

# GOD, EVIL, AND SUFFERING

Daniel Howard-Snyder

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## 1. EVIL AND SUFFERING

Not long ago, an issue of my local paper reminded its readers of Susan Smith, the Carolinian mother who rolled her Mazda into a lake, drowning her two little sons strapped inside. It also reported the abduction and gang rape of an eleven-year old girl by eight teenage members of Angelitos Sur 13, and the indictment of the "Frito Man" on 68 counts of sexual abuse, a forty-five year old man who handed out corn chips to neighborhood children in order to lure them to a secluded location. More recently, the headlines announced the untimely death of Ashley Jones, a twelve-year old girl from nearby Stanwood, Washington--she was raped and bludgeoned to death while babysitting her neighbor's kids.

These are particularly disgusting, appalling cases of evil, all the moreso because children are the victims. One might think that such cases occur only very rarely. I wish that were so. ABC News recently reported that in the United States a child dies from abuse by a parent or guardian every six hours. One is left with the disturbing thought: if that is how frequently a child *dies* from abuse in the US, how frequently are children *merely* abused? A sinister side-effect of familial abuse is that abused children are much more likely to abuse their own children; and so the attitudes and habits of abuse pass from generation to generation, a cycle of evil and suffering from which it can be enormously difficult to extricate oneself.

Frequently, a child's suffering is unintentionally caused by those who love them most. Alvin Plantinga recalls a story about

a man who drove a cement mixer truck. He came home one day for lunch; his three year old daughter was playing in the yard, and after lunch, when he jumped into his truck and backed out, he failed to notice that she was playing behind it; she was killed beneath the great dual wheels.<sup>1</sup>

And who can forget the scorching summer of 1995, when a Kentucky professor, after dropping off his wife at work, drove to school, parked, and absentmindedly left his children in the car for the day, the windows closed; they slowly baked to death.

Such suffering and evil is wrought by human hands. There are other sources, however. A visit to just about any major hospital reveals children born with grossly debilitating genetic abnormalities that impair them so severely one can't help but think that their lives are not worth living. Moreover, children are not exempt from the horrors resulting from earthquakes, tornadoes, hurricanes, famine and the like.

Of course, adults suffer horribly and undeservedly as well, although their innocence is more frequently questionable. And the numbers are staggering: six million snuffed out in the Holocaust, thirty million in the slave trade, forty million in Stalin's purges, a third of Europe's population during the Plague, several million starved just in my lifetime: the list goes on and on. And what about nonhuman animals? We in the enlightened West like to think we are more civilized than our predecessors in our relations to the beasts. We regard the once common practice of beating animals as barbaric, for example. Nevertheless, we don't think twice about hunting for sport, or how the livestock and poultry we don't need to eat got on our plates, or how the musk got into our perfumes. But that's nothing compared to the suffering doled out by

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<sup>1</sup> "Self-Profile," in Peter van Inwagen and James E. Tomberlin, eds, *Alvin Plantinga* (Dordrecht: Reidel, 1985), 34.

Nature. It boggles the mind to consider the billions upon billions of animals stalked and killed or eaten alive by predators or who died slowly and painfully, decimated by disease, famine, or drought.

So it is that we must face a sobering fact: the history of our planet is a history stuffed with undeserved, horrific evil and suffering.

## **2. TWO PROBLEMS**

Evil and suffering is thought to pose a problem for Christians or, more generally, for theists, those who believe in a God who is at once all-powerful or almighty, all-knowing and perfectly good. What sort of problem is it? As it turns out, there are two problems, not one.

### **2.1 The practical problem of evil and the theoretical problem of evil**

When we or our loved ones suffer horribly, we may not understand why God permits it; we may see no good it serves; we may be unable to make any sense of it. "This can be deeply perplexing," writes Plantinga, "and deeply disturbing. It can lead a believer to take towards God an attitude he himself deplors; it can tempt him to be angry with God, to mistrust God, to adopt an attitude of bitterness and rebellion."<sup>2</sup> In the grip of such rage, we might raise our fists toward heaven and curse Him; alternatively, we might repress our feelings, become forlorn, and eventually give in to despair. A completely different stance toward evil and suffering, however, merely considers whether it is evidence that there is no God, or evidence that theistic belief is unwarranted, irrational, unreasonable, dubious or otherwise intellectually suspect.

We have here two complex mixes of attitudes and feelings, and two corresponding problems. In the first case, the problem is how to maintain or restore a relationship with God in the face of suffering and tragedy while being true to ourselves and completely open and honest with Him about how we feel. In the second case, however, the problem is to figure out whether evil and suffering is good reason to believe that the theistic God does not exist. In the first case, our relationship with God is strained; in the second, we want to know whether a certain sort of argument succeeds. The first is best conducted with the aid of a discerning pastor, priest or mentor, on one's knees; the second requires the help of those trained to evaluate evidence and arguments, pen in hand and lots of paper nearby. The first is an intensely practical problem; the second is "merely"--as they say--theoretical.

Note two facts about these two problems. First, although we can separate them in the abstract, *they typically come together in our experience*. For example, reflecting on an impressively powerful argument from evil, I may begin to suspect that there is no God after all; my doubt may turn to fear or a sense of estrangement from God; consequently, I might become angry or forlorn. On the other hand, it is relatively easy--almost natural--for a believer to move from experienced suffering to outright disbelief. Angry at God for allowing me or my loved ones to suffer, I might lash out at Him, perhaps subconsciously; and what better way to do that than to refuse Him His due and to demand that He play by my rules, rules that make good sense, not just to me but to all fair-minded people. In this frame of mind, I might put God on trial for negligence and gross incompetence, and there, in the courtroom of my inner self, marshal the evidence against Him. If I leave matters here--internally rehearsing my case against God, week after week, month after month--it may not be long before I wake up one morning to find the verdict delivered: what was once anger, pain and fear is now cool, calculated disbelief.

Nevertheless--and this is the second important fact--although the theoretical and practical problems of evil come together in our experience, we must recognize that they are distinct

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<sup>2</sup> "Self-Profile," 35.

problems and, consequently, that *a solution to one might not be a solution to the other*. The sorts of things we need to do to deal with the practical problem *might not* be relevant to solving the theoretical problem; conversely, the sorts of things we need to do to deal with the theoretical problem *might not* be relevant to solving the practical problem.

## **2.2 The importance of distinguishing the two problems**

Now, why have I distinguished the practical and theoretical problems of evil and cautioned against our expecting a solution to the one to be a solution to the other? For two reasons. First, because in what follows I will focus on the theoretical problem, not the practical problem, and second (and more importantly), what I have to say about the theoretical problem is not intended to help with the practical problem--thus, even if what I have to say below fails on that score, that is no strike against it.

No doubt many readers will be dismayed by my choice of focus. I am in sympathy with them. After all, evil and suffering are too real to be dealt with on a merely theoretical level. We need practical advice and wisdom, not speculative hypotheses; we need something we can apply to our lives, something we can use, something to nourish the heart and soul, not the head. In short, we don't need a bunch of "philosophical twaddle" about God and evil, as the pastor at my mother's church put it recently.

There is an important truth lurking here; and some equally important confusions. First, the important truth. For many of us, there are times when even if we understood completely why evil and suffering are not evidence against the existence of God, it would not matter to us. Many of us are faced with the deterioration of our bodies and minds; we are afraid and in constant, sometimes excruciating, pain; we see our loved ones crushed by cruelty or Nature's firm hand. We need solace, not syllogisms. To be offered philosophical speculation in times like these is to be offered a cold stone when only warm bread will do. So far, so good. Many people, however, go on to infer from this important truth that it is a waste of time to examine carefully whether evil is evidence against theism and to learn exactly why it is not. They infer that a deep understanding of the complexities involved in solving the theoretical problem is irrelevant to what they and others really need.

The premise here is true: for many people, there are times when "philosophical twaddle" about God and evil cannot meet their needs. But it does not follow that there is no time when such philosophical reflection would greatly benefit them; moreover, even if some people would gain nothing from such reflection, it doesn't follow that nobody would. There are two points to underscore here. First, while for many of us there are times in our lives when "philosophical twaddle" about God and evil seems nothing more than a bunch of irrelevant nonsense, for most reflective people there will come a time when almost nothing else will be more important. And, second, even if we ourselves will never benefit from knowing exactly how to solve the theoretical problem of evil, there may well be other people who will, perhaps even people we will meet. Let me illustrate both of these points briefly.

Many believers are torn up about evil and suffering precisely because it seems to be such strong evidence against their belief in a loving God. They find it difficult to love God with all their heart, soul, strength and mind--but *especially* their minds. If such people come to understand why evil is no reason to believe that God does not love them--if they truly come to grips with the theoretical problem of evil--they may well be on their way to finding the comfort *they* need; consequently, they may gain the strength to respond aptly to the horrific evil and suffering they encounter in their own lives and in the world at large. Many unbelievers, on the other hand, doubt the credibility of basic Christian belief on account of the evil and suffering in

the world. If they can be convinced that evil is not evidence against the existence of God, one of the most severe intellectual obstacles to their coming to faith may be removed.

So, from a Christian point of view, we need to take quite seriously the efforts that follow in this chapter even if they are "merely" theoretical.<sup>3</sup>

### 3. "WHY DOES GOD PERMIT EVIL AND SUFFERING?"

I begin with a simple observation: the theoretical "problem" of evil is often expressed in the form of a pointed question. God is able to prevent evil and suffering and He would know about them before they happened, right? Moreover, since He is unsurpassably good, surely He would not permit them just for the fun of it. So *why doesn't He prevent them?* Typically, however, the question is much more pointed: Why did God permit the children in the Oklahoma City bombing to suffer like that? And why did he permit my father--an honest, hardworking man--to wither away prematurely with leukemia? And even if there is a good reason for Him to permit some evil and suffering, even a great deal of it, *why so much?*

Some people readily answer such questions. They might say, for example: "God permits evil because if He didn't, we'd have no freedom; we'd be just like robots. And the same goes for the children in Oklahoma City and your father. If God had prevented the bombing, the freedom of Timothy McVeigh would have been jeopardized; and if God had prevented your father's suffering, even just a little, then he would not have been free to respond to it virtuously." Others, including devout Christians, deem such answers "tepid, shallow, and ultimately frivolous," as Plantinga puts it. We'll delve into these matters shortly; for now I want to make a different point.

Questions about why God permits evil and suffering--*when asked in a rhetorical "so there!" tone*--disguise arguments. For example, the pointed questions in the paragraph before last disguise the argument that since you can't say why God would permit evil in general or the Oklahoma City bombing or my father's painful, untimely death, there is no reason. This presupposes that you would be in a position to identify reasons that would justify God, if there were any. But isn't it perfectly sensible to ask why we should assume that? By disguising his argument in the form of a question, the questioner may be trying to evade his responsibility to defend his answer to our question. So, when people rhetorically ask you, "Why does God permit evil?," bring the disguised argument and its assumptions into broad daylight and assess them, as we shall in section 6 below.

### 4. THE BASIC ARGUMENT FROM EVIL

A terminological note: the word "evil" can be used in many ways. An old-fashioned way uses it to refer to wickedness--"evil", strictly so called--and suffering and pain and anything else bad that happens. This use of the word has a venerable history; discussions of the theoretical problem of evil throughout history use the word "evil" in this way. In what follows, however, I will use it to refer specifically to *undeserved, intense* suffering and pain as well as *horrific* wickedness. I'm not interested here in suffering that people deserve, or in bumps and bruises or white lies and mild temper tantrums. I will focus on the stuff that turns our stomachs.

My thesis is simple: every argument from evil fails. Unfortunately, I haven't the space to consider every argument, so I will restrict myself to some popular ones and offer objections that will apply to others. I begin with the most basic argument.

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<sup>3</sup> For more on the practical problem of evil, see Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Lament for a Son* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1987), C.S. Lewis, *A Grief Observed* (New York: Bantam Books, 1961), and Harold Kushner, *When Bad Things Happen to Good People* (New York: Avon Books, 1981). Much of the insight of these authors is rooted in a resolution of the theoretical problem.

#### 4.1 The basic argument stated

The most straightforward way to put the argument from evil is like this:

1. If God exists, then there is no evil.
  2. There is evil.
  3. So, God does not exist. (from 1 & 2)
- 3 follows from 1 and 2, and 2 is surely true.<sup>4</sup> That leaves premise 1. Is it true?

J.L. Mackie famously argued for premise 1 like this:<sup>5</sup>

- 1a. A perfectly good being always prevents evil as far as he can.
- 1b. An omnipotent and omniscient being can do anything possible.
- 1c. So, if a perfectly good, omnipotent and omniscient being exists, he prevents evil completely. (from 1a & 1b)
- 1d. If God exists, then He is perfectly good, omnipotent and omniscient.
- 1e. So, if God exists, He prevents evil completely. (from 1c & 1d)

It follows from 1e that if God exists, then there is no evil--which is premise 1 of the basic argument.

Is Mackie's argument a *good* argument? That depends on whether all the premises are true. Are they?

Most theists accept 1d, but some say it is false: they say we need to give up the omnipotence and omniscience of God. Unfortunately, this tact is not as attractive as it first appears. For we would have to give up much more than omnipotence and omniscience to help out here. We would have to say God lacks power and knowledge to such an extent that He *can't* prevent evil. And there lies the trouble. For how could God have enough power and knowledge to create and sustain the physical universe if He can't even prevent evil? How could He be the providential governor of the world if He is unable to do what even *we* frequently do, namely prevent evil? So if we take this route, it seems we would have to jettison more than we bargained for. Perhaps we would do better to look elsewhere.

Consider 1a. Would a perfectly good being *always* prevent evil as far as he can? Suppose he had a reason to permit evil, a reason that was compatible with his never doing wrong and his being perfect in love, what I'll call a *justifying reason*. For example, suppose that if he prevented evil completely, then we would miss out on a greater good, a good whose goodness was so great that it far surpassed the badness of evil. In that case, he might not prevent evil as far as he can, for he would have a justifying reason to permit it. Proponents of the basic argument typically respond by modifying 1a to read: "A perfectly good being always prevents evil as far as he can *unless there is a reason that would justify him in permitting it.*"

But notice that altering 1a in this way means that Mackie's argument must be altered in other ways. For if a perfectly good being might permit evil for a justifying reason, then God might do the same, in which case 1c and 1e must be similarly altered. Consequently, we must also alter the basic argument in two ways, indicated by italics below:

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<sup>4</sup> St. Augustine and the medieval Christian tradition generally would object that premise 2 is false. For, *strictly speaking*, there *is* no evil but only lack of good just as, *strictly speaking*, there are no holes but only lack of dirt in certain places. Unfortunately, this objection doesn't get to the heart of the matter. Premise 2 can be easily rephrased as "Sometimes sentient beings suffer intensely and undeservedly, and sometimes persons act in horribly wicked ways", which does not imply that there *is* evil. Augustinians are invited to make the appropriate substitutions throughout the text.

<sup>5</sup> "Evil and Omnipotence," *Mind* (1955), collected in Robert and Marilyn Adams, eds, *The Problem of Evil* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990).

1. If God exists, then there is no evil, *unless there is a reason that would justify Him in permitting it.*
2. There is evil.
3. *There is no reason that would justify God in permitting evil.*
4. So, God does not exist.<sup>6</sup>

Notice the new premise, premise 3. This modified basic argument nicely brings the main issue to the foreground, namely, whether there is a reason that would justify God in permitting evil.

#### **4.2 The categorical ban on permitting evil**

Why suppose that there is no reason that would justify God in permitting evil? One answer is that it is wrong or unloving for *anyone* to permit evil under *any* circumstances.

This answer seems false. What if the only way to prevent horrible suffering is to permit less horrible but equally undeserved suffering to occur? Or, what if the only way to prevent horrible, undeserved suffering from befalling many others is to let fewer people suffer? Suppose you're a lifeguard and several swimmers are drowning. If you go after the one furthest away, you'll have to let three others nearby drown, but you can rescue the three nearby swimmers, provided you let the furthest one drown. In that case, it is neither wrong nor unloving of you to save the three and let the one drown. So it is false that it is wrong or unloving for *anyone* to permit evil under *any* circumstance.

Of course, God, unlike you, is omnipotent and omniscient. You can't get to all the swimmers; God can. One might assert, then, that the *only* reasons that justify us in permitting evil involve our impotence or ignorance. So while there may be circumstances in which it is neither wrong nor unloving for *us* to permit suffering, there can't be any for God since He is neither impotent nor ignorant. He can always bring about the greater good without permitting evil.

As plausible as this line of thought might initially appear, it fails. For even if God is omnipotent and omniscient, it does not follow that He can always bring about the greater good without permitting evil. God's power is limited to what is possible; not even an omnipotent being has the power to do what is absolutely impossible. Thus, *if* there were some greater good that *absolutely could not* occur unless evil were permitted, it might well figure in God's reason to permit evil.

Many Christians have a difficult time with sentences like "God's power is limited to what is possible". Two points might be helpful here. First, to say that God's power is limited to what is possible is not to say God's power is limited to what *we are able to do*, or to what *we think* is possible. Rather, it is to say that God's power does not permit Him to do what is *absolutely impossible*. Second, very few Christian thinkers have been willing to say that it is possible for God both to exist and not exist at the very same time, or that it is possible for a man to be a bachelor and married at once, or that the number 2 can be the only whole number between 1 and 3 and be odd--and for good reason. Such things are absolutely impossible. This is the same answer Christians usually give to questions like, "Why didn't God save us without sacrificing His Son?" and "Why can't God break a promise?" It shouldn't be surprising, therefore, to countenance the same answer to questions like "Why didn't God fulfill His purposes without permitting evil?" or "Why can't God bring about every greater good while still preventing evil?" Let's return to the main thread of thought.

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<sup>6</sup> Under the influence of objections like those we will consider in section 5, Mackie reformulated his 1955 argument in *The Miracle of Theism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982), chapter 9; see especially 154-55. Something close to Mackie's reformulation is the focus of section 6.

*If* there were some greater good that *could not possibly* occur unless evil were permitted, it might well figure in God's reason to permit evil. Of course, that's a big *if*. Is there a greater good that could not occur unless evil were permitted? Is there such a good that might figure in God's reason for permitting evil?

## 5. THEODICIES

There are several, interrelated attempts to justify God's permission of evil, to give reasons for His permitting evil. We call them *theodicies*. I'll sketch the more popular theodicies and evaluate the standard objections.

### 5.1 Punishment theodicy

God would be justified in *punishing evildoers* and suffering is a result of His punishing them.

*But what about undeserved suffering?*

While God is justified in punishing the wicked for their wrongdoing, much of the suffering in the world is *undeserved*. And no one can sensibly say that God would be justified in punishing those who don't deserve it. But might not *all* the suffering in the world be deserved? I doubt it. Nonhuman animals, very young children and severely impaired adults suffer immensely but do not deserve it since they are not *morally* responsible for their actions. They lack the requisite capacities for moral deliberation and awareness. Moreover, although many morally responsible persons suffer to a degree that is proportionate to their sins, many more do not. (This is one of the main lessons of the book of Job.) Finally, the punishment theodicy does not even begin to explain why God permitted wickedness in the first place.

So, while *some* suffering might be accounted for by divine punishment, it cannot explain the evil with which we are mainly concerned: undeserved suffering and horrific wickedness.<sup>7</sup>

### 5.2 Counterpart theodicy

Good and evil are like pairs of opposites or counterparts. If one exists so does the other. So, if there were no evil, its opposite--moral goodness--wouldn't exist. Thus, God would be justified in permitting evil since that's the only way there can be good.

*How can theists use this theodicy?*

One difficulty here is that, according to theism, God is unsurpassably morally good. Moreover, *He* could have existed without there being any evil. After all, what if He had never created anything? Then He would have existed and there would have been good--but there would have been no evil. So, according to theism, it's *false* that if there were no evil there would be no good.

*Difficulties for the Opposites Exist Principle*

Note that the most natural understanding of the claim that if one of a pair of "opposites" or "counterparts" exists, the other exists also is this:

If there is something that has a certain feature, F, then there is something that has the opposite feature, not-F.

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<sup>7</sup> Two notes: First, if we are reincarnated, then maybe, for all we know, apparently undeserved suffering really is deserved since it is punishment for evildoing in previous lives. But the Church has always rejected the doctrine of reincarnation. Second, a Christian can affirm that there is undeserved suffering without calling into question either the doctrine of inherited sin or eternal punishment.

Call this the *Opposites Exist Principle*. It implies that so long as there is something that has the property of being rectangular, there is something with the property of being nonrectangular. Likewise, so long as something has the property of being morally good, there is something with the property of lacking moral goodness, being not-good, you might say.

One difficulty here is that just as there are different ways of being nonrectangular (e.g., triangular and circular), so there are different ways of being not-good. One way is to be neither morally good nor evil, just neutral between moral goodness and evil. Hydrogen atoms and mustache hairs, for example, are neutral in this way. So even if the Opposites Exist Principle is true, it does not imply that if there is something that is morally good, then there is something that is evil (rather than being neutral). Furthermore, even if the Principle did imply that there is something that is evil, it would only require a speck of evil, not a world stuffed with it like ours is. A more important difficulty is that the Principle is false. After all, it is not impossible for there to be a world in which everything was immaterial. Moreover, something has the property of being a nonunicorn, namely you. And what's the opposite of that property? Being a unicorn. So, *if* the Principle is true, then there is something that has the property of being a unicorn, which is to say that there is at least one unicorn. Of course, there are no unicorns; thus, since the Principle implies that there are unicorns, it is false.<sup>8</sup>

Let's now consider some theodicies that have a better chance of explaining evil.

### 5.3 Free will theodicy

God could have created us so that there was no chance of us going wrong or being bad. If He had done so the result would have been splendid, but we would have missed out on a very great good, namely, self-determination. For one to be *self-determined* is for one to be free to a significant degree with respect to the sort of person one becomes, the sort of character one has--and that requires that one have it within one's power to be both good and evil. Lacking such freedom, we could not be deeply responsible for who we are, who we will become and whether we will manifest and confirm our character through the choices we make. Since the capacity for self-determination is such a great good and it requires that we be given considerable latitude with respect to harming ourselves severely, it is a reason that would justify God in permitting evil.<sup>9</sup>

*But why not block harm to others?*

One might object that development of my character requires only that my choices affect me, that is, that they serve to develop my character in one way or another. But couldn't God have arranged things in such a way that while my choices have an effect on me and my character, they have no effect on anyone else (or at least none of the bad ones has an effect on anyone else). For example, suppose I choose freely to steal from you. My choice can contribute to my being untrustworthy without my ever actually stealing since God can arrange things in such a way that I believe I stole even though I didn't. In a nutshell, self-determination doesn't account for the bad consequences for others of evil free choices.<sup>10</sup>

There are several replies to this objection, foremost of which are two.

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<sup>8</sup> Perhaps those who use the counterpart theodicy mean something very different. Perhaps they mean that we couldn't *know* one of a pair of opposites without knowing the other of the pair. Thus, we couldn't *know* good without knowing evil; and we couldn't *know* evil without there being evil; so, to know good, there has to be evil. Thus, God would be justified in permitting evil because without it we wouldn't know good. I leave as homework an evaluation of this argument.

<sup>9</sup> See Michael Murray's chapter xx for a more detailed development of the line of thought here.

<sup>10</sup> See Steven Boer's "The Irrelevance of the Free Will Defense," *Analysis* (1975), 110-12.

*Reply 1.* If God systematically prevents us from harming others yet permits us to have a significant say about the sorts of persons we become, then it will have to *look* to us as though we can harm others even though we can't. For if I know nothing I do can harm others, then I won't have the same opportunity to develop my character as I would if it seemed that I could harm others. But deception is incompatible with God's goodness, one might urge.

Unfortunately, this reply overlooks the fact that deception is not always wrong nor always unloving. (Just ask as any parent.) Perhaps preventing the horrific consequences for others of our free choices is as watertight a reason for deception as there can be. Then again, perhaps not. Let's look into the matter a little more closely.

If God were to arrange things so that none of the horrific consequences for others of our choices really occurred although they appeared to, then we--each of us--would be living a massive illusion. It would seem as though we were involved in genuine relationships with others, making choices that matter for each other, when in fact nothing of the sort really occurred. Our whole lives would be a charade, a sham, a farce; and we wouldn't have a clue. While such massive deception would not result in an utterly meaningless existence (we would still be self-determining creatures), it isn't obvious that such massive deception about matters so central to our lives would be permissible or loving.

*Reply 2.* A related reply agrees that self-determination does not justify God's permitting us to harm others, even if it does justify God's permitting us to harm ourselves. What other goods, then, would be lost if God were to give us the freedom only to affect ourselves? Well, as indicated in the last reply, we would have no responsibility for each other and we would not be able to enter into the most meaningful relationships; for we are deeply responsible for others and can enter into relationships of love only if we can both benefit and harm others.

This point deserves development. We are deeply responsible for others only if our choices actually make a big difference to their well-being, and that cannot happen unless we can benefit them as well as harm them. This seems obvious enough. Frequently missed, however, is the fact that a similar point applies to love *relationships*, as contrasted with loving attitudes and feelings. Two persons cannot share in the most significant relationships of love unless it is up to each of them that they are so related; this fact can be seen by considering what we want from those whose love we value most. Jean-Paul Sartre expresses the point like this:

The man who wants to be loved does not desire the enslavement of the beloved. He is not bent on becoming the object of passion which flows forth mechanically. He does not want to possess an automaton, and if we want to humiliate him, we need only try to persuade him that the beloved's passion is the result of a psychological determinism. The lover will then feel that both his love and his being are cheapened.... If the beloved is transformed into an automaton, the lover finds himself alone.<sup>11</sup>

Since those love relationships which we cherish most are those in which we are most deeply vested, in light of love's freedom they are also those from which we can suffer most. It simply is not possible, therefore, for us to be in relationships of love without (at some time) having it within our power to harm and be harmed in a serious fashion.

Something analogous might be said of our relationship with God as well. Suppose God wanted a relationship of love with some of His creatures, and so made some of them fit to be loved by Him and capable of reciprocating His love. Here He faces a choice: He could guarantee that they return His love, or He could leave it up to them. If He guaranteed it, they would never have a choice about whether they loved Him, in which case their love of Him would be a sham

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<sup>11</sup> *Being and Nothingness* (New York, 1956), 367, quoted in Vincent Brummer, *The Model of Love* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 160.

and He'd know it. Clearly, then, God cannot be in a relationship of love with His creatures unless He leaves it up to them whether they reciprocate His love. And that requires that they (at some time) have it within their power to withhold their love from Him. But, that cannot be unless they are able to be and do evil.<sup>12</sup>

Deep responsibility for others, relationships of love with our fellows and with God: if these were worthless or even meagerly good things, God would not be justified in permitting evil in order that we might be capable of them. But these are goods of tremendous--perhaps unsurpassable--value. And they are impossible in a world where our choices only have an effect on ourselves.<sup>13</sup>

*Why not create persons who always freely choose the good?*

Another objection is that, since God knows before creating how each of His creatures will act, He can make a world in which everyone *always freely* chooses the good. He is omnipotent, after all, and so He can create any world He pleases.<sup>14</sup> It follows that God can create a world with the great goods of self-determination, deep responsibility for others, and love *without* there being any evil at all. Thus, these goods cannot justify God's permission of evil.

*Reply.* Note that this objection relies on the thought that *if God is omnipotent, then He can create any world He pleases*. This is false. For if God creates free creatures, He must leave it up to them what world results from their choices. Let's develop this point briefly.

Out of all of the possible creatures God could create, suppose He aims to create me, and suppose He considers whether to make me free with respect to planting roses along Walhout Way, a little section of my garden. If He did, He would have to place me in a situation in which it is *up to me* whether I plant roses or refrain from doing so. Now, if He placed me in such a situation, either I would freely plant or I wouldn't. For the sake of illustration, suppose I would. Now imagine that God tries to make a world in which I freely *refrain* from planting. Can He? Not if He leaves it up to me whether I plant. For, given our supposition, if He left it up to me, I would *not* refrain; rather, I would plant. So, given that I would freely plant roses along Walhout Way if it were left up to me, God--even though omnipotent--cannot make a world in which I am in that situation and I freely refrain from planting roses. To make that world God would have to *make* me so that I refrain, in which case I would not *freely* refrain.

Therefore, the assumption made by this objection is false. If God creates free persons, He *cannot* create just any world He pleases, even though He is omnipotent. Which world results from His creative activity is, in no small part, up to His free creatures.

We can go further. For we can now see that, for all we know, it was not within God's power to create a world with persons who always freely choose the good. How could this be? Well, as we just saw, if God creates free creatures, then He can't create some worlds. In the example above, God cannot create a world in which I freely refrain from planting roses along Walhout Way. That's because I would freely plant if God left it up to me. Now, what if it were true that

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<sup>12</sup> A question arises: God enters into relationships of love, and yet He is not able to be or do evil; so why can't He make us capable of relationships of love while also making us unable to be and do evil? In response, some deny that God is unable to be or do evil. Others distinguish love at its best *for an essentially good divine being* from love at its best *for a creature made to enter into relationships of love*, and then argue that while the latter requires the ability to withhold love, the first does not. And there are other options as well.

<sup>13</sup> These themes are developed by Richard Swinburne in *The Existence of God*, chapter 11, and "Some Major Strands of Theodicy," in Daniel Howard-Snyder, ed, *The Evidential Argument from Evil* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996), 36-42.

<sup>14</sup> Mackie takes this line in *The Miracle of Theism* (Oxford, 1982), 164.

for *any* world that has at least as much good as ours and in which every person always freely chooses the good, no matter how God started things off, persons would freely go wrong at least as much as we (actual humans) go wrong? If that were true, then no matter how hard God tried, He simply could not create a world with persons who always freely choose good, at least not one with as much good in it as our world. And here's the rub: for all we know, maybe that's the way things are.<sup>15</sup>

This is a good place to observe that the free will theodicy is *not* to be confused with the cliché, "God doesn't *do* evil, we do. He just *allows* it. So He's not to blame, we are." This cliché, unlike the free will theodicy, assumes that if one does not *do* evil but only *allows* it, then one is not responsible for its happening. That's false. I may not cut off my daughter's fingers but only allow my son to do it; still, if he does it, I'm at least partially responsible.

*What about evil resulting from natural disturbances?*

One might object that the free will theodicy doesn't explain why God would permit *natural evil*, that is, suffering resulting from natural disturbances like earthquakes, disease, and famine--sources of evil other than free persons.

*Reply.* We might try to extend the free will theodicy to explain natural evil. For example, we might say that, contrary to appearances, such evil really is a *direct* result of the activity of free *nonhuman* persons, powerful evil angels intent on destroying God's creation and harming His creatures. Satan and his cohorts crumple the earth's crust causing volcanoes and earthquakes, they twist strands of DNA into destructive forms, they get inside animals and make them eat each other, and so on. This explanation, however, has questionable apologetic value since it presupposes there are angels, a thesis not accepted by most nonbelievers. Moreover, it flies in the face of our understanding of the natural causes of volcanoes, earthquakes, genetic mutation, predation and other sources of natural evil. A more plausible explanation is that natural evil results *indirectly* from free *human* choices. This line of thought has been sketched most recently in the context of the "natural consequences theodicy," which is worth considering in its own right as well. Let's take a closer look.

#### **5.4 Natural consequences theodicy**

Suppose God created humans so He might love them and they might return His love. In giving our ancestors the power to love Him, God gave them the ability to withhold their love. And that's what they did. As a consequence, they ruined themselves. Having turned from God, they began to harm one another. Moreover, the potentially destructive forces of nature became their foe since a consequence of separating themselves from God was the loss of their special intellectual powers to predict where and when natural disturbances would occur and to protect themselves from disease and wild beasts, powers dependent upon their union with God. The result is natural evil. This condition--their wickedness and helplessness--has persisted through all the generations, being somehow hereditary.

But God has not left us to our misery. He has instituted the means for us to become reconciled with Him and to undo our ruin. Each of us, however, must cooperate in the venture since the sort of regeneration required involves reorienting our deepest passions and appetites

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<sup>15</sup> A more thorough presentation of this sort of reply is in Plantinga's *God, Freedom and Evil* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1974), 32-44. Note that both the objection and the reply I gave presupposes that an omniscient being could know before creation what uncreated (merely possible) creatures would do if created them and left it up to them how to behave. Many theists deny this. See, e.g., Robert Adams, "Middle Knowledge and the Problem of Evil," *American Philosophical Quarterly* (1977), collected in *The Problem of Evil*.

away from our own power and pleasure and directing them toward Him. God could miraculously and immediately regenerate us but He doesn't because our love of Him would then be a sham. Unfortunately, our deepest inclinations so thoroughly turn us away from a proper love of Him that we will not fix ourselves without some sort of external impetus.

The problem God faces, then, is to get us to turn to Him for help while leaving us free in the matter. We will freely turn to Him, however, only if we see our wretched condition and become dissatisfied with it. There is no better way for us to come to see our condition and to grow dissatisfied with it than to permit its natural consequences, the pain and suffering and wrongdoing that our separation from Him has led to, and to make it "as difficult as possible for us to delude ourselves about the kind of world we live in: a hideous world, much of whose hideousness is quite plainly traceable to the inability of human beings to govern themselves or to order their own lives."<sup>16</sup>

An essential part of God's plan of reconciliation, therefore, is for us to perceive that a natural consequence of our attempting to order our lives on our own is a hideous world, a world with evil, including natural evil. Were God to intervene, He would deceive us about the hideousness of our living unto ourselves and He would seriously weaken our only motivation for turning to Him.

*What about the suffering of nonhuman animals?*

While the natural consequence theodicy may well account for God's permitting natural evil to befall human beings, it provides no reason for Him to permit natural evil to befall nonhuman animals.

*Reply.* To fill the gap, one might offer the "natural law theodicy".

### **5.5 Natural law theodicy**

In order to have a world with creatures who can choose freely, the environment in which they are placed must be set up in certain well-defined ways. One of these environmental requirements is that the world be governed by regular and orderly laws of nature. Why is this a requirement? Well, imagine a world in which nature was not governed by such laws. What would it be like? Simply put, there would be no regular relationship between the occurrence of one sort of event and another. Let go of the ball and sometimes it drops, sometimes it flies straight up, sometimes it does a loop and crashes through the window. Things would happen haphazardly. The world would be quite chaotic.

But why would this disrupt our ability to choose freely? Because without a great deal of order and regularity in nature we could not predict the effects of our choices, even in the slightest; but we can choose freely only if we can predict the effects of our choices, specifically their most immediate effects. To see the point here, imagine a world in which, despite our best efforts, things just happened haphazardly. Suppose I chose to give you a flower and a big hug to express my affection, but my limbs behaved so erratically that it was as likely that my choice would result in what I intended as that I would poke you in the eye and crush your ribs. Or suppose you were very angry with me, but the air between us behaved so irregularly that any attempt on your part to give me a piece of your mind was about as likely to succeed as rolling a pair of sixes twice in a row. If that's how things worked, then our choices would be related to the

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<sup>16</sup> Peter van Inwagen, "The Magnitude, Duration and Distribution of Evil: A Theodicy," *Philosophical Topics* (1988), collected in his *God, Knowledge and Mystery* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1995), 110. My presentation follows his closely. See also Eleonore Stump, "The Problem of Evil," *Faith and Philosophy* (1985).

world in the way they are related (in this world) to the results of pulling a lever on a slot machine. How things came out would be completely out of our control. They wouldn't be up to us. So we cannot be free unless we are able to predict the (immediate) effects of our choices. And that requires an environment that allows our choices to have predictable effects, that is, an environment that behaves in a law-like, regular, constant fashion.

But now the downside. The very laws of momentum that enable you to give and receive flowers will also cause a falling boulder to crush you if you happen to be under it. The same laws of thermodynamics and fluid dynamics that allow me to talk via air causing my vocal chords to vibrate also cause hurricanes and tornadoes. In general, the sources of natural evil which afflict nonhuman animals, and us--disease, sickness, disasters, birth defects, and the like--"are all the outworking of the natural system of which we are a part. They are the byproducts made possible by that which is necessary for the greater good".<sup>17</sup>

*What about worlds with different natural laws?*

The most wide-ranging objection to the natural law theodicy is that there are worlds God could have created which operate according to different laws of nature, laws which do not have sources of natural evil as a byproduct of their operation but which nevertheless provide a sufficiently stable environment in which we could reliably predict the effects of our free choices. Thus, God could have made free creatures without permitting natural evil, in which case we can't say that God might justifiably permit natural evil for the sake of freedom.

*Reply.* This objection presupposes that there are worlds with the requisite sort of natural laws, those that would provide a stable environment for freedom but which don't have natural evil as a side-effect. But no one has ever specified any such laws. Furthermore, the very possibility of life in our universe hangs on "a large number of physical parameters [that] have apparently arbitrary values such that if those values had been only slightly (very, very slightly different) the universe would contain no life," and hence no free human persons.<sup>18</sup> For all we know, the laws that govern our world are the only possible laws; alternatively, for all we know, there are very tight constraints on what sorts of adjustments in the laws can be permitted while retaining life-sustaining capabilities. Thus, for all we know, there *couldn't* be a world of the sort the objector appeals to: one suitable for free creatures to relate to each other but governed by laws which have no source of natural evil as a byproduct.

*Couldn't God prevent a lot of natural evil without undermining freedom?*

Suppose we distinguish (i) cases of natural evil where God's interference would contribute to the weakening of our ability to predict the consequences of our choices from (ii) cases of natural evil where God's interference would have no such effect at all. Clearly enough, there is a lot of natural evil where God's interference would have no ramifications for our freedom--indeed, mind-boggling much when we take into account evolutionary history or predation. Thus, the only reason given in the natural law theodicy for God's permitting natural evil fails to justify His

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<sup>17</sup> Bruce Reichenbach, *Evil and a Good God* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1982), 101. See also Richard Swinburne, "Natural Evil," *American Philosophical Quarterly* (1978), 295-301, and *The Existence of God*, chapter 11. C.S. Lewis takes this line in *The Problem of Pain* (New York: Macmillan, 1978, 21st printing), 30ff.

<sup>18</sup> Peter van Inwagen, "The Problem of Evil, the Problem of Air, and the Problem of Silence," in *The Evidential Argument from Evil*, 160. For more on the physical parameters in question, see Robin Collins, chapter x, and John Leslie, *Universes* (London: Routledge, 1989), chapters 1-3.

permitting (ii)-type natural evil, cases where His interference would have had no effect on our ability to predict the consequences of our choices.<sup>19</sup>

*Reply.* One might say that justice requires even-handedness. In that case, if God--who is perfectly just--intervenes to prevent the pain of this or that nonhuman animal in isolated circumstances, He would be obliged to act similarly in all cases of similar suffering. So, for example, if He were to prevent a squirrel deep in the Cascades from feeling pain as it hit a limb on its way down from the top of a towering Douglas fir, even-handedness would require Him to prevent me from feeling pain when the wind blew the car door shut on my thumb. But if God prevented the pain of *every* nonhuman animal in isolated circumstances, then even-handedness would require the same intervention for humans; such massive intervention would severely undermine the regularity of the laws of nature and hence eliminate our freedom.

While some people are happy with this reply, I am less sanguine. First, the Parable of the Laborers in the Vineyard suggests that God does not always treat us even-handedly. Of course, God is perfect in justice, and so whatever He does is consistent with justice. It follows that principles of justice do not require even-handedness--or that if they do, they can be trumped by other considerations in some cases. Second, even-handedness requires treating like cases alike. But the cases at hand are not alike. God's systematic prevention of natural evil in the human domain would result in a loss of human freedom and all that such a loss entails. If God systematically prevents humans from harm when they collide with solid objects, their freedom will be undermined. Similar intervention in the animal kingdom would have no such effect, provided it didn't happen around us. If God regularly prevents nonhuman animals from harm when they collide with solid objects, nobody's freedom will be undermined. Certainly this is a relevant difference, a difference a just God would take into account.

One final, general observation. In my reply to the objection that God could have created another world with different laws, I expressed skepticism about our ability to tell whether any such laws would result in a world that was hospitable to life. This reply is a double-edged sword. For, just as we cannot confidently affirm that there are hospitable worlds with different laws that would have no source of natural evil as a byproduct, so we cannot confidently deny it. My sense is that we have no idea how God would be justified in permitting the suffering of nonhuman animals at Nature's hand.

### **5.6 Higher-order goods theodicy**

Certain goods require evil: "higher-order goods," they are called. These include showing sympathy, compassion and generosity to the sick, the poor, and the marginalized. It is not merely *having* these virtues that is good. Developing, exercising and confirming them is of immense value, especially when it is difficult to do so since, in that case, a certain sort of courage, self-sacrifice and fortitude is displayed. Likewise, forgiving wrong done to us, making compensation for having wronged others, showing gratitude for help received, and rewarding those who have done well through serious adversity all require evil. Unless there is evil, there cannot be such higher-order goods. Since these goods are of such tremendous value and they require evil, they justify God's permission of evil.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> See William Rowe, "William Alston on the Problem of Evil," in Thomas Senor, ed, *The Rationality of Belief and the Plurality of Faith* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1995), 84-87; also see Quentin Smith, "An Atheological Argument from Evil Natural Laws," *International Journal for the Philosophy of Religion* (1991), 154-74.

<sup>20</sup> See Swinburne, "Some Major Strands of Theodicy," and *Providence* (Oxford: forthcoming); also see John Hick, *Evil and the God of Love* (New York: Harper & Row, 1978, rev ed).

### *Higher order goods don't require real evil*

True enough, we cannot respond with compassion *to the poor* unless there *are* poor people. We cannot exercise fortitude *in the face of hardship* unless we *are* going through rough times. We cannot forgive *another* unless another *has* wronged us. However, we can develop, exercise, and confirm such character traits in response to *simulated* poverty, hardship, and wrongdoing, "illusory evil," we might call it. There doesn't have to be *real* evil for that to occur. To see how this is possible, imagine a world in which persons were, unbeknownst to them, plugged into "experience machines," complex devices programmed to simulate reality perfectly (as in the popular Hollywood flick, *Total Recall*). Even though the poverty, hardship, wrongdoing, etc. that they "experienced" while on the machine was only illusory evil, they would still be able to respond to it in a virtuous fashion. And we can imagine the machine's program being sensitive to their responses. In that way, they would be able to develop, exercise and confirm their characters without there being any *real* evil to which they are responding. In general, only illusory evil is required for there to be higher-order goods; real evil is unnecessary. So God could have created a world with higher-order goods but without (real) evil.

*Reply.* The objection correctly states that higher-order goods only require illusory evil. However, if God were to set up a world in which there was only illusory evil to which we could respond in the formation of our character, something of immense value would be missing. No one would in fact help anybody else; and no one would be helped. No one would in fact be compassionate and sympathetic to another; and no one would receive compassion and sympathy. No one would in fact forgive another; and no one would be forgiven. No one would in fact make compensation to another; and no one would receive compensation. No one would in fact praise or admire their fellows for pursuing noble ends in the face of adversity; and no one would receive such praise and admiration. No one would in fact satisfy their admirable aims and desires; and no one would be their recipient. No one would in fact generously give of their time, their talents or their money to the poor; and no one would receive generosity from another. In short, if every opportunity for a virtuous response were directed at illusory evils, each of us would live in our own little "world," worlds devoid of any genuine interaction and personal relationships.

It seems, then, that if God were to fit us with a capacity to develop, exercise and confirm our characters *in the context of persons forming relationships with each other*, He must permit evil.

### **5.7 "The Reason"**

Let's take stock of what we've done in this section so far. Premise 3 of the modified basic argument from evil says there is no reason that would justify God in permitting evil. This premise is false. The reasons sketched above help us to understand how God would be justified in permitting *some* evil, perhaps even a great deal of it.

Still, the reasons sketched above do not allow us to see how God would be justified in permitting all the evil in the world. It isn't at all clear that any one of those reasons would justify God in permitting *so much* evil rather than a lot less. Nor is it clear that any one of them would justify God in permitting certain *instances* of horrific evil, say, the rape and bludgeoning to death of Ashley Jones. Nor is it clear that any one of them would justify God in permitting nonhuman animals to suffer in locations far removed from human concern.

One might beg to differ with me here. Perhaps one will insist that some of the reasons sketched above clearly *do* justify God in permitting so much evil and Ashley Jones' brutal rape and bludgeoning and the suffering of isolated nonhuman animals. Alternatively, one might say that even if we cannot see how any one of these reasons would *by itself* justify God in permitting

these things, they can be *combined* into a single reason that would clearly justify God. Let's look into these replies briefly, focusing on the second since in assessing it we will assess the first.

Suppose we lump together all the different reasons sketched above, and let's add any we know of that have been left out, e.g. identification with Christ's suffering.<sup>21</sup> Call the result *The Reason*. And let's focus on the enormous quantity of evil in the world rather than some particular horror or the suffering of isolated nonhuman animals. The question, then, is this: would The Reason justify God in permitting *so much* evil rather than *a lot less*?

Well, what would count as *a lot less*? A world without genocide would do. Or how about a world in which dementia didn't occur? Or perhaps a world in which the eboli virus never evolved. Take your pick. An omnipotent being could have easily prevented any of them. Suppose He had. Then *a lot less* suffering would have occurred. In that case, would the goods involved in The Reason have been lost or objectionably reduced? I can't see why. Suppose He had simply prevented us from ever having genocidal thoughts. Would we then have been unable to perceive the hideousness of living unto ourselves? Would we have lacked the requisite incentive to turn to God? Presumably not: our hideousness would still have been apparent in the vast panoply of nongenocidal activities we engage in.<sup>22</sup> What about self-determination, deep responsibility, relationships of love, higher-order goods, punishment, identification with Christ's suffering, union with God and so on, and their combination into one colossal good? We each need to answer this question for ourselves, but for my own part, on careful reflection I can't see how any of them by themselves or in combination would have been lost or significantly diminished if God had systematically prevented genocide (or, for that matter, dementia or the eboli virus or...). Thus, I can't see how The Reason *requires* God to permit so much evil rather than a lot less. That's why I can't see how The Reason would *justify* God in permitting so much evil.

No doubt, many Christians will disagree with me. But let us agree on this much: no authoritative Christian source holds forth that we should expect to be able to understand why God would permit so much evil rather than a lot less. Indeed, the biblical message is that we have no business thinking we can do anything of the sort. This is the lesson of the Book of Job and the words of the prophet (Isaiah 55: 8-10):

"For My thoughts are not your thoughts,  
Nor are your ways My ways," says the LORD.  
"For as the heavens are higher than the earth,  
So are My ways higher than your ways,  
And My thoughts than your thoughts."

We do others a grievous disservice to hold out to them in private or in the pulpit any expectation to understand why God would permit so much evil or any particular instance, expectations which we have no reason to believe will be fulfilled, expectations which when left unfulfilled can become near irresistible grounds for rejecting the faith. We are in the dark here. We can't see how any reason we know of, or the whole lot of them combined, would justify God in permitting so much horrific evil or any particular horror. We need to own up to that fact.

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<sup>21</sup> See, e.g., Marilyn McCord Adams, "Redemptive Suffering: A Christian Solution to the Problem of Evil," *Faith and Philosophy* 3 (1986), and "Horrendous Evils and the Goodness of God," *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 63 (1989), 297-310, collected in Adams and Adams 1990, 209-221.

<sup>22</sup> But wouldn't God be deceiving us about the natural consequences of our ordering our lives on our own? Perhaps. But *some* deception may be worth it. Think of it like this: Suppose that unbeknownst to us, God would not allow an all-out global nuclear war even if a natural consequence of our miserable condition included an ability to do it. Should we accuse Him of wrongful deception upon learning this? Hardly. We should get on our knees and thank Him for His great kindness.

## 6. THE ARGUMENT FROM AMOUNT

Premise 3 of the modified basic argument is false. But the reflections of section 5.7 might provide grist for other, better arguments from evil. For even if there is a reason that would justify God in permitting some evil, even a great deal of it, there may be no reason at all that would justify His permitting *so much*, or certain *particular instances* like Ashley Jones' brutal rape and beating. Indeed, that is precisely what many proponents of the argument from evil claim.

But wouldn't any such argument be doomed from the outset? After all, if there is a reason that would justify God in permitting some evil, wouldn't that *automatically* justify His permitting all the evil there is?

Not at all. One can have a reason to permit some evil, even a great deal of it, even if one has no reason to permit just any amount of it or no reason to permit some particular instance. Just because I have a reason to permit my son to treat his sister badly sometimes, I don't thereby have a reason to permit him to treat her badly all the time; nor do I thereby have a reason to permit him to push her off a cliff on some particular occasion. We'll have to think harder than this to respond to these (allegedly) better arguments from evil. Let's look into the matter more closely.

### 6.1 The argument stated

The argument from particular instances of horrific evil will go differently depending on which instance or instances are mentioned in the premises, but a typical version would go something like this:

1. There is no reason that would justify God in permitting Ashley Jones' brutal rape and bludgeoning to death.
2. If God exists, then there must be such a reason.
3. So, God does not exist.

The argument from amount can be put like this:

1. There is no reason that would justify God in permitting so much evil rather than a lot less.
2. If God exists, then there must be such a reason.
3. So, God does not exist.

In what follows, I will focus on the argument from amount. The argument from amount is not susceptible to objections that the argument from particular instances is susceptible.<sup>23</sup> It is also the argument that I have found most troubling. So in an effort to put (what I think is) the best argument forward, I'll stick to the argument from amount. What should we make of it?

Well, premise 2 is true. If there is an omnipotent and omniscient being who permits the evil in our world for no reason at all or whose purposes in permitting evil could have been achieved even if he had systematically prevented, say, all genocide or the plague, but he permitted them anyway, the enormity of his hideousness defies adequate description. Of course, the inference from 1 and 2 to 3 is impeccable. That leaves premise 1. Is it true?

Several arguments for it have been given in the literature, the best of which have come from a philosopher whom I admire very much, William Rowe. I do not have the space here to do

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<sup>23</sup> Specifically, I don't think we should accept premise 2 of the argument from instances. See Peter van Inwagen, "The Magnitude, Duration, and Distribution of Evil: A Theodicy," *Philosophical Topics* (1988), 167-68, "The Place of Chance in a World Sustained by God," in *Divine and Human Action* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1988), ed. Thomas V. Morris, 230ff, and "The Problem of Evil, the Problem of Air, and the Problem of Silence," *Philosophical Perspectives* (1991), note 11. All three essays are collected in his *God, Knowledge and Mystery*. See also my "The Argument from Inscrutable Evil," in *The Evidential Argument from Evil*, 286-89.

justice to his three arguments, but the objections to the one that I will assess here can, with a little ingenuity, be extended to the other two.<sup>24</sup>

## 6.2 Rowe's Noseeum Inference

Suppose that, after rummaging around carefully in my fridge, I can't find a carton of milk. Naturally enough, I infer that there isn't one there. Or suppose that, on viewing a chess match between two novices, Kasparov says to himself, "So far as I can tell, there is no way for John to get out of check," and then infers that there is no way. These are what we might call *no-see-um* inferences: we don't see 'um, so they ain't there!

Notice four things about noseem inferences. First, they have this basic shape: "So far as we can tell, there is no x; so, there is no x." Second, note that in each of the cases just mentioned, it is possible for the conclusion to be false even if the premise is true. Even though I rummaged through the fridge carefully and my vision is in tip-top shape, I could just simply miss the carton of milk. And even Kasparov can have an off day. Nevertheless--and this is the third point--in each case the argument is a strong one. Under certain conditions (about which I will say more shortly), our inability to see something makes it highly likely that there isn't anything of the sort we failed to see. Finally, it won't do to object to any particular noseem inference that even if the premise is true the conclusion *might* be false. For *every* noseem argument--even the strongest of them--is like that. When evaluating a particular noseem argument, we can't just write it off with a casual, "Ah! But there *might* be an x we don't know of even if so far as we can tell there isn't one." That's true, but it's irrelevant to the strength of the inference.

Now, in effect, I claimed in section 5.7 that, upon careful reflection on various theodicies, so far as we can tell, there is no reason that would justify God in permitting so much evil.<sup>25</sup> We might be tempted to infer that, quite likely, there is no such reason. In fact, Rowe bids us to do just that. We can put the resulting argument most simply like this:

Q. So far as we can tell, there is no reason that would justify God.

So, it is very likely that

1. There is no such reason.

What should we make of *Rowe's Noseeum Inference*, as I will call it?

Obviously enough, many noseem inferences are reasonable. And, just as obviously, many are *not*. For example, looking at my distant garden from my kitchen window, the fact that, so far as I can tell, there are no slugs there hardly makes it likely that there are none. Likewise, a beginner viewing a chess match between Kasparov and Deep Blue would be ill-advised to reason: "I can't see any way for Deep Blue to get out of check; so, there is none." Or imagine us listening to the best physicists in the world discussing the mathematics used to describe quantum phenomena or the theory of general relativity. Presumably it would be unreasonable for us to infer that, since we can't comprehend or grasp what they are saying, there is nothing there to be grasped. The crucial question, then, is this: what distinguishes the reasonable noseem inferences from the lousy ones?

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<sup>24</sup> I discuss the other arguments in "The Argument from Inscrutable Evil". The one I assess here is in "The Problem of Evil and Some Varieties of Atheism," *American Philosophical Quarterly* (1979), collected in *The Evidential Argument from Evil*. The other two are in "Evil and Theodicy," *Philosophical Topics* (1988), "Ruminations About Evil," *Philosophical Perspectives* (1991), and "The Evidential Argument from Evil: A Second Look," in *The Evidential Argument from Evil*.

<sup>25</sup> The attentive reader will note that I might as well have claimed here that, upon reflection on various theodicies, so far as we can tell, there *is* a reason that would justify God in permitting so much evil. Clearly understanding why that thought is relevant and devastating is the goal of the rest of section 6.

Consider the cases already sketched. Notice that it is quite likely that I would see a milk jug in the fridge if one were there, and it is very likely that Kasparov would see a way out of check if there were one. That's because Kasparov and I have what it takes to discern the sorts of things in question. On the other hand, it is not very likely that I would see a slug in my garden even if there were one there, at least not from my kitchen window. Nor is it very likely that a beginner would be able to see a way out of check for Deep Blue even if there were one since strategy at the grandmaster level can be very complex. And the same goes for our comprehending exceedingly complex mathematics: even if what the physicists were talking about did make sense, it isn't very likely that we would be able to understand it.

We can distill these reflections in the following principle, which marks an important difference between reasonable and unreasonable noseem inferences:

A noseem inference is reasonable only if it is reasonable to believe that we would very likely see (grasp, comprehend, understand) the item in question if it existed.

Applying this principle to Rowe's Noseem Inference, we get the following result:

The move from "So far as we can tell, there is no reason" to it is very likely that "There is no reason" is reasonable only if it is reasonable to believe that *we would very likely see or comprehend a reason, if there were one*.

Call the italicized portion *Rowe's Noseem Assumption*.

Now we are in a position to raise an important question. Is it reasonable to believe Rowe's Noseem Assumption?

### 6.3 Tooley's argument on behalf of Rowe's Noseem Assumption

Several reasons might be given here, but the most promising is: since it is very likely that we know of all the intrinsic goods there are,<sup>26</sup> it is very likely that we already know of all the reasons that would justify God's permission of evil; hence, if there were a reason, we would very likely see or understand it.

This argument hangs on the thought that "since it is very likely that we know of all the intrinsic goods there are, it is very likely that we already know of all the reasons that would justify God's permission of evil". We might well question the inference here,<sup>27</sup> but I will focus on the premise. Why believe that it is highly likely that we know of all the intrinsic goods there are? Michael Tooley offers this argument: very few states of affairs that human beings have discovered over the course of their history are intrinsic goods, and in the past three thousand years or so no intrinsic goods have been discovered at all; so, it is "improbable in the extreme" that there are intrinsic goods other than those we know of. Thus, we very likely know of every intrinsic good.<sup>28</sup>

Is this a good reason to believe it's likely that we know of all the intrinsic goods there are? I think not.

First of all, *at best* the premise that humans have discovered very few intrinsic goods and no new ones recently only shows that it is very likely that we have discovered all the intrinsic goods *we are presently capable of discovering*, just as, say, cats have discovered all the intrinsic goods they are now capable of discovering. Whether there are more intrinsic goods--specifically, ones

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<sup>26</sup> An *intrinsic* good is good in itself, not merely because it is a means to some other good. While it is debatable which goods are intrinsic goods, the most plausible candidates include pleasure, knowledge, freedom, love and justice, among others.

<sup>27</sup> The inference holds only if it is also very likely that we know of all the conditions of realization for those goods we do know of. See Alston, "Some (Temporarily) Final Thoughts on Evidential Arguments from Evil," in *The Evidential Argument from Evil*, 315ff.

<sup>28</sup> See "The Argument from Evil," *Philosophical Perspectives* (1991), especially 114-15.

we are presently incapable of grasping--is left wide open. Hence it is unreasonable to move from "humans have discovered very few intrinsic goods and no new ones recently " to "it is very likely that we have discovered all the intrinsic goods".

Secondly, this move is reasonable only if our human ancestors discovered the few intrinsic goods we know of over a short span of time. For suppose otherwise, that is suppose that our ancestors discovered intrinsic goods over the course of tens of thousands of years with several thousands of years inbetween when no goods were discovered. Such a sporadic progression in our discovery of intrinsic goods would not be surprising at all given that our species' ability even to conceive of them is rooted in structures in the human brain, structures which, for all we know, evolved sporadically over the course of tens of thousands of years. (It might help you to draw a time-line correlating distinct cerebral developments with distinct capacities to conceive of and appreciate different intrinsic goods.) *If* such a sporadic progression occurred, then we should *expect* to have discovered no goods for several millenia *even if there are many we don't know of*. So, the fact that humans have discovered few intrinsic goods and no new ones of late makes it likely that there are no others *only if* our ancestors discovered the goods we know of over a relatively short time in the history of our species.

But why should we assume *that*? The fact of the matter is that neither Tooley nor anybody else has any reason at all to believe it. There is no reason to think that our ancestors' grasp of intrinsic goods must have come in such a tightly bound package that they could not have grasped one without grasping them all. (In this connection reflect on the development in a child's awareness and appreciation of different intrinsic goods.) Moreover, given the scant archeological and paleontological evidence we have, it would not be surprising at all if the sort of sporadic progression indicated above occurred. I am not saying that we have reason to think that such a progression *did* occur. Rather, I am saying that--contrary to what Tooley assumes--the information we presently have gives us *no* reason to think that it *didn't* occur.<sup>29</sup>

Tooley's argument, therefore, fails to show that it is "improbable in the extreme" that there are intrinsic goods other than the ones we know of. So we cannot use it as a basis for believing that we would very likely discern a reason for God's permitting so much evil if there were one, which is just Rowe's Noseum Assumption.

More arguments might be given for Rowe's Noseum Assumption, but my general objection to Tooley's argument--namely, that it relies on assumptions that we are in no position to make reasonably--applies to them as well.<sup>30</sup> Let us turn, then, to what might be said *against* Rowe's Noseum Assumption.

## 6.5 Two strategies

I begin by distinguishing two strategies for arguing against Rowe's Noseum Assmption. We can get at them by way of comparing two questions.

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<sup>29</sup> Some readers might say that since we have good reason to think that the Earth is no more than 10,000 years old, we have good reason to deny the multi-millenia-long gaps my speculations rely on, not to mention the evolutionary anthropology it takes for granted. If this is your view, I invite you to reflect on what your audience in the apologetic task will think about these matters. In that case, you might think of my reply to Tooley as a way to show them how, *given their own views about pre-history*, they should reject Tooley's argument.

<sup>30</sup> I discuss some of them in "The Argument from Inscrutable Evil," 291-97. The best argument for Rowe's Noseum Assumption can be gleaned from Rowe's "The Evidential Argument from Evil: A Second Look," 276. See also my "Argument from Inscrutable Evil," 305-307. A proper assessment of that argument is beyond the scope of this chapter but can be found in *The Hiddenness of God: New Essays* (forthcoming), eds. Daniel Howard-Snyder and Paul K. Moser.

First: is it highly likely that I would see a slug in my garden from the kitchen window if one were there? Not at all. I know that slugs are relatively small and I know that the unaided human eye is not suited to see such small things at a hundred feet; moreover, my garden is over an acre large and, per usual, it's overgrown. So we have superb reason to think that it is *false* that I would very likely see a slug in my garden even if one were there. Now, another question: is it highly likely that extra-terrestrial life forms would contact us if they existed? The only answer suitable here is "How should I know?" If there were extra-terrestrial life forms, how likely is it that some of them would be intelligent enough to attempt contact? And of those intelligent enough, how many would care about it? And of those who are intelligent enough and care, how likely is it that they would have the means at their disposal to try? And of those with the means, how likely is it that they would succeed? I haven't the foggiest idea how to answer these questions. I can't even begin to say with even the most minimal degree of confidence that the likelihood is low or middling or high. I just don't have enough to go on. In that case, I should be *in doubt* about how likely it is that extra-terrestrial life forms would contact us if they existed. I should be of two minds, neither for it, nor against it. I should just shrug my shoulders and say "I don't know. I'm in the dark on that score."

There are two points to see here. First, in each case it is *not reasonable to believe* that the proposition in question is highly likely to be true, although for different reasons. In the first case, it is not reasonable to believe it is highly likely that I would see a slug in the garden even if there were one there because it is reasonable to believe that the proposition is positively *false*--indeed, because the garden is large and overgrown and I am viewing it from a distance, I have good reason to believe it is very, very likely that I would *not* see a slug. In the second case, however, it is *not* reasonable to believe that the proposition in question is *false*. Rather, for the reasons mentioned, we have good reason to be *in doubt* about how likely it is that we would have been contacted by extra-terrestrials if there were any. Indeed, we don't even have enough to go on to make a rough guess. As a consequence--and here is the second, absolutely crucial point--having good reason to be in doubt about the matter is good enough reason all by itself to think that it is *not* reasonable to *believe* that we would probably have been contacted. For how could it be reasonable for us to believe something about which we have good reason to think we are utterly in the dark?

Now let's apply these points to Rowe's Noseeum Assumption. To assess the reasonableness of believing that we would very likely see a reason that would justify God in permitting so much evil if there were a reason, we might consider whether Rowe's Noseeum Assumption is *false*. In that case, we might try to think of reasons to believe that it is very likely that we would *not* see a God-justifying reason. We would then be treating Rowe's Noseeum Assumption as I treated the proposition that it is very likely that I would see a slug in my garden from the kitchen window.<sup>31</sup> On the other hand, we might consider whether we should be *in doubt* about whether we would very likely see a God-justifying reason. This would be to treat Rowe's Noseeum Assumption as I treated the proposition that it is highly likely that extra-terrestrials would contact us if there were any. The crucial point to understand here is that even if *all* we have is good reason to be *in doubt* about whether it is highly likely that we would see a God-justifying reason, that's good enough reason to deny that it is reasonable to believe Rowe's Noseeum Assumption.

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<sup>31</sup> To show that Rowe's Noseeum Assumption is false we don't have to have reason to believe that it is *highly likely* that we would *not* see a God-justifying reason. All we really need is reason to believe that it is *no more* likely that we would see a God-justifying reason than that we would *not*. For if it is no more likely that we would see God-justifying reason than that we would not, then it is *not highly likely* that we would see a God-justifying reason. Our plates are full enough without pursuing this option here.

In what follows, I focus on reasons to be in doubt about Rowe's Noseeum Assumption rather than reasons to think it is false. Why? Because reasons to be in doubt are easier to come by and the only reasons I can think of for believing that it is false presuppose that God has informed us that we should expect to be unable to discern His purposes in permitting evil. (That seems to be the main lesson of the Book of Job, and it is arguably an implication of the doctrine of the Fall.) While such reasons provide the believer with grounds for denying Rowe's Noseeum Assumption, they do little for the nonbeliever since he does not accept the Bible as a source of information. Of course, we might try to convince him of the veracity of the Bible and then use it to argue that Rowe's Noseeum Assumption is false. But that is a circuitous route to a goal that can be more directly achieved. In what follows, I try to appeal to reasons that should be as compelling for nonbelievers as to believers; and since I don't know of any compelling reason for a nonbeliever to think that Rowe's Noseeum Assumption is false, I will stick to reasons for all of us--believers and nonbelievers alike--to be in doubt about Rowe's Noseeum Assumption.

## **6.6 Reasons to be in doubt about Rowe's Noseeum Assumption**

Several sorts of considerations have emerged in the literature. I'll mention three.

### *Alston's Analogies*

Rowe's Noseeum Inference involves two aspects which should make us wary of our ability to tell whether we would very likely see justifying reasons if there were any.

First, it takes "the insights attainable by finite, fallible human beings as an adequate indication of what is available in the way of reasons to an omniscient, omnipotent being." But this is like supposing that when I am confronted with the activity or productions of a master in a field in which I have little expertise, it is reasonable for me to draw inferences about the quality of her work just because I "don't get it". I've taken a year of university physics. I'm faced with some theory about quantum phenomena and I can't make heads or tails of it. Certainly it is unreasonable for me to suppose it's likely that I'd be able to make sense of it. Similarly for other areas of expertise: painting, architectural design, chess, music, and so on.

Second, Rowe's Noseeum Inference "involves trying to determine whether there is a so-and-so in a territory the extent and composition of which is largely unknown to us." It is like someone who is culturally and geographically isolated supposing that if there were something on earth beyond this forest, they'd likely discern it. It is like a physicist supposing that if there were something beyond the temporal bounds of the universe, we'd probably know about it (where those bounds are the big bang and the final crunch). All these analogies point in the same direction: we should be in doubt about whether we would very likely discern a reason that would justify God even if one were there.<sup>32</sup>

### *The Progress Argument*

Knowledge has progressed in a variety of fields of enquiry, especially the physical sciences. The periodic discovery of previously unknown aspects of reality strongly suggests that there will be further progress of a similar sort. Since, future progress implies present ignorance, it is very likely that there is much we are now ignorant of. Now, what we have to go on in charting the progress of the discovery of intrinsic goods by our ancestors is meager to say the least. Indeed, given the scant archeological evidence we have, and given paleontological evidence regarding the evolutionary development of the brain in *Homo sapiens*, it would not be surprising at all that humans discovered various intrinsic goods over tens of thousands of years dotted by several

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<sup>32</sup> William Alston, "Some (Temporarily) Final Thoughts on Evidential Arguments from Evil," 316- 319.

millenia-long gaps in which nothing was discovered. (Recall the point of my second reply to Tooley's argument in section 6.3.) Hence, given what we have to go on, it would not be surprising if there has been the sort of periodic progress that strongly suggests that there remain goods to be discovered. Thus it would not be surprising if there are goods of which we are ignorant, goods of which God--in His omniscience--would not be ignorant.

### *The Argument from Complexity*

One thing Mozart's Violin Concerto No. 4, fine coffee (notably, Starbuck's), and the best sorts of love have in common when compared to Chopsticks, Folger's, and puppy love is that each illustrates the fact that the goodness of a state of affairs is sometimes greater, in part, because it is more complex. Now, since immense, undeserved suffering and horrific wickedness is so bad, it would take correspondingly greater goods to justify God's permitting so much of it rather than a lot less. Hence, it would not be surprising if God's reasons have to do with goods whose complexity is beyond our grasp. It follows that it would not be surprising if God's reasons were outside our ken.

Of course, while complexity does not *always* adversely affect our ability to recognize value, it can and sometimes does. To defend this claim, I cannot show you a complex state of affairs whose value we recognize but whose complexity hinders such recognition. I must resort to more general considerations.

First, there is the general phenomenon of the complexity of something hindering our view of some important feature it has, e.g. the complexity of an argument hindering our ability to discern its validity, or the complexity of your opponent's strategy hindering your ability to discern that unless you move your knight to queen's side bishop 5, her next move is checkmate. But, more to the point, why can a child discern the literary merits of a comic book but not *Henry V* or *The Brothers Karamozov*? Why can a child clearly discern the aesthetic value of a toffee but not coho salmon served with a lemon-dill sauce, lightly buttered asparagus al dente and fine coffee? Why can a child recognize the value of his friendship with his buddy next door but not the full value of his parents' love for each other? Surely because great works of literature, fine cuisine and adult love involves much more than he is able to comprehend. And this is true of adults as well, as reflection on our progress in understanding the complexity of various things of value reveals. For example, periodically reflecting on the fabric of our relationships with those whom we most love and whose love we most cherish, we might well find strands and shades that when brought to full light permit us to see that love as more valuable than we had once thought. If the failure to grasp the more complicated aspects of our relationships can prevent a full appreciation of love's value, surely the failure to grasp the complexity of a state of affairs might well hinder us from discerning its goodness. Value is often veiled in complexity.

The three considerations presented here--Alston's Analogies, the Progress Argument, and the Argument from Complexity--*together* constitute a good reason to be in doubt about whether it is highly likely that we would see a reason that would justify God in permitting so much evil if there were a reason. This is *not* to say that these considerations jointly constitute a good reason to believe that it is highly likely that we would *not* see a God-justifying reason. We must not overstate our case. Nevertheless, they constitute good reason to think that it is unreasonable to believe Rowe's Noseum Assumption. Thus, to the extent that the argument from amount relies on Rowe's Noseum Inference, it fails.

### **6.8 On "copping out"**

Several people I have talked to about the argument from evil have responded to my deliberations in something like the following way:

You haven't given a reason that would justify God in permitting so much evil rather than a lot less. At any rate, you haven't given a reason that quite clearly would justify Him. And you admit it. You admit to failing to state any such reason. But that's just a cop out. After all, the problem of evil just *is* the problem of stating a justifying reason, a reason we can *see* to be justifying. And you've given up on that project. You've thrown in the towel. Put it this way: you are a Christian. As such you believe that there is a reason that would justify God's permission of so much horrific, undeserved evil in the world. So what is it? What *is* that reason? You have no answer. Your God stands accused of being a moral monster. You are defending Him, you say. According to you, He's perfect in love and power and wisdom. He could prevent each and every instance of evil and suffering with the mere thought "Be stilled". You can hardly expect us, then, not to convict, not after Buchenwald and Auschwitz, not after millions have suffered undeservedly and so horrifically. We need some answers. We need to know why He didn't stop more of it. But all you give us is a bunch of remote possibilities, a bunch of hypotheticals. "For all we know, there is a reason we're ignorant of." Well, sorry, but that's not good enough. Any defense lawyer who tried that stunt in court would be tossed out on his ear. Why should we treat you any differently?

There's a lot going on in this passionate speech, some of which I have already addressed. (See section 3.) But let me underscore three points here.

First, it is true that I have not tried to argue that there is a reason that would justify God in permitting so much evil rather than a lot less. I believe that our attempts at discerning any such reason fail. Still, I believe there *is* a reason. That's because I believe there is a God and, of course, if that's right, then there is a reason, even if I can't say what it is. But the fact that I believe that there is a reason and I can't say what it is cannot substitute for an *argument* against the existence of God--unless, of course, one assumes that I (or we) would probably be privy to such a reason if there were one, an assumption that I have argued we should be in doubt about. This leads to my second point.

The judicial analogy in the speech is importantly flawed. Crucial to our practice of trying suspected wrongdoers in a court of law is the sensible assumption that we are trying *one of us*, someone whose reasons for acting would tend to be accessible to us because they are the sorts of reasons available to humans generally. Without this assumption we'd have no grounds whatsoever for ruling out reasons we don't know of. When God is in the dock, however, we cannot presume to know quite well the sorts of reasons that *He* would be privy to. As I have argued, we are in the dark on that score.

Finally, nothing I have said in section 6 presupposes that God exists or that the Bible is divinely inspired or any such thing. If you are an atheist or an agnostic who still takes theism to be a live option, you should be able to appreciate the reasons I have given for thinking that we are in the dark about Rowe's Noseeum Assumption. If you think my arguments assume that there is a God or that the Bible is God's word, you haven't understood my arguments.

So, have I "copped out"? Well, that all depends. If the game we're playing is "Let's Make a Theodicy", then yes, I copped out. If, however, the game we're playing is "Let's Make an Argument from Evil", then it is not me who has copped out but those who make impassioned speeches like the one above.

## **7. THE ARGUMENT FROM EVIL AND EVIDENCE FOR THEISM**

No argument from evil I am aware of makes it likely or even reasonable to believe there is no God. Evil cannot carry that evidential load. But suppose I'm wrong. Suppose evil is evidence to think God does not exist. Does it follow that it's reasonable to believe there is no God?

Let's approach this question by way of analogy. Suppose you learn in your European Culture class today that 95% of the French population can't swim. That statistic is some evidence to think that Pierre, your friend from Paris, can't swim. Does it follow that you should believe Pierre can't swim? Of course not. What if you and Pierre spent last Saturday afternoon together swimming and chatting about the fine-tuning argument and Albert Camus' *The Plague*? Surely, in that case, it isn't reasonable for you to believe Pierre can't swim. Your experience with him is much better evidence to think he can swim even though the statistical evidence by itself makes it very likely that he cannot.

The same goes with evil and God. Even if evil is some evidence that there is no God, you might have much better evidence to think that God exists; in that case, it wouldn't be reasonable for you to believe there is no God.

This line of thought naturally leads to some weighty questions not the least of which are these: *is* the evidence for God significantly better than the evidence that evil provides against God? What *sources* of evidence are there? How should we *balance* the evidence for and against theism? Some answers to these and similar questions are presented throughout this book and in other sources.<sup>33</sup>

## 8. CONCLUSION

In section 2, I distinguished the practical problem of evil from the theoretical "problem" of evil. I focused on the latter. Evil constitutes a genuine theoretical problem only if there is a good argument from evil. There is no good argument from evil. So, there is no theoretical problem evil.

What relevance does this conclusion have for the task of apologetics? Several, but most notably this. God calls men and women to love Him with all their heart, soul, strength and mind. It is that last bit that to many inside and outside of the Church seems to be an insurmountable difficulty. Love God with all your *mind*. That's where apologetics comes in. Apologetics is largely the task of removing intellectual obstacles to the love of God. Evil and suffering have always appeared to be the most troublesome obstacle. The conclusion of this chapter is that, in reality, they are no obstacle at all to a fully intelligent love of God.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> In this connection, I recommend religious experience as a source. For detailed and sympathetic treatment of the topic, see William Alston, *Perceiving God: the Epistemology of Religious Experience* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1991), Keith Yandell, *The Epistemology of Religious Experience* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), and Alvin Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, forthcoming).

<sup>34</sup> I am grateful to the authors of this book and several others for comments on earlier drafts of this chapter, especially Terence Cuneo, William Davis, Mary Howard, Frances Howard-Snyder, Nate King, Trenton Merricks, Georgia and Tom Senor, and Michael Murray, the latter of whom exercised editorial virtues *in excelcis*. My thinking about God and evil has been shaped mostly by William Alston, Paul Draper, Alvin Plantinga, William Rowe, Peter van Inwagen and Steve Wykstra. On this occasion, however, I want to express my deepest gratitude to Steve. His work on our topic has not only enriched my understanding of something I care about deeply, it was for me the grain of sand God used to make the unfinished pearl that is my faith. I dedicate this chapter to Steve. I would be remiss if I failed to mention that I have relied heavily on two of his papers, both of which repay careful study: "The Humean Obstacle to Evidential Arguments from Suffering: On Avoiding the Evils of 'Appearance'," *International Journal for the Philosophy of Religion* (1984), collected in *The Problem of Evil*, and "Rowe's Noseeum Arguments from Evil," in *The Evidential Argument from Evil*.