

GROUNDS FOR BELIEF IN GOD ASIDE, DOES EVIL MAKE ATHEISM MORE REASONABLE THAN THEISM?

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Many people deny that evil makes belief in atheism more reasonable for us than belief in theism. After all, they say, the grounds for belief in God are much better than the evidence for atheism, including the evidence provided by evil. We will not join their ranks on this occasion. Rather, we wish to consider the proposition that, setting aside grounds for belief in God and relying only on the background knowledge shared in common by nontheists and theists, evil makes belief in atheism more reasonable for us than belief in theism. Our aim is to argue against this proposition. We recognize that in doing so, we face a formidable challenge. It's one thing to say that evil presents a reason for atheism that is, ultimately, overridden by arguments for theism. It's another to say that it doesn't so much as provide us with a reason for atheism in the first place. In order to make this latter claim seem initially more plausible, consider the apparent design of the mammalian eye or the apparent fine-tuning of the universe to support life. These are often proposed as reasons to believe in theism. Critics commonly argue *not* merely that these supposed reasons for theism are overridden by arguments for atheism but *rather* that they aren't good reasons for theism in the first place. Our parallel proposal with respect to evil and atheism is, initially at least, no less plausible than this proposal with respect to apparent design and theism.

We begin by laying out what we will refer to as 'the basic argument' for the conclusion that *grounds for belief in God aside, evil does not make belief in atheism more reasonable for us than belief in theism*:

- I. Grounds for belief in God aside, evil makes belief in atheism more reasonable for us than belief in theism only if somebody has a good argument that displays how evil makes atheism more likely than theism.
- II. Nobody has a good argument that displays how evil makes atheism more likely than theism.
- III. So, grounds for belief in God aside, evil does not make belief in atheism more reasonable for us than belief in theism. (from I & II)

Before we get down to work, we need to address several preliminary questions.

1. PRELIMINARY QUESTIONS

What do we mean by "a good argument" here? We have nothing out of the ordinary in mind. A good argument conforms to the rules of logic, none of its premise is obviously false, and there are other standards as well. But for our purposes, it is important to single out one more *minimal standard*, namely:

- Every premise, inference, and assumption on which the argument depends must be more reasonable for us to affirm than to refrain from affirming.

The proponent of the basic argument says that nobody has a good argument that displays how evil makes atheism more likely than theism because this minimal standard has not been satisfied.

Now, how can we tell that nobody has a good argument of the sort in question? While some have argued that there *couldn't* be such an argument, we think that a more promising strategy is to consider one by one each argument from evil, laboriously checking whether every premise, assumption, and inference is more reasonable to affirm than to refrain from affirming. If every argument written by recognized authorities on the topic were to have a premise, inference, or assumption that failed to pass the test, then we'd have pretty good reason to think that nobody has an argument of the sort in question. Unfortunately, to complete the work this strategy requires would take a book. So we must rest content in this chapter with only a start at undertaking it.

But which arguments should we focus on here? It would be uncharitable to focus on lousy arguments, and so we will focus on two, both of which are recognizably identified with our friend and esteemed colleague—who also happens to be the most frequently anthologized proponent of an affirmative answer to our title question—William Rowe.

2. NOSEEUM ARGUMENTS

We begin with an analogy introduced to show how our minimal standard for a good argument works and to develop an important principle for assessing a certain popular kind of argument from evil.

Suppose we asked a friend who claimed that there is no extraterrestrial life why he thought that, and he responded like this: “I don't have any way to *prove* that there is none. I am in no position to do that. But it is reasonable to think there is none. After all, so far as we can tell, there isn't any. We've never detected any other life-forms, nor have we received any signals or codes from distant galaxies—and we've been searching pretty hard. While this doesn't add up to proof, surely it makes it *more* likely that there is no extraterrestrial life than that there is, even *significantly* more likely.” What should we make of our friend's reasoning?

2.1 Noseeum arguments in general

Well, notice first of all that he argued for his claim like this:

(a) So far as we can tell (detect), there is no extraterrestrial life.

So, it is more likely than not (perhaps significantly so) that

(b) There is no extraterrestrial life.

This argument follows a general pattern:

So far as we can tell (detect), there is no x.

So, it is more likely than not (perhaps significantly so) that

There is no x.

Let's call this general pattern a *no-see-um* argument: we don't see 'em, so they ain't there!¹

¹ The “noseeum” lingo is Stephen Wykstra's. See his “Rowe's Noseeum Arguments from Evil,” in Daniel Howard-Snyder (editor), *The Evidential Argument from Evil* (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1996).

Notice that our friend did not claim that (a) *guarantees* the truth of (b). He merely claimed that it makes it *more likely than its denial*, perhaps quite a bit more. So we can't just retort that there *could be* extraterrestrial life even if we don't detect any. That's true, but it's irrelevant. What is relevant, however, is that his noseem argument relies on a certain assumption. To see it, consider some other noseem arguments.

Suppose that, after rummaging around carefully in your fridge, you can't find a carton of milk. Naturally enough, you infer that there isn't one there. Or suppose that, on viewing a chess match between two novices, Kasparov says to himself, "So far as I can tell, there is no way for John to get out of check," and then infers that there is no way. These are clear cases in which the noseem premise makes the conclusion more likely than its denial, significantly more likely.² On the other hand, suppose that, looking at a distant garden, so far as we can see, there are no slugs there. Should we infer that it is more likely that there are no slugs in the garden than that there are? Or imagine listening to the best physicists in the world discussing the mathematics used to describe quantum phenomena; so far as we can tell, they don't make any sense at all. Should we infer from this that it is more likely that they don't make any sense than that they do? Clearly not. So what accounts for the difference between these two pairs of cases?

Notice that it is more likely than not that you would see a milk jug in the fridge if one were there, and it is more likely than not that Kasparov would see a way out of check if there were one. That's because you and Kasparov have what it takes to discern the sorts of things in question. On the other hand, it is not more likely than not that we would see a slug in a distant garden if there were one there; and it is not more likely than not that we'd be able to understand quantum mathematics if it were understandable. That's because we don't have what it takes to discern the sorts of things in question, in those circumstances with the cognitive equipment we possess. A general principle about noseem arguments is lurking here, namely:

- A noseem premise makes its conclusion more likely than not only if *more likely than not we'd detect (see, discern) the item in question if it existed*.

Call the italicized portion *The Noseem Assumption*. Anybody who uses a noseem argument makes a noseem assumption of this form. Let's return to our friend, the antiextraterrestrialist.

2.2 The antiextraterrestrialist's noseem assumption

He gave a noseem argument and thereby made a noseem assumption, namely this one:

- More likely than not we'd detect extraterrestrial life-forms if there were any.

Our minimal standard for a good argument implies that his noseem argument is a good argument only if it is more reasonable to *affirm* his noseem assumption than to *refrain* from affirming it. Is it more reasonable to do that?

Clearly not. After all, if there were extra-terrestrial life forms, how likely is it that some of them would be intelligent enough to attempt contact? And of those who are intelligent enough, how likely is it that any would care about it? And of those who are intelligent enough and care about it, how likely is it that they would have the means at their disposal to try? And of those with the intelligence, the desire, and the means, how

² Another case of legitimate reliance on a noseem premise is in the strategy recommended in the second to last paragraph of section 1.

likely is it that they would succeed? Nobody has a very good idea how to answer these questions. We can't begin to say with even the most minimal degree of confidence that the probabilities are low, or that they are middling, or that they are high. We just don't have enough to go on. For this reason we should be *in doubt* about whether *more likely than not we'd detect extraterrestrial life-forms if there were any*. So it is *not* more reasonable to affirm our friend's noseum assumption than to refrain from affirming it.

It is important to see that we are not saying that it is highly likely that we would *not* discern any extraterrestrial life-forms; nor are we saying that it is more likely that we would not detect extraterrestrial life-forms than that we would. Rather, our point is that it is not reasonable for us to make any judgment about the probability of our detecting extraterrestrial life-forms if there were any. That's all it takes for it *not* to be more reasonable for us to affirm than to refrain from affirming this noseum assumption.

3. NOSEUM ARGUMENTS FROM EVIL

In this section, we will apply the main points of section 2 to some popular noseum arguments from evil.

3.1 Standard noseum arguments from evil

Here's a standard argument from evil:

1. There is no reason that would justify God in permitting certain instances of intense suffering.
2. If God exists, then there is a reason that would justify God in permitting every instance of intense suffering.
3. So, God does not exist

From the vantage of the title question, our main concern is whether noseum arguments in defense of premise 1 make it more reasonable for us to believe it than to refrain from believing it. Let's look into the matter closely.³

Consider the case of a fawn, trapped in a forest fire occasioned by lightning, who suffers for several days before dying (call this case 'E1'). Or consider the case of the five-year old girl from Flint, Michigan who, on January 1, 1986, was raped, severely beaten, and strangled to death by her mother's boyfriend (call this case 'E2'). How could a God who loved this fawn and this child and who had the power to prevent their suffering permit them to suffer so horribly? Of course, God might permit E1 and E2 if doing so is necessary to achieve for the fawn and the child (or, perhaps, someone else) some benefit whose goodness outweighs the badness of their suffering. But what could the benefit be? When we try to answer that question, we draw a blank. We just can't think of a benefit that is both sufficiently great to outweigh the badness of their suffering and such that God can't obtain it without permitting E1 and E2. So far as we can tell, there isn't one. While this doesn't *prove* that there is no reason, surely, says the atheistic objector, it makes it more likely than not that there is none, perhaps even a good deal more likely.

In short, the noseum argument here goes like this:

³ The noseum arguments we mention in this section are simplified versions of arguments in Rowe's work, especially his classic essay, "The Problem of Evil and Some Varieties of Atheism," collected in *The Evidential Argument from Evil*.

1a. So far as we can tell, there is no reason that would justify God in permitting E1 and E2.

So it is more likely than not that

1b. There is no reason that would justify God in permitting E1 and E2.

So it is more likely than not that

1. There is no reason that would justify God in permitting certain instances of intense suffering.

Other noseem arguments from evil are just like this except that they focus on the *amount* of suffering rather than on particular instances of intense suffering or horrific evil. What should we make of these noseem arguments? Many people think that we *do* see how God would be justified in permitting E1 and E2, that we *do* see how He would be justified in permitting so much rather than a lot less intense suffering. While this strategy is not wholly without merit, we will not pursue it here.⁴ Rather, we begin by noting that each of these noseem arguments from evil makes a noseem assumption, specifically:

- More likely than not we'd detect a reason that would justify God in permitting...if there were one,

where the ellipsis is filled in with either "E1 and E2" or "so much intense suffering rather than a lot less" or "so much intense suffering rather than just a little less". Nothing we have to say hangs on the difference, so we'll focus on the first. Call it the *Atheist's Noseem Assumption*. Is it more reasonable to affirm it than to refrain from affirming it?

3.2 Considerations against the atheist's noseem assumption

Several considerations suggest that it is *not* more reasonable to affirm than to refrain from affirming the Atheist's Noseem Assumption.⁵

1. Two aspects of the atheist's noseem inference should make us wary. First, they take "the insights attainable by finite, fallible human beings as an adequate indication of what is available in the way of reasons to an omniscient, omnipotent being." But this is like supposing that when you are confronted with the activity or productions of a master in a field in which you have little expertise, it is reasonable for you to draw inferences about the quality of her work just because you "don't get it". You've taken a year of high school physics. You're faced with some theory about quantum phenomena and you can't make heads or tails of it. Certainly it is unreasonable for you to assume that more likely than not you'd be able to make sense of it. Similarly for other areas of expertise: painting, architectural design, chess, music, and so on. Second, the atheist's noseem inference "involves trying to determine whether there is a so-and-so in a territory the extent and composition of which is largely unknown to us." It is like someone who is culturally and

⁴ This strategy, often called 'giving a *theodicy*', has a venerable history. For literature on the topic, as well as other relevant issues, see Barry Whitney, *Theodicy: An Annotated Bibliography, 1960-1991* (Bowling Green, Ohio: Philosophy Documentation Center, 1998), second edition, as well as the bibliographies in Michael Peterson (editor), *The Problem of Evil* (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1992) and *The Evidential Argument from Evil*.

⁵ The considerations we mention here are developed by William Alston. The first is in his "Some (Temporarily) Final Thoughts on Evidential Arguments from Evil," in *The Evidential Argument from Evil*, pp. 316- 319. The second is in his "The Inductive Argument Evil and the Human Cognitive Condition," in *The Evidential Argument from Evil*, p.109.

geographically isolated supposing that if there were something on earth beyond her forest, more likely than not she'd discern it. It is like a physicist supposing that if there were something beyond the temporal bounds of the universe, more likely than not she'd know about it (where those bounds are the big bang and the final crunch).

All these analogies and others like them point in the same direction: we should be of two minds about affirming the claim that more likely than not we'd be aware of some reason that would justify God in permitting E1 and E2, if there were one.

2. Knowledge has progressed in a variety of fields of enquiry, especially the physical sciences. The periodic discovery of previously unknown aspects of reality strongly suggests that there will be further progress of a similar sort. Since, future progress implies present ignorance, it wouldn't be surprising if there is much we are currently ignorant of. Now, what we have to go on in charting the progress of the discovery of fundamental goods (like freedom, love, and justice) by our ancestors is meager to say the least. Indeed, given the scant archeological evidence we have, and given paleontological evidence regarding the evolutionary development of the human brain, it would not be surprising at all that humans discovered various fundamental goods over tens of thousands of years dotted by several millenia-long gaps in which nothing was discovered. Hence, given what we have to go on, it would not be surprising if there has been the sort of periodic progress that strongly suggests that there remain goods to be discovered. Thus it would not be surprising if there are goods of which we are ignorant, goods of which God—in His omniscience—would not be ignorant.

3.3 Considerations in favor of the Atheist's Noseeum Assumption

So there is good reason to be in doubt about the Atheist's Noseeum Assumption. In addition, there are good reasons to reject the considerations that have been offered in its favor.

Consider, for example, the supposed fact that for thousands of years we have not discovered any new fundamental goods in addition to the old standbys—friendship, pleasure, freedom, knowledge, etc. One might think that the best explanation of this fact is that there are no new fundamental goods to be discovered. Hence, the argument goes, our inability to think of a reason that would justify God in permitting E1 and E2 makes it likely that there is no such reason.⁶ But this ignores the live possibility that, due to our cognitive limitations, we are (permanently or at least currently) unable to discover many of the fundamental goods there are. And we have no reason to think this “cognitive limitation” hypothesis is a worse explanation of our lack of discovery than the hypothesis that there are no new goods to be discovered.

Others claim that if we confess skepticism about the Atheist's Noseeum Assumption, then we'll have to do the same thing in other areas as well, resulting in excessive and unpalatable skepticism in those other areas. They ask us to consider claims like these:

- (1) The earth is more than 100 years old.
- (2) You are not constantly dreaming.
- (3) There is no reason that justified Hitler in conducting the holocaust.

⁶ See Michael Tooley, “The Argument from Evil,” *Philosophical Perspectives* (1991), pp. 111-16.

They say that since doubts about (1)-(3) are unreasonable, excessive, and unpalatable, so is doubt about the Atheist's Noseeum Assumption.⁷ What should we make of this argument?

It seems eminently sensible insofar as it recommends that we be consistent in our skepticism rather than apply it only when doing so serves our agenda. And we agree that doubts about (1)-(3) are unreasonable. But our main concern is whether the comparison is apt. Most of us think that doubts about (1)-(3) are unreasonable because we're pretty sure that we have what it takes to believe these things reasonably even if we can't say exactly how and even though we don't have a knockdown argument for them. Do any of us, however, have even a modicum of assurance that we've got what it takes to believe reasonably that there is no reason outside our ken that would justify God in permitting E1 and E2? Think of it like this: To be in doubt about the Atheist's Noseeum Assumption involves being in doubt about whether there is a reason outside our ken that would justify God in permitting E1 and E2. Is being in doubt about whether there is such a reason like being in doubt about (1)-(3)—unreasonable, excessive, unpalatable, a bit wacky, over the top? Or is it more like being in doubt about these three claims, claims none of us is in a position to make reasonably?

(4) There is no extraterrestrial life.

(5) There will be no further developments in science as radical as quantum mechanics.

(6) There is no atheistic explanation outside our ken for the apparent fine-tuning of the universe to support life.

In light of the considerations mentioned in section 3.2 (and others like them), we submit that doubt about whether there is a God-justifying reason outside our ken is more like doubts about (4)-(6) than like doubts about (1)-(3). We suggest, therefore, that since doubts about (4)-(6) are sensible, sane, fitting, reasonable, and otherwise in accordance with good mental hygiene, so is doubt about the Atheist's Noseeum Assumption.

It might seem that if we're going to be skeptical about the Atheist's Noseeum Assumption, then we're going to have to be skeptical about reasoning about God altogether. By our lights, that would be an unhappy consequence of our argument. Fortunately, however, we don't need to go that far. Our arguments support agnosticism only about what reasons there are that would justify God in permitting E1 and E2, or more generally the horrific, undeserved suffering in our world. Such limited skepticism need not extend to every argument for theism or to all reflection on the nature of God.

3.4 Summing up

The Atheist's Noseeum Assumption says that more likely than not we'd see a God-justifying reason if there were one. We have argued that it is not reasonable to accept it. We aren't saying that it is highly likely that we would *not* see a reason; nor are we saying that our not seeing a reason is more likely than our seeing a reason. Rather, given the considerations mentioned in sections 3.2 and 3.3, we're saying that it is not more reasonable to affirm than to refrain from affirming the Atheist's Noseeum Assumption. In light of the minimal standard for a good argument mentioned in section 1, this is enough

⁷ Richard Gale, "Some Difficulties in Theistic Treatments of Evil," in *The Evidential Argument from Evil*, pp. 208-9; Bruce Russell, "Defenseless," in *The Evidential Argument from Evil*, pp. 196-98; Theodore Drange, *Nonbelief and Evil* (Amherst, New York: Prometheus, 1998), p. 207.

to show that arguments from evil depending on the Atheist's Noseeum Assumption are not good arguments.

4. ROWE'S NEW BAYESIAN ARGUMENT

Rowe has come to recognize that noseeum arguments have some of the weaknesses discussed above. And, presumably because of this recognition, he has recently abandoned them in favor of another argument relying on Bayes' Theorem, a fundamental principle used in probabilistic reasoning.⁸ In this new Bayesian argument, he aims to show that

P. No good we know of justifies God in permitting E1 and E2 provides us with a good reason for atheism—i.e., for not-G (where 'G' is theism). We will note some flaws in this argument which, despite Rowe's efforts, include its dependence on noseeum assumptions.

The argument goes like this. Let 'k' be the background knowledge shared in common by nontheists and theists alike and let 'Pr(x/y)' refer to the probability of x given the assumption that y is true (this probability will be a number greater than or equal to 0 and less than or equal to 1). According to Bayes' Theorem:

$$\frac{\text{Pr}(G/P\&k)}{\text{Pr}(G/k)} = \frac{\text{Pr}(P/G\&k)}{\text{Pr}(P/k)}$$

(The rough idea is that P makes G less likely than it would otherwise be—i.e., $\text{Pr}(G/P\&k) < \text{Pr}(G/k)$ —only if G makes P less likely than it would otherwise be.) A quick perusal of this equation shows us that if $\text{Pr}(P/G\&k) < \text{Pr}(P/k)$, then $\text{Pr}(G/P\&k) < \text{Pr}(G/k)$. And if $\text{Pr}(G/P\&k) < \text{Pr}(G/k)$, then, as I said, P makes G less likely than it would otherwise be, i.e., P gives us a reason for atheism. Thus, if Rowe can show that $\text{Pr}(P/G\&k) < \text{Pr}(P/k)$, it looks like he will have established his conclusion.

Rowe thinks he can show that $\text{Pr}(P/G\&k) < \text{Pr}(P/k)$. We don't have the space to lay out his argument in any detail. But, as he acknowledges, his argument assumes that $\text{Pr}(P/G\&k)$ is less than 1. For if $\text{Pr}(P/G\&k)$ were equal to 1, it would be impossible for $\text{Pr}(P/G\&k)$ to be less than $\text{Pr}(P/k)$ (since 1 is as high as probabilities go). Furthermore, if $\text{Pr}(P/G\&k)$ were only very slightly less than 1, then the right hand side of the above equation would be equal to some number very slightly less than 1, such as 0.95. And of course the left hand side will be equal to exactly the same number, which means that $\text{Pr}(G/P\&k)$ could be only slightly less than $\text{Pr}(G/k)$. But that would mean that P provides us with only a very negligible reason for atheism instead of a moderate or good reason for atheism. So an important question arises: why should we suppose that $\text{Pr}(P/G\&k)$ is not extremely high, perhaps even as high as 1?

As it turns out, Rowe doesn't answer this question. Instead, he argues that we have no good reason for thinking that $\text{Pr}(P/G\&k)$ is high.⁹ But this isn't enough. Even if we have no good reason for thinking it *is* high, that doesn't mean we have good reason for thinking that it is *not* extremely high. So our question remains.

The truth is that our question is enormously difficult to answer. In fact, by our lights, we presently have no good reason to think that $\text{Pr}(P/G\&k)$ is not extremely high, perhaps even as high as 1. We just aren't in a good position to judge that $\text{Pr}(P/G\&k)$ is low, or that it is middling or that it is high. We should shrug our shoulders and admit that we

⁸ "The Evidential Argument from Evil: A Second Look," in *The Evidential Argument from Evil*.

⁹ "The Evidential Argument from Evil: A Second Look," pp. 274-76.

don't have enough to go on here. So Rowe's new Bayesian argument is (at best) incomplete because he hasn't given us a reason for thinking that $\Pr(P/G\&k)$ isn't high.

There are two *further* troubles with his argument. The first additional trouble is that in order to give us a reason for thinking that $\Pr(P/G\&k)$ isn't high, Rowe must explain why it isn't highly *unlikely*, given G and k , that we would be aware of the goods that justify the permission of $E1$ and $E2$. Unfortunately, many of the candidate reasons that come to mind here depend on illegitimate noseenum assumptions. For example, Rowe argues that if we were *not* aware of the goods that justify the permission of $E1$ and $E2$, it is likely that we would be given comforting words from God telling us that he has reasons for such permission—reasons that are beyond our ken. But k includes the knowledge that very often we lack such comforting communication—that we experience divine silence instead. Thus, given G and k , Rowe thinks it is likely that we *would* know of the goods justifying permission of $E1$ and $E2$.¹⁰

But notice that this argument depends on the assumption that:

- If God exists and the goods that justify permission of $E1$ and $E2$ are beyond our ken, then it is unlikely that we would experience divine silence.

The problem with this assumption is that it takes for granted that it is unlikely that there is a good that justifies divine silence in the face of evils like $E1$ and $E2$. But what reason do we have for thinking *that* unlikely? We can't rely on our inability to discern such a good. To do so would be to depend on a noseenum assumption—one that is illegitimate in ways analogous to those described in sections 3.2 and 3.3.

The second additional problem with Rowe's new Bayesian argument is that he presumes (as he does in his noseenum argument) that we reasonably believe that

P. No good we know of justifies God in permitting $E1$ and $E2$.

But is that right? Let's focus on $E2$. Consider the good of both the little girl and her murderer living together completely reconciled (which involves genuine and deep repentance on the part of the murderer and genuine and deep forgiveness on the part of the little girl) and enjoying eternal felicity in the presence of God. That is a possible good we know of (which isn't to say we know it will obtain). Is it reasonable for us to affirm that *that* good doesn't justify God in permitting $E2$? No. We aren't in a position to judge that its goodness doesn't outweigh the evil of $E2$. Nor are we in a position to determine that it (or something like it) doesn't require the permission of $E2$ (or something as bad or worse). For it is not only our knowledge of what possible goods there are that may be limited. Our knowledge of the logical (i.e., omnipotence-constraining) connections between the obtaining of certain goods and the permission of evils like $E2$ might also be limited (it wouldn't be the least bit surprising if they were). Just as we are in the dark about whether known goods are representative of the goods there are, so also we are in the dark about whether the omnipotence-constraining connections we know of are representative of the omnipotence-constraining connections there are. Consequently, our inability to discern such a connection doesn't give us a good reason to think there is none. Likewise, the fact that we can't intelligently compare the magnitude of the good mentioned above with the magnitude of $E2$ doesn't give us a good reason for thinking the

¹⁰ See Rowe's "Evidential Argument from Evil: A Second Look", p. 276. Rowe himself does *not* try to use this argument to show that $\Pr(P/G\&k)$ is not high.

former does not outweigh the latter. Thus, even the acceptance of P seems to depend on our making certain questionable noseem assumptions.¹¹

5. CONCLUSION

We've raised some serious questions about explicit noseem arguments from evil. And we've pointed out that Rowe's new Bayesian argument is incomplete, and that certain obvious attempts to complete it (as well as the acceptance of P itself) seem to depend, implicitly, on questionable noseem assumptions. But we haven't shown that nobody has a good argument from evil. To show that we would have to consider other arguments in the literature and other ways to complete Rowe's Bayesian argument or to support P. In closing, we'll mention briefly two arguments that seem to refrain from depending on noseem assumptions and which deserve serious reflection.

First, Paul Draper argues that atheism explains the actual pattern of pain and pleasure in the world better than theism does. The focus here is not on our inability to see a justifying reason but on our supposed ability to see that an atheistic explanation is superior to a theistic one.¹² Second, Michael Tooley argues that since

1. Permission of suffering is justified only if it is, in some way, for the sake of the sufferer

and

2. Animal suffering in cases like E1 cannot benefit the sufferer there is suffering whose permission is unjustified and, hence, there is no God.¹³ Notice that this argument does not depend on an inference from known goods to unknown goods. Instead, it takes for granted that we know a general moral principle (i.e., premise 1) which, together with certain information we supposedly have about animal capacities, enables us to make a generalization about *all* the goods there are (i.e., that none of them—even the ones we don't know of—could justify the permission of E1).

Draper's argument has received considerable discussion in the literature (much of which suggests that it doesn't satisfy the minimal standard for a good argument identified in section 1).¹⁴ Tooley's has received virtually none. So let's ask ourselves, briefly: Are there any considerations that would lead us to think *Tooley's* argument fails to satisfy our minimal standard? That's hard to say. But here are some pertinent questions. First, regarding premise 1: Is this a true general moral principle?¹⁵ Can the state be justified in confiscating the land and home of one its citizens against her will in order to construct an irrigation canal required for the survival of many of its other citizens *provided it supplies compensation*? For that matter, is compensation even necessary? What if the state lacks

¹¹ For more on the points of this section, see Michael Bergmann, "Skeptical Theism and Rowe's New Evidential Argument from Evil," (forthcoming).

¹² See Draper, "Pain and Pleasure: An Evidential Problem for Theists," collected in *The Evidential Argument from Evil*.

¹³ See "The Argument from Evil", pp. 110-11.

¹⁴ See both essays by Peter van Inwagen, both essays by Draper, the second contribution by Alvin Plantinga and Alston's concluding paper in *The Evidential Argument from Evil*. See also Howard-Snyder, "Theism, the Hypothesis of Indifference, and the Biological Role of Pain and Pleasure," *Faith and Philosophy* (1994).

¹⁵ For more on this question, see van Inwagen, "The Magnitude, Duration, and Distribution of Evil: A Theodicy," in *God, Knowledge, and Mystery* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1995), pp. 121-22, and Alston, "The Inductive Argument from Evil...", pp. 111-12.

the resources to supply compensation? Are these considerations about a state and its citizens relevant to our present worries about God and his suffering creatures? I.e., could *God* be constrained (by the limits of logical possibility) in achieving his purposes in ways analogous to those in which the state is constrained? Regarding premise 2 (according to which dying fawns *can't* benefit from their final moments of suffering): Must the sufferer be able to appreciate fully (or even partially) the sense in which he or she benefits from the suffering?¹⁶ People take seriously the idea that humans (even the severely mentally handicapped) can experience post-mortem goods—are we right not to take this possibility seriously with respect to animals?

Other arguments from evil deserve serious consideration before anyone can claim that the strategy recommended at the outset of this chapter is successful. We have only pointed the way toward a more extensive defense of it.¹⁷

¹⁶ See Alston, “The Inductive Argument from Evil...,” p. 108.

¹⁷ Thanks to William Alston, Andrew Cortens, Del Kiernan-Lewis, Michael Murray and Timothy O’Connor for comments on an earlier draft of this paper.