

DEFUSING THE COMMON SENSE PROBLEM OF EVIL

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The inductive argument from evil contains the premise that, probably, there is gratuitous evil. According to traditional formulations, the argument for this premise involves an inference—a “noseeum” inference—from the proposition that we don’t see a good reason for some evil to the proposition that it appears that there is no good reason for that evil. One brand of skeptical theism involves using a principle—CORNEA—to block the inference. Recently, however, the common sense problem of evil threatens the relevance of these skeptical theists’ project. Proponents of the common sense problem of evil hold that there need not be any inference to justify the belief that there is gratuitous evil. Rather, someone can have non-inferential *prima facie* justification, or at least a *pro tanto* reason, for her belief that there is gratuitous evil. In this paper, I argue that the common sense problem of evil doesn’t avoid CORNEA and that CORNEA, or a reformulated version of it, helps prevent anyone from having any justification for the belief that there is gratuitous evil.

Introduction

The inductive argument from evil contains the premise that, probably, there is gratuitous evil. According to traditional formulations,¹ the argument for this premise involves an inference—a “noseeum” inference—from the proposition that we don’t see a good reason for some evil to the proposition that it appears that there is no good reason for that evil. One brand of skeptical theism involves using a principle—CORNEA—to block the inference. Recently, however, the common sense problem of evil threatens the relevance of these skeptical theists’ project. Proponents of the common sense problem of evil hold that there need not be any inference to justify the belief that there is gratuitous evil. Rather, someone can have non-inferential *prima facie* justification, or at least a *pro tanto* reason,² for her belief that there is gratuitous evil. In this paper, I argue that the common sense

¹There are, of course, formulations of the inductive argument from evil in the philosophical tradition that are different than the formulation I give. By calling these formulations “traditional,” I am referring to a common strain of argument throughout the tradition, in particular a strain skeptical theists target.

²If I have *prima facie* justification for a belief, my belief is justified, but that justification can, in principle, be defeated. That is, if I have *prima facie* justification for believing a proposition, there is in principle information I could attain that would make it so that I am no longer justified in believing that proposition. A *pro tanto* reason for a belief is a reason in favor of that belief, at least to some degree. I can have a *pro tanto* reason for a belief that is not justified.



problem of evil doesn't avoid CORNEA and that CORNEA, or a reformulated version of it, helps prevent anyone from having any justification for the belief that there is gratuitous evil.

To do this, I will first give a traditional formulation of the inductive argument from evil and a summary of some skeptical theists' project, specifically the project of those who advocate CORNEA, and I will show how CORNEA is designed to work against that traditional formulation. Second, I will present the common sense problem of evil, and I will show how it threatens the relevance of those skeptical theists' project. Third, I will expose an area of attack for those skeptical theists. Last, I will show how those skeptical theists can use CORNEA, or a reformulated version of it, against even the common sense problem of evil. If I'm successful, I will have shown that CORNEA, or a reformulated version of it—and thus a brand of skeptical theism—is relevant to the common sense problem of evil, and that no one has any more justification for the belief that there is gratuitous evil in the newer, common sense version of the problem of evil than in the older, inferential version.

1. CORNEA and the Inductive Argument from Evil

The inductive argument from evil relies on our justifiably believing that there are gratuitous evils. An evil is gratuitous just in case allowing it would not thereby produce a greater good or prevent an evil equally as bad or worse. The argument concludes that, probably, there is no god—i.e. there is no being that is omnipotent, omniscient, and omnibenevolent. The argument is as follows:

1. Probably, there is gratuitous evil.
2. If there were a god, there would be no gratuitous evil.
3. Probably, there is no god.³ (from 1 and 2)

Suppose there is some evil *e*. The following argument has been offered for 1:

- a. We don't know of any good that justifies God in permitting *e*.
- b. So, it appears that there is no good that justifies God in permitting *e*.
- 1'. So, probably, there is no good that justifies God in permitting *e*.⁴

³This problem was initially formulated by William Rowe, "The Problem of Evil and Some Varieties of Atheism," *American Philosophical Quarterly* 16 (1979), 335–341, but the version here better matches Rowe's "Friendly Atheism, Skeptical Theism, and the Problem of Evil," *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 59 (2006), 80. I have represented the argument, as it is presented in much of the literature, with a *modus tollens* type structure. However, one could also represent the argument without the "probably" modifiers and conclude with the revised 3 if the conjunction of the revised 1 and 2 is probable.

⁴This argument roughly follows the argument given in Stephen Wykstra's "Rowe's Noseeum Arguments from Evil," in *The Evidential Argument from Evil*, ed. Daniel Howard-Snyder (Indiana University Press, 1996), 127.

By generalizing 1', we get 1. The move from b to 1' is justified by the principle of credulity, which is the principle that "if it appears to S that *p*, then, in the absence of further considerations, probably *p*."⁵

Some skeptical theists challenge the move from a to b, which is the move from the absence of evidence to the evidence of absence. Some skeptical theists challenge this move by endorsing CORNEA. The exact formulations of the principle have changed,⁶ but on every version of it, the idea behind CORNEA is to "provide a necessary condition on whether some evidence E can strongly support some hypothesis H."⁷ Initially, the formulation was meant to prevent the proponent of the argument from evil from claiming b. Here's the initial formulation:

(Initial 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 that it is in some way discernible by her.⁸

Stephen Wykstra, the most prominent of CORNEA advocates, gives the following analogy:⁹ suppose a doctor looks at a syringe needle and doesn't see HIV on the needle. Is she entitled to claim that it appears that there is no HIV on the needle? She isn't, because if there were HIV on the needle, her situation would be the same—she wouldn't see the virus on the needle.

William Rowe reformulated the argument for 1' so that it does not include any appearance claim.¹⁰ Rather, the argument for 1 is from c to 1':

c. No good we know of justifies God in permitting *e*.

1'. So, probably, there is no good that justifies God in permitting *e*.

CORNEA was modified to block the inference from c to 1':

⁵Wykstra, "Rowe's Noseum Arguments from Evil," 127. For the principle of credulity, see Richard Swinburne, *The Existence of God*, 2nd ed. (Oxford University Press, 2004), 303. Similar principles can also be used, such as Huemer's phenomenal conservatism (Michael Huemer, *Skepticism and the Veil of Perception* [Rowman & Littlefield, 2001], 99) or weaker views like Conee's seeming evidentialism (Earl Conee, "First Things First," in *Evidentialism: Essays in Epistemology* [Oxford University Press, 2004], 15), Chisholm's commonsensism (Roderick Chisholm, *Theory of Knowledge*, 3rd ed. [Prentice Hall, 1989], 63) or Dougherty's reasons commonsensism (Trent Dougherty, "The Common Sense Problem of Evil," presented at Notre Dame, Spring 2012 [manuscript]).

⁶For a review of these formulations, see Trent Dougherty, "Skeptical Theism," in the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward Zalta.

⁷Wykstra says this in his "CORNEA, Carnap, and Current Closure Befuddlement," *Faith and Philosophy* 24 (2007), 88, and in Stephen Wykstra and Timothy Perrine, "Foundations of Skeptical Theism: CORNEA, CORE, and Conditional Probabilities," *Faith and Philosophy* 29 (2012), 375–399.

⁸Stephen Wykstra, "The Humean Obstacle to Evidential Arguments from Suffering: On Avoiding the Evils of 'Appearance,'" *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 16 (1984), 85.

⁹Wykstra, "CORNEA, Carnap, and Current Closure Befuddlement," 88.

¹⁰Rowe, "Friendly Atheism, Skeptical Theism, and the Problem of Evil," 88.

(CORNEA modified) For person P in a certain cognitive situation S, P is entitled to claim that new evidence E is levering¹¹ evidence for H only if it is reasonable for P to believe that: if H were false, E would, in S, likely be different.¹²

In both cases, CORNEA is meant to prevent the subject from being entitled to some claim, and in both cases, it does so by blocking an inference to 1' by imposing a restriction on when some evidence supports a hypothesis. In both cases, the inference doesn't meet the restriction. So, if CORNEA is successful, it blocks the inference to 1' and thereby provides the theist with a defense against the inductive argument from evil.

2. CORNEA and the Common Sense Problem of Evil

The common sense problem of evil threatens the relevance of CORNEA (and skeptical theism in general).¹³ In the common sense problem of evil, there is no inference from a to b or from c to 1'. Instead, the subject has, e.g., an experience of a particularly poignant evil, and on that basis the subject's belief that there is gratuitous evil is non-inferentially justified for her. CORNEA was designed to block an inference, but without an inference to block, CORNEA seems impotent. So, CORNEA seems ineffective against the common sense problem of evil. More should be said, though, about the details of the common sense problem of evil and how, according to proponents of that problem, the subject's belief that there is gratuitous evil is non-inferentially justified.

The common sense problem of evil is (in most cases¹⁴) an argument from evil in which the premise that there is gratuitous evil is non-inferentially justified.¹⁵ A subject S's belief is non-inferentially justified just in case it is

¹¹I'll say more about what levering evidence is in section 4.

¹²Wykstra "CORNEA, Carnap, and Current Closure Befuddlement," 88; it's called "CORNEA-2" in Wykstra and Perrine, "Foundations of Skeptical Theism: CORNEA, CORE, and Conditional Probabilities." For two objections against this principle that have been raised in the literature, see Justin McBrayer, "CORNEA and Inductive Evidence," *Faith and Philosophy* 26 (2009), 77–86, and Andrew Graham and Stephen Maitzen, "Cornea and Closure," *Faith and Philosophy* 24 (2007), 83–86. For replies, see Wykstra and Perrine, "Foundations of Skeptical Theism: CORNEA, CORE, and Conditional Probabilities," and Wykstra, "CORNEA, Carnap, and Current Closure Befuddlement."

¹³For recent defenses of the common sense argument from evil, see Trent Dougherty, "Epistemological Considerations Concerning Skeptical Theism," *Faith and Philosophy* 25 (2008), 172–176, and Dougherty, "The Common Sense Problem of Evil." For predecessors, see Jerome Gellman, "A New Look at the Problem of Evil," *Faith and Philosophy* 9 (1992), 210–216, and Paul Draper, "Evil and the Proper Basicity of Belief in God," *Faith and Philosophy* 8 (1991), 135–147.

¹⁴There may be, as presented in Gellman, "A New Look at the Problem of Evil," a common sense problem of evil in which someone is non-inferentially justified in believing that there is no god. In this case, there is no argument, but there is a common sense problem of evil.

¹⁵The common sense problem of evil can be defined more broadly than this so that it is (in most cases) any argument in which either the premise that there is gratuitous evil is non-inferentially justified or a premise that obviously entails that there is gratuitous evil is non-inferentially justified. I address the relevance of this broader definition in note 25, and there I explain why I've given the narrower definition here.

justified but is not justified by an inference from other propositions. Sometimes justification is inferential. To adapt an example given by Jim Pryor,¹⁶ suppose I look at my car's gas gauge, see that it reads "E," and reason that I'm out of gas because my car's gas gauge reads "E." My belief that my car is out of gas is (*prima facie*) justified for me, and it is (*prima facie*) justified for me based on my evidence: my car's gas gauge reads "E." In this case, my justification for believing that my car is out of gas is inferential; it's justified because I inferred it from my evidence: my car's gas gauge reads "E." Some justification, however, is non-inferential—or so maintains the proponent of the common sense problem of evil. If justification is non-inferential, a subject can be justified in believing a proposition but not as a result of an inference. She could, for example, believe a proposition because of a state she's in or an experience she's having, not by inferring it from other propositions she's justified in believing. For example, perhaps my belief that I have a headache is justified for me because of this horrible pain in my head, not because I infer it from some other proposition.

Paul Draper gives a prototype of the common sense problem of evil by giving a *tu quoque* argument against Alvin Plantinga.¹⁷ According to Plantinga, someone's experiences of, say, contemplating a flower or beholding the starry heavens can incline her to form beliefs about God—say, that God exists—and can also non-inferentially (*prima facie*) justify her belief that God exists.¹⁸ Draper argues that if that's true, there are other kinds of experiences we have—experiences of poignant evils—that incline us toward other beliefs:

When confronted with poignant evil (like the intense suffering of a child), theists often become angry at their creator and of course feel inclined to form the accompanying belief that the creator should not have permitted that evil. Alternatively, they may feel abandoned by their creator, feeling inclined to believe that he is indifferent to the well-being of his creatures. I will call these experiences "alienation experiences."¹⁹

Draper's reply to Plantinga provides a prototype of the common sense problem of evil in this way: just as someone's belief that God exists may be (*prima facie*) justified by an experience of contemplating a flower, perhaps someone's belief that there is gratuitous evil can be *prima facie* justified by an experience of a particularly poignant evil or feelings of abandonment by his or her creator, if there is one. I'll focus on something like the first kind of alienation experience: the experience one has when confronted by

¹⁶I'm using Pryor's example (James Pryor, "The Skeptic and the Dogmatist," *Nous* 34 [2000], 532–533) but not in the way Pryor uses it. Pryor intends his example to demonstrate non-immediate propositional justification. I'm adapting the example to demonstrate inferential doxastic justification.

¹⁷Draper, "Evil and the Proper Basicity of Belief in God."

¹⁸Alvin Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief* (Oxford University Press, 2000).

¹⁹Draper, "Evil and the Proper Basicity of Belief in God," 141.

a particularly poignant evil. Perhaps, then, a subject *S*'s experience, *E*, of a poignant evil can (*prima facie*) justify *S*'s belief in the hypothesis, *H*, that there is gratuitous evil.²⁰

Alvin Plantinga describes the non-inferential version of the problem of evil as "the best version of the atheological case from evil." Here's his description of the problem:

[P]erhaps there isn't a good probabilistic or evidential atheological argument . . . but so what? Isn't it just apparent, just evident that a being living up to God's reputation couldn't permit things like that? . . . The claim is essentially that one who is properly sensitive and properly aware of the sheer horror of the evil displayed in our somber and unhappy world will simply see that no being of the sort God is alleged to be could possibly permit it.²¹

On this problem of evil, then, as long as one is in a state in which she is properly sensitive to and aware of a horrible evil she is experiencing, one can simply see that it is gratuitous. And, according to the proponent of common sense philosophy, if a subject simply sees that something is the case, one's belief that it is the case is (*prima facie*) justified for her. So, according to Plantinga's description of the common sense problem of evil, by being in the state or having the experience Plantinga describes, one's belief that there is gratuitous evil is *prima facie* justified for her.

Trent Dougherty, a more recent defender of a version of the common sense problem of evil, gives a version in which a seeming state can *prima facie* justify someone's belief that there is gratuitous evil. According to Dougherty, if it seems to *S* that *p*, *S* thereby has a *pro tanto* reason to believe *p*,²² and Dougherty also holds that if the seeming is sufficiently strong, *S* is (*prima facie*) justified in believing *p*.²³ Dougherty gives several candidates for *p*:

- A. there simply couldn't be a justification for such widespread and intense suffering,
- B. a loving God would not allow *e*, or

²⁰Draper, "Evil and the Proper Basicity of Belief in God," says that these alienation experiences may not justify one's belief that there is gratuitous evil but may only undercut the warrant that religious experiences would otherwise confer on the subject's belief that God exists. Draper is not making an argument from evil, but what he says provides a prototype for such an argument.

²¹Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief*, 484.

²²Dougherty, "Skeptical Theism," Trent Dougherty, "Phenomenal Conservatism, Skeptical Theism, and Probabilistic Reasoning," in *Skeptical Theism: New Essays*, ed. Trent Dougherty and Justin McBrayer (Oxford University Press, 2014), 21–31, and Trent Dougherty and Blake McAllister, "A Reductive Account of the *Sensus Divinitatis*" (manuscript).

²³Dougherty holds (in Dougherty and McAllister, "A Reductive Account of the *Sensus Divinitatis*" and in person) that if the seeming is sufficiently strong, *S* is (*prima facie*) justified in believing *p*.

C. if there were a God, he could do much, much better than this.²⁴

In any case, according to Dougherty, if a subject is in any one of these seeming states, if that state is sufficiently strong, the subject's belief that there is gratuitous evil is *prima facie* justified for her (or, rather, one's belief that A, B, or C is *prima facie* justified for her, and A, B, and C each obviously entail that there is gratuitous evil).²⁵

On almost all versions of the common sense problem of evil, then, the subject's belief that there is gratuitous evil is (*prima facie*) non-inferentially justified. On each of these versions, the subject is justified in virtue of an experience or a state the subject is in. There are no inferences from one premise to another, as there are in traditional formulations of the inductive arguments from evil. Without these inferences in play, CORNEA seems not to have anything to block. So, CORNEA seems powerless against the common sense problem of evil.

In the rest of this paper, I'll argue that it is not powerless: CORNEA, or a reformulated version of it, can still prevent a subject from being *prima facie* justified, or even from having a *pro tanto* reason, for believing that there are gratuitous evils. First, though, I will expose an area of attack for the skeptical theist, in particular for the advocate of CORNEA-like principles. This area of attack is support facts.

3. Non-inferential Justification and Support Facts

Juan Comesaña argues that there are what he calls "support facts."²⁶ He offers the following example. Suppose it seems to you that it's raining.

²⁴Some objections: (1) These seemings are negative, and they're modals, and we can't have negative modal intuitions. (2) These seemings could be triggered by a seemingly unrelated event, including sipping a Coke on a warm day. Dougherty, in his "The Common Sense Problem of Evil," responds to the first objection by giving cases in which we have negative and modal seemings. For example, Wykstra, "The Humean Obstacle to Evidential Arguments from Suffering: On Avoiding the Evils of 'Appearance,'" 84, gives a case in which it can seem that one's wife is bare, which is a negative seeming; and Plantinga "claims to see that an elephant couldn't possibly be a proposition" (Dougherty, "The Common Sense Problem of Evil," 24), which is a negative modal intuition. The second objection isn't unique to the kind of seemings Dougherty thinks someone can have. Almost all accounts of seemings seem susceptible to the objection that a seeming can be triggered by an event seemingly unrelated to that seeming. Whether some accounts of seemings can successfully reply to this objection, though, is outside the scope of this paper. (I owe an anonymous referee for raising these objections.)

²⁵One could here object that Dougherty's argument is not a version of the common sense problem of evil because that there is gratuitous evil is inferred from A, B, or C. If the move from A, B, or C to 1 is an inference, though, (i) it's not one that CORNEA attacks, and (ii) it's just as much of an inference as 1' to 1 is in the traditional formulation, but the move from 1' to 1 is generally treated as so obvious so as not even be treated as an inference. What makes an argument from evil a version of the common sense problem of evil can be restated, then, as any argument from evil in which the premise that there is gratuitous evil is justified non-inferentially or is obviously entailed by a proposition that is justified non-inferentially. I pass over these technicalities here, since they're not relevant to CORNEA's attack.

²⁶Juan Comesaña, "We Are (Almost) All Externalists Now," *Philosophical Perspectives* 19 (2005). Such views go back at least to Roderick Chisholm, *Theory of Knowledge*, 1st ed. (Prentice Hall, 1966).

Suppose you also believe that it's raining. What is the relation between the two? Intuitively, one supports the other. The factors that contribute to your justification that it's raining are not only that it seems to you that it's raining but also the fact that the proposition *it seems to you that it's raining* supports the proposition *it's raining*. Support facts of the kind Comesana describes are of the following form: p supports q just in case p is a good reason to believe q .²⁷

Similarly, there is an extended sense of support facts (not given by Comesana) that holds between experiences and the proposition that the experience allegedly supports. Here's an example similar to the one above. Suppose you experience a lot of water falling from the sky. Suppose you also believe it's raining. Again, intuitively, one supports the other; the experience *prima facie* justifies you in believing that it's raining. The factors that contribute to your justification that it's raining are not just that you have a certain experience but also the fact that that experience supports the proposition that it's raining. In this extended sense of support facts, then, some experience or state E supports a proposition q for a subject S just in case E *prima facie* justifies S in believing q . There need to be support facts in this extended sense in order for a subject's experiences or states to justify her beliefs.

There is a difference between support facts in this extended sense and the things that provide the support. Even if the things that provide the support are states or experiences, there is, in addition, a support fact relating those states or experiences and the proposition they justify the subject in believing, and this support fact is not itself a state or experience. So, even if a subject is justified in believing a proposition on the basis of a state or experience, in order for the subject to be justified in believing that proposition, there has to be in addition to the state or experience a support fact linking this state or experience to the proposition. So, even if a subject has beliefs that are non-inferentially justified by a state or experience, the subject's beliefs are so justified only if there obtains a support fact between the state or experience and the subject's beliefs.

Since the idea behind CORNEA is to provide a necessary condition on whether some evidence E can strongly *support* some hypothesis H , perhaps there is an area of attack for CORNEA even when a belief is allegedly non-inferentially justified. This area of attack is the support fact relating the state or experience and the belief it allegedly supports.

4. Defusing the Common Sense Problem of Evil

According to the common sense problem of evil, the subject has an experience of poignant evil or has a seeming of the sort Dougherty describes above, and on that basis the subject non-inferentially believes that there is gratuitous evil. But, as in the last section, in order for the subject to be justified in believing that there is gratuitous evil on the basis of an expe-

²⁷See Comesana, "We Are (Almost) All Externalists Now," 60–61.

rience or seeming, there needs to be a support fact that obtains linking the seeming or experience and the belief. The idea behind CORNEA is to provide a necessary condition on whether some evidence (such as an experience or state)²⁸ supports a hypothesis (such as the proposition that there is gratuitous evil). Perhaps, then, CORNEA, or some version of it, can provide a necessary condition on whether support facts obtain between a subject's experiences or states and the propositions that they allegedly justify the subject in believing.

There is a potential problem: (Initial CORNEA) (minus the metalinguistic consideration) is meant to provide a restriction on the kind of support a cognized situation can provide for a subject's seeming state, *not* whether the subject's evidence (such as a state or experience) justifies the subject in believing a proposition. In reply, (CORNEA modified) seems not to do this. In fact, (CORNEA modified) seems precisely to be a restriction on whether the subject's evidence justifies her in believing a proposition. Here's why. The idea behind (CORNEA modified) is to provide a necessary condition on whether some new evidence *E* is *levering* evidence for *H*.²⁹ Wykstra and Perrine list three necessary conditions for evidence to be levering. One of these conditions is that the evidence "is sufficient enough to shift the rational credibility of a hypothesis from one square state to another."³⁰ Square states are doxastic attitudes: belief, non-belief, and disbelief. That is, (CORNEA modified) is a necessary condition on whether some evidence supports belief, non-belief, or disbelief in the target proposition. So, although (Initial CORNEA) is specifically aimed at restricting whether or not the subject has the right to make a claim to an appearance, (CORNEA modified) (minus the metalinguistic consideration) is aimed at whether some evidence (e.g. a state or experience) supports an agent's doxastic attitude toward a proposition. Further, (CORNEA modified) doesn't say anything about an inference. So, it seems that (CORNEA modified) is well-suited to apply to the common sense problem of evil.

Here is (CORNEA modified) again:

(CORNEA modified) For person *P* in a certain cognitive situation *S*, *P* is entitled to claim that new evidence *E* is levering evidence for *H* only if it is reasonable for *P* to believe that: if *H* were false, *E* would, in the situation *S*, likely be different.

Suppose the proponent of the common sense problem of evil wants to claim that her new evidence, an experience of a poignant evil, brings her

²⁸This parenthetical applies if an experience or state can be evidence. I will here treat experiences and states as if they can be evidence, but CORNEA can be easily modified to address support facts relating experience or states and propositions even if neither experiences nor states can be evidence.

²⁹The idea behind (CORNEA modified) is also to provide a necessary condition on whether some new evidence strongly supports *H*. For our purposes here, these are equivalent.

³⁰Wykstra and Perrine, "Foundations of Skeptical Theism: CORNEA, CORE, and Conditional Probabilities," 381–382.

from a state of nonbelief to a state of (*prima facie*) justified belief that there is gratuitous evil. According to (CORNEA modified), she can make this claim only if it is reasonable for her to believe that if there weren't any gratuitous evil, then likely she wouldn't experience that poignant evil. Further, if we drop the metalinguistic consideration from (CORNEA modified), we get the following version of CORNEA:

(new CORNEA modified) For person P in a certain cognitive situation S, new evidence E is levering evidence for H for person P only if it is reasonable for P to believe that: if H were false, E would, in the situation S, likely be different.

According to (new CORNEA modified), a subject is *prima facie* justified in believing there is gratuitous evil on the basis of an experience of a poignant evil only if it is reasonable for her to believe that if there weren't any gratuitous evil, then likely she wouldn't have that experience of poignant evil.

According to proponents of CORNEA, it is not reasonable for someone to believe that if there weren't any gratuitous evil, likely she wouldn't have the experience of poignant evil. To skeptical theists in general, we are "in the dark"³¹ about God's reasons for allowing poignant evil, the relations between various goods and evils, and so on;³² God's purposes for goods are "beyond our ken."³³ So it's not reasonable for us to believe that if God had good reasons for allowing any evil that there is in the world so that no evils in the world are gratuitous, likely we wouldn't have the experience of the poignant evil we in fact have. In fact, it is reasonable for us to think that even if the evil in the world weren't gratuitous, we would still have the *same* experience of poignant evil but not be able to detect whether or not that poignant evil is one that could be prevented without either allowing some greater good or preventing an evil equally as bad or worse. According to skeptical theists, then, because of our cognitive limitations, it is reasonable for us to believe that we wouldn't be able to assess whether or not a poignant evil is gratuitous. Rather, skeptical theists say, it's reasonable for us to believe that whether or not there is gratuitous evil, we would still have the same experience of evils, that they are poignant. *A fortiori*, it's not reasonable for us to believe that if there weren't

³¹This phrase is in Michael Bergmann, "Skeptical Theism and Rowe's New Evidential Argument from Evil," *Nous* 35 (2001), 289, 291, and throughout Michael Bergmann, "Skeptical Theism and the Problem of Evil," in *The Oxford Handbook of Philosophical Theology*, ed. Thomas Flint and Michael Rea (Oxford University Press, 2008).

³²See Bergmann, "Skeptical Theism and the Problem of Evil," for a list of the relevant areas about which we're ignorant, which he numbers ST1–ST4.

³³E.g. Wykstra, "Rowe's Noseeum Arguments from Evil," 139–140. There, Wykstra says that "the disparity between our cognitive limits and the vision needed to create a universe gives us reason to think that if our universe is created by God it is expectable that it would be deep" (140), where a deep universe is one in which observable goods often serve goods that are not on the surface. See also Bruce Russell and Stephen Wykstra, "The 'Inductive' Argument from Evil: A Dialogue," *Philosophical Topics* 16 (1988), 145–147.

any gratuitous evil, likely we wouldn't have that experience of poignant evil. The alleged justification for premise 1 in the common sense problem of evil, then, doesn't pass (new CORNEA modified)'s test. The experience of a poignant evil does not support the belief that there is gratuitous evil.³⁴

Perhaps the proponent of the common sense problem of evil will object: "That's fine, but I'm not claiming that the experience of poignant evil is *levering* evidence but only that it provides a *pro tanto* reason to believe that there is gratuitous evil."³⁵ In this case, the skeptical theist can reply in two ways. First, the skeptical theist can point out that having a *pro tanto* reason to believe there is gratuitous evil is not enough to get the argument from evil going. One needs stronger evidence for the premise that probably there is gratuitous evil than that one has a *pro tanto* reason to believe it. Second, the skeptical theist can argue that one does not even have a *pro tanto* reason to believe there is gratuitous evil by first adopting a reformulated version of CORNEA.³⁶

(Reformulated CORNEA) Evidence E that is new to S (incrementally) supports hypothesis H only if it is the case that if H were false, E would more likely be different.

According to (Reformulated CORNEA), whether new evidence E (incrementally) supports H depends on the difference between E with respect to H and E with respect to not-H. If E would just as likely or more likely be the same if H were false as if H were true, E doesn't incrementally support H. So, in order to (incrementally) support H, E needs to be more likely different if H is false than if H is true.

There have been some purported counterexamples to CORNEA-like principles similar to (Reformulated CORNEA), because those principles look very much like sensitivity constraints on whether new evidence supports a hypothesis. Counterexamples to sensitivity constraints also count against CORNEA-like principles that place that kind of constraint on whether some evidence supports a hypothesis. Stephen Wykstra and Timothy Perrine reply to these purported counterexamples by claiming that although the grammatical subjunctive in these principles, e.g. "if H were false, E would likely be different," sounds like a counterfactual, it is

³⁴CORNEA also works against Gellman's version of the common sense problem of evil in which someone's belief that God doesn't exist is non-inferentially justified on the basis of an experience of certain evils. This is because the alleged support fact relating the experience and the belief that God doesn't exist doesn't pass CORNEA's test. The reason it doesn't pass CORNEA's test is similar to the reason given in this paragraph: according to skeptical theists, it's reasonable for us to believe that whether or not God exists, we would still have the same experience of poignant evils.

³⁵Dougherty makes this move in his "Further Epistemological Considerations Concerning Skeptical Theism," *Faith and Philosophy* 28 (2011), 332–340, and "The Common Sense Problem of Evil."

³⁶I call this "a reformulated version of CORNEA" because it at least gets to what is behind CORNEA-like principles. It may be missing some conditions that some people take to be necessary for a principle to be CORNEA-like, but given how CORNEA has varied over the years, it's hard to tell exactly what those conditions are. In any case, I'm not set on the name.

actually meant to express a conditional probability, viz. $P(E \mid \sim H) < .5$.³⁷ The purported counterexamples require that the grammatical subjunctive, “if H were false, E would likely be different,” is logically a counterfactual. Read as a conditional probability, however, the grammatical subjunctive is insusceptible to the purported counterexamples.³⁸

Note that the consequent of (Reformulated CORNEA) is not “if H were false, E would likely be different” but is instead “if H were false, E would *more* likely be different.” Most of the CORNEA-like principles don’t include “more,” perhaps because those principles place a constraint on whether new evidence rationally moves someone from one square doxastic state to another, not whether new evidence incrementally supports a proposition. If new evidence E is only slightly likely on not-H—say it has a probability just above .5—but is certain on H, then gaining evidence E *does* incrementally confirm H, even if it’s not enough to rationally move someone from one square doxastic state to another.³⁹ If, however, E is just as likely or more likely on not-H as on H, then E does not even incrementally confirm H. So, to incrementally confirm H, E has to be more likely different on not-H than it is on H. That’s what (Reformulated CORNEA) says. Note also that the condition in (Reformulated CORNEA) is an externalist condition, but support facts are external,⁴⁰ and Wykstra endorses external parts to his original CORNEA.⁴¹

Skeptical theists can use (Reformulated CORNEA) to object to the position that the experience of poignant evil provides a *pro tanto* reason to believe that there is gratuitous evil by endorsing (Reformulated CORNEA) and arguing that it’s not the case that if there were no gratuitous evil, then it’s more likely that our experiences would be different. Instead, we would

³⁷See Wykstra and Perrine, “Foundations of Skeptical Theism: CORNEA, CORE, and Conditional Probabilities,” 377, 386, and Stephen Wykstra, “CORNEA, Carnap, and Current Closure Befuddlement,” 89n12.

³⁸For the purported counterexamples, see Justin McBrayer, “CORNEA and Inductive Evidence,” and for the reply, see Wykstra and Perrine, “Foundations of Skeptical Theism: CORNEA, CORE, and Conditional Probabilities.”

³⁹Wykstra and Perrine, “Foundations of Skeptical Theism: CORNEA, CORE, and Conditional Probabilities,” may have meant *more likely* where they have written “likely,” which would make the consequent of the condition in their CORNEA-like principles comparative. If what is meant by “likely” is not comparative, the CORNEA-like principle is mistaken. The values in the text are enough to rationally move one from one square doxastic state to another. If one is on the verge of believing there is gratuitous evil but doesn’t quite believe it and later has a vivid experience of poignant evil—an experience that on the hypothesis that there is gratuitous evil is certain but on the hypothesis that there is no gratuitous evil has a .51 probability—that new evidence (the experience) is enough to rationally move her from one square doxastic state (suspension of judgment) to another (belief) even though it is not likely that the experience would be different if there were no gratuitous evil.

I have explicitly added “more” to (Reformulated CORNEA) but not to (new CORNEA modified) to avoid unnecessary complications. Let us now assume that “likely” in (new CORNEA modified) means *more likely* and that the grammatical subjunctive there expresses a conditional probability.

⁴⁰This is argued for in Comesana, “We Are (Almost) All Externalists Now.”

⁴¹See Wykstra and Perrine, “Foundations of Skeptical Theism: CORNEA, CORE, and Conditional Probabilities.”

just as likely have the experiences we now in fact have if there were no gratuitous evil. God's ways are inscrutable. We're so severely cognitively limited and in the dark about God's reasons for allowing evil, the relations between various goods and evils, and so on that even if there weren't any gratuitous evil, we would be just as likely to have the same experiences of poignant evil.

So, even though the common sense problem of evil avoids both inferences to premise 1 and the move from the absence of evidence to the evidence of absence, there is still an alleged support fact that, according to CORNEA, or a reformulated version of it, does not obtain. I conclude, then, that the proponent of CORNEA still has a way to defuse the common sense problem of evil.⁴²

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