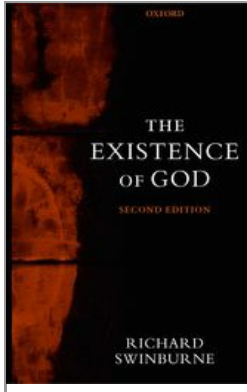


University Press Scholarship Online

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The Existence of God

Richard Swinburne

Print publication date: 2004

Print ISBN-13: 9780199271672

Published to Oxford Scholarship Online: September 2007

DOI: 10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199271672.001.0001

The Problem of Evil

Richard Swinburne (Contributor Webpage)

DOI: 10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199271672.003.0012

[−] Abstract and Keywords

It is a good thing that humans should have the opportunity to choose freely between good and evil; and so it is also good that there should be natural evil — to give us the knowledge of how to bring about good and evil events ourselves, and to give us the opportunity to react to suffering with courage and sympathy. God has a limited right to bring about evil for a good purpose. In order to give us greater freedom, he has good reason to remain 'hidden' for a limited time. The existence of moral and natural evil, and divine 'hiddenness' do not therefore provide arguments of much strength against the existence of God.

Keywords: hiddenness, good, moral, divine, Schellenberg

I argued in Chapter 6 that God has substantial reason to create humanly free agents. They will have bodies of the kind analysed in Chapter 8, a mental life as analysed in

Chapter 9, and something like the nature and circumstances of life considered in Chapter 10. To all appearances, humans are humanly free agents. In a world of the kind described in Chapter 10, there will inevitably be evils in the sense of bad states or actions.¹ I divide the world's evils in the traditional way into moral evils (those brought about by human intentional choice, or knowingly allowed to occur by humans, together with the evils of their intentional bad actions or negligence) and natural evils (all other evils, such as bad desires that we cannot help, disease and accidents). If there is a God, he permits moral evils to occur, and apparently himself brings about natural evils (through creating the natural processes that cause bad desires, disease, and accidents.) The moral and natural evils include animal pain, either caused by humans or by other animals or natural processes. However, since brain complexity and sophistication of behaviour decrease as we move further away from humans down the evolutionary scale, it seems reasonable to suppose that animal pain is less intense than human pain, and that animals feel pain less, as we go down the evolutionary scale from the primates to the least developed vertebrates. And, since the brains of invertebrates are of a different kind from those of vertebrates, I see little reason for supposing that the latter suffer pain at all.

(p.237) I have already given reason for supposing that, in a world providential in the ways described in Chapter 10, there will be evils of certain kinds. There will inevitably be biologically useful unpleasant sensations, such as the pain that someone suffers until he escapes from a fire or the feeling of suffocation that one gets in a room full of poisonous gas, and the emotion of fear in dangerous circumstances. Also, since humans have the power to do each other significant hurt and they are not causally determined to do what they do, it is vastly probable that in such a world there will be a lot of further suffering, inflicted by humans on each other. And there will also be the moral evil of people choosing to do what they believe to be wrong, in inflicting such suffering; an evil that will exist even if they are not successful in inflicting the suffering. There will be the evil of bad desires, temptations to do wrong, whether or not we yield to them, that make possible the choice between good and evil. And when bad things happen to us or are done by us, or good things come to an end, there will be feelings of grief and sympathy and regret. But it might appear that most of the world's natural evils are in no way necessary to secure the good purposes described so far. And it might seem to some that, although humans having a free choice between hurting or benefiting each other logically requires the possibility of humans being caused by others to suffer, a good God would not be justified in permitting these moral evils for the sake of the good that the possibility of their occurrence unprevented by God makes possible.

Clearly, however, sometimes perfectly good people will allow evils to occur when they could easily prevent them. For sometimes some greater good can be achieved only by a route that involves suffering; and it is right to try to achieve it despite the suffering. Parents rightly allow children to suffer pain in the dentist's chair for the sake of the resulting healthy teeth. But God, unlike human parents, could produce healthy teeth without the need for the pain of dental surgery. Yet, as we saw in Chapter 5, even God cannot do the logically impossible. And that makes it plausible to suppose that a perfectly good God may allow an evil *E* to occur or bring it about if it is not logically possible or

morally permissible to bring about some good *G* except by allowing *E* (or an evil equally bad) to occur or by bringing it about. I suggest that there are three further conditions that must be satisfied if, compatibly with his perfect goodness, God is to allow an evil *E* to occur. The second condition is that God also in fact brings **(p.238)** about the good *G*. Thirdly, God must not wrong the sufferer by causing or permitting the evil. He must have the right to make or permit that individual to suffer. And, finally, some sort of comparative condition must be satisfied. It cannot be as strong as the condition that *G* is a greater good state than *E* is a bad state. For obviously we are often justified in order to ensure the occurrence of a substantial good in risking the very unlikely occurrence of a greater evil. A plausible formal way of capturing this condition is to say that the expected value of allowing *E* to occur—given that God does bring about *G*—must be positive; that it is probable that the good will outweigh any evil necessary to attain it. I shall summarize the claim, with respect to some evil *E* that, if there is a God, he could, compatibly with his perfect goodness, allow it to occur in order to promote a good *G*, as the claim that *E* serves a greater good. I shall illustrate what these conditions amount to by examples, and defend the thesis that all the world's evils do probably serve a greater good—at least if we add to theism one or two further hypotheses. My treatment of evils, until the final section of this chapter, is concerned only with those evils that would be evils whether or not there is a God. I discuss certain states that would be evils only if there is a God in the final section entitled 'The Argument from Hiddenness'.

How Evils Serve Greater Goods

I begin with the first condition. This is evidently satisfied in the case of moral evil, as I have pointed out earlier. If humans are to have the free choice of bringing about good or evil, and the free choice thereby of gradually forming their characters, then it is logically necessary that there be the possibility of the occurrence of moral evil unprevented by God. If God normally intervened to stop our bad choices having their intended effects, we would not have significant responsibility for the world. And, as pointed out earlier, for us to have a free choice between good and evil we must (of logical necessity) have some temptation to do the evil. Hence the natural evil of bad desires. But what of the major natural evils of disease and accident?

I must begin by commenting briefly on three well-known but imperfect defences that theists have offered to the problem of natural evil. First there is the defence that much of the evil suffered by a human being is God's punishment for his sins; such punishment is **(p.239)** a good, and suffering is necessary to achieve it. Although this might account for some natural evil, it is clearly quite unable to account for the suffering of babies or animals. Secondly, there is the claim that God ties to the choices of some humans the well-being of humans (and animals) of later generations by routes other than normal causal processes (such as that of the influence we have over our children). God gives to our ancestors a great responsibility for our well-being. If they behave well, we flourish. If they sin, we suffer for their sins. The good of their responsibility, it may be claimed, requires the possibility of our suffering when they abuse it. Again, although this second defence might account for some natural evil, it clearly does not provide a satisfactory account of all such evil. There is the major difficulty that the good of agents having a

choice between good and evil depends on their knowing the good and evil consequences that follow from their different actions. It is implausible to suppose that our early ancestors had any conception that their actions might cause the range of natural evils that their descendants suffer. And anyway this defence cannot explain the suffering of animals long before humans arrived on earth.²

More substantial is the third defence, used by many theistic writers down the centuries,³ that natural evils have been brought about by free agents other than humans—namely, fallen angels. If there is reason, as I argued that there is, for allowing humanly free agents to hurt other agents, then there is reason for allowing free agents other than humans to inflict such hurt—if, as may be postulated for angels, but cannot be believed with plausibility about our ancestors, they are agents with significant freedom and moral awareness⁴ fully aware of the consequences of their actions. This defence, unlike the first two, is adequate to cope with natural evils of all kinds. But it does have the major problem that it saves theism from refutation by adding to it an extra hypothesis, a hypothesis for which there does not seem to me to be much independent evidence—the hypothesis that angels of this **(p.240)** kind exist created by God and have limited power over the rest of God's creation. This hypothesis is not entailed by theism, nor does theism make it especially probable; any need for God to create creatures with free choices between good and evil that make great differences to other creatures is satisfied by the creation of human beings. A hypothesis added to a theory complicates the theory and for that reason decreases its prior probability and so its posterior probability. I shall, however, argue that we do not need to add this additional hypothesis to theism, since there are two other substantial reasons why, without natural evils, our ability to make the significant free choices that 'the free-will defence' rightly sees as such a good thing would be gravely diminished. That is, God has himself two substantial reasons for bringing about natural evils; and so we do not need to postulate that fallen angels are responsible for them. But I shall be arguing later that we do need to add one or two different further hypotheses to theism in order to justify the claim that God has the right to impose the degree of suffering that some individuals suffer.

The first of the substantial reasons why our ability to make significant free choices would be gravely diminished in the absence of natural evil is what is known as the 'higher-order' defence. This claims that natural evil provides opportunities for especially valuable kinds of emotional response and free choice. It begins by pointing out that the great good of compassion (the natural emotional response to the sufferings of others) can be felt only if others are suffering. It is good that we should be involved with others emotionally, when they are at their worst as well as at their best. But of course, the objector will say, even if pain is better for the response of compassion, better still that there be no pain at all. Now obviously it would be crazy for God to multiply pains in order to multiply compassion. But I suggest that a world with some pain and some compassion is at least as good as a world with no pain and so no compassion. For it is good to have a deep concern for others; and the concern can be a deep and serious one only if things are bad with the sufferer. One cannot worry about someone's condition unless there is something bad or likely to be bad about it. If things always went well with someone, there would be no scope for

anyone's deep concern. It is good that the range of our compassion should be wide, extending far in time and space. The sorrow of one in a distant land who really cares for the starving in Ethiopia or the blinded in **(p.241)** India or the victims of carnivorous dinosaurs millions of years ago is compassion for a fellow creature, even though the latter does not feel it; and the world is better for there being such concern.

The 'higher-order-goods' defence goes on to provide the first reason why natural evil makes possible significant free choices. It points out that certain kinds of especially valuable free choice are possible only as responses to evil. I can (logically) show courage in bearing my suffering only if I am suffering (an evil state). I can 'show' sympathy for you (a phrase that I shall use to designate performing an action as opposed to having the passive feeling of compassion), and help you in various ways, only if you are suffering and need help. If I make the wrong choices and I ignore or laugh at your suffering, or indulge in self-pity at my own suffering, further possibilities of choice become available—you can resist the impulse to resent my lack of sympathy, or try gently to encourage me to show courage rather than self-pity. More generally, each bad action or state of affairs gives to the victims, perpetrators, and observers a free choice of how to react by actions, good or bad (as also does each good action and state of affairs). It is good that we should have the opportunity (occasionally) to do such actions as showing courage or sympathy, actions that often involve resisting great temptation, because thereby we manifest our total commitment to the good. (A commitment that we do not make when the temptation to do otherwise is not strong is not a total commitment.) Help is most significant when it is most needed, and it is most needed when its recipient is suffering and deprived. But I can (logically) help others who are suffering only if there is the evil of their suffering. In these cases, if there is a God, he makes possible the good of free choices of particular kinds, between good and evil, which—logically—he could not give us without allowing the evils (or evils equally bad) to occur. Or rather, it is the only morally permissible way in which he could give us the free choice. For God could make a basically deceptive world in which other people appeared to be in great pain when really they were not. Then we could have the choice between helping them or not helping them (or at any rate the choice of trying to help them or refusing to do so). But it would not be morally permissible—in my view—for God to make a world where people are moved to help others at great cost when the others do not really need help at all. God, if he is not to deceive us and yet give us a real free choice between helping and not helping others, must make a world where others really do suffer.

(p.242) But could not the absence of a good (of an ability to walk, say, or the ability to talk French) give to the victim equal opportunity: whether to endure it with patience, or whether to bemoan his lot; and to friends, whether to show sympathy or whether to be callous? To answer this question, it is important to consider why pain is a bad state and so, if uncaused by humans (and not negligently allowed to occur by them), a natural evil. Pain is a sensation of a kind that we do not dislike if we have it in a very weak degree; indeed, we may often like it—we may like the sensation of warmth, which we dislike if it gets a lot stronger and becomes a sensation of great heat. And there are a few abnormal people who appear not to dislike the sensations that we call 'pains' at all. A sensation is a

pain and so a natural evil only in so far as it is strongly disliked. Any state of affairs not caused (or negligently allowed to occur) by humans, disliked as strongly, would be just as bad. Some people dislike their disabilities just as much as they dislike pain; they so dislike their inability to walk that they will undertake a programme to conquer it that involves their 'overcoming the pain barrier'. True, it would be unusual for anyone to dislike anything quite as much as some of the pains caused by disease or accident (and to call those pains 'intense' just is to say how much they are disliked). And, for that reason, pain normally provides more opportunity for evincing patience rather than self-pity than does anything else. But any state of affairs disliked as much would be equally bad and so provide as much opportunity. And the choice between being sympathetic rather than callous matters more than it does if the suffering is less. If the absence of the good is not disliked nearly as much as the sensations caused by disease and accident, then, of course, it is still very good to show courage in bearing that absence, but the courage is not in the face of such strong dislike for the existing state of affairs.

It may, however, be suggested, secondly, that adequate opportunity for the higher-level good emotions and especially valuable kinds of free choice would be provided by the occurrence of moral evil without any need for suffering to be caused by natural processes. You can show courage when threatened by a gunman, as well as when threatened by cancer; and show sympathy to those likely to be killed by gunmen as well as to those likely to die of cancer. Yet just imagine all the suffering of mind and body caused by disease, earthquake, and death not immediately preventable by humans removed at a stroke from our society. No sickness, no unavoidable diminution of powers **(p.243)** in the aged, no birth deformities, no madness, no accidents. Then, not merely would none of us have the opportunity to respond with sympathy or courage or reforming zeal, etc. directly, but so much of the oppression of one group by another stimulated by such suffering would also be removed. Starvation and disease in one group have so often served as the triggers leading to their oppression of another group whose good things they seek to possess. (That is, those natural evils have so strengthened the desires of the former for food and easier living that they have yielded to them, despite their dim awareness that they had no right to oppress the other group.) Then so many opportunities for coping with difficult circumstances would have been removed that many of us would have such an easy life that we simply would not have much opportunity to show courage or indeed manifest much in the way of goodness at all. It needs those insidious processes of (currently) unavoidable accident and dissolution that money and strength cannot ward off for long to give us the opportunities, so easy otherwise to avoid, to become heroes. True, God could compensate for the absence of natural evil by subjecting humans to such temptation deliberately (or at any rate knowingly) to cause suffering to each other that there was again plenty of opportunity for courage. He could make us so naturally evil that we lacked much natural affection and had inbuilt urges to torture each other (or at any rate allow each other to suffer), in face of which we could show courage and sympathy. But it is, I hope, in no way obvious that it would be better for God to replace disease by such an increase of inbuilt depravity (that is, a system of strong desires for what is known to be bad or to cause what is bad). Rather, I would have thought, the reverse. A world in which humans (and animals) lacked much natural

affection for parents, children, neighbours, etc. would be a horrible place.

So, by bringing about the natural evil of pain and other suffering, God provides an evil such that allowing it, or an equally bad evil, to occur makes possible, and is the only morally permissible way in which he can make possible, many good states. It is good that the intentional actions of serious response to natural evil that I have been describing should be available also to simple creatures lacking free will. As we saw earlier, good actions may be good without being freely chosen. It is good that there be animals who show courage in the face of pain, to secure food and to find and rescue their mates and their young, and who show sympathetic concern for other animals. An **(p.244)** animal life is of so much greater value for the heroism it shows. And, if the animal does not freely choose the good action, it will do the action only because on balance it desires to do so; and, when its desire to act is uncomplicated by conflicting desires, the good action will be spontaneous. And (even if complicated by conflicting desires), animal actions of sympathy, affection, courage, and patience are great goods.

Yet an animal cannot go on looking for a mate despite failure to find it unless the mate is lost and the animal longs for it; nor decoy predators or explore the vicinity despite risk of loss of life unless there are predators, and unless there is a risk of loss of life. There will not be predators unless sometimes animals get caught. A hunt would be only a game unless it was likely to end in an animal getting caught and killed; and animals would not then be involved in a serious endeavour. And there will not be a risk of loss of life unless sometimes life is lost. Nor can an animal intentionally avoid the danger of a forest fire or guide its offspring away from one unless the danger exists objectively. And that cannot be unless some animals, such as fawns,⁵ sometimes get caught in forest fires. For you cannot intentionally avoid forest fires, or take trouble to rescue your offspring from forest fires, unless there exists a serious danger of getting caught in fires. The intentional action of rescuing despite danger simply cannot be done unless the danger exists and is believed to exist. The danger will not exist unless there is a significant natural probability of being caught in the fire; and to the extent that the world is deterministic, that involves creatures actually being caught in the fire; and to the extent that the world is indeterministic, that involves an inclination in nature to produce that effect unprevented by God.

True, the deterministic forces that lead to animals performing good actions sometimes lead to animals doing bad intentional actions—they may reject their offspring or wound their kin—and in this case the bad action cannot be attributed to free will. Nevertheless, such bad actions, like physical pain, provide opportunities for good actions to be done in response to them; for example, the **(p.245)** persistence, despite rejection, of the offspring in seeking the mother's love or the love of another animal; the courage of the wounded animal in seeking food, especially for its young, despite the wound. And so on. The world would be much the poorer without the courage of a wounded lion continuing to struggle despite its wound, the courage of the deer in escaping from the lion, the courage of the deer in decoying the lion to chase her instead of her offspring, the mourning of the bird for the lost mate. God could have made a world in which animals got

nothing but thrills out of life; but their life is richer for the complexity and difficulty of the tasks they face and the hardships to which they react appropriately.

The Argument from the Need for Knowledge

The second substantial reason why without natural evils, such as disease and accident, our ability to make significant free choices would be greatly diminished is that natural evils provide us with the knowledge required to make such choices. Natural evils are necessary if agents are to have the knowledge of how to bring about evil or prevent its occurrence, knowledge that they must have if they are to have a genuine choice between bringing about evil and bringing about good. Or rather, they are necessary if agents are to have this knowledge without being deprived of the good of rational response to evidence, and rational inquiry.

We saw in Chapters 6 and 8 that there need to be regular connections between an agent's bodily states and events beyond his body if he is to be able intentionally to perform mediated actions—that is, by his basic actions intentionally to produce effects beyond his body. But, if he is to acquire knowledge of how to perform these mediated actions by rational inference from observations of regularities in the world, and if he is to have the choice of whether to try to acquire this knowledge by rational inquiry (that is, by looking for such regularities), these regularities must be simple and observable, and the agent will need to extrapolate from what he observes by the criteria for a theory and so its predictions being probably true, as described in Chapter 3—what I shall call normal inductive inference. The simplest case of normal inductive inference is where I infer that a present state of affairs *C* will be followed by a future state *E*, from the generalization that, in the past, states of affairs like *C* on all occasions of which **(p.246)** I have knowledge have been followed by states like *E*. Because on the many occasions of which I have knowledge a piece of chalk being liberated from the hand has fallen to the floor, I can infer that the next time chalk is liberated it will fall. However, as we saw in Chapter 3, normal induction may take a more complicated form. From a vast collection of data about the positions of the sun, moon, and planets a scientist may infer a consequence of a different kind—for example, that there will be a very high tide on earth when the moon is in such-and-such a position. Here the data render probable a scientific theory of which the prediction about the high tide is a somewhat remote consequence: the similarities between the data and the prediction are more remote than in the simplest cases. (But the similarities exist and are the basis of the prediction. In both the data and the prediction there are material bodies attracting each other.)

Whether the normal inductive inference is simple or complicated,⁶ certain general points can be made about the claim to knowledge of the future that results from it. The first is that the more past data there are, the better established is a claim to such knowledge. This is because the data confirm a claim about the future by confirming a theory or a simple universal (or probabilistic) generalization (for example, 'states like *C* are always followed by states like *E*'), which in turn licenses the claim about the future. The more data there are, the more they show that the theory or generalization holds in many different circumstances and so is more likely to hold in the future instance in question.

(However similar in many respects are the circumstances under which the past data have been observed, they are almost bound to differ from each other in some observable or unobservable respects; if the generalization has worked so far despite many such differences, that gives it greater probability.) Secondly, the surer my knowledge that the past data occurred as stated, the better grounded is my claim to knowledge of the future. If the data are mental experiences of mine or events that I myself have seen, then my knowledge of their occurrence is sure. If they are experiences that others report or events that others claim to have seen, then my knowledge of their occurrence is less sure. My knowledge of their occurrence will be still less sure, if I need to make a complicated **(p.247)** inference from other data to prove their occurrence. Clearly, in so far as an inference is licensed by certain data, then to the extent to which it is doubtful whether the data are correct, it is doubtful whether the inference is justified. Thirdly, in so far as the data are qualitatively rather dissimilar from what is predicted, and a complicated scientific theory is needed to generate the prediction, the claim to knowledge will be less surely based. Thus, suppose that by a process of complex extrapolation from a number n of astronomical data I reach a very complex theory of mechanics, from which I conclude that in a very unusual set of circumstances (when the planets are in just such-and-such configurations) if I let go of a bit of chalk it will rise into the air. And suppose that these circumstances are to be manifested on earth uniquely in my study during this hour. Do I *know* that when shortly I let go of the chalk it will rise? Doubtfully so. Clearly I do know it and know it a lot better if I have already actually let go of the chalk n times during the hour, and it has risen. Fourthly, if a complicated inference is needed in order to reach a prediction, then, in so far as the inference is of a type that has proved successful in the past or the inference is done by persons with known predictive success from this kind of work in the past, that is grounds for believing the prediction. These four points about the strength of knowledge obtained by normal induction may be summarized by saying that our claims to knowledge are better justified, the closer they are to our experience.

Now, if agents are knowingly to bring about states of affairs, or to allow states of affairs to come about through neglecting to prevent them, they must know what consequences will follow from their actions. Normal inductive knowledge of consequences, it follows from what has just been said, is to be obtained as follows. Consider an action A , which I am contemplating doing in circumstances X . Suppose that A consists in bringing about a state of affairs C , the result of A (see p. 35 for a definition of 'result'). How am I to know what its effects will be, what will follow from it? Most certainly, by having done such an action myself many times before in similar circumstances, and having observed the effects of its result. I could come to know most surely what will result from my drinking eight double whiskies—that I shall be unable to drive my car safely, by having done such an action often before. I know the effect less surely by having seen the effects of others doing the action, or by having seen the effects of the result of the action when this was brought **(p.248)** about unintentionally, all in similar circumstances to those in which I am considering doing the action or by others telling me what happened on different occasions when they drank eight double whiskies. I know that this will lead to inability to drive less surely, because I suspect that I am different from the others (have more will power, am

more conscious of the dangers, am a better driver than the others anyway).

Less sure knowledge still is obtained by observing the result occur in somewhat different circumstances (for example, when drinkers drink the whiskies much more quickly, or when tired). Still less sure knowledge is obtained by having observed goings-on only somewhat similar, and having to make allowance for the difference—for example, I may only have seen the effects of people drinking different quantities of beer or gin. Or my knowledge may depend on reports given by others; then it will be still less certain. The witnesses may have exaggerated, not noticed differences in circumstances, etc. The least certain knowledge of all is that which is reached by a process of more complicated inference from goings-on only remotely similar to A. However, it is difficult to see how a theory that predicted the occurrence of an evil such as pain could have any justification unless the data on which the theory was built were cases of pain. If you had no knowledge of anything causing pain, how could other kinds of data substantiate predictions about pain? For pain is so different from other kinds of goings-on and has no natural connection with particular brain or nerve conditions rather than with others. (As I argued in Chapter 9, there is no reason for supposing that stimulation of this nerve will cause pain and of that one will cause pleasure, other than knowledge that that is what has happened in the past.)

So proximity to experience gives more certain knowledge. It is notorious that people are much more inclined to take precautions against some disaster if a similar disaster has happened to them previously or to those close to them than if they are warned of the need for precaution by some impersonal distant authority. Someone is far more inclined to take precautions against fire and burglary if she or her neighbours have previously been victims of fire or burglary than if the police warn her that these things have happened in the next village. My point is that this is not just irrational perversity. It is the height of rationality to be influenced more by what is known better. People know better that it can happen to them if they know that it has happened to them or to others like them. With a mere **(p.249)** police warning, they always have some reason for suspecting that police exaggerate or that things are different in the next village. What is irrational is not being influenced at all by the police warning; what is not irrational is being influenced more by goings-on closer at hand of which we have more intimate experience.

Now, for any evil that people knowingly inflict on each other, there must have been a first time in human history at which this was done. There must have been a first murder, a first murder by cyanide poisoning, a first deliberate humiliation, and so on. The malevolent agent in each case knows the consequence of the result of his action (for example, that causing someone to imbibe cyanide will lead to their death). *Ex hypothesi*, he cannot know this through having seen an agent give another person cyanide for this purpose. His knowledge that cyanide poisoning causes death must come from his having seen or others' having told him that on other occasions taking cyanide accidentally led to death. (If, in my example, you think that knowledge of the effects of imbibing cyanide might be gained by seeing the effects of taking similar chemicals, the argument can be put more generally. Some person must have taken previously a similar poison by accident.)

What applies to the malevolent agent also applies to the person who knowingly refrains from inflicting evil on another or stops evil occurring to another. There must be naturally occurring evils (that is, evils not knowingly caused by humans) if humans are to know how to cause evils themselves or are to prevent evils occurring. And there have to be *many* such evils, if humans are to have sure knowledge, for, as we saw, sure knowledge of what will happen in the future comes only by induction from many past instances. A solitary instance of a person dying after taking cyanide will not give to others very sure knowledge that in general cyanide causes death—maybe the death on the occasion studied had a different cause, and the cyanide poisoning had nothing to do with it. And, unless people have knowingly been bringing about evils of a certain kind recently, there have to have been many recent naturally occurring evils if people are currently to have sure knowledge of how to bring about or prevent such evils.

To take another example—we know that rabies causes a terrible death. With this knowledge we have the possibility of preventing such death (for example, by controlling the entry of pet animals into Britain), or of negligently allowing it to occur, or even of deliberately causing it. Only with the knowledge of the effects of rabies are such **(p.250)** possibilities ours. But for us to gain knowledge by normal induction of the effect of rabies it is necessary that others die of rabies (when the rabies was not preventable by humans), and be seen to have done so. Generally, we can have the opportunity to prevent disease affecting ourselves or others or to neglect to do so, or the opportunity to spread disease deliberately (for example, by indulging in biological warfare), only if there are naturally occurring diseases. And we can have the opportunity to prevent incurable diseases or to allow them to occur, only if there are naturally occurring incurable diseases.

What applies to individuals in the short term applies in the longer term and to races. If humans are to have the opportunity by their actions or negligence to bring about evil consequences in the distant future, or to avoid doing so, they must know the long-term consequences of their actions, and the most sure inductive knowledge of those consequences can only come from past human history. How are we to have the opportunity to stop future generations catching asbestosis, except through knowledge of what causes asbestosis, and how is that to be obtained except through records that show that persons in contact with blue asbestos many years ago have died from asbestosis thirty years later? Or—to take a slightly different kind of example—suppose that people are to have the choice of building cities along earthquake belts, and so risking the destruction of whole cities and their populations hundreds of years later, or of avoiding doing so. How can such a choice be available to them unless they know where earthquakes are likely to occur and what their probable consequences are? And how are they to come to know this, unless (unpredicted) earthquakes have happened in the past, and the circumstances of their occurrence are studied and provide evidence making probable a theory of when earthquakes are likely to occur? And if humans in the past could not predict the earthquakes, it is highly probable that sometimes earthquakes would occur where humans have built cities. And so again (though in a slightly different kind of way), natural evil provides us with a wider range of choice of actions by which we

can affect ourselves, each other, and the physical world.

What has happened to sentient creatures other than humans also gives knowledge of what will happen to us, though very much less sure knowledge. Indeed, a great deal of our knowledge of the disasters for man that would follow some action comes from study of the actual disasters that have befallen animals. For a long time it has been **(p.251)** normal to discover the effects of drugs or surgery or unusual circumstances on man by deliberately subjecting animals to those drugs or surgery or circumstances. Before putting humans into space, humans put animals into space and saw what happened to them. Such experiments do not give very sure knowledge of what would happen to humans—because from the nature of the case there are very considerable differences between animals and humans—but they do give considerable knowledge. The evils that have naturally befallen animals provide a huge reservoir of information for humans to acquire knowledge of the choices open to them, a reservoir that they have often tapped—seeing the fate of sheep, humans have learnt of the presence of dangerous tigers; seeing cows sink into a bog, they have learnt not to cross that bog, and so on. And the evils that provide information need not just be physical ones, and the ways in which they are produced may be by the actions of other animals not blessed with free will. The effects of bad parenting by gorillas may help us to see some of the effects of bad parenting by humans.

The scope for long-term choice available to future generations must not be underestimated. They may have the choice not merely of whether to build cities so as to avoid earthquakes, but of whether to drive the earth nearer to the sun or further from it, to take air and water to Mars and live there instead, to extend the life span, to produce new manlike organisms in laboratories, and so on. But rational choices on these matters can be made only in the light of knowledge of the consequences of alternative actions. While knowledge of the disasters and benefits that have befallen past human generations can be of great use in providing such knowledge, when we are considering the *very* long-term consequences of changes of circumstances, environment, or climate, the story of animal evolution provides our main information. Human history so far is too short to provide much useful knowledge. For example, the fossil record indicates that the earth's magnetic field periodically undergoes a sudden reversal every few hundred thousand years. (Magnetized parts of metal that previously pointed north thereafter point south and vice versa). We need to know how this will affect humans when it next occurs; and if its effects will be harmful, whether there are precautionary measures that we can take to minimize the harm. Our main evidence on the long-term effects of such a reversal can only come from the fossil record of how it has affected animals. But in any case the story of pre-human nature 'red in tooth and claw' **(p.252)** already provides some very general information crucially relevant to our possible choices. For suppose that animals had come into existence at the same time as human beings (for example, 4004 BC) always in situations where humans could save them from any suffering. Naturally it would then seem a well-confirmed theory that (either through act of God or nature) suffering never happens to animals except such as humans can prevent at that time. So humans would seem not to need to bother to take action now to prevent later animal suffering. But the

story of evolution tells us that that is not so—animals may well suffer in circumstances when humans are not available or able to prevent this, because this has happened in the past. This knowledge gives us a choice of taking action now to prevent animal suffering in future, or of not bothering to do so. The story of pre-human evolution reveals to man just how much the subsequent fate of animals is in his hands—for it will depend on the environment that he causes for them and their genes, which he may cause to mutate.

Like earlier examples, the above argument illustrates the more general point that, if agents are to have knowledge of the evil that will result from their actions or negligence, laws of nature must operate regularly. Thus I mentioned in the last chapter that among the advantages of the pain caused by fire is that it leads the sufferer to escape from the fire. But the pain still occurs when the sufferer is too weak or paralysed to escape from the fire. Would it not be better if only those able to escape suffered the pain? But, if that were the case, then others would know that it mattered much less that they should help people to escape from fire and that they should prevent fire. And so the opportunities for humans to choose whether to help others and guard against their future sufferings will correspondingly diminish. And in general, if God normally helps those who cannot help themselves when others do not help, others will not take the trouble to help the helpless next time, and they will be rational not to take that trouble. For they will know that more powerful help is always available.

My argument so far has been that, if humans are to have the opportunity to bring about serious evils for themselves or others by actions or negligence, or to prevent their occurrence, and if all knowledge of the future is obtained by normal induction, that is by rational response to evidence—then there must be serious natural evils occurring to man or animals. I have argued earlier that it is good (**p.253**) that we should have the former opportunity. What of the possibility that God should give us the necessary knowledge by a different route?

Normal inductive inference from the past is not the only possible route to knowledge of the future. Why do we need to acquire this knowledge by rational response to evidence? Why could not God ensure that we simply found ourselves having true basic beliefs that this action would cause pain and that action would cause pleasure, for actions of various kinds and pleasures and pains of various kinds?⁷ A basic belief is one that we find ourselves having, not on the basis of inference from other beliefs, and from which we may infer to other things that we then come to believe. For example, for most of us, the immediate deliverances of perception—that I am looking at a tree, or listening to a lecture—come to us as basic beliefs. By the Principle of Credulity, which I defend in Chapter 13, all basic beliefs with which agents find themselves are—in the absence of counter evidence—probably true; the mere fact that you have a belief is grounds for believing it. This route to knowledge of the future would be inductive, but not use induction of the normal kind. Given that (for the good reason adduced on p. 226) our world is a world of decay, our basic beliefs would need to include beliefs about what will happen if we do nothing—for example, about when a disease epidemic will strike unless we begin a programme of inoculation. It would not, however, be possible for any of us to know with

any reasonable certainty *all* the long-term consequences of our actions, since those long-term consequences depend on whether other free agents help or hinder our actions attaining the consequences that we intend. So the most that would be possible is for us to know those consequences that are independent of the actions of others, and also conditional consequences (for example, 'if no one else interferes, action *A* will have consequence *C*'). But, if God gave us true basic beliefs about the consequences of all our actions subject to those restrictions, we would know what would be the whole future of the world if humans did not interfere with it, and what would happen if **(p.254)** they did interfere with it in various ways. And so, among the other things that we would know would be the outcomes of all the experiments we might do to attempt to confirm any scientific or metaphysical theory. We could still decide between competing theories on the basis of the *a priori* criteria of simplicity and scope. But the decision would be limited to a decision between theories that had exactly the same observable consequences as each other (even in the distant future); and in consequence the interest and importance of such a decision would be extremely low. For a major reason why some conclusion that a certain theory is more probable than some other is of great interest and importance is that the former makes predictions that the latter does not. But in the postulated situation we would not need to do science in order to know the future.

As things are in the actual world, most moral decisions are decisions taken in uncertainty about the consequences of our actions, even if we discount the possibility of interference by other agents. I do not know for certain that, if I smoke, I will get cancer; or that, if I refuse to give money to Oxfam, another person will starve to death. Maybe I will be one of the ones who does not get cancer, and maybe my failing to make my small gift to Oxfam will make no difference to the number of people who starve to death. For suppose that the only difference made by the absence of my gift is that each starving person gets an allocation of food a tiny bit smaller than what they would have got anyway; and I know that this will be the immediate effect of my action. But what I may not know is whether that difference of allocation is so small as to make no difference to the future condition of the starving. So we have to make our moral decisions on the basis of how probable it is that our actions will have various outcomes—how probable it is that I will get cancer if I continue to smoke (when I would not otherwise get cancer) or that someone will starve if I do not give (when they would not starve otherwise). These decisions under uncertainty are not merely the normal moral decisions; they are also the hard ones. Since probabilities are so hard to assess, it is all too easy to persuade yourself that it is worth taking the chance that no harm will result from the less demanding decision (that is, the decision that you have a strong desire to make). And, even if you face up to a correct assessment of the probabilities, true dedication to the good is shown by doing the act that, although it is probably the best action, may have no good consequences at all.

(p.255) But if we are often in this situation (and for the above reasons it is good that we should be), then it is good (because we rightly seek to do good actions) that we should have the opportunity to obtain more certain knowledge of the consequences of our actions—that will involve getting more data about the consequences of events, for example, data from the past about what has happened to people who have smoked in

ignorance of the possibility that smoking causes cancer. Seeking more certain knowledge, in other words, involves once again relying on normal induction.

Above all, if our knowledge of the consequences of our actions is limited, we have the all-important choice of whether or not to pursue scientific inquiry to extend our knowledge, and of teaching or not teaching others the results of such inquiry. The rationality that is necessary if we are to make serious moral choices is, quite apart from its value for this purpose, a great good in itself. One of the very greatest glories of humans is their ability to be responsive to evidence and reach probable conclusions about the effects of their actions, about how the world works, and about what is our origin and destiny. Rationality is a quality for which it is worth paying a considerable price. We rightly value greatly the scientist who investigates the causes and effects of things and who opens himself to applying objectively correct criteria to discovering how nature operates, and about which events cause pain and which cause pleasure. And it is a further glory of humans that they cooperate in the activity of reaching probable conclusions; some humans teach others, and the others build on those foundations. And humans have the choice whether or not to investigate, to cooperate in investigation, and to teach the results of investigation. To have these various serious moral choices, we need initially to be (more or less) ignorant of the consequences of our actions, for good or evil. The occurrence of natural evil gives us the choice of improving our knowledge of these consequences, which we cannot obtain in any other way without a serious loss of good.

The higher animals themselves also acquire knowledge by normal induction, knowledge of where to obtain food, drink, and fellowship; and also knowledge of the causes of pain, loss of health, and loss of life. While animals do not have the free choice of active investigation into causes and effects, the higher animals do learn (that is, acquire knowledge) by the use of objective criteria of what is evidence for what—by generalizing, the simplest kind of normal inductive (**p.256**) inference. Seeing the suffering, disease, and death of others in certain circumstances, they learn to avoid those circumstances. Seeing a fawn caught by a fire in a thicket, other animals learn to avoid the thicket. (Animals, and especially the lower animals, do of course avoid many situations and do many actions instinctively; but in those cases they do not do the action or avoid the situation through rationally acquired knowledge of its consequences.) And some of the higher animals (albeit unfreely) do investigate the consequences of actions before doing them. A cat often tests the strength of a tree branch before putting his full weight on it. Their rationality in this simple respect is one of their glories, another limited respect in which they have some similarity to humans. It is good that they too should save their lives and those of their offspring through learning the consequences of things by observation and inquiry. Yet other animals must suffer if some animals are to learn to avoid suffering for themselves and their offspring.

We may not know exactly when and where the past natural evils occurred, but the mere knowledge that suffering of a certain type occurred to certain kinds of creatures under certain conditions provides us with very good reason to avoid actions that may produce those conditions. Indeed, since all natural evils occur as a result of largely deterministic

natural processes (there are no kinds of natural evil that occur in a totally random way), all such knowledge helps to build up knowledge of natural processes that we can utilize to produce or prevent future evils. All past and present human and animal natural evils of which we know thus contribute to the widening of human choice when we learn about them. And (except at a heavy cost) we could not learn, and especially choose to learn, without them. The great good of choice between good and bad acts cannot be had without knowledge of the consequences of our actions. If we were given this knowledge in the form of basic beliefs, we would be deprived of the great good of rational response to evidence, rational investigation, and the choice of whether to pursue it. To have all this knowledge provided for us would radically reduce the range of the choices we have. Natural evil makes it possible for us to make many more serious moral choices, including the choice of whether or not to pursue rational investigation.

In developing the higher-order-goods defence and the argument from the need for knowledge, I have been arguing that by bringing about natural evils God makes possible various goods and that doing **(p.257)** the former is the only logically possible and morally permissible way in which he can secure the latter. I have argued that theism can justifiably claim that this first condition for God to allow evils to occur is satisfied without the need to invoke any extra hypotheses such as the fallen-angel hypothesis discussed earlier. All the evils of our orderly world of which we know are ones to which we can choose to react in the right way—minimally by compassion and by learning from them, and often in many other ways as well. But, if God is to be justified in bringing about or allowing others to bring about these evils, he must also bring about the good that they make possible; humans who choose between good and evil must do so of their own free will. The bad nature and bad effects of human free choices being so much worse than the bad nature and effects of instinctive animal reactions, the free nature of their choices is, I suggest, needed to justify a good God allowing them to cause such evil as they can. I have argued briefly that there is no reason to deny that things are as they seem to be in this respect, and that humans do have the requisite free will. The second condition for God to be justified in bringing about natural evils is also satisfied.

God's Right to Inflict Harm

I have been arguing that, by permitting moral evil and bringing about natural evil, God gives us (and animals) a good that he could not give us in any other morally permissible way. But does God have the right to impose harm on us for the sake of a resulting good; and, in particular, does he have the right to allow some to suffer for the benefit of a good to others?

God as the author of our being would have rights over us that we do not have over our fellow humans. To allow someone to suffer for his own good or the good of someone else, one has to stand in some kind of parental relationship towards him. I do not have the right to force some stranger, Joe Bloggs, to suffer for the good of his soul or of the soul of Bill Snoggs, but I have *some* right of this kind in respect of my own children. I may let the younger son suffer *somewhat* for the good of his and his brother's soul. I have this right because in small part I am responsible for the younger son's existence, its beginning, and

continuance; I feed him and educate him. I have the right to demand something in return, that he is open to the possibility of his **(p.258)** elder brother inflicting (limited) harm on him. If this is correct, then, *a fortiori*, a God who is, *ex hypothesi*, so much more the author of our being than are our parents, has rights so much greater in this respect.

It is for this reason that, it is not a good objection to my argument that, if pain serves various good purposes (such as providing opportunities for sympathetic and courageous action, and knowledge of when pain is caused), it would be good for us humans to cause more pain to each other and to animals. We are not the primary cause of the existence of other humans and animals, and so we do not in general have that right. God has that right, and in very specific circumstances and to a very limited degree humans in parental situations do also.

I suggest that we can generalize these intuitions by the following principle. A benefactor has the right to take back, or to tie bad aspects to, some of the benefits that he gives to some one, so long as he remains on balance a benefactor. God who gives so much has the right to take back something in return; though he who is perfectly good will never seek it unless to take it is logically necessary in order to provide some good to this beneficiary or to someone else.

One might feel that people ought to be asked whether they want to receive a benefit, especially one with bad aspects (for example, pain) attached. Surely no one has this right to inflict harm on some person for his greater good, let alone for the greater good of another, without that person's consent. We judge that doctors who use people as involuntary guinea pigs for medical experiments are doing something wrong. The all-important difference, however, is that the doctors *could* have asked the patients for permission; and the patients being free agents of some power and knowledge could have made an informed choice of whether or not to allow themselves to be used. God's choice is not about how to use already existing people, but about the sort of people to make and the sort of world into which to put them. In God's situation there are no people to be asked. Thus in the previous chapter I argued that it would be good that one person, *A*, should have deep responsibility for another one, *B*. Ought not God to have asked *B* if he wanted things thus? But this is not possible, for, if *A* is to be responsible for, *B*'s growth in freedom, knowledge, and power, there will not be a *B* with enough freedom and knowledge to make any choice before God has to choose whether or not to give *A* responsibility for him. The creator has to make the choice independently of his creatures, and he has a reason for choosing to **(p.259)** make them deeply interdependent. Again, God has reason, we saw, to create a world in which some suffer, to give others knowledge through rational inquiry. But humans cannot choose in what sort of a world by what route they are to acquire knowledge, for until they have acquired knowledge they cannot choose anything. God has to make the choice for them. And, if there is a God, he often pays us the compliment of assuming that, if we had the choice, we would want our lives to be of use to others.

It may seem that my condition that God may not impose on us evils that (equal or) outweigh the good things he gives us is not satisfied in many cases. Does it not seem that

many humans live lives that are such that it was better for that human never to have lived? I believe that this is the case far less often than it seems initially for two reasons. The first is that it is a great good simply to be alive, even if life involves quite a lot of suffering, perhaps many periods in which the bad outweighs the good. I hope that a reader will not think me callous in making the comment that, if many people really thought that it were better that they had never lived, there would be many more suicides than there are. The objector may say that the reason why there are not more suicides than there are is that people feel obligations to their parents, children, spouses, etc. to stay alive. That is true, and they are surely often right to feel these obligations. But that brings me to the second reason why a judgement that it were better for some humans never to have lived is so often mistaken. It ignores the great good of being of use.

That helping is an immense good for the helper has always been difficult for humans to see, but it is especially hard for twenty-first-century secularized Western man to see. But just think how awful life would be if we were of no use, if we could not ever help others in some way or another. And most of us can see that sometimes: when, for example, we seek to help prisoners, not by giving them more comfortable quarters, but by letting them help the handicapped; or when we pity rather than envy the 'poor little rich girl' who has everything and does nothing for anyone else. And one phenomenon prevalent in modern Europe draws this especially to our attention—the evil of unemployment. Because of the systems of social security common in Western Europe, the unemployed on the whole have enough money to live without too much discomfort; certainly they are a lot better off than are many employed in Africa, Asia, or nineteenth-century Britain. What is evil about unemployment in **(p.260)** Western Europe is not so much any resulting poverty but the uselessness of the unemployed. They often report feeling unvalued by society, of no use, 'on the scrap heap'. They rightly think it would be a good for them to contribute; but they cannot.

It is not only intentional actions freely chosen, but also ones performed involuntarily, that have good consequences for others, that constitute a good for those who do them. If the unemployed were compelled to work for some useful purpose, they would still—most of them—regard that as a good for them in comparison with being useless. Or, if they would not so regard it, I suggest that most of us who are employed, and not directly involved in their plight, can see it as a good for them. Or consider the conscript killed in a just and ultimately successful war in defence of his country against a tyrannous aggressor. Almost all peoples, apart from those of the Western world in our generation, have recognized that dying for one's country is a great good for him who dies, even if he was conscripted.

And it is not only intentional actions but experiences undergone involuntarily (or involuntary curtailment of good experiences, as by death) that have good consequences—so long as those experiences are closely connected with their consequences—which constitute a good for him who has them (even if a lesser good than that of a free intentional action causing those consequences, and a good often outweighed by the evil of the experience in question). Consider someone hurt or killed in an accident that leads to some reform that prevents the occurrence of similar accidents in future (for example,

someone killed in a rail crash, which leads to the installation of a new system of railway signalling that prevents similar accidents in future). His relatives often comment in such a situation that at any rate the victim did not suffer or die in vain. They would have regarded it as a greater misfortune for the victim if his suffering or death served no useful purpose. It is a good for us if our experiences are not wasted but are used for the good of others, if they are the means of a benefit that would not have come to others without them, which will at least in part compensate for those experiences. It follows from this insight that it is a blessing for a human (or animal) if the possibility of his suffering makes possible the good for others of having the free choice of hurting or harming him; and if his actual suffering provides knowledge for others, and allows others to feel compassion for him and gives to them the choice of showing or not **(p.261)** showing sympathy to him. Thus it is a good for the fawn caught in the thicket in the forest fire that his suffering provides knowledge for the deer and other animals who see it to avoid the fire and deter their other offspring from being caught in it. (I should make it clear here again that—for the reasons given earlier—I am *not* saying that humans have any right to cause train crashes or forest fires of the kind just described. God alone has that right.) It is much better if the being-of-use is chosen voluntarily, but it is good even if it is not.

Someone may object that the good is not (for example) dying for one's country, but knowingly dying for one's country when one believes it good to do so—having the experience of 'feeling good' that one is sacrificing oneself. But that cannot be right. It could be good to have the experience in question only if one's beliefs were correct. There would be nothing good about believing one was dying for a good cause, when in fact it was a lousy cause. To take an analogy, it is a good thing to rejoice that you have passed your exams only if it is a good thing (independently of whether or not you believe it) that you have passed your exams. Believing that it is good that something has happened cannot make it good that it has happened; it will be good to have the belief only if it is good anyway that that thing has happened. So, while believing truly that it is good that one is dying for one's country is a good, it will be a good only if dying for one's country is a good anyway (whether or not one believes it).

One consequence of all this is that, if someone refrains from committing suicide because he knows that someone who loves him will be greatly hurt thereby, he is very fortunate. To be loved, and for your life to be valuable to someone else, are an enormous benefit for you. And, if the would-be suicide does not see that, he is simply mistaken.

If there is a God, the greatest good of all in this respect must be being-of-use to God himself; and all human suffering that is of use to others will also be of use to God, who has designed the world so that suffering does benefit those others. Just as when a doctor helps a small child to use injured limbs, he benefits both the child and the child's parents, one of whose major goals in life is that the child shall flourish, so all human suffering that helps others is of use to God in forwarding his purposes. And one who is of use to the perfectly good source of all being is indeed fortunate.

If, however, when even this great good of being of use is taken into account, there are humans whose lives on earth are such that on **(p.262)** balance it would have been

better for them never to have lived, then God has an obligation to provide them with enough (in quantity and quality) of a good life after death, so that their total life (on earth and hereafter) is on balance a good life. Being omnipotent, he can do this, and we have no reason to suppose that (if there is a God) he does not. There is nothing wrong in a benefactor providing a life that (within limits) in its early stages is on balance bad, so long as over its whole period it is on balance good. We can see that from the fact that doctors and parents are surely right to allow a foetus or very young child to suffer in consequence of some serious surgery or other medical intervention, so long as it is the means to a good life overall.

In this respect also what goes for humans goes for animals too. God must give to each of them on balance a good life; the goodness of their lives must outweigh evils in it. But for them too being of use to others—either to humans or to other animals or to God himself—is a great good, whether or not they recognize this. And I am inclined to think (though I may be mistaken) that, because the pains of animals are less than ours, when the great good of being of use is taken into account, God's obligation to provide for each animal a good life would be satisfied without any need for life after death.

However, if the evils of this world are such that, in order to save the hypothesis of theism from refutation, I need to add to it the hypothesis that God provides a period of good life after death for anyone whose life on earth is on balance a bad one (one such that it would be better if they had never lived), I am complicating theism and therefore decreasing its probability—in the same way as if I were to have added to it the fallen-angel hypothesis. I shall return to this point shortly.

Still, given this crucial assumption of a compensatory life after death for any whose lives on earth are on balance bad, I claim that God has the right to allow humans (and animals) to suffer for a limited period and to a limited extent. But, in view of the fact that he is so much more a benefactor than are human benefactors, his rights in this regard are so much greater than are theirs. And, of course, there are limits—of time (roughly eighty years) and of intensity (suffering beyond a certain point leads to death). (Again, I hope the reader will not think me callous in making these points. They are not points that I would put to a victim in his moment of suffering, where the need is for comfort and not theodicy; but the points are correct, and need to be taken into account by anyone who wishes to **(p.263)** investigate this subject with proper logical rigour.) The crucial issue, however, is whether the actual limits are too wide.

The Quantity of Evil

It may be urged that, despite the good ends that its actual or possible occurrence serves, there is too much evil in the world. My fourth condition for a perfectly good God to allow or bring about some evil is that it is probable that the good will outweigh any evil necessary for attaining it. And, even if it does outweigh it, there are—we have noted—limits to God's right to impose evil. So—is there in the world too much evil for a perfectly good God to have imposed it? An objector may agree that one does need a substantial amount of various kinds of evil in order to provide the opportunity for greater goods, and in particular a choice of destiny for human beings. But he may feel that there is just

too much evil in the world, and that less evil would produce adequate benefit. It might be said that a God could give to man choice enough by allowing him to inflict quite a bit of pain on his fellows, and could deter humans from harmful actions by some nasty headaches. In our world, the objection goes, things are too serious. There is too much evil that humans can do to their fellows, and too many and too unpleasant natural evils to subserve the good of the opportunities for sympathetic and courageous response and for rational inference and inquiry that they give to humans. The suffering of children and animals is something that rightly often appals us. This is, I believe, the crux of the problem of evil. It is not the fact of evil or the kinds of evil that are the real threat to theism: it is the quantity of evil—both the number of people (and animals) who suffer and the amount that they suffer. If there is a God, the objector says in effect he has given humans too much choice. He has inflicted too much suffering on too many people (and animals) for the purpose of making it possible for them to have a free choice and to make greatly significant differences to themselves, each other, and the world on the basis of knowledge obtained by rational inquiry. No God ought to have allowed Hiroshima, the Holocaust, the Lisbon Earthquake, or the Black Death, claims the objector. With the objection that, if there is a God, he has overdone it, I feel *considerable initial* sympathy. The objection seems to count against the claim that there is a God.

(p.264) But then I reflect that each bad state or possible bad state eliminated eliminates *one* actual good. Each small addition to the number of actual or possible bad states makes a small addition to the number of actual or possible good states. Suppose that one less person had been burnt by the Hiroshima atomic bomb. Then there would have been less opportunity for courage and sympathy; one less piece of information about the effects of atomic radiation, less people (relatives of the person burnt) who would have had a strong desire to campaign for nuclear disarmament and against imperialist expansion. And so on. Of course removal of one bad state or the possibility of one bad state will not remove much good, any more than the removal of one grain of sand will make much difference to the fact that you still have a heap of sand. But the removal of one grain of sand will make a bit of difference, and so will the removal of one bad state.

What, in effect, the objector is asking is that God shall very greatly diminish the number of sufferers and intensity of the suffering produced by natural processes, and the harm that humans can do to each other. What this means is that, yes, there should be diseases, but not ones that maim or kill; accidents that incapacitate people for a year or two but not for life; we could cause each other pain or not help each other to acquire knowledge, but not damage our own or each other's characters. And our influence would be limited to those with whom we come into contact; there would be no possibility of influencing for good or ill distant generations. And most of our beliefs about how to cause effects, good or evil, would be beliefs with which we would be born. Such a world would be a toy-world; a world where things matter, but not very much; where we can choose and our choices can make a small difference, but the real choices remain God's. The objector is asking that God should not be willing to be generous and trust us with his world, and give us occasional opportunities to show ourselves at our heroic best.

I have already suggested that God would not have the right to give anyone an earthly life that is on balance bad unless he provided for them a compensatory period of good life after death. To add to theism the hypothesis that he does so is to complicate theism. I am also inclined to suggest that, if God makes humans (and animals) suffer to the extent to which he does, albeit for good purposes, he would in virtue of his perfect goodness share our suffering himself. (He would recognize it as a best act to do so.) We think that good **(p.265)** parents who make their children eat a plain diet because of some disease that they have will often share that diet (although they do not themselves suffer from the disease); or, if they make their children play with difficult neighbouring children who are badly in need of friendship, they will show special friendship to the neighbouring parents (even if the parents are less in need of friendship). Good kings and queens share the suffering that they demand of their subjects for good purposes (for example, to win a war against an oppressor), even if the suffering of the king or queen itself would not help to forward that particular good purpose. If he makes us suffer as much as we do, God must become incarnate and share our suffering. But to add to theism the hypothesis that he does so is further to complicate theism. For, while his allowing the *kinds* of evil that he does is as such compatible with his perfect goodness, and not unexpected in view of the good states that it makes possible, my concern (as that of most people who are concerned with the problem of evil) is with the degree of that evil (the amount particular individuals have to suffer). That, my claim is, God would be justified in allowing only if he provides a compensatory period of good life after death (where necessary) and perhaps also shares the suffering of humans and animals by becoming incarnate. While I am not myself confident that there are any humans such that it would be better for them not to have lived, let me nevertheless allow the objector his claim that there are such. In that case theism needs one or maybe two additional complicating hypotheses. Given them, and so the additional good that the additional evil makes possible, the degree of evil is not unexpected. For God might well be expected to ask a lot from us in order to give a lot to us.

So, given both of these additional hypotheses, and conscious of the *very* short temporal span of human and animal life (and to a lesser extent of the limits to the intensity of pain and suffering within that life that can be experienced), my own final verdict is that a God would not be less than perfectly good if he were to bring about or allow to occur that amount of suffering that exists for the sake of the greater good that results. Still, the need for additional hypotheses in order to save theism makes the resulting theistic theory more complicated than theism on its own (bare theism), and so reduces the probability of bare theism. Put another way, bare theism makes it less probable that we would find evil of as great a degree as we do than it would be on background evidence alone, because theism is **(p.266)** compatible with this evidence only if we add to theism a further hypothesis or hypotheses. Hence evil provides a good C-inductive argument against the existence of God. But it does not provide a very strong one, for the reason that providing life after death for many humans (not merely those who need compensation) and becoming incarnate to share their suffering are the kinds of act that a good God might well do anyway—for they are good acts (and perhaps good acts of different kinds from the other acts of God that we have been discussing, and maybe even acts of best kinds),

whether or not required in order for God justifiably to allow the amount of evil that occurs. (See p. 231 for the goodness of an act of the former kind, and pp. 288–90 for additional reasons that God might have for becoming incarnate.) So, with e as the occurrence of the moral and natural evils known to us, h as the hypothesis of theism, and k as the evidence considered in previous chapters, $P(h|e \ \& \ k) < P(h|k)$, but the former is not less than the latter by very much.

Note further that, while evil may provide a good C-inductive argument against the existence of God (bare theism); it does not provide a good C-inductive argument against Christian theism (theism plus the central Christian doctrines incorporated in creeds), for life after death⁸ and God becoming incarnate are already part of the more detailed hypothesis of Christian theism; which, because of its more detailed character (its greater scope), is always as such less probable than bare theism. So any further evidence in favour of these two detailed Christian claims⁹ will diminish further the force of the C-inductive argument. (And if the only extra hypothesis required were life after death, then, since that is part of many more specific forms of theism (for example, Islam), evil would not provide a good C-inductive argument against these forms of theism.)

(p.267) The arguments of opponents who claim that the occurrence of evil provides a stronger argument against the existence of God than I am willing to allow stem, I claim, from a failure to appreciate the deepest needs of human beings and other conscious beings, and a failure to appreciate the strength of the logical constraints on the kinds of world that a God can make. The reader will sympathize with my verdict in so far as he believes that it is more important what an agent does (the choices he makes, the changes he produces in the world and the effects of his life on others) than what happens to him (the sensations and disappointments he experiences).

The Argument from Hiddenness

The physical and moral evils that I have considered so far would be evils, whether or not there is a God. But there are certain states of affairs that would be bad only if there is a God. Of these the state that has seemed most evidently to constitute evidence against the existence of God is honest agnosticism (which I understand in such a way that it includes atheism). If there is a God who is our loving creator, surely he ought to make himself known to all creatures with the capacity to understand what it is for there to be a God, a capacity that humans evidently have. Fathers who absent themselves too much from their children are rightly judged less than adequately loving. God's failure to make himself known is surely, an objector will say,¹⁰ in view of God's supposed perfect goodness, evidence against his existence. This argument is a variant on the normal argument from evil against the existence of God. Some agnosticism may be due to people not taking the trouble to investigate whether or not there is a God, or hiding from themselves the force of arguments for the existence of God; or be due to those who do believe that there is a God failing to announce the 'good news' to others. Agnosticism arising from such causes would be a moral evil for which there **(p.268)** would be justification of the same kind as for other moral evils. All-important free choices (of whether to investigate, or evangelize) would be unavailable to humans if God had already provided all humans with knowledge

of his existence.

But clearly there is much honest agnosticism. Many people who have devoted much time to considering whether or not there is a God are unconvinced by any arguments known to them, and have themselves had no relevant religious experiences. Their failure to be convinced by arguments may be due to their inadequate acquaintance with cogent arguments. But, whatever the cause, they are honestly unconvinced. Why should a good God hide himself in this way from many human beings capable of reacting to him in worship and service?

My answer is twofold. Agnosticism makes possible a good for the agnostic, and it makes possible a good for the religious believer. To start with the former—a deep conviction of the existence of God inhibits someone's ability to choose freely between good and evil. It makes it too easy to choose the good for anyone who has either a strong desire to be liked by good persons (and especially any on whom he depends for his existence), stronger than any contrary bad desire; or a strong desire for his own future well-being combined with a strong belief that it is quite likely that a God would not provide a good afterlife for bad people. Why it makes it too easy to choose the good is because, as we saw earlier, in order for someone to have a free choice between good and evil, he needs temptation—a (balance of) desire to do what is evil, which he can then resist, if he so chooses. Our good desires have to be outweighed in their causal influence on us by our evil desires if we are to make a free choice in favour of the good.

It is good for us to have a desire to be liked, to like to be thought well of by others, and to have them seek our company and respect our opinions and achievements. To like and to like to be liked are essential elements of friendship (even though sometimes we may need to risk temporary unpopularity in order to secure some very important goal). And friendship with the good, and above all with the perfectly good perfectly wise all-powerful source of our existence, would be an enormous good. There would be something deeply wrong with someone who did not mind whether such a God liked him much or not. And yet how could such a God like him very much if he did and was inclined to do wrong actions? For God loves the **(p.269)** good and hates the evil; and, while he may still love us because he has made us and we still have some potential for doing good, he will not love us for our wrong actions.

Now, if I acquire a deep awareness of the presence of God, I will then become deeply aware that, if I do bad, and especially wrong, actions, the all-good creator will strongly disapprove. Hence, if I have the proper desire to be liked, I will have a strong inclination not to do wrong; and, unless that is overborne by some even stronger desire to do wrong, there will be a balance of desire against choosing wrong and so no overall temptation to do wrong. I will inevitably do the good. The desire to be liked may be of various strengths, as may the desire to do what is bad, and the belief that there is a God. But, if the good desire is stronger than the bad one and I have a deep awareness of the presence of God (that is, such that God's existence is not open to question), then the balance of inclination will be to the good and there will be no free choice between good and bad. We will be in the situation of the child in the nursery who knows that mother is

looking in at the door, and for whom, in view of the child's desire for mother's approval, the temptation to wrongdoing is simply overborne. We need 'epistemic distance' from God in order to have a free choice between good and evil.

The only way in which a strong awareness of the presence of God will leave open the possibility of free choice between good and evil will be if the desire for divine approval is weaker than the desire to do wrong. If God makes us naturally malicious enough, keen to hurt and deceive others with no natural affection for them, then the choice may remain open. But, of course, just as it is good that we desire the love of God, so it is bad if we are naturally malicious and lack natural affection. Yet it is not logically possible that God give us both a strong awareness of his presence and a free choice between good and evil at the same time as giving us a strong desire for his love and some natural affection for our fellows. These latter are great goods; God can give us certain goods only if he does not give us others.

God could give us much more moderate awareness of his presence, ambiguous experiences but ones best interpreted as experiences of God, or arguments to show that on a slight balance of probability there is a God. Yet, even given only a moderate belief that there is a God, the possibility of a free choice between right and wrong will exist only given a certain ratio of strength between the desire to please (p.270) God and the desire to do wrong. Even if the influence of the former desire is modified by doubt about the existence of God, it cannot be too much stronger than the latter desire if there is to be that balance of desire for wrong action over right that alone makes possible serious free choice between right and wrong. Even God cannot give us that choice if he gives us fairly strong natural desires for good (including the desire to be liked by the good) and shows us, even only on a balance of probability, that he exists. But the more uncertainty there is about the existence of God, the more it is possible for us to be naturally good people who still have a free choice between right and wrong.

This point is strengthened when we take into account the other relevant desire—the desire for our own future well-being, another desire that it is very good that we should have. It is good that we should seek to make our lives good lives and want them to continue as good lives (even if sometimes we may need to sacrifice our lives for some very important goal). But, if we believe that there is a God, we will believe that whether we will have a life after death and of what kind that life will be will depend on his decision. If our present lives are bad ones in which we get pleasure out of wrongdoing, we may reasonably suspect that God may see no point in allowing us to continue to exist; or, we might suspect, God would punish us for the abuse of our present lives. Yet for God to force us to live good lives in the next world (which we would enjoy only if we wanted to live such lives) would be forcing on us desires and a destiny contrary to our present free choices. That, we may reasonably suspect, God is unlikely to do. So, if we believe there is a God, we are likely to believe that, if we want to have a good afterlife, it is to our selfish advantage to do good now. And also for the reasons given on pp. 228–31, to the extent to which we are confident that there is life after death (and we are likely to have such confidence only if we believe that there is a God), we are deprived of the possibility of

making certain kinds of very serious choice.

I conclude that, if we believe that there is a God and desire the approval of any good God there may be for our actions and desire to have a good life after death, we shall be less open to temptation to do what is bad and have less opportunity for serious good actions. That will make our commitment to the good a less serious one. Only a significant balance of desire in favour of evil (with many opportunities for serious good actions) gives us the possibility of showing total **(p.271)** commitment to the good. When religious believers do what is wrong, either they do not have the right desires of the kind discussed above in sufficient strength, or they are subject to other strong desires to do evil, or their wrongdoing is worse than that of the agnostic—for they have yielded to a very weak temptation.

The agnosticism of the agnostic also makes possible a great good for the religious believer. It allows the believer to have the awesome choice of helping or not helping the agnostic to understand who is the source of his existence and of his ultimate well-being (helping the agnostic not merely by verbal preaching but by an example of what living a religious life is like). The existence of honest agnosticism may, if there is a God, be due to the failures of believers to help agnostics in these ways.

But while, if there is a God, there are these good states that the evil of agnosticism makes possible, the goodness of these states (as of some of the other good states discussed in this chapter) depends on their being temporary. Agnosticism allows the agnostic to make a more serious commitment to the good than he would be able to make if the presence of God were more obvious. As his earthly life progresses, so he begins to form his character for good or ill. Once he has become committed to the good, the advantage of agnosticism in helping him to do it with great seriousness disappears. If he makes himself a good person, he makes himself a person ready to worship his creator if he learns that he exists, whether in this life or another one. And the goodness for the religious believer of the existence of agnosticism is for him to have the opportunity to abolish it. It loses its point if the believer makes himself so hard-hearted as to be indifferent to it. So, of course, if God has made us, it is a great good that he should show us his presence, and I shall be arguing in the next two chapters that he does show his presence to many humans. And there would be no good in the existence of agnosticism for the religious believer if there were no religious believers. So some must be aware of the presence of God (either through religious experience or seeing the force of arguments) if the existence of agnosticism is to provide an opportunity for them.

So I suggest the conditions for a perfectly good God to permit or bring about the evil of agnosticism are satisfied. Doing so makes it possible for the agnostic to have the great good of a serious free choice between good and evil and also at the same time to have the great goods of the desires to be liked and to have a good future, **(p.272)** without having strong malicious desires. It also makes it possible for others to have the great good of the choice of whether or not to help the agnostic to reach true religious belief. As far as we can tell (that is, given that we have free will), we do have these great goods. God has the right to allow us to suffer the evil of agnosticism for the period of our earthly

life for the same reason as he has the right to allow us to suffer other evils—so long as there remains a balance of good in our lives, which normally there will be. Given such a balance, I cannot see that God has any obligation to reveal his presence to the agnostic after his death, good though it is that he should do so. Agnosticism, though (if there is a God) an evil, is not an evil as awful as some of the suffering that does require God to provide a compensatory afterlife or to become incarnate. And the great good of significant free choice (while having the two good desires in great strength) is a great good indeed, sufficient to outweigh—I suggest—the evil of agnosticism. I conclude, therefore, that the argument from hiddenness does not constitute a good *C*-inductive argument against the existence of God. With *e* as the existence of honest agnosticism (and atheism), *h* as theism, and *k* as the evidence that we have considered, previously $P(h|e \ \& \ k) \frac{1}{4} P(h|k)$.

Notes:

(1) All that I mean by calling an event or state of affairs an 'evil' is that it is a state such that in itself, apart from its circumstances, causes, and consequences, it is bad that it should occur. I do not imply that bringing it about or allowing it to occur would be (what would ordinarily be called) an evil act, or even a bad act at all. I argue in Chapter 11 that it is sometimes a good act to allow or even bring about a bad state. I call such bad states 'evils' simply to conform with much philosophical usage.

(2) Both of these defences were rejected by Jesus, according to St John's Gospel (John 9: 3), as accounts of why one particular person was born blind.

(3) This defence has been used recently by, among others, Alvin Plantinga. See his *The Nature of Necessity* (Clarendon Press, 1974), 191–3.

(4) Given the traditional view (see Chapter 6 n. 8) that angels have a fixed character (good or bad) as a result of one free original choice, we would have to suppose that they made that choice in the knowledge that God had promised them limited power over his creation, and that their free choice of character involved a choice of how they would use that power.

(5) Those familiar with recent philosophical writing on the problem of evil will realize that I choose the example of a fawn caught in a forest fire because of its prevalence in that literature. This example was put forward by William Rowe ('The Problem of Evil and Some Varieties of Atheism', *American Philosophical Quarterly*, 16 (1979), 335–41) as an example of apparently pointless evil. I shall be pointing out in several places the good purposes that the fawn's suffering subserves.

(6) Note that the complexity of an inferential process does not as such make its conclusion any less likely to be true; whereas the complexity of a postulated hypothesis does make it less likely to be true.

(7) A third way, beside that of normal inductive inference and providing such knowledge in the form of basic beliefs, by which God could provide us with knowledge of the consequences of our actions is by telling us himself what these consequences would be,

and making it evident that he is telling us. But that would make his presence so evident to us that it would be open to all the disadvantages of that which I shall discuss shortly when I come to the 'argument from hiddenness', as well as depriving us of the opportunity for rational inference and inquiry.

(8) The more central function of a good life after death in the Christian system is to provide a reward for the virtuous, rather than compensation for the suffering. But there is quite a bit in later Church tradition that teaches that those who die as babies have a basically good life after death (in the medieval Catholic tradition, Heaven was for baptized babies and Limbo for the unbaptized). If there are any lives that are on balance bad lives, the lives of suffering babies are perhaps the most obvious example. And Jesus's parable of Dives and Lazarus (Luke 16: 19–31) sees Lazarus's good life after death as straightforward compensation for his adult life of suffering on earth.

(9) Apart from a brief mention in Chapter 12 of the possibility of evidence that God became incarnate in Jesus Christ, the present book is not concerned with evidence for specifically Christian claims. For this, see my *The Resurrection of God Incarnate* (Clarendon Press, 2003).

(10) This objection has recently been presented very thoroughly in a book devoted solely to the objection: John Schellenberg, *Divine Hiddenness and Human Reason* (Cornell University Press, 1993). Schellenberg's positive claim is that a perfectly good God would provide 'probabilifying evidence' (p. 35) of his existence (whether by experience of God or the availability of public objective argument) for all human beings capable of being aware of God, 'at all times' (p. 25); and that, since we do not all always have such evidence, there is no God.

