

## Seeing through CORNEA\*

DANIEL HOWARD-SNYDER

*541 Hall of Languages, Department of Philosophy, Syracuse University,  
Syracuse, NY 13244–170*

### 1. Introduction

Students of the problem of evil generally agree that God and evil are logically compossible. Nonetheless, when many of us reflect on particularly horrible and ruinous evils, we are tempted to say “It seems there is no outweighing good that requires God to permit them; and it appears no equally bad or worse state of affairs must be permitted were they prevented.” Some of us are drawn further and infer that there is no sufficient reason for God to permit these evils and, therefore, that there is no God. When theists of a skeptical bent rightly push us to justify why we are entitled to assert that evils *seem* to be this way, we may feel bedrock beneath our spade. Perhaps all we can do is repeat ourselves, insisting a little more loudly: “They just seem pointless; can’t you see it?!” And why not? Sometimes that is all that can be said. Justification must end somewhere.

Stephen Wykstra has recently provoked quite a stir by arguing that we are not entitled to make such claims as “There seems to be no sufficient reason for God to permit Hank to flay and salt young Billy.”<sup>1</sup> If he’s right, it becomes difficult to deny that atheism based on instances of pointless evil is atheism built on sand. My aim in this essay is to evaluate Wykstra’s case for that startling conclusion.

\* For useful comments on an early draft of this paper, I wish to thank Andrew Cortens, William Hasker, Richard Swinburne and Mark Webb. I am especially grateful to William Alston, Frances Howard-Snyder and John O’Leary-Hawthorne for extended discussion on several pertinent matters.

## 2. Wykstra's case

Wykstra begins with an analysis of the appropriate sense of 'appears' and 'seems' found in the atheist's argument. He argues that what one means by, for example, "Hank's flaying and salting Billy seems (appears) pointless" is that (i) she is inclined to believe that his suffering is pointless, (ii) she is led to believe this by the fact that, upon careful reflection, she sees no outweighing good that requires Hank's being permitted to flay and salt Billy, and (iii) she takes there to be an 'evidential connection' between that fact and what she believes. Next, Wykstra defends what he calls a "principle of epistemic justification" which lays down a necessary condition on one's being entitled to make such an appearing-claim:

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. (p. 85)

This is the "Condition of Reasonable Epistemic Access," *CORNEA* for short. (With 'cognized situation' Wykstra refers to (roughly) whatever inclines one to believe something.) Armed with *CORNEA*, Wykstra argues that those who claim that some evils seem pointless are not entitled to make that claim. For

if there were an outweighing good of the sort at issue, connected in the requisite way to instances of suffering like [that of Billy's], how likely is it that this should be apparent to us?

Wykstra answers:

the outweighing good at issue is of a special sort: one purposed by the Creator of all that is, whose vision and wisdom are therefore somewhat greater than ours. How much greater? A modest proposal might be that his wisdom is to ours, roughly as an adult human's is to a one-month old infant's. (You may adjust the ages and species to fit your own estimate of how close our knowledge is to omniscience.) ... If such goods as this exist, ... 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. So for any selected instance of intense suffering, there is good reason to think that if there is an outweighing good of the sort at issue connected to it, we would not have epistemic access to this: our cognized situation would be just as [it is now]. (p. 88)

Indeed, not merely "for any selected instance of intense suffering," but for

any *possible* instance of intense suffering! If Wykstra's argument is sound, it entails that no possible evil – not even the evil of a world converted into a death camp in which 99% of the population was bred for endless, excruciating torture inflicted by the remaining sadistic madmen – would be *prima facie* evidence for there really being pointless evil. We may justifiably claim with respect to even that horror that it seems pointless only if it would be reasonable for us to believe that, were it to have a point, we would probably discern it. But since we would have the same reason to expect ourselves not to discern God's reason for permitting such a horror, it would be unreasonable for us to think that we would have access to it. Wykstra's argument, if sound, demonstrates that evil *could not* constitute evidence against the existence of God. This is a startling reversal of traditional opinion indeed! How should the atheist reply?

### 3. Wykstra's defense of CORNEA

Our first question should be: Why think that CORNEA is true? Wykstra offers a handful of cases reflection upon which reveals the following rationale:

If I say "it appears that p," I am saying (among other things) that I take there to be an evidential connection between what I am inclined to believe ... and the cognized situation [s] that inclines me to believe it. If it is not reasonable for me to take this evidential connection to obtain, then I am not entitled to say "it appears that p." Now suppose that it is not reasonable for me to believe that if p were not the case, s would be different than it is in some discernible respect ... In this event it can scarcely be reasonable for me to believe that an evidential connection obtains between what I am inclined to believe, and [s]. Hence, ... I am not entitled to say "it appears that p." So to be entitled (by cognizance of s) to say "it appears that p," it must be reasonable for me to believe that if it were not the case that p, then s would likely be discernibly different than it is. (p. 87)

Thus, CORNEA.

This passage reveals two epistemic principles upon which CORNEA rests. The first we might call "*The Taking Condition*":

H is entitled to claim that it appears that p on the basis of cognized situation s only if it is reasonable for her to take it that there is an evidential connection between p and s.

The second, what I shall call "*The Discernible Difference Principle*," poses a necessary condition for reasonably taking there to be an evidential

connection between what one believes and one's cognized situation:

It is reasonable for H to take it that there is an evidential connection between p and s only if it is reasonable for H to believe that, given her cognitive faculties and the use she has made of them, were p false, s would likely be discernibly different to H in some way.

What should we make of these principles?

#### 4. On avoiding the evils of (relying on the atheist's use of 'appearance')

The first thing we should note is that The Taking Condition seems to be a consequence of Wykstra's meaning analysis of epistemic uses of appearing locutions. Wykstra even goes so far as to suggest that The Taking Condition, and hence CORNEA, stands or falls on the correctness of that analysis (pp. 85 and 87) If he's right, I shall now argue, his objection is unworthy of the attention it has received in the literature.

When one utters "It appears (seems) that there is no elephant in the room" one might well mean nothing more than what is typically meant by "So far as I can see (tell), there is no elephant in the room." And claims of the form 'so far as I can tell, not-p' do not carry with them the commitments that Wykstra argues are part of the meaning of the epistemic use of appearance locutions. But if that's the case, the atheist can readily admit that CORNEA is true and that Wykstra's meaning analysis is correct, yet easily sidestep his polemic by simply cleansing her argument of the appearance terminology. She should argue, instead: "So far as we can tell, there is no outweighing good that requires God to permit (say) the fawn's suffering for days on end; nor, so far as we can tell, is there some equally bad or worse state of affairs that must have been permitted, had the fawn's suffering been prevented. The fawn's suffering, we might say, is 'inscrutable'. So, the fawn's suffering is pointless. Thus, there is no God." Since there is no use of 'appears' and such locutions here, there is nothing for CORNEA to apply to. Hence, we've met Wykstra's pesky objection.

Our success is short-lived, however. It is fairly easy to show that Wykstra is wrong in thinking that his case hangs on his meaning analysis of the epistemic use of 'appears' and the like.<sup>2</sup> We can easily reconstruct his case so that it avoids the evils of relying on the atheist's use of 'appearance.' Here is how.

Sometimes it is eminently reasonable to move from what we have to go on in claiming that 'so far as we can tell, p' to 'p'; sometimes it is not. CORNEA should be seen as a condition on when one justifiedly believes

something on the basis of such an inference:

On the basis of what she has to go on, H is entitled to infer p from 'so far as I can tell, p' only if it is reasonable for H to believe that, given her cognitive faculties and the use she has made of them, were p false, what she has to go on in claiming 'so far as I can tell, p' would likely be different than it is in some way discernible by her.<sup>3</sup>

Nothing in Wykstra's case, I submit, is lost in this reconstruction. Naturally, the rationale underlying it will be slightly different since there will be no appeal to implicit 'takings.' But the following seems to capture the main thrust of the rationale Wykstra offered:

Suppose I say 'so far as I can tell, p,' and then infer that p. If it is not reasonable for me to assume that there is an evidential connection between what I am inclined to believe and what I have to go on in claiming 'so far as I can tell, p,' then I am not entitled to draw that inference. Now suppose that it is not reasonable for me to believe that if p were not the case, what I have to go on would be different than it is in some discernible respect. In this event it can scarcely be reasonable for me to believe that an evidential connection obtains between what I am inclined to believe and what I have to go on. Hence, I am not entitled to infer p on the basis of what I have to go on in claiming 'so far as I can tell, p.' So to be entitled (on the basis of what I have to go on) to infer p, it must be reasonable for me to believe that were p false, then what I have to go on would likely be discernibly different than it is.

Parallel to the two epistemic principles we uncovered earlier, we have what I shall call "*The Reasonable Assumption Condition*,"

H is entitled to infer p on the basis of what she has to go on in claiming 'so far as she can tell, p' only if it is reasonable for her to assume that there is an evidential connection between p and what she has to go on,

and *The Discernible Difference Principle*:

It is reasonable for H to assume that there is an evidential connection between p and what she has to go on in claiming 'so far as I can tell, p' only if it is reasonable for H to believe that, given her cognitive faculties and the use she has made of them, were p false, what she has to go on would likely be discernibly different to H in some way.

I claim that something close to the rationale just offered and the principles just formulated underlie our reconstructed CORNEA if Wykstra's case is to be rescued from the pedantic objection above.<sup>4</sup>

So, then, what should we make of these two principles? Since our

reconstruction renders moot the meaning analysis Wykstra used to support The Taking Condition, perhaps it would be unfair to demand a defense of The Reasonable Assumption Condition. Suffice it to say that many epistemologists these days would happily embrace it, although I would not. Let's focus on the credentials of The Discernible Difference Principle.

Notice that it involves three substantive epistemological theses. The first is what I will call "*The Subjunctive Condition*" (Wykstra calls it the "epistemic access condition"):

There is an evidential connection between what H has to go on in claiming 'so far as I can tell, p' and p only if, given H's cognitive faculties and the use she has made of them, were p false, what H has to go on would probably be discernibly different in some way by H.

This is certainly compelling. After all, from the point of view of gaining truth, what one has to go on does not count as evidence for a proposition unless what one has to go on "tracks the truth," to borrow Robert Nozick's apt phrase. And The Subjunctive Condition can be seen as a constraint on the truth-conduciveness of the grounds of one's belief. But Wykstra, surprisingly, does not require that The Subjunctive Condition *be* satisfied. It can be reasonable for us to believe that there is an evidential connection between what we have to go on and what we believe, despite the fact that what we have to go on is not truth-conducive grounds for what we believe. But if that's the case, how is Wykstra conceiving of reasonableness here? In what does this reasonableness consist? And what is the nature of the relation that, according to Wykstra, must hold between an entitled subject and The Subjunctive Condition?

Wykstra does not pause long enough to address our questions in anything like a thorough manner. However, he does offer this:

I do not mean to require that H believe [that The Subjunctive Condition is satisfied] in any conscious or occurrent way. I mean, roughly, only that should the matter be put to H, it would be reasonable for her to affirm that the condition is satisfied: that is, no norms of reasonable belief would be violated by her believing this. This need not always involve her having, or being able to produce, an evidential or inferential justification for so believing: in some cases, this might properly be believed in a "basic" way. (p. 87)

Herein lie the second and third epistemological theses. The second is that epistemic reasonableness is a matter of a person's not violating any "norms of reasonable belief." There is at least one difficulty for theorists who conceive of epistemic justification in deontological terms. Failure to violate norms of reasonable belief seems neither necessary nor sufficient

for satisfying the primary epistemic goal: to form beliefs in a truth-conducive manner. But this worry about Wykstra's notion of reasonableness is taken up elsewhere and need not detain us.<sup>5</sup>

The more germane item of interest (and third thesis) is Wykstra's explanation of the relation between the entitled subject and The Subjunctive Condition. One might understand Wykstra as requiring that she at least have the implicit belief that The Subjunctive Condition is satisfied.<sup>6</sup> But a more plausible rendering of what Wykstra actually writes amounts to what I shall call "*Wykstra's Accessibility Condition*:"

It is reasonable for H to believe that The Subjunctive Condition is satisfied if and only if H would not be violating any of her epistemic duties were she to believe that The Subjunctive Condition is met.

This condition must be restricted. For suppose that in fact H is comatose or that she has an IQ of 30. Still, it might be that *were* she to believe that The Subjunctive Condition is met, none of her epistemic duties would be violated. But, surely, this counterfactual fact would not contribute to its actually being reasonable for her to believe that the condition is met. The best way to avoid this untoward result is to restrict Wykstra's Accessibility Condition: one must satisfy it given her actual cognitive makeup during the time she believes p. In that case, Wykstra's Accessibility Condition entails that if it is reasonable for H to believe p, she must possess during that time whatever intellectual capacities it takes to grasp and believe the relevant subjunctive.

With the Discernible Difference Principle, The Subjunctive Condition and Wykstra's Accessibility Condition clearly in mind, we are prepared to see through CORNEA.

### 5. Seeing through CORNEA

In this section I will try to show that there are at least four things wrong with Wykstra's case. I will argue (i) that Wykstra's use of CORNEA forces him to an unpalatable dilemma, (ii) that CORNEA is false, (iii) that even when we fix it up in a plausible fashion, CORNEA cannot be used in conjunction with Wykstra's minor premise since that premise is not supported by the considerations he adduces in its favor, and (iv) even if we find adequate support, Wykstra's argument is a *non-sequitur*.

### 5.1 A dilemma for Wykstra's use of CORNEA

As an example of a seemingly pointless instance of intense suffering, William Rowe asked us to consider a fawn who lies in pain for days before dying from burns suffered in a forest fire caused by lightning. Wykstra argues that it is not reasonable for us to infer that the suffering of Rowe's fawn is pointless from what we have to go on: CORNEA requires that it be reasonable for us to believe that if there were a sufficient reason for God to permit the fawn to suffer days on end, we would probably be able to discern it. But it is reasonable to believe this is false since it is unlikely that we would be able to discern God's reason for permitting it, were there a God. The crucial inference here is that since

1. Were there a God, we probably would not be able to discern His reason for permitting Rowe's fawn to suffer days on end,

it is reasonable for us to believe

2. Were there a sufficient reason for God to permit this horror, we probably would not be able to discern it.

But, (1) is not at all obviously useful in showing that it is reasonable for us to believe (2).

Given the standard modal semantics for subjunctive conditionals, (2) is true just in case at the closest worlds in which there is a sufficient reason for God to permit the fawn's suffering, it is unlikely that we discern it. (1) is true just in case at the closest worlds in which God exists, it is unlikely that we discern His reason for permitting the fawn's suffering. But whether (1) constitutes good reason to believe (2) depends on whether the closest worlds in which there is a sufficient reason for God to permit the fawn's suffering are worlds in which God exists and has a reason for doing so. For suppose that they are not. That is, suppose that the closest worlds in which there is a sufficient reason for God to permit the fawn's suffering are *not* worlds in which God exists. Let this be *The Theistic Worlds Aren't Closer Supposition* (or, *The Supposition*, for short).<sup>7</sup> Given *The Supposition*, why should we think that in the closest worlds in which there is a sufficient reason for God to permit the fawn's suffering that reason would probably be indiscernible by us? It won't do to answer that we would not discern that reason since God's vision and wisdom would be so much greater than ours; for we are countenancing worlds in which there is no God. Perhaps there is some purely naturalistic reason for thinking that, were there a sufficient reason but no God, it would nonetheless be very unlikely that we would discern it. One suggestion is that in a world in



which there was a sufficient reason for God to permit the fawn to suffer but no God, it might still be the case that the fawn's suffering is appropriately related to some outweighing good(s) distant in space-time. But if that were so, the fawn's suffering would probably look pretty much the same to us: inscrutable.

This line of thought is fallacious. Let's grant that at some non-theistic worlds there are states of affairs distant in space-time related to the fawn's suffering in such a way that if there were a God (at those worlds), those states of affairs would constitute a sufficient reason for Him to permit its suffering. True enough, *in those worlds* we would not be able to discern the states of affairs in question. However, it does not follow that *in the closest non-theistic worlds* in which there are states of affairs appropriately related to the fawn's suffering, we would not be able to discern them. That would follow only if the closest non-theistic worlds in which there are states of affairs appropriately related to the fawn's suffering are worlds in which those states of affairs are distant in space-time. But I see absolutely no reason to believe that they would be. Perhaps there are more plausible naturalistic reasons to suppose that the fawn's suffering would remain inscrutable were there a sufficient reason for God to permit it, but no God. I can think of none.

Given The Supposition, then, I submit that (1) does not render it unreasonable for us to believe (2). So Wykstra's case seems to rest on the claim that theistic worlds in which there is a sufficient reason for God to permit the fawn's suffering are closer than non-theistic worlds in which there is a sufficient reason.<sup>8</sup>

Well, is The Supposition false? I don't know. How in the world are we to proceed confidently on this question? For my part, I cannot see. If matters really are as muddy as I suspect, it is safe to conclude that the roots of Wykstra's case are quite unstable.

Of course, there is one sure-fire way out of this difficulty: give good reason to think that God exists. If we had such reasons, then to the extent that it would be reasonable to believe that God existed, it would be reasonable to believe that the closest worlds are worlds in which God exists. But if Wykstra's use of (1) to reject (2) depends on denying The Theistic Worlds Aren't Closer Supposition, and if there is no good reason to deny it save for good reason to think that God exists, then Wykstra faces the following dilemma: his use of CORNEA presupposes either a proposition we have no reason to think true or else that we have good reason to believe in theism. If Wykstra grasps the first horn, he must admit that his case is rooted in doubt; if he grasps the second, he forfeits his announced strategy to defeat the atheist's argument without appealing to natural theology. (p. 81)

## 5.2 CORNEA is false

Earlier I showed how CORNEA entails Wykstra's Accessibility Condition and embodies The Subjunctive Condition. Because of this, I shall argue, CORNEA is false.

### 5.2.1 Wykstra's Accessibility Condition is too Strong

Recall that Wykstra's Accessibility Condition is the claim that it is reasonable for one to believe

SC. Given my cognitive faculties and the use I have made of them, were  $p$  false, what I had to go on in claiming that, so far as I could tell,  $p$ , would probably be different in a way discernible by me

if, and only if, one would not violate any of her epistemic duties were she to believe that (SC) is true. I argued earlier that meeting this condition requires that one be able to grasp what I shall call (SC)-conditionals. This consequence suggests that CORNEA is an implausible epistemic principle.

To see why, imagine that, resting midway across the saddle bridging Wenatchee Ridge and Kodiak Peak, you see a mountain before you. Naturally, you come to believe that there is a mountain there. After all, your vision is perfectly reliable, it is a clear August morning, Glacier Peak is before you in all its inspiring grandeur, and you have no reason to think (nor should you have any reason to think) either that there is no mountain before you or that your visual faculties are defective in some relevant way. Suppose, however, that unknown to you, you are unable to grasp the relevant (SC)-conditional. Let this oddity be due to a burst of anti-(SC)-radiation nearby, or let it be due to a devious demon who accepts CORNEA and likes to render people's beliefs unjustified, or let it be due to the simple fact that you are no good with this sort of subjunctive. I submit that, *pace* Wykstra, you are entitled to move from 'so far as I can tell, there is a mountain before me' to 'there is indeed a mountain before me' even though you are a temporary victim of, say, the dreaded anti-(SC)-radiation. Or suppose that, hoping others have sought shade from the midafternoon summer's sun, you and your backpacking partner cool off *au naturale* in the headwaters of the Little Wenatchee River. As before, all your faculties are in good working order, and you have no reason to believe they aren't. It is difficult to see why in this situation you would not be entitled to infer that the water isn't warm, even though your genetic endowment has left you in the peculiar position of being unable to grasp (SC)-conditionals.

Reflection on examples like these strongly suggests that Wykstra's Accessibility Condition fastens on a capacity of many adult human beings that we need not possess in order to be justified in our beliefs. So we should doubt that any true epistemic principle requires that we have that capacity.<sup>9</sup>

### 5.2.2 *The Subjunctive Condition is too Strong*

There are cases in which there is an evidential connection between what, so far as one can tell, is the case and what is the case, even though The Subjunctive Condition is not satisfied. For starters, consider cases in which what one believes is false while, nonetheless, what she has to go on in believing it is perfectly good evidence. Suppose, for example, that you have taken your son to the zoo one Saturday morning and, as is his custom, he leads you directly to the zebra exhibit. It is broad daylight, your vision is 20/20, and you have no reason to think that what stands before you is not a zebra (nor should you have any such reason). Unbeknownst to you, however, the zebras escaped last night. But since Fred, the zookeeper, is not one given to disappointing youngsters, one of the zoo's mules now stands before you and your boy, cleverly painted with black and white stripes. Every non-skeptic would concur that you have perfectly good evidence, at least perfectly good *prima facie* evidence, that there is a zebra before you. It is, nevertheless, manifestly false that were a zebra not before you, what you have to go on would probably be discernibly different to you. For the closest world at which a zebra is not before you is the actual world; and you discern no such difference.<sup>10</sup>

Another sort of case that shows The Subjunctive Condition is too exclusive is this: if the proposition believed were false, the believing subject wouldn't exist. For example, suppose that, in light of your present mental life, you believe that you exist. If The Subjunctive Condition is true, then there is no evidential connection between your present conscious experience and the proposition that you exist since, naturally enough, *you* would not discern a difference in your present mental life, if you didn't exist.<sup>11</sup> So if we accept The Subjunctive Condition, we shall have to admit that our own mental lives are not even *prima facie* evidence for thinking that we exist. But that is wrong.

We should conclude that The Subjunctive Condition is false. Wykstra might reply, however, that even if I'm right about that, it doesn't follow that The Discernible Difference Principle is false. The latter says that is reasonable to believe that there is an evidential connection only if it is reasonable for one to believe that what one has to go on would probably be discernibly different. Fair enough. But the only motivation for insisting that it must be reasonable to believe this in order for it to be reasonable to

believe that there is an evidential connection is that it specifies, at least in part, what the evidential relation consists in. Since it does not do that job, we need not reasonably believe it in order to reasonably believe that there is an evidential connection. I conclude that The Discernible Difference Principle is false. Without it, it is difficult not to infer that CORNEA is false too.

### 5.2.3 CORNEA\*

CORNEA cannot be of service to Wykstra. But lurking in the neighborhood is another principle much like CORNEA which might be serviceable. In *Epistemology and Cognition*, Alvin Goldman draws our attention to two ways (broadly speaking) in which possible situations might bear on the epistemic status of belief.<sup>12</sup> Applied to our concerns, his distinction comes to this: First, there is Wykstra's familiar *Pure Subjunctive View*: given H's cognitive faculties and the use she has made of them, what H has to go on in claiming 'so far as I can tell, p' is evidence for p only if were p false, what H has to go on would probably be different in some way discernible by her. Second, there is the *Relevant Alternatives View*: given H's cognitive faculties and the use she has made of them, what she has to go on in claiming 'so far as I can tell, p' is evidence for p only if in those relevant alternative situations in which p is false, what one has to go on would likely be different in a way discernible by her. On the Relevant Alternatives View, CORNEA would look like this:

On the basis of what she has to go on, H is entitled to infer p from 'so far as I can tell, 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 in relevant alternative situations, what she had to go on in claiming 'so far as I can tell, p' would probably be different than it is in some way discernible by her.

For ease of reference, let's call the subjunctive imbedded in the consequent of this principle "*The Relevant Alternatives Condition*".<sup>13</sup>

It is not my aim here to defend The Relevant Alternatives Condition; nor is it my job to defend this revision of CORNEA. I offer it to those sympathetic with Wykstra's strategy as a way they might try to avoid the troubles that beset the original. In this regard, note that, first of all, it is arguable that our intuitions about the zebra case are preserved. What you have to go on, then and there, is evidence for inferring that there is a zebra before you since things in zoos looking like zebras is pretty good reason to think they are zebras, and Fred's painting a mule to resemble a zebra on this rare occasion does not count as a relevant alternative situation, even though that is what actually happened.<sup>14</sup> On the other hand, if the scope of

The Relevant Alternatives Condition were restricted to *most* relevant alternative situations, then the zebra objection might be met. The 'I exist' case can also be easily sidestepped.<sup>15</sup> Moreover, using the reconstructed CORNEA does not commit one to the denial of The Theistic Worlds Aren't Closer Supposition. Relevant alternative situations include those that do not obtain at the closest worlds. Thus, the fact that we have no reason to think that theistic worlds are closer than non-theistic worlds doesn't matter; hence, the first horn of the dilemma I posed in section 5.1 turns into dust.

Our new version of CORNEA, however, retains Wykstra's Accessibility Condition and remains implausible for that reason alone. We can remedy this by simply requiring that what one has to go on must in fact satisfy The Relevant Alternatives Condition. That is, we might insist that if *p* were not the case in relevant alternative situations, what one had to go on in judging that so far as she can tell, *p*, would probably *be* different in a way discernible by her. Alternatively, we might require that one must have no good reason to think that The Relevant Alternatives Condition is *not* satisfied. Or, in an ecumenical spirit, we might insist that *both* of the just-mentioned requirements be satisfied. For our purposes, it does not matter which option we take. All three of them remove the difficulty posed by Wykstra's Accessibility Condition. I am attracted to the third option since it captures both the truth-conducive character of evidence and the fact that epistemic status is defeasible. Since nothing that I have to say in the sequel hangs on our choice, I shall go with it. Thus, we have:

On the basis of what she has to go on, H is entitled to infer *p* from 'so far as I can tell, *p*' only if (i) given her cognitive faculties and the use she has made of them, what she had to go on would probably be different than it is in some way discernible by her in those relevant alternative situations in which *p* is false, and (ii) H has no good reason to believe that condition (i) is not satisfied.

So as not to confuse our revision with the original, let's call the newcomer 'CORNEA\*'.<sup>16</sup>

Even if he adopts CORNEA\*, difficulties remain for Wykstra case.

### 5.3 Wykstra's minor premise

Applied to a real-life case first introduced by Bruce Russell,<sup>17</sup> Wykstra's minor premise is that, were there a sufficient reason for God to permit five-year old Sue's being severely beaten, raped and strangled to death by her mother's boyfriend, we probably would not be able to discern it. The

pure subjunctive view presupposed here is wrong. Let's correct it: in those relevant alternative situations in which God as a sufficient reason to permit Sue's suffering, we would probably not be able to discern it; it would be "beyond our ken."

Now, why should we believe this premise?

### 5.3.1 *The Appeal to Omniscience*

We saw earlier that Wykstra offers the following consideration: were there a God of the sort theists subscribe to, then given His "vision and wisdom," in a word, His omniscience, it is likely that He would quite often have purposes for permitting evils that would be beyond our ken. Wykstra is not alone in this *Appeal to Omniscience*, as I shall call it. Whenever I spell out Wykstra's case for my students, the theists in the class invariably respond that it is *because* God would know so much more than we would that it is incredibly unlikely that we would be unable to discern why He permitted some horror to happen. And they are in distinguished company. William Alston joins Wykstra when he remarks that "[i]t would be exceedingly strange if an omniscient being did not immeasurably exceed our grasp of such matters," then infers that the atheist is "on shaky ground" in denying that there is a sufficient reason for God to permit Sue's suffering. And Alvin Plantinga is on record as saying that the lesson of the book of Job is that since God knows so much more than we do, we must not infer that an evil is pointless if it is inscrutable.<sup>18</sup> Well, what should we make of the Appeal to Omniscience? What is it about our comparative ignorance next to Omniscience that makes it unlikely that we would have access to those reasons for the sake of which God might permit Sue's suffering?

I believe that the Appeal to Omniscience is little more than a rhetorical device masquerading as an important insight. If we unpack it a bit, we'll see that it amounts to very little in the way of an argument. Here's an adequate characterization:

- a. Were there a God, He would be omniscient.
- b. So God would know scads more than we would (or do).
- c. Therefore, were there a God, it is improbable that we would see His reason for permitting most of the horrors there actually are.
- d. Therefore, we have good reason to think that, were there a God, it is unlikely that we would see His reason for permitting Sue to be raped, severely beaten and strangled to death.

The problem is that (c) doesn't follow from (a) and (b). What's missing are these two premises.

e. One of the things that God would know is that there is a sufficient reason for Him to permit those horrors that are actually inscrutable to us, including Sue's

and

f. That reason would probably fall outside the scope of what we would be able to discern.

Only if both (e) and (f) are true does it follow that were there a God, it would be improbable that we would see His reason for permitting most of the horrors in the world. Many people agree with Ivan Karamozov in thinking that (e) is false; no good state of affairs would be reason enough for God to permit an innocent child like Sue to suffer as she did. If that's right, then obviously there would be a discernible difference in what we have to go on since Sue would not be severely beaten, raped and strangled to death by her mother's boyfriend.<sup>19</sup> But let's suppose Ivan and company are wrong; suppose there are some possible circumstances in which God might justifiably permit Sue's suffering.<sup>20</sup> We're still left with (f). Why should we suppose it is true? *Why?* I fail to see how the bald appeal to God's omniscience and our comparative ignorance supports (f) in any way. *That fact* just isn't rich enough to warrant that conclusion.

In all fairness, we should recall that Wykstra weaves the Appeal to Omniscience together with the analogy that we would stand to most of God's reasons for permitting actual horrors as a one-month old infant stands to her parents' reasons for permitting her to suffer, say, at the hands of a pediatrician. Although Wykstra does not tell us exactly in what respects our relation to God resembles that of an infant to her parents, it is safe to assume that he means that our stage of cognitive development, next to God's, is comparatively infantile. Of course, merely appealing to our Creator's vision and wisdom is not enough to support the claim that we are cognitively underdeveloped *along the relevant lines*. Our cognitive poverty doesn't preclude our knowing a great many things. What we need, then, is some good reason to think that we are like infants *in this respect*. We need some reason to believe that, like infants, there's a good chance that we are shooting in the dark when it comes to inferring pointlessness. Wykstra gives us no hints.

William Alston, however, has plenty to say about the matter.

### 5.3.2 Alston's case for Wykstra's minor premise

I see Professor Alston as arguing that with respect to any given horror, we have good reason to believe that in relevant alternative situations in which there is sufficient reason for God to permit it, we would probably be

ignorant of that reason. For, first of all, we are missing crucial data. We aren't privy to (i) whether there is an afterlife and what it is like, (ii) the secrets of the human heart, particularly the attitudes, intentions and motives of others, and related to this, (iii) a complete record of anyone else's public behavior, (iv) whether there are free creatures besides human beings, (v) the range of wickedness, past, present and future, and (vi) the total consequences of any particular horror. Moreover, our cognitive capacities are limited in relevant respects: in particular, (vii) our capacity to assess what's necessary and what's possible is restricted and (viii) our capacity to grasp large complexes of fact like whole natural systems and possible worlds is woefully inadequate, hence our ability to make evaluative comparisons is suspect. But, argues Alston, we need this data and we need these capacities in order to be able to rule out familiar theodical suggestions. But suppose he's wrong about all this. Suppose that no theodical suggestion, nor any combination thereof, is a sufficient reason for God to permit Sue's suffering or the suffering of Rowe's fawn. Or suppose that we are able to rule out sufficient reasons we can think of. Nevertheless, argues Alston, there are good inductive grounds to think we are ignorant of some values, and some conditions for the realization of those values we know of. Thus, it is, at least, just as likely as not that we are ignorant of the full range of reasons available to God. That's cause enough to doubt that what we have to go on could provide sufficient warrant for inferring pointlessness.

To evaluate Alston's provocative line of argument would take us too far from the primary object of this essay.<sup>21</sup> I propose that we simply augment Wykstra's reasons for his minor premise with Alston's conclusions and see what follows. Let it be the case, then, that we have good enough reason to believe that in those relevant alternative situations in which God has a sufficient reason to permit Sue's suffering, we probably would not be able to discern it. Nevertheless, I shall argue, Wykstra's argument is unsound.

#### *5.4 Wykstra's conclusion is a non-sequitur*

Recall Wykstra's case as I have chisholmed it. CORNEA\* implies that:

On the basis of what we have to go on, we are entitled to infer 'There is no sufficient reason for God to permit Sue's suffering' from 'So far as we can tell, upon careful reflection, there is no such reason' only if (i) given our cognitive faculties and the use we have made of them, what we have to go on would probably be discernibly different to us in those relevant alternative situations in which there is a sufficient reason, and



(ii) we have no good reason to believe condition (i) is not satisfied.

Wykstra argues that

In those relevant alternative situations in which there is a sufficient reason, we would probably be unable to discern what it is.

From these two premises he concludes that we are *not* entitled to infer 'There is no sufficient reason for God to permit Sue's suffering.' But this does not follow.

To see why, let's take a closer look at the demand of CORNEA\* that what we have to go on would probably be discernibly different to us. Exactly what sort of discernible difference would there have to be in order to satisfy this constraint on reasonable inference?

The most straightforward answer is this: what leads one to believe that, so far as he can tell, there is no sufficient reason for God to permit some particular horror would probably change in such a way that a reasonable person would not infer that there is no such reason. On this account, then, what one has to go on is *prima facie* evidence that there is no sufficient reason for God to permit Sue's suffering only if in those relevant alternative situations in which there is a sufficient reason, what one has to go on would probably be different in such a way that a reasonable person would not infer that there is no sufficient reason. Let this be *The Weak Version* of The Relevant Alternatives Condition in CORNEA\*<sup>22</sup> One might urge a stronger difference, however: a reasonable person would probably be led to infer that there is a sufficient reason. In that case, what one has to go on is *prima facie* evidence that there is no sufficient reason for God to permit Sue's suffering only if in those relevant alternative situations in which there is such a reason, what one has to go on would probably be different in such a way that a reasonable person would infer that there is a sufficient reason. Let this be *The Stronger Version* of The Relevant Alternatives Condition. Finally, one might suggest *The Strongest Version*: a reasonable person would probably discern God's reason. That is, what one has to go on is *prima facie* evidence that there is no sufficient reason for God to permit Sue's suffering only if in those relevant alternative situations in which there is a sufficient reason, what one has to go on would probably change in such a way that one would discern God's reason.<sup>23</sup>

The importance of these distinctions is that the rationale motivating The Relevant Alternatives Condition requires the satisfaction of neither The Stronger nor The Strongest Version. That rationale consisted in the idea that something is evidence for a proposition only if it tends to lead one to have a true belief about it. But satisfying The Weak Version is enough to meet that requirement. A reasonable person need not discern God's

reasons, nor need he believe there is a sufficient reason, in order for what he has to go on to be different in such a way as to tend to lead him to true belief about Sue's suffering. It is enough that what he has to go on would change in such a way that a reasonable person would not infer that there is no such reason.

Now, Wykstra uses CORNEA\* and the premise that we probably would not be able to discern God's reason to conclude that we are not entitled to infer that there is no sufficient reason. But with our distinctions in mind, we can clearly see that it does *not* follow that we are unentitled to draw this inference. The reason is this: the requirement that "what we have to go on would probably be different in some discernible way to us" is ambiguous. It could mean one of three very different things:

1. What we have to go on would probably be different in such a way that a reasonable person would not infer that there is no sufficient reason,

or

- ii. What we have to go on would probably be different in such a way that a reasonable person would infer that there is a sufficient reason,

or

- iii. What we have to go on would probably be different in such a way that a reasonable person would discern that reason.

Wykstra holds us to the standard of (iii).<sup>24</sup> But as we have seen, CORNEA\* does not require that we satisfy (iii). We need not be in a position to discern God's purposes, nor need we be in a position to believe there is a sufficient reason. If CORNEA\* is correct, only The Weak Version of The Relevant Alternatives Condition *must* be satisfied. And it could be satisfied even if we did not have "epistemic access" either to the fact that there is a sufficient reason or, as Wykstra insists, to the reason itself. Wykstra's conclusion is a glaring *non-sequitur*.

To circumvent the *non-sequitur* charge Wykstra might argue that The Weak Version of The Relevant Alternatives Condition *could not* be satisfied unless one of the stronger versions is. But this tactic will not work. At least, I cannot think of a good reason to believe that in every relevant alternative situation in which Sue is raped, severely beaten and strangled to death and there is a sufficient reason for God to permit her to suffer like that, we would not infer that there is no such reason unless we grasped God's purposes, or unless we were led to believe there in fact was

a reason. For consider

a. In some theistic relevant alternative situations there would be more reason than we actually have to think God exists, enough to counterbalance the *prima facie* reason Sue's being severely beaten, raped and strangled to death gives us for believing that there is no God,

and

b. In some theistic relevant alternative situations, there would be more reason than we presently have to believe that there is a sufficient reason for Sue's suffering, enough to counterbalance the *prima facie* reason it gives us for believing atheism.

If either of these propositions is *true*, then a reasonable person might well refrain from inferring that Sue's suffering is pointless. Indeed, if either (a) or (b) is true, and there was nothing else to go on, one might reasonably be led to agnosticism. So, given (a) or (b), we could satisfy The Weak Version of The Relevant Alternatives Condition without satisfying either of the stronger versions.<sup>25</sup>

It seems, then, that if Wykstra is to overcome the *non-sequitur* charge in the suggested way, he must argue that both (a) and (b) are false. But to argue that in no relevant alternative situation would God make Himself more evident or make more evident the end for which He permits Sue to suffer like this, one would have to assume, *inter alia*, that she has a sort of access to God's mind that I doubt any of us is willing to lay claim to. While to offer reasons why God might not make Himself or His purposes more evident is a worthy endeavor, to argue that He *would not* do these things is hubris of the most offensive sort.

An important moral emerges here. Theists sometimes contend that we can justifiedly move from inscrutability to pointlessness only if we would be in a position to discern God's reasons. But this is not true. The distinctions I have drawn imply that we might well justifiedly infer pointlessness from inscrutability even if we were not in such an epistemically privileged position. The ability to access the divine mind is not necessary.

As it stands, Wykstra's case fails. But perhaps all is not lost. In the next section, I suggest a way in which Wykstra's strategy might be revamped whilst avoiding the problems of section 5.

## 6. The Wykstraean strategy revamped

The objection of the last section relied on an important ambiguity in

Wykstra's CORNEA and in my reconstruction of it, CORNEA\*. That can be easily corrected. I offer (what else?) CORNEA\*\*:

On the basis of what one has to go on, she is entitled to infer *p* from 'so far as I can tell, *p*' only if (i) given her cognitive faculties and the use she has made of them, what she has to go on would probably be different in such a way that a reasonable person would not infer *p* in those relevant alternative situations in which *p* is false, and (ii) she has no good reason to believe that condition (i) is not satisfied.

Applied to the topic of this paper, CORNEA\*\* implies that

On the basis of what we have to go on, we are entitled to infer 'There is no sufficient reason for God to permit Sue's suffering' from 'So far as we can tell, upon careful reflection, there is no such reason' only if (E) what we have to go on would probably be different in such a way that a reasonable person would not infer that there is no such reason in those relevant alternative situations in which there is, and (I) we have no good reason to believe that condition (E) is not satisfied.

But then, obviously enough, one is *not* entitled to infer that there is no sufficient reason for God to permit Sue's suffering if one of (E) or (I) is false. I claim that (E) would be false if:

It is just as likely that in those relevant alternative situations in which there is a sufficient reason, what we have to go on would change in such a way that a reasonable person would not infer that there is no such reason as to remain unchanged.

It will be convenient to have a name for this condition, rather, the general condition of which it is an instance. Let it be *The Just-As-Likely-As-Not Condition*.

CORNEA\*\* strikes me as a plausible epistemological principle precisely because it implies The Just-As-Likely-As-Not Condition. If it is just as likely that (in relevant not-*p* situations) what we have to go on in inferring *p* would change in such a way that a reasonable person would not infer *p* as not to change at all, then what we have to go on would not be an adequate ground for believing *p*. For in that case there would be only a 50-50 chance, so to speak, that what we have to go on would lead us to truly believe *p*. And those are bad odds. Most internalists, however, would not be happy with this line of thought. Still, no internalist will deny that if we have good reason to believe that what we have to go on gives us only a 50-50 shot at truly believing *p*, we are not entitled to believe *p* on the basis of it. Thus, I claim that if we have good reason to believe The Just-As-Likely-As-Not Condition, we have good reason to believe that (E) is false,

hence that (I) is false. So internalist and externalist can agree that if either (E) is false or if we have good reason to believe it, we are not entitled to believe p.

A Wykstra-style argument based on CORNEA\*\* might be constructed like this: We do *not* justifiedly believe that there is no sufficient reason for God to permit Sue's suffering on the basis of its inscrutability if it is just as likely that what we have to go on in relevant alternative situations would change in such a way that a reasonable person would not infer that there is no such reason as that it would remain unchanged, *or* if we have good reason to believe this condition is satisfied. We have good reason to believe that The Just-As-Likely-As-Not Condition is satisfied in this case if, after careful reflection, we can think of *no* true proposition q that has the following shape:

1. q is compatible with theism,
2. q entails that what we have to go on would change in such a way that a reasonable person would not infer that there is no sufficient reason for God to permit these horrors, and
3. the likelihood of q on theism is significantly greater than the likelihood of *any* proposition p on theism, such that
  - a. p is compatible with theism,
  - b. p is just as likely as its denial given theism or anything we have good reason to believe, and
  - c. p entails that what we have to go on would remain *unchanged*.

In that case, the Wykstraean challenge is this: unless you, the atheist, can come up with a respectable candidate for q, you are not justified in believing that Sue's suffering is pointless on the basis of its inscrutability.

Now, how is the atheist to meet this challenge? Perhaps she will reject the claim that The Just-As-Likely-As-Not Condition is satisfied if there is no proposition described as q. But I fail to see how such an objection would proceed. It seems that the atheist will have to argue that there *is* a proposition that matches q's description. And what candidates for q are there? Perhaps there are others, but here are two:

- a'. In theistic relevant alternative situations there would be more reason than we actually have to think God exists, enough to counterbalance the *prima facie* reason Sue's being severely beaten, raped and strangled to death gives us for believing that there is no God.
- b'. In theistic relevant alternative situations, there would be more reason than we presently have to believe that there is in fact a sufficient reason for God to permit Sue's suffering, enough to counterbalance the *prima facie* reason it gives us for believing atheism.

To argue that (a') or (b') is a successful candidate for q will involve doing

two things. First, it will involve arguing that, for some reason or other, God would probably bring it about that (a') or (b') are true. Second, it will involve arguing that one of (a') and (b') is much more likely than any proposition *p* such that *p* is compatible with theism, just as likely as its denial given theism and other things it is reasonable to believe, and entails that what we have to go on would not change, were it true. Now, many theists – most notably Blaise Pascal and John Hick<sup>26</sup> – have described in some detail reasons God might have for keeping Himself and His actual purposes in permitting horrendous evils hidden. These reasons constitute candidates for *p*. Thus, granting that it is just as likely as not that we would be in the dark as to exactly why God permitted Sue to be raped, severely beaten and strangled to death, the atheist can meet the challenge posed by CORNEA\*\* only if she can show either that Pascal and Hick fail at what they purport to do or that the stories they tell are significantly more unlikely than candidates for *q* (given theism or other things we reasonably believe).

It is beyond the scope of this essay to examine the possibilities for meeting the neo-Wykstraean challenge. But I do want to underscore that if the revamped Wykstraean strategy is on target and if the argument of section 5.4 is sound, then an interesting suggestion reveals itself: the justificatory value of inscrutability as a basis for atheism depends on the likelihood that God would make Himself or His purposes more evident than He does (if He exists).

## 6. Concluding remarks

My goal in this paper has been almost wholly negative: to show that Wykstra fails to demonstrate that we are not entitled to infer pointlessness from inscrutability. But even if I have succeeded on that score, important questions remain, questions related to the last section. For example, is it true, as Hick suggests, that if God were to make Himself or His purposes significantly more evident, we would lose the possibility of responding freely to Him in faith? Or is Pascal right in thinking that it is an act of grace on God's part that He remains evidentially ambiguous since, given our bent toward sinful arrogance and pride, if He were to make Himself and His purposes more evident, we would sink more deeply into our fallen state? On the other hand, is there good reason to suppose that God would reveal Himself or His reasons for permitting horrors like Sue's any more than He has? Many people have thought so, religious devotees and skeptics alike. But why must He? These questions shall have to wait for another day.

## Notes

1. In "The Humean Obstacle to Evidential Arguments from Suffering: On Avoiding the Evils of 'Appearance,'" *International Journal for the Philosophy Religion* 16 (1984): 73–93. Parenthetical page references are to this article. Wykstra's primary target is William Rowe's version of the evidential argument from evil as found in Rowe's now classic essay, "The Problem of Evil and Varieties of Atheism," *American Philosophical Quarterly* 16 (1979): 335–341.
2. And a good thing, too. Wykstra's meaning analysis of the *epistemic* use of appears locutions seems false since not a single one of his conditions is an epistemic condition. The one that comes closest is condition (iii). But it does not require that there *be* an evidential connection, or that one be justified in believing that there is, or that one have no reason to believe there isn't. All it requires is that one *take it* that there an evidential connection. But what's epistemic about that biographical tidbit? William Alston pointed out this defect to me.
3. By 'what one has to go on' I mean what Wykstra meant by 'one's cognitive situation.' I just like my term better than his.
4. In what follows, I shall use 'CORNEA' to refer to our reconstruction of it. The objections I level in section 5 apply, *mutatis mutandis*, to Wykstra's original case. In the remainder of the essay I shall proceed as if Wykstra actually endorsed this reconstruction of his case, even though, strictly speaking, he has not.
5. See Essays 4 and 5 in William Alston's fine collection, *Epistemic Justification: Essays in the Theory of Knowledge* (Ithaca: Cornell Press, 1989). See also the section entitled "Chisholmian Internalism" in Alvin Plantinga's "Positive Epistemic Status and Proper Function," *Philosophical Perspectives* 2 (Atascadero, CA: Ridgeview, 1988), ed. James E. Tomberlin.
6. If this is what he means, then Wykstra is in worse trouble than I let on in the text. For the only reason to require that one believe that The Subjunctive Condition is satisfied is this: it specifies, in part, what it is for what one has to go on to be an adequate ground for belief and one has to believe that one's ground is adequate in order to be justified. Thus, on this interpretation of Wykstra's Accessibility Condition, one must believe that one's ground for believing *p* is adequate in order to be justified in believing *p*. The problems for this view are chronicled by Alston in Essays 1, 6, 8, 9, and 11 of *Epistemic Justification*.
7. Perhaps the mere suggestion that it is possible for there to be a sufficient reason for God to permit an evil yet no God will strike the reader's ear as a bit far-fetched. But it shouldn't. There could be a state of affairs such that *if* God existed, it might well constitute or play some crucial role in a reason for Him to permit some horror. One notable candidate is that human beings are free with respect to morally significant options. Of course, human beings might be free in this way even if there is no God.
8. Textual evidence that Wykstra denies The Theistic Worlds Aren't Closer Supposition is found in his slide from "if there were an outweighing good of the sort at issue, connected in the requisite way to instances of suffering like [Rowe's fawn], how likely is it that this should be apparent to us?" to the

next sentence, "We must note here, first, that the outweighing good at issue is of a special sort: one purposed by the Creator of all that is ..." See his section 4.3 for further evidence.

9. This is not to say that *no* accessibility constraint is relevant to matters of epistemic justification. It is arguable that wholly different aspects of what we have to go on must be accessible to us. See Essays 8 and 9 of Alston's *Epistemic Justification*, Paul Moser's *Empirical Justification* (Dordrecht: Reidel, 1985), chapter V, and Carl Ginet's *Knowledge, Perception and Memory* (Dordrecht: Reidel 1975), chapter III.
10. The example is, for the most part, lifted out of context from Fred Dretske's *Knowledge and the Flow of Information* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1981), p. 130.
11. John O'Leary-Hawthorne brought this case to my attention.
12. (Cambridge: Harvard Press, 1986), p. 45. I refer the reader to this work for a defense of The Relevant Alternatives View. Also see Dretske's book in note 10.
13. People might disagree about the scope of The Relevant Alternatives Condition, whether it should be *all* or only *most* relevant alternatives.
14. I am not *endorsing* the view that the way things are on some particular occasion might not be a relevant alternative situation. Nor am I suggesting that Fred's painting a mule to look like a zebra could *never* be a relevant alternative. If Fred loses his zebras often and frequently compromises by disguising mules, then I should think that, while visiting Fred's zoo, what you have to go on in looking at the zebra exhibit is not evidence for inferring that there is a zebra before you.
15. Read section 3.4 first, then see note 22 below.
16. Perhaps the switch to CORNEA\* brings more troubles for Wykstra's strategy than it solves. Just as he can't simply assume that theistic worlds are closer than non-theistic ones, he can't just assume that possibilities in which there is a sufficient reason for God to permit some horror are alternative situations that are relevant to the epistemic status of the belief that it is pointless. He has to argue for it. Perhaps the mere suggestion that possibilities in which there is a sufficient reason for God to permit some horror might not constitute relevant alternatives will be met with an incredulous stare. But, I submit, it is not entirely clear that they are. At least, I'm not entirely sure since, *inter alia*, I'm not entirely sure what makes a possibility a relevant alternative. But in so far as I have an intuitive grasp of it, I sometimes think I can see cases analogous to the atheist's inference and about which we should say that there are analogous possibilities and that they are *not* relevant alternatives. But autobiography is no substitute for argument. And I haven't an argument. Thus, I leave it as an exercise for the reader to think about the matter.
17. "The Persistent Problem of Evil," *Faith and Philosophy* (April 1988).
18. Alston, "The Inductive Argument from Evil and the Human Cognitive Condition," forthcoming in *Philosophical Perspectives 5* (Atascadero, CA: Ridgeview, 1991), ed. James E. Tomberlin; Plantinga, "Epistemic Probability and Evil," *Archivio Di filosofia* LVI (1988).
19. Richard Swinburne makes a similar point in "Does Theism Need a Theodicy?," *Canadian Journal of Philosophy* (June 1988).
20. In this connection, see Thomas F. Tracy's excellent discussion of this view, "Victimization and the Problem of Evil: A Response to Ivan Karamozov,"