CHAPTER 17

SKEPTICAL THEISM AND THE PROBLEM OF EVIL

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In philosophy of religion, some moves—like appealing to evil to support atheism or appealing to the appearance of design in nature to support theism—are very natural. They occur easily to non-philosophers in their reflective moments. Others (e.g. the ontological argument) are moves only a philosopher would think of. The skeptical theist's signature move is a very natural one. To see this, consider what would happen if you were addressing some freshman college students in an introductory philosophy class and you presented them with the following argument from evil:

(1) There are some evils that are such that humans can't think of any God-justifying reason for permitting them.[1]
(2) So probably there aren't any God-justifying reasons for permitting those evils.
(3) If God existed, he wouldn't permit these evils if there were no God-justifying reason for permitting them.
(4) Therefore, probably God does not exist.

If you asked them what they think of the argument, it's almost a certainty that someone in the class would point out that the inference from (1) to (2) doesn't seem persuasive: the fact that humans can't think of any God-justifying reason for permitting an evil, doesn't make it likely that there are no such reasons; this

is because if God existed, God's mind would be far greater than our minds, so it wouldn't be surprising if God had reasons we weren't able to think of. This very natural sort of response is precisely the move the skeptical theist is known for.

Some say the term 'skeptical theism' is a bad name for the view under consideration here. The main complaint is that one needn't be a theist to object to the above argument in the way skeptical theists do.[2] I agree that one needn't be a theist to object to the above argument in the way skeptical theists do. But I don't think that makes 'skeptical theism' a bad name for the view. Skeptical theism has both a skeptical component and a theistic component. The theistic component is just theism, the view that there exists an omnipotent, omniscient, wholly good, eternal person—i.e. a perfect being of the sort endorsed by the western monotheisms. The skeptical component advocates skepticism about the realm of potentially God-justifying reasons—a degree of skepticism that leads to a denial of the cogency of such noseeum inferences as the one above from (1) to (2). (Wykstra 1996: 126 calls this a 'noseeum inference' because it says that since we don't see 'um, they probably ain't there.) And although non-theists won't endorse skeptical theism given its *theistic* component, many think that non-theists should—and some do—endorse its *skeptical* component, which is why they can agree with the objection in the previous paragraph. Moreover, it makes perfect sense that those who first made popular this sort of move in response to the above argument from evil were called 'skeptical theists': they were, after all, theists; and their advocacy of skepticism about certain matters relevant to God's ways was a striking feature of their view. It was only natural, then, to call the view they espoused 'skeptical theism'.

For our purposes here, what's most interesting about skeptical theism is its skeptical component. When skeptical theists use that skeptical component in responding to arguments from evil, they think it is reasonable for their non-theistic interlocutors to accept that skeptical component, even if they don't expect them to accept their theism. It is that skeptical component that will be the focus of this chapter. In the first section, I will explain more precisely what the skeptical theist's skepticism amounts to and how it is used in response to various sorts of arguments from evil. Then, in sect. II, I will consider and respond to objections to skeptical theism. One thing we'll find is that just as there are non-theists who accept the skeptical theist's skepticism, so also there are theists who reject it.

I. The Skeptical Theist's Skepticism

The skeptical theist's skepticism applies to the realm of God-justifying reasons. (What exactly is required for something to count as a God-justifying reason? Here's

a very natural proposal that can serve as a first approximation: a good state of affairs G—which might just be the prevention of some bad state of affairs E*—is a God-justifying reason for permitting an evil E if and only if (1) G's goodness outweighs E's badness and (2) G couldn't be obtained without permitting E or something as bad or worse.[3]) Skepticism about the realm of God-justifying reasons leads many theists as well as some non-theists to reject noseeum inferences such as the one from (1) to (2), which Howard-Snyder (1996*a*: 291) calls 'the inference from inscrutable to pointless evil'. In this section, I want to address three questions: what exactly is involved in this skepticism? What motivates it? To which arguments from evil does the skeptical theist's skepticism apply?

A. What's Involved in the Skeptical Theist's Skepticism and What Motivates It?

The skeptical theist's skepticism[4] is, I believe, best explained as an endorsement of some skeptical theses, among which these three are prominent:

(ST1) We have no good reason for thinking that the possible goods we know of are representative of the possible goods there are.

(ST2) We have no good reason for thinking that the possible evils we know of are representative of the possible evils there are.

(ST3) We have no good reason for thinking that the entailment relations we know of between possible goods and the permission of possible evils are representative of the entailment relations there are between possible goods and the permission of possible evils.[5]

Three clarificatory remarks are in order.

First, as William Rowe (1996: 264) emphasizes, possible goods are abstracta—good states of affairs that could obtain. Thus, if we set aside concerns about God being a necessary being if he exists at all, atheists can agree that the beatific vision is a possible good, despite the fact that they think it isn't an actual good since it entails God's existence. Likewise, possible evils are bad states of affairs that could obtain. And, of course, among the possible goods and evils are actual goods and evils as well as merely possible ones.

Second, one might wonder why there is a focus in (ST1)–(ST3) on *possible* goods and evils instead of on *actual* goods and evils (i.e. possible good and evil states of affairs that obtain). In the case of evils, this isn't difficult to understand. God might permit an evil E in order to *prevent* a worse evil E* which will obtain if E isn't permitted. Here there is clearly no need for E* to be an actual evil. As for goods, it's true that in order for God's aim of obtaining G to be of use in actually justifying his permission of E, G must *eventually* be actual. But it doesn't need to be currently actual. It may currently be merely possible and it may become actual

only as a result of permitting E, perhaps long after E is permitted. Moreover, if one's goal is simply to respond to arguments from evil such as the one mentioned at the beginning of this chapter (a goal an agnostic and theist might share), there's no need to defend the claim that God *does* exist or that there in fact *is* a God-justifying reason for permitting the evils mentioned. It's enough that we lack any good reason or justifying ground for thinking it's likely that there isn't such a God-justifying reason. Hence, considerations having to do with possible goods that we have no good reason to think are unlikely to be actual (now or in the future) are relevant in addressing such arguments—even if those goods are in fact *merely* possible.

Third, a sample of Xs can be representative of all Xs relative to one property but not another. For example, a sample of humans can be representative of all humans relative to the property of *having a lung* while at the same time not being representative of all humans relative to the property of *being a Russian*. To say a sample of Xs is representative of all Xs relative to a property F is just to say that if n/m of the Xs in the sample have property F, then approximately n/m of all Xs have F. In (ST1)–(ST3), what we are interested in is whether our sample of possible goods, possible evils, and entailment relations between them (i.e. the possible goods, evils, and relevant entailments we know of) is representative of all possible goods, possible evils, and entailment relations there are *relative to the property of figuring in a (potentially) God-justifying reason for permitting the inscrutable evils we see around us*.[6] Although that property is not explicitly mentioned in (ST1)–(ST3), it is representativeness relative to that property that (ST1)–(ST3) are speaking of.

Thus, the skeptical theist's skepticism affirms certain limitations to our knowledge with respect to the realms of value and modality. The claim isn't that we know nothing about those realms. I can confess to being in the dark about which of two proposed courses of action will have the best overall consequences without thereby admitting complete skepticism about value. And I can confess that I don't know whether simple mathematical truths entail Goldbach's conjecture without admitting to complete modal ignorance. Likewise, endorsing the limitations mentioned in (ST1)–(ST3) isn't an acknowledgment of complete skepticism about value and modality. As we'll see below in sect. II, objectors to skeptical theism often argue that the skeptical theists' skepticism *commits them* to further unpalatable skepticism. But we should recognize up front that the skeptical theist intends to affirm only a modest form of skepticism.

What, exactly, is the upshot of (ST1)–(ST3)? Suppose we've thought long and hard about what God-justifying reason there might be for permitting the following horrific evils, which are commonly used as examples in the literature:

(E1) the evil of a fawn trapped in a forest fire and undergoing several days of terrible agony before dying.

(E2) the evil of a 5-year-old girl being raped, beaten, and murdered by strangulation.

Such thinking will typically involve considering various possible goods and evils and the conditions of their realization—e.g. whether permitting (E1) and (E2) is necessary for obtaining some outweighing possible good or for avoiding the obtaining of some worse possible evil. Now suppose we fail to come up with anything that we think is a God-justifying reason for permitting, say, (E2). That is, suppose that both of the following are true:

(*a*) none of the possible goods we know of that outweigh (E2) stand in entailment relations we know of to (E2) such that obtaining those goods would justify permitting (E2);

(*b*) none of the possible evils we know of that are worse than (E2) stand in entailment relations we know of to (E2) such that preventing the obtaining of those evils would justify permitting (E2).

If we recognize the truth of (ST3), then it seems we can't infer from (*a*) and (*b*) that it's false or even unlikely that permitting (E2) (or something as bad or worse) is required—by entailment relations we *don't* know of—for the obtaining of outweighing possible goods we *know* of or the prevention of worse possible evils we *know* of. We are simply in the dark about whether there are such entailment relations between the possible goods and evils we know of.[7] And if we recognize the truth of (ST1) and (ST2), then it seems we can't infer from (*a*) and (*b*) that it's false or even unlikely that permitting (E2) (or something as bad) is required for the obtaining of outweighing possible goods we *don't* know of or for the prevention of worse possible evils we *don't* know of. We are simply in the dark about whether there are goods and evils we don't know of that could feature in a God-justifying reason for permitting (E2). Thus, (ST3) keeps us from using (*a*) and (*b*) to conclude that it's false or even unlikely that:

(*c*) the possible goods or evils *we know of* feature in a God-justifying reason for permitting (E2).

And (ST1) and (ST2) together keep us from using (*a*) and (*b*) to conclude that it's false or even unlikely that:

(*d*) the possible goods or evils *we don't know of* feature in a God-justifying reason for permitting E2.

In short, (ST1)–(ST3) tell us that we can't use our failure to think of a God-justifying reason for permitting the horrendous evil (E2) to conclude that it's unlikely that there is such a reason—either among known goods and evils or among unknown goods and evils.[8]

Analogies are often used to support and drive home the skeptical theist's point. We can't use our failure to see any insects in the garage (when taking a look from the street) to conclude that it's unlikely that there are any insects in the garage. We can't use our failure to discover any rational agents on other planets to conclude that it's unlikely that there are some on some other planet. We can't (if we're chess

novices) use our failure to detect a good reason for a particular chess move made by a world champion chess player to conclude that it's unlikely that there is any good reason for that chess move. Likewise, say skeptical theists, we can't use our failure to discern any God-justifying reason for permitting (E2) to conclude that it's unlikely that there is any God-justifying reason for permitting (E2). There's nothing unreasonable or excessive about the skepticism involved in the cases of the insects, extraterrestrial life, or chess champion. Skepticism in those cases doesn't seem to force us to accept other more extreme and unpalatable sorts of skepticism. Likewise, says the skeptical theist, there's nothing unreasonable or excessive about the skepticism involved in the case of God-justifying reasons for permitting (E2).

Are these good analogies? Are we really that ignorant about possible goods, possible evils, and possible entailment relations between them? Notice that (ST1)–(ST3) don't deny there are many possible goods, evils, and entailment relations between them that we know of. So the claim isn't that we know very little about these things. Rather, the claim is just that we have no good reason to think that what we know of these things is representative of what there is to know about them. We've no reason to deny that what we know about possible goods, evils, and entailments between them is a very small (percentage-wise) and unrepresentative sample of these things—unrepresentative with respect to the property of *figuring in a (potentially) God-justifying reason for permitting the evils we see around us*. But if we have no such reason, then we are seriously in the dark about whether the possible goods, evils, and entailments between them are likely to contain the makings of a potentially God-justifying reason to permit (E2). And this, says the skeptical theist, makes the analogies in the previous paragraph seem like good ones.

(ST1) and (ST2) suggest that we don't have good reason to deny that there is, among the *unknown* goods and evils, a God-justifying reason for permitting (E2). (ST3), on the other hand, suggests that we don't have good reason to deny that there is, among the *known* goods and evils, a God-justifying reason for permitting (E2). There's another skeptical thesis, the import of which is similar to (ST3)'s:

(ST4) We have no good reason for thinking that the total moral value or disvalue we perceive in certain complex states of affairs accurately reflects the total moral value or disvalue they really have.[9]

The question raised here is: in comparing some of the very complex goods and evils we know of that are unrelated to the concerns of everyday life, why think we are able to grasp them sufficiently to make the value comparisons needed to determine whether securing or preventing them could justify the permission of the evils around us? If we can't grasp them sufficiently to make such value comparisons, then our failure to think of a God-justifying reason for permitting some evil might be due to our failure to recognize that some good we know of outweighs (or that some evil we know of is worse than) the evil in question. Less emphasis is placed on (ST4) in the literature and it's not needed to make the skeptical theist's

point. But it's worth mentioning (ST4) as an additional consideration that supports the lesson taught by (ST3)—namely, that there may be a God-justifying reason for permitting (E1) and (E2) among the goods and evils we know of. Using van Inwagen's terminology, (ST4) expresses skepticism about our grasp of the intrinsic value (or, as Alston puts it, the nature) of at least some of the goods and evils we know of while (ST3) expresses skepticism about our grasp of the extrinsic value (or, as Alston puts it, the conditions of realization) of the goods and evils we know of.[10]

Three further clarificatory points are worth mentioning here. First, the skepticism encouraged by (ST1)–(ST4) seems to be focused on our ability to make informed judgments about how considerations of consequences would (if God existed) factor into God's decisions about what is the best thing to do. (ST1)–(ST4) have to do with our knowledge and understanding of the realm of possible goods and evils—including our knowledge and understanding of the entailment and comparative value relations that hold between possible goods and evils. An appreciation of these relations is important when considering what the consequences are of bringing about or preventing a good or of preventing or permitting an evil. However, the fact that (ST1)–(ST4) are relevant to considering such consequences doesn't in any way take for granted the truth of consequentialist ethical theories. For it may be that consequentialist ethical theories are false (because, say, we have absolute duties that bind us regardless of the consequences), but that very often, moral agents should be guided in their moral deliberations by considerations of consequences. This is because very often the right thing to do is to try to bring about what seems best for those we love, so long as doing so involves no violation of duties. Thus, non-consequentialist ethical theories have no trouble allowing for considerations of consequences to play a role in moral decision-making.

The second clarificatory point is that there's a difference between (*a*) describing a potentially God-justifying reason X and then announcing that we have no good reason to think it's unlikely that X itself *is* the God-justifying reason God has for permitting some evil such as (E1) or (E2) and (*b*) simply pointing out that, in light of (ST1)–(ST4), we have no good reason to think it unlikely that there is some God-justifying reason God has for permitting such an evil. Although some skeptical theists (e.g. Alston 1991 and van Inwagen 1991) sometimes aim to do (*a*), it's a mistake to think (as some philosophers seem to) that (*b*) by itself—without any effort to do (*a*)—is insufficient for defending the skeptical theist's skepticism. So long as we have reason to endorse (ST1)–(ST4) and we can see that they do in fact imply that we aren't justified in thinking it's unlikely that there are God-justifying reasons for permitting the horrific evils we see around us, doing (*a*) is unnecessary for making the skeptical theist's case.

Third, it's important to realize that the skeptical theist's skepticism does nothing to show that theism is likely to be true or reasonable to believe. But, so far as I know, no theist has claimed otherwise. Instead, skeptical theists claim that the skeptical

theist's skepticism undermines certain arguments from evil for atheism, showing that such arguments don't make it reasonable to reject theism. Which arguments from evil does it undermine? Let's consider that question next.

B. To Which Arguments from Evil Does the Skeptical Theist's Skepticism Apply?

There are many different arguments from evil. For some it's pretty clear that the skeptical theist's skepticism applies whereas for others it's controversial whether it applies.[11] (Whether there are some arguments from evil to which it clearly doesn't apply is a question I won't address in this chapter.) Let's begin by looking at three arguments—all by William Rowe—to which the skeptical theist's skepticism seems quite clearly to apply.

It's easy to see how (ST1)–(ST4) apply to the following argument, similar to the one given in the opening paragraph of this chapter:

(A1) We can't think of any God-justifying reasons for permitting (E1) and (E2).[12]

(A2) So probably there aren't any God-justifying reasons for permitting (E1) and (E2).

(A3) If an omnipotent, omniscient, perfectly good being existed, it wouldn't permit any evils unless it had a God-justifying reason for permitting them.

(A4) Therefore, probably there is no omnipotent, omniscient, perfectly good being.

This is basically how Rowe's 1979 argument from evil goes. The skeptical theist's skepticism straightforwardly challenges the inference from (A1) to (A2). The fact that we can't think of any God-justifying reasons for permitting (E1) and (E2) doesn't make it probable that there aren't any—any more than the fact that we can't see any insects in the garage (from our vantage point standing in the street) makes it probable that there aren't any insects in the garage.

Rowe proposed a slightly different argument from evil in later papers (see his 1988 and 1991):

(P) No good we know of justifies an omnipotent, omniscient, perfectly good being in permitting (E1) and (E2);

therefore [it's probable that],

(Q) no good at all justifies an omnipotent, omniscient, perfectly good being in permitting (E1) and (E2);

therefore [it's probable that],

(~G) there is no omnipotent, omniscient, perfectly good being.[13]

This attempt by Rowe to improve the 1979 argument has been viewed by skeptical theists as a change for the worse. For now we have two problems. First, the inference

from (P) to the likelihood of (Q) seems faulty given (ST1) and (ST2). Even if we could be sure that no *known* goods figure in God-justifying reasons for (E1) and (E2), this tells us nothing about whether there are *unknown* goods and evils that could figure in God-justifying reasons for (E1) and (E2) (since—as (ST1) and (ST2) tell us—we've no reason to think the goods and evils we know of are representative of the goods and evils there are). But second, (ST3) and (ST4) imply that we have no good reason to believe (P). As I noted in sect. IA, (ST3) and (ST4) emphasize that we have an inadequate grasp of the extrinsic and intrinsic value of some known goods. In light of this, we are simply in the dark about whether there is a God-justifying reason for (E1) and (E2) among the goods we know of. For both these reasons, this second argument from Rowe also fails by the skeptical theist's lights.[14]

A third argument by Rowe, proposed specifically to avoid the skeptical theist's skepticism, nevertheless also falls prey to it.[15] Instead of arguing from (P) to (Q) and then from (Q) to (~G), as in the previous argument, this time Rowe argues directly from (P) to (~G). We needn't examine any further how this argument goes in order to see that (ST3) and (ST4) imply (as I noted in the previous paragraph) that we have no good reason to believe (P). This is enough by itself to make this argument unacceptable from the skeptical theist's perspective.[16]

Let's turn next to two arguments whose proponents view them as not being targeted by the skeptical theist's skepticism, but which are, arguably, targeted by it nonetheless. The first of these, touched on by Rowe and developed at length by John Schellenberg, is the argument from divine hiddenness:

(B1) If God exists and is unsurpassably loving, then for any human subject H and time t, if H is at t capable of relating personally to God, H at t believes that God exists, unless H is culpably in a contrary position at t.[17]

(B2) There is a human subject H and a time t such that H is at t capable of relating personally to God, H is not culpably in a contrary position at t, and yet H at t fails to believe that God exists.[18]

(B3) Therefore, God does not exist.

Does the skeptical theist's skepticism raise any difficulties for this argument? Here's a way in which it might: (B1) is false if there are God-justifying reasons to permit a period of divine hiddenness (that's what I'll call a period of time during which a human, who is capable of relating personally to God and is not culpably in a contrary position, fails to believe in God). For if there were such reasons, then, if God existed, he would permit periods of divine hiddenness, contrary to what (B1) says. After all, God, being perfectly loving, would want what is best for his creatures. So long as it isn't intrinsically wrong to permit a period of divine hiddenness regardless of the benefits it might produce (and there seems to be no good reason for thinking this is the case), God would do so if doing so would bring about a greater good or prevent a worse evil. But (ST1)–(ST4) suggest that we're simply in the dark about whether (and how likely it is that) there are any God-justifying

reasons for permitting a period of divine hiddenness. Thus, since we know that the existence of a (potentially) God-justifying reason for permitting divine hiddenness entails the falsity of (B1), and we are in the dark about the truth and the likelihood of the claim that there exists such a reason, it follows that we are likewise in the dark about the truth and likelihood of (B1).

The second argument from evil I want to look at whose vulnerability to the skeptical theist's skepticism is controversial is proposed by Paul Draper. Let 'T' be theism. Let 'HI' be the Hypothesis of Indifference—i.e. the hypothesis that neither the nature nor the condition of sentient beings on earth is due to the malevolent or benevolent actions of any non-human person. And let 'O' report what we know about the kinds, amounts, and distribution of pain and pleasure in the world. Using these abbreviations, Draper argues as follows:

(C1) O is known to be true.
(C2) HI is at least as probable intrinsically as T.
(C3) Pr(O/HI) >! Pr(O/T).[19]
(C4) Therefore, other evidence held equal, T is very probably false.[20]

How might the skeptical theist's skepticism apply to this argument? Well, in order sensibly to assert (C3), we'd have to have some idea what Pr(O/T) is—at the very least, we'd have to know that it's not quite high, since if Pr(O/T) *is* high, (C3) is false. But it seems that Pr(O/T) depends on what the likelihood is of there being a God-justifying reason for permitting the evil state of affairs described in O (i.e. if the latter is quite high, so is the former; and if the latter is quite low, so is the former). And, according to (ST1)–(ST4), we're in the dark about whether—and how likely it is—that there is such a reason. This means we're in the dark about whether that likelihood is quite high. Thus, since (1) we know that the high probability of the existence of a (potentially) God-justifying reason for permitting the evils described in O entails that Pr(O/T) is high (making (C3) false) and (2) we are in the dark about whether it's highly likely that there exists such a God-justifying reason, it follows that we are likewise in the dark about the truth and likelihood of (C3).

As I've already indicated, Schellenberg and Draper object to the charge that the skeptical theist's skepticism applies to their arguments from evil.[21] As I understand them, they each offer this sort of reply: 'It's true that we know that my premise implies that it's unlikely for there to be a God-justifying reason for permitting the evil I'm focusing on. But I've given reasons for my premise. From all this it follows that these reasons for my premise double as reasons for thinking it's unlikely for there to be a God-justifying reason for permitting the evil I'm focusing on. Hence we have a reason for thinking it's unlikely for there to be such a reason, even if (ST1)–(ST4) are true.'[22]

Is this reply adequate? Can the reasons Draper and Schellenberg give for their premises successfully be used to show that it's unlikely for there to be a

God-justifying reason for permitting the evils in question? The evils they focus on are these:

(E3) the evil of there being a period of time during which a human who is capable of relating personally to God and is not culpably in a contrary position, fails to believe in God.

(E4) the evil of there being the distribution of pain and pleasure that we know there is in the world.

It's clear that there are evils worse than (E3) (e.g. that human never experiencing the beatific vision; if God were forced to inflict one or the other on a beloved creature, he would inflict (E3)). And it's clear that there are goods that outweigh (E3) (e.g. that human experiencing the beatific vision; if God wanted one of his creatures to experience the beatific vision and could do so only by permitting that creature to undergo (E3), he would permit it). The same points apply to (E4). But could an omnipotent being be *forced* to permit (E3) or (E4) or something as bad, in order to obtain some outweighing good? (ST3) suggests we are seriously in the dark about the answer to this question. Insofar as we have no reasons for thinking the entailments we know of between possible goods and evils are representative of the entailments there are between goods and evils, we simply aren't in a position to comment in an informed way about how likely it is that an omnipotent being would be forced to permit (E3) or (E4) or something as bad, in order to obtain some outweighing good. What do Schellenberg and Draper have to say about this? What reasons do they give for thinking it's false or unlikely that God would permit (E3) or (E4) that might possibly double as reasons to think it is unlikely or false that any outweighing possible good entails the permission of (E3) or (E4) or something as bad?

As I read them, they point, ultimately, to two main reasons for thinking it's false or unlikely that God (if he exists) would permit (E3) or (E4): God's perfect love and God's infinite resourcefulness.[23] But I don't quite see how either of these is at all relevant to whether any outweighing possible good entails the permission of (E3) or (E4) or something as bad. Suppose that God, if he exists, deeply loves all humans and places an exceedingly high value on having a relationship with them. What does that imply about whether some outweighing possible good entails the permission of (E3) or (E4) or something as bad? Nothing much as far as I can see. Whether some outweighing possible good entails the permission of (E3) or (E4) or something as bad is a necessary truth that doesn't seem to be relevant to whether God loves us deeply and wants a relationship with us. Likewise, suppose—as also seems plausible—that God, if he exists, has the infinite resourcefulness implied by omniscience and omnipotence. Does that suggest that no outweighing possible good entails the permission of (E3) or (E4) or something as bad? Again, I can't see how. It's widely accepted that omnipotence doesn't imply the ability to actualize what is metaphysically impossible. This means that if some outweighing possible

good does entail the permission of (E3) (or something as bad), God wouldn't be able to do anything about that.

Can one sensibly appeal to God's perfect love and infinite resourcefulness to support the claim that God is unlikely to permit (E3) or (E4) and then use that result to support the further claim that no outweighing possible good entails the permission of (E3) or (E4) or something as bad? No. Once we see that God's perfect love and infinite resourcefulness don't support the conclusion that no outweighing possible good entails the permission of (E3) or (E4) or something as bad, we thereby see that there's also no reason to think they support the claim that God is unlikely to permit (E3) and (E4).

There is, however, a way in which Draper's argument has an advantage over Schellenberg's. For, given that Draper's argument focuses on comparing probabilities, he can offer the following reply (suggested by the work of Mark Bernstein[24]): 'I can grant the skeptical theist's point that I'm in the dark about Pr(O/T). But consider what we should do when deciding between inconsistent claims X and Y if we know that Pr(P/X) is high and we're completely in the dark about Pr(P/Y)—where P is some piece of evidence we have. For example, suppose we know that P, where that is the claim that the ball recently pulled out of one of two nearby urns is white. And suppose that X is the claim that the ball was randomly pulled out of the left urn and Y is the claim that the ball was randomly pulled out of the right urn. Let's say you know that the strong majority of the balls in the left urn are white and, therefore, that Pr(P/X) is high. And let's say you have no idea what Pr(P/Y) is—you have no idea whether all the balls in the right urn are white or none of them are or some fraction between 0 and 1 are white. Now, if you are offered a bet of one million dollars to identify correctly which urn the white ball was drawn from, the reasonable thing for you to do is to say X is true (i.e. that the ball came from the left urn). This shows that when you are comparing a known high probability with an unknown probability, it's reasonable to think that the unknown probability is lower than the known high probability. Thus, (C3) from Draper's argument is true even if we don't know what the value of Pr(O/T) is.'

This reply is effective if we can reasonably use the Principle of Indifference to conclude that, if the likelihood of Pr(O/T) is unknown, then the likelihood that Pr(O/T) is less than 0.5 is 0.5, and the likelihood that it is higher than 0.9 is 0.1, and the likelihood that it is between 0.11 and 0.12 is about 0.01, and so on. But suppose it's not reasonable to use the Principle of Indifference in that way in this case. Suppose instead it's reasonable to conclude, based on (ST1)–(ST4), that we have no idea what the likelihood is that Pr(O/T) is, say, higher than 0.99. Suppose the likelihood that Pr(O/T) is higher than 0.99 might be 0 or 1 or anything in between; contrary to what the Principle of Indifference suggests, we just don't know how likely it is that Pr(O/T) is higher than 0.99. Then the reply in the previous paragraph—which seems to assume that Pr(O/T) is more likely to be lower than a high probability than it is to be higher than that high probability—fails. From

the failure of this reply (given the suppositions noted in this paragraph) we may conclude that *if* the skeptical theist's skepticism can reasonably be combined with rejecting the use to which the Principle of Indifference was put in the reply inspired by Bernstein in the previous paragraph, *then* the skeptical theist's skepticism causes trouble for Draper's argument.[25] I won't undertake here to discuss the antecedent of that conditional except to say that I myself don't find it implausible.[26]

II. Objections to the Skeptical Theist's Skepticism

I will consider two sorts of objections to the skeptical theist's skepticism. The first argues (1) that for some horrific evils there *appear* not to be any God-justifying reasons to permit them and (2) that this fact counts as a prima facie reason for thinking there *are* no God-justifying reasons to permit them—a prima facie reason that is not overridden by the considerations the skeptical theist highlights. The second sort of objection comes in several versions. The basic idea of each version is that by endorsing the skeptical theist's skepticism, one is committed to some other unpalatable form of skepticism (such as skepticism about the past or the external world or moral reasoning). The obvious implication is that, given that we should reject the unpalatable skepticism, we should reject the skeptical theist's skepticism too. In what follows, I'll consider and respond to both sorts of objection.

A. Objection One: The Appearance of No God-Justifying Reasons

Swinburne's objection to the skeptical theist's skepticism depends on three points. First he argues that, in the absence of any God-justifying reason we can think of for permitting horrific evils such as (E1) and (E2), *it appears that* there is no God-justifying reason for permitting them. Second, he notes that the Principle of Credulity tells us that, other things being equal, it's rational to believe that things are as they appear. Third, although the skeptical theist is right that things may be better than they appear (since there may be some unknown greater good that is secured by permitting the evil in question and that itself brings about no greater evil), we should also recognize that things might be worse than they appear (since there may be some unknown greater evil that is produced by the evil in question and that doesn't itself bring about any greater good); and since it's just as likely that things are worse than they appear as it is that they're better than they appear,

we should conclude that things are probably as bad as they appear. Based on the first two points, Swinburne concludes that if we can't think of any God-justifying reason for permitting (E1) and (E2), then, other things being equal, this makes it reasonable for us to conclude that probably there is no such reason.[27] And based on the third point, Swinburne concludes that although the skeptical theist is right to point out that God may have reasons we are ignorant of, this does nothing to change the conclusion derived from the first two points.[28]

The main problem with Swinburne's objection to the skeptical theist's skepticism is that the skeptical theist thinks there is good reason not to grant his first point that *it appears that* there is no God-justifying reason for permitting evils such as (E1) and (E2). According to (ST1)–(ST4), it *doesn't* appear that there is no God-justifying reason for permitting for (E1) and (E2). Nor does it appear that there is such a reason. Nor does it appear likely that there is. Nor does it appear likely that there isn't. Rather, we just don't know how likely it is that there is a God-justifying reason for permitting evils such as (E1) and (E2). To see this, notice the difference between saying 'it appears that there are no Fs' and saying 'it doesn't appear that there are Fs'. If, while standing in a friend's garage that is normal in size and uncluttered, you look around and can't see an automobile in it, then it's reasonable for you to conclude both that *it doesn't appear that there is an automobile in the garage* and that *it appears that there is no automobile in the garage*. But suppose instead you are standing on the street and, upon looking into a rather cluttered garage, you fail to see any fleas. Then, although it's rational for you to conclude that *it doesn't appear (to you upon looking from the street) that there are fleas in the garage*, it's not rational to conclude that *it appears that there are no fleas in the garage*. According to (ST1)–(ST4), we've no good reason to deny that God-justifying reasons for permitting (E1) and (E2) sought for from our vantage point (apart from divine revelation) are like fleas in a cluttered garage viewed from the street. Hence, we can't reasonably conclude, as Swinburne does, that *it appears that there is no God-justifying reason for permitting evils such as (E1) and (E2)*. At best we can reasonably conclude that *it doesn't appear (to us) that there is a God-justifying reason for permitting (E1) and (E2)*. But of course that can't be used in conjunction with Swinburne's Principle of Credulity to get him the conclusion he's after in responding to the skeptical theist's skepticism. For if it could, then we could use a Swinburne-like response to conclude, on the basis of our failure to see any fleas in the garage when looking from the street, that there probably aren't any in the garage.

Thus, Swinburne misconstrues the skeptical theist's response. He thinks the skeptical theist's aim is to show that the likelihood of some evil or other on theism might for all we know be higher than it initially appears. And he replies that similar remarks show that it might for all we know be lower than it initially appears. And he replies that similar remarks show that it might for all we know be higher than it initially appears. Since, according to him, it's just as likely to be higher than it initially appears as it is to be lower than it initially appears, it's reasonable to go

with initial appearances. But in fact, the skeptical theist's response is that we aren't justified in thinking the probability judgment initially appears the way Swinburne says it appears. Clear thinking and reflection on (ST1)–(ST4) reveal that there's no particular value or range (short of the range between 0 and 1) that the probability in question appears to be.[29]

Swinburne's (1998: 23) response to the remarks in the previous paragraph is as follows:[30]

> And if our understanding of possible reasons why anyone might allow suffering to occur provides us with no reason for supposing that a good God might allow certain suffering, we ought to believe that there is no God—unless we have a contrary reason. Just reflect on some of the horrors that we read about in our newspapers and history books: the prolonged cruelty of parents to lonely children, the torture of the innocent, the long-drawn-out acute physical pain of some disease, and so on. If we cannot see all that as a reason for believing that there is no all-good and all-powerful being, when we cannot think of any reason why such a being should allow it all to happen, there really is something deeply wrong with *us*. We have lost our sensitivity to the good.

In short, if we don't conclude, upon our failure to think of any God-justifying reason for permitting evils like (E1) and (E2), that (other things being equal) there probably is no God, we have lost our sensitivity to the good.[31] I find this extremely unpersuasive. What I grant is that if we can't see that a good God would, other things being equal, want to prevent horrific evils, then it seems we have lost our sensitivity to the good. When we see or learn of utterly horrific suffering, the sensible and appropriate response is to be extremely upset that it has occurred and, with deep feeling, to think 'There had better be a good reason for God, if he exists, to permit that suffering; if there isn't, then there is no perfectly good God.'

But although it's extremely common, it's not reasonable, given (ST1)–(ST4), to go on from there to think that it's *unlikely* that there is a God-justifying reason for permitting such suffering (and, hence, unlikely that God exists). For the only basis we have for that conclusion is our own inability to think of any such reason. Suppose I'm considering possible goods, possible evils, and possible entailment relations between them with the aim of discovering a (potentially) God-justifying reason for permitting (E1) and (E2). If I accept (ST1)–(ST4), then my failure, upon engaging in such a search, to discover any God-justifying reason for permitting (E1) and (E2) won't lead me to conclude that there is no such reason. In refraining from drawing that conclusion, I'll be just as rational as the person who refrains from concluding there are no fleas in the garage on the basis of a failure to see any when looking from the street. Does the fact that I refrain under these conditions from concluding that there are no God-justifying reasons for permitting (E1) and (E2) (or even that it's unlikely that there are any such reasons) demonstrate that I've lost my sensitivity to the good? Hardly. It demonstrates only that I don't want to jump inappropriately to unfounded conclusions (about fleas in the garage or about God-

justifying reasons). But if it's reasonable for me to refrain from concluding that it's false or unlikely that there are God-justifying reasons for permitting (E1) and (E2) (on the basis of my failure to discover any such reasons), then it's also reasonable for me to refrain from concluding on that basis that it's false or unlikely that God exists. Such reasonable thinking does nothing to suggest any insensitivity to the good.

B. Objection Two: Commitment to Unpalatable Skepticism

This second type of objection to skeptical theism seems to be the most common, though (as I've already noted) it comes in different forms, depending on what sort of unpalatable skepticism it focuses on. I'll briefly consider four forms of this objection.

B.1. Skepticism about Certain Theistic Arguments

The first charge of skeptical commitment is the charge that if one endorses the skeptical theist's skepticism, one can't consistently endorse certain arguments for theism.[32] In particular, some arguments for God's existence based on identifying something as an all-things-considered good—even in light of its consequences—will be undermined by the skeptical theist's skepticism. So, for example, if the order one sees in the natural world or the joy one witnesses in people's lives is identified as reason to think that there is a good being who is the cause of such things, one is failing to take into account the lessons of (ST1)–(ST4). Given our cognitive limitations, we simply don't know what evils might be entailed by those good things and this prevents us from being able to conclude that they are all-things-considered goods that an omnibenevolent being would bring about.

The skeptical theist's response to this charge should, I think, be to accept it. We aren't able to determine whether something is an all-things-considered good simply by noticing how good it is since we don't know what it might bring in its wake. Of course, perhaps there are other ways of learning something is an all-things-considered good. Maybe divine revelation is such a way. But given that theists don't seem to be able to arrange for divine revelation to be passed on to non-theists, this way of learning something is an all-things-considered good won't be of much help in offering a theistic argument that will be persuasive to a non-theist. We needn't conclude from this that the skeptical theist's skepticism is inconsistent with *every* way of arguing for the existence of a good God (just as we needn't conclude it is inconsistent with every atheistic argument). But there's no doubt that some theistic arguments collapse under pressure from (ST1)–(ST4).

B.2. Skeptical Theism No Matter How Much Evil There Is

The second charge of skeptical commitment is the charge that skeptical theists are forced to admit that, no matter how much suffering or evil we witness, we cannot reasonably conclude that God wouldn't permit it. As Rowe puts it, even 'if human life were *nothing more than a series of agonizing moments from birth to death*, [the skeptical theists'] position would still require them to say that we cannot reasonably infer that it is even likely that God does not exist'.[33] But since this is an absurd conclusion, Rowe argues, the skeptical theist's skepticism, which forces her to this absurd conclusion, must also be mistaken.

This charge does not stick. It's true that, given (ST1)–(ST4), we can't determine *merely by trying to consider the consequences of goods and evils* whether a certain amount or kind of suffering is such that there couldn't be a God-justifying reason to permit it. But there are other ways of determining this that don't rely on considerations of consequences. Tooley has proposed, as a premise in one of his arguments from evil, the principle that God would permit horrific suffering only for the benefit of the sufferer.[34] I don't find that particular moral principle plausible.[35] But there are others like it that seem more promising. Swinburne (1998: 229–36) argues that a perfectly good God would not permit suffering unless the sufferer's life is on the whole a good one (notice that this is a weaker requirement than Tooley's according to which the reason the suffering is permitted must be to benefit the sufferer). It's true that Swinburne is no friend of skeptical theism, but I see no reason why those endorsing the skeptical theist's skepticism couldn't consistently accept this principle Swinburne proposes (since we can see the truth of such general principles even if we can't see what all the consequences of the goods and evils we know of are). And by accepting this principle, skeptical theists would have reason to say that a good God would not permit a human life to be literally *nothing more* than a series of agonizing moments from birth to death.

B.3. Skepticism about the Past and the External World

According to a third charge, those who endorse the skeptical theist's skepticism are committed to skepticism about the external world and the past. The idea is basically that, given (ST1)–(ST4), I have no idea whether there is a God-justifying reason to permit or to arrange for the following bad states of affairs to obtain:

(E5) My being a bodiless victim of an evil demon who deceives me into thinking there's an external physical world when in fact there is not.

(E6) My being deceived by an evil demon into believing that I and the physical universe have been around for years when in fact I and the physical universe came into existence five minutes ago (me with false memories, the physical universe with the misleading appearance of being old).

Given this, the objector concludes that if I endorse the skeptical theist's skepticism, I should likewise endorse skepticism about the external world and about the past.

The skeptical theist's reply is to note that our way of knowing that (E5) and (E6) aren't actual is *not* by considering possible goods, possible evils, and entailments between them—seeing that these provide no God-justifying reason to permit the obtaining of (E5) and (E6) and concluding that, since God exists, (E5) and (E6) must not be actual.[36] Not at all. Rather, we have some independent way of knowing that (E5) and (E6) aren't actual and we can conclude, from the fact that they aren't actual, that if God exists, he has no good reason to arrange for them to be actual. This way of knowing something about God's reasons is consistent with (ST1)–(ST4). (What is the independent way—i.e. independent of considering possible God-justifying reasons for permitting (E5) and (E6)—in which we know (E5) and (E6) aren't actual? Epistemologists offer many different answers to this question. This isn't the place to explore these answers. But it's widely held, by theists and non-theists, that we have some independent way of knowing that (E5) and (E6) aren't actual.[37])

Why can't the proponent of the argument from evil make the same sort of move? Why can't she say that we know independently that there's no God-justifying reason for permitting evils such as (E1) and (E2)—not by surveying possible goods, possible evils, and entailments between them but in some other way? That's certainly a strategy worth considering. But what we need is some plausible suggestion of what that independent way of knowing might be. And in the case of the arguments from evil we've been considering, no such suggestion is forthcoming. It's not plausible to claim that we know independently that such a supremely loving and resourceful being as God is likely to prevent evils such as (E1) and (E2) (or (E3) and (E4) mentioned above in connection with Draper and Schellenberg). What we seem to know independently is that a perfect being definitely wouldn't permit (E1)–(E4) without a God-justifying reason for doing so. But this doesn't enable us to know independently that God is likely to prevent (E1)–(E4), not unless we have some independent way of knowing that *it is unlikely for there to be a God-justifying reason for permitting those evils.* But plausible suggestions of independent ways of knowing *that*—ways that don't rely on our failure to think of any such reasons upon considering possible goods, possible evils, and entailments between them—are in short supply.

B.4. Skepticism about Morality

Perhaps the most common and influential charge of skeptical commitment lodged against skeptical theists is the one that says that, by endorsing the skeptical theist's skepticism, we are forced into an appalling sort of skepticism about the morality of various actions. For example, the skeptical theist's skepticism tells us that we have no good reason to think that the horrific rape and murder of a small child won't

bring about some outweighing greater good. Given this, why should we think it's good to prevent such horrific suffering if we are easily able to do so? According to this sort of objector, considerations like these suggest that consistency requires the skeptical theist to be skeptical about whether it's right to prevent such horrific suffering when we easily can. But skepticism about such moral issues as these is both appalling and implausible. Hence, the skeptical theist's skepticism, which supposedly leads to this unpalatable moral skepticism, should be rejected.[38]

By way of response, those (theists and non-theists) who accept the skeptical theist's skepticism can offer the following proposals about how we make moral decisions. First, it is very often important in making moral decisions that we consider the consequences of our actions—the good and the harm that we think will result from our choices. We can acknowledge this while at the same time recognizing that we may have some duties that constrain our behavior independently of the consequences of our actions. (So, as already noted at the end of sect. I.A, recognizing the importance of considering consequences doesn't commit us to a consequentialist moral theory.) Second, in cases where it *is* important for us to be guided by considerations of possible good and bad consequences of our actions, we aren't morally bound to do what *in fact* has the overall best consequences (since we typically can't determine that). What is relevant are the likely consequences we have some reason to be confident about after a reasonable amount of time and effort aimed at identifying the expected results of our behavior. If, after such consideration, a particular course of action seems clearly to maximize the good (or minimize the bad) among the consequences we're able to identify and we non-culpably and reasonably take ourselves to have no overriding consequence-independent obligation to refrain from that action, then that action is a morally appropriate one for us to perform. Third, God's moral decision-making can be viewed as analogous to our own as it was just described. God too will seek to bring about the best consequences except in cases where what morality requires is not dependent on consequences. And, in those cases where consequences of an action matter, God too will put the right amount of effort and time into determining what the best consequences are. (Of course, in God's case, this might require no time and not much effort; and, unlike in our case, what God *thinks* is the action with the best consequences *is* the action with the best consequences.[39]) Fourth, when considering whether to permit someone to suffer in order to bring about some outweighing good, it matters tremendously what one's relationship is to the one permitted to suffer. It may be morally appropriate for me to allow or even bring about certain minor sorts of suffering in my own child for her good whereas similar treatment of some stranger's child would be morally inappropriate. Likewise, it may be morally appropriate for your loving and omniscient creator to permit you to experience preventable horrific suffering in order to achieve some good whereas it wouldn't be morally appropriate for another human to do so.

In light of the four considerations from the previous paragraph, the 'moral skepticism' objection to skeptical theism seems to lose its force. The fact that we're in the dark about whether there are reasons that would justify *a perfect being* in permitting easily preventable horrific suffering doesn't give us a reason to doubt that *we* ought to prevent easily preventable horrific suffering when, even after taking a reasonable amount of time and effort, we can think of no outweighing goods that will be achieved by our permitting it. For we are reasonable and moral to base our decision on the likely consequences we know of and ignore the far-off ones we're ignorant of (only the most committed actual-consequence consequentialist would think otherwise). Moreover, in the case of preventing easily preventable horrific suffering, we know we have a prima facie duty to prevent great harm to others when this is easy for us to do and that this gives us a strong prima facie reason to prevent the suffering. If after a reasonable amount of time and effort we can't think of any negative consequence of such suffering-prevention that might outweigh its obvious goodness, then we ought to prevent the suffering we have strong prima facie reason to prevent—even though we don't know the long-term consequences of such prevention (again, only a diehard actual-consequence consequentialist would think otherwise). And even if we knew that the overall consequences that would result from permitting the easily preventable horrific suffering would be good, it's not at all clear that we have the sort of relationship with the sufferer (e.g. we aren't the sufferer's loving creator) that makes it appropriate to permit the person's horrific suffering for the sake of some greater good.

Derk Pereboom has responded on behalf of the 'moral skepticism' objection by arguing that skeptical theists have a reason for thinking they shouldn't intervene to prevent easily preventable horrific suffering. Pereboom makes his case by comparing two scenarios.[40] In the first, Jack (a nurse) knows that morphine will ease the suffering of the patients in the clinic in which he assists doctors. But he's noticed that in his experience, the doctors never give morphine to the bone cancer patients though they give it to other patients. He has no idea why this hasn't been done (at least not when he's been watching) or whether they've given morphine to bone cancer patients in the past. On a day when the doctors are unable to make it into work, he has the opportunity to relieve the suffering of bone cancer patients. But (says Pereboom) Jack clearly has some significant moral reason not to give the patients morphine. In the second scenario, Sue is a doctor who has (rationally) become a skeptical theist. She sees that God has for millennia let people suffer from a disease X. But a cure has just been developed and she has an opportunity to administer it. It seems (says Pereboom) that just as Jack has a significant moral reason not to give the patients morphine, so also Sue has a parallel reason not to administer the cure for disease X.

The problem with this response by Pereboom is that the most we should suspect (based on noticing that the disease has progressed in humans unchecked for millennia) is that a person with a relationship to humans such as the one God has with

them has a reason not to administer the cure. In Jack's case, he knows that he has to the patients a relationship sufficiently like the relationship the doctors have—i.e. a human caregiver—so he knows that if the doctors have a right to withhold the morphine for some greater good, he does too. But it's clear to Sue that she doesn't have a relationship to other humans that is like that of a loving creator to his creatures. She thinks she does not have the right to let them suffer terribly for their moral development, say, even though God does have that right in light of his relationship with them. So although Jack has a good reason to hesitate rather than relieve the suffering of the bone cancer patients, Sue does not have such a reason to hesitate rather than administer the cure for disease X. Thus, the 'moral skepticism' objection to skeptical theism—like the other objections I've considered in sect. II—does not succeed.

Notes

My thanks to Paul Draper, Tom Flint, Patrick Kain, Trenton Merricks, Michael Rea, William Rowe, and Chris Tucker for helpful comments on earlier drafts.

1. A God-justifying reason for permitting an evil E is, as you might guess, a reason for permitting E that would justify God, if God existed, in permitting E.
2. Draper (unpublished) and Howard-Snyder (forthcoming) both express this sort of concern, though Draper confesses there to being the one to introduce the terminology in print in his 1996.
3. Unfortunately, that first approximation needs some tweaking. For starters, as Plantinga 1967: 120 points out, G's possessing the two features noted won't guarantee that the aim of obtaining G can be used to justify God in permitting E. Suppose, for example, that G is a conjunctive good (G*&E). It may be that because G* is so good, the goodness of (G*&E), outweighs the badness of E. And clearly (G*&E) entails E. So the conjunctive good (G*&E) has the two features noted above. But this doesn't guarantee that the aim of obtaining (G*&E) would justify God in permitting E. For suppose that G* doesn't entail E and that G*'s goodness is greater than the goodness of the conjunctive good (G*&E). In that case, it seems God could have done better by obtaining G* instead of the conjunctive good (G*&E) and that he could do so without permitting E. Rowe (1979: 10) and Plantinga (1967: 121) suggest ways to handle this difficulty. The basic idea is to say that if G is to justify God in permitting E, then, in addition to satisfying the two conditions identified above in the text, it must also be the case that (3) there is no distinct good G* that is as good or better than G and could be obtained without permitting E (or something as bad or worse).

   Another complication that needs to be mentioned has to do with the Molinist view that there are counterfactuals of freedom that are true of individual creaturely essences even before those essences are instantiated as free creatures. According to this view, the truth of these counterfactuals of freedom is contingent. Moreover, on one plausible notion of freedom, God (if he exists) wouldn't have control over their truth, despite their contingency. So—in addition to necessary truths having to do with entailment

relations between possible goods and possible evils—there might be these contingent truths that place additional constraints on what God can bring about. (For an account of how such truths might place constraints on what God can do, see Plantinga 1974: ch. 9. For a defense of the view that there are true counterfactuals of freedom, see Flint 1998.) To deal with these concerns about counterfactuals of freedom that might place limitations on what God (if he exists) is able to bring about, we need to say something about how to interpret the 'couldn't' in clause (2) and the 'could' in clause (3). To say 'G couldn't be obtained without permitting E' is to say that God (if he exists) is not able to bring about G without permitting E—either because G's obtaining entails the permission of E or because G's obtaining *together with the counterfactuals of freedom that are contingently true of individual creaturely essences* entails the permission of E. Likewise, to say 'G* could be obtained without permitting E' is to say that God (if he exists) is able to obtain G* without permitting E—because it's the case both that G*'s obtaining doesn't entail the permission of E and that G's obtaining *together with the counterfactuals of freedom that are contingently true of individual creaturely essences* doesn't entail the permission of E.

For simplicity's sake, I will continue to focus in the main text only on clauses (1) and (2) mentioned there. But clause (3) should also be understood as being required and the interpretation of clauses (2) and (3) mentioned at the end of the previous paragraph in this note should also be assumed.

4. Probably the best place to start in getting a feel for the skeptical theist's position is William Alston's 1991. Peter van Inwagen's 1991 is also a good resource for this purpose. Wykstra's 1984 is a classic for contemporary skeptical theists (and their opponents), though he focuses on formulating a general epistemic principle (for when we are entitled to claim 'it appears that p') instead of on explaining and defending the rationale behind the skeptical theist's views as Alston does.
5. These are from Bergmann 2001.
6. The inscrutable evils we see around us are those that many thoughtful atheists and theists agree are ones for which we can't think of a God-justifying reason.
7. As I mentioned in n. 3, the Molinist view that there are true counterfactuals of freedom reminds us that—in addition to necessary truths having to do with entailment relations between possible goods and possible evils—there may be some contingent truths that place additional constraints on what God can bring about. It's worth noting here that if that Molinist view is true, we've no reason to think that what we in fact know about these contingent truths for all creaturely essences—instantiated and uninstantiated—is representative of what there is to know about them (again, I have in mind representativeness relative to the property of their figuring in a potentially God-justifying reason for permitting the inscrutable evils we see around us).
8. It may not be true, as a general rule, that an inference from a sample is justified only if the person making the inference explicitly believes that the sample is representative. But justification for such inferences *does* require that it's false that the person making the inference does or should disbelieve or (due to uncertainty) withhold the proposition that the sample in question is representative (in the relevant respect). And those who recognize the truth of (ST1)–(ST3) *should*, it seems, withhold (due to uncertainty) the propositions about the representativeness of the samples there mentioned.

9. This is how John Beaudoin formulates this skeptical thesis, which is reflected in the work of Alston (1996: 324), Howard-Snyder (1996*a*: 302–3), and van Inwagen (1991: 161–2). See Beaudoin 2005: 50.
10. See Alston 1996: 325 and van Inwagen 1991: 162–3.
11. To say it applies to an argument isn't to say it's right. Rather, it's to say that if the skeptical theist's skepticism is right, then these arguments fail.
12. (E1) and (E2) are the evils of the horrific deaths of the fawn and the 5-year-old girl, both mentioned earlier in this chapter.
13. This summary of the argument given in his 1988 and 1991 is from Rowe 1996: 262–3.
14. And by Rowe's lights too, it seems. See ibid. 267 where he says that he thinks 'this argument is, at best, a weak argument' and he proposes 'to abandon this argument altogether'.
15. This argument is proposed in Rowe 1996.
16. See Alston 1996: 323–5; Bergmann 2001: 294 n. 9; Howard-Snyder 1996*a*: 295; and Plantinga 1998: 534 for this objection to P. See Plantinga 1998 and Bergmann 2001 for further objections to this third argument by Rowe; and see Rowe 1998, 2001 for his replies.
17. In Schellenberg (2002: 51) this proposition is called 'P2'.
18. To culpably be in a contrary position involves one's own free choice: 'whether it is the free choice to ignore a God we are aware of, or to take steps to remove that awareness, and so to remove ourselves from that place where we are in a position to relate personally to God' (ibid. 42–3).
19. Pr(X/Y) >! Pr(X/Z) says that the probability of X given Y is *much* greater than the probability of X given Z.
20. He gives the argument this formulation in Draper 2004: 45 n. 6. He defends something like this argument in Draper 1989.
21. See Schellenberg 1996 and Draper 1996, both of which make it clear that they would like to avoid conflict with the skeptical theist's skepticism—presumably because they think there is some merit to that skepticism.
22. Draper has made this sort of point to me in email correspondence in July 2006. See also Schellenberg 1996: 456–9.
23. See Draper 1989: 17–18 and Schellenberg 2002: 42–52.
24. See Bernstein 1998: 155–6.
25. I should note that Bernstein himself makes no explicit appeal to the Principle of Indifference in laying out his objection, but I think that is what's lurking behind his reasoning.
26. Consider the following comment by Hájek (2003: sect. 3.1) on how philosophers think about applications of the Principle of Indifference: 'This brings us to one of the chief points of controversy regarding the classical interpretation. Critics accuse the principle of indifference of extracting information from ignorance. Proponents reply that it rather codifies the way in which such ignorance should be epistemically managed—for anything other than an equal assignment of probabilities would represent the possession of some knowledge. Critics counter-reply that in a state of complete ignorance, it is better to assign vague probabilities (perhaps vague over the entire [0, 1] interval), or to eschew the assignment of probabilities altogether.' One further possibility to consider is that—because of differences in the amount or degree of ignorance in particular cases—the Principle of Indifference may be sensibly

applied in some cases of ignorance whereas eschewing the assignment of probabilities altogether may be appropriate in other cases (and the latter approach may be best in the cases discussed by skeptical theists).

27. As becomes clear in his 1998, Swinburne himself thinks we *can* think of God-justifying reasons for permitting evils such as (E1) and (E2) so he doesn't endorse the atheist's argument.
28. These three points come out in Swinburne 1998: 20–8.
29. Remarks similar to those I've made in these last few paragraphs apply to what William Hasker 2004—another theist who rejects skeptical theism—says.
30. In correspondence, Swinburne pointed me to these remarks of his when I mentioned to him the points raised in the previous paragraph.
31. Gale 1996: 214 says something similar.
32. See e.g. Wilks 2004: 317–18.
33. Rowe 2001: 298.
34. From this he concludes that God would not permit animals to suffer lonely, horrific deaths since, he thinks, they cannot benefit from them. See Tooley 1991: 111. Stump 1985, 1990 also endorses a principle like this, though, unlike Tooley, she maintains it while defending theism against arguments from evil rather than using it to argue for atheism.
35. See van Inwagen 1988: 121–2 and Swinburne 1998: 223–36 for some reasons to doubt it.
36. See Beaudoin 2005: 45 and Bergmann 2001: 295 n. 27.
37. My own account of how we know (E5) and (E6) aren't actual is discussed in Bergmann 2006: 206–11.
38. This charge is developed in a number of places. See Almeida and Oppy 2003; Pereboom 2004; Hasker 2004; Russell 1996; and Tooley 1991. For replies to this line of reasoning see Bergmann 2001; Bergmann and Rea 2005; and Howard-Snyder forthcoming.
39. Or at least this is so if we assume the falsity of the open theist's conception of God.
40. See Pereboom 2004: 164–5.

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