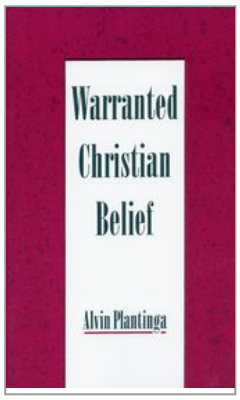
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Warranted Christian Belief
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Suffering and Evil

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Abstract and Keywords

Continuing an examination of proposed defeaters for Christian belief, I consider in this chapter the question of whether knowledge of the facts of evil (i.e., knowledge of the amount, variety, and distribution of suffering and evil in the world) constitutes a defeater for theistic and Christian belief. In the first section of the chapter, I focus on versions of the evidential argument from evil, which claims not that the existence of God and the existence of evil are logically incompatible, but only that the facts of evil offer powerful evidence against the existence of God. I first examine two such arguments due to William Rowe and then turn to one due to Paul Draper; I argue that all three fail. In the second section, I consider what we might call a nonargumentative defeater based on suffering and evil; essentially, the claim at issue here is that one who is properly sensitive and properly aware of the sheer horror of the evil displayed in the world will simply see that no being of the sort God is alleged to be could possibly permit it. After exploring and responding to this claim, I close with a brief look at some relevant themes in the Book of Job.

Keywords: Christian belief, Draper, evidential argument from evil, evil, Job, Rowe, suffering

> Why do you make me look at injustice?
>
> Why then do you tolerate the treacherous? Why are you silent while the wicked swallow up those more righteous than themselves?
>
> Habakkuk

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Our world contains an appalling amount and variety both of suffering and of evil; perhaps no century rivals ours for the magnitude of either. I'm thinking of *suffering* as encompassing any kind of pain or discomfort: pain or discomfort that results from disease or injury, or oppression, or overwork, or old age, but also disappointment with oneself or with one's lot in life (or that of people close to one), the pain of loneliness, isolation, betrayal, unrequited love; and there is also suffering that results from awareness of others' suffering. I'm thinking of *evil*, fundamentally, as a matter of free creatures' doing what is wrong, including particularly the way we human beings mistreat and savage each other. Often pain and suffering result from evil, as in some of the events for which our century will be remembered—the Holocaust, the horrifying seventy-year-long Marxist experiment in eastern Europe with its millions of victims, the villainy of Pol Pot and his followers, genocide in Bosnia and Africa. Of course much suffering and evil are banal and everyday, and are none the better for that.
Now the evil and suffering in our world have, indeed, baffled and perplexed Christians and other believers in God. This bafflement and perplexity are widely represented in Christian and Hebrew Scriptures, especially, though by no means exclusively, in Psalms and the book of Job. Faced with the shocking concreteness of **(p.459)** a particularly horrifying example of suffering or evil in his own life or the life of someone close to him, a believer can find himself tempted to take toward God an attitude he himself deplores—an attitude of mistrust, or suspicion, or bitterness, or rebellion. Such a problem, broadly speaking, is a spiritual or pastoral problem. A person in its grip may not be much tempted to doubt the existence or even the goodness of God; nevertheless he may resent God, fail to trust him, be wary of him, be unable to think of him as a loving father, think of him as if he were far off and unconcerned.

Now many philosophers and others have argued that knowledge of the amount, variety, and distribution of suffering and evil (“the facts of evil,” for short) confronts the believer with a problem of quite another sort.[1] These facts, they argue, can serve as the premise of a powerful argument against the very existence of God—against the existence, that is, of an all-powerful, all-knowing, and wholly good person who has created the world and loves the creatures he has created. Call such an argument ‘atheological’; atheological arguments go all the way back to the ancient world, to Epicurus, whose argument is repeated in the eighteenth century by Hume:

> Epicurus' old questions are yet unanswered.
>
> Is he willing to prevent evil, but not able? then he is impotent.
>
> Is he able, but not willing? then he is malevolent. Is he both able and willing? whence then is evil?[2]

And the claim is that this argument (more exactly, knowledge of this argument) constitutes a defeater for theistic belief—and if for theistic belief, then also for Christian belief.

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Our question in this chapter, therefore, is whether knowledge of the facts of evil *does* constitute a defeater for theistic and Christian belief. Does knowledge of the facts of evil, together with the rest of what I know, give me a reason to give up belief in God? Does this knowledge make it the case that I cannot continue to hold Christian belief *rationally*? Note that this is not the traditional problem of theodicy: I will not be making any attempt to "justify the ways of God to man" or **(p.460)** to give an answer to the question why God permits evil generally or why he permits some specially heinous forms of evil. Our question is, instead, *epistemological*: given that theistic and Christian belief can have warrant in the way suggested in chapters 6 through 8, does knowledge of the facts of evil provide a defeater for this belief?

Of course the answer need not be the same for all Christians: perhaps the facts of suffering and evil, in our sad world, do not constitute such a defeater for very young Christians, or for culturally insulated Christians, or for Christians who know little about the suffering and evil our world contains, or for those who don't have an adequate appreciation of the seriousness of what they do know about. Our question, however, is about Philip Quinn's "intellectually sophisticated adults in our culture" (above, p. 358); can I be mature, both intellectually and spiritually, be aware of the enormous and impressive amounts and depths of suffering and evil in our world, be aware also of the best atheological arguments starting from the facts of evil, and still be such that Christian belief is rational and warranted for me? Could it still have warrant sufficient for knowledge, for me? I shall argue that the right response is, "Yes indeed." And it isn't that this can be so just for an exceptional few, perhaps the Mother Teresas of the world. I shall argue that for any serious Christian with a little epistemology, the facts of evil, appalling as they are, offer no obstacle to warranted Christian belief.

Now until twenty or twenty-five years ago, the favored sort of atheological argument from evil was for the conclusion that there is a *logical inconsistency* in what Christians believe. They believe both that there is such a person as God (a person who is omnipotent, omniscient, and wholly good), and also that there is evil in the world; it isn't logically possible (so went the claim) that both of these beliefs be true. Thus the late John Mackie:

> I think, however, that a more telling criticism can be made by way of the traditional problem of evil. Here it can be shown, not merely that religious beliefs lack rational support, but that they are positively irrational, that the several parts of the essential theological doctrine are inconsistent with one another.[3]

(p.461) Mackie goes on to argue that the existence of God is logically incompatible with the existence of evil; he concludes that since the theist is committed to both, theistic belief is clearly irrational.

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At present, however, it is widely conceded that there is nothing like straightforward contradiction or necessary falsehood in the joint affirmation of God and evil; the existence of evil is not logically incompatible (even in the broadly logical sense) with the existence of an all-powerful, all-knowing, and perfectly good God.[4] An important line of thought in the demise of the traditional claim of contradiction has involved the notion of *free will*: although it is logically possible that there be free creatures (creatures whose actions are not antecedently determined, e.g., by God, or by natural law and antecedent conditions) who always do only what is right, it is not within **(p.462)** God's power to create free creatures and cause them to do only what is right. (If he *causes* someone to do what is right, then that person does not do what is right *freely*.) Of course that doesn't necessarily suffice to get the theist off the hook. There is also no logical contradiction in the thought that the earth is flat, or that it rests on the back of a turtle, which rests on the back of another turtle, and so on, so that it's turtles all the way down; nevertheless these views (given what we now think we know) are irrational. (You would be distressed if your grown children adopted them.) Those who offer atheological arguments from evil have accordingly turned from the claim that the existence of God is flatly incompatible with that of evil to *evidential* or *probabilistic* arguments of one sort or another. Here the claim is not that Christian belief is logically inconsistent, but rather that the facts of evil offer *powerful evidence against* the existence of God. These evidential arguments are also typically probabilistic: in the simplest cases, they claim that the existence of God is unlikely or improbable with respect to the facts of evil together with the rest of our background knowledge—that is, what we all know, or perhaps what all reasonable and well-informed people now believe. So the typical atheological claim at present is not that the existence of God is *incompatible* with that of evil; it is rather that the latter offers the resources for a strong evidential or probabilistic argument against the former.

Now from an atheological point of view, the old argument for inconsistency in Christian belief had a lot to be said for it. It was short and sweet; if there is a contradiction in Christian belief, then Christian belief is false, and that's all there is to it. It doesn't matter what else is or isn't true, and it doesn't matter whether there are any good arguments or evidence of other kinds *for* Christian belief: if it is inconsistent, it's false, and that settles the matter. Furthermore, once you see that a proposition is false, you can't rationally continue to believe it; so such an argument would show at one stroke that Christian belief is *false* and that it is *irrational*, at least for those apprised of the argument. But things are very different with contemporary evidential arguments from evil. First, suppose evil does constitute evidence, of some kind, against theism: what follows from that? Not much. There are many propositions I believe that are true and rationally accepted, and such that there is evidence against them. The fact that Peter is only three months old is evidence against his weighing nineteen pounds; nevertheless I might rationally (and truly) believe that's how much he weighs. Is

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the idea, instead, that the existence of God is improbable with respect to our *total evidence*, all the rest of what we know or believe? To show this, the atheologian would have to look into all the evidence *for* the existence of God—the traditional ontological, cosmological, and teleological arguments, as well as many **(p.463)** others;[5] he would be obliged to weigh the relative merits of all of these arguments, and weigh them against the evidential argument from evil in order to reach the indicated conclusion. This is vastly messier and more problematic than a terse and elegant demonstration of a contradiction *à la* Mackie.

Another problem for this atheological argument can be brought out by considering responses to the most popular contemporary version of the argument from design—the so-called fine-tuning argument. This argument begins from the apparent fact that the fundamental constants of physics—the speed of light, the gravitational constant, the strength of the weak and strong nuclear forces—must apparently have values that fall within an exquisitely narrow range for life to be so much as possible. If these values had been even minutely different (if, for example, the gravitational constant had been different in even the most minuscule degree), habitable planets would not have developed and life (at least life at all like ours) would not have been possible. And this suggests or makes plausible the thought that the world was designed or created by a Designer who intended the existence of living creatures and eventually rational, intelligent, morally significant creatures. One contemporary response is that *possibly* "there has been an evolution of worlds (in the sense of whole universes) and the world we find ourselves in is simply one among countless others that have existed throughout all eternity."[6] And given infinitely many universes, Daniel Dennett thinks, all the possible distributions of values over the cosmological constants would have been tried out (p. 179); as it happens, we find ourselves, naturally enough, in one of those universes where the constants are such as to allow the development of intelligent life. But then the probability of theism, given the whole array of worlds, isn't particularly high.

In the same way, then, a theist might agree that it is unlikely, given just what we know about *our* world, that there is such a person as God. But perhaps God has created countless worlds, in fact, all the worlds (all the universes) in which there is a substantial overall balance of good over evil. In some of these worlds there is no suffering and evil; in some a good deal; as it happens, we find ourselves in one of the worlds where there is a good deal. But the probability of theism, given the whole ensemble of worlds, isn't particularly low.[7]

(p.464) Still further, suppose theism *were* improbable with respect to the rest of what I believe; alternatively, suppose the rest of what I believe offered evidence *against* theism and none *for* it. What would follow from that? Again, not much. There are many true beliefs I hold (and hold in complete rationality) such that they are unlikely given the rest of what I believe. I am playing poker; it is

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improbable on the rest of what I know or believe that I have just drawn to an inside straight; it doesn't follow that there is even the slightest irrationality in my belief that I have just drawn to an inside straight. The reason, of course, is that this belief doesn't depend, for its warrant, on its being appropriately probable on the rest of what I believe; it has a quite different source of warrant, namely, perception. Similarly for theism: everything really turns, here, on the question whether, as I have been arguing, theism has or may have some source of warrant—perception of God, or the *sensus divinitatis*, or faith and the internal instigation of the Holy Spirit (see above, chapters 8 and 9) —distinct from its probability on other propositions I believe.

The important questions with respect to these atheological evidential arguments, therefore, are of the following sort: precisely what are they supposed to prove? That theism is false? Or that it is irrational for any thoughtful person apprised of the facts of evil to accept it? Or that the facts of evil and those probabilistic considerations together constitute a defeater for it? Or for at least *some* reflective theists, even if not for all? Or that the facts of suffering and evil make it more rational to reject belief in God than to accept it? Or what? One of the main problems here is to make out the proposed bearing of the atheological arguments from evil: precisely what are they supposed to accomplish? We'll have to bear this question in mind as we look at some of these arguments. Twenty-five years ago, there were no developed atheological evidential arguments from evil; that is understandable because (apparently) nearly all atheologians were of the opinion that the existence of God is flatly inconsistent with that of evil. Since then, however, there have been several attempts to state and develop evidential arguments from evil. Some of these efforts are ingenious and indeed revealing; I shall argue, however, that they are no more successful than the older argument for inconsistency. Indeed, what is most surprising, here, is the *weakness* of these arguments. I shall then go on to suggest that there is a wholly different (and more promising) way in which the atheologian could claim that the facts of evil constitute a defeater for theistic belief. Promising as it is, however, this claim, in my opinion, also fails.

(p.465) I. Evidential Atheological Arguments

The last twenty-five years or so have seen the development of several different versions of the evidential argument from evil. In this section I examine a couple of the best.

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A. Rowe's Arguments

I turn first to an argument William Rowe has been proposing and developing for the past twenty years.[8] Consider some particularly horrifying cases of evil or suffering: a five-year-old girl's rape and murder (E_1) or a fawn's lingering and painful death in a forest fire (E_2). Rowe's argument goes as follows:

> P: No good we know of is such that we know that it justifies an omnipotent, omniscient, perfectly good being [a *perfect being*, for short] in permitting E_1 and E_2;[9]
> **(p.466)**

Therefore, probably

Q: No good at all justifies a perfect being in permitting E_1 and E_2;

Therefore probably

not-G: There is no perfect being.

Here we are thinking of goods and evils as *states of affairs*. A state of affairs can be *actual* or *nonactual*; only an actual good, says Rowe, could justify a perfect being in permitting E_1 and E_2 (or, indeed, any other evil). So the idea behind P is that we do not know of any good that is actual and is such that we know that it suffices to justify a perfect being in permitting E_1 and E_2.

There are several problems with this argument. At the simplest level, however, the main problem, once the others are straightened out or ignored, is with the inference from P to Q. I look inside my tent: I don't see a St. Bernard; it is then probable that there is no St. Bernard in my tent. That is because if there were one there, I would very likely have seen it; it's not easy for a St. Bernard to avoid detection in a small tent. Again, I look inside my tent: I don't see any noseeums (very small midges with a bite out of all proportion to their size); this time it is not particularly probable that there are no noseeums in my tent—at least it isn't any more probable than before I looked. The reason, of course, is that even if there were noseeums there, I wouldn't see 'em; they're too small to see. And now the question is whether God's reasons, if any, for permitting such evils as E_1 and E_2 are more like St. Bernards or more like noseeums. Suppose the fact is God has a reason for permitting a particular evil like E_1 or E_2, and suppose we try to figure out what that reason might be: is it likely that we would come up with the right answer? Is it even likely that we would wind up with plausible candidates for God's reason? A series of important recent papers by Stephen Wykstra, William Alston, and Peter van Inwagen argue (among other things) that it is not.[10] The main reason is the epistemic distance between us and **(p.467)** God: given that God *does* have a reason for permitting these evils, why think we would be the first to know? Given that he is omniscient and given our very substantial epistemic limitations, it isn't at all surprising that his reasons for some of what he does or permits completely escape us. But then from the fact that no goods we know of are such that we know that they justify God in (serve as his reasons for) permitting E_1 or E_2, it simply doesn't follow that it is

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probable, with respect to what we know, that there aren't any such goods, or that God has no reason for permitting those evils. The arguments in these papers seem to me to be conclusive; I shall not repeat them here.

More recently (and partly under the pressure of some of the works mentioned in footnote 10), Rowe has himself come to view this argument with a jaundiced eye: “I now think this argument is, at best, a weak argument.”[11] He therefore sets this argument aside in favor of one whose prospects he thinks are brighter: “I propose to abandon this argument altogether and give what I believe is a better argument for thinking that P makes Q more likely than not” (p. 267). After giving *that* argument, Rowe goes on to say that “we can simplify the argument considerably by bypassing Q altogether and proceeding directly from P to -G” (p. 270). This new argument goes as follows. First, we must note that Rowe intends P in such a way that it is entailed by not-G; P is equivalent to

P′ There is no perfect being and known good such that the latter justifies the former in permitting E_1 and E_2.

Rowe then assumes that P(G/k) and P(P/G&k) both equal .5 (where k is our background information—what all or most of us know or believe.) It then follows by the probability calculus that P(G/P&k) is considerably less than P(G/k); hence P disconfirms G. The argument thus simplified is Rowe's *new* evidential argument from evil. I regret to say, however, that this new argument is, if anything, weaker than the old. That is because an analysis of purely formal features of the argument shows that it is counterbalanced by other arguments of the same structure and strength for a conclusion inconsistent with Rowe's conclusion (and hence for the denial of Rowe's conclusion).[12] In essence, the problem is twofold. **(p.468)**
First, Rowe's argument really depends on the fact (as already noted) that the conclusion he proposes to support, i.e.,

not-G There is no perfect being

entails P, the premise of his argument. Now the probability calculus tells us that if a proposition *A* entails a proposition *B*, then *B* confirms *A* in the sense that the probability of *A* on *B* conjoined with our background information k will exceed that of *A* on k *simpliciter* (unless either *A* or *B* has an absolute probability of 1). Thus any contingent consequence *C* of not-G will confirm not-G with respect to any body of background information k (k, of course, cannot include or entail *C*). But then by the same token, any contingent consequence of G will confirm G with respect to any body of background information k. This means that Rowe's argument will be counterbalanced by other arguments—for example, one that takes as its premise any of the following propositions:

P* Neither E_1 nor E_2 is such that we know that no good justifies a perfect being in permitting it.

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P** No evil we know of is such that we know that no perfect being is justified by some good in permitting it.
P*** No evil we know of is such that we know that no perfect being would permit it.

Presumably there will be as many arguments of this sort *for* G as there are arguments of Rowe's sort *against* G.

The second problem is like unto the first. Rowe's argument is really an "argument from degenerate evidence"—an argument in which you take as your new evidence, not the new proposition you learn, but a weaker consequence of it. We can see this as follows. Rowe's premise P is equivalent to

P′ Either not-G or no good we know of is such that we know that it justifies E_1 and E_2,

where a good *g* justifies an evil *e* iff if there were a perfect being *b*, and *g* and *e* were actual, then *b* would be justified by *g* in permitting *e*.[13] (For example, perhaps a certain kind of moral growth on my part requires a certain amount of suffering; and perhaps we can see that a perfect being would be justified by that moral growth in permitting the suffering in question.) Now what we learn by reflecting on E_1 and E_2 (and other evils) and their relation to a perfect being is really

-J No good we know of is such that we know that it justifies E_1 and E_2.

Clearly enough, -J entails and is stronger than P′, the premise of Rowe's argument. And the problem with arguments of this sort is that, once again, there will be other arguments of the same structure and strength for an incompatible conclusion. For example, suppose I win the Indiana **(p.469)** lottery (W). The probability of W with respect to k is very low, say one in a million. Now suppose I take as my new evidence not W, but

W or -G.

By an argument just like Rowe's,[14] we can show that the probability of -G on this premise together with the relevant background information is very high indeed—something like .999999. Of course there is a similar argument for G; here the premise will be

W or G.

Clearly, neither of these arguments makes any real advance, and that is because they counterbalance each other.

Rowe's argument from P to -G displays the same structure as this lottery argument. He proposes to argue for -G; our "new evidence" is really -J; but to get his premise P he weakens this new evidence by adding the conclusion of his argument, -G, as a disjunct, so that P is or is equivalent to the proposition *-J or -G*. That makes this an argument from degenerate evidence. To construct the counterbalancing argument we simply weaken

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> -J by adding as a disjunct G, the proposition that there is a perfect being, rather than -G; this counterbalancing argument will be for the denial of Rowe's conclusion and will be as strong as his. Arguments from degenerate evidence, clearly enough, do not serve to advance the discussion.

B. Draper's Argument

Paul Draper presents an argument of quite a different sort.[15] He asks us to consider the pattern of pain and pleasure in the world: the amount and distribution of each and the sorts of conditions under which each is found. Draper then claims two things: first, this pattern of pain and pleasure is much less probable on theism than on a certain other hypothesis *h* inconsistent with theism; and second, this fact poses a serious problem for theistic belief. A way in which Draper's argument is superior to the Rowe variety is that it doesn't require that we be in a position to judge, with respect to any kinds of evils, the likelihood that an omniscient, omnipotent, and wholly good being would permit them. Nevertheless, he says, “Our knowledge about pain and pleasure creates an epistemic problem for theists” (p. 12). Why so, exactly?

(p.470) 1. Draper's Argument Initially Stated

> The problem is not that some proposition about pain and pleasure can be shown to be both true and logically inconsistent with theism. Rather, the problem is evidential. A statement reporting the observations and testimony upon which our knowledge about pain and pleasure is based bears a certain significant negative evidential relation to theism. And because of this, we have a *prima facie* good epistemic reason to reject theism—that is, a reason that is sufficient for rejecting theism unless overridden by other reasons for not rejecting theism. (p. 12)

What is that statement, and what is the significant negative evidential relation it bears to theism? As for the statement:

> Now let “O” stand for a statement reporting both the observations one has made of humans and animals experiencing pain or pleasure and the testimony one has encountered concerning the observations others have made of sentient beings experiencing pain and pleasure. By “pain” I mean physical or mental suffering of any sort. (pp. 13–14)

So O is the statement that bears a “significant negative evidential relation to theism.” Note that O is person relative: each of us will have her own O, and my O may differ from yours. My O, we might say, sets out the facts about the magnitude, variety, distribution, duration, and the like (for short, the ‘disposition’) of pleasure and pain as *I* know them; yours does the same for *you*.

But what is this significant negative evidential relation in which O stands to theism? Here Draper bows in the direction of David Hume: most contemporary philosophers of religion (unlike Hume) “fail to recognize that one cannot determine what facts about evil theism needs to explain or how well it needs to

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explain them without considering alternatives to theism" (p. 13). The important question is "whether or not any serious hypothesis that is logically inconsistent with theism explains some significant set of facts about evil or about good and evil much better than theism does" (p. 13). And the answer to this important question, says Draper, is that indeed there is such a serious hypothesis, one that is both inconsistent with theism and explains some significant facts about good and evil much better than theism does. This is the "hypothesis of indifference" (HI, for short):

> HI: Neither the nature nor the condition of sentient beings on earth is the result of benevolent or malevolent actions performed by non-human persons. (p. 13)[16]
> **(p.471)**

HI, of course, is inconsistent with theism (taking the latter to entail that the world has been created by a person who is wholly good as well as omnipotent and omniscient). Draper's claim is that:

> C: HI explains the facts O reports much better than theism does. (p. 14)

He claims furthermore that if one could show that there is a serious hypothesis that is incompatible with theism and explains O much better than theism does, then "one would have a *prima facie* good reason to believe that this alternative hypothesis is more probable than theism and hence that theism is probably false."[17] What is it for a proposition to 'explain' something like the facts that O reports?

> I will reformulate C as the claim that the facts O reports are much more surprising on theism than they are on HI, or, more precisely, that the antecedent probability of O is much greater on the assumption that HI is true than on the assumption that theism is true. (p. 14)

I take it the more precise formulation is the operative one here; we aren't really talking about *explanation*[18] but just about the antecedent probabilities of O on theism and HI. Accordingly, we must ask what this 'antecedent probability' is. "By the 'antecedent' probability of O," says Draper, "I mean O's probability, independent of (rather than prior to) the observations and testimony it reports" (p. 14). So the antecedent probability of O is the probability of O on something like the rest of what I know.[19] Finally, the probability in question is *epistemic* probability, not (for example) logical, statistical, or physical probability. And what is epistemic probability? **(p. 472)**

> The concept of epistemic probability is an ordinary concept of probability for which no adequate philosophical analysis has, in my opinion, been proposed. As a first approximation, however, perhaps the following analysis will do:

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> Relative to K, p is epistemically more probable than q, where K is an epistemic situation and p and q are propositions, just in case any fully rational person in K would have a higher degree of belief in p than in q. (p. 27, footnote 2)

As Draper says, epistemic probability is an ordinary concept that is difficult to analyze or explain; suppose we provisionally accept his proposed first approximation.[20] (I take it there is an implicit restriction to *human* persons; how things might go with other rational creatures is not our present concern.) What does K include? What goes into an epistemic situation? We shall have to return to this question later; for now, let's say initially that K, for a given person *S*, would include at least some of the other propositions *S* believes, as well as the experiences *S* is undergoing and perhaps has undergone; it would also include what *S* remembers, possibly a specification of *S*'s epistemic environment, and no doubt more besides.

Now we see the general shape of the argument: the first premise is C, the claim that the antecedent epistemic probability of O given HI is much greater than the antecedent probability of O given theism. And second, if C is true, says Draper, then "we have a *prima facie* good epistemic reason to reject theism—that is, a reason that is sufficient for rejecting theism unless overridden by other reasons for not rejecting theism" (p. 12). Here he is apparently relying on a general principle, perhaps something like

> (1) For any propositions *P* and *Q* and person *S*, if *S* believes *P* and *Q* and there is a serious hypothesis *R* that is incompatible with *P* and such that the antecedent epistemic probability of *Q* with respect to *R* for *S* is much greater than the antecedent epistemic probability of *Q* with respect to *P* for *S,* then *S* has a *prima facie* good epistemic reason to reject *P*.

Draper's claim is that the antecedent epistemic probability of O on HI is much greater than on theism, and because HI is a serious hypothesis and is inconsistent with theism, we have a *prima facie* good reason for rejecting theism:

> Now suppose I succeed in showing that C is true (relative to our own and my reader's epistemic situations.) Then the truth of C is (for us) a *prima facie* good (epistemic) reason to believe that theism is less probable than HI. Thus, since the denial of theism is obviously **(p.473)** entailed by HI and so is at least as probable as HI, the truth of C is a *prima facie* good reason to believe that theism is less probable than not. And since it is epistemically irrational to believe both that theism is true and that it is less probable than not, the truth of C is also a *prima facie* good reason to reject (i.e., to cease or refrain from believing) theism. (p. 14)

The claim, then, is that the truth of C gives me a "*prima facie* good reason to believe that theism is less probable than not"—that is, that its probability is less than .5. Less probable than not with respect to *what*? The answer must be K. The idea is that the truth of C gives me a *prima facie* good reason for thinking that theism is improbable with respect to my noetic situation; hence, unless I can find some reasons *for* theism, the rational thing to do is to give it up.[21] We could put this by saying that, according to

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Draper, my knowledge of the truth of C gives me a defeater for theism, unless I can find some reasons for it; alternatively, it gives me a potential defeater for theism, a potential defeater that will be *actual* unless I can find those reasons for theism.

2. On Being Evidentially Challenged

This is a subtle challenge and a fascinating new entry into the lists; Draper deploys it with power and sophistication. Nevertheless I think the argument utterly fails to show that traditional Christian theism is threatened by a defeater or epistemologically threatened in some other way. Suppose we take a closer look. Now Draper's argument really has two premises, C and (1). I have argued elsewhere[22] that in fact C is false: it is not the case that the amount, duration, and distribution of pain and pleasure, as I understand it, are more probable on HI than on theism. Here I want to focus on the other premise, the claim that if, in fact, O is much more likely on a serious alternative hypothesis like HI than on theism, then the theist has a *prima facie* reason to reject theism. Why think a thing like that? Suppose (contrary to fact, as I see it) C were true: what kind and how much of a challenge to theistic belief would this be? How widespread **(p. 474)** is this alleged evidential disability? Before we can answer this question, however, we must ask another: what, exactly, is a *serious* alternative hypothesis? Draper's answer: “Specifically, one hypothesis is a ‘serious’ alternative to another only if (i) it is not *ad hoc*—the facts to be explained are not arbitrarily built into it—and (ii) it is at least as plausible initially as the other hypothesis.”[23] Condition (i) requires no present comment; what about condition (ii)? How are we to understand ‘plausibility’ here? I think Draper means to abstract from specific epistemic situations: we are to think of the plausibility of a hypothesis as depending not on considerations such as the specific evidence (propositional and nonpropositional) I may have for or against it, but on more general considerations such as its scope and specificity, and perhaps how it fits in with what is generally known (a hypothesis entailing that the world is flat wouldn't be plausible). Thus, for example, he defends the plausibility of HI as follows:

> And it [HI] is at least as plausible initially as G [i.e., theism]. After all, G is a very specific supernaturalist hypothesis with strong ontological commitments. If, on the other hand, we take the Indifference Hypothesis to be the hypothesis that the first causes of the universe, *if there are any*, are neither benevolent nor malevolent, then the Indifference Hypothesis is consistent with naturalism as well as with many supernaturalist hypotheses and its ontological commitments are much weaker than G's.[24]

So what counts for plausibility are these general facts about relative scope and strength. Still further, if I had to consider the *specific* evidence I have (propositional or otherwise) for HI to evaluate its plausibility, I would have to take any reasons I have *for* theism as evidence *against* HI; HI might then be very implausible for me. So plausibility must abstract from such specific evidence.

Suppose we say that a proposition *P* is *evidentially challenged* for *S* if it satisfies the antecedent of (1): *P* is evidentially challenged for a person *S* if and only if *S*

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believes P and there are propositions Q and R such that S believes Q, R is a serious hypothesis incompatible with P, and Q is much more probable with respect to R than with respect to P. What (1) claims, therefore, is that if a proposition P is evidentially challenged for S, then S has a *prima facie* good epistemic reason for rejecting P—for being agnostic with respect to it or believing its denial. Is this really true? Is being evidentially challenged a serious handicap?

Well, how widespread is it? How many of my beliefs *are* evidentially challenged, for me? More, perhaps, than we might initially think. For example, here are three more propositions related, for me, as are theism, O and HI: **(p.475)**

(2) George is a non-Catholic academic,
(3) George is a professor at Notre Dame,

and

(4) George is a Catholic academic.

First, I believe both (2) and (3). Second, (3) is vastly more likely on (4) (relative to K) than it is on (2). (After all, the proportion of Catholic academics who are professors at Notre Dame is many times greater than that of non-Catholic academics who are professors there.) Further, (4) is incompatible with (2). Still further, (4) is a serious hypothesis: it is not *ad hoc*, and it is as plausible as (2). (True, I have a lot of evidence for (2) — the fact, e.g., that George is an elder in the Christian Reformed Church, which is non-Catholic, the fact that George has always claimed to be a Protestant, and so on—but as we saw above, this specific evidence isn't relevant to the plausibility of (4).) So (2) is evidentially challenged for me. Does this fact give me a good reason to reject it? (Should I reconsider: George *is* a professor at Notre Dame, after all, and that is much more likely on (4) than on (2); so maybe he's really a Catholic?) Not clearly. A similar trio of propositions:

(2*) I am in my study,
(3*) I am within four feet of a dog,

and

(4*) I am at the dog pound.

Again, I believe (2*) and (3*); (4*) is a serious (in Draper's sense) alternative to (2*), and (3*) is much more likely on (4*) than it is on (2*) (usually there aren't any dogs in my study); therefore (2*) is evidentially challenged for me. So, incidentally, is (3*) itself:

(3*) I am within four feet of a dog,
(5) I hear no doggie sounds such as barking, growling, panting, or jingling of tags,

and

(6) I am not within earshot of any dogs.

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Again, (6) is a serious alternative hypothesis to (3*), and (5) is much more likely with respect to (6) than it is with respect to (3*). (3*), therefore, is evidentially challenged for me. A couple of more examples: my friend has a cat named Maynard; I believe that Maynard is a cat and **(p.476)** also (as my friend reports) that Maynard likes cooked green beans; the latter, however, is much more likely on the serious (in Draper's sense) alternative hypothesis that Maynard is a Frisian, or possibly a Frenchman; so the belief that Maynard is a cat is evidentially challenged for me. I believe (naturally enough) that you are a human being; you and I are on a walk in the woods, however, so I also believe that you are in a forest; of course that proposition is vastly more likely on the serious alternative hypothesis that you are a tree; so the belief that you are a human being is evidentially challenged for me. (As far as that goes, so is the belief that *I* am a human being.)

I think you get the picture. It seems likely that most of what we believe—at any rate for propositions that are contingent in the broadly logical sense—is also evidentially challenged. I don't know how to give a *proof* of this claim (it probably isn't worth spending a whole lot of time trying to find a proof); but it certainly seems likely to be the case. And this suggests that a challenge of this sort is not very significant *by itself* or *in the general case*. If most of the propositions I believe face an evidential challenge, then I don't learn much of interest about theism by learning that it, too, faces such a challenge.

Under what conditions (if any) would a challenge of this sort *be* significant? What sorts of beliefs are such that their being subject to an evidential challenge gives us serious reason to doubt them? Here we think first of scientific hypotheses. I propose a hypothesis *H** to explain the behavior of gases: you point out that certain data are more probable with respect to another hypothesis *H'* incompatible with mine; that certainly seems to be a strong *prima facie* reason to doubt my hypothesis. Of course the data must be *relevant* data, the sort of data *H** is in the business of explaining. Suppose Sam presently feels a mild pain in his left knee. That is much less probable with respect to *H** than with respect to the hypothesis *H'*: *Overcome by astonishment at learning that H* is false, Sam fell and injured his knee*; still, that is nothing whatever against *H**. For the typical scientific hypothesis *H*, there will be a body of relevant data (past and future as well as present) such that the success of *H* depends on how well it explains that data; and many scientific hypotheses (at least on the most usual stories) get all or nearly all of their warrant from the fact that they account for the relevant data.[25] A proposition of that sort is seriously threatened by a relevant evidential challenge. If I discover that a belief of *this* sort is subject to an evidential challenge, then I do have substantial evidence against it and a strong *prima facie* reason to give it up.

(p.477) As I have argued throughout this book, however, it is an enormous assumption to think that belief in God or, more broadly, the larger set of Christian (or Jewish or Muslim) beliefs of which belief in God is a part, is in this respect like a scientific hypothesis. Not only is this assumption enormous: it is also false. The warrant for these beliefs, if they have warrant, does not derive

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from the fact (if it is a fact) that they properly explain some body of data. For most believers, theistic belief is part of a larger whole (a Christian or Muslim or Jewish whole); it is accepted as part of that larger whole and is not ordinarily accepted because it is an *explanation* of anything; hence its rationality or warrant, if it has some, does not depend on its nicely explaining some body of data.[26]

Still, does this fact, crucially important as it is, deliver theism from Draper's evidential challenge? Is it *only* scientific hypotheses for which (relevant) evidential challenges are serious? No. Suppose you are under the impression that your friend Paul has been vacationing on Cape Cod for the last couple of weeks (you have a rather weak memory that this is where he said he was going), but the postcards you get from him were mailed from Grand Teton National Park; he doesn't say in the postcards where he is, but he does note the remarkably dry air, as well as the great differences between day and night temperatures. Then I think your belief that he is vacationing at Cape Cod is seriously challenged (a relevant alternative hypothesis being that he is vacationing in the Tetons). And this is true even though the warrant for your belief that he was vacationing on the cape didn't arise as a result of its properly explaining data of one kind or another. So it isn't just scientific hypotheses that can be called into question by virtue of facing a relevant evidential challenge.

Suppose we look a bit deeper here. That I am in my study (and not at the dog pound), that Maynard is a cat, that you are a human being—these are all subject to an evidential challenge; of course that doesn't suggest for a moment that there is something irrational or problematic in these beliefs, or that they are improbable with respect to our epistemic situations. Why not? Because each of these propositions has a good deal of warrant for me, warrant that is independent of its probabilistic relationships to the beliefs involved in the evidential challenges. In cases like this, being evidentially challenged comes to very little. And it isn't even necessary that the belief in question have a *high* degree of warrant. I believe rather infirmly (I have a relatively weak memory belief here) that the population of greater New York City is more than 17 million; I also believe that the area of **(p.478)** greater New York City is 1,384 square miles; that proposition is many times more likely with respect to the serious alternative hypothesis that the population of New York City is less than 10 million. My belief that the population of New York City is more than 17 million is therefore subject to an evidential challenge; that fact doesn't provide me with a *prima facie* defeater for it, even though it doesn't have a high degree of warrant. Perhaps most of what I believe faces an evidential challenge, but most of what I believe (so one thinks) also has warrant of one kind or another; and when it does, an evidential challenge doesn't amount to much. With respect to most of what I believe, being evidentially challenged does not threaten to serve as a defeater for the proposition in question, and neither does my knowing, if I do, that it is evidentially challenged. Neither the challenge nor the knowledge, in

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the case of the propositions mentioned, puts me in a condition where, if I continue to believe the challenged proposition, I am irrational or in some other way out of line, epistemically speaking. And that is because the propositions in question get warrant from such sources as perception, memory, sympathy, testimony, *a priori* intuition, and the like; they do not depend, for their warrant, on their relation to such propositions as those furnishing the evidential challenge.

Well then, how does it stand with theism? According to Draper, "Establishing the truth of H [that theistic belief faces an evidential challenge] would be insignificant if the typical theist could rationally continue to believe that God exists after learning that H is true."[27] What I propose to argue here is that the typical theist *can* rationally continue to believe that God exists after learning that theism faces an evidential challenge. Suppose I accept traditional Christian belief, including, of course, theistic belief. Now suppose I come to believe that in fact theistic belief is subject to an evidential challenge. I don't as a matter of fact believe that the pattern of pain and pleasure in the world does provide such a challenge—at any rate I don't think Draper's argument for this conclusion is successful—but suppose I come to believe that there is an evidential challenge of this or some other kind for Christian or theistic belief. Would that give me a defeater for my theistic belief? Would it make it irrational for me to continue believing?

Not if that belief has any significant degree of warrant for me. Suppose Christian and theistic belief has a good deal of warrant for me by way of faith and the internal instigation of the Holy Spirit (IIHS) (see above pp. 249ff.); then the fact that theism is evidentially challenged doesn't give me a defeater and doesn't bring it about that **(p.479)** my theistic belief is irrational. Compare the case of Maynard and my belief that he is a cat. You point out that this belief suffers from an evidential challenge: that he likes cooked green beans is much less likely on his being a cat than on his being a Frisian. I agree, but am undeterred, continuing in full rationality to believe that he is indeed a cat. This belief is rational for me in these circumstances because it has warrant for me quite independent of its relationship to the proposition that Maynard likes cooked green beans. There is of course no cognitive malfunction involved in my continuing to hold a belief with significant warrant from such sources as memory, perception, IIHS, and the like, even when I learn that the belief is subject to an evidential challenge. Our cognitive design plan permits, indeed, requires maintaining such a belief in the face of such a "challenge." And clearly the same goes for my theistic belief, if, in fact, it has warrant in the way proposed in chapter 8.

And this is true even if I don't myself *believe* that theistic belief has warrant for me. Perhaps I have never thought much about epistemology, have at best a hazy idea as to what warrant is, and have never considered such questions as

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whether a proposition's being evidentially challenged gives me a reason for rejecting it. You point out that my belief that Maynard is a cat is evidentially challenged; I continue (in my epistemological innocence) to believe as firmly as before that Maynard is a cat; neither the rationality nor the warrant of that belief is diminished. Again, the same goes for theistic belief, if it has significant warrant for me. You point out that theism is evidentially challenged for me: I agree that that is so and continue to believe as firmly as before; if Christian belief and hence theism *do* have significant warrant for me, my continuing so to believe is wholly rational and remains warranted. It is perfectly rational, internally, because it still seems obviously true to me; it is perfectly rational, externally, because the belief in question is held under the conditions of warrant. If it had sufficient warrant for knowledge before you made your point about its being evidentially challenged, it still has sufficient warrant.

So if theistic belief has significant warrant for me, then (in the typical case and provided I do not believe that it lacks warrant) my coming to believe that it faces an evidential challenge does not provide me with a defeater for it. Here we see a special case of a pattern we have seen before. I argued in chapters 6 and 8 that if theistic and Christian belief is true, then very likely it has warrant. A consequence is that if Christian belief is true, then very likely (in the typical case) an evidential challenge to theism is an insignificant challenge.

But even if theism has little or no warrant, it could still be (and in the typical case would still be) that an evidential challenge doesn't provide a real challenge or a *prima facie* defeater. Analogy: perhaps I am once more told by my friend that she has a pet named Maynard **(p.480)** who is a cat but nonetheless loves cooked green beans; having never met this Maynard, I believe on the basis of my friend's testimony that Maynard is a cat. As it turns out, my friend is indulging (unbeknownst to me) her penchant for telling whimsical (and false) stories. Then my belief that Maynard is a cat has little by way of warrant: the epistemic minienvironment (see above, pp. 158ff.) isn't right, being polluted by my friend's thus lying to me, so that the environmental condition for warrant is not met. Still, my belief that Maynard is a cat is (all else being equal) entirely rational (even if not warranted), both internally and externally; and that holds even though I am quite aware that it is evidentially challenged. The same can be true for theistic belief. Perhaps I mistakenly but rationally believe that it has warrant; I rationally believe that some of the theistic arguments, for example, are very strong, or I believe, mistakenly, in some story like the one told in chapters 6 and 8, according to which theistic belief does indeed have warrant. Under those conditions, my theistic belief does not, in fact, have warrant; nevertheless, my learning that it is subject to an evidential challenge does not compromise its rationality and does not give me a defeater for it.

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So when *could* a belief's being evidentially challenged (more exactly, my knowledge that it is evidentially challenged) actually offer me a defeater for a belief and make it irrational for me to continue to hold it? I can see two sorts of cases in which learning that theism is subject to an evidential challenge could be a defeater for it. First, suppose I am a theist, am rational in accepting this belief, but hold it with little firmness and furthermore think my reasons for it are absolutely minimal—barely sufficient for holding the belief rationally. Then if I learn that theism is subject to an evidential challenge, perhaps I have a defeater for it. I say ‘perhaps’ advisedly; the situation isn't really clear.

The second sort of situation is clearer. Consider a belief *B* I accept because I think it the best explanation of a certain range of data *D*; *B* has no warrant apart from its properly explaining *D*, and I am aware of this fact. Finding that *B* is subject to an evidential challenge, one thinks, gives me a defeater for it—provided that the belief that is more probable with respect to the alternative hypothesis is one that *B* is supposed to explain. I believe the butler did it: my only reason for so believing is that this hypothesis best explains all the facts and circumstances of the crime. Now I come to see that the hypothesis that Lady Fauntleroy did the deed better explains some of those facts and circumstances.[28] Then my belief that the butler did it faces a relevant evidential challenge, a challenge which is *prima facie* a defeater **(p.481)** for that belief. (Of course it doesn't matter if some alternative hypothesis better explains the fact that Beijing is a large city.) So suppose I accept theism as a hypothesis; I accept it because I think it the best explanation of some range of phenomena including the origin of the universe, the reality and objectivity of right and wrong, and also the distribution of pain and pleasure. Suppose, furthermore, I rightly believe that I have no other sort of reason for theistic belief—no promptings from the IIHS, or from the *sensus divinitatis*, or from the testimony of others. I believe that I have no other source and am correct in that belief. Now suppose I come to think that the Indifference Hypothesis, or naturalism, or something else does a better job of explaining the magnitude, duration, and distribution of pain and pleasure; then my theistic belief would be subject to an evidential challenge, a challenge that is *prima facie* a defeater for theistic belief and a reason for giving it up. (Even then, however, I might conclude that theism did a better job of explaining some *other* relevant phenomena.)

So there are some situations in which an evidential challenge—not just any old evidential challenge, but a relevant one—does furnish a defeater: cases where someone believes that the warrant enjoyed by his theistic belief is minimal, and cases where he believes that the warrant theism has for him depends just on its explaining a certain range of phenomena. Most theists, however, are not in either of these conditions. Are there other conditions in which theists often find themselves, conditions in which coming to see that theism faces an evidential challenge really does provide a defeater or a *prima facie* defeater for theistic belief? I doubt very much that the typical theist is in any such condition. I

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therefore think Draper's challenge, subtle and sophisticated as it is, fails; in his own words, “the typical theist could rationally continue to believe that God exists after learning that H [that theism is evidentially challenged] is true.”

start here

II. Nonargumentative Defeaters?[29]

These new arguments by Rowe and Draper are subtle and sophisticated; many deep and interesting topics come up in considering them. Upon close examination, however, they fail, and fail resoundingly. They fail to provide a defeater for theistic belief and, indeed, give the person on the fence little if any reason to prefer atheism to theism. They are not much of an improvement over the older “if I can't see any reason God might have for permitting that evil E, then **(p.482)** probably he doesn't have any” kind of argument. If the facts of evil really do provide a substantial challenge to Christian or theistic belief, it must be by a wholly different route; the probabilistic relationships to which Rowe and Draper point do not carry sufficient epistemic clout. And indeed the fact is most defeaters do not proceed by way of the subject's becoming aware of probabilistic relationships. I have always thought your name was Sam: you tell me that Sam is only your nickname and that your name is really Ahab; I then give up the belief that your name is Sam. But I don't do so because I think that your name's being Sam is unlikely, given that you say it is Ahab, or that it is more probable that you would say your name is Ahab on the hypothesis that it is Ahab than on the hypothesis that it is Sam. The defeat doesn't seem to go via probabilistic argumentation. I see what I take to be a patch of snow on a distant crag; as I approach a bit closer, however, the patch apparently moves; I no longer believe it is a patch of snow—perhaps it's a mountain goat? Again, I don't engage in probabilistic reasoning. I thought your zip code was 49506; then I get a letter from you with a return address that includes zip code 49508; I no longer believe that it is 49506, but not because of probabilistic reasoning. In most actual cases of defeat, probabilistic reasoning apparently doesn't enter in.

And perhaps something similar holds with respect to evil. There is no cogent argument for the conclusion that the existence of evil is incompatible with the existence of God; there is also no serious evidential or probabilistic argument from evil; fair enough. It doesn't follow that suffering and evil do not constitute a serious obstacle to Christian belief or theistic belief, and it doesn't follow that they do not constitute a defeater for it. I have argued throughout that belief in God can be properly basic; rational belief in God does not depend on one's having or there being good arguments for the existence of God. Should something analogous be said for the facts of evil, thought of as a potential defeater for theistic belief? Perhaps the defeating power of these facts in no way depends on the existence of a good antitheistic argument (deductive, inductive, abductive, probabilistic, whatever) from the facts of evil.

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Clearly enough, suffering and evil do constitute *some* kind of problem for at least *some* believers in God; the Old Testament (in particular Job and Psalms) is full of examples. Indeed, there is the agonized cry uttered by Jesus Christ himself: “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”—a cry in which he is echoing the words of Psalm 22. In the book of Job, a searching and powerful exploration of the facts of evil and human responses to them, Job thinks God is unfair to him; he is incensed, and challenges God to explain and justify himself. Countless others, in the grip of their own cruel suffering or the suffering of someone close to them, have found themselves angry with God; one can become resentful, mistrusting, antagonistic, **(p.483)** hostile. Still, these situations don't typically produce a defeater for theistic belief. It isn't as if Jesus, or the psalmist, or Job is at all inclined to give up theistic belief. The problem is of a different order; it is a spiritual or pastoral problem rather than a defeater for theistic belief. Perhaps God permits my father, or my daughter, or my friend, or me to suffer in the most appalling way. I may then find myself thinking as follows: “No doubt he has all those dandy divine qualities and no doubt he has a fine reason for permitting this abomination—after all, I am no match for him with respect to coming up with reasons, reasons that are utterly beyond me—but what he permits is appalling, and I hate it!” I may want to tell him off face to face: “You may be wonderful, and magnificent, and omniscient and omnipotent (and even wholly good) and all that exalted stuff, but I utterly detest what you are doing!” A problem of this kind is not really an evidential problem at all, and it isn't a defeater for theism.

Still, perhaps that's not the only realistic reaction here: perhaps I *could* react in this way, but aren't there other reactions in which I would have a defeater? Couldn't suffering and evil, under some circumstances, at any rate, actually serve as a defeater for belief in God? Think of some of the horrifying examples of evil our sad world displays. Dostoevski's classic depiction is fictional, but no less convincing and no less disturbing:

> “A Bulgarian I met lately in Moscow,” Ivan went on, seeming not to hear his brothers words, “told me about the crimes committed by Turks and Circassians in all parts of Bulgaria through fear of a general rising of the Slavs. They burn villages, murder, outrage women and children, they nail their prisoners by the ears to the fences, leave them so till morning, and in the morning they hang them—all sorts of things you can't imagine. People talk sometimes of bestial cruelty, but that's a great injustice and insult to the beasts: a beast can never be so cruel as a man, so artistically cruel. The tiger only tears and gnaws, that's all he can do. He would never think of nailing people by the ears, even if he were able to do it. These Turks took a pleasure in torturing children, too; cutting the unborn child from the mother's womb, and tossing babies up in the air and catching them on the

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> points of their bayonets before their mother's eyes. Doing it before the mother's eyes was what gave zest to the amusement."[30]

The list of atrocities human beings commit against others is horrifying and hideous; it is also so long, so repetitious, that it is finally wearying. Occasionally, though, new depths are reached: **(p.484)**

> A young Muslim mother in Bosnia was repeatedly raped in front of her husband and father, with her baby screaming on the floor beside her. When her tormentors seemed finally tired of her, she begged permission to nurse the child. In response, one of the rapists swiftly decapitated the baby and threw the head in the mother's lap.[31]

These things are absolutely horrifying; it is painful even to consider them, to bring them squarely before the mind. To introduce them into cool philosophical discussion like this is distressing and can seem inappropriate, even callous. And now the question: wouldn't a rational person think, in the face of this kind of appalling evil, that there just couldn't be an omnipotent, omniscient, and wholly good person superintending our world? Perhaps he can't give a demonstration that no perfect person could permit these things; perhaps there isn't a good probabilistic or evidential atheological argument either: but so what? Isn't it just apparent, just evident that a being living up to God's reputation couldn't permit things like that? Don't I have a defeater here, even if there is no good antitheistic argument from evil? Perhaps I don't in fact give up belief in God in the face of the facts of evil: might that not be because I simply can't bear the thought of living in a Godless universe? Because of some psychological mechanism not aimed at the truth, perhaps the sort of wish-fulfillment Freud suggests? If so, then suffering and evil (or rather, my apprehension of it) would or could be a defeater,[32] for me, for Christian belief, even though it doesn't eventuate in my giving up such belief.

Something like this, I think, is the best version of the atheological case from evil. The claim is essentially that one who is properly sensitive and properly aware of the sheer horror of the evil displayed in our somber and unhappy world will simply see that no being of the sort God is alleged to be could possibly permit it. This is a sort of inverse *sensus divinitatis*: perhaps there is no good antitheistic argument from evil; but no argument is needed. An appeal of this sort will proceed, not by rehearsing arguments, but by putting the interlocutor in the sort of situation in which the full horror of the world's suffering and evil stands out clearly in all its loathsomeness. Indeed, from the atheological point of view, giving an argument is counterproductive here: it permits the believer in God to turn his attention away, to avert his eyes from the abomination of suffering, to take refuge in antiseptic discussions of possible worlds, probability functions, and other arcana. It diverts attention from the situations that in fact constitute a defeater for belief in God.

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(p.485) Suppose we look into this claim. Recall first that a defeater for a belief is *relative to a noetic structure*; whether my new belief *B* is a defeater for an old belief *B** depends upon what else I believe and what my experience is like. I believe that tree is a maple; you tell me it's really an elm; that will defeat my belief that it's a maple if I think you know what you are talking about and aim to tell the truth, but not if I think you are even less arboreally informed than I, or that there is only a fifty-fifty chance that you are telling what you take to be the truth. Coming to see the full horror of the evil the world displays might be a defeater for theistic belief with respect to *some* noetic structure and not with respect to *others*.

What I want to argue first is that if classical Christianity is true, then the perception of evil is not a defeater for belief in God with respect to *fully rational* noetic structures—any noetic structure with no cognitive dysfunction, one in which all cognitive faculties and processes are functioning properly. From the point of view of classical Christianity (at any rate according to the model of chapters 6 and 8), this includes also the proper function of the *sensus divinitatis*. Someone in whom this process was functioning properly would have an intimate, detailed, vivid, and explicit knowledge of God; she would have an intense awareness of his presence, glory, goodness, power, perfection, wonderful attractiveness, and sweetness; and she would be as convinced of God's existence as of her own. She might therefore be *perplexed* by the existence of this evil in God's world—for God, she knows, hates evil with a holy and burning passion—but the idea that perhaps there just *wasn't* any such person as God would no doubt not so much as cross her mind. Confronted with evil and suffering, such a person might ask herself why God permits it; the facts of evil may be a spur to inquiry as well as to action. If she finds no answer, she will no doubt conclude that God has a reason that is beyond her ken; she won't be in the least inclined to doubt that there *is* such a person as God. For someone fully rational, therefore, the existence of evil doesn't so much as begin to constitute a defeater for belief in God.

In an earlier piece of work I explained epistemic conditional probability (roughly, and ignoring complications and qualifications) as follows:

> The conditional epistemic probability of *A* on *B*, then, initially and to a first approximation, is the degree to which a rational person, a person whose faculties are functioning properly, would accept *A* given that she was certain of *B*, knew that she accepted *B*, reflectively considered *A* in the light of *B*, and had no other source of warrant or positive epistemic status for *A* or for its denial.[33]

(p.486) Then (no doubt because of youth, inexperience, and epistemic innocence) I went on to say that perhaps the existence of God *was* in this sense epistemically improbable on the existence of certain sorts of evil (p. 576). But first, that account of

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epistemic probability doesn't have this result—more exactly, it doesn't clearly apply in this case, or any case where a belief has positive epistemic status or warrant for a person *S* just by virtue of *S*'s being rational in the sense in question.[34] On the extended Aquinas/Calvin (A/C) model, the *sensus divinitatis* is among our cognitive faculties or processes; if it is functioning properly in *S*, then the belief that there is such a person as God will automatically have warrant for *S*. Applied to the existence of God taken as *A* and that of any sort of evil as *B*, the definition will not yield the consequence that the former is improbable on the latter; that is because the condition expressed by the last clause in the definition, "and had no other source of warrant or positive epistemic status for *A* or for its denial," will not be satisfied by belief in the existence of God, if the believer's cognitive faculties are functioning properly.

Further: consider a person *S* in whom the *sensus divinitatis* does not, in fact, function properly; *S* has only a sort of weak and *pro forma* residual belief in God, left over from the religion of his childhood. Add that *S* suffers just from *that* cognitive malfunction (and no other). Now suppose *S* becomes seriously aware of the facts of evil and thinks about them in connection with the existence of God: perhaps, given these conditions, *S* will give up belief in God, or come to think it improbable with respect to his evidence. Would it follow that the facts of evil are in some sense negative evidence with respect to the existence of God, evidence that is counterbalanced and outweighed in a fully rational noetic structure by the positive evidence provided by a properly functioning *sensus divinitatis*? No. For perhaps various modules of the cognitive establishment are designed to work together. If so, the deliverances of one module *m* that isn't itself subject to dysfunction might still have no epistemic standing, given the failure of *another* module *m**. *m*'s functioning in this way—that is, the way it functions when there is malfunction of *m** but no malfunction in *m*, given the malfunction of *m**—might not be part of the design plan at all. When the electric current is fluctuating because of a problem in the wiring, the air raid siren emits a weak and pathetic squeak; it doesn't follow that the vibrating disk that produces the sound is designed to produce that squeak under those conditions. True, it is designed in such a way that in fact it *will* produce that squeak then; but its doing so is not part of the design plan. Its functioning in this way under those conditions will of course be part of its *maxi*plan (WPF, pp. 22ff.). It does not follow that its behaving in this way is part of its design plan; that behavior might be, instead, an unintended by-product rather than part of the design plan itself. And the same goes for the *sensus divinitatis* and the other processes actually involved in the production or **(p.487)** suppression of theistic belief. Perhaps the *sensus divinitatis* and the '*sensus probabilitatis*' are designed to work together as a unit; if so, the deliverances of one in the presence of the malfunction of the other need not enjoy any degree of rationality or warrant at all. Hence the sort of situation envisaged doesn't show that the facts of evil are any kind of evidence against the existence of God.

On the A/C model, therefore, the facts of evil do not constitute any sort of defeater for theistic belief for a fully *rational* person, one all of whose cognitive

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faculties are functioning properly. Nevertheless (so the wily atheologian will claim), that fact is at best of dubious relevance with respect to the question whether Christian believers in God—the ones there actually are—have a defeater for theism in the world's ills. For according to Christian doctrine itself, none of us human beings enjoys this pristine condition of complete rationality. The *sensus divinitatis* has been heavily damaged by sin; for most of us most of the time the presence of God is not evident. For many of us (much of the time, anyway) both God's existence and his goodness are a bit shadowy and evanescent, nowhere nearly as evident as the existence of other people or the trees in the backyard. Relative to a fully rational noetic structure (one of an unfallen human being, say), knowledge of the facts of evil may constitute no defeater for theism; relative to the sorts of noetic structures we human beings actually have, however (so the claim goes), they do. Given the noetic results of sin (see chapter 7), the typical believer in God does have a defeater in the facts of evil.

To pursue this line, however, would be to neglect still another feature of Christian belief: that the damage to the *sensus divinitatis* is in principle and increasingly repaired in the process of faith (see chapter 8) and regeneration. The person of faith may be once more such that, at least on some occasions, the presence of God is completely evident to her. In addition, she knows of the divine love revealed in the incarnation, the unthinkable splendor of the suffering and death of Jesus Christ, himself the divine and unique son of God, on our behalf. Of course this knowledge does not provide an answer to the question, Why does God permit evil? It is nonetheless of crucial importance here.[35] I read of one more massive atrocity and am perhaps **(p.488)** shaken. But then I think of the inconceivably great love displayed in Christ's suffering and death, his willingness to empty himself and take on the nature of a servant, his willingness to suffer and die so that we sinful human beings can achieve redemption; and my faith may be restored. I still can't imagine why God permits this suffering, or why he permits people to torture and kill each other, or why he permits gigantic and horrifying social experiments such as Nazism and communism, or why he permits a Holocaust; nevertheless I see that he is willing to share in our suffering, to undergo enormous suffering himself, and to undergo it for our sakes. Confronted with a particularly loathsome example of evil, therefore, I may find myself inclined to question God, perhaps even to be angry and resentful: “Why should I or my family suffer to promote his (no doubt exalted) ends, when I don't have even a glimmer of an idea as to how my suffering contributes to some good?” But then I think of the divine willingness to endure greater suffering on my behalf and am comforted or, at any rate, quieted. And here is a respect in which Christian theism has a resource for dealing with evil that is not available to other forms of theism.[36] Note that probabilities have little to do with the matter. Such a person doesn't reason thus: it's not very likely that an omnipotent, omniscient, and wholly good person would permit such atrocities—

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but it's more likely that such a being who was himself willing to undergo suffering on our behalf would permit them. The comfort involved here doesn't go by way of probabilistic reasoning.

There is much to be said about the Christian meaning of suffering,[37] and much of it provides further epistemic resources for dealing with evil. Perhaps our suffering is deeply connected with the possibility of salvation for human beings;[38] perhaps we share in Christ's suffering in such a way that our suffering too is salvific, and perhaps **(p.489)** even essential to the plan of salvation.[39] Someone who suffers may then look forward to receiving the divine gratitude for taking part in this project of salvation,[40] and to enjoying forever the love and approval of God; she may then concur with Paul: "We are fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him."[41] She may thus reflect that human suffering is in a way an occasion of gratitude. There is another way in which it is perhaps an occasion for gratitude. It is plausible to think that the best possible worlds God could have actualized contain the unthinkably great good of divine incarnation and redemption—but then, of course, also sin and suffering. God chooses one of these worlds to be actual—and in it, humankind suffers. Still, in this world there is also the marvelous opportunity for redemption and for eternal fellowship with God, an inconceivably great good that vastly outweighs the suffering we are called upon to endure.[42] Still further, in being offered eternal fellowship with God, we human beings are invited to join the charmed circle of the trinity itself; and perhaps that invitation can be issued only to creatures who have fallen, suffered, and been redeemed.[43] If so, the condition of humankind is vastly better than it would have been, had there been no sin and no suffering. *O Felix Culpa*, indeed!

Accordingly, those who have faith (those in whom the process of regeneration has taken or is taking place) will also be such that the presence and goodness of God is to some degree evident to them; so for them the belief that there is such a person as God will have considerable warrant. They too, then, like someone in whom the *sensus* **(p.490)** *divinitatis* had never been damaged, will feel little or no inclination to atheism or agnosticism when confronted with cases of horrifying evil. They may be perplexed; they may be shocked; they may be spurred both to action and to inquiry by the presence of appalling evil in God's world; but ceasing to believe will not be an option. If the salient suffering is their own, they may concur with the author of Psalm 119: 75–76: "I know, O Lord, that your laws are righteous, and in faithfulness you have afflicted me. May your unfailing love be my comfort, according to your promise to your servant."

They may also enjoy a blessed contentment. Consider, for example, this letter from Guido de Bres to his wife, written shortly before he was hanged:

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> Your grief and anguish, troubling me in the midst of my joy and gladness, are the cause of my writing you this present letter. I most earnestly pray you not to be grieved beyond measure. . . . If the Lord had wished us to live together longer, He could easily have caused it to be so. . . . Let His good will be done, then, and let that suffice for all reason. . . . I pray you, my dear and faithful companion, to be glad with me, and to thank the good God for what He is doing, for He does nothing but what is altogether right and good. . . .
>
> I am shut up in the strongest and wretchedest of dungeons, so dark and gloomy that it goes by the name of the Black Hole. I can get but little air, and that of the foulest. I have on my hands and feet heavy irons which are a constant torture, galling the flesh even to my poor bones. But, notwithstanding all, my God fails not to make good His promise, and to comfort my heart, and to give me a most blessed content.[44]

De Bres suffered greatly; yet he enjoyed a most blessed content. The furthest thing from his mind, no doubt, was the thought that maybe there wasn't any such person as God, that maybe he had been deceived all along. And this continuing to believe, given the model of chapter 8, betrays no irrationality at all: it isn't as if he had a defeater for theistic belief in his suffering, but somehow suppressed it and (perhaps by way of wishful thinking) continued to believe anyway. No, his belief was instead a result of the proper function of the cognitive processes—a rejuvenated *sensus divinitatis*, the internal instigation of the Holy Spirit—that produce belief in God.

Of course most of us are not in the spiritual condition of Guido de Bres. Not nearly all of us enjoy that comfort and content in the face of suffering. As Calvin points out (*Institutes*, III, ii, 15, p. 560), most of us sometimes have difficulty thinking that God is, indeed, **(p.491)** benevolent toward us; and even the great masters of the spiritual life sometimes find themselves in spiritual darkness.[45] Christians must concede that their epistemic and spiritual situation differs widely from person to person, and within a given person from time to time. Aren't there any conditions at all, then, in which the facts of evil constitute a defeater for Christian belief?

Well, I should think the right answer is “Probably not.” Consider a person in whom the *sensus divinitatis* doesn't work at all well, a person who believes in God in a thoughtless and merely formal way, a person for whom the belief has no real vivacity or liveliness—perhaps such a person, on coming to a deep appreciation of the facts of evil, will ordinarily give up theistic belief. As I argued above, however (pp. 485ff.), that doesn't show that this person has a defeater for theistic belief. She has such a defeater only if it is part of our cognitive design plan to give up theistic belief in those circumstances; and we have no reason to think that it is. The design plan includes the proper function of the *sensus divinitatis*; how things actually go when that process does not function properly

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could be part of the design plan; more likely, though, it is an unintended by-product rather than a part of the design plan.

Nevertheless, let's suppose, just for purposes of argument, that as a matter of fact such a person really *does* have a defeater for theistic belief. What it is important to see, here, is that if she does have a defeater, it is only because of a failure of rationality somewhere in her noetic structure (perhaps there is dysfunction with respect to the *sensus divinitatis*). And now suppose we return to our original question: does a person *S* who believes that there is such a person as God have a defeater in the facts of evil? We can now see that there is no reason to think so. The very fact that *S* continues in theistic belief is evidence that the *sensus divinitatis* is functioning properly to at least some degree in her, and in such a way that knowledge of the facts of evil does not constitute a defeater. It is perhaps *possible* (if failure to believe in these circumstances *is* part of the design plan) that she has a defeater; but there is no reason to think so. I conclude, therefore, that in all likelihood believers in God do not have defeaters for theistic belief in knowledge of the facts of evil.

(p.492) Of course all this is from the perspective of Christian theism. If Christian theism is true, then the existence of the sin and evil and suffering we see does not, in the typical case, constitute a defeater for belief in God. In particular, it doesn't constitute a defeater for Quinn's “intellectually sophisticated adult in our culture” (above, p. 358), at least if she has given a little thought to the epistemology of the matter. Now someone who doesn't accept Christian theism may be unmoved by this fact; he may concede that from the standpoint of Christian theism, suffering and evil do not constitute a defeater for Christian belief; but (so he says) Christian theism is *false*. Hence this fact—that if it were true, evil would not constitute a defeater for Christian belief—cuts no ice with respect to his claim that, as a matter of fact, evil *does* constitute such a defeater. But if he is thinking of an *internal* defeater for theistic belief, then he is mistaken; knowledge of the facts of evil does not constitute an internal defeater, at least for those believers for whom it seems very clear that there is such a person as God and that, indeed, the whole Christian story is true. For such a person, this will seem clear even after he is fully aware of the evils the world contains and has thought hard about them. Therefore there is nothing *internally* irrational in his believing these things; it is not that he somehow fails to believe what seems to him clearly true or somehow mismanages epistemic matters downstream from experience. So if there is irrationality here, it must be *external*; it must be that this inclination to believe, this doxastic evidence, is itself a product of cognitive dysfunction, or else of cognitive processes not directed at truth. The Christian or theistic believer, naturally enough, won't agree: she will see her belief as the product of cognitive faculties functioning properly, functioning in the way God intended them to (and aimed at producing true beliefs).

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What we see here is another instance of a general pattern: once more it appears that questions about the rationality of belief in God (and in the whole Christian story) aren't merely epistemological. What a rational person will do when confronted with suffering and evil depends on what the cognitive design plan for human beings is; but from a filled-out Christian perspective, that design plan will be such that someone who (like Mother Teresa, e.g.) continues to accept Christian belief in the face of the world's suffering and evil displays no irrationality whatever. Indeed, it is the person who gives up belief in God under these circumstances who displays cognitive dysfunction; for such a person, the *sensus divinitatis* must be at least partly disordered. The atheologian can properly claim that evil constitutes a defeater for Christian belief, therefore, only if he already assumes that Christian belief is false. But then a Christian believer can't sensibly be expected to concede that she *does* have a defeater for Christian belief—at least until the atheologian produces a good reason or two for supposing Christian belief is false. Because she is a Christian **(p.493)** believer, she will think, naturally enough, that her Christian belief is true, in which case the facts of evil do not defeat it.

end here

This chapter has been devoted to the question whether knowledge of the facts of evil constitutes a defeater for Christian belief. Of course there are many related projects lurking in the neighborhood. One of particular interest is that of employing the resources of the Christian faith in thinking about sin and evil—not in order to defend the epistemic status of Christian belief but as part of a larger project of Christian scholarship, of discerning the ways in which Christian belief illuminates many of the important areas of human concern. This is an extremely important task that hasn't received nearly the attention it deserves from Christian philosophers.[46] Here is one issue that arises in this area. According to Christian belief, God is wholly good, but also perfectly loving, loves each of his creatures with a perfect love. If so, could it be that he would permit a person *S* to suffer for the good of someone *else* (or, more abstractly, permit *S* to suffer because *S*'s suffering is an element in the best world God can actualize)? If he is perfectly loving, wouldn't he permit *S* to suffer only in the interests of securing an outweighing good for *S* herself? This is a fascinating and complex issue; I don't have the space to deal with it properly. It is clear, however, that we need some distinctions. First, God (assuming that he is perfectly loving) could certainly permit someone to suffer for the good of someone else if, as in Christ's case, this suffering is voluntarily assumed. Suppose, therefore, my suffering is not voluntarily assumed: I am not able, for one reason or another, to make the decision whether to accept suffering (just as someone in a coma might not be able to make an important decision affecting her life). Suppose also God knew that if I *were* able to make that decision, I would accept the suffering: then too, so far as I can see, his being perfectly good wouldn't at all preclude his permitting

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me to suffer for the benefit of others. Alternatively, suppose I am able to make the decision and in fact would *not* accept the suffering; God knows that this unwillingness on my part would be due only to ignorance: if I knew the relevant facts, then I would accept the suffering. In that case too God's perfect goodness would not preclude his permitting me to suffer; and this would be true even if I were myself innocent of wrongdoing. Indeed, suppose what God knows is that if I knew enough and also had the right affections, *then* I would accept the suffering: in that case, too, as far as I can see, his being perfectly loving would not preclude his allowing me to suffer.

There is another distinction that must be made. Perhaps God's reason for permitting me to suffer is not that by undergoing this suffering *I* can thus achieve a greater good (the good of enjoying his gratitude, for example: see footnote 40) but because he can thus achieve a better **(p.494)** world overall. Nevertheless, perhaps it is also true that he would not permit me to suffer for that end, an end outside my own good, unless he could also bring good *for me* out of the evil. Then his reason for permitting me to suffer would not be that this suffering contributes to my own improvement; nevertheless, he would not permit me to suffer unless the suffering could somehow be turned to my own good. A constraint on God's *reasons* (induced, perhaps, by his being perfectly loving) is one thing; a constraint on the conditions under which he would permit involuntary and innocent suffering is another. To return to an earlier example (above, p. 489), perhaps God sees that the best worlds he can actualize are ones that include the unthinkably great good of divine incarnation and atonement. Suppose he therefore actualizes a world α in which human beings fall into sin and evil, salvation from which is accomplished by incarnation and atonement. And suppose still further that the final condition of human beings, in α, is better than it is in the worlds in which there is no fall into sin but also no incarnation and redemption. Then God's actualizing α involves suffering for many human beings; his reason for permitting that suffering is not that thereby the suffering individuals will be benefited (his reason is that he wishes to actualize a very good world, one with the great good of incarnation, atonement, and redemption). Nevertheless his perfect goodness perhaps mandates that he actualize a world in which those who suffer are benefited in such a way that their condition is better than it is in those worlds in which they do not suffer.

The book of Job gives splendid expression to some of the themes of this chapter.[47] As the story opens, Satan challenges God: his servant Job, he says, is a toady, a sycophantic timeserver who will turn on God and curse him to his face if things don't go his way. God disagrees, and then permits Satan to afflict Job, whose friends Eliphaz the Temanite, Bildad the Shuhite, and Zophar the Naamathite come to comfort and console him. After seven days and nights of

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silence (one pictures them hunkered down around a campfire), they tell him repeatedly and at great length that the righteous always prosper and the wicked always come to grief:

> Consider now: Who, being innocent, has ever perished? Where were the upright ever destroyed? As I have observed, those who plow evil and those who sow trouble reap it. (4:7–8)

> All his days the wicked man suffers torment, the ruthless through all the years stored up for him. Terrifying sounds fill his ear; when all seems well, marauders attack him. He despairs of escaping the darkness; he is marked for the sword. He wanders about—food for vultures. . . . Distress and anguish fill him with terror. . . . (15:20–24)

(p.495) So Job must be wicked indeed to warrant such great suffering:

> Is it for your piety that he rebukes you and brings charges against you? Is not your wickedness great? Are not your sins endless? . . . you stripped men of their clothing, leaving them naked. You gave no water to the weary and you withheld food from the hungry, though you were a powerful man, owning land, an honored man, living on it. And you sent widows away empty-handed and broke the strength of the fatherless. That is why snares are all around you, why sudden peril terrifies you, why it is so dark you cannot see and why a flood of water covers you. (22:4–11)

Job must repent and mend his ways:

> But if you will look to God and plead with the Almighty, if you are pure and upright, even now he will rouse himself on your behalf and restore you to your rightful place. (8:5–6)

Job is understandably nettled:

> Doubtless you are the people, and wisdom will die with you! But I have a mind as well as you. . . . (12:1–3)

> Miserable comforters are you all! Will your long-winded speeches never end? (16:2–3)

He knows that the rain falls on the just and on the unjust, that the wicked often prosper:

> Why do the wicked live on, growing old and increasing in power? They see their children established around them, their offspring before their eyes. Their homes are safe and free from fear; the rod of God is not upon them. Their bulls never fail to breed; their cows calve and do not miscarry. They send forth their children as a flock; their little ones dance about. . . . They spend their years in prosperity and go down to the grave in peace. (21:7–13)

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Job also knows he has done nothing unusually heinous or wicked: “my hands have been free of violence and my prayer is pure” (16:17). No doubt “no one does good, no, not one”; but Job is described in the prologue as “blameless and upright”; he knows that he isn't being singled out because he is so much more wicked than the rest of humanity (in particular, he is no greater sinner than Eliphaz, Bildad, or Zophar). So he begins to accuse God of treating him unfairly in permitting him to suffer in this way:

> then know that God has wronged me and drawn his net around me. (19:6)
>
> As surely as God lives, who has denied me justice. . . . (27:2)

He doesn't fear to speak his mind to the Lord. Indeed, a certain suggestion of sarcasm sometimes creeps in: “Does it please you to oppress **(p.496)** me, to spurn the work of your hands, while you smile on the schemes of the wicked?” (10:3), as well as a certain self-righteousness: “So these three men stopped answering Job, because he was righteous in his own eyes” (32:1), and even a touch of defiance: “I will never admit you are in the right; till I die, I will not deny my integrity. I will maintain my righteousness and never let go of it . . . ” (27:5–6). He believes that he is innocent of all wrongdoing and wants to go to court with God to get this thing straightened out:

> Oh that I had someone to hear me! I sign now my defense [after a lengthy recital of his virtues]—let the Almighty answer me; let my accuser put his indictment in writing. Surely I would wear it on my shoulder, I would put it on like a crown.” (31:35–36).

(Again, that note of sarcasm.) But when he ruefully recalls that God would be prosecuting attorney, judge, jury, and executioner, he isn't sanguine about the outcome:

> If I say, “I will forget my complaint, I will change my expression, and smile,” I still dread all my sufferings, for I know you will not hold me innocent. (9:27–28)

There are at least two ways we can understand Job here. In the first way, Job's problem is really intellectual; he can't see any reason at all why God should allow him to be afflicted as he is; and he is inclined to conclude, unthinkingly, that probably God doesn't *have* a good reason. The point here is that the reason for Job's sufferings is something entirely beyond his knowledge or awareness; but then the fact that he can't see what sort of reason God might have for permitting his suffering doesn't even tend to suggest that God has no reason. And when God replies to Job, he doesn't tell him what his reason is for permitting these sufferings (perhaps Job couldn't so much as grasp or comprehend it). Instead, he attacks the implicit inference from Job's not being able to see what God's reason is to the notion that probably he has none; he does this by pointing out how vast is the gulf between Job's knowledge and God's:

> Then the Lord answered Job out of the tempest: Who is this whose ignorant words darken counsel? Brace yourself and stand up like a man; I will ask questions and you shall answer. Where were you when I laid the earth's foundations? Tell me, if you know and understand! Who settled its

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> dimensions? Surely you should know! Who stretched his measuring-line over it? On what do its supporting pillars rest? Who set its corner-stone in place, when the morning stars sang together and all the sons of God shouted for joy? . . . . Have you descended to the springs of the sea or walked in the unfathomable deep? Have the gates of death been revealed to you? Have you ever seen the door-keepers of the place of darkness? Have you comprehended the vast expanse of the world? Come, tell me all this, if you know! Which is the way to the home of light and **(p.497)** where does darkness dwell? And can you then take each to its appointed bound and escort it on its homeward path? Doubtless you know all this; for you were born already, so long is the span of your life! (38:1–7, 16–21)

Job complains that God apparently has no good reason for permitting the evil that befalls him. He suspects that God doesn't have a good reason because he, Job, can't imagine what that reason might be. In reply, God does not tell him what the reason is; instead, he attacks Job's unthinking assumption that if he, Job, can't imagine what reason God might have, then probably God doesn't have a reason at all. And God attacks this assumption by pointing out how limited Job's knowledge is along these lines.[48] No doubt he can't see what God's reason might be, but nothing of interest follows from this: in particular it doesn't follow that probably God doesn't *have* a reason. "All right, Job, if you're so smart, if you know so much, tell me about it! Tell me how the universe was created; tell me about the sons of God who shouted with joy upon its creation! No doubt you were there!" And Job sees the point: "I have spoken of great things which I have not understood, things too wonderful for me to know" (42:3).

There is quite another way to understand Job—a way that can be combined with the first. Taken this second way, the idea is not that Job suspects or is inclined to think probably God doesn't have a reason for allowing his afflictions. It is rather that Job just becomes angry with God, hates and abhors what God is doing (or not doing), and is expressing his displeasure—and all of this quite independent of whether or not he thinks God has a reason. "Sure, maybe God has a reason—being God, he naturally would, wouldn't he? But *I* can't see the slightest suggestion as to what his reason may be; and why do I have to suffer so that he can attain these no doubt dandy ends of his—without so much as being consulted? without so much as a by-your-leave? I hate it! And I'm angry with him! These 'reasons' of his, whatever they are, are wholly inscrutable; and why should I suffer for these things beyond my ken? I don't give a fig for those reasons, and I detest what he is doing!" Here there isn't the suggestion that God maybe doesn't have reasons and is perhaps even *unjust*; this thought doesn't really enter, or at least isn't center stage. There is, instead, mistrust of God, wariness of him and his alleged magnificent ends, hatred of what this does to Job and requires of him, a hint or more than a hint of rebellion. And then when God comes to Job in the whirlwind, it is not to convince him that God really does have reasons (although it may, in fact, do this); it is instead to still the tempest in his

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soul, to quiet him, to restore his trust for God. The Lord gives **(p.498)** Job a glimpse of his greatness, his beauty, his splendid goodness; the doubts and turmoil disappear and are replaced, once more, by love and trust, a state of mind expressed in all its Christian completeness by the apostle Paul:

> No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.[49]

It is time, and past time, to bring this book and this trilogy to a close. In *Warrant: The Current Debate* and *Warrant and Proper Function*, what I argued, essentially, is that the only viable answer to the question 'What is knowledge?' lies in the neighborhood of proper function: a belief has warrant if and only if it is produced by cognitive faculties functioning properly in a congenial epistemic environment according to a design plan successfully aimed at the production of true belief. (This is the basic idea; there is a good bit of fine-tuning required, including some in chapter 6 of the present book.)

In this, the final member of the trilogy, I argued first in part I (chapters 1 and 2) that there really is such a thing as Christian belief and that (contra Kaufman, Hick, and Kant under one interpretation) we can, in fact, talk and think about God. In part II, the next three chapters, I distinguished *de jure* from *de facto* objections to Christian belief; the former are to the effect that such belief is intellectually or rationally questionable, even if true. Although *de jure* objections have been very common ever since the Enlightenment, it isn't easy to tell what the objections are supposed to be. I argued that no viable *de jure* objection lies in the neighborhood either of justification or of internal rationality. The only initially promising candidate for a viable *de jure* objection to Christian belief, I said, can be approached by way of Freud's claim that Christian belief does not have warrant, or at any rate warrant sufficient for knowledge. Freud, however, simply presupposes that theistic and hence Christian belief is false; therefore this alleged *de jure* objection fails to be independent of the *truth* of Christian belief. If Christian belief were false, perhaps Freud would be right; but the *de jure* objection was supposed to be *independent* of its truth or falsehood; hence this is not a successful *de jure* objection. I argued further that the same fate will befall any alleged *de jure* objection formulated in terms of warrant. That is because if Christian belief is true, it very likely does have warrant; hence any objection to its having warrant will have to be an objection to its being true; but in **(p.499)** that case the alleged *de jure* objection either becomes or presupposes a *de facto* objection. Accordingly, a common agnostic attitude—I have no idea whether Christian belief is true, but I do know that it is irrational (or unjustified, or . . .) cannot be defended.

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In part III, chapter 6, I presented the Aquinas/Calvin model of how it is that belief in God can have warrant, and even warrant sufficient for knowledge. In the next chapter, I considered the noetic effects of sin, and the way in which the existence of sin throws a monkey wrench into the A/C model. In chapters 8 and 9, I extended the A/C model in such a way as to deal both with sin and with the full panoply of Christian belief: trinity, incarnation, atonement, resurrection. Chapter 10 dealt with objections to this model. Finally, in part IV, I turned to potential or actual *defeaters* for Christian belief—possible reasons to give it up or hold it less firmly. There were projection theories (chapter 11), contemporary historical biblical criticism (chapter 12), postmodernism and pluralism (chapter 13), and the age-old problem of evil (chapter 14). None of these, I argued, presents a serious challenge to the warrant Christian belief can enjoy if the model, and indeed Christian belief, is, in fact, true.

But *is* it true? This is the really important question. And here we pass beyond the competence of philosophy, whose main competence, in this area, is to clear away certain objections, impedances, and obstacles to Christian belief. Speaking for myself and of course not in the name of philosophy, I can say only that it does, indeed, seem to me to be true, and to be the maximally important truth.

Notes:

(1.) It is worth noting that many *different* problems, questions, and topics fall under the rubric of the problem of evil. There are, for example, the problems of *preventing* suffering and evil, those of *alleviating* it (knowing how to comfort and help those who suffer from it), those of maintaining the right attitude toward those who suffer, the pastoral or spiritual problem I mentioned above, and more; and, of course, a proper response to one of these problems might be totally inappropriate as a response to another.

(2.) *Dialogues concerning Natural Religion*, ed. Richard Popkin (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1980), p. 63. Hume puts the argument in the mouth of Philo, widely thought to represent Hume's own views.

(3.) “Evil and Omnipotence,” *Mind* (1955). The article has been widely reprinted. For difficulties with Mackie's argument, see my *God, Freedom, and Evil* (New York: Harper and Row, 1974; and Grand Rapids: W. B. Eerdmans, 1977), pp. 12ff. In Mackie's posthumous *The Miracle of Theism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982), he wavers between his earlier claim that the existence of God is straightforwardly inconsistent with that of evil, and the claim that the existence of evil is powerful but logically inconclusive evidence against the existence of God. See pp. 150–75, and see my “Is Theism Really a Miracle?” *Faith and Philosophy* (April 1986). The claim that the believer in God (the God of theism) is committed to a contradiction goes back to some of the French encyclopedists, F. H. Bradley, J. McTaggart, and J. S. Mill. More recently (in addition to Mackie),

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see, for example, H. J. McCloskey, “God and Evil,” *Philosophical Quarterly* 10 (1960), p. 97; and Henry David Aiken, “God and Evil,” *Ethics* 48 (1957–58), p. 79.

(4.) For argument for this conclusion, see my *God, Freedom, and Evil*, pp. 7ff. For a fuller and more accurate account, see my *The Nature of Necessity* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1974), chapter 9; and *Alvin Plantinga* (Profiles series), ed. James Tomberlin and Peter van Inwagen (Dordrecht: D. Reidel, 1985), pp. 36–55. Many fascinating problems and questions have emerged from the discussion of the free will defense over the last twenty-five years. In particular, there are arguments against the existence of (true and nontrivial) counterfactuals of freedom by Robert Adams (“Middle Knowledge and the Problem of Evil,” *American Philosophical Quarterly* [1977]) and by William Hasker (“A Refutation of Middle Knowledge,” *Noûs* [December 1986]). One particularly interesting strand here is the “grounding and founding” objection (according to which counterfactuals of freedom with false antecedents couldn't be true because they are incapable of being properly grounded or founded). This objection goes all the way back to the Jesuit-Dominican controversy in the sixteenth century, a dispute whose increasing rancor finally induced the pope to forbid the disputants to vilify one another in public (although he apparently didn't object to vilification among consenting adults in the privacy of their own quarters). The grounding and founding objection has been dealt with in magisterial fashion in my colleague Thomas Flint's *Divine Providence: The Molinist Account* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998).

Another issue of great interest is the question of “selective freedom” (David Lewis's term) (See G. Stanley Kane, “The Free-Will Defense Defended,” *New Scholasticism* 50, no. 4 [1976], and David Lewis, “Evil for Freedom's Sake?”*Philosophical Papers* [November 1993]): couldn't God have let go forward those creaturely free choices he foresaw would be right, and cut off those he foresaw would be wrong? This question is connected with another fascinating issue, that of *backtracking counterfactuals* (see David Lewis, “Counterfactual Dependence and Time's Arrow,” *Noûs* 13, no. 4 [November 1979], p. 455). It is extremely tempting to go into these issues here, but doing so would take us from epistemology deep into metaphysics (some would say *abstruse and arcane* metaphysics, but of course they would be mistaken); self-restraint must be the order of the day.

(5.) See my “Two Dozen or So Good Theistic Arguments,” not yet published.

(6.) Daniel Dennett, *Darwin's Dangerous Idea* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1995), p. 177.

(7.) For a development of this idea, see Donald Turner's Ph.D. dissertation, *God and the Best of All Possible Worlds* (University of Pittsburgh, 1994).

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(8.) See his “The Problem of Evil and Some Varieties of Atheism,” *American Philosophical Quarterly* (1979), pp. 335–41, reprinted in *The Evidential Argument from Evil*, ed. Daniel Howard-Snyder (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996), pp. 1–11; “Evil and the Theistic Hypothesis: A Response to S. J. Wykstra,” *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 16 (1984), pp. 95–100; “The Empirical Argument from Evil,” in *Rationality, Religious Belief, and Moral Commitment*, ed. Robert Audi and William J. Wainwright (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1986); “Evil and Theodicy,” *Philosophical Topics* 16 (1988), pp. 119–32; “Ruminations about Evil,” *Philosophical Perspectives* 5 (1991), pp. 69–88; “William Alston on the Problem of Evil,” in *The Rationality of Belief and the Plurality of Faith*, ed. Thomas D. Senor (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994); and “The Evidential Argument from Evil: A Second Look,” in Howard-Snyder, *The Evidential Argument from Evil* (hereafter EAESL).

(9.) Rowe actually states P as “No good we know of justifies an omnipotent, omniscient, perfectly good being in permitting E_1 and E_2”; neither the theist nor the neutral bystander, however, can be expected to accept this premise because it could be that some good we know of does justify a perfect being in permitting E_1 and E_2, even though we don't know that it does. Indeed, Rowe countenances conjunctive goods such as G, the conjunction of all the goods there are. But G (one supposes) is a good state of affairs; and if theism is true, G justifies a perfect being in permitting E_1 and E_2. Alternatively, the theist might think that the unthinkably great good of incarnation and atonement—a good that we know of—justifies E_1 and E_2. This could happen as follows: God selects for actualization one of the best worlds; but all the best worlds include incarnation and atonement (see below, p. 489), and hence also a great deal of evil—if not specifically E_1 and E_2, then others just as bad. The most the atheologian can sensibly claim, therefore (if he is hoping for agreement from theist and neutral bystander) is that no good we know of is such that *we know* that it justifies a perfect being in permitting E_1 and E_2. If Rowe insists on his premise as originally stated, then, it seems to me, the theist should respond that there is no reason to think it true and good reason to think it false.

(10.) Wykstra: “Difficulties in Rowe's Argument for Atheism, and in One of Plantinga's Fustigations against It,” read on the *Queen Mary* at the Pacific Division Meeting of the American Philosophical Association, 1983; “The Humean Obstacle to Evidential Arguments from Suffering: On Avoiding the Evils of ‘Appearance’,” *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 16 (1984), pp. 73–94; “The ‘Inductive’ Argument from Evil: A Dialogue” (co-authored with Bruce Russell), *Philosophical Topics* 16, pp. 133–60; Alston: “The Inductive Argument from Evil and the Human Cognitive Condition,” *Philosophical Perspectives* 5, pp. 29–67; van Inwagen: “The Place of Chance in a World Sustained by God,” in *Divine and Human Action*, ed. T. Morris (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988); “The Magnitude, Duration, and Distribution of Evil: A Theodicy,” *Philosophical Topics* (1988); “The Problem of Evil, the Problem of Air, and the Problem of

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Silence," *Philosophical Topics* (1991). One hopes these pieces will put the final quietus to the "I can't see what reason God could have for *p*; therefore, probably God doesn't have a reason for *p*" form of argument. (But of course they won't.)

(11.) See EAESL, p. 270.

(12.) For details, please consult my "Degenerate Evidence and Rowe's New Evidential Argument from Evil," *Noûs* 32, no. 4 (Dec. 1998); see also Rowe's reply in "Reply to Plantinga," *Noûs* 32, no. 4 (Dec. 1998).

(13.) For the argument, see "Degenerate Evidence."

(14.) Again, for details see "Degenerate Evidence."

(15.) See his "Pain and Pleasure: An Evidential Problem for Theists," *Noûs* 23 (1989), pp. 331 ff. (This work is reprinted in EAESL page references in the text are to this work). See also his "Evil and the Proper Basicality of Belief in God," *Faith and Philosophy* 8 (April 1991), pp. 135 ff.; "Probabilistic Arguments from Evil," *Religious Studies* 28, no. 3 (September 1992), pp. 285ff.; and "Evolution and the Problem of Evil," in Louis Pojman, ed., *Philosophy of Religion*, 3d ed. (Belmont, Calif.: Wadsworth, 1997).

(16.) In "Evolution and the Problem of Evil," he takes metaphysical naturalism—substantially, the view that there is no such person as God or anything much like God—to be the serious alternative hypothesis. My evaluation of Draper's approach does not depend on a choice between these two candidates for the post of serious alternative hypothesis.

(17.) "The Skeptical Theist" in EAESL, p. 178.

(18.) See William Alston's reply to Draper in "Some (Temporarily) Final Thoughts on Evidential Arguments from Evil," in EAESL, pp. 328–30.

(19.) Or perhaps on a noetic structure as similar as possible to mine that does not contain or entail O. This still isn't quite right: the noetic structure in question also can't contain or entail some proposition *almost as strong as* O. Perhaps we should think, then, of a noetic structure that contains no propositions about the distribution of pain and pleasure and is otherwise as similar as possible to mine. For possible difficulties with this notion, see Peter van Inwagen, "Reflections on the Chapters by Draper, Russell, and Gale" in EAESL, p. 222.

(20.) For a fuller account of a closely related notion (epistemic conditional probability), see chapters 8 and 9 of *Warrant and Proper Function* (hereafter WPF).

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(21.) In “Evolution and the Problem of Evil,” Draper puts the same thought slightly differently; speaking of a similar argument, he says, “This is why my case against theism is a *prima facie* one. I am entitled to conclude only that *other evidence held equal* . . . it is highly probable that theism is false.” What is it to hold other evidence equal? Here's a suggestion: it would be to consider the probability of theism with respect to an evidential situation that was as similar as possible to mine, given that it contained no evidence for or against theistic belief, or given that the evidence it contained for theistic belief was precisely balanced by the evidence it contained against theistic belief.

(22.) “On Being Evidentially Challenged,” EAESL, pp. 250ff.

(23.) “Probabilistic Arguments from Evil,” pp. 315–16.

(24.) Ibid., p. 316.

(25.) At any rate nearly all of its *original* warrant. Special relativity, for example, gets its warrant *for me*, not from the fact that it properly accounts for those data, but from the fact that I have been *told* and *believe* that it does (in such away as to satisfy the conditions for warrant). But if those conditions are indeed satisfied, then there must be someone at the other end of the testimonial chain for whom these beliefs have warrant in some way other than by testimony. See WPF, chapter 4.

(26.) See my “Is Theism Really a Miracle?” and see above, pp. 330ff. I don't mean to deny, of course, that Christian or theistic belief can get more warrant by nicely explaining something else one believes.

(27.) “Evil and the Proper Basicality of Belief in God,” p. 138.

(28.) And in this context perhaps we can gloss ‘explanation’ in terms of probability.

(29.) In writing this section I am indebted to John Cooper (sermon in South Bend Christian Reformed Church, 2/28/92), John Haas (sermon in SBCRC, 5/5/97), and Leonard Vander Zee (sermon in SBCRC, 1/5/97).

(30.) *The Brothers Karamazov*, tr. Constance Garnett (New York: Random House, 1933), pp. 245–46.

(31.) Eleonore Stump, “The Mirror of Evil,” in *God and the Philosophers,* ed. Thomas Morris (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), p. 239.

(32.) A “purely epistemic” defeater; see above, p. 363.

(33.) “Epistemic Probability and Evil,” in *Archivo di Filosofia*, ed. Marco Olivetti (Rome: Cedam, l988), p. 574.

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(34.) Here I am deeply indebted to Richard Otte.

(35.) As Albert Camus (hardly an unambiguous defender of Christian belief) clearly recognized. Christ, says Camus, is the solution to the problems of evil and death:

> His solution consisted, first, in experiencing them. The god-man suffers too, with patience. Evil and death can no longer be entirely imputed to him since he suffers and dies. The night on Golgotha is so important in the history of man only because, in its shadows, the divinity, ostensibly abandoning its traditional privileges, lived through to the end, despair included, the agony of death. Thus is explained the *Lama sabachthani* and the frightful doubt of Christ in agony. (*Essais* [Paris: Gallimard, 1965], p. 444. Quoted in Bruce Ward, "Prometheus or Cain? Albert Camus's Account of the Western Quest for Justice," *Faith and Philosophy* [April 1991], p. 213; this passage is translated by Ward)

(36.) Another such resource has to do with the fact that from the point of view of Christian trinitarian doctrine, personal relationships such as love are to be found at the deepest levels of reality; see above, pp. 320ff.

(37.) Some of which is said in *Salvifici Doloris*, Apostolic Letter of John Paul II (Boston: Pauline Books and Media), pp. 30ff., a profound meditation on suffering and a powerful effort to discern its meaning from a Christian perspective.

(38.) *Salvifici Doloris*, pp. 30ff.

(39.) As is suggested by Paul's enigmatic remark: "Now I rejoice in what was suffered for you, and I fill up in my flesh what is still lacking in regard to Christ's afflictions" (Colossians 1:24).

(40.) "According to Julian of Norwich, before the elect have a chance to thank God for all He has done for them, God will say, 'Thank you for all your suffering, the suffering of your youth' " (Marilyn Adams, "Horrendous Evils and the Goodness of God," *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, supplementary vol. 63 (1989), reprinted with emendations in *The Problem of Evil,* ed. Marilyn Adams and Robert Adams (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), p. 219. The passage Adams cites is from *Revelations of Divine Love*, chapter 14).

(41.) Romans 8:17. Compare 2 Corinthians 4:17: "For this slight momentary affliction is preparing us for an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison."

(42.) Paul continues in Romans 8:18: "For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed in us."

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(43.) Thus Abraham Kuyper: “The angels of God have no knowledge of sin, hence also they have no knowledge of forgiveness, hence again they have no knowledge of that tender love that is formed from forgiveness. Nor have they that richer knowledge of God which springs from this tenderer affection. They stand as strangers in the face of it, and therefore says the Apostle that, with respect to this mystery, the angels are, as it were, jealously desirous ‘to look into it’ ” (*To Be near unto God,* p. 307).

(44.) Quoted in Cornelius Plantinga Jr., *A Place to Stand* (Grand Rapids: Board of Publications of the Christian Reformed Church, 1981), p. 35. De Bres (1522–67) was the author of the Belgic Confession.

(45.) Thus Teresa of Liseaux:

> I get tired of this darkness all around me. . . . It is worse torment than ever; the darkness itself seems to borrow, from the sinners who live in it, the gift of speech. I hear its mocking accents: “It's all a dream, this talk of a heavenly country bathed in light, scented with delicious perfumes, and of a God who made it all, who is to be your possession in eternity! . . . Death will make nonsense of your hopes; it will only mean a night darker than before, the night of mere non-existence.” . . . And all of the time it isn't just a veil, it's a great wall which reaches up to the sky and blots out the stars.

(46.) For interesting and seminal work in this area, I should like to recommend *Salvifici Doloris* (see fn. 37), Marilyn Adams's “Horrendous Evils and the Goodness of God” (see fn. 40), Diogenes Allen's *The Traces of God in a Frequently Hostile World* (Cowley Publications, 1980), and Eleonore Stump's “The Mirror of Evil” (see fn. 31).

(47.) For profoundly insightful comment on the main themes of Job, see Eleonore Stump's “Second-Person Accounts and the Problem of Evil,” Stob Lecture at Calvin College, January 1999 (Grand Rapids: Calvin College, 1999).

(48.) Thus inviting Job to consider the possibility that God's reasons for permitting evil are more like noseeums than St. Bernards; see above, p. 466.

(49.) Romans 8:16–19.

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