The Evidence of Evil

Candidate Number: 50401

Word Count: 29,950

Abstract

Does evil constitute any evidence against the existence of God? Stephen Wykstra argues that it does not, claiming that “if we have realized the magnitude of the theistic proposal, cognizance of suffering ... should not in the least reduce our confidence that it is true”. I argue that he is mistaken.

I outline a framework for modelling the confidence we lend to propositions and assessing the rational propriety of such confidences both at a given time and over time, and apply this framework to the issue at hand by imagining a scenario in which a subject observes for the first time a terrible evil. I argue that no matter which one of us this subject is, he ought to undergo a reduction in confidence in the existence of God as a result of this observation.

The bulk of this thesis is taken up with a defence of two central premises of this argument, the most controversial of which is, roughly speaking, that our subject ought to be more confident of the occurrence of the evil on the supposition that God does not exist than on the supposition that He does. In the course of a defence of this premise I seek to counter the challenge to evidential arguments from evil made by the 'Sceptical Theists' and the challenge, based on the claim that in deciding which evils to permit God may have to draw an arbitrary line, that van Inwagen issues.

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Chapter 1

Section 1: Introduction

1.1 Wykstra's Claim

Stephen Wykstra makes the claim, “if we have realized the magnitude of the theistic proposal, cognizance of suffering... should not in the least reduce our confidence that it is true”.[1] I disagree, and shall attempt to argue that there are certain instances of suffering the cognizance of which should reduce our confidence in 'the theistic proposal', that we should take such instances of suffering as *evidence* against that proposal.

'The theistic proposal' I shall simply take to be the claim that God exists. Here at the outset I shall stipulate that I shall be using the term 'God' in such a way that God exists if and only if there exists a perfect being.

In this chapter I sketch some broad features of two prominent arguments from evil and suggest that a new argument that falls somewhere in between the two would be worthy of consideration, before going on to look at how we should think of confidence and how we might argue that it should or should not change in the light of experience. In the second chapter I further develop this account, outline my 'evidence' – a specific instance of suffering – and set out the argument I will be defending. The third and fourth chapters are devoted to the defence of what I take to be this argument's two most contentious premises.

1 [Wykstra 1984 p91]. Wykstra seems to have since distanced himself somewhat from this claim [Wykstra 1996 p148]. His 1984 position will, nevertheless, serve as a useful example of the kind of stance on the evidential bearing, or lack thereof, of evil that I will be concerned to undermine.

1.2 A Synthesis of Two Arguments

The argument I shall develop is a version of the 'evidential argument from evil' and is to some extent a synthesis of two of the most prominent versions of that argument, that of William Rowe and that of Paul Draper.[2] Providing a very brief outline of some of the salient features of those arguments will therefore be helpful in setting the scene for my own.

Rowe's evidential argument has undergone numerous revisions over the years, but a consistent theme has been a focus on certain examples of horrific suffering. This concentration on specific evils marks Rowe's argument out as what van Inwagen calls a 'local', as opposed to a 'global', argument from evil:[3] the evidence in Rowe's evidential argument takes the form not of general facts about the existence, quantity and overall distribution of evil, but rather of facts about *particular* evils.

Draper, on the other hand, advances a 'global' argument. For Draper, the evidence against theism takes the form of the entire distribution of pain (and pleasure) that we find in the world or, rather, certain general features about that distribution, such as the biological utility or lack thereof of suffering.

A further difference between these two forms of evidential argument is found in the presence in Draper's argument and the absence from Rowe's of what Sobel calls a 'beforehand-shift'.[4] Rowe's argument does not involve any appeal to what our expectations would or should have been for the evils on the basis of which his argument proceeds. Draper's argument, however, does – the linchpin of his argument is the claim that the facts about evil to which he appeals would be much more surprising on the assumption that God exists than on a different and inconsistent assumption; in his terminology, those facts have a much lower "antecedent [epistemic] probability" on the theistic assumption than on the non-

2 The best-known version of Rowe's argument is developed in his [1979/1996]. Draper's argument is contained in his [1989/1996].
3 [van Inwagen 2006 pp.xii-xiii]
4 [Sobel 2004 p407]

theistic assumption.[5] [6]

The argument I shall advance and defend here follows Rowe in concentrating on certain particular evils but follows Draper in involving a 'beforehand-shift'. The full merits of an argument of this form will, I hope, become apparent after it has been set out in detail, but I will say at this point that part of my rationale in developing an argument of this kind is to enable me to make, what I hope will prove to be, a compelling case against one of the most prominent objections to evidential arguments from evil, that of the 'Sceptical Theists'.

A useful tactic for dealing with sceptical criticism directed at a particular argument is to give, what is at least an informal version of, a *reductio*: to show that were one to apply such scepticism consistently, one would find oneself casting doubt where no doubt should be cast. Part of my response to the sceptic will be based on such an argument. Following Draper in setting my argument out in terms of reasonable prior expectations for certain facts about evil, and following Rowe in concentrating on facts about particular evils, will enable me to make this charge most forcefully.

1.3 A Preview of the Argument

In very rough outline, I shall be offering an argument along the following lines. There are instances of intense suffering in whose occurrence our 'beforehand' confidence should be greater on the supposition that God does not exist than on the supposition that He does. Given certain plausible principles governing confidence at a given time and over a period of time, this means that our confidence in the existence of God after having observed such

5 [Draper 1989/1996 p14]

6 This neat division is complicated somewhat by the fact that in the probabilistic argument that appears in his more recent [1996] Rowe *does* make something like a beforehand-shift. Nevertheless, a distinction between Draper's argument and Rowe's along these lines can still be usefully maintained, for even in his [1996], Rowe does not appeal to what our expectations would or should have been *for the occurrence of certain evils*. Rather, what he appeals to is such expectations for "no good we know of [justifying] God in permitting" those evils [Rowe 1996 pp270-276].

suffering should be lower than that which we had beforehand. Accordingly, cognizance of suffering *should* reduce our confidence in the existence of God.

Section 2: Confidence

2.1 Whose Confidence?

The claim for which I shall be arguing, then, is that, *pace* Wykstra, there are certain instances of suffering in the world such that our cognizance of them should reduce our confidence in theism. The question that immediately arises is: whose confidence are we talking about? That of just some human beings? That of all human beings? That of some ideal subject? Depending on whose confidence we are talking about, we make quite different claims when we say things about how that confidence should or should not change.

I suspect that when Wykstra wrote of 'our' confidence he had in mind the confidences had by the fairly large subset of actual human beings who possess more-or-less normal cognitive faculties and who have given at least some thought to the existence of God, i.e. people like himself. I think that that is the right way to proceed. When, henceforth, I write of 'we' or 'us', I shall be referring to this class of people, and 'our confidence(s)' shall be their confidence(s).

2.2 Rational Requirements

When Wykstra claims that cognizance of suffering should not in the least reduce our confidence in the existence of God, the obligation claimed is presumably not, or not in any

straightforward way, supposed to be a moral one. It is rather, it seems plausible to suppose, one of rationality or of reasonableness: it would be in some sense irrational or unreasonable, he seems to be saying, to become less confident of the existence of God on this basis. My claim to the contrary should be read the same way: it would be in some sense irrational or unreasonable, I will be arguing, *not* to become less confident of the existence of God on this basis.[7]

Rather than simply making specific judgements about the rational acceptability or otherwise of certain changes in confidence, it would be nice to be able to appeal to a general framework for making at least some such judgements. And a well-known framework of this sort exists, in the form of Bayesianism about degrees of belief, credence or 'personal probability'. The Bayesian sees what we might call a subject's 'total state of confidence' as reflected in a 'credence-function' – a function that goes from a proposition, in some cases 'conditional on' another, to a number between 0 and 1 that represents the subject's confidence in (the truth of) that proposition.[8] [9] To say so much is, of course, to make a merely descriptive claim, and so of little use for present purposes in isolation, but to this the

7 In order to prevent any confusion, I should say that I am taking the requirements of rationality to extend much further than a requirement for *consistency* or for its correlate, if a different term is thought proper, for confidence. I think that there are plenty of beliefs that it would be irrational for a subject to hold, and plenty of states of confidence that it would be irrational for a subject to have, which nevertheless are quite consistent with every other belief and state of confidence that subject has. In Chapter 3 Section 1, for example, I claim that we are rationally required to have a very high confidence in the proposition 'the sun will rise tomorrow', and my claim is not that we would be guilty of inconsistency in our confidences if we did not give that proposition very high confidence.
In part, this is simply a point of terminology: choosing to call such beliefs and states of confidence irrational as opposed to, say, unreasonable or, to use Plantinga's term, "noetically improp[er]" [Plantinga 1979 p2], is simply a terminological choice on my part, and if someone should prefer to reserve the term 'rational' for requirements of consistency, and use one of these other terms for requirements of other sorts, I would not mind. What is not merely terminological, however, is my insistence that there are requirements, call them what you will, that go beyond those of consistency.

8 Or the orthodox Bayesian does, at any rate. I look at less orthodox but, in my view, more plausible accounts further on.

9 Where the argument is not simply a proposition but is one proposition 'conditional on' another (represented in what follows by '/', i.e. with 'A/B' standing for 'A conditional on B'), the value of the function represents the subject's confidence in the first proposition 'given' the latter. I do not want to stand here on the question (discussed at length in [Hájek 2003]) of whether conditional or unconditional confidences are primitive. It seems to me that we have a good-enough intuitive understanding of the notion of conditional confidence for my purposes here: your confidence in p conditional on q is your confidence 'working on the supposition that q' in p.

Bayesian typically adds two important normative claims, one synchronic and the other diachronic.

The synchronic normative claim is that rationality requires that our credence-functions be probability-functions, that they satisfy the probability axioms. The diachronic normative claim is that rationality requires that we 'update' by 'conditionalizing': that upon discovering evidence e we should 'update' by moving from an old credence-function $c_{old}(-)$ to a new credence-function $c_{new}(-)$ such that for any proposition p, $c_{new}(p)=c_{old}(p/e)$, where $c_{old}(p/e)$ represents one's initial credence in p conditional on e.[10]

Taken together, these normative claims provide the materials for a powerful account of some of the rational constraints on a subject's confidences. However, standing in the way of an appeal on my part to straightforward Bayesianism as a framework for my argument is that one of the axioms of probability theory states that all logical truths have probability 1, the highest there is, and so the straightforward Bayesian will say that it is a rational requirement that all subjects' credence-functions have the value of 1, the highest there is, for the argument p, where p is any logical truth: in short, that we are all rationally required to be absolutely confident of all logical truths.

This "assumption of logical omniscience"[11] is especially problematic where evidential arguments against (or, indeed, for) theism are concerned, for God is widely held to be a necessary being, a consequence of which on at least some accounts is that 'God exists' is either true of logical necessity or false of logical necessity. If that is so, then any evidential argument against the existence of God will, by Bayesian standards, be either superfluous (for regardless of (what would seem to be) the evidence we should be absolutely certain that God does not exist, if indeed He does not) or doomed to failure (for regardless of the evidence we

10 I am simplifying somewhat by supposing that when one 'discovers' e one becomes certain of the truth of e (so the standard principle of conditionalization rather than a more complex principle such as 'Jeffrey conditionalization' is what should be applied).

11 [Talbott 2008 Section 6.2]

should be absolutely certain that God does exist, if indeed He does).

Having raised this difficulty, however, I am largely going to set it aside, the reason being that much of what the Bayesian will say, on the basis the probability axioms, about rational requirements for confidence seems to me to have considerable *independent* plausibility.[12] While it would be wrong to say that there is *nothing* revisionary about Bayesianism, it does seem that much of its plausibility comes from the fact that it seems to codify *intuitions we have anyway* about the way in which we ought to invest confidence.

Now certainly a degree of caution is required here, and qualifications will have to be made. On the orthodox picture, for example, for every proposition p, a subject's credence-function will have a value for the argument 'p', and that seems just wrong, given that there are plenty of propositions none of us have thought us and, indeed, quite possibly many we are unable to think of. This, however, can be accommodated by introducing a qualification to the effect that the principle holds only for those propositions a subject understands and, perhaps, has given some thought to. To give an example, the following is a principle that can be derived from the probability axioms conjoined with the claim that rationally acceptable credence-functions are probability-functions:

> For any propositions p and q, a rationally acceptable credence-function c(-) will be such that: $c(p) = c(p/q)c(q) + c(p/\sim q)c(\sim q)$.

On the face of it, this 'weighted-average principle' seems untenable as anything but an idealisation. There are surely plenty of propositions that I am simply incapable of

12 Draper would seem to take the same view. In outlining a certain principle of 'epistemic probability', he states “my reason for believing that this [principle] is true...is that I can find no counter-example to it. I do not place a lot of emphasis on the mere fact that it is a theorem of the probability calculus.” [1989/1996 p27]

understanding. If we let q stand for any one of them, the value of my credence-function for the arguments 'q' and '~q' must surely be undefined, and going by this principle we would presumably have to say that my confidence in p ought to be undefined too, but since p can be just any proposition, we would have to say that all my confidences ought to be undefined, and that cannot be right.

A little qualification, though, can leave us with a principle that does seem correct, moreover, one which seems correct regardless of whether our credence-functions should be probability-functions:

> For any propositions p and q *that a subject understands*, a rationally acceptable credence-function c(-) for that subject will be such that:
> $c(p) = c(p/q)c(q) + c(p/\sim q)c(\sim q)$.

If you are confident to some degree that the Conservatives will win the next election if the economy worsens, confident to some other degree that the Conservatives will win the next election if it does not, and confident to some further degree that the economy will worsen, how confident should you be that the Conservatives will win the next election? Well, it seems that you should reason as follows: my confidence in that happening should be an average of that which I have on the supposition that the economy worsens and that which I have on the supposition that it does not, weighted by my confidence in its worsening. This is exactly what this principle tells you to do.

So it seems that it will be legitimate to appeal to a broadly Bayesian framework here, so long as no principles are used which do not have independent plausibility, and so long as those principles that are used are qualified in the way set out above, and perhaps in other

ways as necessary. That is how I shall proceed in what follows, though for brevity I shall not keep repeating the '...that a subject understands' qualification, which henceforth is to be assumed throughout.

One principle I shall not be appealing to, and which I shall be actively dismissing, is that, mentioned above, which dictates that all rational credence-functions have the value of 1 for any proposition which is true of logical necessity. In this way, the problem of God's necessary existence or non-existence is sidestepped. This, I should stress, is not in my view an *ad hoc* manoeuvre.

Take Goldbach's conjecture. This conjecture is either true or false, and whichever it is, it surely is so of logical necessity. So the orthodox Bayesian should hold that we ought to be either completely certain of its truth, or completely certain of its falsity, depending on its actual truth-value, and therefore that there can be no evidence either way as to its truth-value. But that seems just wrong: even if the conjecture is true, it *would* be irrational for me, in my current state of knowledge, to be completely certain of its truth, and it is just not stretching the concept of 'evidence' to say that my reading the newspaper headline 'Mathematician Proves Goldbach's Conjecture' constitutes evidence for me of the truth of Goldbach's conjecture; moreover, a broadly speaking *Bayesian* account of why this constitutes evidence for me can be given[13]. Accordingly, I do not consider the matter of God's alleged logically necessary existence problematic here.

One further matter on which I ought to make some comment at this stage is Plantinga's general objection to evidential arguments from evil that are based on a 'personalist' interpretation of probability, which is simply another term for 'subjective probability', or confidence conceived of in terms of a subject's credence-function. The

13 For example and rather roughly: the headline, 'H', is evidence for me of the truth of Goldbach's conjecture, 'C', because my prior confidence in H conditional on C should exceed my prior confidence in H conditional on ~C.

problem with such arguments, he suggests, is that their central claims constitute “a piece of atheological autobiography rather than an objection to theism”.[14]

His reasoning seems to be this: the only rational constraints on acceptable credences a Bayesian has to go on are constraints of consistency; if the existence of God is not logically inconsistent with that of the evil we find in the world then for any evidence about evil that the atheologian cares to appeal to, a credence in the existence of God conditional on that evidence that is at odds with that which the atheologian would need can be embedded without inconsistency in some set of credences; so all the atheologian can be saying is that such a credence could not without inconsistency be embedded into *his* set of credences, and while this “is perhaps moderately interesting (at least to his friends and relatives)”, it is not something the theist need worry about.[15]

Plantinga's line here seems to me to miss the mark in a couple of ways. First, even if it *were* true that all the 'personalist' atheologian has to go on are constraints on consistency, he need not be saying something of interest only to 'friends and relatives'. He could, for example, employ something akin to the familiar dialectical strategy of taking for granted certain beliefs held in common by oneself and one's audience, and arguing that one's conclusion follows from those beliefs. That is, he could argue as follows: we all, theist, atheist and agnostic alike, in fact have credences in salient propositions that fall within a certain range; given that that is so, we all should, on pain of inconsistency (or its correlate for credences) have credences in the existence of God that fall within such-and-such a range. I do not say that this can *in fact* be done, but it is surely at least a possibility, and such an argument could not be dismissed as mere autobiography.

Second, and more importantly, it is just not true that if one argues on the basis of personal probability, i.e. credence, *all* one has to go on are constraints of consistency (a

14 [Plantinga 1979 p48]
15 [Plantinga 1979 p17]

matter touched upon in footnote 7, above). Admittedly, some Bayesians (those Talbott refers to as 'Subjective Bayesians'[16]) do think that these are the only rational constraints there are, but one can make an appeal to Bayesian principles without sharing this view. So there is the possibility of a personal-probabilistic argument that appeals to *more than* just these constraints, the type of argument I myself will be defending.

Of course, one might side with the Subjective Bayesians here, but given what I take to be the very great plausibility of the contrary position, to dismiss a probabilistic argument on that basis would take substantial argument. Moreover, Plantinga *himself* makes it clear that he does not take that side: "This [Subjective Bayesianism] is indeed a counsel of tolerance; it tolerates sheer absurdity".[17]

2.3 Imprecise Confidence

There is one more piece of important introductory work to be done before moving on. In accordance with the orthodox Bayesian picture, I have been supposing that a subject's confidence in a proposition can be thought of as a single number, which is the value of that subject's single credence-function when it has that proposition as its argument.

This elegantly simple picture is, however, in my view and that of a number of others, flawed, both as a descriptive account and as a normative one. It is flawed as a descriptive account because it is just not plausible to suppose that our states of confidence are as precise, as *sharp*, as this picture would have us believe. As Hájek puts it, "our belief states are irremediably vague: we cannot assign probability, precise to indefinitely many decimal places, to all propositions...there [is] a vast set of propositions upon which our opinion is vague."[18] And it is flawed as a normative account because sometimes a vague, imprecise

16 [Talbott 2008 Section 4]
17 [Plantinga 1979 p17]
18 [Hájek 2000 pp3-4]

confidence is *what the evidence calls for.*[19]

Does this mean that the Bayesian picture should be abandoned altogether? The answer, I think, is no, for it can be adapted. This adaptation could take a number of forms; I shall employ something very like the method endorsed by van Fraassen, whereby we think of a subject as having not one single credence-function, but *many.*[20] It may be that each of a subject's credence-functions has the same value for a certain argument, the proposition p say, but it may not be, and when it is not, the subject's confidence in p can be thought of as given by the *set* of numbers composed of every number n such that at least one of the subject's credence-functions has the value n for the argument p.

The idea here is best illustrated by way of an example. Suppose (to adapt an example due to Sturgeon[21]) you are presented with a box of balls and you are certain that at least 80% of them are red, that at most 90% of them are red, and have no other relevant information at all. What should your confidence be in the proposition, call it 'R', that a ball randomly drawn from the box will be red?

Well, it seems plausible enough to say that you should rule out all those credence-functions whose value for the argument R is less than 0.8, and all those whose value for the argument R is greater than 0.9. What about those credence-functions whose value for the argument R is greater than or equal to 0.8 and less than or equal to 0.9? Although this is not uncontroversial, it seems to me that you have reason *not* to rule out at least one credence

19 This last point is of crucial relevance for present purposes, for, as already noted, an important objection to the evidential argument is that of the Sceptical Theists. These theists urge suspension of judgement on a number of relevant points, and in certain cases the best way of thinking of suspension of judgement seems to be in terms of imprecise confidence. It strikes me that probabilistic arguments from evil, such as that in [Draper 1989/1996], which do not take imprecise confidence into account are therefore in an important respect incomplete.

20 For a précis of this method, see [van Fraassen 2005 p28].

21 [Sturgeon 2008 p156] Sturgeon's example is presented in terms of vague confidence in general, rather than van Fraassen's particular model for representing such confidence.

-function whose value for the argument R is n, for every n such that $0.8 \leq n \leq 0.9$.[22] Assuming that this is so, what can we say about your overall state of confidence in R? It seems we can say this: that it should cover the whole interval [0.8, 0.9].

This is a convenient point at which to introduce some abbreviations and symbols that I shall be using throughout. I shall use 'c(-)' as a variable ranging over credence-functions, 'C_{st}' to designate what I shall call a subject S's 'credence-set' at time t[23] and '$C_{st}(-)$' to designate what I shall call S's 'confidence-function' at time t. The value of $C_{st}(p)$ will be a set of numbers composed as follows:

> For every number n, the set which is the value of $C_{st}(p)$ will contain n as a member just in case there is some credence-function c(-) in C_{st} such that c(p)=n.

Applying this to the case introduced above, we can say that for a subject S confronted at t with the box of balls, S is required to ensure that $C_{st}(R)=[0.8, 0.9]$.

So far so good, but now how should we reformulate the synchronic and diachronic Bayesian principles, given that those principles are formulated in terms of a single credence-function? The most appealing suggestion, in my view, is that we simply see those principles as applying to *all* of a subject's credence-functions.[24] For example, take the weighted-average principle, outlined in Section 2.2. This principle can easily be made to apply to imprecise confidence by recasting it as follows:

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22 Making use of a link between betting behaviour and confidence that I shall outline in more detail at a later point, the idea here can be motivated by considering what you should regard as a *fair price* to pay for a bet that pays £1 if the ball drawn is red. It seems clear that this price should not be lower than £0.80 and it should not be higher than £0.90, but can we really be more precise? It does seem as if we cannot, that you have reason not to rule out as a fair price any sum between £0.80 and £0.90.

23 This is what van Fraassen calls a 'representor' ([van Fraassen 2005 p28]).

24 cf [van Fraassen 2005 p28] and [Kaplan 2002 p442].

For any propositions p and q, subject S at time t is required to adopt a credence-set C_{st} such that for every credence function c(-) in C_{st}:

$$c(p)=c(p/q)c(q)+c(p/\sim q)c(\sim q)\ .$$

One final point. I am going to be arguing that on the basis of our cognizance of certain evils, we should become less confident of the existence of God. It is clear enough what this means if our confidence in the existence of God both before and after our discovery should be sharp (i.e. represented by a single number) – it means, of course, that where our prior confidence has the value n and our posterior confidence the value m, n should be greater than m – but what if that should turn out not to be so, what if either our prior or our posterior confidence should or could be vague (i.e. represented by an interval)?

Specifying exactly what the circumstances are under which one imprecise confidence can properly be said to be 'less than' another is, in my view, surprisingly difficult, but this difficulty need not detain us, for there are some cases in which it seems clear that one state-of-confidence-in-p is less than another. One of these is that in which, where a 'new' state-of-confidence-in p $C_{new}(p)$ has the value [c, d] and an 'old' state-of-confidence-in-p $C_{old}(p)$ has the value [a, b], $c<a$ and $d<b$. It seems clear to me that this is a case of the new confidence being less than the old one because, although there may indeed be some 'overlap' (i.e. it may be that $d>a$), nevertheless there are credence-functions in C_{new} whose value for the argument 'p' is lower than that of any credence-function in C_{old} while at the same time there are credence-functions in C_{old} whose value for the argument 'p' is higher than than of any credence-function in C_{new}. When I write henceforth of one confidence in a proposition being less than or being reduced to another confidence in that proposition, it is a case such as this that I shall have in mind.

Chapter 2

Section 1: The Method & The Evidence

1.1 Recap

I have suggested that we might seek to show that cognizance of (certain instances of) suffering should reduce our confidence in the existence of God by working within a broadly Bayesian framework, adapted to take into account the fact that we – those whose confidence is at issue – are neither logically omniscient nor able (nor indeed required) to have a precise degree of confidence in even all those propositions we understand. I have also suggested that the claim that our confidence should be reduced is to be understood as follows: if state-of-confidence-in-p $C_{old}(p)$ changes to state-of-confidence-in-p $C_{new}(p)$, this change will count as a reduction in confidence if, where $C_{old}(p)=[a, b]$ and $C_{new}(p)=[c, d]$, $c<a$ and $d<b$.

In this section I outline a general method for arguing that our confidence in an hypothesis should be reduced by cognizance of evidence and discuss exactly how the evidence of suffering should be construed. In the following section I draw on this to set out my argument.

1.2 How To Argue That Cognizance of Evidence e Should Reduce Our Confidence in Hypothesis h

I have already mentioned the Bayesian principle of conditionalizing. Adapting this principle to take into account imprecise confidence gives us something along the following lines as an principle governing how becoming cognizant of evidence e should impact upon a

subject's confidence in hypothesis h:

> If a subject, S, becomes certain of evidence e, then S should adopt a new credence-set C_{new}, such that for every credence-function c(-) in C_{new}, c(h)=n just in case there is some credence-function c(-) in S's old credence-set C_{old} such that c(h/e)=n.

This in turn gives rise to the more succinct:

> If a subject, S, becomes certain of evidence e, then S should adopt a new confidence-function $C_{new}(-)$, such that $C_{new}(h)=C_{old}(h/e)$

This principle can be used to develop a simple argument for the conclusion that cognizance of e should reduce a subject's confidence in h. If we let 'C_{st1}' stand for a subject S's credence-set before becoming certain of e and 'C_{st2}' for his credence-set after becoming certain of e, we could argue as follows:

1. S should ensure that where $C_{st1}(h)=[a, b]$ and $C_{st1}(h/e)=[c, d]$, $c<a$ and $d<b$.
2. So (via the principle of conditionalization), S should ensure that $C_{st2}(h)=[c, d]$, where $c<a$ and $d<b$.
3. So, S's confidence in h after becoming certain of e should be less than S's confidence in h before becoming certain of e.

Now it may, of course, be difficult or even impossible to say exactly what a subject's confidences should be for various propositions, but we need not do that to be able to offer an argument such as this. It would, for example, be sufficient in this case to say that for any acceptable confidences for S at t1 and t2, premise 1 will hold. More pressing is the problem of how this premise is to be substantiated, even given that precise values for the confidences involved are not required. Coming to our aid is establishing this is Bayes' Theorem. Adapting a simple form of this theorem to accommodate imprecise confidence gives us:

For any acceptable credence-set C, for any credence-function c(-) that is a member of C and for any propositions p and q: $c(p/q)=\frac{c(p)c(q/p)}{c(q)}$.

So one could defend premise 1 by arguing that for every credence-function c(-) in credence-set C_{st1}, $\frac{c(h)c(e/h)}{c(e)}$ should be less than c(h). If that were so, premise 1 would be true. For it will be recalled from Chapter 1 Section 2.3 that the interval (the degenerate interval in the case of precise confidence) that is the value of C(p), for any confidence-function C(-) and any proposition p, has as a member the number n just in case there is a credence-function c(-) in the credence-set C such that c(p)=n. Now if for every credence-function c(-) in C_{st1}, $\frac{c(h)c(e/h)}{c(e)}$ should be less than c(h), then, by Bayes' theorem, for every credence-function c(-) in C_{st1}, c(h/e) should be less than c(h). And that means that S should ensure that, where $C_{st1}(h)=[a, b]$ and $C_{st1}(h/e)=[c, d]$, $c<a$ and $d<b$, which is what premise 1 asserts.

In a sense, of course, this just postpones the problem, for we now have to show that for every credence-function c(-) in credence-set C_{st1}, $\frac{c(h)c(e/h)}{c(e)}$ should be less than c(h).

But here another principle already mentioned can be appealed to, the weighted-average principle, which when adapted to fit imprecise confidence (cf. Chapter 1 Section 2.3) could read:

> For any acceptable credence-set C, for any credence-function c(-) that is a member of C and for any propositions p and q:
>
> $c(q)=c(q/p)c(p)+c(q/\sim p)c(\sim p)$.

This means that for every credence-function c(-) in credence-set C_{st1} , c(e) should equal $(c(e/h)c(h)+c(e/\sim h)c(\sim h))$. Accordingly, for every credence-function c(-) in credence-set C_{st1}, $\frac{c(h)c(e/h)}{c(e)}$ should equal $\frac{c(h)c(e/h)}{c(e/h)c(h)+c(e/\sim h)c(\sim h)}$, and therefore for every credence-function c(-) in credence-set C_{st1}, $\frac{c(h)c(e/h)}{c(e)}$ should be less than c(h) just in case $\frac{c(h)c(e/h)}{c(e/h)c(h)+c(e/\sim h)c(\sim h)}$ should be less than c(h). Now $\frac{c(h)c(e/h)}{c(e/h)c(h)+c(e/\sim h)c(\sim h)}$ *will* be less than c(h) for every credence-function c(-) in credence-set C_{st1} if for every credence-function c(-) in credence-set C_{st1}, c(h) is greater than 0 and less than 1 and c(e/~h) is greater than c(e/h). So under those circumstances $\frac{c(h)c(e/h)}{c(e)}$ will also be less than c(h) for every credence-function c(-) in credence-set C_{st1}.

Since it has already been established that if, for every credence-function c(-) in credence-set C_{st1}, $\frac{c(h)c(e/h)}{c(e)}$ should be less than c(h), then premise 1 will be true, it follows that if it can be shown that, for every credence-function c(-) in credence-set C_{st1} , (i) c(h) should be greater than 0 and less than 1 and (ii) c(e/~h) should be greater than c(e/h), then premise 1 will have been shown to be true.

Now since claims like (i) and (ii) are claims that we may well be able to establish in certain cases, we may well be able to show that, for some subject S, evidence e and

hypothesis h, cognizance of e (thought of as becoming of e) should reduce S's confidence in h. And if we can go further and show that pretty much any one of us can 'take the place' of S, we will be able to show that for pretty much any of us, cognizance of e should reduce our confidence in h. That is precisely what I shall try to do here, for some evidence of evil and the hypothesis of God's existence.

1.3 The Evidence

So what, then, is this evidence of evil, cognizance of which is to be argued to force upon us a diminished confidence in the existence of God? As stated earlier, I am going to follow Rowe in concentrating on particular instances of horrible suffering. In fact, I shall go so far as to borrow (one of) Rowe's own examples: the slow and painful death, over a number of days, of a fawn caught in a forest fire.[25] I shall henceforth use 'E' to refer both to this evil and to the proposition reporting its occurrence, the context making clear which is intended.

As suggested above, the argument will proceed as follows: I will try to argue that, take pretty much any one of us and call him 'S', S's becoming certain of E should lead to a reduction in S's confidence in the existence of God ('G', henceforth).[26] If that could be done, it will have been shown that, for pretty much all of us, cognizance of this suffering should reduce our confidence in the existence of God.

At this point I am going to introduce something of a convenient fiction. I am going to suppose that our 'everyman', S, is in the following situation. At a time I shall designate t1, S has not yet become cognizant of the fact that the world contains evils as terrible as E (or if he

25 [Rowe 1979/1996 p4]

26 It is plausible to suggest that in fact none of every do (or, at least, ever should) become *absolutely certain* of the occurrence of evils like E. Nevertheless, in order to keep things simple (in particular, in order to be able to stick with the simple principle of conditionalizing rather than having to outline and go via a principle such as Jeffrey conditionalizing) I am going to suppose that we do.

has, this knowledge has been stripped away). He is, however, about to, for he is at this moment watching, powerless to intervene, the forest fire encircle Rowe's fawn. At a time I shall designate t2, S has observed the fawn's slow and agonising death and has had time to consider the import of what he has seen. My contention will be this: that S's confidence in the existence of God at t2, after having observed E, ought to be less than that which he has at t1, beforehand.

The reason I introduce this set-up is threefold. First, by making what I referred to earlier as a 'beforehand-shift' in initially supposing S not to have yet observed E, it avoids the 'Problem of Old Evidence'. This is the problem that arises for determining the significance for a subject of evidence of which that subject is already certain. For suppose that we looked simply at the situation that obtains at some point *after* S has become certain of E. At that point, S's confidence in the existence of God should be exactly equal to S's confidence in the existence of God conditional on E, and so it could not be said that S's confidence in the existence of God conditional on E should be less than his confidence in the existence of God 'anyway'.

Second, by supposing S to be at t1 unaware of any other terrible evils, it circumvents any problems to do with 'double-dipping' that may be thought to arise. 'Double-dipping' is Juhl's term[27] for the error of overplaying the significance of a piece of evidence by updating on it more than once. This matter may arise in the case at hand for one might argue as follows: if S *already* knows about certain terrible evils the world contains, he ought not to become less confident of the existence of God upon becoming cognizant of E, for he will have *already* adjusted his confidence accordingly in the light of those other terrible evils. Now I am not at all sure that this line would be entirely correct, for it does not seem to me obvious that we need take all terrible evils to be multiple instances of the same 'piece of

27 [Juhl 2007 p554]

evidence'. That said, determining exactly what does and does not constitute double-dipping is difficult question, so it will be safest to suppose that S, at t1, is as yet unaware of any other terrible evils.

A related issue underlies the third reason for setting things up this way. I will be arguing below that S should have a confidence in E conditional G that is less than that which he should have in E conditional on ~G. An important objection to claims such as these comes from the Sceptical Theists. I shall have more to say about this objection at a later point, but for present purposes the following rough sketch will suffice: the Sceptical Theist maintains that our insight into what God has available in the way of reasons for permitting evil is, or at least for all we know is, very poor. Now if that is right, then perhaps S should not have a confidence in E conditional on G that is less than that which he should have in E conditional on ~G.

As I say, I will be addressing this matter at greater length below. The point I want to make here is that by supposing S to have not yet become aware of *any* terrible evils, I am able to avoid the following argument that might be given in support of the sceptical position: S knows that many terrible evils have occurred; he most likely also knows that, for at least some of those evils, he is unable to see what reason God could have had for permitting them; accordingly, S ought to have grave doubts about his ability to discern any reasons there may be for God to permit terrible evils; accordingly, when deciding at t1 upon a confidence in E conditional on G, S should not place much stock in any failure on his part to discern a reason God could have for permitting E. By supposing that this is the *first* terrible evil of which S is (about to become) cognizant, a line of thought such as this can be set aside.

Section 2: The Argument

2.1 The Argument

My argument can be outlined. The set-up introduced above is taken as given: 'S' refers to a subject who can be pretty much any one of us; C_{st1} is S's credence-set and $C_{st1}(-)$ S's confidence-function at t1, the time at which, having been stripped of any knowledge he has of the world's terrible evils, S is watching the forest fire which is about to consume the fawn; C_{st2} is S's credence-set and $C_{st2}(-)$ S's confidence-function at t2, the time at which S has observed the fawn's slow and painful death, become thereby certain of E, and reflected upon what he has seen. In the interests of brevity I will here and throughout use '$R_s[p]$' as short for 'S is rationally required to ensure that p', '$\forall c(-) \in C_{stn}$:' as short for 'for every credence-function c(-) in credence-set C_{stn}:' and '$\exists c(-) \in C_{stn}$:' as short for 'for some credence-function c(-) in credence-set C_{stn}:'.

I shall first simply state the argument before making some comment on its premises.

1. Where $C_{st2}(G)=[a, b]$ and $C_{st1}(G)=[c, d]$, if $a<c$ and $b<d$ then S is less confident of the existence of God at t2 than at t1. [Premise]
2. $R_s[C_{st2}(G)=C_{st1}(G/E)]$. [Premise]
3. $\text{If } (R_s[\forall c(-)\in C_{st1}: 1>c(G)>0] \text{ and } R_s[\forall c(-)\in C_{st1}: c(E/\sim G)>c(E/G)]), \text{ then } R_s[\forall c(-)\in C_{st1}: c(G/E)<c(G)]$ [Premise]
4. $R_s[\forall c(-)\in C_{st1}: 1>c(G)>0]$ [Premise]
5. $R_s[\forall c(-)\in C_{st1}: c(E/\sim G)>c(E/G)]$ [Premise]
6. So, $R_s[\forall c(-)\in C_{st1}: c(G/E)<c(G)]$ [From 3, 4 & 5]

7. If $R_s[\forall c(-) \in C_{st1} : c(G/E) < c(G)]$, then

   R_s[where C_{st1}(G/E)=[a, b] and C_{st1}(G)=[c, d], a<c and b<d] [Premise]

8. So, R_s[where C_{st1}(G/E)=[a, b] and C_{st1}(G)=[c, d], a<c and b<d] [From 6 & 7]

9. So, R_s[where C_{st2}(G)=[a, b] and C_{st1}(G)=[c, d], a<c and b<d] [From 2 & 8]

10. So, R_s[S is less confident of the existence of God at t2 than at t1] [From 1 & 9]

2.2 Initial Comments

The argument seems valid so its soundness turns on the truth of premises 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 and 7. Premises 4 and 5 require substantial defence and that will be the task of the following chapters. Here I shall draw together some strands from the preceding sections to defend the other premises.

First, though, a brief clarification. Perhaps it is the case that sometimes a person's confidence in a proposition is best thought of as given by neither a single number nor even an interval; perhaps people sometimes have a confidence in a proposition which is best thought of as being simply a 'blank', with no numerical value at all. And perhaps such states-of-confidence, which I will call 'empty confidences',[28] are sometimes what rationality calls for (or permits, at least).

The possibility of empty confidences will emerge at a couple of points in the following chapters, but the point I want to make here is simply that the premises in the above argument should be read in such a way as to be *false* if S is permitted to have an empty confidence in the relevant propositions. Take premise 4 – $R_s[\forall c(-) \in C_{st1} : 1 > c(G) > 0]$ – for example. This premise might be taken in such a way as to turn out true if S is required to

28 Hàjek uses the term "[subjective] probability gap" [Hájek 2003 p278].

have an empty confidence in G.[29] That is not how I intend for it to be read, however. If S is required, or even permitted, to have such a confidence in G, this premise is false.

Turning now to the premises themselves, premise 1 is an application of the claim made at the end of Chapter 1 Section 2.3. Let $C_{st2}(G)=[a, b]$ and $C_{st1}(G)=[c, d]$. Now it may be that state-of-confidence-in-G $C_{st2}(G)$ and state-of-confidence-in-G $C_{st1}(G)$ are both precise confidences, in which case $a=b$ and $c=d$ and it will obvious that $C_{st2}(G)$ is less than $C_{st1}(G)$ if $a<c$. On the other hand, it could be that either or both of $C_{st2}(G)$ and $C_{st1}(G)$ are imprecise or vague confidences, in which case either $b>a$, $d>c$ or both. But still, if $a<c$ and $b<d$, the lower endpoint of S's confidence in G at t2 will be lower than that of his confidence in G at t1 and the upper endpoint of S's confidence in G at t2 will also be lower than that of his confidence in G at t2 and that, I have suggested, makes it appropriate to say that the former confidence is lower than the latter.

Premise 2 is an application of the principle, first mentioned for precise confidence in Section 2.2 of Chapter 1 and then adapted for imprecise confidence in Section 1.2 of Chapter 2, that would have us react to evidence by updating via conditionalization. A principle along these lines is often defended by Bayesians via a (diachronic) 'Dutch Book' argument,[30] but given my departure from orthodox Bayesianism I doubt that I am in a position to mount such an argument. Nevertheless, the principle seems to me to have considerable independent plausibility. It seems that there would be something irrational in investing a certain degree of confidence in an hypothesis conditional on some future finding, but then, upon making exactly that finding, refusing to invest that very same degree of confidence, now unconditionally, in the hypothesis.

Premise 3 draws on the illustration in Section 1.2 of this chapter of how we might

29 For it will be true, albeit vacuously so, that for every number n, if n is the value of a credence-function in C_{st1} for the argument G, then $1>n>0$.

30 cf, e.g., [Talbott 2008 Section 3]

seek to argue, by way of Bayes' Theorem expanded by the weighted average principle, that evidence e should reduce our confidence in hypothesis h. I have already (Chapter 1 Section 2.2) expressed my belief that the weighted average principle embodies a requirement of rationality. As for Bayes' Theorem itself, the claim that we should make our credences conform to this theorem, also, seems to me a fair one, principally because I cannot think of a plausible counter-example.

Importantly though, even if the acceptability of seeing Bayes' Theorem as embodying a constraint on rational credence-functions were for some reason disputed, the principle behind premise 3 seems to me to be a good one in its own right. It just seems eminently reasonable for you to have a confidence in some hypothesis, conditional on your finding some evidence, that is lower than that which you have in that hypothesis 'anyway' (i.e. unconditionally) if your confidence in finding that evidence conditional on the truth of that hypothesis is lower than your confidence in finding that evidence conditional on that hypothesis's falsity, so long as you are not 'anyway' absolutely certain that the hypothesis is true or absolutely certain that it is false.[31] Taking into account imprecise confidence by suggesting that you make each one of your credence-functions conform to this principle would then give rise to a general principle from which premise 3 can be derived.

As for premise 7, if for every credence-function c(-) in C_{st1}, c(G/E) is less than c(G), then i) there will be some credence-function in C_{st1} whose value for the argument G/E is lower than that of any credence-function in C_{st1} for the argument G and ii) there will be some credence-function in C_{st1} whose value for the argument G is higher than that of any credence-function in C_{st1} for the argument G/E. Now it will be recalled from Section 2.3 of Chapter 1

31 You are on a jury in a murder trial and have not yet seen any evidence to suggest that the defendant's fingerprints were found on the murder weapon. What should be the relationship between your unconditional confidence in the defendant's guilt and your confidence in his guilt conditional on it turning out that his fingerprints were found on the murder weapon? Clearly enough, the former should be lower than the latter, unless you are already absolutely certain of the defendant's innocence or guilt, because you should be more confident of his fingerprints being found on the weapon on the hypothesis that he is guilty than on the hypothesis that he is innocent.

that the set which is the value of $C_{st1}(G/E)$ is composed as follows: n is a member of $C_{st1}(G/E)$ just in case there is some credence-function c(-) in C_{st1} such that c(G/E)=n. Similarly for the set which is the value of $C_{st1}(G)$. All of which taken together means that if for every credence-function c(-) in C_{st1}, c(G/E) is less than c(G), then where $C_{st1}(G/E)=[a, b]$ and $C_{st1}(G)=[c, d]$, $a<c$ and $d<b$. So a requirement on S to make the antecedent of this conditional true just is a requirement on S to make its consequent true. Hence premise 7 is true.

All that remains is to support premises 4 and 5. It will be convenient to postpone discussion of premise 4 until some relevant points have been developed in the course of a defence of premise 5, to which I now turn.

Chapter 3

Section 1: S's Confidence in E, Conditional on ~G

1.1 Introduction

Premise 5 in the argument set out above asserts that $R_s[\forall c(\text{-}) \in C_{st1} : c(E/\sim G) > c(E/G)]$. That is, it asserts that S is rationally required to ensure that for every credence-function c(-) in C_{st1}, the credence-set he has at t1, c(E/~G) is greater than c(E/G), that in this sense S's confidence in E conditional on ~G is greater than his confidence in E conditional on G.

I begin by looking in this section at what can be said about the credence-functions it is permissible for S to have at t1 in relation to E conditional on ~G, before turning in the following sections to the contentious issue of what can be said about the credence-functions it is permissible for S to have at t1 in relation to E conditional on G.

1.2 E/~G

How confident should S be at t1 in E conditional on ~G? How confident, that is, should he be, working on the supposition that God does not exist, that the fawn will die the horrible death that E reports in the forest fire that at that time is about to engulf it? *Extremely* confident, I would say.

Set E aside for the moment and consider 'Sun', the proposition that the sun will rise tomorrow. Specifically, consider C_{st1}(Sun/~G). S is surely rationally required to ensure that every member of this set is very high, to ensure that for every credence-function c(-) in C_{st1},

c(Sun/~G) is very high. It does not, of course, follow from ~G that the sun will rise tomorrow, and so sceptical doubts can be raised. But the fact remains that we would rightly judge someone who did not have an extremely high confidence in Sun, conditional on ~G, to be guilty of some failing, unless we had reason to believe that he was privy to some rather startling information of which we were ignorant.

C_{st1}(E/~G), I maintain, should be about as high as C_{st1}(Sun/~G), i.e. extremely high. The reason being that given how 'close' S is to the evil E reports, it would take something little short of a miracle for that evil not to occur. Just as the sun will rise tomorrow if the world carries on behaving as it has in the past, so too will the fawn die the slow and painful death that E reports if the the world carries on behaving as it has in the past. Of course, this *could* not happen. A freak gale *could* blow the fire out just before it engulfs the fawn, say, or the fawn *could* be magically transported out of harm's way by some powerful, benevolent being other than God. But so too the sun *could* fail to rise tomorrow morning. It remains the case that we are obliged to invest very little confidence in these possibilities, and therefore to invest very great confidence in propositions like E and Sun, on the supposition that ~G. Accordingly, for every credence-function c(-) in C_{st1}, c(E/~G) should be very high indeed.[32]

32 It might be said that since S, at t1, is unaware of any of the world's terrible evils, he will not be in a position to assign this extremely high confidence to E (which is a quite specific report of what will happen to the fawn), for he will be unaware that, say flesh burns, and of how much suffering being burnt alive and left to die a lingering death would cause the fawn. This objection does not seem too problematic, however, for we can allow that S has knowledge like this and is nonetheless unaware of evil as terrible as E. For in a world in which no evils like E ever took place, people could still come to know, through scientific study, that if fawns ever *did* find themselves caught in forest fires in the way in which Rowe's fawn is caught, they would experience the kind of suffering E reports.

Section 2: S's Confidence in E, Conditional on G

2.1 What Needs To Be Shown

So, what needs to be established in this Chapter is that $R_s[\forall c(\text{-}) \in C_{st1} : c(E/\sim G) > c(E/G)]$, and what I hope to have shown above is that $R_s[\forall c(\text{-}) \in C_{st1} : c(E/\sim G) \text{is very high indeed}]$. The task now is to argue that $R_s[\forall c(\text{-}) \in C_{st1} : c(E/G) \text{is lower than very high indeed}]$. If I succeed in that task, I will have established premise 5.

The line I shall take here is one familiar from Rowe's work. Rowe's evidential argument in its various guises has always sought to reach its conclusion by way of considerations about what God would have a morally sufficient reason to permit. Since God is by definition a perfect being, He will do only that which He has such a reason to do, so His having a morally sufficient reason to permit E is a necessary condition of His permitting it.

Now what I need to show is not strictly speaking that it is unlikely that God would have a morally sufficient reason for permitting E, nor even that S should think it unlikely that He would. Rather, I need to show merely that S ought to be sufficiently confident that God would not have such a reason that S ought to rule out all those credence-functions that have a very high value for the argument 'God has a morally sufficient reason for permitting E, given that He exists'.

To put the point more explicitly – suppose that I could show that, where 'R' stands for 'God has a morally sufficient reason to permit E':

[1] $R_s[\forall c(\text{-}) \in C_{st1} : c(R/G) \text{ is lower than very high indeed}]$

By the weighted-average principle:

[2] $R_s[\forall c(\text{-}) \in C_{st1} : c(E/G) = c(E/G \& R)c(R/G) + c(E/G \& \sim R)c(\sim R/G)]$

Now S ought to be *certain* that if God does not have a morally sufficient reason for permitting E, E will not occur, so:

[3] $R_s[\forall c(\text{-}) \in C_{st1} : c(E/\sim R \& G) = 0]$

Which gives us:

[4] $R_s[\forall c(\text{-}) \in C_{st1} : c(E/G) = c(E/G \& R)c(R/G)]$

And since c(E/G&R) can be no greater than 1:

[5] $R_s[\forall c(\text{-}) \in C_{st1} : c(E/G) \leq c(R/G)]$ [33]

So if [1] is true, then:

[6] $R_s[\forall c(\text{-}) \in C_{st1} : c(E/G)$ is lower than very high indeed$]$

Which, given the conclusion of the preceding section, namely that:

[7] $R_s[\forall c(\text{-}) \in C_{st1} : c(E/\sim G)$ is very high indeed $]$

Means that:

[8] $R_s[\forall c(\text{-}) \in C_{st1} : c(E/G) < c(E/\sim G)]$

Which, of course, is premise 5.

It is perhaps worth stressing that it is time t1 with which we are concerned here. *After* having become certain of the fawn's death, S should, of course, become certain of R, given G. But that is no objection to my argument, for consider: *after* hearing a suspect's confession I should become certain that the suspect has given a false confession conditional on his

33 The argument from [2] to [5] shows that S should ensure that for every credence-function in his credence-set, the value of that function for the argument p should be less than or equal to its value for what S is certain is a necessary condition of p. I will be making frequent use of this.

innocence, but that is no objection to the claim that *beforehand* I ought to think it unlikely, conditional on the suspect's innocence, that the suspect should give a false confession, that I therefore ought to think it unlikely, conditional on the suspect's innocence, that I will hear him confess, and therefore (given also that I think it likely that he will confess, given that he is guilty) that I ought to become less confident of the suspect's innocence upon hearing his confession.

2.2 What Would it Take for God to Have a Morally Sufficient Reason for Permitting E?

So, what can we say about what S's confidence should be at t1 in God, given that He exists, having a morally sufficient reason for permitting E? Well, that depends in part on what S ought to think the necessary conditions are for God's having a morally sufficient reason for permitting E. A natural suggestion is that S should be certain that God has a morally sufficient reason for permitting E only if, in Rowe's words, He could not prevent E "without thereby losing some greater good or permitting some evil equally bad or worse".[34]

A bit more fully, one might suggest that since E is an evil, since its occurrence is intrinsically disvaluable, and since God could prevent E from occurring, He would have a morally sufficient reason for permitting it only if either i) there is some good that not even He could bring about without permitting E or an evil equally bad or worse, and which is such that if permitting E or an evil equally bad or worse is the 'price' He has to pay for bringing it about, that price is worth paying, or ii) there is some evil that not even He could prevent from occurring without permitting E or an evil equally bad or worse, and which is such that if permitting E or an evil equally bad or worse is the 'price' He has to pay for preventing it, that price is worth paying.

Let us say that if a good is such that the permission by God of E or an evil equally

34 [Rowe 1979/1996 p2]

bad or worse would be a price worth paying for bringing about that good, then that good is a 'greater good' with respect to E, and that if a good is such that not even God could bring it about without permitting E or an evil equally bad or worse, then E is a 'minimum price' for obtaining that good. Let us similarly say, for want of a better term, that if an evil is such that the permission by God of E or an evil equally bad or worse would be a price worth paying for the prevention of that evil, then that evil is a 'greater evil' with respect to E, and that if an evil is such that not even God could prevent it without permitting E or an evil equally bad or worse, then E is a 'minimum price' for preventing that evil.

The suggestion, then, is that S should be certain that a necessary condition for God's having a morally sufficient reason for permitting E is this: either there is a greater good for the obtaining of which E is a minimum price, or there is a greater evil for the prevention of which E is a is a minimum price. Using 'GG' to abbreviate 'there is a greater good for the obtaining of which E is a minimum price' and 'GE' to abbreviate 'there is a greater evil for the prevention of which E is a is a minimum price', the suggestion is that S should be certain that (GGvGE) is a necessary condition for God's having a morally sufficient reason to permit E.

Is this correct? Well, at first it certainly does seem right, for if neither GG nor GE is true, then God's preventing E would surely be for the best all-things-considered. However, van Inwagen argues that (GGvGE) is not a necessary condition for God's having a morally sufficient reason for permitting E.[35] He argues that God could have a morally sufficient reason to permit E even if (to put in the terminology I am using) there were no greater good for the bringing about of which E is a minimum price and no greater evil for the prevention of which E is minimum price. His basis for so arguing is that there may be greater goods for which there is no *minimum* price at all, that there may be greater goods such that while God

35 This argument is developed in greatest detail in [van Inwagen 2006].

would have to permit *some* amount of evil to bring them about, it cannot be specified exactly how great that amount is, for there is simply no fact of the matter. Accordingly, the best that even God could do would be to settle upon some *arbitrary* amount of evil to permit in order to secure those goods. And, given this, God could be justified in permitting E in pursuance of some greater good, even if it is not the case that (GGvGE).

I shall have more to say about van Inwagen's claims here in Section 4, but for now I will assume that S should take into account the possibility that God has a morally sufficient reason of this sort for permitting E. Let us say that if God is justified in permitting E for such a reason, then He has a 'VI-justification' for permitting E, and abbreviate 'God has a VI-justification for permitting E' as 'VI'. Taking this into account, the suggestion is then that a necessary condition for God's having a morally sufficient reason to permit E is (GGvGEvVI). Of this, I submit, S should be certain.

2.3 Where To Go From Here

So (GGvGEvVI) specifies what S ought to be certain is a disjunctive necessary condition for God's having a morally sufficient reason to permit E. Accordingly, $R_s[\forall c(\text{-}) \in C_{st1} : c(R/G) \leq c(GGvGEvVI/G)]$.

(GGvGEvVI) is equivalent to ~(~GG&~GE&~VI), so ~(GGvGEvVI) is equivalent to (~GG&~GE&~VI). Since, $R_s[\forall c(\text{-}) \in C_{st1} : c(p/q) = 1 - c(\sim p/q)]$, for any propositions p and q, $R_s[\forall c(\text{-}) \in C_{st1} : c(GGvGEvVI/G) = 1 - c(\sim GG\&\sim GE\&\sim VI/G)]$. So, $R_s[\forall c(\text{-}) \in C_{st1} : c(R/G) \leq 1 - c(\sim GG\&\sim GE\&\sim VI/G)]$.

Now what is to be shown is: $R_s[\forall c(\text{-}) \in C_{st1} : c(R/G)$ is lower than very high indeed$]$. That will follow from $R_s[\forall c(\text{-}) \in C_{st1} : c(R/G) \leq 1 - c(\sim GG\&\sim GE\&\sim VI/G)]$ if, roughly

speaking, $R_s[\forall c(\text{-}) \in C_{st1} : c(\sim GG \& \sim GE \& \sim VI / G) \text{ is higher than very low}]$.

Now S surely ought to ensure that his credence-functions behave as probability functions in this respect: $R_s[\forall c(\text{-}) \in C_{st1} : c(p \& q / r) = c(p / r)c(q / p \& r)]$ for any propositions p, q and r. So it follows that:

$R_s[\forall c(\text{-}) \in C_{st1} : c(\sim GG \& \sim GE \& \sim VI / G) = c(\sim GG \& \sim GE / G)\, c(\sim VI / \sim GG \& \sim GE \& G)]$.

Accordingly, we can approach the question of whether it is indeed true that $R_s[\forall c(\text{-}) \in C_{st1} : c(\sim GG \& \sim GE \& \sim VI / G) \text{ is higher than very low}]$ by looking first at what S's confidence at t1 in (~GG&~GE), conditional on the existence of God, should be, and then at what his confidence at t1 in ~VI, conditional on (~GG&~GE) and the existence of God, should be.

Section 3: S's Confidence in ~GG&~GE, Conditional on G

3.1 Introduction

The matter to be decided here is what can be said about the confidence S, at t1 and conditional on the existence of God, should have in it not being the case that there is some greater good that not even God could bring about without permitting E or some evil equally bad or worse, and it also not being the case that there is some greater evil that not even God could prevent without permitting E or some evil equally bad or worse (in the interests of brevity I shall talk henceforth as if only greater goods were at issue, but what I say is intended to apply equally to greater evils). This matter is, of course, at least very closely related to that which has been at the heart of much of the discussion over Rowe's evidential argument.

Relevant to settling this issue is the following. It is very widely, although admittedly not universally, accepted, by both parties to the debate over Rowe's argument, that if there is a good which is both a greater good with respect to E and for which E is a minimum price, we have no idea what it is, that there is no good that we can see to fit this bill.[36] So if S is 'one of us', as he *ex hypothesi* is, then he will be unable to think of a good that he can recognise as both a greater good and one for which E is a minimum price. Moreover, we can stipulate that S has conducted an exhaustive search for such a good, and that he knows that many others have too and that their failure has been as complete as his own.[37]

Now, if S ought to think that his access into what God, assuming His existence, has available in the way of reasons of this kind for permitting E is *perfect*, if he ought to think that, were there a greater good for which E is a minimum price, he would *certainly* see it and recognise it as such, he ought to conclude with certainty, on the basis of his failure to discern such a good, that no such good exists, giving: $R_s[\forall c(-) \in C_{st1} : c(\sim GG \& \sim GE/G) = 1]$.

The antecedent here, however, is surely false – it would be intellectual hubris of the highest order for S, 'one of us', to think it *certain* that he would see a greater good for which E is a minimum price if there were one. Nevertheless, is it not plausible to think that S ought to take himself to have some reasonable degree of insight into what God has available in the way of reasons of this sort for permitting E, and therefore, in light of the failure of his and others' diligent efforts to find a justifying reason of this sort, to have a confidence in (~GG&~GE) conditional on God's existence that is at least moderately high, for it to be the

36 Alston (an 'opponent' of Rowe), for example, writes, “I concede that Rowe is not idiosyncratic in failing to “see”, with respect to any envisaged good, that it [is a minimum price for E and is a greater good with respect to E]...I agree that we cannot discern any sufficient divine reason for permitting [the fawn's] suffering” [Alston 1996 p316]. And Howard-Snyder (similarly an 'opponent'), admits, “We can’t see how any reason we know of, or the whole lot of them combined, would justify God in permitting...any particular horror. We need to own up to that fact.” [Howard-Snyder 1999 p101]

37 A little care needs to be taken here to square this with S's hypothesised ignorance of both E and any other terrible evil, but this does not seem to be a great problem. We can pretend, for example, that S has been reading books containing what we might call 'hypothetical theodicies', attempts to reconcile the existence of God with evils that are not known to be actual.

case that $R_s[\forall c(-) \in C_{st1} : c(\sim GG \& \sim GE / G)$ is at least moderately high]?

On the face of it, I think it is. However, it is here that perhaps the most formidable objection to evidential argument from evil surfaces, that of the 'Sceptical Theists'.

3.2 The Sceptical Challenge

Quite a number of broadly speaking 'Sceptical Theistic' responses have been made to various forms of the evidential argument from evil.[38] The version of the argument I am offering differs in ways that will now be clear from most of the arguments to which Sceptical Theists have explicitly responded, so I am unable to quote a direct response to my argument from such a sceptic. Nevertheless, it is not too difficult to see the form such a response might take.

Bergmann, himself a Sceptical Theist, provides a useful summary of some of the theses that have come to be associated with the position:

> "ST1: We have no good reason for thinking that the possible goods we know of are representative of the possible goods there are.
> ST2: We have no good reason for thinking that the possible evils we know of are representative of the possible evils there are.
> ST3: We have no good reason for thinking that the entailment relations we know of between possible goods and the permission of possible evils are representative of the entailment relations there are between possible goods and the permission of possible evils."[39]

Now if this is right, then, it is plausible to suppose, S is in just no position to say that he would have been able to discern a greater good (or evil) related in the right way to E if such there were. And so he should, it seems, admit to being simply ignorant, wholly in the

38 Classic sources include [Wysktra 1984] and [Alston 1991].
39 [Bergmann 2001 p297]

dark, about whether his failure to discern such a good is of any relevance to whether there actually is such a good. As Bergmann puts it, (with regard to the consequences of ST1, specifically), "we don't know the 'size' of the realm of possible goods and so we are *completely in the dark* about whether or not the sort of intellectual search we are capable of will discover a representative sample".[40] Since what goes for us goes for S, he too should acknowledge utter ignorance as to whether he has been consulting a 'representative sample'.

Now it would surely be going too far to say that, if this is so, S should have a very low confidence in (~GG&~GE) conditional on the existence of God (in the sense of his adopting a credence-set all of whose credence-functions have a very low value for the argument '~GG&~GE/G'): that S has no reason to think that he would see a greater good for which E is a minimum price if there were such a good would not, of course, mean that S should think it very likely that there is a such a good given that he has failed see to one.

Rather, what does seem right is that, *given that all S has to go on* is his failure to find a greater good for which E is a minimum price, to the extent to which he should acknowledge himself to be in the dark about the whether he would see a greater good for which E is a minimum price if there were one there to be seen, to the extent to which he should acknowledge himself to be in dark about whether his 'sample' is representative, to that extent S should acknowledge that he also is in the dark as to whether there *is* a greater good for which E is a minimum price. So if S ought to acknowledge himself to be *completely* in the dark on the former point, so too, it would seem, should he acknowledge himself to be *completely* in the dark on the latter. In short, he should *suspend judgement* on the truth-value of (~GG&~GE).[41]

One of Alston's analogies may be helpful here. In the course of his objection to

40 [Bergmann 2001 p289] emphasis mine

41 The same conclusion would seem to be what would be warranted if S is not in the dark about whether he would see a greater good connected to E in the right way if there were one, but rather has good reason to believe that he *would not* see such a good if there were one.

Rowe's evidential argument, he asks us to consider the position of someone who "[h]aving only the sketchiest grasp of chess...fail[s] to see any reason for Karpov to have made the move he did at a certain point in a game".[42] Now this is not directly relevant to the present issue, for S is not considering a 'move' God has *already* made (i.e. an evil He has already permitted). Nevertheless, it is easy to make the necessary adaptations: suppose instead that the person with only "the sketchiest grasp of chess" is considering whether Karpov has a reason to make a certain move that he has not yet made.

It does indeed seem that this person, since he ought to acknowledge that he has no basis for supposing that the reasons he knows of for making moves are representative of the reasons that there are, ought to acknowledge at the very least that he is completely in dark as to whether he would see a reason for Karpov to make that move if there were such a reason.[43] This does not mean that he ought to have low confidence in there not being such a reason. What it quite plausibly does mean, however, is that he ought to take himself to be almost utterly ignorant, wholly in the dark, about whether there is such a reason. In short, on the existence of such a reason he should *suspend judgement*.

Now at first sight, the finding that, if the Sceptical Theists are right, S should suspend judgement on (~GG&~GE) may not seem to present a particularly difficult problem for my argument, for one may be tempted to reason as follows: suppose it agreed that S ought to acknowledge utter and complete ignorance at t1 as to the truth-value of (~GG&~GE), that could mean only that S's confidence in (~GG&~GE) should be 'middling', that $R_s[\forall c(\text{-}) \in C_{st1} : c(\sim GG\&\sim GE / G) \approx 0.5]$, and *that* need not be a problem, for so long as S's confidence in ~VI, conditional on (~GG&~GE) and God's existence, is not *too* low, it will turn out that $R_s[\forall c(\text{-}) \in C_{st1} : c(\sim GG\&\sim GE\&\sim VI / G) \text{ is higher than very low}]$, which would

42 [Alston 1996 p317]

43 Indeed, if this person is supposed to *know* that he has only the sketchiest grasp of chess and how skilled Karpov is, the stronger concession that he has good reason to think that he would not see such a reason if there were one seems called for here.

be all that is needed for the current argument.

Although tempting, this line of thought seems flawed in its central idea, which is that the kind of suspended judgement with which we are dealing here should be thought of as middling confidence, confidence involving credence-functions with values of or around 0.5. That seems wrong because to have this kind of (at least reasonably) *sharp* middling confidence is not to have the kind of 'open-minded' attitude of suspended judgement that S's ignorance would require; rather, it is to have quite the opposite, the kind of precise, definite attitude that one has, for example, towards the proposition 'this (fair) coin will land heads on the next toss'.

But if the kind of suspended judgement that S's alleged ignorance warrants is not to be thought of as middling confidence, how is it to be thought of? Well, I have already suggested that *imprecise* confidence can reflect ignorance. In the example of Chapter 1 Section 2.3 involving a subject who knew only that between 80% and 90% of the balls in an urn were red, a confidence covering an interval was advanced as a suitable one for a subject lacking information. In that case, the subject's ignorance was rather limited, for he did know that at least 80% and at most 90% of the balls were red, and so the extent of the imprecision in his confidence that the next ball drawn would be red was similarly limited: it covered the relatively small interval [0.8, 0.9]. However, we can easily imagine that the extent of his ignorance should increase, and it seems that as it does so, so should the extent of the imprecision in his confidence (if he knew only that between 50% and 90% of the balls were red, his confidence should cover the interval [0.5, 0.9], and so forth). At the limit, where his ignorance is *complete*, it seems that the imprecision in his confidence should be complete too, covering the whole unit interval (if he knows only that between 0% and 100% of the

balls are red, i.e. if he knows nothing, his confidence should cover the interval [0, 1]).[44]

So perhaps we can think of the kind of suspended judgement warranted by S's alleged utter ignorance at t1 as to whether there is a greater good (or evil) connected in the right way to E as completely imprecise confidence, confidence that covers the entire interval [0, 1].

Now if this is the kind of suspended judgement that S ought to have towards (~GG&~GE) conditional on the existence of God, my argument *is* in trouble. Here is why. Suppose that the Sceptical Theists are right and that S ought therefore to acknowledge that he is completely in the dark about whether his 'sample' is representative, that he is completely in the dark about whether he would have discerned a greater good (or evil) connected to E in the right way if there were one there. Suppose that he therefore ought to acknowledge, given that his consultation of this 'sample', his failing to discern a good (or evil) of the right sort, is all he has to go on, that he is utterly ignorant at t1 as to the truth value of (~GG&~GE), conditional on the existence of God, and suppose that this means that he ought to have the kind of maximally imprecise confidence outlined above. That is, suppose that:

$$\forall n \in [0,1], R_s[\exists c(\text{-}) \in C_{st1} : c(\sim GG\&\sim GE / G) = n]$$

From this it follows that:

$$R_s[\exists c(\text{-}) \in C_{st1} : c(\sim GG\&\sim GE / G) = 0]$$

Which in turn gives us:

$$R_s[\exists c(\text{-}) \in C_{st1} : c(\sim GG\&\sim GE\&\sim VI / G) = 0]$$

Now recall that in Section 2.3 I stated that I was going to try to reach premise 5 by way of:

$$R_s[\forall c(\text{-}) \in C_{st1} : c(R / G) \text{ is lower than very high indeed}]$$

44 cf van Fraassen: "in the limiting case, which captures the idea of having no opinion at all, my probability for A is [0,1]" [van Fraassen 2003 p215]. cf also Kaplan: "when you have no evidence whatsoever pertaining to the truth of or falsehood of a hypothesis *P*, then, for every real number *n*, $1 \geq n \geq 0$, your set of con-assignments [*sc.*, roughly, what have called a credence-set] should contain at least one assignment [*sc.* at least one credence-function] on which con(P)=n" [Kaplan 1996 p28].

Which was itself to be arrived at via:

$R_s[\forall c(\text{-}) \in C_{st1} : c(R/G) \leq 1 - c(\sim GG \& \sim GE \& \sim VI/G)]$

And:

$R_s[\forall c(\text{-}) \in C_{st1} : c(\sim GG \& \sim GE \& \sim VI/G) \text{ is higher than very low}]$

This last proposition is *false* if $R_s[\exists c(\text{-}) \in C_{st1} : c(\sim GG \& \sim GE \& \sim VI/G) = 0]$. Hence the problem.

3.3 Response To The Sceptic

Sceptical theses are difficult things to undermine. Nevertheless, one type of argument to which sceptical theses sometimes are vulnerable is, what is at least an informal version of, the *reductio*. One may seek to counter the sceptical thesis by arguing that, followed through, it has consequences which are unacceptable either specifically to the sceptic himself, or to pretty much any of us. In what follows I offer two objections to Sceptical Theism along these lines. The first seeks to show that the Sceptical Theist's scepticism is one whose consequences are such that the theist ought not to endorse it; the second seeks to show that the Sceptical Theist's scepticism is one whose consequences are such that pretty much none of us should endorse it.

3.4 Why The Theist Should Not Be A Sceptic

Let us suppose that the Sceptical Theists are right and therefore that, at t1, S should consider himself to be completely in the dark about whether he would see a greater good for the bringing about of which E is a minimum price if there were one there, and therefore should consider himself to be completely in the dark at t1 about the truth value of (~GG&~GE), conditional on God's existence, and let us suppose that this utter ignorance is

to be thought of as warranting: $\forall n \in [0,1], R_s[\exists c(-) \in C_{st1} : c(\sim GG \& \sim GE / G) = n]$.

What does this mean for the confidence S ought to have, at t1, in E conditional on God's existence? Well, we need to know three things. First, what attitude S ought to have towards ~VI, conditional on (~GG&~GE) and God's existence; second, what attitude S ought therefore to have towards R, conditional on God's existence; third, what attitude S therefore ought to have towards E, conditional on God's existence.

As for the first question, so far as I know nobody suggests that we would beforehand be in a position to be confident that God *does* have a VI-justification for E. The claim is rather that *for all we know* He does, that we are, once again, completely in the dark about whether He does.[45] Accordingly, the same maximally suspended judgement in ~VI, conditional on (~GG&~GE) and God's existence, would seem to be what is called for. That would give us: $\forall n \in [0,1], R_s[\exists c(-) \in C_{st1} : c(\sim GG \& \sim GE \& \sim VI / G) = n]$.

Now the second question: what can be said about the attitude S ought to have towards R at t1? Well, we know this: $R_s[\forall c(-) \in C_{st1} : c(R/G) \leq 1 - c(\sim GG \& \sim GE \& \sim VI / G)]$, and so, given the point made in the previous paragraph, we know that $\forall n \in [0,1], R_s[\exists c(-) \in C_{st1} : c(R/G) \leq 1 - n]$, from which we can conclude that $\forall n \in [0,1], R_s[\exists c(-) \in C_{st1} : c(R/G) \leq n]$.

Finally, what attitude should S have towards E, conditional on God's existence, in light of all this? As outlined in Section 2 of this chapter, we know that $R_s[\forall c(-) \in C_{st1} : c(E/G) \leq c(R/G)]$, and so we now can say that $\forall n \in [0,1], R_s[\exists c(-) \in C_{st1} : c(E/G) \leq n]$.

The problem for the Sceptical Theist can now be stated. From $\forall n \in [0,1], R_s[\exists c(-) \in C_{st1} : c(E/G) \leq n]$ it follows that $R_s[\exists c(-) \in C_{st1} : c(E/G) = 0]$. Now if, as I have suggested is the case, we should ensure that Bayes' Theorem expanded via the

45 Certainly this is van Inwagen's position in his [2006].

weighted average principle holds for all our credence-functions, the following is true:

$$R_s[\forall c(\text{-}) \in C_{st1} : c(G/E) = \frac{c(G)c(E/G)}{c(G)c(E/G) + c(\sim G)c(E/\sim G)}]$$

Which, 'plugging in' $R_s[\exists c(\text{-}) \in C_{st1} : c(E/G) = 0]$, gives us:

$$R_s[\exists c(\text{-}) \in C_{st1} : c(G/E) = \frac{c(G)0}{c(G)0 + c(\sim G)c(E/\sim G)} = 0]$$ [46]

This tells us that S's confidence in G, conditional on E, at t1 should 'go all the way down' to 0; that, for some number b, $R_s[C_{st1}(G/E) = [0, b]]$. Since (by premise 2 in the main argument) $R_s[C_{st2}(G) = C_{st1}(G/E)]$, we then have: $R_s[C_{st2}(G) = [0, b]]$.

Now, it may be that b, here, is greater than d, where d is given by $R_s[C_{st1}(G) = [c, d]]$, and if so, the change in confidence in the existence of God that S should undergo from t1 to t2 will not be what I earlier called a clear case of reduction in confidence, that is, a case in which, where $C_{st1}(G)=[c, d]$ and $C_{st2}(G)=[a, b]$, $a<c$ and $b<d$. Even so, it seems that if, as I have been arguing, Sceptical Theism followed through would lead the theist to concede that $R_s[C_{st2}(G) = [0, b]]$, no theist will want to endorse Sceptical Theism, as I shall now explain.

First, consider the relationship between (graded) confidence and (all-or-nothing) belief. An attractive account of this relationship is the threshold view,[47] according to which belief is sufficiently high confidence. In the case of sharp confidence, it is clear how this

46 At least so long as there exists a credence-function in S's credence-set at t1 such that neither c(~G) nor c(E/~G) equal 0. I have already argued that for every credence-function in S's credence-set at t1, c(E/~G) should be high. And there will be a credence-function in S's credence-set at t1 such that c(~G)>0 just in case S is not, at t1, absolutely certain of God's existence; I argue that S should not be absolutely certain of God's existence in Chapter 4.

47 As, for example, it is termed in [Sturgeon 2008]

account would proceed: one believes a proposition p just in case one's sharp confidence in p exceeds t, where t is a 'belief-threshold' whose exact value may vary from context to context. It is perhaps less clear exactly how to develop this view where imprecise confidence is involved, but one way of doing so is suggested by Sturgeon: one believes a proposition p just in case the lower endpoint of one's confidence exceeds t.[48] Now the value of t, as noted, may well vary depending on the context, but this much is surely clear: it is greater than 0.

The upshot of this is that if $R_s[C_{st2}(G)=[0,b]]$, then at t2 *S ought not to believe in God*, for the lower endpoint of S's confidence at t2 in G should fall below any plausible belief-threshold. Of course, it may not be that S ought to believe that God does *not* exist. Be that as it may, the conclusion that S ought not to believe in God at t2 is surely one the theist will not want to have to accept.

Now while in my view very plausible, the threshold view of the relationship between confidence and belief has not found universal acceptance.[49] Whether or not this view is correct is not a debate into which I wish to enter here, so I shall concede that it may turn out that the foregoing claims can be resisted. That is not all that can be said though. Here is a second reason why the theist should find $R_s[C_{st2}(G)=[0,b]]$ an unacceptable conclusion.

Consider the relationship between confidence and betting. The following is what seems to me a plausible account of such a relationship where sharp confidences are concerned. Suppose that our subject, S, has a sharp confidence of n in proposition p, and is offered the following choice: he can have a sum of money or a ticket that is worth £1 if p is true and £0 if p is false. Suppose further that S is certain that whether p is true or false in no way depends on whether or not he gambles on its truth, that S cares only about money, that S is risk neutral, that money has constant marginal utility for S and that S knows that the truth-

48 [Sturgeon 2008 pp160-161]. I should note, as I had to in footnote 21, that Sturgeon's discussion involves imprecise confidence in general, rather than the particular model I have adopted for representing such confidence.
See also [Kaplan 1996 p94], although he does not endorse this view.

49 Kaplan is one dissenter, cf [Kaplan 2002 p449].

value of p can be determined and, accordingly, the bet can be settled. The following then seems plausible:

[1] For any sum of money £x such that x<n, S would prefer the ticket that pays £1 if p, £0 if not-p to £x.

[2] For any sum of money £y such that y>n, S would prefer £y to the ticket that pays £1 if p, £0 if not-p.

[3] For any sum of money £z such that z=n, S would be indifferent between £z and the ticket that pays £1 if p, £0 if not-p.[50]

Once again, it is not exactly obvious how this account should be expanded to cover imprecise credence. The following, however, seems to me a plausible suggestion. Where S has a confidence in p that covers the interval [a, b] and the conditions outlined above are satisfied:

[1*] For any sum of money £x such that x<a, S would prefer the ticket that pays £1 if p, £0 if not-p to £x

[2*] For any sum of money £y such that y>b, S would prefer £y to the ticket that pays £1 if p, £0 if not-p.

[3*] For any sum of money £z such that b≥z≥a, S would be undecided or indifferent between £z and the ticket that pays £1 if p, £0 if not-p.

For example, suppose S is sure that at least 70% of the balls in a box are white, and that at most 80% of them are white, has no other relevant information, and therefore has the

50 This account is something of an amalgam of [Joyce 2004 p136], [Talbott 2008 Section 3] and [Kaplan 1996 p15].

imprecise confidence [0.7, 0.8] in a randomly drawn ball being white. Then it seems true that, were the conditions outlined above satisfied: S would choose a ticket that pays £1 if the ball is white, £0 otherwise over £0.60; S would choose £0.90 over such a ticket; S would be undecided or indifferent between £0.75 and such a ticket.

So, if – as $R_s[C_{st2}(G)=[0,b]]$ tells us – S ought to have a confidence at t2 in the existence of God that covers an interval whose lower endpoint is 0 then, if he met the conditions set out above: for any sum of money £x such that x<0, S would prefer a ticket that pays £1 if God exists, £0 if He does not to £x, and S would be undecided or indifferent between £0 and a ticket that pays £1 if God exists, £0 if He does not.

And it seems clear that to have *that* attitude towards the existence of God is to be very substantially lacking in confidence as to His existence: there is no (positive) sum of money *at all* that S would want to pay for a bet that pays off £1 if God exists. So, even if the threshold view turns out to be incorrect, the theist will still have every reason to refuse to adopt a position that leads to a confidence, in the face of E, in the existence of God whose lower endpoint is zero. Therefore, the theist has every reason to reject Sceptical Theism if, as I have argued, it leads to the conclusion that $R_s[C_{st2}(G)=[0,b]]$.

Now here I must confess that while I think this objection one that should give the Sceptical Theist cause for concern, I should not like to have to rest my whole case upon it. Principally, this is because it relies heavily on our picturing S's complete suspension of judgement by way of maximally vague confidence, confidence that covers the whole unit interval. Perhaps this is not how we should think of complete suspensions of judgement of this type. Perhaps, rather, we should think of it in terms of what I, in Chapter 2, referred to as an 'empty confidence', a confidence that just lacks *any* numerical value, even an interval.

I should say that the picture of maximally imprecise confidence *does* seem to me a more attractive one than the 'empty confidence' alternative for capturing the kind of attitude

towards (~GG&~GE) conditional on G that Sceptical Theistic considerations would seem to make appropriate for S at t1. For we can imagine S, following his failure to discern any appropriate greater goods or evils, starting out with a high, sharp confidence in (~GG&~GE) which gradually 'spreads out', becomes more imprecise, as he becomes, under the influence of the sceptic, less confident of the relevance of that failure; eventually, if he becomes certain that the sceptic is right and therefore certain that he is just 'in the dark' about the relevance of his failed search, his confidence in (~GG&~GE), given that his failed search is all he has to go on, will have spread out entirely, become maximally imprecise.

Moreover, seeing completely suspended judgement as maximally imprecise confidence seems to me *in general* preferable to seeing it as empty confidence. For by taking the former path we are able to integrate suspended judgement neatly into the overall framework for modelling confidence by way of credence-sets, and are able to see exactly how it could be that a person's confidence could change into one of completely suspended judgement, and under what circumstances that could be the change in confidence that is called for.

Nevertheless, these considerations are at best suggestive; hence my reluctance to rest my case upon this objection. I now turn to an objection upon which I am happy to place much more weight.

3.5 Why Pretty Much None of Us Should Be A Sceptic

In the preceding section I sought to show that Sceptical Theism has consequences which would be unacceptable to the theist. In this section I seek to show that the Sceptical Theist's sceptical theses have consequences which would be unacceptable to pretty much any of us.

In brief, the objection is this: the Sceptical Theist's scepticism is not as innocuous and

"modest"[51] as it is claimed to be; rather, if applied with consistency it would lead to an unacceptably extreme scepticism. It is a familiar objection that Sceptical Theism would prove too much; Almeida and Oppy, among others, argue that it would lead to an unpalatable moral scepticism.[52] Whatever the merits of this objection, it is not the one I will be advancing. My claim will be that Sceptical Theism leads to a much more general scepticism.

To begin to see where the problem lies, note that the will of God acts as a kind of universal override: if God has an *all-things-considered* desire to prevent an event from occurring then that event (unless it one of those events, if such there be, which not even God can prevent) will not occur. This means that finding out about God's all-things-considered desire to prevent a future event would give one a universal defeater: learning that God had an all-things-considered desire to prevent a future event from occurring would trump any other evidence one had for thinking that that event would take place.

Similarly, for any event which it is within God's power to bring about, if God has an all-things-considered desire to bring that event about, then that event will be brought about. This means that finding out that God has an all-things-considered desire to bring about some event would trump any other evidence one had for thinking that that event would not take place.

This much, then, is surely true: for any more-or-less normal subject S and event A, if S is certain that both bringing about A and preventing A are within God's power, then S's confidence in A conditional on God's existence and His all-things-considered desire to bring about A should be a sharp 1, and S's confidence in A conditional on God's existence and His all-things-considered desire to prevent A should be a sharp 0. That is, where 'PA' stands for 'God has an all-things-considered desire to prevent A' and 'BA' for 'God has an all-things-considered desire to bring A about':

51 [Bergmann 2001 p284]
52 [Almeida & Oppy 2003] See also [Russell 1996 pp197-198]

$R_s[\forall c(\text{-}) \in C_s : c(A/PA \,\&\, G) = 0]$ and $R_s[\forall c(\text{-}) \in C_s : c(A/BA \,\&\, G) = 1]$.

The problem for Sceptical Theism, I contend, is that, followed through, it would have us, for a *vast* range of future events, admit to being *completely in the dark* about whether God, if He exists, has an all-things-considered desire to either bring that event about or to prevent it. And now given the points in the previous paragraph, if we have to admit to *that*, then we would also have to admit, for any of these events, to being completely in the dark about whether they will take place, conditional on God's existence. This in turn means that, for any of these events, our unconditional confidence in their occurrence will be 'fuzzed up' – made less sharp – to a degree proportional to the strength of our confidence in the existence of God. And this is, in many cases, a quite absurd result.

Why think that Sceptical Theism, followed through, would require us to admit to being completely in the dark, with regard to any one of a vast range of events, about whether God, assuming He exists, has an all-things-considered desire to permit or to prevent that event? To see why, consider under what circumstances God would have such a desire. To simplify matters, suppose that our event, A, is one which is value-neutral; that is, suppose that it is such that its taking place would be of neither intrinsic value nor intrinsic disvalue, or that its intrinsic value and disvalue would 'balance out'.

Now other things being equal, God would surely be indifferent as to A's taking place, but other things may not be equal. It may be that there is some great good, call it 'GG', which not even God could bring about without bringing A about or which not even God could bring about without preventing A, or it may be that there is some great evil, call it 'GE', which not even God could prevent without bringing A about or which not even God could prevent without preventing A. Now that being so may not, to be sure, give God an *all-things-considered* desire to bring about or to prevent A, for it could be that there is some *still greater evil* for the prevention of which the prevention of GG is price even God has to pay,

or some *still greater good* for the obtaining of which the permission of GE is a price even God has to pay. Nevertheless, the fact surely remains that if we are in completely in the dark as to whether there is a great good GG or a great evil GE, we are completely in the dark as to whether God has an all-things-considered desire to bring about or to prevent A.

The problem for Sceptical Theism is now perhaps clear: holding that view would compel one to admit that we *are* completely in the dark about the existence or otherwise of great good GG or great evil GE. Why? For the very same reason that, according to the Sceptical Theist, we would, before observing E, be completely in the dark about whether there is some greater good for which E is a price even God has to pay, or some greater evil for the prevention of which E is a price even God has to pay. To be sure, we cannot think of any plausible candidate goods or evils, but that is neither here nor there, since we have (cf Bergmann's ST1, 2 and 3, above) " no good reason for thinking that [i] the possible goods we know of are representative of the possible goods there are... [ii] the possible evils we know of are representative of the possible evils there are... [iii] the entailment relations we know of between possible goods and the permission of possible evils are representative of the entailment relations there are between possible goods and the permission of possible evils".

So Sceptical Theism, followed through, would lead to a 'fuzzing up' of our expectations for future events (those over whose occurrence God has control, at least) proportional to our degree of confidence in God's existence. And that, I have said, is absurd. Showing why it is absurd is easiest by way of an example, which will also help illustrate what has been said so far.

Suppose you are playing a game of poker on whose outcome, so far as you can tell, nothing of much importance hangs, and are about to be dealt a card from what you know to be a well-shuffled standard deck. How confident should you be that the card you will be

dealt will be the Ace of Spades? The answer, I take it, is obvious: you should have a sharp confidence of 1/52. Supposing you to be S and your being dealt the Ace of Spades event A: $R_s[\forall c(-) \in C_s : c(A) = \frac{1}{52}]$.

Indeed, this is so obvious that any view that required one to think that you should have a confidence very much different from this one would have to be rejected. Perhaps we can accept that there can be a little 'fuzziness' or imprecision in your confidence, that it can cover an interval spread out around 1/52 by just a bit, but any significant imprecision here would surely be unacceptable. So long as your confidence in the existence of God is not minute, however, such significant imprecision is, for the reasons outlined above, exactly what the Sceptical Theist, if he were consistent in his scepticism, would have to recommend to you, as I shall now illustrate.

First, however, a note. In what follows I assume, as I did in the previous objection, that the kind of suspended judgement appreciation of the Sceptical Theists' points would call for is maximally imprecise confidence. However, and importantly, this objection does not depend on that assumption. What follows is an *illustration* of the underlying point, which is that since you (on the picture the Sceptical Theists would have us accept) are utterly in the dark as to whether God would have an all-things-considered desire to bring about or to prevent your being dealt the Ace of Spades, to the extent that you take seriously the existence of God you should acknowledge yourself to be utterly in the dark about whether you will be dealt that card. This point goes through regardless of exactly how we choose to think of your being utterly in the dark, but is easiest to appreciate by way of the model of suspension of judgement as imprecise confidence, which is why I employ that model in the illustration that follows.

The weighted-average principle tells us that the following should be true of your confidence in A, the card you are dealt being the Ace of Spades, before the card has been

dealt:

[1] $R_s[\forall c(\text{-}) \in C_s : c(A) = c(A/G)c(G) + c(A/\sim G)c(\sim G)]$

We know that your confidence in A conditional on God's non-existence should be a sharp 1/52. That gives us:

[2] $R_s[\forall c(\text{-}) \in C_s : c(A) = c(A/G)c(G) + \frac{1}{52}c(\sim G)]$

We also know, as argued above, that, letting 'PA' stand for 'God has an all-things-considered desire to prevent A' and 'BA' for 'God has an all-things-considered desire to bring about A':

[3] $R_s[\forall c(\text{-}) \in C_s : c(A/PA \,\&\, G) = 0]$ and $R_s[\forall c(\text{-}) \in C_s : c(A/BA \,\&\, G) = 1]$.

Now either God has an all-thing-considered desire to bring A about, or He has an all-things-considered desire to prevent A, or He has neither of these all-things-considered desires, and no more than one of these disjuncts can be true. So another application of the weighted-average principle[53] gives us:

[4] $R_s[\forall c(\text{-}) \in C_s : c(A/G) = c(A/PA \,\&\, G)c(PA/G) + c(A/BA \,\&\, G)c(BA/G) + c(A/\sim BA \,\&\, \sim PA \,\&\, G)c(\sim BA \,\&\, \sim PA/G)]$

Putting in the values (given in [3]) that all your credence-functions should have for A conditional on PA and G (viz. 0) and for A conditional on BA and G (viz. 1):

[5] $R_s[\forall c(\text{-}) \in C_s : c(A/G) = c(BA/G) + c(A/\sim BA \,\&\, \sim PA \,\&\, G)c(\sim BA \,\&\, \sim PA/G)]$

Now, as I have argued, the sceptical theist will have to say that you are completely in the dark about whether God has an all-things-considered desire to bring A about or an all-things-considered desire to prevent A. That means that the sceptical theist will have to say that:

[6] $\forall n \in [0,1], R_s[\exists c(\text{-}) \in C_s : c(BA/G) = n]$ and $\forall n \in [0,1], R_s[\exists c(\text{-}) \in C_s : c(PA/G) = n]$

53 Or rather, the version of it for when three mutually exclusive and jointly exhaustive propositions are involved, rather than just two.

Which immediately gives:

[7] $R_s[\exists c(\text{-}) \in C_s : c(BA/G) = 1]$ and $R_s[\exists c(\text{-}) \in C_s : c(PA/G) = 1]$.

We can now put these values into [5] to get:

[8] $R_s[\exists c(\text{-}) \in C_s : c(A/G) = 1 + c(A/\sim BA \& \sim PA \& G)0]$ and

$R_s[\exists c(\text{-}) \in C_s : c(A/G) = 0 + c(A/\sim BA \& \sim PA \& G)0]$

Giving:

[9] $R_s[\exists c(\text{-}) \in C_s : c(A/G) = 1]$ and $R_s[\exists c(\text{-}) \in C_s : c(A/G) = 0]$

From this and [2]:

[10] $R_s[\exists c(\text{-}) \in C_s : c(A) = c(G) + \frac{1}{52} c(\sim G)]$ and $R_s[\exists c(\text{-}) \in C_s : c(A) = \frac{1}{52} c(\sim G)]$

Now unless you are pretty much certain that God does not exist,[54] there will be a credence-function in your credence-set whose value for the argument G is high enough for it to follow from [10] that your confidence in A is not, as we have agreed it should be, at least close to a sharp 1/52. Suppose, for example, that you have a sharp confidence in the existence of God of 0.5. That is:

[11] $\forall c(\text{-}) \in C_s : c(G) = 0.5$

It then follows from this and [10] that:

[12] $R_s[\exists c(\text{-}) \in C_s : c(A) = 0.5 + \frac{1}{52} 0.5]$ and $R_s[\exists c(\text{-}) \in C_s : c(A) = \frac{1}{52} 0.5]$

That is:

[13] $R_s[\exists c(\text{-}) \in C_s : c(A) = \frac{53}{104}]$ and $R_s[\exists c(\text{-}) \in C_s : c(A) = \frac{1}{104}]$

Which is to say that your confidence in the card you are dealt being the Ace of Spades should be such as to cover the interval $[\frac{1}{104}, \frac{53}{104}]$, and that is a *significant* departure from what it ought to be.

54 Or if you have an 'empty confidence' in the existence of God. See footnote 82 for more on this.

3.6 Objections & Replies

I now address two objections that might arise in response to this argument.

Objection 1:

If there really is a problem here, it is not one that the Sceptical Theist in particular *faces. For surely on any sensible view none of us can be said to know the mind of God, and so surely none of us can know His all-things-considered desires.*

Reply:

Read in one way the central idea here is correct. It does seem true that none of us is in a position to be able to say *with certainty* what God's all-things-considered desires are, and so if this is what gets the problem for Sceptical Theism going, the problem is not one with Sceptical Theism in particular. However, this is not what gets the problem going. What gets the problem going is that, on the sceptical view, none of us is in a position to say with any degree of confidence *at all* what God's all-things-considered desires are.

If the consequence of the sceptical thesis were merely that you ought to *acknowledge the possibility* that, despite your failure to see it, there is a good towards which God is working or an evil towards the prevention of which He is working, the success of which endeavour depends on your getting or not getting the Ace of Spades, then the *reductio* given above could not be run. For all you would be required to do is give a confidence greater than 0 to PA and BA, and although that might lead to a slight 'fuzzing up' of your unconditional confidence in A, there is no reason to think that it would lead to the problematically large 'fuzzing up' I claimed.

But then, to return to main line of argument for a moment, if all the Sceptical Theist is asking us to do is *acknowledge the possibility* that there may be greater goods and greater

evils that would justify God in permitting E despite S's failure to see them, Sceptical Theism is really no problem for my my argument, for nowhere do I claim that S should, at t1, be *absolutely certain* that God has no morally sufficient reason to permit E. Rather, the claim is, roughly, that S should be less confident of God having a morally sufficient reason to permit E than he is of E happening if God does not exist, a claim which is not at all incompatible with the claim that S should acknowledge, and therefore give some small degree of confidence to, the possibility that God does have a morally sufficient reason to permit E despite his failure to see it.

Objection 2:

The Sceptical Theist is able to say that your confidence in A conditional on God's existence should be 1/52 because he is able to say the following: you know that the world is in fact an orderly place, conforming to various laws and exhibiting various regularities, and so you know that that is so if God exists; accordingly, when deciding upon a confidence to have in A conditional on God's existence, you are justified in assuming that things will be in the future pretty much as they have been in the past; in the past, the Ace of Spades has been dealt from a standard deck once in every 52 deals; so you are justified in thinking this will continue to be so; so you are justified in having a confidence of 1/52 in A, conditional on God's existence, and therefore in A unconditionally.

Reply:

As it stands, this objection is unpersuasive for failing to take into account the point made at the start, namely that the will of God constitutes a universal override and therefore a kind of universal defeater for any evidence you may have, evidence suggesting that the future will resemble the past included.

However, the objection could be strengthened, for it could be argued that past regularities in nature provide strong evidence *about the will of God itself*; in particular, it could be argued that such past regularities give you good reason to be confident that God has an all-things-considered desire to make the world an orderly place and therefore, to some extent at least, good reason to be confident that God has an all-things-considered desire not to interfere with nature but rather to let it take its course. It could then be said that since you should have a sharp confidence of 1/52 in A conditional on nature taking its course and God's existence, you should have a confidence close to a sharp 1/52 in A conditional on God's existence.

Eminently sensible though this is, it does not seem to be something the Sceptical Theist can say. For consider the proposition: some great good, which has not depended on God regularly intervening in the world up until now, depends on Sis regularly intervening from now on. Those of us who do not share the Sceptical Theist's scepticism can, of course, maintain that we should give this proposition very little confidence, on the grounds that no good we can think of fits this bill, so far as we can tell. The Sceptical Theist, however, surely cannot; he surely has to maintain that we are just in no position to know whether this proposition is true or not. But having conceded this, the sceptic has conceded that he is in no position to claim that you are entitled to any substantial confidence in God's having an all-things-considered desire to make the world an orderly place in the future, and therefore in no position to claim that you are entitled to any substantial confidence in past regularities continuing in the future, conditional on God's existence.

3.7 Conclusion

I conclude that the sceptical challenge can be safely set aside. S is entitled to think that his failing to find, after a diligent search, a greater good or greater evil connected to E in

the right way provides him with good grounds for concluding that there is no such good or evil. Accordingly: $R_s[\forall c(\text{-}) \in C_{st1} : c(\sim GG \& \sim GE / G)$ is at least moderately high$]$. In fact, given that in order to avoid the 'fuzzing up' of our confidences for future events we need to take our inability to see a greater good or evil, connected in the right way to those events, to warrant a very low confidence in the existence of such a good or evil, a stronger conclusion than that which I strictly speaking need seems called for, namely:

$R_s[\forall c(\text{-}) \in C_{st1} : c(\sim GG \& \sim GE / G)$ is very high$]$.

Section 4: S's Confidence in ~VI, Conditional on ~GG&~GE&G

4.1 Introduction

So, $R_s[\forall c(\text{-}) \in C_{st1} : c(\sim GG \& \sim GE / G)$ is at least moderately high$]$. If it can now be be shown that $R_s[\forall c(\text{-}) \in C_{st1} : c(\sim VI / \sim GG \& \sim GE \& G)$ is at least moderately high$]$ as well, then it will follow that $R_s[\forall c(\text{-}) \in C_{st1} : c(\sim VI \& \sim GG \& \sim GE / G)$ is higher than very low$]$. From this, I have argued, it will follow that $R_s[\forall c(\text{-}) \in C_{st1} : c(E / \sim G) < c(E / G)]$, which is Premise 5.

4.2 VI-justification

'~VI' is my shorthand for 'It is not the case that God has a VI-justification for permitting E'. My introduction of the notion of what I am calling 'VI-justification' in Section 2 was sketchy, so I will outline it in a little more detail here.

Van Inwagen is concerned with the relationship between what he calls 'global' and

'local' arguments from evil, the relationship between arguments against the existence of God based on general facts about the existence, type and distribution of evil and arguments against the existence of God (such as the one I have been developing) based on particular evils.[55] He acknowledges that a satisfactory response to arguments of the former type would typically not *by itself* constitute a satisfactory response to arguments of the latter type, but argues that it may well furnish the materials for such a response.[56]

To see why a response to a global argument from evil may by itself be unsatisfactory as a response to a local argument, van Inwagen asks us to imagine God looking at a 'four-dimensional blueprint' of the world. Suppose that plenty of evils are represented in this blueprint. If one has a satisfactory response to a global argument from evil, he argues, one will be able to point to some greater good such that, at the very least, it is 'true for all we know' that not even God could bring that greater good about without refraining from 'deleting' at least some, and perhaps a very great number, of the evils that feature in this blueprint.[57] But now consider one particular evil in this blueprint. For all we have so far been told, God could have deleted this evil, 'replaced' it with no evil equally bad or worse, and still brought about the greater good. So a response to a 'global' argument based on the mere existence, or general facts about the distribution, of evils in the blueprint does not by itself constitute a response to a 'local' argument based on the existence of some particular evil in the blueprint.[58]

One might seek to augment the response to the global argument by arguing that (at least for all we know) God in fact *would* lose the greater good if he deleted from the blueprint the particular evil in question. That, however, is not van Inwagen's strategy.[59]

55 [van Inwagen 2006 pp.xii-xiii]
56 [van Inwagen 2006 p.xiii]
57 As previously, I am, for brevity, omitting talk of 'greater evils'.
58 [van Inwagen 2006 p99-104]
59 He concedes that he is “strongly inclined” to think that there have been cases of intense animal suffering which God could have prevented without losing any greater good. [van Inwagen 2006 p171]

Rather, he suggests that one might undermine a local argument on the basis of one's response to the global argument as follows.

Suppose that we can point to some great good towards which God may be working that not even He could bring about without permitting some, perhaps a great many, evils of the kind appealed to by someone advancing a local argument. Call these evils 'L-evils'. How many L-evils ought God to permit, exactly? Well, if there is some *minimum* amount consistent with His bringing about the great good – if there some number n such that n L-evils will suffice for bringing about the great good and n-1 will not – then that amount, whatever it is. But what if there is *no minimum amount*, what if for every number n, if leaving n L-evils in the blueprint suffices for bringing about the greater good, leaving n-1 in the blueprint will suffice too? In that case, van Inwagen urges, God will just have to 'draw a line', He will have to make an *arbitrary* decision as to how many L-evils make it into the final blueprint. And given that this is what God would *have* to do, it is no moral flaw on His part that He does it: He will have a morally sufficient reason for doing it.[60]

Now take the particular L-evil to which the proponent of the local argument appeals, call it 'A'. Might God have a justification for not removing A from the blueprint, even if He could remove it without losing any greater good? Given the foregoing, van Inwagen would argue, He might. If there is no minimum number of L-evils whose permission would be sufficient for God's obtaining His greater good, then in deciding how many L-evils to permit, God will have to draw an arbitrary line, and He will be justified in so doing. And A might just fall on (what we would view as) the wrong side of that line. If it does, then God might permit A and be justified in so doing, *even though He could have prevented it without losing any greater good*.

To illustrate his point, van Inwagen asks us to consider a case such as the following.[61]

60 [van Inwagen 2006 pp125-126]
61 [van Inwagen 2006 pp100-102] I have, for the sake of brevity, made a few minor adjustments.

Suppose that the only good that comes from imprisoning people is that of deterring other would-be criminals, and suppose that some particular criminal, Jones, has been sentenced by a judge to a 10-year jail term, in order that a particular good of deterrence, D, be brought about. We can think of this jail term as a series of consecutive one-day imprisonments. Since it is *intrinsically* disvaluable that someone be forced to spend a day in prison, we can also think of the jail term as a series of evils. Nevertheless, it is to be supposed, the judge *is* justified in permitting some, perhaps many, such evils in order to bring about D.

Now suppose that Jones's lawyer makes the following appeal to the judge: reduce my client's sentence by one day; you are, we can agree, justified in imposing some number of day-long imprisonments on my client in order to bring about D; nevertheless, you could get rid of the final day of confinement without sacrificing D (or needing to 'make up for it' by imposing such an evil upon someone else), and so you have no justification for not doing so. Suppose that the lawyer is right to say that cutting a day off the end of Jones's sentence will not prevent D from being brought about. Is it indeed the case that the judge has no morally sufficient reason for refusing the request?

'No' is van Inwagen's answer, for in deciding upon a 10-year sentence the judge has had to draw an arbitrary line: whatever number of days he had settled upon, if a sentence of that length would have been sufficient for D then so would a sentence reduced by one day. To drive the point home, van Inwagen argues that since there is no non-arbitrary line to be drawn, if the judge has no justification for refusing the lawyer's request, he would equally have no justification for refusing a second such request, i.e. a request to reduce the sentence by one further day, and having granted *that* request he would have to grant a third and then a fourth and so on. So if the lawyer put in a sufficient number of requests, the judge would have no justification for refusing to set Jones free without a single day's imprisonment. But that would conflict with a previous assumption, namely that the judge *does* have a

justification for imposing *some* sentence upon Jones.

For the sake of argument at least, let us agree that van Inwagen has indeed identified a genuine type of justification, 'VI-justification' as I am calling it. What conditions must be met in order for an agent to have a VI-justification for permitting evil A? Well, the foregoing suggests that there are at least the following two. First, the agent must have a general justification, in light of some greater good, for permitting evils like A. Second, it must be the case that there is no minimum number of such evils consistent with the bringing about of that greater good.

4.3 Application to the Case at Hand

We can now turn to the question of what S's confidence, at t1, should be in God having a VI-justification for permitting E. In the preceding section two necessary conditions on an agent's having a VI-justification were outlined. Applying them to the case at hand, we can say that God has a VI-justification for permitting E only if: first, there is some greater good for the obtaining of which even God has to pay the price of permitting some, perhaps many, evils like E; second, there is no number n such that God can bring about this greater good if He permits n evils like E but not if He permits n-1 evils like E. Call these conditions 'GJ' (for 'global justification') and 'NM' (for 'no minimum') respectively.

Clearly, then, S's confidence in VI (given (~GG&~GE&G) and at t1, a qualification I shall henceforth omit where appropriate) should be no greater than his confidence in the existence of a good which can make GJ and NM true, that is, a good which is a greater good with respect to the permission of some evils like E, for the bringing about of which the permission of some evils like E is a price even God would have to pay, and for the bringing about of which there is no minimum number of evils like E that will suffice. So if it were

shown that S should have a low confidence in the existence of such a good, it would be shown that S should have a low confidence in VI, and therefore, by way of the principle $R_s[\forall c(\text{-}) \in C_{st1} : c(\sim p) = 1 - c(p)]$, that S should have at least a moderately high confidence in ~VI.

Given the argument of the previous section against Sceptical Theism, it would seem that if it is true that every good S can think of is such that even after careful reflection he cannot see how such a good would make GJ and NM true, then S ought to have a low confidence in the existence of a good which would make GJ and NM true. Now I believe that every good S can think of (every good *we* can think of) is such that, after careful reflection, he ought to conclude that he cannot see how that good would make GJ and NM true. However, a full defence of this claim is beyond my means here: since I am not entirely confident that there is a *general* reason for holding, independently of consideration of candidates, that no good could make both NM and GJ true, I should have to go through each of very many goods, arguing that in the case of each, that good could not make both NM and GJ true.

Instead, what I propose to do is to focus on just one candidate good, but one which seems to me to be both one of the most promising candidates and fairly typical of the kind of good that could be proposed. If I can show that there are good reasons to think that this good would not make NM and GJ true, reasons which are accessible to S, I will have gone at least some way to establishing that S should acknowledge himself unable to see how any good he can think of could make NM and GJ true, and therefore that S should have at least a moderately high confidence in ~VI. In addition, my treatment of this candidate should be suggestive of ways of dealing with other candidates that may be proposed.

The good that I will focus on is one which van Inwagen himself appeals to, the good of preventing the world from being 'massively irregular'.

4.4 Massive Irregularity

More precisely, the good that van Inwagen appeals to is that of making the world a place which contains "higher-level sentient creatures" (that is, conscious non-human animals, which henceforth I shall refer to simply as 'animals'), yet is not massively irregular.[62] As he uses the term, a world is massively irregular if it is one "in which the laws of nature fail in some massive way",[63] which he elaborates upon as follows:

> "A world, a physical universe, containing all the miracles recorded in the Old and New Testaments would not, on that account, be massively irregular, for those miracles were too small..and too few and far between. But a world would be massively irregular if...[it was one in which] God, by means of an ages-long series of ubiquitous miracles, causes a planet inhabited by the same animal life as the actual earth to be a hedonic utopia...
>
> ...It would also be possible for a world to be massively irregular in a more systematic, or "wholesale", way. A world that came into existence five minutes ago, complete with memories of an unreal past, would be on that account massively irregular...A world in which beasts...having the physical structures of and exhibiting the pain-behaviour of actual beasts ... felt no pain would be on that account alone massively irregular"[64]

How might this good make GJ and NM true? Perhaps as follows. In order to bring about the good of a world that contains animals yet is free from massive-irregularity, God has to permit some, perhaps a great many, evils like E, and it is at least as good that God create a world with animals that is not massively irregular and contains some, perhaps a great many, evils like E than that He create either a world with no animals or a world with animals that is massively irregular. Accordingly, GJ is true. There is, though, no *minimum* number of evils like E that God must permit in order to bring about a world containing

62 [van Inwagen 2006 p114]
63 [van Inwagen 2006 p114]
64 [van Inwagen 2006 pp114-115]

animals that is free from massive irregularity: for any number that He settled upon and that would be adequate for bringing about this good, a smaller number would be equally adequate; He could always prevent just one more evil like E without making the world massively irregular. Accordingly, NM is true.[65]

Because nothing important turns on the matter and because it will ease discussion, we can suppose that God has 'set His mind' on creating a world with animals (something which, of course, S will know at t1). Van Inwagen's suggestion can then be put more simply as follows: permitting some, perhaps a great many, evils like E is a price even God has to pay for avoiding massive irregularity, and it is better that He permit some, perhaps a great many, evils like E than that He loses the good of avoiding massive irregularity, so GJ is true; there is, however, no minimum number of evils like E that God must permit in order to avoid massive irregularity, so NM is true.

Now van Inwagen does not maintain that this is *true*; what he does maintain is that it is "true for all anyone knows".[66] Since S will fall under the extension of 'anyone', that would be enough to undermine my argument here.[67]

4.5 Doubts about GJ

Suppose we concede, for the sake of argument, that for all anyone knows, if the permission of some, perhaps a great many, evils like E is the price God has to pay for avoiding massive irregularity, that price is worth paying. Now, is it true for all anyone knows that not even God could bring about a world inhabited by animals which was not massively irregular without permitting at least some evils like E? Well, how shall we think of evils like

65 [van Inwagen 2006 pp124-126]
66 [van Inwagen 2006 p120]
67 Well, it would be enough if by 'p is true for all anyone knows' van Inwagen means something more than 'no-one can conclusively rule out that p', and he clearly does; in this context he means something like 'everyone should be completely neutral as to the truth-value of p' [van Inwagen 2006 p170]

E? This suggestion seems plausible: an evil is like E if it is one which involves an animal suffering as horrendously as Rowe's fawn suffers as it is burnt alive. So the question is this: is it true for all anyone knows that not even God could create a non-massively-irregular world inhabited by animals that never suffer as horrendously as that?

Now van Inwagen's actual defence of his position on this question – that for all anyone knows, this *is* something that not even God could do – seems to me to be slightly beside the point. For that defence (condensed quite a bit) runs roughly as follows: since none of us is able to "design a world", each of us has to concede that for all he knows, God was unable to create a world that 'left to its own devices' would be, at least so far as animals are concerned, an "hedonic utopia"; so for all any of us knows, in order to bring about such an hedonic utopia God would have had to engage in extensive interventions, interventions so extensive that the world would have been massively irregular.[68]

Now this clearly will not do as a defence of the claim that, for all anyone knows, not even God could create a non-massively-irregular world inhabited by animals that never suffer as horrendously as Rowe's fawn. It will not do because at the very most it shows that for all anyone knows not even God could create a non-massively-irregular world inhabited by animals that, with respect to those creatures, was an hedonic utopia. But that would not be enough: the claim that God could not create a world free from massive irregularity in which no animals suffered as much as does Rowe's fawn is *considerably* stronger than the claim that God could not create a world of that sort in which no animals suffered *at all* (that being, I take it, at least in part what it would be for the world to be, in respect of animals, an hedonic utopia).

That said, perhaps a better defence can be given. A straightforward one that is at least in the spirit of van Inwagen's is the following: (for all we know) the number or magnitude of

68 [van Inwagen 2006 p116-119]

the interventions in the natural order that God would have to make in order to bring it about that no animal underwent an episode of suffering as horrendous as that which Rowe's fawn undergoes would be sufficient to make the world massively irregular.

But just how plausible is this suggestion? Not very, in my view. Suppose we accept that, at least for all we know, if God were to prevent all animal suffering as awful as the fawn's by making it merely *appear* that animals feel such intense pain, the world would be made massively irregular thereby.[69] Then perhaps we would have to say that if God is to prevent animal suffering as bad as that of Rowe's fawn, He would have to 'actively intervene' in the world, that miracles would be required. But why think that it is even true for all we know that such miracles would make for massive irregularity?

Van Inwagen does suggest, in the quoted passage, that a world which involved an "ages-long series of ubiquitous miracles" would be a massively irregular one, but it surely would not take *ubiquitous* miracles to prevent any animal from suffering as horrendously as Rowe's fawn does. The suffering of Rowe's fawn is of a *particularly* horrendous type (remember, it lies in agony for *days*); most animals do not die in so painful a way, or experience such intense suffering at any point in their lives. Accordingly, God would need intervene in the lives of only a small proportion of animals in order to prevent all instances of animal suffering as great as that reported by E. It is also worth noting that the requisite miracles would not have to involve animals such as Rowe's fawn being *saved*.[70] It would be sufficient, for example, that such animals be put out of their misery sooner rather than later, that they be burnt alive, for example, somewhat more quickly.

Taking this together with the fact that when van Inwagen writes of 'massive

69 Not that I think this is terribly plausible. Perhaps van Inwagen is right when he says, in the passage quoted above, that a world "in which beasts...having the physical structures of and exhibiting the pain-behaviour of actual beasts ... felt no pain" would be massively irregular, but that animals should feel *no* pain is not what is, as it were, being asked of God; what is being asked is that no animals should feel *as much* pain as Rowe's fawn.

70 We certainly need not, for example, ask for fawns to be "saved by angels when they are in danger of being burnt alive" [van Inwagen 2006 p115].

irregularity' he really does mean *massive* irregularity – he does not maintain, for example, that a world in which God miraculously prevented *all human suffering* would be massively irregular[71] – it seems to me that there is a good case for holding that S should have a low confidence in the good of avoiding massive irregularity serving to give God a VI-justification for permitting E.

4.6 A Rejoinder

At this point, however, I imagine that a supporter of van Inwagen might want to make a reply along the following lines:

You seem to have conceded, if only for the sake of argument, that, for all we know, if God were to prevent all *animal suffering, the world would be made massively irregular. You have gone on to claim that, even so, God could have prevented all animal suffering as bad as that which Rowe's fawn undergoes without making the world massively irregular. But perhaps that could be so and yet God still have a VI-justification for permitting animal suffering as bad as that which Rowe's fawn undergoes.*

For consider: if God prevented all animal suffering of any 'degree of badness' at all, He would lose the great good of avoiding massive irregularity; so in order to bring about this great good, God must permit animal suffering of some degree; accordingly, He must draw a line, decreeing that animal suffering of a certain degree (or higher) is to be prevented, but animal suffering of a lesser degree is to be permitted. But what if there is no non-arbitrary line to be drawn here? Then God would have to draw an arbitrary line, and since this is what He would have to do, He would be justified in doing it. For all we know, this is in fact the case.

71 [van Inwagen 2006 pp127-128]

So, for all we know at least, God is justified in permitting animal suffering of a certain degree, even though He could have prevented animal suffering of that degree without making the world massively irregular. And so, for all we know at least, God is justified in permitting animal suffering of the degree of Rowe's fawn's suffering; it might just fall on the wrong side of an arbitrary line.

The central claim here is this: since for all we know there is no degree of badness such that God's preventing all animal suffering of (at least) that degree would not make the world massively irregular and His preventing all animal suffering of any lesser degree would, He is justified in drawing an arbitrary line on the 'to be permitted' side of which animal suffering of the degree of badness equal to that which E reports falls. Is this claim true?

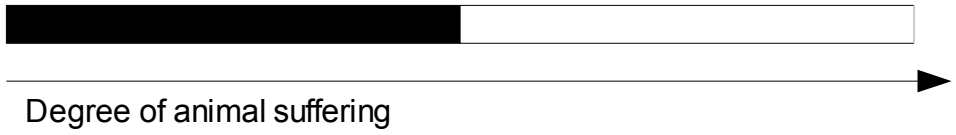
In my view, it is not, for even if there is no non-arbitrary line for God to draw, it does not follow that God has a justification for drawing the line just anywhere. To put the point slightly differently, it does not follow from the fact (if such it be) that there is no point such that God has a non-arbitrary reason for drawing His line at that point (i.e. a reason that is not just that the line 'has to be drawn somewhere'), that there is no point such that God has a non-arbitrary reason for *not* drawing His line at that point.[72] This, and its significance, will take a little explaining.

Suppose we represent the relationship between massive irregularity and permitted degrees of animal suffering diagrammatically. We draw a line the points on which correspond to degrees of animal suffering, increasing from left to right. For any point on the line, there is a white space above that point just in case it is straightforwardly true that by

72 For two recent arguments against van Inwagen's position that are based on similar observations, see [Trakakis 2003] and [Fischer & Tognazzini 2007].

preventing all animal suffering of that degree God *would not* make the world massively irregular. And for any point on the line, there is a black space above that point just in case it is straightforwardly true that by preventing all animal suffering of that degree God *would* make the world massively irregular.

Now it is the *vagueness* of the notion of massive irregularity that causes any issues that arise here. For suppose that there were no such vagueness. In that case no matter what God does, it will be either straightforwardly true or straightforwardly false that the world is made massively irregular thereby. Accordingly, for any degree of badness of animal suffering it will be either straightforwardly true or straightforwardly false that the world would be massively irregular if God prevented all animal suffering of that degree. That would enable us to draw a diagram along the above lines as follows:



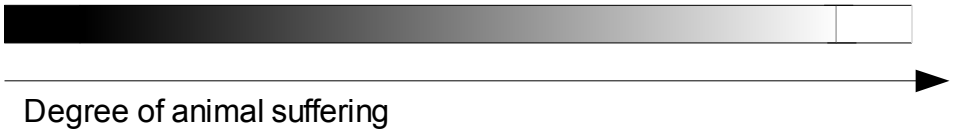
Clearly, there is a non-arbitrary line to be drawn here, through the point at which the black ends and the white begins.

So it is vagueness that causes the problem. Now, one might of course say that not even that is a problem, for one might think that all vagueness is epistemic, and so think that there are no, as it were, metaphysical borderline cases of massive irregularity, as opposed to merely epistemic borderline cases, cases in which we cannot tell if there is massive irregularity.[73] Van Inwagen is more dismissive of such an approach than I think is warranted,[74] but I shall not press the point; I shall assume that there are genuine not-merely-

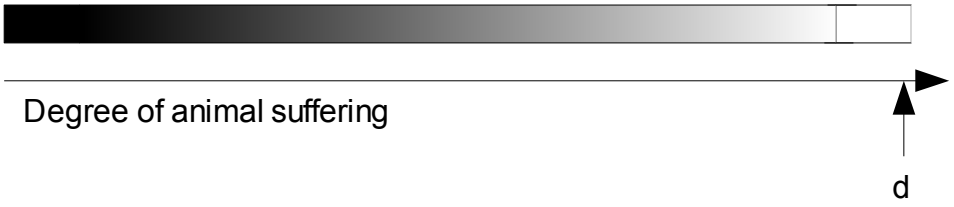
73 This position is appealed to by Stone in his response to van Inwagen [Stone 2003 pp268-269].
74 cf [van Inwagen 2006 pp106-107]

epistemic borderline cases.

Rather than commit myself to any particular view of what we should say about the truth value of 'the world would be massively irregular' in borderline cases, I will simply represent such cases by way of shades of grey in the diagram. That gives us a diagram like the following, in which the 'tapering off' of the grey area accounts for any 'fuzziness' there may be in the location of the relevant boundaries :



Let us say that the instance of animal suffering that E reports is of degree of badness d. Since, as this objection concedes, it is straightforwardly false that were God to prevent all instances of animal suffering of degree d, the world would be made massively irregular, d should occupy a position on the line above which there is a white space, for example:



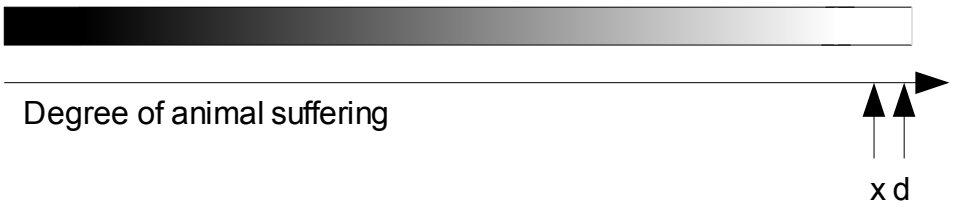
Now suppose we think of God's drawing a line quite literally: when He settles upon a degree of badness of animal suffering such that all instances of animal suffering that bad (or worse) are to be prevented, He literally draws a vertical line through the horizontal line in this diagram. In choosing where to draw such a line, does God have to make an arbitrary choice? Well, perhaps. This will seem particularly plausible if you hold[75] that the degree of

75 Unlike Jordan [2003 pp237-238] and Stone [2003 pp269-270], who seek to undermine (what I have called) VI-justification on this basis.

badness of animal suffering is infinitely divisible, in the sense that for any two degrees m and o, there is always a degree n that is greater than m and less than o. For if you hold that view, then it seems you should maintain that no matter how closely you 'zoom in' on this diagram, you will never find a sharp boundary between, say, white and non-white, for between any two points on the line one above which is a white space and another above which is a non-white space, there will be a third point above which is a non-white space.

However, this diagram also makes clear that it just does not follow from the fact that God has to make an arbitrary choice as to where to draw His line that He has a morally sufficient reason for drawing it so as to permit instances of animal suffering of degree d (the degree of E). To see this, imagine God going through the following process in deciding where to draw the line: He starts at the far left of the horizontal line in the diagram and moves rightwards. It may well be that at no point is He able to say to Himself, 'I have a non-arbitrary reason for stopping exactly here'. But that does not mean that He will not have a non-arbitrary reason for *stopping before He gets to d*.

For it is extremely plausible to suppose that, given that if God prevented all animal suffering of degree d it would be straightforwardly false that the world would be massively irregular, there is some degree x of animal suffering that is very, very slightly less bad than d (suffering of the same intensity but lasting for 1 second less than that of Rowe's fawn's, say) which is also such that if God were to prevent all animal suffering of that degree, it would be straightforwardly false that the world would be massively irregular. So there will be a point x on the line that is further to the left than d but also in the white area, for example:



Now suppose that God, moving rightwards along the horizontal line, has reached point x (of course, if He has found a non-arbitrary reason to stop before reaching this point, that is equally a non-arbitrary reason to stop before reaching point d). Imagine that He asks Himself, 'do I have a morally sufficient reason *not* to draw a line *before* reaching point d?' It seems clear that He does not. For the only consideration on the table at the moment is that of preventing massive irregularity, and since by drawing a line at x God will make it straightforwardly false that the world is massively irregular, He has nothing to gain by continuing to d (and He of course has something to lose, namely the prevention of those instances of animal suffering of degree x).

So the avoidance of massive irregularity does not give God a morally sufficient reason for allowing any instances of animal suffering of as bad as that reported by E, and that is so *even if* there is no point such that God has a non-arbitrary reason to draw His line at exactly that point.

4.7 A Further Rejoinder

One final move might be made on van Inwagen's behalf:

There must be something *wrong with this, for just as in the case of the prisoner and the judge, repeated application would lead to unacceptable results, and your position commits you to accepting that repeated application is possible. In this case, the problem is this. Suppose that what you say is right and that it can be shown that God does not have a morally sufficient reason for permitting any animal suffering of degree d because there is some lesser degree of animal suffering x such that if, in moving along the line from left to right, God had reached x, He would have no morally sufficient reason for continuing to d. In that case there would be some lesser degree of animal suffering y such if, in moving along*

the line from left to right, God had reached y, He would have no morally sufficient reason for continuing to x. Clearly, this 'process' could be repeated however many times you like, the result of which would be that eventually it would have been shown that God has no morally sufficient reason for permitting animal suffering of even a tiny degree. But it has been assumed, for the sake of argument at least, that God does *have such a morally sufficient reason.*

Although initially appealing, this objection is flawed. Let 's' designate some small degree of animal suffering and let it be agreed that God would have a morally sufficient reason to permit instances of animal suffering of degree s; that is, that God would have a morally sufficient reason for drawing his line to the right of the point on the horizontal line corresponding to s. The *reductio*-type objection under consideration will go through only if s can be 'reached' from d by repeated application of the procedure I applied above, and only if I am committed to the acceptability of however many repeat applications it takes to reach s. I will now show that this condition is not met.

Suppose first that the degree of badness of animal suffering is, in the sense outlined above, *not* infinitely divisible. In that case, it is just not true that I am committed to its being the case that for *any* point b, there is some point a such that a<b and if God had reached a, He would have no morally sufficient reason for continuing to b. For given that the degree of animal suffering is not infinitely divisible, there will be a shortest distance back along the line from point b. And therefore there will be a point b on the line such that b is in the 'white area' (i.e. the space above b is white) and a, the closest point to the left of b, is in the grey area. And in that case, the argument I gave above could not be given, for God *would* have something to lose by not continuing along the line from a to b: by not doing so He would be losing the good of making it straightforwardly true that the world is not massively irregular.

So if the degree of badness of animal suffering is not infinitely divisible, I am not committed to point s being reached, because I am not committed to the acceptability of a sufficient number of 'repeat applications' of the procedure I used above.

Now suppose that the degree of badness of animal suffering is infinitely divisible. In that case I *am* committed to the acceptability of an infinite number of repeat applications, because for any point b which is in the white area, there will be a point a such that a<b and a is also in the white area. However, on this supposition it does not follow that I am committed to s being reachable by repeated applications . For the only reason the procedure can be applied infinitely many times is that the gap between points b and a can decrease *ad infinitum*. But that means that the total 'distance travelled' back along the line, even after infinitely many repeated applications, need not be great enough as to lead to s being reached. For that total distance will be the sum of each of the distances back along the line at each step, and since those distances are constantly decreasing, there is no reason to suppose that the sum of even infinitely many such distances will be sufficiently high to lead to s being reached by this process.

4.8 Conclusion

In light of all of this, I conclude that S should be confident (at t1 and conditional on ~GG&~GE&G) that the good of preventing massive irregularity is not one which can give God a VI-justification for E. Since this good would seem to be both fairly typical of the goods that might be thought to underlie a VI-justification, and one of the most initially plausible 'candidates' for such a good, this goes some way to establishing that $R_s[\forall c(\text{-}) \in C_{st1} : c(\sim VI/\sim GG\&\sim GE\&G) \text{ is moderately high}]$ and thereby completing the case for $R_s[\forall c(\text{-}) \in C_{st1} : c(E/\sim G) < c(E/G)]$, Premise 5.

Chapter 4

Section 1: S's Confidence in G

1.1 Introduction

The remaining premise in my argument is Premise 4: $R_s[\forall c(\text{-}) \in C_{st1} : 1 > c(G) > 0]$. As noted, this should be read in such a way as to entail that S ought not to have what I am calling an 'empty confidence' in G at t1, so it tells us that S's confidence in G at t1 should either be given by a single number that is neither 0 nor 1 or by an interval of which neither 0 nor 1 is a member.

Why think that this premise is true? Well, set aside for now the possibility that S's confidence in G at t1 ought to be empty and consider the other confidences that Premise 4 asserts to be unacceptable. All those confidences have the following characteristic: they either go as high as 1 or go as low as 0 (or both, in the case of the confidence that is vague over the entire interval [0, 1]). Now here is an interesting feature of confidences like that: they are stuck that way.

More precisely, what is true is that if you have a confidence in p that is either a sharp 1 or an interval that contains 1 as a member, no amount of updating via conditionalization will give you a confidence in p that is *not* either a sharp 1 or an interval that contains 1 as a member, and if you have a confidence in p that is either a sharp 0 or an interval that contains 0 as a member, no amount of updating via conditionalization will give you a confidence in p

that is *not* either a sharp 0 or an interval that contains 0 as a member.[76] [77]

Consider now what this means. Suppose that S's confidence in the existence of God is or contains 0. Since no amount of updating on new evidence will change this, S will never come to believe in the existence of God by updating on new evidence, *whatever* new evidence he may receive. Or suppose that S's confidence in the existence of God is or contains 1; that means that his confidence in the non-existence of God is or contains 0. Since no amount of updating on new evidence will change this, S will never come to believe in the non-existence of God by updating on new evidence, *whatever* new evidence he may receive.[78] This, as Duncan puts it, "would surely be pure dogmatism".[79]

Could this dogmatism be justified? It seems to me very hard to see how it could, except if at t1 S is justified in being either *absolutely certain* that God exists or *absolutely certain* that He does not, in the sense of having a sharp confidence of 1 in G, or a sharp confidence of 1 of ~G (equivalently, a sharp confidence of 0 in G). If that were so, then the dogmatism would be more palatable.[80] In the following section I will investigate whether such absolute certainty is justified. Before doing so, however, I will look briefly at another suggestion that might be made.

One might say that the dogmatism implied by a confidence of S's at t1 in the

76 cf [Hájek 1998 p201]: "[If an agent has a confidence in X that goes down to 0 then] in the agent's representor [credence-set, in my terminology] there must be a function that assigns 0 to X; conditionalizing or Jeffrey conditionalizing that function will yield another function that assigns 0 to X. Since this function appears in the agent's updated representor, his or her posterior probability assignment again includes 0". And the same goes for a confidence that goes up to 1: since (via the principle $R_s[\forall c(\text{-}) \in C :_s c(p) = 1 - c(\sim p)]$) you should have a confidence which goes up to 1 in p if and only if you have a confidence which goes down to 0 in ~p, if you start out with a confidence in p that goes up to 1 and therefore a confidence in ~p that goes down to 0, your confidence in p cannot via conditionalization cease to go up to 1 because your confidence in ~p cannot via conditionalization cease to go down to 0.

77 It is of course for this reason that I need Premise 4 in order to show that cognizance of E should result in a 'wholesale' downward-shift of S's confidence in the existence of God.

78 I am appealing here to the threshold view of the relationship between confidence and belief which, as noted above, is not uncontroversial. This does not seem to be a great problem, however, for while it is easier to appreciate the point I am making by appealing to this view, such an appeal is not necessary. One could, for example, illustrate the importance of S's confidence being 'stuck' at 0 or 1 by way of the bets that he would be committing himself to making, or not making, in the future.

79 [Duncan 2003 p281]

80 I, for example, am dogmatic in this sense with regard to the proposition '2+2=4', and I think I am justified in this dogmatism precisely because I am justified in being absolutely certain that 2+2=4.

existence of God that includes either 0 or 1 would be justified if S is justified in taking himself to be in just no position to assess the evidential bearing on the existence of God of any information he receives, or any observations he makes. Which 0-or-1-encompassing confidence, exactly? Presumably, only the confidence that encompasses *both* 0 *and* 1, the confidence in the existence of God that is vague over the entire unit interval. Now, usefully, this very same acknowledgement of total ignorance as to the evidential bearing of information on the existence of God would seem to be the only reason for S's having an 'empty confidence' in the existence of God, so at this point we can bring that possibility, which was earlier set aside, back to the table.

Suppose it is conceded that if S ought to take himself to be completely in the dark about the evidential bearing of any information he receives on the existence of God, then either an empty confidence in G or a confidence in G that covers the entire [0,1] interval is called for. The question to be asked, then, is, *ought* S to take himself to be completely in the dark in this regard?

In my view, no, for very much the same reason as that which I offered against Sceptical Theism in Chapter 3 Section 3.5. There, I argued that Sceptical Theism has the unacceptable consequence of requiring a general 'fuzzing up' of our confidences for future events, for if one ought to acknowledge that one is just completely in the dark as to what the greater goods are that could serve to fix God's all-things-considered desires, then one ought to acknowledge that one is just completely in the dark as to what God's all-things-considered desires are, and since the will of God constitutes, in the sense outlined, a universal override, one therefore ought to acknowledge that to the extent that one believes in the existence of God, one is just completely in the dark as to what will happen in the future.[81]

But now it would surely be a necessary condition on taking oneself to be completely

81 That part of the future God is able to control, at least.

in the dark about the evidential bearing on the existence of God of any information one might receive, that one take oneself to be completely in the dark as to what God's all-things-considered desires are with regard to future events. For if one took oneself to have even some insight into those desires, one would take oneself to have at least some insight into the evidential bearing on the existence of God of the actual occurrence of at least some future events. Accordingly, someone who maintained that S at t1 should take himself to be just completely in the dark as to the evidential bearing of any information on the existence of God would fall foul of the same 'proving too much' objection as the sceptical theist: if what he said were correct and were followed through, it would lead to a general scepticism, in proportion to S's confidence in the existence of God, about S's ability to predict what will happen in the future, that is, to a 'fuzzing up' of S's confidences for future events in proportion to his confidence in the existence of God.[82]

With that objection dealt with, all that now stands in the way of Premise 4 is the possibility that S might be justified in either being absolutely certain of God's existence, or of His non-existence, to which question I now turn.

1.2 Absolute Confidence

The claim to be defended here is that S should not be absolutely certain of God's existence, or absolutely certain of His non-existence, in the sense of having a sharp confidence of 1 in His existence, or a sharp confidence of 1 in His non-existence. Why think that? Well first, note just how *strong* these states of confidence are. If you have a sharp

82 Admittedly, there is some difficulty here in assessing exactly how great the 'fuzziness' in S's confidences for future events would be. We know that it would be in proportion to S's confidence in the existence of God, but, of course, that confidence is itself either vague over the entire unit interval, or undefined, so it would take some investigation to work out how great the 'fuzzing up' would be. While an interesting question, I do not think that it is one that needs to be answered here, for this much is surely clear: whatever S's confidence in the existence of God at t1 is, it is not 0, and so there is going to be *some* degree of unacceptable 'fuzzing up'.

confidence of 1 in the truth of proposition p you could not be more confident of p. To bring in the link between confidence and betting appealed to in Chapter 3 Section 3.4, if you have a sharp confidence of 1 in the truth of proposition p you (if you meet the conditions outlined in that section) would be indifferent between £1 and a ticket that paid £1 if p, £0 if ~p (indeed, indifferent between a million pounds and a ticket that paid a million pounds if p, nothing if ~p).

Clearly, then, absolute certainty in this sense will take some pretty significant justifying; if S is to be justified in being absolutely certain of either God's existence or His non-existence, that certainty will have to have an extremely secure basis.[83] Could it? Well, to answer that we need to know what the basis is of S's confidence. There seem to be three possibilities. First, it may be that S just takes the existence or non-existence of God to be self-evident. Second, it may be that S's confidence in the existence or non-existence of God derives from his consideration of arguments for or against the existence of God. Third, it may be that S's confidence in the existence or non-existence of God derives from his phenomenal experience. I will argue that in each case, absolute certainty is not called for.

Suppose S just takes the existence of God to be self-evident, or that he takes His non-existence to be self-evident; could this justify a sharp confidence of 1 in the existence of God, or a sharp confidence of 1 in His non-existence? I do not think it is at all plausible to suppose that it could, not least because the existence of God is a *controversial* matter. S will know that, whatever his take on the question of God's existence, plenty of his peers are of quite the opposite opinion, and that is surely enough to rule out absolute confidence on the

83 As I mentioned in Chapter 1 Section 2.2, the orthodox Bayesian will say that a sharp confidence in p of 1 is justified, indeed called for, if it is merely the case that p is a logically necessary truth. As I argued then, I do not accept this. Even if Goldbach's conjecture is true, it would be just absurd for me in my current state of knowledge to have a sharp confidence of 1 in its truth. Maybe things would be different if I were an ideal agent, but I am not. More to the point, nor is S.

basis of alleged self-evidence.[84]

Now suppose that S is absolutely certain that God exists or absolutely certain that He does not due to his consideration of arguments for or against the existence of God. Could this be justified? Again, it would seem not, for there do not seem to be any suitable arguments. First, it seems clear that no inductive or evidential arguments, even cumulative ones, could be up to the job, for by their very nature such arguments do not *secure* the truth of their conclusions. Second, it seems that no argument whose conclusion is not strictly speaking that *God* exists (or does not), would be suitable, for at best such arguments could justify absolute certainty in the existence (or non-existence) of, say, an intelligent designer or a first cause.[85]

In fact, it seems that the only plausible candidate here would be some version of the ontological argument or of its 'atheological' counterpart (under which heading I would put arguments against the existence of God based on alleged incoherency in the very concept of a perfect being). The problem here is that every version of that argument has, at least when spelled out fully, a very controversial premise, and of the truth of such premises S should not be absolutely certain. To give just one simple example, a version of the modal ontological argument may have a premise along the lines of 'It is possible that it is necessary that God exists', and even if this seems self-evident to S, he will have to concede that it does not seem self-evident to many of his peers, and therefore should not be absolutely certain of its truth.[86]

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84 As will be a recurring theme here, I should stress that I am making no claim about what it is reasonable for S to *believe* or even what he can *know*. It is quite compatible with what I am saying here that at t1 S should, for example, have a rationally justifiable belief in the existence of God that derives simply from what he takes to be the self-evidence of God's existence.

85 Of course, such arguments could form *part* of a case for the existence (or non-existence) of God. But then the case would need to be completed in such a way as to justify absolute certainty (rather than, say, the kind of confidence that an inference to the best explanation warrants), and it is hard to see how that could be done.

86 As above, this claim should not be read as saying anything in particular about what it is reasonable for S to believe at t1. For all I say here, Plantinga may be quite right in his contention that it is rationally acceptable to believe in the possibility of a necessarily existent perfect being, and thereby rationally acceptable to believe in the actually of a necessarily existent perfect being [Plantinga 1975 p112].

What of the third possibility, that on the basis of phenomenal experience S is justifiably absolutely certain that God exists, or justifiably absolutely certain that He does not? Well, we can surely discount S's being absolutely certain of God's non-existence on such a basis, so it remains to consider whether any phenomenal experience S could have could justify absolute certainty in the existence of God.

Now it does seem to me that there are propositions in whose truth we can be justified in being absolutely certain on the basis of phenomenal experience. That I currently have a headache, for example, is something of which I am absolutely certain on the basis of my phenomenal experience, and this is, in my view, justified. However, this is a very special case, a case in which in judging the proposition in question to be true, one does not go beyond what might be called the 'phenomenal base'; my having a headache just is my having a certain phenomenal experience.[87] Is it at all plausible that the same could be said of the existence of God, that S's having a certain phenomenal experience could just *be* the existence of God, that all it would take for God to exist would be for S to have a certain experience? Surely this is not plausible at all.[88] [89]

There is also this important point: even if one could be justified in being absolutely certain that God exists on the basis of phenomenal experience, it is surely only *while the experience lasts* that one is so justified; I am not justified *now*, on the basis of phenomenal experience (or any other basis, for that matter), in being absolutely certain that I had a

87 Well, such is my opinion on the matter anyway. This may of course be called into doubt, but if even *here* absolute certainty is not called for, then it surely is not called for with regard to the existence of God.

88 One might say: in a sense S's having a certain experience would be all it would take for God to exist, for He is a necessary being and so it is necessarily true that He exists, which means that S's having a certain experience would be a sufficient condition for His existence. Clearly, though, this will not do, for the same could be said of Goldbach's conjecture (if that conjecture is true then it is necessarily true, and so any experience S has would suffice for its truth), and surely none of S's phenomenal experiences justifies him in being absolutely certain of the truth of Goldbach's conjecture. There *is* a sense in which something more than S's having a certain experience is required of the world for Goldbach's conjecture to be true, and in *that* sense, something more than S's having a certain experience is required of the world for God to exist.

89 Once more, I need to stress that I am taking no stand here on questions such as whether belief in God could be grounded in religious experience, or even on whether a person's religious experiences could provide him with knowledge of God's existence.

headache *yesterday*. So for S to be justified at t1 in being absolutely certain of the existence of God, he would have to be having whatever experience it is that justifies absolute confidence in the existence of God *at that moment*. That means that unless this experience is one which S is at all times the subject of, we could easily alter the set-up of the argument to discount it. Since it is surely true that, at the very least, the vast majority of us are not the constant recipients of whatever mystical or religious experiences would be required for certainty in the existence of God, it would be of little detriment to my argument to simply stipulate that S is to be any one of us *excepting* those of us who are such recipients.

In light of all this, I conclude that S should not be absolutely certain at t1 of either the existence or the non-existence of God. And, as I have argued, if such absolute certainty is not called for, Premise 4 stands.

Section 2: Conclusion

My case is now complete. I hope to have shown that at t1 S should ensure both that his confidence in the existence of God goes neither all the way up to 1 nor all the way down to 0 (and that it should not be 'empty') and that he should be less confident of the occurrence of E conditional on God's existence than conditional on His non-existence, in the sense that for every credence-function is his credence-set, the value of that function for the argument 'E/G' should be greater than the value of that function for the argument 'E/~G'. From this, I have argued, it follows that S should ensure that his confidence in the existence of God is lower at t2, after he has observed E, than at t1, before he has observed E. And from *this*, conjoined with the fact that S can be 'pretty much any one of us', I have argued, it follows

that cognizance of suffering should reduce our confidence in the existence of God.

I shall conclude with a couple of brief and very provisional thoughts as to the broader significance of this conclusion. First, there is the point that if I have been successful in outlining an evidential argument that avoids the challenge of the Sceptical Theists, a major obstacle to general reasoning about the existence of God based on our 'beforehand' expectations for what the world would be like if God exists has been removed. It is a familiar contention that Sceptical Theism would threaten not merely evidential arguments against the existence of God, but also evidential arguments *for* His existence that appeal to features of the world that we would have been more inclined to expect on the supposition of His existence than otherwise.[90] If I am correct in my dismissal of the sceptical challenge, the prospects are greatly improved for evidential arguments on *both* sides.

Second, although I have been concerned here to establish the more modest claim that cognizance of suffering should reduce our confidence in the existence of God to at least some degree, there seems to me good reason to think that the reduction in confidence in the existence of God called for by cognizance of suffering such as that of Rowe's fawn may well be a pretty significant one. More exactly, it seems that, given that in order to avoid unacceptable 'fuzzing up' of our confidences for future events we have to take our inability to see a greater good or evil connected in the right way to those events to warrant low confidence in the existence of such a good or evil, then S's confidence at t1 in E conditional on G ought to be *quite considerably* lower than his confidence at t1 in E conditional on ~G.[91] Accordingly, if S ought not to have a confidence in the existence of God at t1 that goes *very* high, then the reduction in his confidence in the existence of God called for by his observing E may well be a substantial one.

90 cf, for example, [Sobel 2004 p431]

91 At least if my suggestion that S ought to be pretty confident that no good could serve to give God a VI-justification for E is borne out following consideration of candidate goods other than that of avoiding massive irregularity.

Of course, showing that S's initial confidence in the existence of God ought not to go very high would require much further work, especially given the point made above about the renewed prospects for evidential arguments on both sides, and my suggestion here is very much a tentative one. The fact remains, though, that the considerations about evil that I have explored here could play a central role in what may prove to be a compelling evidential case against the existence of God.

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