Name: Matthew James Cooper,
Institution: Oxford Brookes
Submission on the 30th September 2021
The thesis is submitted in partial fulfilment of the
requirements of the award of MA by Research

The Pragmatic Problem of Evil.

Abstract.

This paper consists of two parts, namely, "*Is the Landscape of the Problem of Evil at an Impasse?*" and *"A Pragmatic Argument against Reliance in God to Prevent Horrendous Evils."*

The first part of this paper completes an analysis of formulations around the problem of evil, analysis of logical and evidential arguments from evil, and analysis of theist responses to the problem of evil.

Within the first part, I establish that certain arguments from evil are not valid, so they will not convince the theist. In response to those which are however, the theist does not convince the atheist to abandon the problem of evil. Sceptical theism allows the theist to remain unconvinced by the problem of evil and immune to any evidential argument from evil. Due to colliding atheist and theist principles, there is an impasse in the debate.

The second part of this paper aims to take a more pragmatic approach to the problem of evil. Rather than focusing on debate and conjecture within the landscape of the problem of evil, this paper seeks to establish a common idea that theists and atheists will be able to hold. Both atheists and theists seek to eliminate evil. Within the second part of the paper, I establish that reliance in God alone to prevent horrendous evils is an unreasonable action. I do this through an analysis and application of pragmatism and Humean thought to the problem of evil. The application is largely based around naturalist background assumptions which atheists and theists will all hold, and how these assumptions inform us of what actions may be reasonable and unreasonable.

<u>Contents</u>

0.1 Acknowledgements.

In this section I would like to give thanks to all that helped me in my completion of this work. First of all, I would like to thank Oxford Brookes University for providing me with the opportunity to write this dissertation within their MRes course.

I would also like to thank Dr Daniel O'Brien for providing great help, advice and having great patience with me within this year.

I would like to thank my family and friends for supporting me through tough times and encouraging me to work as hard as I can.

I would like to thank my wonderful girlfriend Megan, who has motivated me not just in the completion of this dissertation but in all aspects of my life.

This paper is dedicated to those who study within the field of the philosophy of religion who act on a daily basis to prevent and help fight horrendous evils in our world, regardless of their faith.

0.2 Dissertation Introduction.

Before this dissertation begins, it is important to establish a few things. These being the following. What is the problem of evil? What is the evil I am concerned with in this dissertation? What is the Omnigod? What are the possible responses to the problem of evil?

The problem of evil comes in many forms and variations, but is most simply the following:

P1: God is morally perfect.

P2: God is all-knowing.

P3: God is all-powerful.

P4: A morally perfect, all-knowing, all-powerful being will/will likely prevent evil.[1]

P5: Evil exists.

C: God does not/probably does not exist.

Although discussed further in section one, here it is important to define what one might consider "evil" to be. This includes formulations of the nature of evil. The first of these to mention are arguments from evil which establish that all suffering amounts to evil. However, even at a basic glance, certain sufferings are beneficial to our existence.

---

[1] Formulations of the argument here may vary. It may be deductive or inductive, formulations of evil may be specific or unspecific, and formulations of action ethics may be axiological, teleological or deontological. This will be explained further in section one.

Specific pains help to protect us, such as spraining an ankle. To me, it therefore seems unwise to define "evil" as all instances of suffering. Within this dissertation I will simply be concerned with evil as horrendous moral and natural events. One could ask, how does one draw the line between what are horrendous moral and natural events, and what are not? For this dissertation, what draws the line here are the following criteria. In the balance of things, does the event have a possible moral justification for existing? Of course, it is apparent that pain might have justification, or that bullying, for example, could turn me into a stronger person.[2] In contrast, events such as terrorist attacks, rape, and mass genocide do not have these justifications. These events are what I consider to be evil.

Moving on, another aspect of this discussion is the question of what exactly "God" is. In many faiths, and within many faiths, the idea of God is different. A key solution to the problem of evil that many take is to claim that God is either not all-knowing, not morally perfect, or not all-powerful. I will not be concerned with these responses within my dissertation. I will simply be referring to the God which is morally perfect, all-powerful, and all-knowing. I will be concerned with responses by theists who believe in this image of God. I will call this God the *Omnigod*.

There are various ways for such theists to attempt to respond to the problem of evil. The response I do not foresee the theist taking is the response of utter moral nihilism. To escape the problem, the theist could attempt to successfully argue that evil does not exist. I will not be addressing these arguments in my dissertation, as within the boundaries of my dissertation, evil exists. Two other methods that theists attempt to use to rebut the problem of evil are named total refutations and theodicies. The total refutation is the claim that the argument from evil does not prima facie provide a case for the probability or necessity that God does not exist. Notable theodicies include the

---

[2] Justifications for evil will be notably explained in sections across part one.

free-will theodicy and the soul-making theodicy. Although not always considered a theodicy, sceptical theism can also be considered a form of theodicy as it provides an argument against the evidential argument from evil through the obscurity principle.[3]

Having established these key concepts, I will now explain the two main questions this dissertation aims to answer. The first question being, is the current landscape of the problem of evil at an impasse? I define an impasse as a standstill within the debate, where one side of the debate is failing to convince the other and vice versa. This question will be answered in part one of this dissertation. To begin, I will explain the varying formulations of the problem of evil. It is important to establish the differing forms of the problem. I will then move onto discussing the nature of the argument from evil through examples of deductive and inductive arguments from evil. It is important to establish that arguments from evil often do not convince theists due to several issues. If I cannot establish that these arguments do not convince the theist, then there must not be an impasse in the landscape of the problem of evil. I will then explain how total refutations of the problem of evil do not convince the atheist. If they did, then the landscape of the problem of evil also wouldn't be at a standstill. I will then analyse the free-will and soul-making theodicies. I will establish whether or not these theodicies convince the atheist and draw them away from the problem of evil. I will then discuss whether or not sceptical theism can be overcome by the current argument from evil. In the end of the section, I conclude that sceptical theism cannot be overcome by evidentialist arguments from evil.

 I then move onto the second question. This second question being, is it reasonable to rely on God's intervention alone when one is trying to avoid or prevent evil? I will argue that it is not. Within the second part of the dissertation, I will conclude the following: It is unreasonable to put faith in God's intervention alone when it comes to

---

[3] More on this in section 5.

evil events, when other actions informed by naturalistic background assumptions are available to you. To reach this point, I will first introduce the reader to the pragmatic maxim as a response to scepticism. From this point I will make a critique of James's pragmatic argument for faith in God's existence. Although I will use many points discussed by James, such as what makes a genuine hypothesis and what the "spirit of empiricism" is, I will take a different turn to the turn James makes. I will use the pragmatic maxim and the work of James to argue that reliance in God alone to prevent evil events is unreasonable. After this thesis is explained, I will then move to justify it with the thoughts of Hume.[4] Finally, in the conclusion I will summarise the line of argument made through both sections of the thesis, and discuss a new approach I take to the problem of evil in order to defeat the impasse. I call this the *pragmatic problem of evil*.

---

[4] I do this in accordance with the "spirit of empiricism", elaborated upon in section 7.

Part One: Is the Landscape of the Problem of Evil at an Impasse?

1. Formulations of the Argument from Evil.

1.1 Deductive and Inductive Formulations.

Before I introduce the logical and evidential problems of evil, I must first introduce the concepts of deductive and inductive validity. Within philosophy, it is important that arguments attain some kind of validity. A valid argument is defined in two key ways in *Critical Thinking a Concise Guide*, the first says that an argument is valid if it is the case that all the premises were true, then it would be impossible for the conclusion to be false.[5] The second says that if, say, "the premises are (or were) true, the conclusion would also have to be true".[6] There are three different categories of validity, these are deductive validity, inductive validity and abductive validity. As only the first two are relevant to the problem of evil, I will only explain those types of validity.

A deductively valid argument attempts to establish a conclusion of a necessary nature, by this I mean something of the following form.

Premise 1 (P1): Susan plays the violin.

Premise 2 (P2): All violinists are musicians.

Conclusion (C): Susan is a musician.

Under this argument, if premise one is true and premise two is true, there is a logical necessity for the conclusion to be true, and the conclusion in question asserts a claim

---

[5] Bowell and Kemp, 2015, p.73

[6] Bowell and Kemp, 2015, p.73

which is necessarily true given the truth of the premises. The probability of musician-hood asserted by the conclusion is a 100% probability.

In contrast, take a look at this inductive example.

P1: Susan is a cook.

P2: 60% of cooks went to culinary school.

C: Susan probably went to culinary school.

The argument here does not assert that Susan definitely went to culinary school, whereas the prior argument asserts that Susan is definitely a musician. In contrast to the first argument, this argument only asserts that Susan probably went to culinary school. The argument is valid, so the conclusion must be true if both of the premises are true, however it is not valid to claim here that Susan must have gone to culinary school, the conclusion only posits a likelihood that is necessary, not a necessity.

If we proceed from this explanation of deductive and inductive validity, I can explain with greater context the difference between deductive and inductive formulations within the Problem of Evil. To put it simply, a deductive argument from evil posits a logical necessity that the Omnigod does not exist.[7] The argument from evil with deductive formulations attempts to establish a logical incompatibility with the existence of the Omnigod. The claim the deductive formulations attempt to attain is not modest, such formulations attempt to establish a conclusion which asserts that the Omnigod

---

[7] Tooley, 2021ed, section 1.2.: Also note that Omnigod will be defined in the introduction.

cannot exist, if evil (or specific evils) were to exist.[8] Deductive formulations with the argument from evil are also known as incompatibility formulations due to this.[9]

In contrast, an argument with inductive formulations posits a likelihood that the Omnigod doesn't exist. The evidential argument is a more modest type of argument which attempts to establish that there are evils that exist that make it unlikely that the Omnigod exists.

Before addressing examples of arguments from evil with deductive or inductive formulations, it is also important to establish several other formulations of the argument from evil. The first of these is the option of using unspecific or specific formulations.

1.2 Unspecific and Specific Formulations About Evil.

The second divide in formulations of arguments from evil is that of abstract and concrete formulations, which I will refer to as unspecific and specific formulations in this thesis. Versions of the argument from evil differ quite significantly over what kind of evil provides a basis for the argument from evil. If evil exists, is it any evil or a certain amount of evil which provides a basis for the argument, or is it a specified sort of evil (such as horrendous evils). In contrast, the unspecific formulation of the argument provides a basis for the argument from evil based upon a wide and vaguer idea of evil, one that may encompass various levels of suffering.

Is it necessary for the argument from evil to specifically state and make more specific formulations around the type of evil the argument from evil concerns? Is deeper

---

[8] Note that the argument from evil can either take issue with all evils or specific evils. Unspecific and concrete formulations related to this will be discussed in section 1.2.

[9] Tooley, 2021ed, section 1.2. This section is titled using the word "incompatibility" rather than "deductive" in referring to deductive formulations.

information about specific formulations crucial for the argument against evil as a consequence of unspecific formulations of the problem of evil not standing up to criticism from those wishing to refute the argument? Perhaps minor evils make the world a better place? Perhaps minor evils develop a stronger sense of character? Arguments with unspecific formulations around the problem of evil must provide an answer to these questions. The individual trying to defeat the argument against evil with unspecific formulations may argue that there are evils which are logically necessary for goods that outweigh them to exist. If the Omnigod is morally perfect, do they have the desire to eliminate all evil in instances where many levels of suffering quality as evil? If certain evils make the world a better place, it could be claimed that God allows for these minor evils to exist for this very purpose.

Another problematic issue for the claim that a morally perfect Omnigod would not allow certain instances of suffering that could be defined as evil to exist is the libertarian point of view. Can the unspecific formulation resist certain claims around the nature of morality and free will? Many people claim that the world is a better place if people possess free will, rather than those who are not free. Would the Omnigod have a good reason for creating the libertarian world? Is it morally superior for Omnigod to create a free world, where people have the potential to freely act and be good and sometimes evil, or is it morally superior for Omnigod to create the determinist world, where people do not have free-will as many would define it, they must act in a particular way? The question also remains, does a forced action have any moral worth? These are incredibly large questions to answer here, however the question does indeed provide an issue for the unspecific formulation. If it is morally superior to create the libertarian world, then minor evils would be a price to pay for this world to exist. The unspecific formulation forces the individual making it to answer complex questions over the free-will of beings, and whether it is morally superior for Omnigod to create a determinist world or a libertarian world. This is not to say that arguments against unspecific

formulations would be immune from challenge, but to say it is perhaps better for some who wish to argue using the problem of evil to avoid such challenges altogether.[10]

I would prefer to make more specific formulations of the argument from evil. Specified evil such as horrendous events, both natural and moral, can provide a basis for a prima facie argument against the existence of the Omnigod. Such arguments will be addressed later in this thesis, along with their resistance to criticisms levied against the argument from evil which would provide more of a challenge to unspecific formulations.

---

[10] Tooley, 2021ed, section 1.3. Also note the writer speaks about logical and evidential formulations in relation to unspecific formulations however I have only mentioned specifically logical formulations in relation to unspecific formulations.

2. Brief Discussion on the Use of Logical and Evidential Arguments from Evil.

2.1 Introduction.

In the last section, I mentioned that the possibility of a deductive argument against the existence of the Omnigod based on its logically incompatibility with the existence of evil seemed dubious and unachievable. Many different atheistic philosophers have acknowledged that attempted logical arguments from evil (those with deductive formulations) do not establish that there is incompatibility between the existence of the Omnigod and the existence of evil.[11] I recognise that literature on the logical and evidential problems of evil has an incredible amount of depth,[12] so I am not going to be able to provide a comprehensive survey of the literature. Instead, I will be analysing a small number of logical and evidential arguments from evil to attempt to establish certain arguments which will not succeed in swaying the theist from their original position. In order to establish that there is an impasse within the current landscape around the problem of evil, I must at least establish that at a surface level there is a collection of both logical and evidential arguments from evil that fail to sway the theist from their position that the Omnigod exists.[13]

I will be focusing particularly upon arguments which are too weak, unspecific, or undeveloped to take further into the debate around the problem of evil. It may be the case that such arguments are invalid, or do not consider key elements which are necessary to avoid criticism from the theist. After this, I will be speaking more about

---

[11] See Mackie 1983, Rowe 1979 and Aston 1991.

[12] Acknowledged also by Oppy, 2010.

[13] This alone does not establish that there is an impasse in the current landscape of the problem of evil, the strategy here is more to introduce the notion of such an impasse which I will explore further later.

theist refutations, defences and theodicy in future sections and how successful they are at dispatching arguments from evil which are good enough to resist surface level criticisms concerning validity.

Of course, as has been established previously, the logical argument from evil uses deductive formulations, and requires its conclusion to be of logical necessity in virtue of the truth of the premises. I will be analysing Mackie's logical argument from evil (in its original form) and explain that I do not find it suitable to regard as an argument worthy to be held highly in opposition to the theist due to its non-specific formulation about evil, and due to how easily aspects of the argument are criticised by Plantinga's free will defence. Due to criticism such as Plantinga, it is clear how the argument may not be valid, and therefore not worth being help against the theist. I will analyse this argument referring to the work of Graham Oppy (2017). In other words, I will be explaining why the argument should not be taken further into the debate, as it encounters many immediate problems and is not worth holding in leu of these problems.

2.2 The Flawed Nature of Mackie's Argument from Evil.

Graham Oppy begins by claiming that Mackie's logical argument from evil (which I will go on to explain) is refuted by Plantinga's Free-Will Defence. Oppy claims that arguments from evil are made up of three kinds of premises, the characterisation (traits of God), the datum (claims about the existence of evil) and links (In other words, inferences and premises which, through the characterisation and datum, attempt to assert the likelihood or necessity of God's inexistence).[14] Oppy notices that Mackie's argument is made up of two characterisations, a single datum, and two links.

---

[14] Oppy, 2017, ed. Meister and Moser, p.45

Mackie claims that if God exists, God is omnipotent.[15] He also claims that if God exists, God is morally perfect.[16] These are the two characterisations Mackie assigns to the God within his argument. As for the datum, Mackie claims that there is evil (suffering) in our universe.[17] This is his claim as to what evil is within his argument, what he means when he says "evil". This is a non-specific formulation of evil, as the argument does not specify any particular type of evil. The argument could focus on horrendous evils, or evils of a specific nature. His datum does not do this, it is simply a larger scope of non-specific evil. The two links relevant to the characterisations of God and to the datum of evil he sets out as follows. Firstly, he claims that good is opposed to evil in such a way that a good thing always eliminates evil as far as it can.[18] It is clear that the link he is making here is that God, who he sets out as a good thing in his characterisations through the attribution of moral perfection, must eliminate evil as far as it can. Secondly, he claims that there are no limits to what an omnipotent being can do.[19] The attempted link here is also clear, as he has characterised God as an omnipotent being, he is claiming that there is no limit to what God can do. From these premises, Mackie claims it is logically necessary that the Omnigod must prevent these evils as they have the ability to prevent all evil and wish to as they are morally perfect. Mackie claims that the existence of evil and the Omnigod characterised in this argument are incompatible, and as evil exists this Omnigod must not.[20]

To Oppy, and to myself in part, the great importance of the link Mackie makes within his argument is the theist must be encouraged to accept the links, that God must stop

---

[15] Oppy, 2017, ed. Meister and Moser, p.48

[16] Ibid

[17] Ibid

[18] Ibid

[19] Ibid

[20] Ibid

evil as he is morally perfect, and has the ability to because he is omnipotent. Mackie's strategy is to appeal to the theist and sway them from their original position through making formulations about the Omnigod he feels the theist may agree with. I think this is a clever strategy from Mackie. Supposedly, if the theist were forced to accept the link in such a logical argument from evil, then the argument would be successful, especially as the argument is deductively valid.[21] Unfortunately for this argument, the links emphasised so heavily by Mackie are rather easily repelled by the theist (it's easy to show how they very well may not be true), particularly (as Oppy writes), by Plantinga's free will defence.

Regarding the first link, that God must prevent evil as he is morally perfect, Oppy claims Mackie makes the mistake of assuming that the perfectly good being must eliminate evil as far as it can, rather than aiming for the perfect (or as good as possible) balance between good and evil. Oppy questions whether a perfectly good being would in-fact seek to eliminate all evil.[22] Many theists, such as Plantinga and Hick, attempt to provide reasons for why an Omnigod may not want to eliminate all evil, e.g., via the virtue of free-will or soul-making. Referring to my previous commentary on specific and non-specific formulations of evil, Mackie's non-specific formulation of evil (only stating that evil exists) harms his argument, as this non-specific formulation lends itself to criticism regarding the possibility of God allowing for the existence of evil. This will be discussed further in the Theodicy Based on Free Will section, but prima facie, Plantinga has an easier time providing an issue for the arguments from evil with non-specific formulations about evil, than, let's say, specific formulations about horrendous natural evils. He will have a very difficult time providing a criticism of an argument from natural evil. Mackie's second link is also very questionable. The omnipotent being

---

[21] Oppy, 2017, ed. Meister and Moser, p.49-50

[22] Oppy, 2017, ed. Meister and Moser, p.50

cannot do what is impossible. As Oppy says, if some goods require the presence of certain evils and the God in question aims to maximise the presence of these goods, then it would be impossible for that to be done without the existence of the required evils.[23]

From this, Plantinga is well positioned to levy a defence against this particular logical argument.[24] Plantinga's defence is specifically formed in order to attack logical arguments which make characterisations about the omnipotence, omniscience, and moral perfection of God, in conjunction with the non-specific formulation about evil (evil exists), as noted earlier. Plantinga attempts to provide premises which are logically consistent with the premises made by the logical arguments in question. The premise in question is that God creates and actualises a world in which every person and their essence suffers from trans-world depravity.[25] Trans-world depravity is the idea that throughout all possible worlds there is always some kind of moral corruption via free-agency or the state of reality, and via this all individuals through freedom will use the freedom in a morally bad fashion at least once in all possible worlds in which God made humans free agents. In a possible world where original sin exists, and sin is morally bad, then all are presumably born with the capability to commit wrong actions. The notion of original sin could be compared with the idea of trans-world depravity, as, according to both, we all share the notion of innate depravity. Trans-world depravity however implies that depravity is innate to any possible world. In addition to this, one could appeal to our cognitive weakness when compared with God and claim that we

---

[23] Oppy (2017, ed. Meister and Moser, p.51)

[24] I will be speaking about Plantinga's free-will defence here, but I will speak about it more in a future section, designed specifically to target defences.

[25] Oppy, 2017, ed. Meister and Moser, p.53)

could all be unknowingly committing evil acts which we cannot conceive as evil but God does.

For the theist to dispatch Mackie's logical argument, they must assert that one could still accept the characterisations of God Mackie provides yet contest the argument on the grounds that it does not successfully establish the logical necessity of its conclusion. Unfortunately for Mackie, for the reasons discussed above, there is both a lack of logical necessity in Mackie's links, and the ability is present to reasonably accept the premise offered by Plantinga in reply to Mackie's problem of evil.

To conclude this subsection, it is evident that Mackie's logical argument from evil (1955) does not stand up to the critiques of both atheists (Oppy) and theists (Plantinga) alike. Crucially for this section, it fails to sway the theist from their original position. I judge that this is due to two factors. Firstly, the links Mackie attempts to make are weak. Oppy shows this and with my own judgement I claim that the first link is easily avoided by the theist due to the possibility that the elimination of evil entirely is not necessarily in the characterised God's best interest. The second link is dispatched by the possibility that God must allow for certain evils to exist if they wish to maximise the presence of evil-requiring goods. God cannot eliminate said evils if they wish said goods to be present. Secondly, the weaknesses in these links partially comes from the datum Mackie uses in this logical argument from evil. Mackie makes a non-specific formulation about evil (the datum is only that evil exists). Due to this, theists may levy criticisms against the argument that work in virtue of this non-specific datum. I will not be taking Mackie's argument forward into deeper discussion on refutations, defences and theodicy due to these two factors.[26]

---

[26] For the purposes of saving space within this paper, I will not discuss other logical problems of evil with non-specific formulations about evil, J.L Schellenberg also attempts to revitalise Mackie's problem of evil.

From this argument, I feel that logical arguments from evil are not in a state by which they are currently able to sway the theist from their original position. Perhaps there could be more powerful logical formulations of the argument from evil, but this cannot be assumed. For now, as an atheist, I have failed to provide a logical argument against evil which sways the theist from their original position.

2.3 Rejecting certain Evidential Arguments from Evil.

2.3.1 Rowe's Original Evidential Argument from Evil.

As a result of the free-will defence and the subsequent defeat of Mackie's logical argument from evil (1955), the debate has shifted to the evidential problem of evil. Although not all focus lies on the evidential argument in today's landscape,[27] it is where the majority of the contemporary debate lies. This may be for a particular reason: as established with the example of Mackie, it is notably difficult to defend a logical argument from evil with non-specific formulations of evil. The logical claim is also more ambitious than the evidential. Philosophers agree that the evidential argument from evil is far easier to establish than the logical argument from evil. Although it would be damning to theists if a good logical argument were produced for the non-existence of the Omnigod, and likewise for atheists if a good logical argument were produced for the existence of the Omnigod, individuals like Graham Oppy claim that there is no good reason as of yet to think either side of the atheist-theist debate on God's existence has any substantial logical argument that can resist refutation.[28] The atheist side of the debate, in the context of the problem of evil, therefore moves towards the evidential claim to establish the improbability of God's existence.

---

[27] Take for example, J.L. Schellenberg who supplies their own logical argument from evil, and attempts to revitalise Mackie's (1955) logical argument from evil.

[28] Oppy, 2017, ed. Meister and Moser, p.63.

A key evidential argument is Rowe's evidential argument from evil (1979). Oppy (2010) summarizes this well, so I will largely be referring to his writings.[29]

Oppy notes that Rowe's original evidential argument from evil is as follows.

"1. There exist instances of intense suffering which an omnipotent, omniscient being could have prevented without thereby losing some greater good or permitting some evil equally bad or worse. (Premise)

2. An omniscient, wholly good being would prevent the occurrence of any intense suffering it could, unless it could not do so without thereby losing some greater good or permitting some evil equally bad or worse. (Premise)

3. (Therefore) There does not exist an omnipotent, omniscient, wholly good being."[30],[31]

(From 1, 2)

Although accepting the argument as valid, Oppy claims that these premises are controversial. Rowe does not consider premise two to be incredibly controversial, however Oppy notes that many individuals do on both sides of the debate.[32] Oppy however moves to discuss a particularly important minor premise.

"mp1. There exist instances of intense suffering for which we have found no greater goods (not that there are none) which would be lost or evils equally as bad or worse

---

[29] At the beginning of this paper, Oppy notes that he will only be considering key evidentialist arguments from evil, such as Rowe (1979) and Draper (1989). Although he notices other key evidential arguments from evil by Schellenberg (1993) and Drange (1998). A good discussion of these arguments is written by Howard Snyder (1996).

[30] Oppy, 2010, p.2.

[31] Note that Rowe's wording is misconstrued here, although he speaks as if the conclusion is logically necessary, he is intending to make an evidential argument not a logical one.

[32] Oppy, 2010, p.2.

which would be permitted if a perfect being were to prevent those instances of suffering. (Premise)"[33]

Rowe argues that this provides rational grounds, along with premise two, for disbelief in God's existence. Note that this is not a claim for the logical necessity that God does not exist, making it an evidential argument from evil. Rowe's argument is evidentialist as the aim is to establish the probable non-existence of God, not the necessary non-existence of God. There are still possibilities for the existence of God under these premises. The argument establishes itself under the evidence we have, it does not attempt to make logically necessary claims. Note in particular, the first minor premise. In regards to the instances, we have not found any greater goods. Rowe does not attempt to claim that there are none.

Oppy claims that the key issue with this argumentation is raised by the following question, which I will rephrase. If there are no X's found, can we deduce that there are no X's if the likelihood of finding X is very low? Oppy notes that if X is something invisible for example, just because we can't find X does not mean we have grounds to argue for its inexistence. In the case of Rowe's argument, if there are no goods to be found that justify the existence of the evil in question (notably a specified evil rather than non-specific), it is important to ask, how likely is it that these goods are to be found?[34] If these goods are not likely to be found in the first place, then the premises outlined previously do nothing to establish an evidential argument from evil. Take the following example: Imagine you live in an isolated village in northern medieval England. The animals you'd most likely observe are different kinds of birds, woodland mammals, and so on. Imagine a traveller describes to you one day the existence of a cobra. You search in this northern environment for the Cobra, but you cannot find one.

---

[33] Oppy, 2010, p.3.

[34] Oppy, 2010, p.3-4.

In this situation, how valid is the premise that there are likely no Cobras, if to this man, finding the cobra is not going to be very likely at all. In this original argument, Rowe provides no explanation of how likely it is to find said goods.

Wykstra (1984) and Bergman (2001) illustrate this, the former claiming that it is unlikely for us to find said goods and evils if we look for them, in the process claiming that a cognitively superior Omnigod will be able to observe, know and understand such goods which would be much more difficult for us to observe, know and understand. Perhaps we do not have the cognitive faculties to observe these moral goods, just as we do not have the ability to observe cell structure without a microscope. This rebuttal from the theist is a problem for Rowe as it highlights that if moral goods are not easy for us to detect, then the assertion that we cannot find them in a certain situation does not evidentially establish the unlikelihood of their existence. The Sceptical Theist standpoint illustrates well the problem with Rowe's first premise.[35] I will discuss Sceptical Theism much more in the section titled Sceptical Theism, however it is notable to see here how it provides a good reason to denounce mp1 prima facie. If one were to provide a substantial argument or suitable modification of the argument it could perhaps be taken further into the landscape of the debate as the argument may be worth holding, however, this original evidential argument from evil by Rowe is not one I wish to take further into the discussion for now as the argument does not avoid these surface level criticisms by theists. It is key for me, that an argument against evil must avoid making epistemological assumptions and claims without justification.

2.3.2 Draper's Evidential Argument from Evil.

Draper's (1989) also provides an evidential argument, one that is acknowledged both to have a foreboding appearance, yet is also relatively simple in nature.[36] Draper

---

[35] Oppy, 2010, p.4.

[36] Oppy, 2010, p.6.

sought an indirect inductively valid argument. The hypothesis of indifference claims that neither the nature or condition of sentient beings is the result of benevolent or malevolent actions performed by nonhumans (for example, the Omnigod). In Draper's evidential argument, he gives three examples of the occurrences of pain, these being the following:

1) Pain and pleasure experienced by moral agents, known to be biologically useful.

2) Pain and pleasure experienced by sentient beings that are not moral agents which is known to be biologically useful.

3) Pain and pleasure experienced by sentient beings which is not known to be biologically useful.

Draper proceeds to argue that the hypothesis of indifference is more likely correct than the existence of the Omnigod.[37] Draper claims through the conjunction of these occurrences of pleasure and pain it is more likely that the hypothesis of indifference is true and thus it is unlikely that God exists.[38] He establishes that although there is a clear and valid justification that an Omnigod could allow for the existence of pain which is biologically useful, Draper considers that the existence of pain that is not known to be biologically useful displays an evidential argument that God is more likely to be indifferent to suffering and evil than not indifferent to it.

To me, though, again it seems that this argument would fail to convince the theist,[39] and the most central criticism noted by Tooley (2021ed) is that it again fails to defeat the sceptical theist. One can look at Draper's argument and hold it true that it is more likely that the hypothesis of indifference is true than the existence or intervention of

---

[37] Oppy, 2010, p.6.

[38] Oppy, 2010, p.6.

[39] For many other criticisms, visit: Tooley, 2021ed, section 3.3.

the Omnigod. The sceptical theist however can appeal to the cognitive shortcomings of the human species in order to retain their theism. If the theist can continue to use sceptical theism to question whether the argument provides an adequate shift of the burden of proof, then the argument has failed to sway the sceptical theist. In the Sceptical Theism section, I will further analyse sceptical theism and, importantly, the obscurity principle, to investigate whether this provides a larger problem for the evidential argument from evil and whether it prevents the argument from being able to sway the theist who accepts sceptical theism.

3. Attempted Total Refutations of the Problem of Evil.

3.1 Introduction.

There are several ways theists attempt to combat the problem of evil, one can split these into three basic categories. The first of these categories I will discuss are the refutations, that is, attempts to display how the problem of evil does not even prove prima facie that the Omnigod and Evil are incompatible.[40] I will specifically be looking at Schlesinger's attempted refutation. Within this section I will be analysing what this refutation succeeds in doing, but more importantly, what it fails accomplish. After displaying that they do not succeed in completely refuting the problem of evil, I will move onto discussing theodicy based on free will.

3.2 Schlesinger's Attempted Refutation.

In order to discuss the refutation on the grounds of the possibility of the perfect world, I will analyse and critique the writings of George Schlesinger (1964). I will also refer to the critiques of Haig Khatchadourian (1966).[41]

To begin with the former, Schlesinger aims to establish that the discussion and refutation of the problem of evil lies within the concept of infinite and therefore ineradicable evil.[42] Before this, however, Schlesinger notes several religious attempts to refute the argument from evil which he believes do not work. Some of these include blind faith, human epistemological limitation, suffering as a preliminary to an ultimate good, and the idea of a Godly plan.[43]

---

[40] Tooley, 2021ed, Section 5 Introduction

[41] In regards to other criticisms of Schlesinger, see La Para (1965), Chrzan (1987), and Tooley (2019).

[42] Schlesinger, 1964, American Philosophical Quarterly (Volume 1, Number 3), p.244

[43] Schlesinger, 1964, American Philosophical Quarterly (Volume 1, Number 3), p.244-245

Schlesinger attempts to assert that God is not able to create infinite happiness as this is impossible for him. He asserts that God is unable to create a world that is void of suffering due to the limited happiness of people. As our happiness is limited, Schlesinger argues that humans will inevitably be unsatisfied and experience suffering which is better characterised by a failure to achieve the desired happiness. Therefore, as God is not able to create the infinite happiness humans seek, he is not responsible for this failure of humans to achieve satisfaction, and therefore not responsible for evil within the world due to the infinite capacity for greater happiness within the world. Schlesinger attempts to use this to claim that the amount of pain and joy present in the world is entirely irrelevant and cannot be introduced as evidence against the existence or moral nature of God.[44] Some aspects of this argument are persuasive: of course, it is logically necessary that an omnipotent being cannot do what is logically impossible (through virtue of the meaning of "logically impossible"). The question is however, whether this criticism provides a total refutation of the problem of evil, or simply a refutation against an aspect of it.

There are several routes one can go down to criticise Schlesinger's argument. At first, I would like to note that the actual existence of certain evils, in my view, dispatches the refutation of Schlesinger. If the Omnigod considered in the problem of evil is omniscient, then this God should understand the possibility of certain suffering through the creation of the human species. There is a possibility for human beings to have cancer in childhood and die an agonising death. If God is omnipotent then God could make it the case that certain conditions, such as cancer, are biologically impossible. If humans are the creation of the Omnigod, then I do not see how God does not have the duty to prevent certain horrendous suffering that is in virtue of human biology. Why

---

[44] Schlesinger, 1964, American Philosophical Quarterly (Volume 1, Number 3), p.246

is it that humans have the possibility in the actual world (metaphysically) to contract cancer at a young age, and die an agonising death?

In response to this criticism, one could point to Schlesinger's paper again, where he says that no yearning for an explanation warrants a confusion between the problem of evil and the problem of suffering.[45] This distinction being the problem of the existence of suffering in all aspects and the imperfect nature of our world, and the existence of specifically evil acts and events. From this, it is observable to me however that Schlesinger emphasises suffering as a result of the failure to achieve infinite happiness rather than dissatisfaction with evils within the world. This is an important distinction. Schlesinger considers the problem in an older sense. He discusses how his argument prevents simply the attribution of evil to an omnipotent and perfectly good being. A crucial aspect to my criticism is how one defines evil. I don't believe Schlesinger does enough to do this, since I could hold that human suffering is a part of what evil is. This opinion may change with an analysis of Khatchadourian's writings. The crucial thing to remember here is that Schlesinger wrongly focuses on the inherent suffering as a result of a lack of infinite happiness, rather than dissatisfaction with specific evils.

Moving on to other criticisms, Khatchadourian (1966) attempts to show that Schlesinger is not right to conclude that the problem of evil is not a genuine problem.[46] Something which Khatchadourian notes however, which I would like to address before assessing Khatchadourian's criticisms of Schlesinger's paper, is that the question of whether or not God could have created man with a capacity for biological suffering cannot be answered without a greater understanding of the possibility of biological existence without the corresponding existence of biological suffering. I believe there is

---

[45] Schlesinger, 1964, American Philosophical Quarterly (Volume 1, Number 3) p.246.

[46] Khatchadourian, 1966, Rel. Stud, 2 p.109.

some value to this point. If it is not possible for a human to exist, biologically, without the actual possibility[47] of biological suffering, then my claim of certain biological occurrences providing a basis for a circumvention of Schlesinger's argument is void.[48]

Moving on to Khatchadourian's criticism of the thesis specifically, he first defines Schlesinger's thesis as the argument that it is impossible for God to create infinite happiness and therefore the amount of pain in the world is entirely irrelevant and cannot be used in a case against God's moral character. Khatchadourian first notes a criticism made also by La Para (1965). This criticism notes that even if there is no upper logical limit to happiness (something which Khatchadourian later disagrees with), this does not eliminate the basic problem actually facing the theist. Experience tells us that there is suffering as well as other positive evils in the world, and this appears to be incompatible with the Omnigod who is defined as perfectly good, omnipotent, and omniscient. To clarify, by positive evils I mean evils that could perhaps be seen to give benefits to our existence. For example, minor character-building evils. I will speak more about these kind of evils in the Theodicy Based on Free Will section. This gives rise to the problem of evil regardless of Schlesinger's conclusions on happiness. This is a persuasive objection. Two more criticisms are also offered and these in tandem with Khatchadourian's other criticisms establish that Schlesinger's attempt at a total refutation of the problem of evil fails.

---

[47] Khatchadourian clarifies that Schlesinger is speaking of actual possibility rather than logical possibility for human suffering in his article.

[48] From these comments about the requirement for greater knowledge of biology regarding a criticism based on the actual possibility for biological suffering, Khatchadourian moves on to a crucial observation of Schlesinger's discussion, much of his discussion is centred around the notion of unnecessary suffering however Schlesinger does not provide a characterisation of this. This is very relevant to the ideas of necessary suffering, to be discovered elsewhere in the thesis.

Regarding the second criticism, Khatchadourian notes that Schlesinger maintains that there are no prima facie cases for the finite possibilities of happiness. Khatchadourian notes that this statement from Schlesinger is extremely vague, and is stated without any form of evidence. What arises here is the question, what exactly does finite happiness mean? Is finite happiness defined relative to a perfect state of happiness? Khatchadourian notes that our biological and psychological make-up as people appears to place limits upon our experiences for happiness as human beings. He also notes that the nature of the universe seems to place limitations upon happiness available to us as human beings. It is also noted how possibilities for increasing happiness, in some situations, increases possibilities for unhappiness.[49] For example, if I take the last cookie in the jar, I am happy and enjoy eating that cookie. But as a result of this, someone else who wanted said cookie may find themselves disappointed when they see that the cookie jar is empty. Due to these kinds of considerations, one could prima facie argue that there is not an infinite number of possibilities for happiness. Khatchadourian essentially notices also, that certain types of happiness do not align with the morally perfect nature of God. God cannot experience happiness through morally bad action. Khatchadourian argues that Schlesinger's claim that "the greater possibilities for happiness are not finite" is that, and I quote from Khatchadourian, "if there were no suffering or any other evils in the universe, it would be unreasonable to ask why God has not made all men perfectly happy." It is this kind of suffering and its relationship with the finite nature of happiness which gives rise to the problem of evil.[50]

Moving onto the third criticism made by Khatchadourian, it is noted that it is paradoxical for Schlesinger to state that moral responsibilities which apply to humans (e.g., to do

---

[49] Khatchadourian, 1966, Rel. Stud, 2 p.114

[50] Khatchadourian, 1966, Rel. Stud, 2 p.115

as much as one possibly can to make others happy) cannot logically apply to an Omnipotent being. He regards it as "utterly strange that it could be morally wrong (to not make others happy), in the case of imperfect beings but not in the case of the most perfect being."[51] Khatchadourian argues that God's creation of a state of affairs where there is a finite possibility for happiness would allow people to conform to his "perfect goodness", however God's failure to create this world is incompatible with the concept of his omnipotence, omniscience, and perfectly good nature. This criticism is reached via the claim that Schlesinger's assumption concerning the moral responsibilities of God fails especially if one, such as himself, could argue for the finite nature of happiness. In my view he successfully does this in his second criticism.[52]

To conclude, Khatchadourian successfully argues that several of Schlesinger's points are incorrect. Firstly, him and La Para establish that even if the possibilities for happiness were infinite, this does not suggest that there is a problem to be looked at considering the nature of suffering, aside from happiness and its infinite or finite nature. Regarding the second and third criticisms, Khatchadourian successfully argues that there are prima facie grounds for arguing for some kind of finite happiness, and through this successfully argues that to say that the Omnigod doesn't have the moral responsibility to maximise happiness here is paradoxical.

To finish this section, I would like to return to something previously discussed. Earlier I claimed the following: "I believe there is some value to this point. If it is not possible for a human to exist, biologically, without the actual possibility of biological suffering, then my claim of certain biological occurrences providing a basis for a circumvention of Schlesinger's argument is void." Perhaps, in hindsight, there is a way of altering my criticism of Schlesinger. Khatchadourian speaks of causes for finite possibilities for

---

[51] Khatchadourian, 1966, Rel. Stud, 2 p.115-116

[52] For a more detailed account of how exactly he reaches this point, read pages 116-119

happiness. In extension, rather than commenting on the failure of God to alter biology in such a way, the occurrences of two-year old's getting cancer and dying agonising deaths seems to limit the potentiality of happiness since these individuals will never be able to experience happiness associated with a mature lifestyle (the happiness of adult independence, education at high levels, etc). Therefore, I am forced to instead temporarily abandon my own criticism, and use Khatchadourian's successful criticism. In my view these criticisms levied by Khatchadourian provide a solid argument as to why the attempted refutation from Schlesinger is not successful in refuting the problem of evil.

4. Theodicy Based on Free Will.

4.1 Introduction.

Within Theodicy, there are two central theodicies which rely upon the existence of free-will. These are the Soul-Making Theodicy championed by John Hick and the Free Will theodicy championed by philosophers such as Alvin Plantinga. This chapter will provide a summary of these theodicies, address criticisms towards them, and apply them to this paper. The first of these theodicies I will address is the Free Will theodicy and then I will move onto the Soul-Making Theodicy.

Throughout the section, I will be analysing whether these theodicies successfully sway the atheist away from the problem of evil or change the landscape of the discussion around the problem of evil. By this, I mean whether or not the theodicy impacts the discussion to a point where the burden of proof is successfully shifted off the theist, and whether a challenge is put to the atheist that must be defeated in order to retain the problem of evil.

4.2 The Free Will Theodicy.

4.2.1 Summary of the Free Will Theodicy.

The Free Will theodicy can be defined as the attempt to justify the suffering of the innocent via the existence of Free Will. It is clear here that the suffering of the innocent is particularly the example of evil this theodicy addresses. Within the context of my thesis, I choose to interpret this as horrendous suffering of the innocent. Rather than an innocent person facing minor discomfort such as stubbing their toe on the table, I choose to interpret this as an innocent person facing horrendous evils, such as genocide, as to relate better to the earlier parts of this thesis.

This theodicy relies upon the libertarian principle of free will. It perpetuates the idea that the free will we possess is of great value. Due to such free will, God cannot force us to perform any action, as to do so would conflict with our free-will. Any action not

forced upon us by outside influence is free. Those who support this theodicy also maintain that a world in which agents possess free will is superior to a world in which there is no free will. It is better for God to create this world with evil in which we possess free will than to create a world with no free will. In one sense, the lack of a free will may be considered a greater evil than necessary evils in a world which contains free will by an individual which champions this theodicy. A wide array of philosophers have attempted to formulate such free-will theodicies; St Augustine, Irenaeus, and Alvin Plantinga are the most notable.

4.2.2 Concerns with the Free Will Theodicy.

This theodicy and its champions can be met with some immediate concerns. Firstly, one who champions this theodicy must supply a valid argument for the existence of libertarian free will in our actual world. Secondly, they must maintain that this libertarian world is necessarily superior. If they cannot, then the claim that God chose to create this world as it would be superior to another possible world falls apart. The final immediate concern is the issue that this theodicy, at first glance, only addresses the horrendous moral evils in this world. How does this theodicy interact with evils not caused by the actions of ourselves, such as certain biological diseases and natural disasters?

The second concern is the idea that the libertarian claims that God believes the world in which we have free-will is necessarily superior to a world without free-will. The libertarian must show that the world with free-will is indeed superior, and provide answers to examples levied towards them in which free-will may not be superior. The first response to the idea that free will is superior is to ask the question, should one ever intervene in libertarian free-will? Several instances within our society would seem to establish that it is at least very plausible that it is considered (commonly) morally good to intervene in heinous moral actions. If one's self isn't put in mortal danger, then would many people claim that one should allow an individual to massacre or rape?

How can the individual which advocates for the free-will theodicy justify the fact that God should allow free action rather than preventing actions such as rape and murder? Two responses could be offered.

The first is the idea that without free-will and morally heinous actions such as rape and murder being allowed to happen, there would be no goods which arise from this, and that ultimately some of these goods provide the basis for the argument that this world is superior to the world in which rape and murder are prevented. Is preventing a rape a good so valuable that it must exist to create the ideal world? Is the existence of free-will to rape necessary in order to create this good and therefore the ideal world? In a world in which rape does occur, and the prevention of rape occurs, do the goods of compassion for the victim and empathy/sympathy for the victim justify the existence of the evil that is the occurrence of rape.

My opinion on this is no. Although preventing rape is a good, it only exists in virtue of how bad a rape is. The question I would ask the libertarian is the following. Why is a world which provides individuals the opportunity to rape, and individuals the opportunity to attempt to prevent rape but not always successfully, better than a world in which God can prevent rape entirely? This idea will be returned to within the section on Soul Making Theodicy, as this can provide an example of a response to this point.

The second response to this is also an attempted response to the concern that the free-will theodicy does not address natural evils. The theodicy neglects evils that are not seemingly caused by moral agents, such as earthquakes, tsunamis, etc. Some writers, such as C. S. Lewis (1957) and Alvin Plantinga (1974a) have noted that evils such as morally heinous actions and natural disasters may be due to the immoral actions of supernatural beings.

Plantinga (1974a, 58) begins this by claiming there are two lines of thought that proceed from the questioning of God's compatibility with natural evil. The first is that

less moral goods may have been produced if these evils were absent. It is important here to note that just above I have provided an argument as to why this claim does not sway the atheist and is weak. The second is a more traditional approach. Plantinga notes that St Augustine attributes much of the evil in the world to the existence of Satan. Is there a mighty nonhuman spirit that creates the natural evil in our world? He also notes that Augustine maintains that it is supposedly not within the power of God to create a favourable balance between good and evil with respect to the action of non-humans.

The crucial error in Plantinga's writings here is that he states that it is not required for any of those Augustinian claims to be true, they must only be compatible with the first line of thought, that is, that less moral good could be produced if these natural evils did not exist. Through this mistake, the argument loses its grounds to convince the atheist. The question the atheist may ask Plantinga is, upon what circumstances they should accept the theodicy if there is no levied empirical evidence supporting the conceptual idea which supports it? If there is no evidence for these supernatural beings which cause natural evil, then the atheist need not accept them as grounds for the existence of evil. Just how does a theologian prove the existence of supernatural beings to an atheist? Due to the fact these supposed beings are supernatural, one cannot. Accounts made for their existence do not convince the atheist as they are not based on valid empirical premises and arguments. As the existence of the supernatural being is not argued for successfully, and there is also no empirical evidence to suggest that these beings cause natural evils in the first place, the atheist need not accept the Augustinian theodicy explained by Plantinga. As the first of Plantinga's claims does not stand up to the atheist's criticisms either, Plantinga fails to sway the atheist.

A secondary objection to note is the question whether a natural being has free will if events are forced upon it, and through this, certain outcomes are forced upon it. If a

supernatural being forces an earthquake within an ancient city, the individuals in stone buildings have no choice but to be crushed by the falling buildings. They are not free here. Is this compatible with this idea of free will supposedly given to us by God? Surely if supernatural beings were able to necessarily impose certain events upon certain individuals this would not be free will under the definition of it assumed by this theodicy.

To note also, Plantinga (1974a) questions whether it is obvious that God could have indeed created a world with less moral evil. He states that perhaps it is not within God's power to create a world with a better mix of good and evil. Plantinga could maintain this, yet several atheists will maintain that there are at least three logically possible worlds which are superior to our actual world in their good-evil balance.

It is clear here that the Free Will theodicy has many criticisms that it does not successfully counter. The burden of proof here is not therefore shifted onto the atheist. The free will theodicy is not successful in changing the landscape of the discussion around evil to the point that philosophically competent atheists will abandon their positions and accept theism. The free will theodicy however has an alternative that is slightly more challenging for the atheist to neglect. This is the Soul-Making theodicy championed by John Hick (1966).

4.3 The Soul Making Theodicy.

I mentioned earlier that this theodicy can provide a response to the question I asked previously, "Why is a world which provides individuals the opportunity to rape, and individuals the opportunity to attempt to prevent rape but not always successfully better than a world in which God can prevent rape entirely?" This section will explore whether or not this theodicy is successful in changing the landscape of the problem of evil in such a way which forces individuals to abandon it. Firstly, I will summarise the theodicy, then I will address some criticisms and offer my responses.

4.3.1 Summary of the Soul Making Theodicy.

The soul making theodicy is championed by John Hick. It is influenced by Irenaeus and Augustine. The idea is that a world which contains evils is justified as God has designed an environment in which people can grow in spirit and goodness and reach communion with God.

A key judgement made in this theodicy is that a good which is not the result of free action and not worked towards with accompanying growth in spirit and goodness is not as good as a good which is worked towards in this way. If one attains goodness through religious doctrine, by mastering temptation and so on and so forth, this good is richer than that which is produced by faculties that are innate. A good which comes from a place of costly personal effort is the good that God wants us to attain, a superior good to the good that comes from no personal investment. Is being morally good truly good if we have not worked towards it?[53]

Hick (1966) suggests that as this soul-making process is superior to innate goodness, God would be justified in creating a world which allows for soul-making. The world must have evils in order for us to attain the superior good and attain communion with God. The world is not meant to be free of suffering as this would prevent soul-making.

4.3.2 Concerns with the Soul Making Theodicy.

Although as I mentioned earlier, this theodicy is more challenging to the atheist than the basic free will theodicy, there are still many concerns with this theodicy. If these are not addressed then the landscape around the problem of evil does not change. The three core concerns here are the following. Firstly, is the existence of horrendous sufferings always justified within the world of soul making? Secondly, how does this

---

[53] Hick, 1966, p.255–256.

theodicy interact with the problem of animal suffering? Thirdly, how does this theodicy handle the horrendous suffering and deaths of young people?

To begin with the concerns, Eleanore Stump is the most notable philosopher to ask whether horrendous evils are always justified within this soul making world. She claims that "spiritual chemotherapy"[54] is a hopeless view to take as horrible end-of-life illnesses do not discriminate who they fall upon, although these illnesses must be viewed as suffering ordained by God in order for individuals to undergo soul-making. She also questions whether certain instances of suffering provide a good environment for the development of character in relation to resisting temptation and attaining oneness with God. The crux of this criticism is that if suffering occurs in instances in which it is not needed for soul-making, and it does not occur when soul-making is needed, then the idea of soul-making seems to be a coincidental thing to happen in the world that God has created rather than a necessary opportunity in the world God has created.

Another criticism is based around consciousness and soul-making. Say someone undergoes an illness that actively prevents soul-making, or destroys aspects of their consciousness, then how is this individual capable of retaining moral lessons and spiritual growth. Under certain problems such as dementia and Alzheimer's, they may not be capable of such growth. Damage to the brain is also something that could be considered here. A key question here is whether the soul is the consciousness or whether it metaphysically depends on it in some way. If the soul is the consciousness, then presumably if our conscious minds are damaged then spiritual growth is jeopardised through no fault of the individual in question. Take for example dementia. Dementia is an evil, but cannot be justified by soul-making theodicy if the soul is metaphysically depended on consciousness as dementia itself would prevent soul-

---

[54] Stump, 1993b, p349.

making if the soul and consciousness were metaphysically co-dependant. If this is the case, then why does God allow for dementia to exist? If the soul is does not metaphysically depend on the consciousness, this would denote that the soul could not access the conscious and perceptions of the individual in question, making learning from observation and learning impossible for the soul. If it is linked in such a way as the two-share knowledge and capacity, then it is possible that damage to one may cause damage to the other.

Although personally I am unsure how the soul if it exists may relate to the conscious, there are various examples how the soul could presumably be damaged by events that are of no fault of the individual in question. Also, the question remains, does the soul exist? If the soul does not exist, then the conscious may be the placeholder here. Is it our consciousness with my ascend from our bodies to reach communion with God? If so, then damage to it through events the agent has no control over may jeopardise oneness with God.

If the possibility exists for the spirit or consciousness to be damaged in such a way, then God has created a world in which individuals are prevented from soul-making and do not have the opportunity to freely attain the good via growth. If such situations exist, why does God not prevent them? The champion of the soul-making theodicy must be able to establish that soul-making cannot be jeopardised in this way. It is questionable here whether the burden of proof lies on the champion of soul-making to prove the existence of the spirit in the first place or the burden of proof lies with the atheist to display that the spirit is able to be damaged by events the agent cannot control. Regardless, this concern is too great not to mention.

Secondly, one could question why God would allow animal pain to exist. Throughout his discussion around animals, Hick (1966) notes that we cannot be directly aware of their perceptions and their experiences, yet also notes that there are certain concepts

around pain and perception that animals are aware of.[55] From this we can see that Hick accepts that a deer running in a blazing forest would in fact be in horrendous pain and suffering. If this deer cannot be aware of God, and soul-making however, what is the point in this deer's suffering? Hick notes that human beings have a one-ness with animal kind. That humans and animals work in harmony. Humans are the stewards of animals and in return animals exist in order to assist us in our soul making through their life and suffering. What is the purpose of animal suffering and life? Hick notes that it is possibly to understand that the creation of man is divine, and that we as higher beings are worthy of this soul-making journey.[56] This escapes me as an atheist. What does it mean for humankind to be divine? This justification does not sway the atheist away from the question of animal pain if the atheist does not believe in the concept of divinity as the theologian defines it.

The third concern is the example of horrendous suffering and death in young individuals. Of course, death from cancer can be painful and horrible. Within the soul-making theodicy there is no credible account to justify why children endure diseases which bring terrible pain and terrible death. Where has the opportunity been for children to grow in spirit to reach communion with God? These children die young, have less temptation to learn how to grow spiritually, and do not have the opportunity to become aware of the vast moral landscape in our world. Has God provided the opportunity for these children to grow in spirit? The champion of this theodicy must demonstrate to those who have criticised it that the child is still provided an opportunity to grow in soul, otherwise their claim that God made the world in such a way to allow for soul-making is incorrect, as terminal illnesses in these children denies them of that opportunity. The same also applies to children who have gone through horrible

---

[55] Hick, 1966, p.309-318.

[56] Hick, 1966, p.309-318.

suffering and murder at the hands of adults. Their free-will is taken away from them as they die without a say and they are not given the opportunity to grow in spirit by God. Why is it that these sufferings are allowed by God when they prevent the very justification of evil that the soul-making theodicy relies on? The soul-making philosophy cannot justify evils which actively disprove its value.

In conclusion, although this theodicy is more credible that the basic free-will theodicy, there are still overwhelming concerns that must be addressed in order to sway the atheist away from the problem of evil. The existence of this theodicy does not change the landscape of the debate, it does not sway atheists, as the theodicy has not dispatched crucial problems surrounding it on the topics of child suffering, animal suffering and the possibility of damage to the spirit.

4.4 Do Theodicies Based on Free Will Sway the Atheist?

It is my conclusion here that the landscape of the problem of evil remains unchanged by the Theodicies discussed. Both the Free Will Theodicy and the Soul Making Theodicy have too many concerns and problems which prevent them from being able to shift the burden of proof onto the atheist, which prevent them from being able to sway the atheist, and which prevent them from truly changing the landscape of the debate.

The Free Will Theodicy relies very heavily on the successful establishment of libertarian causal metaphysics which is problematic and does not successfully satisfy criticisms to events which are out of the control of the agent such as natural disasters. The burden of proof is not shifted when the theist attempts to prove the existence of supernatural beings which cause said events, nor by the claim that God is unable to create a world that has a superior good-evil balance to our actual world.

The Soul Making Theodicy fails to consider several examples of suffering which demonstrate that the world was not simply created to give us the opportunity to

complete soul-making. The examples of possible damage to the spirit, needless suffering, and the existence of child suffering and animal suffering actively demonstrate that suffering does not only exist in the world to provide the opportunity for soul making. The champion of this theodicy does not provide adequate responses to these concerns and so the theodicy is not successful in swaying the atheist or changing the landscape of the problem of evil.

5. Sceptical Theism.

5.1 Introduction.

In Dougherty (2016), an overview of several variants of sceptical theism is provided. He describes all of the following types of sceptical theism. First, the epistemic principles approach, then the general cognitive limitations approach, then both the broad and focused modal/moral scepticism approaches. In this section I will be describing and discussing the models themselves as well as various replies and responses. I will then conclude, establishing how Sceptical Theism relates to the conclusions I have made up to this point.

Dougherty begins with a basic description of what Sceptical theism is, influenced by Alston (1996, 1998) and Howard-Snyder (2009, 2018). Within this, the problem of evil is simply divided into a Theological Premise, an Empirical Premise, and a Conclusion. This is to simplify the large scope of the problem of evil into a simple concept that sceptical theists can attempt to attack. The way this is presented in Dougherty (2016) is as follows:

Theological Premise: Necessarily, if there is a God, there are no pointless evils.

Empirical Premise: There are pointless evils.

Conclusion: There is no God.

It is noted by Dougherty that there are two central ways in which the empirical premises can be justified.[57] Firstly, through an inference from the obvious existence of inscrutable and pointless evils, these evils being evils that no one can discern a suitable reason for their occurrence. The second is that the premise could be defended by reference to examples of obviously unjustified evil. Earlier in this project, I covered

---

[57] Dougherty, 2016ed, section 1.1.

William Rowe's evidential problem of evil, which attempts this second method to justify the epistemic premise. Sceptical theism's aim is to attack this empirical justification, as Dougherty summarises, "Here is why that name has been applied. Sceptical theists point out that absence of evidence is not always evidence of absence."[58] This is a point I discussed earlier, regarding our not seeing an invisible X as being grounds for the lack of X.

To divulge more on sceptical theism, Dougherty notes that sceptical theists tend to accept the "No Weight Thesis". This is the idea that considerations pertaining to evil do not disconfirm theism. Sceptical Theists differ in their radicalism when it comes to this thesis.

The "Non-Starter Thesis" claims that evil does not provide prima facie reason against theism that would need to be countered by sceptical considerations. Van Inwagen claims that our lack of ability to discern moral truths and truths about possibility provides heavy grounds for Sceptical Theism.[59]

To explain, our ability to discern moral truths clearly displays our cognitive shortcomings in comparison to God. We have no reason to accept any evidential premise from an argument from evil. Alston claims that our cognitive resources are "radically insufficient to provide sufficient warrant to accepting (the main premise of the evidential argument),"[60] to the point that the argument collapses. In relation to this, Wykstra at first claimed that evil provides no evidence for atheism but now admits that the evidence from evil tilts the evidence for God's inexistence in favour of the atheists. Arguments from evil could possibly appeal to a human intuition that the Omnigod may

---

[58] Dougherty, 2016ed, section 1.1.

[59] Van Ingawen, 1995, p.94-95

[60] Alston, 1996, p.98.

likely not exist. This is a stance that Wykstra considers needs to be approached and not ignored.

Bergmann extends this line of argument. He claims we have no reason to think the goods we are aware of represent actual goods,[61] Dougherty notes that Bergmann proceeds to support the no-starter thesis, "evil does not even provide a prima facie reason against theism that would need to be countered by sceptical considerations."[62]

Although most sceptical theists hold at least the first of these theses, there are many different ways in which sceptical theism is levied at evidential arguments from evil. The first of these I will explain is the epistemic principles approach.

5.2 The Epistemic Principles Approach of Sceptical Theism.

The epistemic principles approach is centred around attacking the evidence provided in the evidential argument from evil, in regards that it does not satisfy a key epistemic principle necessary for the argument to defeat the no weight thesis discussed previously. One of these principles is CORNEA (Condition of Reasonable Epistemic Access). CORNEA states that a person is only entitled on the basis of a cognised situation to claim that something appears to be the case if it is reasonable for the person, given their cognitive faculties, that if this the premise is not true, would the observed situation be different? In cognised situation S, person H can only believe P reasonably, given their cognitive faculties, that S changes if P is different. The cognised situation is not however only dependent on sense experience, it is also dependent on scientific knowledge. I cannot sense black holes, but science dictates that they are the case. With CORNEA in this case, we know black holes do not exist

---

[61] Bergmann, 2001, p.288-p.300.

[62] Dougherty, 2016ed, section 1.2.

if experiments with dictate the existence of black holes provided results which would only be the case if black holes don't exist.[63]

Discussed in a previous section, this can be applied to Rowe's evidential argument from evil. As noted by Oppy and Wysktra, it is not reasonable to believe in the absence of a God based on the absence of goods that balance the evils we find in the world. Of course, as is already established, this argument fails if the possibility of us finding these goods is low. According to the principle of CORNEA, Rowe has not provided an appropriate evidential argument as Rowe does nothing to establish that there would in fact be equivalent goods if there was a God. He does not suitably argue that P is the case, as he does not establish that S changes if P is different. An important question though, related to this argument, is whether it is within the cognitive faculties of a human to argue in the first place that S may change if P is different within this situation.

According to Wykstra, in his dialogue with Russell, a key notion behind CORNEA is the obscurity principle.[64] This is the idea that if there is a God who has good reasons for allowing the suffering that occurs, we are unlikely to know what these reasons are. If this is true, it provides a strong backbone to the epistemic principles approach.

Dougherty notes from Wykstra that if the Obscurity premise is true, then a good reason to doubt common sense epistemic justification can be levied. One can doubt the principle of credulity; this being the principle that if it seems that P then apart from further consideration, probably P. One can also use obscurity to doubt the premise that if it seems to S that P, then S has reason to believe in P.[65]

---

[63] Note that CORNEA isn't sense-dependent.

[64] Dougherty, 2016ed, section 2.1. From Russel and Wykstra, 1988.

[65] Dougherty, 2016ed, section 2.1.

Obscurity would be one of the following considerations mentioned in these premises according to Swinburne (1998). Wykstra moves to defend the obscurity principle against this using the parent analogy.

"Just as we expect a small child to be blind to the reasons an adult has for allowing her to suffer justified pain, so we should expect that we will be blind to the reasons God has for allowing our justified suffering."[66]

Dougherty uses a different principle levied by Howard-Snyder to establish the "deceiving" nature of Wykstra's parent analogy. Howard Snyder argues that "we cannot see x" justifies believing that there is no x only if we have no good reason to doubt the likelihood of seeing X if there was one.[67]

The difference between Howard Snyder's and Wykstra's principles is that Howard Snyder requires that one not be in doubt. If someone has a good reason to doubt that X exists, then they can do so under Howard Snyder's principle. Wykstra essentially requires not that one has good reason to doubt X but a good reason to believe in the lack of X.

5.3 Common Objections to The Epistemic Principles Approach and Replies.

There are three criticisms of CORNEA that I will explain and provide my own judgement upon. The first of these is that CORNEA is false. Two types of arguments have been devised to attempt to show this.

---

[66] Dougherty, 2016ed, section 2.1. From Wykstra, 1984, 88. Also from Russel and Wykstra, 1988, p.135-146.

[67] Dougherty, 2016ed, section 2.1.

One could perhaps argue that CORNEA is satisfied and that sceptical theism should not therefore be accepted. If there were a God then reasons as to why evils may be allowed would be more transparent. A separate kind of parent analogy and a certain transparency principle could be levied in support of CORNEA. According to Dougherty (2011), the parent analogy proposed in favour of CORNEA does not take into account the apparent power and love of God. He proposes a different parent analogy, and following from such we can move to argue for the satisfaction of CORNEA. The reverse parent analogy is as follows.

"Just as we would expect a loving parent with the power to do so to make a necessarily suffering child understand the reasons for her suffering, so we would expect a loving God who clearly has the power to do so to make us able to understand the reason for our suffering."[68]

This version of the parent analogy appeals more to traditional theistic accounts of God's apparent all-loving nature. It can be said that it provides a more robust account, beyond simply omniscience, of the properties of the Omnigod and one could believe due to such that it is more appropriate than the previous parent analogy. Using this parent analogy, individuals who would argue CORNEA is satisfied would adopt the transparency principle. This is the idea that the probability that we would see God's reasons for allowing evil if said reasons exist is high.

The reply to the satisfaction of CORNEA based on the reverse parent analogy proceeds as follows. Dougherty claims that with respect to the problem of evil, when a hypothesis makes an event likely to occur and the event doesn't occur, then the hypothesis is disconfirmed. And if a hypothesis makes it very probable that an event

---

[68] Dougherty 2016ed, section 2.2. Dougherty notes that Russel and Rowe defend this alternative parent analogy.

will occur, and it does, then it confirms the hypothesis. If the hypothesis doesn't make the event probable or improbable, then the hypothesis and event are probabilistically independent. This can be applied to the problem of evil. If the hypothesis (All Loving God) exists, and this makes it likely that God would help us like this loving parent, and then that doesn't happen, then this all-loving parent-like God likely does not exist.[69]

I have gripes with this "important structural feature" noted by Dougherty here as I do not believe it is correct to reduce the problem of evil to this. The Sceptical theist could easily provide arguments as to why this parent-like God might not intervene and help us out.

Moving on from these considerations, Dougherty uses comments from Rowe (1991) to establish the reply.

"It would be sufficient to weaken the inference from P [no good state of affairs we know of is such that an omnipotent, omniscient being's obtaining it would morally satisfy that being's permitting some horrendous evil] to Q [no good state of affairs is such that an omnipotent, omniscient being's obtaining it would morally justify that being in permitting some horrendous evil] to show that if there were an omnipotent, wholly good being who created our world, then the goods in virtue of which he permits [some horrendous evil] would be as likely to be undetectable by us as to be detectable by us."[70]

From this quote we can observe that the route is to continue to attempt to support epistemic distance and lack of cognisance in comparison to God in an attempt to refute the account that CORNEA is satisfied. If a theist were to provide an account of divine

---

[69] Dougherty, 2016ed, section 2.3.3.

[70] Rowe, 1991, p.88.

hiddenness, they could attempt to refute the transparency principle. Apparent reasons for divine hiddenness could be used to defend the obscurity principle discussed above.

Both the Obscurity principle and the Transparency principle seem epistemically weak to me. I believe the sceptical nature of sceptical theism prevents us from being able to levy a criticism based upon the premise that CORNEA is already satisfied that the sceptical theist will consider. Through this I move onto my second set of criticisms, based around the sceptical nature of sceptical theism.

5.3.2 Closure Principles.

Some arguments state that CORNEA violates a plausible closure principle. These principles state that when a proposition has some form of epistemic status, and bears relevance to another proposition which is a logical consequence of this first proposition, it therefore has the same epistemic status as the first. The relevant plausible principle is as follows.

"A principle popular among friends of closure is the following: If one knows p and competently deduces q from p while retaining knowledge of p, and one comes to believe q on that basis, then one knows q."[71]

Laraudogoitia (2000) and Graham and Maitzen (2007) have all argued that sceptical theism and this closure principle are incompatible, and posit that CORNEA is false based upon the intuitive nature of this closure principle. According to Laraudogoitia, many normal theists would hold the following closure principle over sceptical theism.[72] This closure principle being, "if it is reasonable for S to believe p, and S knows that p entails q, then S is committed to the reasonableness of q." If it is reasonable for the theist to believe in God, the theist is committed to all that God entails.

---

[71] Dougherty, 2016ed, section 2.2.1

[72] Due to the epistemic principles that sceptical theism violates. Laraudogoitia, 2000, p.81-86.

CORNEA posits that agnosticism proceeds from the acknowledgement that pointless evils exist. In this situation, it is easy to misinterpret the word "Agnosticism". In this case, agnosticism simply refers to agnosticism with respect to perfect knowledge rather than agnosticism in the religious sense. Cornea defies the closure principle as, of course, those who use it cannot deduce Q (inferred premise) from P (primary premise) as upon scepticism one cannot perfectly acknowledge P as it's not perfect knowledge in the eyes of the sceptic. The contradiction is that sceptical theists ignore these sceptical principles when they retain their idea that God exists. They abide by closure principles when they attempt to argue for the existence of God, yet default to an agnostic nature and defy the same closure principles when attempting to refute arguments from evil. It is the prevention of the inference of q from p and the agnosticism regarding p that breaks the closure principle. Although this criticism is notably valid in my eyes, it seems unlikely to convince the sceptical theist to me. From an outward perspective, they do not seem likely to adhere to the principles of epistemic closure, as they default to sceptical thinking. We cannot infer the existence of God based upon what we know about the existence of evil, as the obscurity principle prevents the inference here.[73]

5.3.3 The Nature of Scepticism.

Russell notes that CORNEA leaves itself open to Cartesian scepticism. He considers the following application of Cartesian scepticism. We are a brain being kept alive in a vat, and being sustained by nutrients and so on. If it was not the case that I was a brain in a vat, under the example, would one have reason to think things would look different if we were not a brain in a vat? According to the hypothesis, no. CORNEA appears to lead into the sceptical conclusion that we do not know that we are not brains in vats. Dougherty notes that the objections of Russell and McBrayer depend

---

[73] Dougherty, 2016ed, section 3.2.1.

upon considering CORNEA as a counterfactual conditional.[74] This consideration is resisted by Wykstra and Perrine (2011). The idea is that if the reason for p can be outweighed by the Obscurity principle, then the criticism of scepticism fails. As discussed at the end of the last subsection, what argument can be provided to sway the theist away from the obscurity principle? Why should the sceptic defer from the obscurity principle? They seem content in using the obscurity principle in order to maintain belief that God exists.

If the sceptical theist adheres to the Obscurity principle, then unfortunately we remain in a situation where we cannot sway the sceptical theist to the idea that an Omnigod is likely to not exist through an evidential argument from evil. If we cannot sway the sceptical theist from the principle that if there is a God who has good reasons for allowing the suffering that occurs and keeps us cognitively unaware of these reasons, then we cannot demonstrate any kind of likelihood for God's inexistence based upon evil that will sway the sceptical theist from their position. This leaves me at an endpoint for sceptical theism. The sceptical theist has the ability to resist being swayed by the evidential argument from evil if they maintain this point.

---

[74] Dougherty, 2016ed, section 2.3.2.

6. Part One Conclusion: Is the current landscape of the problem of evil at an impasse?

Throughout the first part of this dissertation, I have aimed to discern whether the current landscape of the problem of evil is at an impasse. As an atheist, it could perhaps be easy to be carried away and retain the premise of the superiority of the argument from evil as proof for the fact or likelihood that the Omnigod does not exist, however the purpose of the first two sections is to establish that certain formulations and examples of arguments from evil are weak and do not render themselves immune to the theist retort. As discussed earlier, for example, unspecific formulations of evil seem to be less effective at establishing an argument from evil, as there are many minor evils whose existence can be justified through the net positivity of their existence, and are therefore a necessity for creating the most positive world. There will not be a possible world where humans are incapable of stubbing their toe on a table. Personally, I would not consider such things evil, so I view specific formulations around evil to be more damning to the theist. Also, Mackie's logical argument from evil emphasises the difficulty in establishing a logically necessary argument for the non-existence of the Omnigod which Plantinga cannot easily refute. Rowe's evidential argument from evil can also be refuted by sceptical theism, as can Draper's. The critiques of these arguments display that there are flaws which predictably leave these arguments vulnerable to the criticisms they both face. Even though I'm an atheist myself that informally holds the problem of evil in high regard for a justification for my atheism in my personal life, philosophically the current examples of the problem I have examined fail to sway the theist from their beliefs in the Omnigod.

Moving on from this, it is also clear to see that the theist fails to sway the atheist who holds that the problem of evil is a successful strategy in establishing the unlikelihood of God's existence. From section three onwards I approach these theist responses

and display how they fail to provide a strong enough rebuttal to sway the atheist. As an atheist myself, it would be easy to get carried away and hold these responses unsuitable and retain the problem of evil as the superior stance, however as discussed previously, the current shortcomings of arguments from evil prevent me from doing this. Even though the theist may decide to hold their responses in high regard, I have shown that these responses are not adequate enough to sway the atheist and destroy the impasse of the landscape around the problem of evil.

In section three, I have adequately displayed an example of how a total refutation fails to sway the atheist from their position that the Omnigod doesn't exist based upon arguments from evil. I have displayed how there are many criticisms which demonstrate the atheist need not accept this total refutation. In section four, I have demonstrated that free-will theodicies fail to sway the atheist from their position also. Free will theologians fail to shift the burden of proof onto the atheist in such a way that will change the landscape of the problem of evil.

In section five, I move on to sceptical theism. The theist who holds sceptical theism as a response to the problem of evil will not be convinced by the problem of evil due to the nature of scepticism. The obscurity principle provides a justification that the sceptical theist will continue to hold unless a logically necessary argument from evil is levied towards them.

It is clear within the landscape of the problem of evil that there is an impasse. The atheist who continues to hold the problem of evil in high regard is not currently able to sway the theist away from the belief that the Omnigod exists, yet the theist is not able to sway the atheist away from the problem of evil. Sceptical theism is key to the impasse as the theist who holds this belief will not be swayed by any evidential problem of evil, and there is no logically necessary argument from evil that currently exists. From observing both sides of this current landscape, at this point the aim to debate the other party away from the position that the Omnigod does or doesn't exist

56

around the problem of evil seems largely fruitless. If the atheist or theist seeks to convert the other or shift the other's position in such a way then their attempts, unless significantly improved, are not going to be successful.

From this first part of the dissertation, I move forward. I suggest there is a more fruitful and productive approach to be had to this problem. Rather than establishing that the Omnigod does or doesn't exist, it will be more fruitful to ask what we can take away from the reality denoted by the existence of evil, and possible existence of the Omnigod. In the next part of this dissertation, I will propose a different approach to the debate around the problem of evil. Rather than arguing for the necessary or likely non-existence of the Omnigod, I will attempt to argue with pragmatic principles that we cannot solely rely on God's intervention to prevent evil events. An important consideration must also be made in leu of this impasse. What is a common goal of the atheist and theist? What can I appeal to in order to make a broader approach which solves the impasse? The desire to prevent evil and avoid it lies in the theist and the atheist.

Part Two: A Pragmatic Argument against Reliance in God to Prevent Horrendous Evils.

7. The Pragmatic Twist.

7.1 Introduction.

From Part 1 of this dissertation, I have displayed that the debate around the problem of evil is at an impasse. Discourse on both sides fails to sway the other. The continuation of the debate in the evidentialist sense seems fruitless, unless the impasse is destroyed. There are a few solutions one can foresee to the impasse. Pragmatism and the work of Hume seem to be the solution to this impasse. Within this section I will introduce the reader to the pragmatic maxim. I will also explain how pragmatism is an appropriate solution to scepticism, and in particular the sceptical theism that prevents the atheist from being able to sway the theist in the discourse around the problem of evil currently. I do stress however that I will also define the direction I wish to take pragmatism is not the same as William James (1896) takes it. Although James claims that one should use pragmatism in an effort to make a leap of faith into belief in God, I will critique this, and then in the next section I will combine the pragmatic maxim with Humean thought in order to distinguish my own pragmatic approach.

7.2 Pragmatic Maxim.

Pragmatism in the sense I will define it was introduced by William James and Charles Sanders Peirce. As described by Catherine Legg and Christopher Hookway in the *Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy* (2021), the key ideas of the movement

originated from a metaphysics club which met in Harvard in the 1870s.[75] The two prior mentioned philosophers, Peirce and James, participated in the discussions that would come to form this philosophical movement. Peirce would develop the ideas discussed in his publications from the 1870s, and James would increase the prominence of the ideas via his lectures in the 1890s. They labelled this philosophical movement the pragmatic maxim.[76] William James published a series of lectures on identifying what he called the present dilemma of philosophy and its solution.

In his observations of the history of philosophy, there is a great clash of temperaments between what he calls "tender-minded and tough-minded" people.[77] To him, the tender-minded prefer a priori principles and rationalism whereas the tough-minded people focus wholly on empirical facts and evidence. This immediately brings to mind the dispute between rationalism and empiricism. James notes we are then left with an empirical philosophy that is not religious enough, or a religious philosophy that is not empirical enough (1907: 15f).[78] The basis of this claim is evident from part one of this dissertation. To the theist, the empirical evidential approach of the atheist in arguing that God cannot exist in tandem with evil distances itself from the possibility of a supernatural being through the naturalist principles of the atheist empiricist. To the atheist, the strategy from the theist to adhere to the obscurity principle and practise sceptical theism is clearly not empirical enough due to the defiance of empirical closure principles.

Of particular importance, James claims the challenge is to present a philosophy that has a scientific loyalty to the facts along with a confidence in human values whether it

---

[75] Legg and Hookway, 2021ed, introduction.

[76] Legg and Hookway, 2021ed, introduction.

[77] Legg and Hookway, 2021ed, section 1.

[78] Legg and Hookway, 2021ed, section 1.

be the religious or romantic type. Pragmatism is presented as this reconciliation between these opposing sides. It is the so called "mediating philosophy".[79] Importantly to my thesis, he claims that this can be the solution to religious debates. "Practical difference" may eliminate the idle nature, or impasse, of certain disputes.[80] The mediating philosophy of the pragmatic maxim is that which I will be using to attempt to overcome the impasse discussed in part one of this dissertation.

To best sum up James's pragmatism, we must observe the famous thought experiment of the squirrel he presented in his lectures. Picture in your mind a visit to the mountains, a squirrel is hanging onto one side of a tree trunk whereas a person is standing on the other side. No matter how fast the human runs around the tree the squirrel moves around to prevent being seen. They always keep the tree between themselves and the man. Does the man go around the squirrel? James proposes that the answer depends on what you mean by "going around". If you mean passing by each direction on the compass then the answer is yes, but if you mean to go in front, right, behind, and left of him then the answer is no. Once the term is disambiguated then the answer of the dispute presents itself.[81]

To look specifically into what is named the pragmatic maxim, Peirce claims we must consider what effects we conceive the object of our conception to possess.[82] Our conception of these effects exhausts our conception of the object; further, the background effects behind an object inform us about how to behave practically around said object. If we conceive that a piano is falling from above us, we know that pianos are heavy, so we must move to avoid being crushed.

---

[79] Legg and Hookway, 2021ed, section 1.

[80] Legg and Hookway, 2021ed, section 1.

[81] Legg and Hookway, 2021ed, section 1.

[82] Legg and Hookway, 2021ed, section 2.

As Hookway and Legg explain, we clarify a hypothesis by first identifying the practical consequences we expect should it be true. Hookway and Legg provide an example to clarify what is meant by this statement.[83] For instance, if one wants to break a window, we need an object that is hard not soft as we look for laws which govern the behaviour of hard things and we understand that the effects of those are that they have the power to shatter things whereas soft things do not.[84]

Based on the observable effects of our world, we know that throwing a brick against a window is more likely to break it than throwing a sponge. A brick is heavy and strong and we have witnessed bricks break things and resist objects. We don't witness it compress when we press it against something. We use them to build houses and they are strong and durable. In contrast, sponge is soft and compressible. We witness it in padding for the transportation of objects and in trampoline houses to break falls. We witness the sponge move as we press it against objects to clean them. We know that an object is more likely to break glass if it is heavy than if it is soft. We can use the pragmatic maxim to understand that a brick is more likely to break a window when thrown than sponge because of the effects and attributes we observe from each of them. The following quote by Hookway and Legg describes the nature of this maxim well:

"Pragmatism, described by Peirce as a 'laboratory philosophy', shows us how we test theories by carrying out experiments in the expectation that if the hypothesis is not true, then the experiment will fail to have some predetermined sensible effect."[85]

The question may remain, how exactly does pragmatism provide a solution for scepticism? I mentioned in the last chapter and earlier in this one that I must turn to

---

[83] Legg and Hookway, 2021ed, section 2.

[84] Legg and Hookway, 2021ed, section 2.

[85] Legg and Hookway, 2021ed, section 2.

this movement as a solution to the problem of evil due to the effect of sceptical theism and the obscurity principle on the debate surrounding the problem of evil. Hookway and Legg (2021) can help us understand why with their account of pragmatist epistemology.

The roots of the movement of pragmatists against scepticism can be found in 'Consequences of Four Incapabilities', an early paper by Peirce (1868). Peirce claims here that Cartesian scepticism is a pathology, and there were four main problems with the teachings of modern philosophy at the time. These four problems are as follows. The first is that one can and should try to doubt all their beliefs; second, that the individual consciousness is the test of what is certain; third, that single chain influence has replaced scholastic argumentation; concluding in the fourth, that Cartesianism renders itself as philosophically dangerous. What exactly is meant by "single chain influence" will become clear in my discussion of this to follow.

Pragmatists have responses for all of these problems according to Peirce. To begin, the first problem is a philosophical maxim of the Cartesian movement. One must throw out all of their previous beliefs in order to then move forward and attain *Scientia* or certain knowledge. Descartes' advocates for this in his meditations. It includes the claim that we cannot trust our sense experience.

To the pragmatist, there is little use in practising this Cartesian maxim. This is perhaps due to the fact that the previously mentioned "effects of objects" are all perceived and developed with our senses. According to Peirce, when practising this maxim, we do not in fact really doubt all our beliefs. It is a kind of fake doubt. It is a self-deception. If we intend to practise the Cartesian maxim of doubting all our beliefs that aren't Scientia, the empirical observations about objects and their effects still lurk within the background of our thoughts and decisions. Certain beliefs are unavoidable and will remain within one's psyche in spite of philosophical arguments they may face. We still have *Naturalistic Background Assumptions*. Even if we claim that we must doubt a car

63

exists, even if one practises the Cartesian maxim, they will not walk into an oncoming car as the belief they will get struck and killed lingers in the background. Due to the lingering of our beliefs on the effects of objects, the practise of the Cartesian maxim is pointless to Peirce.

Regarding the second problem, the pragmatist claims that this teaching strays from normal realistic practise. In society when we hold a belief it could be argued we hold our belief until it is proven untrue, these beliefs are informed by the common observations of effects. This is what prevents those judgements about the effects of objects from being eliminated from our thought, realistically we will hold them as true until they are proven false. If we have the naturalistic background assumption that stone is hard, we will regard this as true until it is proven otherwise. Although Cartesian scepticism claims that the individual rationale is the determiner of truth, the communal aspect of society prevents this from being the case. Scientific hypothesis does not suggest absolute truth but a communal conclusion that is most likely to be true unless proved otherwise. For example, people will often default to the scientific hypothesis of gravity when determining how much they think something might fall. This conclusion is based upon the communal hypothesis about gravity and communal thoughts about the effects of objects. In philosophy, this communalism prevents an individual from realistically declaring their individual consciousness the arbiter of truth. More on the relation of truth and truth in a pragmatic sense will come in the next section. This is a convincing argument in favour of the pragmatic maxim. A communal philosophy based upon our cognitive faculties in relation to the naturalistic background assumptions we have about objects informs action in our daily life. The philosophy is not concerned with fruitless debate concerning problems that are at an impasse, such as the problem of evil. The philosophy is concerned with taking our common naturalistic background assumptions and proceeding to make an argument of how one should act as a result

of these. James uses the pragmatic maxim in order to argue for a leap of faith into belief in God.

7.3 James's Pragmatic Theism.

In James's *The Will to Believe,* James claims life contains living, forced and momentous decisions. Deadness and Liveness in a hypothesis vary with the original thinker. A hypothesis may be live to some and not to others. James gives an example based around the Mahdi.[86] Say you are a Christian-born person who has not had contact with the Islamic faith. Take that your nature inclines you to believe in the Christian faith you were brought up in. The hypothesis of the Mahdi may not resonate with you due to your Christian background, whereas it may resonate much more with someone who has grown up as a Muslim and in an Islamic culture. James argues that this demonstrates that a large aspect of a hypothesis is its relation to the individual thinker.[87] Certain hypotheses are living to some and dead to others (an explanation of this will come soon). From pragmatism that I have described previously, this seems to be largely dependent on the background assumptions one has about effects, based on experience. James then moves to consider "options".

In a collection of options, a hypothesis is considered genuine if the option is live, forced and momentous.[88] The decision between two separate hypotheses may be either living or dead, they may be forced or avoidable, and then they may be either momentous or trivial.[89] A living option is when both hypotheses are live. For example, to somebody who is brought up in a Christian culture but is unsure about the existence

---

[86] James, 1896, p3.

[87] James, 1896, p3.

[88] James, 1896, p3-4.

[89] James, 1896 p3-4.

65

of God, both the hypothesis of agnosticism and Christianity are live as the individual may consider both as possibly true.[90]

Regarding the forced/avoidable distinction, an example of a forced option though is the option to fully accept X, or to not fully accept X. The choice is forced because to avoid the decision is impossible, as to avoid the acceptance of X one is actively choosing not to fully accept X, which is one of the options. There is no possibility of not choosing an option here, therefore it is forced.

Finally, the momentous decision is one that is made at a single time and once it's gone, under our current understanding of time and events it is impossible for the same identical decision to be pressed upon you again. James gives the example of being invited on a specific north-pole journey. The exact same journey will not occur again, so the decision is momentous. In the momentous decision, the impact of which hypothesis you choose is unavoidable and cannot be delayed; the impacts must be faced.[91]

James proceeds to argue in the face of claims made by those such as Clifford, that belief in things cannot solely be based upon fact. [92] He claims that not only facts influence our beliefs but also a variety of other factors. It is normal for a human to have their beliefs reinforced by states such as fear, hope, prejudice, passion, partisanship. I could also add factors such as conformity and identity. It would be naïve according to James to deny the influence these things have on our beliefs, especially those that cannot be attained or disconfirmed by logically necessary arguments. James gives the example of democracy.[93] To expand on what he claims, perhaps we hold democracy

---

[90] James, 1896 p3-4.

[91] James, 1896, p3-4.

[92] James, 1896, p8-11.

[93] James, 1896, p9-10.

as the correct political system, the right hypothesis in an option, because we identify with those who use it, or fear authoritarianism, or hope for opportunity under the chances the system provides us, etc. We cannot simply expect people to make faith decisions based upon the domain of facts when they are so closely tied to these variables.

One variable that James argues affects our beliefs notably is the prestige of the hypothesis.[94] This can be seen in the prior example. Picture you are within a democracy. The majority believes in democracy. Those running the country likely believe in democracy. Those in authority likely believe in democracy. You may believe in democracy due to your faith in the faith of the societal majority aka the prestige hypothesis. The same hypothesis, however, may not have the prestige it does in another society. Democracy has more prestige in a democracy than it does in an authoritarian state.

From all these variables, James claims that a large aspect of what we regard as true (non-logically) is a kind of passionate affirmation backed up by society. He also claims we like to think we know truth because it puts our society in an apparently preferrable situation, but we have no reply to the pyrrhonistic sceptic if we take this route. There are matters such as these that cannot be solved by logical debate. If the sceptic asks "well, how do you know Democracy is the right hypothesis?", the response we give cannot be a response of logical necessity, it will likely result from one of these psychological variables.

Clifford might call these unreasonable as they are not absolutely factual, but James claims that even Clifford would be prone to similar aspects. Most scientists do not accept Christian theories even if they do not have the factual evidence to directly

---

[94] James, 1896, p9-10.

disprove them, as the prestige hypothesis in the scientific community is presumably to hold atheism.

Originally James claimed one might look at Pascal's wager with disregard. Pascal's wager is a pragmatic argument that dictates it is more pragmatic to believe in God than to not due to the risks/rewards of believing and not believing in God. You risk far much more in not believing in God than you do in believing in God.[95] James uses this argument to demonstrate that Pascal's wager is never one that is meant to logically convince one, simply one that is meant to be the "clincher" and a last chance argument through its existence in the realm of these kind of unreasonable non-logical arguments. Pascal's wager simply offers, to the reader, the suggestion that it is wiser to believe in God and avoid infinite punishment (and have the possibility of infinite good in heaven) than to be an atheist and risk the possibility of infinite punishment. It has no bearings as to the evidential likelihood of God's existence; Pascal's views will convince people to believe in God on pragmatic terms.

7.3.1 James's Thesis and Preliminaries.

James claims in his thesis that our passional nature (and variables we discussed earlier) must decide on an option between propositions whenever said option is a genuine option (living, forced, momentous) that cannot be decided on intellectual grounds (logical argument).[96]

James declares himself an empiricist by the nature of how we strive to come to know things, but accepts that objective evidence cannot be provided in support of certain beliefs due to the sceptic, so he turns to the difference in doctrine between the empiricist and the rationalist. He notes that when empiricists give up the doctrine of servitude to the objective evidence, we do not give up the quest of truth itself or hope

---

[95] James, 1896, p10-11.

[96] James, 1896, p11-12.

in it. James moves on to note that when as empiricists we give up the doctrine of objective certitude, we do not thereby give up the quest of hope or truth itself.[97] The strength of an argument is what it leads us to decide and have hope in. The total drift of thinking to establish it as a prestige option and confirm it to those who interact with it. This is as close to "truth" as we can attain in response to scepticism. Rather than being dogmatic, we must accept that we cannot know the truth which the sceptic denies from us, but we can hold justified faith in the truth that we support with our psychological variables, one which ideally continues to hold itself as "true" to as many as possible based upon the psychological variables.[98]

7.3.2 James's Main Argument.

James develops his main argument across the last 3 sections of his essay. He claims we have a passional nature (non-logical, influenced by psychological variables) influencing us in our opinions, this is regarded as inevitable and as lawfully determined. There are two steps that James argues are necessary if we are to avoid dupery and to attain truth. In making certain decisions, we attempt to avoid dupery (being "duped" as James puts it, or fooled) and attain truth.[99] When the option of attaining truth is not momentous, we can throw the chance of gaining truth away to save ourselves from believing falsehood until the arrival of objective evidence.

We need not answer trivial questions when we risk making a mistaken belief. The sceptic is satisfied with this state of things, but this can only exist for trivial questions, not momentous ones. James claims that our passions however can come to override technical rules when it comes to a momentous decision.

---

[97] James, 1896, p17-18.

[98] James, 1896, p17-18.

[99] James, 1896, p20.

James proceeds to note that decisions concerning moral questions cannot wait for objective evidence. For such questions, in striving for the truth which James defines, we must consult our heart with these questions. Our belief here is decided by our will according to James, as pure intellect cannot make decisions on its own. [100]

James finally moves to claim that a decision upon belief in God can be live, forced, and momentous. The sceptic or hard-line atheist does not need to proceed further here as, to them, the options are not live.[101] There is no conceivable way to the hard-line atheist that God exists due to their background assumptions and psychological variables, but this is not the case in agnostic or Christian folk. The decision of believing in whether or not God exists is momentous because from the final establishment in a belief in God or not, the individual possibly stands to lose some infinite amount of religious good. James explains that this good can be seen as the infinite pleasure within Pascal's wager. It is a forced option too as by the end of our lives within this world view to the agnostic or Christian must make this decision; they cannot escape the doors of an apparent afterlife of heaven or hell through waiting and delaying.

In conclusion to this summary, James argues that a pragmatic argument for theism exists. He claims that it is right for one to believe in God through the adherence to what he calls a genuine hypothesis, one that is live, forced and momentous. For options that are not momentous, a hypothesis will not be reached as the psychological tendency to avoid mistakes in our belief will trump the search for truth. Within the realm of God, the option of choosing to believe in God or not is not trivial but momentous. Infinite pleasure and pain are possibly at stake within this choice, whereas the impact of choosing for example whether or not to believe in an obscure atomic theory does not have these stakes. James argues that therefore it is just for a dogmatic empiricist

---

[100] James, 1896, p20-24.

[101] James, 1896, p26-29.

to claim belief in God due to the live, forced and momentous nature of the decision. Whether or not it is objectively true is irrelevant.

7.3.3 Evaluation: James's Empiricism, Psychological Variables, and the Flaw of James's Hypothesis.

From the summary I understand that James is arguing for a method for an agnostic or Christian individual to make a leap of faith into a belief in God. Upon pragmatic principles he provides space for the religious believer to find belief in the face of the sceptics. Despite what I regard to be an incredible establishment of the power of psychological variables, a different kind of truth which is not of concern to the sceptic, and the idea of the genuine hypothesis, there is a flaw in James's arguments which I argue ensures it does not solve the impasse currently present in the debate around the problem of evil. In this section, I will explain the arguments of James with respect to the idea of psychological variables and a different kind of truth which I hold in high regard, and then I will move to explain the flaw that prevents the argument from solving the current impasse concerning the problem of evil.

Within James's argument is the distinction between empiricism striving towards objective evidence and the empiricism he holds himself. In the face of scepticism, James does well to notice that the standard empiricism concerned with objective evidence does not stand. The sceptic can simply dispatch such views if there is no objective evidence in support of their beliefs. Objective evidence seems overwhelmingly difficult to attain, even within science. James defines that the purpose of his empiricism is to strive for truth and for the superiority of the argument. However, I have established that there is an impasse with respect to the problem of evil, largely based upon the presence of sceptical theism. Is there a pragmatic argument to dissuade sceptical theists? Perhaps not. But in the case that there is not, I am

encouraged to argue for a pragmatic thesis which operates with respect to the problem of evil. The essential takeaway from James's argument that will assist me greatly in levying a pragmatic argument for a genuine hypothesis is his establishment of psychological variables. He notes that, realistically, many aspects of our psychology affect our decisions, such as fear, hope, conformity, anxiety of being false and the need to be proved right. Without the aid of a formal argument, it is simple for me to say that everyone has these aspects of their mind impacting decisions they make. In daily life, we all do things for a reason. That reason is ultimately motivated by our psychological state. We might not text back a crush because we are scared of rejection. We might get up at 6pm in time to get to work because otherwise we fear we will be late, or we might do it because that's the time everyone at your office gets up to travel to work. Such choices are based greatly upon our psychological variance and our background assumptions and are not solely based on logical argument. The importance of background assumptions cannot be understated. The issue of the impasse within the debate around the problem of evil not only lies with the existence of sceptical theism, but with the atheist's adherence to naturalism. The atheist adheres to naturalism because it fits within their background assumptions. One of these background assumptions is that all beings are natural. God however is a supernatural being, so the atheist does not hold belief in God's existence because no being that is not natural can exist according to them. They believe this due to their background assumptions that fuel their belief in naturalism. James's argument relies upon one accepting the hypothesis as live to convince them. The hypothesis is not genuine to the naturalist atheist. James also notes that an individual cannot believe a dead hypothesis at will, so atheists cannot force themselves to suddenly disbelieve naturalism and regard the God-hypothesis as live.

As the atheists cannot force themselves into this leap of faith, there is no common ground between atheists and theists. The pragmatic argument for theism from James

simply operates to justify the theists' belief in God. The argument does not mediate and solve the impasse.

It is clear to me here, that James's pragmatic argument is not the way forward as it does not meet the philosophical standards he has set out. Rather than arguing for a leap of faith, I will argue for pragmatic decision- making based upon the cognitive faculties available to atheists and theists alike.

8. Hume and Pragmatism.

8.1 Introduction.

In the last section, I introduced the pragmatic maxim as a suggested solution to the impasse in the current landscape of the debate concerning the problem of evil. Although I claimed that James's approach was the wrong approach, many principles of the pragmatic maxim and even principles within James's 'The Will to Believe' are strong. Namely, the existence of naturalist background assumptions, the impact of psychological variables on decision making, the spirited pursuit of truth (to strive to get as close to it as one can), and the idea of the genuine hypothesis. As stressed throughout the last section however, my approach is not to use pragmatism to make a leap of faith for the existence of God, instead it is the use of pragmatism to justify decision-making based upon the cognitive faculties available to us. Within this section, I will introduce the reader to Hume's epistemological humility and response to scepticism, which will aid me in the establishment of my approach. I will then turn to the action of petitionary prayer and the idea of supernatural background assumptions, and with the pragmatic maxim and the work of Hume I will determine whether or not faith in miracles is reliable. I will then move forward from this, and contest the claim by the theist that they trust supernatural background assumptions.

8.2 Hume's Humility.

O'Brien (2022) gives us an insight into the humility of Hume. Wayne Riggs describes the ability to be "aware of one's fallibility as a believer" as a feature of open-mindedness and as an epistemic virtue (Riggs 2010). Hume also regards this approach as a virtue in a philosopher. Thinkers must always regard that they could indeed possibly be wrong. Although Hume regards this to be the case, it is not to such a degree that he cannot hold any belief that is not Scientia, as nature has determined us to make judgements in our lives. As we will see, even in the face of powerful

sceptical arguments, we cannot help but have certain beliefs about, for example, the existence of the external world. Such sceptical arguments, though, encourage a type of modesty, a degree of doubt and a wider capacity of human understanding. This relates to the impasse as one could take these Humean thoughts and perhaps engage in modesty and doubt in regards to thoughts concerning the problem of evil and the impasse. O'Brien (2022) notes that Hume accepts that there are certain metaphysical questions we do not have the capacity to answer. The atheist could ask themselves if they could indeed be wrong that there is no supernatural realm. The theists could ask themselves whether they can be sure their supernatural background assumptions are indeed reliable.

Hume does note however, that this doubt should also be maintained in our interaction with the beliefs of others. We must not have 'too easy faith' in the testimony of others. One should strive for this self-awareness in one's own mind and also awareness in the credulity of others. O'Brien (2022) claims the cultivation of this virtue can lead to "good sense" and a clear head. From this I suggest an unclear head may be one influenced strongly by psychological variables, what Hume calls passions. This will become important later in regards to self-deception.

O'Brien (2022) claims that Hume suggests that such scepticism (in the Humean sense) should be applied to testimony in all aspects of life, and therefore to miracle testimony. In Hume's *Dialogues concerning Human Understanding*, Philo claims that we must be thoroughly sensible of the limits of human reason. For Hume, this can be extended to the epistemological standard. Within the narrow limits of human reason, does the testimony conform to the limits of cognition. In O'Brien (2022), Hume's argument against miracle testimony is summarised in two chapters. The first of these chapters focuses on the epistemological standard testimony must reach in order to be considered true. Two types of evidence must be weighed in order to believe the truth of a particular testimonial report. These are the intrinsic likelihood of the event having

occurred and the likelihood that the speaker is mistaken or not telling the truth. We shall see the relevance of this with regards to miracles below.

8.3 Petitionary Prayer, Supernatural Background Assumptions and Miracles.

Humean thought has provided an argument for the pragmatic path I choose to make, that involving trust in our cognitive faculties and our naturalistic background assumptions. I must however now take this into the example of religious action. The path I take requires me to establish that a common use of naturalistic background assumptions is more reasonable than faith in supernatural background assumptions. Theists may have the background assumption that God may intervene in evil.[102] If faith in supernatural background assumptions is reasonable, then the path I take will not unite theists and atheists as theists may choose to act in relation to supernatural background assumptions whereas atheists may not. In order to explore this issue, I will first define petitionary prayer and its expectations. I will then use Humean thought to establish an argument against miracle testimony. Finally, I will levy an argument against the theist who claims that reliance in supernatural background assumptions is reasonable using Humean thoughts on self-deception and psychological variables.

What is petitionary prayer? Davison claims that people pray for many reasons, sometimes to give thanks, sometimes to give praise, and sometimes to ask for things. Petitionary prayer is the last of these three examples: prayer from the petitioner with the purpose to ask for something from God.[103] Davison continues to explore the philosophical discussion behind this concept. He asks the question, "what would it

---

[102] Theodicies justify the lack of God's intervention in evil, so those who hold theodicy as true admit that God may not intervene in evil.

[103] Davison, 2017ed, section 1.

mean to say that a petitionary prayer to God had been effective?"[104] Although those such as Phillips (1981) and Brümmer (2008) claim that these prayers make a difference in regard to the state of those offering them, the more important thing for us is the effect these prayers have on God. Do they make a difference to God? Does God hear and notice these prayers? Does God even exist to hear them? If God does hear them, does God act upon them? The last of these questions is of particular importance to the philosopher. According to Davison, philosophers hold petitionary prayer as effective if God brings about what is requested of them by the petitioner. It is key to note here that a correlation between what you ask for and what occurs is not enough to establish whether or not God brings about what has been asked for. God must have actually brought around what is asked for, rather than for it to simply happen to occur.

From this we currently understand the following: that petitionary prayer requests action from God, a supernatural being. So, one making a petitionary prayer believes in the possible existence of the supernatural being, believes that supernatural beings can be affected by natural events, and believes that supernatural beings may interfere with the natural state of the world. Prima facie however, in order to establish that God does in fact answer petitionary prayer, the individual must provide an argument for the possibility of miracles. Hume, though, provides an argument against the reliability of these miracle testimonies.

8.4 Hume on Miracle Testimony.

Bailey and O'Brien (2007) provide a summary of Hume's argument against miracle testimony. According to Hume, no miracle testimony is currently reliable enough to regard as true due to these factors. Notably, miracles contradict natural law and established testimony of natural law. O'Brien and Bailey use the following example. If Mary has always been honest and correctly identified water and wine as separate

---

[104] Davison, 2017ed, section 1.

things, and if our common naturalist background assumptions dictate that water and wine are two separate things, then testimony that claims transmutation between these things is possible must be weighed up against the testimony based upon naturalistic background assumptions.[105] How likely is it that our collective experience about water and wine is true *versus* the contradictory testimony of transmutation?[106] This argument is applied to miracles. When miracle testimony is levied against the naturalist testimony that it contradicts, the evidence for the naturalist testimony is stronger. Past experience and common naturalistic background assumptions support the naturalistic testimony. The testimony in a miracle does not supersede this. Hume's account of testimony goes on to support this. Although there is no philosophical justification in testimony in the sense of Scientia, we are naturally inclined to believe in the testimony that is more coherent with our common naturalistic background assumptions.

What is more likely? The truth of testimony based upon natural background assumptions? Or the truth of miracle testimony? Testimony based upon naturalistic background assumptions is founded in our experience. We testify about the natural world from our sense experiences with natural objects and the naturalistic background assumptions that we have developed. Most people can testify that getting hit by a car in the road will hurt, as most people have the naturalistic assumptions that inform them of this. When reflecting on the likelihood of this testimony being true, I cannot conceive of a reason why significant numbers of people would lie about this. The commonality of this testimony and the support of it by naturalistic background assumptions posit that it is more likely to be true. In contrast, miracle testimony isn't based on naturalistic background assumptions. In many cases, it contradicts testimony concerning natural things. If I have the naturalistic background assumption that people sink when they

---

[105] Bailey and O'Brien, 2007.

[106] Bailey and O'Brien, 2007.

attempt to walk on water, and this naturalistic background assumption is reliable, then I am not justified in believing the testimony that God may have caused the miracle of water walking. Hume regards this to be the case with all miracle testimony, not just the example I have provided. Hume does not regard miracles as impossible, but does regard miracle testimony as having insufficient evidence in comparison with testimony concerning natural things that the miracle testimony contradicts.

The first part of the question is solved: we regard the evidence for miracle testimony as insufficient. The next part remains, though. What is the likelihood that those who give miracle testimony are lying or not telling the truth, purposely or not? Hume holds that self-deception and the passions establish it is more likely that the theist is (in some sense) lying than telling the truth when they give miracle testimony.

8.5 Hume on Self-Deception.

If we've concluded from the previous section that miracle testimony does not meet Hume's epistemological standard and miracle testimony does not support faith in miracles, why do certain theists practise petitionary prayer? Are theists confident that God will help them in spite of the lack of epistemological support for this? Do theists act as if they are confident in God's intervention? Hume's claim is that theists will discover that they do not truly believe that God will intervene in the natural affairs of the world.

One of the key reasons for this is self-deception: "The usual conduct of men belies their words, action oftentimes defers much more to disbelief than conviction."[107] Dennett gives the example of masturbation in Christianity.[108] If God apparently doesn't want you to masturbate, and God is watching you, why would you ever masturbate? Prima facie, most people masturbate. Do these Christians really believe God is

---

[107] O'Brien, 2022.

[108] Hume's Critique of Religion

watching them? Perhaps. But do they act as if they believe God is watching them? No, it seems not. O'Brien claims there are different levels of self-deception and occasionally contradictions between beliefs and actions become apparent.[109] One might call these contradictions hypocrisy. Many religious practises are entered into with a cold and languid heart according to Hume (1779). In other words, with a disingenuous nature. Although of course one might not always act in this self-fraudulent and hypocritical fashion in relation to their belief. One might truly refuse to masturbate as they feel God might be watching them and disapproving of their actions. Regardless though, individuals with an apparently strong conviction in their belief often contradict their belief in one way or another.

Another aspect of belief that Hume attacks is belief from fear and other psychological variables (O'Brien calls these passions, following Hume). Hume claims that religion arises from anxiety, fear and dread. For example, the fear of what lies after death, the anxious appetite for happiness, and nervousness when looking to the future. Of course, in the fear of death, other psychological variables such as hopefulness can result in a belief in God. A theist may fear death immensely, but may believe in God due to the hope that the doctrines of the Christian afterlife are true, or the fear that hell exists.[110] One could perhaps also view this as self-deception based upon psychological variables. Perhaps the fear of death and other examples of psychological variables leading to religious belief could inform self-deception based on hope.

As an individual, I do not want to fall into the trap of dogmatically accusing theists of self-deception. I could possibly be wrong if I adhere to Hume's humility, so my strategy here is not to accuse the theist of self-deception. I wish to mediate between atheists

---

[109] Bailey and O'Brien, 2007.

[110] Bailey and O'Brien, 2007.

and theists as the pragmatists would have it, not to continue pointless and divisive conjecture. I present first to the theist that evil is of course something that most of us, most of the time, wish to prevent. Theists and atheists alike seek to prevent evil. Many evil events both atheists and theists regard as abhorrent. Should we strive to overcome an impasse by working together to find the most reasonable argument for reasonable action to avoid and overcome evil? Of course, we should. I appeal to atheists and theists alike that many of us have the overriding psychological variable of self-preservation, as James outlines. In the interest of overcoming the impasse, we should embody certain values. We should aim to come as close to the truth as we possibly can in the spirit of empiricism. We should aim to practise humility as Hume does. We should look honestly within ourselves. I wish not to accuse the theist of self-deception. Instead, I ask the theist to practise Humean humility and look within themselves as to whether they do. What psychological variables motivate your religious action? Why do you pray? Do you pray because you genuinely think that a God will help you, or do you pray because you hope God might help you? Do you hold supernatural background assumptions, such as the existence of a God, as a result of fear of what might happen to you if you don't?

If as a result of this questioning, the theist feels it is possible that they could be deceiving themselves that their supernatural assumptions may be wrong, then the hypothesis I present (that one should not rely on God's intervention alone when it comes to evil events) is live.

9. The Pragmatic Problem of Evil.

9.1 An Introduction to the Pragmatic Problem of Evil.

Within this section I shall take what I have discussed so far and set out the thesis of this paper. I will then proceed to self-evaluate the thesis.

From previous chapters I have established that there is an impasse in the debate around the problem of evil, and to sway the landscape of the problem one must provide an argument that sways both many atheists and many theists in order to destroy the impasse in debate concerning the problem of evil. The question that first comes to me is "What should this argument concern?" Should I attempt to argue why one shouldn't believe in the existence of God, or should I attempt to strive for something humbler? I choose to go with the latter. I will not be making a pragmatic argument as to why one should not believe in God. I believe this will require certain background assumptions, and just as the atheist is unable to escape their background assumptions and accept a hypothesis for the belief in God as live, I fear that the theist may also be unable to escape their background assumptions that there is the possibility for a supernatural being and our world must have been created by the supernatural being. The prestige opinion across Christianity is that God made the world and supernatural beings can exist. Within Christian society the psychological variables of Christians may prevent them from ever accepting the hypothesis that God cannot exist as live. The hypothesis I feel is not one they will be able to accept genuinely. Hope within the Christian may always enforce the idea of divine retribution, fear in the Christian may dissuade them from denouncing their belief in God, conformity within the social structures of Christianity such as church societies may prevent those from within them to stray via conformity. As James says, his empiricism defines the search of truth as that which is the best argument, with the best upshot. My goal is to convince the Christian, not to provide a hypothesis they cannot accept, so therefore I must advocate for a hypothesis the Christian can accept.

What makes a hypothesis one that the Christian can most likely accept? The first thing to note here is that there are background assumptions that are common amongst Christians and Atheists, background assumptions that are common amongst Christians but not atheist, and background assumptions that are not common amongst Christians but contribute to Christian belief. I will give examples of all.

Common background assumptions amongst atheist and Christians seem to me to be the most core background assumptions we base our lives upon, such as observation of ordinary physical events. Both Atheists and Christians know through their background assumptions that when they step into the road in front of the car they are in danger. Both Atheists and Christians know that if we do not eat then we starve, and if we do not drink then we become thirsty. Both atheists and Christians have the instinct for self-preservation, and in action this is a prime determinator. It is a background assumption that motivates many actions we take, unless another background assumption supersedes it. Both atheists and Christians have a common understanding of what is dangerous to us in most cases. Most atheists and Christians can agree that a car in the road is dangerous to us when it's travelling at high speed and we move into its path. Both Christians and Atheists look when they cross the road when they are actively seeking not to get hit by a car. When the Christian and the atheist make informed decisions, they consult with these prime background assumptions.

In regards to the second of these three categories, I have already partially discussed. Atheists within the landscape of the problem of evil have the background assumption that all that exists adheres to the rules of natural science. They believe in naturalism. Despite how an atheist could possibly believe in supernatural forces and superstitions, the philosophical atheist understands that their argument for not believing in God comes from the lack of an ability of a supernatural being to prove itself to us, unless it is presented through natural action. 'Natural' here meaning that we can observe it, we

can feel it, we are not blind to it. God itself is a supernatural being and therefore does not adhere to the maxims of naturalism so there is no argument for the existence of God under atheism. Christians on the other hand, have the background assumption that supernatural beings may exist, and by virtue of being a Christian of course they believe God, a supernatural being, exists.

The last of these three categories is key in helping me provide my pragmatic argument. Christians do not always have the same background assumptions about God amongst themselves. As discussed in the first part of this dissertation, Christians have a variety of responses when it comes to the problem of evil. Although they may all come to settle with the background assumption of the obscurity principle in order to adhere to their faith, which is also key to why I cannot argue for a lack of belief in God to convince them, there are many assumptions that Christians do not settle on. Some have the belief that God is interventionist on the background assumptions that supernatural beings intervene and God wants to intervene to help us (but doesn't necessarily). Some have the background assumptions that God does not intervene in matters of good and evil and that God is testing us, examples include those who believe John Hick's soul making theodicy.

The key to my Pragmatic Problem of Evil is to provide a thesis that most Christians can agree with due to their background assumptions of self-preservation and psychological variables in the context of this. Pessimistically, I view that I will not be able to convince every single Christian with my argument, but what matters is that I provide the ideals of James's empiricism. I need to provide the best upshot. The best swaying of the debate. Although this may not affect the landscape in terms of belief in God, I believe it does something that some may can too minor. It establishes an argument as to why Christians should not live their lives under the assumption that God will intervene in evil, a pragmatic argument against reliance in God's intervention.

9.2 Forming the Thesis.

I will now lay out my thesis in the form of its major premises.

P1) Atheists and Christians have instincts of self-preservation.

P2) In an observable possibility of danger, Atheists and Christians will likely act on their instinct for self-preservation.

P3) The most reasonable action to avoid danger is that which renders the individual most likely to avoid it.

P4) Petitionary Prayer does not render us likely to avoid danger.

Therefore **P5)** Petitionary Prayer is an unreasonable action to take alone to prevent evil.

Therefore **C)** It is unreasonable to put faith in God's intervention alone when it comes to evil events, when other actions informed by naturalistic background assumptions are available to you.

Here of course it is important to explain the relevance of all of this to the problem of evil. As discussed in the introduction and in the section on total refutations of the problem of evil, there is a distinction that must always be made between the problem of evil and the problem of suffering. Although the two are distinguishable, it is important to remember that horrendous suffering is still associated with the evil I am concerned with in this dissertation.

Evil of course is dangerous to us. Evil can harm society and individuals in major ways. As set out by the premises, of course in the face of evil we will likely attempt to avoid suffering. In contrast to the current landscape of the problem of evil, this is not an

argument for or against the existence of the Omnigod. It is instead the establishment of what unites rather than divides those across the landscape of the problem of evil. Both theists and atheists have instincts for self-preservation, and therefore want to avoid danger. Horrendous evils are dangerous, and people (unless for various reasons covered in the next sub-section) will seek to avoid or prevent horrendous evils. Even if the theist believes that evil is a part of God's plan, their self-preservation and actions built upon naturalistic background assumptions render this irrelevant. Whether or not evil is a part of God's plan does not matter as, regardless, theists and atheists will both aim to avoid or prevent horrendous evils. How strongly to theists put their faith in God in comparison to the drive to protect themselves from the danger of horrendous evils? For theists who accept that God is not interventionist, I would say that their instinct for self-preservation is greater than their faith in the idea of "God's plan". In the next section, this discussion will be expanded on.

It is also important to make a few clarifications at this stage within some of the premises. Regarding the first premise, by self-preservation I do not mean simply the protection of oneself from physical or psychological harm, I also mean the protection of one's self from being "duped" as James puts it. In other words, from being fooled or lied to.

In regards to the second premise, by "observable possibility of danger" I mean a situation in which people are capable of analysing the presence of danger. This is likely informed by background assumptions discussed previously. For example, if you see a car speeding towards you, then this is an observable possibility of danger if your background assumptions inform you that the car is fast and fast cars can kill people. By "danger" I mean the likelihood or notable possibility of physical, psychological, or reputational harm.

I would also like to state in regards to the third premise, the most reasonable action is often informed by the naturalistic background assumptions around the dangerous

86

situation. In the example, the naturalistic observation that a car in the road is dangerous informs the most reasonable action. In the case of evil events, to prevent said events happening to us we trust in naturalistic observation. For example, to stop Hitler's advance, the instinct of societal preservation and naturalistic observations inform the choice of facing them in war.

9.3 Self-Evaluating the Thesis.

9.3.1 Is the Thesis Genuine?

The first evaluation of this thesis of course, is to ask whether or not the thesis is genuine? Of course, it is not as simple as that, it is also important to establish who it is genuine to. As discussed previously by James, a genuine hypothesis is one that is live, forced, and momentous. The hypothesis is live to the group of Christians and Atheists with overlapping naturalistic background assumptions discussed previously, such background assumptions that are not eclipsed by other background assumptions and psychological variables. Atheists of course accept that prayer is unreasonable as they do not believe in God, and Christians who advocate that God does not intervene are also convinced. As a result of Humean humility and self-reflection, theists may also come to regard this thesis as genuine through the possibility that they may be wrong or deceiving themselves when it comes to the possibility of miracles as a result of petitionary prayer.

In regards to whether or not the hypothesis is forced, it clearly is in regards to people with a sense of self-preservation. When an evil event is about to happen to yourself, and you don't want it to, you cannot simply not act (unless that is the best course of action to avoid the evil). The decision on whether or not to pray or do something else is forced because those with the instinct of self-preservation have no choice but to make this judgement. They are determined to by their psychological variables, and cannot simply will to not make this decision instinctually. This however may not be the

case for everyone. Those without the instinct of self-preservation, or the moral instinct to prevent evil.

The hypothesis is also momentous in regards to the specific situation. If you want to prevent a specific evil event from happening to you, you cannot undo it if it does. If you get slaughtered by an opposing army soldier, you can't come back from that. The decision is momentous in the case where the specific evil event either does or does not happen. Once it does not happen to you in that specific circumstance, or does, there is no undoing that. Vaguely, one could suggest the decision is not momentous because the event could happen to you in the future, but I claim this is wrong as it abandons the nature of the specific circumstance.

I therefore believe the hypothesis is genuine to Atheists and Christians with instincts of self-preservation that are not superseded by other background assumptions or psychological variables.

One criticism one might possibly levy towards the possibility of this hypothesis swaying many Christians is based upon the idea of overlapping self-preservation instincts. Different aspects of the self-preservation instinct of the Christian might lead to different outcomes in where their belief is assigned. Protecting their reputation within Christian society might inform faith that prayer for a supernatural being to intervene as an action they believe in. In contrast, their confidence in naturalist background assumptions might motivate them to act outside prayer alone to protect their lives.

From James however, I feel the naturalist background assumptions have the edge here. James claims that two of the central psychological variables which motivate decisions regarding the assignment of belief are the search for truth and the cautiousness to not be duped. If this psychological instinct prevails, then I state many Christians will put their faith in naturalist principles rather than supernaturalist ones. Ultimately, in spite of the encouragement for Humean humility, if the psychological

variables in an individual prevent this from occurring in an individual, then they will put their faith in supernatural background assumptions.

Although of course I am not stating that naturalist principles are objective evidence, one has to question which is more reliable, belief in natural things or belief in supernatural things? As an atheist myself, I would obviously claim natural things. For me personally, I do not believe in the existence of the supernatural. In spite of this, I must provide an argument for why one should hold more faith in their background assumptions in relation to the natural over their background assumptions in relation to the supernatural.

Supernatural things as discussed before are in and of themselves unobservable by natural means and sense experience. Natural things however are. People regularly get hit and killed by fast cars on the road, cars are natural things. Although we do not have perfect knowledge, the assumption that this car will hurt us is justified by background assumptions most of us have which present to us not Scientia like Cartesian scepticism requires, but a way of acting based upon observance and effect that pragmatists and Hume advocate for.

Consider the example of a heathen army coming over the horizon? What is the harm in being duped when it comes to abandoning supernatural principles? Does God condemn you to eternal suffering if you do not just pray for protection from this army, but instead run, or do both? The risk of being duped here is only that our action to avoid the evil might be based on incorrect information, but as there is no objective evidence here, this is the best we can do.

In contrast though, the risk of being duped in the case of reliance on the supernatural is far greater. If we believe that God will intervene and save us as a result of prayer alone, and God doesn't, the risk is likely death or some kind of horrendous evil happening to us. Of course, the risk of death is still present with options based on

natural background assumptions, but belief in those actions is based upon the observation of effects. What happens when you run from an army versus what happens when you don't? What happens when you step out of the way of an oncoming car versus when you don't? These decisions are based upon the best ability of observation we have. Prayer in God alone though is different. I would wager that the background assumptions of cause and effect do not lean towards putting absolute faith in a being you cannot observe. Say you put your faith in a supernatural being in this scenario, if the supernatural being and heaven post-life does not exist, being duped and dying involves the risk of absolute cessation of your being, whereas fleeing the army does not put your place in any real afterlife at risk, self-preservation in this situation is no sin that will shut you out of heaven.

9.3.2 Psychological Variables that may override Self-Preservation.

It is also important to clarify, that even if one has an instinct for self-preservation, one is not necessarily guaranteed to act in light of this. I can foresee several psychological variables that could override this in a variety of ways. Personally, I suffer from depression, and I view that others who also suffer from depression and those who attempt suicide might have the instinct for the cessation of suffering which overrides the particular sense for self-preservation in terms of them living. In a separate context, those who drink excessively and take drugs might have a particular psychological variable which overrides self-preservation. This might be addiction, or hedonism, or masochism for example. In terms of the preservation of the society, psychopaths or amoralists may not have this instinct. Psychopaths may not care for the state of society in the interest of their own greeds. Amoralists may not care for the evil and suffering of others. From this section, one must take away that not all individuals with the instinct of self-preservation are guaranteed to follow this hypothesis. The hypothesis only claims when one's goal is informed by self-preservation above all other instincts, then

it is unreasonable to put one's faith in God's intervention alone if one seeks to prevent

or avoid evil.[111]

---

[111] Note I am not saying here that people's whose self-preservation does not override other

factors are reasonable in putting their faith in God's intervention. I am simply saying in the

interest of self-preservation, one cannot regard prayer in God as reasonable when they hold

naturalistic background assumptions. If the motivating psychological variable is something

else (such as masochism), then the hypothesis is irrelevant.

10. Dissertation Conclusion.

Within this conclusion I will explain the key points of both parts of the dissertation and how they have led to their respective conclusions. Within section one I have successfully established that the current landscape of the problem of evil is at an impasse. Arguments from evil fail to convince the theist for a variety of reasons. Deductive arguments from evil such as that of Mackie seem very weak, as do arguments with non-specific formulations of evil. Inductive arguments seem more reasonable, however, notable examples such as Rowe's are not strong arguments and have shortcomings. Nonetheless, this does not establish that the problem of evil has no appeal to the atheist, and it is possible to provide a well thought out evidentialist argument from evil. From this, it is important to understand whether or not the theist can provide a suitable response to the atheist. Total refutations of the problem of evil such as those made by Schlesinger do not convince atheists. Free-will theodicy also does not convince the atheist to abandon the problem of evil. This is due to a variety of reasons including their rejection of supernatural justifications for evil.

On the other hand, it has been established that the theist has a method to remain impervious to evidentialist arguments from evil. This is sceptical theism. The obscurity principle can be used to avoid the inductive formulations of the problem of evil. Therefore, both atheists and theists remain unconvinced by the other. Atheists adhere too strongly to naturalist principles to be swayed by the supernaturalism in the theodicy of theists. Theists can default to sceptical theism to remain unconvinced by the atheists' evidential arguments from evil. As there is no deductive argument from evil strong enough, the landscape is at an impasse. From this there are two pathways one could take: one could either provide a deductive argument from evil to sway the theist, or one could move away from logical arguments and think in terms of pragmatic considerations instead. I move to do the latter.

Part two establishes that it is unreasonable to rely on God's intervention alone when it comes to evil events. Pragmatism is the solution to scepticism, so I levy it against the sceptical theists. Regardless of sceptical thought, we pragmatically act as if certain things are true due to our naturalistic background assumptions. Naturalistic background assumptions inform our action, sceptical thinking does not.

From here, one can take a variety of directions. James and I differ in the directions we take. James argues for the belief in God. As an atheist I am not concerned with an argument for belief in God, however I take several important things from his argument. I take his ideas of naturalist background assumptions and psychological variables. I also take his claims on how pragmatic decisions are made. Finally, I take the idea of the genuine hypothesis. My thesis adheres to these principles.

After the rejection of James's direction, I establish that Humean humility is needed in order to solve the fruitless discourse and conjecture in debate surrounding the problem of evil. Hume argues, for example, that miracle testimony by theists does not meet the requisite epistemic standards. He claims their psychological variables of fear and hope (when overriding the psychological desire not to be duped) contribute to self-deception. Self-deception, the prevalence of these psychological variables, and the Humean evidential requirements demonstrate that testimony in miracles is not satisfactory. The actions of religious individuals also demonstrate their self-deception in belief in a God, as they will often act as if their God does not exist. They don't act in line with their supernatural background assumptions; they are far more likely to act in accordance with their natural background assumptions. In the avoidance of evil, they act as if reliance in God's intervention alone is unreasonable. They act as if God does not exist or does not intervene in evil events. Although I do not outright accuse theists of lying to themselves, this Humean thought provides a basis for theists who hold supernatural background assumptions to self-reflect. With the practise of Humean

humility, the impasse can be solved and atheists and theists can be united behind my hypothesis.

My thesis does not concern belief in God's existence. It concerns action in regards to evil. The problem of evil in the pragmatic sense is not whether or not God exists and allows for evil to occur. It concerns how we act in regards to the occurrence of evil. My thesis captures the unreasonability of reliance in God's intervention. Theists and atheists alike accept this thesis. Atheists act as if God does not exist so would regard reliance in a being that does not exist as unreasonable. Theists who subscribe to theodicy accept that God does not intervene in evil, and therefore accept that God's intervention when it comes to evil events is unlikely and reliance on such is unreasonable. Theists, as a result of Humean humility, may also come to regard the hypothesis as genuine upon self-reflection.

From James's psychological variables, we understand we have the desire for self-preservation. Therefore, in dangerous situations (in regards to evil), we act in accordance with what is likely to satisfy the desire for self-preservation (unless another psychological variable overrides this). Our naturalistic background assumptions inform us how to avoid evil and suffering. They inform us which actions render us likely to avoid evil and which do not. Petitionary prayer expects the intervention of a supernatural being. Within our naturalistic background assumptions, miracles do not occur. Reliance on God is determined as unreasonable by naturalistic background assumptions as God is supernatural and is associated with supernatural background assumptions not natural background assumptions. Reliance on God alone to prevent evil events is therefore unreasonable.

To conclude, the pragmatic problem of evil I have suggested explains why atheists and theists who have the overriding psychological desire for self-preservation both act as if reliance in God's intervention alone when it comes to evil events is unreasonable. When other action informed by naturalistic background assumptions is available to

them, they are more likely to take that route rather than petitionary prayer which is not informed by naturalistic background assumptions in regards to the possibility of the prevention or avoidance of evil. Atheists and many theists will accept this thesis as true and act accordingly.

Within the second part of this dissertation, I have focused on the theistic action of petitionary prayer which seeks to prevent evil through divine intervention. Through my pragmatic problem of evil, I have provided a critique of the rationale behind this action. My pragmatic problem of evil should however be seen as a path for others to follow, as a wider response across the debate surrounding the problem of evil. Logical and evidentialist problems of evil have not swayed the theist and have not defeated the impasse within the problem of evil. Sceptical theism prevents these arguments from swaying the theist. Therefore, for the atheist, it is necessary to adopt a method that will solve this impasse. Conjecture and debate in the traditional sense will not convince the theist. We should not see the problem of evil as a fruitless exchange of arguments that will not sway the other side of the debate. Instead, I posit that we should have a more pragmatic approach to the problem. Theists and atheists should work together to find solutions to evil in the world, and ways to act based upon what we can agree to be true together. If this were to be done, we could strive to alleviate evil as much as we can within the world, by acting reasonably to prevent and avoid evil. The path to this is by focusing on our shared naturalistic background assumptions, and acting upon these. The solution is not to unreasonably put faith in God alone to prevent horrendous evils, it is to take reasonable action ourselves to prevent and avoid horrendous evils.

Bibliography

Alston, W. (1991) "The Inductive Argument from Evil and the Human Cognitive Condition," Philosophical Perspectives, 5: 29–67, reprinted in Howard-Snyder 1996b, 97–125.

Alston, W (1996) "Some (Temporarily) Final Thoughts on Evidential Arguments from Evil," in Howard-Snyder 1996b, 311-332.

Bailey, A., O'Brien, D. (2007) "Hume's Critique of Religion: 'Sick Men's Dreams'", Springer, London.

Bergmann, M. (2001) "Skeptical Theism and Rowe's New Evidential Argument from Evil," Noûs, 35: 278–296.

Bowell, T., & Kemp, G. (2015) "Critical thinking: a concise guide". New York, Routledge. Accessed at: https://www.taylorfrancis.com/books/e/9781315772035.

Brümmer, V. (2008) "What Are We Doing When We Pray? On Prayer and the Nature of Faith", Farnham: Ashgate Publishing Limited.

Chrzan, K. (1987) "The Irrelevance of the No Best Possible World Defence," Philosophia, 17: 161–7.

O'Brien, D. (forthcoming 2022) "Hume on Testimony", Routledge.

Davison, S A., (2017ed) "Petitionary Prayer", The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy accessed at:
https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2017/entries/petitionary-prayer/.

Descartes, R. (1641) "Meditations on First Philosophy", Leiden; translated in Philosophical Works of Descartes (Volume 1), Elizabeth S. Haldane and G.R.T. Ross (eds./trans.), New York: Dover Publications, 1931.

Dougherty, T (2016ed) "Skeptical Theism", The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy Accessed at: https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2016/entries/skeptical-theism/.

Drange, T. (1998) "Non-Belief and Evil: Two Arguments for the Non-Existence of God" New York: Prometheus Books

Draper, P. (1989) "Pain and Pleasure: An Evidential Problem for Theists," Noûs, 23: 331–350

Graham, A., Maitzen, S. (2007) "Cornea and Closure," Faith and Philosophy, 24: 83–86.

Hick, J, (1966). "Evil and the God of Love", New York: Harper and Row, revised edition 1978.

Howard-Snyder, D. (1996a) "The Argument from Divine Hiddenness," Canadian Journal of Philosophy, 26(3): 433–453.

Howard-Snyder, D. (2009) "Epistemic Humility, Arguments from Evil, and Moral Skepticism," in Kvanvig, J. (ed.), Oxford Studies in Philosophy of Religion, vol. 2, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Howard-Snyder, D. ed. (1996b) "The Evidential Argument from Evil", Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press.

Hume, D. (1739) "A Treatise of Human Nature", edited by David Fate Norton and Mary J. Norton, Oxford/New York: Oxford University Press, 2000.

Hume, D. (1748) "An Enquiry concerning Human Understanding", ed. Beauchamp, T L. Oxford/New York: Oxford University Press, 1999.

James, W. (1897) "The Will to Believe and Other Popular Essays in Philosophy", Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, pb(1979).

Khatchadourian, H. (1966). "God, Happiness and Evil," Religious Studies, 2: 109–19.

La Para, N. (1965) "Suffering, Happiness, Evil," Sophia, 4: 10–16.

Laraudogoitia, J P. (2000) "CORNEA against Theism," International Journal for Philosophy of Religion, 48(2): 81–87.

Legg, C., Hookway, C. (2021) "Pragmatism", The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, ed. Zalta, E N. Accessed at: https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2021/entries/pragmatism/.

Lewis, C. S. (1957). "The Problem of Pain", London: Fontana Books.

Mackie, J. L. (1955). "Evil and omnipotence". Mind 64 (254):200-212. Accessed at:

Mackie, J.L. (1982) "The Miracle of Theism", Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Oppy, G. (2010). "The Evidential Problem of Evil". In A Companion to Philosophy of Religion. Ed. Taliaferro, C., Draper, P., Quinn P L. Accessed at: https://doi.org/10.1002/9781444320152.ch59

Oppy, G. (2017) "Logical arguments from evil and free-will defences." in Meister, C., Moser, P K. "The Cambridge Companion to the Problem of Evil." 1st edn, Cambridge Companions to Religion, Cambridge University Press, New York NY USA, pp. 45-64. Accessed at: https://doi.org/10.26180/5c787dc86dfe5

Oppy, G. (2013) "Rowe's evidential arguments from evil". In McBrayer J., Howard-Snyder, D." A Companion to the Problem of Evil." Wiley-Blackwell. pp. 49-66. PhilArchive copy v1: https://philarchive.org/archive/OPPREAv1

Phillips, D. Z. (1981) "The Concept of Prayer", New York: Seabury Press.

Plantinga, A. (1967). "God and Other Minds", Ithaca: Cornell University Press.

Plantinga, A. (1974a). "God, Freedom, and Evil", New York: Harper and Row.

Plantinga, A. (1974b). "The Nature of Necessity", Oxford: Clarendon Press.

Rowe, W. (1979). "The Problem of Evil and Some Varieties of Atheism," American Philosophical Quarterly, 16: 335–41

Rowe, W. (1991) "Ruminations About Evil," Philosophical Perspectives, 5: 69–88.

Russell et al. 1988. "The 'Inductive' Problem of Evil: A Dialogue," Philosophical Topics, 16: 133–160.

Schellenberg, J L. (1993) "Divine Hiddenness and Human Reason", Ithaca: Cornell University Press.

Schlesinger, G (1964). "The Problem of Evil and the Problem of Suffering," American Philosophical Quarterly, 1: 244–7.

Stump, E. (1979) "Petitionary Prayer", American Philosophical Quarterly, 16: 81–91.

Stump, E. (1983). "Knowledge, Freedom and the Problem of Evil," International Journal for Philosophy of Religion, 14: 49–58

Stump, E. (ed.) (1993a). "Reasoned Faith", Ithaca: Cornell University Press.

Stump, E. (1993b). "Aquinas on the Sufferings of Job," in Stump (ed.), Reasoned Faith, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 328–57.

Swinburne, R. (1998) "Providence and the Problem of Evil", Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Tooley, M. (2021) "The Problem of Evil", The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Fall 2021 Edition), ed. Zalta, E N. Accessed at: https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2021/entries/evil/.

van Inwagen, P. (1991) "The Problem of Evil, the Problem of Air, and the Problem of Silence," in Philosophical Perspectives, 5: 135–165.

Wykstra S., Perrin, T. (2012), "Foundations of Skeptical Theism," Faith and Philosophy, 29(4): 375-399.

Wykstra, S. (1984) "The Human Obstacle to Evidential Arguments from Suffering: On Avoiding the Evils of 'Appearance,'" International Journal for Philosophy of Religion, 16: 73–94.