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Friendly Atheism, Skeptical Theism, and the Problem of Evil

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In 1979, a quarter of a century ago, I published a paper entitled "The Problem of Evil and Some Varieties of Atheism."[1] It received a good deal of attention in the professional journals, and was frequently included in anthologies for use in the classroom. Indeed, nothing I've written before or since has received anything near the attention that was given to that paper. So, in that respect, my career as a philosopher has been downhill ever since. In that paper I focused on a particular example of evil: a fawn being horribly burned in a fire caused by lightning, and suffering terribly for 5 days before death ended its life. Unlike humans, fawns are not credited with free will, and so the fawn's suffering cannot be attributed to a misuse of free will. Why then would God permit it when, if he exists, he could have so easily prevented it? It is generally admitted that we are simply unable to imagine any greater good whose realization can reasonably be thought to require God to permit that fawn's terrible suffering. And it hardly seems reasonable to suppose there is some greater evil that God would have been unable to prevent had he not permitted that fawn's terrible suffering. Suppose that by a "pointless evil" we mean an evil that God (if he exists) could have prevented without thereby losing an outweighing good or having to permit an evil equally bad or worse. Is the fawn's suffering a pointless evil? Clearly, it certainly *seems to us* to be pointless. On that point there appears to be near universal agreement. For given God's omniscience and absolute power it would be child's play for him to have prevented either the fire or the fawn's being caught in the fire. Moreover, as we've noted it is extraordinarily difficult to think of, or even imagine, a greater good whose realization can sensibly be thought to require God to permit that fawn's

terrible suffering.[2] And, it is just as difficult to imagine an equal or even worse evil that God would be required to permit were he to have prevented the fawn's suffering. It therefore seems altogether reasonable for us to think that the fawn's suffering is likely to be a pointless evil, an evil that God (if he exists) could have prevented without thereby losing some outweighing good or having to permit some other evil just as bad or worse.

In light of such examples of horrendous evils, evils that occur all too frequently in our world, I proposed an argument similar to this:

1. Probably, there are pointless evils. (e.g., the fawn's suffering).
2. If God exists, there are no pointless evils, therefore,
3. Probably, God does not exist.

How can a theist respond to this argument? Since the conclusion logically follows from its two premises, and since the second premise is generally admitted to be not only true but necessarily true, theists are limited, I believe, to basically three different responses. The first is the response that I, rather naively, thought is the most reasonable response for the theist to give. It consists in simply accepting the argument as showing that we have *a reason* to think it unlikely that God exists. For given that no good we can imagine can be reasonably thought to justify God in permitting that fawn's terrible suffering, it does *seem unlikely* that there is a good that in fact does justify God in permitting that suffering. After all, we can think of many goods, even the greatest good of all – life eternal in the loving presence of God. And none of the goods we can think of appears to require the fawn's terrible suffering as a condition of its realization.[3] Of course, it remains possible that some good that is unknowable by us justifies God in permitting the fawn's suffering and death. So, even though the argument may make it somewhat unlikely that God exists, if, as some theists will surely claim, we have stronger reasons to think he does exist – for example, a personal experience of an all powerful, all-knowing, perfectly good creator – we will be justified in believing that some good unknown to us does justify God in permitting the fawn's 5 days of terrible suffering. On the other hand, if someone has no outweighing reason to believe that God exists, the fawn's suffering, along with numerous other instances of seemingly pointless evils, may well justify such a person in thinking that it is unlikely that there is any such being as God.

In a relatively short time, however, I came to see that I was mistaken in thinking that philosophers, whether theists or nontheists, would agree with me in accepting the first premise of the argument, the premise that says it is likely that pointless evils occur. Indeed, I came to see this as early as 1982, just 3 years later, when I conducted an NEH Summer Seminar for College Teachers. I had a group of young, able philosophers who held teaching positions in various colleges. We covered several topics during the 6 weeks they were at Purdue, and toward the end we spent a week on the problem of evil. Among the group was a chap named Stephen Wykstra who had accepted a teaching position in philosophy at Calvin college. Wykstra talked only occasionally in the seminar, but when he became excited about some point or argument he would talk a good deal, sometimes having difficulty stopping talking, even after having fully made his point. At such times he would finally become aware that he had gone on too long, stop for moment, and then say, "Shut up Wykstra!" And when he said that, to our surprise he would stop talking. When the 6 weeks were up, many of those in the seminar departed. But Wykstra remained at Purdue for about two additional weeks, coming in to see me and discussing further the problem of evil. I have only dim recollections of those discussions, but I rightly sensed that Wykstra was very focused on providing a philosophical critique of my argument from evil. I also correctly sensed he would not rest until he had done so. A year later, he presented an important paper on the problem of evil at the Pacific Division of the American Philosophical Association, to which I was invited to respond. I recall that meeting of the Pacific Division very well. For it took place on board the Queen Mary, and each person's private room on the vessel was about the size of a rather spacious coat closet. I don't recall much at all of what went on at the session with Wykstra. I do recall, however, what was then referred to as 'the smoker', an evening session at all APA meetings in which the main activity is sipping wine and talking with one's friends in the profession. My recollection is that I felt it altogether proper and good to be on the Queen Mary, drinking wine while talking with other philosophers. And it did not seem to matter that the Queen Mary was going nowhere at all, being permanently in dock.

In 1984 Wykstra's paper was published in the *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion*, along with my reply.[4] The publication of his paper significantly advanced a position in philosophy that has come to be known as 'skeptical theism.' For Wykstra presented a *skeptical argument* against the justification I gave for the crucial

premise at work in my argument from evil, the premise stating that probably there are pointless evils. Why did I believe that the fawn's suffering is likely to be pointless? It was because we cannot think of or even imagine a good that would both outweigh the fawn's suffering and be such that an all-powerful, all-knowing being could not find some way of bringing about that good, or some equal or better good, without having to permit the fawn's suffering. For think for a moment of the fawn's suffering. It is not only terribly burned, but it lies for 5 days on the forest floor in agony, before death finally ends its life. Is there some great good that an all-powerful, all-knowing being could bring about *only* by allowing that fawn to suffer for *five full days*, rather than say, four, three, two, one, or even not at all – say, by bringing it about that its death is instantaneous? It baffles the human mind to think that an all-powerful, all-knowing being would find itself in such a predicament. But the skeptical theist's response is that, for all we know, the reason why the human mind is baffled by this state of affairs is simply because it doesn't know enough. For if we were to know what God knows then our human minds would know that God really had no choice at all. For, according to the skeptical theist, God knew that if he prevented that fawn's being terribly burned, or prevented even 1 day of the fawn's 5 days of terrible suffering, he either would have to permit some other evil equally bad or worse or forfeit some great good, without which the world as a whole would be worse than it is by virtue of his permitting that fawn to suffer intensely for five full days. And the fact that we have no idea of what that good might be is not at all surprising, given the disparity between the goods knowable by our minds and the goods knowable by a perfectly good and all-knowing creator of the world. So, according to the skeptical theist, we simply are in no position to *reasonably judge* that God, if he exists, could have prevented the fawn's 5 days of terrible suffering without losing some outweighing good or having to permit some equally bad or worse evil. For our limited minds are simply unable to think of the goods that the mind of God would know. And since we are simply unable to know many of the goods God would know, the fact that no good *we know of* can reasonably be thought to justify an infinitely good, all-powerful being in permitting the fawn's terrible suffering is not really surprising. In fact, given the enormous gulf between God's knowledge and our knowledge, that no good we know of appears to in any way justify God in permitting the fawn's terrible suffering is perhaps just what we should expect if such a being as God actually exists.

In developing his view Wykstra argued that to reasonably believe that the fawn's suffering is likely to have been pointless, we must have a *positive reason* to think that if some good should justify God's permitting the fawn's suffering it is likely that we would know of that good. He then claimed that goods knowable to God are quite likely not going to be knowable to us. To support his claim Wykstra pointed out that upon looking in his garage and seeing no dog, we would be entitled to conclude that there is no dog in the garage. But upon looking in his garage and seeing no fleas, we would not be entitled to conclude that there are no fleas in his garage. For we have reason to think that if there were any fleas in his garage, it would not be likely that we would see them. And similarly, he argued, our not being able to think of a good that might justify God in permitting the fawn's suffering is no reason to think there isn't such a good. For, on Wykstra's view, were there such a God-purposed good for permitting the fawn's suffering it is altogether likely that we would not know of it. So, the fact that we cannot even imagine what such a good would be, far from being a reason to think it unlikely that God exists, is just what we should expect to be true if God does exist.

Toward the end of his paper Wykstra notes that I am right in holding that a wholly good God would allow suffering, such as the fawn's terrible suffering, only if "there is an outweighing good served by so doing." He also agrees with me "that such goods are, in many cases, nowhere within our ken." But he then says:

> The linchpin of my critique has been that if theism is true, this is just what one would expect: for if we think carefully about the sort of being theism proposes for our belief, it is entirely expectable – given what we know of our cognitive limits – that the goods by virtue of which this Being allows known suffering should very often be beyond our ken. Since this state of affairs is just what one should expect if theism were true, how can its obtaining be evidence *against* theism? (p. 91)

II

Wykstra's elegant and carefully argued paper forced me to make some distinctions that are all too easily overlooked in responses to objections to the claim that the theistic God exists.[5] In making these distinctions, I let the capital letter 'O' abbreviate 'an omnipotent,

omniscient, wholly good being'. I then suggested that *standard theism* is "any view which holds that O exists." Thus, traditional Christianity, Islam, and Judaism are all examples of standard theism. However, within standard theism we can distinguish *restricted* standard theism and *expanded* standard theism. Expanded theism is the view that O exists, conjoined with certain other significant religious claims, claims that are not *entailed* by the proposition that there exists an omnipotent, omniscient, wholly good being who has created the world. For that proposition is common to traditional Christianity, Islam, and Judaism. What are some of the independent religious ideas that have been added to standard theism so as to produce the version of expanded theism that we now know as Christianity? There is, of course, the idea that God is a trinity: God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost, an idea that took several centuries to be worked out, and is held only in Christianity. It was first established at the Council of Nicea in 325 AD when Athanasius, accused of heresy and exiled several times in his lifetime, won out over Arius who denied that Jesus of Nazareth was a divine being. In addition, of course, there are claims about original sin, Adam and Eve in the garden, redemption, a future life, a last judgment, and the like. Orthodox Christian theism is a version of expanded theism, for the doctrine that God took on human form and died for our sins is essential to orthodox Christianity, but not deducible merely from the claim that the theistic God exists. Since some might be led to think that if the theistic God exists, then certain other *logically independent* religious claims must also be true – claims about sin, redemption, heaven, the divinity of the son of Mary and Joseph, etc. – in my reply to Wykstra I insisted on using the expression 'O exists' rather than the expression 'God exists'. I did this to assist the reader in recognizing that from the assumption that there exists an omnipotent, omniscient, wholly good being who created the world nothing can be *logically deduced* concerning whether certain other religious claims held by Judaism, Islam or Christianity are true or false.[6] And this means, of course, that from the fact that O exists we cannot logically deduce that there is a life beyond our three score years and ten, that there is a heaven or a hell, that Jesus of Nazareth is the Son of God, or that the Bible is divinely inspired. With this in mind I noted that in answer to my claim that it appears that the fawn's suffering is pointless, Wykstra's principle response is that we have *no reason* at all to think that were O to exist things would strike us any differently. And we can formulate his argument for this point as follows:

4. O's mind grasps goods beyond our ken.
5. It is likely that the goods in relation to which O permits many sufferings are beyond our ken.
   therefore,
6. It is likely that many of the sufferings in our world do not appear to have a point – we can't see what goods justify O in permitting them.

I then pointed out that the fact that O's mind grasps goods beyond our ken does not entail that it is likely that the goods in relation to which O permits many sufferings are *beyond our ken*. For once such goods occur we have reason to think that we would know them, given that they are goods involving those who have suffered. Moreover, the mere fact that O exists gives us no reason to think that the goods for the sake of which O permits horrendous human and animal suffering are goods that occur only in some far distant future, perhaps in some other form of existence altogether unknown and perhaps unknowable by us. But what about expanded theism? Reading the writings attributed to Saint Paul, one may conclude that the goods for the sake of which O permits vast amounts of human and animal suffering will be realized only at the end of the world, or in some state of existence quite unknown to us. If we conjoin this claim with the horrendous suffering that occurs in our world, we do seem to have some reason to think just what Wykstra claims: that it is likely that the goods in question would be beyond our ken. But as we've noted, the mere fact that O exists gives us no reason to think that what we find in the Bible or the Koran is anything more than what it probably is, the writings of various human beings scattered over time who, for whatever reasons (if any) came to believe that a divine being exists and is the creator of everything else, and that this being has a plan for his creatures (at least, human beings) and will provide them with some sort of existence after bodily death, etc.

In his paper Wykstra claimed that the theistic hypothesis "contains" the claim that the goods for the sake of which O permits the sufferings in the world are, to a large extent, quite beyond our ken. He speaks of it as a "logical extension of theism." He says this claim is not an "additional postulate" but instead was "implicit" in theism all along. In my reply I said that Wykstra is mistaken about this. What is implicit in theism is that O's mind grasps goods that are beyond our ken. That does seem to be a "logical extension" implicit in the-

ism. For O is omniscient, and we quite clearly are not. However, the claim that these goods are realizable *only* in a world beyond the world of our earthly existence is not a part of the hypothesis that O exists. It is an additional postulate that produces a form of *expanded theism*, a version that is not rendered unlikely by the facts about suffering that I claim to render restricted standard theism unlikely. Indeed, I now rather suspect that Wykstra was supposing that the Bible, or at least much of the New Testament, is somehow guaranteed to be true by virtue of the assumption that O exists. And that is a supposition that I, along with a number of biblical scholars, am unwilling to concede.

Wykstra noted in his essay that among believers, as well as nonbelievers, there is a "persistent intuition that the inscrutable suffering in our world in some sense disconfirms theism." This observation by Wykstra strikes me as exactly right. It is not just unbelievers who tend to see the inscrutable suffering in our world as in some sense disconfirming theism; it is a near universal, natural phenomenon. Believers too, as Wykstra notes, have a strong, natural tendency to see inscrutable suffering, especially as it affects those they dearly love, as an intellectual difficulty or obstacle to belief, something that in the absence of a sensible explanation tends to count against theism. He, nevertheless, thinks that this persistent intuition of believers and nonbelievers is a mistake. For given our cognitive limitations and O's omniscience and omnipotence, Wykstra believes that it should be expected that much of the suffering in our world will be inscrutable to us. So, he concludes that believers and nonbelievers simply fail to see what is really contained in the theistic hypothesis. But if I am right, what Wykstra has unwittingly done is change the question. He has supplemented the theistic hypothesis that O (an omnipotent, omniscient, wholly good, perfectly loving being) exists with other propositions such that the supplemented result is not disconfirmed by the facts that are claimed to count against the hypothesis that O exists. I ended my response, however, by pointing out that Wykstra would likely disagree with me about whether he has really supplemented the hypothesis that O exists. For Wykstra seems to think that what I hold to be supplements to the hypothesis that O exists are in some way already *logically contained* in that very hypothesis. But clearly, they are not.

An analogy to which theists often appeal in defending the reasonableness of supposing that the goods justifying the horrendous evils in our world are unknowable by us is the good-parent analogy. The

idea is that God is to us humans as good parents are to their children whom they love. And just as their children often cannot comprehend the goods for which their loving parents permit things to happen to them, so too we humans cannot comprehend the goods for which God permits us, his created children, to endure the evils that happen to us. My own judgment is that this analogy, very much favored by theists, is actually unfavorable to theism. It is true that good, loving parents may have to permit their ailing child to be separated from them, confined to a hospital, forced to swallow evil tasting medicines, and put in the care of strangers in order to cure the child of some illness. The very young child, of course, may not understand why his parents have removed him from his home and put him in the care of strangers. So too, the theist may say, our sin, or something else, may have separated us from God. But the analogy is a dismal failure. When children are ill and confined to a hospital, the loving parents by any means possible seek to comfort their child, giving special assurances of their love while he is separated from them and suffering for a reason he does not understand. No loving parents use their child's stay in the hospital as an occasion to take a holiday, saying to themselves that the doctors and nurses will surely look after little Johnny while they are away. But many human beings have endured horrendous suffering without any awareness of God's assurances of his love and concern during their period of suffering. If you are in doubt of this, try reading the literature concerning the holocaust victims. Unlike the good parents, God has been on holiday for centuries. Indeed, even in the 11th century, during the age of faith, the great Christian saint, St. Anselm of Canterbury, lamented:

> I have never seen thee, O Lord my God;... What O most high Lord, shall this man do, an exile far from thee? He longs to come to thee, and thy dwelling place is inaccessible.... I was created to see thee and not yet have I done that for which I was made.[7]

In an age of faith, before the growth of the scientific knowledge that produced alternative, credible explanations of the emergence of human life, Anselm's lament, quite reasonably, would not lead to disbelief. But the age or faith has been replaced by an age of reason and science. And in this age of reason and science, for many human beings the idea of God no longer plays an *essential, rational* role in explaining the world and human existence. The idea that human suffering may be divine punishment for human sin and wickedness is

no longer a credible explanation for many educated human beings. My own inclination is to think that given the horrendous evils in our world, the absence of the God who supposedly walked with Adam and Eve in the garden is evidence that there is no God. For surely, if there were a God he would wish to provide us with strong reasons to think that he exists, given that the horrendous evils in our world, both natural and moral, seem to provide us with reason to doubt his existence. Of course, one can come up with elaborate stories in which God's hiddenness, even given all the horrendous evils that occur in our world, is not altogether implausible. John Hick and Richard Swinburne, for example, have endeavored to provide such stories. They are called theodicies. Agnostics and atheists tend to view these efforts at explaining God's permission of evil as rather unconvincing. And skeptical theists, following Alvin Plantinga, tend to dismiss theodicies as unnecessary, weak, and unpersuasive. My own judgment is that the theodicies provided by Swinburne and Hick do go some way toward reconciling theism with the horrendous evils that afflict us. But given the enormity of evil in our world, both natural and moral, coupled with the inexplicable absence of the God of traditional theism, I continue to think that the horrendous evils in our world provide evidence against the existence of God.

III

Of course, believing, as I and many others do, that the horrendous evils in our world count against the existence of the theistic God is not the same as being *rationally justified* in holding that belief. And I must confess that my earlier confidence in the inference from

> no good *we know of* justifies God in permitting many of the evils in our world to the conclusion
>
> probably no good justifies God in permitting those evils

has been somewhat diminished by the objections raised by skeptical theists.[8] The crucial objection is this: In order to have confidence in the inference, it seems that I must suppose that the goods we know of are representative of the goods there are.[9] But given that God, if he exists, would likely know of goods beyond our wildest dreams,

why should we think that the goods we know of are a representative sample of the goods there are? Of course, we do know of some very great goods, even the greatest good of all – life eternal in the loving presence of God. But that isn't the same as being justified in thinking that the goods we know of are representative of the goods there are. In response to this serious objection posed by skeptical theists I have tried to do two things. First, I have supplemented my original argument in an effort to blunt the challenge raised by the objection that the goods we know of are not known to be representative of the goods there are. And second, I have sought to show that the skeptical theist's objection, if correct, leads into a black hole for those theists who endeavor to support and defend some of their religious beliefs by philosophical arguments. The supplement I have added to my original argument is the good parent analogy that I relied on in responding to Wykstra's challenging objection to my original argument. So, I can be now be very brief in showing how it lends support to my original argument. God, if he exists, is all-powerful, all-knowing, perfectly good and a supremely loving being. He is to us as loving parents are to their children. It is not for nothing that the common prayer begins with the words: "Our *father* which art in heaven." Morever, he is our loving father. What do loving parents do when their children are suffering for reasons they cannot comprehend? Loving parents do their best to relieve the suffering of their children. And if the suffering should be the result of necessary discipline of the child, the loving parents endeavor as best they can to help the child understand what the discipline is for; and they strive to enable the child to be aware of the constancy of their love. And should their children suffer from injury or illness, the loving parents make special efforts to be consciously present to them, showing their love and concern. Moreover, they do their best to help the child understand the illness and what needs to be done to cure it. But in a world supposedly created by their loving heavenly father, countless people suffer horrendously without any sense of his comforting presence or his helping them to understand why he permits them to endure such suffering. The point is this: love *entails* doing the best one can to be consciously present to those one loves when they are suffering, and particularly so when they are suffering for reasons they do not or cannot comprehend. And given the absence of any loving, heavenly father, the evil and suffering in our world only increases the likelihood that God does not exist.

Emphasizing these implications of God's love for his human creatures, however, does not refute the line of reasoning advanced by skep-

tical theists. For since we are unable to prove that the goods we know of are representative of the goods known by God, there remains the logical possibility that some outweighing good would be lost were God to yield to his perfect love and be consciously present to his human creatures, comforting them while permitting them to suffer for reasons they are unable to comprehend.

IV

The skeptical theist's emphasis on our inability to be confident that the goods we know of are representative of the goods there are does raise important questions about the inference in the argument from evil. But when we apply their skeptical thesis to the religious beliefs that they and other believers hold, the position of the skeptical theist is seen to lead to conclusions that are very unfriendly to traditional theism. Christian theists, for example, believe that there is a glorious life after death, at least for those who accept Christ as their savior and endeavor to live in accordance with his teachings. What rational grounds do Christians have for these beliefs? They believe, not unreasonably, that God's ultimate purpose for their lives is seldom, if ever, fulfilled in this earthly life; and that, being perfectly good and loving, God will surely grant them the greatest good conceivable to mankind: everlasting life in the presence of God himself. In addition, they also find some support for these beliefs in the Bible. On the basis of these two sources – the recognition that God's purpose for their lives is not fulfilled on earth, and the teachings of the Bible – they not unreasonably conclude that they have *rational grounds* for their belief that there is life after death, a glorious everlasting life in the presence of God himself.

As forceful as this line of reasoning may seem to the faithful, the position of the "skeptical theists" shows it to be utterly inadequate. For given their skeptical theses, we human beings are simply *in the dark about how likely it is* that God will bring it about that faithful believers will have a glorious, everlasting life in his presence. We humans are in the dark about this important matter because, as the skeptical theists tell us, we simply are *in the dark* about the goods that God will know, and the conditions of their realization. For we have no sufficient reason to suppose that the goods we know are representative of the goods there are. And for all we know there is some good far greater than the good of eternal life for the faithful on earth, a

good the realization of which precludes God's granting eternal life to the faithful on earth. For example, consider the Christian belief that there are fallen angels: Satan and his cohorts. They are judged to be higher beings than mere humans on earth. And, if we follow the skeptical theists we must conclude that *for all we know*, the good of the fallen angels being redeemed by God far exceeds the good of faithful human beings being granted eternal life. And *for all we know* the cost of God's redeeming the fallen angels precludes God from granting eternal life to any humans. For remember, according to the skeptical theists we are simply in the dark not only about the goods there are but also the conditions of their realization. And it clearly follows from this skeptical view that our being unable to think of any possible good that would justify God in *not* permitting faithful Christians to experience an afterlife *provides* no adequate reason to conclude that probably there is no good that justifies God in precluding faithful Christians from experiencing an afterlife. Moreover, as we've seen, *for all we know*, a condition of the realization of the salvation of Satan and the fallen angels may require God to permit the faithful on earth to perish along with atheists, agnostics, and those who have lived without even forming an idea of such a being as God.

Skeptical theists choose to ride the trolley car of skepticism concerning the goods that God would know so as to undercut the evidential argument from evil. But once on that trolley car it may not be easy to prevent that skepticism from also undercutting any reasons they may suppose they have for thinking that God will provide them and the worshipful faithful with life everlasting in his presence. Of course, they may still appeal to some *special* divine revelation in which God himself supposedly informs them that he will provide faithful, Christian believers with life everlasting in his presence. But to the rest of us, particularly philosophers who find ourselves without the benefit of such special revelations, such a carefully crafted philosophical skepticism will surely appear to be something less than genuine skepticism about whether the goods we know of are representative of the goods there are. Morever, while philosophers may respect religious appeals to special divine revelations, such appeals can hardly provide a *philosophical response* to the skeptical implications of the philosophical claims of skeptical theism.

Notes

1. "The Problem of Evil and Some Varieties of Atheism," *American Philosophical Quarterly* 16 (1979): 335–41.
2. Skeptical theists will say that we are in no position to assert this. For they claim that several of the goods we can think of may, *for all we know*, be goods, any one of which in fact may be the good that does justify God, if he exists, in permitting the fawn's terrible suffering. They would prefer that the sentence in question be revised as follows: "Moreover, it is extraordinarily difficult to think of, or even imagine, a greater good whose realization *we know* would require God to permit that fawn's terrible suffering."
3. If some good G outweighs an evil e, then the good state of affairs G&e outweighs e and cannot be obtained without permitting e. I take it as given that if G can exist without e, a perfectly good being (other things being equal) would prevent e.
4. "The Humean Obstacle to Evidential Arguments from Suffering: On Avoding the Evils of "Appearance," *International Journal for the Philosophy of Religion*, 16 (1984): 73–93. "Evil and the Theistic Hypothesis: A Response to Wykstra," *International Journal for the Philosophy of Religion*, 16 (1984): 95–100.
5. Since there is a natural tendency to associate the word 'God' with various *religious* beliefs about *when* the goods for the sake of which God permits horrendous evils will be realized, beliefs that are not themselves logically derivable from the concept of God, I used the letter 'O' to free the mind from the tendency to think that those religious beliefs are logically entailed by the mere concept of an omnipotent, omniscient, creator of the world.
6. Of course, since these three religious systems contradict one another, we can be sure not all these religious claims can be true.
7. Proslogium, Ch. 1, pp. 3–7 in *Anselm: Basic Writings*, trans. S. N. Deane. (LaSalle, IL: Open Court, 2n ed., 1966).
8. Two objections have been raised. The first is that the premise is too strong. Instead, it should read as follows: "no good we know of (is known by us to justify) God in permitting many of the evils in our world." The second, more crucial objection is as I go on to state.
9. The best presentation of Skeptical Theism I am aware of is by my colleague, Michael Bergmann. See his important paper, "Skeptical Theism and Rowe's New Evidential Argument from Evil," *Nous* 35 (2001): 278–296.