenorth can avoid both Plantinga's and Moon's objections to Norman and Truetemp. Truenorth has a natural internal compass that makes him reliable in his judgments about compass direction. You can blindfold Truenorth, spin him around and, with the blindfold still in place, ask him what direction is north. He will always give the correct answer. But Truenorth has never confirmed that he has the ability to tell compass directions with his eyes closed; he has never put it to the test. He also lacks evidence as to whether others have, or lack, this ability. The issue has never come up.

Imagine that one day Truenorth is at a party and people are bragging that they can tell what direction is north with their eyes closed, though none of them has ever put it to the test either. They decide to see if their boasts are baseless. They draw lots to see who will go first and Truenorth wins. They spin him around and with the blindfold still in place ask him to point north. He does and, of course, he is right. Intuitively, he is not justified in believing, nor does he know, that the direction to which he pointed is north. He has no reason to believe that he can tell which direction is north with his eyes closed but also no reason to believe that he can't.

Suppose we expand Plantinga's view to encompass justification, not just warrant and knowledge, as Moon proposes. What does his view, when coupled with Moon's account of defeat, imply? That Truenorth was justified in believing, and knew, which direction was north? On Moon's account of defeat, Truenorth's justification and knowledge would be defeated if EITHER he *should* believe that the source of his belief is unreliable OR *should* at least withhold judgment about whether it is reliable.

Sometimes Moon writes as if what you *should* believe about the reliability of the source of your belief is both a function of whether you are epistemically

accountable for your beliefs and what in fact your alpha- and beta-beliefs are.[13] If we assume that Truenorth is old enough to be epistemically accountable and that he has no alpha-beta beliefs about the reliability of his sense of compass direction, then it's not true that *relative to his beliefs about reliability* he *should* either believe that this source is unreliable or *should* suspend judgment about its reliability. He has no beliefs about his reliability when it comes to compass directions. So on Moon's account of defeat, Truenorth's belief that he pointed north would not be defeated. On Plantinga's account, a person is justified in believing something if the belief has been reliably produced in the appropriate circumstances, etc., and there are no defeaters. So Truenorth would be justified in believing, and even know on Plantinga's theory, that he pointed north. That result is counterintuitive since Truenorth has no evidence that his belief stems from a reliable source.

Perhaps Moon should not link what a person *should* believe about the reliability of a source of belief to what she in fact believes. Then he might be able to make the case that Truenorth *should* withhold judgment about the reliability of the source of his beliefs about compass directions. After all, he has no evidence that this source is reliable, even if also no evidence that it is not. In that case he *should* withhold judgment about its reliability.

But this account of why Truenorth *should* withhold judgment appeals to internal evidence which he lacks. It would be unconvincing if Moon argued that Truenorth *should* withhold judgment because there is a reliable defeater faculty whose output is the belief: withhold judgment about the reliability of the source of your beliefs that a given direction is north! For if Truenorth has no evidence that his defeater faculty is reliable, why should he accept its output?[14] Its deliverances would come just as much "out of the blue" as Norman's and Truetemp's.

13 I base this claim on what Moon says about the first two scenarios he offers about Sally, a woman that possesses a *sensus divinitatis*. See Moon, "How to Use Cognitive Faculties You Never Knew You Had", 265–66.

14 Harmen Ghijsen offers a proper functionalist's account of defeat in terms of properly functioning monitoring mechanisms that prevent people from accepting false beliefs produced by their cognitive faculties. The objection I raise in the text will apply to his account of defeat. See Harmen Ghijsen, "Norman and Truetemp Revisited Reliabilistically: A Proper Functionalist Defeat Account of Clairvoyance", *Episteme* 13, no. 1 (2016).

Moon's account of defeat is in terms of what a person *should* believe about the reliability of the source of his belief. And what a person *should* believe about that is either a function of what she in fact believes or it is not. If it is a function of what she in fact believes, Moon won't be able to fend off the counterexample that Truenorth represents. If it is not a function of what the person in fact believes, it is either a function of some externalistically reliable source that outputs judgments about the reliability of sources of belief or, alternatively, of some internalistic evidence (or the lack of it) that supports the belief that the person *should* withhold judgment about the relevant reliability. To hold that it is some externalistically reliable source of reliability judgments begs the question. Why think that this sort of reliability can determine what a person is justified in believing if it seems that it can't in the case of Truenorth's beliefs about what direction is north?

Moon tries to remain neutral between internalism and externalism by offering a sense of "should" that does not presuppose one view over the other.[15] But the issue over whether Truenorth is justified in believing what he does turns on whether internalism or extermalism about justification, and derivatively about knowledge, is correct. If "should" is left vague in an account of defeat in an attempt to accommodate both sides, the real issue is obscured. Everyone has the intuition that Truenorth is not justified in believing, and does not know, that he has pointed north. The best explanation is that is because he lacks evidence that he has a reliable sense of direction, even though his sense of direction is in fact a reliable source of his beliefs. It does not help to introduce higher-level reliable faculties whose outputs are judgments about a source's reliability. The same question arises at this higher level about the justification for believing the relevant outputs about reliability.

A person like Moon's Sally who has a properly functioning *sensus divinitatis* is like Truenorth: because they lack evidence that the source of their beliefs is reliable, neither is justified in believing, nor knows, what they believe on the basis of that source. Having a properly functioning *sensus divinitatis* is not enough to yield knowledge, or even justified belief, that God exists. For that, we would at least need evidence that we have such a sixth sense, just as Truenorth needs evidence that he has a reliable internal compass for his beliefs about what direction is north to be justified and to be instances of

15 Moon, "How to Use Cognitive Faculties You Never Knew", 256–59.

knowledge. Plantinga's theory of knowledge will not allow him to execute a G. E. Moore shift to counter the argument from evil.

### *III.3 Bayes' Theorem: likelihoods and priors*

There has been a lot of discussion between theists and atheists that involves appeal to Bayes's Theorem. Suppose we let *e* stand for the evidence people have; *h* a hypothesis to explain that evidence*; k* relevant background evidence or knowledge, and P for the probability of some hypothesis. Then Bayes' Theorem says:

$$P(h/e\wedge k) = P(h/k)/P(e/k) \text{ x } P(e/h\wedge k)$$

$P(h/e\wedge k)$ is called the posterior probability of the hypothesis *h* on the evidence *e* and our background knowledge, *k*. $P(e/h\wedge k)$ is called the likelihood of the evidence *e* on the hypothesis *h* and background knowledge, *k*.[16] $P(h/k)$ is called the prior probability of the hypothesis *h* on background knowledge *k*. Finally, $P(e/k)$ is called the prior probability of the evidence *e* on background knowledge *k*.

To illustrate how Bayes's Theorem might be applied, suppose we are looking at a painting that is painted in what I will call "the typical van Gogh style." Suppose, further, that our background knowledge implies that there are 1,000 paintings in that style and that van Gogh painted 100 of them. Suppose that 90% of the time van Gogh paints in that styles so $P(e/Hvg\wedge k) = 0.90$. Then $P(Hvg/e\wedge k) = 0.90 \text{ x } 100/1{,}000 = 0.09 = 9\%$ probability that the relevant painting was painted by van Gogh.

Imagine that we know that there is a van Gogh forger named van Faux who can paint in the van Gogh style but only does that 50% of the time. Then, assuming we know on background evidence that van Faux painted 900 of the 1,000 paintings in the van Gogh style, the probability that van Faux painted the painting in question would be: $P(Hvf/e\wedge k) = 0.50 \text{ x } 900/1{,}000 = 0.45 = 45\%$. So the painting in question was probably painted by van Faux despite the fact that van Gogh more frequently paints in the van Gogh style than van Faux (90% vs.50% of the time). We can't ignore the fact that van Faux painted

16 Richard Swinburne says that the likelihood of the evidence on a hypothesis and background knowledge represents the predictive or explanatory power of that hypothesis. See his *The Existence of God* (OUP, 2004), 56–57. Hereafter, relevant citations in the text will be to this book.

a lot more paintings in the van Gogh style than van Gogh himself (900 vs. 100 paintings in that style) when deciding how likely it is that the painting we are looking at was painted by van Faux rather than van Gogh.

Philosophers of religion appeal to Bayes's Theorem to argue about the probability that God exists given all the evidence we observe in the world, which includes both good and bad actions and events. Richard Swinburne argues that there are two kinds of explanation: scientific and personal. Scientific explanation involves laws of nature, L, operating in certain conditions, C, to bring about E. If there are gas fumes in the air and someone lights a match, given the chemical laws of nature, an explosion will occur. Laws of nature can serve to explain not only particular events but also other laws of nature, as Newton's laws of motion and gravitation explain the laws of planetary motion, and Einstein's General Relativity explains Newton's laws.[17] On the other hand, personal explanations refer to intentions, beliefs, and powers: what explains my getting something out of the refrigerator is that I intended to get something to eat, believed that there was something to eat in the refrigerator, and had the power to walk to the refrigerator and open it.

Scientific explanations can explain what goes on in the universe but not why it exists and exists with the regularities we observe it to have. If the universe came into existence, then the universe itself cannot explain its coming into existence. On the other hand, if it has always existed, this infinitely old universe cannot explain why it manifests the regularities that it does rather than some others.[18] Swinburne argues that a personal explanation can be given of there being a universe and its manifesting regularities. It is good for there to be rational creatures with significant freedom to affect their futures. So a good God would choose to have a universe with such creatures in it and for that universe to be governed by regularities so those creatures can use their reason and freedom to make plans to act now in order to bring about certain states of affairs in the future.

17 Swinburne, *The Existence of God*, 81–82.

18 Swinburne cites Leibniz who compares an infinite universe in time to infinite copies of some geometry text. Even if every such book came about through someone copying its predecessor, there remains a question why there are infinite copies of *this specific geometry text* and not of some other geometry book, or even of some book not on geometry. See Swinburne, *The Existence of God*, 143.

So the choices are between an explanation of the existence and nature of the universe in terms of God's creation or accepting these things as brute facts. Swinburne does not endorse the Principle of Sufficient Reason that says that everything must have a reason why it exists and exists in the way that it does. He thinks that every explanation must terminate in some brute fact, but that we should accept an explanation if it is the best explanation of certain phenomena. He thinks that if God exists, that is a brute fact, though it is necessarily true that *if* he exists, he exists at every moment of time (he is eternal). Because God's creation and sustaining of the universe is a good explanation of why it exists and exists in the way it does, we should accept that explanation. We should not stop with the brute fact that the universe exists even if the God-explanation of its existence itself introduces a brute fact, namely, the existence of God.

In general, Swinburne thinks that what makes a hypothesis a good explanation of some phenomena is its explanatory fit (or power) and its intrinsic (or *a priori*) probability. These correspond to what are called the likelihoods and prior probabilities of a hypothesis, and which appear on the right side of Bayes's Theorem. For Swinburne, a hypothesis' intrinsic probability is a function of its simplicity, and its simplicity is,

> a matter of it postulating few (logically independent) entities, few properties of entities, few kinds of entities, few kinds of properties, few separate laws with few terms relating few variables, the simplest formulation of each law being mathematically simple.[19]

The hypothesis that God created the universe with the regularities that we find in it is a simple hypothesis on these criteria because God is just one entity and there is only one entity of that kind. In addition, the properties of God are few and simple: God is all-knowing, all-powerful, wholly good and perfectly free in the sense that he is not subject to any outside causal influences (94-95). As Swinburne says in summary,

> I conclude that theism postulates one person of a very simple kind–a person who is essentially omnipotent, omniscient, and perfectly free and eternal.[20]

19 *Swinburne, The Existence of God*, 53. The formula of gravitational attraction, $g$, between two bodies with masses $m_1$ and $m_2$ that are distance $r$ apart is: $g = (m_1 \times m_2)/r^2$. Swinburne argues that a formula with $r$ in it is simpler if $r$ is raised to some integer rather than to some decimal or other power (see 56)

20 *Swinburne, The Existence of God*, 105–6.

What needs to be questioned is whether the criteria Swinburne offers of simplicity, and therefore, in turn, of what makes an explanation a good one, are correct. It doesn't seem that a universe with one million grains of sand is relevantly simpler than one with a billion, and similarly for a universe with one million instances of some property and another with one billion instances of that property. But it does seem right to say that a universe with fewer *fundamental* entities (say, subatomic particles) and fewer *fundamental* properties (say, being located somewhere in space and time and having "basic" powers) is simpler than one with more.

While Swinburne may include things on his list of considerations relevant to simplicity that should not be there, he also excludes some that should be there. It is possible to find in Peter Lipton's book *Inference to the Best Explanation* about eight different considerations that he thinks make one hypothesis a better explanation of some phenomena than another, other things being equal.[21] One of them has to do with whether the hypothesis contains a detailed account of the mechanisms by which it claims that A causes B. The hypothesis that opium causes people to fall asleep because of its dormitive powers fails on this criterion because it does not provide any details of the causal mechanisms by which opium produces sleep.

And the God-hypothesis to explain the creation and sustaining of the universe fails in the same way. How does a non-embodied being like God interact with the physical universe? One might call this the mind-body problem writ large. Further, while it seems possible to learn what causes opium to have dormitive powers, it seems impossible to learn how God acts on the physical world. And because of God's infinite mind and understanding, we will never be able to understand why he causes, or allows, certain things to happen, say, the suffering of little children. It is a mark against a hypothesis if it posits reasons why things happen where it is impossible for us to grasp those reasons. Swinburne says that,

> The prior probability of a hypothesis is, we saw, a matter of its fit with background knowledge, its simplicity, and its lack of scope. Fit with background knowledge in the case of the hypotheses of personal explanation considered so far is a matter of postulating persons similar to known persons in their history and physiology, their basic powers, their intentions,

21 Peter Lipton, *Inference to the Best Explanation* (Routledge, 2004), 59, for the example about opium.

> and their ways of acquiring beliefs. We saw that the less similar to known persons (namely, humans) were the postulated persons, the less probable it was that they exist.[22]

Nevertheless, Swinburne thinks that the best explanation of certain phenomena involving books, chairs, inkwells, etc., flying about his room could be the activity of poltergeist, which are non-embodied agents and so quite different from human persons. The explanatory power of the poltergeist hypothesis might counterbalance the low prior probability of their being non-embodied persons so that in the end it is reasonable to believe that poltergeist are causing the books, chairs, etc., to fly about the room.

Swinburne argues that we cannot appeal to fit with background conditions when it comes to the God-hypothesis because it "purports to explain everything logically contingent (apart from itself)."[23] But it does seem relevant that the existence of the intentions, beliefs, and powers of persons we know about seem dependent on the physical, upon brain activity, and not vice versa. Even if we can conceive of situations where it would be reasonable to believe that there are non-embodied poltergeist, the fact that there aren't any gives us some reason to think that mental life is dependent on the physical and not vice versa. So while it might be reasonable to believe in some sort of pantheism where God is to the physical universe as we are to our bodies, it seems less reasonable to believe in theism, which assumes that while God can (somehow) act on the physical universe, his intentions, beliefs, and powers are not dependent upon the physical universe.

Further, if the evidence were different, it might be more reasonable to believe in the God of theism. For instance, if everyone all over the world at the same time heard an inner voice urging them to do good and avoid doing bad (say, that encouraged them to love one another, to end all wars and the

22 *Swinburne, The Existence of God, 65*. Swinburne is thinking that a more specific hypothesis is more probable because it makes a weaker claim. "All crows in North America are black" is a weaker claim than "All crows on earth are black" because it is entailed by that latter claim. However, he grants that greater scope can add to a hypothesis' simplicity and so counterbalance the loss in probability. Peter Lipton thinks that, other things being equal, a hypothesis' larger scope makes it a better explanation of phenomena than one that lacks scope. That's why Newton's laws of motion and gravitation are better hypotheses than Kepler's law of planetary motion to explain the motions of the planets.

23 *Swinburne, The Existence of God, 66*. Recall that Swinburne thinks that the existence of God is logically contingent but necessarily true that *if* he exists, he exists at all times (see 96).

production of weapons of mass destruction, to cease polluting the planet, etc.), then the best explanation of this phenomena might include the existence of God.[24]

But given the alternatives of the existence and nature of the physical universe being a brute fact, pantheism, and theism, it seems most reasonable to accept the first option. The mind-body problem and the seeming primacy of the physical count against theism; the lack of relevant specific evidence in favor of pantheism counts against it. The view that matter is contingent but must take the form that it has in our universe, and so must display the same fundamental laws of nature, if it exists, is comparable to Swinburne's view that God is logically contingent but if God exists, he must exist at all times and have the essential properties of being all-knowing, all-powerful, wholly good, and perfectly free. But the God-hypothesis is no simpler than the version of physicalism I just stated and introduces an extra entity and a mystery regarding how God interacts with the physical world.[25] All things considered, it is more reasonable to believe this form of physicalism than theism or pantheism.

Finally, suppose I am mistaken and Swinburne is right that *leaving aside the existence of evil*, it is more reasonable to accept his form of theism than physicalism. But how does he handle evil? The answer is that he offers a theodicy, not a defense, that is, he offers reasons that he thinks God would have for allowing all the suffering we see. The theodicy rests on his claim that certain things are intrinsically good and that the world is all things considered a better world with these goods and the evils we see than with neither. Among the intrinsic goods, Swinburne lists: (1) having significant freedom and responsibility, which requires having a choice between good and wrong where one is

24 This example, of course, alludes to Hume's famous example in his *Dialogues on Natural Religion* of the "voice in the clouds" which says something similar to everyone all over the world. I make the voice an inner voice because the message would be garbled if at some moment it were spoken aloud in each person's native language, unless suddenly everyone came to understand the one language in which it is spoken.

25 Not simpler on balance because the various fundamental constants that are referred to in the fine-tuning argument cannot be expressed as simple integers and so according to Swinburne's criteria are less simple than if they could be. But the preference for "simple *numbers*" might be a pragmatic, rather than an epistemic, reason for accepting a formula of some law. It is easier to work with such formulas, but it does not seem that such formulas are more likely to be true than ones not expressible in terms of simple numbers. Even if Swinburne were right in thinking it is an epistemic reason, that reason would have to be weighed against other reasons for accepting physicalism which holds that the existence of the universe is a brute fact.

strongly tempted to do what is wrong; (2) the opportunity to acquire certain dispositions and emotions such as compassion, courage, sympathy, and patience (and we might add, forgiveness) (240-45); (3) the opportunity to engage in rational inquiry and to base your beliefs on a rational response to evidence (245-57); (4) a natural love of God (a natural desire to please God); (5) natural affection for fellow rational beings (and animals); (6) a natural desire to increase our well-being; and (7) being of use to others. In addition, Swinburne holds that because God is the author of our being, he has rights over us that we do not have over our fellow human beings, which include the right to harm, or allow harm, (within limits) to them that we lack (257-63).

Because God is wholly good, Swinburne believes that God would not create a person whose life is, on balance, bad for him (259; 266, note 8). Swinburne argues that people might think that someone who suffers greatly so that others may benefit leads a life that is, on balance, bad for him, but he says that is because they fail to take account of how great a good the good of being of use to others is. Still, there seem to be babies who live short miserable lives and whose lives are on balance bad for them (266, note 8).[26] And there are innocent adults who are tortured to death, and others who are wracked with the pain of disease at the end of their lives. That segment of their lives is bad on balance for them. So on Swinburne's criterion of what a good God can do or allow, wouldn't he end these lives earlier to avoid the needless suffering that makes the last segment of their lives bad on balance for them?

He grants that some people (especially babies, 266, note 8) may have earthly lives that are bad on balance for them, and so grants that if God exists, there must be an afterlife where they are compensated so that their total life (earthly and afterlife) is not bad on balance for them. He is inclined to think that the life of a fawn who is burned in a forest fire and suffers for days before dying has an earthly life that is good on balance for it once the good of being of use is taken into account and it is assumed that "the pains of animals are less than ours" (262). So no afterlife is needed to compensate fawns. But fawns who linger on and suffer but are never observed by anyone (other animals or humans) won't

26 I raised this objection to Swinburne's view in my review of his *Providence and the Problem of Evil* (Clarendon Press, 1998) in Bruce Russell, "Review of Providence and the Problem of Evil", *Philosophical Books* 41, no. 3 (2000). I also noted how his view seems to require a place for fawns in the afterlife and that it implies that it is better to have a world of nuclear weapons with people tempted (to some extent) to use then than a world without them.

be of use to anyone on earth, and it begs the question of God's existence to assume that they will be of use to him. Further, the assumption that fawns suffer less than us *from burns* because they are "further down the evolutionary scale" seems unjustified (see his remark about this, 236, 262). So it looks like if God exists, there is also an afterlife for fawns and other similar animals.

Swinburne does not think that adding the saving hypothesis of an afterlife makes what he calls "bare theism" unlikely because a good God would create an afterlife anyway for people whose earthly life was good on balance so that they could enjoy union with him. While adding an auxiliary hypothesis complicates a theory, and so lowers its prior probability, Swinburne argues in this case it does not lower it much (265-66). But if an afterlife where either immaterial souls exist or we exist in some physical resurrection world is independently unlikely, it does lower a lot the probability of either "bare theism," if it by itself entails the existence of an afterlife, or "expanded theism" that adds to "bare theism" the postulate of an afterlife. And on background knowledge, we should think that an afterlife of immaterial souls, or one where the matter of our bodies is transported to a distant resurrection world, is pretty unlikely. The idea of immaterial souls or the transportation of matter quickly across long distances in an imperceptible way does not fit well with our background knowledge. Even if substantive background knowledge cannot be introduced when we are considering "big" hypotheses that are to explain everything physical or everything logically contingent (except God), it can be introduced when it is a narrower issue like the existence of an afterlife.

I have been discussing Swinburne's solution to the problem of innocent people and animals whose earthly lives are bad on balance for them. But he does not think that this is the central problem that the problem of evil poses. He says that the crux of the problem of evil "is the quantity of evil–both the number of [innocent] people (and animals) that suffer and the amount that they suffer" (263; I added "innocent" because that makes the problem even harder). Couldn't all the intrinsic goods that Swinburne lists be realized with a lot less suffering of innocents? Isn't there *excessive* unnecessary suffering as I argued at the beginning of this essay?

One of Swinburne's answers is that there has to be lots of natural evil (suffering caused by natural causes) so that everyone can have the opportunity to show compassion and sympathy with those who suffer (243). But there seems to be way more than is necessary to provide this opportunity. We all see ads

on TV of starving children and mistreated animals, and we see and hear of the devastation caused by hurricanes, tsunamis, earthquakes, fires, and disease. The opportunities for compassion and sympathy are endless, and we are vividly aware of them.

Swinburne *also* thinks that suffering is an incentive for people to engage in rational inquiry (given our natural fellow feeling and interest in our own well-being) and to form beliefs about its causes and ways to prevent it based on their rational response to the evidence they gather. There has to be a lot of suffering to produce what he calls "sure knowledge" because it must be based on "induction from many past instances" (249), and the same could be said if people are to form rational, justified beliefs about the causes of, and the ways to prevent, suffering.

Swinburne thinks that the suffering of humans and animals provides *some* reason to believe that God does not exist. In a way that is good, for if the evidence in favor of God's existence were overwhelming that would compromise significant freedom given the natural love of God that humans have. If people knew for sure that God exists, their desire to please him and to act in their own self-interest would make a free choice between good and wrong impossible (269). There is just the right amount of suffering to inspire people to investigate its causes and methods of prevention and just enough to create some doubt about God's existence (presumably even among those who have read Swinburne's arguments for God's existence) to make it possible for people to freely choose to do good or wrong, given our natural love of God and desire to be liked (269).

Not everyone will agree with Swinburne's weightings of what he calls intrinsic goods, nor whether so much suffering of innocents is required to realize them. In earlier essays I have described actual cases, one where a little girl in Flint was brutally raped, beaten, and then strangled to death and another where a little girl in Detroit was killed by her parents pouring water down her throat for not eating properly (and then coaching their other children to take the fall). Perhaps some people read these stories and took measures to prevent such horrible actions from happening in the future. So their suffering and deaths may have been of use to others. But was their "being of use to others" really that good *for the little girls*? Wouldn't it have been better *for them* not to have died in the way they did? Also, is it really better as Swinburne argues to have the choice between good and great wrong where there is strong

temptation to do wrong than to have that choice where the wrong is not so great or the temptation not so strong? On Swinburne's view it is better to have nuclear weapons and people who have a strong temptation to use them than not, but that seems false.

Suppose we agree with Swinburne that rational inquiry and thinking is good in itself so that God would not want to impart at birth the knowledge that results from the exercise of our rational faculties. But couldn't we have learned the lessons that such inquiry imparts about suffering with much less evidence of suffering? How much evidence do we need to justify us in believing that beating, cutting, and burning people and animals causes suffering? How much evidence do we need that camp fires and cigarettes cause forest fires and that those that come from these sources can be prevented by banning camp fires and smoking in dangerously dry areas? Contra Swinburne, being of use is not as good for the person who is being used as he says, nor is the kind of significant freedom that he finds most valuable. The exercise of our rational faculties of inquiry and inference does not require all the suffering of innocents that we observe. Far from there being so much evidence of God's existence that it compromises our choice between doing good or wrong, there is so little that we should believe that there is excessive, unnecessary suffering and conclude that God does not exist.

The Skeptical Theists tried to offer an undercutting defeater of the argument from evil; Plantinga and Swinburne can be seen as offering an overriding one. Neither attempt is successful. More arguments for the existence of God can be given, and more objections to the argument from evil. It's a long road that leads to the conclusion that atheism is the most reasonable view to hold on the total evidence. I hope what I have contributed here is more than just a single step along that long journey.

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