

## REPRESENTING THE PARENT ANALOGY

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**Abstract.** I argue that Stephen Wykstra's much discussed Parent Analogy is still helpful in responding to the evidential problem of evil when coupled with so-called positive skeptical theism, despite recent valid criticisms of the analogy. Positive skeptical theism, defended by John DePoe, says that although we often remain in the dark about the first-order reasons that God allows particular instances of suffering, we can have positive second-order reasons that God would create a world with seemingly gratuitous evils. I further explain positive skeptical theism and then apply it to the Parent Analogy, saying that a plausible second-order reason that God would allow seemingly gratuitous evils is that God, like a good parent, wants a rightly ordered friendship with created beings. Then, because this sort of friendship is significantly disanalogous to human parent-child relationships, I go beyond the analogy and directly argue that friendship with God will involve ignorance of suffering-justifying goods.

### I. INTRODUCTION

Skeptical theism remains one of the most discussed responses to the evidential problem of evil. When faced with the claim that there are gratuitous evils (evils for which there is no good that might be obtained through God's permitting the evils), skeptical theists demur. They assess the evidence to be insufficient to infer the lack of outweighing goods that could be obtained by God permitting the kind of evil we see in our world. So, we could characterize the disagreement between those claiming that there are gratuitous evils and the skeptical theists as a disagreement regarding our epistemic position. Given this disagreement, a natural next step would be to pose a question asked by Stephen Wykstra: If there were outweighing goods that God could not obtain without permitting intense suffering, how likely is it that these goods would be apparent to us?<sup>1</sup>

Many skeptical theists follow Wykstra's strategy for establishing that it is unlikely that these goods would be apparent to us, accepting his CORNEA principle (condition of reasonable epistemic access). They appeal to CORNEA to motivate their skepticism regarding our ability to determine that there are no goods that would justify God permitting evil:

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.<sup>2</sup>

For these skeptical theists, the matter becomes one of showing that, with respect to alleged gratuitous evils, we do not meet the CORNEA condition. To establish this, Wykstra makes use of the Parent Analogy.

*Parent Analogy:* A modest proposal might be that his [God's] wisdom is to ours, roughly as an adult human's is to a one month-old infant's...If such goods as this exist, it might not be unlikely that we should discern some of them: even a one-month old infant can perhaps discern, in its inarticulate way, some of

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1 Stephen Wykstra, "The Humean Obstacle to Evidential Arguments from Suffering: On Avoiding the Evils of "Appearance"", *International Journal of Philosophy of Religion* 16, no. 2 (1984); Wykstra, "The Humean Obstacle to Evidential Arguments from Suffering", 88.

2 Ibid., 85.

the purposes of his mother in her dealings with him. But if outweighing goods of the sort at issue exist in connection with instances of suffering, that we should discern most of them seems about as likely as that a one-month old should discern most of his parents' purposes for those pains they allow him to suffer, which is to say, it is not likely at all.<sup>3</sup>

In the first part of the paper, I will argue that there is a tension between what John DePoe has labeled “negative skeptical theism”<sup>4</sup> and the Parent Analogy. The problem is that it seems to fit better with a less skeptical epistemic position, as the analogy gives us second order-reasons for thinking that there are no gratuitous evils. DePoe calls this less skeptical approach “positive skeptical theism”<sup>5</sup>, which is best characterized as a repackaging of the “soul-making” theodicy into a kind of skeptical theism. In what follows, I will first highlight DePoe’s defense of skeptical theism against the challenge that it is too skeptical and leads to widespread skepticism. What I want to show is that appealing to the Parent Analogy is one way of taking the DePoe approach, so skeptical theists who are sympathetic with the Parent Analogy veer into DePoe’s approach. DePoe’s approach is a healthy form of skeptical theism though, so I hope to improve its standing by making this clear.

In the second part of the paper, I’ll consider objections to the use of the Parent Analogy coming from Trent Dougherty and Jonathan Curtis Rutledge. They argue that the Parent Analogy fails to establish the unlikelihood of suffering-justifying goods being apparent to us, given theism. But, I’ll argue that when coupled with positive skeptical theism, the Parent Analogy can help us to see that a morally obscure world with seeming gratuitous evils is likely. One thing that the analogy already does fairly well is highlight our epistemic limitations, but Wykstra leaves unanswered the obvious question of why we would have such limitations. What I want to do here is put positive skeptical theism to service in answering this question; I suggest here that the way in which we acquire some of our knowledge may necessitate this finitude. Additionally, even if God could impart knowledge of suffering-justifying goods upon us, this action is in conflict with God’s goal of forming with us a friendship that is ultimately perfectly rightly ordered.

## II. DEPOE AND SECOND-ORDER REASONS

DePoe distinguishes between negative skeptical theism and skeptical theism that is less skeptical—positive skeptical theism. Negative skeptical theism holds that we simply cannot know God’s reasons for anything (outside of revelation, perhaps). It is a thoroughly defensive position, seeking to establish merely that we could not know one way or the other whether there are gratuitous evils; negative skeptical theism limits itself to epistemically modest claims of possible suffering-justifying goods and their seeming connection to evils, but it emphasizes that we do not know all the entailment relations between evils and goods, so it’s not reasonable to believe that a seemingly suffering-justifying good G actually justifies an evil E.<sup>6</sup> Positive skeptical theists, however, say we can know some of God’s reasons for allowing seemingly gratuitous evils. They remain skeptical that we would know God’s reasons for allowing particular evils in all particular instances, but they think we can justifiably offer reasons that God would create a world with seemingly gratuitous evils.<sup>7</sup> Much like we can know the general reasons that a football coach draws up plays without knowing the particular goals for which a coach draws up particular plays, we can know some general reasons that God might create a world with sickness, even though we do not know, for instance, why God permits a particular cancer patient to develop cancer, especially in the short term.

3 Ibid., 88.

4 John DePoe, “On the Epistemological Framework for Skeptical Theism”, in *Skeptical Theism: New Essays*, ed. Trent Dougherty and Justin P. McBrayer (Oxford Univ. Press, 2014), 34–35.

5 DePoe, “On the Epistemological Framework for Skeptical Theism”, 36; William Rowe, “Skeptical Theism: A Response to Bergmann”, *Nous* 35, no. 2 (2001).

6 Thanks for an anonymous referee for pointing out a misunderstanding in an earlier draft and helping me more clearly describe the negative skeptical theist position.

7 DePoe, “On the Epistemological Framework for Skeptical Theism”, 36.

DePoe calls these more general reasons “second-order”; they are not reasons for particular instances of suffering, which would be the first-order reasons. Beyond this, he leaves the nature of second-order reasons for readers to infer, which I attempt to do here. Second-order reasons apply in a large number of cases and they lack the detail and specificity of first-order reasons. First-order reasons are instances of reasons belonging to broader kinds, or classes, of reasons, and these kinds are what I am thinking of as second-order reasons. The positive skeptical theist says, given theism, it is likely that God would create a world with evils that are *prima facie* gratuitous to us.<sup>8</sup> Why? Well, through reason and revelation, we can surmise at least some of these positive second-order reasons. Familiar ones include that there needs to be epistemic space between ourselves and God so as to maintain our ability to freely come to belief in him and encourage the virtue of faith-seeking-understanding<sup>9</sup>, and, the existence of seemingly gratuitous evils that allows the exercise of extraordinary acts of love.<sup>10</sup> Soul-building reasons, as discussed by St. Irenaeus, or more recently, John Hick<sup>11</sup> and Richard Swinburne<sup>12</sup>, are apropos here, though I think it’s more on-point to call these “saint-making reasons”<sup>13</sup>; God wants to accomplish each soul’s sanctification, making saints, and evil has a key role to play in this task, as even a cursory study of saints reveals. So, to apply the distinction between first and second-order reasons, let’s say that God permits evil E into Mary and Martha’s lives, in part, because God knows that E is an opportunity for Mary to develop more patience, thereby becoming more saint-like, and E is an opportunity for Martha to develop more faith, thereby becoming more saint-like. So, the first-order reason that God allowed E into Mary’s life is for her to develop patience, and for Martha that she develop faith. Both of these fall within the second-order reason that God wants to make people into saints.

Positive skeptical theism holds that we can be confident in positive, second-order reasons that God allows evil. To be clear, positive skeptical theism does not hold that we can never know God’s first-order reasons, but here we can appeal to skeptical theism’s skepticism that we would know all the entailment relations between particular evils and particular suffering-justifying goods and add that we often do not know the particular good(s) that God might obtain. But, we have second-order reasons to think that some kind of good can be obtained. Both first and second-order reasons are, in principle, knowable, but knowledge of the first-order reasons typically requires a level of specificity in our knowledge of individuals and their context that we simply lack and have trouble obtaining. Thus, our epistemic situation, when determining suffering-justifying goods, is basically the same as with the problem of other minds in that I cannot directly access your internal states, so I do not know many of the ways in which you need to become more saint-like, nor you me. We do not need the first-order reasons, though, as the second-order reasons help block the “noseeum” inference. Positive skeptical theism is also less susceptible to the objection that skeptical theism leads to skepticism about a host of unintended things, since it holds that it is reasonable to believe that a seemingly suffering-justifying second-order reason actually justifies an evil E, though we often remain in the dark as to the actual, specific goods obtained by permitting evil.

Linking negative and positive skeptical theism to the Parent Analogy, first note that CORNEA is a negative skeptical theism principle, and Wykstra seems to be a negative skeptical theist, at least some of the time. The point of appealing to CORNEA is to argue that the conditions for moving from, “I do not see p” to “p does not exist” have not been met; we simply cannot establish one way or the other that there is no p. So, in highlighting our epistemic finitude, the Parent Analogy seems to fit with negative skeptical theism.

8 Ibid., 39–40 .

9 I’ll say more about this later, as it is significant with respect to what would be the case when it comes to friendship between the divine and a created being.

10 DePoe, “On the Epistemological Framework for Skeptical Theism”, 39–40.

11 John Hick, *Evil and the God of Love* (Palgrave MacMillan, 2007).

12 Richard Swinburne, *Providence and the Problem of Evil* (Oxford Univ. Press, 1998) and Richard Swinburne, *The Existence of God* (Oxford Univ. Press, 2004).

13 I credit Trent Dougherty for the term “saint-making.”

That it actually fits better with positive skeptical theism becomes clearer in the subsequent literature in which it is discussed. William Rowe says, in response to the Parent Analogy, that any loving parent would endeavor to ensure a child of the constancy of his or her love, and to communicate the goods for which the child is suffering. And, if God is like a loving parent, then we have even more reason for thinking he would communicate to us the goods for which we suffer, given that his goodness and ability to communicate effectively easily outstrips the best of human parents.<sup>14</sup> This is meant to turn the tables and show us that, actually, the Parent Analogy demonstrates that CORNEA is satisfied, since God and his supposed reasons for allowing suffering remain hidden from us.<sup>15</sup> Wykstra responds to Rowe by saying that if God exists and created the universe, it is morally deep, where a morally deep world is one in which the goods for the sake of which God allows evils are hard or even impossible for humans to recognize. In contrast, a morally shallow world is one in which the goods for the sake of which God allows evils are apparent and easily detected by anyone of moderate intelligence. Wykstra says that if God created the universe, "...then it is eminently more likely that it is morally deep rather than morally shallow."<sup>16</sup> Wykstra is more explicitly giving us a second-order reason to expect seemingly gratuitous evils, if God exists. Specifically, God would create a morally deep world. Dougherty rightly makes the case that Wykstra seems to be advocating for the following claim:

*Obscurity:* If the world is made by an omnipotent, omniscient God, then it is highly likely that if evil is permitted, most of the goods for the sake of which it is permitted will be obscure to humans.<sup>17</sup>

Bruce Russell calls into question whether it really is eminently more likely that our universe is a morally deep one, if God created it. He asks, "...if God is good, and cares about us, wouldn't he want us to be apprised of his game plan? Wouldn't he want the universe to be morally transparent...to sensitive creatures like ourselves?"<sup>18</sup> The implication, here, is that such a God would want to create a morally transparent universe, since it is presumably good that His creatures be able to recognize those goods without too much trouble. By raising these questions, as Dougherty has also noted, Russell argues that a different claim seems true.

*Strong Transparency:* If the world is made by an omnipotent, omniscient God, then it is highly likely that if evil is permitted, the goods for the sake of which it is permitted will usually be transparent to humans.<sup>19</sup>

Russell's response is very similar to Rowe's. To counter Russell, Wykstra would need to assert a second-order claim about why it is in fact more likely that God would create a morally obscure world. Wykstra makes his case by expanding on the Parent Analogy, this time focusing on the intelligence, ability, and goodness of parents. As each of these characteristics increases, so does the probability that there are goods in the distant future that justify suffering. This is because as the characteristics of wisdom, intelligence, and ability increase, parents become more capable and willing to plan ahead to achieve these goods.<sup>20</sup> God's wisdom and intelligence are perfect, so Wykstra concludes that these are reasons for thinking that there may be suffering-justifying goods either beyond our grasp or in the future.

14 William Rowe, "Friendly Atheism, Skeptical Theism, and the Problem of Evil", *International Journal of Philosophy of Religion* 59, no. 2 (2006): 89.

15 See Jeff Jordan, "The 'Loving Parent' Analogy", *International Journal of Philosophy of Religion* 82 (2017), for a presentation of problems for using the analogy against theism, more generally. None of the problems that he presents for using the analogy against theism double as problems for using the analogy in favor of skeptical theism, so we still need to examine whether the analogy can be used in such a manner.

16 Bruce Russell and Stephen Wykstra, "The 'Inductive' Argument from Evil: A Dialogue", *Philosophical Topics* 16, no. 2 (1988): 146–47.

17 Trent Dougherty, "Reconsidering the Parent Analogy: Unfinished Business for Skeptical Theists", *International Journal of Philosophy of Religion* 72 (2012): 20.

18 Russell and Wykstra, "The 'Inductive' Argument from Evil", 147.

19 Dougherty, "Reconsidering the Parent Analogy", 20.

20 Stephen Wykstra, "Rowe's Noseeum Arguments from Evil", in *The Evidential Argument from Evil*, ed. Daniel Howard-Snyder (Indiana Univ. Press, 1996), 143.

There are two things I want to note here. First, the Parent Analogy, as Wykstra develops it in responses to Rowe and Russell, becomes more positive skeptical theist in character. This is due to a limitation of negative skeptical theism. When skeptical theists try to establish their skeptical claim by talking about our cognitive limitations or by asserting that an epistemic principle like CORNEA has not been met, those inclined to think that the evidential problem of evil is a problem for theism respond like Rowe and Russell did; they suggest a good and omnipotent God would not leave us in the blind. A natural response to this reply to negative skeptical theism is to offer reasons that God would, in fact, make this kind of world by giving second-order reasons that God would create a world with seemingly gratuitous evils. To not do so is to stop short of an answer that fully addresses a perfectly fair challenge from the proponents of the evidential argument.

Second, I do not think Wykstra's expanded Parent Analogy gives us reason to think that God is more likely to create a morally obscure world. It does not respond to Russell's contention that, if God is good and cares about us, he would want the universe to be morally transparent. Nor does it respond to Rowe's contention that, if God is like a loving parent, then he would let us know about the goods for which we are suffering. Relatedly, Dougherty points out that it is a serious flaw that the argument is relativized to "what we actually know of our cognitive limits." He says,

This is a serious flaw because Russell and Rowe... explicitly question whether we would expect to have such limits in the first place, given theism. Wykstra admits as much in a footnote: "This reply would not be apt if someone were to argue that if God exists, he would give us faculties ample to grasp all goods served by current sufferings, out of regard for our potential bewilderment" (Wykstra (1996), 149, n18). But that's precisely what Russell suggested in 1988 and what Rowe emphasizes in 1991, 2001, and 2006.<sup>21</sup>

Dougherty also points out that the very characteristics of God that are supposed to enable him to plan for the future are also characteristics that would enable him to create a *strongly transparent* world. It may be true that God's perfect wisdom and intelligence, combined with His vast abilities, increase the probability that He could plan ahead, but it likewise increases the probability that He could create a morally transparent world in which sufferers understand the goods for which they are suffering.<sup>22</sup> So, Wykstra's expanded Parent Analogy fails to show that a morally obscure world is more likely than a morally transparent one, given theism. Something like *Obscurity* is needed to show that CORNEA has not been met in the case of whether there are always suffering justifying goods.

### III. IMPROVING THE PARENT ANALOGY

Though something like *Obscurity* might be needed to block the move from absence of evidence to evidence of absence, it may not be *Obscurity* itself that is needed. Jonathan Curtis Rutledge recently pointed out that Dougherty's critique of Wykstra's expanded Parent Analogy may have a flaw. Wykstra may have been seeking to establish a slightly weaker claim than *Obscurity*:

*Obscurity Light*—It is likely that the goods for which an Omni-God permits *many* sufferings are beyond our ken.<sup>23</sup>

Notice that this is weaker in that it states that only many of the suffering-justifying goods would be inscrutable, instead of most. But, Rutledge notes that if Wykstra intended *Obscurity Light*, rather than *Obscurity*, then Dougherty needs to show that neither *Obscurity* nor *Obscurity Light* is more likely than *Strong Transparency*; the argument is incomplete.<sup>24</sup> Rutledge thinks that personal experiences, at least for many, reveal that *most* suffering is inscrutable though, so skeptical theism needs the stronger *Obscurity*

21 Dougherty, "Reconsidering the Parent Analogy", 22.

22 Dougherty, "Reconsidering the Parent Analogy", 23.

23 Jonathan C. Rutledge, "The Parent Analogy: A Reassessment", *International Journal of Philosophy of Religion* 82, no. 1 (2017): 10.

24 Rutledge, "The Parent Analogy", 11.

to be likely; for any who's evidence is like his, they should conclude that the Parent Analogy still fails to establish *Obscurity* and skeptical theism.<sup>25</sup>

I think there was a more convincing way to explicate the Parent Analogy that avoids the shortcomings rightly identified by Dougherty and Rutledge. The analogy brings out our cognitive limitations, but more needs to be said about why God might create us with the kind of limitations that we have. I think the answer is found in the overarching, second-order reason that God is aiming for friendship with us. This, too, is what a good parent hopes for over the long haul, even if this is not evident in the day-to-day relationship with an immature child. The hope, though, is that the child will mature to where she sees the parent as more than just an authority figure and provider of material goods.

There is again a temptation to think that a god who wants relationship with his creation would at least make His existence, let alone the suffering-justifying goods for which we suffer, plainly obvious. But, when it comes to God, this aim of friendship requires limitations on our part because of considerations unrelated to parent-like qualities, and those are worth spending some time thinking through, for these considerations give us reason to think we are not justified in believing that things are as they seem. I'll offer three reasons that this would require limitations. First, God wants us to know the goods for which we suffer, as this brings us to know God better; this requires an irreducible, non-propositional knowledge, which contingent beings can only acquire by acquaintance with them, but God making us immediately acquainted with all such goods is in conflict with the second reason—cognitive limitations are required for some of the virtues that God would like to cultivate in us, such as faith and trust, which are also constitutive of sainthood and a friendship with God. Thirdly, genuine friendship requires the possibility of rejection and God might undermine this possibility by giving us too much information.

Proceeding in order, I say that despite God's omnipotence, simply instantaneously imparting knowledge of suffering-justifying goods (this seems to be what Rowe, Russell, and Dougherty would expect, if God were omnibenevolent) is not always possible. There is a temptation to think that such a god could just tell us the suffering-justifying goods or create us with the capacity to clearly perceive them. But, I think a harder look at the experiential aspect of some knowledge indicates that God simply telling us everything we want to know will not cut it. Arguably, there are several kinds of knowledge, including propositional knowledge, acquaintance knowledge, and ability knowledge (Feldman (2003), 12).<sup>26</sup> Intuitively, propositional knowledge is knowledge of facts and propositions. Acquaintance knowledge is knowledge that comes from being directly acquainted with something or someone. Finally, one who possesses ability knowledge with respect to a task is able to perform that task.

All three kinds of knowledge involve an experiential element to some degree. Acquaintance knowledge only comes by way of a direct experience of something or someone. Many cases of ability knowledge involved experiencing doing the skill or task. Most of our propositional knowledge also comes through experience.

Now suppose that God told us His suffering-justifying goods. Would that be enough to count as a satisfying degree of knowledge of suffering-justifying goods? For reasons similar to those offered by Albert Haig, I think not. The kind of knowledge involved here is not just propositional knowledge, for propositional knowledge is incomplete.<sup>27</sup> I think this point is vividly demonstrated by Mary the in the knowledge argument.<sup>28</sup> Regardless of whether the argument successfully undermines physicalism, I take it to show that having complete descriptions of something is not the same as having complete knowledge of a thing, for we gain knowledge when we become acquainted with a thing.<sup>29</sup> Recall the example: Mary

25 Ibid., 12.

26 Richard Feldman, *Epistemology* (Prentice Hall, 2003).

27 Albert Haig, "A Deontological Solution to the Problem of Evil: The 'Informed Consent' Theodicy", *Ars Disputandi* 6, no. 1 (2006): 9.

28 Frank Jackson, "Epiphenomenal Qualia", *Philosophical Quarterly* 32 (1982).

29 However, my interpretation of the argument is disputed, unquestionably. For different interpretations, see Peter Ludlow, Yujin Nagasawa, and Daniel Stoljar, *There's Something About Mary: Essays on Phenomenal Consciousness and Frank Jackson's Knowledge Argument* (MIT Press, 2004).

is a brilliant neurophysiologist who has completed the science of color vision and optics, but she's done this while only ever having seen black and white. Jackson asks us if Mary learns anything new when she sees red for the first time. Jackson originally thought that she did, as do I. But, is there a reason to think this, beyond mere intuition, which is all that Jackson appealed to?

Consider here an argument that both supports the knowledge argument and my claim that propositional knowledge is incomplete. Suppose that all knowledge is propositional. There are also non-propositional entities. If all knowledge is propositional, then the only things we know are propositions. It thus follows that we would never have knowledge of non-propositional entities, such as persons. If all my knowledge of my wife is propositional, then the objects of my knowledge are propositions. But she is not a proposition. Thus, saying that all knowledge is propositional, along with some plausible metaphysical assumptions in my argument, seems to lead to a radical skepticism regarding our ability to know anything other than propositions. But surely we can know other persons; it is better to let go of the claim that all knowledge is propositional.

When it comes to the evil, we cannot be said to know the suffering-justifying goods until they are experienced through acquaintance, or we develop the ability and virtue needed to have them (ability knowledge). Mere propositional knowledge would give us knowledge *that* a good is tied to an evil, but it does not give us knowledge of the good, much like Mary lacks knowledge of red. This requires acquaintance with good itself. Thus, we contingent, finite beings, who have a limited number of experiences, have limited knowledge of the suffering-justifying goods that could come through the experience of suffering. Noting that we often lack an experience of a suffering-justifying good around the approximate time of experiencing the suffering, which could come later, gives us reason to think there will be some obscurity of the goods associated with instances of suffering.

But this does not settle the matter, for all that follows from what I have said is that experiences in time are the usual way of gaining the propositional knowledge in which we are interested; it does not follow that God could not impart this knowledge by some other means.<sup>30</sup> Perhaps, for instance, God could have created a morally transparent world by creating us such that we be immediately acquainted with the suffering-justifying goods—we immediately perceive them at our first instance of consciousness, or at the very least, upon experience of the associated evil.

This strikes me as probably impossible, given our cognitive limitations. But, as Wykstra has already said, "This reply would not be apt if someone were to argue that if God exists, he would give us faculties ample to grasp all goods served by current sufferings, out of regard for our potential bewilderment."<sup>31</sup> But, given God's goal of friendship with us, I don't think it likely that we be given such faculties, for we could never experience God's faithfulness unless it didn't seem guaranteed. In this regard, the idea of immediate perception of God's goods is in conflict with the good of coming to know God's faithfulness, which must be demonstrated through events. This is not a logical necessity, but it is a necessity given what faithfulness is.

Perhaps faithfulness rests on some more basic moral properties, in which case, why couldn't God have created us with the kind of intellects that could immediately perceive these moral properties? Here, I think the onus is on the objector to show us why God would owe it to us to create us with extremely powerful, angelic-like intellects. Moreover, a being with a super-intellect would still have limitations on its understanding and therefore might face similar excruciating psychological pain related to its lack of knowledge. Any sort of being that lacks knowledge of the extent of God's goodness will have to wrestle with why some things seem beyond its ken; simply thinking that God is omnibenevolent does not suffice to give knowledge of the extent of such goodness. So, the situation is such that, to meet Russell and Rowe's expectations, we'd need omniscience.

It seems neither possible for God to create an omniscient creature nor morally required. Defending this claim, the first part especially, is a worthy undertaking for further work, but deserves attention that I

30 Thanks to an anonymous referee for raising this important and clear objection.

31 Wykstra, "Rowe's Noseeum Arguments from Evil", 149.

don't have space for here. Note that once we grant that it is acceptable for God to create beings who suffer and have some degree of lack of knowledge, then there is no principled reason for thinking it would be acceptable to create beings with a slightly more significant degree of lack of knowledge. We have an example of a sorities series, and so our question becomes whether the cognitive abilities that we have fall within the penumbra of creatures with a morally acceptable balance of suffering experience and potential cognizance of suffering-justifying goods. We would not fall within the penumbra if we experienced suffering with no corresponding suffering-justifying goods. On the other end of the spectrum are creatures who suffer and immediately perceive why, which clearly would be justifiable. Neither situation is ours. This idea that God wants to make us to experience Him as a faithful friend, however, gives us reason to think that our situation falls within the penumbra, as it gives an explanation of why we seem to be a vague case with respect to my question.

The mention of faith and trust brings us to my second reason for thinking we have limitations, as faith is a virtue and requires cognitive limitations. Consider whether God could imbue us with the knowledge of the suffering-justifying goods while accomplishing God's end for us that I mentioned earlier, namely, that we become saints. It has to be acknowledged that God could imbue us with God's reasons for permitting evil, as Dougherty, Russell, and Rowe have already pointed out. But, to imbue us with the propositional knowledge of suffering-justifying goods for each evil one encounters would make faith and trust completely unnecessary. We would never have to trust God in an outcome because we would always know the outcome.

I suppose faith and trust, faith especially, are the Christian virtues that atheists are most likely to question. It is obviously good to be charitable, patient, and brave; but what does faith accomplish? Faith and trust are necessary conditions for true friendships; and, as Aristotle holds, the good life consists in friendship. To be a saint is to be a friend with God and with others, so saints trust God. In order to trust God, though, there have to be situations in which the outcome is outside of one's control, or even a large group of people's control, and a good outcome at least has the appearance of not being guaranteed. Propositional knowledge of God's suffering-justifying goods eliminates any seeming uncertainty with respect to an outcome.

Returning to explaining why genuine friendship between God and humans is likely to involve ignorance of some of God's suffering-justifying goods, it is interesting that we come into the world as strangers, unacquainted with God. So God must introduce himself to us, but he has to be careful about how he does this, as he is aiming at a friendship that is properly ordered. A properly ordered relationship with God is one in which God is acknowledged as Lord of the creation, worthy of our worship, and given our complete submission. God cannot be satisfied by a relationship in which humans give him any less place than sovereign Lord. Not only would God find such a state unsatisfactory, it would be wrong of him to be satisfied with such an arrangement, since it would seem to involve God assenting to being lesser.

At the same time, God wants this submission to be freely given, and this requires, as DePoe suggests, that he leave some epistemic space that would be eliminated if God gave us immediate acquaintance with himself and the suffering-justifying goods. Furthermore, we must be created in such a way that our moral dispositions are not entirely formed, for if they were entirely formed, our acceptance or rejection of God would be determined. God cannot be overbearing in His working of special signs and wonders, or in his giving of special revelation. He wants us to love him for the right reasons, and he wants us to acknowledge his place as Lord because we want to, not because we *have* to. That God plausibly wants a relationship of mutual love that is properly ordered is a second-order reason to think that God would create a world with seemingly gratuitous evils. Such second-order reasons serve as defeaters for *Strong Transparency*.

Recall that the conclusion of Rutledge's argument is that skeptical theism needs the stronger *Obscurity* to be likely, as personal experience for many indicates that most suffering is inscrutable. I'm not confident in speculating about what personal experience indicates for many, and it is an empirical question, but if that is what personal experience indicates for most, it is no problem for positive skeptical theism. The second-order reasons mentioned here do not say anything about how much obscurity to expect



when it comes to the particular goods that justify particular instances of suffering. But if each person's strengths and weaknesses are different, and if God wants a rightly ordered relationship with us all, then it seems likely that the amount of seemingly inscrutable suffering will vary from one person to the next; perhaps many people's experience of most suffering will be that it is initially inscrutable. Perhaps even most suffering for us all will be initially inscrutable, for if God needs to give us epistemic space to accomplish all his creative goals, and the majority of our suffering was *clearly* scrutable, perhaps we would infer without much effort that the seemingly inscrutable evils also had suffering-justifying goods. So, God may need at least half, or a majority of instances of suffering to be inscrutable. Or, perhaps it has to be vague whether most suffering is scrutable. These scenarios seem quite plausible, given God's goal of genuine friendship with us.

Building on my mention of strangers above, note that strangers do not divulge everything about themselves upon meeting, even if both parties hope to build a friendship. Telling all about yourself is a quick way to put a stop to the growth of a loving relationship. Consider couples who have been married for a long time. If married couples knew everything they now know about each other *before* they were married, many people would have been at least a little more reluctant to get married. Obviously, God already knows everything about us and has no flaws for the other person to discover (like in marriage!). However, because we do not come into existence with our moral formation complete, God understands that some goods might not look like goods from our standpoint; this seems even more plausible, given a doctrine such as Original Sin. Many people would be much more reluctant to enter into a relationship with God if they knew upfront everything that God would expect of them in this life. This especially would be the case if our moral formation is incomplete or even poor and we like some objectively bad things about ourselves, or we simply lack the willingness to go through suffering if it would lead us and others to be more saint-like.

#### IV. CONCLUDING REMARKS

God knows our dispositions, and so he has reason to withhold information about himself as well as His knowledge of suffering-justifying goods as he encourages our friendship and formation. So, I think we should expect a world with moral obscurity. These are second-order reasons to think that a world with seemingly gratuitous evils is likely, given theism, and they go some way toward showing why we would still expect some degree of obscurity despite Dougherty and Rutledge being right about Wykstra's replies. Recall that Dougherty's criticism of Wykstra was that God's ability to secure suffering-justifying goods also seems to enable God to create a morally transparent world. Well, God cannot give us omniscience, and though he could give us particular knowledge of the goods for which we suffer, that seems in conflict with other good goals.

My skeptical stance is less thoroughgoing than that of many other skeptical theists. For instance, one could be a positive skeptical theist and deny what Dougherty has dubbed the No Weights Thesis—considerations pertaining to evil do not disconfirm theism at all.<sup>32</sup> A similar negative skeptical theist thesis, The Non-starter Thesis<sup>33</sup>, may actually be inconsistent with positive skeptical theism. We positive skeptical theists argue that seemingly gratuitous evils are likely given theism, and if we can say that a seeming would be a *prima facie* reason in favor of something, then a seeming gratuitous evil would provide a *prima facie* reason against theism, contrary to the Non-starter Thesis.

Analogies can never be a full or comprehensive argument for anything. Nevertheless, they often illuminate deeper and hard to tease out truths. While Dougherty and Pruss's analogy between theism and

32 Trent Dougherty, *Skeptical Theism* (2014).

33 Non-starter Thesis: Evil does not even provide a *prima facie* reason against theism that would need to be countered by skeptical considerations "Dougherty, *Skeptical Theism*".

grand-scientific theories is, as they say, more regimented than the Parent Analogy<sup>34</sup>, it does not lead as naturally to the issues that I have directly argued for here in an attempt to explain why friendship with God would require ignorance of suffering-justifying goods on our part. Keeping the Parent Analogy is, therefore, still useful. As a parting thought, this particular way of developing the analogy may only be available to more specific theological traditions that describe God as also relational—Christian trinitarianism perhaps being the most prominent such tradition. This would be a promising basis for responding to the next natural question from those like Russell and Rowe—why would such a God want friendship with created beings?

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<sup>34</sup> Trent Dougherty and Alexander Pruss, “Evil and the Problem of Anomaly”, in *Oxford Studies in Philosophy of Religion Volume 5*, ed. Jonathan Kvanvig (Oxford Univ. Press, 2014).