Methodological Worries for Humean Arguments from Evil
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Abstract. Humean arguments from evil are some of the most powerful arguments against Theism. They take as their data what we know about good and evil. And they argue that some rival to Theism better explains, or otherwise predicts, that data than Theism. However, this paper argues that there are many problems with various methods for defending Humean arguments. I consider Philo's original strategy; modern strategies in terms of epistemic probability; phenomenological strategies; and strategies that appeal to scientific and metaphysical explanations. None of these methods have been sufficiently developed to provide a clear and distinctive defense of Humean arguments. Defenders of Humean arguments need to spend more time on the underlying methodology of their arguments.

Humean arguments from evil are some of the most sophisticated and powerful arguments against Theism. Humean arguments take as their "data" what we know about good and evil. They argue that some rival to Theism better explains that data, thereby giving us a strong reason to not believe Theism. Humean arguments are traced to Philo's argument in section XI of Hume's *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*. More recently, Paul Draper in a series of papers (1989, 1992, 2009, 2013 2014b) has developed and refined these arguments, though others have given similar arguments such as Marsh (2013: 351-3) and Morriston (2014).

A lot of contemporary work on Humean arguments concerns its comparison to *other* arguments from evil. Specifically, William Rowe (1979, 1991, 1996) famously provided "nosseum" arguments against Theism. He argued that the inability to "see" reasons that would justify God's permission of evil provides a strong reason to not believe Theism. Rowe's arguments have been heavily criticized by skeptical theists who argue that we should expect not to see the reasons that would justify God's permission of evil. Part of the interest of Humean arguments is whether they are immune from the type of criticisms skeptical theists have raised for Rowe's nosseum arguments.

In this paper, I am not primarily interested in a comparison between Humean arguments and other arguments from evil. Nor am I interested in whether such arguments are immune from skeptical theistic critiques. Rather, I am interested in potential methodologies for defending Humean arguments. As I see it, many philosophers have moved too quickly to evaluating Humean arguments without getting clarity about their inner workings. I will argue that several of the methods have not been sufficiently developed to provide a clear and distinctive defense of Humean arguments. To be sure, the problems I identify might not be decisive problems; and I have no proof that no method could be used to defend Humean arguments. Nonetheless, these are outstanding problems that have not been given enough attention.

In section I, I exposit modern Humean arguments and their central claim. In section II, I describe Philo's own defense of a Humean argument and argue it fails due to resting on implausible principles about cause and effect. In sections III-VIII, I turn to the most popular method for developing and defending Humean arguments, a method in terms of epistemic probability. I argue that this method struggles with a problem I call the Entailment Problem; that the standard way of sidestepping that problem undermines the standard way of defending Humean arguments; and that this method is at odds with a common methodology for evaluating Theism. In sections IX-X, I consider a method for defending Humean arguments that appeals to phenomenological approaches to reasonable belief. I argue that this method may be used by defenders of Humean arguments, but it undermines the dialectical significance of Humean arguments. Lastly, in section XI, I argue that work on scientific and metaphysical explanation also cannot be pressed into service to defend Humean arguments. The overall upshot is that defenders of Humean arguments are currently lacking a method for providing a clear and distinctive defense of their arguments.

I.   Humean Arguments

Arguments from evil are arguments against Theism, understood here as the view that there is an all-perfect creator of the universe. Arguments from evil come in different shapes and sizes. Logical arguments from evil try to show that some known fact is logically inconsistent with Theism. Such arguments have a desirable dialectical feature. If some known fact is inconsistent with Theism, then Theism is false—regardless of whatever evidence Theists might try to muster in favor of Theism.

By contrast, evidential arguments from evil do not try to show that Theism is inconsistent with some known facts. Rather, they try to show that some known facts are strong evidence against Theism. Now there are a variety of ways of making more precise the idea of "strong evidence" (cf. Draper (2014a)). Normally, the evidence is considered strong enough that, on its own, it would make it *not* reasonable to believe Theism or even make it *unreasonable* to believe Theism. That is, the evidence is strong enough that, on its own, it would make Agnosticism or even Atheism reasonable (cf. Rowe (1979: 337-8), Draper (1989: 331), Wykstra (1996: 130-2), Wykstra and Perrine (2012: 380)).

Additionally, the evidence is strong enough "on its own" or "taken by itself" to make it not reasonable to believe Theism. Defenders of evidential arguments from evil need not claim that, when we consider all possible evidence mustered for or against Theism, that total body of evidence makes it not reasonable to believe Theism. Rather, they propose that certain known facts make it not reasonable to believe Theism, bracketing or setting aside other potential evidence for or against Theism. In other words, the evidence makes agnosticism or atheism "*prima facie* reasonable;" all else being equal, the evidence makes attitudes of Agnosticism or Atheism reasonable.

The larger methodology here is a "separate and compare" methodology that Swinburne (1989 [2004]) popularized. Swinburne imagines discrete types or kinds of evidence one might muster for or against Theism—the existence of the world, the fine-tuning of the cosmos, the existence of consciousness, evil, divine hiddenness, etc. For each type or kind of evidence, one determines its relative strength for or against Theism. Swinburne himself used this method to create a "cumulative case" argument for Theism. He argued that many discrete pieces of evidence are, collectively or cumulatively, strong enough evidence to make it not reasonable to believe Atheism. Others, e.g. Oppy (2013), use the same "separate and compare" methodology to argue against Theism. An evidential argument from evil may be used with this larger "separate

and compare" methodology by focusing on some specific known facts about evil and maintaining that such facts provide evidence sufficient on its own, and independent of other facts, to make it not reasonable to believe Theism.

Humean arguments from evil are one important kind of argument from evil. (For an overview, see Perrine (2023).) They take their argumentative strategy from Philo in section XI of Hume's *Dialogue Concerning Natural Religion*. There are several key features about Philo's argumentative strategy First, Philo articulates several *rival hypotheses* (or just: *rival*) to Theism. A rival is a hypothesis that is inconsistent with Theism, but also more specific than just the negation of Theism. In the *Dialogue*, Philo articulates three rivals; but each implies that the universe has a creator (or creators). Many contemporary philosophers would prefer a rival without such an implication. So consider the following hypothesis, which I'll stipulatively refer to as the *Hypothesis of Indifference*:

- It is not the case that the existence and features of sentient life are the intentional results of a creator who is either benevolent or malevolent.

This hypothesis does not assume that there is a creator. For purposes of this paper, this is the only rival I'll consider.

Second, for his argument, Philo uses not just facts about evil that we know about, but also facts about good as well. Philo's appeal to both good and evil is appropriate for the following reason. If God exists, then God would not only be interested in *preventing* evil but also *promoting* good. So facts about good and evil are relevant to whether or not God exists. I'll use the term 'data of good and evil' to refer to known facts about good and evil.

Third, Philo *compares* to what degree the rival hypothesis better explains—or otherwise fits or predicts—the data of good and evil. Philo argues that some rival does a much better job explaining the data of good and evil than Theism. This kind of claim is the central claim of Humean arguments—a comparative claim about the explanatory power of Theism with a rival. For purposes here, I'll formulate the claim as follows:

- The Hypothesis of Indifference much better explains the data of good and evil than Theism.

Hereafter I'll refer to this claim as *Central Claim*.

At this point, a clarification is in order. *Central Claim* compares two hypotheses *vis-à-vis* some data. But what many of us are interested in is whether that data makes Agnosticism or Atheism *prima facie* reasonable. It is natural to wonder how *Central Claim* might connect to what makes these claims *prima facie* reasonable. However, understanding *Central Claim* in a certain way would produce a straightforward connection. It is conceivable that the Hypothesis of Indifference does such a better job of explaining the data that the data makes it no longer reasonable to believe Theism. Of course, it may not be that the Hypothesis of Indifference is, itself, the *best* explanation of the data (cf. Draper (1992: 315)). Rather, regarding the data, the explanatory power of the rival is so much greater than Theism that Theism is no longer reasonable to believe. Hereafter I will understand *Central Claim* in this way: the Hypothesis of Indifference so much better explains the data that, at the very least, it makes it not reasonable to believe Theism given that data alone (cf. Draper (2009: 343), Perrine and Wykstra (2014: 145 fn. 4) for similar formulations.)

Now even if *Central Claim* is true, it may be unreasonable and irresponsible to infer that Agnosticism or Atheism are true. For instance, perhaps the rival to Theism is epistemically problematic on its own—inelegant, ontologically bloated, or otherwise unsimple. Or, alternatively, perhaps the other evidence that was set aside, when brought back in, strongly

supports Theism over its rival—thereby "off-setting" the evidential force of the data of good and evil. To address these kinds of issues, a full Humean argument may include other claims such as these (cf. Draper (2013: 69), Morriston (2014: 226-7), Perrine and Wykstra (2014: 145), Perrine (2019: 117), Rutledge (2022: 231)):

- The Hypothesis of Indifference is as simple or more simple than Theism.
- There is no strong evidence in favor of Theism and against the Hypothesis of Indifference that "offsets" the data of good and evil.

Nonetheless, defenders of Humean arguments may spend less time defending these premises, as their main focus is with *Central Claim*. For purposes here, I will follow their lead.

A final comment on the difference between prediction and explanation. *Central Claim* makes an explanatory comparison: the Hypothesis of Indifference does a superior job explaining a body of data than Theism. But I also claim that in a full Humean argument there will be a premise claiming that the rival to Theism, in this case the Hypothesis of Indifference, is simpler than Theism. One might object that the additional premise is gratuitous. Specifically, one might distinguish between *predicting* a body of data and *explaining* that body of data. A hypothesis might predict some body of data without explaining that body of data if the hypothesis is inelegant, ontologically bloated, *ad hoc*, or otherwise not "simple." Thus, one might object, in order for *Central Claim* to be true, the Hypothesis of Indifference can't simply do a better job of predicting the relevant data; it must also be at least as "simple." Thus, the addition of a further premise is gratuitous.

I'm sympathetic to both distinguishing between a hypothesis predicting and explaining some data as well as marking this distinction in terms of how "simple" a hypothesis is. However, in the context of evaluating a full Humean argument, I do not think these points matter very much. If one believes that it is *not* the case that the Hypothesis of Indifference better predicts the data than Theism, then one may object directly to *Central Claim*. But suppose one believes that the Hypothesis of Indifference better predicts the data than Theism, but it is also less simple than Theism. Then, depending upon one's views about the relationship between predicting and explaining, one might object to *Central Claim* or the additional premise. Either way, one will be objecting to *some* premise of a full Humean argument. Conversely, suppose one is defending a full Humean argument. Then, at some point in time, one should argue that the rival to Theism is at least as simple as Theism. Depending upon one's views about the relationship between predicting or explaining, one might argue for that conclusion when defending a premise like *Central Claim* or when defending an additional premise.

In what follows, I'll continue to speak in terms of explanation, instead of merely prediction. While I am sympathetic to there being a difference between the two, it will not matter for the most part in what follows until the final section.[1]

II. Philo's Principles and Reasoning

Having exposited Humean arguments, let's turn to potential methods for defending a Humean argument. Since the first Humean argument appears in Hume's own *Dialogues* given by Philo, it is natural to start there.

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[1] Some authors distinguish between a hypothesis *predicting* some data and a hypothesis *accommodating* that data (cf. Maher (1988), Lipton (2004: chp. 10) for some standard discussions). There are different ways of drawing this distinction. But normally prediction occurs only if the hypothesis is formulated prior to the data being known, whereas accommodation occurs only if the hypothesis is formulated after the data is known. The distinction shouldn't matter for discussion here.

In the *Dialogues*, much of Philo's reasoning relies upon Hume's preferred principles of reasoning. Specifically, Philo uses rough and ready metaphysical principles that "like effects have like causes;" that is, effects are "like" their causes. This metaphysical principle is paired with an epistemological one, roughly, that the only kinds of features it is reasonable to infer from an effect to its cause(s) are features that would be similar between the two (see, for instance: II.7, II.8, II.14, II.17, V.1, VI.1-2, X.30). Philo puts these principles to creative use throughout the dialogue. For instance, Philo suggests that the creator of the universe is not infinite, since the world is not infinite (V.5); the creator cannot be perfect, since the world is not perfect (V.6); and, more creatively, perhaps the world is the body of God with God being an animating force (VI.3).

Philo also uses these principles in giving a Humean argument from evil. Philo assumes that there is at least one creator of the world. He considers four rivals: the creator is supremely good; the creator is supremely evil; the creator is indifferent; and there are several creators with divergent moral characters. He rejects the first two rivals because "mixed phenomena can never prove the two former unmixed principles" (XI.15). For the "mixed" nature of the world—containing the good and evil it does—is too *dissimilar* from such "unmixed" moral characters as supremely good and supremely malicious. He rejects the idea that there are several creators of varying moral characters who are warring because it doesn't fit the stability of nature. The best hypothesis of the bunch, then, is that there is an indifferent creator.

Philo's method for defending a Humean argument from evil relies upon Hume's principles of reasoning, such as "like effects have like causes." But these kinds of principles are widely rejected today. And for good reason, there are many counterexamples: bacteria cause running noses; large volumes of CO_2 emissions cause global warming; low SAT scores cause college rejections; high demand and low supply cause rising costs; etc. Few of these causes are similar to their effects in any interesting sense, and it would be excessively skeptical to reject them as causes for that reason.

Thus, a good defense of a Humean argument cannot rely upon Philo's original defense, since Philo's defense utilizes such implausible principles. Contemporary defenders of Humean arguments need a refined and updated methodology. Far and away, the most popular method for defending Humean arguments uses epistemic probability. I explain this modern refinement in the next section.

III.   Modern Refinements: Epistemic Probability

Many modern discussions of arguments from evil—both Humean and others—appeal to epistemic probability to refine and explicate those arguments. One advantage to using epistemic probability is that authors can utilize the probability calculus—including probabilistic principles such as Bayes' theorem or the Total Probability Theorem—in clarifying and evaluating arguments from evil. Many authors would find these probabilistic principles more plausible and useful than Hume's principles of reasoning.

Unfortunately, there is no widely accepted analysis of epistemic probability. (Though, for attempts and discussion, see van Inwagen (1996: 220ff.), Plantinga (1993: 137-175), Achinstein (2001: chp. 5), Fumerton (2004), Otte (2006)) However, epistemic probability is widely regarded as concerning normativity in that it is concerned with a reasonable or justified status. However, there are two things one might understand this status as attaching to, depending upon the underlying psychology one is concerned with. Some philosophers assume a three-fold division amongst psychological states of belief, disbelief, and suspended belief. Other philosophers assume a singular psychological state that comes in degrees between 0 and 1, normally called credences or degrees of belief. It is controversial whether any of these psychological states

reduce to another. But one can understand epistemic probability in terms of either. For instance, suppose the following is true:

- The epistemic probability of *p* is greater than the epistemic probability of *q*.

This statement could be explicated as:

- It is reasonable for a person S to believe that the probability of *p* is greater than the probability of *q*.

Alternatively, this statement could be explicated as:

- The degree of belief that is reasonable for S to have in *p* is greater than the degree of belief that is reasonable for S to have in *q*.

The first explication would fit those epistemologists who assume three doxastic states; the second explication would fit epistemologists who assume a singular state. Either way, epistemic probability is concerned with what is reasonable for an individual agent.

Epistemic probability is person relative. The epistemic probability for a claim may change from person to person, or for the same person from time to time. There are two reasons epistemic probability is person relative. First, which mental states are reasonable for a person to have is partly determined by what *other* mental states a person already has. Since people have different mental states, what is reasonable for them will differ. Second, what is reasonable for a person to believe normally depends upon their abilities, capacities, and dispositions. Since people have different abilities, capacities, and dispositions, what is reasonable for them will differ.

Following many authors, I will explicate *Central Claim* using epistemic probability. Some terminology is needed. Let 'Pr(x|y)' be used to represent the epistemic probability of some statement, given another. Let 'T' stand for Theism; 'I' stand for the Hypothesis of Indifference; 'O' stand for the data of good and evil that we know about. Finally, let 'k' stand for relevant background knowledge. This is information that, as Swinburne usefully characterizes it, is made up of "knowledge we take for granted before new evidence turns up" (2004: 16). Since what is known changes from individual to individual, so too *k* will change from individual to individual. Lastly, let '>>' stand for 'much greater than' (keeping in mind how 'much greater than' was understood in the previous section as implying that Theism is no longer reasonable to believe). *Central Claim* may be explicated as:

- Pr(O|I&k) >> Pr(O|T&k)

I will call this claim *Probabilistic Claim*. Several authors either bypass *Central Claim* entirely for *Probabilistic Claim* or explicate *Central Claim* as *Probabilistic Claim* (see Draper (1989: 333), Draper (2013: 103), Howard-Snyder (1994: 454), Otte (2000: 2), Bergmann (2009: 383), Oppy (2010: 503ff), Morriston (2014: 227), Perrine (2019: 117)). Something like *Probabilistic Claim* has come to dominate discussions of Humean arguments (modulo alternative formulations people have of Theism and the rival to Theism).

O is the data of good and evil—what is known about good and evil. Just as epistemic probability is person relative, so too O will be person relative. After all, the good and evil you know about is distinct from the good and evil I know about. For me, O might include very general statements like:

- Most organisms evolved through a process of natural selection, whereby many organisms are killed.
- Many good people die in war; many bad people die in war.

As well as much more specific statements such as:

- During February 2022, I had a mild cause of Achilles tendinitis causing moderate pain.

- My mother's second marriage was much better for her than her first marriage.

For others, it may include the first two statements, but not the third or fourth.[2]

Finally, there are two potential ways of understanding *Probabilistic Claim*. The first understanding is that *Probabilistic Claim* is a claim about the epistemic probability for some given individual, where "O" consists in what that person knows about good and evil and "*k*" consists in what they know. For most of the paper, I will focus on *Probabilistic Claim* in this way, where the individual is myself. But on a second understanding *Probabilistic Claim* is a schema. As a schema it may be true or false for a given individual. Context will make clear when the schematic understanding is being used.

IV.   Old Evidence and the Entailment Problem

There is an immediate problem that defenders of *Probabilistic Claim* have to address. I'll call it the "Entailment Problem." The problem is similar to what is sometimes called the problem of old evidence. Defenders of *Probabilistic Claim* have a standard response to the Entailment Problem that presses into service the so-called "counterfactual solution" to the problem of old evidence. But I'll argue it is doubtful that the standard response to the Entailment Problem works. And, even if it does, it will complicate defenses of *Probabilistic Claim*, as we'll see in subsequent sections.[3]

The Entailment Problem utilizes two well-known probabilistic results. Suppose there is a logically consistent proposition *q* that logically implies a proposition *p*. The first well-known result is that probability of *p*, given *q*, is 1. Now suppose we conjoin additional propositions to *q* resulting in a proposition *r* that is still logically consistent. The second well-known result is that the probability of *p*, given *r*, is still 1.

Turning to *Probabilistic Claim, k* is composed of what an individual knows, whereas O is composed of what an individual knows about good and evil. We can treat both *k* and O as conjunctions of what the individual knows. Since *k* and O are both true, they are both logically consistent. Further, all of the conjuncts of O are also conjuncts of *k*, since O is composed of a subset of an individual's knowledge. So *k* is logically consistent and implies O. Thus, applying the first well-known result, $Pr(O|k) = 1$.

For purposes here, I'll also assume the following logical consistency claims are true:
- Both I and ~I are logically consistent with *k*.
- Both T and ~T are logically consistent with *k*.

Medieval theologians might object to the first assumption, urging that our background knowledge *does* imply the existence of a benevolent creator. Contemporary authors are more likely to object to the second assumption, urging that our knowledge of evil in the world is logically inconsistent with Theism. But many philosophers, inspired by the work of Alvin Plantinga, believe that Theism is logically consistent with our knowledge of evil in the world.[4] Given these assumptions, and $Pr(O|k) = 1$, we can apply the second well-known result to get these equivalences:
- $Pr(O|I\&k) = Pr(O|{\sim}I\&k) = Pr(O|T\&k) = Pr(O|{\sim}T\&k) = 1$.

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[2] For more discussion of what makes up O, see Perrine (unpublished).

[3] I'll present this problem in terms of propositions and conjunctions instead of sets, but either way will work.

[4] See Plantinga (1972, 1974) for the classic statements. Kraal (2013) objects to Plantinga's view. But Kraal's argument seems to require the falsity of the following principle: if (*p*, *q*, *r*) is logically consistent and *q* is false, then (*p*, *r*) are logically consistent. Sterba (2019) also objects to Plantinga's view. But Sterba doesn't show that there is a logical incompability, since Sterba's argument requires additional claims that are neither logical truths nor logical implications of the relevant claims. Further, Sterba's additional claim strike me as wholly implausible. I can't defend these criticisms of Kraal and Sterba here—though I hope to do so in future work.

For, in each case, there is a logically consistent proposition (*k*) that implies another (O) and we've added new propositions that result in a logically consistent proposition.

At this point, the Entailment Problem is clear. According to *Probabilistic Claim*:

- Pr(O|I&k) >> Pr(O|T&k)

But *k* entails O. And given the two well-known probabilistic results and two simple assumptions, it follows that Pr(O|I&k) = Pr(O|T&k). So *Probabilistic Claim* is false.

There are similarities between the Entailment Problem for *Probabilistic Claim* and a cluster of problems known as the problem of "old evidence." One might try to represent, model, or even reduce claims about evidence to claims about probability. The problem of old evidence—or, at least, the one that concerns us here—is a problem for a proposed way of doing that. Specifically, one might propose:

> *Increasing Evidence*: E is evidence for a hypothesis H only if Pr(H|E&k) > Pr(H|k).

The intuitive idea here is to represent a claim about evidence—that E is evidence for H—in terms of the probability of the hypothesis H increasing. However, suppose that E is "old" evidence in the sense that *k* already implies E. (E is "old" in the sense that it is already amongst what we know in a straightforward way: it is implied by what we already know.) Now a proposition *p* is logically equivalent to the conjunction of *p* and any implication of *p*. If *k* implies E, then *k* and E&k are logically equivalent. Consequently, Pr(H|E&k) = Pr(H|k). However, there are intuitive cases where E *is* evidence for H, even though E is already known and thus part of the background knowledge *k*. Those cases will be intuitive counterexamples to *Increasing Evidence*. Solutions to this problem will either diffuse these kinds of counterexamples or offer an alternative representation, model, or reduction of claims about evidence to claims about probability.

In response to the Entailment Problem, defenders of *Probabilistic Claim* may be ready to cry foul. What's generating the Entailment Problem is that O is amongst the conjuncts of *k*, so that when we consider Pr(O|k) we are in effect considering how likely some of what we know is, given all of what we know. But defenders of *Probabilistic Claim* may say that is not how we should understand Pr(O|k), Pr(O|I&k), or Pr(O|T&k). For instance, throughout his work, Draper claims that the probabilities in *Probabilistic Claim* are what he calls "antecedent" probabilities. He sometimes characterizes "antecedent probabilities" by saying that we are interested in the probability of O "independent of the observations and testimony O reports" (1989: 333; cf. 2009: 340; 2013: 103; 2016: 64-65). But if O is amongst the conjuncts of *k*, then when we consider Pr(O|k), it doesn't seem we are considering how likely O is "independent of the observations and testimony O reports"! So defenders of *Probabilistic Claim* may object that the Entailment Problem assumes an understanding of the probabilistic expressions that they reject.

Of course, the rub is what exactly this alternative understanding of those probabilistic expressions amounts to. Draper himself does not fully explain what he has in mind by an "antecedent probability." But we can get a sense of what the cure needs to be by studying the disease. What's generating the Entailment Problem is that O is amongst the conjuncts of *k*. So whatever exactly an antecedent probability is supposed to be, it needs to be the case that O is *not* amongst the conjuncts of *k*. And at this point defenders of *Probabilistic Claim* might try to appropriate what's called the "counterfactual response" to the problem of old evidence (see Howson (1984: 246; 1985: 307; 1991: 548)). For the counterfactual response tries to sidestep a problem just like this.

The underlying idea of the counterfactual response is that a probability like Pr(H|E&k) represents how likely the hypothesis H is were we to learn the evidence E is true given our background knowledge *k*. There are no special complications if the evidence E is new, and not implied by background knowledge. But if E is old evidence that is already part of *k*, then we engage in counterfactual reasoning. We imagine a scenario where we don't know E and it has been "deleted" from *k*. Then, in that scenario, we imagine coming to learn E and how likely H would be in such a scenario. So if E is old evidence, then the (actual) probability of Pr(H|E&k) is determined by a (counterfactual) scenario where E is *not* old evidence and not part of *k*.

Defenders of *Probabilistic Claim* might try to appropriate this idea (see for instance Draper (2016: 64 fn. 2).). Given that O is amongst the conjuncts of *k*, a probability like Pr(O|k) should be understood in terms of a counterfactual scenario. We imagine a scenario where we don't know O and it has been "deleted" from *k*. Then in that scenario we imagine coming to learn O and how likely O would be in such a scenario. So the (actual) probability of Pr(O|k) is determined by a (counterfactual) scenario where O is *not* already known and not part of *k*. (Analogously for Pr(O|I&k) and Pr(O|T&k).) In this way, the defender of *Probabilistic Claim* might try to sidestep the Entailment Problem.

However, in general, there are two complications when it comes to "deleting" the old evidence E from *k*. The first complication is that E might not be a proper subset of *k*; rather, E might be an implication of *k*. Consequently, to "delete" the old evidence E from *k* one can't simply go through *k* throwing out propositions that also belong to E. One might propose removing from *k* the subset of *k* that logically implies E (even if that subset isn't equivalent to E). But there might not be a unique subset that logically implies E; there might be many. While this complication is important for the counterfactual response to the problem of old evidence, it is less pressing in this context. For O is amongst the conjunctions of *k*. For *k* is what we know, and O is what we know about good and evil.

The second complication is more pressing in this context. Oftentimes we don't just acquire evidence E from nowhere. Frequently, that evidence is based on other things we know or experiences we have had. And those other things may, on their own, be strong evidence for the hypothesis H that E is supposed to support. For instance, I may know (H) my son is sick because (E) his temperature is 38.6C (101F). But I know his temperature is 38.6C because that belief is based on what a reliable thermometer reports (B). So suppose I utilize the counterfactual response, and consider a situation where I "delete" E from what I know. Well, I still know B in that situation, and B is still very strong evidence for H. So to utilize the counterfactual response, it is not enough to consider a situation where I come to learn E; I need to consider a situation where I also have yet to learn what E is based on as well. So to sidestep the Entailment Problem, it is not enough to imagine a scenario where O has been deleted from *k*; we also have to delete from *k* all of the various things O is based on such as other pieces of knowledge or experience.

Described this abstractly, it may seem feasible to delete O, and everything it is based on, from *k*. But in reality, it is not psychologically feasible for people like you or me. O is the data of good and evil—all the various things we know about what is good and evil. But O contains a huge number of statements on a broad range of topics. Amongst O are specific statements about me, such as how I broke my ankle as a child, my successes as a high school athlete, the kindness of my college mentors, and the serious illness I suffered in the summer of 2021; there are statements about well-known world events, like the massive man-made famines in China in the 20th century or the racist attacks on peaceful protestors on the Edmund Pettus Bridge in 1965; there are also statements about general facts, like people suffer from a wide range of physical

and mental disorders; many virtuous people stand up for what is right; many animals die in the wild; advances in modern medicine have alleviated huge amounts of suffering; and countless other statements in O that I haven't even begun to gesture at. To use this response to the Entailment Problem, I am to imagine a counterfactual scenario where I delete *all* of these claims from *k as well as* what they are based on and only then consider how likely O is given *k*, T&*k*, and I&*k*.

The obvious problem to me is that I can't do that (and, not to be presumptuous, but I doubt you are much better on this score). O is simply made up of too many statements, too much of my knowledge. I don't know how to go about imagining a scenario where I delete so much of my knowledge. Additionally, O is tangled up with my personal history and life choices, political opinions, moral beliefs, world events, general scientific knowledge (biology, ecology, medicine), etc. Trying to remove O would result in making many of those subject matters unintelligible to me. Further, I not only have to imagine a scenario where I remove O from my knowledge, but also what O is based on as well—my experiences, memory, recollection of education and sources of information, etc. Lastly, even if I could imagine a scenario where I remove such a huge and intermeshed volume of my knowledge, I don't think I could reasonably and responsibly reason about what is likely in such a scenario. To use an analogy, you could rip out half the pages of one of my favorite novel trilogies and then ask me to estimate the likelihood of various subplots using exclusively the remaining pages, but I don't think I could do that; I'm not sure how to even go about trying; and even if I were to try, I doubt anyone should put much stock in the results anyway.

To be clear, I'm not entirely benighted. I can imagine a counterfactual scenario where I remove a discrete piece of knowledge, say, that I broke my ankle as a child, or that protestors weren't assaulted by police near the Edmund Pettus bridge in 1965. And I can reason in responsible and reasonable ways about what would be likely in such scenarios. But what should be clear is that, in response to the Entailment Problem, defenders of *Probabilistic Claim* are asking us to do far more than that.

So, summing up, the Entailment Problem for *Probabilistic Claim* is that if O is amongst the conjuncts of *k*, then given well-known probabilistic results and widely accepted consistency claims, *Probabilistic Claim* is false. To avoid this problem, defenders of *Probabilistic Claim* may ask us to consider "antecedent probabilities" where we imagine counterfactual scenarios where O, and what it is based on, is removed from *k*, and we then consider how likely O is in such scenarios. But, I've claimed, it is very doubtful that we could imagine such scenarios where we do this and, even if we could, we couldn't reason in a reasonable and responsible way about such scenarios.

Any adequate defense of *Probabilistic Claim* needs to address the Entailment Problem. So far, defenders of *Probabilistic Claim* seem interested in sidestepping the Entailment Problem by appropriating the counterfactual response to the problem of old evidence. But, I've argued, it is doubtful that this appropriation works in the current context. At the very least, defenders of *Probabilistic Claim* need to further develop that response.[5]

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[5] A different family of solutions to the problem of old evidence denies that the probability of a proposition p, on a set of coherent propositions q that logically imply p, is 1. Rather, one might learn a logical truth, e.g. that the coherent set of propositions *q* logically implies *p*, thereby changing the conditional probability of *p* on *q* (for discussion see Sprenger (2015), Hartmann and Fitelson (2015)). Developing this solution requires a fair bit of technical machinery. But this solution is unlikely to succeed in this context. For the relationship between O and *k* is

However, for the remainder of the paper, I'll simply assume that this counterfactual response to the Entailment Problem succeeds. As we'll see in sections VII and VIII, this counterfactual response will cause other problems for defending Humean arguments from evil.

V. The *Independence Method*

Let us suppose, temporarily, the counterfactual response allows defenders of *Probabilistic Claim* to sidestep the Entailment Problem. Even still, one might wonder what methods might be used to defend *Probabilistic Claim*. This section considers, and rejects, one potential method, the *Independence Method*.

The *Independence Method* is a method for defending *Probabilistic Claim*. The method has three parts. First, one arrives at a value for Pr(O|T&k), independently of a value for Pr(O|I&k). Second, one arrives at a value for Pr(O|I&k), independently of a value for Pr(O|T&k). Third, one compares the two to see if the second one is many times greater than the first. This method is a natural one to use for many conditional epistemic probabilities. For instance, players in card games might be interested in determining whether a straight or a flush is more likely in a game. A natural strategy is to determine the probability of getting a straight; determine the probability of getting a flush; and then compare the two probabilities.

The problem with the *Independence Method* is obvious. It seems very challenging for us to arrive at the values for the two conditional probabilities in independent ways. The hypotheses at issue are very abstract; the data at issue is also incredibly specific. Human beings are simply not very reliable at probabilistic reasoning of that kind. To be sure, if someone threatened us with violence, we might make some guesses. But these are *epistemic* probabilities—they state what a reasonable person would think or what would be reasonable for a person to think. And guessing on the basis of threats of violence is not a reasonable method.

In cases like card games or dice rolls, we have a good understanding of the range of potential outcomes. Consequently, the conditional epistemic probability of some outcome might be equal to the proportion of that outcome to the range of potential outcomes. But we *don't* have a good understanding of the potential outcomes when it comes to the claims at issue here. In fact, to the best of my knowledge, no one has even bothered to try to list what all of the possible outcomes are for good and evil for us to know about in a sense remotely similar to possible outcomes for card games or dice rolls.

So the *Independence Method* is unpromising for defending *Probabilistic Claim*. Or, at the very least, it is in need of development in some way. Fortunately for defenders of *Probabilistic Claim* they need not rely upon this strategy. And, in fact, contemporary authors do not. Instead, they use what I will call the *Forked Method*.

VI. The *Forked Method*

Defenders of *Probabilistic Claim* may use what I'll call the *Forked Method*. The *Forked Method* exploits a well-known feature of probability: it is non-monotonic. Thus, suppose for some propositions p and q, Pr(p|q) = x. There is no guarantee that for some proposition r, Pr(p|q&r) will also equal x. In fact, it may have a value higher or lower than x. Not only that, depending upon the further proposition, the resulting value may be *much* higher or *much* lower.

The *Forked Method* has two steps. First, it formulates a conditional probability that does not include reference to either Theism or the Hypothesis of Indifference. Perhaps the most obvious candidate—if not the only one—is Pr(O|k). At this stage, no specific value or range of values

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not just one of implication. O is amongst the conjuncts of k. And while it is sometimes challenging to see that a coherent set implies a proposition, it is normally quite easy to see that some of the conjuncts of a conjunction are implied by that conjunction.

needs to be assigned to Pr(O|k). (Though, presumably, any such values would be incredibly low, given how specific O is.) Second, one compares the differences between *adding* Theism to k and the Hypothesis of Indifference to k. More specifically, one argues that adding Theism to k will greatly change the resulting probability in a way that adding the Hypothesis of Indifference will not. More specifically yet, the resulting differences of addition will mean that Pr(O|I&k) will be much greater than the Pr(O|T&k). Thus, *Probabilistic Claim* is true.

Again, this method can be used in a range of cases outside this dialectical context. For instance, consider the conditional probability that my aunt has lung cancer on background knowledge, Pr(C|k). One might not be able to provide a value for this. But now consider the conditional probability that my aunt has lung cancer, given that she is a truck driver Pr(C|D&k) versus the conditional probability that my aunt has lung cancer, given that she is a pilates instructor Pr(C|P&k). Presumably, Pr(C|D&k) >> Pr(C|P&k). For our background knowledge gives us reason to think that some professions—such as truck drivers—are more likely to smoke than others—such as pilates instructors. Additionally, our background knowledge gives us reason to think that smoking greatly increases the chances of lung cancer. Thus, in this case, even though it is challenging to provide a reasonable value to Pr(C|k), it is unnecessary for comparing Pr(C|D&k) and Pr(C|P&k). Rather, we consider the potential change of values as a result of adding these claims to the background knowledge.

I call this strategy for defending *Probabilistic Claim* the *Forked Method* because the method maintains that the addition of the different hypotheses makes the relevant probabilities "fork" or "diverge." Further, unlike the *Independence Method*, the *Forked Method* doesn't require coming up with values that are independent of one another. Rather, it involves a comparison between the addition of two hypotheses. It is this comparison that allows the *Forked Method* to avoid some of the problems of the *Independence Method*.

The *Forked Method* is a method. It may be implemented in a variety of ways. Draper has, at various points, implemented this method (cf. (1989: 334-339; 1992: 316-7; 2013: 107). He argues that our background knowledge gives us reason to expect pleasure and pain to play certain biological roles in the lives of organisms. That background knowledge thereby supports O to some degree. Now the Hypothesis of Indifference will not undermine or otherwise interact with that support. By contrast, Theism *will* undermine or otherwise interact with that support. For given Theism pleasure and pain are also morally salient. Thus, we might expect them to play additional, non-biological roles such as moral or religious roles. And we may even expect them periodically to *not* play biological roles, if doing so would interfere with some moral roles or religious roles. Thus, the addition of the Hypothesis of Indifference or Theism to *k* results in a "forking" or "divergence" of what is reasonable to expect.

The *Forked Method* might not be the only way of defending *Probabilistic Claim*. But it is the method that is implicitly and explicitly used. Draper has explicitly used it. But even the thought experiments of Draper (2013) and Morriston (2014) implicitly use it.[6] They imagine visitors similar to human beings who don't know much about the good and evil of life on earth. One of the visitors accepts the Hypothesis of Indifference while the other accepts Theism. And both visitors begin to make predictions about the good and evil of life on earth. Draper and Morriston claim that the visitor who accepts the Hypothesis of Indifference will make superior

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[6] Strictly speaking, Morriston's interest is "demonism" that idea that there is an all knowing, all powerful but perfectly *malevolent* creator (2014: 224). But Morriston sees demonism as structurally analogous to theism. I agree. So I have switched his discussion back to the case of theism.

predictions to the visitor who accepts Theism. As Morriston summarizes the reasoning of such beings (2014: 226):

> Indifference makes no difference… That is, it makes no difference to what we should expect just on background knowledge. But the mixture of good and evil that I've discovered is antecedently *much* less likely on… theism than it is on the indifference hypothesis…

But the reasoning here is an instance of the *Forked Method*. The addition of Theism, to the background knowledge, "makes a difference" to what is reasonable to expect in a way that the addition of the Hypothesis of Indifference makes "no difference." In other words, the addition of Theism to one of the visitor's beliefs means diverging or "forking" predictions from the addition of the Hypothesis of Indifference to the other visitor's beliefs.

VII. The *Forked Method* and the Entailment Problem

The *Forked Method* is superior to the *Independence Method* in at least the following way: it doesn't require us to provide values for the conditional epistemic probabilities on their own. Rather, our background knowledge k gives us reasons to expect O to some degree, and we can consider how those reasons are interfered with (or not) by hypotheses such as Theism or the Hypothesis of Indifference.

However, the *Forked Method* cannot be effectively combined with the counterfactual response to the Entailment Problem of section IV. The *Forked Method* requires that k gives us reasons to predict O to a certain degree. The counterfactual response requires that O, and what it is based on, has been deleted from k. But k cannot mutually satisfy these requirements.

To illustrate the problem here, reconsider one of Draper's preferred ways of defending *Probabilistic Claim*—the biological role of pleasure and pain. Draper's basic defense is that we have antecedent reason, given by the claims in k, for thinking that pleasure and pain will play biological roles. Theism, but not the Hypothesis of Indifference, will interfere with those reasons. But how, exactly, does k give us reason for thinking that pleasure and pain will play biological roles? Presumably, k gives us reason for thinking that because it contains various statements, both general and particular, about the adaptability of pleasure and pain in organisms. But since pleasure is a good and pain an evil, such statements are already part of O! Thus, in accordance with the counterfactual response to the Entailment Problem, we should imagine a counterfactual scenario where those claims, and what they are based on, have been removed from k. But if those claims have been removed from k, then it is not the case that k provides us with a reason for expecting pleasure and pain to play biological roles.

The problem is not unique to Draper's preferred way of defending *Probabilistic Claim*. The problem arises for attempts to combine the *Forked Method* with the counterfactual response to the Entailment Problem. For to use the *Forked Method*, the background information k has to contain relevant information that provides antecedent reasons for expecting facts about good and evil. The kind of information that would provide such reasons would be facts about good and evil. But such facts are, *per* the counterfactual response, removed from k. It is as if we are being asked to reason about a subject matter while being denied the premises about that subject matter we could use.

Thus, defenders of *Probabilistic Claim* are left in a bind. If O is amongst the conjuncts of k, the Entailment Problem shows that *Probabilistic Claim* is false. One might try to counterfactually remove O, and what it is based on, from k. It's not clear that we could extract so much knowledge. But even if we could, then we cannot use the most promising (and common!) method for defending *Probabilistic Claim*, namely, the *Forked Method*. Thus, either

Probabilistic Claim is false or we—as of now—lack reasons for believing it. Either way is bad news for defenses of *Probabilistic Claim*.

VIII.   Complications with the Separate and Compare Methodology

Humean arguments are not logical arguments from evil. They do not claim that the data of good and evil, O, is logically inconsistent with Theism. Rather, they claim that on its own—separated from other potential evidence—it is strong evidence against Theism. Defenders of Humean arguments normally use the "separate and compare" methodology as described above. For instance, at one point, Draper formulates the conclusion of his argument as "Other evidence held equal, theism is very probably false" (2009: 343). By "other evidence" Draper has in mind data other than O which might be considered evidence for or against Theism. Draper's thought is that O, separated out from other evidence, makes Theism very probably false.

But there's a methodological conflict here. O contains many statements that theists *would* say constitute evidence in favor of Theism over the Hypothesis of Indifference. Specifically, some philosophers have argued that claims about consciousness, or the complexity of life, or free will, or moral responsibility, or moral knowledge are evidence in favor of Theism against a competitor like naturalism (see, e.g., Swinburne (2004: chp. 7-9), Layman (2003 a,b)). Let's call these facts "mustered evidence" to indicate both that Theists muster it in favor of Theism and that I'm officially neutral as to whether or not these facts (or some subset thereof) genuinely are evidence for Theism. Now many of the statements of O straightforwardly imply claims about the existence of consciousness, free will, moral responsibility, moral knowledge, etc. Thus, many of the statements of O will either include or strongly support the mustered evidence. Thus, when evaluating the evidential strength of O for Theism one cannot keep "other evidence held equal;" the mustered evidence for Theism is already included in O or strongly supported by it.

Here are two possible ways of dealing with this methodological conflict. The first response says that the mustered evidence for Theism is part of both O *and k*. But since the mustered evidence is already part of *k*, it has already been separated out and weighed in favor (or not) of Theism. The second response says that the mustered evidence is part of *k* but has been excluded from O. Since it has been excluded from O, the mustered evidence can be separated and weighed at some other time—after the evidential strength of O has been determined. (Draper himself seems to suggest the former response at (2013: 74), the latter at (2014b: 166).)

However, both responses are problematic. The first response is problematic because it contradicts the counterfactual response to the Entailment Problem. On the counterfactual response, we "deleted" from *k* both O and what O is based on. But according to the first response, the mustered evidence from O is part of both O *and k*. But it can't be, per the counterfactual response, that the mustered evidence has been deleted from *k* and, per the first response here, that the mustered evidence is already part of *k*. Something has to give.

The second response is that the mustered evidence is part of *k* but has been excluded from O. However, this response is implausible because so many of the elements of O will imply, or otherwise strongly support, the mustered evidence. For instance, any claims about pleasure or pain will straightforwardly imply the existence of consciousness. Similarly, many claims in O about human actors will straightforwardly imply statements about free will, responsibility, and moral knowledge such as:

- John Lewis knowingly resisted social injustice throughout his career.
- John Wilkes Booth assassinated Abraham Lincoln.
- My sister helped my mother after the surgery because she knew she needed help.

And many of the claims of O will also support that there is complexity to life. It would simply be too difficult to exclude from O all the mustered evidence.

It is important to be clear. This methodological conflict does not show that *Probabilistic Claim* is false. What it shows is that defenses of *Probabilistic Claim* cannot be easily combined with the standard "separate and compare" approach many philosophers of religion prefer when it comes to evaluating worldview hypotheses like Theism. Perhaps the most promising route for defenders of *Probabilistic Claim* is to just expand their defense of *Probabilistic Claim* to take into account all the mustered evidence. But such a route would radically increase the ambitions of Humean arguments and it's no surprise no one has taken that route yet.

IX.   Seemings and Phenomenological Approaches

Some Humean arguments have as a premise *Central Claim*:

- The Hypothesis of Indifference much better explains the data of good and evil than Theism.

However, *Central Claim* is frequently explicated as *Probabilistic Claim*:

- $Pr(O|I\&k) \gg Pr(O|T\&k)$

In the previous sections (sections III-VIII), I've raised problems for defending *Probabilistic Claim*. Some of these problems are semi-technical in nature. Some readers may worry that these problems are an artifact of explicating *Central Claim* using epistemic probability. Thus, it is worth exploring if there are other ways of defending *Central Claim* that don't turn on explicating it in terms of epistemic probability as done in *Probabilistic Claim*. This section, and the next two, consider two ways of defending *Central Claim* that don't rely upon defending *Probabilistic Claim*.

An alternative defense may take inspiration from the following few lines from Philo (XI.13):

The whole [of the universe] presents nothing but the idea of a blind nature,
impregnated by a great vivifying principle, and pouring forth from her lap,
without discernment or parental care, her maimed and abortive children.

Now, strictly speaking, since the universe is not a person, it doesn't "present" anything at all. But presumably Philo is not attributing personhood to the universe. Rather, Philo is making a broadly phenomenological claim: that when we consider the whole of the universe, it seems to us or appears to us to be a "blind nature." Other authors also use language with phenomenological connotations. For instance, Draper (1989), and Morriston (2014) describe how "surprising" O may or may not be on Theism and the Hypothesis of Indifference. But being surprising or unsurprising has clear phenomenological implications as well.

Now according to one family of epistemological theories, our phenomenology—how things "look" or "seem" or "appear"—primarily fixes or determines what is reasonable for us to believe. There are a variety of ways of developing theories of this kind— see, e.g., Pryor (2001), Huemer (2001, 2007, 2013), Tucker (2010), Cullison (2010), Chudnoff (2013: chp. 3), Smithies (2019), Berghofer (2020), McCain and Moretti (2021). On more extreme members of this family, any time we are reasonable or justified in believing something it is in virtue of how things seem to us—either occurrently or in the past. On more moderate members of this family, how things seem to us is one source of reasonable or justified belief, allowing other things to play a role as well.

It will be useful to work with a singular principle that is representative of this approach. To that end, drawing on work of Huemer and Tucker, I will focus on the following principle that I'll call *Phenomenal Conservativism* (PC):

PC: If it seems to S that *p*, then S has *prima facie* justification for believing *p*.

Following a growing consensus (compare Cullison (2010), McAllister (2018), McCain and Moretti (2021: chp. 3)), I'll treat "it seems to S that *p*" as requiring a *sui generis* mental state whereby a proposition that *p* is presented "forcefully" to S as true. Now defenders of phenomenological approaches might quibble over this formulation of PC. For it is possible that the "seeming" that S has is quick, fleeting, or wavering. And one might wonder whether such lackluster seemings could be sufficient for *prima facie* justification (cf. Huemer (2007: 30, fn. 1)). Consequently, henceforth, I'll assume that the seemings at stake in PC are *not* quick, fleeting, or wavering but suitably stable and clear.

PC, so formulated, provides a sufficient condition for having *prima facie* justification for believing *p*. But even if S believes *p*, S might not be reasonable or justified in believing *p*. First, even if S has *prima facie* justification for believing *p*, S might base her belief on some silly or outlandish reason instead of whatever it is that provides the *prima facie* justification. Second, even if S believes *p* on the basis of whatever it is that provides *prima facie* justification, it might still be the case that S has "defeaters" that defeat that *prima facie* justification. Keeping these points in mind, a natural extension of PC is:

> PC+: If it seems to S that *p*, S believes *p* on the basis of that seeming, and S lacks any defeaters for believing *p*, then S is reasonable in believing *p*.

While PC+ is not a logical implication of PC, it is a natural extension of PC.

In a certain sense, PC makes *prima facie* justification "easy." All it takes to have *prima facie* justification for a given proposition is that one is in the "right" phenomenological state—its seeming to one that *p* is true. That state is, on its own, sufficient for *prima facie* justification. One need not consult experts; engage in extensive research; or gather loads of statistical evidence. One need not construct a careful and detailed argument or engage in reasonable and responsible reflection. Of course, one could do any of those things. And perhaps doing those things might help get one in the "right" phenomenological state. But if one can get one's self into the "right" phenomenological state vis-a-vis some proposition, then one has *prima facie* justification for believing that proposition.

Let us return to *Central Claim*. Suppose for a given person, S, the following is true:

- It seems to S that *Central Claim* is true.

Given PC, it follows that:

- S has *prima facie* justification for believing *Central Claim*.

Let us further suppose that S believes *Central Claim* on the basis of this seeming, and (more contentiously) S lacks any defeaters for *Central Claim*. Given PC+, it follows that:

- S is reasonable in believing *Central Claim*.

In this way, a given subject S might have *prima facie* justification for *Central Claim*—or even reasonable belief in *Central Claim*.

Notice that, in order for S to have prima facie justification for believing *Central Claim* it is not necessary that S has constructed a careful argument, or read up-to-date work in philosophy of religion, or anything of the sort. S need not have to resolve the *Entailment Problem* or rely upon the *Independence Method* or the *Forked Method*. So long as S is in the "right" phenomenological state *vis-à-vis Central Claim*, S has *prima facie* justification for believing *Central Claim*.[7]

So one method for defending a Humean argument, with a premise like *Central Claim*, is to appeal to phenomenological approaches in general or principles like PC and PC+ in particular.

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[7] Of course, it might be that one has an "inferential seeming," that *Central Claim* must be true on the basis of some set of arguments. However, it may also just be that, upon considering the content of *Central Claim*, it will seem true to a person. For a sympathetic discussion of "inferential seemings," see Huemer (2016).

Now these defenses might require that agents are in the "right" phenomenological state *vis-à-vis* premises like *Central Claim*. Additionally, phenomenological approaches do not need to defend *Probabilistic Claim*. Consequently, they may argue that they can sidestep many of the problems raised above. They need not talk about epistemic probability *per se*; instead they can talk about what is reasonable to believe.

X.   Drawbacks

Given a phenomenological approach to reasonable belief—an approach that utilizes principles like PC or PC+—it may be that individuals are *prima facie* reasonable in believing the premises of a Humean argument, like *Central Claim*. And it may be that such approaches allow defenders of *Central Claim* to sidestep many of the problems I raised for *Probabilistic Claim*. Nonetheless, there are several potential drawbacks to using phenomenological approaches to defend Humean arguments.

The first drawback is dialectical. Phenomenological based approaches are not very distinctive or selective; they can be used to defend any number of arguments. As a result, phenomenological based approaches may very well make Humean arguments from evil dialectically redundant. For there are other arguments from evil that are less complex that, given phenomenological based approaches, are just as good if not better. For instance, consider the following argument (inspired by Rowe (1979)):

- If there is any unjustified evil, then there is no God.
- There is some unjustified evil.
- Therefore, there is no God.

For many people, when they reflect upon the first two premises, those premises simply seem to be true. Further, because those first two premises seem to them to be true, then the conclusion is also likely to seem true to them. But from principles like PC, it will follow that they are *prima facie* reasonable in believing that there is no God. Or consider the following 0-premise argument for Atheism:

- There is no God.

For many people, when they consider this proposition, it seems true to them. (In fact, my anecdotal evidence is that as a psychological reality more people accept Atheism because it seems true to them as opposed to inferring it from an argument against Theism.) Given a principle like *PC*, these people are thereby *prima facie* reasonable in believing there is no God.

Of course, there may be some people for whom the premises of a Humean argument, like *Central Claim*, seem true but the premises of these simpler arguments for Atheism do not seem true. For those individuals, Humean arguments will not be redundant. But my guess is that such individuals are few and far between. For most people for whom *Central Claim* seems true to them, there will be simpler arguments for Atheism whose premises also seem true to them. In that way, in general, Humean arguments will be dialectically redundant.

The second drawback is straightforward. This way of defending Humean arguments requires the success of phenomenological based approaches to reasonable belief. But those approaches are open to criticisms. Thus, this way of defending Humean arguments is vulnerable to those criticisms.

The most straightforward criticism of phenomenological approaches is that they are false. One popular criticism involves bad etiology—that phenomenological states can be caused by things that we don't normally think are sufficient for justification (compare Markie (2005: 356ff.), Siegel (2013)). A related criticism is that phenomenological approaches fit poorly with ordinary evaluations of reasonable or justified belief, which often times require responsible or

reliably formed beliefs (see Perrine (2022: 548-551). A third criticism is that there is a conflict between the principles of these phenomenological approaches and the principles of probabilism (White (2006), Hawthorne and Lasonen-Aarnio (2021)). I won't argue against phenomenological approaches—having done so elsewhere—but I'll note that defending Humean arguments in this way will open them up to further objections having to do with the methodology used to defend them.

XI.   Scientific and Metaphysical Explanations

The *Central Claim* for Humean arguments is this:

- The Hypothesis of Indifference much better explains the data of good and evil than Theism.

A final method for defending *Central Claim* is to turn to work on scientific or metaphysical explanation; perhaps there is a well-known theory of scientific or metaphysical explanation that could easily be pressed into service for defending *Central Claim*. However, there is a battery of reasons for thinking that appeals to scientific explanation or metaphysical explanation will not help defenses of *Central Claim* in any straightforward way.

First, as noted earlier, the concept of explanation used in *Central Claim* is closer to the concept of prediction, since *Central Claim* is not intended to take a stand on the simplicity of the two hypotheses. However, various models of metaphysical explanation are not about metaphysical *prediction* so it is unlikely they can be used to defend *Central Claim*. Second, a common feature of most models of metaphysical explanation is that metaphysical explanation is a kind of non-causal explanation (compare Fine (2001: 15-16), deRosset (2010: 78), Audi (2012: 104), Schaffer (2018: 3)). But the kind of explanation Theism would give of the data of good and evil would be a kind of causal explanation. Specifically, it would be a causal explanation at the person level, involving an agent's plans, purposes, or intentions. So models of metaphysical explanation seem unlikely to help a defense of *Central Claim.*

Second, there are many models of scientific explanation. Many of them model scientific explanation using laws of nature (Hempel (1965)), invariances in nature (Woodward (2003)), and mechanisms (Salmon (1984), Craver (2006)). None of these models will apply to the kinds of explanation Theism or the Hypothesis of Indifference provide. Worse yet, many scientific models focus on causal explanations involving causes and effects. But, as the discussion of the *Forked Method* illustrates, the Hypothesis of Indifference does *not* identify any potential causes for the good and evil we know about. In fact, that was why it was supposed to be superior to Theism; it *doesn't* provide us with causes that would interfere with the background predictions.

Lastly, recall that *Central Claim* was supposed to be understood in a weak way. The Hypothesis of Indifference merely provides a *better* explanation than Theism. But both might do quite poorly at providing much by way of explanation at all. But most models of scientific and metaphysical explanation are interested in modeling successful explanations. So even to apply scientific and metaphysical explanation to this case, one would have to first extend them to cases of non-successful or non-optimal explanations. For this reason, as well, appealing to scientific or metaphysical models of explanation are unlikely to assist in defending *Central Claim*.

XII.   Concluding Thoughts

Humean arguments from evil are some of the most sophisticated and powerful arguments against Theism. Their central idea is that some rival to Theism better predicts what we know about good and evil than does Theism. In this paper, I've argued that there are major problems with defending these arguments. Hume's own defense rests on outdated principles involving similarities between cause and effect. Most contemporary defenses rely upon epistemic

probability; but those defenses have a range of problems. Appeals to phenomenological approaches may make it easy to satisfy their principles; but those principles are controversial and are liable to undermine the dialectical significance of Humean arguments versus other arguments. And contemporary work on metaphysical and causal explanation do not apply to Humean arguments. The upshot is that more work needs to be done shoring up the methodology of Humean arguments.[8]

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