

Some Considerations Concerning CORNEA, Global Skepticism, and Trust

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Abstract: Skeptical theists have been charged with being committed to global skepticism. I consider this objection as it applies to a common variety of skeptical theism based on an epistemological principle that Stephen Wykstra labeled “CORNEA.” I show how a recent reformulation of CORNEA (provided by Stephen Wykstra and Timothy Perrine) affords us with a formal apparatus that allows us to see just where this objection gets a grip on that view, as well as what is needed for an adequate response. I conclude by arguing that, given some plausible, modest, and independently motivated anti-skeptical principles, this objection poses no threat to Wykstra’s brand of skeptical theism.

I. Overview

Proponents of the evidential argument from evil claim that certain facts concerning evil afford us with powerful evidence that there is no such being as God (where ‘God’ functions as an honorific title for any being that is omnipotent, omniscient, and wholly good). Skeptical theists, by contrast, argue that, given our cognitive limitations, we are in no position to judge that our moral insight significantly extends into the sorts of reasons that might justify a being such as God in permitting various evils. This fact, they further argue, significantly undercuts many (if not all) versions of the evidential argument from evil.

This kind of skepticism about the extent of our moral insight may be shared by theists and non-theists alike. But skeptical theists are *not merely skeptics* about the extent of our moral insight; they are *also theists*. And this combination of views, some have claimed, has disastrous epistemological consequences – indeed, that it commits skeptical theists to global skepticism. For all the skeptical theist is entitled to claim she knows (or justifiably believes or even properly

judges likely), say the proponents of this objection, God has morally adequate reasons upon which he acts to radically deceive her about such matters as the reality of the external world. And since (proponents of this objection argue) the skeptical theist cannot consistently take herself to be in a position to rule out such a possibility, she cannot consistently take herself to be in a position to know (or justifiably believe) that she is not in fact being radically deceived.¹ As is standard, call this objection to skeptical theism “the global skepticism objection.”²

I will be concerned with the global skepticism objection as it pertains to a common version of skeptical theism originally articulated by Stephen Wykstra.³ Wykstra’s version takes as its impetus a proposed epistemological principle that he labels “CORNEA.” I will argue that a recent reformulation of CORNEA (offered by Stephen Wykstra and Timothy Perrine⁴) in terms of conditional probabilities furnishes us with a formal apparatus that allows us to see just where the global skepticism objection gets a grip on that view, as well as what is needed for an adequate response. I will conclude by arguing that, given some plausible, modest, and independently motivated anti-skeptical principles, the global skepticism objection poses no threat to Wykstra’s brand of skeptical theism.

II. CORNEA: A Primer

¹ I will not consider any response to this objection that consists in denying closure for knowledge (or justified belief) or in taking some sort of contextualist or contrastive view of knowledge (or justified belief). For a response of the latter sort, see (McBrayer 2012).

² Variants of this objection (or something sufficiently in the neighborhood thereof) have been articulated by Russell (1996, 196-197), Gale (1996, 208-209), and Wilks (2009; forthcoming). For a couple of responses on behalf of skeptical theism, generally construed, see (Bergmann 2012) and (Rea forthcoming).

³ It was first laid out in (Wykstra 1984).

⁴ See (Wykstra and Perrine 2012)

As noted above, Wykstra's variety of skeptical theism (from now on "Wykstranian skeptical theism") takes as its centerpiece an epistemological principle that he refers to as "CORNEA," which he originally stated as follows:

(CORNEA) On the basis of cognized situation *s*, human *H* is entitled to claim "It appears that *p*" only if it is reasonable for *H* to believe that, given her cognitive faculties and the use she has made of them, if *p* were not the case, *s* would likely be different than it is in some way discernible by her.⁵

The original target of Wykstra's skeptical theism was William Rowe's (1979) evidential argument from evil. Rowe (at least Rowe as understood by Wykstra (1984)) had argued that there are instances of intense suffering for which there *appear* to be no compensating goods that would justify a being such as God's permission of them, and that this fact affords us with *prima facie* justification for the belief that there are instances of suffering that a being such as God would not permit.⁶ Rowe (as Wykstra read him) took himself to be entitled to this appearance claim on the ground that there are instances of suffering for which, try as hard as we might, *we can't see any* compensating goods that would justify God's permitting them. Wykstra invoked CORNEA as a means of denying that Rowe is so entitled. Given our cognitive limitations, Wykstra argued, it is not reasonable for us to believe that if there were the relevant compensating goods, we would likely be aware of them. It's plausible that many of God's reasons for permitting various instances of suffering are completely beyond our ken.⁷

⁵ (Wykstra 1984, 85)

⁶ See (Wykstra 1984, 80-83). In this context, the prevention of an evil that is equally bad or worse (rather than the securing of a positive good) should also be considered "a compensating good."

⁷ (Wykstra 1984, 87- 89)

Originally, Wykstra took these considerations to show that our failure to see what reasons God might have for permitting various instances of intense suffering cannot properly be taken by us to afford *any evidence* at all for the conclusion that there are evils for which there are no God justifying reasons.⁸ He has subsequently backed off that claim, now claiming only that we may not properly take this failure on our part to provide us with *levering evidence* for that conclusion, where E is levering evidence for a hypothesis H just in case it properly moves one from one “square belief-state to another” (where a “square belief-state” is either a square state of belief, a square state of agnosticism, or a square state of disbelief).⁹ Wykstra’s considered position is that CORNEA affords us a restriction on which items of evidence for a given claim are properly taken as levering evidence for that claim.

While CORNEA functions as restriction on what is *properly taken as* levering evidence, it is also helpful (as Wykstra and Perrine have recently pointed out) to think of it as having at its core a restriction on what *counts as* levering evidence (a restriction that Wykstra and Perrine label “CORE”) :

(CORE) In cognitive situation S giving new input E, E is levering evidence for Hypothesis H only if it is true that if H were false, E would likely be different.¹⁰

CORNEA, on this way of thinking about it, says that a subject may properly take a given input as levering evidence for a given hypothesis only if it is reasonable for her to believe that CORE is satisfied with respect to that input and hypothesis.

⁸ (Wykstra 1984, 77-79, 90-91)

⁹ (Wykstra 1996, 131, 137-139, 145-147)

¹⁰ (Wykstra and Perrine 2012, 384)

III. Counterexamples to CORNEA?

Unfortunately, as Justin McBrayer has pointed out, there appear to be counterexamples to CORNEA.¹¹ Here is one of McBrayer's purported counterexamples (one that is representative of the others he provides):

(Lotto) I am given a lottery ticket in ignorance of how many tickets are sold... Being rational, I withhold belief concerning the proposition that I will win the lottery. Later I learn that the odds of winning are one in a million... My cognitive situation in this case warrants a belief revision from non-belief to disbelief. The evidence is therefore levering evidence. However, it remains irrational for me to believe the required subjunctive conditional: I know full well that my cognitive situation would be exactly the same in the closest world in which I win the lottery.¹²

As Wykstra and Perrine note, the success of this counterexample depends on understanding the subjunctive clause that occurs in CORE as expressing a counterfactual conditional, one that is to be understood in accordance with the (now) standard Lewis-Stalnaker semantics.¹³ Call the CORE principle so understood "the counterfactual CORE principle" and the version of CORNEA that corresponds to it "the counterfactual CORNEA principle."

As Wykstra and Perrine also argue, however, subjunctive conditionals as used in ordinary English are sometimes plausibly understood to express claims that pertain to conditional probabilities, rather than as counterfactual conditionals that conform to the Lewis-Stalnaker

¹¹ (McBrayer 2009)

¹² (McBrayer 2009, 85)

¹³ (Wykstra and Perrine 2012, 377)

semantics.¹⁴ This, they conclude, suggests an alternative reading of the CORE requirement, one phrased in terms of conditional probabilities. Since (for reasons that space does not permit me to summarize here) they also argue that this formulation can be given a Bayesian underpinning,¹⁵ I will refer to it as “the Bayesian CORE principle” (and to the resulting version of CORNEA as “the Bayesian CORNEA principle”):

(Bayesian CORE) In cognitive situation S giving new input E, E is levering evidence for H only if it is the case that the conditional probability of E on not H – viz. $P(E/\sim H \& k)$ – is low.¹⁶

Wykstra and Perrine further argue that, unlike the counterfactual CORNEA principle, the Bayesian CORNEA principle does not fall prey to McBrayer-style counterexamples. Their discussion of the issue is summarized below.¹⁷

Consider a case in which we are evaluating whether some cognitive input (reported by some proposition) E is properly taken as levering evidence for some hypothesis H relative to a given body of background knowledge k. We are also to consider another hypothesis (a skeptical hypothesis) H_S which both entails that H is false and is such that $P(E/H_S \& \sim H \& k)$ is high. We then note (along with Wykstra and Perrine) that (via the theorem of total probability) the following equation holds:¹⁸

¹⁴ (Wykstra and Perrine 2012, 384-385)

¹⁵ (Wykstra and Perrine 2012, 391-395)

¹⁶ (Wykstra and Perrine 2012, 392). Instead of “low” here, Wykstra and Perrine say “below .5.”

¹⁷ The remainder of this section constitutes my own way of summarizing Wykstra’s and Perrine’s (2012, 389-399) discussion of McBrayer’s Lotto example. While the substance is theirs, *some* of the ways in which things are put are mine, and I make no careful attempt to distinguish between the two.

¹⁸ Put schematically, the theorem of total probability (in one of its forms) is as follows: $P(A/B) = P(C/B)P(A/C \& B) + P(\sim C/B)P(A/\sim C \& B)$, provided that $0 < P(C) < 1$.

$$\text{(Schema) } P(E/\sim H \& k) = P(H_S/\sim H \& k)P(E/H_S \& \sim H \& k) + P(\sim H_S/\sim H \& k)P(E/\sim H_S \& \sim H \& k)$$

Keep in mind that (given the kind of Bayesian Framework that Wykstra and Perrine employ) the conditional probabilities at issue here are to be regarded as *antecedent* probabilities with respect to E (i.e. as probabilities that are to be assigned independently of the information that E is true).¹⁹

Now consider McBrayer's Lotto case. Suppose artificially (as Wykstra and Perrine do, for technical reasons that need not be broached here) that one's background knowledge (which is otherwise typical) entails that one's ticket comes from a fair lottery with exactly one winning ticket and that there is a .5 initial probability that the lottery from which it comes is a single ticket lottery and also a .5 initial probability that it is a million ticket lottery. Suppose also that one has received testimony (from a source that one knows to be extremely reliable) that one's ticket comes from a million ticket lottery (and suppose that one's background knowledge renders it extremely probable that one would receive testimony concerning this matter from that source). To get the relevant instantiation of Schema, let 'H' denote the hypothesis that one's lottery ticket is not a winner, 'E' the proposition that one has received testimony from one's source that one's ticket is from a million ticket lottery, and 'H_S' the proposition that one's ticket is the sole winning ticket from a million ticket lottery.

Given these stipulations, $P(E/H_S \& \sim H \& k)$ is high (one is likely to get the testimony one receives given that one does in fact have the winning ticket from a million ticket lottery). This (as Wykstra and Perrine point out) reflects our intuition that in the nearest worlds in which one holds the winning ticket, one is likely to learn E. $P(H_S/\sim H \& k)$, however (as they also note), is quite low, thereby making the first summand of this instantiation of Schema low. It is extremely

¹⁹ See (Wykstra and Perrine, 380 n. 19)

antecedently unlikely, given one's background knowledge, that one has the sole winning ticket from a million ticket lottery, even on the assumption that one does in fact hold a winning ticket. The second summand is also low, but (as Wykstra and Perrine point out) for precisely the opposite reason. It is low on account of the fact that $P(E/\sim H_S \& \sim H \& k)$ is low (since $\sim H_S \& \sim H \& k$ entails that the testimony E reports is false even though one's source is extremely reliable) and in spite of the fact that $P(\sim H_S/\sim H \& k)$ is high.

For these reasons, both summands of this instantiation of Schema are sufficiently low that their sum, $P(E/\sim H \& k)$, is also low. So even though it is plausibly true in Lotto that, if one did hold the winning ticket, one's cognitive situation would likely be just as it is (in the counterfactual sense of this conditional), it is not true that $P(E/\sim H \& k)$ isn't low. Therefore, it is reasonable for the Lotto ticket holder to believe that the Bayesian CORE condition is met.²⁰ Wykstra and Perrine conclude that the Bayesian CORE principle successfully evades McBrayer-style counterexamples.

IV. The Global Skepticism Objection Meets CORNEA

Not only does Wykstra's and Perrine's framework help us see how the Bayesian CORNEA principle evades McBrayer-style counterexamples, it also helps us see just where the global skepticism objection gets a grip on Wykstranian skeptical theism.

Let's consider the global skepticism objection in relation to our perceptually based beliefs. Consider the claim that I have hands. There are lots of different cognitive inputs that I

²⁰ It's reasonable for him to believe this, at any rate, if he is sufficiently adept at reasoning about the relevant conditional probabilities. If it were up to me, I'd restrict CORNEA to certain kinds of *idealized* cognitive situations (in part, in order to avoid worries like those pressed in (Howard-Snyder 1992) to the effect that CORNEA imposes overly demanding accessibility requirements). I'd argue, however, that those situations obtain (or at least approximately obtain) where it matters most to skeptical theists (i.e. in cases of competent philosophical reflection on evidential arguments from evil). I will ignore this issue in what follows, however.

take to furnish me with evidence for this claim, but most of these are either perceptual in nature (e.g. its visually appearing to me as though I have hands) or such that I take their evidential status to depend on the evidential status of prior perceptual experiences (e.g. my remembering recently having had visual experiences as of having hands). What bearing does the Bayesian CORNEA principle (from now on just “CORNEA”) have on the issue of whether I properly take such experiences as good evidence for the claim that I have hands?

At first glance, it’s not obvious that it has any bearing at all. As described above, CORNEA functions as a constraint on what one may properly take as *levering evidence*, evidence that properly moves one from one square belief state to another. But its perceptually appearing to me that I have hands does not function as levering evidence for me for the proposition that I have hands. I already firmly believe that proposition, and I have done so for as long as I remember. Even so, I do take my belief that I have hands to be primarily *based on* various items of perceptual evidence.²¹ And there is a plausible way in which CORNEA might be thought to bear on the rationality of my believing that I have hands on that basis. I might reason as follows:

In order to properly base my belief that I have hands on perceptual experiences as of having hands, it has to be reasonable for me to believe that those experiences (either individually or jointly) constitute *sufficiently good evidence* for the claim that I have hands. And in order for it to be reasonable for me to believe *that*, it also has to be reasonable for me to believe that these experiences are of a sort that the same kind of experiences *could* properly lever me (in conditions not too far removed, epistemically

²¹ See Wykstra’s (2007) discussion of the distinction between a hypothesis being probable *on* a given body of evidence and it’s being rendered probable *by* that evidence.

speaking, from those in which I actually find myself) from a state of non-belief that I have hands to one of belief. So, given CORNEA, these experiences are properly taken by me to be sufficiently good items of evidence for my belief that I have hands only if CORNEA is satisfied with respect to the same kinds of experiences in hypothetical situations (not too far removed, epistemically speaking, from those in which I actually find myself) in which I do take those experiences to function as levering evidence for that belief.

While I do find this line of reasoning plausible, I will not spend time defending it. That's because, in the current dialectical context, its soundness can be taken for granted as a concession to the proponent of the global skepticism objection. Without something like this reasoning in the background, it's hard to see how the global skepticism objection even so much as gets a grip on Wykstranian skeptical theism. Keeping the above in mind, then, suppose that I am in following hypothetical scenario:

(Scenario) Following a terrible accident, I am taken to the hospital with injuries that require surgery. As I drift off into an anesthetic induced slumber, I overhear the surgeon say that there's about a fifty percent chance that they will have to amputate both my hands. This causes me to enter into a square state of non-belief that I will have hands upon awakening. Upon awakening I am relieved to find (as I anxiously look down toward the end of my arms) that I have vivid perceptual experiences as of having hands. I take my perceptual experiences, in this situation, to function as levering evidence for the proposition that I have hands.

Do I satisfy CORNEA in this scenario?

Let ‘ H_h ’ denote the proposition that I have hands, ‘ E_h ’ the proposition that I have vivid perceptual experiences as of having hands, ‘ H_{Sh} ’ the proposition that I have vivid perceptual experiences as of having hands in spite of the fact that I do not have hands, and ‘ k ’ a proposition that encapsulates the background knowledge that I have in Scenario. Now consider the following instantiation of Schema:

$$\begin{aligned} \text{(Instantiation)} \quad & P(E_h/\sim H_h \& k) = P(H_{Sh}/\sim H_h \& k)P(E_h/H_{Sh} \& \sim H_h \& k) + \\ & P(\sim H_{Sh}/\sim H_h \& k)P(E_h/\sim H_{Sh} \& \sim H_h \& k) \end{aligned}$$

Provided that I am aware (in Scenario) of the truth of Instantiation,²² I satisfy CORNEA in this case only if it is reasonable for me to believe that both summands of Instantiation are low. There certainly is no difficulty, furthermore, in my believing that the second summand is low. That’s because (given the above definitions) $\sim H_{Sh} \& \sim H_h$ entails the denial of E_h . So $P(E_h/\sim H_{Sh} \& \sim H_h \& k) = 0$. When it comes to the first summand, however, the opposite is the case. Since H_{Sh} entails E_h , $P(E_h/H_{Sh} \& \sim H_h \& k) = 1$. So I am entitled to believe that the first summand is low if and only if I am entitled to believe that $P(H_{Sh}/\sim H_h \& k)$ is low.

And here is just where the skeptical theist’s skepticism about the extent of our moral insight, combined with her theism, might be thought to get her into trouble. In Scenario, I am entitled to think that $P(H_{Sh}/\sim H_h \& k)$ is low only if I am entitled to think that it is antecedently unlikely (on the assumption that I do not have hands) that God has a morally adequate reason upon which he acts to cause me to have misleading, vivid perceptual experiences as of having hands. That’s because (given God’s omnipotence) the claim that God has such a reason (one upon which he acts) entails that H_{Sh} is true. So the antecedent probability that H_{Sh} is true (on any

²² See note 20.

jointly consistent set of assumptions) is at least as high as the claim that God has such a reason. So I satisfy CORNEA in this case only if it is reasonable for me to believe that it is antecedently unlikely (on the assumption that I do not have hands) that God does have such a reason. But suppose that (in Scenario) I am a skeptical theist. What grounds can I consistently take myself to have for thinking this unlikely? After all, as a skeptical theist, I concede that, as far as I can tell based on the extent of my moral insight, God might have a fantastically good reason to cause me to have misleading, vivid perceptual experiences as of having hands.

I might try to argue that, in this case, I have good *inductive* grounds for thinking that $P(H_{Sh}/\sim H_h \& k)$ is low. In any realistic scenario like the one that I described, I'll have extensive memory traces of having relied on perception in the past, of my perception's having been veridical, etc. If all of that sort of information is taken as part of my background knowledge, then (given any plausible anti-skeptical view) I'll have good grounds for thinking that it is antecedently unlikely that I would have vivid perceptual experiences as of having hands on the assumption that I do not in fact have hands. But we can remove such items of background knowledge by stipulating that in Scenario my injuries also caused me to have extensive amnesia, causing me to forget nearly all of these grounds. This stipulation is appropriate, furthermore, since part of what is at issue is whether I can consistently take the perceptually based beliefs that would constitute such grounds to be items of knowledge in the first place.

Thus, if I am a Wykstranian skeptical theist in Scenario, and all I have to go on is that I can't think of any good reason that God might have to cause me to have misleading, vivid perceptual experiences as of having hands, I do not (by my own lights) satisfy CORNEA. So, assuming that *is* all I have to go on, CORNEA entails that I do not properly take my perceptual experiences in Scenario as levering evidence for the claim that I have hands. But (quite

plausibly) if I don't properly take such experiences *as levering evidence* for the claim that I have hands in a hypothetical situation such as Scenario, I also don't properly take such experiences *as good evidence* for that claim in my actual situation.

V. CORNEA and Perceptual Trust

Is the Wykstranian skeptical theist committed to global skepticism for the above reason? Before I suggest a reply on her behalf, I'd like to consider a response to this objection that is *not* available to her. According to *dogmatists* about perception, we can reasonably believe that we have hands on the basis of perceptual experiences as of having hands, without its first being reasonable for us to believe that it is antecedently unlikely that our perceptual experiences are misleading.²³ So a skeptical theist who is also a dogmatist about perception might respond to the global skepticism objection by arguing that even though she is not in a position to judge that it is *antecedently* unlikely that her perceptual experiences as of having hands are misleading, once she has such experiences, she is in a position to reasonably believe that she has hands (and therefore also in a position to infer from what she reasonably believes that God does not have a morally adequate reason upon which he acts to cause her to have misleading perceptual experiences as of having hands).²⁴

This kind of response (whatever its merits) is not available to an advocate of CORNEA. As we saw in Section III, Schema is to be read in such a way that conditional probabilities like

²³ I am loosely basing my characterization of dogmatism about perception on White's (2006) characterization of that view. White, in turn, bases his characterization on that of Pryor (2000). I should also note that someone might (contrary to my somewhat simplified characterization) call herself a "dogmatist" about perception while thinking that the contents that can be rendered reasonable to believe via perception in this manner are not as conceptually thick as *I have hands*.

²⁴ Bergmann's (2012) response to the global skepticism objection appears very similar to this one (see especially p. 15).

$P(H_{sh}/\sim H_h \& k)$ are to be interpreted as *antecedent* probabilities – as probabilities that are assigned *independently* of the purported items of evidence that one is evaluating. Thus in Scenario, in order to satisfy CORNEA, it has to be reasonable for me to believe that $P(H_{sh}/\sim H_h \& k)$ is low independently of my having vivid perceptual experiences as of having hands. And if this is not reasonable for me to believe, then (according to CORNEA) I am not in a position to properly come to believe that I have hands on the basis of my vivid perceptual experiences as of having hands.

Nevertheless, the dogmatist way of replying to the global skepticism objection does suggest a *general strategy* that the Wykstranian skeptical theist might employ. The *dogmatist* skeptical theist does not argue that she can see *on the basis of her moral insight into God's reasons* that God does not have a morally adequate reason upon which he acts to cause her to have misleading perceptual experiences as of having hands. She argues, rather, that she is able to *infer this from other claims* that it is reasonable for her to believe.²⁵ The *anti-dogmatist* about perception, furthermore, takes herself to be in a position to reasonably believe things on the basis of perception only if she is in a position to reasonably believe that it is antecedently unlikely that her perceptual experiences are misleading. So if the anti-dogmatist about perception is to consistently avoid skepticism about her perceptual beliefs, she must find a way to maintain that she is in such a position. And whatever grounds the anti-dogmatist might take herself to have for maintaining this might also be available to the Wykstranian skeptical theist, and might serve as grounds by which she is able to infer that it is antecedently unlikely that God has a morally adequate reason upon which he acts to cause her to have misleading perceptual experiences.

²⁵ The point that this general strategy is available to the skeptical theist is not new. Beaudoin (2005, 44-45) notes that it is available, as does Bergmann (2009, 390-391). Bergmann also deploys it himself in (Bergmann 2012).

One way for the anti-dogmatist to attempt to maintain that she is in such a position would be to take up the Cartesian project of trying to infer that it is antecedently unlikely that perception is misleading from other propositions that are self-evident or incorrigible for her. But the history of philosophy suggests that the prospects of success for such a project are not promising. An alternative strategy has been suggested by Roger White and Stewart Cohen.²⁶ They both suggest that we adopt something in the neighborhood of the following principle:

(Perceptual Trust): For any given P (such that P is eligible to be the content of one's perceptual experience) it is reasonable *by default* (i.e. in the absence of any good reasons to believe the contrary) for one to believe that it is antecedently extremely likely that P obtains on the assumption that one has vivid perceptual experiences as of P.²⁷

Allowing 'E(P)' to stand for 'one has vivid perceptual experiences as of P', we may restate the above principle as follows:

(PT) For any given P (such that P is eligible to be the content of one's perceptual experience) it is reasonable *by default* for one to believe that P(P/E(P)&k) is extremely high (provided that k, and nothing else of relevance to one's epistemic situation, affords one with good reasons to believe the contrary).

As White points out, a principle like PT, though employed as part of an anti-dogmatist strategy to avoid skepticism, can be motivated by the same sort of modest, anti-skepticism that is used to motivate dogmatism.²⁸ Modest anti-skeptics typically grant that the Cartesian project of

²⁶ See White (2006, 552-553) and Cohen (2010, 153-155). My formulation of the principle below is more closely based on White's presentation than it is Cohen's (the "by default" language comes directly from White).

²⁷ I am here using the locution 'one has vivid perceptual experiences as of P' to mean the same thing as 'one has vivid perceptual experiences with the content that p'. If that doesn't match your own usage, consider this a matter of stipulation on my part.

²⁸ (White 2006, 552-553)

responding to the skeptic is a failure, but deny that the debate is to be conceded to the skeptic on that ground.²⁹ Rather, they maintain, when it comes to certain basic sources of belief like perception, it is reasonable to place a high degree of trust in those sources in the absence of any good reasons to think them unreliable.³⁰ There is no obvious reason why the Wykstranian skeptical theist cannot jump on this modest anti-skeptical bandwagon and in so doing endorse PT. And if she does, she has all the resources she needs for responding to the global skepticism objection.

Suppose once again that I am in Scenario. Let 'H_h', 'E_h', 'H_{sh}', and 'k' denote the same items they were previously assigned.³¹ It is true that if I am a skeptical theist in Scenario, I cannot consistently take myself to be in a position to judge it antecedently unlikely that God would cause me to have misleading perceptual experiences as of having hands *on the basis of my moral insight into the sort of reasons God might have*. It is also true, however, that my being a skeptical theist does not entail that I have any good, *positive* reasons to believe that God would do this. So my being a skeptical theist in Scenario does not afford any barrier to my consistently taking myself to satisfy the proviso of PT. So (given PT and the stipulation that k, and nothing else of relevance to my epistemic situation in Scenario affords me with any good reason to believe that my perceptual experiences aren't trustworthy), it is reasonable by default for me to believe (in Scenario) that $P(H_h/E_h \& k)$ is extremely high.

²⁹ See (Pryor 2000, 517-518)

³⁰ (White 2006, 552-553)

³¹ I will assume that propositions such as *I have hands* are eligible to be contents of perception. If you disagree, substitute in E_h whatever perceptual contents you take my belief in Scenario that I have hands to be based upon.

A little probabilistic reasoning suffices to show, furthermore, that the claim that $P(H_h/E_h \& k)$ is extremely high entails that $P(\sim H_h/k)P(E_h/\sim H_h \& k) \approx 0$.³² If we add the stipulation that in Scenario it is reasonable for me to believe that $P(\sim H_h/k) \approx .5$ (which I might do on the basis of my having heard the surgeon's testimony or a judicious application of the principle of indifference or both), it follows from all that it is reasonable for me to believe that $P(E_h/\sim H_h \& k) \approx 0$; i.e. it follows from all that it is reasonable for me to believe that $P(E_h/\sim H_h \& k)$ is low (which is just what is needed for me to satisfy CORNEA!). It *also* follows that $P(H_{Sh}/\sim H_h \& k) \approx 0$ (that's because $P(H_{Sh}/\sim H_h \& k) = P(E_h/\sim H_h \& k)$, since H_{Sh} is equivalent to $E_h \& \sim H_h$). So while it may be true that I am in no position to judge that $P(H_{Sh}/\sim H_h \& k)$ is low on the basis of my moral insight into God's reasons, I am (given PT) able to *infer* that this probability is low from other things that it is reasonable for me to believe. This suffices, I believe, to answer the version of the global skepticism objection pressed against the Wykstranian skeptical theist in the previous section.

Even if PT is not quite right (on account of a need for more Chisholming), furthermore, I take it that *something like PT* is needed by any modestly anti-skeptical, anti-dogmatist. And I take it that whatever the correct principle is, it will serve to provide the Wykstranian skeptical theist with a similar response to the global skepticism objection as the one sketched above. I conclude, therefore, that the global skepticism objection is not a significant threat to Wykstranian skeptical theism. Or, to put the point more cautiously, I conclude that the global skepticism

³² Assume that $P(H_h/E_h \& k)$ is extremely high. Since, according to Bayes' theorem, $P(H_h/E_h \& k) = \frac{P(H_h/k)P(E_h/H_h \& k)}{P(E_h/k)}$, it follows that $P(H_h/k)P(E_h/H_h \& k) \approx P(E_h/k)$. So it follows, via the theorem of total probability, that $P(H_h/k)P(E_h/H_h \& k) \approx P(H_h/k)P(E_h/H_h \& k) + P(\sim H_h/k)P(E_h/\sim H_h \& k)$. So it follows that $P(\sim H_h/k)P(E_h/\sim H_h \& k) \approx 0$.

objection is no more of a threat to Wykstranian skeptical theism than the threat of global skepticism is to any modestly anti-skeptical, anti-dogmatist view in epistemology.³³

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