

THE PROBLEM OF EVIL AS A MORAL OBJECTION TO THEISM

by

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Abstract: I argue that the problem of evil can be a moral objection to theistic belief. The thesis has three broad sections, each establishing an element in this argument. Section one establishes the logically binding nature of the problem of evil: The problem of evil *must* be solved, if you are to believe in God. And yet, I borrow from J. L. Mackie's criticisms of the moral argument for the existence of God, and argue that the fundamentally evaluative nature of the premises within the problem of evil entails that it cannot be used to argue for the non-existence of God. Section two establishes the moral objectionability of many responses to the problem of evil (theodicies). I discuss the work of the moral 'anti-theodacists', and support some of the key premises within their arguments via appeal to the moral philosophy of Raimond Gaita. I combine the claims of section one and section two, and conclude that theism inherits the moral objectionability of theodicy. In section three, I establish the plausibility of a morally motivated non-cognitive atheism, offering an example (Dostoevsky's Ivan Karamazov), before finally distilling the central claims of this thesis into the form of a slogan: God lacks humanity.

To Kirsty

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Introduction

The problem of evil remains a central problem for any religious believer, and continues to feature prominently in the analytic philosophy of religion. My thesis will look once again at the problem of evil, and begins with the fairly obvious observation (often ignored) that certain ethical and metaethical assumptions are essential to the meaningfulness of the problem of evil. We cannot make sense of what a problem of ‘evil’ is unless we have some working understanding of what it is for something to be ‘evil’; we cannot make sense of the problem of evil as a problem for theism unless we have some working understanding of what we mean when we say that God is good. Any argument from evil must take a stance on these issues if it is to be meaningful, and if it hopes to have any argumentative impact then its stance on these issues must relate to the theism that it seeks to deny. The argument from evil, therefore, relies fundamentally upon certain ethical assumptions. Furthermore, any defence against the argument from evil, in the form of a theodicy, must also be founded upon certain ethical assumptions; the theodicy too must take a stance upon these issues of what we mean by ‘evil’ and ‘God is good’.

These may seem like obvious points, but they are sadly neglected in the philosophical discussion of the problem of evil. The purpose of this thesis is to bring these points to consciousness, and to look at some of the consequences that they entail, both for religious belief and for the arguments that seek to act as defeaters for religious belief. I will construct a thesis, an overall argument, that will be constructed of the various sub-conclusions of my chapters. Although each chapter will offer arguments that ought to be of interest in their own right, they each build towards a final conclusion.

My first chapter focuses on bringing these points to consciousness, by offering an analysis of the meta-structure of the problem of evil. Contrary to the prevailing consensus, I argue that the problem of evil remains logically binding. I consider various ways of understanding the difference between the ‘logical’ and ‘evidential’ formulation of the problem of evil, and conclude that none gives us good reason to reject a logically binding formulation of the problem of evil. The sub-conclusion of this chapter, in terms of the thesis, is that the problem of evil remains unavoidable for the theist. A theist must, on pain of logical contradiction, ‘solve’ the problem of evil by denying the truth of one of the propositions within the inconsistent set that forms it.

My second chapter attempts to offer a new formulation of the problem of evil, one that I will dub a ‘morally aware’ formulation of the problem of evil. I do not hold out much hope of this new formulation being terribly persuasive towards atheism, and instead intend it to reveal the main points of disagreement between theists and atheists on this issue. Having presented a full-fledged formulation of the problem of evil, I will retreat to a (hopefully) more agreeable ‘meta-formulation’ of the problem of evil, one that is intended to be representative of all the various formulations of the problem of evil, which can then be used as an archetype for the remainder of my thesis.

My third chapter builds upon the analysis offered in chapters one and two, and identifies more closely the meta-structure within the problem of evil. I point out that the problem of evil contains both evaluative and non-evaluative content; that is, it contains both fact-type claims and value-type claims. Recognising the significance of the evaluative content within the problem of evil leads to two main problems for the argument from evil. Firstly, any formulation of the argument from evil must remain consistent in the application of its ethical assumptions. In order to generate a contradiction between God and evil, what is meant by calling something ‘evil’ must be derived from the same set of ethical assumptions that grounds the description of God as ‘good’. This often does not seem to happen, both within the problem - whereby a different set of ethical assumptions is seemingly deployed in the former of those propositions within the problem of evil than is deployed in the latter - and between interlocutors discussing the problem - whereby the proponent of the problem of evil does not fully appreciate the fundamental difference between their and the theist’s ethical assumptions. This is the first problem for the problem of evil that arises from a recognition of the fundamental role that evaluative claims play within the problem: Underlying ethical assumptions are rarely sufficiently agreed upon to generate any kind of compelling argument from evil. Chapter three offers up a further problem for the problem of evil, derived from a recognition of the fundamental role that evaluative claims play within the problem of evil, one that draws upon J. L. Mackie’s discussion of the moral argument for God’s existence. According to Mackie (and also, to a certain extent, Kant), the moral argument for the existence of God cannot succeed because it moves from evaluative premises to a non-evaluative conclusion; it moves from a claim about what ‘ought’ to be the case to a claim about what ‘is’ the case. I argue that the argument from evil does precisely the same thing, and therefore if Mackie’s argument against the moral argument for the existence of God is successful, then the same argument ought to apply to the moral argument *against* the existence of God; namely, the argument from evil. The sub-conclusion of this chapter is

therefore that the argument from evil cannot be used as an argument for the non-existence of God, as any kind of non-evaluative or ‘fact-type’ claim.

Chapter four digresses from the central argument of the thesis briefly, and identifies an example of the kind of mistakes that can occur if we are unaware of the fundamental role that evaluative claims, and the ethical assumptions that ground them, play within the problem of evil. I point out that many theistic responses to the problem of evil (theodicies) rely upon the truth of ethical assumptions that are not commonly associated with theism. That is, theism is traditionally not consequentialist, yet many theodicies are profoundly consequentialist in their ethical reasoning. I present a dilemma that forces a resolution of this inconsistency. I argue that these theodicies are consequentialist, and show that a commitment to the truth of them entails a commitment to the truth of consequentialism. Therefore, it would be inconsistent for any theist who does not think that consequentialism is true (which I take to be the vast majority of theists) to support the truth of a consequentialist theodicy; either the theist must reject the truth of consequentialist theodicies, or embrace consequentialism. The theist must remain consistent in their ethical assumptions in responding to the problem of evil, just as the atheologian must remain consistent in the application of the agreed ethical assumptions in formulating the problem of evil (as was shown in chapter three).

Chapter five builds upon the identification of theodicies as being essentially consequentialist, and outlines the responses of the ‘moral anti-theodacists’. A distinctive anti-theodical response has emerged in the work of Nick Trakakis, D. Z. Phillips, Kenneth Surin, and others, and this response focuses specifically upon certain moral features of certain theodicies. These moral anti-theodacists also identify certain theodicies as being essentially consequentialist in nature, and highlight some of the morally unsavoury characteristics of a consequentialist moral attitude, especially when applied to solving the problem of evil. I clarify a series of distinctively moral objections that the moral anti-theodacists have to theodicy, and identify the key premises or assumptions that these objections rely upon. I conclude that if certain of these key premises are plausible, then at least some of the objections of moral anti-theodicy are justified, and therefore that consequentialist theodicies (and theodicies generally) are morally objectionable, in that they can be objected to on moral grounds and we have good reason to so object.

Chapter six offers some justification for the key premises in the moral-anti-theodical argument outlined in chapter five, and draws heavily upon the moral philosophy of Raimond Gaita. I also recruit some of Wittgenstein’s views in *On Certainty*, and combine these two to provide a firm basis upon which to found the key moral-anti-theodical objections. I conclude

that Wittgenstein and Gaita's views are plausible, and therefore that the key moral-anti-theodical premises have good support. The moral-anti-theodical argument can therefore run its course, and establish its conclusion: Theodicy is morally objectionable.

Chapter seven moves the argument of my thesis on to its crucial step: I use the success of the moral-anti-theodical argument (chapters four, five, and six), combine it with the logically binding nature of the problem of evil (chapter one), and conclude that theism inherits the moral objectionability of any theodicy upon which it relies. In short, if theodicy is morally objectionable, and theism needs theodicy, then theism is morally objectionable. This is the central and most controversial claim of my thesis. It leaves the problem of evil as still capable of being conducive towards atheism, in spite of my claim (given in chapter three) that the problem of evil cannot be used as a basis from which to argue for the non-existence of God. The problem of evil, via moral anti-theodicy, is conducive towards a negative moral appraisal, or other con-attitudes, towards theism and God, and is therefore conducive towards a kind of 'non-cognitive' atheism.

The viability of a genuinely noncognitive atheism is defended in chapter eight, where I construct a simple argument to press this case: Atheism is the negation of theism; theism necessarily has noncognitive components; therefore, atheism can be purely noncognitive. I draw upon some uncontroversial theological views about the nature of religious belief (e.g., Karl Barth, Blaise Pascal) and the central role that certain concepts play in that belief (e.g., trust), and combine these with some more explicitly analytic ways of understanding some of these concepts in a noncognitive way. I conclude that we ought to consider the possibility of a noncognitive form of atheism to be a logical possibility, and further that we seem to have some good examples of atheists of this kind, in the form of Albert Camus, and Dostoevsky's character Ivan Karamazov. Although neither of these explicitly denies the existence of God, in a cognitive manner, they both ought rightly to be considered atheists; their atheism lies in their noncognitive con-attitudes towards God, the world as created by God, and religious belief.

In chapter nine, I discuss the example of noncognitive atheism to be found in the form of Dostoevsky's Ivan Karamazov, as featuring in *The Brothers Karamazov*. I argue against certain common misinterpretations of the character of Ivan Karamazov, and try to establish clearly what the character of Ivan stands for. I argue that we ought to understand Ivan Karamazov as primarily being a *Romantic*, and a hopeless one at that. The assumption of metaphysical and epistemological Romanticism in Ivan leads to a more coherent picture of the character of Ivan and the role that he plays in *The Brothers Karamazov*. This

interpretation is also in line with Dostoevsky's own explicitly stated aims and intentions in drawing up the character of Ivan. If my interpretation is correct, then it precludes Ivan's response to the problem of evil being conducive to the conclusion that God does not exist. Instead, Ivan's atheism lies in the Romantic *feeling* of despair, outrage, and hopelessness that he encounters when he engages with the concepts of God and the created order (in all its horror). In short, when encountering the problem of evil, Ivan chooses to 'stick to the facts' of his ethical appraisal of the problem, and *will not* consent to the hope of a Christian faith, out of 'love for humanity'. Ivan's humanity, his human response, his humanitarian response, prevents him from believing 'in' God, even if he 'accepts' God's existence. He therefore stands as the archetypal noncognitive atheistic response to the problem of evil.

Chapter ten states the conclusion of this thesis, which takes the form of a slogan: God lacks humanity. If we agree with Raimond Gaita that the meaningfulness of our morality lies in our common humanity, and we agree with the moral anti-theodacists that theodicy displays an abject lack of 'humanity', in Gaita's sense, then any theist who commits to the truth of a theodicy must necessarily see God as lacking our common humanity. Of course, this is not a very unusual claim; God is often thought not to be 'a member of our moral community', and it is often said that 'the ways of the most high are not our ways'. (My thesis is perhaps not so controversial as it sounds!) But it is important to recognise the moral implications for religious belief that this view entails. Specifically, I wish to highlight the forcefulness of an atheism that is formulated as a distinctively moral objection to belief in God. The problem of evil reveals God to be at odds with human morality (our 'humanity'). There have been notable examples of prominent atheistic archetypes who have situated their atheism in a love for humanity (e.g. Ivan Karamazov, Albert Camus). That this particular form of atheism does not explicitly deny the existence of God, yet remains a robust form of atheism, is both philosophically interesting in its own right and has potentially huge consequences for the analytic philosophy of religion in general. If this is indeed a viable and legitimate form of atheism, and we can establish this from purely analytic grounds, then the analytic philosophy of religion will be revealed to have been far too shallow in its understanding of religious belief.

1. The Problem of Evil Remains Logically Binding

There are crimes of passion and crimes of logic. The line that divides them is not clear.

Albert Camus¹

1.1 The logical problem of evil: J. L. Mackie vs. Alvin Plantinga

The problem of evil is said to arise from the combination of the following three propositions:

1. God is omnipotent.
2. God is omnibenevolent.
3. Evil exists.²

The ‘logical’ problem of evil claims that these three propositions constitute an inconsistent set: that is, they cannot all be true together. The truth of any two entails the falsity of the corresponding third. If this inconsistency is used as the basis from which to argue for the non-existence of God, then the ‘logical problem of evil’ becomes the ‘logical argument from evil to the non-existence of God’. J. L. Mackie presented this problem,³ and Alvin Plantinga pointed out that the problem, in order to be deductively valid and therefore qualify as ‘logical’, requires some logical inconsistency, of the form ‘P & ¬P’, between the three propositions.⁴ This inconsistency does not immediately present itself. Though there might be some intuitive push towards understanding these three propositions to contradict each other somehow, formally speaking we only have a set consisting of ‘P, Q, R’. There are no logical connectives tying the propositions together, so they seem content to stand consistently.

Mackie was aware of this, and so attempted to bolster the original argument by adding two ‘quasi-logical rules’ that would serve as this connecting function:

¹ Albert Camus, *The Rebel*, trans. by Anthony Bower (London: Penguin, 2000), p. 11.

² Although ‘evil’ often has broader connotations in ordinary language, in the context of the philosophy of religion and the problem of evil, the proposition ‘evil exists’ just means ‘bad things happen’; people do bad things, and bad things happen to people.

³ J. L. Mackie, *The Miracle of Theism: Arguments for and against the Existence of God* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982), pp. 150-1.

⁴ Alvin Plantinga, *God, Freedom, and Evil* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1977), p. 12.

4. 'Good is opposed to evil in such a way that a being who is wholly good eliminates evil as far as he can.'
5. 'There are no limits to what an omnipotent being can do.'⁵

From this, Mackie claimed that a logical inconsistency did arise.

Alvin Plantinga successfully responded to Mackie's logical problem of evil. He pointed out that there was still no formal inconsistency here: the set has just become 'P, Q, R, S, T'. Though there might now be a stronger intuitive push towards perceiving these five propositions as incapable of being true at the same time, there is no obvious logical justification for claiming that they are an inconsistent set. Showing considerable sympathy (more, perhaps, than he was obliged to), Plantinga considered whether Mackie intended to present a set of propositions that were 'implicitly contradictory': that is, neither explicitly contradictory (displaying a contradiction of the form $P \ \& \ \neg P$) nor formally contradictory (capable of yielding, by the application of logical rules, a contradiction of the form $P \ \& \ \neg P$), but rather being capable of yielding a formal contradiction if we add certain necessary truths to the set.⁶ These additions act as qualifying statements, intending to reveal the logical connectives between the three original premises.

The situation is like this: Imagine, for example, that I offered you the set of propositions: 'Mike is a bachelor' and 'Sarah is Mike's wife'. I would clearly have stated something intuitively contradictory, such that these propositions cannot both be true simultaneously, but it would also be true to say that I had stated something that was neither explicitly nor formally contradictory. I have just asserted a statement 'P' and a statement 'Q', and have given no connectives to bind them together or express the incompatibility between them. The propositions are implicitly contradictory, however, since if we add the necessary truth that 'for all x , if x is a bachelor, then there will be no y such that y is x 's wife', then we can plug the original propositions into a simple logical calculus and derive an explicit contradiction. From 'Mike is a bachelor', and our definition of bachelorhood, we can deduce that 'there is no y such that y is Mike's wife', and from 'Sarah is Mike's wife' we can deduce that 'there is a y such that y is Mike's wife'. We can now combine these two deductions and derive an explicit contradiction: 'There is, and is not, a y such that y is Mike's wife.' The original set of propositions is therefore revealed to be implicitly contradictory.

⁵ J. L. Mackie, *The Miracle of Theism*, p. 150.

⁶ Alvin Plantinga, *God, Freedom, and Evil*, p. 17.

It is this kind of thing that Plantinga is looking for in Mackie's formulation of the problem of evil: Some additional definitional statements that establish that the original three propositions are logically inconsistent. Since these additions are only qualifying statements, these 'quasi-logical rules'⁷ would need to be necessarily true in order to justify claiming an implicit contradiction and therefore a logical inconsistency between the original three propositions. This is what Mackie was going for with his addition of 4 and 5. But, as it happens, Mackie's additions are not necessarily true. In fact, they are not even plausible.

Plantinga shows that 5 is certainly not necessarily true, since few expect God to be capable of doing what is logically impossible; we do not commonly expect God to be capable of producing square circles, for example. Therefore, there are at least some limits to what an omnipotent being can do. But perhaps this is easily fixed:

5*: There are no *non-logical* limits to what an omnipotent being can do.⁸

A deeper problem arises when we consider 4. Firstly, it seems clear to Plantinga that we cannot assert 4 as being necessarily true without qualification. As it stands, 4 makes no mention of the possibility that this 'good being' might be unaware of what evil might be occurring, and therefore might well not eliminate it, because they are unaware, yet would surely still qualify as 'good' in that their ignorance would render them blameless.⁹ Further, even if this good being knows about the evil, it is possible that this evil could not be prevented without the necessary bringing about of some evil equally bad or worse, or the necessary loss of some greater good worth the permitting of the minor evil.¹⁰ We must therefore limit 4 to applying only to those evils that the good being knows about, and can eliminate without the necessary loss of greater goods or the bringing about of evils equally bad or worse.

But the problem goes deeper still. For even if we allow for these qualifications, we are still left without a formal contradiction within the set. In order to get to this formal contradiction, we must make the additional claim:

6. 'If God is omniscient and omnipotent, then he can properly eliminate every evil state of affairs.'¹¹

⁷ Alvin Plantinga, *God, Freedom, and Evil*, p. 16.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 18.

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 20.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 22.

Now, perhaps, we can claim that there is an inconsistency within the set 'P, Q, R, S, T', for we include a statement loosely reflecting an entailment of the form: ' $P \rightarrow \neg R$ '.¹²

And yet we must still ask, since it is merely acting as a 'qualifying statement', whether this addition is necessarily true. Plantinga claims not, and offers his Free-Will Defence (FWD) in support of this.¹³ The FWD has been widely discussed elsewhere, and I will not add to that discussion. Suffice to summarise that since it is logically possible that we possess free-will, the preservation of which justifies the existence of some evils, and it is logically possible that we, as human beings, also suffer from 'transworld depravity'¹⁴ - i.e. the property of being incapable of acting well all the time - it is logically possible that there are some evils in the world that God would be logically incapable of preventing without the necessary loss of the greater good of our free-will. Therefore, the existence of an omnipotent, omnibenevolent, and omniscient God remains compatible with the existence of some evil states of affairs. This renders 6 not necessarily true, thus defeating the logical problem of evil.

1.1.1 The shift towards evidential formulations of the problem of evil

Since Mackie's formulation of the logical problem of evil seems doomed to failure, philosophers (led by William Rowe)¹⁵ have been keen to shift towards 'evidential' formulations of the problem of evil. That is, versions of the problem that do not rely upon a notion of logical incompatibility between God and evil (or God and certain types of evil), but instead rely upon a non-deductive probabilistic move from the perceived fact that the evils of the world render it incredibly unlikely that God exists. This shift was, I think, a mistake. Plantinga has not given us sufficient reason to abandon all logical formulations, even if he has successfully shown that the most basic version - in the form of Mackie's 1, 2, and 3 - will not cut it. It is still quite possible to formulate logical formulations of the problem of evil that rely upon some notion of deductive validity, or logical inconsistency. I will argue that we can and should do so.

But we must be careful here, because it is far from clear quite what people mean when they assert 'evidential' rather than 'logical' formulations. The relevant difference between the

¹² Although, of course, this still does not quite get at what Mackie would have been aiming for. Premise 6 only mentions God's power to do such and such, it establishes what God *can* do; there is no mention here of the further requirement, that of the entailment that stipulates that God, if good, *would* eliminate every evil state of affairs that He had the power to eliminate. But I will gloss over this point, as Plantinga does, for it is not currently relevant and can be easily mopped-up later.

¹³ Alvin Plantinga, *God, Freedom, and Evil*, pp. 29 ff.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 48.

¹⁵ William Rowe, 'Evil and Theodicy', *Philosophical Topics*, 16:2 (1988), 119-32.

two is not clearly defined, and it seems to me that those discussing the problem of evil are frequently careless in how they talk about the difference between evidential and logical formulations. At least four options as to the relevant difference between logical and evidential formulations seem to present themselves:

1. Logical formulations are deductive, whereas evidential formulations are inductive.
2. Logical formulations claim that God is incompatible with all evil, or evil *per se*, whereas evidential formulations only claim that God is incompatible with a certain type or class of evils.
3. Logical formulations claim that it is necessarily true that God is incompatible with certain types of evil, whereas evidential formulations only claim that it is likely that God is incompatible with certain types of evil.
4. Logical formulations make the strong conclusion that the existence of evil entails the logical impossibility of God's existence, whereas evidential formulations only make the weaker conclusion that the existence of evil renders God's existence unlikely.

I want to show that none of these options presents a situation in which we should abandon a logically binding formulation of the problem of evil. Ultimately, any of these interpretations either a) fail to represent a significant difference between the two formulations, such that the two formulations - evidential and logical - are to be treated any differently, or else b) fail to offer a sufficient motivation to warrant shifting from logical to evidential formulations. The conclusion of my arguments will be that we have no good reason to dismiss logical formulations of the problem of evil, formulations that rely upon a strong sense of deductive or logical inconsistency, and are therefore logically binding. Crucially for my overall thesis, the problem of evil remains *unavoidable*. That is, the problem of evil must be solved, even if that resolution is merely tacit or implicit.

I want to show that we can switch to an alternative formulation of the logical problem of evil, one that Plantinga's challenge does not defeat, and that evades all the other motivations we might have for shifting away from logical formulations. Over the course of discussing the four ways in which we can interpret the relevant difference between logical and evidential formulations of the problem of evil, I will offer a few examples of such a 'logical' formulation, starting with the simplest versions and progressing through layers of complexity until I finally get to my attempt at formulating a deductively valid (and arguably sound) logical problem of evil. I do not think I need to rely upon the success of this full-

fledged formulation to make the more general point of my thesis, but it might be helpful and productive in its own right, and act as an illustration of the kind of morally aware formulation of the problem of evil that I will gesture towards throughout my thesis. Since I do not hold any great expectations of convincing anyone of its soundness, once I have presented my full-fledged formulation of the problem of evil I will then retreat to a ‘meta-formulation’ of the problem of evil, one that captures the structure of all variations of the problem of evil (including Mackie’s original formulation, and my full-fledged formulation). This meta-formulation remains a logical formulation, in that it remains logically binding, but lacks the persuasiveness and complexity of a full-fledged formulation; it should, nonetheless, be more agreeable as a result of its being more approximate and less ambitious. The meta-formulation can then be used as a foundation for the remainder of my thesis.

1.1.2 The relevant difference between logical and evidential formulations

As has been noted, there is huge variation in what is perceived as being the relevant difference between logical and evidential formulations of the problem of evil. I think some options are more plausible and popular than others, but I will argue against each of them in turn, starting with what I take to be the most common and plausible way of understanding the relevant difference between logical and evidential formulations of the problem of evil: Logical formulations are deductive, whereas evidential formulations are inductive. I will then move on to the other options of how to understand the relevant difference between logical and evidential formulations of the problem of evil, and argue that they too offer up no good reason to warrant dismissing logically binding formulations of the problem of evil.

1.2 Option 1: Deductive versus inductive formulations

The point of focus for this perceived difference between logical and evidential formulations is the debate between Alvin Plantinga and J. L. Mackie. The perception is that Plantinga showed Mackie’s logical formulation to not be deductively valid, and therefore any future formulations of the problem of evil would need to abandon the aspiration towards deductively valid argument. Inductive argument would then present the next best alternative, and this is what evidential formulations of the problem of evil aspire to achieve.

I will argue that Plantinga’s challenge to Mackie, though remaining a successful refutation of Mackie’s formulation, does not offer us sufficient motivation to warrant shifting

away from deductively valid formulations of the problem of evil. Plantinga's criticisms are successful against Mackie's formulation, but not against all logical formulations of the problem of evil. We can easily reformulate the problem of evil to evade Plantinga's challenge to the problem's *validity*, even if his challenge would remain a challenge to the *soundness* of any argument that resulted from the problem. My argument ought to do away with any motivations we have for abandoning logical formulations of the problem of evil on the basis of anything Plantinga offers. I will then move on to attacking what might be seen as the positive motivations for shifting towards evidential formulations. These positive motivations mainly consist in a recognition that a premise within the problem of/argument from evil contains a crucial inductive step. Because of the presence of this inductive step, it is concluded that the argument from evil is better formulated as an inductive argument. I will argue that this is a mistake.

Having dealt with both the positive and negative motivations for shifting from logical to evidential formulations of the problem of evil, I will conclude by pointing out that under this understanding of what the relevant difference between the logical and evidential formulations is (i.e., deductive versus inductive argument), there is in reality no significant shift to be made. Things have always been as they are now; the old-fashioned logical argument was always based upon inductive 'evidence', and the new-fangled evidential formulations are just as deductively logically binding as their logical forebears ever were. We therefore have no reason to abandon logically binding formulations of the problem of evil under this first option.

1.2.1 *Plantinga evaded*

As I briefly covered earlier, one of Plantinga's central assumptions in taking on Mackie's formulation of the problem of evil is that any proposition that is additional to the original three premises must be 'necessarily true' if it is to expose an implicit contradiction, and thus render Mackie's argument deductively valid. This is because this addition would only be acting as a qualifying statement or quasi-logical rule, intended to express the connection between the original three propositions. But the special requirement that these additions be necessarily true is only a product of needing to go looking for an implicit contradiction.¹⁶ If we reformulate the problem of evil in such a way that the contradiction is

¹⁶ The overly assuming nature of Plantinga's requirement that any addition to Mackie's propositions be *necessarily* true has recently been criticised from a slightly different angle. Anders Kraal thinks Plantinga was

explicit or formal, then we lose this special requirement. The first thing to ask, therefore, is why on earth we should feel bound to Mackie's formulation of the original three propositions? We can easily reformulate the problem of evil in such a way that a contradiction is made explicit or formal, and if we do this then Plantinga's challenge ceases to be a challenge to the deductive validity of the logical problem of evil. The easiest way to do this would be to build the additions into the premises from the outset, expressing both the relevant divine properties and the perceived incompatibility between God and evil, giving something like so:

- A1. A maximally-good, maximally-powerful creator of the universe would not create or permit any evil in its creation.¹⁷
- A2. Some evil exists.

If we now add the proposition 'A maximally-good, maximally-powerful creator of the universe exists' (i.e., in short-hand, 'God exists') then we would have a straightforwardly inconsistent set. The contradiction would be formal, in this case, and therefore we have no need to go looking for an implicit contradiction. We therefore have no requirement that any of these premises, or any component thereof, be necessarily true. We now have a deductively valid inconsistent set of propositions, and we can debate which of these propositions are more likely to be true or not.

Plantinga's challenge, in the form of his Free-Will Defence, would not then threaten the logical status of the problem of evil, for it would only (at most) show that one of the propositions is not necessarily true. His original challenge to the validity of the problem of evil becomes (at most) a challenge to its soundness only.

It is worth noting that this formulation has some advantages over Mackie's formulation (his original three propositions). Firstly, it clearly identifies the crucial premise of A1; the premise that sets up the incompatibility between God and evil. Secondly, it is straightforwardly deductively valid. Thirdly, it has fewer premises, which may indicate greater simplicity (if that is to be considered a virtue). Fourthly, it does not require any

mistaken to understand Mackie as appealing to necessary truths here, instead limiting himself to appealing to what he took theists to believe. See Anders Kraal, 'Has Plantinga "buried" Mackie's Logical Argument from Evil?', *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion*, 75:3 (2014), 189-196. Either way, it is surely time to reappraise the consensus view that the logical problem of evil has been refuted by Alvin Plantinga.

¹⁷ This is a fairly natural way of stating the basic entailment, which could be reduced to: 'If God exists, then evil wouldn't.' Although 'would not' does not simply translate into the 'if/then' form of a conditional, I think this form captures the underlying intuition that there is a contradiction within Mackie's original three propositions.

additional qualifying statements in order to achieve a logical inconsistency, which is really the same thing as saying that it is straightforwardly deductively valid.

Why, then, should we not adopt this formulation of the problem of evil? Well, it might be argued that, whereas Mackie's formulation moves from propositions that are readily acceptable to any theist, this formulation is not so obviously acceptable, if only because the propositions are more complex. The original three propositions were fairly obviously *prima facie* true for most theists, whereas these propositions are not so obviously so. Though most theists would readily consent to God being both maximally-good and maximally-powerful, fewer (at least if Plantinga's response is anything to go by) would so easily consent to the notion that, because of this, God would not permit any evil in His creation. Any argument that is based upon this formulation of the problem of evil would hold little weight with such a theist, and this might be considered a significant failure, if the intention of the problem of evil were to facilitate an argument from evil that would hold some sway with all theists.

But this is not a very good reason to reject the formulation. After all, the original formulation (that of Mackie's 1, 2, 3) included a claim that not all theists were willing to accept; namely, that evil existed. The history of the discussion of the problem of evil is replete with examples of theists who have denied that this premise was true.¹⁸ The point is not whether the premises within the argument from evil are *ultima facie* acceptable to all theists, but only that the premises are *prima facie* true to most theists most of the time (or even some theists some of the time). And it certainly seems to be *prima facie* true for most theists (as the original perception of the intuitive contradiction between Mackie's original three propositions indicates) that a maximally-good, maximally-powerful God would prevent any evil in His creation.

That this premise is certainly not necessarily true is not a threat to the validity of the problem, only to its soundness. That the problem is deductively valid entails that it is 'logical' under this first way of understanding the difference between logical and evidential formulations, and certainly remains logically binding; no one can consistently maintain the truth of all three propositions. This is all the problem of evil ever sought to achieve, and as such ought to be considered successful in this form. The argument from evil, however, might be left in poorer shape. It is worth spending some time expanding upon the difference between the 'problem of' and 'argument from' evil, for the two are not the same, and they do not share the same success conditions.

¹⁸ Consider, for example, Alexander Pope's *Essay On Man*, or perhaps the Augustinian notion of *privatio boni*.

1.2.1.1 The argument from evil

The argument from evil sets out to say something about the world. Specifically, it seeks to establish the non-existence of God by arguing from the existence of the many and varied evils that we find in our world. For illustration, we can assume the simple form of the problem of evil just mentioned, and convert it into an argument from evil to the non-existence of God by adding the conclusion ‘Therefore, God does not exist’.

This argument has a very simple logical form: $P \rightarrow \neg Q$, $Q: \neg P$. Given the simplicity of the form, the proof is equally simple: Introduce a double negation to premise A2, giving $\neg\neg Q$, and use that negation to apply *modus tollens* to A1, yielding $\neg P$. So this argument is formally valid: it is impossible for the premises to be true whilst the conclusion is false. But if you are trying to establish the truth of a conclusion, validity is not the whole story. We must also ask whether the premises are true; that is, is the argument sound as well as valid?

This is where theodicies kick-off, and where Plantinga steps in. A theodicy seeks to defend the existence of God against the challenge of the argument from evil. Theodicies, therefore, deny the truth of the conclusion of the argument from evil, and as such (given the validity of the argument) must deny the truth of one of the premises. But this is easily done; either premise can plausibly be denied; neither premise is necessarily true. Perhaps God would create or permit evil in His creation if He had a morally sufficient reason for doing so, such as if his permitting of this evil was necessary for the achievement of greater goods. This would make premise A1 false, and it is Plantinga’s move. Equally, perhaps we are mistaken in our perception of premise A2; perhaps evil does not exist, and we only experience a false appearance of evil, or a ‘privation of the good’. This would make premise A2 false. Either of these strategies is an effective way to counter the necessary truth of the conclusion, and as such weaken the persuasive force of the argument.

That the premises within the argument are not necessarily *ultima facie* true for all theists does, therefore, weaken the argument from evil, because we are not entirely persuaded to accept the conclusion. We might, therefore, consider the argument to have failed, for it certainly has not compelled its conclusion.

1.2.1.2 The problem of evil

The problem of evil does not set out to say anything about the world. Rather than arguing for any particular conclusion, its aims are to prompt the theist to establish consistency within their beliefs. Reprising the simple form, it looks something like this:

- P1. There exists a maximally-good, maximally-powerful creator of the universe.
- P2. A maximally-good, maximally-powerful creator of the universe would not create or permit any evil in its creation.
- P3. Some evil exists.

This form is clearly reminiscent of the argument from evil: $P, P \rightarrow \neg Q, Q$. It is an inconsistent set of propositions; it is not possible without contradiction to assert all three propositions as true simultaneously; the truth of any two entails the falsity of the remaining third. The ‘problem’ is that all three appear to be at least *prima facie* true for a theist. Therefore, the theist must face the challenge of resolving an apparent inconsistency within their beliefs by denying at least one of the premises - this is what it means to ‘solve’ the problem of evil.

The theist is entirely free in how they do this. They could adopt either of the theodical strategies mentioned in the previous section, so finding a way to deny P2 or P3. Alternatively, they could maintain the truth of P2 and P3, and be forced to reject P1, so accepting atheism, or significantly modifying traditional theism. The point of the logical problem of evil is that the theist *must* do either of these if they are to avoid endorsing the truth of an inconsistent set of propositions. This ‘must’ is forced with the force of a logical must, mandated by the law of non-contradiction.

That the rejection of P1 is intuitively considered the most natural solution for the problem of evil is the reason the argument from evil gets off the ground, so it is not surprising that the lines between the two variations get blurred. And, certainly, one might be thought of as relying upon the other; perhaps the argument from evil ought to be thought of as an extension of the problem of evil. But this extension would only be warranted to the extent that we were certain of the truth of premises P2 and P3. If a theodist gives us reason to doubt the truth of either of those, then the motivation for moving towards the argument from evil is weakened.

The key difference between the two variations (i.e., argument and problem) is the stated aims and intended conclusions. The argument from evil seeks to establish the non-existence of God; the problem of evil seeks only to establish consistency - or rather, resolve the apparent inconsistency - within the theist’s beliefs. Both variations are ‘logical’, if by ‘logical’ we mean relying upon a notion of deductive validity, but they do not necessarily share the same level of commitment, nor therefore the same level of success. For success is to be determined by the extent to which each variation achieves its stated aim, and the stated

aims are very different. That Plantinga successfully weakens the argument from evil, to such a degree that it might be considered to have failed, does not entail that we can no longer present the logical version of the *problem* of evil. Since the failure of the argument from evil in no way entails the failure of the problem of evil, the logical problem still applies.

Plantinga's original response to Mackie did defeat the logical status of the problem of evil as formulated by Mackie, but only because Plantinga claimed the special requirement that any additional premises must be necessarily true. This special requirement was only generated from the very specific task of looking for an implicit contradiction within Mackie's original three propositions. I do not see why we should accept this special requirement in all cases and apply it to components in every formulation of the problem of evil, even if it does apply to Mackie's formulation. We can easily formulate versions of the problem of evil that are deductively valid, even if their corresponding argumentative formulations remain rhetorically weak. Plantinga has given an excellent reason to deny that there are deductively sound arguments from evil, but no good reason to deny that there are deductively valid formulations of the problem of evil.

1.2.1.3 Conclusion

The differences between the argument from and problem of evil, chiefly the recognition of their very different aims, reveal that the two variations have radically different success criteria. Arguably, Plantinga's challenge entails the failure of the logical argument from evil, but his challenge does not entail the failure of all formulations of the logical problem of evil. The argument from evil needs soundness, whereas the problem of evil only needs validity. A challenge to the soundness of the logical argument from evil is not a threat to the validity of the logical problem of evil. Plantinga only offers a challenge to the (suitably reformulated) argument from evil. Therefore, Plantinga's challenge does not entail the failure of the logical problem of evil.

1.2.2 The shift to evidential formulations on the basis of the perceived failure of the logical argument from evil: William Rowe and Michael Tooley

The previous section identified the difference between the problem of and argument from evil, and showed that the failure of the latter does not entail the failure of the former. And yet, there is a sense in which those who call for a shift to evidential formulations of the

problem of evil are inclined to think otherwise. The motivation for this seems to stem from a willingness to adopt a notion of ‘logical’ argument that extends Plantinga’s original requirement that any premises in addition to Mackie’s original three propositions be necessarily true to *every* premise in the argument from evil. This is a mistake; I will now show why.

Any discussion of the evidential argument from evil ought to begin with William Rowe, so this I shall briefly do. Here is Rowe’s formulation of the argument from evil; it is strongly reminiscent of the form of my simple version:

- R1. There exist instances of intense suffering which an omnipotent, omniscient being could have prevented without thereby losing some greater good or permitting some evil equally bad or worse.
- R2. An omniscient, wholly good being would prevent the occurrence of any intense suffering it could, unless it could not do so without thereby losing some greater good or permitting some evil equally bad or worse.
- R3. [Therefore] There does not exist an omnipotent, omniscient, wholly good being.¹⁹

Rowe concedes Plantinga’s broader point that it remains logically possible that any instance of perceived evil is in fact justified by the existence of greater goods, but argues that it nevertheless remains reasonable to believe otherwise. It is very difficult to see what possible good could result from a deer suffering a painful death over the course of five days after having been burnt in a forest fire. What good could be achieved by a five-day death that could not be achieved by a four-day death, for example? Rowe’s conclusion is that the existence of such evil in the world remains evidence against the existence of God, even if it cannot count as conclusive proof of His non-existence.

Rowe still considers his argument valid,²⁰ which it is, but concedes that it is not necessarily sound, for premise R1 is not necessarily true. From this alone, he and others conclude that we ought to shift towards evidential formulations of the problem of evil. But given what I have said in the previous section, why should we consider this a threat to the logical problem of evil? All that Rowe allows to be open to doubt is whether a premise within the argument is true or not; that is, he questions the soundness of the argument, but not the

¹⁹ William Rowe, ‘The Evidential Argument from Evil’, in Michael Peterson et al. (eds.), *Philosophy of Religion: Selected Readings*, 3rd edition (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), pp. 354–64 (p. 355).

²⁰ ‘The argument is valid; therefore, if we have rational grounds for accepting its premises, to that extent we have rational grounds for accepting atheism.’ Ibid., p. 356.

validity of the underlying problem. It remains the case that *if* there are instances of intense suffering such that an omnipotent, omniscient being could have prevented them without thereby losing some greater good or permitting some evil equally bad or worse, and R2 is true (which, perhaps controversially, seems to be taken as largely uncontroversial), *then* there cannot exist such an omnipotent, wholly-good being. The theist must still deny one premise here, just as the logical problem maintains.

So if Rowe thinks the potential falsity of one premise within his argument is sufficient to warrant abandoning ‘logical’ formulations of the problem of evil, then he seems to think that any ‘logical’ formulation must not only be valid, but must also be made up of entirely *necessarily* true premises. And he is not alone in thinking this, it seems. Consider, for example, Michael Tooley’s view:

How would one go about establishing, via a purely deductive argument that a deer’s suffering a slow and painful death because of a forest fire, or a child’s undergo [*sic*] lingering suffering and eventual death due to cancer, is not logically necessary either to achieve a greater good or to avoid a greater evil? [...] If a premise such as [R1] cannot, at least at present, be established deductively, then the only possibility, it would seem, is to offer some sort of inductive argument in support of the relevant premise. But if this is right, then it is surely best to get that crucial inductive step out into the open, and thus to formulate the argument from evil not as a deductive argument for the very strong claim that it is logically impossible for both God and evil to exist, (or for God and certain types, or instances, of evil to exist), but as an evidential (inductive/probabilistic) argument for the more modest claim that there are evils that actually exist in the world that make it unlikely that God exists.²¹

Now, if we read Tooley in an unsympathetic way, we could respond with an incredibly trivial answer here. In order for the problem of evil to be considered ‘logical’, Tooley wants a ‘purely deductive’ argument that establishes the truth of a premise like R1; that is, R1 must be the product of a deductively valid argument that contains no inductive premises or steps. This is, strictly speaking, an incredibly easy thing to achieve. For example: One plus one equals two, and if one plus one equals two then R1 is true...therefore, R1 is true. This is a deductively valid argument that establishes the truth of R1, and it contains no obviously inductive steps, but it is not a good argument and is clearly not what Tooley is looking for. What he wants is for R1 to be supported by an argument that is both purely deductively valid (i.e., including no inductive steps) and *sound*. But an argument that is deductively valid, composed of premises that are themselves deductively valid (i.e. containing no inductive steps), and sound is an argument that is *necessarily* sound. This, as

²¹ Michael Tooley, ‘The Problem of Evil’, *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, 2012, available at: <<http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/evil/>> [accessed 03/09/2014].

Tooley is aware, is a very difficult thing to achieve. As a result, he concludes that the problem of evil ought not to be formulated as a logical problem.

We can extract the relevant line of reasoning here, and condense it into a simple claim: If a premise within an argument cannot be established ‘purely deductively’, then the argument is better formulated as an inductive (evidential/probabilistic) argument. It seems, then, that Rowe, Tooley, et al., think that in order for an argument to be considered ‘logical’ it must be deductively valid and composed of premises that are themselves the product of deductively valid arguments; that is, they must include absolutely no inductive steps. I will call this feature ‘deductively valid all the way down’ (DVATWD), and it is a very bad criterion for what we are to consider ‘logical’ arguments.

I will argue that DVATWD an utterly unreasonable demand to place upon what we are to consider ‘logical’ arguments. It is not what logicians typically think a ‘logical’ argument is, and neither is it what most philosophers (and non-philosophers) would recognise as the criterion of a ‘logical’ argument. It restricts the potential list of ‘logical’ arguments to a vanishingly small number of largely uninteresting tautologies.

1.2.3 ‘Logical’ arguments

What do we mean by ‘logical’ argument? Well, consider this collection of quotations from an introductory logic textbook:

Logic is not really concerned with particular matters of fact. Logic is not really about the way things actually are in the world. Rather, logic is about argument.²²

For the logician, deductive argument is valid argument, i.e. validity is the logical standard of deductive argument.²³

What is it about a valid argument with true premises which compels us to accept the conclusion of that argument? [...] It is *logical force*, the force of reason. [...] We can appeal to the definition of validity to cash out quite what logical force comes to: valid arguments establish the truth of their conclusions conditionally upon the truth of all their premises.²⁴

It is clear from even these few introductory remarks that, for a logician, whether an argument is logical or not is primarily dependent upon deductive validity. It is also clear that logical arguments are not necessarily only those that can be considered good or successful arguments. Good arguments require validity and true premises, and whether premises are true or not is an issue of soundness, not validity. Sound arguments might be a strong indication of

²² Paul Tomassi, *Logic* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2007), p. 4.

²³ Ibid., p. 7.

²⁴ Ibid., p. 9 (emphasis added in place of emboldened text).

good arguments, and a certain indication (by definition) of logical arguments, but that does not mean that only sound arguments are logical arguments.

You can have bad logical arguments:

1. If the moon is made of cheese, then I'm a flamingo.
2. The moon is made of cheese.
3. Therefore, I'm a flamingo.

And good logical arguments:

1. All men are mortal.
2. Socrates is a man.
3. Therefore, Socrates is mortal.

But in all cases, what makes an argument logical is its deductive validity. It seems Rowe and Tooley disagree with this point. They require that, in order for the problem of evil to be considered 'logical', it and its premises must be deductively valid all the way down. This entails that, for them, logical arguments are only those that contain absolutely no inductive steps. I will call this 'The Tooley Definition'. This definition cannot be correct, for it places an utterly unreasonable demand upon what we can consider to be 'logical' arguments.

Consider, for example, what Tooley et al. would make of the good logical argument just stated. I would take it to be fairly uncontroversial that the old 'Socrates is mortal' example is an archetypal 'logical' argument; indeed, Plantinga cites a version of it as an archetypal 'formally contradictory' argument.²⁵ And yet, is it deductively valid all the way down? Consider 1: 'All men are mortal.' How would we establish 'via a purely deductive argument' the truth of this premise? Well, one might wish to go down the route of claiming that 'by definition, human beings are mortal', but I do not think that this is commonly what people would take to be adequate justification for the truth of this premise. If this premise is true, then it is because all the evidence available to us tells us that it is so! It is because every human we have ever known of has died that we conclude that 'all men are mortal'. It is an empirical claim, and therefore relies, ultimately, upon an inductive step. It is the product of an inductive argument.

²⁵ Though, perhaps revealing a bit of trickery on Plantinga's part, he does alter the standard rendition of this argument to include a more explicit entailment: 'If all men are mortal, then Socrates is mortal.' Alvin Plantinga, *God, Freedom, and Evil*, p. 13.

The same applies to 2: ‘Socrates is a man.’ This is an empirical claim. It is not logically necessary that Socrates be a man; it is not impossible that Socrates was not a man. It is not possible to know *a priori*, nor establish purely deductively, that Socrates is a man. Therefore, this archetypal logical argument is not deductively valid all the way down, and as such ought to be, according to the Tooley definition, formulated as an inductive argument. This is an ‘evidential argument for the mortality of Socrates’.

But it is absurd not to call the Socrates argument ‘logical’. The Socrates argument is definitely logical, and yet according to the DVATWD criterion for logical arguments, it is not. Therefore, the DVATWD criterion is incorrect.

Note that the same applies if we include a DVATWD premise. Consider:

1. All bachelors are unmarried men.
2. Mike is a bachelor.
3. Therefore, Mike is an unmarried man.

This is a deductively valid argument, of the same form as ‘Socrates’, but where we had a logically contingent claim of ‘all men are mortal’, we now have a logically necessary claim: ‘All bachelors are unmarried men.’ This is necessarily true; it is impossible that it be false. This premise is deductively valid all the way down. But, unfortunately, premise 2 is not so lucky. Though Mike might actually be a bachelor, it could never be necessarily true that he would be, and it could never be established ‘purely deductively’ that he is. Again, 2 is an empirical claim, and as such cannot ever be deductively valid all the way down. Once again, according to the DVATWD criterion of what it takes for an argument to be ‘logical’, this is not a logical argument. We should ‘get our inductive step out into the open’, and formulate this as an inductive argument for the conclusion that Mike is (probably) an unmarried man.

What can be considered a ‘logical’ argument, according to the Tooley definition? The answer is clear: hardly any argument. Specifically, only those arguments that are deductively valid all the way down. That is, only arguments that are deductively valid, whose premises are themselves deductively valid, etc., and that contain no inductive steps. Which means, ultimately, only those arguments that are composed entirely of necessary truths - premises for which it is not the case that they could possibly be false. This seems to have extended Plantinga’s original requirement that any *additional* premises be necessarily true to apply to

all premises within the problem of evil. To my mind, to do this limits the list of ‘logical’ arguments to statements in mathematics, and otherwise entirely uninteresting tautologies.²⁶

Surely, if we mean anything at all by calling an argument ‘logical’, we mean *only* that it is deductively valid. Whether its premises happen to be true or not, potentially true or not, possibly false or not, is entirely beside the point. So that Plantinga has successfully shown that a premise within the argument from/problem of evil is possibly false makes absolutely no difference to the status of the argument/problem as being a ‘logical’ argument/problem. (Unless, of course, you stick with Mackie’s formulation and so accept Plantinga’s requirement that any premise that is additional to Mackie’s original three be necessarily true. This, however, is not what Rowe and Tooley are doing, and I have argued that we are under no obligation to stick with Mackie’s original three propositions.)

If we insist that any ‘logical’ argument must be deductively valid all the way down, then we commit ourselves to an unreasonable standard of ‘logical’ argument, one which would limit the list of properly-called ‘logical’ arguments to a vanishingly small number. It therefore seems clear that we are still quite free to formulate overtly logical versions of the problem of evil, even if some of the premises within that formulation are not necessarily *ultima facie* true for the theist. So long as the problem is composed of a set of propositions that constitute an inconsistent set, then it will remain a logical problem; and so long as those propositions are *prima facie* true for the theist, then the logical problem of evil will remain a pertinent and unavoidable problem for the theist. The problem of evil, at least as Rowe presents it in its ‘evidential’ form, remains a deductively valid ‘logical’ problem, one that cannot, therefore, be left unresolved by anyone rational, on pain of contradiction.

1.2.4 ‘Evidential’ arguments

Having said all that, we might still be intuitively inclined to call it an ‘evidential’ argument, in that a) it is an argument for the non-existence of God, and therefore counts as evidence against the sort of cumulative case argument for the existence of God presented by

²⁶ This is not to even mention the issues raised by W. V. O. Quine in his ‘Two Dogmas of Empiricism’, *Philosophical Review*, 60 (1951), 20–43. Arguably, a combination of the DVATWD criterion for logical arguments and Quine’s view entails that *no* argument is logical. Similar could be said of such a combination of the DVATWD criterion with Wittgenstein’s view: ‘...one cannot contrast mathematical certainty with the relative uncertainty of empirical propositions. For the mathematical proposition has been obtained by a series of actions that are in no way different from the actions of the rest of our lives...’ Ludwig Wittgenstein, *On Certainty*, G. E. M. Anscombe and G. H. von Wright, eds., trans. by G. E. M. Anscombe and Denis Paul (Oxford: Blackwell, 1969), §651.

Richard Swinburne,²⁷ and b) it is an argument for the non-existence of God that is based upon evidence, in some form. But though there is clearly an ambiguity in how we describe evil as ‘evidence against the existence of God’,²⁸ with some philosophers no doubt taking this to mean ‘an argument based upon evidence’ and others just as ‘an argument against the existence of God’, this linguistic carelessness does not justify abandoning the notion that the problem of evil can be a fundamentally logically binding problem, relying upon a notion of deductive logical inconsistency. For nothing has really changed here. The logical argument from evil always counted as ‘evidence against’ God’s existence, but that (alone) did not render it an ‘evidential’ argument. Further, the argument from evil was always based upon ‘evidence’, in that even Mackie’s original three contained the claim that ‘evil exists’, and, as I have mentioned, this has always been a disputed empirical claim.

1.2.5 Conclusion

So, given that this has always been the case, and that Rowe and Tooley’s motivation for the shift is not a valid one, we are left without cause to shift from deductive logical formulations of the problem of evil towards merely evidential, inductive versions. With the caveat, of course, that Mackie’s original three propositions will not cut the mustard. I have presented one very simple formulation of the argument from evil that avoids Plantinga’s challenge, and found that version echoed in Rowe’s formulation. This formulation remains as a ‘logical’ problem for the theist, if we understand the definition of ‘logical’ formulation as being primarily one of deductive validity, but it is (perhaps) not persuasive as an argument. It is too easily avoided because the premises are too easy to deny, and so we should move on to the second understanding of the relevant difference between logical and evidential formulations of the problem of evil, because that discussion can conclude with a more robust formulation that might hold more weight with theists generally.

1.3 Option 2: Evil per se, or evil specified?

Understanding the relevant difference between logical and evidential formulations of the problem of evil as being chiefly one of deductive versus inductive arguments has been shown to offer us no good reason to warrant abandoning logically binding formulations of the problem of evil. I will now consider the prospects of the second option; that of understanding

²⁷ See., e.g., Richard Swinburne’s *The Existence of God*, 2nd edition (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).

²⁸ Michael Tooley, ‘The Problem of Evil’.

the relevant difference between evidential and logical problems of evil as being God's incompatibility with all evil (or evil *per se*), or God's incompatibility with some specified type or class of evils. According to this option, logical formulations, it is claimed, assert the necessary incompatibility between God and evil *per se*, whereas evidential formulations only assert the necessary incompatibility between God and certain types of evil.

For someone wishing to claim that logical formulations of the problem of evil have failed, this is probably the best option; at least insofar as it is the option under which that claim is most obviously true. I consider it fairly obvious that few people believe that a maximally-good, maximally-powerful creator of the universe is logically incompatible with the existence of *any evil whatsoever*, no matter how minor or insignificant. I will, therefore, not spend any time trying to defend the claim that God is logically incompatible with evil *per se*, and will concede that point immediately. Instead, I will claim that there is no historical warrant for taking this option; that is, there is no historical warrant for understanding the relevant difference between logical and evidential formulations to be that of God's being incompatible with evil *per se* or just some specified types of evil. I do not think many people seriously, absent of straw-men, understood the logical formulation of the problem of evil as making this strong claim, and it is certainly not how most participants in the contemporary debate (the aforementioned Rowe, Tooley, et al., for example) understand the logical formulation. Secondly, even if this option is taken (or is judged to be the correct way to understand the relevant difference between logical and evidential formulations), it will remain the case that we can easily formulate an 'evidential' version of the problem of evil that is logically binding and therefore (crucially for my overall thesis) unavoidable. This formulation of the problem of evil, through restricting God's incompatibility to certain specified types of evil, would be an 'evidential' formulation according to this way of defining the difference between logical and evidential formulations, but it would serve all the purposes that I would require of what I would otherwise call a 'logical' formulation. Apart from the superficial issue of which label we are to apply to my eventual full-fledged and meta-formulations, taking this option will therefore have no effect on the overall outcome of my thesis.

1.3.1 Logical formulations: God's incompatibility with all evil (evil *per se*)

According to option 2, a logical formulation of the problem of evil would look very much like the simple version I outlined earlier (perhaps with a little italicised emphasis):

- P1. There exists a maximally-good, maximally-powerful creator of the universe.
- P2. A maximally-good, maximally-powerful creator of the universe would not create or permit *any* evil in its creation.
- P3. Some evil exists.

This formulation of the problem of evil, and specifically premise 2, states that there is an incompatibility between God and evil *per se*. That is, if God is maximally-good and maximally-powerful, then there should not be any evil in the world, no matter how minor or seemingly insignificant. If we take for granted the fact that ‘evil’ is here being defined as any bad state of affairs (which is fairly standard practice), then this is a very strong claim. But it is a claim that has (at least *prima facie*) reasonable philosophical reasoning behind it, since once you establish that, in principle, God ought to be able to eliminate any one bad state of affairs, it stands to reason that He has the capability to eliminate every bad state of affairs. It is very difficult to draw the line as to when God need not bother eliminating ‘evil’ states of affairs, even to the point where the instance of evil in question is so minor as to be practically irrelevant. Imagine that one sub-atomic particle, in some distant corner of the universe, behaves in a way that is not in accordance with the maximal beauty and order of the universe. Under this logical formulation, this event would count as incontrovertible proof of the non-existence of God. Or (limiting ourselves to the more intuitive value of pain, rather than some ethereal concept of universal beauty) imagine that one of the tiniest life-forms in existence experiences the tiniest degree of pain imaginable, with no practical significance for it or those around it. The pain is miniscule, barely noticeable, and passes in an infinitesimally small period of time. It has no greater effect on the life-form’s life, nor any effect on the wider world. It remains a bad state of affairs, such that the world would have been better had it not occurred, but it is so to an infinitely small degree. According to this formulation of the logical problem of evil, this state of affairs entails that God does not exist. It even seems that, given that we can assume pleasure and pain to be uncontroversially of value, and that an absence of pleasure in life is (relatively speaking) worse or bad in comparison to the possibility of what life could be, this logical formulation commits one to the conclusion that should one individual not be perfectly happy for one moment in their existence, then God could not exist. These are, obviously, very strong claims. So strong, in fact, that they almost count as *reductios* for the underlying principle.

1.3.2 Evidential formulations: God's incompatibility with certain types of evils

An evidential formulation of the problem of evil under this option, on the other hand, does not assert that God is incompatible with evil *per se*, but rather makes the less expansive claim that there is a certain type or class of evil that is incompatible with God's existence. It would look something like this:

- E1. There exists a maximally-good, maximally-powerful creator of the universe.
- E2. A maximally-good, maximally-powerful creator of the universe would not create or permit any particularly bad evil in its creation.
- E3. Some particularly bad evil exists.

This formulation could arguably make room for the misbehaving sub-atomic particle, the unpleasant experience of our poor little life-form, and an imperfect moment of happiness in an otherwise perfect life, since none of these things are particularly bad. The rather subjective judgement as to which evils are to be considered particularly bad or not, such that they are incompatible with God's existence, is what leaves this 'evidential' formulation open to the wiggle room that is so characteristic of evidential formulations generally. Any argument from evil, based upon this formulation of the problem, is left with conclusions that are only true to the extent that its key premise is true; like William Rowe's argument, we must conclude that 'therefore, probably, God does not exist', rather than simply 'therefore, God does not exist'.

1.3.3 These logical formulations are unreasonable

I have nothing to say in defence of a logical formulation under this understanding. It seems to me to be utterly unreasonable. To say that the occurrence of one infinitesimally small instance of a bad state of affairs is sufficient motivation to categorically reject the existence of God is to assert the conclusion of a philosophical problem that has no basis in any religious understanding of God, nor any relevance for the wider world. No one would ever seriously think, 'My life is really happy, but it's not perfectly happy; I feel I could be happier...so how can people say there's a God?!' That would be a parody of the problem of evil. Not only is that problem, so framed, of no concern to anyone, but any argument formulated on the basis of it would convince no one. It is extreme suffering, evil that is 'particularly bad', that drives, and has always driven, people to question the existence of an all-loving God. So if this is the correct option to take, if this is what we mean when we

distinguish ‘logical’ from ‘evidential’ formulations, then I side completely with evidential formulations, and conclude that we should reject logical formulations.

The mistake of this kind of logical formulation was to define ‘evil’ only as being simply any ‘bad state of affairs’. It is not the case that the problem of evil is motivated by *any* bad state of affairs; it is only the worst degree of that category that counts as problematic for belief in God. If the logical problem of evil is understood primarily in terms of making the bold claim that *any* bad state of affairs is incompatible with God’s existence, then it parodies itself, and reduces itself to absurdity.

1.3.3.1 *The limited consequences of the failure of these logical formulations*

Should this be the case, however, then the success of evidential formulations under this understanding should not be taken to be equated in any way with the features of evidential arguments under the previous option that I considered (Rowe and Tooley’s, for example), or the other options that I will outline. The evidential formulation being understood as a version of the problem of evil that operates with a premise which states an incompatibility between God and only certain types of evil remains deductively valid, logically binding, relying upon a notion of logical inconsistency, and makes a strong conclusion that God cannot exist given the existence of the specified type of evil. That is, it remains a ‘logical’ formulation under any of the other ways of understanding the key difference between evidential and logical formulations. This ‘evidential’ formulation serves all the purposes that I require a ‘logical’ formulation to do: It remains logically binding, deductively valid, and as such unavoidable.

Related to this point is the observation that the drawing of this distinction, and the situating of it entirely in the issue of ‘evil *per se*’ versus ‘evil of a certain kind’, lacks any of the features that are often cited as being relevant to evidential formulations. The deductive/inductive distinction is no longer relevant, likewise *a priori/a posteriori*, logical necessity versus probability, etc. In short, all of the issues that Rowe and Tooley identify as being relevant to the distinction between logical and evidential formulations are absent here. Indeed, Tooley seems to explicitly rule out option 2 in the quotation that I cited earlier:

...formulate the argument from evil not as a deductive argument for the very strong claim that it is logically impossible for both God and evil to exist, (or for God and *certain types, or instances, of evil* to exist), but as an evidential (inductive/probabilistic) argument for the more

modest claim that there are evils that actually exist in the world that make it unlikely that God exists.²⁹

Tooley clearly states that it is an option for the logical (deductive) formulation to state the incompatibility between God and either evil *per se* or ‘certain types, or instances, of evil’.

Although this is all strong evidence in favour of rejecting this option, none of what I say here establishes the falsity of this option, only its irrelevance. If someone should choose to take this option, and see the relevant difference between logical and evidential formulations as being the incompatibility between God and evil *per se* or only evil of a certain kind, then our disagreement will only amount to one of ‘mere words’, of how we are to label the formulations of the problem of evil that I will proceed to work with. These formulations will work in exactly the same way, whatever we decide to call them.

1.4 Option 3: Necessary incompatibility versus contingent incompatibility

The third option states that the relevant difference between logical and evidential formulations of the problem of evil is that the logical argument from evil arrives at a ‘stronger’ conclusion, and the extra strength of its conclusion is due to the fact that it makes a stronger claim to the truth of its premises. Specifically, according to this option, logical formulations claim that the premise stating the incompatibility between God and (for the sake of argument) a certain type of evil is necessarily true, whereas evidential formulations only say that it is likely. So, to put it another way, logical formulations claim that ‘given the existence of this type of evil, God *definitely* doesn’t exist’, whereas evidential formulations limit themselves to the claim that ‘given the existence of this type of evil, God *probably* doesn’t exist’. That is, precisely inverting the kind of scepticism that Rowe and Tooley demonstrated regarding the judgement that any one instance of evil be of a kind that is incompatible with God’s existence (whilst being certain enough that the underlying incompatibility premise is true), these evidential formulations assert a scepticism as to the truth of the incompatibility premise whilst remaining certain enough of their judgement that such a type of evil exists.

Given the evident similarities between this option and what I said in response to Rowe and Tooley, it is clear that a lot of my arguments given there apply here also. That is, being sceptical as to the certainty of the truth of a premise in an argument does not make that argument invalid, nor threaten the validity of any underlying problem. There is still a logical

²⁹ Michael Tooley, ‘The Problem of Evil’ (emphasis added).

inconsistency between the underlying propositions. Further, the claim that it is *necessarily true* that God's existence is incompatible with a certain kind of evil amounts to the same thing as saying that it is DVATWD, and so any argument that we should shift to evidential formulations on these grounds becomes subject to the same counter-arguments outlined against that position; it is unreasonable to require any premise to be necessarily true in order for an argument to qualify as logical. I will not repeat myself here.

Similarly, much of what I said in response to option 2 applies here also. I do not see any evidence of understanding the relevant difference between logical and evidential formulations in this way in Rowe or Tooley, nor Plantinga, nor anyone else who has contributed significantly to the literature. Neither is it a burning issue for those who are not involved in the philosophical debate, yet consider the problem of evil to be a threat to religious belief. There is, therefore, a lack of evidence for the claim that this option is widely adopted. Should it be taken nonetheless, I reiterate that it would make nothing beyond a semantic difference to my overall thesis; the problem of evil would remain logically binding, relying upon a notion of logical inconsistency, and therefore remain unavoidable, even if we were to settle upon labelling it an 'evidential' formulation (since it would not claim any component of the problem to be necessarily true).

1.4.1 A specific response to option 3

However, there is a criticism that we can add as a specific response to this option, and it begins by noting the argumentative move made in my discussion of option 2. There, we noted that (what some people perhaps mistakenly believe to be) logical formulations are (erroneously) reported to claim that God is incompatible with evil *per se*, whilst evidential formulations weaken this claim to only extend the incompatibility to a certain kind of evil. The argumentative move to go from absurd logical formulations to reasonable evidential formulations is to simply specify a certain type or class of evils, such that they are more obviously incompatible with the existence of God. Option 3 now understands logical formulations to claim this incompatibility premise to be necessarily true, whereas evidential formulations only claim that it is probably true that God's existence is incompatible with certain types of evil. Should we wish to preserve logical formulations under this understanding, we would need to find a way to make that incompatibility premise necessarily true. And we can achieve this, simply by repeating the same argumentative step that we saw

in option 2. That is, we further specify which class of evils are incompatible with God's existence.

The first move of that kind, seen in the discussion of option 2, was to move from an unreasonable 'all evil/evil *per se*' to a more reasonable 'some evil', probably where that 'some evil' is understood as being the type or class of evil that is particularly bad. Moving on from this foundation, option 3 now seems to say something to the effect that logical formulations look like this:

- P1. There exists a maximally-good, maximally-powerful creator of the universe.
- P2. A maximally-good, maximally-powerful creator of the universe would not create or permit any particularly bad evil in its creation.
- P3. Some particularly bad evil exists.

Whereas evidential formulations look like this:

- E1. There exists a maximally-good, maximally-powerful creator of the universe.
- E2. Probably, a maximally-good, maximally-powerful creator of the universe would not create or permit any particularly bad evil in its creation.
- E3. Some particularly bad evil exists.

That is, the relevant difference between them is the degree to which we claim P2/E2 to be true. Logical formulations assert it as true (claim it as necessarily true), whereas evidential formulations only assert it as likely (contingently true). To save the logical formulation according to this option, we must make P2/E2 necessarily true, and we can do this quite easily by simply repeating the move made in the discussion of option 2. That is, we further specify the type of evil that is incompatible with God's existence. (People discussing the problem of evil tend to do this fairly intuitively, given that the usual practice is to set the incompatibility premise in stone, and then discuss the 'evil exists' premise.)³⁰

So, for example, we can further specify that God's existence is not necessarily incompatible with 'particularly bad' evil, but remains necessarily incompatible with 'pointless' or 'gratuitous' evil (that is, evil that the permission of which is not justified by a morally sufficient reason). Should the evidential formulator still claim that this is not necessarily true, then we can repeat the move and further specify that God's existence,

³⁰ As mentioned earlier, William Rowe, for example, seemed to take his incompatibility premise to be uncontroversially true.

though not necessarily incompatible with pointless evil, remains incompatible with ‘unconscionable’ evil (that is, evil that is beyond justification by morally sufficient reasons, and should under no circumstances be permitted by any being who has the power to do so). Either of these moves, should the evidential formulator accept the resulting incompatibility premise as being necessarily true, will push the debate back to the issue of whether or not such a type of evil occurs in the world, and this will leave us back in the position of Rowe and Tooley, and, according to this way of understanding the difference between evidential and logical formulations, back dealing with a logical formulation once again. Should the evidential formulator continue to reject the necessary truth of the incompatibility premise (which by now will be becoming very difficult), then we can repeat the move *ad infinitum*, until we eventually get to a merely structural definition of the type of evil that we are interested in. That is, something that looks like this:

- P1. There exists a maximally-good, maximally-powerful creator of the universe.
- P2. A maximally-good, maximally-powerful creator of the universe would not create or permit any evil (x) in its creation, where (x) is such that is incompatible with God’s existence.
- P3. Some evil (x) exists.

P2, in this instance, becomes simply tautologous, and therefore necessarily true. This would render the problem of evil a valid ‘logical’ problem, according to option 3. The crucial premise of P3 would now be stating something akin to ‘some evil exists that a maximally-good, maximally-powerful creator of the universe wouldn’t allow’, which is a perhaps roundabout way of saying things, but remains a meaningful proposition and is arguably the underlying intuition in any formulation of the problem of evil.

So even if we take option 3 to be a serious option, it is easy to save a logical formulation under this understanding, simply by further specifying the type or class of evils that God’s existence is taken to be incompatible with.³¹ But I do not think that we should take

³¹ This is very similar to the line of reasoning that Richard Swinburne follows in the opening chapter of his *Providence and the Problem of Evil* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), pp. 3-29. He begins by stating that the premise that there is at least one morally bad state (his ‘premiss four’) is ‘obviously true’ (p. 8), and so he discusses instead the incompatibility premise. Once suitably modified, however, the incompatibility premise is then fixed as being true (pp. 13-14), whereas: ‘the theist now denies the new fourth premiss. He claims there are no morally bad states of the kind specified there. [...] The atheist denies this.’ (p. 14) And eventually: ‘premise 2* [the modified incompatibility premise] would seem ... to be necessarily true. [...] Hence whether the atheist has a sound argument from his premisses to the non-existence of God turns solely on whether premise 4* [the modified ‘evil exists’ premise] is true.’ (p. 19) In general, people discussing the problem of evil have shown a tendency to fix the incompatibility premise by further specifying which type or class of evils God is taken to be

option 3 to be a serious option, since it falls foul of the criticisms that I levelled at both option 2 and option 1. I do not think many people see this as being the crucial difference between logical and evidential formulations, and it is a mistake to think that any component in a logical argument must be deductively valid all the way down or otherwise necessarily true.

1.5 Option 4: Strong versus weak conclusions

The final option states that the relevant difference between logical and evidential formulations of the problem of evil is that logical formulations assert the strong conclusion that the existence of evil entails the logical impossibility of God's existence, whereas evidential formulations only assert the weaker conclusion that the existence of evil renders God's existence unlikely. For some, this might be the most intuitive option, but although it sounds like a reasonable distinction to draw, the distinction cannot be sensibly maintained and quickly collapses into one of the previous three options; it can therefore be dismissed with the same criticisms. I will not repeat those criticisms excessively, but will put the greatest effort into showing how this option collapses into one of the previous three.

1.5.1 Reducing option 4 to options 1 or 3

What is it to say that the existence of evil renders God's existence unlikely, rather than impossible? Given that this statement is taken as the conclusion of an argument, there are two possibilities: Firstly, one could be asserting that one's argument is not necessarily deductively valid, even though one's premises are true. This would leave the argument from evil as an inductive-style argument whereby the truth of the premises does not confirm the truth of the conclusion; the argument is not based upon any notion of logical inconsistency. This seems to have been what those who followed Plantinga were seeking to assert (Rowe, Tooley, et al.), but they instead fell back into presenting the second possibility: Second, one could be asserting that though the argument is deductively valid, one or more of the premises are not necessarily true. Therefore, the conclusion is true only to the extent that the premises are certain. The premises are not certain, though likely, and therefore the conclusion is limited to a probabilistic claim. This seems to be what Rowe et al. opted for.

incompatible with, before proceeding to ask whether such evils exist in the world. This shows that, according to the option currently under discussion regarding the difference between logical and evidential formulations of the problem of evil, most philosophers side with 'logical' formulations here.

The first possibility is a viable option and would quite genuinely, I think, count as a properly ‘evidential’ argument from evil to the non-existence of God; it is one that I will consider in my concluding remarks, since it represents what I take to be the most legitimate claim to an ‘evidential’ formulation of the problem of evil. It is a viable option, only no one seems to choose it. Rowe, Tooley, et al., all go for deductively valid formulations of the problem of evil, and then debate the probabilistic truth of the premises. That is, they opt for the second possibility. This leaves the conclusions of their ‘evidential’ arguments as being logically binding *conditionally upon the truth of their premises*. This leaves their formulations in precisely the same position as any other deductive argument, and therefore given that the ‘logical’ alternative is purported to be a ‘necessary’ conclusion (rather than a contingent one), the difference between ‘logical’ and ‘evidential’ formulations, according to this fourth way of understanding that difference, is going to boil down to, once again, the requirement that some or all components within the argument be DVATWD.

Requiring that any component of an argument be DVATWD is a mistake, as my response to option 1 indicates. Option 4 now repeats this mistake, so the same criticism applies. Further, specifically requiring the incompatibility premise to be DVATWD amounts to the same claim discussed in option 3, so if option 4 repeats this mistake, then it will be subject to the same responses given there too. Either way, if the key difference between logical and evidential formulations is understood to be the necessary or non-necessary status of their conclusions, and each variation is understood to be deductively valid, then the necessary/non-necessary status of their respective conclusions will boil down to the necessary/non-necessary status of their premises. Having necessarily true premises is not something that we should ask of a logical argument, so maintaining the distinction between logical and evidential formulations on this basis is untenable.

The viable alternative for evidential formulations according to option 4 is to construct a genuinely inductive argument from the basis of evil to the non-existence God, one in which the truth of the premises does not logically compel the truth of the conclusion. This, however, would reduce option 4 to option 1, since logical formulations, by comparison, would be deductive arguments. This, then, seems to be the only sensible distinction to be drawn between ‘logical’ and ‘evidential’ formulations; that of ‘deductive’ versus ‘inductive’ arguments. Although much of what I said in response to option 1 should render logical formulations perfectly viable under this distinction, nothing I have said so far rules out the viability of genuinely inductive arguments from evil to the non-existence of God, and it

might be that these are preferable to deductive formulations of the problem of evil. I will now argue that they are not preferable in any way.

1.6 Genuinely 'evidential' arguments: e.g., homeopathy

For all that I have said against the distinction between logical and evidential formulations of the problem of evil, there is a relevant and helpful distinction to be drawn between logical and evidential arguments generally. But this distinction cannot just be that evidential arguments are deductive arguments with evidence-based or otherwise non-necessary premises. The relevant distinction must lie in the contrast between 'inductive' and 'deductive' argument forms. This distinction is a genuine distinction, and it is helpful because some things are more appropriately dealt with via inductive arguments, whilst some are better dealt with via deductive arguments.

I can illustrate this with an example. Imagine that I am trying to convince someone of the ineffectiveness of homeopathy. I could offer a strictly evidential/inductive argument:

- E1. Study 1 shows that homeopathy is ineffective.
- E2. Study 2 shows that homeopathy is ineffective.
- E3. Study 3 shows that homeopathy is ineffective.
- E[...]. [...]
- E10. Study 10 shows that homeopathy is ineffective.
- E11. Therefore, homeopathy is ineffective.

This is a strictly inductive argument. It is certainly reasonable to believe the conclusion based upon the premises (especially if the premises are supplemented with the addition of further studies showing homeopathy's ineffectiveness), and it is intuitively clear that the premises increase the probability of the conclusion, but no one is logically bound to accept the conclusion even though they might accept the truth of the premises. Quite feasibly my opponent could accept the truth of all my premises and yet reject my conclusion. All I could say in response, at this point, is something akin to 'you are being unreasonable', or 'you are ignoring the evidence', etc. But these will not necessarily be conclusive or convincing responses.

Alternatively, I could offer a logical argument for the ineffectiveness of homeopathy, in the form of trying to show that those who believe that homeopathy is effective believe a logically inconsistent set of propositions:

P1. Homeopathy is effective.

P2. If homeopathy is effective, then it will be effective under reasonable experimental conditions.

P3. Homeopathy is not effective under reasonable experimental conditions.

One of these propositions must be rejected, since the set is logically inconsistent, and yet all three seem to be at least *prima facie* true for those who believe that homeopathy is effective (and are aware of the evidence against it). If I am so inclined, I can convert this ‘problem of homeopathy’ into an argument for the ineffectiveness of homeopathy by adding the conclusion: ‘Therefore, homeopathy is not effective.’ But this conclusion would only be true to the extent that I was sure that P2 and P3 are true. This logical formulation lays no claim to any of its components being necessarily true, or DVATWD, and is quite open about the fact that P3 is an overtly empirical claim. But it is clearly distinct from the evidential/inductive formulation just mentioned, and the relevant difference is that this logical formulation relies upon a notion of logical inconsistency. My opponent *cannot* accept the truth of my premises yet reject the truth of my conclusion. If they wish to maintain a denial of my conclusion, then they *must*, with the force of a logical must, reject one of my premises, in this case P2 or P3. This logical formulation is *unavoidable*, whereas the evidential formulation could potentially be left unresolved.

It might be that the practical difference between these two options does not amount to all that much, since in the first instance we would end up debating the strength of the (inductive) entailment between the premises and the conclusion, and in the second we would end up debating the truth of the premise that asserts this entailment outright. But it would remain the case that there is an important theoretical distinction, and it seems to me that, depending on the beliefs of my interlocutor, one or other argument form might be more appropriate. If, for example, my interlocutor is simply ignorant of the many studies that show homeopathy to be ineffective, then presenting a list of premises in an inductive argument might be more persuasive than constructing a deductive argument out of premises that they are not in a position to understand or appreciate the truth of. If, on the other hand, I know that my interlocutor is fully aware of the many studies that show the ineffectiveness of homeopathy - the ‘evidence’ is fixed, as it were, as a common ground - then it will be clear to me that simply adding to the list is not going to get to the root of the disagreement between us. Instead, it might be more helpful for me to present a deductively valid problem to them, and pinpoint precisely what it is that they reject in my argument. If it is simply the strength of

the inductive entailment, as expressed in premise 2, then at least we now know where we stand.

For many such disagreements, where the ‘evidence’ is not fixed or known to all parties, offering inductive-style arguments in the form of adding further premises to the list of propositions that, on balance, increase the probability of one conclusion or another is an entirely appropriate way to go about persuading people of things. If, however, the evidence is shared as a common ground, then adding to the list is not so helpful. The disagreement is then more *logical* in nature, it is about ‘what follows from what’, ‘what entails what’, and as such is better dealt with via deductive arguments. In a deductive argument, you can still debate the truth of the premises, but at least now you will know where your disagreement lies.

1.6.1 Evidential formulations are inappropriate for the problem of evil

An important point to recognise here is that though it is clearly suitable to debate the effectiveness of homeopathy in evidential terms, it is not so clearly the case with the problem of evil. We can generate evidence for or against the proposition of homeopathy’s effectiveness without difficulty, but it is very difficult to see how we would go about generating any more or less evidence for the comparable issues in the problem of evil. Everyone is surely aware that there have been instances of terrible evil in the world and that more are likely to come. Unlike the homeopathy example, it is not as if any further evidence is likely to have any effect on the outcome of the debate concerning the problem of evil. This calls into question the suitability of evidential formulations to tackle such a problem.

In the case of homeopathy, we are (arguably) debating the evidence; we are asking an overtly evidential question: ‘Is it the case that homeopathy works?’ The only way we can go about answering this question is by doing some empirical work, so this question is reasonably dealt with evidentially. But in the case of the problem of evil, we are not debating the evidence, we are debating what we should believe on the basis of the evidence. It is not as if we are asking, ‘Is it the case that bad stuff happens?’, since we already know the answer to that. We do not need to do any further empirical work here, the results are in. Instead we ask, ‘Given this evidence, what should we believe?’; this would be akin to asking of homeopathy, ‘So, the results are in and it seems that homeopathy doesn’t work. So should we believe that homeopathy works?’ This latter type of question is best dealt with logically, since it concerns how we establish a coherent set of beliefs.

The questions that we ask about the problem of evil are not of an overtly evidential form such as ‘Does bad stuff happen?’, but of the rather more philosophical form of ‘Does the bad stuff that happens count as evidence against God’s existence?’ Although it is talking about evidence, this is not an evidential question, since there is no further evidence that we can bring in to help us find an answer to this question. The issue is about ‘what follows from what’, and so we must simply reflect, *a priori* if you will, on our set of beliefs and try to establish a coherent set. This is precisely in opposition to the genuine sort of evidential questions that we could apply to the homeopathy case. If we decided to propose the evidential argument for the ineffectiveness of homeopathy, described earlier, then it would be quite appropriate to look for and bring in further evidence in support of the conclusion. This is what we mean when we talk about ‘evidential’ issues, but it is not what we are doing when we debate the problem of evil. When we debate the problem of evil, all we are really doing is asking whether it is possible to establish a coherent set of beliefs that includes an awareness of the existence of evil, the various purported divine attributes, and belief in the existence of God. This is not a task that further evidential work can help with. Evidential formulations of the problem of evil, therefore, seem inappropriate.

1.7 Conclusion: The problem of evil remains logically binding

None of the ways of understanding the relevant difference between logical and evidential formulations yields any sufficient motivation for relinquishing our claim to logically binding formulations of the problem of evil. It seems to me that many people have simply been careless in taking the non-necessary truth of a premise within an argument as good reason to call that argument ‘evidential’ rather than logical, and have further concluded from this that, since the argument is merely ‘evidential’ and inductive, the conclusion is not logically binding. This is a mistake. Valid, logically binding arguments only ever established the truth of their conclusions *conditionally upon the truth of their premises*, and this remains the case in the argument from evil. All that has happened, with challenges such as Alvin Plantinga’s, is that the premises within the argument have been shown to be not necessarily true. But this was always the case, and is no reason to consider the problem of evil as not logically binding.

There is, therefore, nothing preventing us from operating with a simple and logically binding formulation of the problem of evil that looks like so:

1. There exists a maximally-good, maximally-powerful creator of the universe.
2. A maximally-good, maximally-powerful creator of the universe would not create or permit any evil (x) in its creation.
3. Some evil (x) exists.

This logical formulation of the problem of evil should achieve the aim of forcing the theist to ‘clarify, and if possible reconcile’³² their set of beliefs. It is *unavoidable*, in that it must be solved, on pain of contradiction. One of these propositions, so formulated, must be false.

But as it stands it is not a very effective basis for the argument from evil. ‘Evil’ is here left undefined, and as such it would be too easy for premises 2 or 3 to be rejected. In order to develop an argument from evil from this foundation, it will be necessary to expand upon the content of the simple premises offered here. It is to this that I now turn, in the next chapter. I will briefly offer a ‘full-fledged’ formulation of the argument from evil, one that aspires to be sound, but in truth I hold out little hope that it will be convincing. Its main aim is to reveal the crucially controversial premises in any formulation of the problem of evil, the main point of disagreement between theists and atheists on this matter. I will conclude by retreating to a ‘meta-formulation’ that ought to capture the essence of all formulations of the problem of evil, with which I can operate for the remainder of my thesis.

³² J. L. Mackie, *The Miracle of Theism*, p. 150.

2. A Morally Aware Formulation of the Problem of Evil

All Nature is but Art, unknown to thee; / All Chance, Direction, which thou canst not see; / All Discord, Harmony not understood; / All partial Evil, universal Good: / And, spite of Pride in erring Reason's spite, / One truth is clear, 'whatever IS, is RIGHT'.

Alexander Pope¹

Moral understanding requires that those who would claim to have it should be serious respondents to morality's demands. Someone who cannot be responsive to morality's demands is one for whom morality has no reality. The 'reality' of moral value is inseparable from the reality of it as a claim on us, and serious responsiveness to that claim is internal to the recognition of its reality.

Raimond Gaita²

In the previous chapter, I argued that we have no good reason to abandon logically binding formulations of the problem of evil. We can, and should, operate with formulations of the problem of evil that are logically binding and therefore, crucially for my thesis, *unavoidable* for the theist. One of the propositions within the following set must be denied, on pain of inconsistency:

1. There exists a maximally-good, maximally-powerful creator of the universe.
2. A maximally-good, maximally-powerful creator of the universe would not create or permit any evil (x) in its creation.
3. Some evil (x) exists.

But as it stands, this is easily done, since we have not yet specified what type of evil is taken to be incompatible with God's existence. In order for this formulation of the problem of evil to be viable as a basis from which to argue for the non-existence of God, premise 3 must

¹ Alexander Pope, *An Essay on Man*, Kindle edition (London: Cassell & Co., 1891), Epistle 1, X.

² Raimond Gaita, *Good and Evil: An Absolute Conception*, 2nd edition, Kindle edition (London: Routledge, 2004), p. 59.

operate with some specified class of evil that is both *prima facie* evident in the world for the theist, whilst also being perceived as being incompatible with God's existence in the way that premise 2 maintains. Should this be done successfully, then we would be left with a compelling argument from evil to the non-existence of God.

However, if the current literature on the problem of evil is anything to go by, this is likely to be a difficult thing to achieve since many philosophers of religion seem willing to assert that there is no actual evil in the world that is incompatible with God's existence. My aim in this chapter, therefore, is realistically limited to formulating a version of the problem of evil that adequately specifies the type of evil that is considered both incompatible with God's existence whilst simultaneously actually existing in the world, in a way that clearly reveals the point of disagreement between those who think that such evil exists, and those who do not. My purpose is not to show that, according to an inconsistency within the theist's set of beliefs, God cannot exist; my purpose is to reveal the chronically underappreciated moral cost that comes with belief in God. That is, which moral evaluations must be denied in order to maintain theistic belief. Although I believe my formulation to be sound, I have no doubt that the evaluative claims that it relies upon will be denied by many theists. But that will be enough to highlight a point of disagreement between many atheists and theists on this issue.

Given my pessimism regarding the prospects of my formulation being considered sound, I will not rely upon it for the remainder of my thesis. Instead, I will conclude this chapter by retreating to a 'meta-formulation' of the problem of evil. That is, a version of the problem of evil that tries to accommodate all the many varieties of formulations that can be found in the literature. This 'meta-formulation' is so called because it is intended to be a 'formulation of the formulations', identifying the shared structure and essential components that all viable formulations of the problem of evil must have. I will use this meta-formulation for the remainder of my thesis, but first I will make my attempt at formulating a full-fledged formulation of the problem of evil, one that I consider to be sound and compelling.

2.1 A full-fledged formulation of the argument from evil

Returning for a moment to the beginning of my discussion, we have seen that Alvin Plantinga insisted that a deductively valid formulation of the problem of evil requires three things: Firstly, it must have a basis of Mackie's three original propositions:³

1. God is maximally-good.
2. God is maximally-powerful.
3. Evil exists.

I have claimed that this is non-essential, but I am willing to work with Plantinga here and agree that it would certainly be desirable (if non-essential) as a departure point. Secondly, these three original propositions must be combined with some additional premises that are either necessarily true, essential to theism, or a logical consequence of such propositions. This is what is required to mount an effective internal critique of theistic belief whilst working within the Plantinga-style demands regarding the necessary truth of additional premises that are not contained within the set of theistic beliefs. Thirdly, this combination must result in a logically inconsistent set of propositions. William Lane Craig claims that 'no philosopher has ever been able to identify such premises';⁴ well, here is my attempt: To be clear, I will identify each premise (in square brackets) according to whether it is one of Mackie's original propositions, understood as a proposition that is essential to theism, understood as a necessary truth, or a logical consequence of any of the above. This ought to keep me in working agreement with Plantinga's requirements. Any controversial premises will be discussed in the following section.

³ NB: I use Yujin Nagasawa's 'maximally-x' locution in preference to the outdated 'omni-x'. Nagasawa is entirely convincing on this point, and there is no relevant contradictory tension between God's goodness and His power such that a maximally consistent set of these attributes would adversely affect my formulation of the problem of evil. This is because, crucially, the premises within the problem of evil contain a non-necessary, contingent claim that evil exists. Therefore, the 'maximalGod' thesis that Nagasawa defends - 'God is the being that has the maximal consistent set of knowledge, power and benevolence' - cannot be used to show that there is any inconsistency in asserting God's maximal-power and maximal-goodness in such a way that there would be no evil in the world. We can conceive of a being with such a consistent set of powers, in the possible world in which there is no evil (which is itself conceivable). Therefore, the problem of evil remains, since *our* possible world contains evil, and therefore these divine attributes may as well be read as 'unlimited', much as 'omni' attributes would be, provided we are aware of the limiting caveats that Nagasawa identifies (which would have applied to 'omni' attributes anyway). Though Nagasawa did not seem to be aware of this in his original formulation, instead writing that his new defence of Anselmian theism defeats the problem of evil, in private correspondence he has agreed that my argument shows that his original defence does not entirely defeat the problem of evil, at least not without further caveats. See Yujin Nagasawa, 'A New Defence of Anselmian Theism', *Philosophical Quarterly*, 58 (2008), 577-96.

⁴ William Lane Craig, 'The Problem of Evil', available at: <<http://www.reasonablefaith.org/the-problem-of-evil>> [accessed 04/09/2014].

2.2 A morally-aware formulation of the problem of evil

1. God is maximally-good. [Original proposition]
2. God is maximally-powerful. [Original proposition]
3. God is a moral agent. [Essential to theism, and arguably entailed by 1, to avoid equivocation]
4. 'Maximally-powerful' means 'can do anything logically possible'. [Necessary truth, by meaning of terms]
5. When we talk of moral agents, 'good' means 'does what they ought to'; 'maximally-good' means 'does all that they ought to'. [Necessary truth, by meaning of terms, limited by 6]
6. Ought implies can. [Necessary truth]
7. Therefore, God does all that He ought to. [Logical consequence of 1-6]⁵
8. An event x happens. [Logical consequence of original proposition 'Evil exists']
9. 'Evil', in this context, means 'ought not to be' or 'ought to have been prevented, all things considered, by any agent who had the power to do so'. [Necessary truth, by meaning of terms; this defines the subset of 'evil' events that we are interested in.]
10. Event x is 'evil' (it ought to have been prevented, all things considered, by anyone who had the power to do so). [Logical consequence of original proposition 'Evil exists', though it remains an empirical/evaluative claim]
11. Therefore, either God did not have the power to prevent x from happening, or God ought to have prevented x from happening. [Logical consequence of 7-10]
12. God had the power to prevent x from happening. [Essential to theism, given the possibility of miracles, or a logical consequence of 2]⁶
13. Therefore, God ought to have prevented x from happening. [From 11, 12]
14. God did not prevent x from happening. [From 8]
15. Therefore, God did not do something that He ought to have done. [From 13, 14]
16. Therefore, it is the case that God does everything that he ought to, and did not do something that He ought to have done. [Contradiction. From 7, 15]
17. (Finally, according to theism) God exists. [Essential to theism]⁷
18. Therefore, one of the above is false. [From 16]

⁵ i.e. Because of 6, what He cannot do He has no obligation to do.

⁶ NB: This is 'had the power to prevent x ' *simpliciter*; greater goods are irrelevant here, since that objection would instead challenge the evaluative claim that x ought to have been prevented by anyone who had the power to do so.

⁷ And also apparently a necessary truth, and that too is essential to theism.

And since all of the above were deduced from premises that were either original propositions within the problem of evil, or else were necessarily true, essential to theism, or a logical consequence of those, then either one of the original propositions or one of the propositions that is essential to theism must be false. This is a logical problem; we have a logically inconsistent set of propositions; the problem of evil, therefore, remains a logical problem.

It is quite possible to solve the problem. We have no really concrete idea, after all, whether the moral judgement of premise 10 is true or not: Should the event in question have been prevented by any being who had the power to do so? My point is that the problem, in remaining logical, forces someone (everyone) to deny one of these premises. That much is unavoidable. And all of these premises were either original propositions, propositions that are essential to theism, necessary truths, or a logical consequence of any of the above.

2.3 Solving the problem

To solve the problem would constitute denying any of the premises within the argument. I will only provide a very cursory summary here, since many of the most relevant of these issues will be discussed in later chapters, but the most plausible solutions are as follows:

2.3.1 God does not exist

Perhaps the most plausible and therefore easiest solution, but not one that many theists are going to be willing to accept. It remains a ‘solution’, in that it would resolve the inconsistency present in the set of premises by denying one of the premises; namely, the one that says that God exists.

2.3.2 God is not maximally-good

Problematic for most theists. Remember that this premise does not specify (yet) what God’s goodness amounts to. All it says is that whatever ‘goodness’ is, God has it (or perhaps *is* it) maximally. To deny this is to say something that runs contrary to swaths of theological tradition.

2.3.3 *God is not maximally-powerful*

Perhaps slightly less problematic than denying God's maximal-goodness, and certainly an option that many theologians have been willing to consent to. Perhaps 'process theology'⁸ is the best example of this, but John Bishop has also defended a view along these lines.⁹ In any case, this would impose more severe limits on God's power than the already limiting stipulation of 'no non-logical limits', and we might want good reason to accept the truth of this new limitation, other than as an *ad hoc* response to the challenge of the problem of evil.

2.3.4 *God is not a moral agent*

To my mind this is by far the most plausible solution for a theist, one that is taken up by many theologians, theists, and atheists. D. Z. Phillips argues effectively for the conclusion that we should not think of God as sharing our moral community.¹⁰ Similarly, Brian Davies says: 'Theologians have taught that God is good without holding that his goodness is that of a morally good agent.'¹¹ This is a solution that has sound theological mandate: The Bible is quite happy to say that God's ways are not our own.¹² It might seem dubious, therefore, that I have labelled this premise as being 'essential to theism'. The justification for this claim comes from the observation that to deny that God is a moral agent is to equivocate absolutely between what we are willing to say of God in this context (i.e., the context of the problem of evil) and what we are willing to say of God in other contexts. That is, if even once God is described as 'acting', and operates with 'reasons' that are (broadly understood) 'moral', then God is a moral agent. Theological tradition is replete with examples of God's being understood as acting in this way. If God 'creates' and sees creation as 'good', then we seem to have an example of this kind. Even limiting ourselves to the context of the problem of evil, we can find many similar examples: God 'forgives sins', God 'compensates for suffering', perhaps God even 'punishes wrongdoing'. Given the range of examples readily available to

⁸ See, for example, Alfred North Whitehead, *Process and Reality: An Essay in Cosmology*, corrected edition, ed. by David Ray Griffin and Donald W. Sherburne (New York: The Free Press, 1978).

⁹ John Bishop, 'Evil and the Concept of God', *Philosophical Papers*, 22 (1993), 1-15.

¹⁰ D. Z. Phillips, *The Problem of Evil and the Problem of God*, Kindle edition (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2005).

¹¹ Brian Davies, *An Introduction to the Philosophy of Religion*, 2nd edition (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), p. 48.

¹² 'For my thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways my ways, says the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts higher than your thoughts.' Isaiah 55.8-9, *The Bible: New Revised Standard Version* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995).

us to justify the claim that God is a moral agent, it seems that we must therefore either commit to God's being a moral agent, or else dismiss all of these instances in which God is purported to act morally.

2.3.5 Event x is not 'evil'; i.e., it is not the case that it ought not to have been permitted by anyone who had the power to do so

Another popular option. Theodacists from Augustine to Leibniz have been willing to commend the horrors of the world as misunderstood harmony.¹³ It is this option that constitutes the central focus of my thesis, and so I will leave discussion of it for elsewhere. Suffice to say that any theodicy, in response to my full-fledged formulation of the problem of evil, will deny premise 10. That is, specifically, they will deny the evaluative claim that the event x ought to have been prevented. Event x was permissible, not needing to be prevented, because there was/is a morally sufficient reason for permitting it. I will say more on this throughout my thesis.

2.3.6 God could not have prevented event x

There is one final 'plausible' solution that I ought to mention, for completion's sake, but I do not think it is very plausible. This is the claim that God, though maximally-powerful, could not have prevented the event x . Although this sounds like it might be similar to the theodical response of Plantinga et al., in that they claim that God could not prevent x without the loss of some greater good or permission of some evil equally bad or worse, it is in fact very different. The crucial difference between my formulation and others is that mine leaves no room for God's being incapable of preventing x due to some moral or logical necessity, whilst x remains something that can be used as a basis for the problem of evil. I have ruled that out by limiting God's power to what is logically possible, and combining that claim with the uncontroversial moral premise that 'ought implies can'. That is, if you are incapable of doing something, then you cannot be under any moral obligation to do that thing. Given that we have specified that x is something that 'ought to be prevented by a being who had the power to do so', to now claim that God could not prevent x is to claim that God could not prevent x *simpliciter*. Moral reasons are entirely beside the point. That is, we specify that God *should* prevent this x , and this judgement is dependent upon the precursor of God's capability

¹³ Consider the quotation that opened this chapter, from Alexander Pope's *An Essay on Man*.

of being able to act to prevent x . We cannot judge that He *should* unless we judge that He *can*. To say that God cannot prevent x is to rule x out as being something that God should prevent.

Likewise, to deny premise 12 is to make premise 10 redundant, since that premise specifies that the event x ought to have been prevented by 'anyone who had the power do so'. But if God does not have that power, then who would?! If it is not the case that God has the power to prevent x , then it is a rather empty statement to assert that it ought to have been prevented 'by any being who had the power to do so'; that set would surely be empty!

Given the examples of God's power that are evident in scripture, and the act of creating the world, it would seem deeply implausible to now claim that God could not, say, bring it about that a small shower prevents a forest fire...or indeed prevent the lightning bolt from striking the tree in the first place. A being that can turn water into wine can surely turn a mistakenly placed peanut into something that would not be harmful for the unfortunate nut allergy sufferer who is about to eat it. Or, indeed, prevent the peanut from being mistakenly placed in the first place, or give the nut allergy sufferer a sixth sense for the presence of nuts, or outlaw nut allergies generally... I have no special reason for focussing on nut allergies, but it is as good an example as any to identify the levels of efficient causation involved in any tragedy, any stage of which could be subject to intervention by a sufficiently powerful being. To say that God could not do *any* of these things, and yet still call Him 'maximally-powerful', such that He is capable of creating an entire universe, is, frankly, nuts.

Note, therefore, that the only way we could plausibly deny that God could have prevented x is to claim that it is logically impossible that God prevent x . Without good reason for this claim, it remains deeply implausible. (NB: Justification by appeal to 'greater goods' or 'soul-making', etc., is irrelevant here, for those issues are subsumed within the judgement that x 'ought not to be'. If x is justified by appeal to greater goods then x 'ought to be', just as my temporary yet necessary pain at the dentist 'ought to be' (it ought not to have been prevented by any being who had the power to do so, given that it is a necessary by-product of my dental health) due to the prevention of subsequently poorer dental health, and the unavoidable nature of the temporary pain on the way to that goal. Those x that are justified by greater goods are not the x that we are using in this argument.)

2.3.7 Conclusions

The two most plausible solutions to my problem of evil, besides atheism, are to claim that God is not a moral agent or to claim that x is not 'evil' in the specified sense; that is, it is not an evil that ought to be prevented, all things considered. The purpose of my formulation of the problem of evil is to force the theist (with the force of a logical must) to take one of these two options. Either option is fraught with problems of a peculiarly moral kind, and it is these moral issues that will form the central focus of my thesis.

2.4 Retreating to a 'meta-formulation'

Although I consider my full-fledged formulation of the problem of evil to be sound, I accept that this would be a bold claim to make, and one that is likely to be met with significant objections from the general audience of philosophers of religion. It would therefore, perhaps, be sensible to work with a version that would be more acceptable to the general audience. Mine is also a rather complicated version, including no less than eighteen steps; this makes it rather unmanageable. These reasons prompt me to retreat to a more manageable formulation, one that is more acceptable to the general audience. But which formulation to work with?

I have discussed various variations over the course of this and the preceding chapter: Mackie's formulation was deemed to not cut the mustard; Rowe's and Tooley's are too 'inductive' and retreat from a notion of logically binding inconsistency; I have mentioned various 'simple' versions over the course of my discussion of how we should understand the difference between evidential and logical formulations, and found that although they reflected the central elements of the problem of (and argument from) evil, in both logical and evidential forms, their premises were too easy to deny, and therefore they were too easily defeated by responses such as Plantinga's; my full-fledged version is too complicated, and likely to be considered controversial. I am left in need of a new formulation, one that combines the strengths of all the variations but lacking the weaknesses. We must learn from Mackie that we must include our central entailment (that expresses the incompatibility between God and evil) from the outset; we must learn from my criticisms of Rowe and Tooley that we need not frame it as an 'inductive' problem; we must learn from Plantinga (and others) that there might be some subset of evils that are not incompatible with God's existence - if certain evils are justified via their necessary connection with greater goods, say, then they will not be considered incompatible with God's existence. I propose the following

‘meta-formulation’ to take account of all these lessons - I call it a ‘meta-formulation’ because it is intended to represent a formulation that all variations of the problem of evil could be reduced to, or else a formulation whose framework all variations of the problem of evil could fit into:

1. There exists a maximally-good, maximally-powerful creator of the universe.
2. A maximally-good, maximally-powerful creator of the universe would not create or permit any pointless or unconscionable evil in its creation.
3. Some pointless or unconscionable evil exists.

These three propositions form an inconsistent set; there is no need for any inductive move between premises to establish this inconsistency. The central entailment expressing the incompatibility between God and evil is featured centrally. Initial theodical responses (such as Plantinga’s) are headed-off by the stipulations that the relevant evils (i.e. the ones that remain incompatible with God’s existence) are not justified by greater goods, or else are of such a kind as to be considered unjustifiable by any appeal to greater goods. (I am yet to discuss this issue of ‘unjustifiable’ evils, since I have not engaged with anyone making that point, but it will soon become relevant in the following chapters.)

There is, of course, nothing to say that any of these premises are necessarily true, or *ultima facie* true for a theist; I only claim that they are *prima facie* true for a theist, and this is all we need concern ourselves with. Crucially, it remains the case that the underlying logical inconsistency remains logically binding. This problem is, therefore, unavoidable. It must be solved, on pain of contradiction. To accept the truth of any two propositions within the set is to deny the truth of the remaining third.

2.5 Conclusion

My full-fledged formulation of the problem of evil is intended to illustrate the principal points of disagreement between those who think that the evil of the world shows that there is no God, and those who do not. It is intended to force the theist (presumably, one of those who does not think that the evil of the world shows that there is no God) to reconcile their set of beliefs by rejecting either the evaluative claim, regarding a certain instance of evil, that that evil ought to have been prevented, all things considered, or else rejecting the claim that God is a moral agent such that He is subject to the kind of moral obligations that such an evaluative claim would yield. I have given a brief defence against the latter of those

two options, and claimed that denying God's moral agency leads to equivocation issues. The former option, that of denying the evaluative claim that a certain evil ought to have been prevented, all things considered, has not been defended against yet, since it will form the focus of the remainder of my thesis. To my mind, the most common response to the problem of evil, whether it takes the form of a 'theodicy' or not, is to reject the evaluative claim that any pointless or unconscionable evil exists in the world. That is, it is to reject the claim that any of the evils of the world ought to have been prevented, all things considered. It is the moral status of this claim that I intend to investigate for the majority of this thesis.

I consider my full-fledged formulation to be sound but, as mentioned, I do not expect this formulation to hold any great sway with many philosophers of religion. The two key judgements that the formulation relies upon - that God is a moral agent and that there are evils in the world that ought to have been prevented, all things considered - have been extensively discussed elsewhere, and the extent of that discussion alone is testament to the level of widespread disagreement about these issues. So rather than try to convince anyone that these judgements are true, I instead aim to point out the repercussions - specifically moral repercussions - of denying them. That is, if theistic belief combines with the logical (and therefore unavoidable) status of my formulation of the problem of evil to force a denial either of God's moral agency, or the evaluative claim that there are evils in the world that ought to have been prevented, all things considered, then what is the moral cost of denying either of these claims?

For simplicity, I have retreated to my 'meta-formulation' to tackle this issue, but it should be understood that the same evaluative claims (or at least very similar) that are found in my full-fledged formulation would be found in the meta-formulation, as they are found in all formulations of the problem of evil. The problem of evil is founded upon just such evaluative claims; it is the problem of *evil*, after all! The next chapter will look at some issues that arise from a recognition of the fundamental role that these evaluative claims play within the problem of evil.

3. Evaluative Claims within the Problem of Evil

Theoretical knowledge may be defined as knowledge of what *is*, practical knowledge as the representation of what *ought to be*.

Immanuel Kant¹

Our words used as we use them in science, are vessels capable only of containing and conveying meaning and sense, *natural* meaning and sense. Ethics, if it is anything, is supernatural and our words will only express facts; as a teacup will only hold a teacup full of water and if I were to pour out a gallon over it. [...] What [ethics] says does not add to our knowledge in any sense.

Ludwig Wittgenstein²

The problem of evil is a moral problem. Once properly situated, most disagreements regarding the problem of evil can be identified as being distinctively moral disagreements. To disagree about whatever conclusion might be drawn from the problem of evil is to disagree about some morally relevant claim or claims. The previous chapter attempted to posit a formulation of the problem of evil that clearly identified the most common points of disagreement between atheists and theists concerning the problem of evil. The purpose of this chapter is to establish these points further, and begin to investigate the consequences of engaging with a morally aware formulation of the problem of evil, by pointing out two issues that arise from a recognition of the fundamental role that evaluative claims play within the problem of evil. I will begin by showing that the problem of evil contains some evaluative claims. Secondly, I argue that the underlying normative consistency necessary for the success of any argument from evil might be a difficult thing to achieve. Thirdly, I align J. L. Mackie's criticisms for the moral argument for the existence of God with the problem of evil, and show that Mackie's criticisms serve to act against his own presentation of the argument from evil, which occurs just two chapters later in *The Miracle of Theism*.

¹ Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason* (1787), in *Werke in zehn Bänden*, Wilhelm Weischedel (ed.), *Band 4: Kritik der reinen Vernunft: Zweiter Teil* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1968), p. 661 (my translation).

² Ludwig Wittgenstein, 'Lecture on Ethics', *The Philosophical Review*, 74:1 (1965), 3-13 (pp. 7, 12).

3.1 A 'meta-formulation' of the problem of evil

To recap, I will assume that this 'meta-formulation' of the problem of evil is an accurate representation of all variations of the problem of evil:³

1. There exists a maximally-good, maximally-powerful creator of the universe.
2. A maximally-good, maximally-powerful creator of the universe would not create or permit any pointless or unconscionable evil in its creation.
3. Some pointless or unconscionable evil exists.

These three propositions constitute an inconsistent set, such that they cannot all be true together; at least one of them must be denied. (Although I have argued for the continued viability of 'logical' over 'evidential' formulations of the problem of evil, across various ways of interpreting the relevant distinction between those two, it should by now be clear that this meta-formulation should not be taken to be an assumption of the 'logical' formulation over the 'evidential' version. The meta-formulation is intended to capture both variations, however you might see the relevant difference between them; there is still an incompatibility between God and evil expressed within the evidential problem of evil, after all, even if that incompatibility is not seen as being necessarily true. But these issues are not relevant for the purposes of this chapter.)

3.1.1 Analysis of the meta-formulation

A little analysis of the three propositions that constitute the meta-formulation of the problem of evil reveals them to be complex propositions, propositions which we can reduce down to being conjunctions or implications that are made up of simpler propositions. So, for example, the claim 'There exists a maximally-good, maximally-powerful creator of the universe' can, at the very least, be broken down into a conjunction of the various constitutive elements: 'There is an *x*' AND '*x* is maximally-good' AND '*x* is maximally-powerful' AND 'There is a universe' AND '*x* created that universe', etc. These more complex propositions might take the form of conjunctions, but they might also take the form of entailments, in some way. For example, it might be the case that 'God is maximally-powerful' is a claim that

³ Everything I say in this chapter, and the remainder of my thesis, ought to be applicable to any version of the problem of evil, so feel free to assume whatever version of the problem of evil that you would like, if you find this meta-formulation unacceptable.

follows from 'God created the universe'. That is, these 'simple' propositions might be assertions in their own right, or they might be representations of *lines of reasoning*.

In either case, the components of these more complex propositions are revealed to be either positive, descriptive, 'fact-type' claims, or else evaluative, normative, 'value', or broadly 'moral' claims; which is to say that the propositions within the problem of evil are made up of both evaluative and non-evaluative content.

I will define 'evaluative content' as being any claim that makes some sort of value judgement about a fact. A shortcut to identifying the most obvious of these will be to pick out any statement that contains the terms '...is good' or '...is evil/bad'. We can, for simplicity, define 'non-evaluative content' in relation to the definition of 'evaluative content'. A 'non-evaluative claim' is any claim that does not make a value judgement. (I have in mind here the classical distinction between 'facts' and 'values', between the 'is' and the 'ought'; these are traditionally thought of as being distinct, such that you cannot deduce a claim in one from a claim in the other. This distinction will become more relevant later, when we consider J. L. Mackie's criticisms of the moral argument for God's existence.)

Typically non-evaluative claims include propositions such as: 'God is maximally-powerful', 'God created the universe', etc. These are simple statements of states of affairs, or 'facts'; they contain no obvious value judgements.⁴ Recognisably evaluative claims are those such as: 'Pointless evil exists', 'God is maximally-good', etc. These claims contain a value judgement of the form '...is good/bad'.

So, for instance, the third proposition - 'Some pointless or unconscionable evil exists' - is actually a conjunction of both evaluative and non-evaluative content. There is a non-evaluative claim - such as, for example, that an earthquake occurs - and an evaluative claim attached to that non-evaluative claim - i.e. the value judgement that it is *bad* that an earthquake occurs. Abstracted beyond any particular example of evil, the third proposition looks like this:

3*. 'Some physical occurrence *z* occurs' AND 'It is bad that *z* occurs'.

⁴ I say 'obvious' here, because there is a possibility that, from a certain point of view, to deploy the term 'God' is to necessarily make a kind of evaluative claim. This would be because the meaning of the term 'God' is somehow necessarily equated with 'goodness' in some form. So to say 'God is powerful' equates to saying 'at least one good thing is powerful'. I will assume that this possibility is avoided, and that claims can be made about God, even existential claims, that do not necessarily make value judgements. That it is at least possible that we can make statements about God without making evaluative claims ought to be fairly uncontroversial.

These two conjuncts combine to give the ‘simpler’ (which is to say, of course, more complex) proposition ‘Evil exists’. (Given the rather more complex form of the third proposition that I have placed in my meta-formulation, there will also be additional claims within the grand conjunction of 3 that refer to the ‘pointless’ and ‘unconscionable’ elements. But that is beside the point for the current discussion.) Further, it would be misleading to present these two conjuncts as existing entirely independently, as a brute conjunctive assertion. There is a line of reasoning that connects them, and this line of reasoning seems to move from the initial purely empirical (non-evaluative or ‘fact-type’) observation of some state of affairs (e.g., ‘earthquakes occur’), towards the conclusion that ‘evil exists’, which contains the evaluative claim that ‘it is bad that earthquakes occur’ (e.g.). The move from facts to values here requires the deployment of some kind of underlying normative assumption about what kinds of things are to be considered ‘good’ or ‘bad’, and this brings the problem of evil into the scope of concerns such as the ‘fact-value’ distinction, and other such moral-philosophical issues. But all I wish to point out, for now, is that the propositions within the problem of evil are made up of some value-type claims and some fact-type claims. Therefore, the problem of evil’s propositions are made up of both evaluative and non-evaluative content.

A common response to my claim is to insist that the problem of evil can be constructed without any appeal to any kind of evaluative claim. That is, we can talk about nothing but physical states of affairs - ‘pain’, for example - and make the stipulation that God has a certain attribute of preventing this state of affairs - ‘God would eliminate unnecessary pain’, for example. We can then construct a version of the problem of evil that sounds intuitive and viable, but that lacks any kind of ‘evaluative content’ as I have defined it.

This response fails, because to strip the problem of evil of any kind of evaluative content is to lose the justification for the claim that God’s existence is incompatible with whatever state of affairs is being identified (e.g., in this case, ‘pain’). The immediate question we would ask, of this non-evaluative version of the problem of evil, is: ‘why would God eliminate unnecessary pain?’ That is, why is it the case that God would eliminate this particular state of affairs and not others? One might be tempted to say, ‘because God is good!’, but this still gets us nowhere. We would then need to ask why it is that a good thing would eliminate unnecessary pain. The answer that must come is, ‘because *it is bad* that unnecessary pain occurs’. This is the only way we can non-arbitrarily establish an incompatibility between the existence of God and the existence of this particular state of affairs, by establishing some kind of connection between the specified state of affairs and the

‘goodness’ of God. If we were to insist upon removing any kind of evaluative content, then we would have no more justification for the claim ‘God would eliminate unnecessary pain’ than we would for the claim ‘God would eliminate unnecessary fluffiness’. Without evaluative content, in some form, we have no reason to take ‘the problem of pain’ any more seriously than we would take ‘the problem of fluffiness’.

So, there are two strands of content running through the problem of evil. On the one hand, we have the non-evaluative content claims: God is powerful, some z occurs in the universe, etc. And on the other, we have the evaluative content claims: z is bad, God is good, etc. These two strands are strung together somehow in order to compel some sort of contradiction between the three, and the expression of this connection comes in proposition 2. To anticipate my conclusion in this chapter a little, it is the strength and validity of this string, this thread of reasoning that runs through the propositions of the problem of evil and seeks to use them to establish the conclusion of the argument from evil, that ultimately I want to challenge. Within the premises of the argument from evil, as it makes its way towards its conclusion, entailments are drawn between evaluative and non-evaluative propositions, and the direction of these entailments sometimes goes in the wrong direction.

In this meta-formulation, the second proposition *only* emerges as a product of the interaction between the contents of propositions 1 and 3. This is an important point; proposition 2 does not have any additional fact or value claims within it apart from identifying the interaction between the claims of 1 and the claims of 3. Proposition 2 is just a further expression of the meanings of both 1 and 3; it is, as Plantinga would have it, a merely ‘qualifying statement’.⁵ Saying ‘If a maximally-good, maximally-powerful creator of the universe exists, then there would be no pointless or unconscionable evil in the universe’ carries exactly the same meaning as saying ‘There exists a maximally-good, maximally-powerful creator of the universe’ if one properly understands the claims being made in that complex proposition; that is, if one properly understands what is meant by ‘maximally-good’, and ‘maximally-powerful’, ‘creator of the universe’, etc. Understanding the second proposition to emerge as a ‘qualifying statement’ entails that to combine the claims ‘maximally-good’, ‘maximally-powerful’, and ‘creator of the universe’ *just means* that there is no pointless or unconscionable evil in the universe; it is not an additional fact to state that the one entails the other, the entailment is contained within the meaning of the terms. That is what is required to operate within a Plantinga-style ‘qualifying statement’ demand.

⁵ This issue has been discussed in the previous chapters. I try to work within Plantinga-style demands in order to avoid some obvious objections that might arise from that camp.

This is not to say that any of these claims are true, of course, merely that this is what they are meant to mean. This is really just a way of restating Plantinga's requirement that any additions or qualifying statements be necessarily true. Whether they are actually true or not is open for debate; whether the combination of God's goodness and power in actuality entails that there would be no evil of a certain kind in the world is another discussion. My point is only that we can work with Plantinga's requirement that these 'qualifying statements' must be necessarily true, and an easy way of doing this is to say that the non-existence of a certain type of evil is entailed by the combination of claims made about God, in exactly the same way that 'bachelor' is entailed by the combination of 'unmarried' and 'man'. Framing this as an 'if-then' statement, as proposition 2 does, makes it sound like it is saying more than it is. This entailment does not imply any kind of causal relationship here (though that would be the most natural way of reading it: 'If God exists, then *He would cause there to be no evil of a certain kind*'); instead, this entailment only reflects the intended meaning of the terms given in proposition 1. So just as the intended meaning of the terms 'unmarried' and 'man' combine to entail 'bachelor', so too the intended meanings of the terms 'good', 'creator', 'powerful', etc., combine to entail that there would be no evil of a certain kind in the world. To disagree with the entailment is to disagree with the meanings assigned to the terms involved.

So this is how the problem of evil works, generally speaking: Proposition 1 says something about the existence of God, proposition 3 says something about the existence of evil, propositions 1 and 3 are understood to conflict with each other, and this contradiction is captured and expressed in proposition 2.

3.2 *The argument from evil has a non-evaluative conclusion*

The problem of evil, which is made up of both evaluative and non-evaluative content, when used as an argument for God's non-existence, works its way towards a non-evaluative conclusion:

4. 'Therefore, God does not exist.'⁶

⁶ A short-hand way of negating the first proposition as I have formulated it in the meta-formulation. I have intentionally not used the same formulation, to preserve the sense in which we remain speaking at the abstract 'meta' level here, reluctant to speak of any one version of the problem of evil (even my own), and also to emphasise the fact that people take the conclusion of the argument from evil to be an explicitly simple non-evaluative claim.

Although this seems like an obvious and intuitive conclusion to draw from the problem of evil, appearing to be a simple negation of the first proposition, I will argue that it is not so simple as it may seem. Recognising that the problem of evil contains some evaluative claims offers up two significant problems for the argument from evil.

The First Problem: The evaluative claims within 1 and 3 need to actually connect up in the way that 2 expresses. This might not be the case. If different kinds of underlying evaluative claims or normative assumptions are being deployed in 1 and 3, then the interaction between 1 and 3 expressed in 2 will not hold. If, for example, one is being a divine command theorist in 1, yet a consequentialist in 3, then these claims might not connect up properly, since the underlying normative assumption operating in 1 does nothing to justify the evaluative claim made in 3; 1 and 3, although both talking about ‘good’ and ‘evil’ are in effect talking about different kinds of ‘good’ and ‘evil’. Some sort of underlying normative consistency must be achieved both *within* the propositions of the problem of evil, and *between* those who are discussing it; further, one must remain consistent in the application of these underlying normative assumptions. This is particularly problematic when we consider that there is likely to be a great deal of disagreement about which underlying normative assumptions ought to be deployed in discussion of the problem of evil. Identifying the First Problem serves to address two issues: It seems to me both that a) people often fail to realise that they are even deploying normative assumptions in this case, and b) if they are aware that normative assumptions are being deployed, people often begin by showing philosophical quasi-sympathy with their interlocutor, framing their version of the problem of evil as a strict *reductio*, working with their opponent’s normative assumptions, only to (unwittingly) shift to radically different normative territory halfway along the line of argument.

The Second Problem: More attention needs to be paid to the fact that the problem of evil casually and repeatedly skips across the is-ought gap or fact-value distinction over the course of its propositions. Even if it is not fatally problematic to skip across the is-ought gap, there might still be a major problem for the argument from evil in drawing non-evaluative conclusions from evaluative premises. Skipping across the is-ought gap *the wrong way* - i.e., arguing for non-evaluative claims from evaluative premises - is, at least according to J. L. Mackie, decidedly not on. It is ironic that this claim comes from Mackie, who argues for the truth of this point during his criticisms of the moral argument for God’s existence in *The Miracle of Theism*, merely two chapters before he discusses the problem of evil. If I am correct in my analysis, then this was a serious oversight on his part. He cannot have both his

criticisms for the moral argument for God's existence succeed, and retain the success of the argument from evil.

I will discuss The First Problem first and conclude with The Second Problem. If my analysis is correct, then I will have established an inconsistency within Mackie's work. Further, if Mackie's criticisms of the moral argument for the existence of God are correct, then the argument from evil will be left fatally undermined. The problem of evil cannot then be used as a basis from which to argue for the conclusion that 'God does not exist'.

3.3 The First Problem: Underlying normative inconsistency

In order for the problem of evil to work as a problem - i.e. give rise to a *prima facie* contradiction - the evaluative contents of 1 and 3 need to connect up properly via 2 such that (when combined with the non-evaluative content) if one (of either 1 or 3) is true then the other will be false. This might be more difficult than is intuitively thought. For if different types of underlying normative assumptions are operating in 1 and 3, then they will not connect up properly.

3.3.1 Consistency within the problem

The problem of evil will collapse internally if the normative assumptions underlying the evaluative claims of 1 and 3 do not match up. If one evaluative claim, such as 'God is maximally-good', depends upon a certain normative assumption, such as 'good is defined as whatever God does/commands', whereas the other evaluative claim (i.e. 'evil exists') depends upon a different and incompatible normative assumption (e.g. 'good and evil are to be defined primarily in terms of pleasure and suffering'), then the two will not connect up. This is because the normative assumption underlying the evaluative claim of 1 does nothing to provide any justification for the evaluative claim contained within 3, and as such the claims of 1 and 3 do not contradict each other since they are not referring to the same version of 'good' or 'evil'.

This would be a fatal problem for the problem of evil, since to maintain its validity in light of the underlying normative inconsistency would be to commit the fallacy of equivocation, but it is probably quite unlikely to ever happen; at least not within one who is proposing the problem of evil. Most people are going to be sensible enough to recognise that underlying normative assumptions affect the nature of any evaluative claims that are derived

from these assumptions, and so though this problem is a potentially serious problem for those posing the problem of evil, it is easily solved, simply by remaining internally consistent in one's normative assumptions and by applying them consistently.

Having said that, I identify this possibility to highlight that there remains the danger of this mistake occurring as a failure to recognise the proper domain of a discussion concerning the problem of evil. Say an atheologian wishes to present the problem of evil as an internal critique via *reductio*. They therefore wish to begin with the theist's normative assumptions, which they do. But then, half-way through the discussion, the atheologian asserts: '*surely* a maximally-good God would prevent pointless suffering!' If we assume that the atheologian is engaging with a theist who is particularly bold regarding their normative assumptions as they relate to God - the absolute priority of His goodness and justice, etc. - then this is a '*surely*' too far. The atheologian has supplanted the normative assumptions originally adopted for the sake of *reductio* with their own, and has lost the feature of an 'internal' critique. The proper domain of discussion is no longer whether or not pointless evil shows that God does not exist, but whether the theist's normative assumptions are acceptable. In this discussion, the internal critique via *reductio* has gone out of the window; the problem of evil has gone out of the window. We are now in a strictly moral-philosophical discussion, and the problem of evil has failed to compel any kind of conclusion regarding God's existence.

Additionally, there certainly remains an argument to say that those *responding* to the problem of evil (i.e. theodacists) are guilty of a kind of internal normative inconsistency within their solutions to the problem of evil. Given that many of these theodicies (for example, the 'Soul-Making Theodicy') are recognisably consequentialist in their normative nature, yet come from the mouths of theists who do not commonly deploy consequentialism in their other ethical judgements, nor think that God is a consequentialist, it would seem that some 'internal inconsistency' is at work here: On the one hand, it is reasonable to construct a refutation of the problem of evil on consequentialist grounds; on the other, there is a general resistance from traditional theism to the 'doing of evil so that good may come'.⁷ But this is an argument for elsewhere since it would, at best, establish an internal inconsistency in the theodical response to the problem of evil, rather than in the problem of evil itself. I will leave it aside for the time being in order to focus upon it exclusively in the next chapter.

⁷ Romans 3.8, *The Bible: New Revised Standard Version* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995).

But internal consistency is only one factor here; there is a more relevant version of this problem for the problem of evil, and it emerges when we consider the dialectical expression of the problem of evil.

3.3.2 Consistency between problems

It is one thing to be consistent within one's normative assumptions, it is another to have that consistency extend to others around you. Consider, for example, a not too far-fetched situation such as this: An atheist is presenting the problem of evil to a theist, and wishes to set the theist 'the task of clarifying and if possible reconciling the several beliefs which he holds'.⁸ The atheist is a brutally utilitarian consequentialist; they think that 'there is one ultimate moral aim: that outcomes be as good as possible',⁹ and that outcomes are to be judged on the basis of the maximisation of pleasure and the minimisation of pain or suffering. On the basis of this ethical outlook, and these underlying normative assumptions, the atheist frames the problem of evil in such a way that the overwhelming presence of seemingly pointless and unjustified suffering in the world is deeply contradictory with the notion of a maximally-powerful, maximally-good creator God. God ought to maximise pleasure, and minimise suffering, and He has the power to do so, and yet (it seems) clearly does not; this is a valid rendition of the problem of evil, and it is quite sound from a utilitarian point of view.

But the theist, on the contrary, is a rather simple and normatively bold divine command theorist. Not only do they think that what can be considered morally 'good' depends entirely upon God's commands - they have opted for the spiky horn of the Euthyphro dilemma; 'it is good because God commands it' - but they also believe that *whatever* God creates He deems good, and therefore everything that is, is good (with the possible exception of freely chosen rejection of/falling away from God). All suffering is deserved; it is all just; whatever is, is right. Is the theist vulnerable to the atheist's version of the problem of evil? Of course not. The suffering that the atheist appeals to as support for their assertion of proposition 3 is in no way contradictory with the type of 'maximal-goodness' that the theist holds to in proposition 1. Internally, the atheist's version of the problem of evil retains its contradiction, since there is an expectation (under that normative view) that God behave a certain way (i.e., minimise suffering), but it falls on deaf ears to any who do not share the atheist's normative assumptions. The type of evil presented as evil by a

⁸ J. L. Mackie, *The Miracle of Theism: Arguments for and against the Existence of God* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982), p. 150.

⁹ Borrowing Derek Parfit's definition in *Reasons and Persons* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), p. 24.

utilitarian atheist is not contradictory with the notion of goodness possessed by the Euthyphro-bold theist. For the theist, such evil simply does not exist according to their value-system; it could not, suffering would always assuredly be just deserts - even the term 'pointless' has no purchase as a concept in this system, since good is not being defined in terms of outcomes - and so the problem is solved. There simply is not the link between 'suffering' and 'bad' that the utilitarian atheist would assume to be self-evident. Raimond Gaita puts the point succinctly, 'what a person counts as harm depends on his understanding of value.'¹⁰

One could also run the story in precisely the opposite manner: Imagine an atheist who thinks that certain instances of suffering are so horrendous as to be considered 'unconscionable', not even in principle capable of being justified by appeal to greater goods; in contrast, we have a brutally consequentialist theodocist who thinks that anything can be justified if subsequently compensated by greater goods. Assuming that one can reasonably believe that all the sufferings of humanity are subsequently compensated (which is undoubtedly the case with some people), is the theodocist troubled by the atheist's challenge? Of course not. The evaluative claims of the atheist (re: the existence of unconscionable evils) are not shared by the theodocist, and so their challenge has no bite. But equally, the consequentialist theodocist's response holds no weight for the morally-minded atheist. Again, though the various versions of the problem of evil might retain an internal contradiction, the contradiction is not transferred across the atheist/theodocist divide.

In each of these cases, the evaluative contents of 1 and 3 connect up *within* the various versions of the problem of evil, but they do not connect up *between* the various versions. So this is the first point to extract from all this: In order for the argument from evil to be persuasive, it seems that either interlocutor must first convince the other to share their evaluative assumptions. Any resolution of the problem of evil would amount to an evaluative resolution of this kind.

Perhaps this seems like a trivial conclusion of the 'First Problem' for the problem of evil, but I do not intend merely to point out that 'in order for an argument to be persuasive, an interlocutor must persuade the other to accept their assumptions'; I want to highlight that people do not even seem to be aware that they are deploying assumptions in this context. These normative assumptions are often not framed as logical assumptions - for the sake of *reductio*, say - but are simply propositions that are *assumed*. My point is that in the context of

¹⁰ Raimond Gaita, *Good and Evil: An Absolute Conception*, 2nd edition, Kindle edition (London: Routledge, 2004), p. 196.

the problem of evil, we cannot assume the truth or applicability of such normative claims. This is partly because religious and non-religious ethical worldviews are likely to be quite different, but also because the problem of evil has a peculiarly reflexive normative character. The existence of evil can be seen to tell us as much about God's goodness as it can tell against His existence, and the existence of God is invariably seen as a fundamental and foundational variable in formulating any kind of value judgement.

3.3.3 Examples of evaluative claims in the problem of evil

It is not difficult to find some examples of these evaluative claims that are fundamental to any version of the problem of evil, or a response to it. Consider this from John Hick:

Virtues which have been formed within the agent as a hard-won deposit of her own right decisions...are *intrinsically more valuable* than virtues created within her ready made.¹¹

It is noteworthy that of all the claims and complex arguments made within the proposition and rebuttal of the problem of evil, these evaluative claims are often asserted rather than defended. As Hick says, these evaluative claims express 'a basic value judgement that cannot be established by argument but which one can only present, in the hope that it will be as morally plausible, and indeed compelling, to others as to oneself'.¹² This shows a rather pessimistic take on moral philosophy!

Likewise, consider this from Alvin Plantinga:

A world containing creatures who are significantly free (and freely perform more good than evil actions) is *more valuable*, all else being equal, than a world containing no free creatures at all.¹³

Again, this claim is not defended, but only asserted, and yet it is absolutely fundamental to the success of Plantinga's Free-Will Defence.

From Marilyn Adams:

Christians never believed God was a pleasure-maximiser anyway.¹⁴

¹¹ John Hick, 'An Irenaean Theodicy', in Stephen T. Davis (ed.), *Encountering Evil: Live Options in Theodicy*, a new edition (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), pp. 38-52 (p. 43).

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Alvin Plantinga, *God, Freedom, and Evil* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1977), p. 30.

¹⁴ Marilyn McCord Adams, 'Horrendous Evils and the Goodness of God', in Michael Peterson et al. (eds.), *Philosophy of Religion: Selected Readings*, 3rd edition (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), pp. 365-376 (p. 366).

Here Adams rejects the implicit assumption of hedonism present in almost any version of the problem of evil. The ‘evils’ identified invariably align with pain and suffering, but pains and pleasures are not the whole of the story of good and evil from a Christian point of view. In a similar yet slightly more extreme vein, we have this from Simone Weil:

He [God] did not reserve the cross for Christ...¹⁵

For Weil, not only do Christians not believe God to be a pleasure-maximiser, some might even consider it a *virtue*, obscurely understood, to suffer terribly, if that terrible suffering allowed them to be more Christ-like and thus brought them closer to God.¹⁶

Each of these statements clearly represents a kind of evaluative claim, derived from an underlying normative assumption, and one that is unlikely to be shared by all participants in the debate. To say with Simone Weil that ‘God did not reserve the cross for Christ’, and imply that suffering, even horrendous suffering, can actually be seen as an overwhelmingly *good* thing, since it allows one to be all the more Christ-like, is clearly not an evaluative claim that many non-Christians or atheists are likely to agree with. But if this counts as a response to the problem of evil, it can successfully rebuff any challenge, since it resolves the apparent inconsistency within the problem. God *would* create or permit horrendous suffering, because ‘He did not reserve the cross for Christ’ alone. The normative assumption that the atheologian was relying upon - the one that generated the contradiction between the evaluative claim of 1 (God is maximally-good) and that of 3 (evil exists) - is not shared by Weil, so there is no impact to the atheologian’s challenge. Either the atheologian has failed to successfully construct a *reductio*, or else they have chosen to work with their own normative assumptions over and above their opponent’s. Either way, their formulation is toothless.

Given the fundamental role that these evaluative claims play, the problem of evil only seems to have a hope of being viable if the various sides of the debate can come to some agreement over the underlying normative assumptions that are to grant these evaluative claims legitimacy, or at least agree upon which normative assumptions are to be deployed in the debate. Such agreement is never going to be an easy thing to achieve. As a result, the problem of evil lacks the universal consistency *between* versions of it that would be required for it to be successful.

¹⁵ Simone Weil, *Gravity and Grace* (London and New York: Ark Paperbacks, 1987), p. 101.

¹⁶ God, in permitting this state of affairs, seems to be perceived to inherit a portion of that virtue: ‘Of the links between God and man, love is the greatest. It is as great as the distance to be crossed. So that the love may be as great as possible, the distance is as great as possible.’ Ibid., pp. 81-2. Are we to conclude from this that God was right to permit suffering, since it increased the distance between creature and creator, thus allowing for greater love to overcome greater distance? ‘From human misery to God. But not as a compensation or consolation. As a correlation.’ Ibid.

Many philosophers seem to be aware of this, displaying the sort of pessimistic view of moral philosophy that Hick demonstrated earlier, and yet carry on regardless. Marilyn Adams says: ‘Once theorizing begins [...] the hope of universal agreement in value theory is shattered.’¹⁷ Similarly, Brian Davies says: ‘It is very hard to see how we are to settle the question, for what is now at stake is a fundamental moral option.’¹⁸ Given this pessimism regarding the prospects of moral philosophy in this context, it is always going to be an open option for a theist to respond to any version of the problem of evil with contrasting evaluative claims. This is ‘The First Problem’ for the problem of (and argument from) evil that emerges from my analysis: Unless some sort of underlying normative consistency can be agreed upon, the argument from evil cannot hope to be successful.

This is not the final word on problems for the argument from evil that stem from my analysis. Suppose we adopt a more optimistic attitude to the prospects of moral philosophy, and assume we can all come to some (at least minimal) normative agreement, and further assume that the argument from evil does manage to connect up the evaluative claims of 1 and 3 in such a way as to compel a conclusion. This conclusion will be a non-evaluative conclusion: ‘God does not exist.’ It will, therefore, be a non-evaluative conclusion that was deduced from evaluative premises, and this is something that J. L. Mackie considers to be essentially problematic.

3.4 The Second Problem: Crossing the is-ought gap is problematic, especially the wrong way; Mackie’s criticisms of the moral argument for the existence of God

J. L. Mackie addresses these issues during his criticism of the moral argument for God’s existence.¹⁹ This argument - put in various forms, but Mackie engages principally with Kant’s - states that God’s existence must be rendered more probable if we wish to maintain the rationality of a commitment to objective moral values. In order for it to be rational to pursue the satisfaction of the highest good, which is the only true aim of morality, it must be possible for this highest good to be achieved. But the only way that can happen is if God exists, as a guarantor of universal justice. Therefore, if we wish to believe that it is rational to behave morally, we ought also to commit to the truth of God’s existence.

¹⁷ Marilyn McCord Adams, *Horrendous Evils and the Goodness of God* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1999), p. 11.

¹⁸ Brian Davies, *An Introduction to the Philosophy of Religion*, 2nd edition (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), p. 38.

¹⁹ Chapter 6 of J. L. Mackie, *The Miracle of Theism*, pp. 102-118.

Kant retreats from claiming this argument to deductively prove the existence of God, and instead claims that maintaining a belief in God's existence is necessary from a 'practical point of view'.²⁰ But in any case, one can extract similar arguments from various theistic apologetics; a personal favourite of mine can be found in the works of Dostoevsky, but the argument is present in William Lane Craig's,²¹ as well as many others,²² and can be paraphrased (simply) like so:

M1. If God does not exist, then everything is permitted.

M2. It is not the case that everything is permitted.

M3. Therefore, God exists.

It is a simple argument, straightforwardly deductively valid, and with apparently true premises (at least for some). Why, then, is it not terribly persuasive for some people?

Well, partly, no doubt, because many are happy to reject the truth of the premises. Moral sceptics are quite happy to reject M2, and say that everything is indeed permitted, whilst many morally-minded atheists baulk at the notion of M1, that God is required for the legitimacy of even one moral obligation. But there is another problem with arguments such as these, and it is this problem that Mackie considers to be 'the basic weakness of almost every form of moral argument for the existence of a god'.²³

Whilst one can reject moral arguments for the existence of God such as these by rejecting the premises, it is also clear that there is something rather odd going on with the structure of the argument overall: The moral argument for God's existence moves from normative premises to a non-normative or 'factual' conclusion, and this is not really a rational way to go about arguing for something. As Mackie says:

A set of beliefs, even if they are called 'intuitions', about how one ought to act cannot be a good reason for settling a factual issue, a way of determining what is the case, or even for deciding what to 'believe for practical purposes'.²⁴

He presents this by way of example:

...what should we say about a general who accepted these three premises:

²⁰ J. L. Mackie, *The Miracle of Theism*, p. 108.

²¹ William Lane Craig, 'Theistic Critiques Of Atheism', available at: <<http://www.reasonablefaith.org/theistic-critiques-of-atheism>> [accessed 05/09/2014].

²² As ever, the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy provides a helpful summary, in this case newly revised: C. Stephen Evans, 'Moral Arguments for the Existence of God', in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, 2014, available at: <<http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/moral-arguments-god/>> [accessed 05/09/2014].

²³ J. L. Mackie, *The Miracle of Theism*, p. 122.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 112.

1. If the enemy are advancing in overwhelming strength, then, if we do not withdraw, our army will be wiped out;
 2. We must not allow our army to be wiped out;
 3. We must not withdraw, because that would mean letting down our allies;
- and concluded, on these grounds alone, that the enemy were not advancing in overwhelming strength?²⁵

Clearly, we would think this general were being incredibly irrational in seeming to think that he/she could deduce a claim about what factually *is* the case from his/her judgement of what *ought* to be the case. Mackie goes on:

In all such cases, what it is rational to do depends upon what the facts are; but we cannot take what we are inclined to think that it is rational to do as evidence about those facts. To use a conjunction of practical judgements to try to establish what the facts are would be to put the cart before the horse. We must rely on speculative reasoning first to determine what is the case, and then frame our practical and moral beliefs and attitudes in light of these facts. There is a direction of supervenience: since what *is* morally and practically rational supervenes on what is the case, what it is rational to *believe* with a view to practice, or to *choose* to do, must similarly supervene upon what it is rational to believe about what is the case.²⁶

Now, here Mackie is directing his criticism against the kind of moral argument for God's existence put forward by Kant, one that is supposed to be persuasive from a 'practical point of view'. As such, Mackie's language slightly misses the mark for what I wish to say. But we can draw on what he says, and particularly his example of the unfortunate general, to draw out some relevant points.

Firstly, one should note that the general's argument is deductively valid if we remove all normative content. Consider a version in which this is the case; it is easier, grammatically, to put the argument in the past tense, thereby removing any normative 'oughts' yet preserving a sensible set of sentences. So instead of 'We ought not to let our army get wiped out', which contains a sort of normative claim, we get the straightforward non-normative claim of 'our army was not wiped out'. And so, *mutatis mutandis*, and though it will read a little clumsily, we get something like this:

- G1. If the enemy had advanced, then if we did not withdraw, our army would have been wiped out.
- G2. Our army was not wiped out.
- G3. We did not withdraw.

²⁵ J. L. Mackie, *The Miracle of Theism*, p. 113.

²⁶ Ibid.

From this, if we hold that the premises are true, we could quite happily conclude that the enemy army did not advance, and this would be a perfectly valid conclusion. So what is the difference between the obviously rational line of reasoning evident in this non-normative general example, and the obviously irrational reasoning in the normative general example? Clearly, it is the presence of the normative content, and the attempt to draw non-normative conclusions from that content. This is what Mackie means by ‘direction of supervenience’; when we are dealing with truth-apt propositions, values can supervene upon facts, and facts can supervene upon other facts, but facts cannot supervene on values.

Mackie presents another analogous case to support this claim, in the form of a couple of syllogisms: Firstly, ‘Eat no animal fats; butter is an animal fat; so don’t eat butter’,²⁷ which is a syllogism of a kind that ‘most of those who have discussed imperative logic have assumed [...] are valid’.²⁸ Secondly, ‘Eat no animal fats; you may eat butter; so butter is not an animal fat.’²⁹ According to Mackie, if the first of these is valid, then so too must the second be. And yet, in the case of the second, ‘such a pair of imperative premises [...] could not objectively establish the truth of the factual conclusion’.³⁰ According to Mackie, you cannot derive facts from values.

It is this that Mackie thinks causes the obvious irrationality in the normative general case. The general is attempting to have some fact claim about the enemy advancing supervene on his or her normative claims about what he or she ought to do, but this does not work. Similarly, Mackie argues, Kant et al. are trying to have the fact claim regarding God’s existence supervene upon a normative claim about how the highest good ought to be achievable, or that there are moral obligations. But clearly the direction of entailment cannot be drawn from what ought to be the case to what actually is the case.³¹ Mackie’s criticisms of

²⁷ J. L. Mackie, *The Miracle of Theism*, p. 112.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid. In the interests of full disclosure, the quotation continues: ‘They show only that anyone who coherently issues both imperatives [...] must *believe* the conclusion to be true.’ I am not sure what to make of this addition, since it seems to go against what Mackie says in the next paragraph, when he talks about his example of the general. Must the field marshal, who is issuing the commands to the general, *believe* that the enemy will not advance in overwhelming strength when he or she issues the imperatives ‘do not let your army be wiped out’ and ‘do not withdraw’? If the field marshal were to take those imperatives as grounds for his or her belief, would the ‘normative field marshal’ not be as irrational as the ‘normative general’? I suspect the difference lies therein, in that the field marshal does not take the imperatives (or evaluative claims) as grounds for his or her belief, whereas the general does.

³¹ This is not to deny that ‘ought implies can’, but only to limit the extent to which that entailment can be used to tell us something about the world. The stipulation that ‘ought implies can’ acts as a limiting condition for the range of things that we can consider obligatory; if we *cannot* do such and such, then it cannot be the case that we ‘ought’ to do such and such - i.e., the world tells us something about what we can or cannot do, and we frame our moral judgements about what we ‘ought’ to do in light of that. But that we (perhaps *prima facie*) judge that something ‘ought’ to be done does not, in itself, give us good reason to deduce that it ‘can’ be done -

the moral argument for God's existence distil into one claim: There is a direction of supervenience, such that values supervene upon facts, but facts cannot supervene upon values.

If Mackie's criticisms of the moral argument for the existence of God are to be considered successful, then all that remains for me to point out is that the very same criticisms ought to apply to the moral argument *against* God's existence too; that is, the argument from evil. The argument from evil moves just as much from evaluative claims to non-evaluative claims as the moral argument does, and therefore ought to be considered just as vulnerable to Mackie's criticisms. In his criticisms of the moral argument contained within his *The Miracle of Theism*, Mackie has therefore sawn off the branch that he sits on, only two chapters later, when he presents the argument from evil.

3.5 Conclusion: The argument from evil is vulnerable to Mackie's challenge

I have argued that the problem of evil is made up of both evaluative and non-evaluative content, and that (as the argument from evil) it seeks to establish a non-evaluative conclusion. I have pointed out that there might be some difficulties concerning consistency within the underlying normative assumptions of the problem of evil, but assumed that these are not insurmountable difficulties. I have also discussed Mackie's criticisms of moral arguments for God's existence, and distilled them into one simple point: It is not legitimate to argue for a non-evaluative conclusion from normative (or evaluative) claims. There is a direction of supervenience between facts and values, which such an argument would get back-to-front.

Given that the argument from evil to the non-existence of God depends upon some evaluative claims, then, if the conclusion of that argument seeks to be a non-evaluative claim, wishing to state something about God's existence, it will become susceptible to Mackie's criticisms of moral arguments for the existence of God. Mackie's problem with moral arguments for the existence of God is that they attempt to derive facts from values. But, if I am correct, this is also precisely what the argument from evil attempts to do. The argument from evil moves from some non-evaluative claims (facts), via some evaluative claims (values), *and back again* to a non-evaluative conclusion (fact). If deriving facts from values is not on, then neither is deriving facts from values *and* facts, if those values play some

i.e., we cannot use our subjective judgements about what ought to be the case to tell us something about the world.

fundamental role – which, in the problem of evil, they do. So even if we achieve some underlying normative agreement concerning the evaluative claims within the problem of evil, the fact that the argument from evil skips across the is-ought gap into fundamentally evaluative premises, *and then back again to a non-evaluative conclusion*, is something that must be considered deeply problematic for the argument from evil. To do this is to commit precisely the same error that moral arguments *for* the existence of God are guilty of; it would be hopelessly inconsistent to ignore the issue when dealing with moral arguments *against* the existence of God.

So either Mackie's criticism of the moral argument is fatally wrong in some way, or the combination of it and my analysis entails that the argument from evil is left fatally undermined. Since it is based upon evaluative premises, the argument from evil cannot conclude with a non-evaluative claim. And since 'God does not exist' is taken to be a non-evaluative claim, the argument from evil cannot be used to argue for the non-existence of God.³²

³² I gratefully acknowledge the input of Mark 'Joss' Walker, and the comments of an anonymous reviewer on earlier drafts of this chapter.

4. Ethics and Theodicy: A Call for Consistency

Will you give his person [special] consideration? Will you plead for God? He shall punish you, if you secretly have consideration for persons! - There will be no hypocrite before him!

Immanuel Kant¹

In the last chapter, we noted that there were some issues concerning the consistency of the normative assumptions (and the evaluative claims that derive from these normative assumptions) deployed within the problem of evil, and between those who are discussing the problem of evil. I claimed that some minimal level of normative consistency and agreement must be reached before the problem of evil can be thought of as being a successful challenge to religious belief, but assumed that this level of normative agreement is not impossible. (I further claimed that even if this normative agreement is achieved, the argument from evil can never be a successful challenge to God's existence; it can at best be a moral challenge to religious belief. But that is beside the point for this chapter; I will return to those issues later.)

All that being said, it is clear that such a level of normative agreement is not commonly reached. A great deal of the disagreement surrounding the problem of evil often boils down to some basic normative disagreement, about whether such and such an evil is morally justified, or whether it is beyond justification, etc. The points made in the last chapter ought to bring those issues to consciousness. The purpose of this chapter is to identify a specific outcome of these underlying normative disagreements, to identify a specific form of underlying normative inconsistency. But instead of identifying an inconsistency in the normative assumptions deployed within the problem of evil itself, or an inconsistency in the normative assumptions between those who are discussing the problem of evil, I will focus on an apparent inconsistency that exists within certain traditional theists' *domains* of ethics. By which I mean, in certain domains of discussion - issues of public ethical concern perhaps; e.g., reproductive issues, end of life issues, etc. - certain traditional theists deploy one set of

¹ Immanuel Kant, 'On the Miscarriage of all Philosophical Trials in Theodicy', in Allen W. Wood and George Di Giovanni (trans. and eds.), *Religion and Rational Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), pp. 24-37 (pp. 32-3).

normative assumptions, and yet when they discuss the problem of evil (the ‘theodical domain’) they deploy an entirely different set.

4.1 The dilemma

The point is best presented as a dilemma:

1. If traditional theistic ethics is true, then consequentialism is false.
2. If certain traditional theodicies (such as the ‘Soul-Making Theodicy’) are true, then consequentialism is true.
3. Therefore, either traditional theistic ethics is false, or certain traditional theodicies are false.

Premise 1 states that traditional theists are commonly not consequentialists; traditional theists do not commonly think that consequentialism is the true moral theory. But premise 2 states that these same theists, when it comes to responding to the problem of evil, are often happy to deploy theodicies that are very consequentialist in their nature. These theodicies are so brutally consequentialist, in fact, that the truth of them would seem to compel a commitment to the truth of consequentialism. Therefore, these theists are maintaining one set of normative assumptions in their day to day moral thinking, yet applying an entirely different and contradictory set of normative assumptions when responding to the problem of evil. My dilemma forces these theists to resolve this inconsistency; either abandon consequentialist theodicies, or abandon non-consequentialist ethics, you cannot have both.

I will begin by briefly outlining what I understand by ‘consequentialism’, before proceeding to offer a defence of the premises in light of this understanding, followed by a discussion of some potential ways in which a theist can resolve this dilemma.

4.2 Consequentialism

What do I mean by ‘consequentialism’, how are we to define it, and how do we know if traditional theism or traditional theodicies entail its truth or falsity? According to a standard definition, consequentialism is true just in case it is true that ‘normative properties depend only on consequences’.² That definition is too brief to encompass all the relevant

² Walter Sinnott-Armstrong, ‘Consequentialism’, *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, 2011, available at: <<http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/consequentialism/>> [accessed 05/09/2014].

complications that would need to be taken into account in a full description of consequentialism, but it will do for our purposes. Note that consequentialism is defined largely by what it denies: That is, it allows for no normative property other than that derived from consequences. It is therefore far easier to identify ‘non-consequentialist’ moral theories, since we only need find one instance of a normative value claim that is not derived from consequences.

Therefore, it seems that premise 1 will be far easier to achieve, since we only need to identify one normative property that is entailed by traditional theism and does not depend upon consequences. I will offer three defences of this premise; each offers a way to identify just such a normative property, and to align it with traditional theism: a) An appeal to scripture. b) An empirical defence. c) A philosophical defence.

Premise 2 would seem to be a more difficult prospect, since the burden of proof goes the other way. Rather than finding one exception to the rule, we need to establish that certain traditional theodicies entail that there are *no* other normative properties besides those derived from consequences. This will not be easy, but I will offer an argument for it anyway. I will focus only on the ‘traditional’ theodicy of the Soul-Making Theodicy (SMT).³ I will argue that the SMT is a consequentialist theodicy, and that a commitment to the truth of it entails a commitment to the truth of consequentialism.

As it happens, neither premise 1 nor premise 2 needs to be particularly robust, in my view. I am happy to limit my conclusions, and the targets of my dilemma, to only those who are routinely non-consequentialist in their ethical outlooks (perhaps because of their theism, but this connection is not necessary) and yet appeal to overtly consequentialist theodicies, such as the Soul-Making Theodicy. As much as anything, this is an exercise in identifying the potential consequences of being ignorant about the underlying normative assumptions that are being used in any discussion of the problem of evil; in that regard, it is sufficient to point out that there is an apparent inconsistency between the way theists respond to the problem of evil and the way that they respond to other moral issues. It is not a problem for me to have my dilemma fail, and have this inconsistency resolved; in fact, I think that would be a good thing!

³ As outlined by John Hick in his *Evil and the God of Love* (London: Macmillan, 1966).

4.3 *Premise 1: Theism tends to entail non-consequentialism*

Premise 1 strikes me as profoundly intuitive, and therefore there seem to be many things that could be offered in its defence. We could talk about the scriptural support seeming to condemn a consequentialist moral attitude; we could talk about the many instances of Church authority speaking out against a consequentialist ethical outlook; we could talk about the philosophical reasons that seem to compel someone who believes in God away from adopting a consequentialist moral attitude; and I will talk about all of these in turn. But I recognise that none of these would be conclusive to the establishment of premise 1. There are always going to be exceptions to the rule in this case; I cannot claim that all theists are not consequentialists, and neither can I hope to claim (conclusively) that they should not be. All I can point out is that, generally speaking, theists do not tend to be consequentialists in their normative assumptions, and I think they have good reason not to be. I can offer the aforementioned reasons in support of this general claim, but they will only be true insofar as the empirical claims are accurate, the scriptural claims accepted theologically, and the philosophical claims agreed upon. This confines the scope of my conclusion to only those theists for whom the above are true, but I am quite happy with this. All valid arguments can be re-phrased as conditionals, after all, and all conditionals are prefaced with an ‘if’. So *if* you think the first two premises are true, then you will be faced with my dilemma.

4.3.1 *Scriptural support*

But we can offer some reason to accept the truth of premise 1. Firstly, we can easily find some scriptural support for the rejection of consequentialism, and if we take for granted the fact that traditional theism regards scripture as a valid authority on moral matters, this would provide us with good reason to accept the truth of premise 1.

Often cited on this point is the rather clear statement of Romans 3.8: ‘And why not say (as some people slander us by saying that we say), “Let us do evil so that good may come”? Their condemnation is deserved!’⁴ This is a clear rejection of a consequentialist ‘means-ends’ reasoning. It is not permissible to ‘do evil so that good may come’, and though this principle has been weakened over the centuries to become the ‘Principle of Double Effect’,⁵ the central non-consequentialist point remains.

⁴ *The Bible: New Revised Standard Version* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995).

⁵ ‘It is claimed that sometimes it is permissible to cause such a harm as a side effect (or “double effect”) of bringing about a good result even though it would not be permissible to cause such a harm as a means to

In addition to the explicit scriptural support of Romans 3.8, we can appeal to the abject lack of any affirmative statement of consequentialist ethics in scripture. In a collection of books that covers a great deal of moral ground (to put it mildly), the inclusion of consequentialist ethics in the Bible is conspicuously absent. Nowhere in the 613 commandments do we find anything remotely akin to ‘Thou shalt maximise outcomes wherever possible’, and yet this might have been a very simple command to give.

But we do find many other explicitly non-consequentialist commandments. Given the requirements for non-consequentialism set out earlier - that we only need one normative property that does not derive from consequences - we can take our pick of the 613 commandments, and find (surely) at least one whose normative properties cannot be reduced to the normative value of consequences. Should we find such a one, then we would have good reason to support premise 1.

There remains the possibility that this scriptural advice to be non-consequentialist, and absence of any advice to the contrary, is a product of a sort of ‘Government House Utilitarianism’,⁶ whereby God decrees the rules that we should follow, non-consequentially, yet these rules are determined by the true moral theory of consequentialism. Though Henry Sidgwick’s original outline of such a form of utilitarianism receives ample criticism from the likes of Bernard Williams, it is unclear that those criticisms adequately transfer to the religious context. For instance, consider the provocation for Williams’ jibe of ‘Government House Utilitarianism’; we find this in Sidgwick’s original discussion:

...it may be desirable that Common Sense should repudiate the doctrines which it is expedient to confine to an enlightened few. And thus a Utilitarian may reasonably desire, on Utilitarian principles, that some of his conclusions should be rejected by mankind generally; or even that the vulgar should keep aloof from his system as a whole, in so far as the inevitable indefiniteness and complexity of its calculations render it likely to lead to bad results in their hands.⁷

This prompts Williams to reply:

On this kind of account, Utilitarianism emerges as the morality of an elite, and the distinction between theory and practice determines a class of theorists distinct from other persons, theorists in whose hands the truth of the Utilitarian justification of non-Utilitarian dispositions

bringing about the same good end.’ Alison McIntyre, ‘Doctrine of Double Effect’, *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, 2011, available at: <<http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/double-effect/>> [accessed 07/09/2014].

⁶ A jibe coined by Bernard Williams. See his, ‘The Point of View of the Universe: Sidgwick and the Ambitions of Ethics’, in *Making Sense of Humanity and Other Philosophical Essays* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), pp. 153-71.

⁷ Henry Sidgwick, *The Methods of Ethics*, 7th edition (London: Macmillan, 1907), pp. 489-90.

will be responsibly deployed. This outlook accords well enough with the important colonial origins of Utilitarianism. This version may be called ‘Government House Utilitarianism’.⁸

What might be seen to justly count as a criticism to this kind of elitism in the purely human context does not quite seem to apply to the divine context. A maximally-knowledgeable and maximally-good God is, almost by definition, a ‘class of theorist distinct from other persons’.

But regardless, this would still leave traditional theists, as occupying the rank of the lower ‘vulgar’ orders, deprived of any justification or right to reason consequentially. These traditional theists would be Divine Command Theorists, even if those divine commands were themselves inspired by consequentialism. ‘Is God a consequentialist?’ is a question that has received a great deal of attention,⁹ and I will not weigh-in on that debate any more than I need to. It seems to me that God being a ‘self-effacing consequentialist’ would be a very difficult position to argue against, and it would probably be the best option for anyone wishing to respond to my dilemma and retain both consequentialist theodicies and traditional, non-consequentialist theistic ethics; certainly on the basis of the scriptural condemnation of consequentialism, at least. I suspect there are, ultimately, reasons to reject this hypothesis, some of which will be covered in section 4.3.3 (the philosophical reasons for a theist to reject consequentialism). But before we get on to that, let us first consider the empirical evidence in favour of premise 1.

4.3.2 Empirical support

In addition to the scriptural support, we can offer empirical support for the truth of premise 1. Romans 3.8 rejects a kind of consequentialist ‘means-ends’ reasoning, and this strong rejection of ‘means-ends’ reasoning continues in many contemporary public ethical debates in which theists speak as theists. Consider this: ‘Everything involving the use or disposal of human life, as a means to another end, must be categorically rejected.’¹⁰ The Catholic Church, to name only one theistic voice, clearly adopts an anti-consequentialist attitude in contemporary moral debates. This attitude is, I think, widespread amongst theists, and empirical support for the widespread correlation between traditional theists and anti-consequentialist moral attitudes is easily found. In almost any public (or academic) ethical

⁸ Cited in Bart Schultz and Georgios Varouxakis (eds.), *Utilitarianism and Empire* (Oxford: Lexington, 2005), pp. 215-16.

⁹ A typical and excellent example of this ongoing debate can be found in David McNaughton’s ‘Is God (almost) a Consequentialist? Swinburne’s Moral Theory’, *Religious Studies*, 38:3 (2002), 265-81.

¹⁰ Cardinal Basil Hume et al., ‘*The Common Good*’ and the Catholic Church’s Social Teaching: A Statement by the Catholic Bishops’ Conference of England and Wales (1996), p. 30

debate that we should care to mention, if there is a religious voice, it tends to be speaking against a reductionist, utilitarian, consequentialist position. Consider, even superficially, the classic issues, for Catholicism at least, of abortion, contraception, and euthanasia. Theistic voices are not alone in participating in these debates in non-consequentialist terms, but theistic voices that argue for these issues in *purely* consequentialist terms are surely an exception to the rule.

This is not to say that this is a universal rule, or that theists always fall on the same side on these debates,¹¹ and neither is it to say that consequentialist reasoning is absent from any theistic voice. It is true that part of the reasoning offered in support of the rejection of condom use was a sort of consequentialist appeal to the fact that condoms would not work in combating the spread of AIDS.¹² It is also true that one of the arguments against euthanasia is that it would cause a sort of ‘slippery slope’ towards a general loss of human dignity, and that this would cause bad outcomes that we should avoid.¹³ And yet, in either case it would be misleading to understand these arguments as being *purely* consequentialist, drawing as they do on normative properties that are not reducible to consequences. So let us put all of these issues aside and concern ourselves with this very general claim: Traditional theism, generally speaking, promotes a moral outlook that is non-consequentialist in its nature.

I am happy to leave this as an empirical claim, and limit the target of my dilemma to only those for whom it is true that traditional theism entails the falsity of consequentialism. I suspect this will be most theists, but concede that it will not be all; but I will say more about this when I come to consider the various ways in which a theist can escape my dilemma.

4.3.3 *Philosophical support*

Finally, we can offer a few brief comments by way of philosophical support for the notion that traditional theists have good reason not to be consequentialists. Setting aside that the major monotheistic texts appear to explicitly reject consequentialism, and the fact that the majority of the theistic community appears to reject consequentialism, and indeed all the

¹¹ See, for example, Paul Badham, *Is there a Christian Case for Assisted Dying?* (London: SPCK, 2009).

¹² ‘Pope Benedict XVI: Condoms Make AIDS Crisis Worse’, *The Telegraph Online*, 2009, available at: <<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/europe/vaticancityandhollysee/5005357/Pope-Benedict-XVI-condoms-make-Aids-crisis-worse.html>> [accessed 11/09/2014]. Though this was, of course, a confused way of taking the message, clarified at a later date: ‘The Pope Drops Catholic Ban on Condoms in Historic Shift’, *The Telegraph Online*, 2010, available at: <<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/the-pope/8148944/The-Pope-drops-Catholic-ban-on-condoms-in-historic-shift.html>> [accessed 11/09/2014].

¹³ Note, therefore, that the loss of human dignity is not posited, argumentatively, as a deontological concern concerning rights, but as a consequentialist concern concerning outcomes.

criticisms of consequentialism that can be put independently of anything relating to theism, there might be viable, purely philosophical reasons for a theist specifically to reject consequentialism; i.e., reject consequentialism because of their theism.

Firstly, if any kind of Divine Command Theory of ethics is true, or even any element of it is true (e.g., if divine commands only established the *obligatory* feature of moral laws, rather than dictating what the laws are),¹⁴ then consequentialism will be false. There are elements of theism that seem to encourage a commitment to elements of Divine Command Theory - for example, the reliable authority of scripture and therefore of the commands within it, the essential goodness of God and the fact that He has given commands, the moral argument for God's existence¹⁵ - and if any of these elements are true, then consequentialism will be false, since consequentialism allows for no normative properties to derive from non-consequentialist sources.

Secondly, if theism is true, then there is a maximally-good, maximally-powerful creator and sustainer of the universe. The existence of this being seems to ensure that any event that happens in the world is morally justified, all things considered. This conclusion seems to be compelled by the problem of evil; a being who had the power to ensure that no evil event that was not morally justified, all things considered, would occur, yet chose not to, would not be maximally-good. So if God does exist, and He is both maximally-good and maximally-powerful, then anything that happens *must* be morally justified, all things considered. This is often cited as a source of comfort for theists: 'God has a plan', 'God works in mysterious ways', etc. But this comforting fact has a downside, one that some recent criticism of 'Sceptical Theism' has pointed out.

Michael Almeida and Graham Oppy¹⁶ argue that adopting Sceptical Theism as a response to the problem of evil commits oneself to a sort of moral scepticism. If one cannot know that God does not have good reason for allowing what seems to us at least to be pointless evil, and one thinks this ignorance on our part is good reason to reject the

¹⁴ For example, William Lane Craig, 'The Indispensability of Theological Meta-ethical Foundations for Morality', *Foundations*, 5 (1997), 9-12.

¹⁵ The moral argument for God's existence relies upon an element of the Divine Command Theory being true, in that a crucial premise within the moral argument - the one that states that moral obligations do not exist unless God exists - establishes that the only way a moral duty can be considered truly applicable is if it is mandated by God. If a theist think the moral argument for God's existence is a good argument, then they must think this crucial premise is true; and if they think this premise is true, then they must think that moral duties cannot be duties unless mandated by God; and if they think that, then they commit themselves to an element of the Divine Command Theory, the element that claims that God is the source of moral *obligation*, if not the source of the moral laws themselves.

¹⁶ Michael J. Almeida and Graham Oppy, 'Sceptical Theism and Evidential Arguments from Evil', *Australasian Journal of Philosophy*, 81:4 (2003), 496-516.

judgement that it is, in fact, an instance of pointless evil, then how can one know that *any* instance of evil is not being expressly permitted for some morally sufficient reason, some greater good? Almeida and Oppy apply this moral scepticism to our day to day moral judgements of the actions of others, but the only relevant part for my purposes is that we know that God can be relied upon to allow only those evils that are justified by a morally sufficient reason. But given that this is the case, and assuming that God exists, surely *all* instances of evil that are allowed to occur must be justified by a morally sufficient reason. Otherwise, God would prevent them.

This only seems to be reinforced by Alvin Plantinga's comments in *Knowledge of God*,¹⁷ where he states that every event that occurs (in our world, given the existence of God) has the 'right-making property' of having been permitted to occur by a morally perfect being. This right-making property he takes to outweigh any other wrong-making properties that may feature in the event. If we were to read Plantinga's argument in purely consequentialist terms (which we should not, of course, but we can assume it for the sake of argument), we should take this to mean that God has maximised outcomes no matter what occurs. The only 'right-making' properties that exist in a consequentialist outlook are those associated with consequences, so to say that this 'right-making property' comes from having been permitted by a morally perfect being is just to say that that morally perfect being would, and has, maximise(d) outcomes. So yet again it seems that for a theist who is also a consequentialist, whatever you decide to do for any action, in terms of a strictly consequentialist calculation of moral value, you are neither damned if you do nor damned if you don't.

This leaves the theist in a difficult position regarding how to make their moral decisions. If they were to make their moral decisions based upon the expected consequences, and judge actions solely in light of their consequences - i.e., adopt a consequentialist moral attitude - they soon run up against the issue that neither they nor anyone else can do any wrong! For any action, the outcome is assured to be positive, justified, all things considered, even if it might seem to us to be negative and pointless. It *must* be positive, or at least not negative, all things considered, or else a maximally-good, maximally-powerful God would have prevented it. Therefore, a consequentialist theist is left with no viable moral apparatus whatsoever.

The only option for the theist who wishes to retain a viable moral apparatus is to adopt a non-consequentialist moral attitude. Even if the ultimate worth of their actions is to

¹⁷ Alvin Plantinga and Michael Tooley, *Knowledge of God* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2008), p. 171.

be (mysteriously, for it would be far beyond their ken) determined by consequences, the reason why they would do any action, and the method by which they would judge any action, would be non-consequentialist. An action is good because God recommended it, or because it is a response to a duty, etc. Some kind of non-consequentialist normative property must be invoked, or else the theist is left with a form of moral scepticism.

This harks back to Kant's insistence that one should not violate the moral law for the sake of expected good outcomes, given in his *On a Supposed Right to Lie Because of Philanthropic Concerns*,¹⁸ even if that violation of the moral law is to lie to an inquiring murderer. It is for these sorts of philosophical reasons that theists are advised to steer clear of consequentialism. Like Kant, you concentrate on doing the right thing, let God take care of the consequences.

But this is not to make any hard and fast claims regarding the truth of premise 1. As I said, I am happy for my conclusions to be limited by the extent to which this premise is true, and if it only applies to some theists, then only those theists will be subject to my dilemma.

4.4 Premise 2: If certain traditional theodicies are true, then consequentialism is true

Premise 2 states that if certain traditional theodicies are true, then consequentialism must be true. The first stage in arguing for this premise consists in establishing that certain traditional theodicies are broadly consequentialist in their ethical nature. This is easily done, since the theodicy that I will focus on is fairly explicit in its consequentialism. I will only consider the 'Soul-Making Theodicy' (SMT), but I expect these sorts of issues arise in other theodicies more generally (indeed, these broader issues will be the central focus of the next chapter).

4.4.1 Soul-Making Theodicy is consequentialist

John Hick's 'Soul-Making Theodicy' responds to the problem of evil by asserting that God has a certain end in mind for which certain means - means which unfortunately involve some evil - are required. 'The end sought...is the full realisation of human potential in a

¹⁸ Immanuel Kant, 'On a Supposed Right to Lie Because of Philanthropic Concerns', in *Grounding for the Metaphysics of Morals*, trans. by James W. Ellington (Indianapolis, Indiana: Hackett, 1993), pp. 63-7.

spiritual and moral perfection within the divine kingdom',¹⁹ and this end requires that we gradually mature in a hostile environment, for this is the only way in which we can truly achieve it. God creates and allows evil to exist because it is better, all things considered, this way than any other. That it is 'better' is determined by the outcome, or the consequences of doing things this way. It is right that God arrange the universe this way *because* of the consequences of arranging the universe in this way.

This is an important point, and one that should not be ignored or underestimated. According to SMT, and many other theodicies that appeal to a kind of 'greater good' reasoning, God is morally justified in permitting certain evils, or creating a universe in which certain evils will occur, *by the consequences of His so permitting*. It is right that God does such and such because it is best overall that He does so. According to SMT, the 'best' is the 'end sought'. As such, the good is here being defined exclusively in terms of consequences. The important point to recognise is not only that SMT expresses goods in terms of consequences, but that it explicitly states that God's reasons for permitting evil are *because* of these goods (defined in terms of consequences). According to this story, the goods (defined in terms of consequences) are not a by-product of some otherwise good scheme; they are the feature that makes the scheme good. As such, consequentialism is revealed to be even more embedded in SMT than even a cursory glance at its reference to 'good outcomes' would suggest.

4.4.2 Strengthening the connection between SMT and consequentialism

But that the SMT is fairly explicitly consequentialist in its nature does not, in itself, establish the connection between the truth of it and the truth of consequentialism, even though it might offer some fairly hefty intuitive support for that claim. Though perhaps counterintuitive, it remains logically possible that this consequentialist theodicy is true whilst consequentialism is false. All that this theodicy seems to commit itself to is the fact that God reasons and acts in a consequentialist way when it comes to deciding whether to permit evil. But in day to day life, it is quite normal for non-consequentialists to reason and act consequentially, and this does not necessarily mean that they believe consequentialism to be the true moral theory; it just means that in this instance there is nothing forbidding reasoning and acting in a consequentialist way. The same might be true of God.

¹⁹ John Hick, 'An Irenaean Theodicy', in Stephen T. Davis (ed.), *Encountering Evil: Live Options in Theodicy*, a new edition (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), pp. 38-52 (p. 44).

So we need an argument to reinforce the intuition that there is a necessary connection between a commitment to God reasoning and acting in a consequentialist way, and a commitment to the truth of consequentialism. I think this connection can be established; I will offer a few possibilities.

It might, at first, be tempting to appeal to God's moral perfection here. Surely the morally perfect being would not reason and act consequentially unless the true moral theory compelled it? Well, maybe; but this seems to ignore the point just made, that people regularly reason and act consequentially without committing to consequentialism as the true moral theory. Perhaps the true moral theory does not compel acting in this way, but neither does it expressly forbid acting in this way. This would mean that God, the morally perfect being, could reason and act consequentially without this entailing the truth of consequentialism.

So it is not enough to combine God's moral perfection with God's reasoning and acting in a consequentialist way to deduce the truth of consequentialism. Instead, we need to look at quite what we mean when we say that God reasons and acts in a consequentialist way. To say that God reasons and acts in a consequentialist way, as the SMT asserts, is to say that God does certain things, or permits certain things (which is the same thing), *because* of the consequences of permitting those things. So that God reasons in this way entails that He is acting in response to a motivation that is derived from the value of the consequences of His actions. Further, we say that this motivation is a distinctly *moral* motivation; we say that God reasons and acts in this way because it is *good* that He does so; we see it as an expression of His goodness that he acts in this way, at least according to the SMT.

From this we can deduce that God's reasoning and acting in a consequentialist way entails that He is responding to a consequentialist *obligation*, in some fashion. He is responding to a moral motivation, derived from a moral value, which we call 'obligation', and as a morally perfect being cannot fail to respond to an obligation if that obligation is true. Therefore, it seems that this consequentialist obligation must be present in order for God to reason and act in such a consequentialist way as the SMT asserts, and that this obligation is present and responded to by God entails that it must be a true obligation. To put it another way, we understand that God is responding to a consequentialist obligation by describing His behaviour in consequentialist terms, and we deduce the implied truth of that obligation from His moral perfection.

Obligations come from moral theories; true obligations come from true moral theories. The consequentialist obligation to reason and act in a consequentialist way (and no other way) comes from consequentialism. So if this consequentialist obligation is true, then

consequentialism must be true. According to the SMT, God, in reasoning and acting in a consequentialist way, is responding to this obligation; that He, the morally perfect being, responds to this obligation entails that the obligation is true; and that the obligation is true entails that consequentialism is true. Therefore, a commitment to the truth of SMT, combined with some other uncontroversial commitments relating to God's attributes and the mechanisms of moral obligations (in relation to moral theories), entails a commitment to the truth of consequentialism. Or, to put it briefly, if the SMT is true then consequentialism is true. And to put it even more clearly: In order for the SMT to be true, it must be the case that consequentialism is true. This establishes the truth of premise 2.

4.4.3 Objections

The appropriate objection to make here is that the jump from God reasoning and acting in a consequentialist way to the conclusion that He is responding to the consequentialist moral obligation (and no other moral obligation) is too quick. Why not imagine that God has other obligations, non-consequentialist obligations, that the SMT does not mention, perhaps because we are not (and cannot be) aware of them? Here is my response: The consequentialist obligation is an exclusive obligation; it allows for no other moral obligations other than to maximise outcomes.²⁰ Therefore, either God is responding to the consequentialist moral obligation, in which case there are no other moral obligations for Him to respond to, or else there are other moral obligations, and therefore, as the morally perfect being, God is not responding to the consequentialist obligation at all. So if we claim that God is responding to a consequentialist obligation, then we rule out the possibility of other moral obligations.

But that is a relatively inconclusive point. I suspect the objection would continue by surrendering the claim that God is responding to a consequentialist obligation at all. And this would be fine, were it not for the fact that the SMT clearly indicates that God is responding to a consequentialist obligation in some form. Again, I reiterate, the SMT states that God is reasoning and acting in a consequentialist way *because it is good that He does so*. If we wish to add that there are other obligations that He is also responding to, then we are owed that story, because all we have in the SMT is a pretty brutally consequentialist explanation.

²⁰ 'There is one ultimate moral aim: that outcomes be as good as possible.' Derek Parfit, *Reasons and Persons* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), p. 24.

So rather like my defence of premise 1, this defence ends with a relatively easy way to deny the premise. One need only claim that God is not *only* responding to a consequentialist obligation when he behaves in the way the SMT describes. The caveat here being that we are now owed the story relating to the other obligation that God is responding to, and that story might be difficult to give, given that the situation as the SMT presents it allows for God to permit every instance of evil that has ever been or ever will be, and yet remain ‘perfectly good’. If there are other, non-consequentialist, moral obligations in operation here, they are clearly not very restrictive.

But in any case, just as with premise 1, I am happy to concede that none of these points is utterly conclusive, and therefore only address my dilemma to those (of which there are surely many) who see the SMT as an essentially consequentialist theodicy that assumes the truth of consequentialism (or at least deploys consequentialism as an underlying normative assumption).

4.5 Conclusion

I have presented a dilemma, the conclusion of which is that you cannot commit to both the truth of a consequentialist theodicy (such as the SMT) and to the truth of traditional theistic ethics. Clearly, there are two very obvious ways we can resolve this dilemma: Reject consequentialist theodicies, or reject traditional theistic ethics. I suspect the former is the better option, but I will not argue for this here. The purpose of this chapter was to identify the apparent inconsistency between the normative assumptions often deployed in responses to the problem of evil (i.e. consequentialism in the Soul-Making Theodicy), and the normative assumptions traditionally associated with traditional theism (which are profoundly non-consequentialist, generally speaking). My dilemma illustrates this issue, and presses the theist to establish some consistency in their normative assumptions, across any domain in which these normative assumptions are deployed.

The following chapter will discuss what is essentially a resolution of the dilemma presented here. If one is not a consequentialist, as most theists are not, then one ought to reject consequentialist theodicies *for being consequentialist*. This is the response of the ‘moral anti-theodicists’, and it is to them that I now turn.

5. Moral Anti-Theodicy

One cannot ask suffering to justify its reasons. One would expose oneself to empathizing with nearly nothing.

Albert Camus¹

This apology, in which the vindication is worse than the complaint, needs no refutation; surely it can be freely given over to the detestation of every human being who has the least feeling for morality.

Immanuel Kant²

In the previous chapter, we noted an apparent inconsistency in the normative assumptions deployed by theists in various ethical contexts. Specifically, theists seem generally averse to consequentialist moral reasoning in most ethical discussions, yet appear generally in favour of deploying consequentialist justifications when it comes to discussing the problem of evil. This built upon the work of the preceding chapters of this thesis, which sought to highlight the important role that evaluative claims, and underlying normative assumptions, play in both the proposition of the problem of evil and its attempted refutation. I argue that disagreements regarding the problem of evil are, in the main, distinctively moral disagreements, and as such ought to be dealt with using the best tools that we have at our disposal - namely, those of moral philosophy. Once we are sufficiently aware of the fundamental role that evaluative claims play within the problem of evil, this is the only sensible way that the discussion can continue. I will now turn to an example of the kind of discussion that results from an awareness of the fundamental role that evaluative claims play within the problem of evil: the discussion of *moral anti-theodicy*.

Moral anti-theodicy claims that there is something morally objectionable about the way in which theodicy goes about its work. A barrage of critical arguments have been brought to bear on the moral status of theodicy, from the likes of Nick Trakakis, D. Z.

¹ Albert Camus, *Notebooks 1951-1959*, trans. by Ryan Bloom, Kindle edition (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 2008), note of July 26th, 1957 (Kindle location 1546).

² Immanuel Kant, 'On the Miscarriage of all Philosophical Trials in Theodicy', in Allen W. Wood and George Di Giovanni (trans. and eds.), *Religion and Rational Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), pp. 24-37 (p. 27).

Phillips, and Kenneth Surin. Each concludes that certain classical theodical solutions ought to be dismissed on moral grounds. I will dwell on these arguments at some length, but first I think it would be helpful, to provide some context, to say a little more about how theodicies work, and the particular steps that they take that might cause a moral anti-theodicy to take offence.

5.1 How theodicies work, according to my analysis

I have argued that the problem of evil is made up of evaluative and non-evaluative content. Theodicies defeat the problem of evil; they find a way to deny the conclusion of the argument from evil, or find a way to resolve the problem of evil, by denying the truth of one of the premises within the problem. But how do these theodicies work, at the meta level? Recall my meta-formulation of the problem of evil:

1. There exists a maximally-good, maximally-powerful creator of the universe.
2. A maximally-good, maximally-powerful creator of the universe would not create or permit any pointless or unconscionable evil in its creation.
3. Some pointless or unconscionable evil exists.

If my analysis is correct, then theodicies deny some part of premise 1 (relating to the existence of God), deny some part of premise 3 (relating to the existence of evil), or else deny that the existence of God and the existence of evil are incompatible (i.e. deny premise 2). I have claimed that these premises are made up of evaluative and non-evaluative components. Which do theodicies deny, the evaluative or the non-evaluative components?

We can ignore a denial of premise 1 for now, for that is mostly considered conducive to atheism.³ We must focus on premises 2 and 3. Consider premise 3: In its simplest form ‘Evil exists’, or as I have it in my meta-formulation ‘Some pointless or unconscionable evil exists’, or in its more complex form ‘An event x happens, and it is bad that x happens (x ought to have been prevented by any being who had the power to do so).’ Clearly, theodicy cannot deny the non-evaluative content of this premise; no one can deny that earthquakes happen, or that suffering occurs. What theodicy denies, if they wish to deny the truth of this premise, is the evaluative content. That is, they accept that earthquakes happen, but they deny that such an earthquake is ‘bad’, all things considered, or otherwise ought to have been

³ I will consider the possibilities that remain open for theism to deny premise 1 in my final chapter, but they deserve a fuller further investigation, one that cannot be embarked upon here.

prevented by a being who had the power to do so. Theodicies deny premise 3 by bringing in a further evaluative claim, one that undermines and trumps the initial evaluative claim contained within premise 3. A theodicy might claim that it is justified that such an earthquake should occur, for it provides us with opportunities for moral growth, etc. This is an evaluative claim; it is good that we attain moral growth, and the permission of earthquakes (by a being who had the power to do otherwise) is morally justified in light of this.

Similarly, consider premise 2: 'A maximally-good, maximally-powerful creator of the universe would not create or permit any pointless or unconscionable evil in its creation.' I have claimed that this entailment is an expression of the perceived contradiction between the evaluative contents of premises 3 and 1. So, in Mackie's sense, that 'a being who is wholly good eliminates evil as far as he can',⁴ or in my sense, that being maximally-good (as a moral agent) entails that you do all that you ought to, where what is 'evil' in this context (as an event) is understood to mean 'ought not to be permitted by any being who has the power to do so'. I have claimed, in my meta-formulation, that this entailment is intended as an expression of the meaning of the terms within premises 1 and 3. As such, to deny the truth of this entailment is to deny the meaning of the terms within premises 1 and 3. And, again, what is likely to be being denied here, the meaning of the terms relating to the non-evaluative claims - what it means for an earthquake to occur, for God to have power,⁵ etc. - or the meaning of the terms relating to the evaluative content - what being 'maximally-good' entails, what an event being 'evil' entails? It seems clear that theodicy works, in either case, by denying or challenging the truth or meaning of some of the evaluative components within the problem of evil. This can only be done by bringing in further evaluative claims that either undermine or else trump the initial evaluative claim contained within the problem of evil. Specifically, and speaking once again at the meta level, the claim of theodicy will almost always take the form of providing God with a morally sufficient reason for permitting the evils of the world.

Because this is how theodicy works, it remains likely that theodicy will *always* succeed in its aims of resolving the inconsistency within the meta-formulation of the problem of evil. I stress the 'always', because I really do mean that theodicy will always be capable of defeating the problem of evil. Given that all theodicy requires is the proposition of an

⁴ Paraphrased from J. L. Mackie, *The Miracle of Theism: Arguments for and against the Existence of God* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982), p. 150.

⁵ I am aware that some philosophers are happy to question what it means to say that God has 'power' - see D. Z. Phillips, *The Problem of Evil and the Problem of God*, Kindle edition (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2005) - and I think that they are wise to do so. Again, this deserves a fuller further discussion that I do not have the space for here.

additional moral truth (or evaluative claim), and given that it is incredibly difficult to establish the absolute truth or falsity of moral claims one way or the other - the history of normative ethics is testament to that fact - these additional moral claims are going to be fairly impervious to conclusive counter-attack. (This echoes a point I made earlier, in chapter three, that the underlying normative agreement necessary to come to some mutually acceptable conclusion is likely to be difficult to achieve.)

Because of this relative immunity to counter-attack, the theodicist has tremendous flexibility in how they go about their work, and great freedom in the variety of additional moral claims that they can invoke to establish their conclusion. In chapter three, section 3.3.3, we saw something of the range and variety of evaluative claims that have been offered as responses to the problem of evil; from John Hick's consequentialism to Simone Weil's 'God did not reserve the cross for Christ alone'. Some of these evaluative claims are less extreme than others, but all of them exploit a relative freedom in formulating their theodical narratives. It is not terribly important for these theodicists that some other people are not going to agree with their evaluative claims, since 'everyone knows' that such normative agreement is a rare thing anyway.

5.1.1 Conclusion

In summary, theodicies work by denying some evaluative component of the problem of evil. This much is obvious, really, since it is impossible to deny that (say) earthquakes occur. The evaluative content within the problem of evil is denied by a further evaluative claim; which, again, is rather obvious if we maintain some minimal version of the is-ought gap: a fact claim cannot be used to directly deny the truth of an evaluative claim (though it can deny the truth of an evaluative claim indirectly, by undermining the factual object that the evaluative claim relates to; but this is not what theodicies do).

The response of the moral anti-theodicist is to recognise the central role that these additional evaluative claims play in theodicy, and point out that all of them, in some way, deny (either explicitly or implicitly) an essential moral claim that we ought otherwise to accept as true. For example, Weil's claim regarding the goodness of suffering (if that is not an unfairly glib caricature of her position) denies the essential, well, *badness* of suffering; Marilyn Adams's claim regarding the irrelevance of pleasure in the theodical equation denies the essential role that the extreme negation of pleasure, in the form of horrendous suffering, ought to play in this equation; Plantinga and Hick both rely upon a fundamentally means-

ends reasoning that denies the essential moral requirement that humans be treated never as mere means, but always as ends in themselves.

My claim is that moral anti-theodicy works by rejecting the moral claims of theodicy. Robert Mark Simpson⁶ offers a slightly different reading of the response of moral anti-theodicy. For him, moral anti-theodicy works by making one moral claim - that there is some moral impropriety in sanctioning the horrendous evils in the world⁷ - and then accusing theodicy in light of this claim. I do not disagree with him on this point, but consider my reading to be more applicable, given my analysis of the problem of evil at the meta level. Simpson's reading is certainly correct, but my reading explains why his reading works. Why is there some moral impropriety in sanctioning the horrendous evils of the world? I answer: Because to sanction the evils of the world requires that we deny the moral claims that afford these evils their moral status.

5.2 *Moral Anti-Theodicy*

My analysis of the problem of evil shows that the premises within the problem of (and argument from) evil contain some fundamentally evaluative claims. I have further claimed that theodicy works by denying some of these evaluative claims, and that this can only be done by invoking other evaluative claims. These further evaluative claims seek to undermine the overall, all things considered, 'badness' of any evil event that is posited in premise 3 of the problem of evil, or else seek to weaken the perceived incompatibility between the maximal-goodness of God, as expressed in premise 1, and the 'evil' of the event expressed in premise 3. As such, the evaluative claims of theodicy will do one of two things: Deny that the event in question is 'evil', all things considered, or deny that it is incompatible with 'maximal-goodness' or moral perfection. The response of the moral anti-theodicy is to reject either of these claims on purely moral grounds. That is, the moral anti-theodicy rejects the evaluative claims of theodicy with some evaluative claims of their own, or by re-asserting the strength of the original evaluative claims within the problem of evil.

I will focus on the work of D. Z. Phillips, Kenneth Surin, and Nick Trakakis. Each of these has offered their own distinct moral critiques of theodicy, but I do not think that it is unfair to group them all together as expressing the same basic point. They all, according to

⁶ Robert Mark Simpson, 'Moral Antitheodicy: Prospects and Problems', *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion*, 65 (2009), 153-69.

⁷ He has this as a premise: 'P1. There is an inherent moral impropriety in the discourse practice of theodicy (key premise of moral antitheodicy).' *Ibid.*, p. 156.

my analysis, reject those evaluative claims within theodicy that facilitate theodicy's defeat of the problem of evil, and they reject these evaluative claims on evaluative grounds.

The evaluative grounds on which theodicy's evaluative claims are rejected can be separated into six broad categories, which I will deal with in distinct sections. As will become clear, each of these bases for the rejection of theodicy on evaluative grounds bleed into one another, such that it is slightly artificial to separate them as I do. Nevertheless, for clarity I will treat them as distinct criticisms.

5.2.1 Moral insensitivity: Theodicy fails to take suffering seriously

This is perhaps the most common and frequently recurring criticism of theodicy on evaluative grounds, that it does not take the suffering posited in premise 3 within the problem of evil sufficiently seriously. This point has been made by Phillips, Surin, Trakakis, and most others who have written on this subject, and is fairly labelled the central objection of moral anti-theodicy. It gives rise to an accusation of moral insensitivity, since to engage in the practice of constructing theodicies is to speak of the horrendous sufferings of the world as something that can be 'absorbed', or outweighed by some greater good, and to do this is to downplay the extremity of the horror involved. It is precisely the recognition of certain instances of suffering as being horrendous that confirms their irredeemable status. As such, to speak of the horrors of the holocaust in the same breath as one speaks of patently redeemable sufferings (such as going to the dentist), and to allow for some comparison in degree to be drawn between them, is to fail to recognise the qualitative, and not merely quantitative, severity of the horrors in question.

D. Z. Phillips argued best for this point:

When we see God's ultimate good, it may be said, we will no longer accept 'inflicting evils on human beings' as the overall description of what God has done. Just like the pain at the dentist's, the evils human beings suffer will be swallowed up in a greater good. It is precisely at this point that what we know, morally, will not allow that comparison to be drawn. We cannot speak of swallowing the Holocaust, as we speak of swallowing the pain at the dentist's. What is more, Swinburne knows this as well as anyone else. When not philosophizing, he does not speak of the Holocaust in the same breath as a visit to the dentist (unless they were visits to Nazi dentists!). We wouldn't know what to make of someone who did in the moral community to which Swinburne thinks God, like us, belongs.⁸

Richard Swinburne seems to bear the brunt of Phillips's critiques, perhaps because he more than any other is so open about his willingness to engage in such comparisons. A now

⁸ D. Z. Phillips, *The Problem of Evil and the Problem of God*, chapter 2, section 3, para. 19 (Kindle locations 634-9).

infamous passage of his - at least judging by the frequency with which it appears in the anti-theodical literature - makes this clear:

[God] may know that the suffering that A will cause B is not nearly as great as B's screams might suggest to us and will provide (unknown to us) an opportunity to C to help B recover and will thus give C a deep responsibility which he would not otherwise have. God may very well have reason for allowing particular evils which it is our bounden duty to attempt to stop at all costs simply because he knows so much more about them than we do.⁹

But as Phillips rightly points out:

There are screams and screams. In some cases, it would be meaningless to think that the evil is not as bad as the screams suggest. Just try applying Swinburne's argument for suspended judgement to the Holocaust. [...] Theodicies cannot rely on a one-sided diet of examples. They argue that things are not as bad as they seem. The irony comes in the realization that they can be, and can be even worse.¹⁰

Richard Swinburne is not the only theodacist to 'rely on a one-sided diet of examples'. A typical example of a discussion by Alvin Plantinga of his Free-Will Defence utilises a mountaineer's bruised knees, a car breaking down, and some stranded mountaineers on the north face of the Grand Teton.¹¹ The former are used, it seems, precisely because they are trivial and obvious, and though the latter is undoubtedly tragic, we are still a long way from the depths of horror that this world has proven itself capable of. Although Plantinga only uses these as logical counterexamples - he does not mean to say anything about God's ability, or otherwise, to prevent bruised knees, but only uses these examples as support for the notion that there are some evils that cannot be prevented without the loss of a greater good, and therefore that greater goods can outweigh and justify some evils - the point remains that Plantinga chooses not to use what we might call *hard cases*. The choice between amputating a leg to prevent the pain of a bruised knee, or leaving the knee be, is rightly seen as obvious, a no-brainer, no big deal. But the truth of such a broadly utilitarian principle cannot be established by such easy cases alone.

This is obvious when we consider, even superficially, the historical discussion of utilitarianism. Bernard Williams presented some clear examples of just such 'hard cases'; cases in which it was far from obvious that the application of utilitarian moral principles yielded the correct result. In 'A Critique of Utilitarianism',¹² Williams asks us to imagine a

⁹ Richard Swinburne, 'The Problem of Evil', in Stuart Brown (ed.), *Reason and Religion* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1977), pp. 81-102 (p. 92).

¹⁰ D. Z. Phillips, *The Problem of Evil and the Problem of God*, chapter 3, section 9, paras 3-6 (Kindle locations 1127-31, 1124-5).

¹¹ Alvin Plantinga, *God, Freedom, and Evil* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1977), p. 20.

¹² Bernard Williams, 'A Critique of Utilitarianism', in George Sher (ed.), *Ethics: Essential Readings in Moral Theory* (New York: Routledge, 2012), pp. 253-61.

situation in which Jim - a hapless botanist, lost in the jungle - stumbles upon a dire situation. A captain of the local military has twenty inhabitants of a village lined up against the wall, and is about to execute them in response to some recent protests. But the captain, wishing to make a special occasion of Jim's arrival, offers Jim the opportunity to shoot only one villager, upon which case the rest of the villagers will be allowed to go free. If, however, Jim refused to shoot anyone, then the captain will continue as planned and execute the lot. What should Jim do?

Williams uses this example to demonstrate that even though it might ultimately be correct for Jim to shoot a villager, it is far from obvious that he should do so, and there are far more considerations involved than what utilitarianism will allow. Considerations such as personal moral responsibility, or the incommensurable value of individual human lives. These are weighty moral considerations that ought rightly to feature in any moral decision, and yet according to utilitarianism these considerations do not feature in this case or any other. It ought to be *obvious* that Jim should shoot a villager; the outcome is much better, after all. The example of 'Jim and the Indians' therefore tries to act as a counterexample to the truth of utilitarianism, since it reveals that a simple cost-benefit analysis is not sufficient to capture the moral meaning of the situation.

Williams' example might be considered a 'hard case' for utilitarianism, since even if utilitarianism comes to the right result, it does not come to it easily. But we do not get such 'hard case' examples in theodicy. To stretch the analogy, the sort of examples we see offered by theodacists are akin to re-framing 'Jim and the Indians' with a situation in which rather than executing a villager, Jim must only slap one of them in the face, or punch them on the arm, on pain of (should he refuse) the captain executing all of them. In this case even Williams would agree that it is obvious that Jim ought to slap a villager, but this fails to prove much of any significance.

And yet it seems that, speaking analogously, the theodacists are attempting to derive something very general, such as the truth of utilitarianism, by offering up the case of something fairly specific and minor, such as our modified 'Jim slapping the Indian'. How else are we to read the theodacists' moving from some examples involving slightly painful trips to the dentist, towards conclusions that the holocaust was justified by a morally sufficient reason? I agree that it is obviously correct to send your child to the dentist, even if they suffer slightly, in order that they enjoy better dental health in the future. I do not agree that it is obviously correct that the holocaust can be justified by a morally sufficient reason; not only because there happens to be no such reason, but because it is not possible to speak of

there being such a reason. The holocaust can reasonably be said to belong to a category of evils that are rightly understood as being ‘unjustifiable’, or unconscionable, beyond the pale of what can be considered redeemable by appeal to greater goods.

The criticism that emerges is a basic logical one: Theodacists, in employing vaguely consequentialist justifications for the existence of evil, rely upon a one-sided diet of examples, and therefore conclude a general rule from only a limited selection of specific cases. This is bad reasoning. Consider Plantinga’s examples, for example. We should recognise that his bruised knees emerge only as counter-examples to the rule that ‘good is opposed to evil in such a way that a being who is wholly good eliminates evil as far as he can’, and therefore Plantinga is only looking to establish the potential falsity of that premise. He shows us examples in which it might be justifiable, on broadly consequentialist grounds, for a maximally-good being to permit some evil; i.e., leave bruised knees as they are, if the only alternative is to chop your legs off. However, whilst establishing that ‘there exist some cases in which evils can be justified by greater goods (or lesser evils)’ permits you to deduce that ‘not all cases in which evil occurs are the evils unjustified’, it does not permit you to deduce that ‘*in all cases*, evil can be justified by greater goods (or lesser evils)’. This is a very basic logical error, and yet it is one that many theodacists seem to make, in arguing from the logical possibility of *some* evil being justified to the conclusion that *all* evil is potentially justifiable. This is like someone trying to establish the truth of utilitarianism by citing our ‘Jim slapping the Indian’ story.¹³

The anti-theodacist could present horrendous evils as mere ‘hard case’ counter-examples to the general rule that ‘all evils are potentially justified by appeal to greater goods (or lesser evils)’, in much the same vein as Bernard Williams, but the effectiveness of these horrendous evils as counter-examples to consequentialist justification will be dependent upon a perception of them actually being counter-examples to the consequentialist justification of evil, and this requires a level of moral sensitivity that theodacists seem to lack. So rather than make the simple logical point that theodacists establish the viability of an unrestrictedly consequentialist justification of evil on very slim foundations, anti-theodacists instead

¹³ The error is not quite so simple as arguing from a claim of ‘some x...’ to a claim of ‘all x...’. The mistake comes from Plantinga’s (though I do not wish to pick on him) arguing from a claim that ‘some x...’ entails the claim that ‘it is possible that all x...’. We drift into modal complications here, but the basic principle is easy to refute by counter example. I could not argue from the claim that ‘some people own Rolls Royce Phantoms’ to the claim that ‘it is possible that everyone owns a Rolls Royce Phantom’, since if there are a limited number of Rolls Royce Phantoms, fewer than there are people anyway, then it will not be possible for *everyone* to own a Rolls Royce Phantom, even if any one person might be able to. Perhaps there is a similar limiting factor for justifiable evils.

highlight the moral insensitivity evident in theodicy's ignorance (and I mean that as much as a verb as a noun) of horrendous evils *as counter-examples to that general rule*.

Theodicy, in its very nature, must judge all evils to be 'ok', all things considered. If a theodicy is correct, then there is no unjustified, unconscionable evil. And yet, for many morally-minded people, there are such evils - the holocaust is just one example. For theodicy to therefore insist that no such evil does, has, or can exist reveals an unwillingness to concede that any of the evils that have occurred are really as bad as some people (including the victims) seem to think they are. Theodicy is willing to place these terrible evils alongside minor tribulations like the pain we experience when we exercise, or go to the dentist, and judges that they are all capable of being justified by greater goods. But this is to ignore the radical qualitative severity of horrendous evils; to ignore that severity is to reveal a stark moral insensitivity, and therefore 'the theodicist's way of proceeding evinces a failure to take suffering seriously'.¹⁴

5.2.2 *Theodicy adopts too detached a perspective*

Following on from the charge of moral insensitivity - and acting as a kind of precursor of moral insensitivity - comes the charge that theodicy adopts too detached a perspective when it makes its moral calculations. Indeed, we have already seen that to be willing to make 'calculations' regarding certain evils reveals a kind of moral insensitivity, but this latest accusation resides in the theodicists' willingness to adopt a 'God's-eye view' of the world, a view of the world from an eternal point of view, *sub specie aeternitatis*, a view of the world as if from no place within it. At first glance, this might seem like a particularly unfair accusation to level at the theodicist, since theodicy seeks to understand God's reasons for permitting the evils of the world, and what perspective can God have but a God's-eye view? But this, it is claimed, is not a proper perspective to take when making evaluative claims.

To adopt a God's-eye view of the world when making one's moral decisions is, again, to run into the criticisms that utilitarianism has long been subject to. Such a perspective removes any of the subjective elements that (one might think) are crucial to many of our

¹⁴ Nick Trakakis, *The End of Philosophy of Religion* (London: Continuum, 2008), p. 11.

evaluative claims. We can return to the other example offered by Bernard Williams in his ‘Critique of Utilitarianism’,¹⁵ that of George the unfortunate scientist, to illustrate this point.

George is an out-of-work scientist with limited career prospects. He has a family to support, and times are hard. He is offered a job (by a friend) working for a company that produces chemical and biological weapons. George has a strong moral objection to the production of chemical and biological weapons. However, the job is well-paid, and his friend informs him that if he does not take the job, it will undoubtedly go to another candidate who is unusually zealous in his support for the production of chemical and biological weapons. Should George take the job?

Again, the point of this example is not that George should not take the job (though Williams thinks that he should not), but that it is far from obvious that George should take the job, and, again, there are far more considerations to consider than those that utilitarianism would allow. And yet, if utilitarianism were true, it would be obvious that George should take the job.

This criticism applies also to theodicy’s willingness to adopt a detached perspective when making their moral calculations. To adopt an objective, God’s-eye view of the world when making one’s moral decisions is to blind oneself to the down-to-earth realities of morality at the subjective level. From the utterly objective view, one that disregards George’s personal moral commitments, George should *obviously* take the job; it is better for him, his family, and the world. Williams’ point is that George’s personal perspective is a significant consideration in his decision, and that it ought to be. Extrapolating, we recognise that the personal perspective is fundamental to evaluative claims. It is this personal perspective that theodicy denies, in adopting a God’s-eye view of the world.

‘No statement, theological or otherwise, should be made that would not be credible in the presence of the burning children.’¹⁶ Being willing to construct systems of moral justification that allow for extreme suffering to be ‘manure for a future harmony’¹⁷ is to run the risk of making statements that are not credible in the presence of burning children. As such, Trakakis concludes, ‘the project of theodicy, of offering moral justifications for God’s permission of evil, clearly fails Greenberg’s litmus test. In the presence of the burning

¹⁵ I paraphrase throughout, but the originals can be found in J. J. C. Smart and Bernard Williams, *Utilitarianism: For and Against* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973), pp. 97-9.

¹⁶ Irving Greenberg, ‘Cloud of Smoke, Pillar of Fire’, in John K. Roth and Michael Berenbaum (eds.), *Holocaust: Religious and Philosophical Implications* (Minnesota: Paragon House, 1989), p. 315. Cited in Nick Trakakis, *The End of Philosophy of Religion*, p. 6.

¹⁷ See Ivan Karamazov in Dostoevsky’s *The Brothers Karamazov*. I will return frequently to Dostoevsky, and Ivan, later.

children, the declarations of theodacists are shown to be not merely morally confused, but morally scandalous.’¹⁸ And elsewhere, ‘...when our gaze turns to the evil and horrible suffering we inflict upon each other on a daily basis, dispassionate and abstract theorizing (at least of the kind recommended by theodacists) seems wholly inappropriate.’¹⁹

Kenneth Surin agrees: ‘To regard theodicy as a purely theoretical and scholarly exercise is to provide - albeit unwittingly - a tacit sanction of the myriad evils that exist on this planet.’²⁰ This notion of a ‘tacit sanction’ is an important one, and one that I will return to later. For now, it will suffice to leave this criticism at that, and move on to the next.

5.2.3 *Theodicy exhibits an ‘irremissable moral blindness’*

Again following on from the previous criticisms, a combination of moral insensitivity and the adopting of too detached a perspective leads to an accusation of an ‘irremissable moral blindness’.²¹ ‘A theodacist who, intentionally or inadvertently, formulates doctrines which occlude the radical and ruthless particularity of human evil is, by implication, mediating a social and political practice which averts its gaze from the cruelties that exist in the world.’²² This accusation rests not only on what has been mentioned - the detached perspective causing one to be blind to the down-to-earth subjective realities of morality - but extends to a very specific anti-theodical objection, one that is worth discussing at some length, since it turns out to be rather controversial. The objection is that theodicy is blind specifically to the moral reality of *unconscionable* evils. That is, evils that are beyond justification by greater goods.

This point is powerfully expressed by Kenneth Surin. In response to the notion that we should remain open-minded about the possibility that horrendous evils, such as the holocaust, could be justified by appeal to greater goods, Surin says this:

To be ‘open-minded’ about certain realities, and ‘more tellingly’ to *insist* on retaining such a contemplative disposition, is to show oneself to be incapable of making certain exigent moral discriminations. In the worst of cases, this incapacity to acknowledge that a particular reality is mind-stopping betokens an irremissable moral blindness, in less serious occurrences it testifies to a real lack of moral imagination, to an unshakeable moral coarseness. But in *all* cases the failure to lend a voice to the cries of the innocent (and there can be few more glaring instances of this failure than the willingness to construct a divine teleology out of innocent suffering) is to have lost the capacity to tell the truth: ‘The need to lend a voice to suffering is

¹⁸ Nick Trakakis, *The End of Philosophy of Religion*, p. 29.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 24.

²⁰ Kenneth Surin, *Theology and the Problem of Evil* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1986), p. 50.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 84.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 51.

a condition of all truth. For suffering is objectivity that weighs upon the subject; its most subjective experience, its expression, is objectively conveyed.²³

He continues:

In cases where human beings are *in extremis*, to be ‘open-minded’, and thus to deafen one’s ears to their cries, is to repudiate their flesh-and-bloodness, their being human. And in this hedging of one’s acknowledgement of the humanity of the other, one has lost one’s own humanity. [...] There are moral reasons, and we can abide by them, spurn them, contemplate them, be convinced by them, and so forth. [...] In the domain where human beings have to think and act, there are irreducible realities - realities ‘extra-territorial to reason’ (to borrow a phrase of George Steiner’s) - which halt the tongue, afflict the mind with blankness. To be resolutely ‘open-minded’ when confronted with these morally surd realities is to have lost any possible accordance with the truth (Adorno). It is to have lost one’s own humanity (Cavell).²⁴

Surin follows this paragraph with a particularly harrowing account of an incident in a concentration camp, and leaves it there, without further explanation or discussion. The account stands as an example of just the sort of ‘morally surd realities’ that theodacists, in seeking to fit such an event into a network of divine purposes, are blind to. No further explanation can be, or need be, offered to establish the truth of this irreducible moral reality.

5.2.3.1 *The key anti-theodical premise*

We can construct a simple little argument to make this key anti-theodical point clear:

1. There are unconscionable evils, which exist as ‘morally surd realities’.
2. If theodicy is true, then there are no unconscionable evils.
3. Therefore, theodicy is not true.

3 follows from 1 and 2, and 2 is undoubtedly true. 1, however, turns out to be a very controversial claim.

Robert Mark Simpson objects to this premise on the basis that it is begging the question against the conclusion of theodicy.²⁵ Theodicy seeks to argue that all evils are justified, the anti-theodical premise asserts that there are some evils that cannot be justified. As such, the key premise of anti-theodicy assumes that the conclusion of theodicy is false; or in other words, it begs the question against theodicy.

Although appearing to be a legitimate criticism to make, it rather misses the point of the anti-theodical premise. Namely, that the truth of this premise exists as a ‘morally surd

²³ Kenneth Surin, *Theology and the Problem of Evil*, p. 84. The quotation is from T. W. Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, trans. by E. B. Ashton (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1973), pp. 17-18.

²⁴ Kenneth Surin, *Theology and the Problem of Evil*, pp. 84-5.

²⁵ Robert Mark Simpson, ‘Moral Antitheodicy: Prospects and Problems’, op. cit.

reality'. So yes, the anti-theodical premise does assume the negation of the conclusion of theodicy, but it does so because that assumption is unavoidable, fundamental, necessary. The anti-theodist claims that this premise is *basically* true, and further claims that the basic truth of this premise is not something that is reducible to further argument. It exists as a brute reality, one which can only be revealed by example, and that we can either recognise or be blind to.

This, it is clear, is a rather bold meta-ethical claim, but it is not one that is vulnerable to accusations of question-begging. Indeed, to accuse the anti-theodists of question-begging on account of this seems only to invite a *tu quoque* response! D. Z. Phillips is all too ready to reply with his own accusation of question-begging. In those who construct theodicies, he says, 'there is an unreadiness to consider examples where the moral perspective involved is one which says that doing, or allowing, certain evils for the sake of a greater good is ruled out'.²⁶ Or, in other words, the theodists beg the question against the anti-theodists in assuming the non-existence of unconscionable evils.

It is this sort of stalemate, each side seeming vulnerable to accusations of question-begging, that leads certain philosophers to accept the stalemate, and become tempted to abandon the discussion. Speaking of the instrumentalism involved in theodicy, Stephen T. Davis writes: 'Instrumentalism in this context is understood by Phillips as the attempt to justify human suffering as a means to something greater. And it is clear that Phillips finds this idea morally objectionable and untrue to the logic of moral responsibility. But I am afraid I don't, and I'm not sure what else can be said here.'²⁷ I mentioned earlier, in chapter three, that this sort of pessimism regarding the prospects of moral philosophy was disappointing to see in such able philosophers. All we have here is an apparent *aporia*, but this is no reason to halt the discussion.

5.2.3.2 *The key question*

We have identified, at least, the point of disagreement between the theodists and the anti-theodists; and the point of disagreement concerns an evaluative claim. Either there are such things as unconscionable evils, in which case theodicy fails, or else there is either no such category as unconscionable evils, or if there is such a category then no such event has

²⁶ D. Z. Phillips, *The Problem of Evil and the Problem of God*, chapter 3, section 8, para. 23 (Kindle Locations 1111-2).

²⁷ Stephen T. Davis, 'Rejoinder', *Encountering Evil: Live Options in Theodicy*, a new edition (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), pp. 101-7 (p. 103).

ever occurred. The anti-theodacists - Surin, Phillips, et al. - believe the former proposition (there are unconscionable evils), the theodacists the latter disjunction (either there is no such category, or else that category is empty). To state either as a premise is to seem to beg the question against their opponent, since the peculiar feature of this category of evils is that they exist as 'morally surd realities', the truth of which cannot be established by argument but only shown by example. What needs to be decided, here, is whether this category of evils is a moral reality or not, and if it is a moral reality as a category of evils, have there actually been any incidents of such evils in this world? If the answer to that question is anything other than a resounding 'no', then anti-theodacy can, I think, avoid any accusation of question-begging, since it would remain at least an open question whether unconscionable evils exist or not, and therefore it would seem legitimate to criticise theodacy for averting its gaze from the possibility of these evils. To answer this question, we need to move into the realm of ethics, and draw upon those philosophical resources.

We can gloss over as *obvious* the viability of the notion that there are certain things that are not appropriate to consider justifiable by appeal to greater goods. The history of deontological ethics stands as testament to that. It is not necessary to argue that any aspect of deontological ethics is true, merely to state that it is obviously an open question that there could be such 'unjustifiable' evils. So short of dismissing the entire history of philosophical ethics since Socrates, the anti-theodacist seems to have the first stage of their position established: It is reasonable to consider the possibility that there is a category of evils that are rightly seen as 'unjustifiable' by appeal to greater goods, or otherwise unconscionable.

The second element is to further claim that there have actually been incidents of these evils. This is a slightly more controversial claim, and is particularly controversial in the manner in which it is defended. The anti-theodacists claim to recognise the existence of these evils as moral realities that are 'extra-territorial to reason', and as such offer no reasoned defence of their existence. Their existence is confirmed in their recognition, and that is all that can be said. It would be morally unthinkable to see things any other way. These two components - the recognition of these moral realities as necessitated responses, and the unthinkable nature of denying them - reveal that the anti-theodacists' view is strikingly similar to the view of the moral philosopher Raimond Gaita. I will return to an extended discussion of his work in the next chapter, since it offers credible support for the key anti-theodical premise. Suffice to say for now that, at least as far as this particular anti-theodical objection goes, we have identified the key premise in the anti-theodacists' claim that theodacy exhibits an 'irremissable moral blindness'. If that premise is credible, then the moral anti-

theodicists can avoid an accusation of question-begging, and their anti-theodical argument can run its course. I will leave a defence of that key premise for the next chapter, and move on to the remaining anti-theodical objections.

5.2.4 *Theodicy does not understand how morality works*

The fourth anti-theodical objection could be seen as a combination of all of the above, in that it claims that theodicy does not understand how morality works. Theodicy seems to assume an unrestricted utilitarianism, and in doing so does not recognise the qualitative extremity of certain horrendous evils, the essential role that the subjective perspective plays in evaluative claims, and the moral reality of unconscionable evils. Combined, this gives the impression that theodicy just does not get how morality works; it is working with the wrong moral theory. As such, it cannot hope to yield accurate conclusions.

D. Z. Phillips illustrates this point with an argument that shows the self-defeating nature of certain features of a Soul-Making Theodicy (SMT). An element of SMT holds that one of the reasons God permits evils is that evils allow us the opportunity to develop character. As John Hick says, there is a divine end that we must strive to reach: ‘The end sought...is the full realisation of human potential in a spiritual and moral perfection within the divine kingdom.’²⁸ This end requires that we gradually mature and develop our moral characters in a hostile environment, for this is the only way in which we can truly achieve it. But, Phillips points out, for God to permit evils for the instrumental purpose that we develop moral character is to defeat that very purpose!

To make the development of one’s character an aim is to ensure that the development will not take place. This is because the endeavour so conceived is self-defeating: *it lacks character*. [...] It seems to be both a logical and moral truth that to seek one’s character development is to lose it.²⁹

We need to be clear about precisely what kind of ‘character’ Phillips is talking about here, since the ‘logical truth’ that ‘to seek one’s character development is to lose it’ is not so obvious as Phillips assumes. There do seem to me to be some cases in which to seek one’s character development is an admirable, characterful, pursuit. People often subject themselves to a certain degree of suffering in order to ‘develop character’; the examples of religious ascetics, sportsmen and women, and martial artists spring to mind. One cannot deny that

²⁸ John Hick, ‘An Irenaean Theodicy’, in Stephen T. Davis (ed.), *Encountering Evil: Live Options in Theodicy*, pp. 38-52 (p. 44).

²⁹ D. Z. Phillips, *The Problem of Evil and the Problem of God*, chapter 3, section 3, paras 3-4 (Kindle locations 870-1, 875) (emphasis original).

subjecting oneself to the discipline of, say, cycling as fast as one can up a mountain is a characterful act. And if the goal is nothing more than to develop one's character, to be more hardy in the face of suffering, then the act of pursuing this character trait hardly seems to diminish the achievement. Similarly, parents might subject their children, and teachers might subject their pupils, to some suffering as a 'character building' exercise. Clearly, we should not assume from this, as theodacists are inclined to do, the principle that *any* suffering can be seen in this way. As Phillips says, there are screams and there are screams, and there is a qualitative difference between being pushed out of your comfort zone in order to develop character and being afflicted by horrendous suffering. Nevertheless, if cases like this are plausible, then it would seem to challenge the 'logical truth' that 'to seek one's character development is to lose it'.

But it is not this kind of 'character' that Phillips, or Hick, are talking about. They are referring specifically to *moral* character, and as such the idea is that to do something moral for purely self-regarding reasons of developing one's character is to detract from the moral worth of the act. Moral character applies to, as Phillips says, 'other things', rather than oneself.³⁰ If someone dives into a burning building to save a puppy, this is undoubtedly an admirable act, showing great moral (and other) character; but if we learn that they did this solely for self-regarding reasons - to impress their friends, for monetary reward, etc. - then many would be inclined to see these self-regarding reasons as detracting from the moral worth of the action. (Consider further the even more clearly self-regarding situation in which the individual had both left the puppy inside and set the building on fire in order that they have the opportunity to 'develop their character'. It would be absurd to consider this a characterful pursuit.) And yet, if theodicy is correct, then these self-regarding reasons occupy a pivotal role in the permission of evils. To think this way 'involves the objectionable instrumentalism in which the sufferings of others are treated as an opportunity for me to be shown at my best. Ironically, if I think of their sufferings in this way, I am shown at my worst'.³¹

5.2.5 Theodicy treats people as mere means

The fifth anti-theodical objection could be seen as an example of the fourth. In failing to understand how morality works, and assuming a sort of unrestricted utilitarianism,

³⁰ 'Character is shown in the ways we deal with *other things*.' D. Z. Phillips, *The Problem of Evil and the Problem of God*, chapter 3, section 3, para. 4 (Kindle location 872).

³¹ *Ibid.*, chapter 3, section 6, para. 1 (Kindle locations 948-9).

theodicy falls into the trap of treating people as mere means, rather than as ends in themselves. This broadly Kantian doctrine is, it is claimed, a basic moral truth, and as such theodicy suffers if it ignores it. That theodicy misunderstands this basic moral truth is rendered particularly obvious in the following passage from Richard Swinburne:

It is because being of use is a good for him who is of use and increases his well-being, that when someone's suffering is the means by which they are of use that the net negative weight of their suffering-and-being-of-use is not nearly as great as it would otherwise be; and so our Creator, if he has given us many other good things has the right to use us to a limited extent for the sake of some good to others. Kant was surely correct to emphasise that one must treat individuals as moral ends in themselves and not use them for the good of others. But the latter phrase must be interrupted [*sic*, probably 'interpreted'] as 'on balance'. It is permissible to use someone for the good of others if on balance you are their benefactor, and if they were in no position to make the choice for themselves.³²

Kant's 'Kingdom of Ends' formulation of the Categorical Imperative is in no way to be interpreted (or 'interrupted') as 'on balance'. It is *categorical*! Swinburne here seems to establish a ridiculous interpretation of Kant's moral principle in which I could rescue a poor unfortunate from some deprived part of the world, someone who perhaps was imminently to die had I not intervened, enslave them, and so long as I was 'on balance' their 'benefactor' treat them however I liked. (This absurd consequence of Swinburne's interpretation of the Categorical Imperative is only aided by his insistence that being 'of use' is a good that can be bestowed upon people by making use of them, thus implying that the more I use my slave, the greater a benefactor I become!)

That theodicy does in fact treat people as mere means was far more obvious twenty or thirty years ago, before people began to insist upon a 'patient-centred' adequacy condition for the goods that are posited to outweigh the evils of the world. At one point, it was supposed that the suffering of some might be redeemable by the benefits it afforded to others; for example, an earthquake in some distant part of the world affords us the opportunity to develop the virtue of charity, etc. This is now an unpopular position. As Eleonore Stump puts it, 'there is something morally repulsive about supposing that the point of allowing a child to suffer is some abstract benefit for the race as a whole'. She concludes that 'the good which justifies a child's pain must be a benefit *for that child*'.³³

³² Richard Swinburne, 'Theodicy, Our Well-Being, and God's Rights', *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion*, 38 (1995), 75-91 (pp. 87-8). I choose to ignore Swinburne's partial justification of his position via appeal to God's 'rights', contrasted with the rights of His creatures. This is a prime example in which the language of rights is 'ludicrously inadequate'. 'If a young girl is being forced into a brothel she will not talk about her rights. In such a situation the word would sound ludicrously inadequate.' Simone Weil, 'Human Personality', in G. A. Panichas (ed.), *The Simone Weil Reader* (New York: David McKay Co., 1977), p. 325.

³³ Eleonore Stump, 'Suffering and Redemption: A Reply to Smith', *Faith and Philosophy*, 2 (1985), 430-5 (p. 433).

And yet the criticism remains that theodicy, in constructing a ‘divine teleology out of human suffering’, fails to sufficiently treat people as ends in themselves. The adequacy condition of ‘patient-centred’ goods is intended to circumvent this criticism, but it is not wholly successful, simply because it remains bound by the mechanisms of a consequentialist justification via compensation, which misses the point of the more fundamental deontological requirement that people be respected as ends in themselves. There is more to respecting an individual as an end in themselves than simply offering them a sufficient compensation for any violations that they have suffered. As D. Z. Phillips pithily remarks, ‘To rescue sufferings from degradation by employing cost-benefit analysis, is like rescuing a prostitute from degradation by telling her to charge higher fees.’³⁴

5.2.6 *Theodicy adds to the evils of the world*

The final strictly evaluative anti-theodical criticism of theodicy is a recognition of all of the above, together with a further claim that the practice of generating and endorsing theodicies, rather than justifying or ameliorating evils, actually adds to the evils of the world. This is for two reasons: Firstly, all of the moral criticisms above having been made, to engage in theodicy is to engage in a morally bad practice, and therefore engaging in theodicy increases the amount of morally bad practices that go on in the world, thus adding to the evils of the world. This is the main contention of D. Z. Phillips: ‘...a theodicy, in the very language it employs, actually adds to the evils it seeks to justify.’³⁵

Secondly, according to Terrence Tilley, ‘accepting the recommendation of detachment when considering evils may render one oblivious to the commitment, practical wisdom and constancy needed to counteract some evils.’³⁶ Or, to put it another way, to engage in theodicy is to somehow weaken one’s moral responsiveness. James Wetzel agrees: ‘[Theodicy] seems too Panglossian a resolution to the challenge of evil, one which may tend to deaden us to the harsher realities of our world.’³⁷ This latter point is perhaps similar to a consequence, mentioned earlier (in chapter four), of fully accepting the truth of a consequentialist theodicy. This was pointed out by Almeida and Oppy,³⁸ chiefly in response

³⁴ D. Z. Phillips, *The Problem of Evil and the Problem of God*, chapter 3, section 7, para. 18 (Kindle locations 1043-4). Phillips says he is paraphrasing Simone Weil here.

³⁵ Ibid., chapter 3, section 4, para. 6 (Kindle location 902).

³⁶ Terrence W. Tilley, *The Evils of Theodicy* (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 1991), p. 231.

³⁷ James Wetzel, ‘Can Theodicy Be Avoided? The Claim of Unredeemed Evil’, *Religious Studies*, 25:1 (1989), 1-13 (p. 10).

³⁸ Michael J. Almeida and Graham Oppy, ‘Sceptical Theism and Evidential Arguments from Evil’, *Australasian Journal of Philosophy*, 81:4 (2003), 496-516.

to sceptical theism, the main thrust of the argument being that to understand the world as being composed of only goods and justified evils is to remove gratuitous evils from one's picture of the world. This leaves the theodacist in a tricky situation when one is faced with a potentially 'evil' situation that they could prevent. Should they intervene? Why should they, when they know that whatever evil might result, by their action or inaction, will be justified by a morally sufficient reason? This is a route to a kind of Panglossianism,³⁹ one that, if fully accepted, cannot but weaken one's resolve to act against the evils of the world.

The latter point is, of course, an empirical claim, and one that would be very difficult to establish; we can only really say that it may or may not be the case that accepting the truth of a theodicy weakens one's moral resolve. But the former point is true, at least insofar as the criticisms of anti-theodicy are correct. So even if the consequences of theodicy are not all that bad, it is morally wrong to dismiss the horrors of the world as not being all that bad, and that is enough to establish the claim that theodicy makes the world worse. To see why this is the case, one need only cast a glance back over the previous five criticisms: It is morally insensitive, adopting too detached a perspective on the world, and showing insufficient respect for the victims of these horrors. The world would be better off without the presence of these attitudes.

5.2.7 *Non-evaluative criticisms*

There are other, non-evaluative, criticisms of theodicy offered by the anti-theodacists. D. Z. Phillips, for example, offers an ingenious and purely logical argument against the notion of divine moral perfection, one that relies upon the mechanisms of theodicy to show that theodicy is in effect self-defeating.⁴⁰ The argument takes the form of a simple dilemma: Either God permits the evils of the world with or without a second thought. Either way He cannot be considered morally perfect. If He permits the evils of the world without a second thought, then He is morally callous, insensitive. If He permits the evils of the world with a second thought, with the hesitation and moral turmoil that one would expect of a morally sensitive and serious individual, then He is left with 'dirty hands', so to speak; He is left with an awareness that He has done something terrible, even if for the best of reasons. This too fails to meet the standard required of moral perfection.

³⁹ Referring, of course, to Voltaire's *Candide*.

⁴⁰ See D. Z. Phillips, *The Problem of Evil and the Problem of God*, section 3, paras 28 ff. (Kindle locations 662 ff.).

Although it is an ingenious argument, it is easily circumvented. Perhaps the easiest way is to adopt, as I have assumed from the outset of this thesis, Yujin Nagasawa's notion of the 'maximal-God', rather than the traditional 'omni-God' thesis. Nagasawa is utterly convincing on this point.⁴¹ We do not expect God to exceed the limits of logical possibility, and if it turns out that it is logically impossible to be both, say, omniscient and omnipotent - perhaps because, for example, it is paradoxical for this being to know what it is like to be powerless - then we can only expect God to be 'maximally-powerful'; 'maximally' here meaning to the greatest extent whilst remaining logically compatible with other maximally divine attributes.

Given that Phillips's argument is a purely logical argument, and assuming (for the sake of argument) the truth of some theodicy (for we would not wish to beg the question against it), Phillips's argument establishes that it is not logically possible for God to be morally *perfect* in this way. But given that it is logically impossible, we cannot expect God to achieve this level of moral perfection. Therefore, we can only expect his divinity to extend maximally in that regard. Cutting a long story short, this means that the latter of the two horns of Phillips's dilemma is not a particularly troubling one to adopt. We can suppose that God permits the evils of the world with a second thought, in full awareness of the magnitude of what He has done, and suffers alongside His creation. This would not be a threat to God's maximal moral goodness. For many, including many who are opposed to theodicy (Surin included), this is precisely the meaning of a 'theology of the cross'.

5.3 Conclusion: Theodicy mediates a praxis that sanctions evil

Though, as we have seen, there are a variety of specific criticisms within the umbrella term of moral anti-theodicy, at the meta level the response of the moral anti-theodicists is to reject the evaluative claims of theodicy with evaluative claims of their own. Theodicy denies the evaluative claims made within the problem of evil, generally either in premise 2 or premise 3; theodicies say that there is a morally sufficient reason for the evils of the world to exist, or else that this evil is not incompatible with the existence of God. Theodicies deny the evaluative content within the problem of evil by making further evaluative claims. According to the moral anti-theodicists, these further evaluative claims are morally objectionable in

⁴¹ Although in most cases concerning the problem of evil Nagasawa's argument affects no practicable difference, this is one instance in which it does, since it is an example of a kind of internal contradiction within concepts. I briefly outline my argument against Nagasawa in chapter two, footnote 3. cf. Yujin Nagasawa, 'A New Defence of Anselmian Theism', *Philosophical Quarterly*, 58 (2008), 577-96.

some way, and therefore theodicies are morally objectionable. Theodicies think the morally unthinkable, sanction the unsanctionable, justify the unjustifiable; theodicies render 'ok' what should not be rendered 'ok'. In short, '*Theodicies mediate a praxis that sanctions evil.*'⁴²

It is one thing to oppose the evaluative claims of theodicy with evaluative claims of your own, it is quite another to confirm that those evaluative claims are correct. The moral anti-theodicists make some rather bold evaluative and meta-ethical claims over the course of their criticisms, such as the irreducible nature of certain moral realities and the morally unthinkable nature of denying them. I have spent some time in this chapter identifying those bold claims, and the next chapter will be dedicated to offering some support for their credibility. It will remain the case, however, in spite of the support I will offer in the next chapter, that these evaluative claims are *bold*, and as such are widely disagreed with. Many perceive the difference in ethical opinion here to be indicative of an irreconcilable stalemate; as Stephen Davis says, 'I'm not sure what else can be said here.'⁴³ To pre-echo a Wittgensteinian refrain that will feature heavily in the next chapter, perhaps we cannot *say* any more, but perhaps we can *show* what remains to be settled.⁴⁴ When it comes to settling this ethical question, each individual must be called to a kind of moral seriousness. The examples of horrendous evils *show* the reality of something that cannot perhaps be said, and they reveal the truth of the moral anti-theodicists' evaluative claims. To recognise this requires that one be 'in touch with moral reality'. Though these are bold claims, they are not unreasonable ones. I now turn to the moral philosophy of Raimond Gaita (whose work draws in turn upon Ludwig Wittgenstein) to offer some support for the credibility of these bold anti-theodical evaluative claims.

⁴² Nick Trakakis, *The End of Philosophy of Religion*, pp. 28-9.

⁴³ Stephen T. Davis, 'Rejoinder', p. 103.

⁴⁴ 'What *can* be shown, *cannot* be said.' Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, trans. by D. F. Pears and B. F. McGuinness, Kindle edition (London & New York: Routledge, 2001), 4.1212.

6. Moral Anti-Theodicy and the Moral Philosophy of Raimond Gaita

What *can* be shown, *cannot* be said.

Ludwig Wittgenstein¹

In the previous chapter, I outlined the criticisms of the moral anti-theodacists and identified the key premises that support the anti-theodical critique. These key premises are composed of some evaluative claims, and it is certainly true to say that the evaluative claims of the moral anti-theodacists are, at times, bold. Further, there is an argument to say that if these bold claims are made only by the moral anti-theodacists - in isolation, as it were - then they might come across as a little *ad hoc*. Without some kind of external justification, their moral views might be seen as reactionary, rather than reasonable. To that end, this chapter will be dedicated to bolstering the key anti-theodical premise - that there are unconscionable evils in the world that exist as 'irreducible moral realities' - by drawing upon the work of Raimond Gaita and Ludwig Wittgenstein.

It is difficult for me to judge the extent to which Raimond Gaita's metaethical work has gained mainstream acceptance. I was fortunate enough to attend his lectures whilst at King's College London in 2010, and have been fascinated by his view ever since. As such, I probably have a skewed view of how influential his ideas have been. Here, I can only offer a brief account of some key aspects of his metaethics, and show that it grants philosophical credibility to the key component of the anti-theodical premise; namely that the truth of the existence of unconscionable evils is a moral reality that is 'extra-territorial to reason',² that is there to be recognised and cannot be established by reason alone, and it would be unthinkable to deny it. I think that Gaita is right in almost all that he says, but it will suffice here to establish only that some of what he says is plausible.

To recap, the key anti-theodical premise is that there are unconscionable evils that exist as 'irreducible moral realities'; moral realities that are there to be recognised, yet the claim that they exist cannot be supported (ultimately) by rational argument. Further, it would

¹ Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, trans. by D. F. Pears and B. F. McGuinness, Kindle edition (London & New York: Routledge, 2001), 4.1212.

² Kenneth Surin, *Theology and the Problem of Evil* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1986), p. 84.

be ‘unthinkable’ to deny these moral realities. I will deal with each of these features in turn, showing how the moral philosophy of Raimond Gaita exhibits obvious parallels with the moral philosophy of the moral anti-theodacists, especially in terms of the irreducible nature of certain moral realities. I will also draw upon some of Ludwig Wittgenstein’s comments in *On Certainty*³ to further bolster the credibility of the claim that certain things are ‘unthinkable’ to deny. If any of what Gaita and Wittgenstein say on these matters can be considered plausible, then it will offer support for the plausibility of the key anti-theodical premise, and as such allow the anti-theodical argument to run through to its conclusion.

6.1 Irreducible moral realities

Gaita’s view is best introduced just as he does in *A Common Humanity*, by way of example:

In the early 1960s, when I was seventeen years old, I worked as a ward-assistant in a psychiatric hospital. [...] The patients were judged to be incurable and they appeared to have irretrievably lost everything which gives meaning to our lives. They had no grounds for self-respect insofar as we connect that with self-esteem; or, none which could be based on qualities or achievements for which we could admire or congratulate them without condescension. [...] Often they were treated brutally by the psychiatrists and nurses. A small number of psychiatrists did, however, work devotedly to improve their conditions. They spoke, against all appearances, of the inalienable *dignity* of even those patients. I admired them enormously. Most of their colleagues believed these doctors to be naive, even fools. [...]

One day a nun came to the ward. In her middle years, only her vivacity made an impression on me until she talked to the patients. Then everything in her demeanour towards them - the way she spoke to them, her facial expressions, the inflexions of her body - contrasted with and showed up the behaviour of those noble psychiatrists. She showed that they were, despite their best efforts, condescending, as I too had been. She thereby revealed that even such patients were, as the psychiatrists and I had sincerely and generously professed, the equals of those who wanted to help them; but she also revealed that in our hearts we did not believe this.⁴

This autobiographical story acts as a departure point for the comprehensive metaethical discussion in *A Common Humanity*, and there are many relevant things that can be drawn from it. I must limit myself here, however, to only those elements that are relevant to the metaethical claims of moral anti-theodicy. I am citing Gaita as someone whose thought grants credence to the claim that it is reasonable to propose ‘morally surd realities’ that are ‘extra-territorial to reason’, realities that are there to be recognised yet stand without adequate rational justification, realities that it would be ‘unthinkable’ to deny. Gaita’s example of the

³ Ludwig Wittgenstein, *On Certainty*, G. E. M. Anscombe and G. H. von Wright (eds.), trans. by G. E. M. Anscombe and Denis Paul (Oxford: Blackwell, 1969).

⁴ Raimond Gaita, *A Common Humanity* (London: Routledge, 2001), pp. 17-9.

nun reveals precisely this kind of moral reality to him, a reality for which no completely rational justification is possible or required:

It would be no fault in any account of ethics if it failed to find words to make fully intelligible what the nun revealed, for she revealed something mysterious. [...] I have no understanding of what it revealed independently of the quality of her love. If I am asked what I mean when I say that even such people as were patients in that ward are fully our equals, I can only say that the quality of her love proved that they are rightly the objects of our non-condescending treatment, that we should do all in our power to respond in that way. But if someone were now to ask me what informs my sense that they are *rightly* the objects of such treatment, I can appeal only to the purity of her love. For me, the purity of the love proved the reality of what it revealed. I have to say 'for me', because one must speak personally about such matters. That after all is the nature of witness. From the point of view of the speculative intelligence, however, I am going around in ever darkening circles, because I allow for no independent justification of her attitude.

Nothing I can say will diminish this affront to reason.⁵

Gaita's work seems to have, perhaps unsurprisingly, attracted more attention from religious philosophers than from secular or outright ethical philosophers. His work relies upon concepts that many see to be fundamentally religious in their nature, though Gaita himself maintains that his view is in no way religious.⁶ That it was a nun who responded in this way has been taken by some⁷ to be an indication of the necessity of the religious concept of the sacred, and the perhaps derivative concept of the saintly. Could it be possible for the nun to respond in such a way had she not had the religious conceptual grounding from which to draw upon, the stories of saints and the embodiment of a certain moral attitude in Jesus Christ? This remains an open question, and one that Gaita is less inclined to dismiss now than he perhaps once was.⁸ He also litters his work with many recognisably religious terms; the use of 'witness' here is just such an example. But this should not be taken to imply the necessity of a religious foundation for these concepts:

If the nun were questioned she might have told a religious or theological or metaphysical story about the people to whom she responded with a love of such purity. But one need not

⁵ Raimond Gaita, *A Common Humanity*, pp. 19, 21-2.

⁶ For example, when ruminating on the superiority of the term 'sacred' over 'precious', and the ease with which a religious person could deploy the term 'sacred', Gaita says, rather abruptly: 'I am not religious, however, so I cannot use it.' Raimond Gaita, *Good and Evil: An Absolute Conception*, 2nd edition, Kindle edition (London: Routledge, 2004), Introduction, section iv, para. 1 (Kindle location 375).

⁷ See, e.g., Stephen Mulhall, 'The Work of Saintly Love: The Religious Impulse in Gaita's Writing', in Christopher Cordner (ed.), *Philosophy, Ethics and a Common Humanity: Essays in Honour of Raimond Gaita* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2011), pp. 21-36.

⁸ In the preface for the second edition of *Good and Evil*, Gaita says: 'Despite my disavowals, many readers have taken *Good and Evil* to be (implicitly) a religious work, or to require religious commitment if its arguments are to be pressed home. I persist with my disavowals, but I am now more sympathetic to the reasons why people have read it that way.' Raimond Gaita, *Good and Evil*, Introduction, section iv, para. 1 (Kindle location 375).

believe it or substitute any other metaphysical story in its place to be certain about the revelatory quality of her behaviour.⁹

And again, in the preface to the second edition of *Good and Evil*:

My commitment to what the nun in the hospital revealed is not conditional upon my believing something like she believed. [...] Nor do I wish to say that the wondrousness of her behaviour gives strong prima-facie grounds for believing in God or for attributing metaphysical properties to the patients. My affirmation is as firm and unreserved as it is metaphysically groundless. [...] Nothing that can be said about human beings – about their natural or their metaphysical properties – could ground it, in the sense of providing rational foundation for it. It cannot even make it less offensive to reason. How is God's gratuitous love for his creatures different?¹⁰

The temptation to say otherwise seems to be yet another symptom of refusing to engage seriously with the notion of a morally surd reality:

Theology and philosophy, both being discursive disciplines, seek ways of formulating the relation between the nun's behaviour and her religious beliefs which are more abstract and more tractable to a certain conception of reason. [...] Philosophers and theologians are, for reasons that go deep in their disciplines, inclined to say that the language of prayer and worship, anthropocentric and often poetic, merely makes moving and therefore psychologically accessible to less than perfectly rational beings, things whose intellectual content is more clearly revealed in the abstract deliverance of theological and philosophical theories. I suspect that the contrary is closer to the truth - that the unashamedly untheoretical, anthropocentric language of worship has greater power to reveal the structure of the concepts which make the nun's behaviour and what it revealed intelligible to us.¹¹

For Gaita, it is precisely these 'un-reasonable' and irreducible concepts that ground morality; concepts such as the inalienable preciousness of human beings:

Our sense of the preciousness of other people is connected with their power to affect us in ways we cannot fathom and in ways against which we can protect ourselves only at the cost of becoming shallow. There is nothing reasonable in the fact that another person's absence can make our lives seem empty. [...] Such attachments, and the joy and the grief which they may cause, condition our sense of the preciousness of human beings. Love is the most important of them.¹²

The concepts that ground our moral understanding, according to Gaita, are likewise conditioned by fundamentally 'un-reasonable' responses; responses such as the nun's love. There is no rational justification for the legitimacy of these responses, and so they exist as a kind of morally surd reality. In this respect at least, Raimond Gaita's metaethics is very much in line with the underlying claims of moral anti-theodicy, and in that regard his metaethics grants credence to the anti-theodical claim that such morally surd realities exist.

⁹ Raimond Gaita, *A Common Humanity*, p. 20.

¹⁰ Raimond Gaita, *Good and Evil*, Introduction, section iv, para. 5 (Kindle location 400).

¹¹ Raimond Gaita, *A Common Humanity*, pp. 22-3.

¹² *Ibid.*, pp. 26-7.

6.2 Thinking the unthinkable: Raimond Gaita and Ludwig Wittgenstein

There is another important area of shared ground between Gaita's metaethics and the claims of moral anti-theodicy, and this is the notion (closely connected with the irreducible nature of moral reality) of the morally 'unthinkable'. Anti-theodicists do not only say that there are unconscionable evils, and that these evils exist as morally surd realities, but they also claim that it would be *unthinkable* to deny their existence. It would be 'unthinkable' to construct divine teleologies out of innocent suffering; which is not to say that it would be impossible, only that it would be 'beyond the pale': 'To call something "unthinkable" is to express the extremity of what has been done. It is not to say it cannot be done. When this happens we say, "What was done was unthinkable." People do unthinkable things to each other.'¹³

Constructing divine teleologies out of innocent suffering is something that we should not even contemplate;¹⁴ it is morally unthinkable.¹⁵ Though Raimond Gaita does not address the theodical question, he provides support for the notion of the 'morally unthinkable'. In the chapter 'Forms of the Unthinkable', in *A Common Humanity*, Gaita addresses the tendency of contemporary moral philosophy to drift ever further into morally 'unthinkable' territory. He notes that Peter Singer, for example, does not attract anywhere near the level of moral outrage that we should expect of reasonable people when he argues that 'you would not wrong a three-week-old child if you killed it for frivolous reasons'.¹⁶ Gaita argues that there are some things that we should not even contemplate, if we are reasonable; some things are 'unthinkable':

...unthinkable not in the sense that no one ever thinks them, but in the sense that they are beyond argument; they are 'indefensible' because any serious attempt to defend them would show one to lack the judgment necessary for the proper exercise of reason on the matters in question. Or, in the case of moral matters, because it is wicked even to contemplate them.¹⁷

¹³ D. Z. Phillips, *The Problem of God and the Problem of Evil*, Kindle edition (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2005), chapter 9, section 2, para. 2 (Kindle locations 2593-4).

¹⁴ 'To ask of what use are the screams of the innocent, as Swinburne's defence would have us do, is to embark on a speculation we should not even contemplate.' D. Z. Phillips, 'The Problem of Evil: II', in Stuart Brown (ed.), *Reason and Religion* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1977), pp. 103-22 (p. 115).

¹⁵ Derivatively from this notion of the morally unthinkable comes the literally unthinkable: 'The horrific realities to be encountered in these "kingdoms of death" make the thought of God an irrational, even impossible, thought. The notion of a "Soul-making" deity who "operates" in these places becomes a literally unthinkable proposition.' Kenneth Surin, *Theology and the Problem of Evil*, p. 117.

¹⁶ This is Gaita's summary of Singer's view, given in: Raimond Gaita, *A Common Humanity*, p. 182. Gaita says that this view is 'undisguised' in Singer's work, and I agree. See Peter Singer, *Practical Ethics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979).

¹⁷ Raimond Gaita, *A Common Humanity*, p. 181.

There is a danger, of which Gaita is all too aware,¹⁸ of ‘moralising’ too much here. To claim outright that it is ‘wicked’ to contemplate certain options, and offer no further justification, would seem to be an unwarranted scramble to capture the moral high ground (even if we decide that we are content to deal with ‘morally surd realities’). But we do not need to limit ourselves to a moralistic claim about what is and is not wicked to contemplate; there is sound philosophical justification for the notion of the ‘unthinkable’, be it morally unthinkable or otherwise.

For this, Gaita draws upon some of Wittgenstein’s comments in *On Certainty* and elsewhere. Wittgenstein observes that, though there are many things that we can address a sceptical doubt towards, there are some things that it *makes no sense* to doubt; there are some things that it is ‘unthinkable’ that we could be mistaken about. What is ‘reasonable’ to believe is not limited to only believing what one has good grounds to believe; reason also sets limits to doubt. This, as ever for the later Wittgenstein, is a distinctively *grammatical* point. Wittgenstein is not attempting to refute the sceptical hypothesis directly; he does not want to confirm that any particular assertion – G. E. Moore’s ‘here is my hand’, for example – is definitely true. Instead, Wittgenstein asks ‘whether it can make sense to doubt it’,¹⁹ within the grammar of ‘reason’, and he finds some success in answering this question in the negative.

Although clearly *On Certainty* offers only sketches and notes, we can extract the central arguments insofar as they bear on this issue. The first step is to notice the purely logical (grammatical) relationship between doubting and non-doubting behaviour: ‘Doubting and non-doubting behaviour. There is the first only if there is the second.’²⁰ To doubt everything is senseless, since you would have to doubt even the meaning of the words used in your doubting: ‘If you are not certain of any fact, you cannot be certain of the meaning of your words either. If you tried to doubt everything you would not get as far as doubting anything. The game of doubting itself presupposes certainty.’²¹

So given that we cannot doubt everything, we must hold some things as certain; we must hold some things as being beyond doubt. Some things are ‘hinges’ upon which doubts can turn.²² This is a kind of grammatical, purely logical statement about what it means to be ‘reasonable’: it is unreasonable (for purely logical/grammatical reasons) to doubt *everything*.

¹⁸ ‘I have many times acknowledged the dangers of declaring things to be beyond consideration.’ Raimond Gaita, *A Common Humanity*, p. 185.

¹⁹ Ludwig Wittgenstein, *On Certainty*, §2.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, §354.

²¹ *Ibid.*, §§114–5.

²² ‘[T]he questions that we raise and our doubts depend on the fact that some propositions are exempt from doubt, are as it were like hinges on which those turn.’ *Ibid.*, §341.

‘The reasonable man does not have certain doubts.’²³ Establishing that there must at least be *some* things that are held certain effectively refutes the sceptical hypothesis that ‘nothing is certain’, but Wittgenstein’s purely grammatical argument contributes nothing to the (perhaps more relevant) question of *which* things are to be held certain.

Wittgenstein offers a few sketches towards answering this question, but the incomplete nature of the work entails that nothing is terribly conclusive. He first observes that, though we can offer no definitive ground for our certainty of any one thing, we have no trouble working with the belief that some things are certain. Further, our behaviour reveals to us which of these things are taken as indubitable.²⁴ I do not check that I have feet before I rise out of my chair, for example. If I am looking for a book, and fail to find it by looking in a particular drawer, I do not repeatedly look in the same drawer, over and over again, expecting to find it upon each opening. The negation of these things - that I have feet, that books do not spontaneously reappear in otherwise empty drawers - are not considered serious options by sane people; if someone were to subject these beliefs to serious doubt, then we would undoubtedly question their sanity (and would be right to do so). These certainties appear to be conditioned by the regularities of life, in a rather conventionally inductive manner, and yet we do not hold to them only with the strength of an inductive inference. Our certainty of these things clearly exceeds our inductive warrant. If I am sane, I *do not even admit the possibility* of my feet not existing, as Moore does not even admit the possibility of his hands not existing. It is *unthinkable* that I be mistaken about these things. It is part of a successful engagement in the ‘language-game’ that we take these things as beyond reasonable doubt. And yet whilst life shows us of which things we are certain, there is no ultimate rational *ground* for our certainty regarding these things. According to Wittgenstein, we should not see this lack of ultimate grounding as being problematic in any way: ‘The difficulty is to realize the groundlessness of our believing.’²⁵

Wittgenstein has a few threads of argument to justify this acceptance of a lack of grounding. The first thread runs like this: To bring these certainties into doubt would cause me to collapse all certainties, since I am as certain that my hand exists (say) as I am about any proposition. To doubt a belief like this is to effectively doubt everything, even the meaning of one’s words - ‘If my name is not L. W., how can I rely on what is meant by “true” and

²³ Ludwig Wittgenstein, *On Certainty*, §220.

²⁴ ‘My life shows that I know or am certain that there is a chair over there, or a door, and so on. - I tell a friend e.g. “Take that chair over there”, “Shut the door”, etc. etc.’ Ibid., §7.

²⁵ Ibid., §166.

“false”?²⁶ - and since we know it is senseless (by which we mean it is grammatically impossible, and not merely psychologically impossible) to doubt everything, we cannot sensibly allow for doubt about those things of which we are most certain. (Note that this in no way confirms that one cannot be *mistaken*, only that one cannot sensibly doubt the indubitable.)

A second thread of argument relates and adds to this: Were I to attempt to offer ‘ground’ for these certainties, that ground would be less certain (or at least no more certain) than the original certainty:

306. ‘I don’t know if this is a hand.’ But do you know what the word ‘hand’ means? And don’t say ‘I know what it means now for me’. And isn’t it an empirical fact - that this word is used like this?

307. And here the strange thing is that when I am quite certain of how the words are used, have no doubt about it, I can still give no grounds for my way of going on. If I tried I could give a thousand, but none as certain as the very thing they were supposed to be grounds for.²⁷

So if I am willing to doubt the certainty, then I ought to be as (or more) willing to doubt the ground of that certainty, and we will once again find ourselves back in the position of doubting everything.

A third thread of argument reinforces Wittgenstein’s position, but, as Wittgenstein is all-too-aware, it is likely to remain unsatisfying for anyone not already on board with his idiosyncratic ‘language-games’ and ‘forms of life’ solutions to the problems of philosophy:

358. Now I would like to regard this certainty, not as something akin to hastiness or superficiality, but as a form of life. (That is very badly expressed and probably badly thought as well.)

359. But that means I want to conceive it as something that lies beyond being justified or unjustified; as it were, as something animal.²⁸

The notion of a ‘form of life’ becomes very important here, since it is a ‘form of life’ that both shows us which beliefs we take as being certain and also serves to ground those beliefs as being reasonable to consider as certain, by determining the correct ‘rules’ of the ‘language-game’ in which these beliefs find their home. Life conditions both our beliefs, and the criteria by which we judge what is reasonable to believe or to leave open to doubt. Wittgenstein goes looking for the foundations of his house, and finds that the foundations are carried by the walls of the house...²⁹ For Wittgenstein, there is nothing wrong with this picture.

²⁶ Ludwig Wittgenstein, *On Certainty*, §515.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, §§306-7.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, §§358-9.

²⁹ ‘I have arrived at the rock bottom of my convictions. And one might almost say that these foundation-walls are carried by the whole house.’ Ludwig Wittgenstein, *On Certainty*, §248.

We find hints at a similar expression in *Philosophical Investigations*, though they are hinting to thoughts that are as yet not developed to the extent that they are in *On Certainty*:

‘I believe that he is suffering.’ - Do I also *believe* that he isn’t an automaton?
It would go against the grain to use the word in both connexions.
(Or is it like this: I believe that he is suffering, but am certain that he is not an automaton?
Nonsense!)

[...]

‘I believe that he is not an automaton’, just like that, so far makes no sense.
My attitude towards him is an attitude towards a soul. I am not of the *opinion* that he has a soul.³⁰

For Gaita, the point to extract from Wittgenstein’s thought, expressed in both *Philosophical Investigations* and *On Certainty*, is that the ‘regularities’ of human life ‘condition the concepts used in our reasoning, rather than providing support for it’.³¹ Life shows us what we are certain of, and what it makes no sense to consider appropriate or open to doubt; as Wittgenstein says, I am not of the ‘opinion’ that someone that I meet has an inner life.³² My attitude towards him is precisely that of an attitude towards someone who has an inner life; that attitude reveals my certainty of that fact, and is conditioned by the perception of his inner life. To be open to serious doubt about the existence of the inner life of others is revealed as being tantamount to doubting my very attitude, and I have no sense of what that could entail; I do not know what it would look like to doubt my having a certain attitude. To doubt my having a certain attitude would throw me back into doubting everything, which would be a grammatical error.

The example Gaita considers is the paranoid thought that waiters in restaurants might be trying to poison us. It is not as if the reasonable assumption that waiters in restaurants are not trying to poison us is the product of a process of inductive reasoning - e.g., ‘no waiter has ever tried to poison me...therefore, it’s very unlikely that this waiter is trying to poison me.’ (It is not really sensibly described as an ‘assumption’ at all.) The regularities of life condition the criteria by which we judge what is reasonable and what is not reasonable to think in such situations. Imagine someone were to believe that waiters were not trying to poison them only to the extent that their inductive reasoning allowed them to conclude, such that the possibility remained that the waiter might, just might, be trying to poison them...

³⁰ Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, trans. by G. E. M. Anscombe, 3rd edition (Oxford: Blackwell, 1967), part 2, §ii.

³¹ Raimond Gaita, *A Common Humanity*, p. 166.

³² Which, it should be stressed, is all Wittgenstein means by ‘soul’.

Is that an edifying picture of how we would be if we were able to be truly rational, or is it the same parody of reason that lunatics display? The latter, surely. If it did seem to us to be possible, though highly improbable, that the waiter might try to poison us, we would have one leg in the psychiatric clinic. Insisting that the probabilities of it are really very small, but real nonetheless, would not enable us to get it out again. The reason is not because here on earth, in an epistemically fallen state, we are doomed to treat things as certain though they are merely probable. It is that, even in the best of worlds, the sane would be distinguished from the insane by the fact that they rule things out of consideration.³³

In claiming that the regularities of life somehow condition the concepts by which we judge thinking well and thinking badly about a certain issue, Gaita is once again echoing Wittgenstein's observation: 'My life shows that I know or am certain that there is a chair over there, or a door, and so on. - I tell a friend e. g. "Take that chair over there", "Shut the door", etc. etc.'³⁴ Life *shows us*³⁵ that it is unreasonable to seriously consider the possibility that waiters might be trying to poison us. To consider that option as a genuine option is to have taken the first step towards losing touch with reality. Those who have lost touch with reality are labelled insane or, if they show no signs of pathological psychosis, 'cranks':

'Cranks' is an interesting word. [...] it is not just a term of abuse. It refers to someone who has so radically lost his capacity for judgment that his views are not even worth considering. Like those who are severely mentally ill, the most interesting thing about cranks - about what makes someone a crank - does not show itself when they declaim what they believe. It does so when they do not rule certain things out of consideration. They suffer from something far more serious than ignorance. Knowledge and understanding - and therefore, all serious radical critique - depend upon the exercise of sound judgment about what counts as evidence, about when authorities can be relied upon, when they are justifiably discredited, and so on.³⁶

Cranks are those who 'think the unthinkable' in a relatively non-moral sense. They believe that the earth is flat, or that the political leaders of the world are actually reptilian overlords. Whilst some of these beliefs might be morally objectionable for various reasons (consider holocaust denial), the beliefs themselves are non-moral in nature, and as such fit neatly into the Wittgensteinian picture of what is and is not 'reasonable' to consider seriously open to doubt. To think the unthinkable in non-moral terms (e.g., consider the earth's being flat as a serious option) is to show oneself to have slipped into crankhood, to have lost one's capacity for sound judgement. Thinking the *morally* unthinkable extends beyond crankhood, however, and so the connection to the Wittgensteinian analysis is weakened somewhat.

³³ Raimond Gaita, *A Common Humanity*, p. 165.

³⁴ Ludwig Wittgenstein, *On Certainty*, §7.

³⁵ 'Don't think, but look!' Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, §66.

³⁶ Raimond Gaita, *A Common Humanity*, p. 160.

6.3 Thinking the morally unthinkable

The difference between thinking the morally unthinkable and thinking the unthinkable generally is, according to Gaita, exposed when we consider the kinds of ‘fear’ that thinking the unthinkable invokes in us. If we imagine debating with a crank who believed that the earth was flat, and found that we had no answer to some of their arguments, such that we began to feel rationally and seriously compelled to believe what they believe, we should most likely be struck by a fear that we were losing touch with reality: ‘I would feel like someone who suspects he is losing his mind and who is still lucid enough to feel the full terror of the realisation that he cannot trust his mind when it assures him that it is not so.’³⁷

If, however, we were to engage with someone who thought the morally unthinkable, perhaps someone who was (like Peter Singer) dismissing the reality of a particular moral evil, and we found ourselves becoming convinced by their arguments, we should be struck by a totally different kind of fear, one that ‘is not, as is the fear of thinking the earth might be flat, a fear that one is losing one’s capacity for sound judgment. It is the moral fear of becoming the kind of person who seriously doubts the reality of evil. At stake is nothing less than one’s moral being.’³⁸

That statement is a little melodramatic, but it highlights an important point. It highlights both the similarities and differences between the notion of the ‘unthinkable’ in a broad non-moral sense (what we might call ‘crankhood’ or madness) and the notion of the ‘unthinkable’ in a specifically moral sense. The similarities are structural; it makes sense to talk about the morally unthinkable for precisely the same reasons it makes sense to talk about the unthinkable generally. Wittgenstein’s ‘grammatical’ analysis applies in the moral case just as much as it applies in the general case: Some moral beliefs seem certain (the reality of good and evil, say), life reveals to us which of these beliefs are taken as certain, and to doubt these beliefs is tantamount to doubting one’s having a certain attitude, or doubting the meaning of one’s words. Life, or our form of life, conditions which beliefs we hold as certain, and also the criteria by which we judge what is and is not reasonable to doubt: ‘My judgments themselves characterize the way I judge, characterize the nature of judgment.’³⁹ This applies to moral judgement as much as any other form of judgement. The structural response to scepticism given in Wittgenstein’s *On Certainty* applies directly here, and so

³⁷ Raimond Gaita, *A Common Humanity*, pp. 162-3.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 178.

³⁹ Ludwig Wittgenstein, *On Certainty*, §149.

whilst it does not confirm any one moral belief to be true, it nevertheless establishes that it is 'reasonable' to operate with certainty regarding them.

However, whilst the structure of the response is similar, the content of this response is different. For whereas we can gain a good grasp of what holds non-moral beliefs to account - empirical verification, for example, or other clearly established rules within language-games - there is no such clear sense of what holds moral beliefs to account: 'Astronomy shows up astrology, but what shows up the morally unthinkable?'⁴⁰ I referred earlier to the 'irreducible moral realities' that ground moral beliefs, and to the fact that there are no rational grounds for these beliefs. In absence of *any* reasonable grounds or further justification, moral beliefs appear to be far more vulnerable to the kind of relativistic dangers that are commonly the consequence of a Wittgensteinian analysis. If everything boils down to language-games, forms of life, and 'as it were, something animal',⁴¹ then what are we to say when language-games collide? 'Where two principles really do meet which cannot be reconciled with one another, then each man declares the other a fool and heretic.'⁴² This situation is far from ideal.

There is, therefore, a danger here of falling back into the kind of moral-philosophical pessimism cited earlier as being evident in those discussing the problem of evil; there I quoted Stephen Davis, but Brian Davies concurs: 'It is very hard to see how we are to settle the question, for what is now at stake is a fundamental moral option. [...] One side is saying that the whole attempt to justify God in terms of consequences is simply intolerable. [...] The other side holds that it is not intolerable.'⁴³

These dangers of relativism and irreconcilable difference have long been accusations levelled at the later Wittgenstein. I do not have the resources to respond to these accusations here, and so will limit myself to at the very least establishing that moral beliefs, contrary to the aforementioned intuition, are no more vulnerable to relativistic dangers than non-moral beliefs. Wittgenstein believes that non-moral beliefs are not vulnerable to the kinds of relativistic dangers so often cited against his position, and offers an argument in support of this belief; that same argument, though not perhaps intended for this purpose, can be applied to the moral case.

⁴⁰ Raimond Gaita, *A Common Humanity*, p. 177.

⁴¹ 'I want to conceive it as something that lies beyond being justified or unjustified; as it were, as something animal.' Ludwig Wittgenstein, *On Certainty*, §359.

⁴² *Ibid.*, §611.

⁴³ Brian Davies, *An Introduction to the Philosophy of Religion*, 2nd edition (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), p. 38.

Wittgenstein is concerned to establish that there is no difference in kind between those ‘empirical’ beliefs that we hold to be beyond doubt, and other beliefs that might appear relatively more certain, such as beliefs in the propositions of mathematics. For Wittgenstein, to draw a distinction between these two types of belief is unjustified: They have both been derived from the same basic process, they are both conditioned by a form of life. What it means to reason well mathematically amounts to nothing more than abiding by the rules in a language-game, knowledge of which is acquired through empirical means, and this is just the same with empirical beliefs. So if we were to make some arbitrary mathematical statement - ‘ $12 \times 12 = 144$ ’, for example - we can (for all the reasons outlined earlier) deem it quite reasonable to consider it ‘unthinkable’ to be mistaken about this proposition. And the same applies to similarly indubitable empirical propositions:

I cannot be making a mistake about 12×12 being 144. And now one cannot contrast mathematical certainty with the relative uncertainty of empirical propositions. For the mathematical proposition has been obtained by a series of actions that are in no way different from the actions of the rest of our lives, and are in the same degree liable to forgetfulness, oversight and illusion.⁴⁴

We can now simply reiterate this argument once more, and apply it to the even more ‘relatively uncertain’ moral propositions. These moral propositions, though we are currently understanding them to lack any ultimate rational ground, are the product of the same ‘series of actions’ as mathematical propositions; they are still the product of, and conditioned by, a form of life and a language-game. Just as there is no significant difference between ‘relatively certain’ mathematical propositions and ‘relatively uncertain’ empirical propositions, so too is there no significant difference between ‘relatively certain’ empirical propositions and ‘relatively uncertain’ moral propositions. In none of these cases is there, according to Wittgenstein, an *ultimate* rational ground. If we have reason to be sure in one case, then we have equal reason to be sure in all cases. *Life has taught us that it is so.* ‘If the proposition $12 \times 12 = 144$ is exempt from doubt, then so too must non-mathematical propositions be.’⁴⁵ Wittgenstein applies this thought only to empirical propositions, but it applies to moral propositions also.

The dangers of relativism, or of irreconcilable difference, are therefore not peculiar to moral propositions. If they are serious dangers for the Wittgensteinian analysis, then they apply equally across the board; to mathematical propositions, empirical propositions, and moral propositions. What it means to be ‘reasonable’ in each instance is conditioned by a

⁴⁴ Ludwig Wittgenstein, *On Certainty*, §651.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, §653.

form of life; there is no significant difference between the instances. If mathematical propositions can be beyond doubt, then empirical propositions can be beyond doubt; and if empirical propositions can be beyond doubt, then moral propositions can be beyond doubt. The only rejection of this point can come via a rejection of the entire Wittgensteinian analysis, which is not something that I think we should do, and I am surely not alone in so thinking. Supported by all of this, the notion of the morally unthinkable remains a robust notion.

6.4 Conclusions

We began this chapter as an attempt to offer some support for the credibility of the key anti-theodical premise against a charge of question-begging; namely, that it is reasonable to claim that certain unconscionable evils have occurred in the world, and they exist as irreducible moral realities that it would be ‘unthinkable’ to deny. Raimond Gaita and Ludwig Wittgenstein offer strong philosophical support for the credibility of the ‘irreducible moral realities’ and ‘unthinkable’ components of that key anti-theodical premise. It would therefore seem to be unfair to level a charge of question-begging against this key anti-theodical premise, since to do so would miss the point of both Gaita’s and Wittgenstein’s contribution. I think both Gaita and Wittgenstein are entirely right, but to avoid the charge of question-begging it is sufficient that their views be considered plausible.

Further, the recognisable parallels between the bold evaluative claims of the moral anti-theodicists, or the metaethical views that they depend upon, and the moral philosophy of Raimond Gaita, fortified with contributions from Wittgenstein, shows that these bold evaluative claims are not a purely *ad hoc* response to an inability to justify the anti-theodical argument. They are philosophically respectable views, at least to the extent that Gaita and Wittgenstein stand for philosophically respectable views.

We must conclude, therefore, that the key premise of the anti-theodical argument finds sufficient support from elsewhere, such that the argument can avoid any charge of question-begging or being somehow *ad hoc*. The argument is therefore free to run its course and compel its conclusion.

6.4.1 *Conclusions caveated*

Anti-theodicists claim that theodicists exhibit an ‘irremissable moral blindness’ in denying the existence of unconscionable evils. Further, to remain ‘open-minded’ about the negation of such moral realities is to ‘think the morally unthinkable’; it is to consider options that we *should not* consider, if we are morally reasonable people. Gaita and Wittgenstein provide everything we need to mount a defence of this claim, but this is not quite to establish that anti-theodicists are correct in their moral judgement of there being unconscionable evils in the world. Given the irreducible and fundamentally non-rational nature of moral reality in effect here, the correctness of their judgement is not something that can be established by any clever argument from me. We must instead rely upon examples, and a recognition of the moral reality revealed in those examples. Both Kenneth Surin (as cited earlier) and Raimond Gaita rely upon examples to show the correctness of their moral judgement, examples that reveal the nature of moral reality, examples that reveal ‘what it means’ in some moral case. Surin cites some horrendous events of the Holocaust, Gaita cites the example of the nun; both reveal an irreducible moral reality.⁴⁶

But these examples are all citations of experiences; we might share in the reality of these experiences, and it might be sufficient to quote examples, but a precondition of our understanding these examples properly seems to be that we are ‘in touch with moral reality’. Being in touch with moral reality is precisely the thing that anti-theodicists claim theodicists lack.

And further, Gaita is only trying to establish the reality of evil generally, rather than addressing Surin’s specific anti-theodical concern of ‘unconscionable’ evils. I have been drawing a strong connection throughout this chapter between what Raimond Gaita says about the reality of *evil*, and what anti-theodicists say about the reality of *unconscionable evil*. These are not necessarily the same thing, the latter carrying some additional normative baggage whilst the former remains more meta-ethically pure, but my intention has been to show that everything Gaita (and, in turn, Wittgenstein) says in support of the reality of evil extends to the reality of unconscionable evil also. The accusation that Raimond Gaita puts to Peter Singer is closely analogous to the accusation that anti-theodicists put to theodicists. If the former accusation is credible, then the latter is also.

⁴⁶ In addition to the pure goodness revealed by the nun, Gaita takes ‘remorse’ to be particularly indicative in this regard: ‘Is there something in our experience that can, so dramatically, teach us what evil is? There is, I believe. It is remorse. [...] Just as the contact with the goodness of the kind shown by the nun inspires the wonder that there could be such a thing in the world, so remorse makes us painfully aware of the reality of evil.’ Raimond Gaita, *A Common Humanity*, pp. 4, 31.

The accusation of the anti-theodacists is that theodacists have, in constructing divine teleologies out of innocent suffering, made the kind of mistake that reveals them to have lost touch with moral reality; they have made the kind of error that reveals them to lack the appropriate conceptual understanding of what it is to reason well or reason badly about moral matters; therefore, offering yet more examples of horrific evil is not likely to help here, since it is not a reality that they are receptive to. The situation is loosely analogous to debating with a ‘crank’. ‘The trouble with cranks is not that they hold radically unconventional beliefs on insufficient evidence, nor is it that they cannot reason. We call them cranks because we recognise that the proper exercise of our critical concepts – the concept of sufficient evidence, for example – depends upon them not being exercised by cranks and madmen.’⁴⁷ Further evidence is not the issue here; to show moral examples as ‘proof’ of the anti-theodacist’s evaluative judgement will count for nothing, since ‘something is a proof only within the ranks of the sane and the sober, those who, as the colloquial expression has it, “are in tune with reality”. That belongs to the concept of a proof.’⁴⁸ This is particularly obvious with moral matters: ‘Once scepticism about the concept of evil has seriously set in, pointing to horrific examples of it will achieve nothing.’⁴⁹

There is no argument for the anti-theodical point, nor need there be. Instead, what the anti-theodacist can hope to do, to overcome this seemingly irreconcilable difference, is call theodacists to a kind of moral seriousness;⁵⁰ a kind of seriousness that is opposed to the ‘frivolity’ that Rush Rhees identifies:

What is the value of suffering like that in *King Lear*? What was the value of the degradation that belonged to the sufferings in the concentration camps? When, for instance, a man is going to pieces morally and knows it. ‘Joyful acceptance’??? [...] If I could put my questions more strongly, I should do so. For I think that religious apologists have generally been irresponsible and frivolous in writing about this matter. They have deceived both themselves and others by such phrases as ‘suffering for Christ’, ‘joyful sacrifice’, etc.⁵¹

It is this kind of challenge - a call to moral seriousness - that we see presented by the likes of Dostoevsky’s Ivan Karamazov, and it is a potent challenge; it is likely that this is why Ivan has had such an impact on the theodical debate. I will return to Ivan Karamazov later,

⁴⁷ Raimond Gaita, *Good and Evil*, p. 309.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 309.

⁴⁹ Raimond Gaita, *A Common Humanity*, p. 30.

⁵⁰ ‘To be morally serious ... is to fear to doubt the reality of evil because that fear is inseparable from understanding what evil is. [...] The fear of doubting the reality of evil is inseparable from an understanding of the very nature of evil because it is central to our understanding of the *kind of seriousness* that we attribute to any morality informed by a sense of evil.’ *Ibid.*, p. 179.

⁵¹ Rush Rhees, ‘Suffering’, in Rush Rhees, *On Religion and Philosophy*, ed. by D. Z. Phillips, assisted by Mario von der Ruhr (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), pp. 301–6 (p. 304).

repeatedly, but it will suffice to conclude here that Raimond Gaita and Ludwig Wittgenstein provide strong support for the credibility of the key anti-theodical premise, and as such the anti-theodical argument runs its course. Theodicies exhibit an irremissible moral blindness in refusing to countenance the reality of unconscionable evils.

At least some of the arguments of moral anti-theodicy must therefore surely be seen as correct. Theodicy is morally objectionable, in that it can be objected to on moral grounds, and we have good reason for so objecting. The next chapter will move this argument on, and combine it with the conclusions of my earlier chapters to extend the moral objectionability of theodicy to theism generally.

7. Anti-Theodicy as a Moral Objection to Theism

When innocence has its eyes gouged out, a Christian must lose his faith or accept the gouging out of eyes.

Albert Camus¹

7.1 *A moral objection to theodicy becomes a moral objection to theism*

We have seen that moral anti-theodicy presents a barrage of evaluative criticisms against theodicy. Many of these criticisms are undoubtedly correct: Therefore, theodicy is morally objectionable; by which I mean that it can be objected to on moral grounds, and we have good reason to so object.² Theodicy mediates a praxis that sanctions the evils of the world. What I wish to add to this is the observation that, according to my analysis as presented in chapter one, the meta-problem of evil remains a logically binding problem and as such cannot be avoided by any theist (or anyone else for that matter). If a theist wishes to remain a theist in the traditional manner that assumes the maximal-goodness and maximal-power of God, some form of ‘meta-theodicy’ (loosely understood) is therefore necessary and unavoidable. As such, if theodicy mediates a praxis that sanctions the evils of the world, and theism requires theodicy necessarily, then *theism mediates a praxis that sanctions the evils of the world*. Or, to put it another way, if theodicy is morally objectionable, and theism requires theodicy, then theism is morally objectionable. To be a theist *is to* sanction the evils of the world in a morally objectionable way.

7.1.1 *The argument*

1. Theism requires theodicy.
2. Theodicy is morally objectionable.
3. Therefore, theism is morally objectionable.

¹ Albert Camus, *The Plague*, trans. by Robin Buss (London: Penguin, 2001), p. 177.

² This is to be distinguished from the sense of ‘morally objectionable’ that means ‘wrong, bad, evil’. I will say a little more on that later, since it is debatable whether or not those two senses can be separated.

7.2 Premise 1: Theism requires theodicy

The defence of premise 1 was largely made in chapter one, when I discussed the logically binding nature of the problem of evil. There I argued that the problem of evil remains a logically binding problem, even in its ‘evidential’ form, and as such cannot be avoided by anyone, on pain of contradiction. Everyone must deny at least one premise in this inconsistent set:

1. There exists a maximally-good, maximally-powerful creator of the universe.
2. A maximally-good, maximally-powerful creator of the universe would not create or permit any pointless or unconscionable evil in its creation.
3. Some pointless or unconscionable evil exists.

This is not a particularly challenging problem for atheists, since they can simply deny the first proposition. It is a more challenging problem for theists, since the second and third propositions in the problem of evil are *prima facie* true; indeed, they would be considered *obviously* true by many. Given that this is a meta-formulation of the problem of evil, the second proposition is intended to reflect the incompatibility between God and evil that is necessary in any formulation of the problem of evil. It is generated only from the intended meanings of the terms involved in the first and third propositions, and captures the perceived incompatibility between them. To deny it is therefore to deny the received meanings of terms like ‘good’ and ‘evil’, which is not an easy thing to do. (The consequences of trying to do this have been explored earlier in this thesis; it is one of the central objections of the moral anti-theodacists, and the kind of equivocating inconsistency that comes with altering the notions of ‘good’ and ‘evil’ within the context of the problem of evil, whilst perhaps maintaining other notions in other domains, is shown up in chapter four.) Likewise, to deny the third proposition is to deny the existence or moral reality of horrendous, unconscionable, unjustifiable evils. The difficulty of doing this is, again, highlighted by the moral anti-theodacists, and I have used Raimond Gaita and Ludwig Wittgenstein to provide some support for their arguments.

And yet, the theist must deny one of these two propositions, if they are to retain the truth of the first proposition. This is the ‘problem’ of evil; how can it be resolved? The point of chapter one was to point out that *however* it is resolved, *it must be resolved*. It is not possible to remain a theist, such that the first proposition is maintained as wholly true, unless at least one of the remaining two propositions within the problem of evil is rejected as false,

or else some of the meanings of the terms involved in the propositions are rejected as misleading. A resolution of the problem of evil is *unavoidable*, for everyone; the theist faces the additional challenge of needing to resolve this problem whilst retaining the truth of the first proposition. This means that they must deny one of the remaining two, and this will lead them into the proposing of some form of theodicy.

This final move might appear too bold, since there would seem to be a difference between on the one hand constructing a theodicy and on the other merely rejecting the truth of a proposition. I argue that, on the meta level, this is not the case. But I will need to show this; I turn to this now.

7.2.1 Meta-theodicy

What does theodicy look like, at the meta level? I have already made some brief comments on this, when I pointed out the mechanisms by which moral anti-theodicists object to theodicy, but I will reiterate here for clarity. According to my analysis, the moral anti-theodicists object (evaluatively) to an evaluative claim within theodicy. I claimed that theodicy must make this kind of evaluative claim in order to resolve the problem of evil. (This is largely because the non-evaluative content in the problem of evil is near-impossible to deny; no one can deny that earthquakes occur, or that people experience pain.) This much should be taken as uncontroversial, given the analysis presented in chapter three, and all that has been said in this thesis up to this point. What remains for me to add here is the contention that a rejection of either the second or third propositions within the problem of evil will *always*, necessarily, involve the invoking of just such an evaluative claim. This is a bolder claim, and stands in need of some justification.

We can begin by clarifying what theodicy is traditionally thought of as being: Theodicy is a way of ‘justifying the ways of God to man’.³ Or, to put it another way, it is a way of retaining the truth of the first proposition in the problem of evil. This requires the rejection of at least one of the other two propositions and, I have argued, can only be done (sensibly) by attacking the evaluative content within those propositions. Therefore, stepping back from any particular example of theodicy, we can define theodicy, at the meta level, as being: ‘*the invocation of an evaluative claim (or claims) that acts as a defeater for the evaluative claims made within the second or third proposition of the problem of evil.*’ If this meta-definition is correct, then any sensible rejection of the second or third proposition

³ John Milton, *Paradise Lost* (London: Penguin, 2000), Book I, 25-6 (paraphrased).

within the problem of evil will always emerge as being a ‘theodicy’, so understood. And if I am correct that the problem of evil remains a logical problem, then *any* retaining of the first proposition entails that ‘theodicy’ must necessarily follow. In simple terms: theodicy is unavoidable for the theist.

7.2.2 *Implicit theodicy, tacit sanctions*

It ought to be borne in mind that we remain talking at the meta level here, and therefore it is left entirely unspecified what form this ‘theodicy’ takes. This leaves open the possibility of no theodicy being explicitly stated, leaving the theodicy as an *implicit* theodicy. This accurately allows for the approach of the sceptical theist, who says nothing whatsoever about what God’s reasons for permitting evil are, yet maintains that there are such reasons, and that we ought not to be surprised that we are ignorant of them.⁴

Just as the moral anti-theodicists accuse theodicies of offering a tacit sanction for the evils of the world, so too can we accuse any theist (who has been presented with the problem of evil and remained a theist) of offering an implicit theodicy. The string of entailments, that of theism requiring (at least) an implicit theodicy, and an implicit theodicy offering a tacit sanction of the evils of the world, entails that theism offers a tacit sanction of the evils of the world. That is the contention of this thesis. To be a theist *is to* offer a tacit sanction of the evils of the world. It is to look at the world, consider its horrors, and deem it ‘ok’, all things considered. Given the logically binding nature of the problem of evil, this response is essential to theism.

7.3 *Premise 2: Theodicy is morally objectionable*

The defence of this premise has largely been made already, since it relies entirely upon the criticisms proposed by the moral anti-theodicists. If their criticisms are correct, then theodicy, even implicit theodicy, is morally objectionable. To deny the evaluative claims made within the second or third propositions of the problem of evil is to make evaluative claims that are morally unthinkable. These unthinkable evaluative claims ought not to be made, and to make them is morally objectionable.

My argument states that, to the extent that theodicy is morally objectionable, theism necessarily inherits that moral objectionability. To be clear, and to reiterate something that I

⁴ For an outline, see Trent Dougherty, ‘Skeptical Theism’, *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, 2014, available at: <<http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/skeptical-theism/>> [accessed 09/09/2014].

mentioned earlier (albeit in a footnote; see note 2 of this chapter), all I mean by that is that one can, and has good reason to, object to theism on moral grounds. The phrase ‘morally objectionable’ has connotations though, connotations of ‘morally distasteful’, ‘wrong’, ‘bad’, or ‘evil’. I do not intend to make those connotations; ‘morally objectionable’ is here meant to only mean ‘capable of being objected to morally, and there is good reason to so object’. So, to reduce the rhetorical connotations a little, rather than saying ‘theism is morally objectionable’, we ought probably to say ‘theism commits one to making certain evaluative claims, claims that we have good moral reason to disagree with’. But that is a clumsy phrase. And besides, we might have reason not to shrink away from making the bolder claim that theism is ‘morally objectionable’, in the sense that it is ‘wrong’, ‘bad’, or ‘evil’.

7.3.1 Morally objectionable, in a strong sense and in a weak sense

In general, when someone makes evaluative claims about something of sufficient moral importance, claims that contrast with your own, we find their claims morally objectionable in the stronger sense; we find those claims to be *wrong*, morally, and the person who makes those claims is judged to be a bad person in light of them. Consider something like slavery: If someone makes the claim that ‘slavery is good’, or even ‘slavery is not bad’, we are naturally inclined to see them as a bad person. There is nothing wrong with this picture; but this is not to say that all cases of contrasting evaluative claims warrant a judgement that the other person is a bad person. Consider something like vegetarianism: A vegetarian might be a vegetarian for moral reasons, thus meaning that they hold evaluative claims (e.g. ‘eating meat is wrong’) that contrast with meat eaters (‘eating meat is not wrong’). But there are many liberal vegetarians who do not see all meat eaters around them as being bad people for that difference in evaluative opinion. Some more extreme or committed vegetarians might, but not all. Whereas, I would say, all reasonable people would judge any supporter of slavery to be a bad person.

These are the two senses of ‘morally objectionable’: The liberal vegetarian considers meat eaters to be ‘morally objectionable’ in the weaker sense, in that the meat eaters’ views are capable of being objected to morally and they consider that there is good reason to so object, but not in the stronger sense of necessarily seeing meat eaters as bad people for all that. The slavery example illustrates the second, stronger sense: Someone who believes that ‘slavery is good’ is morally objectionable in both the weaker sense and the stronger sense. Not only are their views capable of being objected to morally, and we have good reason to so

object, but their views are also conducive to seeing them as a bad person. The difference between the two senses seems to be a matter of ascertaining the moral weight of the issue. Some things we are not so concerned about as to go around judging everyone who disagrees with us as terrible people. For some other things we will tolerate no dissent. Vegetarianism seems to belong to the former, slavery the latter. In the context of my thesis, where should theism belong?

Deciding at what point something becomes of sufficient moral weight such that to hold contrasting evaluative judgements entails a moral objection is a profoundly grey area. Fortunately, our task is rendered a little more simple in this instance in that theodicy, in its very nature, extends to *all* morally relevant cases, up to and including the most severe cases. The conclusion of theodicy is that *no* evil is to be considered unjustifiable or unconscionable. We are therefore free to push ourselves to the most extreme of examples, and engage with theodicy on these cases alone. It ought to be clear by now that to deny the evaluative claim that the holocaust, say, was an instance (or perhaps better understood as a collection of instances) of unconscionable evil is probably to make a claim that is morally objectionable in the stronger sense. Theodicy, even implicit theodicy, makes this claim. As Michael Levine says, ‘what [theodicists] have done is to offer not just a *prima facie*, but an ultimate justification for the holocaust and other horrors.’⁵ Therefore, theodicy is probably morally objectionable in the strong sense, and if theism inherits the extent to which theodicy is morally objectionable, then theism is probably morally objectionable in the strong sense too.

That theodicy (or, derivatively, theism) is probably morally objectionable in the strong sense does not in itself recommend any specific action or attitude regarding it; we are free to adopt a liberal attitude of live and let live, and refrain from presenting our moral condemnation to any theist that we happen to meet. And there are many complex philosophical issues regarding separating views such as ‘slavery is good’ from ‘slavery is justified’, or ‘for all I know slavery is justified’, etc. Theodicy does not intend to say that the holocaust was good, after all; the most it could be accused of would be offering a contention that it was justified. And so it remains an open question whether or not we would, analogously, consider someone who considered slavery to be justified to be a bad person. But given that theodicy presides over all instances that have ever or will ever occur, including

⁵ Michael P. Levine, ‘Contemporary Christian Analytic Philosophy of Religion: Biblical Fundamentalism, Terrible Solutions to a Horrible Problem, and Hearing God’, *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion*, 48:2 (2000), 89-119 (p. 107).

slavery, then whatever decision we come to regarding these issues will transfer directly to the theodicy, and so (at least implicitly) to the theist.

I leave the reader to make their own evaluative judgements here. The point of this thesis is to identify the string of entailments that leads a theist, necessarily, to the tacit sanctioning of the evils of the world. Included in that sanctioning is the evaluative statement: 'From a God's-eye view, x was/is justified', where x equals absolutely anything horrible that ever has or will occur. Slavery is just one horror in a very long list. I only lay claim to the statement that theism is therefore morally objectionable in the weaker sense, in that it is capable of being objected to on moral grounds, and that we have good reason to so object. The question of whether it is also objectionable in the stronger sense will be left unanswered, but it certainly seems at least *prima facie* reasonable to suppose that theism might be morally objectionable in the strong sense on the basis of this argument.

7.4 Theism is morally objectionable

A combination of theism's necessary requiring of theodicy, and the necessary status of theodicy as being morally objectionable, entails that theism is necessarily morally objectionable, at least in the weak sense. This conclusion is entirely dependent upon the success of the anti-theodical criticisms, but chapters five and six argued that at least some of those criticisms were successful. It also depends entirely upon what has been established in chapter one, which claimed that the problem of evil remained a logically binding problem. Clearly, I stack controversial thesis upon controversial thesis here, and if one collapses, then so too does the whole house of cards! But there was another claim in an earlier chapter (chapter three), a claim to the effect that the problem of evil could not be used as an argument against the existence of God, since one cannot reliably derive non-evaluative conclusions from evaluative premises. Given the obviously evaluative nature of the conclusion of this latest argument - 'Theism is morally objectionable' - it is clear that this cannot be seen as an argument for the non-existence of God. It is, therefore, no reason to resolve the problem of evil in favour of atheism, traditionally understood.

And yet, I will argue that the moral objections to theodicy, and the tying together of those objections with the necessary requirement that theism has for theodicy, entails that the problem of evil can once again be conducive towards atheism, if we are not bound by a traditional (and mistaken) understanding of the limits of atheism. For it is clear that the moral objection to theism, via a moral objection to theodicy, entails that the problem of evil is

conducive to a negative evaluative claim of God and of theism. Although, given what has been said in chapter three, it is not possible to use this as a basis from which to argue for the non-existence of God, it remains the case that this negative evaluative claim regarding theism is tantamount to a noncognitive con-attitude towards God and theism. This, I argue, is sufficient to establish in an individual a legitimate and robust form of atheism that has been sadly neglected in analytic philosophical literature.

I will need to argue for the plausibility of this ‘non-cognitive atheism’, and I will turn to that in the next chapter. But for now, let me conclude this chapter with a clear summation of where we have come to so far. I am saying the problem of evil, though incapable of being used to argue for the non-existence of God, can be conducive to a form of noncognitive atheism. This is because the problem of evil remains a logically binding problem, in its broadest meta-form, and is therefore unavoidable for the theist. The theist must resolve the problem of evil by denying one of the evaluative claims made within either the second or third propositions within the problem, and this leads them to do something that is morally objectionable. The moral anti-theodacists make this clear: denying the evaluative claims within the second and third propositions within the problem of evil is morally unthinkable, and to do the morally unthinkable is morally objectionable (at least in a weak sense). Therefore, the problem of evil has led us decisively to a negative evaluative attitude towards theism, and this con-attitude amounts to a noncognitive rejection of theism. The following chapter will build on this position, and claim that to noncognitively reject theism is to adopt a form of atheism. I argue that this form of atheism is a legitimate form of atheism, and after presenting an argument for its plausibility I will discuss some examples of this form of atheism, particularly in the form of Dostoevsky’s Ivan Karamazov.

8. Non-Cognitive Atheism

It isn't God I don't accept, you see; it's the world created by Him, the world of God I don't accept and cannot agree to accept. [...] It isn't God I don't accept, Alyosha, it's just his ticket that I most respectfully return to him.

Ivan Karamazov, in Dostoevsky's *The Brothers Karamazov*¹

I often read that I am atheistic; I hear people speak of my atheism. Yet these words say nothing to me; for me they have no meaning. I do not believe in God and I am not an atheist.

Albert Camus²

I think we should rightly think of Ivan Karamazov and Albert Camus as being atheists. I will argue for the plausibility of a primarily noncognitive atheism. That is, a form of atheism that does not explicitly deny the existence of God, yet nevertheless counts as a full and legitimate form of atheism. To do this, I appeal to a simple argument; two premises that lead to a conclusion: 1. Atheism is the negation of theism. 2. Theism necessarily has noncognitive components. 3. Therefore, atheism can be purely noncognitive. Premise 1 is fairly uncontroversial. Premise 2 is the controversial meat of the matter. It is far from clear that all forms of theism must have noncognitive components but, although I would be inclined to make that strong claim, strictly speaking I only need some forms of theism to necessarily have noncognitive components. I will spend some time defending the plausibility of this premise, before proceeding to discuss some consequences of this argument and its conclusion.

If this argument is correct, then it establishes the plausibility of my claim (constructed over the course of previous chapters) that the problem of evil can still be conducive towards atheism, albeit not an atheism that explicitly denies the existence of God. The moral objections to theodicy, and, derivatively, to theism, are conducive towards the establishment of con-attitudes towards God and belief in God. This amounts to a noncognitive rejection of

¹ Fyodor Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*, trans. by David McDuff (London: Penguin, 2003), pp. 308, 320.

² Albert Camus, *Notebooks 1951-1959*, trans. by Ryan Bloom, Kindle Edition (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 2008), note of November 1st, 1954 (Kindle location 894).

God and belief in God. The argument of this chapter now moves this position on one stage further, claiming that this noncognitive rejection of God amounts to a form of atheism. Therefore, the problem of evil remains conducive towards atheism, even if it cannot establish the non-existence of God.

The Argument

1. Atheism is the negation of theism.
2. Theism necessarily has noncognitive components.
3. Therefore, atheism can be purely noncognitive.

8.1 Premise 1: Atheism is the negation of theism

Atheism is the negation of theism. What it means to be an atheist is to negate or deny what it is to be a theist, and to be a theist is to believe in God. As Robin Le Poidevin says:

Atheism [...] is a definite doctrine, and defending it requires one to engage with religious ideas. An atheist is one who denies the existence of a personal, transcendent creator of the universe, rather than one who simply lives life without reference to such a being. A theist is one who asserts the existence of such a creator. Any discussion of atheism, then, is necessarily a discussion of theism.³

The first point to note, therefore, is that to be an atheist ‘requires one to engage with religious ideas’. And this of course makes sense; given that something is being denied or negated, it stands to reason that one ought to understand something of what is being denied. One needs a firm enough grasp of what it is to be a ‘theist’, what it means to assert the existence of God, in order to understand what one means when one declares oneself not to be a theist, to be an ‘atheist’. Indeed, one could push Le Poidevin’s conclusion further here, and say that not only is any discussion of atheism ‘necessarily a discussion of theism’, but any *position* on atheism, for or against, is necessarily a position on theism.

I will proceed from this foundation: Atheism is the denial of belief in God; it is the negation of ‘theism’, logically ‘not-theism’. So to be clear on what ‘atheism’ is, we must be clear on what ‘theism’ is. And so for whatever we decide ‘theism’ is, whatever propositional

³ Robin Le Poidevin, *Arguing for Atheism*, Kindle Edition (London: Taylor & Francis, 2004), Introduction, para. 1 (Kindle location 223). This clearly does away with the notion of a ‘negative’ atheism (cf. Michael Martin, *Atheism: A Philosophical Justification* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1990)), and though I am generally against doing away with that notion, it is not relevant for this discussion. It is also clear that Le Poidevin implies disagreement with the thesis of this chapter when he says ‘an atheist is one who denies the existence of a personal, transcendent creator of the universe’, but I will leave this to one side, representative, as it is, of an orthodox view that I am about to argue against.

content we decide that word/position represents - for simplicity we can label that content with an arbitrary placeholder in some brackets: i.e. theism = (x) - atheism will be a negation of that content: so the propositional content and form of atheism would just be $\neg(x)$.

Premise 1 is fairly uncontroversial. I therefore leave the defence of premise 1 at that - an appeal to authority, to intuition, and to an illustration of the logical form of what it means to be an atheist, what the proposition of 'atheism' means.

8.2 Premise 2: Theism necessarily has noncognitive components

Premise 2 is the controversial meat of the matter. I claim that noncognitive content is bound up in what it means to be a theist. And necessarily so; I claim that a theist is not a theist unless they have some noncognitive attitudes, motivations, desires, emotions, etc., bound up, somehow, with their conception of God, and with their affirmation of His existence. This is a *prima facie* controversial claim, for it denies that standard view of 'theism' as simply meaning a merely cognitive 'one who believes that P', where P = 'God exists'.

(Just to be clear, by 'cognitive components' or content, I mean propositional claims, truth-apt statements. By noncognitive components, I mean that which is not cognitive; the affective or conative parts of thought, from which non-truth-apt statements emerge; expressions of attitudes, emotions, evaluations, etc. I do not mean to say anything controversial here, but use standard terminological distinctions. So when I say 'theism necessarily has noncognitive components', I mean nothing more than 'theism cannot be entirely reduced to cognitive, truth-apt propositions'. Some affective or conative components are involved, from the ground up.)

8.2.1 Cook Wilson

I am at least not alone in making this claim. Consider this from Cook Wilson: 'That the conception of God can only be realized by us with certain emotions, is not only a very interesting fact but it is an essential characteristic of the conception.'⁴

There are many things that could be said of Cook Wilson's statement. Firstly, there is the clear stipulation of a necessary condition:

⁴ Cook Wilson, cited in Stewart R. Sutherland, *Atheism and the Rejection of God: Contemporary Philosophy and The Brothers Karamazov* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1977), p. 21.

The implication of Cook Wilson's claim is that unless the thoughts in question are accompanied by certain emotions, then they do *not* count as 'realising the conception of God'. The condition in question is necessary, if not sufficient.⁵

This makes the statement obviously in tune with what I am arguing for in premise 2. Secondly, there is some ambiguity regarding the word 'realized': This could mean 'understood', or it could mean 'made real' - i.e. instantiated. Either interpretation leads us into some interesting questions, and some controversial ground.

8.2.2 Sutherland's analysis

Stewart Sutherland proceeds to investigate the 'understood' branch of interpretation. He writes: 'For "realizing a conception" as the focus of our inquiry I propose to substitute "understanding an expression"'.⁶ This, I think, was a mistake, since it misses an important connotation of Cook Wilson's claim. There is an important difference between saying that 'the term "God" can only be understood with certain emotions', and saying that 'the concept of "God" can only be instantiated with certain emotions'. I am not sure Cook Wilson was intending to say much at all about how people talk about God; rather, it seems to me that he wanted to say something about how people *believe* in God, how they hold the concept in their minds, the manner of their belief, etc.

Sutherland's interpretation leads him into an extended discussion of the various uses or contexts in which the term 'God' is deployed, and whether all of these users can lay legitimate claim to having understood the expression they were using even if they lacked the 'certain emotions':

(a) Is part, or the whole of what it means to use expressions, including the word 'God' correctly, to have certain feelings or emotions when one does so? (b) Is part, or the whole of what it means to understand someone using expressions including the word 'God' correctly, to be thus made aware that he is expressing certain emotions or feelings?⁷

I will not dwell on his extended discussion here, as it proceeds into areas that are largely irrelevant for my purposes, but suffice to say that Sutherland drifts towards the old Wittgensteinian issue of whether secondary users of a term, who are outside of a particular language-game, can really understand a term as deployed by the primary users within a language-game. Or, as Sutherland has it: 'Is it essential that all secondary users of such

⁵ Stewart Sutherland, *Atheism and the Rejection of God*, p. 42.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

utterances must, if they are to understand the utterances in question, also be primary users of the expressions in question?’⁸

8.2.3 *Use and context*

As interesting and important as these issues are generally, they are not so important for my discussion. Given that we are trying to establish the meaning of ‘theism’, in order to understand the nature of atheism, I am only really interested in one usage of the term ‘God’, and one specific context: That is, a statement of theism, made from within the theistic context. Given that this statement is being made from a theist to an atheist, and therefore is given from within a theistic context and received (presumably) outside of that context, the translation issue could present a problem, but for the sake of argument I will assume that it is not an insurmountable problem; I will assume the concept of God can successfully cross the language-game gap. Should it be that there are ‘certain emotions’ bound up with what it means to be a theist within a theistic context, then this might additionally require that an atheist be empathetic enough to realise that certain emotions are involved in what it means to be a theist. But I see no reason to think that we should consider this beyond an atheist’s capabilities.

So rather than concentrating on the ‘understanding’ branch of interpreting Cook Wilson’s statement, as Sutherland does, it makes more sense for me to focus on the ‘instantiating’ branch: i.e., Cook Wilson’s claim is that the conception of God can only be *instantiated* by us with certain emotions, and further, that these ‘certain emotions’ are an *essential* characteristic of the conception. So to paraphrase Sutherland, my question is this: (a) Is part, or the whole of what it means to say ‘I believe in God’ correctly, from within a theistic context, to have certain feelings or emotions when one does so? (b) Is part, or the whole of what it means to understand someone saying ‘I believe in God’ from within a theistic context, to be thus made aware that he is expressing certain emotions or feelings? Or, to put it a little more simply, are ‘certain emotions’ a necessary component of belief in God?

8.2.4 *God of religion*

One final caveat. Given that we are interested in a statement of theism made from within a theistic context, we ought to be aware that ‘what it means to believe in God, to

⁸ Stewart Sutherland, *Atheism and the Rejection of God*, p. 47.

affirm his existence, will be different according to whether that affirmation is of the God of religion or of the God of the philosophers'.⁹ To understand what theism means - to decide what goes in the brackets of our arbitrary placeholder: (x) - we must understand what theism *really* means. That is, we should not be content with what philosophers think theism means, if what philosophers think theism means bears little resemblance to what theists think theism means. After all, this is what theism is: *Theism is what theists think theism is*. To avoid error we must look to the archetypal affirmations of the existence of the God of religion. These, I think, are typified in the various creedal statements of religion and the theologies that back them up.

So my question is this: When someone makes this kind of affirmation, is that affirmation partly constituted by noncognitive content? And if it is, is that necessarily so, or merely contingently?

8.2.5 Contingent

It seems obvious that certain emotions are contingently bound up with what it means to say 'I believe in God'; it is certainly true that for some people, at least some of the time, to say 'I believe in God' is to express certain emotions. And it is certainly true that engaging in religion, and engaging with a concept of God, sometimes elicits certain emotions in people. As Le Poidevin says: 'Religion engages not merely our intellect but our emotions.'¹⁰

That much is obvious. But even at this early stage of discussion, there seems to be an intuitive push towards claiming more of a role for the emotions in religious concepts. Elsewhere, Le Poidevin says this: 'If it did not evoke strong feelings, it would be difficult to see why theism should be taken seriously.'¹¹ To this we can ask: Why? Why must it be the case that religion ought to, or somehow must, evoke some kind of emotional response in order to be taken seriously? Other metaphysical claims do not evoke emotional responses, and yet are taken seriously (at least by metaphysicians).

So it is obvious that emotional content is contingently bound up with what it means to be a theist, and there seems to be some intuitive push towards claiming a more fundamental

⁹ Raimond Gaita, 'Morality, Metaphysics and Religion', in *Moral Powers, Fragile Beliefs: Essays in Moral and Religious Philosophy*, ed. by Joseph Carlisle, James C. Carter, and Daniel Whistler (New York: Continuum, 2011), pp. 3-28 (p. 12).

¹⁰ Robin Le Poidevin, *Arguing for Atheism*, Kindle Edition, p. 114 (Kindle Location 2553).

¹¹ Robin Le Poidevin, 'Theistic Discourse and Fictional Truth', in *Revue Internationale de Philosophie*, 57 (2003), 271-84 (p. 277). Available at: <<http://www.cairn.info/revue-internationale-de-philosophie-2003-3-page-271.htm>> [accessed 14/01/2014].

role for the emotions in religious concepts. But I think we can push even further, and cite examples of noncognitive components featuring necessarily in what it means to say 'I believe in God'.

8.2.6 Necessary: The example of Christianity

Any first year theology undergraduate will tell you that when a Christian says 'I believe in God' - the first statement in the first line of the Apostles' creed - this should not be taken to mean merely 'I believe that God exists'. It means more than that; it means 'I *believe* in God' - it is a stronger, thicker concept of belief. It means 'I trust in God', or 'I place my trust in God', 'I have faith in God', etc., etc. In much the same way as if I were to say to you, when trying to give you a pep-talk, 'I believe in you!' You would not take that to mean my saying: 'Listen, as far as I'm concerned I think you exist.'

In a Christian theological context, it is not sufficient to believe *that* God exists, you must also believe *in* God. There is a resistance to the sort of 'barren intellectualism'¹² of a faith as mere knowledge, a faith reducible to purely cognitive 'beliefs that'. If faith as mere knowledge (and knowledge here is, of course, cognitive stuff) is insufficient to capture what it means to believe in God, then it seems there is some additional requirement for the instantiation of theism. Indeed, it further implies that this additional requirement is not reducible to further knowledge, or otherwise cognitive content; it is not as if the request is to avoid 'faith as mere knowledge' by achieving faith as *more* knowledge.

But it might nevertheless be tricky for an analytic philosopher to recognise the relevant difference between such statements as 'I believe in God' and 'I believe that God exists'. After all, both at least appear to be reducible to a certain kind of propositional claim: 'It is the case that God exists.' How, then, does noncognitive content get bound up as a necessary condition in this apparently simple cognitive claim?

Well, Karl Barth says: "'I believe" means "I trust".'¹³ Perhaps for a philosopher this mention of 'trust' offers a window into understanding quite how noncognitive components can get bound up within an apparently cognitive propositional statement of 'I believe...'. The literature is divided on whether 'trust' is a purely cognitive notion - reducible to 'beliefs that', to a series of cognitive propositions - or a noncognitive attitude not reducible to 'beliefs

¹² C. E. B. Cranfield, *The Apostles' Creed: A Faith to Live By* (London: Continuum, 2004), p. 10.

¹³ Karl Barth, *Dogmatics in Outline*, trans. by G. T. Thomson (London: SCM Press, 2001), p. 10.

that'.¹⁴ It could be that to say 'I trust you' is to state 'I believe that you will do X'; and this seems true if we were talking of specific actions - e.g. 'I trust you to lock up when we leave' might merely mean 'I believe that you will lock up when we leave'. Alternatively, 'I trust you' might equally be expressive of an attitude of trust towards you, regardless of any propositional beliefs about what states of affairs might occur. As Lawrence C. Becker describes it:

Cognitive trust is composed of beliefs or expectations about the future behaviour of others, in some or all situations. Thus, to assert that A trusts B cognitively is to assert something of the form A believes or expects B will do X in situation S. Noncognitive trust is composed of attitudes of certain sorts, period. To assert that A trusts B noncognitively is to assert something of the form A's attitude (affect, noncognitive disposition) toward B is X. That is, it is to assert that A's attitude is trustful of (or trusting with) B.¹⁵

The latter seems more accurate for the religious context. There is a hint of superstition, of divine bargaining, in the notion of religious believers intending 'I trust in God' to mean 'I trust God to do X'; the implication being that their faith depends on God actually doing X. If God were to fail to do X, then their trust would have been misplaced, and they might have to cease trusting in God - just as if you failed to lock up when we left, I would be inclined to cease trusting you in future.

But this does not seem to be the case in the religious context, at least for the likes of Barth. For Barth, the expression 'I trust God' appears to be just that, an expression of an attitude of trust towards God. It is not dependent on God doing any action; it is not dependent on the actualisation of any particular state of affairs. The Christian simply places their trust in God, adopts an attitude of trust towards God, unconditionally, and that is all there is to it. There are no particular 'beliefs that' involved, besides perhaps the related belief that God is benevolent. Elsewhere in the same article, when Becker discusses potential varieties of noncognitive trust, we get this hypothetical expression of noncognitive trust as 'security': 'I don't know anything about you, but somehow I feel safe with you. I trust you.'¹⁶ Such an expression is clearly appropriate for the religious context.

So if part of what it means to say 'I believe in God' is to say 'I trust in God', and this expression of trust is the expression of a noncognitive attitude of trust towards God, then at least in the case of Karl Barth, we seem to have an example of a noncognitive attitude being a

¹⁴ See, for example, Lawrence C. Becker, 'Trust as Noncognitive Security about Motives', *Ethics*, 107:1 (1996), 43-61.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 44-5.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 46.

necessary component for belief in God, for what it means to say ‘I believe in God’, for what it means to be a theist.

8.2.7 Philosophical reinforcements

But we need not limit ourselves to the often obscure and sometimes contradictory (at least to analytic ears) realm of theology. We can find some back-up in good old-fashioned analytic philosophy, in the form of H. H. Price’s Gifford Lectures: ‘Belief in God is [...] evaluative and not merely factual. It cannot be reduced to the mere acceptance of an existential proposition.’¹⁷ In other words, belief in God is not reducible to ‘beliefs that’, or cognitive content. Some noncognitive, attitudinal or emotional content is part and parcel of it. Price continues:

...belief-in, or at least some instances of it, cuts across the boundary sometimes drawn between the cognitive side of human nature, concerned with what is true or false, and the evaluative side, concerned with what is good or evil. Either the boundary vanishes altogether, or we find ourselves on both sides of it at the same time.¹⁸

Finding ourselves on both sides of the cognitive/noncognitive divide is a recurring source of problems in many areas of philosophy, particularly metaethics. I will leave a discussion of those problems aside for now. Suffice to summarise that so far we have established this: What it means to be a theist is, in at least some cases, determined by a combination of forms of cognitive ‘beliefs that’ and other forms of ‘belief in’, the latter necessarily having some noncognitive components. Therefore, theism necessarily has noncognitive components.

Of course, this final move is too bold. It would be an elementary logical error to move towards a conclusion of ‘in all cases’ - i.e. theism generally - from a premise that is true only ‘in at least some cases’; I have said nothing about theism generally if I speak of only certain theisms specifically. So I say ‘in at least some cases’ because, clearly, Cook Wilson, Karl Barth, and H. H. Price do not establish the case for all forms of theism. I have only offered some intuitive support for my view applying to theism generally (Le Poidevin’s remarks on the perceived importance of emotion in religion), some more robust theological support for Christianity specifically (Karl Barth’s trust), and some further philosophical support in favour of widening the applicability of this view to theism generally once again (H. H. Price). But clearly, whether premise 2 is correct or not will depend entirely on what we decide ‘theism’

¹⁷ Henry Habberley Price, *Belief*, Gifford Lectures 1959-61. Available online at: <<http://www.giffordlectures.org/Browse.asp?PubID=TPBELI&Volume=0&Issue=0&ArticleID=20>> [accessed 14/04/2014].

¹⁸ Ibid. Emphasis added.

is. I have argued that it makes sense to understand theism as meaning what theists intend theism to mean, and therefore we ought to try and understand theism from within a theistic context (as much as we are able). It would be an empirical claim to assert that Cook Wilson's, Karl Barth's, and H. H. Price's views are representative of theism generally, but I feel content to make that claim, and limit the success or scope of my conclusion to the extent to which that empirical claim is true.

8.3 *Theism is a conjunction*

I ought to mention at this point that I am assuming that theism also has some cognitive components as a necessary part, in addition to the noncognitive. I will not argue for this; I take it as uncontroversial, or at least reasonable, to assume some minimal theological realism. That is, when someone says 'I believe in God', at least part of the meaning of that claim is constituted by the positive affirmation of the cognitive proposition 'It is the case that God exists'.

Assuming some sort of minimal theological realism, and assuming I am correct that theism (or at least certain forms of it) necessarily has some noncognitive components, leaves us in the awkward position of finding ourselves on both sides of the cognitive/noncognitive divide at the same time. What this means is that 'theism', as a position, is a conjunction of two logically distinct conjuncts. We have the straightforward propositional content - 'It is the case that God exists' - conjoined with the non-propositional, noncognitive content, which is, of course, difficult to represent in clear terms. As an expression of attitude, desire, emotion, etc., it is as much a matter of tone as of content. The natural limits of words on a page nudge a poor writer towards italicisation ('I *believe* in God'), or other clumsy means to try and demonstrate this. As an analytic philosopher, I retreat to a vague formalisation: (Φ P). I use this as a stand-in to represent whatever noncognitive content is bound up within theism.

The placing of the ' Φ ' immediately adjacent to the 'P' is intended to reflect the fact that this noncognitive ' Φ ' is not free-floating, it is directed *at* something. It is an attitude (say) *about* or *towards* God; this implies that there is a certain minimal cognitive theological component in any form of ' Φ P' - i.e., the thing that the attitude is directed towards. Whether it is expressed positively or negated, the ' Φ ' expressed must concern God. But what this ' Φ ' is is left entirely undefined. Some candidates for this position have been mentioned already - Karl Barth's 'trust', for example - but one could intuitively imagine any of the following fitting comfortably within this ' Φ P': A sense of reverence or awe, wonder, worship, fear, mystery,

comfort, faith, gratitude, hope, love, etc., etc.¹⁹ Any of these are likely candidates for being resistant to reduction to purely cognitive ‘beliefs that’, whilst being essential components for belief in God - and this is by no means an exhaustive list.

8.3.1 Identifying a four-way split

If we think that theistic belief is plausibly composed in this way, and we think that premise 1 is true, then we can identify this four-way distinction between some understandings of theism and their respective atheisms:

<p style="text-align: center;"><u>Theism</u>¹</p> <p>Purely cognitive claim: ‘P’, where ‘P’ = ‘It is the case that there exists...’</p> <p>This is (probably) the standard view.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><u>Theism</u>²</p> <p>Conjunction of the cognitive claim of Theism¹ and noncognitive content, giving something like: (P & ϕP)</p> <p>Noncognitive content is a necessary condition for theism.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;"><u>Atheism</u>¹</p> <p>Simple negation of the cognitive claim of Theism¹: \negP</p> <p>‘It is not the case that there exists...’</p> <p>This is (probably) the standard view.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><u>Atheism</u>²</p> <p>Negation of the conjunction of Theism², \neg(P & ϕP), via a negation of the noncognitive conjunct: $\neg\phi$P</p> <p>This is not the standard view!</p>

Theism¹ is theism as understood without noncognitive components as a necessary component of theism. It is, therefore, to be considered the standard philosophical view of theism: Theism is *just* the positive assertion of the cognitive proposition ‘P’, where P = ‘It is the case that God exists’. Given that atheism is the negation of theism, we can put this form of theism into our brackets (replacing our arbitrary placeholder of earlier), and deduce that atheism¹ is ‘ \neg P’,

¹⁹ For any of these I contend it is the case that there is a recognisable qualitative difference, if one opens one’s ears to tone, between saying, for example, ‘there are some things that we as limited and finite human beings, necessarily, can never know about God’ (a purely cognitive ‘belief that’) and appealing to a sense of God’s mystery, perhaps as Rudolf Otto’s ‘*mysterium tremendum*’. I am reminded of Raimond Gaita’s excellent illustration of this point: ‘The omniscient God of religion knows all our sins and woes. The omniscient God of the philosophers know them and also our email addresses. Whatever else may be said against the claim that if God is really to be omniscient, he must know our email addresses, it is the banality of it that compromises it fatally.’ Raimond Gaita, ‘Morality, Metaphysics and Religion’, p. 14.

or 'It is not the case that God exists'. This much probably strikes you as uncontroversial, and ought to represent the standard view.

If, however, you think that theism¹ does not quite capture what it means to be a theist, and you think that some noncognitive components are a necessary part of theism (in addition to some minimal theological realism), then theism² becomes a conjunction of cognitive and noncognitive contents, looking something like: $P \ \& \ \phi P$. (Clearly, noncognitive components, in the form of ' ϕP ', are not truth-apt, and are therefore resistant to formulation into logical form; so this conjunction is more illustrative than formal.)

We can then replace our arbitrary placeholder for theism with this conjunction - i.e. theism² = $(P \ \& \ \phi P)$ - and deduce that the negation of theism² will give us atheism²: $\neg(P \ \& \ \phi P)$. But atheism² is a negation of a conjunction. As such, atheism² is free to negate only one conjunct in order to negate the conjunction of theism² as a whole. It could negate the cognitive propositional content, just as atheism¹ does: $\neg P$.²⁰ It could also negate both the cognitive and the noncognitive components: $\neg P \ \& \ \neg \phi P$. But this might be atheistic overkill.

The point to recognise is that atheism², as a negated conjunction, is logically equivalent to a disjunction composed of two negations, $(\neg P \vee \neg \phi P)$, and as such has every right to negate only the noncognitive content, $\neg \phi P$, and emerge true, so remaining a legitimate form of atheism. It would remain a negation of theism, even though it says nothing whatsoever about the cognitive propositional claim about whether or not God exists. This, I warrant, is a counterintuitive conclusion.

There are some questions left unanswered about quite how one goes about negating noncognitive content; it is clearly not going to be a question of truth versus falsity. This would need further investigation, but I see no reason to think we should dismiss it as inherently implausible. As a brief sketch, one could imagine something like this: If these noncognitive components of theism are, for example, attitudes or emotions, then one could plausibly negate them by adopting contrary attitudes, or expressing contrary emotions. Bearing in mind a healthy awareness of the 'negation problem' in metaethics - this being just one instance of the shared ground that this issue has with metaethics (I will say more on this shortly) - I do not think we would struggle to come up with examples of this kind.

²⁰ I think this freedom of atheism² to negate only the cognitive propositional content of theism plays a strong role in the maintenance of the standard view of theism as being theism¹. Philosophers perceive the legitimacy of denying theism by stating merely 'it is not the case that God exists', and assume from that that theism was *only ever*, as it were, the negation of that negation: 'It is not the case that it is not the case that God exists', or 'God exists'. But this, I argue, is a mistake. One can be a purely cognitive atheist, and recognise that atheism is the negation of theism, but this does not entail that theism is purely cognitive.

8.3.2 Counterintuitive conclusions

The counterintuitive conclusion is made all the more counterintuitive when we consider that not only does it allow for the possibility of being an atheist whilst saying nothing whatsoever about whether or not God exists, it also allows for the possibility of an atheist actually agreeing with the cognitive components of theism - giving a positive truth value to P, stating that God exists - yet remaining an atheist; that is, ‘an atheist who believes that God exists’.

And further, if we allow ‘indifference’, or other lack of positive noncognitive pro-attitude, to be an appropriate negation of the noncognitive content that is essential to theism, we seem to have talked ourselves into an even more deeply counterintuitive position. For not only does my argument seem to compel the plausibility of someone being an atheist even though they believe that God exists, it also seems to compel the plausibility of calling someone an atheist, even though they believe that God exists, *simply because they cannot rouse in themselves an attitude of trust (for example) towards God*. This, I grant you, sounds absurd.

And yet, if premises 1 and 2 are to be considered true, then this conclusion also seems to follow. And as counterintuitive as this conclusion is, this is precisely the form of atheism that I wish to press for the plausibility of. After all, this atheist does not *believe in* God, even if they believe that God exists. If, as I have argued in this chapter, we think that atheism is the negation of theism, and that we ought to think that theism means ‘one who believes in God’, and one who believes in God is not merely stating that they believe *that* God exists, then the plausibility of this ‘atheist who believes that God exists’ appears to become a necessary consequence.

8.3.3 Countering counterintuitive conclusions

As it happens, this appearance is deceptive, and there is a simple and plausible block to this counterintuitive conclusion.²¹ We need a way to avoid the situation of the ‘atheist who believes that God exists’. That is, one who positively assigns truth-value to the cognitive components of theism (‘P’), whilst negatively assessing/expressing (such words are unavoidably clumsy) the noncognitive components (‘ $\neg\phi P$ ’); i.e. we want to rule out the possibility of (P & $\neg\phi P$). This means we need to find an additional premise that ensures that

²¹ Thanks to Yujin Nagasawa for pointing this out.

$\neg(P \ \& \ \neg\phi P)$ is true. $\neg(P \ \& \ \neg\phi P)$ is logically equivalent to $(P \rightarrow \phi P)$. As it happens, this is a fairly plausible additional premise. It essentially states that a positive truth-valuing of the cognitive components of belief in God *entails* a positive expression of the noncognitive components. That is, in slightly less formal language, if one really understands the cognitive propositions relating to God, and believes them to be true, then one will necessarily come to adopt the appropriate noncognitive attitudes or emotions.

The Humeans in the house, or perhaps Mackiens in the manse, will think that this smacks of metaphysical queerness. Which it does. But given that we are assuming some minimal theological realism, I do not think metaphysical queerness is reason enough to warrant dismissing this additional premise out of hand. With this addition, we can let my initial argument run its course, yet not find ourselves with any wildly counterintuitive conclusions.

Now, I am not a great fan of this additional premise. Although it solves the initial problem (if we can call it that) of feeling compelled to posit the ‘atheist who believes that God exists’, not only does it add layers of complexity that I fear - in multiplying premises beyond absolute necessity - will only encourage more disagreement and further weaken an already disagreeable argument, it also opens the argument up to far more telling problems in the end. I will discuss these in section 8.4.2, objection 2.

8.3.4 A moral reminder: Metaphysical queerness and the negation problem

That being said, this mention of metaphysical queerness, and the previous mention of the negation problem, hints towards some analogous metaethical issues; worth dwelling upon at some length, since they offer some support for the plausibility of my view. Because finding ourselves on both sides of the cognitive/noncognitive divide at the same time is precisely analogous to the sort of metaethical issues discussed in a book like Michael Smith’s *The Moral Problem*.²² It is not the purpose of this thesis to solve the moral problem. I only mention these issues because a) the metaethical discussion of the moral problem presents a structural precedent for my additional premise that the cognitive beliefs relating to God entail the noncognitive components, and b) the discussion of moral motivation, and specifically the notion of ‘motivational judgement internalism’, presents a pretty apt analogy to the overall thrust of my argument in this chapter.

²² Michael Smith, *The Moral Problem* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994).

In brief, motivational judgement internalism states that to cognitively judge something as morally right or wrong *is to be* motivated by that belief. We could endlessly discuss whether that is true or not, but my point is to point out that in that debate few people have any problem labelling the person who ‘believes a moral proposition yet is unmoved by it’ an ‘amoralist’. In fact, this term comes to be the name that we use to refer to the principal problem of motivational judgement internalism: ‘What are we to make of the “amoralist”?’²³

So if we are happy to call the individual who ‘believes that’ a moral proposition is true, yet feels no motivational (and therefore noncognitive) volition regarding it, an ‘amoralist’, why should we hesitate to do the same with religious propositions, and call such a person an ‘atheist’?

And further, we find that this offers additional support for my additional premise, which claims that the cognitive beliefs relating to God entail a noncognitive component of some sort. For when we come across someone who claims to believe that, say, beating children is absolutely morally wrong in all circumstances, and yet is happily mercilessly beating a child whilst professing this, we would say either that they were mad, or that they were lying, or that they had failed to understand the moral proposition that they were claiming to believe. That is, we expect the cognitive beliefs to entail some noncognitive response. Why then would it be implausible to say, when we came across someone who ‘believed in God’, yet had no noncognitive component of their belief, that they too must be mad, or lying, or failing to grasp the full implications of the cognitive components of belief in God? Why should we not expect those cognitive beliefs relating to God to entail a noncognitive response? The various responses to the problem of motivational judgement internalism at least demonstrate that there is a precedent for such a structure, and as such nothing inherently implausible in this view.

Not only does the world of metaethics present a structural precedent for the plausibility of my view, but we can also draw upon the tools of metaethics to solve some of the problems that my argument faces: For example, how we are to understand the negating of ‘certain emotions’? Although I offered some brief sketches earlier, the question remains: How is it that an assertion of ‘ ϕP ’ is logically inconsistent with a negation of ‘ ϕP ’, given that neither is truth-apt, such that a negation of ‘ ϕP ’ is sufficient to negate the conjunction of ‘ $P \& \phi P$ ’? This is virtually identical to the ‘negation problem’ for metaethical expressivism, and so

²³ See the entry on ‘Moral Motivation’ in the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*: Connie S. Rosati, ‘Moral Motivation’, *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, 2006, available at: <<http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/moral-motivation>> [accessed 09/09/2014].

any solution to that problem, insofar as it is a genuine and plausible solution, could happily work for me too. So, for example, we could draw upon Mark Schroeder's solution to the negation problem offered in 'How Expressivists Can and Should Solve Their Problem with Negation'.²⁴ We could see ' ϕP ' as expressing an attitude of 'being for' the worship of God, for example. That general 'pro-attitude' could be cashed out in various different ways, but provided we can present a plausible picture in which contrasting 'con-attitudes' (i.e. 'not being for x ' or 'being for not- x ') towards the concept of God turn out to be inconsistent with pro-attitudes, then we can solve the negation problem for noncognitive atheism.

But, as I have said, the purpose of this thesis is not to solve the moral problem, and nor is it to discuss the success of solutions to the negation problem. Suffice to say that there are some striking similarities between the issue raised in this chapter and the world of metaethics. Since the issues are seen as plausible in the metaethical world, this similarity provides support to the contention of the argument in this chapter. And further, a lot of the problems inherent to my view have been extensively discussed in the context of metaethics. We can, and should, draw upon those discussions to shed light on these issues in the philosophy of religion.

8.4 Objections

I will now consider some objections. Given the controversial and counterintuitive nature of the conclusion of the argument in this chapter, I suspect that there are many things that could be said against it. I will cover the two most obvious ones here, in the hope that this discussion will cover most of the relevant ground.

8.4.1 Objection 1: Not '*Theism*²' but '*Theism*+'

Perhaps the most obvious objection to my argument comes in the form of a restatement of what I have called the 'standard view' of theism. Namely, that theism is just the positive truth-valuing of the purely cognitive proposition 'It is the case that God exists', which I have represented as '*Theism*¹'. Surely this, and this alone, is the necessary *and* sufficient condition for what it means to be a theist? What I have described in '*Theism*²' is

²⁴ Mark Schroeder, 'How Expressivists Can and Should Solve Their Problem with Negation', *Noûs*, 42 (2008), 573-599. Although, it should be mentioned, Schroeder does not see his solution as being ultimately conducive to the truth of expressivism, since it only opens the door to further problems. Still, his argument provides a short-term solution to the 'negation problem' of noncognitive atheism.

not really theism, but ‘theism+’; theism plus commitment,²⁵ theism plus religion, theism plus faith, theism plus emotion, etc. As such, premise 2 is false, since this noncognitive content, even if it does play a role in theistic or religious belief, does not play an essential role, and is thus not a necessary component of theism.

In response, I would ask the objector to consider the counterintuitive conclusions of their own position. To say that one can be a theist solely in virtue of one’s cognitive beliefs, regardless of one’s noncognitive attitudes, emotions, etc., is to ignore the depths of theology that consider ‘belief in’ God, and all the noncognitive stuff that comes along with it, to be of primary importance. There is a sense in which, for the likes of such archetypal theists as Dostoevsky, Pascal, Augustine, et al., these noncognitive components, which are recognisably evident in theological concepts such as ‘faith’, ‘grace’, ‘love’, etc., are there in our understanding of what it means to believe in God *from the ground up*. They are not, contrary to objection 1, peripheral or additional to a core thesis; the ‘core thesis’ *emerges from* these noncognitive-laden concepts. The ‘belief that God exists’, as a cognitive proposition, is very much secondary to the religious form of life that gives rise to it.

This is particularly obvious if we recognise that our notion of ‘noncognitive’ includes any product of what have traditionally been termed ‘reasons of the heart’:

The heart has its reasons, which reason does not know [...] It is the heart which experiences God, and not the reason. This, then, is faith: God felt by the heart, not by the reason. [...] We know truth, not only by the reason, but also by the heart, and it is in this last way that we know first principles.²⁶

This is a frequently recurring theme; consider this from Dostoevsky: ‘To know nature, the soul, God, love [...] These are known by the heart, not the mind.’²⁷ Or this from Schleiermacher: ‘The essence of religion consists in the feeling of an absolute dependence.’²⁸ Pascal, Dostoevsky, Schleiermacher, Otto, Barth, not even to mention Kierkegaard, Wittgenstein, Augustine, Tillich, William James, Rowan Williams, etc., etc.; the list could go on and on. To say that belief in God, ‘theism’, is solely cognitive in nature is to cast all of these theologians and philosophers aside as being misguided about theism. That is a conclusion no less absurd than mine.

²⁵ Thanks to Andrei Buckareff for this comment.

²⁶ Blaise Pascal, *Pensées* [1669] (New York: E. P. Dutton & Co., Inc., 1958), §§277, 278, 282.

²⁷ This simple statement of what we might call ‘Metaphysical Romanticism’ is offered in response to an appeal made to Dostoevsky (by his brother) that ‘to *know* more, one must *feel* less’. Cited in Joseph Frank, *Dostoevsky: A Writer in His Time* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010), pp. 56-7.

²⁸ Cited in Victoria Harrison, *Religion and Modern Thought* (London: SCM Press, 2007), p. 16.

But further, I think we can recognise objection 1 as being a symptom of a broader methodological issue in the analytic philosophy of religion; namely, that the analytic philosophy of religion operates with an impoverished conception of religious belief, and it does not want to listen to theology's corrective insights on the matter. I said earlier that 'theism is what theists think theism is', and that we should be aware that what it means to affirm the existence of the God of religion might be different to that of the God of the philosophers; I do not want to let the strength of that assertion go unnoticed. It would be a terrible mistake to think that the analytic philosophy of religion can operate without listening *intently* to theology. It is philosophy of *religion*, after all. To choose to adopt and operate with a concept of theism that is only relevant to the analytic philosophy of religion, formed in wilful disregard of theology, is to make the discipline wholly irrelevant to its subject matter. 'What can be formalised without loss of cognitive content cannot be corrupted by cliché or spiritual deadness.'²⁹ A robust conception of theistic belief can clearly be corrupted by cliché or spiritual deadness, yet the conception of theistic belief often deployed in the analytic philosophy of religion is not so vulnerable. This ought to ring alarm bells for the analytic philosophy of religion.

And besides, there is a more serious logical point to be made, and it offers me an easy escape from objection 1. It is simply this: My conclusion states 'atheism *can be* purely noncognitive'. As such, I would point out that I am not claiming that atheism *is* noncognitive. Given the explicitly stated limits to my conclusion, it is sufficient for me to claim that there is just one instance of a partially noncognitive theism in order to justify my conclusion that atheism *can be* purely noncognitive. Now, you might not think that theism *as such* is necessarily noncognitive, but given the examples I have cited in this article, it would be obtuse to maintain that *no* form of theism is necessarily noncognitive in part.

Part of me thinks that that is too easy a way out, however. I do intend my conclusion to be more far reaching than merely being a very restricted possibility. I think noncognitive atheisms can be appropriate responses to the vast majority of theisms, but that is largely because I think the vast majority of theisms are partly constituted by noncognitive contents. I allow that there might be some very specific forms of theism that might not require noncognitive content, but contend that there is as little justification to move from 'some theisms do not require noncognitive content' to 'therefore, no theism requires noncognitive

²⁹ Raimond Gaita, *Good and Evil: An Absolute Conception*, 2nd edition, Kindle edition (London: Routledge, 2004), p. 272.

content', as there is to move from 'some theisms require noncognitive content' to 'therefore, all theisms require noncognitive content'.

In conclusion, to deny premise 2 is to ignore theology. We should not ignore theology. Therefore, we should not deny premise 2. But if it will help, I can rephrase premise 2, and make the limited scope of my conclusion more clear, giving:

1. Atheism is the negation of theism.
- 2*. Some forms of theism necessarily have noncognitive components.
- 3*. Therefore, atheism *can be* purely noncognitive.

8.4.2 *Objection 2: Inappropriate attitudes imply a lack of belief*

Objection 2 focuses on my additional premise, which was intended to head-off some of the more wildly counterintuitive conclusions of my argument; namely, that we can have 'atheists who believe that God exists'. This additional premise claimed that the cognitive components of theism entailed, somehow, the noncognitive components. Accepting this additional premise leads to a more serious objection to my initial argument. For just as this premise entails that someone who believes that God exists will certainly adopt the appropriate attitudes, it also entails that someone who adopts inappropriate attitudes must surely lack the belief that God exists - the structure of the entailment can work both ways, if we were to negate the consequent. So it seems that my additional premise entails that to be a noncognitive atheist is to commit oneself to being a cognitive atheist also. This does not exactly challenge my conclusion, for it is still possible to be an atheist noncognitively, but it does seem to challenge the idea that one could be a *purely* noncognitive atheist; that is, an atheist who says nothing whatsoever about God's existence. Given that establishing the plausibility of that claim was the main objective of this argument, I seem to have sawn off the branch that I was sitting on, with uncomfortable results.

We can retreat back to the metaethical analogy for reinforcement of this point. For just as we expect anyone who has a certain moral belief to be motivated in that regard - as the thesis of motivational judgement internalism dictates - so too do we doubt the moral beliefs of someone who lacks the relevant motivations. Analogously, if someone lacks the appropriate religious attitudes, then we would doubt that they possess the relevant religious beliefs. If I invoke my additional premise and claim that the relevant religious beliefs entail

the appropriate religious attitudes, then I make this doubt a certainty. But if this doubt is a certainty, then any noncognitive atheist must be a cognitive atheist also.

The additional premise was initially brought in to counter a counterintuitive conclusion - to head-off the possibility of having an 'atheist who believes that God exists' - but it has now led to the dismissal of the possibility of something that I was keen to argue for - the 'atheist who says nothing whatsoever about God's existence'. As such, it seems that I have a choice between two unpleasant outcomes. Either I accept that this additional premise is true, in which case the notion of 'a noncognitive atheist who says nothing whatsoever about God's existence' falls out of the picture, or I reject the truth of this additional premise, in which case we are left with the counterintuitive conclusion of being faced with the possibility of 'atheists who believe that God exists'. Perhaps, to my reader, the former is clearly more desirable, and we should just accept that I have been wrong to argue this case. But I would be left wondering what we are to make of the likes of Ivan Karamazov.

To my mind, there clearly seem to be some essentially noncognitive components of theism, and some essentially noncognitive forms of atheism in response. I conclude, then, by biting the bullet and accepting that, counterintuitive though it may be, our best option is to try to accept the conclusion that there might be 'atheists who believe that God exists'. The additional premise should therefore be weakened to a contingent entailment. That is, the cognitive components of theism *tend to entail* the noncognitive components, but not always, everywhere, and for everyone. Some people can accurately engage with the cognitive components of theistic belief, 'accept them', and still reject the noncognitive. These people are atheists who believe that God exists.

Now perhaps those people do not, as a matter of fact, exist; but we should allow for their possibility. A more likely noncognitive atheist would be one who says nothing about God's existence - perhaps because they are a positivist, and so believe that theological propositions are incapable of being true or false - yet still considers themselves an atheist on noncognitive grounds.

8.5 Conclusion

Armed with my argument, and returning to the two quotations that began this chapter, we can now see Ivan Karamazov as being an atheist even though he 'accepts God', and we can reassure Camus that he is an atheist, just not an atheist who positively asserts that God does not exist. We should not feel bound, as Camus no doubt felt, to only consider as atheists

those who positively (cognitively) assert that God does not exist. There is another form of atheism that is fully and legitimately called atheism, and it exists in those who reject God noncognitively, with con-attitudes, without saying anything whatsoever about whether God exists or not. These people are atheists; they do not *believe in* God. Since there is more to belief in God than cognitive assent to a fact-claim, these noncognitive atheists represent a kind of ‘not-theism’ that is formed in relation to that richer understanding of theistic belief.

In terms of my thesis, this entails that those who are compelled to adopt a con-attitude towards God and belief in God, inspired by the unavoidable nature of the problem of evil and the moral objectionability of theodicy, are legitimately called atheists. The problem of evil therefore remains conducive towards atheism, even if it cannot be used as a basis from which to argue for the non-existence of God.

In the next chapter, I will discuss an example of just this form of atheism, in the form of Dostoevsky’s Ivan Karamazov.

9. Ivan Karamazov is a Hopeless Romantic

Le cœur a ses raisons, que la raison ne connaît point. On le sent en mille choses. [...] C'est le cœur qui sent Dieu, et non la raison. Voilà ce que c'est que la foi parfaite, Dieu sensible au cœur.

Blaise Pascal¹

To know nature, the soul, god, love...These are known by the heart, not the mind.

Fyodor Dostoevsky²

One way to understand what I mean by the realm of meaning [...] is to think of it as a cognitive realm that enables us to understand why people have sometimes said there is a form of understanding in which head and heart are inseparably combined.

Raimond Gaita³

Ivan Karamazov, from Fyodor Dostoevsky's *The Brothers Karamazov*,⁴ is frequently to be found in discussions within the philosophy of religion that concern the problem of evil. He is wheeled into proceedings to act as an example that is used by philosophers who seem to assume that merely by the mention of his name, accompanied by what he assuredly stands for, one can make some sort of conclusive point regarding the problem of evil. In using him so, these philosophers tend to neglect any kind of deep investigation into how they are interpreting the character of Ivan Karamazov, resulting in some incredibly superficial interpretations of Ivan, and leading to misguided uses of him in their philosophical arguments. The purpose of this chapter is to correct these misinterpretations, in order that we

¹ 'The heart has its reasons, which reason does not know. We feel it in a thousand things. It is the heart which experiences God, and not the reason. This, then, is faith: God felt by the heart, not by the reason.' Blaise Pascal, *Pensées* [1669] (New York: E. P. Dutton & Co., Inc., 1958), §§277, 278. (The French taken from the original, available at: <<http://www.penseesdepascal.fr/index.php>> [accessed 03/12/2014].)

² Cited in Joseph Frank, *Dostoevsky: A Writer in His Time* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010), pp. 56-7.

³ Raimond Gaita, 'Morality, Metaphysics and Religion', in *Moral Powers, Fragile Beliefs: Essays in Moral and Religious Philosophy*, ed. by Joseph Carlisle, James C. Carter, and Daniel Whistler (New York: Continuum, 2011), pp. 3-28 (p. 16).

⁴ Fyodor Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*, trans. by David McDuff (London: Penguin, 2003).

may better understand the form of atheism that Dostoevsky uses Ivan to represent. To my mind, Ivan Karamazov represents precisely the kind of noncognitive atheism that I argued for the plausibility of in the previous chapter. His example therefore lends support for the contention of that chapter, provided my interpretation of Dostoevsky's aims and intentions in constructing the character of Ivan is correct.

I will begin by outlining some common interpretations of Ivan, together with some less common ones, with the intention of illustrating just how wrong some people can be regarding this matter. Once I have established what Ivan is not saying, I will seek to address what Ivan is saying. From this, and from a wider consideration of Dostoevsky and his intentions, I can unpack what I take to be the intended meaning of Ivan's statement. The character of Ivan Karamazov stands as a fine example of the kind of noncognitive atheism that I wish to argue for the plausibility of. He does not explicitly deny the existence of God - in fact, he 'accepts' God - and yet remains (surely) an atheist. His atheism is primarily noncognitive, but I will need to take a slightly roundabout route to show how this noncognitive atheism manifests itself. The key point that I will argue for in this chapter is that Dostoevsky constructs Ivan Karamazov as a *metaphysical Romantic*; Ivan therefore closely parallels Dostoevsky's own attitude to religious belief. Ivan and Dostoevsky share the 'cognitive' components of their 'religious' belief - they both consider propositions about God to be beyond human intellectual understanding - but when it comes to the noncognitive, where Dostoevsky has hope, faith, and love, Ivan has only hopelessness, injustice, and despair. Ivan Karamazov is, therefore, a hopeless Romantic.

9.1 Misinterpretations

I will, rather unfairly, pick upon two philosophers of religion as archetypes of the worst examples of Ivan's misuse and misinterpretation, before proceeding to a third example that is less misguided.

Marilyn Adams and John Hick have both offered theodicies, and more general discussions of the problem of evil, that are considered to be amongst the most successful in the field. Both of them come to mention and use Ivan Karamazov in the course of their discussion, and both of them use him incorrectly.

Marilyn Adams has Ivan as the ‘voice of the standard criticism’,⁵ where the ‘standard criticism’ is to respond to a theodicy by positing a *qualitative* dimension to the problem of evil. That is to say that whilst a theodicy might succeed in defending God against the gross *quantity* of evil in the world, He surely remains defenceless against a charge that highlights the extreme *quality* of certain types of evil. So whilst certain theodicies might successfully defend God’s existence in response to, say, the widely prevalent occurrence of petty theft - because perhaps the preservation of the thieves’ free-will, or the opportunities for character growth, forgiveness, redemption, etc., that are afforded to both victim and perpetrator, are a ‘greater good’ that outweighs the suffering caused by the evil act - how can the same arguments be effective in responding to an instance of meaningless, entirely destructive, entirely cruel, and hopelessly pointless child torture, for example? The thrust of Ivan’s statement, according to Adams, is to point to these types of evil, and restate the problem of evil in these terms, thus ruling out the potential success of many theodicies that focus on the merely quantitative scope of evil.

It is true that Ivan does point to such instances of terrible - Adams labels them ‘horrendous’ - evils, and it is true that he seems to be seeking to say something about religious belief in light of these evils. But is he constructing an argument from the problem of evil to the non-existence of God? I think not. And yet, Adams interprets him as stating just such an argument.

As does John Hick, who identifies Ivan as being the finest literary expression of an emotional response to the existence of horrendous evils in the world.⁶ In this regard, Ivan does not say anything distinctive or interesting regarding the problem of evil, but Dostoevsky has him express his outrage well. This outrage, however, is made of pure emotion, and as such Hick believes it must be overruled by an intellectual response - Hick’s ‘Soul-Making Theodicy’, for example. This primacy of intellect over emotion, and the assumption, by Hick, that such an intellectual response can offer a response to Ivan’s emotional statement, is the key indication that something has gone wrong with Hick’s interpretation. Hick interprets Ivan as doing nothing more than restating the argument from the problem of evil to the non-existence of God, but in a rather eloquent and literary manner. But again, I say, Ivan is not

⁵ Marilyn McCord Adams, *Horrendous Evil and the Goodness of God* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1999), p. 40.

⁶ John Hick, *Evil and the God of Love* (London: Macmillan, 1966), p. 386. I must confess that I am picking on John Hick a little here, as he does not make too much out of the example of Ivan Karamazov. Nevertheless, that Ivan warrants even the slightest mention in Hick’s discussion is in itself enough to prompt me to respond to him.

stating such an argument, one that can be appropriately responded to by an intellectual response.

Both of these philosophers have Ivan, the infamous atheist, offering a logical argument for atheism that is constructed on the basis of observations regarding evil. Stewart Sutherland⁷ offers a far more subtle and reasoned interpretation of Ivan Karamazov, one that does not share the mistakes of Adams and Hick. Sutherland interprets Ivan's statement as essentially being a statement of logical positivism. Dostoevsky, Sutherland notes, intended Ivan Karamazov to be the strongest statement of atheism that he could muster, and he was quite explicit about this point.⁸ This statement of atheism, in the form of Ivan, would be responded to with the strongest statement of theism, in the form of Alyosha and, more specifically, the Elder Zosima. Sutherland combines an awareness of these intentions with a reading of Ivan's statements concerning the limitations of human understanding, and draws his interpretation from this combination. His recognition of Dostoevsky's intentions is the strongest feature of his reading, and it is to this strong point that I will return to later, but he is mistaken in his reading of Ivan's statements concerning the limits of human understanding.

Sutherland hears Ivan state categorically that man is 'Euclidean', he possesses a Euclidean mind in a Euclidean world, and is therefore utterly incapable of understanding God.⁹ He also hears Ivan insist that he has chosen to 'stick to the facts'. Sutherland hears this, and concludes that Ivan must surely be standing in as a representative for positivism, or logical positivism as it would later become known. Dostoevsky is presenting 'the strongest form of atheism' in the strongest form of the day, that of positivism.

In this, Sutherland interprets Dostoevsky as presenting a far subtler version of atheism in Ivan than the likes of Adams or Hick would imagine. Rather than operating as an argument from the problem of evil to the non-existence of God, Ivan becomes a proponent of the noncognitive nature of religious language; religious propositions are quite literally meaningless to the intellect, as they propose to consider things that are beyond the limits of human understanding. They should, accordingly, be rejected wholesale. Yet Sutherland's proposal seems to be that the strongest form of atheism that Dostoevsky could present could not stop at positivism alone; it could not stop at simply dismissing the meaningfulness of religious language. Dostoevsky's ultimate atheist must first dismiss religious language as

⁷ In his book length discussion of Ivan: Stewart Sutherland, *Atheism and the Rejection of God: Contemporary Philosophy and the Brothers Karamazov* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1977).

⁸ For a wealth of evidence regarding this point, consult Joseph Frank's peerless biography *Dostoevsky: A Writer in His Time*, pp. 788-92.

⁹ '...the mind I have is a Euclidean, earthbound one, and so how are we to make inferences about that which is not of this world?' Fyodor Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*, p. 307.

meaningless, thus eliminating God at the intellectual level, before then destroying whatever meaning might remain in the notion of God with an inappropriate and blasphemous emotional response to the notion of God, thus eliminating God at the emotional and non-intellectual level. According to Sutherland, this is precisely what Ivan Karamazov achieves.

Although I admire the depth of Sutherland's analysis generally, I feel Sutherland has made a fundamental misinterpretation of the 'form' of Ivan; for Sutherland has Ivan as a confessed positivist, and Ivan Karamazov is no positivist. To demonstrate this, I only need refer to the words of Ivan himself, as featuring in his encounter with Alyosha. It is at this point that my three exemplar misinterpretations of Ivan can coincide and be criticised.

9.2 Misinterpretations refuted

The strength of Sutherland's interpretation reveals the ultimate refutation of Adams' and Hick's respective positions. A crucial part of Ivan's statement is a rejection of the appropriateness of religious propositions to be dealt with in human intellectual - i.e. logical - terms. Ivan sees that if God were to exist, and given our understanding of the nature of the world, then the world would be created according to Euclidean rules, and as such a human being too would be made according to these rules. A human being would be bound by these rules, incapable of understanding anything beyond these rules. As such, any discussion of the existence of a non-Euclidean being such as God is quite beyond the capacities of any man. It is, quite literally, nonsense, and as such Ivan refuses to engage with it; indeed, he is scornful of the ignorance of those who feel that they can engage with such matters on logical terms. Human beings are fundamentally incapable of understanding God, for God lies beyond the limits of human intellectual understanding. Therefore, we should stay silent on the matter. Ivan is quite explicit about this, and his derision of the 'Russian boys', who discuss God's existence over stolen moments in pubs, adds to this impression.¹⁰

Not only this, but we know that Dostoevsky intended to respond to Ivan with Alyosha and Zosima, and we do not find these characters stating any kind of theodicy, or any other logical response to the 'argument' reputed to be found in Ivan. I defer again to Joseph

¹⁰ See, e.g., Ivan saying to his brother: '...how have Russian boys run the show up till now - a certain kind of boy, that is? Take this fetid inn, for example, this is where they gather, huddled in corners. They have never seen each other in their lives before, and when they get out of the inn they'll never see each other again for forty years, well, but what of it, what are they going to talk about now that they've snatched a minute or two in this inn of theirs? About the question of the universe, what else? Is there a God, is there such a thing as immortality? [...] it would be hard to imagine anything more stupid than the things with which our Russian boys occupy themselves these days.' Fyodor Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*, pp. 305-6.

Frank's excellent biography for evidence of this. He records various letters of Dostoevsky's in which this intention is made quite explicit:

He [Dostoevsky] defines 'the point of the book' as being 'blasphemy and the refutation of blasphemy. The blasphemy I have taken as I myself have realised it, in its strongest form, that is, precisely as it occurs among us now in Russia with the whole (almost) upper stratum, and primarily with the young people, that is, the scientific and philosophical rejection of God's existence has been abandoned now, today's practical Socialists don't bother with it at all (as people did the whole last century and the first half of the present one). But on the other hand God's creation, God's world, and its meaning are negated as strongly as possible. That's the only thing contemporary civilisation finds nonsensical. [...] The refutation of this (not direct, that is, not from one person to another) will appear in the last words of the dying elder. [...] In the next book the elder Zosima's death and deathbed conversations with his friends will occur...If I succeed, I'll have...forced people to recognise that a pure, ideal Christian is not an abstract matter but one graphically real, possible, standing before our eyes, and that Christianity is the only refuge of the Russian land from its evils. I pray God that I'll succeed; the piece will be moving, if only my inspiration holds out...The whole novel is being written for its sake, but only let it succeed, that's what worries me now!'¹¹

These two factors - Ivan's rejection of 'logical' talk of God, and Dostoevsky's intentions in opposing Ivan's statement with Alyosha and Zosima - prove that Ivan's statement is not one that can be restated as a logical argument from the problem of evil to the non-existence of God, and this shows that Adams' and Hick's interpretations are mistaken.

At this point it would be tempting to herald Sutherland's interpretation as rising above these two mistaken readings; his does, after all, recognise that whatever the statement of Ivan is, it is not merely the presentation of a logical argument from evil to the non-existence of God. And yet, where Sutherland has succeeded in capturing the wider point of opposing the 'form' of Ivan with the 'form' of Alyosha and Zosima, he has committed himself too early to the interpretation of Ivan as a positivist. A recognition that Ivan/Dostoevsky is tackling the issues concerning the legitimacy of what can be said to be meaningful works as a criticism of Adams and Hick, but to claim that this is all that Dostoevsky is doing is premature. For there is another direction that Dostoevsky could have intended this statement to go... Denying the possibility of man grasping religious truths with his intellect alone could lead one to endorse positivism, but it could also lead one to endorse *Romanticism*.

It is my firm contention that Ivan Karamazov is not a positivist, as Sutherland would have him be; Ivan Karamazov is a Romantic. Ivan Karamazov is the product of Dostoevsky, he is the intentional creation of a passionately theistic man who wished to present what he

¹¹ Joseph Frank, recounting some of Dostoevsky's letters, cited in *Dostoevsky: A Writer in His Time*, pp. 790, 792. Later, Frank comments: 'Dostoevsky expresses his trepidation over whether his reply to this "negative side" of his work will be "a sufficient reply. The more so as the reply, after all, is...only an indirect one...an artistic picture...There are a few of the monk's precepts in response to which people will absolutely yell that they're absurd in the everyday sense, but in another, inner sense I think they [Zosima's precepts] are right".' Ibid., p. 800.

saw as the strongest statement of atheism, and a positivist would not be a strong form of atheism to Dostoevsky - a man who developed as a writer and an individual through the turbulent periods of 19th century Russia, so heavily influenced in his earlier years by Romantic literature.¹²

Sutherland recognises that Dostoevsky is tackling both the intellectual and the emotional contexts of religious belief when he develops Ivan. But Sutherland has become distracted by Ivan's repeated insistence on 'sticking to the facts'; he has become hung-up on this fact alone, and has missed the context in which this statement is made. A proper understanding of this statement, of this insistence, leads us directly to the correct interpretation of Ivan Karamazov.

9.3 *The correct interpretation*

This insistence of 'sticking to the facts' is uttered by Ivan repeatedly, but is oriented towards two different elements in his conversation with Alyosha. The first element is indeed as Sutherland would have it, when Ivan insists on 'sticking to the facts' of the world, of his Euclidean mind, in a positivistic sense. This is one notion of 'fact'; a fact about what can legitimately be said to be meaningful; a 'fact' about the nature of 'facts'.¹³ There is, however, another notion of 'fact' that Ivan insists upon sticking to, and it arises specifically in his discussion of the problem of evil. The second time Ivan speaks of 'sticking to the facts', he is no longer talking about the legitimacy of what can be said to be meaningful; this time, Ivan insists upon sticking to the 'fact' of his emotional response to an encounter with terrible evil in the world. It is *this* fact above all others that Ivan refuses to relinquish; he *will not* assent to any theory (or theodicy) that compels him to accept these evils as justified. If he were to perceive these evils as in any way justified, or just, then he would have to 'alter the facts' of his response to these evils. It is the 'fact' of his emotional response to these evils that Ivan insists upon sticking to.¹⁴

¹² We must note, too, that references to this Romantic literature feature prominently in Ivan's speech, and they are said with the most honest feeling that we find in Ivan. There is no trace of irony when he quotes these lines.

¹³ For this, see Fyodor Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*, pp. 306-9.

¹⁴ When asked what he knows, regarding an instance of terrible evil, Ivan replies: 'That I don't understand anything...And that I don't want to understand anything now, either. I want to remain with the facts. I decided long ago not to understand. If I understand anything, I shall instantly be untrue to the facts, and I have decided to remain with the facts...' Ibid., p. 318. To my mind, this is strongly reminiscent of those passages (cited earlier in this thesis) found in the works of the moral anti-theodicists that speak of 'irreducible moral realities' that are 'extra-territorial to reason'.

If this is a correct interpretation - as an analysis of the text surely reveals it to be - then we are left with only one conclusion. For Ivan has stated two things by insisting upon 'sticking to the facts': Firstly, he has stated something about the legitimacy of what can be said to be meaningful, something about the limits of human *intellectual* understanding - Sutherland identifies this point. Secondly, Ivan has stated something about the nature of ethical responsiveness; he has insisted that there is a 'fact' (that he will not yield) within the very nature of his emotional response. The second insistence compels us to interpret Ivan, not as a positivist, but as a Romantic. Ivan states clearly that there are severe limits to human intellectual understanding, but he does not stop at that; he clearly believes that there is something worth saying beyond the limits of the intellect. Concerning certain matters - such as ethics, the soul, God, love¹⁵ - intellect alone is impotent; it is in *feeling* that these matters will find meaning. The Romantic ideal is to prize emotional knowledge over intellectual knowledge, or at the very least to propose that there are some truths that the heart is capable of understanding whilst the head is incapable, and we can clearly see this ideal manifest in Ivan, the Karamazovian character who insists to his brother that he must 'live from the insides' and 'love life over logic'.¹⁶ What Ivan comes to represent, epistemologically speaking, is not a positivist epistemology, which limits human knowledge to what the intellect can grasp, but a Romantic epistemology, which recognises those limits yet allows for knowledge beyond the limits of purely intellectual understanding.

And why should we be surprised to find this in Ivan? Dostoevsky is constantly playing with intellectual characters who are wrestling with this epistemological paradox. In *Crime and Punishment*, we find the student intellectual Raskolnikov trying vehemently to stick to his intellectual facts, and dismiss his meaningless emotional conscience. In this endeavour, Raskolnikov fails; it would not be a glib reading of the novel to claim that its central message, its 'argument', was to demonstrate the inescapable truth of the spiritual dimension in human existence, an ethical dimension that is fundamentally non-intellectual, mysterious, emotional, yet nevertheless *meaningful*.

For Dostoevsky, this dimension is inexorably bound up with theism, with Christianity, and with Christian morality, but the underlying truth that grounds this faith is an absolute commitment to the meaningfulness of this non-intellectual and transcendent

¹⁵ Dostoevsky writes in a letter to his brother, 'To know nature, the soul, god, love...These are known by the heart, not the mind.' Cited in Joseph Frank's, *Dostoevsky: A Writer in His Time*, pp. 56-7.

¹⁶ For this, see the excellent and revealing exchange between Alyosha and Ivan on p. 302 of *The Brothers Karamazov*: 'To love life more than its meaning?' 'Most certainly; to love it before logic, as you say, especially before logic, for only then will I understand its meaning.'

dimension of human existence. It is the preservation of this truth against the criticisms of the day, when Dostoevsky is surrounded by a modernising and rapidly secularising Russia, that he is constantly fighting for, within his work and outside of it. His literary exploration of Ivan is therefore his exploration of a man who recognises the base underlying truth of Romanticism - that man is paradoxically limited by a Euclidean mind and yet capable of touching realms of meaning beyond the naturalistic and positivistic - whilst not recognising the truth that, for Dostoevsky, is conjunctive with this: namely, the truth of Christian theism.

Ivan comes to represent the strongest form of atheism, in Dostoevsky's eyes, precisely because he is not like all the other atheists who simply reject the Romantic notion that there is, necessarily, a spiritual dimension to human existence. Such a pure positivist would be too weak an atheist for Dostoevsky; he/she would be too easily refuted by a demonstration of the unavoidably spiritual nature of humanity. Dostoevsky considers this matter to have been conclusively demonstrated via the likes of Raskolnikov and others, and begins from the conclusion of that 'argument'. Ivan Karamazov is a strong statement of atheism precisely because he shares with Dostoevsky the rejection of the 'Russian boys', and all that those secular progressives stand for; he shares with Dostoevsky a recognition of the importance of the Romantic epistemology. Ivan is Dostoevsky's ultimate atheist because Ivan agrees with everything that leads Dostoevsky to his theistic conclusion - metaphysical and epistemological Romanticism, the reality of morality, etc. - and yet does not share that theistic conclusion. Ivan agrees with Dostoevsky right up to the point where he 'accepts God', and we must take Ivan seriously when he says this. But in accepting God, in endorsing the Romantic epistemology that allows Ivan to accept God, Ivan does not find the hope of Christianity, he finds the despair of injustice. The meaning that Ivan discovers, beyond the intellectual realm, the meaning that Ivan insists upon sticking to, is not theistic and is not Christian.

Dostoevsky opposes Ivan's statement with that of Zosima and Alyosha. Where Zosima (like Dostoevsky, presumably) recognises Christianity in the transcendent meaning to be found beyond human intellectual limits, Ivan sees only injustice and horror. Where Alyosha sees hope in this miraculous recognition of something beyond the physical, Ivan sees despair; it is precisely because Ivan is caught up in 'living with his insides' that he feels the full horror of what it means to say that *not* everything is permitted, and recognises too clearly the immense injustice that such a recognition must entail. He feels the abject horror at encountering the reality of this injustice, and chooses to stick to *these* facts above all else. He will refuse any hope, he will refuse any forgiveness, he would rather be left with his

‘unassuaged indignation’, *even if he is not right*.¹⁷ Ivan therefore becomes an ‘atheist’, in that he lacks belief in God; but what he lacks is not a belief in the ‘fact’ of God (for that would be nonsense to his Euclidean understanding). Ivan lacks ‘belief’ insofar as he lacks *faith*. Ivan does not find hope in the meaning that is to be found beyond the intellectual realm, and so remains a hopeless Romantic.

9.4 Conclusion

Using Ivan Karamazov as a spokesman for the argument from evil to the non-existence of God is profoundly misguided, for Ivan does not state any such logical argument; indeed, he is outspokenly derisive of those who aim to say anything about God in limited human intellectual (by which we can read ‘logical’) terms. Neither should Ivan be considered a statement of positivism, for he places huge emphasis on the ‘facts’ of his ethical responsiveness. The statement of Ivan Karamazov is one of epistemological or metaphysical Romanticism, which recognises the limits of human intellectual understanding whilst allowing for meaningful knowledge beyond those limits, combined with a rejection of the hope that can be found in theistic faith. As such, he comes to represent precisely the form of atheism that I argued for the plausibility of in the previous chapter. Ivan says nothing whatsoever about God’s existence - he is scornful of those who claim any kind of propositional or cognitive understanding about such non-Euclidean matters - and yet he remains an atheist. His atheism is situated in his noncognitive con-attitudes towards the notion of God and religious belief. In fact, his atheism lies in his noncognitive con-attitudes towards the world as created by God; Ivan rejects the created order. The problem of evil is the inspiration for this rejection, but it is not used as a basis from which to argue for the non-existence of God. Ivan’s response is volitional, not reducible to cognitive components. As such, it precisely reflects Dostoevsky’s theism, in that Dostoevsky was one of the archetypal theists (mentioned in the previous chapter) for whom noncognitive components were inexorably bound up with what it means to believe in God. Ivan negates this form of theism, Dostoevsky’s form of theism, by negating the necessary noncognitive components of that belief *in* God.

Ivan Karamazov therefore provides a prime example of the form of atheism that I argued for the plausibility of in the previous chapter, and the rest of my thesis can be seen as

¹⁷ ‘Let me rather remain with my unavenged suffering and unassuaged indignation, *even though I am not right*.’ Fyodor Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*, p. 320.

an attempt to justify, analytically, the legitimacy and vitality of this form of atheism. The ‘logical’ problem of evil remains the inspiration for this form of atheism, but not as raw material from which to argue for the non-existence of God. The problem of evil highlights the moral issues that belief in God is burdened with, the moral cost that theistic belief carries with it, and the form of atheism that Ivan Karamazov represents is a manifestation of a moral-anti-theodical reaction against that moral cost. Ivan cannot accept a Christian (theistic) hope, because in order to do so he would have to surrender the facts of his moral responsiveness, his evaluative claims regarding the horrendous evils of the world.

In the next (and final) chapter, I will draw the strands of my overall argument to a point of conclusion, and distil it into the form of a slogan: *God lacks humanity*.

10. God Lacks Humanity

Inhuman. adj. **1.** lacking positive human qualities; cruel and barbaric. **2.** not human in nature or character.

*Oxford English Dictionary*¹

Perhaps it is time for philosophers of religion to look away from theodicy - not to appeal blandly to the mysterious purposes of God, not to appeal to any putative justification at all, but to put the question of how we remain faithful to *human* ways of seeing suffering, even and especially when we are thinking from a religious perspective.

Rowan Williams²

This thesis has identified the fundamental role that evaluative claims play within the problem of evil. Two things have emerged from this analysis. Firstly, I argue that, due to its dependence upon evaluative claims, the problem of evil cannot be used as a basis from which to argue for the non-existence of God. Evaluative claims supervene upon non-evaluative claims, and there is a direction of supervenience that the argument from evil (and the moral argument for God's existence) gets back-to-front. Secondly, I constructed an argument for the moral objectionability of theistic belief. This can be summarised as follows:

1. The problem of evil remains logically binding, and is therefore unavoidable for the theist (or anyone else for that matter).
2. Theodicy is morally objectionable (in that it can be objected to on moral grounds, and we have good reason to so object). Theodicy offers a tacit sanction for the unsanctionable evils of the world.
3. Due to the unavoidable nature of the problem of evil (from 1), a commitment to theism entails an implicit commitment to theodicy.

¹ *Oxford English Dictionary*, 11th edition revised (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

² Rowan Williams, 'Redeeming Sorrows: Marilyn McCord Adams and the Defeat of Evil', in *Wrestling with Angels: Conversations in Modern Theology*, ed. by Mike Higon (London: SCM Press, 2007), pp. 255-74 (p. 271).

4. Therefore, theism inherits the moral objectionability of theodicy (from 2 and 3).
Theism implicitly offers a tacit sanction of the unsanctionable evils of the world.

If this argument is successful, then it follows that the problem of evil is conducive towards evaluative, noncognitive con-attitudes towards God and belief in God. I argue that this is sufficient to ensure that the problem of evil can still be conducive towards atheism, provided that we understand a primarily noncognitive atheism to be plausible. I argue that this form of atheism is indeed plausible, reasonable, and that we have good examples of it in the form of Albert Camus and Dostoevsky's character of Ivan Karamazov. If we are sufficiently aware of what it means to be a theist, then we ought to recognise the essential role of noncognitive components in religious belief. Negating these noncognitive components, however that may be done, is therefore a fully legitimate way to negate theism.

The genius of Dostoevsky's character is that Ivan does not engage cognitively with the concept of God, but instead decides to 'stick with the facts' of his noncognitive feelings. The combination of fact and feeling betrays Dostoevsky's Romantic assumptions, but the broader point is easily transferrable to the modern context via certain views in metaethics, most prominently the views of Raimond Gaita. Ivan Karamazov's atheism is a claim that is made in Gaita's 'Realm of Meaning', the 'form of understanding in which head and heart are inseparably combined'.³

³ 'One way to understand what I mean by the realm of meaning [...] is to think of it as a cognitive realm that enables us to understand why people have sometimes said there is a form of understanding in which head and heart are inseparably combined.' Raimond Gaita, 'Morality, Metaphysics and Religion', in *Moral Powers, Fragile Beliefs: Essays in Moral and Religious Philosophy*, ed. by Joseph Carlisle, James C. Carter, and Daniel Whistler (New York: Continuum, 2011), pp. 3-28 (p. 16). There is an important connection here, not to be underestimated, between the classically Romantic notion of 'the heart' knowing what 'the head' cannot, and certain developments in contemporary analytic philosophy that are increasingly sympathetic to these kind of Romantic tendencies. A plausible story could be constructed along the lines of saying that the initial rationalist reaction against Romanticism, no doubt due largely to Romanticism's perceived leanings towards irrationalism, continued in full force through western analytic philosophy, throwing Romantic babies out with irrationalist bathwater. A prime example of this *cultural* bias (for it is a product of culture and not of philosophy), to my mind, comes in the continued and wilful misperception (in some circles) of Wittgenstein as being an outright logical positivist. Wittgenstein shows far more *Romantic* leanings than he does positivistic ones (see, e.g., his 'Lecture on Ethics'), and this should not be considered surprising, given his upbringing, surrounded as he was by an 'all-pervading atmosphere of humanity and culture' (Ray Monk, *Ludwig Wittgenstein: The Duty of Genius*, Kindle edition (London: Vintage, 1991), p. 8), deeply steeped in the influence of high German Romanticism. There is a recognisable thread of influence, even if we limit ourselves to only the philosophical world and ignore the arts, from the beginnings of Romanticism in Kant and Fichte, through Schopenhauer, to Wittgenstein, and on to contemporary analytic philosophy. We are only recently recovering some of what was lost; in my humble opinion, not only Raimond Gaita but also the likes of John McDowell, for example, could easily be described as *new* metaphysical Romantics. This story remains only my opinion, and so remains in a footnote and not in the main text.

That the problem of evil is conducive, via moral reasons, to the appropriate formation of con-attitudes towards God is, I think, capable of being explained in one idea, distilled into the form of a slogan: *God lacks humanity*.

10.1 A Common Humanity

Our morality and our humanity are deeply connected. Raimond Gaita's metaethics stands as the best representative of this position, but accepting his view is not necessary to accept the broader point that everything we understand about our shared ethics, our shared morality, is encompassed in a sense of our shared *humanity*. It is our humanity that defines us as moral beings, and (according to Gaita) an awareness of our shared humanity that gives rise to all moral sentiment. It is this that leads us to exclaim 'Oh, the inhumanity!' when we encounter horrendous evils. It is this that causes us to speak of 'man's inhumanity to man', to speak of the worst cases of suffering and degradation as being 'inhuman', etc. The term 'humanity' is deployed to refer to any moral, caring behaviour. It is the benchmark for all ethical value, and according to many theodical stories, it is what God lacks.

In one sense, this is an obvious assertion. There is no order of ratio between the finite and the infinite. God does not share a moral community with us, as humans; He cannot, He is not human. But in another sense, it is a description of our reaction to the kinds of behaviour theodicies inform us that God is engaging in. It is inhuman to allow people to be subjected to the kinds of suffering that God is willing to permit in order to further certain ends. It is inhuman to allow people to be subjected to the kinds of suffering that we see in the world, period.

There are therefore two ways in which one can understand this slogan, 'God lacks humanity'. Firstly, this can refer to the simple fact that our ordinary ethical understanding (rules, norms, etc.) does not apply to God, since He is far beyond our limited human level. We do not perceive the world *sub specie aeternitatis*, as He does. 'The ways of the most high are not our ways.'⁴ '*Sunt superis sua iura! quid ad caelestia ritus / Exigere humanos diversaue foedera tempto?*'⁵ Secondly, the slogan can refer to the central moral-anti-theodical contention: Theodicy is morally objectionable; it reveals an irremissable moral

⁴ Immanuel Kant, 'On the Miscarriage of all Philosophical Trials in Theodicy', in Allen W. Wood and George Di Giovanni (trans. and eds.), *Religion and Rational Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), pp. 24-37 (p. 27).

⁵ Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, book IX, lines 500-1, available at: <<http://www.thelatinlibrary.com/ovid.html>> [accessed 03/12/2014]. Roughly translating as: 'The gods have their own laws! Why try to relate human rules to them?'

blindness or coarseness. If theodicy is an accurate description of the situation as regards God and the existence of evil, then God's behaviour is revealed to be as irremissably coarse as theodicy describes it, showing a lack of the common humanity central to our understanding of morally decent behaviour. God not only sanctions the unsanctionable, as belief in God does, but goes so far as to permit the impermissible.

10.2 A dilemma

The two ways in which this slogan can be understood enables the underlying point to be presented as a kind of dilemma:

1. Either the ways of the most high are our ways, or they are not.
2. If the ways of the most high are not our ways, then God lacks humanity.
3. If the ways of the most high are our ways, then God lacks humanity.
4. Therefore, God lacks humanity.

Strictly speaking, there is a danger of equivocation in this dilemma, as it is currently presented, since the term 'humanity' is being used slightly differently in 2 and 3. In 2, 'humanity' refers to 'our ways'; this is the sense in which to talk about our 'humanity' is to talk about our form of moral understanding, our 'Common Humanity'. In 3, 'humanity' refers to the kind of moral sensitivity, the kind of appropriate moral responsiveness, that an absence of which qualifies for the description of 'inhuman'. This would be closer to a dictionary definition of one sense of 'humanity'.

However, since the dilemma is intended to reflect two distinct ways in which one can understand the slogan 'God lacks humanity', equivocation is not a real problem. I could remove the equivocation, rephrasing the argument as:

1. Either the ways of the most high are our ways, or they are not.
- 2*. If the ways of the most high are not our ways, then God lacks humanity(a).
- 3*. If the ways of the most high are our ways, then God lacks humanity(b).
- 4*. Therefore, either God lacks humanity(a) or God lacks humanity(b).

And then, should we so desire, for completion's sake, add the additional conclusion:

5. If God lacks humanity(a) or humanity(b), then God lacks humanity.

But we should not get bogged down in such trivialities. I am sure that my original intention was clear enough. It remains the case that the original conclusion, and this modified conclusion, smuggles an ambiguity within it. But, after all, it is in the form of a slogan, not a thesis; slogans are made as much of tone as of content, and tone admits of some ambiguity.⁶

10.3 Support for the premises

I will now offer some support for the premises in this dilemma.

10.3.1 Premise 1: Either the ways of the most high are our ways, or they are not

Premise 1 is a simple disjunction, and needs no justification, though it may require clarification. I borrow the terminology from Kant (who in turn borrows from Ovid); I do not mean to do anything controversial in my usage, so take the following to be largely obvious. By ‘the ways’, in this context, I mean simply moral norms, or a form of moral understanding. By ‘the ways of the most high’, I mean simply the moral norms that apply to God, or the form of moral understanding that God has. By ‘our ways’, I mean the moral norms that apply to us, or the form of moral understanding that we have. So either God shares our set of moral norms, our form of moral understanding (for which the term ‘humanity’ or our ‘common humanity’ can stand as a placeholder), or He does not. This is the meaning of premise 1.

10.3.2 Premise 2: If the ways of the most high are not our ways, then God lacks humanity

In this premise, we explore the option whereby God’s ways (moral norms, form of moral understanding) are not our ways. If this is the case, and God has a radically different form of moral understanding to us, then, since ‘humanity’ is here being used as a placeholder for ‘our ways’, by definition God ‘lacks humanity’. He lacks humanity in that He does not share in our common humanity, our particular form of moral understanding, our particular set of moral norms. He therefore lacks that particular form of moral understanding.

The connection between our form of moral understanding and our ‘humanity’, and the identification of the one with the other, is doing a great deal of work here. In support of this

⁶ As an aside, which may or may not be interesting, the etymology of the word ‘slogan’ is as an old Gaelic battle cry. From ‘sluagh’, meaning ‘army’, and ‘gairm’, meaning ‘shout’. I reiterate that tone is as important as content in a battle cry.

contention, we could once again offer the moral philosophy of Raimond Gaita. I spent some time in chapter six briefly outlining his moral philosophy, and I will not repeat myself here. Suffice to say that our moral understanding, and our set of moral norms, are understood to be conditioned by our embodied humanity:

Acknowledgement that our concepts (rather than merely our beliefs) are conditioned by our human ways of living will alter our sense of what we mean in the many ways we use the term 'human being'. Most philosophers recommend the concept of a person as more suitable than that of a 'human being' when talk is of more than the species *homo sapiens*. The concept of a person is tailor-made to prescind from the living of any particular form of life. Angels are persons, God is a person, perhaps some animals are persons and some machines will be. [...]

I had wondered whether to call this book *A Common Humanity* or *A Common Understanding*. The former more accurately conveys what is central to it, even when I am explicitly concerned with the forms of common understanding, because it emphasises the dependence of the latter on the former. None of these forms, but especially not those dependent on the ways we construe the meaning of our lives, is between persons, or rational beings contingently living the life of human beings. They are between human beings whose characteristic embodiment - that we have faces, for example - and whose ways of living give us not only something to think about, but condition the concepts with which we think, including those with which we think, as philosophers must, about how we think.⁷

Although I consider Gaita's work to be largely correct, and consider his contribution of so strongly identifying our form of moral understanding with our common humanity to be amongst the most important of his contributions generally, it is not necessary to buy into Gaita's meta-ethical work wholesale in order to accept the truth of premise 2 in my dilemma. I reiterate that 'humanity' can here simply be a placeholder for whatever normative or meta-ethics you wish to work with. The point of premise 2 is only to say that if God has a set of normative or meta-ethics that contrasts or conflicts with our set of normative or meta-ethics, then He lacks our set of normative or meta-ethics! As such, this premise, if not supported by Gaita's peculiar view of moral philosophy, becomes simply tautologous.

10.3.3 Premise 3: If the ways of the most high are our ways, then God lacks humanity

This premise cannot, unlike the former, be reduced to a tautology. This premise requires justification, but most of this justification has already been given in chapter five, 'Moral Anti-Theodicy'. Premise 3 claims that if God's form of moral understanding is the same as ours, then He exhibits a profound lack of 'humanity', which in this sense refers to the form of moral responsiveness the absence of which qualifies for the description 'inhuman'.

⁷ Raimond Gaita, *A Common Humanity* (London: Routledge, 2001), pp. 14-15.

We can refer back to the claims of the moral anti-theodacists in order to clarify quite why this is the case. Every criticism that they levelled at theodicy becomes levelled at God, if we assume that theodicy presents an accurate picture of things. If God really is behaving in the way that theodicy depicts, then He exhibits the kind of moral insensitivity of which theodicy is guilty. If theodicy is rightly accused of not taking suffering sufficiently seriously, and theodicy presents an accurate picture of God's behaviour, then God is rightly accused of not taking suffering sufficiently seriously. This point is clearly dependent upon the success of the moral-anti-theodical arguments, given in chapter five, but I concluded earlier that those arguments were correct, and I stand by that conclusion.

It must be noted that we need not assume, for the sake of my dilemma, that any theodicy does in fact present an accurate picture of things. Should it be the case that no theodicy has yet presented an accurate picture of things, and therefore God avoids all of the moral objectionability that current theodicies are burdened with, to retain the truth of premise 2 requires only that we fall back to the meta-formulation of the problem of evil and meta-definition of theodicy that I stated earlier (in chapters two and seven). To repeat, the meta-formulation of the problem of evil looks like this:

1. There exists a maximally-good, maximally-powerful creator of the universe.
2. A maximally-good, maximally-powerful creator of the universe would not create or permit any pointless or unconscionable evil in its creation.
3. Some pointless or unconscionable evil exists.

And the meta-definition of theodicy is as follows: 'The invocation of an evaluative claim (or claims) that acts as a defeater for the evaluative claims made within the second or third propositions of the problem of evil.'

Given these definitions, then the combination of God's existence, the inaccuracy of any theodicy currently given, and God's sharing of our form of moral understanding, forces a contradiction that confirms God's lack of 'humanity'. This is because both of the evaluative claims within the second and third propositions of the meta-formulation of the problem of evil are moral responses which are products of precisely the form of moral understanding that God is said to participate in. And yet, the truth of these claims is inconsistent with the existence of God. Therefore, it cannot be the case both that these evaluative claims are true for God, and that God exists.

The point can be put in different terms as follows: If God exists, then the first proposition in the problem of evil is true. (That much is tautologous.) The second and third propositions within the problem of evil are moral responses which are a product of our human form of moral understanding (which is in turn conditioned by our particular form of moral responsiveness). Therefore, to deny either the second or third proposition within the problem of evil is to reveal oneself to lack moral understanding ('humanity' in the peculiar meta-ethical sense of 'A Common Humanity') or else to lack moral responsiveness ('humanity' in the more ordinary sense of a dictionary definition). We stipulate in premise 2 in my dilemma that God's ways are our ways, and therefore that He does not lack 'A Common Humanity' (remember, this can just be a placeholder for 'our form of moral understanding', our set of norms, metaethics, etc.). So now either we must say that God, in existing, and therefore implicitly denying one of the second or third propositions within the problem of evil, either lacks our form of moral understanding or our form of moral responsiveness. If we say that He lacks our form of moral understanding, then we have a contradiction within this premise - God's ways both are and are not our ways; or, more accurately, 'if the ways of the most high are our ways, then the ways of the most high are not our ways' - and therefore one horn of the dilemma loses relevance, since it becomes either trivially true or necessarily false, depending on your view of logic. (Whatever your view of logic, this horn will at the very least not be doing the work that we want it to.) Alternatively, we say that God lacks the form of moral responsiveness identified as 'humanity', which confirms the truth of premise 2.

The interaction of God and the problem of evil confirms His lack of sufficient moral responsiveness, our form of moral responsiveness, His lack of 'humanity'. In essence, the problem of evil contains some evaluative claims - e.g. that unconscionable evil exists - and the inconsistency between these claims and the existence of God shows that God disagrees with these evaluative claims (just as theists and theodacists are forced implicitly to disagree with those claims). These evaluative claims are, as I have argued earlier, a product of an appropriate moral responsiveness within the form of moral understanding that I have labelled (along with Raimond Gaita) 'A Common Humanity'. To disagree with these 'irreducible moral realities' is to occupy a different form of moral understanding (an option that is ruled out by premise 2), or else display a lack of moral responsiveness. Premise 2 must operate with the latter of those options, and therefore if God's ways are our ways, then He lacks appropriate moral responsiveness, He lacks 'humanity'.

Clearly, this conclusion - 'God lacks moral responsiveness' - has an air of a contradiction about it when we consider that God is maximally-good. And the same would apply to the alternative - 'God lacks moral understanding' - were that alternative not caveated with 'God lacks *our form of* moral understanding'. We can learn from that lesson in this case also, and caveat 'God lacks moral responsiveness' - which is the meaning of this sense of 'God lacks humanity' - with 'God lacks *our form of* moral responsiveness'. This now sheds the air of contradiction, yet preserves the underlying point.

10.4 Two senses of 'humanity'

These, then, are the two senses of 'humanity' that my dilemma concludes that God lacks:

Humanity(a): Our form of moral understanding.

Humanity(b): Our form of moral responsiveness.

Premise 2 states that God lacks Humanity(a), premise 3 states that God lacks Humanity(b). As mentioned earlier, this means that my conclusion - in the form of a slogan, 'God lacks humanity' - smuggles an ambiguity within it. Strictly speaking, my conclusion is:

4*. Either God lacks Humanity(a) or Humanity(b).

Should we so desire, we can clear up the smuggled ambiguity by drawing this conclusion (4*), and then adding the translation into the slogan form:

5. If God lacks either Humanity(a) or Humanity(b), then God lacks humanity.

But, as I have said, I do not think that we should get bogged down in such trivialities. Though there is an ambiguity smuggled within my conclusion, I do not think it is likely to cause any significant misunderstandings.

10.5 Conclusions

Everything I have said in this chapter depends upon everything that has come before in this thesis. Therefore, it is likely that, by stacking controversial premise upon controversial premise, this conclusion will not be very agreeable to an awful lot of people. I have tried to rely upon respectable philosophers as much as possible, but I accept that even this kind of

support is unlikely to guarantee philosophical respectability. My intention has been to point out the string of entailments that connects the strongest arguments of the moral anti-theodacists with the logically binding nature of a certain kind of formulation of the problem of evil. The evaluative claims of the moral anti-theodacists are bold, but can be supported by the moral philosophy of Raimond Gaita, fortified with some comments from Wittgenstein. If this analysis is correct, then the conclusion ‘God lacks humanity’ stands.

And, indeed, although I am fully aware of the combative tone of the slogan, I am not even sure that it would deserve a negative reception from a theistic point of view. None of what I say in this thesis is necessarily to accuse God of any moral wrongdoing, or other such anti-theistic accusation; it is only to point out that the ethical and meta-ethical gulf between God and His creation is far greater than theodical stories would have us believe. *Sunt superis sua iura!*

10.6 Caveat: The Grand Inquisitor

It will surely be obvious by now that the nature of the atheological response given in this concluding chapter shares close affinities with the atheological response of Ivan Karamazov, and it should come as no surprise that it will share structural similarities also. Immediately following Ivan’s anti-theodical critique, Dostoevsky offers us Alyosha’s response:

...you said just now, is there a being in the whole world who would have the right to forgive and could forgive? But there is a Being and He can forgive everything, all and for all, because He gave His innocent blood for all and everything. You have forgotten Him, and on Him is built the edifice, and it is to Him they cry aloud, ‘Thou art just, O Lord, for Thy ways are revealed!’⁸

Here, of course, Alyosha (Dostoevsky) refers to Jesus Christ. Christ is God’s humanity, God’s human essence.⁹ As such, Christ must be taken into consideration in the assessment of the claim that God lacks humanity. Dostoevsky’s claim - and he is far from alone in making this claim¹⁰ - is that whereas the abstract omni-god of the philosophers has no resources with which to respond to an accusation of inhumanity, Christ does, because Christ is fully human and fully divine. Though there is a deep mystery here, there is assuredly no lack of humanity.

⁸ Fyodor Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*, trans. by Constance Garnett, Kindle edition (Richmond, Indiana: Ray Ontko & Co., 2009), p. 167.

⁹ Christ is God *qua* human. See Alexander R. Pruss, ‘Nested Modes, “Qua” and the Incarnation’, *European Journal for Philosophy of Religion*, 6:2 (2014), 65-80.

¹⁰ Kenneth Surin and Rowan Williams, for example, to name only two who have been cited in this thesis.

But Ivan does not forget the role that Christ plays in this discussion,¹¹ and neither do I. Ivan's response is the infamous 'poema', 'The Grand Inquisitor'.¹² In this chapter of *The Brothers Karamazov*, Ivan recounts an imagined narrative of what would occur if Christ were to have reappeared in the time of the Spanish Inquisition. In Ivan's story, although Christ is initially recognised and adored by the general population, upon recognition by the Grand Inquisitor, and by his orders, Christ is arrested and imprisoned. What follows is a dialogue (well, a monologue: Christ is entirely silent throughout the 'discussion') between Christ and the Grand Inquisitor.

Dostoevsky seems to use this 'poema' to fulfil two principal purposes. Firstly, it is used to provide Ivan's retort to Alyosha's response to Ivan's posed problem of evil; i.e., Christ. The Grand Inquisitor outlines what we take to be the central reasons why Ivan does not see Christ as being all that helpful in solving the peculiar form of the problem of evil that he has posed (i.e., a Romantic moral form). Secondly, it must be noted that Dostoevsky is responding directly in this chapter to a) certain religious ideologies that he dislikes (i.e., the Roman Catholic Church, particularly the Jesuits), and b) certain political ideologies that he also dislikes, and considers to be closely connected with the aforementioned religious ideologies (i.e., socialism).¹³ I will not dwell on the sociological (political or religious) content of 'The Grand Inquisitor', but will focus mainly on the relevance that the poema has for the question of to what extent Christ can afford God (and theism) the resources to respond to the accusation that 'God lacks humanity'.

10.6.1 Bread

The Grand Inquisitor seeks to take the moral high-ground over Christ. According to the Grand Inquisitor, the Church (and here, of course, we must read the particular Jesuitical form of the Roman Catholic Church, of whom Dostoevsky was not a fan) has succeeded where Christ failed. The Grand Inquisitor says to Christ, 'Why, then, art Thou come to hinder us?'¹⁴ What follows is the Grand Inquisitor's reasoning, and presumably Ivan's reasons for rejecting the Christological component of the theistic response to the problem of evil.

¹¹ 'Ah! the One without sin and His blood! No, I have not forgotten Him.' Ivan in *The Brothers Karamazov*, p. 167.

¹² Ibid., pp. 168-79.

¹³ All of this is clear from his notes. See Joseph Frank, *Dostoevsky: A Writer in His Time* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010), chapter 59, pp. 867-85.

¹⁴ Fyodor Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*, p. 170.

According to the Grand Inquisitor, Christ was said to act out of love for humanity, yet He has left us in dire straits. Further, Christ had every opportunity to help our situation and chose not to. The critique centres around the temptations of Christ in the wilderness. In the first of these, Christ is famished, and tempted by Satan to turn stones into bread. Christ refuses, and says ‘One does not live by bread alone’.¹⁵ The standard reading of the message of this story is that Christ opts for a more rewarding, spiritual fulfilment, over the short-lived satisfaction of earthly desires. But does it follow from this that people must be allowed to starve? The irrelevance of earthly desires towards spiritual fulfilment has its limits, after all; what spiritual fulfilment can there be for a mother who helplessly witnesses her infant child starve to death? As Rush Rhees sardonically asks, ‘Joyful acceptance?!’¹⁶

Christ had the opportunity to turn all the stones of the world into bread, and ensure that no one would ever starve again. The reason Christ offers for not doing so is to allow mankind the freedom of spiritual development. In a way, this is similar to many theodical stories. But it is an inadequate reason, and an inadequate story.

One of the essential characteristics that Dostoevsky places in Ivan is a lack of faith in the capabilities of humanity. It is this that he, fundamentally, wishes to contrast with the Christian response of Zosima and Alyosha. Therefore, through the mouth of Ivan, we have the Grand Inquisitor asking of Christ how he expected a weak and ignorant mankind to respond when faced with starvation, as Christ was? Did He expect that they would respond with equal spiritual and moral perfection? Surely He must have known that they would not rise to meet such a grand expectation! Although perhaps some would rise to the challenge, many would surely fall, and what are we to think of their fate?

Thou didst promise them the bread of Heaven, but, I repeat again, can it compare with earthly bread in the eyes of the weak, ever sinful and ignoble race of man? And if for the sake of the bread of Heaven thousands shall follow Thee, what is to become of the millions and tens of thousands of millions of creatures who will not have the strength to forego the earthly bread for the sake of the heavenly? Or dost Thou care only for the tens of thousands of the great and strong, while the millions, numerous as the sands of the sea, who are weak but love Thee, must exist only for the sake of the great and strong? No, we care for the weak too.¹⁷

According to the Grand Inquisitor, the Church cares more for its flock than Christ does. For the Church (in the Jesuitical Catholic way that Dostoevsky so dislikes) will feed their flock *earthly* bread, rather than ethereal. Man is not strong enough to endure the sufferings of

¹⁵ Matthew 4.4, *The Bible: New Revised Standard Version* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995).

¹⁶ Rush Rhees, ‘Suffering’, in Rush Rhees, *On Religion and Philosophy*, ed. by D. Z. Phillips, assisted by Mario von der Ruhr (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), pp. 301-6 (p. 304).

¹⁷ Fyodor Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*, p. 173.

starvation as Christ did, and retain or develop a spiritual perfection. Humanity needs bread, and a human response to the starving is to provide it where able.

10.6.2 *Peace*

Further, had Christ delivered earthly bread, miraculously, then He would have incontrovertibly proven His existence for all to see. This is likewise true of the second (or third, depending on the account) temptation of Christ, where He is tempted to throw Himself from the pinnacle of the temple, only to be caught by angels, to prove his divinity. Were Christ to have done this, or if Christ were to have given mankind earthly bread, then He would have saved us from our fate: ‘Choosing “bread”, Thou wouldst have satisfied the universal and everlasting craving of humanity - to find someone to worship.’¹⁸ Were Christ to have proven His existence via miracle, humanity would have joined together, bowed down to Him, united in a unity that Christ must surely have known would *never* occur otherwise. Christ could have given mankind *peace*, both literally, in that He could have ended all wars, and spiritually, in that He could have afforded us direct access to the kind of moral foundation the absence of which causes us such distress:

Didst Thou forget that man prefers peace, and even death, to freedom of choice in the knowledge of good and evil? Nothing is more seductive for man than his freedom of conscience, but nothing is a greater cause of suffering. And behold, instead of giving a firm foundation for setting the conscience of man at rest for ever, Thou didst choose all that is exceptional, vague and enigmatic; Thou didst choose what was utterly beyond the strength of men, acting as though Thou didst not love them at all - Thou who didst come to give Thy life for them! Instead of taking possession of men’s freedom, Thou didst increase it, and burdened the spiritual kingdom of mankind with its sufferings forever. Thou didst desire man’s free love, that he should follow Thee freely, enticed and taken captive by Thee. In place of the rigid ancient law, man must hereafter with free heart decide for himself what is good and what is evil, having only Thy image before him as his guide. But didst Thou not know that he would at last reject even Thy image and Thy truth, if he is weighed down with the fearful burden of free choice? They will cry aloud at last that the truth is not in Thee, for they could not have been left in greater confusion and suffering than Thou hast caused, laying upon them so many cares and unanswerable problems.¹⁹

10.6.3 *Power*

Had Christ responded otherwise to the three temptations offered Him by the devil, He could have given us everything that we need, without asking the burdensome requirement of faith. Ultimately, when tempted to take dominion of all the kingdoms of the world, if Christ

¹⁸ Fyodor Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*, p. 173.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 174.

had taken charge, we would not have been left with our destructive freedom. For Ivan, who has such a dim view of humanity, this was a terrible mistake. Left to his own devices, mankind has filled the world with war because of his need for power. Christ could have taken this need away, by providing the world with ultimate and tangible authority.²⁰

At this point, the positive sense of a humanistic response to the problem of evil that can be found in Ivan, what some critics have been inclined to call the ‘culmination of this Romantic tradition of protest against God on behalf of a suffering humanity’,²¹ starts to evaporate into Dostoevsky’s bias against the atheistic humanisms of the day; namely, the socialism that would ultimately become Bolshevism. The final requirement that the Grand Inquisitor lays at Christ’s door is that He take dominion over the world, thereby removing humanity’s freedom. Although it is true that this would avoid many of the destructive elements that cause so much suffering in the world, it seems to go against Ivan’s own Romantic insistence on individuality and personal freedom, on ‘living with one’s insides’ and ‘loving life over logic’. The negative consequences of totalitarian regimes, of any kind, is obvious to us now in a way that perhaps it was not to all in Dostoevsky’s time.

In a characteristically prophetic coincidence, the three requirements that Dostoevsky has the Grand Inquisitor lay at Christ’s feet are recognisably similar to the Bolshevik slogan ‘Peace, Bread, and Land’. According to the Grand Inquisitor, this kind of earthly provision is what humanity needs more than anything else, and it is what the Church (the Jesuitical Roman Catholic Church, as Dostoevsky sees it) can provide. Where Christ left humanity with its destructive freedom, the Church will take that freedom away, and man will be happy. According to some critics, Dostoevsky’s original notes put this blasphemous inversion of the Christian message in terms stronger than those that eventually made it into print: ‘It is Christ who is guilty and cruel, and it is the Grand Inquisitor who is kind and innocent. It is Christ who demands that men suffer for Him, whereas the Grand Inquisitor suffers for men.’²²

10.7 A response in human terms

There is, of course, very little to be said in support of the Grand Inquisitor. He is not meant to be an admirable character, for all his claims to be the one who is acting out of a

²⁰ This point is echoed in Mikhail Bakunin’s *God and the State*: ‘To console us, God, ever just, ever good, hands over the earth to the government of the Napoleon Thirds, of the William Firsts, of the Ferdinands of Austria, and of the Alexanders of all the Russias.’ Mikhail Bakunin, *God and the State*, chapter one, available at: <<http://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/bakunin/works/godstate/>> [accessed 16/09/2014].

²¹ Vaclav Cerny, cited in Joseph Frank, *Dostoevsky: A Writer in His Time*, p. 867.

²² Edward Wasiolek, cited in Joseph Frank, *Dostoevsky: A Writer in His Time*, p. 793.

genuine love for humanity. The obvious parallels to be drawn between the picture that he presents and the eventual development of Bolshevism are enough to steer us away from sympathising too strongly with his views. And yet, it remains the case that, seeing things once more from Ivan's point of view, and recognising Ivan's poem of the Grand Inquisitor as a hyperbolic expression of that point of view, there is a case to be answered here. Christ does refuse to turn stones into bread, and yet people starve. Christ does refuse to confirm his existence through miracle, and yet people suffer the silence of divine hiddenness.²³ Christ does refuse to take dominion of the kingdoms of the world, and tyrants rise up to fill the void. That these might strike us as *prima facie* problematic is not to say that we must agree with the Grand Inquisitor's solutions. What Ivan's poem illustrates is the tension present in the distinctively Christian response to the problem of evil.

Let us take as read the contention that theodical stories lack humanity, and God, insofar as those stories are in any way accurate, inherits that charge of inhumanity. Let us also assume that Christ is the counter-point to this accusation; Christ is what provides God with a human response, a human face, to our sufferings. What 'The Grand Inquisitor' serves to demonstrate is that even Christ behaves inhumanly when He refuses the temptation to cure the ills of the world. In leaving man to his own devices, Christ 'didst, as it were, cease to feel for him, for Thou didst ask far too much from him—Thou who hast loved him more than Thyself! Respecting him less, Thou wouldst have asked less of him. That would have been more like love, for his burden would have been lighter'.²⁴ The conclusion of recognising this tension need not become repugnant; we need not commit ourselves to the Grand Inquisitor's solution. The underlying tension remains. Christ the Son is no less vulnerable to the accusations of moral anti-theodicy than God the Father is.

With one notable exception: Ivan's poem ends as follows:

When the Inquisitor ceased speaking he waited some time for his Prisoner to answer him. His silence weighed down upon him. He saw that the Prisoner had listened intently all the time, looking gently in his face and evidently not wishing to reply. The old man longed for Him to say something, however bitter and terrible. But He suddenly approached the old man in silence and softly kissed him on his bloodless aged lips. That was all His answer.²⁵

This is the distinctively human response that Christ the Son can offer, that God the Father and theodicy cannot. In this response there is no 'justification', there is no counter-argument to the Grand Inquisitor's accusations, there is no sanctioning of the unsanctionable. I need not

²³ See John L. Schellenberg, *Divine Hiddenness and Human Reason* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1993).

²⁴ Fyodor Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*, p. 175.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 178.

reiterate the distinctively Gaita-esque requirements of this moral ‘response’ as being embodied, personal, constructed as much of tone as of content. It is a response that occurs in the ‘Realm of Meaning’, which is why it can hope to meet Ivan’s challenge on its own terms. (Dostoevsky has the chapter conclude with Alyosha ‘plagiarising’ Christ’s response.)²⁶ It is a response in human terms. For some, this is an adequate response; for others, it is not. And it is likely that this is all that can be said on the matter. Not, I stress, because the two options represent contrasting evaluative claims regarding the status of horrendous evils; I do not wish to fall into a pessimism regarding the prospects of moral philosophy, and both of these options should agree in their superficial evaluative claims regarding the unconscionable evils of the world. Instead, I say that it is likely that this is all that can be said on the matter because what is left to say can likely only be *shown*, and this belongs to the partly mysterious and certainly irreducible realms of meaning that are constitutive of a fully formed form of life. This is not an opposition that can be reduced to rational argument, or rational appraisal. ‘Reason or rationality cannot cope with the senselessness of such suffering, and Zosima will respond to it only with a leap of faith in God’s ultimate goodness and mercy.’²⁷

So echoing once again Wittgenstein’s notion that what cannot be said can be shown, though there is little to say between these two options, Dostoevsky hopes to *show* ‘that a pure, ideal Christian is not an abstract matter but one graphically real, possible, standing before our eyes’.²⁸ For this, he relies upon his character of Zosima, yet he was pessimistic about the likelihood of success: ‘The reply [to Ivan], after all, is [...] only an indirect one [...] an artistic picture. [...] There are a few of the monk’s precepts in response to which people will absolutely yell that they’re absurd in the everyday sense, but in another, inner sense I think they [Zosima’s precepts] are right.’²⁹ Zosima’s ‘indirect, artistic picture’ is as well typified in Christ’s response to the Grand Inquisitor as in any other depiction.

10.8 Conclusion

This, then, is my conclusion. The only tolerable response to the problem of evil, in light of all that has been said by the moral anti-theodacists, is a distinctively human response; a response that says nothing to the *justification* of evil. This is the only kind of response that

²⁶ ‘Alyosha got up, went to him and softly kissed him on the lips. “That’s plagiarism,” cried Ivan, highly delighted. “You stole that from my poem. Thank you though”.’ Fyodor Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*, p. 179.

²⁷ Joseph Frank, *Dostoevsky: A Writer in His Time*, p. 789.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 792.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 800.

can evade a charge of inhumanity. Abstract theodical stories will not do; they misunderstand our human form of moral understanding or they lack moral responsiveness. Although Christianity might appear to offer some hope of this ‘distinctively human’ response, as Dostoevsky thought, it too is vulnerable to charges of lacking sufficient moral responsiveness. Although there remains a tension here, given that we are not eager to accept the Grand Inquisitor’s conclusions, we should perhaps not be surprised that this problem ends in tension. There are conflicting moral demands in this instance, and we should have no expectation that the world would be kind enough to ensure that moral demands do not conflict:

Morality is never merely the servant but always the judge of our interests and purposes. Thus, we cannot commandeer it to our purposes, not even when morality and the world are tragically mismatched. We cannot always find a solution (even in principle) to dilemmas which are in part caused by the claims of morality. The most serious cause of conflict within morality and between morality and other values is caused by the fact that our various ways of loving condition our sense that human beings are precious beyond reason and beyond merit. Some of those loves are in conflict with one another and with morality. Morality is, therefore, in tension with what conditions its most fundamental concept.³⁰

The overarching purpose of this thesis has been to reveal the tension between theistic claims and the claims of human morality. Theists cannot mortgage their moral understanding or moral responsiveness in order to maintain their theistic belief. They do themselves a great disservice by opting for abstract and inhuman solutions to the problem of evil. The only acceptable response to the problem of evil is one that does not diminish the humanity of the victim or the theodist. It remains an open question whether or not such a response could adequately address the problem of evil.

³⁰ Raimond Gaita, *A Common Humanity*, p. 8.

Conclusion

Let us fight, but let us make a distinction. The peculiar property of truth is never to commit excesses. What need has it of exaggeration? There is that which it is necessary to destroy, and there is that which it is simply necessary to elucidate and examine. What a force is kindly and serious examination! Let us not apply a flame where only a light is required.

Victor Hugo¹

If God really existed, it would be necessary to abolish him.

Mikhail Bakunin²

The purpose of this thesis has been to highlight the chronically underappreciated moral cost of believing in God. I have tried to argue that the problem of evil remains a serious challenge to religious belief, not because it goes any way towards establishing the non-existence of God, but because it highlights the undesirable moral claims that must be committed to if one is to believe in God. In order to believe in the existence of a maximally-good, maximally-powerful creator of the universe, you must believe that none of the evils that exist in the world are incompatible with such a being. Derivatively, you must believe that everything is ‘ok’, all things considered. But this, I have argued, is to deny the evils of the world their proper status. Simply put, all things considered, some things are not ‘ok’.

To this end, I have sought to construct a valid argument that highlights these issues. The first section of this thesis (chapters one, two, and three) established the logically binding nature of the problem of evil. The problem of evil remains such that it *must* be solved by any theist, even if that resolution is only tacit. And yet, I also argued that the fundamentally evaluative nature of some of the premises within the problem of evil entails that it cannot be used as a basis from which to argue for the non-existence of God. I borrowed from J. L. Mackie for this point.

¹ Victor Hugo, *Les Misérables*, trans. by Isabel F. Hapgood, Kindle edition (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell & Co., 1887), p. 348.

² Mikhail Bakunin, *God and the State*, chapter two, available at: <http://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/bakunin/works/godstate/> [accessed 16/09/2014].

The second section (chapters four, five, six, and seven) established the morally objectionable nature of many theodical responses to the problem of evil. I discussed some inconsistencies within the ethical underpinnings of some common theistic responses to the problem of evil, and discussed the work of the moral anti-theodacists. I supported some of the key premises within the arguments of the moral anti-theodacists via appeal to the moral philosophy of Raimond Gaita, and to Ludwig Wittgenstein. I concluded that at least some of the criticisms of the moral anti-theodacists are correct and, therefore, that theodicy is morally objectionable. I then combined the claims of section one with the claims of section two, and concluded that theism inherits the moral objectionability of theodicy. To the extent that theodicy is morally objectionable, theism is morally objectionable.

Section three (chapters eight, nine, and ten) argued for the plausibility of a form of atheism constructed not of belief in the non-existence of God, but of a noncognitive negative moral appraisal of God or belief in God. I discussed a likely example of this form of atheism, in the form of Dostoevsky's Ivan Karamazov, and concluded that this was a viable and robust form of atheism. My final chapter distilled the claims of this thesis into a slogan: God lacks humanity. The problem of evil reveals that belief in a maximally-good God is fundamentally at odds with the evaluative claims that are a product of our common humanity. To believe in God is to deny certain evaluative claims that are constitutive of our essentially human ethical understanding; it is to fail to respond to the evils of the world in human terms. Even Christ - surely God's greatest hope of responding in human terms - cannot fully evade this challenge; even Christ can be accused of lacking humanity.

What we are left with, if any of what I have said here is plausible, is a distinctively moral objection to theistic belief. All I mean by this is that the problem of evil provides a basis from which to object to theistic belief on moral grounds, and we have good reason to so object. It does not necessarily recommend any action or accusation. 'The claims of morality [...] do not express themselves only in what ought to or must be done.'³ At most, I might suppose that, in light of my argument, atheists might be more inclined to react to certain theistic views with raised eyebrows, and theists might be more inclined to express such views with a heavier heart. Perhaps at the very least I might suppose that, contrary to what can seem sometimes to be the prevailing consensus, theists should not be assumed to possess the moral high-ground.

³ Raimond Gaita, *Good and Evil: An Absolute Conception*, 2nd edition, Kindle edition (London: Routledge, 2004), p. 243.

For such distinctively moral arguments have often been sent the other way, with lack of belief in God (atheism) standing accused of making some undesirable moral claims. It is often said that if one does not believe in God, then one cannot believe in morality.⁴ This is taken to be undesirable, with the conclusion being, if not the confirmed existence of God, at least some pressure to believe in God for the sake of practical purposes. Though that argument is weak enough in itself, the argument presented in this thesis ought to place some pressure back in the opposite direction, and show that belief in God is not a morally easy option. You do not get that belief for free; there is some moral cost involved with theism, just as some people are inclined to think that there might be with atheism. As some might be inclined to say that to not believe in God entails that you cannot believe in morality, so I would retort that to believe in God entails that you cannot *understand* morality.

This should not be interpreted as a charge to claim the moral high-ground. I have tried to be very careful in establishing the legitimate moral-philosophical foundations for such a claim. I have drawn heavily on Raimond Gaita's work for this throughout, and will continue to do so:

Moral understanding requires that those who would claim to have it should be serious respondents to morality's demands. Someone who cannot be responsive to morality's demands is one for whom morality has no reality. The 'reality' of moral value is inseparable from the reality of it as a claim on us, and serious responsiveness to that claim is internal to the recognition of its reality.⁵

Whatever else may be said of the predominant theistic responses to the problem of evil, that they display an eminent lack of serious moral responsiveness ought by now to be clear and uncontroversial. To the extent that theists continue to rely upon those theodical responses, they will be vulnerable to accusations of lacking moral understanding.

So should we side with Bakunin, or with Hugo? For my part, I hope that what I have said in this thesis will be taken to side with Hugo. I do not consider my thesis, if correct, as a call for the morally-motivated abolition of theism, but perhaps as an admonition. It is a chiding, a scolding, a call for theists to buck up their moral ideas. It is a call to seriousness: 'Come now, *think* about what you are saying!'⁶

⁴ I say 'often', because any version of the moral argument for God's existence relies upon this claim, and that argument is often offered.

⁵ Raimond Gaita, *Good and Evil*, p. 59.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 301.

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