

A THREEFOLD RESPONSE TO THE EVIDENTIAL ARGUMENT  
FROM EVIL

by

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# Abstract

In this thesis, I develop a threefold response to the evidential argument from evil. I first raise a new version of skeptical theism, data-based skeptical theism, to defend theism from the evidential argument from evil, but it works only under certain conditions. Data-based skeptical theism needs to be supplemented by other arguments. I then raise the evidential argument from evil against naturalism to reduce the explanatory power of naturalism over evil. Finally, I develop the divine justice theodicy to enhance theism's explanatory power over evil. In this way, theism can defend the attack of the evidential argument from evil.

My thesis can be further detailed as the following:

First, I develop data-based skeptical theism to protect theism from being directly disproved by the evidential argument from evil while avoiding skeptical theism's two general unwelcomed consequences: global skepticism and moral skepticism. However, data-based skeptical theism works for people who hold no other competing theories to theism. When naturalism is regarded as a competing theory for the existence of evil, the evidential argument from evil can still disconfirm theism indirectly. Because data-based skeptical theism does not offer explanations for evil and naturalism can explain more evil than theism, evil's existence favours naturalism. Therefore, I supplement data-based skeptical theism with the other two arguments: the evidential argument from evil against

naturalism and the divine justice theodicy. The former can reduce the explanatory power of naturalism; the latter can increase that of theism. The two arguments render theism's explanatory power over evil stronger than that of naturalism. Hence, theism will not be indirectly disconfirmed by the evidential argument from evil. Instead, theism becomes a more plausible theory than naturalism with respect to evil.

In summary, data-based skeptical theism can prevent the evidential argument from evil from directly disconfirming theism; the evidential argument from evil against naturalism and the divine justice theodicy can help theism avoid being indirectly disproved by the evidential argument from evil. The three strategies constitute a solid threefold theistic response to the evidential argument from evil.

**To Harley, Peter, Yvonne, and Bird**

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於年華正盛時離去的朋友們

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# Chapter 1

## Introduction

### 1.1 The Evidential Argument from Evil

In 1979, William Rowe published his seminal paper, ‘The Problem of Evil and Some Varieties of Theism.’ In this paper, Rowe raises the so-called evidential argument from evil to undermine theism. He argues that the gratuitous evil that brings about intense suffering in this world is strong evidence against theism. If we consider these evils alone and leave all the other evidence against or in favour of theism aside, we will get the conclusion that it is highly probable that God does not exist. Rowe’s argument can be summarized as the following (Rowe et al., 2017, p. 132):

1. There exist horrendous evils that an all-powerful, all knowing, perfectly good being would have no justifying reason to permit.
  2. An all-powerful, all-knowing, perfectly good being would not permit an evil unless he had a justifying reason to permit it.
- Therefore,
3. God does not exist.

Many theists and atheists agree with the second premise, and hence, Rowe does not pay much attention to it. It is the first premise that is the focus of Rowe’s evidential argument from evil. Rowe offers some cases of evils, and he argues that these evils are gratuitous. That is, no greater good can be gained from these evils. God can prevent these evils without losing any greater good or without permitting evils as bad or worse than these

evils.

For example, Rowe (1979, p. 337) argues that a fawn seriously hurt in a forest fire is strong evidence against God's existence. This fawn intensely suffered for days before passing away. Moreover, the fawn's suffering happened in a distant forest where no human beings were present. It seems that the fawn's suffering cannot bring any greater good. An omnipotent and merciful God should have prevented the fawn's gratuitous suffering, but he did not. As a result, the fawn's suffering supports the first premise, so it is evidence against God's existence. In addition to the fawn's example, many evils in the world seem to be gratuitous. They all evidence the first premise.

It is worth noting that Rowe does not argue that the first premise is true. Instead, he argues that 'we are rationally justified in believing [the first premise] to be true (Rowe et al., 2017, p. 134).' Gratuitous evil which brings intense suffering is accordingly strong evidence against God's existence. Therefore, we are justified in believing that the conclusion (God does not exist) is true.

One can deploy different strategies to deal with the evidential argument from evil. One way is to directly raise an account to explain why God has allowed the evil in question; the other way is to dissolve the evidential argument from evil. Among explanations adduced to delineate why God allows evil, free will and soul-making are the two most

significant accounts for evil. As to the latter strategy, skeptical theism without doubt is important.

However, all of them have some critical deficits and problems. In the following, I will sketch the contours of the free will theodicy, the soul-making theodicy, and skeptical theism, their problems included. I propose that they are all insufficient to deal with the evidential argument from evil. Then I will introduce how I deal with the evidential argument from evil in this thesis.

## 1.2 The Free Will Theodicy

Before starting the discussion, a brief introduction to the distinction between moral and natural evil would be helpful. By moral evils, I mean evils which are ‘brought about by intentional human choice, or knowingly allowed to occur by humans, together with the evils of their intentional bad actions or negligence (Swinburne, 2004, p. 236).’ Moral evils are within the sphere of moral evaluation. Agents contributing to moral evils are culpable of it.<sup>1</sup> Natural evils, on the other hand, are not attributable to human beings. That is, no one would hold moral responsibility when it happens. Natural evils are out of the reach of human capability. They are produced by natural processes which human beings are not able to intervene and prevent. We cannot assign moral evaluation to natural evils since they are not committed or caused by free agents. Besides, people can intentionally or neglectfully cause natural disasters leading to desperate sufferings, but I will not include these cases in the category of natural evil because human beings are responsible for them.<sup>2</sup> I treat natural disasters which human beings are morally responsible for as moral evils here.

The distinction between moral and natural evil can help us evaluate a theodicy. Some

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<sup>1</sup> Supernatural agents, such as angels, are also capable of causing moral evil. However, unless it is specifically clarified, moral evil in this thesis refers to evil made by human beings.

<sup>2</sup> This definition does not exclude the possibility that natural evil can be caused by other free agents, such as Satan or fallen angels. For example, see DeWeese, 2013, pp. 62–63. For a more detailed distinction of moral and natural evil, see Trakakis, 2008, pp. 162–163.

theodicies are more ambitious such that they aim to explain every kind of evil in the world, while some simply want to delineate why God allows certain kinds of evil. With this distinction in mind, we could have a more accurate expectation on a theodicy and hence can more precisely evaluate it.

The free will theodicy<sup>3</sup> proposes that free will is good in itself and virtues realized by free choice are valuable as well. It is good for God to equip humans with free will. However, endowing human beings with free will is not without risk. Though free will is intrinsically valuable and can contribute to valuable moral virtues, it may also be abused and produce devastating consequences. Free agents, like human beings, may exert their free will to pursue virtues and good, but may also abuse it to serve their evil desires. Free agents are capable of committing themselves to moral evil. This is the risk of free will. Creatures who are not capable of misusing their free will are not really free agents (Pruss, 2003, p. 218). The dark side of abusing free will for evil, like a ghost, always accompanies the bright side of utilizing it for virtues.

However, the possibility of free will's being abused does not prevent God from creating a world with free agents, because the good brought about by free will is greater than the risk and moral disvalues it may cause. Therefore, free will is the justifying reason

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<sup>3</sup> Free will is sometimes constructed as a defense rather than a theodicy. However, since free will has constituted a reason for God to permit evil, I consider it as a theodicy here. I treat theories giving possible accounts for why God allows evil as theodicies.

for God to create a world with evil. Evil is a desperate side effect, but it is outweighed by the good caused by free will.

According to this view, God allows evil because free will can lead to some greater goods. The first good is the intrinsic value of free will. It seems that it is better for God to create creatures with free will. Everything being equal, a human being who can freely think and freely make decisions is better than one who can only think and act according to set programs.

In addition to its intrinsic value, free will can also render a virtue more valuable. We tend to think that virtues which are attained and gained by free choice are better and more valuable. 'An intended good action is the better if done freely in the sense of not being fully caused (Swinburne, 1996, p. 37)'. Free will can enhance the value of a virtue because a virtue accomplished by free choice is more authentic and are more valuable accordingly. On the other hand, when virtues are achieved by coercion or control, we may think that they are of less value. A child who shares her toys out of her free choice is more morally praiseworthy than one being ordered to do so. The conclusion applies to other moral virtues as well.

Following this line of thought, supporters of free will theodicy often emphasize that God creates human beings with free will in order that they can freely love God and each

other. God can create human beings without free will so that they can only love God and each other. In this way, there will be no moral evil, but the valuable relationship of free love will diminish as a result. God has to give human beings free will to form the relationship of love between him and humanity, and among human beings themselves. Though free will may lead to the result of moral evil, virtues achieved out of free choice are more valuable than those fully caused by other reasons such as order or coercion.

In addition, the value of virtues can increase through struggle and suffering in the process of free choice:

...the good of freely forwarding the good is better if the agent has a free choice between a greater and a lesser good; better still if he has a free choice between the good and the bad, and even more so if the possibility of doing bad includes the possibility of doing wrong ..., not just between alternative equal goods (Swinburne, 1998, p. 84).

Temptations create opportunities for free choice. A virtue gained by overcoming temptation is more valuable because the agent has to struggle to give up other desires. We may more appreciate the achievement of an athlete who has trained themselves with incredible discipline than that of those who rely more on inherent advantages. Everything being equal, when the two kinds of athletes are competing for the champion, many people will hail more for the former who take more effort and make more sacrifice to win. All the sweat and suffering of training make the achievement of an athlete more valuable. Virtues earned

by conquering struggling and suffering are more valuable. God has to allow evil to give human beings opportunities to resist temptations out of their free will to render virtues gained more valuable.

Finally, though free will may be abused, the abuse itself can create opportunities for cultivating and showing virtues. As Richard Swinburne (1998, p. 162) proposes, '[h]elp is most significant when it is most needed and it is most needed when its recipient is suffering and deprived.' Other people may sympathize with and act to help the victims, solidify together to find out the perpetrators to let justice be done, and take further steps to prevent similar evil from happening in the future again. The abuse of free will is bad, but it serves to stimulate other people to manifest virtues through free choice.<sup>4</sup>

In short, free will is intrinsically good. It also enhances the value of virtues and produces chances for people to freely choose to do good things. However, free will theodicy cannot cope with the challenge from the evidential argument from evil and it also faces other problems.

First, it is questionable that free will is such important that it deserves the horrendous evil in the world. Compared with the horrific hurts and results caused by horrendous evil,

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<sup>4</sup> The soul-making theodicy also proposes that moral evil could help people cultivate and show their virtues. The free will theodicy and the soul-making theodicy are not incompatible with each other. It is arguable that the two theodicies are closely interwoven, and can be combined together to construct a robust theodicy. For example, Nick Trakakis (2008, p. 164) purports to view the two theodicies 'as a single theodicy comprised of two separate elements'.

free will and goods connected with it seems to be far less significant. Even if horrendous evil can provide opportunities for free agents to develop and show virtues such as love and sympathy, it is rather implausible that those goods can outweigh the suffering the victims of horrendous evil have experienced. If our beloved or ourselves are the victims, we would definitely think that those virtues followed do not deserve the dreadful and horrific suffering at all. Without love, sympathy, and other virtues evoked by horrendous evil, the other people and the whole society still live rather well. Losing some opportunities for them to manifest moral goodness does not cause much suffering for people; on the other hand, the negative consequences and effects on the victims, their families and friends are much more serious. It is dubious whether the pain and suffering caused by horrendous evil can be outweighed by goods elicited by it.

Second, the free will theodicy is hard to explain natural evil, including the suffering of Rowe's fawn. According to the aforementioned definition, natural evil is not caused by intended human acts or ignorance which people can prevent. Its cause is independent of human free will. For example, earthquakes regularly happen and kill a lot of people, but their occurrences are irrelevant to human free will. They are caused by crustal movement. Therefore, they are not related to the misuse of free will and thus are not within the scope of free will theodicy. God could create a world without earthquakes but still allow free

agents to freely exert their will. The two things, allowing free will and preventing natural disasters, do not contradict each other. Proponents of free will theodicy have to indicate the connection between free will and natural evil.

To solve this problem, proponents of free will theodicy may argue that natural evil is indispensable for human beings to make free moral choices. Natural evil can provide human beings with knowledge for moral maturity. We can learn from natural evil about the consequences of some moral evil (Connor, 1987, p. 162). For instance, we can know that some plants are poisonous from natural evil. When we have chances to make use of those plants to serve our goals, we can choose to carry on the plan or not. Natural evils caused by those plants render some moral evils possible and practicable. In addition, T. J. Mawson has argued that it is impossible for God to allow a world with moral evil while completely blocking natural evil. Certain kinds of natural evil will always exist if moral evil caused by free agents is possible:

To have effective freedom to harm another requires one to have more power than the other, and one person's having more power than another must be a consequence of natural facts, i.e. facts which are solely the result of randomness or the operation of natural laws on the initial or boundary conditions of the universe (Mawson, 2004, p. 38).

Moral evil cannot exist alone. Some kinds of natural evil have to pre-exist to enable it. However, Mawson's argument does not intend to explain why there are so many other

kinds of natural evils (for example, earthquakes) in the world. According to his argument, the scope of natural evil God must permit is much smaller than what we have now. And natural evil in this world seems to be excessive. To render some moral evils possible, we do not need such a great amount of natural evil in our world. For example, we do not need a destructive earthquake killing thousands of people to know that iron, stone and falling construction are lethal. We only need to be hurt by them and then can infer that these kinds of events and things can be employed to exert some evil plans. It seems that God can allow much less quantity of natural evil to render moral evil possible.

Furthermore, it seems that natural evils not sensed by human beings should not exist, such as Rowe's fawn. Those natural evils cannot offer knowledge for moral evil. God can prevent them without influencing the existence of moral evil. This explanation does not answer when God permit so many natural evils in the world.

Third, the free will theodicy does not square well with theistic eschatology. Many theistic traditions, such as Christian theism, propose that God's people will dwell in heaven in their afterlife. In heaven, evil has been defeated. Only good things exist and remain. There is no pain and suffering anymore. God's people have been purified and have completely gotten rid of the influence of sin and evil. They will then only obey God's will and will no longer commit any moral evil. Furthermore, natural evil will not happen

anymore. Disease and death belong to the past, and no one will ever experience them. In summary, everything is good in heaven and nothing bad will exist there.

Nevertheless, since free will is important to the degree that God has to permit its abuse, heaven should also contain at least moral evil. God's people have free will in the temporal life, and they should also keep enjoying it in heaven. As free agents, they should be capable of committing moral evil in heaven. As a result, there would be moral evil in heaven, but this consequence is incompatible with many theistic traditions. On the other hand, if in heaven people do not have free will or their free will is disposed to do good and always avoid evil, then God is able to create a world without evil from the outset. The free will theodicy thus is not consistent with many theistic eschatological traditions, especially those of Abrahamic religions.

Fourth, a theodicy should not only point out the greater good that outweighs the evil in question, but should also generate greater good in the victim's life. The evil one has suffered should not only lead to an overall global greater good, but also must make the victim's life better. If not, then it is immoral for God to allow this evil on someone.

Marilyn Adams ( 1999, p. 31, emphasis original) argues:

...God could be said to value human personhood in general, and to love individual human persons in particular, only if God were *good to* each and every human person God created. And divine *goodness* to created persons involves the distribution of harms and benefits, not merely globally, but also

within the context of the individual person's life. At a minimum, God's *goodness* to human individuals would require that God guarantee each a life that was a great good to him/her on the whole by balancing off serious evils. To value the individual qua person, God would have to go further to defeat any horrendous evil in which s/he participated by giving it positive meaning through organic unity with a great enough good *within the context of his/her life*.

Proponents of the free will theodicy may suggest that God could compensate the victims of evil in the afterlife, but compensation is not justification. Sacrificing someone's benefits for a greater good with proper compensation is morally permissible only under certain conditions. Proponents of the free will theodicy have to specify those conditions and delineate that the free will theodicy has satisfied them.

The free will theodicy has the above problems, and it is not easy to explain away all these problems. One can stick to the free will theodicy and try to explain every evil and every problem by appealing to free will. However, this approach may lead to an impasse. The other way is to combine it with other theodicies. They may together constitute a strong theodicy. Now let us turn to the soul-making theodicy.

### **1.3 The Soul-making Theodicy**

John Hick is the most important contemporary espouser of the soul-making theodicy. I will focus on his version of soul-making theodicy in this section. Christian orthodox holds that before the fall, human beings were without defects, though not perfect, in each aspect. Without the fall, human beings would not have experienced evil and suffering. It is human beings' free choice to disobey God that brings sin into the world and initiates evil and suffering in human life and history. God had made humans in a flawless status at the beginning, and human beings are responsible for the fall and the induction of sin. In contrast to this orthodox, John Hick does not consider that human beings are flawless at the beginning. He suggests that God's creation should be divided into two stages (Leo K. C. Cheung, 2020, p. 551). At the first stage, through evolution, God has created and equipped human beings with the abilities to grow up to be the children of God. With God's omnipotence, there would be no problem for the creation at the first stage.

Then at the second stage, human beings need to be transformed into the measure of God's children. The second stage cannot be directly fulfilled by God's omnipotence. It must be developed in a process:

Man is in process of becoming the perfected being whom God is seeking to create. However, this is not taking place...by a natural and inevitable evolution, but through a hazardous adventure in individual freedom (Hick, 2007, p. 256).

Accordingly, each individual is on the pilgrimage of soul-making. Now, the question is, what kind of environment is most suitable for soul-making? A world filled with only pleasure and containing no pains and sufferings may not be suitable for the soul-making task. Hence, God does not intend the world to be a paradise without suffering, but to be ‘the scene of a history in which human personality may be formed towards the pattern of Christ (Hick, 2007, p.258).’

Hick adopts the analogy of good parents to elucidate this point. Good parents do not allow their children to be spoiled to such a degree that they always only want to enjoy pleasures and advantages. Children growing up in this kind of environment would not become a morally and spiritually mature person. To avoid this consequence, good parents sometimes have to subject their children to hardships and trials to help them grow up:

Certainly we seek pleasure for our children, and take great delight in obtaining it for them; but we do not desire for them unalloyed pleasure at the expense of their growth in such even greater values as moral integrity, unselfishness, compassion, courage, humour, reverence for the truth, and perhaps above all the capacity for love.... A child Brought up on the principle that the only or the supreme value is pleasure would not be likely to become an ethically mature adult or an attractive and happy personality (Hick 2007, pp. 258-59).

A child must experience pains and sufferings to be mature. A child, who has never suffered, as Hick has said above, will not grow up spiritually or morally. In fact, it is a common experience that children who have been overly pampered and know only pleasure and

enjoyment will not only spiritually and morally underdevelop, but may also lack progression in their other abilities. They may not even know how to take care of themselves and may live in a chaotic situation. In short, pains and sufferings are essential to children's development.

Parents on the earth, out of love for their children, would let them experience suffering and pain to help them grow up, let alone the benevolent God. God, in addition to being the creator of humanity, loves humanity to a degree far greater than earthly parents. For this reason, God would not have created a world composed of only pleasure and enjoyment. Rather, God has put suffering in the world through which his children would grow up into the full measure of the stature of Christ. Evil and suffering provide opportunities for human beings to grow into the likeness of Christ.

In addition, evil and suffering provide an epistemic distance between human beings and God (Cheung, 2020, p. 551). Suffering and evil prevent human beings from perceiving the presence of God in a clear way. In a world without suffering and evil, the presence and providence of God must be extremely obvious. In this world, when someone tries to harm others, the weapon in this person's hand would automatically be ineffective and unable to cause damage. For example, a bullet fired from a handgun would be automatically softened when it hits someone. This bullet would bring about no harm, not even a small scratch;

similarly, a natural disaster would automatically become incapable of causing harm when it is about to hurt people and animals. Volcanic lava would bypass people and animals every time. When it cannot avoid, it would miraculously cool down and hence would not burn anyone. When someone has fallen from a height, the hard ground would become a soft cushion, or the gravity would suddenly change to render this person descend without being injured.

In such a world, it is easy for a rational person to infer that there is an omnipotent, omniscient, and supremely good God in the world, and this God has watched over this world at all times to keep evil and suffering out. Human beings would consequently not have sufficient opportunities to make moral choices and conquer temptations. They would always choose what is pleasing to God because of the overwhelming presence of God, just as people would intentionally choose not to run a red light or break a traffic rule when a traffic policeman is in their car. As a result, people would not grow up in morality and spirituality. They choose to do good simply because of the pressure of the presence of God, rather than for the sake of good itself. A world free from suffering and evil would therefore not offer enough opportunities for people to grow up.

Finally, suffering and evil ensure the development of evolution. Without suffering and evil, natural selection would have been impossible, and the evolution of creatures would

have remained at an early stage. The richness of the world's species would have become rather homogeneous. Humankind would not have appeared as well. Furthermore, in this situation, much scientific knowledge would also have become inaccessible because, under the special providence of God, the laws of physics would automatically fail or change to avoid bringing about suffering and evil whenever evil and suffering were going to occur. The physical laws would often be disrupted and lose their regularity so that human beings would not be able to gain scientific knowledge by observation and deduction.

For the above reasons, God must allow suffering and evil to exist in this world so that human beings can grow in every way, become a child of God, and grow into the likeness of Christ.

However, even if Hick's soul-making theodicy is right that suffering and evil are essential for human growth and maturity, people would still question that there is too much suffering and evil in the world. Only a fraction of people can grow after experiencing suffering and evil. Some people have suffered and then have simply collapsed rather than become mature. Hick's soul-making theodicy has underestimated the destructive power of evil and suffering, and the world of excessive suffering is not always like a schoolroom for growth. Rather, it is more like a cruel arena in which many people are beaten and

destroyed by evil and suffering, gaining no inspiration or growth (Scott, 2015, p. 319).<sup>5</sup>

Hick admits that evil and suffering do not always lead to correspondent growth. Some of them are not proportionate to the good caused, while some seem to be gratuitous. Those evils and sufferings' 'effect seems to be sheerly dysteleological and destructive (Hick, 2007, p. 330)'. But Hick insists that those evils and sufferings do contribute to soul-making. If all suffering in the world is deserved and produces greater good, then people would not sympathize with those who suffer, nor would they be provoked to help others with virtues such as courage, sacrifice, etc. 'In such a world human misery would not evoke deep personal sympathy or call forth organized relief and sacrificial help and service (Hick, 2007, p.334).' People would not lend a hand to suffering people because they know that these sufferings and evils are necessary and good for the victims by making them more mature. Moreover, in a world where suffering is always deserved, people know exactly how the rules of remuneration and retribution work. People would only do good for the sake of reward rather than good itself. This consequence is harmful to soul-making (Hick, 2007, p. 335). Adams nicely summarizes Hick's point about why there is undeserved suffering in the world:

Hick ingeniously subsumes these data under his soul-making hypothesis, with the suggestion that such dysteleological evils lend the universe a quality of mystery that *is* conducive to soul-making. Mystery...is

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<sup>5</sup> For a tragic example of spiritual and moral collapse due to suffering, see Boyd, 2001, pp. 260–61.

wholesome, because we would not sympathize with those who suffered their just deserts or suffered for what was clearly their own good. Likewise, if patterns of reward and punishment were too clear, we would never transcend ourselves to love the good or pursue the right for its own sake (Adams, 1999, p. 52).

Undeserved evil has its place in soul-making. From this respect, the soul-making theodicy is able to deal with the evidential argument from evil. The suffering of Rowe's fawn occurs in a corner no one knows. The fawn's suffering cannot directly contribute to people's soul-making. However, it can indirectly benefit human soul-making by constituting part of the mystery mentioned by Adams. People do not know the fawn's suffering, but they know innumerable similar cases have occurred in many unknown corners. Those unknown cases contribute to the mystery of suffering and thus to soul-making.

In addition, Hick understands that not everyone can reach the final stage of soul-making in the present life. In fact, it seems that no one can be absolutely mature in this life. Eschatology, therefore, is introduced to ensure that people who have underdeveloped in their present life can continue the journey of soul-making in the afterlife. '[T]he soul-making process continues into the life to come, providing more occasions for exercising trust in God, until all persons are brought into the divine kingdom (Michael L. Pererson, 2007, p. 522)'. Therefore, for soul-making theodicy, being able to keep growing in morality and spirituality in the afterlife is necessary.

The above discussion is a brief introduction to Hick's soul-making theodicy. Hick's

soul-making theodicy has avoided some difficulties of the free-will theodicy, and to a certain degree, it forcefully delineates why God allows so many evils and sufferings in the world. However, the soul-making theodicy (like the free will theodicy) also has some critical problems.

First, this theodicy has made God the author of evil. In the system of the free will theodicy, evil and suffering are the unavoidable and unwanted by-products of human free will. God does not positively will their existence. If God could create creatures with free will that would not abuse it, the omnipotent and good God would do so. On the view of the free will theodicy, evil and suffering are not positively willed by God.

In the soul-making theodicy, evil and suffering are necessary for human growth into the likeness of Christ, so that God has to create a universe like ours to enable human growth. In most Christian traditions, God 'allows' evil and suffering for a number of reasons, but he does not positively intend and realize them. Hick's soul-making theodicy has made God the direct cause and author of evil, which is strongly at odds with most Christian traditions. Truly, it is debatable that God can be the direct cause and author of sin and suffering. As James Spiegel indicates, from the Christian theological and philosophical perspectives, it is not necessary that we have to deny that God can positively cause and be the author of evil. Some Christian philosophers, such as Richard Swinburne, purport that

God has the right to treat human beings in this way, and some theologians, such as Schleiermacher, also agree that God is evil's ultimate cause and author (Spiegel, 2013, pp. 89–90).

Even so, the claim that God is the author of evil is contradictory to his attributes such as holiness and love, especially in the cases of so-called horrendous evil. Imagine that God will and thus cause an innocent baby to be tortured to death. A God willing such a horrendous evil seems not to be a God of love. God is the author of evil will undermine his attribute of benevolence. Of course, there is space for discussion and debate on this issue, but it remains controversial. In addition, the idea that God positively predestines and accomplishes evil is not an orthodox and popular view among Christianity<sup>6</sup>.

Second, as aforementioned Marilyn Adams' critique of the free will theodicy, the soul-making theodicy also does not satisfy the principle that evil and suffering should bring about greater good in the life of its victim. In the case of undeserved evil and suffering, it is other people who really benefit, not the victims themselves. Others may be inspired to do good by undeserved evil and suffering, but the victims themselves have gained nothing except pain and suffering. The victims of horrendous evil are just instruments. God seems to be unfair and unjust to treat them in this way. Consequently, the soul-making theodicy has put God's just and love in question. The soul-making theodicy

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<sup>6</sup> For example, see the discussion against that God is the author of sin in Paul Copan, 2013, pp. 111–16.

needs to point out how gratuitous or undeserved evil can produce greater good for the victims, not just for the world in general.

Third, the assumption that God could not create mature human beings in the first place may be wrong. According to the soul-making theodicy, human beings need to learn through evil and suffering to grow. This is the road that everyone must take. However, this idea is first and foremost at odds with the traditional doctrines of Christian anthropology and hamartiology. If Adam had not eaten from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil before his fall, he would have passed the test and entered into the highest and eternal blessing. He would have been in a perfect situation thence. Therefore, evil and suffering are not sufficient and necessary for the maturation of human beings.

Hick can deny such traditions. In fact, he does not interpret the first few chapters of Genesis in the traditional way. He opposes the literal interpretation of these passages and rejects the traditional creation-fall narrative. Instead, he argues that the story of the fall in Genesis is merely an analogy, suggesting that the human condition is not perfect and needs to continue to grow (Hick, 2007, pp. 282-91). By rejecting the traditional interpretation, Hick can avoid this problem. However, on the other hand, no matter how Hick reinterprets the Bible, he cannot deny that there is a being who is in a perfect state without experiencing evil and suffering unless he abandons the central concept of theism. That

being is God himself. God is perfect in every way, but he is in such a state in eternity. God does not become perfect by experiencing suffering and evil. God has the knowledge of good and evil in eternity and is always in the state of perfection. Evil and suffering are not necessary for one's maturity in morality and spirituality.

In addition, there are created beings who have not experienced suffering and evil but still own their perfection and maturity. They are unfallen angels. After angels were created, some of them, for some unknown reason, have betrayed God, and thus have become fallen angels. But a great number of angels have not fallen. They have remained faithful to God and keep serving him. The unfallen angels do not experience the suffering and evil that humans have experienced, but they still remain in a certain state of perfection. If this is the case, the soul-making theodicy cannot explain while both humans and angels are creatures, angels are exempt from suffering and evil, but human beings have to proceed through this painful path. Proponents of the soul-making theodicy need to explain why humans have to experience evil and suffering to be mature, while God and angels do not.

## 1.4 Skeptical Theism

Skeptical theists reply that the plausibility of the first premise is based on the so-called noseem inference. The noseem inference roughly works in the following way (Rowe et al., 2017, p. 146):

So far as we can tell (detect), there is no x.  
So, it is more likely than not (perhaps significantly so) that  
There is no x.

The noseem inference infers from our not conceiving x to the conclusion that there is indeed no x. It functions well in many cases. For example, one can infer from not seeing a dog in a classroom, all things being equal, to the conclusion that there is not any dog there. However, in some cases, adopting noseem inference is problematic. For instance, one cannot infer from not seeing (detecting) a kind of virus in a room to the conclusion that there is no such kind of virus there. That is because human beings are not equipped with the ability to detect things like virus with naked eyes. Whether a noseem inference is a plausible inference depends on our ability to detect a specific object in a certain environment. The noseem inference of the first premise of the evidential argument from evil can be summarized in the following two steps (Rowe et al., 2017, pp. 148–149):

Step 1: we do not conceive any possible good that would justify God in permitting those evils.  
Step 2: it is very likely that there is no good that would justify God for those evils.

Skeptical theists propose that because of the epistemic gap between God and humans, we cannot conclude that God does not have justifying good for the evil he permits. God is omnipotent, omniscient and supremely good. We human beings cannot fathom God's will and wisdom. We are not equipped with the suitable capacity to detect if God has a justifying reason for a seemingly gratuitous evil. God's will and wisdom are just beyond our ken. We should withhold our judgements on whether God has a justifying reason for a seemingly gratuitous evil in the world. The inference from step 1 to step 2 accordingly is not a good move. In this way, noseum inference of the first premise does not stand. Skeptical theism has undermined the first premise and has defended theism from the evidential argument from evil.

There are different versions of skeptical theism, but they all aim to block or undermine the noseum inference of the evidential argument from evil. For example, Stephen Wykstra raises an epistemological principle CORNEA to decide if a noseum inference is plausible or not. The CORNEA is as follows (Wykstra, 1984, p. 85):

On the basis of cognized situation *s*, human *H* is entitled to claim 'It appears that *p*' only if it is reasonable for *H* to believe that, given her cognitive faculties and the use she has made of them, if *p* were not the case, *s* would likely be different than it is in some way discernible by her.

According to CORNEA, we are qualified to conclude that it appears that God does not have any justifying reason for an evil only if we can tell some differences when God has

one. However, because of our cognitive limitations, it is not plausible for us to claim that if God has justifying reasons, we would likely discern them. Therefore, we cannot adopt the noseem inference in the evidential argument from evil. Wykstra devises CORNEA to block the noseem inference in the evidential argument from evil.

Michael Bergmann's skeptical theses are different from Wykstra's, but his theses still aim to block the noseem inference in the evidential argument from evil. His skeptical theses are as follows (Bergmann, 2001, p. 279):

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.

If the three theses are plausible, then it is not unreasonable to propose that we cannot ascertain that God does not have any justifying goods for an evil even if we cannot find any. Bergmann's skeptical theses also render the noseem inference in the evidential argument from evil implausible.

Bergmann and Wykstra's arguments show that various versions of skeptical theism may be different in contents and strategies, but they share the same goal of blocking or

undermining the noseum inference in the evidential argument from evil.<sup>7</sup>

Though skeptical theism may succeed in undermining the evidential argument from evil by attacking its noseum inference, skeptical theism may lead to two unwanted consequences which render it implausible. The two consequences are global skepticism and moral skepticism.

First, as to the global skepticism, skeptical theists assert that we cannot conclude that God has no justifying reason for an evil. No matter how serious and gratuitous this evil appears to be, we are not qualified to infer from our finding no justifying reason for an evil to that God has no such reason. As Justin P. McBrayer (2012, p. 10, emphasis original) points out, ‘Skeptical theists attempt to block this inference by insisting that the mere fact that we cannot think of a reason or justification is NOT...a good reason for thinking that there is no such reason or justification.’ Because of this characteristic, it seems that we should not limit this skepticism to the problem of evil. The skeptical lobe of skeptical theism should spread into each area of human knowledge. God may also have his justifying reason to make us mistakenly believe something, even if we think God has no justifying reason to deceive us in this way.

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<sup>7</sup> Different versions of skeptical theism may perceive the problem of the evidential argument from evil in a different way. Besides, the evidential argument from evil has been revised and so there exists more than not one kind of this argument. This fact even renders forms of skeptical theism more diverse. For example, Timothy Perrine (2018, pp. 119–21) has distinguished two types of skeptical theism: Wykstra’s skeptical theism and Alston/Bergmann skeptical theism. The two kinds of skeptical theism are raised to deal with different versions’ evidential argument from evil, and hence are different in detail about how skeptical theism undermines the evidential argument from evil. However, the core idea of different versions’ skeptical theism is that we human beings are incapable of judging that God has not justifying reason for a certain evil.

For example, one can argue that the age of earth is in fact one hundred years old. Though there is abundant evidence indicating that the age of earth is much older, one can still reply that God has his justifying reason to deceive us by disguising a young earth as an old one. We, finite human beings, simply are not qualified to make the conclusion that God has no such reason. Therefore, according to skeptical theism, we seem to need to be skeptical about the age of earth and admit that we cannot conclude that the earth is old. The same conclusion can be applied to other well-accepted knowledge. It is not easy for skeptical theists to limit their skeptical lobe only to the problem of evil (Bergmann, 2001, pp.289-90).

Furthermore, skeptical theism may also lead to moral skepticism. Since we do not know whether God has any justifying reason for an evil, we should not prevent an evil in case we prevent the greater good caused by the evil. Moral skepticism can be summarized as follows:

If we are never in a position to tell whether God has a reason for allowing a particular *prima facie* evil or not, then we are never in a position to tell whether *we* should allow a particular *prima facie* evil or not. For we know, the occurrence of that evil is necessary for the existence of some compensating good. So anytime the skeptical theist is faced with the opportunity to intervene in what looks like a terrible tragedy (e.g. rape, genocide, etc.), her skepticism prevents her from completing any moral deliberations. She ends up being agnostic about whether or not it is a good thing to intervene to stop the tragedy (McBrayer, 2010, p. 619, emphasis original).

Accordingly, it seems that we should give up preventing evil and doing good things because

of moral skepticism, but this is an unacceptable consequence for anyone. Skeptical theists, of course, want to avoid this predicament.

From the above brief discussion, we can see the contour and the core idea of skeptical theism and its problems. Skeptical theists have to raise solutions to avoid the two disastrous consequences in addition to each version of skeptical theism's inner problems. Without those solutions, skeptical theism has thrown out the baby with the bathwater by introducing skepticism to knowledge and morality.

The free will theodicy, soul-making theodicy, and skeptical theism seem not to successfully deal with the challenge raised by the evidential argument from evil. In the next section, I will explain how I respond to the evidential argument from evil and the structure of this thesis.

## **1.5 The Structure of this Thesis**

In this thesis, I develop a threefold response to the evidential argument from evil. The threefold response is composed of the following three arguments: data-based skeptical theism, the evidential argument from evil against naturalism, and the divine justice theodicy.

Data-based skeptical theism prevents theism from being directly disproved by the evidential argument from evil. However, when naturalism as a competing theory owns stronger explanatory power over evil in the world, the existence of evil will render naturalism more plausible than theism. Therefore, the evidential argument from evil can still indirectly undermine theism. Data-based skeptical theism needs to be supplemented with the other two arguments to avoid this consequence.

The evidential argument from evil against naturalism reduces naturalism's explanatory power over evil while the divine justice theodicy increases theism's explanatory power. The two arguments together can make theism's explanatory power over evil higher than naturalism's. Theism is a more plausible theory than naturalism with respect to evil as a result. The evidential argument from evil against naturalism and the divine justice theodicy can accordingly prevent theism from being indirectly undermined by the evidential argument from evil. Therefore, data-based skeptical theism, the evidential

argument from evil against naturalism, and the divine justice theodicy constitute a comprehensive threefold response to the evidential argument from evil. The above is the core idea of this thesis. The detail of each chapter is as follows:

I have already introduced the evidential argument from evil and the three prominent responses (the free will theodicy, the soul-making theodicy, and skeptical theism) in this chapter. I propose that the above three theistic responses are not satisfactory. A threefold response is raised to deal with the evidential argument from evil. And this threefold response is based on a version of expanded theism: Christian theism. However, Rowe has argued that if restricted theism is improbable given some evils, it makes no difference to appeal to expanded theism. In chapter 2, I introduce Rowe's argument for the uselessness of appealing to expanded theism, and argue that expanding a theory is useful in many ways. Expanding a theory can help explain confusing evidence and phenomena, and accordingly contributes to the progression of knowledge. It is, therefore, not futile to appeal to expanded theism to reply to the evidential argument from evil. After clarifying this point, I then develop the threefold response on the basis of Christian theism in the following chapters.

As mention above, the threefold response consists of three arguments. The first argument is data-based skeptical theism. In chapter 3, by appealing to data concerning

good and evil, I argue that we are justified in believing that God has justifying reason for an evil in the world even if we do not know that reason. In addition, because data-based skeptical theism, unlike other versions of skeptical theism, does not only rely on the epistemic gap between God and humanity to grapple with the problem of evil, it can avoid the two devastating consequences (global and moral skepticism) of skeptical theism. Therefore, data-based skeptical theism can prevent theism from being directly disconfirmed by the evidential argument from evil without letting skepticism sprawl into other areas.

After establishing data-based skeptical theism, I then discuss its limit and deficits in chapter 4. I argue that data-based skeptical theism is not sufficient because naturalism has better explanatory power over evil. Data-based skeptical theism does not explain why God permits evil in the world. Naturalism, on the other hand, seems to offer plausible explanations for evil in the world. It seems that the existence of evil favours naturalism rather than theism. The evidential argument from evil may still indirectly renders theism implausible.

Therefore, data-based skeptical theism alone is not adequate for theism. When no other plausible competing theories exist, data-based skeptical theism can prevent theism from being disproved by the evidential argument from evil. It may be the case for some

people. For some reason, they may think that theism is the only option worthy of consideration. Competing theories would not render theism implausible for them. But this is a real problem for some people. They may seriously compare theism with naturalism and want to know which theory is more plausible in the light of evil. To reverse the disadvantage of explanatory power, theists have to reduce the explanatory power of naturalism and enhance that of theism. In this way, theism will be more plausible than naturalism with regard to evil. The evidential argument from evil cannot indirectly undermine theism.

In chapter 5, I raise the evidential argument from evil against naturalism to reduce naturalism's explanatory power over evil. I argue that naturalism cannot explain why some moral evils have occurred. To attain this goal, I first establish that evolutionary explanations are necessary for naturalism to explain human behaviours and traits. Naturalistic explanations without evolutionary explanations are incomplete. After constructing the necessity of evolutionary explanations, I then argue that some moral evils lack plausible naturalistic evolutionary explanations. Those moral evils should not occur in our society according to naturalism. Thus, those moral evils are evidence against naturalism and have significantly reduced naturalism's explanatory power over evil.

Following the evidential argument from evil against naturalism, I construct the divine

justice theodicy to explain why God allows moral and natural evil in chapter 6. I first discuss what God's justice is. I propose that God's justice can be conceptually distinguished into dispositive justice, remunerative justice, and retributive justice. On the basis of God's justice, I raise explanations for the evil of the fall of human beings, moral evil after the fall, and natural evil after the fall. These explanations have focused on different perspectives of God's justice. Each of them has answered a certain part of the problem of evil. They together constitute a comprehensive theistic explanation for evil in the world.

Finally, since Christian theism is exploited to deal with the evidential argument from evil, the problem of hell is introduced and becomes a threat to the project of this thesis. According to the doctrine of hell, the damned will intensely suffer in hell forever. The infinite suffering in hell, if not justified, will undermine any theodicy. The problem of hell is critical for theodicies based on expanded theism, including the doctrine of hell. To avoid the threefold response being undermined by the problem of hell, I purport a solution based on the doctrine of common grace in chapter 7. I argue that without God's common grace, one will be completely devoured by sin. At that stage, that person cannot be saved from sin, and suffering caused by sin cannot be removed anymore. That's why the suffering in hell will last forever. In addition, before retrieving his common grace, God will give sufficient

opportunities for each person to decide whether to accept salvation or not. Therefore, it is the damned, rather than God, who should be responsible for the result of eternal suffering in hell.

The above is a brief introduction to the structure of this thesis. By appealing to Christian theism, I construct a threefold response to the evidential argument from evil. Now let us move to chapter 2 to discuss the usefulness of appealing to expanded theism.

## Chapter 2

### The Usefulness of Expanding a Theory

When articulating the evidential argument from evil, William Rowe makes a distinction between restricted theism (RST) and expanded theism (EST). RST consists only of the following core propositions of theism: God is omnipotent, omniscient, and supremely good. It excludes any proposition which the above three propositions do not imply. EST, on the other hand, subsumes more propositions, such as that God is the creator of the world, God has revealed his words in scripture, and so forth. RST has eliminated most propositions that are unique to theistic religions and only kept the three principal propositions concerning God's omni-attributes (Rowe et al., 2017, p. 131). Rowe has argued that if RST is disconfirmed by the evidential argument from evil, it is of no use to appeal to EST. That is because a restricted theory must be both priorly and posteriorly more probable than its expanded theory. It is impossible for EST to be more probable than RST in this case. To formalise the relation between the restricted and expanded theory regarding probability, let RT be the restricted theory, ET be the expanded theory, and E be the given condition. Then the following two formulas both stand; (1)  $P(RT) \geq P(ET)$  (the probability of RT is greater than or equal to ET's probability); (2)  $P(RT/E) \geq P(ET/E)$  (given E, the probability of RT is greater than or equal to ET's probability). It is unnecessary to explore a restricted theory's

expanded theories as a result. Rowe proposes that because  $P(RST) \geq P(EST)$  and  $P(RST/E) \geq P(EST/E)$  (E is the seemingly gratuitous evil in the world), it is futile and useless to expand a restricted theory to explain the given evidence. I dub the view restrictionism.

In this chapter, I will argue that although  $P(RST) \geq P(EST)$  and  $P(RST/E) \geq P(EST/E)$ , expanding a theory is not useless. I will first give an example to show that it is not unusual to expand a theory to explain a given phenomenon, and then argue that restrictionism will result in an unacceptable consequence. Finally, I will raise three models of expansion to explain why expanding a theory could help defend and strengthen the original theory. Thus, it is not futile for me to adopt Christian theism, a version of EST, to develop replies to the evidential argument from evil.

## 2.1 Rowe's Concern about EST

Rowe (1986, p. 240) argues that theists gain little by appealing to EST because the posterior probability of EST cannot be greater than that of RST:

If  $e$  disconfirms  $h$  (in the sense of making  $h$  more unlikely than it otherwise is), we can conjoin  $h$  with a proposition that clearly entails or makes  $e$  likely (call this conjunction  $h'$ ) and no longer worry about  $e$ , for  $e$  will not disconfirm  $h'$ . But the price is that  $h'$  will then be of itself as unlikely as  $h$  was, given  $e$ . So if the facts about suffering do render RST unlikely, there is not much to be gained by retreating to EST.

According to Rowe, the probability of EST may not be decreased by  $E$  (the seemingly gratuitous evil in the world). That is, the probability of EST on  $E$  may be approximately the same as EST's prior probability.  $P(\text{EST}/E)$  is roughly the same as  $P(\text{EST})$ . However, the probability of EST will be as unlikely as the probability of RST, given  $E$ .  $P(\text{EST}/E)$  will be smaller than or equal to  $P(\text{RST}/E)$ . Therefore, if RST cannot respond to the evidential argument from evil, it is futile to appeal to EST. It seems that theists should limit their responses to RST rather than wasting time on EST. However, given  $E$ , why is the probability of EST as unlikely as that of RST? Rowe says (1986, p. 240, fn. 16):

EST, since it implies  $E$  (or makes  $E$  likely), is not disconfirmed by  $E$ . But since EST entails RST, EST is just as improbable, given  $E$ , as is RST. The reason this can be so, even though EST's probability is not lowered by  $E$ , is that the probability of EST, given  $E$ , is a function not only of any tendency of  $E$  to disconfirm it, but also of the prior probability of EST, the probability of EST alone. Thus, even though  $E$  does not disconfirm EST, since EST commits us to much more than does RST, the probability of EST alone may

be much lower than the probability of RST alone.

The prior probability of EST cannot be greater than that of RST because RST is a subset of EST and commits to fewer propositions. Furthermore, because EST subsumes RST, if the probability of RST is decreased by E, it is impossible for EST not to be influenced. When making such a claim, Rowe exploits the following logical truth to support his view:  $P[(a\&c)/b] \leq P(a/b)$  (Beilby, 1996, p. 320). For this reason, Rowe concludes that given E, the probability of EST will be at least as unlikely as the probability of RST (Wilks, 2004, p. 321, fn. 13). The reason why given E, the probability of EST is necessarily lower than that of RST can be further detailed in the following way:

Suppose that EST is equal to RST&O, O are propositions which EST contains, but RST does not. Because RST is a subset of EST which has fewer propositions than EST, the prior probability of RST cannot be lower than that of EST. For example, if  $P(\text{RST}) = 0.5$ , then  $P(\text{EST}) = P(\text{RST}\&\text{O}) = P(\text{RST}) \times P(\text{O}) = 0.5 \times P(\text{O}) \leq 0.5$ . Furthermore, if RST cannot adequately reply to Rowe's evidential argument from evil, neither can EST. That is, if the evidential argument from evil can greatly reduce the probability of RST, there is no hope for EST to survive:  $P(\text{EST}/\text{E}) = P[(\text{RST}\&\text{O})/\text{E}] \leq P(\text{RST}/\text{E})$  (E is the seemingly gratuitous evil in the world). The posterior probability of EST cannot be higher than that of RST. Consequently, Rowe has confined theistic replies to the evidential argument from evil to RST. He makes theism disadvantaged because within the scope of RST, theists have

fewer resources to exploit.

## **2.2 The Usefulness of Expanding a Theory: the Planet Neptune and Newton's Theory**

The example is about the discovery of the planet Neptune and the correctness of Newton's theory. This example shows that expanding a theory is a useful and reasonable strategy.

When the planet Uranus was found in 1781, astronomers attempted to predict its orbit by Newton's theory, taking the influence of all the other known planets at that time into consideration. However, the prediction was incorrect. The observed orbit of Uranus was inconsistent with the calculation of Newton's theory.

The orbit of Uranus seems to be a good reason to consider Newton's theory defective and implausible. However, not every astronomer considered that Newton's theory had inherent faults. Some astronomers inferred that there was an unknown planet not taken into calculation affecting the orbit of Uranus, and they believed that this was why Newton's theory made an inaccurate prediction. Two Astronomers, John Couch Adams and U. J. J. Le Verrier, were confident in the existence of the unknown planet, and had independently calculated where the unknown planet should be according to the orbit of Uranus. In 1846, the unknown planet, later named Neptune, was found (Howson and Urbach, 2011, pp. 239–40). Newton's theory was free from being disconfirmed by the orbit of Uranus.

In this example, when Newton's theory's prediction of the orbit of Uranus was incorrect, some astronomers did not immediately conclude that Newton's theory was false.

On the contrary, they were confident in the authenticity of Newton's theory and added an auxiliary hypothesis—an undiscovered planet was affecting the orbit of Uranus—to maintain the tenability of Newton's theory. Here, Newton's theory is the restricted theory, and Newton's theory plus the existence of an unknown planet (Neptune) is the expanded theory. If those astronomers had accepted restrictionism, they should have given up adding any auxiliary hypothesis to Newton's theory. That is because the restricted theory (i.e., Newton's theory) was refuted by the orbit of Uranus and so any of its expanded theories would also have been refuted. However, Newton's theory was expanded, and the expanded theory has been proved correct.

As Timothy Perrine and Stephen J. Wykstra (2014, p. 151) say, expansion is an indispensable part of science:

We make theoretical progress only by the sustained effort, under the theoretical and conceptual pressures that characterise science, to add specifying hypotheses to a core conception, so as to yield expanded theories from which we identify the best current expanded versions of a generic core conception, running these against the best versions of rival core conceptions.

We can formalise this example to show how expanding a theory contributes to the progress of knowledge. Let  $N$  = Newton's theory,  $U$  = the orbit of Uranus,  $k$  is the background knowledge, and  $A$  = the existence of an unknown planet. At the beginning, when the existence of the planet Neptune was unknown to astronomers,  $P[N/U(\&k)]$  is low (I will

neglect the background knowledge  $k$  thereafter).  $U$  was evidence disconfirming  $N$ . Furthermore, as mentioned above, some astronomers did not give up  $N$ . They instead expanded  $N$  by adding an auxiliary theory  $A$ . Since the existence of this unknown planet could prevent Newton's theory from being disconfirmed by  $U$ ,  $P[(N\&A)/U] \approx P(N\&A)$ .  $(N\&A)$  is not disproved by  $U$ .

However, it remains that  $P[(N\&A)/U]$  cannot be greater than  $P(N/U)$ . The challenge for Newton's theory was not assuaged by merely adding an auxiliary hypothesis. But the expansion of Newton's theory is not meaningless. Taking  $(N\&A)$  as a probationary theory, some astronomers had kept investigating if the unknown planet really exists or not. They finally successfully found the existence of the planet Neptune, confirming the truth of the added auxiliary hypothesis. Now the existence of Neptune is included in the given conditions, and the probability of  $N$ , therefore, is high again, given the orbit of Uranus and the existence of Neptune. We can express this change by the Bayesian theorem: Let the existence of Neptune be  $S$ . After the finding of  $S$ ,  $P[(N\&A)/(U\&S)]$  is high, and so is  $P[N/(U\&S)]$ . By adding and confirming the auxiliary hypothesis of an unknown planet, astronomers saved Newton's theory from the problem of the orbit of Uranus.

Accordingly, restrictionism is not always consistent with scientific practices. The above example of Newton's theory shows that expanding a theory is not redundant in the

practice of science, and an expanded theory may be finally proved to be correct and true, leading to the progress of knowledge. Science practice seems not to follow the rule of restrictionism.

After illustrating this example of Newton's theory to support that expanding a theory is not futile, I will now argue that restrictionism is problematic because it may make some plausible theories improbable.

### **2.3 An Unacceptable Consequence of Restrictionism**

It is true that expanded theories cannot be priorly and posteriorly more probable than the restricted theory. But restrictionism further proposes that if the restricted theory cannot explain and is improbable on its explanandum, then it is useless to labour to expand it or investigate any expanded theory. Restrictionism seems to imply that all we need to do is simply look at the restricted theory and investigate whether it can explain the explanandum and how probable it is given the explanandum. However, this view is problematic. It will render many good theories improbable and useless because their atomic theory cannot explain and is improbable on their explanandum. I will illustrate what an atomic theory is, and, why , when combined with restrictionism, it will undermine many good theories.

A theory usually consists of multiple propositions, and has a subset theory which contains fewer propositions. Because one theory's subset theory contains fewer propositions, it is not possible that this theory's prior and posterior probability is higher than that of its subset theory. We can view the subset theory as the restricted theory since the mother theory is its expansion.

Furthermore, for a theory which contains several propositions, there are some subset theories which contain only one proposition. Let us call subset theories having only one proposition atomic theories. An atomic theory is also the restricted theory of its mother

theory. Accordingly, a theory cannot be priorly or posteriorly more probable than its atomic theory because the atomic theory is the restricted theory of its mother theory. When one atomic theory is rendered improbable by the explanandum, its mother theory will also be improbable.

However, because atomic theories are too restricted to explain their explanandum, they will hence be improbable relative to the explanandum. And when an atomic theory is improbable, its mother theory will suffer the same consequence. As a result, some good theories will be improbable and have to be abandoned because their atomic theory is improbable on the issue which those good theories aim to explain.

For example, in the case of Newton's theory and the orbits of the planets in the solar system, there exists one atomic theory which contains only one proposition of Newton's theory. Let us call this theory the atomic Newton's theory. With regard to the orbits of the planets in the solar system, because the atomic Newton's theory does not have sufficient resources, it cannot correctly explain why a planet's orbit is such a case. Take the orbit of Earth as an example; since the atomic Newton's theory does not contain sufficient physical laws to calculate the complicated interaction between Earth and the other planets, it cannot correctly explain the orbit of Earth. Its prediction of the orbit of Earth will be false as well. Its prediction will be different from the Earth's real orbit. The atomic Newton's theory will

be improbable on the orbit of Earth. The orbit of Earth will become adverse evidence denying the correctness of the atomic Newton's theory. The same goes for the other planets in the solar system.

Therefore, the atomic Newton's theory will be improbable on the orbits of the planets in the solar system. If restrictionism is correct, scientists should not expand the atomic Newton's theory by adding other physical laws to explain these planet's orbits. Then scientists have to consider Newton's theory improbable due to the improbability of the atomic Newton's theory.

However, Newton's theory is a better theory than the atomic Newton's theory because Newton's theory can correctly predict and explain the movements of many macroscopic objects, including the orbits of the solar system's planets. Should we give it up simply because of its atomic theory being unable to explain and correctly predict orbits and movement of macroscopic objects? The answer is definitely no. Besides, other theories will also face the same problem. It seems that we should not give up one theory simply because its atomic theory is improbable under certain conditions.

Hence, restrictionism will render some good theories improbable and require people to abandon them. This consequence is not acceptable and counter-intuitive.

The aforementioned counterexample of Newton's theory and the discussion of the

atomic theory show that we should not limit ourselves to restricted theory when exploring possible explanations for a specific phenomenon. Nevertheless, what does the mistake of restrictionism consist in? Restrictionism is composed of two parts. The first part is about the logical truth of the restricted theory:  $P(RT) \geq P(ET)$  and  $P(RT/E) \geq P(ET/E)$  (the probability of the restricted theory is not smaller than that of its expanded theory; given evidence E, the probability of the restricted theory is not smaller than that of its expanded theory); the second part is about the practice: it proposes that due to the former logical truth, expanding a theory is of no use. Once a theory is defeated, it is defeated. Expanding it makes no amendment. The problem of restrictionism lies in the second part of the practice.

I will raise three models of expanding to explain why expanding a theory will gain progress in knowledge while not violating the aforementioned logical truth of the restricted theory. Theists can adopt one of these models to deal with the evidential argument from evil without succumbing to restrictionism.

## 2.4 The Three Models of Expanding

In this section, I will propose three models by which a theory can be expanded while maintaining that  $P(RT) \geq P(ET)$  and  $P(RT/E) \geq P(ET/E)$ . The three models are as follows: (1) to alter, change the content of the restricted theory while expanding; (2) to expand the restricted theory as a probationary theory, and then to investigate whether evidence supports that probationary theory or not; (3) to expand the restricted theory so that the old evidence and background knowledge can be updated or viewed from a different perspective to support both the restricted and expanded theory.

The first model expands a restricted theory and changes its content at the same time. In this way, the expanded theory is not merely an expansion of the restricted theory in a strict sense. The meaning of some propositions or hypotheses of the restricted theory is partially revised; hence, the expanded theory is not exactly the combination of the restricted theory and some added hypotheses. Rather, it only overlaps with the restricted theory to a certain degree. Thus, an expanded theory may be priorly and posteriorly more probable than its restricted theory. Let us formalise it to illustrate how this model works. Suppose that a restricted theory is  $X \& Y$ . When expanding this theory by adding an auxiliary doctrine  $A$ , the meaning of  $X$  is also changed. Let the changed  $X$  theory be  $X_1$ . Therefore, the expanded theory is not  $A \& (X \& Y)$ . Rather, it is  $A \& (X_1 \& Y)$ . Under this situation, it is possible that

$P[A \& X_1 \& Y] > P(X \& Y)$  and  $P[(A \& X_1 \& Y)/E] > P[(X \& Y)/E]$ .

Expanded theism may be able to expand the restricted theism by this model. For example, a version of expanded theism may propose that God can only save people from sin through Jesus Christ's atonement. This expanded theism has altered and limited God's omnipotence in the way that God's omnipotence cannot directly forgive and save people without the atonement of Jesus Christ. Hence, this expanded theism is not simply the combination of restricted theism with an auxiliary doctrine. It has altered the meaning of God's omnipotence, and therefore this expanded theism is not RST&O. Instead, it is  $RST_1 \& O$ . It is possible that  $RST_1 \& O$  can be priorly or posteriorly more probable than RST. According to this model, it is not useless to expand RST in the case of the evidential argument from evil.

The second model proposes that an expanded theory could be a probationary theory. After raising this expanded theory as a probationary theory, people can test if the added auxiliary hypothesis is true or not. If the answer is yes, both the restricted theory and the expanded theory's posterior probability will be raised, given the truth of this auxiliary hypothesis.

In the above example of the planet Neptune and Newton's theory, I have shown how this model of expansion works. Because of the confirmation of the auxiliary hypothesis of

the existence of an unknown planet (the planet Neptune), both the posterior probability of the restricted theory and expanded theory are raised. Both  $P[N/(U\&S)]$  and  $P[(N\&A)/(U\&S)]$  are greater than  $P(N/U)$  and  $P[(N\&A)/U]$  ( $N$  = Newton's theory,  $U$  = the orbit of Uranus,  $A$  = the existence of an unknown planet, and  $S$  = the existence of Neptune).

Expanding a theory helps people hold the theory temporarily, and then they can find out more evidence to confirm or disconfirm it. If people abandon a theory whenever facing some unexplained phenomena or counter-evidence, it will lead to a great loss.

Theists can expand RST in this way to deal with the evidential argument from evil. For example, they can add the incarnation and atonement of Jesus Christ as an auxiliary doctrine to RST and then develop a defence or theodicy. If the defence or theodicy works well to save theism from the evidential argument from evil, then the problem is whether the incarnation and atonement of Jesus Christ are true. The problem hence is shifted from the evidential argument from evil to the authenticity of Christ's incarnation and atonement. If theists have other resources to support those claims about Christ, the problem of the evidential argument from evil would be alleviated to a certain degree. In this way, whether the evidential argument from evil works depends on another question: the authenticity of a version of EST. Theists can insist that the evidential problem of evil is discussed under the assumption that a specific version of expanded theism is true. They just want to prove that

under this assumption, the evidential problem of evil would be assuaged or solved. Whether this assumption is really true is another independent problem.

Finally, the last model is about reinterpreting the old evidence and background knowledge. When one expands a theory, the expanded theory may offer a new perspective of viewing the old evidence and background knowledge. Although no new evidence is found and raised, the expanded theory can help people see how the old evidence and background knowledge can be reinterpreted to support the restricted and expanded theory. The expansion of the restricted theory, thus, renders both the expanded and restricted theory more probable given the original evidence and background knowledge. The following example may help illustrate this point.

In detective novels, we can sometimes see a case where a murder is committed in an absolutely confined and locked room not accessible from the outside. Suppose that, in one case, a murder was committed in a confined room. Before the victim was found, the room was locked from the inside and there was no other way out. Moreover, the room can only be locked from the inside. If the murderer had left the room after killing the victim, the room could not have been locked. Therefore, after the police have collected and viewed all the evidence found in the room, they conclude that the most plausible explanation is that the victim was not murdered by someone else but had killed him/herself intentionally or by

accident. In summary, under this situation, the restricted theory  $M$ , the victim was murdered by someone else, is improbable given the current evidence  $C$  found in the room.  $P(M/C)$  is low.

However, at this moment, a genius detective has rebutted and falsified the above inference. This genius detective has carefully examined the crime scene and evidence found, and then explained how the murderer killed the victim, left and locked the room. In this way, the detective has raised a theory about how someone else killed the victim and locked the room. Let this theory be  $X$ . The detective hence has expanded the restricted theory  $M$  (someone else murdered the victim) to  $M\&X$  (someone else killed the victim with a certain method). Suppose that  $X$  can properly and satisfactorily explain the found evidence  $C$ . After understanding the theory  $X$  raised by this genius detective, the police now see how the existing evidence  $C$  supports the original restricted theory  $M$ . The evaluation of  $P(M/C)$  has changed because the new theory  $X$  helps people connect  $M$  with the old evidence and background knowledge in a different and plausible way. As a result, both  $P(M/C)$  and  $P[(M\&X)/C]$  are enhanced and become probable.

This example has illustrated how an expanded theory might be able to reshape people's understanding of the relation between its restricted theory, old evidence and background knowledge. An expanded theory, hence, can enhance both itself and the

restricted theory's posterior probability. Note that I am not trying to discuss Bayesian confirmation theory's problem of old evidence here. I simply want to indicate the possibility that one can expand a restricted theory to produce a new perspective of the old evidence and then transform the old evidence from disconfirming to confirming this restricted theory. If this is the case, theists can expand the restricted theory by adding new perspectives of viewing and interpreting the current evidence while not falling prey to restrictionism.

The above three models have shown that restrictionism is not correct. It is not futile but helpful to expand a theory. Expanding a theory may be able to save and strengthen this theory. Besides, the three models are not mutually exclusive. Theists may be able to expand restricted theism in a way involving more than one of the three models.

In this thesis, I will adopt Christian theism, a version of EST, as the assumption of my argument to deal with the evidential argument from evil. The above discussion shows that even if RST is defeated by the evidential argument from evil, EST is not automatically defeated. It is plausible for theists to adopt a version of EST (in my case, it is Christian theism) to respond to the evidential argument from evil.

However, though Christian theism can avoid the problem of restrictionism, people may still deny its legitimacy. They may argue that Christian theism is not qualified as a legitimate candidate theory to answer the challenge from the evidential argument from evil

because adding Christian doctrines to RST is ad hoc.

I will argue that adding Christian doctrines to RST is not ad hoc; it is legitimate to employ Christian theism in constructing arguments in response to the evidential argument from evil.

## 2.5 The Problem of Ad Hocness

As discussed above, when a theory cannot explain adverse evidence, people may not immediately discard it. On the contrary, they may add some auxiliary hypotheses so that the theory can explain the adverse evidence. Nevertheless, in some cases, the added hypothesis is obviously ad hoc, and hence it is not legitimate to make use of such a hypothesis to save the original theory.

For example, suppose that I have a theory that Birmingham in the UK is presently the biggest habitat of Asian elephants in the world. People can immediately refute the theory by raising the evidence that there are no elephants in the city except possibly in the zoo. Trying to keep the theory sustainable, I then add an auxiliary hypothesis, the shy and smart elephant hypothesis: Asian elephants are so shy and smart that they usually hide away from humans, and no one can see them in a common situation. This added hypothesis can help the original theory survive the adverse evidence, but this added hypothesis is ad hoc in an implausible sense. We should not accept the added hypothesis, and my theory of elephants is not sustainable as a result.

However, not every hypothesis raised for the purpose of amending and saving the original theory is ad hoc as the above shy and smart elephant hypothesis. The example of planet Neptune and Newton's theory is not ad hoc, though the existence of Neptune is

presumed to save Newton's theory from being falsified by the orbit of Uranus. Hence, an added hypothesis is not always ad hoc. If this is not the case, many plausible auxiliary hypotheses will need to be abandoned because they are advanced solely to explain certain opposing evidence and to save the original theory from being refuted (Bamford, 1999, p. 382). In daily life, it is also not unusual to add a hypothesis to an original theory to explain something. The problem is whether there is a criterion that could help in distinguishing a legitimate added hypothesis from an ad hoc hypothesis.

What the criterion should be for deciding when an added hypothesis is ad hoc is controversial. Some propose that the criterion is the independent testability of the added hypothesis, but others deny it. It is also controversial whether ad hocness itself is a good criterion in evaluating the legitimacy of the added hypothesis. Some philosophers argue that non-circularity is a better criterion than ad hocness, and we should substitute ad hocness with non-circularity.<sup>8</sup>

In addition, the criterion of independent testability is raised in the context of the philosophy of science. It is quite natural to think that an auxiliary hypothesis should be able to be tested independently since this hypothesis is part of a scientific theory and is empirically able to be confirmed or disconfirmed in theory. However, it is doubtful whether or not this independent testability criterion also applies to hypotheses in

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<sup>8</sup> Relevant discussions please see Bamford, 1993, 1999, and Howson and Urbach, 2011, pp. 238–44.

metaphysics and the philosophy of religion. Therefore, even if, in science, the criterion of independent testability is a good criterion for deciding if an added hypothesis is ad hoc or not, it seems that this criterion may not be able to apply to the current discussion of EST and RST without modification.

There are many debates and problems around the definition and plausibility of ad hocness as a criterion, but I will leave those questions aside in this chapter. I only want to note one point: Being added to the original theory to save it from adverse evidence is one of the necessary conditions of ad hocness; yet Christian theism, one version of EST, is not raised for the purpose of saving RST from the evidential problem of evil. Its appearance is not due to adding some propositions or doctrines to RST to prevent RST from being disproved by the problem of evil. The origin of Christian theism is not relevant to ‘the problem of evil’ which modern atheistic philosophers employ to render the existence of God implausible and improbable. Christian theism was founded in the first century. The appearance of Christian theism should be attributed to Jesus and his disciples. In the first century, Jesus and his followers claimed that he is the Messiah prophesied in the Old Testament, who can save people from their sins and will bring salvation and eternal life to whoever believes in him. The foundation of Christian theism is irrelevant to the problem of evil adopted by modern philosophers to contradict the existence of God.

Therefore, Christian theism, a version of EST, is not raised specifically to save the RST from the problem of evil. On the contrary, Christian theism occurred much earlier than RST. That means Christian theism does not match one of the necessary conditions of ad hocness. Endorsing Christian theism in reply to the evidential argument from evil will not cause the problem of ad hocness.

In addition, the problem of evil, though it has been mentioned and discussed by ancient writers before Christian theism was advocated, is not specifically raised to contradict the existence of the God of RST. The problem of evil is advanced to question the providence of gods, and those ancient authors are discussing gods of ancient religions instead of God of RST. When Christian theism occurs, the problem of evil which denies the existence of the God of RST has not appeared yet. It is not possible that Christian theism is raised to save RST from the aforementioned problem of evil.

For example, though Plato mentioned problems caused by evil in several places, his aim was not to deny the existence of gods, and the gods he referred to are not the God of RST. Plato thought that evil in the world challenged the providence of gods, for, at that time, some people thought that evil proved that gods did not care about human affairs. Plato himself did not think gods were indifferent to human beings, so he tried to deal with problems and uncertainty caused by evil. In Plato's case, evil is not the reason for

questioning gods' existence (Hickson, 2013, pp. 4–6), and the gods under discussion are not the God of RST.

Another example is Epicurus. David Hume mentions 'Epicurus' old questions about God with regard to the problem of evil in his *Dialogue concerning Natural Religion*. Hume represents Epicurus' old questions as the logical problem of evil, suggesting that God is logically incompatible with the existence of evil (Hickson, 2013, p.6). However, as Hickson (2013, pp.6-7) points out, it is doubtful whether Epicurus really wrote the old questions, and it is very probable that Epicurus was questioning the providence of gods rather than their existence. If Hickson is right, the ancient authors were not developing arguments from evil to prove that gods do not exist. Hence, it is not the God of RST under discussion but the gods of ancient religions. Christian theism was not raised to save RST from the problems of evil.

In fact, the first logical and evidential arguments from evil in a modern sense did not appear until the 18th century. Two authors in the 18th century constructed arguments from evil to deny the existence of God. One is the anonymous author of *Jordanus Brunus Redivivus*. This author 'sought to demonstrate the logical incompatibility of the existence of a good God and the existence of physical and moral evil' (Hickson, 2013, p.14). The other author is David Hume. In the 10th and 11th chapters of *Dialogues Concerning*

*Natural Religion*, Hume argues that an omnipotent and supremely good God is improbable given the mix of good and evil in the world (Hickson, 2013, pp.14-15).

Accordingly, Christian theism was not advanced as an expanded version of RST in the first century to save RST from arguments from evil. The foundation of Christian theism is independent of the problem of evil assumed by modern philosophers. Besides, there were no such arguments from evil denying the existence of the God of RST before the appearance of Christian theism, not to mention that the evidential argument from evil of Rowe's style was introduced chronologically much later than the appearance of Christian theism. Christian theism is, therefore, not intentionally added to RST in reply to the challenge from the evidential argument from evil. It is not ad hoc with respect to the evidential argument from evil. The problem of ad hocness does not make Christian theism an illegitimate assumption.

## 2.6 Conclusion

Rowe's restrictionism has some serious problems. Restrictionism is not in line with scientific practice to a certain degree, and it will also lead to some unwelcome consequences.

I also have raised three models of expansion to show how expanding a theory may save the restricted theory and lead to the progress of knowledge. Restrictionism is, therefore, untenable. It is not right to insist on restrictionism in the debate of the evidential argument from evil. EST may help save theism from the attack of the evidential argument from evil in some situations. The improbability of RST on the evidential argument from evil should not discourage theists from developing theistic responses from a specific version of EST. And as to the project of this thesis, Christian theism, a version of EST, could be a tenable assumption as well.

My threefold response has made use of the three models. First, by appealing to Christian theism, I have modified the content of God's omnipotence and supreme benevolence. For example, I argue that because of God's justice, God cannot directly give human beings the highest blessings in chapter 6. This modification matches the first model of expansion.

Second, whether my project can succeed partially depends on the authenticity of certain proportions of Christian theism. Christian theism can be viewed as a probationary

theory. If my threefold response has succeeded in defending theism, the question will be transferred to the authenticity of Christian theism. From this perspective, the second model of expansion is adopted.

Finally, some new connections between evil and theism are revealed by the arguments in this thesis. For example, data-based skeptical theism has raised a new perspective on interpreting data of evil and good permitted by God. By interpreting those relevant data from a new perspective, we are justified in believing that God has justifying reasons for evil in the world. This approach makes use of the third model of expansion.

Therefore, it is useful and plausible for me to adopt Christian theism to respond to the evidential argument from evil.

## **Chapter 3**

### **Data-based Skeptical Theism**

In this chapter, I raise a new version of skeptical theism (data-based skeptical theism) to undermine the evidential argument from evil without falling prey to global skepticism and moral skepticism.

Data-based skeptical theism does not rely on the gap of power and wisdom between God and humanity (the p&w gap) alone to deal with the evidential argument from evil. In addition, it exploits the resources of Christian theism to argue that theists are justified in believing that God has justifying reasons for seemingly gratuitous evil in the world. Data-based skeptical theism proposes that the data of good and evil in the world support that God always follows the principle presented in premise 2 of the evidential argument from evil. That is, God will not permit an evil unless he has a justifying reason for it.

### **3.1 An Analogy to Data-based Skeptical Theism**

For starters, I will use the following example to illustrate the core idea of data-based skeptical theism:

Jack, an excellent secret agent, is Bob's best friend. Bob understands Jack very much. He knows that Jack is a very good guy. When Jack is off duty, he always tries to make the world better by helping people in need or doing something good. Besides, for some reason, Jack has secretly left a file recording his activities as a secret agent to Bob, and asked Bob to submit it to someone if he dies or goes missing. Through this file, Bob knows that Jack is a very excellent agent. Jack has prevented innumerable disasters and evils through his unmatched wisdom, knowledge, and power in detecting and destroying conspiracies. Jack also regularly updates the contents of the file.

However, one day, Bob finds that Jack is in a notorious gang, and that he also practices some illegal activities with gangsters there. This gang has caused serious problems in their society for a long time. Bob cannot understand why Jack has joined such an evil organization, but immediately it comes to Bob that Jack should have justifying reasons for his bad deeds.

First, Bob has recalled all the good things Jack has done and strived in all the years. Bob cannot believe that Jack, who has been working hard to improve the world through all

these years, would perform evil without any justifying reason.

Furthermore, Bob remembers that Jack had been spying in some notorious gangs before, and he also did some bad things in those gangs for the purpose of gaining the trust of gangsters there. Jack thereby had acquired much useful information through his spy activities. Those gangs were finally wiped out because of the information Jack offered. In these cases, Bob always found Jack's evils seemingly gratuitous at the beginning, but later, he knew that Jack had justifying reasons for those evil behaviours.

Finally, Bob knows that Jack has access which he does not have to classified documents and information relevant to many evil gangs and organizations. Those classified documents and information explicitly record all the bad things done by those gangs and organizations. These classified files and information also suggest how to get trust from those groups by doing transactions and cooperating with them in certain ways.

Because of the above three reasons, Bob believes that Jack also has justifying reasons for the evil he does this time. I will further explain why the three reasons can justify Bob in believing that Jack is pursuing greater good through evil.

First, Bob knows that Jack loves good and hates evil through all the good things he has consistently and persistently done on and off duty all the years. Bob knows that Jack has paid much effort and price to do good and prevent evil. This gives Bob some reasons to

believe that Jack would not do bad things without any justifying reason. If Jack were always doing evil and going astray from being moral in the past, it would be natural for Bob to conclude that Jack is prone to evil and joining a gang is consistent with Jack's moral character and dispositions. It would not make much sense for Bob to believe that Jack has a justifying reason for his joining a notorious gang as a result. Jack's consistent and persistent good works are important for Bob to believe that Jack has justifying reasons for the evil this time. Because of Jack's past good deeds, Bob believes that Jack is a good person. He knows that, if possible, Jack will always try to choose good and avoid evil. Therefore, Jack may have some justifying reasons this time.

However, simply knowing that Jack is a good person is not enough. The fact that Jack is a good person constitutes some basis for Bob to be justified in believing that Jack has a justifying reason this time. Nonetheless, good people sometimes fall into temptations. They occasionally do bad things. Bob needs more reason to believe that Jack is not doing bad things this time.

The second reason is that Bob knows that Jack has been involved in many seemingly gratuitous evils in the past. As to these seemingly gratuitous evils, Bob always did not know that those evils were not gratuitous at first. Rather, Bob had judged that Jack had no justifying reasons for these seemingly gratuitous evils. But after Jack had explained, he

understood that these evils were not gratuitous. Some greater goods were achieved by those evils. These cases have undermined Bob's judgments that Jack has committed gratuitous evil and supported that Jack has some justifying reason for the seemingly gratuitous evil he commits this time.

Finally, from the file given by Jack, Bob knows that Jack has access to classified documents and information about infamous gangs and organizations. Those classified documents and information can help Jack evaluate if his actions can bring greater good. He knows that Jack has made decisions according to those documents and information inaccessible to him. Those classified files and documents give Bob confidence that Jack always has information and knowledge he does not have. Jack can see how greater good can come out of a certain evil while Bob cannot tell at all.

The above three reasons have offered Bob confident grounds to believe that Jack is justified in becoming a member of a notorious gang this time. Bob knows that Jack is a good person. He also knows that his judgement that Jack is committing a gratuitous evil is often incorrect. Jack always has justifying reasons for participating in evil. In addition, Jack's justifying reason is often unknown to Bob because Jack has some knowledge and information not accessible to him.

Therefore, Bob should believe that Jack is not carrying out gratuitous evil this time.

The data of Jack's past activities and his information sources are the bases on which the justification of Bob's belief lies.

Data-based skeptical theism argues in a similar way. Under the scheme of Christian theism, it makes use of the principle-proving data, anti-counterexample data, and the p&w gap to support its proposal: we should believe that God always follows the principle indicated in premise 2 of the evidential argument from evil (Let us dub this principle the greater good principle). Thus, we are justified in believing that God has justifying reasons for the seemingly gratuitous evil in the world. The functions of the principle-proving data, anti-counterexample data, and the p&w gap in data-based skeptical theism can be summarized as follows:

The principle-proving data, like Jack's good deeds, confirm that God is good and gracious, always following the greater good principle. If the principle-proving data occupy a rather high proportion among all the relevant data, they will evidence that God will only permit an evil if he has a justifying reason for it. They therefore give us some good reasons to believe that God has justifying reasons for the seemingly gratuitous evil in the world; as a good person's many and consistent good deeds in the past can partly justify that this person will not be involved in evils for no justifying reasons.

However, the principle-proving data alone are not enough. Although the

principle-proving data may always remain at a certain high proportion of all the relevant data, our confidence that God always follows the greater good principle will gradually wither with the accumulation of counterexamples which indicate that God seems to disobey the greater good principle.

Take Jack's example to illustrate this point. Suppose Jack regularly saves 99 people and then badly hurts one person. If the pattern has repeated 1000 times and has kept going on, our confidence in Jack that he would not hurt people for no justifying reasons would reduce gradually with the accumulation of seemingly innocent victims. If we never get satisfying explanations for these seemingly gratuitous evils committed by Jack, we might finally come to the conclusion that Jack is a paranoid or a hypocrite. He may have saved people out of some shady motivations. Perhaps he does not have shady motivations behind all the good things he does, but he is a tyrant at best. Therefore, in addition to the principle-proving data, we need anti-counterexample data to disarm the power of counterexamples in disconfirming that God always follows the greater good principle.

The anti-counterexample data correspond to the seemingly gratuitous evil done by Jack in the above example. They undermine the ground for making judgments that God has permitted gratuitous evil. In the above example, Bob had judged those evils done by Jack gratuitous at first, but he later found that he was wrong. Jack did not commit gratuitous evil.

Rather, he had achieved greater good by those seemingly gratuitous evils. Thus, those seemingly gratuitous evil which Bob thought gratuitous but are not, in fact, have undermined Bob's judgement that the latest gratuitous evil done by Jack is indeed gratuitous.

The anti-counterexample data work in a similar way. They undermine the disconfirming power of the seemingly gratuitous evils. The seemingly gratuitous evils are the counter data indicating that God does not observe the greater good principle when permitting evils. The anti-counterexample data, on the other hand, undermine those counter data by showing that we have mistakenly judged some evils as gratuitous; God does have justifying reasons for these evils, but we think he does not have. Anti-counterexample data show that we are wrong in judging that God has no good reasons for the seemingly gratuitous evils. They can devastatingly reduce the counter-power of the seemingly gratuitous evils.

However, since the anti-counterexample data can show that God has justifying reasons for the seemingly gratuitous evil in the world, do we still need the principle-proving data? The answer is positive. We still need them. If there were no principle-proving data showing that God always follows the greater good principle in most of the relevant cases, we might think that God occasionally has justifying reasons for some

seemingly pointless evils in the world. It is possible that he does not have one for other evils. Therefore, we still need principle-proving data to show that God always acts according to the greater good principle.

Finally, as Jack's classified documents and information, the p&w gap ensures that God has justifying reason we do not know. The p&w gap is indispensable for data-based skeptical theism. Without the p&w gap, we would know all the possible goods and all the possible entailments between goods and evils. Then there would be no space for us to believe that God has justifying reasons we do not know for the seemingly pointless evil. The p&w gap guarantees that God's justifying reasons will not be exhausted by human beings and creates room for data-based skeptical theism.

In short, data-based skeptical theism purports that the p&w gap, principle-proving, and anti-counterexample data together can justify us in believing that God has good reasons for the seemingly gratuitous evils in the world. The p&w gap produces the possibility that God may have justifying reasons we do not know; the principle-proving data confirm that God always obeys the greater good principle; the anti-counterexample data undermine the power of counter data. The three reasons justify us in believing that God has justifying reasons for the seemingly gratuitous evils in the world.

In addition, data-based skeptical theism still belongs to the category of skeptical

theism because it remains that we do not know God's exact reason for some seemingly gratuitous evils.

Among the three factors which support data-based skeptical theism, the p&w gap is doubtlessly less controversial. Most people, even atheists, agree that if God exists, his wisdom, power and knowledge will be beyond our ken. Debates about skeptical theism usually do not fall on the authenticity of the p&w gap. I will mainly focus on the other two factors of data-based skeptical theism henceforward. I will argue that in addition to the p&w gap, there are sufficient principle-proving and anti-counterexample data affirming that God always follows the greater good principle.

### 3.2 The Principle-proving Data

In this section, I will debate that there are sufficient principle-proving data supporting that God always follows the greater good principle. Cases belonging to the principle-proving data have to occupy a rather high proportion in all the relevant cases we know, or we cannot infer from them that God always follows the greater good principle. In the beginning, we must define what relevant cases are. Reviewing the greater good principle can help define: ‘An all-powerful, all-knowing, perfectly good being would not permit an evil unless he had a justifying reason to permit it (Rowe et al., 2017, p.132).’

Since our target is to defend that God always follows this principle, the relevant cases are those in which God permits or prevents an evil. These cases can prove or disconfirm that God follows the greater good principle, so they are relevant cases. The greater good principle proposes that God would not permit an evil if he did not have a justifying reason.

We can distinguish the relevant cases into four distinct types of data as a result:

- A: God permits an evil which he has a justifying reason for it.
- B: God permits an evil which he does not have any justifying reason for it.
- C: God prevents<sup>9</sup> an evil which he has a justifying reason for it.
- D: God prevents an evil which he does not have a justifying reason for it.

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<sup>9</sup> Some may protest that ‘not permit’ is not the same as ‘prevent’. They are not identical to each other in human cases. One’s not permitting x is not identical to one’s preventing it. However, God’s omnipotence has blurredred, even cancelled the distinction between not permitting and preventing. If God does not permit x, he definitely will prevent it. More protests can be raised for sure, but this issue will be left aside due to the limit of space.

The four types of data can make the greater good principle true or false, and hence can decide if God always obey this principle. Among the four types of data, type B data obviously falsify the greater good principle. Type A data back up it. Type D data also verify this principle. Both type A and type D data belong to the principle-proving data.

In addition, when calculating the proportion of type D data, we should not only take into account the cases in which God prevents evils but also the cases in which God realizes goods which cannot exist without preventing certain evils. In those cases, when God realizes a specific good in the world, he also simultaneously prevents a specific evil. For example, when God has realized the good of leading a doctor to cure X's disease, God has prevented the evil of letting X suffer or die from this disease at the same time. This case testifies that God has followed the greater good principle, given that the evil in this case is gratuitous. This kind of case in which God realizes some good by preventing some gratuitous evil belongs to type D data, and thus should be considered as the principle-proving data as well.<sup>10</sup>

Type C data are tricky, however. In the cases of type C data, God prevents an evil even if he has a justifying reason for this evil. If we are only concerned about the material

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<sup>10</sup> I do not assume Augustine's idea that an evil is the privation of its correspondent good here. Data-based skeptical theism does not need to presuppose Augustine's metaphysical explanation of evil. What is included in type D data is only that when God realizes some goods, some gratuitous evils are blocked at the same time. We don't have to step into the mire of the metaphysical status of evil.

counterfactual, type C data confirm the greater good principle because type C data have made the main clause of the greater principle true. However, if we take more factors into consideration, we will find type C data are not always compatible with the greater good principle.

For example, suppose God can prevent huge casualties by killing or paralyzing a bomb attacker, but he decides not to do it. In this example, God has prevented an evil he has justifying reasons for (to kill or paralyze the bomb attacker), and hence has allowed a more serious evil with great casualties caused by the bomb attack. If God does not have any justifying reason for the bomb attack, then he has allowed gratuitous evils which contradict the greater good principle.

Therefore, some cases of type C data are against the greater good principle if God has no justifying reasons for the worse evil caused by his preventing the less serious evil in those cases, and vice versa. Let's call the former anti-type C, and the latter pro-type C. And they can be separately absorbed into type B and type A data. Anti-type C data can be absorbed into type B data because they are the two sides of the same coin. In the cases of anti-type C data, God prevents a less serious evil which can prevent a worse evil for which he does not have a justifying reason. God, therefore, permits an evil for which he has no justifying reasons. In the cases of type B, God also allows an evil for which he has no

justifying reasons. Thus, anti-type C data can be absorbed into type B data. In a similar way, pro-type C data can be absorbed into type A data. As a result, we don't need to evaluate type C data. We only need to examine type A, type B, and type D data in the following discussion.

Namely, type A and D data are principle-proving data that confirm that God always follows the greater good principle, and type B data are counter data which can mitigate the power of the principle-proving data. I will then argue that type B data only make up a very small proportion in all the relevant cases, so there are sufficient principle-proving data supporting that God always obeys the greater good principle.

Now let's start with the cases in which God has permitted evils. We have to investigate if seemingly gratuitous evils (type B data) only occupy a very small proportion of these cases. How do we know the proportion of type B data? It is impossible to give an exact one here, but we can have a rough estimation. My following argument will show that type B data only occupies a small proportion<sup>11</sup>.

For starters, many cases of evil are not gratuitous. They can be explained by theodicies. Cases belonging to type A data amount to a certain proportion in all the relevant

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<sup>11</sup> Let us treat the proportion of a type of data as the confirming or disconfirming power of it. A type of data's proportion will co-vary with its confirming or disconfirming power. For example, in the above Bob and Jack's example, if Jack has risked his life to save a child, the principle-proving data that confirm him as a good guy will be greatly boosted by this event. That is because of the moral value of Jack and the child's life is great. Accordingly, a single event may contribute to data constituting a great proportion in all the relevant cases.

cases.

For instance, diseases are a common source of evil and suffering in the world. Many diseases are among the gratuitous evils defined by Rowe, but God has justifying reasons for many cases of disease. These diseases can bring greater good to the world. They can make people start to think about what is really important in their lives. Many people start to turn to God (if God exists and believing in him or not will influence one's life and eternal destiny) because of diseases; many learn to lead a healthy and responsible life by getting rid of harmful habits; many know how to love and cherish family, friends, and life; many virtues are built and revealed in diseases. Many cases of disease can bring greater good, and God has justifying reasons for their permission.

Many evils in the world can be explained by theodicies. Those evils belong to type A data and occupy a certain proportion in all the relevant cases.

Furthermore, as already noted, data-based skeptical theism exploits resources from Christian theism to deal with the evidential argument from evil. The death of Jesus on the cross can greatly enhance the proportion of evils for which God has justifying reasons for.

According to Christian theism, Jesus is not only a man, but he is also God. He is God himself who had incarnated into the world, born by a woman. He has complete divine and human nature simultaneously. Divine nature and human nature are united in his person, but

the two natures are inseparable, indivisible, unconfused, and unchangeable, according to the Chalcedonian Creed. Let us set aside the relevant complicated problems of the two natures and one person of Jesus and focus on the point that he is a God-man.

The scriptures say that Jesus was killed on the cross in Golgotha, and that means God died there because of the hypostatic union of the two natures in Jesus. The hypostatic union makes what happens to one of the two natures of Jesus attributed to his person. Therefore, though by definition God cannot die, the death of Jesus, which is only possible within the human nature of Jesus, can be attributed to the person of the Son of God because of the hypostatic union of the two natures in one person. As a result, though a mystery, God did die on the cross.

In addition, since God is of infinite value, the killing of God is infinitely evil. The evil of murdering God is infinitely more significant than all the other evils in the world (Visser and Williams, 2009, pp. 230–31). Nevertheless, God has a justifying reason for Jesus's death. The atonement and salvation made by the death of Jesus on the cross can save many people from sin and death, and bring them to live with God forever in the afterlife.

All human beings, according to Christian theism, are afflicted by sin caused by Adam's fall in Eden. Consequently, every human being, at least those who can make moral decisions, sins against God. No one is righteous in the view of God, and everyone is

doomed to perish in sin. Further, because the influence of sin is devastating and universal, no one can save him/herself from sin. That is because everyone has sinned against God, and the price of atonement is so high that no human being is sufficient. That's why human beings need a saviour who is not affected by sin and is also capable of paying the debt of sins of human beings. Jesus, the God-man who is not contaminated by sin, can serve the role of saving the entire human race.

In order to save the fallen humans, God the Son had incarnated and submitted himself to God the Father in his whole life. He led a completely righteous life according to God's standards. When Jesus died on the cross, his righteousness has been imputed to the believers and has become their righteousness, and the believers' sins have become his sins and are retributed to him. Jesus is a human being, so he is qualified to represent humanity to take their sins; on the other hand, Jesus is God, so he is able to bear all the sins of all human beings and take all the due punishment, that is, death. Then he conquered death with the infinite power of God. In this way, Jesus has become the substitution for the believers. He substituted for the believers to bear God's wrath and judgement on their sins. God's wrath was poured out on him without any reservation, and God's justice was satisfied accordingly. His righteousness also has become the believers'. The believers hence are justified in the eye of God because of the atonement made by Jesus on the cross

and are saved from sin (Fesko, 2016, pp. 258–66).

From the above short discussion, we can see that God has permitted the evil of Jesus's death with a justifying reason. Furthermore, the moral disvalue caused by this evil is infinitely more significant than other evils in quantity and quality because the death of Jesus means the death of God, who is of infinite value. In fact, all the other evils in the world will appear pale and slight in the face of this evil.

As a result, the moral disvalue of this evil must occupy a great proportion in all the evil God permits, and this evil can greatly enhance the proportion of type A data. Type A data has constituted a much greater proportion than type B data because of the justified evil of Jesus's death. That is, among evils permitted by God, evils with justifying reasons are more than seeming gratuitous evils by a great margin.

Let us move to type D data. They are related to cases in which God does not permit evils for which he does not have justifying reason. Besides, as mentioned above, cases in which God realizes some goods by which some evils are prevented should also be included in Type D data. As type A data, type D data has outnumbered type B data by a great margin as well. The reason is as follows.

According to Christian theism, it is God's providence on which every being's existence and persistence rely. God's providence sustains everything's existence and

subsistence from moment to moment. Without God's providence, nothing can exist and subsist. God's providence has caused many goods and hence prevented many evils in the world. These goods reveal that God has prevented evils to cause goods on a grand scale and for a very long time, so there are abundant type D data in the world.

We can first look at the providence for lives in the world. The world is full of lives, and it is God's providence persistently supplying and maintaining what lives need. The good design of the world makes it suitable for creatures to live and prosper. God did not design the world in such a way that living creatures have no access to the necessary resources. Food, water, sunshine, and resources are supplied every day. The natural world is created with order and resources, and living creatures are also equipped with abilities necessary for survival. Living creatures hence can regularly acquire the resources they need. In addition, God's providence also limits dangers and threats that can easily take away lives. Plants' and animals' bodies usually function well and regularly, and do not collapse randomly. Diseases and disasters do not occur in a frequency that most living creatures cannot subsist at all.

Without God's providence, many lives would die immediately or perish in suffering gradually. We can imagine a possible world in which there is no or very limited providence of God. In this world, lives cannot prosper at all. Evolution would also be impossible in

this world. Nothing could live and grow at the beginning, so there is no following evolution as well. Through his providence of sustaining all the lives in the world, God has realized colossal amounts of goods and prevented huge amounts of evils. Type D data are, therefore, very abundant. Every life in the world is a token of type D. However, we should still ask: are type D data much more than type B data?

There are innumerable evils in the process of the appearance and thriving of creatures in the world. Many animals and humans have died unaged. Many of them have been brutally hurt and killed. It seems that type D data may not be dominantly more than type B data. Nevertheless, through God's providence, we can find that type D data is much more than type B data.

For example, the fawn Bambi in Rowe's evidential argument had suffered for several days before death. If the doctrine of providence is true, every creature can exist and subsist only because of God's providence. In addition to the providence that keeps one from ontological collapse and vanishing, God's providence has given a living creature what it daily needs, and also has kept the danger threatening its life away every moment. Without God's providence, no creatures can extend for a further moment. God's providence had offered what Bambi needed for life, and kept it away from many dangers which could kill it or make it suffer. God's providence also had made Bambi enjoy the pleasure of life.

Suppose that Bambi is a normal fawn, so before its death, it had enjoyed a life that a fawn should have. Therefore, God had realized good and prevented evils mostly in Bambi's life, but God had taken away his providence to let Bambi suffer in the last few days of its life.

In this case, the proportion of type D data is greatly higher than type B data because the moments at which God provides his providence to Bambi are significantly more than moments without God's providence.

In many cases of unaged death of animals and humans, the moments at which God exerts his providence are higher than the moments without God's providence. If we include the providence of human beings and animals who and which do not suffer this kind of horrendous evils Bambi suffers into the calculation, the moment at which God's providence is present with living creatures (type D data) will be much more than that at which God seems to permit gratuitous evils (type B data). God's providence for living creatures shows that the ratio of type D data to type B data is rather high.

Furthermore, Christianity traditionally holds that there is eternal life after death. Some people, if not all, are elected by God and will live with God forever in heaven. Goods produced by the love relationship between God, angels, and elected people will accumulate infinitely in heaven. By allowing those goods to happen, God has prevented many opposite evils. In this way, infinite type D data will accumulate in heaven. Type D data are thus

infinitely more than type B data accordingly.<sup>12</sup>

For the above reasons, type D data make up a much higher proportion than type B data.

Hence, we can see that type A and D data respectively have occupied a proportion much higher than that of type B. The proportion of type A and D, combined together, is much higher than the proportion of type B. There are sufficient principle-proving data bolstering that God always follows the greater good principle. In the next section, I will then argue that there are enough anti-counterexample data invalidating the counter-power of the seemingly gratuitous evils in the world.

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<sup>12</sup> People may argue that infinite evils would happen in hell, and those evils are gratuitous. If so, ratio of type D data to type B data would not be such high as I claim here. However, I can avoid this problem by refusing the existence of hell or raising a theodicy to explain why God permits hell. In chapter 7, I will deal with this problem.

### **3.3 The Anti-counterexample Data**

I will offer some examples in which we judge that God has no justifying reasons for an evil at first, but later find that God has. These examples can serve as anti-counterexample data to back data-based skeptical theism. They show that we are wrong in judging that God has no justifying reasons for the seemingly gratuitous evils and hence can nullify the disconfirming power of the counter data.

The first example is Joseph's story in Genesis chap. 37-50. Joseph was envied by his ten brothers. One day, his brothers were grazing his father's flocks at Shechem. His father, Jacob, then sent Joseph to Shechem to see if everything was going well. When Joseph was walking to his brothers in the distance, they came up with an evil conspiracy, plotting to kill Joseph. This conspiracy was prevented by Joseph's oldest brother Reuben, but the other brothers still sold Joseph to Ishmaelites. Joseph was finally brought to Egypt to be a slave.

It was a long story, but after being a slave and then being confined to jail for years, Joseph was ordained by Pharaoh to oversee the whole Egypt. No one was more powerful than Joseph in Egypt, except Pharaoh himself. In short, there was a great harvest lasting for seven years in Egypt, but Joseph ordered every city to store all the food for the coming seven years' great famine after the harvest, as God had indicated through Pharaoh's

dreams.

The famine was long and broad, the whole lands of Egypt and the ancient near east had run out of food, and everyone came to Egypt to ask Joseph for food. Many people, including Joseph's father and brothers, were saved because of Joseph's governance in Egypt. Later, Joseph's brothers knew that Joseph was alive and was governing the whole Egypt. They came to beg for Joseph's forgiveness afterwards. Joseph replied, "You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is being done, the saving of many lives (Genesis 50:20)".

In Joseph's story, Joseph had suffered a lot for years as a slave and a prisoner. In the beginning, Joseph himself and even readers of the story could not understand why God allowed such evils on Joseph. Those evils seemed to be gratuitous. However, after many years, God's reason was revealed, and God had saved many people through the evils Joseph experienced. Without these evils, Joseph would not be in charge of Egypt and would have no chance to save many people from the great famine. In this story, we judge that God had no justifying reasons for Joseph's suffering at first, but later we are proved wrong in making this judgement. This story testifies that we are not good at seeing the possible entailment between an evil and a good, but God's revelation helps us see that.

The second example is the blind man in John's Gospel chap. 9. In this story, a man

was born blind. He had suffered economically, mentally, and physically from his blindness. Economically, he could not do any job except begging. He could only rely on his family and other people's mercy to live. His income was unstable, and he could not live a satisfactory life by begging. His life as a beggar was far from satisfying indeed; physically, he had to experience many inconveniences in daily life; mentally, he needed to rely on other people's help to live, and he might have to bear other people's contempt and insults. Furthermore, people at that time thought that the man was blind because of this man or his family's sin. This man and his family must often suffer from other people's contempt and self-condemnation. All of these were hard to bear, and the blind man had suffered these things for decades before he met Jesus.

Just before Jesus had healed the blind man's eyes, Jesus's disciples asked him, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" (John 9:2) Jesus replied, "Neither this man nor his parents sinned, but this happened so that the works of God might be displayed in him...." (John 9:3). No one knew the reason for the man's blindness before Jesus had explained why. Again, God has a justifying reason for the blind man's suffering which we would not know without his revelation.

People may argue that "displaying God's work" is not a justifying reason for the man's blindness. However, it is probable God's work showing on this man has made some

people seeing the miracle or reading the relevant verses in the Bible convert to God, and thus has saved those people to eternal blessings. Besides, the blind man converted as well because of God's work displayed on him in the process of healing. God does have a justifying reason for the man's blindness. He has saved multiple souls through the suffering of the blind man.

The two cases of Joseph and the blind man show that we are not good at judging God's reasons for seemingly gratuitous evils. In the two cases, it seems to us that there are no justifying reasons for God to permit these evils until God has revealed his reasons later. We then find that we are quite wrong in our original judgements. The two cases are anti-counterexample data which lower the power of counter data. They offer us reason to believe that our judgements that some evils are gratuitous are not correct.

There are other anti-counterexample data in addition to the above two from the scriptures. Let us take suffering from diseases as an example again. Some people wonder why they suffer from a disease at the beginning, but later they find that diseases have changed their lives in a positive way and have brought greater good to them. They hence are not right in thinking that there are no justifying reasons for God to allow their diseases. Many sufferings and frustrations in life function in the same way. People initially think those sufferings and frustrations are gratuitous. But when they recall those evils in the next

stage of their lives, many of them can figure out the meaning behind those evils. They then think those evils are necessary for some greater good for them. Many similar cases in the world can serve as anti-counterexample data accordingly.

Though there are many anti-counterexample cases, many counterexamples still remain. The anti-counterexample data may not be strong enough to abrogate the power of all the counter data. However, if we can find some anti-counterexample data in which the evil involved is qualitatively and quantitatively much greater than other evil, the power of anti-counterexample data will enormously increase. One case can satisfy the purpose here. It is the death of Jesus again.

As aforementioned, Jesus is the God-man, so the evil of killing Jesus the God-man is infinitely greater in quality and quantity than all the other evil in the world. Furthermore, the greater an evil is, the fewer goods left to justify it. A good has to be greater than an evil if the good is going to justify that evil. It's harder for one to find a justifying reason for a greater evil than for a smaller evil.

In addition, before God's revelation of the reason for the death of Jesus, it seemed that the evil of the death of Jesus was a gratuitous evil because there seemed to be no good in the world that could justify the infinitely significant evil of Jesus's death.

In order to justify this evil, a good has to be greater than the value of Jesus's life.

However, it seems that nothing in the world can justify the evil of the death of Jesus. Jesus's life is invaluable. Everything in the world is of finite value, but the value of the life of Jesus, the God-man, is infinite. Finite things, no matter how many, are not on the same scale as infinite God. This evil seems to be the most powerful counter datum proving that God does not obey the greater good principle.

Nevertheless, God revealed the justifying reason later. Through the New Testament, we know that Jesus died for the salvation of many people. As mentioned above, human beings don't have the power and ability to save themselves from sin. Everyone would be doomed to perish if God had not done something to change the situation. To save human beings from this predicament, God the Son incarnated and then sacrificed himself to get rid of the sin of the elected people and attribute the righteousness needed for salvation to them. Jesus's death has saved numerous people from perishing. In addition, through saving humanity and renewing the world in the eschaton by Jesus's salvation, God's mercy, justice, and glory are achieved and maintained. These goods are priceless and hence worth the death of Jesus.

Without God's revelation, no one could figure out the reason for the evil of the death of Jesus, but God's revelation has shown that our judgement is wrong. God does have a justifying reason for the evil of Jesus's death.

Because the quality and quantity of the evil of Jesus's death are infinitely more significant than that of other evil, it's infinitely more difficult to have a justifying reason for this evil. It also seems very plausible for us to judge that this evil is gratuitous as a result. Nonetheless, God has a justifying reason for this evil, and our judgement is wrong. Since God can have a good reason for this supreme significant evil, it is very plausible that he may also have justifying reasons for other evils which are much more minor in both quality and quantity.

Accordingly, the case of Jesus's death shows that God has the ability to bring goods from the worst evil in the world, and that our judgement of the gratuitousness of the evil is wrong. This case is a very strong anti-counterexample datum. It can immensely decrease the power of the counter data. Jesus's death, combined with other anti-counterexample data, can effectively nullify the strength of the counter data as a result.

In summary, the principle-proving data confirm that God always follows the greater good principle, and the anti-counterexample data invalidate the power of the counter data. The two kinds of data and the p&w gap together justify us in believing that God always observes the greater good principle. Therefore, we are justified in believing that God has always followed the greater good principle and has justifying reasons for the seemingly gratuitous evil in the world.

### 3.4 Global Skepticism and Moral Skepticism

Other skeptical theism depends on the p&w gap only and claims that we are agnostic about whether God has a justifying reason for an evil. This kind of skeptical theism hence implies that we cannot judge that God has no justifying reason for any evil. And this characteristic leads to the two consequences of global skeptical theism and moral skepticism.

In contrast, data-based skeptical theism does not propose that we are agnostic about whether God has a justifying reason for *any possible* evil. Data-based skeptical theism confirms that God always observes the greater good principle. The greater good principle proposes that if God did not have a justifying reason for an evil, he would not permit it. This principle implies that God would have a justifying reason for an evil he permits, and we are justified in believing that God has at least a justifying reason for an evil occurring in this world. Data-based skeptical theism does not lead to the conclusion that we are simply not qualified to judge whether God has any justifying reason for any possible evil. It only shows that if an evil is realized, God has a justifying reason for it, and if not, God also is justified to thwart it. Because of this characteristic, data-based skeptical theism has some advantages over other versions of skeptical theism. It can avoid global skepticism and moral skepticism.

### 3.4.1 *Global skepticism*

Some versions of skeptical theism only appeal to the p&w gap to block the noseum inference of premise 1 of the evidential argument from evil. However, it seems that any evil can be justified by God if the p&w gap is the only reason we have for explaining an evil in the world. God may simply have justifying reason for any possible evil, and skeptical theism thus could lead to improper global skepticism, as Stephen Law ( 2015, p. 287, emphasis original) summarizes:

Skeptical theism has been criticized on the grounds that it opens up a skeptical Pandora's box, generating forms of skeptical theism that are implausibly wide-ranging and strong. In particular, it is argued that skeptical theism requires we also embrace *skepticism about the external world and the past....* Skeptical theism blocks any attempt to justify the belief that there are unlikely to be such God-justifying reasons by means of a noseum inference: 'I can't think of a good reason why God would deceive me in that way, therefore there probably is no such reason.' But then skeptical theism would seem to have the consequence that, for all I know, God does indeed have a good reason to deceive me in this way and is deceiving me for that reason.

Law suggests that skeptical theism has opened the skeptical Pandora box. The following example helps further illustrate how skeptical theism leads to global skepticism. Suppose that someone proposes that the following evil 'E<sub>d</sub>' exists: God has deceived us with various misleading evidence to make us believe that the world is old, but in fact, the world was just created five minutes ago.

No matter what evidence is raised to demonstrate that the world was not created five minutes ago, proponents of global skepticism can always reply that God has a justifying reason beyond our ken for  $E_d$  and we should believe that the world was just created. We can summarize how global skepticism arises from skeptical theism as the following:

- (i) According to skeptical theism, it is highly probable that God has a justifying reason beyond our ken for  $E_d$ .
- (ii) If God has a justifying reason for an evil, he will allow and realize that evil. From (i) and (ii), we get:
- (iii) It is very probable that God has permitted  $E_d$ .

The key point here is that skeptical theism seems to be able to deny any evidence against  $E_d$  by appealing to (i). But data-based skeptical theism does not imply that God has a justifying reason for any possible evil. It infers from the p&w gap, principle-proving, and anti-counterexample data to the conclusion that God always obeys the greater good principle in the cases in which he allows or not allows an evil: if God permits an evil, he has a justifying reason for it; if he does not permit an evil, he denies it with a justifying reason. Therefore, data-based skeptical theism only avers that for any evil God permits, he has a justifying reason for it. It does not bolster that God has a justifying reason for any possible evil. That God has justifying reasons for the evil he permits does not imply that he has justifying reasons for just any possible evil.

Let us return to the above argument of global skepticism. Data-based skeptical theism

does not imply (i). It only implies that if God allows  $E_d$ , he will have a justifying reason for it. Data-based skeptical theism thus does not imply that God has a justifying reason for  $E_d$ . Hence, the first premise of global skeptical theism is not confirmed or implied by data-based skeptical theism. Data-based skeptical theism does not lead to global skepticism.

In addition, data-based skeptical theism does not employ skepticism to undermine the noseem inference in cases of gratuitous evil. Rather, it offers data as evidence to override our original judgement that an evil is gratuitous. Data-based skeptical theism, therefore, does not undermine the basis of our epistemic judgement. It does not make us distrust our own epistemic judgement. On the other hand, it reaches its conclusion on the basis of the reliability of our epistemic judgement. Because our epistemic judgement is reliable, we can correctly value the data employed by data-based skeptical theism and then conclude that God always follows the greater good principle. If our epistemic judgement is not reliable, data-based skeptical theism will not work as well. Therefore, data-based skeptical theism does not invalidate our judgement on various pieces of evidence for or against  $E_d$ . Unless more evidence is raised to support  $E_d$ , people who hold data-based skeptical theism are still justified in believing that  $E_d$  does not exist according to the current evidence.

### 3.4.2 Moral skepticism

In addition to global skepticism, moral skepticism is skeptical theism's another deficit which is hard to amend. Skeptical theism concludes we are not reliable on all-things-considered moral issues. Even though we judge that one evil is gratuitous from our best opinions, it is possible that the omnipotent and supremely wise God may have some justifying reason unknown to humankind for this evil. That God may always have a justifying reason for any evil has constituted a serious challenge to moral judgement and praxis. Whenever an evil is going to happen and one has a chance to prevent it, skeptical theism warns against taking action to prevent this evil: by preventing this evil, some greater good from this evil might also be blocked as well. Limited human beings, therefore, should hesitate before any occurring evil because God's will is beyond human ken. It may be best for us not to intervene any evil. We can summarize how skeptical theism leads to moral skepticism as follows (Rutledge, 2017, p. 267, emphasis original):

1. If ST [skeptical theism] is true, then we should be skeptical about the reliability of our *all-things-considered* value judgments.
2. If we should be skeptical about the reliability of our all-things-considered value judgments, then we are morally paralyzed (i.e. we cannot engage in moral deliberation on the basis of our moral judgments).
3. Therefore, if ST is true, then we are morally paralyzed (from 1&2)

Because we cannot rely on our own judgements about moral issues, we cannot decide whether we should prevent an evil or not. This kind of moral skepticism is caused by

skeptical theism's skeptical lobe. According to it, axiological issues and their causality are too complicated for us human beings to completely grasp, so that we should be skeptical about our own ability to know the whole picture of moral issues. Consequently, we cannot decide whether we should prevent an evil. To avoid this moral predicament, skeptical theists have to explain why the skeptical lobe of skeptical theism would not cause concern about blocking a greater good by preventing an evil.

Data-based skeptical theism can avoid moral skepticism due to its different strategy of dealing with the evidential argument from evil. It is different from other skeptical theism in the following two ways: first, it does not utilize skepticism to undermine the reliability of our capability in moral judgement to prevent seeming gratuitous evil from rendering theism improbable. Data-based skeptical theism is built on our evaluation and judgement of the relevant data. Thus, the reliability of our capacity for moral judgement is confirmed rather than shaken by data-based skeptical theism; second, unlike other versions of skeptical theism, data-based skeptical theism does not conclude that we should be skeptical about whether God may bring some greater good from a certain evil since God enjoys a panoramic view of the world and we do not. Data-skeptical theism's conclusion is not negatively skeptical. On the other hand, it affirms that we are justified in believing that the good and omnipotent God will always follow the greater good principle. Thus, no matter

an evil is prevented or permitted, God is always justified in doing it.

The above two points are critical for data-based skeptical theism to avoid moral skepticism. Since we are justified in believing that God always follows the greater good principle when permitting or forbidding an evil, we do not need to worry about that we will prevent some greater good when taking action to thwart an evil. The greater good principle purports that God would not allow an evil unless he has a justifying reason for it. That is, when God allows an evil, God has a justifying reason for the allowance. In addition, when God does not permit it, God also has a justifying reason for his non-permission. If an evil is prevented by someone, then it means that God has a justifying reason not to permit this evil; if the evil is not prevented, God is also justified in allowing it. Data-based skeptical theism does not make the scale lean toward the side of letting evil occur.

Therefore, when thinking about whether to stop an evil or not, one does not need to worry about whether some greater good would be blocked by preventing this evil. We can act according to our moral evaluations and judgements since data-based skeptical theism does not imply that some greater good would be lost when evil is prevented.

Critics may reply that data-based skeptical theism does not solve the problem of moral skepticism because both preventing and not preventing an evil can bring some greater good and an agent would still not know which choice is better. It is true that

data-based skeptical theism *per se* does not provide reason for people to prevent evil. It seems that data-based skeptical theism is neutral on whether it is better to prevent evil or not. To prevent is good, but not to prevent is also fine since, in both ways, some greater good would be brought out. To reply to this challenge, we have to go back to the above point that data-based skeptical theism does not undermine the reliability of our capacity for moral judgement. Data-based skeptical theism neither guides us on what to do in the face of occurring evil nor erodes the basis on which we can act morally. It simply stands neutral and leaves the errands of moral judgements and decisions to our other resources.

As a result, data-based skeptical theism does not destroy or undermine other moral principles or guidance we rely on daily when making moral decisions and judgements. We can still act according to what we believe to be good and moral. Moral skepticism, thus, is not a consequence of data-based skeptical theism.

### **3.5 Other objection: Jesus's death is still an unjustified evil**

Data-based skeptical theism heavily relies on the death and resurrection of Jesus to aver that God always follows the greater good principle. Since I construct data-based skeptical theism under the premise of Christian theism, we can temporarily leave aside the disputations about the historical authenticity of Jesus' resurrection (it may still be argued that Jesus did not resurrect from the dead, and hence data-based skeptical theism lacks sufficient data to support it. But this is not the focus of this thesis).

However, even if it is true that Jesus has resurrected, people may still protest that the salvation of many human beings cannot justify Jesus' death on the cross. That is because the salvation of many people is not of greater value than that of Jesus's death. No matter how many humans are saved through Jesus's death, the number is finite. The value of one human life is finite. So is the value of many lives. Because Jesus is God, the evil of Jesus's death is infinitely significant. The good of saving many people can never balance the cost paid by the death of Jesus. Therefore, the good of the salvation of many people is not a justifying reason for God to allow the evil of Jesus's death. This will significantly weaken the force of the data supporting that God always follows the greater good principle.

We can respond in three ways to argue that the salvation of many people is a justifying reason for Jesus's death. First, people who are saved will live in heaven with

God forever, and innumerable goods will subsequently take place in eternity. These goods include the eternal lives of people who are saved, the love relationship between God and those people, beatific blessings, and so forth. Since these above goods will accumulate infinitely in heaven, the evil of the death of Jesus can be justified by the infinite goods produced in eternal heaven.

Nevertheless, it seems that the value of Jesus's life is still higher than the sum of all the other goods of the creature. Nothing can be compared with God himself. God's value is qualitatively infinitely better than that of a creature's life. Though both values of Jesus's life and the good of the salvation of many people are infinite, the value of Jesus's life is qualitatively different from the latter. The value of Jesus's life seems to outweigh the value of all the goods produced by his death. It seems that the good caused by the death of Jesus is not greater than the loss of the death of Jesus. The first reason alone is not enough. It needs to be supplemented by the other two reasons.

Second, the death of Christ not only brings the good of saving many people, but also serves to manifest God's love, satisfy God's justice, and glorify and honour God. How can Jesus's death attain these results? Briefly, every human being is corrupted by sin and is doomed to perish in sin. God is a God of love and justice. He loves humankind but he cannot simply spare the sin of everyone. In order to save human beings, God himself

incarnated and has become the atonement for human sin. In this way, both God's love and justice is satisfied, and people who receive God's salvation will be saved. Jesus's death is an essential part of God's salvific plan. It maintains and fulfils God's love and justice. It also prevents God's plan of creation from being failed by sin. God's will and perfections thus are fulfilled. And this fulfilment has led to the glorification and honour of God.

As a result, the death of Jesus also brings about the good of the fulfilment of God's will and attributes, and leads to God's glorification and honour. The good mentioned here does not belong to the category of the creature. Rather, it belongs to the creator, God himself. This good, together with the good of saving many people, is at least as great as the value of Jesus's life. That the two kinds of good are of no less value is critical and important. With the aid of another condition mentioned in the third reason, the two kinds of good can be justifying reason for Jesus's death.

The third reason is the agreement of Jesus himself: he was willing to die for the salvation of many people, the fulfilment of God's perfections and God's glory. A person's agreement can make an equal good a justifying reason for her loss. That's because the person subjectively values the good she sacrifices for more valuable than the good she loses. One's free agreement is able to render the attained good a justifying reason for her sacrifice even if this good is not greater than her loss.

In the case of Jesus's death, Jesus loves human beings and God so much that he thinks human salvation and God's glory are worthy of his own life. Because of his love for God and human beings, he agreed to incarnate and die on the cross. He did not only passively agree but also positively submitted himself to the whole plan of making himself atonement for human beings.

As a result, even if the value of the salvation of human beings, the fulfilment of God's perfections, and God's glory may not be objectively greater than that of Jesus's life, Jesus's willing to sacrifice himself makes the two kinds of good a justifying reason for his death.

### **3.6 Conclusion**

From the above discussion, we can conclude that there are sufficient principle-proving and anti-counterexample data for data-based skeptical theism. Principle-proving data prove that God always follows the greater good principle; anti-counterexample data confirm that we should believe counterexamples in which evils seem to be gratuitous are, in fact, non-gratuitous. These data can justify us in believing that God always follows the greater good principle in the relevant cases. Therefore, we are justified in believing that God has justifying reasons for seemingly gratuitous evils in the world.

In addition, data-based skeptical theism offers evidence for us to believe that God follows the greater good principle, rather than employing skepticism to undermine the basis of our judgements. Because of this characteristic, it can avoid the two implausible consequences of global skepticism and moral skepticism.

## Chapter 4

### **Data-based Skeptical Theism is Insufficient: Naturalism versus Data-based Skeptical Theism on Explanatory Power**

In chapter 3, I have constructed data-based skeptical theism to argue that theists are justified in believing that God always follows the greater good principle, and hence they are also justified in believing that the seemingly gratuitous evil in the world is not gratuitous in fact. The seemingly gratuitous evil thus will not render God's existence improbable. However, data-based skeptical theism works only under the condition that theism is the only candidate theory with respect to evil. That is, if theism is the only theory under consideration concerning evil, data-based skeptical theism can protect theism from being disconfirmed by the existence of evil. But as we will discuss in this chapter, data-based skeptical theism cannot save theism from the predicament of evil when there exist other plausible competing theories. That is because other plausible competing theories may explain more about why an evil has occurred:

And if theory A says nothing about datum D but theory B predicts it, then D gives B an advantage over A. So even if we cannot sensibly assign any probability at all to how likely it is that we would find what we find given theism, if it is predicted by naturalism, then the evidence favors naturalism. Think of it like a game. You try to predict some event. If you get it right, you get a point, if you get it wrong you lose a point. Since there is a penalty for getting it wrong, you are allowed to pass. So, according to skeptical theism, theists pass when it comes to predicting the data. So theism doesn't

lose a point, on the assumption that skeptical theism is true. That is, theism is not in the least directly disconfirmed by the evidence. But that does not mean that theism isn't *indirectly* disconfirmed. For the naturalist does *not* pass. The naturalist predicts a world indifferent to animal suffering. Since rational belief encompasses alternatives, even giving the skeptical theist everything she wants, the evidence still favors naturalism. Or so it seems (Trent Dougherty, 2014, p. 23, emphasis original).

Since data-based skeptical theism is a genre of skeptical theism, it also share the same problem. Because naturalism is one of the major competing theories to theism, and many defenders of the evidential argument from evil adopt naturalism, I will treat naturalism as the competing theory to theism in terms of the evidential problem of evil.

In this chapter I will argue that naturalism's explanatory power over evil is stronger than data-based skeptical theism. Because naturalism has stronger explanatory power over evil, the evidential argument from evil will still indirectly disconfirm theism. Data-based skeptical theism alone is not sufficient to defend theism.

In order to evaluate naturalism and skeptical theism's explanatory power, I will first elucidate the criteria of explanatory power. After having set the criteria, I will compare naturalism with data-based skeptical theism on their explanatory power over a case of seemingly gratuitous evil, the suffering of William Rowe's fawn Bambi.

#### **4.1 The Criteria of Explanatory Power**

In this section, we will set up three criteria for evaluating the explanatory power of one theory. But before detailing that, we need to briefly clarify what explanatory power is. We can consider explanatory power as follows: ‘a hypothesis has power over a proposition to the extent that it makes that proposition less surprising—or more expected—than it otherwise was’ (Schupbach, 2017, p. 42). A theory with strong explanatory power can illuminate the myths around an explanandum and make people grasp why an explanandum appears. In this way, the theory renders the occurrence of this explanandum less surprising or more expected. I suggest that the key that a theory can expel the enigmas surrounding an explanandum away lies in its ability to reveal the explanandum’s cause and causal process. That is, the strength of one theory’s explanatory power depends on the causal details it provides. When one theory can provide more plausible causal details, it enjoys stronger explanatory power.

For example, the asteroid impact theory can provide more reasonable causal details than other theories for the extinction of dinosaurs and render it less surprising or more expected. It thus has positive strong explanatory power over the dinosaurs’ extinction.

Causal details may not cover the full scope of the evaluation of explanatory power, but it doubtlessly plays a rather important role. They are indispensable for an explanation

to be considered satisfactory. The criteria of explanatory power in terms of causal details can be summarized in the following three points:

(i) Everything being equal, the more causal details a theory offer, the stronger explanatory power it has. That is because when we know more causal details about the explanandum, we can grasp more firmly and thoroughly why the explanandum occurs. And the occurrence of the explanandum will be less surprising or more expected.

(ii) When causal details offered by a theory are helpful to reduce doubts and confusion about an explanandum, the theory has stronger explanatory power. Some causal details are more relevant to the context in which the explanandum is asked and sent, and some are more irrelevant. One theory can provide many causal details without reducing our doubts at all. It is important that causal details offered should help cast away the enigma.

(iii) When a theory provides causal details having fewer theoretical drawbacks, the theory owns stronger explanatory power. Causal details provided may be implausible themselves, or may lead to some implausible or undesirable consequences. They may sometimes solve some problems on the one side but create more on the other side. Those drawbacks will reduce the explanatory power gained by those causal details because they themselves lead to more mysteries and questions. Causal details with fewer theoretical defects contribute more to explanatory power.

After briefly outlining the three criteria, I will give more detail below.

The first criterion suggests that the provided causal details are, the more, the better. By causal details, I do not only mean the causal process (how a cause brings about a specific result) but also the cause itself. Causal details should include the cause of the explanandum and the causal process by which the cause leads to the explanandum. Both of them can reduce the surprise of the explanandum or make it more expected.

The provided information about the cause of an explanandum should include what the cause is and its relevant properties. It should first identify the cause, and then sketch its relevant properties which contribute to the present state of the explanandum. When more information about the cause is known, we will be more capable of mapping up the whole picture of how the explanandum has occurred and reached its current state. The explanandum is accordingly less surprising or more expected. Hence, the causal details an explanation should provide partially consist of the identification and the properties of the cause.

In addition to what the cause and its relevant properties are, causal processes are indispensable in deciphering the explanandum as well. The causal process is positively related to explanatory power because ‘underlying every *why*-question is a set of how-questions. We do not merely want to know why something happened; we also want to

know how the cause brought about the effect (Ylikoski and Kuorikoski, 2008, p. 216)'. We may know what the cause of the explanandum is, but are still confused with the whole issue, due to our incapability of seeing the causal link between the cause and the explanandum. Sometimes, it is simply not sufficient for an explanation to indicate the cause. More details about how the cause lead to the result (explanandum) should be mentioned.

For example, in a murder case, we may know what the cause of the death of the victim is, but still wonder how this event could happen. Some detective stories set their scenes in a complete confined room in which the victim was killed and the murder instrument was found. Those stories want to bewilder readers with the fact that it seems impossible for the murderer to kill the victim and then leave the room. The room can only be locked from the inside and there is no other access to the outside. When the victim was found by other people, the room was locked from the inside. Intuitively, it seems impossible for the murderer to leave the murder scene while maintaining the room in such a confined state. Suppose that those stories also strongly suggest who the murderer is by revealing the murderer's motivation for committing the crime and some weak indirect evidence. In this kind of scenario, readers may know the cause of the death of the victim (the murderer's identification and the instrument used to murder), but they simply cannot

figure out the causal process. They cannot delineate how the murderer went into the room to kill the victim and left the room in a confined state.

In this kind of case, it is the causal process rather than the cause itself confusing readers. In our daily life and in different areas of science, we can find that causal process is important for us to understand an explanandum. As a result, the causal process is indispensable for a good explanation. It will influence the explanatory power of an explanation.

In addition, by proposing causal details as one of the criteria of explanatory power, I do not mean to purport Hempel's deductive-nomological model of explanation. It is too strict that maybe no explanation can satisfy its requirements. This model proposes that an explanation should consist of the following two parts (Banner, 1992, p. 120):

- (1) a set of statements of the initial conditions,  $C_1, C_2, \dots, C_n$
- (2) a set of general laws,  $L_1, L_2, \dots, L_n$

Hempel's model proposes that an explanation should include all the initial conditions and general laws which together lead to the explanandum. However, this model may not be applicable to personal explanations. It is hard to demonstrate that one person's reason for action could be easily reduced to a set of general laws and a set of initial conditions (Banner, 1992, pp. 122–123); besides, some well-acknowledged scientific theories do not match this model. For example, the fact that marsupials are only found in Australia can be

explained by evolutionary theory. Many scientists tend to accept evolutionary theory as a satisfactory explanation for this phenomenon. However, evolutionary theory does not satisfy the conditions of the deductive-nomological model of explanation because it cannot identify all the relevant initial conditions (Banner, 1992, p. 124).

For the above reasons, though I advise that explanations of good explanatory power should provide causal details, I do not propose that they should meet the requirements of Hempel's deductive-nomological model of explanation to be considered as having good explanatory power.

The second criterion is that causal details which are able to clarify doubts and questions about the explanandum have stronger explanatory power. An explanation may have indicated some causal details about the explanandum but is still to be considered as having weak explanatory power because the causal details provided are rather irrelevant to the enigma of the explanandum and are not helpful in clarification.

There are many causal details related to an explanandum, and a theory has good explanatory power only when it indicates causal details which can contribute to illuminating enigmas of the explanandum to a certain degree. Some provided causal details can directly answer questions; some may not directly clarify questions of the explanandum, but they may be able to constitute some critical background knowledge which is important

to understand the explanandum. The two kinds of causal detail can make an explanandum less surprising (or more expected), and they are capable of enhancing the explanatory power of a theory. On the other hand, some causal details may provide some information, but they are irrelevant to questions people have about an explanandum and cast no light on the whole issue. This kind of causal detail contributes little to explanatory power.

For instance, what is in the interest in one case may be the material cause, while in another case, another kind of cause (such as the effectual cause) is the focus. From the context of an explanandum, we can judge whether certain causal details are relevant to the current context and really answer the key question(s) or not. Some causal details are obviously irrelevant, and we can conclude that explanations with these obvious non-relevant causal details have weak explanatory power.

For example, suppose that a house is on fire. When asked why the house is on fire by neighbours, the house owner replies that this house is flammable and the air contains oxygen which enables flammable material to be on fire. It is true that the flammability of the house and the presence of oxygen are among the causal details of the fire because, without them, this house would not be on fire.

Nevertheless, they are somewhat out of context and do not really answer the question asked by the neighbours. When the neighbours ask why the house is on fire, they are not

seeking the physical properties of the house and the air that will give rise to a fire. Rather, they are looking for other information about why and how the fire is ignited in the house, e.g., the effectual cause. The flammability of the house and the presence of oxygen thus are irrelevant to the question asked (explanandum) and do not render the explanandum less surprising or more expected. As a result, they have weak explanatory power over the explanandum as to why the house is on fire.

However, in a different context, the two factors (the flammability of the house and the presence of oxygen) may be relevant to the explanandum and can increase one explanation's explanatory power. For example, for a child who does not understand the physical mechanism of fire, the two factors may be relevant and make the fire less surprising. In this context, the two causal details can boost one explanation's explanatory power.

Finally, causal details given by an explanation may have some drawbacks. They may explain the original explanandum while they themselves are implausible to a certain degree or create other confusions and doubts. Those drawbacks will weaken an explanation's explanatory power. Defects created by an explanation should be taken into consideration when deciding the explanation's explanatory power over the explanandum.

In this chapter, we are discussing whether data-based skeptical theism alone is a

sufficient response to the evidential argument from evil for theism, and hence we will compare the explanatory power of data-based skeptical theism to that of naturalism. If data-based skeptical theism's explanatory power is weaker than naturalism's, the evidential argument from evil still indirectly makes naturalism more plausible than theism. If this is the case, data-based skeptical theism alone does not suffice to defend theism from the attack of the evidential argument from evil. We will employ the above three criteria for the evaluation of the explanatory power of naturalism and data-based skeptical theism for the evil in the world in the following section.

## **4.2 The Explanatory Power of Naturalism and Data-based Skeptical Theism**

In this section, we will take William Rowe's example of a fawn (Rowe, 1979, p. 337) for discussion. Let's name this fawn Bambi. Because this chapter supposes that data-based skeptical theism is the only strategy taken by theism to deal with the evidential argument from evil, the comparison here is between the explanatory power of naturalism and data-based skeptical theism. Before starting the comparison of their explanatory power, let us briefly review the story of the fawn Bambi. This story goes as follows:

A little fawn Bambi lived happily in a forest. One day, however, a devastating forest fire occurred. The terrifying fire approached fast, and it consumed everything. Bambi did not escape in time and was seriously burnt by the fire. Nonetheless, Bambi did not die immediately. He had sorely suffered for several days until death finally brought him peace. Bambi's case is one of the many seemingly gratuitous evils in the world. The explanandum here is Bambi's suffering. We will examine both naturalism and data-based skeptical theism's explanatory power over Bambi's suffering.

Let's first examine the explanatory power of naturalism. To be counted as having strong explanatory power, a naturalistic explanation of evil should identify the relevant causal details concerning the suffering of Bambi. I will not provide a detailed naturalistic explanation about how a naturalistic world gives rise to Bambi's suffering. My aim here is

to show how naturalism can account for Bambi's suffering, and I will only provide a rough explanation. This is sufficient because atheists who adopt naturalism can always revise their explanations in this way.

How will a naturalistic explanation account for Bambi's suffering? Naturalism does not assume an agent who created and governs the world. Instead, it considers the world purely as a natural entity in which no supernatural being or power exists, and everything is dominated and governed by natural conditions and physical laws. The causal details that a naturalistic explanation has to reveal are about how the relevant natural conditions and laws bring about this evil.

Accordingly, a naturalistic explanation can appeal to the conditions of the environment and some physical laws to explain the suffering of Bambi. It can first propose that according to some research, a forest will be on fire at a sort of frequency for some reasons. Furthermore, there are so many animals in the forest. When a forest fire is severe enough, it is inevitable that a certain number of animals will be trapped in flames. Many of them will die immediately, but some may suffer for a while before their death. There will always be some proportion of animals that will get seriously injured without dying instantly. It is just a matter of chance. Hence, it is not unusual that a fawn may succumb to a forest fire and not die immediately.

In summary, naturalistic explanations can offer causal details by appealing to some environmental factors and physical laws to conclude that given all the known factors of the forest fire, Bambi's suffering can be explained and expected without too much difficulty. In addition, the details provided by naturalism are relevant to the context of the explanandum (the suffering of Bambi). That is, they have answered the question: why did Bambi suffer? They render Bambi's suffering less surprising or more expected. Furthermore, while naturalistic explanations make the Bambi's suffering less surprising, they do not create other drawbacks. Naturalistic explanations are not implausible *per se* and do not produce other confusion and doubts under the premise of naturalism. As a result, naturalism has satisfied the aforementioned criteria of explanatory power and has rendered the suffering of Bambi less surprising. In this way, naturalism owns strong explanatory power over Bambi's suffering.

After examining the explanatory power of naturalism, we will survey if data-based skeptical theism has good explanatory power over Bambi's suffering as well.

First, as mentioned above, causal details consist of the cause itself and its causal process. It is necessary for an explanation to indicate what the cause is and what properties it has in order to clarify why the explanandum in question has occurred.

Data-based skeptical theism, as a genre of theism, also assumes that God is the

ultimate cause of everything, evils included. Therefore, the ultimate cause of Bambi's suffering is God.<sup>13</sup> Furthermore, because God is a free agent, he freely decides whether to do something or not, and his decision is based on his intention and motivation, which are shaped by his attributes. Therefore, God's attributes, intention, and motivation are also parts of the causal details of Bambi's suffering.

As a result, the causal details which data-based skeptical theism should provide are relevant to God's attributes, intention, and motivation. These causal details can make Bambi's suffering less surprising or more expected and thus will increase the explanatory power of data-based skeptical theism. Data-based skeptical theism should cover these causal details to have good explanatory power over Bambi's suffering.

Furthermore, theists cannot simply provide natural causal details similar to the above naturalistic explanation for Bambi's suffering. A theistic explanation cannot merely indicate how God has made use of the relevant natural laws and conditions to bring about an evil because that would lead to more confusion and questions. If God does not allow it,

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<sup>13</sup> Some people may find it strange to say that God is the 'cause' of evil since God is supremely good and to attribute him as the ultimate cause of evil seems to violate his goodness. Theists may protest that God is not a cause of evil at all. Human beings rather than God are the author of moral evils. However, many theists agree that God has the knowledge, power, and will to prevent evil. If God does not permit, moral evils committed by humans will not happen. In this sense, God is among the causes of human moral evils. And in fact, since whether an evil will appear or not is on God's decision, God is the ultimate cause of this evil in one sense. In addition, in the cases of natural evil, God plays a more direct causal role in the occurrence of those disasters, e.g., earth quakes and animal suffering. It seems that God is the ultimate cause is obvious in the cases of natural evil.

However, it is important to distinguish between God as the ultimate cause of evil and God as the culpable agent of evil. God is not the author of evil. He will and should not be blamed for it. I will remain the using that God is the ultimate cause of evil while maintaining that God is not culpable of evil. For Relevant discussion please see Thomas H. McCall, 2019, pp. 126–36; Paul Copan, 2013, pp. 112–19.

an evil will not occur. In the case of Bambi, simply offering some natural causal details does not illuminate why an omnipotent and supremely good God would allow such cruel suffering on Bambi. It is doubtless that a God with omnipotent power can cause this evil through the natural process, but this omnipotent God is supremely good at the same time. Even if he is able to directly or indirectly realize this evil with his omnibenevolent power, he will block this evil unless he wants to permit it. Because God is a free agent and he acts according to his will and nature, a natural explanation raised by theists may simply produce more questions about God's goodness, making people wonder why an almighty and good God would simply let Bambi suffer according to natural causality without any intervention. This kind of natural explanation will cause further confusion and trouble for theism instead.

In contrast, naturalism will not lead to such consequences when appealing to natural explanations alone because its worldview is purely material and mechanical. The naturalistic worldview will not make people question whether a nature that makes animals suffer is a benevolent nature or not. Naturalism does not assume that the world is kind and good and does not have this kind of problem as a result. The difference between theism and naturalism consists in that theism assumes a personal God. And a person acts with axiological motivations, intentions, and judgements with respect to moral issues. A theistic

explanation for Bambi's suffering has to point out God's relevant personal accounts as causal details.

Hence, theists cannot merely appeal to this kind of natural explanation. They have to offer some personal accounts of God to elucidate why a powerful and omnibenevolent God would permit such an evil. That is, they need to indicate God's motivation and intention for Bambi's suffering to make this evil less surprising.

Now let us return to the topic of data-based skeptical theism's explanatory power. What kind of causal details does data-based skeptical theism provide? Data-based skeptical theism only claims that according to relevant data, we are justified in believing that God has utilized Bambi's suffering to bring about greater good which we do not know. It seems that data-based skeptical theism does not offer any aforementioned causal details about Bambi's suffering. God would only permit Bambi's suffering under a certain condition, but data-based skeptical theism says nothing about it. It does not indicate God's intention and reason for Bambi's suffering.

Data-based skeptical theism does not give many causal details concerning Bambi's suffering because it is not designed to inform causal details about Bambi's suffering. Rather, it is raised to prevent Bambi's and other sufferings from disconfirming theism. Consequently, data-based skeptical theism fails to supply robust causal details for us to

clearly see the whole picture of Bambi's suffering.

As a result, according to the first criterion of explanatory power, naturalism provides more causal details than data-based skeptical theism. Naturalism has a stronger explanatory power over Bambi's suffering.

Furthermore, data-based skeptical theism does not have much explanatory power according to the second criterion of explanatory power. The information it offered is not directly relevant to the question posed by the explanandum. Instead of telling us why Bambi's suffering had appeared, it tries to convince people that they should believe that God has justifying reason for it. Data-based skeptical theism, thus, has shifted the explanandum and has provided causal details which are not much related to the original explanandum. The original explanandum is Bambi's suffering, and the new explanandum is why we should be confident that God has justifying reason for Bambi's suffering.

The new and old explanandum may be relevant, but they are different. By drawing us into the new explanandum and offering a substitutional explanation for it, data-based skeptical theism does not provide causal details which can answer the enigmas posed by the original explanandum. Therefore, according to the second criterion, data-based skeptical theism's explanatory power is weaker than that of naturalism as a result.

From the perspective of the first and second criteria, data-based skeptical theism is not

able to provide sufficient relevant causal details for Bambi's suffering and is in a disadvantageous situation in terms of explanatory power. However, data-based skeptical theism may be more robust than what is discussed here, and it is still able to make Bambi's suffering less surprising or more expected to some extent. That is because God's knowledge, power and wisdom are infinitely greater than ours. We should expect that God would do something for which we really cannot find any justifying good or reason. In addition, as argued in chapter 3, the relevant data support that God always follows the greater good principle. It is not a great surprise that such a God allows Bambi's suffering to attain some greater good. In this way, data-based skeptical theism may make Bambi's suffering less surprising or more expected. The following analogy can help illustrate how data-based skeptical theism renders the explanandum less surprising or more expected.

Suppose that when we visit an art gallery and see a work of installation art, we cannot appreciate the beauty of this work at all. We wonder why the art gallery exhibits it. Then a person informs us this is a masterpiece of a modern genius installation artist without telling us why this work is excellent and deserves to be exhibited here. Though this person does not directly explain why this work is a masterpiece, his introduction of the artist could still render the exhibition of this work in this art gallery less surprising or more expected. We may think that because we do not have the ability to appreciate the beauty of installation

art and this work is out of the hands of a genius artist, the art gallery may have its justifying reason for exhibiting this work. Hence, the epistemic gap of installation art between the genius artist and us and the information about the genius artist has rendered the exhibition of this piece of work less surprising or more expected. In a similar way, by appealing to the gap of knowledge, power, and wisdom between God and us and all the relevant data, data-based skeptical theism can make the explanandum (Bambi's suffering) less surprising or more expected.

It is possible that data-based skeptical theism can somehow produce some explanatory power over Bambi's suffering in this way. However, even if this is the case, naturalism still enjoys some advantages regarding explanatory power.

First, it seems that causal details given by naturalism are more explicit and directly relevant to the explanandum. The process and cause of Bambi's suffering are rather clear in terms of the naturalistic explanation. On the other hand, data-based skeptical theism does not give the causal process of Bambi's suffering such clarity. Furthermore, as the third criterion requires, when evaluating the explanatory power of an explanation, we should consider the explanation's defects, whether it is implausible itself or has created more questions and problems. Data-based skeptical theism faces more challenges than naturalism in this respect.

A naturalistic explanation can answer Bambi's suffering without bringing about more confusion. Data-based skeptical theism, on the contrary, cannot absolutely explain away the seeming incoherence between Bambi's suffering and God. Even if people have accepted data-based skeptical theism, they are still not completely satisfied with it. Though doubts about God for the suffering and evil are restricted, suppressed, or withheld, they do not disappear. People will still want to know the real reason behind it. They will hope that God will reveal the truth one day. Why do people who accept data-based skeptical theism or similar skeptical responses keep having this kind of doubt and yearning for the answer?

The reason is that even if data-based skeptical theism could squeeze some explanatory power over Bambi's suffering out of God's omnipotence and supreme wisdom, God's omnibenevolence combined with other attributes seem to contradict the occurrence of this evil. Without giving further details about God's intention, motivation or justifying reason, the confusion caused by God's omnibenevolence with other attributes will not disappear. Data-based skeptical theism thus has the defect that it cannot thoroughly cast away people's doubts and questions about evil and suffering. This is a theoretical defect that naturalism does not have.

When the suffering in question is personal, this defect of data-based skeptical theism is more obvious. The following analogy can help illustrate this point:

Suppose that Tom is a prodigal theist. He used to spend most of his money on buying many expensive but not necessary things. Consequently, his financial situation became worse and worse. One day, there was a special product from a private seller, and Tom went to that person's house to buy it. When Tom was on his way to fetch the luxury item, a bolt of lightning accidentally hit his home, and the house burnt down in a short time. Unfortunately, Tom had not renewed his house insurance due to his financial predicament. Though Tom was not hurt by this accident and his life was saved, his financial loss was great. He was upset by this evil and wondered why God permitted this.

One of Tom's theistic friends then visited Tom to comfort him, and Tom received from his friend a response from data-based skeptical theism. Tom's friend told him that he should not lose his faith in God even if he did not understand why God allowed this evil. Since God is almighty and supremely good, he must have some good reason we don't know for this evil. Furthermore, much evidence shows that evil allowed by God will finally attain some greater good. God must have some good plans for Tom. Tom then accepted this response and maintained his faith in God. Therefore, the evil does not encroach on Tom's faith in God. The plausibility of God's existence roughly remains the same for Tom.

Nevertheless, in this situation, Tom would still want to know the reason for which

God permitted this evil. He may not blame God for this accident, but he would like to have an explanation from God. He would suppress his doubt and forbear his suffering, and look forward to knowing the reason at some stage of his remaining life or in the afterlife. Before he knows the answer, this evil is still a potential threat to his faith in God's existence and providence. Tom may rationally know that this evil does not render the existence of God more improbable, but he may still fall into temptation because of the lack of explanation. Perhaps one day, this evil would finally destroy his faith. The fact that Tom is still looking for an answer and his faith in God might be defeated by this evil shows data-based skeptical theism's defect, that its explanatory power is not strong enough to weather all doubts. Data-based skeptical theism cannot clearly explain evil as a part of God's providence, and thus cannot 'turn my wailing into dance; remove my sackcloth and clothe me with joy (Psalm 30:11)'.

Furthermore, we can imagine that if Tom keeps suffering more evil without any direct explanation and only receives responses from data-based skeptical theism, all else being equal, his faith in God would be put to a great test. He would become eager to know why God has permitted such many misery evils. If his doubts are not answered, those unanswered evils will greatly burden him. His faith may be eroded gradually even though he rationally knows that those evils do not render God's existence more improbable. This

problem arises from data-based skeptical theism's inability to pacify Tom's doubts about evil and God. The aforementioned defect of data-based skeptical theism becomes apparent when evils are multiple and severe.

Through this example, we can see that the nature of data-based skeptical theism makes it more incompetent in the aspect of explanatory power. By appealing to God's power, wisdom, and some attributes, data-based skeptical theism may be able to construct some positive explanatory power. Nevertheless, data-based skeptical theism does not absolutely explain away the incoherence between some of God's attributes and the occurrence of Bambi's suffering. People still want to know further why God has allowed such an evil. As a result, though data-based skeptical theism may be able to make Bambi's suffering less surprising in one way, it cannot avoid leaving some confusion in another way. This defect has weakened data-based skeptical theism's explanatory power.

Naturalism, on the contrary, does not face this kind of defect. It can account for Bambi's suffering without leaving more confusion, and hence the third criterion also favours naturalism. Naturalism aligns better with the three criteria of explanatory power than data-based skeptical theism. We should conclude that naturalism has stronger explanatory power than data-based skeptical theism in the case of Bambi.

The same conclusion can also apply to other cases of seemingly gratuitous evil. If

naturalism has stronger explanatory power in every case, then these cases collectively would constitute a good and powerful reason for us to prefer naturalism to theism which only deploys data-based skeptical theism to deal with the problem of evil. Therefore, data-based skeptical theism is insufficient for theism to defend itself from the evidential argument from evil.

### **4.3 Conclusion: Two Ways to Reverse the Disadvantageous Position of Theism**

In summary, data-based skeptical theism's explanatory power over seemingly gratuitous evil is weaker than that of naturalism. The many cases of seemingly gratuitous evil in the world support naturalism because data-based skeptical theism cannot completely explain them. Data-based skeptical theism cannot prevent theism from being indirectly disconfirmed by the evidential argument from evil. Some people may have some good reasons to exclude naturalism from being a competing theory for theism, when evil is concerned. For example, they may have experienced some strong supernatural miracles or have been convinced that naturalism has some incurable defects. For those people, data-based skeptical theism may be enough. However, for many people, this is not the case. They do not view theism as the only option. The evidential argument from evil works for them.

Therefore, we cannot deploy data-based skeptical theism alone to respond to the evidential argument from evil. Other strategies are required to reverse this predicament. The first is to increase the explanatory power of theism by developing more theistic explanations; the second is to reduce the explanatory power of naturalism by devising the evidential problem of evil against naturalism.

In the following two chapters, I will respectively develop an argument to reduce

naturalism's explanatory power and a theodicy to increase theism's. In this way, theism will enjoy higher explanatory power over evil, so the evidential argument from evil cannot indirectly disconfirm theism. Then theism itself can fend off the evidential argument from evil as a result.

## Chapter 5

### **The Evidential Argument from Evil against Naturalism**

I argued in Chapter 4 that data-based skeptical theism alone is not sufficient for defending theism. Data-based Skeptical theism may be able to prevent the evidential argument from evil from directly making theism improbable, but it cannot boost the explanatory power of theism over the existence of evil. Hence, naturalism will be preferable to theism with respect to evil because it appears to have stronger explanatory power over the existence of evil. The evidential argument from evil can still indirectly disprove theism due to naturalism's stronger explanatory power over evil. In order to avert this consequence, theists have to increase theism's explanatory power by developing theodicy, and decrease the explanatory power of naturalism by constructing problems of evil against naturalism.

Since William Rowe published his seminal paper 'The problem of evil and some varieties of naturalism' in 1979, the evidential argument from evil has constituted a tremendous challenge for theism. While atheists and theists exchange their opinions concerning this problem back and forth, both camps seem to accept that only theism is susceptible to this problem, and naturalism is immune from it. Theists' mission is to raise a defence or theodicy to deal with this challenge to save theism. On the contrary, atheists' task is to invalidate theistic defences and theodicies, and to improve or raise a new version

of the evidential argument from evil to defeat theism thoroughly.

However, although it seems that ‘the problem of evil’ is often considered a problem which particularly belongs to theism, some philosophers have noticed that the existence of evil also constitutes challenges to naturalism (atheism)<sup>14</sup>, and they have developed arguments to show that naturalism also suffers from a certain type of problem of evil or that the existence of evil is not compatible with naturalism to some extent.<sup>15</sup> In this chapter, I will follow this approach to challenge the idea that the problem of evil is the patent of theism. I will argue that naturalism lacks plausible explanations for some evils and is incompatible with them. Some evils should not occur from human evolution in a purely natural world.

If the argument in this chapter succeeds, then naturalism will be inconsistent with some evils. Its explanatory power over evil will drop consequently. I will dub the argument in this chapter as ‘the evidential argument from evil against naturalism’. In the next chapter, I will develop a theodicy to increase theism’s explanatory power over evil. The evidential argument from evil against naturalism and the theodicy in the next chapter can establish that theism’s explanatory power over evil is greater than that of naturalism. As a result, theism will be more plausible than naturalism in terms of the existence of evil. And the

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<sup>14</sup> Many atheists have adopted naturalism, and their atheism has included naturalism as its essential component. Therefore, in this thesis, I will treat arguments against naturalism as against atheism, and vice versa.

<sup>15</sup> For example, see, Adams, 2013; Nagasawa, 2018.

evidential argument from evil will not indirectly disconfirm theism.

In order to attain the above goal, it is necessary to establish that some evils should not occur if naturalism is true. In this chapter, I will focus on some human behaviours or traits which cause suffering and evil. If these behaviours and traits are inconsistent with naturalism, it means that the evil and suffering caused by them are not consistent with naturalism.

Naturalism does not assume the existence of God and denies any supernatural being or entity. It also considers that all events and phenomena in the world should have natural causes, so natural explanations should be sufficient for the origin and occurrence of every event and phenomenon in the world. Therefore, when looking for naturalistic explanations for the human behaviours or traits discussed in this chapter, we must search for them in nature. Robust disciplines in natural and social sciences have resolved to clarify the causes and origins of various human behaviours and traits through various approaches. It is unavoidable for atheists to adopt theories developed in those disciplines to explain why certain human behaviours and traits have occurred in our human society.

In this chapter, I will first introduce the evidential argument from evil against naturalism. Then I will raise arguments to support the premises of the evidential argument from evil against naturalism.

## 5.1 The Evidential Argument from Evil against Naturalism

The evidential argument from evil against naturalism proposes that if naturalism is true, some evils should not occur in the world, but they do. Therefore, these evils are inconsistent with and disconfirm naturalism:

1. If naturalism is true, then human beings are pure products of evolution. Human behaviours (and traits)<sup>16</sup> should have evolutionary explanations as their ultimate explanations.
  2. Evils caused by human beings should have evolutionary explanations as their ultimate explanations since these evils are caused by human behaviours.
  3. Some evils caused by human beings lack plausible evolutionary explanations.
- Therefore,
4. Naturalism is disconfirmed by those evils as a result.

In the following discussion, I will raise arguments to support the first three premises of this argument. It is obvious that premise 2 is derived from premise 1. If premise 1 is plausible, so is premise 2. Thus I will mainly focus on premises 1 and 3. As to premise 1, I will include the discussion of proximate and ultimate causes raised by evolutionary psychology to support that evolutionary explanations are necessary for a full understanding of human behaviours. With regard to premise 3, I will discuss some evils caused by certain human behaviours. I will argue that the human behaviours in question lack plausible evolutionary explanations and have contradicted the rationale of evolution. As a result, they should not have appeared during the evolution of humanity, and they are evidence disconfirming

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<sup>16</sup> For the sake of simplicity, I will omit traits and only mention human behaviors in the rest of this chapter.

naturalism.

Note that I am raising an evidential rather than a logical argument against naturalism, so I do not aim to prove that premises 1, 2 and 3 are true. Instead, I argue that evidence supports that they are true—that is, we are justified in believing that they are true. As a result, I do not argue that the conclusion of this argument is true, but that we are justified in believing that it is true.

In addition, this argument does not exclude that possibility that with further research, good evolutionary explanations would be available for human evils in question one day. However, this possibility will not influence the validity of this argument. In so far as there are no plausible evolutionary explanations for human evils in question, these evils will still constitute a challenge to naturalism.

Readers may still protest that premise 3 does not support the conclusion. Lacking evolutionary explanations for some human evils does not mean that these evils have contradicted naturalism, as the absence of good naturalistic theories for the occurrence of dark matter will not make dark matter evidence against naturalism. Opponents of this argument thus could conclude that we should be confident that human evils in question will have plausible naturalistic explanations, as in the case of dark matter.

To deal with this concern, let us compare the argument in this chapter with Rowe's

evidential argument from evil. This comparison can help us understand the evidential nature of the argument raised in this chapter and why the lack of evolutionary explanations for some evils will make these evils evidence against naturalism. Rowe's evidential argument from evil goes as follows (Rowe et al., 2017, p. 132):

1. There exist horrendous evils that an all-powerful, all knowing, perfectly good being would have no justifying reason to permit.
  2. An all-powerful, all-knowing, perfectly good being would not permit an evil unless he had a justifying reason to permit it.
- Therefore,
3. God does not exist.

In his evidential argument from evil, Rowe does not argue that the first premise is true. Rather, he debates that we are justified in believing that it is true. Therefore, we are justified in believing that God does not exist. Furthermore, Rowe's argument also bases on the lack of plausible theistic explanations for some evils. We can translate the first premise as 'there are horrendous evils which we find no plausible justifying reason for God's permission of them.' According to this argument, because of the absence of plausible theistic explanations for the evils in question, we are justified in believing that God does not exist. Rowe's evidential argument from evil does not exclude the possibility that theists may be able to construct or find good theistic explanations for the evils in question in the future. But as long as there is no such explanation, Rowe's argument remains valid that God's existence is disconfirmed by some evil in question.

Similarly, it is also legitimate to construct the evidential argument from evil against naturalism on the lack of plausible evolutionary explanations for some evils. Although plausible evolutionary explanations for evils discussed in this chapter may be found in the future, naturalism is still contravened by these evils before the finding of those explanations.

In addition, in the case of dark matter, we believe that there must be a naturalistic explanation for the cause of dark matter. That is because we have other sources of evidence to support the belief that natural phenomena have proximate natural causes though the ultimate cause(s) of those natural things may not be natural. But it is not the case in the discussion of the evidential argument from evil.

Rowe (2017, p. 131) clarifies that the evidential argument from evil only takes evil into consideration and has left other factors aside. Thus, in the discussion of Rowe's evidential argument from evil, we only evaluate whether evil alone will render theism improbable. There may be other evidence or factors which can outbalance the disadvantage caused by evil for theism, and theism may still be probable, taking everything into consideration. However, those kinds of evidence and factors are not within the scope of discussion. Rowe's evidential argument from evil discusses whether evil alone will render theism improbable or not. When theists find no plausible theistic explanations for evils in

question, these evils *per se* will make theism improbable, no matter how confident theists are on theism according to other evidence.

The evidential argument from evil against naturalism makes the same limitation. Here only the factor of evil is taken into consideration. We are investigating whether evil alone will render naturalism improbable or not. If the argument succeeds, then evil *per se* will make naturalism improbable. Naturalists may be confident that they can find plausible evolutionary explanations for evil in question in the future because they have other resources bolstering naturalism. But this is not within the scope of the current discussion.

Therefore, as I will argue in the following discussion, naturalism lacks plausible evolutionary explanations for some human evils in a way that they should not have appeared from human evolution. Maybe plausible evolutionary explanations for those human evils will be found in the future. But before that, those evils are evidence refuting naturalism.

## **5.2 The Necessity of Evolutionary Explanations for Naturalism**

Because natural and social sciences are conducted under the assumption of methodological naturalism, they only look for natural causes for things or phenomena in question. As a result, when explaining why a certain kind of behaviour has appeared in human society, atheists should appeal to explanations raised by various natural and social science. That is because atheists are looking for pure natural explanations for human behaviours, and those are what natural and social sciences have offered. In this section, I will argue that for naturalism, evolutionary explanations are necessary for understanding the causes of human behaviours and traits. Without them, some human behaviours and traits would be incomprehensible to atheists. Since we are discussing natural explanations for some moral evils here, let us first discuss why evolutionary explanations are necessary for fully understanding the causes of crimes.

In criminology, scholars have raised various theories to explain why criminal behaviours have appeared. They are looking for their causes with the hope that those criminal behaviours can be prevented or reduced with their causes clarified. Some of those scholars focus on some traits or characters of perpetrators; some of them emphasize the influence of the environment and try to figure out what kind of factors in the environment has caused a perpetrator to commit a certain criminal behaviour; some try to examine this

matter from a more holistic view, and include both innate and environmental factors in their explanations for crimes.

Theories which focus on the traits of perpetrators, like biological positivism, may be inspired by Cesare Lombroso (1832-1909), the father of modern criminology. Lombroso considered that all perpetrators share some common physical traits. Hence, he tried to induct these biological traits from perpetrators. By doing so, he thought he could know what kind of people are more prone to commit crimes. However, because of the limit of his contemporary development in science, the physical traits which Lombroso searched for are traits like the shape and size of one's nose, eyes, and skull. His research was doomed to fail from the outset because he sought the causes of crimes in the wrong place. His theory is therefore abandoned, and no one has held it anymore. Nonetheless, his method of inducting from observable factors to build a systematic explanation for crime has a profound influence (Newburn, 2017, p. 133-135, 144).

In addition, though his theory is obsolete and wrong, he does bring some inspiration to finding the causes of crimes from inherent traits: some people have inherited some innate traits which make them prone to behave in a certain way or perform some behaviours.

Evolutionary psychologists propose that those inherent traits (psychological modules)

are products of evolution and are the ultimate causes of human behaviours. To understand human behaviours fully, we must search for these ultimate causes in the history of human evolution. Criminologists influenced by evolutionary psychology have succeeded this idea and developed their explanations for crimes on this basis. They propose that non-evolutionary theories need to be supplemented with evolutionary accounts to illuminate the causes of crime fully.

Take rational choice theory as an example. Without the supplement of evolutionary explanations, it is incomplete. The rational choice theory proposes that the basis and motive of human behaviours are 'expected utility.' This theory assumes that people act on the calculation, evaluation and expectation of what they will gain and lose from an act. When an act's expected benefits are greater than its cost to a certain degree, people will perform this act. Criminal behaviours are committed out of the calculation of gain and cost. In addition, the calculation and evaluation of benefits and costs happen at every stage of crime. Therefore, a perpetrator may suspend the crime at any stage when its cost is too great (Newburn, 2017, p. 299-300).

We will not pursue further details of the rational choice theory. What matters here is its proposal that a perpetrator acts according to the gain and cost brought about by an act. In a certain stage of a crime, when the benefit has exceeded the cost to a certain degree, the

perpetrator will continue her crime, and vice versa. The rational choice theory presupposes that the calculation of gain and loss, which is the basis of human behaviours, is a common and innate trait of all human beings.

However, the rational choice theory does not explain where the mechanism of calculation on gain and loss comes from. It just assumes that this mechanism exists. In order to comprehensively understand criminal behaviours, it is necessary to investigate how this mechanism has appeared, and intuitively, this investigation has to be involved in evolution, if naturalism is assumed. Scholars have to find why and how this mechanism has appeared in the process of human evolution.

Some criminologists and psychologists try to explain how some innate psychological mechanisms have interacted with the external factors in one's environment and consequently lead to criminal behaviour; they also try to elucidate how these innate psychological mechanisms have occurred in our ancestors in the process of evolution. Evolutionary psychology proposes that we human beings inherit many psychological mechanisms which are the fruits of evolution. Those psychological mechanisms helped human ancestors survive and reproduce in the pristine environment in the Pleistocene epoch; therefore, they were selected and preserved as adaptations. Evolutionary psychologists consider that the Pleistocene epoch is the most important stage for us to

understand how human psychological mechanisms had occurred and been selected in our ancestors. At that time, our ancestors had lived a hunting-gatherer lifestyle on the African Savannah. In order to respond to ecological challenges and difficulties in that environment, those psychological mechanisms had evolved and been selected correspondingly. Those psychological mechanisms have later passed to their human offspring through inheritance (Brown and Richerson, 2017, p. 108).

In short, evolution should play a crucial part in understanding criminal behaviours.

For example, Criminologists Anthony Walsh and Cody Jorgensen (2018, p. 520) say:

Without an evolutionary understanding, there is no scientific way to determine how a particular behavioral trait might have served the goal of enhancing survival and/or reproductive success over the course of time and how it can be coopted to serve other purposes, including criminal purposes.

Evolutionary theory is the basis for understanding criminal behaviours. We can find the ultimate causes of criminal behaviours in evolution. However, to emphasize the importance of evolutionary explanation is not to dismiss cultural and social accounts, but to remind us that evolutionary explanations are also necessary for a full understanding of human behaviours.

According to evolutionary psychology, human innate psychological mechanisms interact with and respond to environmental stimuli, and hence lead to a certain behaviour. Stimuli from the external environment, human internal traits or mechanisms, and their

interaction would together contribute to a certain behaviour. Therefore, to understand why a specific criminal behaviour has occurred, we have to figure out what traits or mechanisms are behind this behaviour and how they interact with environmental stimuli. Since human traits or mechanisms are products of evolution, we also have to investigate how evolution gave rise to them. Evolutionary explanations as ultimate explanations for criminal behaviours are crucial for understanding these behaviours as a result. The concepts of proximate and ultimate explanations can help us understand why evolutionary explanations for human psychological mechanisms are necessary to understand criminal behaviours.

Proximate explanations 'are those that operate over the short term—the immediate causes of behavior' (Thornhill and Palmer, 2000, p. 4). Those explanations delineate how a specific trait or mechanism leads to one's criminal behaviour(s) in one's life. They 'include genes, hormones, psychological structures (including brain mechanisms), and environmental stimuli (including environmental experiences that affect learning)' (Thornhill and Palmer, 2000, p. 4). These explanations for a criminal behaviour of a person focus on the immediate causes that lead to this behaviour.

The ultimate explanations, on the hand, try to explain why traits or mechanisms underlying a criminal behaviour had appeared in the first place in human evolutionary

history. The following example can help us understand the distinctions between proximate and ultimate explanations and their functions.

Though many people know that eating too much fast food is not good for their health, they are still attracted to it and eat too much. They may eat too much fast food, and thus have some health problems. The phenomenon's proximate explanations may be that fast food companies' advertisements are rather attractive and successful, fast food is delicious and addictive, eating fast food can help release one's stress, and so on. These explanations answer why people overeat fast food although they know that excessive fast food is not good for their health to a certain degree. However, these explanations do not completely delineate why people are prone to take fast food and are easily attracted to it. The following evolutionary explanation proposes that human beings are born with a disposition for fast food and can further clarify why fast food is such attractive:

Droughts often occurred in the area of the African Savanna when human ancestors lived there, and droughts would cause famines. In this environment, the more fat accumulated in the body, the better. Fat could help human ancestors survive during a famine, and could enhance the probability of reproduction by extending one's lifespan in this extreme environment.

Furthermore, diets containing high quantities of sugar and fat are efficient in human

ancestors' accumulation of fat. Therefore, human preference for foods with high quantities of sugar and fat was selected for in the process of evolution because these foods helped human ancestors survive in the extreme environments of the African Savanna. Although our lifestyle and environment are rather different from our human ancestors' in African Savanna, we are still programmed to ingest foods with high quantities of sugar and fatness. Fast food matches this preference, and, with suitable stimulus, people are easily attracted by fast food and may over-ingest it (Geher, 2014, p. 19).

The preference for food with sugar and fat content is the ultimate explanation for the over-ingestion of fast food. This ultimate explanation can help us understand the phenomenon that many people are prone to overtake fast food although they know the potential risk of excessive fast food to their health. Without this ultimate explanation, the phenomenon of overtaking fast food cannot be completely deciphered.

What lies behind the distinction between proximate and ultimate explanations is the idea that human behaviours are the products of the interaction of innate human mechanisms (or traits) and external environmental inputs. While proximate explanations clarify what the probable external environment inputs and innate mechanisms may be, ultimate explanations delineate how innate mechanisms leading to such a response (behaviour) had initially appeared. Human behaviours are not simply decided and shaped

by environmental stimulus. Human innate mechanisms also play an important role. If human psychological or physiological mechanisms have changed, people will have different reacting behaviour even with the same external or environmental stimulus, as evolutionary psychologists John Tooby and Leda Cosmides (2015, p. 55) say:

Value and behavior cannot be induced from the environment alone. No environmental stimulus intrinsically mandates any response or any value hierarchy of responses. In the tangled bank of co-evolved organisms that Darwin memorably contemplated at the end of the *Origin of Species*, naturally selected differences in the brains of different species cause them to treat the same objects in a rich and conflicting diversity of ways. The infant that is the object of caring attention by one organism is the object of predatory ambition by another, an ectoparasitic home to a third, and a barrier requiring effortful trajectory change to a fourth. It is the brains of these organisms that introduce behavior-regulatory valuation into the causal stream and natural selection that introduced into brains the neural subsystems that accomplish valuation. The same stimulus set cannot, by itself, explain differences in the preferences and actions they provoke, nor indeed, the preferences themselves.

Simply appealing to environmental factors is not enough. It is necessary to indicate what innate traits or mechanisms are involved and how they had appeared in the process of human evolution.

Therefore, both proximate and ultimate explanations are required to understand why some human behaviours and phenomena (criminal behaviours included) have occurred. In addition to proximate causes, we have to investigate what physiological or psychological mechanisms function behind them, how these mechanisms interact with environmental

factors and lead to the behaviour in question, and how these mechanisms have occurred in the process of human evolution. Proximate and ultimate explanations together constitute a comprehensive account of human behaviours. And since naturalists consider human beings as pure products of evolution, ultimate explanations of humankind have to be found in evolution. Evolutionary explanations (ultimate explanations) thus are necessary for a comprehensive understanding of human criminal and other behaviours, given the assumption of naturalism.

### **5.3 Evolution and Psychological Mechanisms**

In the previous section, we investigated the importance and necessity of evolutionary explanations (ultimate explanations). Now we turn to what kind of evolutionary explanations atheists should look for. Evolutionary psychologists have argued that human psychological mechanisms have been selected for as adaptations in the process of human evolution. They exist and are common simply because they had contributed to human ancestors' survival and reproduction in the African Savanna in the Pleistocene epoch. Those psychological mechanisms will interact with various environmental factors and lead to some human behaviours. Hence, psychological mechanisms are the evolutionary explanations atheists should raise as the ultimate explanations for human behaviour. I will first introduce some core ideas concerning evolution and then explain the relationship between psychological mechanisms and human behaviours. The following discussion will clarify what evolutionary explanations atheists should give for human behaviours causing evil.

The first idea relevant to evolution is reproductive success. Reproductive success 'is the idea that life forms evolved a host of features that facilitate the ability of the organism to reproduce (Geher, 2014, p. 5)'. Reproductive success is crucial for understanding why a specific kind of organism with certain features has existed. A species of organism exist

now because this species can competitively and stably reproduce offspring and keep a certain proportion of their offspring survive. To achieve this result, organisms of this species must own some features and traits which contribute to and enhance the chance of reproduction. Otherwise, this species of organism would not have existed due to its ancestors' inability to reproduce.

Besides, according to this view, survival is only the instrument for reproductive success. An organism is 'designed' and 'optimized' for its survival in a given ecological condition because its survival is positively related to its reproductive success. A dead organism cannot give birth to any offspring, and an organism can reproduce more offspring with longer life. Organisms with traits which can enhance their chance of survival have greater advantages in reproductive success, and will hence outcompete their competitors after generations:

Survival, from the perspective of evolution, is a tool that ultimately works toward reproduction.... A simple understanding of evolution is the idea that organisms that exist *must exist* because their ancestors had features that led to [reproductive success] (otherwise the organism in question couldn't exist). So any features of a species that are *species typical* may well have the *ultimate purpose* of increasing [reproductive success] (Geher, 2014, p. 5, emphasis original).

According to this view, we should keep in mind that reproductive success is prior to survival. 'All things equal, qualities that facilitate reproduction are more likely to be

selected than qualities that only facilitate survival (Geher, 2014, p. 16).'

Therefore, when trying to explain why a specific feature or trait of an organism has occurred, we can investigate how this feature or trait is relevant to the organism's survival and reproduction. In addition, as mentioned above, reproductive success is more critical than survival in the process of evolution.

Another crucial idea is adaptation. By adaptation, I mean 'phenotypic features (morphological structures, physiological mechanisms, and behaviours) that are present in individual organisms because they are favoured by natural selection in the past' (Thornhill and Palmer, 2000, p. 5). A trait favoured by natural or sexual selection has the function of helping 'members of the species overcome some important survival or reproduction-based hurdles and facilitates reproduction (Geher, 2014, p. 14).' That is, if a trait obtained by an organism through mutation or some other methods can bring the organism some advantages in survival or reproduction, all things equal, this organism with this trait would have more offspring than other organisms without it. After generations, organisms with this trait will be dominant to a certain degree in this species. As a result, this trait will be common in this species.

Evolutionary psychologists explain the occurrence of human psychological mechanisms in terms of adaptation. Human psychological mechanisms, such as

physiological traits, are ultimately products of evolution. Those mechanisms exist and remain in modern humans because they are adaptations themselves or are related to an adaptation, which had contributed to human survival or reproduction in ancient times and was thus selected. According to this view, when seeking the cause of a specific human behaviour, we need first to figure out the psychological mechanism behind it and then investigate how this psychological mechanism as an adaptation is related to the survival or reproduction of ancestral humans. Evolutionary criminologists Russil Durrant and Tony Ward (2015, pp. 126–27) consider adaptation as the key idea to deciphering the underlying mechanisms of criminal behaviours:

Because evolution via natural (and sexual) selection is an inherently competitive process that entails differential fitness, then—all other things being equal—any characteristic that advances survival and reproductive success at the expense of the reproductive fitness of conspecifics is going to be selected for. To the extent that crime involves the infliction of harm and the “unfair” appropriation of resources from others then we would expect mechanisms that underlie such behavior to be the target of natural selection. One prominent approach taken by evolutionary psychologists is, therefore, to argue that crime—or the mechanisms that underlie crime—reflects the operation of evolutionary adaptations.

Criminal behaviours, together with other human behaviours, are related to evolutionary adaptations and have to be understood in terms of adaptations.

Furthermore, not all criminal behaviours are adaptations. They may be a byproduct of an adaptation. A psychological mechanism may lead to an act which this mechanism is not

originally designed for.

For example, suppose that being aggressive in hunting had a positive effect on the survival and reproduction of human ancestors in ancient hunter-gatherer societies. Thus, this trait was selected and inherited by some human offspring as an adaptation. Some people are more aggressive and more disposed to fight as a result. Moreover, suppose that an evil gang has found this evolutionary fact and has recruited people with this trait to train them as killers. In this case, we cannot conclude that the killing ability of those people is an adaptation. It is a byproduct of the adaptation of being aggressive in hunting. These criminal behaviours are byproducts of the feature of being aggressive but are not adaptations themselves. Different human behaviours and phenomena are related to adaptation in different ways. Criminal behaviours are related to adaptation at least in the following five ways:

First, criminal behaviours may be the selected adaptations themselves. Second, they may be conditional adaptations, which only appear in some population members under certain conditions. Third, they may be adaptations as the result of frequency-dependent selection. Individuals with these adaptive characteristics will only occupy a certain proportion of a population in a dynamic and equilibrium way. Fourth, they may be byproducts of adaptations. They may supervene on or may be caused by adaptations but

are not the adaptations themselves. Finally, they may be pathological malfunctions of an adaptation or multiple adaptations (Durrant and Ward, 2015, p. 127-28).

As a result, given naturalism, when examining why a certain kind of human behaviour has occurred, atheists need to identify the psychological mechanism(s) behind it and explain how this (these) psychological mechanism(s) has (have) occurred. To explain an evil caused by humans, atheists have to provide this kind of evolutionary explanation as well.

## **5.4 Behaviours or Traits Contradictory to the Evolutionary Rationale**

### ***5.4.1 Raping and then killing the victim***

Raping and then killing the victim is a kind of gruesome human behaviour that, without a doubt, causes great suffering for the victim, the victim's family and friends. It seems that this kind of behaviour is unique to human beings. Even if it happens in the animal kingdom, it must be extremely rare. Killing and raping respectively is usual in the animal kingdom, but raping and then killing the victim seems to be rare for animals. In contrast, though raping and then killing the victim is not such common compared to other crimes in human society, it is not rare as well. It is sad that many victims have fallen to prey of this crime.

What kinds of psychological mechanisms would lead to such a cruel behavior? Since this crime is most often committed by males and its victims are usually females, here we will focus on the possible evolutionary accounts for a male's raping and then killing a female victim. I will examine evolutionary accounts for male rape, and then conclude that raping and then killing the victim should not have appeared in the process of human evolution.

For starters, let us examine the evolutionary causes of rape.

Whether rape is an adaptation of males is controversial. Some evolutionary psychologists have proposed that rape is an adaptation which can enhance the opportunity

for copulation and hence can help the perpetrator produce more offspring,<sup>17</sup> whereas other scholars do not agree with this conclusion and contend that rape is a byproduct. Scholars who suppose that rape is an adaptation often focus on the potential reproductive benefits which could be brought about by rape. According to this view, rape can help males conquer some disadvantages in reproduction in some specific situations. For example, William F. McKibbin et al. (2008, p. 89, emphasis original) propose that there exist five kinds of rapists:

(1) disadvantaged men who resort to rape, (2) ‘specialized’ rapists who are sexually aroused by violent sex, (3) men who rape opportunistically, (4) high-mating-effort men who are dominant and often psychopathic, and (5) partner rapists motivated by assessments of increased risk of sperm competition.

William F. McKibbin et al. (2008, pp. 89–92) argue that rape is a conditional mating strategy. The five types of rapists exist because they can increase the chance of reproduction, and each type of rapist is associated with a psychological mechanism in response to a specific environmental condition.

The first type of rapist has appeared because some men have less access to consensual copulation due to their lower social status, physical conditions, or other reason. They find

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<sup>17</sup> Notice that here I will only discuss rape perpetrated by men on women, and I will only discuss a specific kind of rape which can be defined as ‘the use of force or threat of force to achieve penile-vaginal penetration of a woman without her consent’ (McKibbin *et al.*, 2008, p. 86). The definition of rape in criminal law may be broader than the given one here. That is, it may not be limited to the behavior of penile-vaginal penetration. Other kinds of sexual offending behaviors may be also considered as rape, but this will not influence the discussion here.

themselves in such a disadvantaged situation, and so some of them may rape to gain access to copulation. In this way, they can increase reproductive opportunities. As to the second type of rapist, for some reason, the second type of rapist is more sexually aroused by violent copulation and sex. Rape can help this kind of rapist perform copulation and therefore is beneficial to the rapist's reproduction. The third type of rapist may have access to consensual sex, but they desire to have additional copulation when there are opportunities, even when rape is involved. This kind of rapist can enhance the chance of reproduction by engaging in extra copulation.

The fourth type of rapist is dominant and aggressive. They are often characterized as psychopathic. Such rapists usually take a high-mating-effort strategy. They will pursue many partners without much investment and will fulfil their goals by coercion when necessary. This mating strategy also has a positive evolutionary value in increasing the reproduction of the rapist. Finally, men who are under the condition of sperm competition may rape their partners. Sperm competition means that the sperm of different males are accessible to the same women's egg. In order to beat other competitors in sperm competition, a man may aim to have greater numbers of sperm accessible to the woman's egg, even if he has to perform it coercively and violently. In this way, the rapist can enhance the chance of letting the woman conceive his sperm, and this strategy is thus also

designed to promote the reproduction of the rapist.<sup>18</sup>

The above analysis of rapists shows that rape may be an adaptation that helps the perpetrator increase the frequency of copulation and enhance the change of reproduction. Besides, the proposal that rape is an adaptation has also gotten some support from animals. Observations from the orangutan species show that sexual coercion is popular among this species. There exists evidence supporting that among sexually mature male orangutans, orangutans with large size and weight, which normally weigh over 80 kg and about twice as big as the small ones, are less likely to commit coercive copulations. Forced copulations may exceed more than 80% of the small orangutans' whole copulations at some orangutan sites (Huppin and Malamuth, 2015, p. 638). This phenomenon of orangutans implies that some disadvantageous male orangutans adopt rape as a strategy for copulation. The same phenomenon may also occur among human male ancestors. For ancestral male humans, rape may be an adaptation which can positively contribute to the reproduction of the perpetrator.

However, whether the proposal that rape is an adaptation is plausible is controversial. For example, Eric A. Smith et al. (2001, p. 132-34) have built a model to argue that rape is not an adaptation. They have listed several possible benefits and costs brought about by a single event of rape, and each benefit and cost is assigned a reproductive value. Their

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<sup>18</sup> For a brief introduction to the five types of rapists, see Durrant and Ward, 2015, pp. 149–50.

calculation suggests that a single event of rape will bring more cost than benefit to the rapist in ancestral human society: For a 25-year-old male, the value of the benefit of carrying out rape is 0.0078, while the value of the cost is 0.0762. The cost caused by rape is almost ten times greater than the benefit brought out by it. Therefore, it is improbable that rape is an adaptation for ancient men. But if rape is not an adaptation, then it must be a byproduct of other adaptations. Some evolutionary psychologists have tried to explain rape in this way. For example, Durrant and Ward (2015, p. 151) advise that rape is a byproduct of a more general adaptation of men:

Although it is plausible to suggest that rape might have been specifically selected for (i.e., is an evolutionary adaptation), we think that our current best evolutionary explanation is more consistent with the view that rape is a byproduct of other evolved adaptations, in combination with particular developmental and ecological contexts. Specifically, a greater tendency for men (relative to women) to seek impersonal sexual relationships, to dominate and control the sexual behavior of women (especially their partners), and to employ force for instrumental purposes, means that for some men, under certain circumstances, the likelihood of perpetrating sexual offenses is increased. As illustrated in Table 6.2, sexual coercion is not uncommon among extant hominid species, although it is not the primary mode of obtaining sexual access to females in any of the species with the possible exception of orangutans. This suggests that the use of force to obtain sexual access to females reflects more general male tendencies to dominate and control females for reproductive purposes, rather than specific adaptations for rape.

According to this view, rape itself is not an adaptation. It is caused by men's more general psychological mechanism of gaining dominance over women for the sake of reproduction.

However, even if rape itself is not an adaptation, the psychological mechanism motivated it is still relevant to the enhancement of reproduction. In the above Durrant and Ward's statements, rape is caused by males' more general tendencies to put females under domination for the sake of reproduction. That means the end of the psychological mechanism leading to the behaviour of rape is still to increase the chance of the reproduction of the rapist.

Therefore, whether rape is an adaptation or not, it is caused by psychological mechanisms which aim to increase the rapist's chance of reproduction.

In cases of raping and then killing the victim,<sup>19</sup> the psychological mechanisms behind it must be the same or rather similar to those in cases of rape without killing since many or at least some perpetrators of raping and then killing the victim only intend to commit rape rather than murder at the beginning. That is, they are sexually motivated, and it seems rather plausible that they are motivated by psychological mechanisms of rape.

If this is the case, then the behaviour of raping and then killing the victim would be confusing. Psychological mechanisms consciously or unconsciously motivate rapists to

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<sup>19</sup> Notice here I exclude cases in which raping and then killing the victim is taken as an instrument of coercion or revenge, such as those committed by soldiers in an inhuman war. Psychological mechanisms motivating perpetrators in these cases may not be specifically relevant to reproduction. They may be more similar to psychological mechanisms of violence and war in which gaining and securing resources may be the major goal. On the other hand, in this section, I am mainly talking about cases of raping and then killing the victim in which the perpetrators are motivated by sexual desires or factors relevant to sex. Therefore it is plausible to conclude that the psychological mechanisms involved in these cases of raping and then killing the victim are the same as or rather similar to the psychological mechanisms in cases of raping without killing.

commit rape should not lead to the behaviour of killing the victim. As mentioned above, the end of these psychological mechanisms is reproduction, so these psychological mechanisms would be triggered by certain factors in the environment and would lead the rapists to execute coercive copulations. Those rapists themselves may not know the existence of these psychological modules. That is, they may not consciously know that they are under the influence of them, but the psychological mechanisms selected in the process of ancestral humans have 'set' them to rape to attain the goal of reproduction.

However, by killing their victims after rape, the rapist not only gains no benefits in respect of reproduction, but also takes a lot of risks which will threaten their lives. As a result, they have put their survival and reproduction at risk by raping and then killing their victims. For example, the rapist may be hurt and killed by the kin of the victim, especially in the ancient time when no law would have forbidden people to revenge for their family. The behaviour of raping and then killing has completely contradicted the rationale of evolution. The supposed evolutionary causes, the ultimate causes of rape require that the rapists should not kill their victim because the psychological mechanisms motivating them to rape have been 'designed' to increase the opportunity of their reproduction. The behaviour of raping and then killing the victim is thus incoherent with the psychological mechanisms of rape. This behaviour is not only hard to be explained by evolution, but also

is improbable to occur in terms of evolution.

Then let us move to the objection that the psychological mechanisms of raping and then killing the victim is (at least partially) different from those of rape without murder. It may be responded that rapists kill their victims after raping because they want to escape possible revenge from the victims' family and friends or the jurisdictional system. They behave in this way for the sake of their own benefits of survival. Their psychological mechanisms designed to assure their survival have been triggered by some external factors accompanying the event of rape.

In summary, this explanation suggests that the psychological mechanism for self-survival causes some rapists to kill their victims, but it has explained nothing about why these rapists rape. This explanation may have to be combined with the above explanations for rape to form a comprehensive account of those perpetrators' behaviour of raping and then killing the victim. At the stage of rape, the rapists are motivated by the psychological mechanisms related to reproduction; at the stage of kill, they are driven by psychological mechanisms relevant to survival. If this is the case, those perpetrators' raping and killing would have plausible ultimate causes. This explanation may look promising at first glance, but it does not dispel all the surrounding vex. The reason is as follows:

First, this explanation cannot account for rapists who kill their victims for reasons other than fear. It is true that some rapists commit this draconian crime for the sake of their survival, no matter whether they sense it or not. However, it is also true that some do this kind of behaviour for other reasons and motivations.

For example, some rapists murder their victims because it allows them to target more victims and carry out more rapes. These rapists enjoy the behaviour of rape itself so that they do not want to take the risk of letting their victims threaten their chance of rape in the future. Hence, they kill their victims. In such cases, what is behind their homicides is not a psychological mechanism for survival. In addition, psychological mechanisms relevant to reproduction cannot apply to them as well since they always murder their victims of rape. In this way, this explanation fails to account for the behaviour of rapists who murder their victims for motivations and reasons irrelevant to their survival.

Second, this explanation is not plausible itself. As mentioned above, adaptations of reproduction are prior to adaptations of survival. Adaptations of reproduction are more likely to be selected. 'All things equal, qualities that facilitate reproduction are more likely to be selected than qualities that only facilitate survival (Geher, 2014, p. 16).' If this is the case, then psychological mechanisms motivating rape should be dominant over psychological mechanisms leading to the victims' homicide.

Imagine that there were two groups of humans in the Pleistocene epoch, in which various human psychological mechanisms had appeared and were selected. One group had been equipped with psychological mechanisms which would lead to rape but not the homicide of the victims; the other group, on the other hand, had been equipped with psychological mechanisms causing not only rape, but also the murder of the victims. All beings equal, the group with psychological mechanisms that only motivate rape would have advantages in survival and reproduction over the other group. The group with the psychological mechanisms for both rape and killing, in fact, had gained nothing by engaging in the horrible behaviour of raping and then killing their victims. Instead, they had put themselves at great risk by committing this behaviour because they may have been hurt or killed by their victim, the victim's friends or kin, people who think their existence is a great threat to their spouses or daughters, and the like.

As a result, psychological mechanisms that only motivate men to rape rather than to rape and kill are more likely to be selected as adaptations. Psychological mechanisms causing perpetrators to kill the victim should be compromised or dominated by psychological mechanisms of rape. Animals' behaviours of rape have reflected this point of view. Animals rape, but it seems that they do not rape and then kill their victims because raping and then killing the victim brings only potential harm and risks to animals with

respect to their survival and reproduction. It is hard to explain why some human males would commit behaviours such as raping and then killing the victim that only bring risks to their survival and reproduction. If the behaviour of rape is initiated by the psychological mechanisms of rape or general psychological mechanisms relevant to reproduction, the murder of the victim of the rape should not follow since this consequence is completely contradictory to the goal of those psychological mechanisms of rape, which aim to enhance the probability of reproduction. Therefore, the two-stage explanation itself is not plausible. It is not consistent with the rationale of adaptation.

However, it may still be contested that raping and then killing the victim is caused by some psychological mechanisms irrelevant to sex and reproduction. Those psychological mechanisms may bring out greater advantages than the harms and risks which may be caused by raping and then killing. Nonetheless, many (if not most) cases of raping and then killing are motivated by factors relevant to sexual desires, and sexual desires are highly relevant to reproduction. In this situation, it is not abnormal that psychological mechanisms of rape are involved. Therefore, it is hard to conclude that in most cases of raping and then killing, psychological mechanisms of rape which aim at reproduction are not embroiled. If the psychological mechanisms of rape are among the causes, they should be dominant in the way that they would prevent the perpetrator from killing their victims to increase the

chance of reproduction.

Finally, it is possible that rape and then killing are committed by people whose psychological mechanisms do not function properly. Something is wrong with their certain psychological mechanisms, and these malfunctioning psychological mechanisms then lead to the behaviour in question. It is true that some men who commit raping and then kill the victim are psychotic, and their minds have malfunctioned in some aspects. However, some problems still remain for this kind of explanation which appeals to malfunctions of psychological mechanisms.

First of all, supporters of this kind of malfunction explanations have to first define what a malfunction of a psychological mechanism is and explain how it has occurred. If malfunctions of psychological mechanisms are defined as being psychotic, then it is obvious that many people committing rape and then killing do not suffer malfunctions of psychological mechanisms, since it seems that many of them are not psychotic. It is possible that malfunctions of psychological mechanisms may partially consist of being psychotic, but not all. Propagandists of malfunction explanations have to define further what malfunctions of psychological mechanisms are in cases in which rapists are not psychotic. Without clarifying what malfunctions of psychological mechanisms are and how they occur, this kind of malfunction explanation has explained nothing. We can apply this

kind of explanation to all kinds of abnormal or confusing human behaviours without knowing anything.

Second, appealing to malfunctions of psychological mechanisms does not cast all doubts away. It is confusing why these kinds of malfunctions of psychological mechanisms do not occur among animals and make animals rape and then kill. For example, orangutans also kill other animals and even other orangutans, and as mentioned above, some male orangutans also rape. They have some psychological mechanisms behind killing and raping. Those psychological mechanisms help them survive and reproduce. But why do the malfunctions of psychological mechanisms lead men to rape and kill their victims do not occur on orangutans?

If raping and then killing are caused by genetic mutation or some other mechanisms of inheritance, then similar malfunctions should occur on orangutans since they also have relevant mechanisms of inheritance like genetic mutation or genetic drift. If these malfunctions are caused by the environment, they should also have occurred among some orangutans. Raping and then killing is a rather ancient behaviour, and it is plausible to assume that our ancestors living in the pristine environment also had committed this behaviour. The environment of orangutans is similar to that of our ancestors. The environmental factors which had distorted our ancestors' psychological mechanisms should

also exist in the immediate environment of orangutans. As a result, these malfunctions of psychological mechanisms should have occurred among orangutans and animals as well. Animals, especially primates whose genetic sequences are rather similar to that of human beings, should sometimes commit this cruel behaviour.

However, raping and then killing among primates are rare, if not zero. If cases of raping and then killing committed by animals are as frequent as those committed by human males, we will casually see it on the news. However, it seems that there is not any news of raping and killing committed by a male primate on his female cohort, or at least this kind of news is extremely rare. The fact that animals do not rape and then kill or commit it with an extremely rare frequency attests that malfunctions of psychological mechanisms may not be the main cause that leads to such great amount cases of raping and then killing in human society, since this kind of malfunctions of psychological mechanism should sometimes also happen to animals. Therefore, malfunctions of psychological mechanisms may be able to explain some cases of rape and then killing a victim, but many cases still remain unexplained.

In summary, many cases of men raping and then killing their victims lack plausible evolutionary explanations. It should not occur in the process of human evolution. Cases of this horrendous behaviour thus are evidence against naturalism.

### ***5.4.2 Existential emotions***

In this section, I first indicate that some emotions have caused a lot of pain, suffering and tragedies. These emotions can be bracketed as existential emotions (I will explain what they are later). I then argue that these existential emotions do not have plausible evolutionary explanations. They disconfirm naturalism as a result.

For starters, I will define what existential emotions are. By this term, I mean negative emotions towards one's existence, such as confusion about one's meaning of life. Human beings are different from animals in that we are more aware of our own existence. We know that we exist, and are occupied with the idea of self. We always know that as human beings, we ourselves are distinguished from other humans, animals and objects. We know that we are unique and almost all of our thoughts and deeds are related to 'I, me, and mine'. Most of us will put ourselves as the first priority in the usual situation. We strive to satisfy our needs to improve the quality of and extend the length of our lives. Our existence is among the most important thing in our life.

However, while many people get along with their existence well and try their best to serve the 'self', some are troubled by their own existence. They do not know why they exist, and wonder what the meaning of their existence is. Some people even hate their own existence. They have different kinds of emotions towards their existence, and these

emotions ceaselessly haunt their subject. These emotions keep prompting the subject, but it is a prompt without an end. The subject who is caught by these emotions and bears the aimless impulse of these emotions does not know how to get rid of the predicament caused by her existence. Miscellaneous emotions have been triggered by one's existence, and I classify those emotions as existential emotions.

Different people have divergent reactions to the emotions caused by their own existence. Most of them may be more or less tortured by these emotions, but some suffer more and some less. Some quickly learn to ignore the emotions about their existence. They may think, 'this is life' and bury the emotions and problems of their existence in the deepest place of their heart. Their existence may not bother them again during their whole lives.

In contrast, some people may be desperately troubled by their own existence. Emotions such as vanity, anger, depression, disappointment, and the like have haunted their hearts. They do not know how to deal with these emotions about their own existence, and would suffer a lot as a result. The great Japanese writer Osamu Dazai is a paradigm example of people who suffer from their own existence. I would take him as a model who has suffered for their existence.

Osamu Dazai was born into a rich family. He was adored and loved by his family.

However, he was perplexed and troubled by his life since he was very young. In his famous book, *No Longer Human*, we can see how his existence itself has become a problem for him to the degree that his whole life was consequently ruined.

*No Longer Human* was published in the year when Osamu Dazai had succeeded in killing himself after multiple attempts over several years. The book describes in detail how the protagonist is at odds with himself and others, which finally leads to a tragic ending. The life of the protagonist is very similar to Osamu Dazai's. *No longer human* is widely considered that it is based on Osamu Dazai's own life experience and is therefore regarded as Osamu Dazai's semi-autobiographical novel.

Yozo, the protagonist of *No longer human*, has been unable to understand the meaning of being human since he was a child, and he is deeply perplexed by such problems. At the beginning of the first notebook of *no longer human*, he says, 'I can't even guess myself what it must be to live the life of a human being (Dazai, 1973, p. 21).' Yozo simply cannot understand the meaning of life and what a human's life should look like. His confusion has reached the degree that he cannot comfortably act according to human instinct and nature. For example, he cannot understand hunger and cannot sympathize with why people eat. Yozo expresses his confusion as the following:

Again, I have never known what it means to be hungry.... I mean that I have had not the remotest idea of the nature of the sensation of 'hunger.'

When as a boy I returned home from school the people at home would make a great fuss over me. 'You must be hungry. We remember what it's like, how terribly hungry you feel by the time you get home from school, How about some jelly beans? There's cake and biscuits too.' Seeking to please, as I invariably did, I would mumble that I was hungry, and stuff a dozen jelly beans in my mouth, but what they meant by feeling hungry completely escaped me (Dazai, 1973, pp. 22–23).

Yozo cannot understand the feeling of hungry, and he is especially puzzled by the relationship between eating and death:

Eat or die, the saying goes, but to my ears it sounded like just one more unpleasant threat. Nevertheless this superstition (I could only think of it as such) always aroused doubt and fear in me. Nothing was so hard for me to understand, so baffling, and at the same time so filled with menacing overtones as the commonplace remark, 'Human beings work to earn their bread, for if they don't eat, they die (Dazai, 1973, p. 24).'

Yozo cannot feel the impetus of life which pushes everyone to eat. The reason that he cannot feel and know the aspiration of eating is that he cannot understand the meaning of life, and the meaning of existence itself. He is struggling with the big question—to be or not to be, and therefore cannot take eating for survival for granted. Because he could not answer these questions, he could not live his life in a practical and satisfying way, but only lived to meet the demands and criteria of other people and society. Yozo finally tried to kill himself because he could not bear the emptiness of life.

Osamu Dazai's protagonist Yozo in *no longer human* has committed suicide several times, but luckily (or unluckily), Yozo is not successful in killing himself. Osamu Dazai

arranges a ridiculous and pathetic ending for Yozo. Although Yozo is disqualified and unmotivated to live, he lives as a living dead and fares a humble, filthy, and ludicrous life.

Like Yozo in *no longer human*, Osamu Dazai had committed suicide five times in his 39-year life. In his fifth suicide, he tied himself up to Tomie Yamazaki, Dazai's lover who would plunge into the river with him, to make sure that he would not, as in his second attempt, survive the suicide alone. This time, he succeeded in ending his life and left the world confused about his death.

The case of Osamu Dazai shows how the problem of existence and existential emotions can decimate one's life. Osamu Dazai's case is not unique. People have suffered from their own existence. Existential emotions influence people in different ways. Some people are suddenly seized by these emotions and then suffer fiercely; others do not experience these existential emotions so abruptly. These emotions gradually aggrandize and swell, and finally occupy their whole hearts. Then, what kind of psychological mechanism will lead to existential emotions? Why does a person have this kind of strong emotional reaction to their own existence when it seems that these emotions contribute nothing positive to one's survival and reproduction? It seems that existential emotions completely betray the adaptive functions of emotions.

Evolutionary psychologists have suggested that emotions play a critical role in human

life. They are coordinators which can help solve the conflict of one's different physiological needs. For example, in a jungle, when one is sleepy and is also hearing the steps of a lion coming from a nearby place, the function of fulfilling the need for sleep and the function of escaping from potential dangerous assaults are in conflict. It is important to decide which need should be prioritized. The result of prioritizing the wrong need could be devastating. If one has fallen asleep and thus does not take the necessary instruments to prevent the lethal event of being assaulted by a lion, this person may be seriously hurt or killed by the lion. In order to avoid such consequences, emotions are evolved and selected to reconcile this kind of conflict and help an individual perform the more urgent function(s) to satisfy the more important need for the current situation.

In the above case, when hearing the sounds of a lion in a nearby place, we humans will automatically feel nervous and fearful. Under the influence of these emotions, our hearts will beat faster, muscles will contract in preparation to fight or escape, and our senses and attention will be sharper. All of the following changes make it difficult to fall asleep, and render a person more prepared for immediate danger. Therefore, emotions are adaptations selected to coordinate and orchestrate different physiological mechanisms (Tooby and Cosmides, 2015, p. 58).

According to the above view, emotions can be viewed as adaptations which motivate

people to perform actions to ensure one's survival or reproduction. For example, we are scared of ferocious animals because fear could prevent us from approaching them and prompt us to prepare for probable dangers caused by those animals. However, if this is the case, the appearance of existential emotions is confusing.

If emotions are adaptations designed to coordinate different physiological mechanisms, it is improbable that people should be troubled by their own existence. Like Osamu Dazai, many people who have suffered from existential emotions do not lack in material supply or face threats to their life and reproduction. In this kind of situation, there seem to be no conflicts of physiological mechanisms to be reconciled by emotions. According to the above view of evolutionary psychology, emotions orchestrate physiological mechanisms and motivate people to perform some acts. While there are no such conflicts or problems, relevant emotions should not occur as well. When we see no or feel no dangerous elements, we do not fear. Nonetheless, why do people's existences cause vanity and pain when they live a good life? It seems that these existential emotions come from nowhere.

Additionally, according to evolutionary theory, to survive and to reproduce are the two most important aims of a creature, and reproduction is prior to survival. To survive means to maintain one's existence, and one's existence is necessary for one's reproduction.

Hence, one's existence is among the most important things from the evolutionary perspective. Human beings are creatures and products of evolution. The fact that survival and reproductions are the most critical two aims for creatures remains true for human beings. Human psychological mechanisms are adaptations that are selected to attain the two goals. And as mentioned above, traits that prioritize reproduction are more likely to be selected than traits that prioritize survival. Human psychological mechanisms thus prefer one's reproduction to survival when the two conflict with each other.

Therefore, when one's survival does not conflict with one's reproduction, human psychological mechanisms should generally function to prolong and protect one's survival. Since one's existence is inseparable from one's survival, human psychological mechanisms should function to maintain one's existence.

If this is the case, when one's existence does not conflict with one's reproduction, one's existence is the first priority of her psychological mechanisms. Then it is rather confusing that strong existential emotions occur to people when there is no conflict between one's survival and reproduction. Some people's psychological mechanisms cause them to feel painful, vain, deplorable, detestable, and so on about their own existence when no conflict between their survival and reproduction exists. Some of them are deeply tortured by these existential emotions. And they are mentally and physically ill because of

these existential emotions and consequently live a shorter life or have fewer offspring. A few of them, like Osamu Dazai, even dramatically commit suicide and end their lives to end the pain and suffering brought about by their existence. Why do existential emotions appear and threaten one's existence while one's reproduction is not conflicting with one's survival? These existential emotions seem to bring only harm to these people's existence, survival, and reproduction—a consequence which is completely at odds with the supposed functions of emotions as adaptations. Emotions should coordinate human physiological mechanisms in a way which can help people to perform actions beneficial to one's survival or reproduction.

Nevertheless, existential emotions not only fail to orchestrate various human mechanisms, but also mentally and physically harm the subject and gain nothing. Existential emotions have contradicted the adaptive functions of emotions.

As a result, the phenomena of existential emotions do not have plausible evolutionary explanations. Pains and sufferings caused by existential emotions are inexplicable from the perspective of evolution, and are thus contradictory to naturalism.

Atheists may contend that existential emotions are caused by some kind of mental illness. Nevertheless, to attribute all existential emotions to mental diseases may have the following problems.

First, whether we can classify everyone who has suffered from existential emotions as mentally ill is doubtful. For example, can we conclude that people have suffered in this way because they have a mental illness such as depression? In the case of Osamu Dazai, we do not know whether he had suffered from any mental disease or not. He may have or may not. He had suffered from existential emotions when he was rather young. At that time, it seemed that he did not have this kind of problem. Furthermore, existential emotions seem to be a rather wide-spreading phenomenon, and it is not easy to classify every case of existential emotions as a mental disease.

For instance, ‘among today’s American high school students, 60% say they have considered killing themselves, and 14 % have thought about it seriously in the last year (Humphrey, 2018, pp. 3–4. Humphrey cites the data from Garland, Ann F ; Zigler, 1993).’ Suicide aims at terminating one’s existence. And when people think about committing suicide, they should have some kind of existential emotions toward their existence. Existential emotions should play a role in provoking suicidal thoughts. If this is the case, then existential emotions are a rather universal phenomenon. Simply appealing to mental diseases cannot explain the universal phenomenon of existential emotions among American high-school students. It seems not plausible to assume that all or most of those American high-school students have suffered from mental diseases. It is doubtful whether

most people obsessed with existential emotions can be bracketed as under the influence of mental diseases. In addition, even if existential emotions are caused by mental diseases such as depression, it is hard to clarify the causal relationship between existential emotions and mental diseases. Mental diseases, such as depression, may be the result of existential emotions, and vice versa. To conclude which one appears first is difficult. Therefore, many explanatory gaps still need to be filled when one appeals to mental diseases to explain various existential emotions. Claiming that mental diseases are the cause does not automatically solve all the relevant problems.

Finally, mental diseases do not occur from nothing. Even if mental diseases can account for all or most cases of existential emotions, it is still necessary to answer why those mental diseases have occurred in the first place. Proponents of this explanation have to delineate the underlying psychological mechanism(s) and relevant environmental factors which lead to mental diseases as the causes of existential emotions.

For example, even if depression is a good explanation for some existential emotions, we are still wondering why depression has occurred at the beginning. Depression may be the consequence of the interaction of some internal psychological mechanisms and external environmental factors. Then we have to investigate what psychological mechanisms have caused depression and how they have appeared in the process of human evolution. It has

been suggested that some adaptive psychological mechanisms function behind depression:

Many adaptive functions have been suggested for low mood or depression: facilitating disengagement from unreachable responsibility, expressing a need for help, and signaling the act of yielding in a hierarchy conflict. An increased fitness may result from sadness, pessimism and lack of motivation, in the way that they lead to the inhibition of certain behaviors, for example actions in the absence of a practicable plan, dangerous or futile challenges to dominant figures, efforts that would eventually damage the organism. Crying elicits empathy, comforting behaviors in observers and may help strengthen bonds and result in an increase in social support. Feelings of worthlessness and guilt might motivate introspective understanding of how its actions were problematic and may also elicit forgiveness from others involved in the situation (Aubin et al., 2013, pp. 6878–6879).

Depression may have these adaptive functions for human beings. However, these adaptive functions aim at the subject's survival and reproduction as well. All these suggested adaptive functions imply that depression can help one avoid or escape from some detrimental situations to enhance one's welfare as regards survival or reproduction. If so, then why depression as an adaptation has led to existential or other emotions which threaten the survival and reproduction of the subject is left unanswered. Depression as an adaptation is supposed to help one's survival and reproduction, but now it has operated the opposite function by producing existential emotions which facilitate self-destruction. This phenomenon needs to be further explained and investigated, and depression itself does not clarify all the questions of existential emotions.

As a result, the enigma of existential emotions is not expelled by merely appealing to

mental diseases. It seems that existential emotions have defied the adaptive functions of emotions. Before further naturalistic explanations for existential emotions are raised, existential emotions and sufferings caused by them remain evidence against naturalism.

## **5.5 Conclusion**

In this chapter, I have constructed an evidential argument from evil against naturalism. I first argue that evolutionary explanations are necessary for naturalism to explain why certain human behaviours and evils caused by them have appeared in the world. Atheists usually suppose that events and phenomena in the world have a completely natural cause. Human beings are products of evolution, and therefore evolutionary explanations are indispensable for a full delineation of a human trait or behaviour. Furthermore, human psychological mechanisms are developed and selected as adaptations when human ancestors lived and evolved. Psychological mechanisms interact with environmental stimuli and then lead to various responses (human behaviours). When explaining why certain human behaviour has occurred in our society, atheists need to delineate the psychological mechanism working behind it and how it has interacted with external factors. Without this kind of plausible evolutionary explanation, atheists cannot explain why certain human behaviours have occurred.

After establishing the necessity of evolutionary accounts for human behaviours for naturalism, I have argued that some evils made by humans are inconsistent with naturalism. That is, these evils contradict the rationale of evolution and lack plausible evolutionary explanations. Therefore, these evils are inconsistent with naturalism. Each case of these

evils hence is evidence against naturalism. Since there are many cases of these evils in the world, they will collectively constitute a great challenge to naturalism. They will make naturalism implausible.

However, the evidential argument from evil against naturalism itself will not make theism more plausible than naturalism. It cannot show that theism has stronger explanatory power over the evil in the world. In fact, although naturalism cannot explain evils mentioned in this chapter, the amount of evil it can explain is still more. To make theism more plausible than naturalism with respect to evil, theists have to raise theistic explanations for evil. In the next chapter, I will raise a theodicy for both moral and natural evil. If the theodicy has succeeded, theism will own higher explanatory power than naturalism concerning evil. That is because the theodicy could explain evils discussed here and other evils.

Hence, the evidential argument from evil against naturalism and the theodicy developed in the next chapter can reverse the evidential problem of evil to disprove naturalism (and atheism which includes naturalism as its doctrine).

## **Chapter 6 The Divine Justice Theodicy**

In this chapter, I will develop a new theodicy to deal with the problem of evil. In chapter 2, I have argued that it is legitimate and plausible for me to build my responses to the evidential problem of evil on expanded rather than restricted theism. As a result, I will construct a theodicy on the assumption of a certain version of expanded theism—Christian theism. Some of this theodicy’s premises are borrowed or derived from certain Christian traditions. My aim in this chapter is to establish an overall account for evil, and thus enhance the explanatory power of theism over evil. As I have shown in chapter 6, some kinds of evil cannot be explained by naturalism; its explanatory power over evil is reduced to a certain degree. If the theodicy developed here can offer justifying reason for God to allow moral and natural evil, theism’s explanatory power will be stronger than that of naturalism.

Theodicy usually has a core value upon which it constructs its explanation of evil and suffering. For example, the free will theodicy has free will as its core value, and the soul-making theodicy has as its core value the maturation and perfection of the soul. The two theodicies both claim that God allows evil and suffering to occur in the world to implement and realize the core value they propose. The theodicy in this chapter also has a core value upon which this theodicy is developed. This core value is God’s attribute of

justice. I therefore dub this theodicy the divine justice theodicy.

Although the name of this theodicy and core value is divine justice, God's other attributes, such as love and mercy, are also taken into consideration. According to the doctrine of simplicity, the nature of God is one. God's justice should be understood in the qualification of his other attributes. Hence, this theodicy, in fact, is based on God's robust attributes with a salient focus on divine justice.

The divine justice theodicy proposes that because of God's justice, he cannot directly and immediately render the world eternally immune from evil. This theodicy will, in turn, answer why God has permitted the following three kinds of evil: the first is the inception of evil (the fall of humanity) in the world; the second is moral evil after the fall of humanity; the last is natural evil after the fall.

I will first discuss what God's justice is and how God's justice is shaped by his other attributes. Then I will develop the divine justice theodicy to explain the three kinds of evil mentioned above.

## **6.1 Divine Justice**

God's justice is a well-known attribute which will come upon theistic laypeople's minds when they think of the punishment of the wicked. Out of his justice, God will not ignore the sin of human beings. There is a strong sense of retribution in this correlation, as if God's justice is simply composed of retribution. Such a concept of retribution is not only found in Abrahamic religions but also in Buddhism, Hinduism, and some other religions. For example, the doctrine of karma in Buddhism proposes that some laws will ensure that bad or good deeds (and even thoughts) will be justly rewarded. The just desert may not necessarily be rewarded in this life. Sometimes, or often, it comes in the next life.

However, compared with Christian theism, explaining evil in terms of retribution is far easier for Buddhism and religions which hold the doctrines of karma and transmigration. They can appeal to evil deeds (thoughts included) in one's previous lives to explain current suffering and evil as retribution for their previous deeds. Even animal suffering can be explained by karma. Besides, because those religions do not assume an omnipotent and omnibenevolent God, evils and sufferings, no matter how severe they are, do not explicitly (or even arguably, implicitly) conflict with their core doctrines.

In contrast, Christian theism does not have the concept of previous lives and transmigration, so the suffering and evil that one experiences in this life cannot be explained as the 'just deserts' for evil done in past lives. Moreover, Christian theism does

not assume any previous lives existing before this life (transmigration). If evils and sufferings are ‘just deserts’ for one’s past immoral deeds, those deeds must have been done in this life. It is impossible that those deeds were performed in the previous incarnated lives. However, many victims of horrendous evil are young children, even newborns or unborn babies. They must have committed fewer and less serious sins than adults, but their pain and suffering are disproportionately great. Many adults have committed more serious sins, but they do not experience such terrible evil and suffering at all.

Consequently, it seems that for Christian theism, appealing to retribution to explain evil and suffering in one’s current life can gain only rather limited (if not zero) success. Retribution understood in the above sense seems to explain only rather few cases of suffering for Christian theism.

Proponents of the doctrine of retribution might respond that the retribution for these young children has come earlier, while the retribution for adults who commit more sins will come later or in the next life. But such an argument has the following problem. First, it does not explain why the retribution has come earlier for those young children. Second, the suffering of those children was so great and cruel that it is doubtful whether it is retribution or not. The suffering of those children is disproportionately cruel and seems to contravene God’s nature of love.

As a result, it seems difficult (if not impossible) to construct a theodicy merely based on retribution. However, God's justice does not only consist of retribution for negative desert; God's justice is more robust. Christian theists can develop a theodicy from different perspectives of divine justice. Moreover, the application of retribution to theodicy needs not to be limited to the retribution of past misbehaviour and sin. It is possible to construct a theodicy on divine justice from a different perspective. I will first briefly explore what God's justice might mean and then discuss how to apply the relevant concepts to build a new theodicy.

In the Lutheran Orthodox tradition, three kinds of divine justice are mentioned. They are, namely, dispositive justice, remunerative justice, and retributive justice (Kronen and Reitan, 2004, p. 252). God's dispositive justice can be understood as the following:

God's dispositive justice refers to the perfect righteousness with which God rules over the universe. This justice really embraces all God's relative moral attributes (those He possesses in relation to His creatures rather than in Himself apart from those relations), including mercy, patience, and veracity. The moral law, which God Himself imprints on the hearts of men, is an image of this very justice with which God governs the universe.

From God's dispositive justice, we can find that God's justice is mediated and shaped by his other attributes, such as 'mercy, patience, and veracity.' God's justice must function in a way that honours and reflects his own moral attributes. According to God's dispositive justice, God's justice is not an arbitrarily, callously, and ruthlessly mechanical function like

a set program or machine. God's dispositive justice ensures that the execution of his justice will not breach his moral attributes and will instead manifest them. This characteristic ensures that God's retributive and remunerative justice will work coherently with his other attributes. God's justice, thus, will not render God a heartless tyrant.

The other two kinds of divine justice, remunerative and retributive justice, are about distributing proper deserts to human deeds. Remunerative justice is about God's rewards for positive moral actions; retributive justice is about God's just punishment for negative moral actions (Kronen and Reitan, 2004, p. 252).<sup>20</sup>

Biblically speaking, Scripture is full of expressions implying that God will reward the righteous and punish the wicked. For example, Exodus 34:6-7 says:

The LORD, the LORD, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin. Yet he does not leave the guilty unpunished; he punishes the children and their children for the sin of the parents to the third and fourth generation.

Psalm 1:3-4 also says: 'That [righteous] person is like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither— whatever they do prospers. Not so the wicked! They are like chaff that the wind blows away.' In addition, Revelation 20-23 describes how the just judgment of God will come in the style of apocalyptic literature. The righteous will be saved and eternally enjoy the city of heaven,

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<sup>20</sup> Moral actions include thoughts here.

while the wicked will suffer the punishment they deserve, being thrown into the lake of fire (hell) forever.

God's remunerative and retributive justice is emphasized and manifested throughout the Bible. When constructing a theodicy based on divine justice, we should not only emphasize retributive justice. Rather, remunerative justice should also be taken into consideration.

Furthermore, God's remunerative and retributive justice has both negative and positive aspects. Both aspects of God's retributive and remunerative justice are helpful and necessary in the construction of the divine justice theodicy. Let us first examine the two aspects of divine retributive justice:

While as so-called *negative retributivism* holds that the innocent should not be punished because they do not deserve it, the essence of retributive justice lies in so-called *positive retributivism*, which holds that the guilty should be punished because they deserve it (Craig, 2018, p. 237, emphasis original).

God's retributive justice contains both negative and positive aspects. On the one hand, he does not arbitrarily subject people to the punishment they do not deserve; on the other hand, he does not ignore the evil done by people as if nothing has happened. If God's retributive justice had lacked one of the two aspects, God's justice would be compromised.

Next, let us move to God's remunerative justice. It can also be distinguished into negative and positive aspects: negative remunerative justice holds that when people do not

have corresponding positive actions, no reward should be given to them, whereas positive remunerative justice means that when people have positive moral contributions, they must be rewarded.

Compared to negative retributive justice, negative remunerative justice's application is much more limited. God will never violate his negative retributive justice to punish an innocent. In contrast, he will not completely refrain from giving good (assuming that reward includes all kinds of gifts and grace) to people who do not have corresponding merits. In many cases, God still grants good things to people who have no merits. For if no good is admissible without corresponding merits, then there would be no grace in the world. Grace occupies an important place in Christian theism. Many good things in this world are out of the grace of God. Rain, sunshine, and life itself come from God's grace. Wisdom, morality, intellect, and other abilities are all also gifts from God. God has given these good things to human beings freely before they have enough credit for them. Without grace, human beings would not have existed in the first place because God was not obligated to create man.<sup>21</sup> Most importantly, human knowledge of God and their loving relationship with God are also purely the result of God's gracious offer. Many good things

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<sup>21</sup> Michael Horton (2009, p. 100) indicates that we must not confuse grace with God's acts and giving out of his goodness. He argues that grace must be understood in the context of the sinful fall of human beings, and that grace is something that sinful humans do not deserve; by contrast, God's acts and giving out of his goodness do not involve sin. Thus, according to Horton, grace comes only after the fall, and the latter can only be applied to the pre-fall (and heavenly) situation. But whether the definition of grace should include the good things that God had given out of his goodness before the fall or not, it does not affect the discussion here. For if negative remunerative justice must be strictly observed, then human beings should not have anything from God in the first place, whether it is out of God's grace or goodness.

in our world are out of God's free grace and giving. If God's negative remunerative justice had been held in every case, human beings would receive no good things from God before they have accumulated enough merits. Then human beings would not have ever existed or would have been in a rather miserable situation.

However, although the application of negative remunerative justice is quite limited, it cannot be completely abandoned and must be observed to some extent. The complete absence of negative remunerative justice will give rise to problems regarding God's justice. For example, some people may be angry about the prosperity of the wicked because they believe that the wicked do not deserve those good things. In some situations, people expect negative remunerative justice to be followed so that the wicked will not receive certain blessings or good things they are not qualified for.

In the worst-case scenario, the absence of negative remunerative justice may even undermine God's positive remunerative justice. In our daily life, if those who do not have any merit are always better rewarded than those who have merits, then those who have merits will feel that such a distribution of reward is unjust. They will think that their merits deserve better and more, and hence the current arrangement of reward is not just. The same conclusion applies to God's remunerative justice. If negative remunerative is completely abrogated, people with merits may receive worse rewards than those without any.

Therefore, the reward does not match each person's merits. People with fewer merits may get better rewards than those who have more merits. In this kind of situation, it seems that the distribution of reward is not just. Without God's negative remunerative justice, God's justice will be, at best, deficient and arbitrary or, at worst, unjust.

Therefore, God's justice should include the dimension of negative remunerative justice, but the application of this principle will be more limited. It only requires God to refrain from giving goodness or grace to a subject without corresponding merits in some but not all cases.

Finally, God's justice should also include the positive aspect of remunerative justice. Intuitively, God's justice must include positive remunerative justice. It is good, just, and virtuous to reward people according to their merits. It seems that following positive remunerative justice not only brings good consequences but is good in itself. The scripture suggests that God will reward those with merits, as 1 Corinthians 9:24-25 says:

Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one gets the prize? Run in such a way as to get the prize. Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training. They do it to get a crown that will not last, but we do it to get a crown that will last forever.

This passage indicates that Christians labour in the world for the purpose of obtaining a better reward in heaven. The same concept also appears elsewhere. For instance, 'For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them

all (2 Corinthians 4:17)', and 'Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus (Philippians 3:13b-14).' These passages suggest that God will reward people in heaven for their efforts and labour for God's kingdom. The concept that the righteous will be blessed and also rewarded repeatedly occurs in the Old Testament. God blesses those who fear and venerate God (Ezekiel 18:2-28).

Furthermore, the application of positive remunerative justice should be mediated by God's goodness, wisdom, omnipotence and other attributes as well. God cannot simply reward every person's every good work immediately. It may lead to some unwanted consequences.

For example, if every good deed is immediately rewarded, then it seems that people will not be able to cultivate virtues because they will do good things only for the sake of benefits. To avoid this consequence, God will decide when is best to reward; on the other hand, God's positive remunerative justice is still necessary and cannot be abrogated. If positive remunerative justice is completely absent, then good deeds will not be rewarded. This consequence will call God's goodness and justice into question and discourage people from doing good. A just God should ensure that one's reward will match one's merits, i.e., that those who are meritorious will ultimately receive the corresponding reward. Therefore,

positive remunerative justice should also be included in God's justice.

The above is a brief introduction to God's attribute of justice. In the following, I will construct the divine justice theodicy to explain why God has allowed evil in the world. The divine justice theodicy aims to explain the following three kinds of evil. The first kind of evil is the inception of evil, the fall of Adam, in the world; the second and third kinds of evil are moral and natural evil after the fall of Adam.

I divide the evil of the world into the above three kinds according to Christian narratives of human development. Before the fall of Adam, there was no evil in the world. Adam's disobedience against God's order about the tree of knowledge of good and evil had introduced sin and evil into the world. Human beings are corrupted by sin and are not able to refrain themselves from sinning thereafter. The natural world is influenced by the fall of humanity as well. Natural laws and order are changed, and natural disasters and evils have been rampant since then.

As a result, the fall of Adam has caused a serial reaction in the world. Moral and natural evils have occurred because of Adam's sin. To explain why God has permitted evil in the world, we have to first investigate why God had allowed evil to enter the world at the beginning. This first evil has set the world's current conditions with regard to evil and suffering. Clarifying God's justifying reason for it will be helpful in explaining moral and

natural evil after the fall.

After delineating why God had allowed the first evil, I then discuss why God has permitted moral and natural evil after the fall of humanity. In addition, I have developed the divine justice theodicy largely from, but not limited to, the resources of the reformed theology tradition. The theological assumptions adopted here are mostly from this tradition.

## **6.2 The First Evil: the Paradise, the Covenant of Works, and Adam's Fall**

In this section, I will explain why God permitted the first evil to occur in the world. The occurrence of the first evil has occupied an important position related to the problem of evil because, according to Christian theism, before the first evil (the fall of Adam), the world was created in its original good. Neither moral nor natural evil existed before it. All the evil and bad things come after the fall. If God had not allowed the first evil, no suffering and evil would exist now. Explaining why God had permitted the fall is critical for a full explanation of the problem of evil from the perspective of Christian theism.

Briefly speaking, the first sin occurred because of Adam's disobedience to God. God wanted to give human beings the greatest blessings, but for some reason (I will explain later), he cannot directly grant them all those blessings. To attain this goal, God had to arrange a test (the covenant of works) for Adam, the federal head of human beings. Once he had passed the test, he and his offspring could enjoy the reward of this test, the greatest blessings from God. However, the nature of the test inevitably includes the risk of Adam's disobedience since Adam had to freely choose to obey God's command or not. Though Adam had the ability to fulfil the requirement of the covenant of works to earn the reward, he chose not to. Thus, his disobedience constitutes the first sin. Now I will further detail why God permitted the first evil in the world.

According to the narrative of Genesis, God, out of his goodness and love, had created

the first human Adam and then placed him in the Garden of Eden. Eden was a beautiful place, with many plants that were pleasing to the eye and animals that obeyed humans. Earth produced food that nourishes animals and humans. Death and evil had not yet invaded this paradise, and everything in Eden was in its original perfection of creation. But Eden is not heaven. It has not yet reached its ultimate perfection and could be further elevated to an eternal heavenly state.

Moreover, the condition of Eden was not universal. Eden only occupied a small part of the world (Kuyper, 2016, p. 130-31). It is likely that places outside of Eden were not in such a good condition though no evil and suffering existed then. The world beyond Eden might need to be developed and polished further by human beings. Human beings might slowly expand the realm of Eden so that the rest of the world would be annexed to Eden. Maybe human beings do not need to gradually expand the territory of Eden. It is possible that after human beings had fulfilled the requirement of the covenant of works, God would renew the rest of the world. Either way, the rest of the world would be incorporated into Eden and then be further perfected to the heavenly blissful state.

In short, when the ancestors of humanity had just come into existence at the beginning, there was no evil or suffering in the place where they lived, and they had not yet experienced death (Kuyper, 2016, p. 132). However, humankind could not stay in Eden

forever. It was only an intermediate and temporary residency: '[L]ife in paradise was not the highest good, but that Adam's striving and desire had to consist of wanting to leave the provisional paradisaal condition and to reach for eternal life and perfect bliss, in the glory of God (Kuyper, 2016, p. 154).' God desired to bring human beings to a better home, and Adam, as the federal head of human beings, needed to pass a test to attain this goal. The test consisted in satisfying the requirement of the covenant of works. And the requirement is relevant to two special trees in the Garden of Eden: the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Although Adam had not yet experienced death before the fall, he could still die and needed to eat the fruit of the tree of life to enter into the state of immortality (see Gen. 3:22) and get the other highest blessings only available in heaven.<sup>22</sup>

But what conditions must be met for Adam to be eligible to eat from the tree of life and then gain eternal life and the other highest blessings (henceforth, I will only mention 'eternal life' and neglect 'the other highest blessings')? According to the tradition of covenant theology, the narrative of the first few chapters of Genesis implicitly contains elements of a covenant. This tradition asserts that God made the so-called covenant of works with Adam after he had created Adam in Eden. The covenant of works includes

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<sup>22</sup> It is possible that the fruit of the tree of life is only a symbol through which God gives eternal life to those who eat it, rather than that the fruit itself has the power of granting eternal life. Whether the fruit of the tree of life is only a symbol or own the power of conferring eternal life does not affect the discussion here. In either case, human ancestor Adam needed to pass a test to earn the fruit of the tree of life, and God would reward him (and his offspring) with eternal life accordingly. For the discussion of whether the fruit of the tree of life is merely a symbol, please see, for example, Kuyper, 2016, chap. 16,17.

conditions which Adam had to satisfy for eternal blessings and life. Besides, Adam is the federal head of all human beings, and hence his decision would influence his offspring, that is, every person (Nehemiah Coxe, 2005, pp. 47–48).

Before establishing the covenant of works with him, Adam was created in the state of original good and righteousness. God's law was naturally inscribed in his heart, so Adam understood God's decree and moral law. However, although Adam was in the state of original righteousness, he was not incapable of sinning. At this point, Adam was in a state in which he could choose to sin or not. He could choose to obey or disobey God. In contrast, saints in heaven are not able to sin, and they will always choose to obey God's law and will. There is no possibility of their will turning away from God; in contrast, fallen humans do not have the freedom not to sin. Their will cannot refrain from sinning. It is unavoidable that they will sin by violating God's decree and moral law. The covenant of works was established on the basis that God had created Adam in the state of original good and righteousness so that he was capable of choosing to obey the conditions of this covenant or not. God had equipped Adam with the ability required to fulfil the covenant stipulations (Perkins, 2020, pp. 48–50). It was up to Adam to choose the road of life or death.

The covenant of works asked Adam to keep all of God's commands and laws,

including the order that he must refrain from eating the tree of the knowledge of good and evil's fruits. God said to Adam: 'you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat from it you will certainly die (Gen 3:17).' If Adam had successfully obeyed God, he would be rewarded with eternal bliss, and would be transformed from the original perfection of creation to the ultimate perfection of heaven. He would be incapable of sinning against God and would enjoy God's blessings forever in eternal life, including the beatific view of God. In such a state, Adam, together with his offspring (all human beings), would enjoy the best, deepest, and most harmonious relationship with God, each other, and the world.

The covenant of works demonstrates God's love and justice. Before the establishment of this covenant, Adam did not have sufficient merits for eternal life, and God did not have any obligation to grant Adam eternal life. And it seems that it is not just to give Adam the best reward, eternal life, when Adam, in fact, did not show that he deserved it. Meanwhile, God loved Adam and human beings, so he desired to offer them eternal life and the accompanying greatest blessings. To satisfy his justice and love toward Adam (and human beings), God took the initiative to condescend himself to the covenant of works. With this covenant, Adam now had an opportunity to earn enough merit for eternal life. By limiting himself to this covenant, God was obligated to grant Adam and human beings eternal life

once Adam had satisfied this covenant's requirement (Perkins, 2020, pp. 105–09).

Moreover, the requirement of the covenant of works was not unreasonable for Adam since he knew God's law and had the ability to fulfil it. If he could keep God's command for a certain period, he would receive a disproportionately great reward according to the covenant of works. The whole arrangement of this covenant both maintains God's justice and manifests his love for human beings.

However, Adam failed the test. He had violated the condition of the covenant of works by eating from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. After the violation, sin entered the world. When Adam, in his original perfection, disobeyed God and rebelled against him, his human nature was corrupted by sin. His free will was polluted by sin, and his free will was unable to refrain from sinning. He was necessarily disposed to sin and committed moral evil.

In addition, all human beings have fallen in Adam. Human beings are corrupted by sin, and each person is incapable of getting rid of moral evil. Everyone will inevitably commit some kind of moral evil.

There are different theological theories as to how Adam's sin affects his descendants and what its effects are. The doctrine of original sin proposes that all human beings are corrupted by sin because of Adam's fall. But there is no agreement on how original sin is

transmitted to Adam's offspring and the effect of original sin. First, concerning how original sin has passed to Adam's offspring, some theories propose that the effects of sin are passed down from generation to generation through natural reproduction and inheritance.<sup>23</sup> Like DNA, sin and its effects pass to the next generation through inheritance. Since Adam is the ancestor of all humanity, each human is corrupted by sin in this way.

In contrast, some theories deny the concept of natural inheritance as a medium of sin. They purport that Adam is the federal head of all human beings. As a country's fate is influenced by its king's decision, Adam's choice would influence every human being.<sup>24</sup> He represented humankind in deciding to obey God or subdue himself to sin. He might fall into the trap of sin or conquer the temptation, and his decision would decide the destiny of the rest human beings. Therefore, with his fall, all human beings are corrupted by sin and their relationship with God is broken as well.

Furthermore, there are various theories about the effects of Adam's sin on his offspring (the effect of original sin). On the one hand, it has been proposed that Adam's sin only corrupts his offspring's free will but does not render them guilty of this sin. All human beings are unavoidably inclined to sin and will be condemned for sins they commit, but they will not be punished for Adam's sin because they do not bear the guilt of it. Therefore,

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<sup>23</sup> This view is popular among the early and medieval church, see Beeke and Smalley, 2020, pp. 366–70.

<sup>24</sup> Reformed orthodoxy is especially famous for its support of this federal view, see Beeke and Smalley, 2020, pp. 377–79. Note that this does not mean that all 'reformed' theologians hold this position.

children who pass away before they have sinned will not be punished since no sin has been committed yet.

On the other hand, it has also been argued that the progeny of Adam is guilty of Adam's sin. One is sinful before any misbehaviour is actually conducted. Therefore, according to this position, a child who has died before committing any sin will still be punished for guilt caused by the original sin. Between the two poles, there are other hybrid theories. For example, it is argued that the offspring of Adam still suffers from original sin, but original sin is not caused or constituted by Adam's primordial sin, but rather, by their own corrupt and fallen status.<sup>25</sup>

Which theory about original sin is correct will not affect the current discussion. The divine justice theodicy is compatible with different theories of the doctrine of original sin as far as all human beings are disposed to sin because of Adam's fall. I will not pursue further details of those theories here accordingly.

In summary, God, because of some reason, could not directly give eternal life to humankind. Instead, out of his love and justice, he had made the covenant of works with Adam so that Adam could earn eternal life for himself and all human beings by fulfilling the requirement of this covenant. However, Adam had failed. He and his offspring have been ensnared by sin since then; the natural world is also influenced by sin. This is the

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<sup>25</sup> For the introduction to theories about the doctrine of original sin, see Thomas H. McCall, 2019, chap. 4.

origin of evil in the world. It has significantly influenced the current state of human beings and the natural world. Because of Adam's disobedience, sin has entered and corrupted the world.

However, why did God have to set the covenant of works to test Adam? Couldn't God directly give humanity all those blessings at first without taking the risk of Adam's breach of the covenant of works? Why is merit required for human beings to gain eternal life? Why does God not directly give eternal life to human beings? The reasons are as follows.

First, the scripture implies that human beings need merits to obtain eternal life. This is a given premise of Christian theism. At least some traditions, such as the reformed tradition, have interpreted the scripture in this way. I construct my argument on the assumption of Christian theism. What I aim to achieve is that if Christian theism is true, the evidential problem of evil will be answerable within this Christian scheme. Therefore, it is legitimate for me to simply exploit some premises and doctrines from Christian theism without further arguing for their being true and plausible. Alvin Plantinga, in his *Felix Culpa* argument, also takes the same approach. He presupposes a certain interpretation of Christian theism is true and then develops his theodicy on this basis.<sup>26</sup>

In the scripture, there are only two ways for humankind to attain eternal life: one can keep God's law perfectly and then get it with merits earned by works; second, one can

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<sup>26</sup> For the detail of O Felix Culpa argument, please see Plantinga, 2004.

believe in and accept the salvation of Jesus Christ and receive eternal life through Jesus Christ. It is obvious that the former approach requires merits, but the latter approach also presupposes merits. The second approach still requires merits earned by righteous works. The difference between the first and second approaches lies in that in the second approach, it is Jesus Christ who has completely kept God's law and earned enough merits for eternal life, rather than human beings themselves. Christ is the second federal head of human beings. Human beings can receive salvation and eternal life in the mysterious union with Christ. Thus, eternal life must be earned by merits, either by human beings themselves or by Jesus Christ.

As a result, it is not just for God to simply grant Adam and human beings eternal life without requiring any corresponding merit. God had to set up the covenant of works to maintain both his love and justice.

In addition to appealing to the divine revelation, philosophically speaking, if God had given eternal life to humankind at the beginning, his remunerative justice would have been violated. He would have rewarded people who have no corresponding merits for the highest blessings. Since even the best reward could be assigned without due merits, everything else could be freely given to human beings. God could reward people without any merits as long as he likes. In this way, his negative retributive justice would be

completely abrogated. As aforementioned, the abrogation of negative remunerative justice will render God unjust, making God arbitrarily reward at best and reward evil people with good deserts at worst. Besides, as mentioned above, the abrogation of God's negative remunerative justice will undermine God's positive remunerative justice.

Finally, eternal life is not only the highest good but also the highest glory that human beings can receive. In eternal life, people can experience God's presence and communicate with God to the highest degree. Being able to have such a close relationship with God is the greatest honour and glory for human beings. God desires to give human beings such highest glory (including the beatific view), but such glory must be earned by human beings themselves rather than freely given by God. Otherwise, it would not be true glory. True glory must be earned rather than given. Suppose that in Olympics, the championship is decided by voting rather than competition. Even if everyone, including the athletes involved, has agreed on whom should receive the honour of the championship, the glory of such a championship (if any) would be far less than that gained by winning the competition. If God were to give eternal life directly to humankind, then humankind would lose this supreme glory which must be won by total obedience. Human beings' glory in the eternity would be incomplete as a result.

Damage caused by the eclipse of human glory in heaven is not limited to human

beings. God's glory would also be fallen short because his creation does not reach its status of highest glory and perfection which God has intended and ordained. In such a case, God's plan for his creation has failed and his will is frustrated as a result. This consequence does not only compromise God's omniscience and omnipotence, but also casts a shadow over his glory forever. In addition, this frustration with God's plan and shortage of his glory cannot be restored because human beings have already received the highest reward God can give. It is impossible for human beings to win this highest glory again by obedience (merit). Then ironically, human beings will always lack this highest glory because God has freely given it to them. Therefore, if God had given eternal life to humanity at the beginning, not only would it have prevented human beings from gaining this highest glory, but it would also have tarnished God's glory forever. To avoid such a consequence, God cannot simply give human beings eternal life without corresponding merit. He must let Adam represent humanity to fulfil the covenant of works to earn eternal life.

For the above reasons, God had to establish the covenant of works with Adam instead of simply granting eternal life to Adam without any merit. After the establishment of the covenant of works, Adam was free to obey or breach the stipulation. When fulfilling it, he and his progeny could have enjoyed eternal life and all the other blessings that come with it.

However, Adam had failed, and sin has entered into the world ever afterwards. This is how the first evil occurred and God is justified in allowing it.

The first evil has set the tone for the current situation of human beings and the world. All human beings are corrupted by sin and have been disposed to sin since then; the natural world is not immune from the corruption of sin as well. Nature has changed to such a degree that natural disasters and death are common phenomena. Now I will proceed to explain why God allow moral and natural evil after the first evil, the disobedience and fall of Adam.

### **6.3 Moral Evil after the Fall**

Adam did not pass the test, and so every human being (Adam's descendants) has fallen into sin. Sin has corrupted human nature. Everyone is disposed to sin. Human beings have committed gross evils due to their corrupted nature.

In addition, human beings commit not only horrendous evil, but also many relatively minor evils. We all commit moral evil to a certain degree. It is true that most of us do not intentionally do great harm to other people. Most of us do not steal, rob, kill or practice something shocking. However, we may tell lies that we think no great damage would really follow, gossip behind people or damage the environment through unintentional behaviours. No matter how holy a person is, she must admit that moral evil is never completely removed from life. It is morally wrong to do what we should not do, and everyone, without exception, commits moral evil all the time.

Furthermore, if failing to do what we should do is a moral defect, then no one is exempted from this kind of moral evil. Many people in the world need help, and many of us have additional resources to help them. Many live in extreme poverty, with a few dollars or even less than a dollar a day at their disposal. A little money from us will be enough for them to live on for several days. Many of us always have some spare money at our disposal, but most of the time, instead of using it to help those in desperate need, we spend it on things that are not necessary. Perhaps many of the poor are so far away that it is not

morally necessary for us to help them, but what about the poor in our locality? We must admit that we have not done enough to do good and help others. This is a kind of moral evil as well, but God does not always prevent it.

In addition to behaviour, many evil thoughts have often surged in our minds. For example, according to the Tenth Commandment, jealousy and covetousness for other people's achievements and stuff are moral evil and are repulsive to God. This is also a kind of moral evil often committed by everyone.

Thus, moral evil is a universal phenomenon that occurs in each person after the fall of Adam. Both our inner thoughts and external behaviours constitute moral evil.

Nevertheless, why does God permit them? Even though humans have fallen and everyone has the propensity to sin that no one is able to refrain from moral evil, God seems to have the power to prevent most (if not all) moral evil by miraculous interference or implicit providence. I will offer some positive and negative reasons to explain why God allows moral evil after the fall. These reasons are about how a person's eternal destiny is decided. Therefore, I will first explain how God decides one's punishment and reward in the afterlife and then elucidate these reasons.

The life and history of humanity continue after the fall of Adam. God did not immediately manifest his justice and wrath on sin to exterminate the sinful human race. On

the contrary, he loves humanity, and has operated his grace to maintain and save the human race from self-destruction by sin. On the one hand, he has restrained the effects of sin by what is called common grace, so that humankind would not die immediately, nor be completely corrupted by sin. Without the operation of common grace, human beings would be entirely swallowed by sin and would become devoid of any good. Common grace has suppressed the effects of sin, so that as to morality, though human beings would certainly commit moral evil, they would also perform some good deeds at the same time. Human societies and cultures have kept developing under the operation of common grace; on the other hand, common grace cannot remove sin, but can only restrain it.<sup>27</sup> Human beings need redemption to be completely released from sin and its effects.

Nevertheless, God cannot directly give salvation to all men. As mentioned above, eternal life has to be earned by merit. Before the fall, God made it possible for human beings to obtain eternal life by satisfying stipulations of the covenant of works; after the fall, human beings have lost their capacity to fulfil the covenant of works because of sin (Perkins, 2020, p. 132). God has to grant eternal life to people through another covenant, the covenant of grace, but this covenant does not abolish the requirement of merits. Rather, it supposes and confirms this requirement.

The covenant of grace, simply put, is that Jesus Christ, as the federal head, has

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<sup>27</sup> For the function of common grace, see Kuyper, 2016, Mouw, 2001.

fulfilled the requirement of the covenant of works, and hence obtained merits worthy of eternal life. Jesus Christ has achieved two things in the covenant of grace to reconcile God and humanity:

Two things are required for this reconciliation. First, that Christ satisfies the covenant of works for the sake of the rest. Second, that he then communicates this satisfaction with the elect. The satisfaction of the law requires, first, the payment of the price that was owed because the human race violated the covenant that Christ paid through that ministry of humiliation, wherein he who was equal with God made himself of no estimation and became obedient even unto death, enduring the curse owed because of the transgression of the law equally in body and soul. Second, the satisfaction of the law requires the rendering of new righteousness that must be acquired for us, both original righteousness in that it is received from the Holy Spirit in all purity and sanctity of nature, and also actual righteousness in that perfect obedience to every precept of God's law is rendered through the entire course of his life (James Ussher, cited in Perkins, 2020, p. 199).

Accordingly, Jesus Christ, the incarnate God, had obeyed the decree and law of God perfectly in his life and was finally crucified. He has accomplished salvation on the cross by bearing the sins of all who believe in him on himself, and he was punished for those sins. The sin of the believers is retributed to Christ, and the believers' debt of sins is cleaned. Furthermore, bearing the debt of sins of the believers and then suffering for sin's punishment is not the full picture of salvation. If Christ had only accomplished this, human beings would simply be exonerated from sin. They still lack the required merit for eternal life. Christ has accomplished more on the cross. On his crucifixion, the righteousness he

earned by perfectly obeying God's decree and law is imputed on those who believe in him through the union of the believers and him. In this way, the believers are righteous and qualified for the greatest reward: eternal life. The covenant of grace hence has brought salvation to human beings by satisfying the mechanism of the covenant of works. All of Adam's descendants (except Jesus Christ) are tainted by sin, so human beings can only be saved through the salvation accomplished by Jesus Christ. People have to believe in Christ to be saved to heaven. People who do not accept God's salvation will be punished for their sins in hell.

Moreover, though everyone who believes in Christ will be saved, their rewards may be different in heaven. Some may have more glorious rewards than others. But the difference in rewards will not become a stumbling stone for each person to love God and each other in heaven. The reason that everyone's reward will be different in heaven is that each person's involvement in goodness and contribution to God's kingdom is different. God has to reward differently according to his justice.<sup>28</sup>

In addition to the difference in reward in heaven, there is likewise a difference in the degree of punishment in hell. For exponents of the traditional view of hell, the just God will punish the damned according to their misdeeds. The punishment in hell is in

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<sup>28</sup> For a further detail about Christian fathers, theologians and traditions adopting this view, see ROSSI, 2020.

proportion to one's sin though each of the damned will remain in hell forever. For people who consider hell as the natural result of one's refusing God's salvation, the degree of suffering in hell could be caused by sin's influence. The deeper one has entraped in sin, the stronger the effect of sin is on this person. Therefore, a person committing sins of more moral disvalue will suffer more from sin in hell.<sup>29</sup>

In summary, everyone cannot earn the reward of eternal life through her own works because no one is capable of completely obeying God's decree and law after the fall. Everyone has to choose to accept God's salvation or not. Those who accept God's salvation will be saved to heaven because their sins are remitted and Christ's righteousness is imputed on them; those who do not accept will be punished according to their sins and suffer in hell. Furthermore, the degree of reward in heaven and punishment in hell will be different according to one's earthly works. People who do more good works will receive more rewards in heaven; people whose sin is more serious will receive more severe punishment in hell.

Therefore, as each person lives on earth, they must choose to accept or reject God's salvation, and also must decide to do good or evil. Those choices will decide each person's eternal destiny. The above is a brief introduction to the mechanism by which God decides

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<sup>29</sup> The belief that each of the damned will suffer differently in hell is not unusual among Christians. See, for example, Martin and Zaspel, <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/essay/degrees-punishment-hell/>, accessed date August 11, 2022.

one's eternal fate. Now I will further explain why God allows moral evil.

The first reason for God to allow moral evil after the fall is a positive one. In order to justly assign each one's punishment and reward in the afterlife, God has to allow people to freely choose to perform good and evil in this life.

All life experiences, including suffering and evil, are related to one's choice of salvation. Various events in life give one opportunities to think about the meaning, values, and ultimate purpose of life. Experiences of different events stimulate people to think and push them to make a decision of accepting or rejecting God's salvation. People will gradually form their decision about God's salvation among those events. Each decision of accepting or rejecting God's salvation is a long-term consideration accumulated in various events. To help people make their decision, God has to allow people to experience various events.<sup>30</sup>

And the experiences of evil and suffering are particularly powerful in pushing people to think about the meaning and end of life. In the face of evil and suffering, people would think more thoroughly about the meaning of life and their ultimate destiny. On the one hand, moral evil may make one more certain about one's need for God's salvation. Victims

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<sup>30</sup> I am not assuming here that the decision to accept or reject salvation is entirely dependent upon human beings, or otherwise I would be committing the error of Pelagianism or semi-Pelagianism. The grace of God and the work of the holy spirit are not excluded here. The holy spirit will make use of human experience to produce influence on one's salvation. Therefore, the current discussion does not presuppose that human beings can actively seek or begin salvation. The question of how the work of the holy spirit relates to human free will in salvation is another important and complex issue. There is not enough room to discuss this issue here, so I will not go further into it.

of moral evil may want to seek comfort or compensation from God. Perpetrators may be bothered by their sins and finally return to God. On the other hand, the experience of evil may cause one to turn further away from God. Perpetrators may become more addicted to their sin, or people who suffer may feel that God is not trustworthy or even does not exist. In a nutshell, all events, including evil and suffering, play a role in one's journey of choice of salvation. God does not intervene in order to respond justly to people's choices about their ultimate destiny. Those who choose salvation will have eternal life, whilst those who reject it will go to eternal death (hell) because of their sin.<sup>31</sup>

Furthermore, as mentioned earlier, there is a degree of difference concerning the reward in heaven and the punishment in hell. In addition to influencing someone in her choice of accepting or rejecting God's salvation, moral evil also affects her reward in heaven or punishment in hell. When facing evil or suffering, each person will react differently. People can choose to do good and evil in this evil.

For example, when a moral evil occurs, it is without a doubt that the perpetrator has committed the moral evil. This moral evil will affect the perpetrator's punishment or reward in the afterlife. In addition to the perpetrator, other people also have chances to do

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<sup>31</sup> Children who die young may not have a chance or ability to accept or reject God's salvation. Christian scholars have different opinions on this topic. God may judge them according to their original sin, directly admit them to heaven, or set them in a limbo where they do not suffer. The theodicy developed here is at least compatible with theological accounts according to which those children will not suffer in the afterlife. Therefore, I will not further address the issue of children who die young. The same conclusion can apply to people incapable of freely making a decision due to disease or handicap. For infants or children's salvation, see Warfield, 1891; Sullivan, 2011.

good or evil with regard to this evil. When people know that this moral evil is about to happen, they can choose to ignore or prevent it. After the occurrence of this evil, they still have opportunities to do good and evil. They can show compassion for the victim and step forward to help her, or even go further to take precautions to prevent similar evils in the future; conversely, they can be indifferent to the evil or make the victim more painful in some way.

In addition, not only moral evil in our immediate environment can offer opportunities for us to do good or do evil. It is true that there are many moral evils in the world that are distant from us. We are basically unable to help or hurt those who are distant victims of evil. However, we can still express certain attitudes or thoughts about these tragedies and evils. Those attitudes and thoughts also belong to moral evil or good, rendering deserts in our afterlife. Furthermore, those moral evils may also stimulate us to pay attention to similar moral evils around us, in which we can make some moral choices. Moral evil does not only produce opportunities for moral choice for nearby but also for far-away people.

Therefore, to justly assign each one proper punishment and reward, God has to allow moral evils as opportunities for people to make moral choices. Moral evil can influence its perpetrators, victims, and bystanders' decision as to their eternal destiny. People would contemplate more on the meaning and end of life in the light of moral evil. Moral evil

plays a critical part in pulling people toward or pushing them away from God's salvation. In addition, moral evil also provides opportunities for people to make moral choices by which they will receive just deserts in the afterlife. To justly assign deserts to everyone in the afterlife is the positive reason for God to permit moral evil in the world. If God had prevented all moral evils, he would be unable to justly punish or reward a person in the afterlife. His attribute of justice would be compromised as a result.

However, people may question that it seems that this account has neglected God's attribute of supreme benevolence. God is love, and he also has the power to prevent moral evil in the world. He has both the will and power to stop any moral evil from occurring in the world. But why does he not govern the world in this way? It seems to be cruel to allow moral evil simply for just judgment on human beings in the eschaton. To deal with this question, we have to indicate the negative reasons why God does not prevent moral evil.

As mentioned above, the sphere of moral evil extends to the inner attitudes, desires and thoughts of human beings. Moral evil is not limited to horrendous evil. Ideas and thoughts violating God's moral law are also moral evils. God could not prevent horrendous moral evil out of his love while paying no attention to human beings' immoral desires and thoughts. If God's love is a compulsory reason for God to prevent horrendous moral evil, then it should force God to thwart all the other moral evils as well. God's love would

require him to get rid of all moral evil in this situation. Nonetheless, the influence of sin on human beings (at least with respect to morality) would be completely nullified. Each human being would not be able to commit any moral evil. Then everyone would always observe God's commandments and would be qualified for eternal life. But this result will lead to the following problems.

First, it seems to be theologically impossible that Adam's offspring are not influenced by Adam's sin. Scripture indicates that all human beings have fallen in Adam's sin. At least major Christian traditions interpret the Bible in this way. It seems impossible for God to directly get rid of the effect of sin without Christ's sacrifice.

Second, a God of justice has to deal with Adam's sin instead of pretending that it had never happened. To give every offspring of Adam a free will incapable of sinning without Christ's sacrifice implicates that Adam's sin is neglected. And God's justice would be damaged in this way.

Third, eternal life (the highest reward) is granted to human beings without sufficient merits in this scenario. As aforementioned, eternal life can only be earned by merit. When God created Adam, he gave Adam the freedom to choose to obey his commands or not. Adam was able to earn merits for eternal life out of his free choice. In contrast, in the situation that God forcefully nullifies the effect of sin and prevents all moral evils. Human

beings' free will is unable to act against God's commands. It is certain that human beings can satisfy the requirement of the covenant of works under this condition. They will earn eternal life without a doubt. However, merits earned in this way are not true merits. Eternal life is given to human beings without corresponding merits in this situation. God's justice is compromised consequently.

For the above reasons, God cannot block moral evil in the world simply out of his love. For the sake of human ultimate destiny, he has to allow moral evil in which human beings can choose to do good or evil. And then he can justly assign each one's deserts in the afterlife.

#### **6.4 Natural Evil after the Fall**

After discussing why God allows moral evil after the fall, I will proceed to discuss why he permits natural evil after the fall. Natural evil, like volcanic eruptions, earthquakes, droughts, floods, etc., has caused many sufferings in the world. Not only have humans suffered from it, but many animals also have been hurt and died as a result. Everyday innumerable animals are preyed upon and killed by other animals. Why does God allow so many natural evils to happen?

Before discussing this subject, it is noteworthy that natural evil comes about as a result of the fall of human beings. Humans are created in the image of God, and the natural world is entrusted to and under the domination of humanity. At the beginning of creation, God told Adam to work and take care of the Garden of Eden. God further ordered humans to 'be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground (Gen1: 28).' Human beings are charged with the governance of the natural world.

Furthermore, the relationship between humanity and the natural world is not limited to ruling and stewardship. Human beings and the natural world are related to each other, and human beings' fate will also influence the natural world. As Romans 8:19-21 indicates:

For the creation waits in eager expectation for the children of God to be revealed. For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself

will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the freedom and glory of the children of God.

If human beings had not fallen, the natural world would not have been affected by sin. Had Adam fulfilled the stipulations of the covenant of works, the natural world would have been perfected together with humanity as part of human rewards in the afterlife. However, humanity has fallen. After the fall, human beings have to work hard to get food from the land, and thorns and thistles grow up in the ground. These phenomena mean that the natural world was also affected by sin. Its elements, and even some physical laws, have changed and have produced harmful and negative effects. Natural disasters often occur and cause many casualties. Animals start to hurt each other. The natural world can only be restored and renewed with the redemption of human beings.

It may be criticized that it is unfair to bind the natural world's fate with human beings. But, this point is assumed by the scripture. God has ordained human beings with headship over the world since he created the world. After the creation, he said to humans: 'Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground (Gen 1:28)'. The natural world's prosperity is handed over to human beings. After the fall of human beings, nature is also influenced, and some changes have occurred in nature (Gen 3:17-18). It has co-fallen with human beings. The scripture assumes that the natural

world's fate is bound to human beings.

Furthermore, because of the bond between human beings and the natural world, the natural world is capable of entering into the perfect state as a new heaven and a new earth (Rev 21:1). The natural world cannot make a choice to obey or disobey God. It all depends on human beings' decisions. It is not unfair to bind the natural world's fate with human beings. Because of human beings, the natural world has a chance to be perfected.

Thus, natural evil is the result of the fall of humanity, and natural evil has been inevitable since then. However, even so, the question remains: Why does God not prevent natural evil through his providence and miracles? He can use his almighty power to suppress and even thoroughly get rid of any natural evil in the world, but he chooses not to. The reasons are similar to those reasons for which God allows moral evil after the fall. We can also distinguish those reasons into positive and negative ones.

The first reason is a positive one. As in the case of moral evil after the fall, God permits natural evil after the fall because it can create choices of accepting or rejecting God's salvation, and of doing good or evil. God can justly punish or reward people in the afterlife according to their moral choices in the natural evil. When encountering evil and suffering, people may think more thoroughly about the meaning and end of life, and thus decide whether they need God's salvation or not. In addition to making a contribution to

people's choices about salvation, natural evil offers opportunities for people to do good or evil, which will influence their deserts in heaven or hell. As aforementioned, good and bad deeds in this life affect the degree of the reward in heaven and the punishment in hell. Therefore, God allows natural evil to give human beings opportunities to accept or reject God's salvation, and to choose good or evil. God can justly assign rewards or punishments to each one in the afterlife as a result.

However, some natural evils happen without being perceived by anyone. It seems that natural evils unknown to anyone would bear no influence on human moral choice. Since no one knows those natural evils, no one can react to them with moral good or evil. Those unknown natural evils seem not to be relevant to human beings' reward or punishment in the afterlife. It seems that God does not have any justifying reason for permitting those evils, especially those causing animal suffering. To deal with this challenge, let us move to the negative reasons.

The second reason is a negative one. God does not prevent natural evil according to his benevolence and omnipotence because he cannot do so before human sins are justly dealt with. Natural evil is caused by the effects of sin. To get rid of natural disasters, God has to deal with sin first. That is why he sent his son to incarnate to save the whole world. The incarnation is not only involved with the salvation of human beings, but also the

recovery and renewal of the whole creation:

Accounts of the doctrine of the incarnation that claim that it is of only human significance, or which attempt to use it as a boundary marker between human and non-human creatures not only fail to account for the place of the other creatures before God, but also come to be seen as a strangely blinkered underestimate of the scope and grandeur of God's creative and redemptive purposes. Not merely the being of one species of creature, but the being of every kind of creature is transformed by the event of incarnation. The doctrine of the incarnation does not therefore establish a theological boundary between humans and other animals; instead, it is best understood as God stepping over the boundary between creator and creation and taking on creatureliness. The theological commonality established between human and non-human creatures in relation to the doctrine of creation (...) is therefore confirmed and strengthened by recognizing the commonality of all animal creatures before God under the heading of incarnation (David L. Clough, 2012, p. 103, as cited in Eva van Urk-Coster, 2021, pp. 347–48).

The effect of salvation is not limited to human beings. Salvation is critical for the natural world as well. After human beings are saved from sin, God will renew the natural world and grant it to the saved and regenerated new human beings as a part of the reward. The origin of natural evil is sin. To get rid of natural evil, God has to remove sin from the world first. Sin and its effects will be completely removed from the world after the final judgement. Sinful people will be left in hell, while righteous people will be rewarded with the renewed natural world as the new heaven and new earth.

Before sin is absolutely dealt with, God cannot prevent each natural evil simply out of his benevolence and omnipotence. If God forcibly suppresses natural evil by miracle, then

this is identical to that God directly removing the effect of sin on nature. Removing the effects of sin on the natural world without dealing with sin means that God has neglected human sins. God's justice will be violated in such a situation because he does not address sin justly. Therefore, because of God's retributive justice, he would not directly get rid of the effects of sin on the natural world and prevent all natural evil.

The third reason is also a negative one. God does not stop natural evil simply out of his benevolence and omnipotence because he would deprive human beings of the headship over the world by doing so. As mentioned earlier, human beings own headship over the natural world in a certain sense. The natural world's fate resonates with human beings. The status of the natural world is affected by that of human beings who own the headship over the natural world. Since Adam's fall, nature has been influenced by sin. Natural disasters and evils become normal phenomena of nature. On the other hand, as Romans 8:19-21 indicates, the natural world will be recovered and renewed when human beings are redeemed into the new heaven and new earth.

God is able to exert miracles to suppress all the effects of sin in nature before human beings are redeemed, but then he would abolish the headship of human beings over the natural world. Nature would have been set free from human beings' headship in such a situation because nature would be saved without its king.

However, only the damned deserve to be deprived of this headship. The damned have lost their qualification to enjoy and rule the natural world when they keep rejecting God's salvation and love. This deprivation is retribution for their sins and unrepentance. And it is unjust for God to take away human beings' headship over nature when human beings are still in the process of choosing to accept or reject God's salvation. Not everyone deserves such a punishment of losing this headship. God cannot indiscriminately apply it to everyone lest his negative retributive justice would be breached by punishing people who do not deserve it.

The above are the reasons why God allows natural evil according to his justice. We will now respond to some criticisms and questions.

## **6.5 Criticisms and Replies**

According to the first criticism, if natural disasters are caused by the fall of humanity, and human beings are indeed a product of evolution, then we cannot explain the animal suffering that preceded the emergence of humans. If humans evolved from animals, then many animals must have died in the process of natural selection during this long evolutionary process. Many animals were painfully killed by predators or died because of disadvantages in competing for survival resources. Before the appearance of humanity, countless animals died in pain in the process of natural selection. Then it seems that the fall of human beings cannot completely explain the sufferings of animals, at least not those occurring before human beings. Christian theists can deal with this problem in the following ways.

First, Christian theists can appeal to the twenty-four-hour-day theory to avoid this problem. The twenty-four-hour-day theory proposes that the world is created approximately within six solar twenty-four-hour days. Proponents of this theory are able to fend off this problem by arguing that humans and animals came into existence at (roughly) the same time, and that humans did not evolve from animals. With regard to the fossil evidence that the earth is old and carnivorous animals appeared far earlier than human beings, proponents of this theory may appeal to God's miraculous deeds and Noahic flood to explain relevant fossil evidence. I do not propose that this theory is correct, but some

can try to refine this theory to respond to the problem of prehuman animal suffering.<sup>32</sup>

Second, as mentioned earlier, the choice of human beings will affect the destiny of the natural world, including animals. Animals cannot decide their own final destiny. The right to decision belongs to humankind, the bearer of the image of God. Animals will one day be saved together with humankind. They may not have eternal life in heaven, but even if they do not, graceful God will compensate or repay them with at least enjoyable happiness in heaven that greatly surpasses any they can experience on earth. In short, animals' final destiny is tied to that of humanity, and they will receive the greatest blessings together with human beings. God cannot directly give animals their highest blessings. Animals have to wait for the choice of human beings. When each human being has chosen their final destiny, the natural world will be restored and renewed and animals will no longer suffer.

However, to allow human beings to be able to choose their and animals' final destiny, animals must, in fact, die and suffer to a certain degree before humans have appeared. If animals do not die, the world will be filled with animals, and there will be no room for humans to survive. In this way, plants and resources would also be exhausted by the animals that fill the whole earth, and the natural environment would be seriously polluted and destroyed by animal activities and excrement. In the end, after all the plants and

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<sup>32</sup> For an brief introduction to the twenty-four-hour-day theory and other theistic theories of creation, please see John S. Feinberg, 2001, chap. 12.

resources are consumed and the earth is heavily polluted, countless animals will eventually become extinct due to the lack of food and resources, and the extreme deterioration of the living environment.

In addition, in this situation, human ancestors would not be able to appear. Even if they had appeared, they would not have survived. Then human ancestors would not be able to choose whether to keep the covenant of works, and the animals' hope for their highest blessings would vanish forever.

Therefore, to avoid such consequences, some mechanisms for suppressing the number of animals are necessary. God had to manage to maintain the number of animals to a certain degree to keep the balance of ecological systems. Humanity, as a result, can occur from evolution, and Adam, the human ancestor, was in a position to fulfil the covenant of works. The covenant of works is relevant to the eternal destiny of all animals and humankind, and also the justice and glory of God. The value of these things has far outweighed the suffering of the animals prior to the appearance of humanity. Furthermore, God can restore and compensate prehuman animals for their losses. For the sake of such a far greater value and with proper compensation, God is justified in allowing prehuman animals to suffer.

Third, it is possible to appeal to fallen angels' disturbance to explain prehuman animal

sufferings. For example, Gregory A. Boyd proposes the natural evil that existed before the appearance of human beings was caused by the fallen angels (Boyd, 2001, chap. 10). Angels were fallen before humanity (the serpent that tempted Adam in Eden was a fallen angel, and angels must have fallen before that). Angels are ministering spirits, and the original duty of fallen angels was probably to help manage the natural world. It is possible that after some angels fell, they had used their powers to influence nature, including animals. Those fallen angels had exerted their power in the natural world to decay and destroy God's creation so that some animals had become carnivorous. Therefore, natural evil before the emergence of humanity might have been caused by the fallen angels.

However, why does God allow the fallen angels to impose their power on the natural world? As the reason for God to permit human moral evil, God may allow the fallen angels to corrupt nature so that they could make moral choices. God then could justly judge them in the eschaton.

Christian theists may be able to appeal to the above responses to deal with prehuman animal suffering. However, the second and third responses propose that some evil is not caused by the fall of humanity. The assumption that natural evil is the result of the fall of humanity needs to be revised for people who adopt the second or third response. But this will not affect the theodicy developed in this chapter since human beings' headship over

the natural world is not abolished. If Adam had not fallen, he and his offspring might have been able to expand the Garden of Eden step by step to restore the natural world. The world would have eventually come under the stewardship of un-fallen humans, and would then have experienced the renewal following the fulfilment of the covenant of works.

In addition, under the influence of sin and the fall, natural evil is deeply bound to the natural world. Although natural evil is not entirely caused by the fall of humankind, the fall does necessitate, solidify, and deepen natural evil, making it an indispensable part of the current world. The natural world is waiting to be released from sin's influence with the fulfilment of human salvation. Human beings do not lose the headship over the natural world in the scenario of the second or third response. Therefore, the divine justice theodicy will not be influenced by the proposal that some natural evil existed before humanity's fall.

The second concern about this theodicy is that it may not satisfy Marilyn Adams's requirement that the suffering of someone should lead to the greater good of that person. Many horrendous evil's victims seem not to receive greater benefits from the suffering they endure. Their life does not become better overall. Instead, things usually develop in the opposite direction. Their life has become worse and intolerable. My response is as follows.

First, the divine justice theodicy does not exclude other theodicies. Adams' theodicy can also be adopted to deal with this problem. Adams argues that horrendous evil can bring

its victims into a highly intimate relationship with God. This relationship is far more valuable than suffering itself. After the victims of horrendous evil have experienced such a relationship, they will consider it worthwhile to experience horrendous evil to have this relationship with God. They might even prefer to experience horrendous evil if they had the choice (Adams, 1999, chap. 8). In conclusion, the divine justice theodicy and Adams' theodicy can be integrated into a robust theodicy to avoid this problem.

Second, sometimes when the expected good is great enough and the compensation is appropriate, it is justified to sacrifice one's benefit or right. For example, suppose that the construction of a highway will bring great public good, but its intended route will pass some private land. Because of the greater public good, the government is justified in expropriating those private lands to construct a highway with suitable compensation. We can respond to Adams' concern in a similar line of thought.

Personal benefits, interests, or rights expropriated and sacrificed for the public good are usually limited to the property because the property is compensable, fungible and recoverable. The loss of property can be compensated, and one property can be replaced with another equally valuable property. While the sacrifice is of personal freedom, health or life, it may be immoral to permit the sacrifice even with financial compensation. It may be permissible to expropriate lands (property) to build a highway for the great good of the

public, but it may be immoral to sacrifice one's health or even life to pursue the public good.

For example, it would be immoral to kill one or two landlords who refuse the expropriation to build a highway, no matter what great public good the highway could bring about. That is because life is more valuable than property, and one's life is not fungible and recoverable. Under normal circumstances, it is not permissible to sacrifice other people's lives for the public good.

Furthermore, even if the public good in question is not property, but rather the health or life of the public, it may be immoral to sacrifice someone's health or life for that public good. For instance, it would be immoral to infect a group of people with a fatal infectious disease to study how to cure it. Even if the research result could save many other people, it should not be allowed. That is because the disease may severely damage the victims' health or even kill them. The damage to one's health may be irreversible, and life will never be regained once lost. The health and lives of some people are just as important as those of others. A government cannot simply sacrifice the health and lives of some people for those of the public.

However, health and life are not irretrievable for God. He can bring people back to life, and he has the power to heal diseases, pains, bad memories and traumas. God will heal

all the past hurts and traumas of the saints saved into heaven, so that heaven can be free from pain and tears. God can recover the loss and wounds of the victims of horrendous evil and further abundantly compensate them. In addition, evil on earth is related to the fulfilment of God's justice and glory, which by definition are of infinitely greater value than that of any created thing. Therefore, the greater good achieved by horrendous evil is of infinite value (God's justice and glory), and God is able to retrieve and heal the losses and injuries of the victim. God may even be able to give the victims consolation and compensation much more valuable than their losses and sufferings. Taking the greater good attained and the great compensation into consideration, God is justified in allowing horrendous evil.

## **6.6 Conclusion**

This chapter explains why God's justice is a justifying reason for God to allow moral and natural evil. I begin by discussing why God allowed the first evil, Adam's fall. God could not directly give eternal life to human beings without violating his justice. Therefore, God made the covenant of works with Adam to give him the opportunity to win eternal life for all human beings, but Adam failed and became fallen. Sin has since then entered the world and corrupted human nature and the natural world. Human beings will necessarily sin, and moral evil will definitely appear. The natural world has been full of natural evil since then.

After the fall, God does not prevent all moral evil from occurring for the following reasons. First, God allows moral evil after the fall to give each person opportunities to choose or reject salvation and to make moral choices. In the afterlife, everyone will be assigned appropriate punishment or reward according to her choice. God's justice will be satisfied accordingly. In addition, God does not stop moral evil after the fall because to forcefully suppress moral evil would mean that sin is neglected and salvation is given to people without sufficient merits. His justice will be violated by doing so.

Finally, God's justice also is the reason he allows natural evil. The natural world has been corrupted by sin, and natural evil follows. God permits natural evil after the fall because, first, as moral evil, natural evil gives people opportunities to accept or reject salvation and to make moral choices. In this way, God can justly punish or reward each one

in the eschaton and God's justice will be satisfied.

Second, to get rid of natural evil from the world, God has to deal with the problem of sin first. He has to release the world from the bondage of sin, and then he can restore the world from natural evil. God cannot directly take natural evil away without dealing with the problem of sin, or his justice will be compromised. And only in the eschaton when the problem of sin is solved, the natural world will be restored and renewed to its perfection with the saved saints. Before that, God could not arbitrarily remove natural evil.

Finally, if God were to forcefully eliminate natural evil by miracles, He would also deprive human beings of their headship over all creation. This would render God unjust because he has deprived some human beings of their headship without justifying reason.

Therefore, God's justice has constituted justifying reasons for God to allow moral and natural evil in the world.

## Chapter 7

### Common Grace and Hell

In chapters 5 and 6, I argue that theism is more plausible than naturalism concerning evil in the world. However, since I frame my arguments under the assumption of Christian theism, a version of expanded theism,<sup>33</sup> atheists who adopt naturalism can reply that I have taken the cure which is worse than the disease itself. That is because expanded theism, especially Christian theism, usually assumes the existence of hell where infinite torment and intense suffering would occur. As John Hick suggests, the traditional hell ‘renders any coherent Christian theodicy impossible by giving the evils of sin and suffering an eternal lodgment within God’s creation (Hick, 1990, p. 201).’

I will first introduce the traditional view of hell and how this view may invalidate theodicy and theism. Then I will discuss some existent responses to the problem of hell and their defects. Afterwards, I will raise the common grace response to deal with the problem of hell. The common grace response can prevent the problem of hell from devastating this thesis’ project while avoiding defects shared by the other responses discussed in this chapter.

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<sup>33</sup> By expanded theism I mean theism which includes propositions in addition to the three omni-propositions (God is omnipotent, omniscient, and supremely good) and their derived propositions.

## **7.1 The Traditional View of Hell and the Problem of Hell**

The traditional view of hell is heavily influenced and shaped by Augustine, and it can be summarized in the following six points (Hunsinger, 1998, pp. 411–414):

(i) Hell is real. Not everyone is saved by God. Those who do not repent and entrust their sins into the hand of Christ will be doomed to hell by God after death. Hell exists and is real. It is not just a possibility.

(ii) Hell is severe. In hell, people will experience the most intense pain and punishment one can imagine. Pain in hell can be distinguished into two kinds: negative pain (pain of loss) and positive pain (pain of affliction). Negative pain is the result of losing communion with God and other saints. Positive pain is inflicted by God, or other agents, on the damned. Some models of hell make a more nuanced distinction between different kinds of pain.

(iii) Hell is endless. What awaits the damned in hell is eternal suffering. The lake of fire where the damned is burn, will never be quenched, and the worms that eat them will never die. We do not need to literally interpret the language of fire and worms here. They signify that punishment in hell is severe and endless. The endlessness of hell also implies its finality. Those going to hell have no chance to leave it.

(iv) Hell is penal and just. Punishment in hell is God's just retribution for the sin of the damned. The purpose of the punishment in hell is retribution, not deterrence or

rectification. This punishment is what the damned deserve for their sin. Justice requires the damned to be thrown into hell to receive endless and intense punishment.

(v) Hell is ordained by God. The ultimate cause of the destiny of the damned is God, for God does not will to save them. Though there can be some intermediate or proximate causes, such as the consequence of sin or the abuse of free will, God is the one who demands it.

(vi) Hell is inscrutable. We cannot fathom God's reason for allowing some people to suffer in hell eternally, while saving others to enjoy eternal bliss in heaven. There seems to be no significant difference between the elect and the damned. God also seems to have the power to convert the heart and will of the damned to save them before everything is too late. Though we may have the above questions, all of God's deeds are just and good. We cannot doubt God's goodness and justice because we cannot fathom his reason.

This Augustinian view of hell has been influential for a long time, and it leads to the problem of hell: Is God justified in allowing some people to suffer in hell for eternity? The problem of hell is able to render theism implausible because it implies that God may have permitted infinite gratuitous suffering in hell.

Evil and suffering on earth, no matter how bad and serious it is, has a limit. It will end at a certain moment. In contrast, each suffering in hell is severe and will last infinitely.

Sufferings in hell, therefore, is infinitely worse than those occurring on earth. The suffering in hell, which is far more serious than suffering on earth in terms of quality and quantity, could devastatingly disconfirm theism if it is unjustified. And sufferings in hell cannot be explained by the divine justice theodicy because the divine justice theodicy only explains evils happening before the final judgement of one's eternal destiny. Since the final judgement has been made, sufferings in hell are irrelevant to the scheme of the divine justice theodicy. The divine justice theodicy consequently cannot explain sufferings in hell. In addition, since naturalism does not suppose the existence of hell, it will not be undermined by this problem. Therefore, why God allows hell needs to be explained, or the torment and suffering there would become gratuitous evil which devastatingly contradicts and undermines theism.

To deal with the problem of hell, a response can be constructed completely within the scheme of the traditional view of hell or by revising this scheme to a certain degree. Before examining the common grace response, we will first discuss some responses to the problem of hell and their defects.

## **7.2 Some Solutions to the Problem of Hell**

### **7.2.1 *Skeptical theism***

Skeptical theism is one of the most popular defences adopted by theists to respond to the evidential argument from evil. Though it may bring some unacceptable consequences, such as global skepticism and moral skepticism, it has the advantage of not having to explain evil under discussion directly. In addition, skeptical theism can be widely applied to all kinds of evil in the world: human moral evil, natural disasters, and the suffering of animals. It seems that theists can also deploy skeptical theism to deal with the problem of hell. So how would skeptical theism deal with the problem of hell? It would appeal to the gap of wisdom and power between God and humanity.

God is omnipotent, omniscient, and supremely good, while human beings are finite in all respects. God's will is not like our will, and God's road is above our road. Naturally, we cannot fathom God's will in many cases. Even if we cannot find any justifying reason for God to allow an evil, it does not mean that God indeed does not have any reason. In the case of hell, although we may not be able to find any justifying reason for the eternal intense suffering of some people in hell, it does not mean that God does not have one. We human beings should remain agnostic about whether God has a justifying reason for the eternal suffering of the damned in hell. The appearance that the suffering of the damned in hell is gratuitous should not diminish our confidence and faith in God. Skeptical theism

might be able to block our noseum inference with regard to suffering in hell and hence prevent theism from being disproved by the problem of hell.

However, endorsing skeptical theism does not mean that no matter how evil and wicked this world is, God is immune from the problem of evil. When evil is too intense and universal, even theists may refuse to accept that an omnipotent and supremely good God is justified in allowing it. Ian Wilks (2009) raises the concern that skeptical theism is so strong that it makes theism empirically unfalsifiable, and hence theists have to admit many ridiculous propositions. The hellish-world-immunity problem has exemplified this concern (Perrine and Wykstra, 2017, p. 99-100):

Imagine that there is a possible world in which *all* human beings who dwell there are subjected to *lifelong* severe torture. The situation in that world would be much worse than that in our world. Though our world also contains evil and suffering, not everyone suffers, and there are many good things here as well. Our world, at least, is not wholly devastating and hopeless. The imaginary hellish world, on the contrary, comprises only pain, torment, and evil.

Let us also suppose that we cannot find any justifying reason for the suffering there. Is it still possible for theists to argue that God is good though they find absolutely no reason for the suffering in that world? If skeptical theism is correct, theists should also accept that

God may have justifying reason to create this wholly hellish world and the hellish world not erode their faith in the good God.

However, it seems that skeptical theists do not accept that a supremely good God would permit a merely hellish world. When the amount and degree of evil both accumulate to a certain point, it is not unlikely that skeptical theism is not able to repress the doubt of God's goodness and existence.

Some skeptical theists indeed admit that they do not believe that God would create such a wholly hellish world, and they appeal to other principles, rather than skeptical theism, to confirm their view. For example, Michael Bergmann (2009, p. 390) suggests that skeptical theism can be supplied with the following principle, 'a perfectly good God would not permit suffering unless the sufferer's life is on the whole a good one', to avoid the conclusion that God would create an utterly hellish world.<sup>34</sup> The fact that skeptical theists employ other theological principles to deal with the hellish-world-immunity problem shows that skeptical theism is insufficient when the amount and degree of evil exceeds a certain point.

If the hellish-world-immunity problem does constitute a challenge to skeptical theism, the existence of hell will also become a significant challenge to it. The fact that theists

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<sup>34</sup> Let us leave aside the problem of whether this theological principle can really prevent God from creating such a wholly hellish world.

appeal to other philosophical or theological principles to deal with the hellish-world-immunity problem shows that theists cannot merely adopt skeptical theism to deal with the problem of hell. That is because the situation in hell, where suffering is not only intense but also endless, is much more severe than that in the scenario assumed by the hellish-world-immunity problem. The problem of hell is an enforced version of the hellish-world-immunity problem. While theists refuse that skeptical theism would lead them to accept that a hellish world would be created by God, they assume that skeptical theism is not sufficient to defend theism in a hellish world where seemingly gratuitous evil and suffering is intense, severe, and universal. If this is the case, skeptical theism is not adequate to save theism from the problem of hell. Theists need theodicy or other defence to deal with this problem of hell.

Besides, if we accept the aforementioned principle, ‘a perfectly good God would not permit suffering unless the sufferer’s life is on the whole a good one’ (Bergmann 2009, p. 390), then it seems that skeptical theism does not apply to the suffering in hell. The damned will suffer forever in hell, and there is no chance for them to have a better life because of the finality of hell. Once someone is in hell, nothing will change. What has remained in one’s life in hell is eternal suffering. If this is the case, God should not permit the suffering in hell according to this principle.

In chapter 3, I developed a new version of skeptical theism: data-based skeptical theism. Data-based skeptical theism, as other versions of skeptical theism, is not immune from the problem of hell either. The reason is as follows:

I argue that according to the data of the world under the assumption of Christian theism, Christian theists have reason to believe that God has a justifying reason for any seemingly gratuitous evil in the world. First, I appeal to good contained in the world, Jesus's atonement and heaven to argue that in most relevant cases, God adheres to the following principle: if he has no justifying reason, he will not allow an evil to occur. I argue that good in the world outnumbers seemingly gratuitous evil by a wide margin. Therefore, cases of evil which seem to be gratuitous for us only occupy a tiny small proportion in all the relevant cases. In most relevant cases, God follows the above principle.

Then I further argue that the death of Christ shows that we should not doubt that God has no justifying reason for other seemingly gratuitous evils. That is because the death of Christ seems infinitely more gratuitous for us than in other cases, but God still has a justifying reason for it. So, if God has a justifying reason for the death of Christ, he should also have one for other seemingly gratuitous evil.

Therefore, in most cases, God follows the above principle. As to the cases of small

proportion in which evil seems to be gratuitous, we should believe that God also has justifying reason because of the death of Christ. Data-based skeptical theism justifies theists in believing that God always follows the above principle.

Nevertheless, the problem of hell will nullify the power of data-based skeptical theism as well. The evil in hell will greatly boost the proportion of seemingly gratuitous evil in all the relevant cases. It denies that, in most cases, God does not always follow the above principle because evil in hell is infinite. Skeptical theism, data-based skeptical theism included, is not tenable in responding to the problem of hell. Without any further explanation for suffering in hell, God seems to be a tyrant who arbitrarily assigns people to heaven and hell. Theists consequently need other solutions for the suffering in hell.

The standard response to the problem of hell is that suffering in hell is due punishment for the sin of the damned. Though God is love, he is also just. A just God cannot simply overlook the sin of human beings. His justice requires that sin will be punished. Therefore, eternal punishment in hell is the result of sin.

It is true that justice requires wrongdoing to be rewarded with due reckoning. However, the eternal severe suffering in hell seems to violate the principle of proportionality: Is eternal intense suffering what the damned deserve for their sin? Punishment in hell seems not to match the moral disvalue of sin. That is, eternal suffering

in hell is not due reckoning for the sin and wrongdoing of the damned. It seems that sin and punishment are not equal here. Because the punishment in hell is eternal, the moral disvalue corresponding to the sins of the damned must be infinite as well. But the ability and power of people whose final destination is hell are finite. They can only perform a limited number of acts in their lifetime, and each of those acts has only a finite moral value or disvalue. Therefore, it seems that the moral disvalue of a person's sins is finite (Himma, 2003, p. 64).

If this is the case, to inflict such eternal and intense punishment on a person whose sin is of finite moral disvalue has breached the principle of proportionality. And it is unjust for God to punish people more than they deserve. As a result, God would allow infinite gratuitous evil in such a situation. Simply appealing to the punishment of sin cannot solve the problem of hell, but some responses have further amended this theory to answer why the moral disvalue of the sin of the damned deserves eternal severe punishment in hell.

In the following, I will discuss two replies based on the punishment of sin: the continuing-sinning response and the offending-infinite-God response. I will also indicate the problems of the two responses.

### ***7.2.2 The continuing-sinning response***

The proportionality problem of hell indicates that a person is not able to commit sins which deserve infinite punishment, and hence, God is not justified in sending people to hell forever to punish their sins. One way to meet this challenge is to propose that a person can commit infinite sins which, combined together, would deserve infinite moral disvalue. That is, although each sin is worth only finite moral disvalue and therefore respectively deserves finite punishment, the accumulation of infinite individual sins can collectively constitute infinite moral disvalue and make a person deserve eternal punishment.

But how can a person commit infinite sins? No matter how long one person lives, it is not possible to do so. The continuing-sinning response hence advances that sinners continue sinning eternally in hell. Every time they sin, their penalty in hell will be extended accordingly. Because they sin ceaselessly in hell, their corresponding sentence extends infinitely. In this way, people in hell can commit infinite sins and extend their punishment endlessly. Since God does not punish sins of finite moral disvalue with infinite punishment, the proportionality problem is dissolved (Manis, 2019, pp. 36–37). It is justified for God to exert infinite punishment on the damned as a result, and the problem of hell is answered. Nonetheless, this response has the following problems (Manis, 2019, pp. 37–38).

First, the continuing-sinning response proposes that people in hell receive additional

punishment whenever they sin. This leads to the following problem: if people are punished for sins committed in hell, it means that they are morally accountable. Himma (2003, p. 75) argues that ‘moral accountability for a behaviour presupposes the ability to do otherwise.’ We should consider someone morally accountable only if that person can choose differently. The proposal that the damned are morally accountable for sins committed in hell assumes that they are capable of withholding themselves from sinning and can act otherwise. Therefore, it is possible for them not to sin in hell, and they would not commit infinite sins which would lead them to the infinite suffering in hell. In addition, it is implausible to assume that a morally accountable person would relentlessly commit sin since she has experienced the severe punishment in hell. It seems that the damned in hell should not choose to continue to sin forever.

On the other hand, if people in hell are morally unaccountable, it is not just to punish them furthermore. They should not be confined to hell and endure further punishment. Consequently, the continuing-sinning response encounters a dilemma. Whether people in hell are morally accountable or not, hell should not be eternal.

Proponents of the continuing-sinning response could dissolve this dilemma in the following way. They can demur that although people in hell are not morally accountable, God can still confine them in hell for the sake of other people’s safety and well-being, just

like that we would restrict the freedom of some morally unaccountable but highly aggressive persons to protect other people. However, this amendment cannot explain why God exerts intense punishment on those people if the aim is to segregate them to protect other people. The supporters of the continuing-sinning response can further purport that the suffering in hell is not directly ordained by God, but is from the damned themselves. They may suffer from their emotions or other mental issues when confined to hell. Thus, suffering in hell is not a punishment from God but unavoidable side effects or natural results of the damned's nature and characteristics. God is justified to confine the damned in hell forever for the sake of other people's well-being though the damned are not morally accountable for their sins in hell.

Additionally, it is arguable that moral accountability does not imply that a person can act otherwise. There is not enough space to discuss all the relevant issues of moral accountability here, but I will simply indicate one possible solution: people who hold the compatible view of free will may think that people should be morally responsible for their misbehaviours even if they cannot choose to act otherwise. Unlike the libertarian view, compatibilism does not consider that true freedom requires multiple options. According to compatibilism, no matter how many options there are (even if there is only one), if a person has freely willed one option and acted accordingly, she has acted freely. This person

should bear moral accountability for her choice. As a result, it is possible that people in hell will continue sinning while remaining morally accountable. It is not utterly impossible for proponents of this response to dissolve this dilemma.

Nevertheless, the continuing-sinning response still faces another problem: it seems to undermine the finality of hell, i.e., this response assumes that if a person does not keep sinning in hell, then she can escape from hell. In contrast, the traditional view of hell regards hell as eternal and inescapable: when a person is sent to hell after judgement day, she is doomed to stay there forever.

If the continuing-sinning response finally proves itself to be a version of escapism (the view which proposes that people can leave hell when certain conditions are satisfied), it may no longer be qualified as a traditional view. To avoid this consequence, its defenders could argue that for some reason, people in hell cannot keep themselves from sinning, and hence it is impossible for people to leave hell once they enter it.

Richard Swinburne is not a proponent of the continuing-sinning response, but we can borrow his view to explain why people in hell cannot refrain from sinning. He says, 'There is no longer a "he"; having immunized himself against the nagging of conscience, the agent has turned into a mere theatre of conflicting desires of which the strongest automatically dictates "his" action (Swinburne, 1983, p. 48).' In other words, people in hell

have immersed themselves in sin to the degree that their conscience no longer has any effect on them. Whenever they choose to ignore the calling of the conscience, their hearts become harder, and they become more resistant to the advice of their conscience. They then become more and more disposed to sin, and finally reach the point where their conscience has died. Consequently, they cannot choose what is good anymore. They can only subject themselves to their sinful desires.

This solution corresponds to our daily experiences to some extent. Moral virtues require discipline, perseverance, and practice. For example, the longer a person gets used to a lazy and prodigal life, the harder it is to change and reform her life. Sin has the power to corrupt one's emotions, mentality, reason, and will, and it is not easy to get out of the mire.

However, the scenario of the continuing-sinning response is still at odds with our daily experiences at certain points. It seems that even if one continually does bad things and immerses herself in sin to the degree that the voice of conscience is suppressed, it is still logically possible for that person to abstain from sinning at times.

For example, a person may be used to being lazy so that she is immune to any advice about being diligent, but it is still possible that this person could act against her lazy disposition in some situations, such as when facing great danger or benefit.

Furthermore, no matter how dire the circumstances are in our daily lives, they are still not comparable to hell. Hell is worse than whatever anyone can imagine. It is hard to understand why people cannot temporarily oppress their sinful dispositions and then repent to save themselves from hell in the face of eternal immense suffering and pain. One possible solution is to argue that if repentance of wrongdoing is not true and wholehearted, it fails to deliver a person from hell. But why can the damned not sincerely repent and believe in God? Why cannot their free will be disciplined and redirected by the hardship in hell? Proponents of the continuing-sinning response still need to explain why people in hell lose their capacity to do good, believe in God, and repent. Now let us move to the offending-infinite-God response.

### ***7.2.3 The offending-infinite-God response***

According to the offending-infinite-God response, a finite person can commit sins of infinite moral disvalue, and thus deserves infinite suffering in hell. Anselm's discussion in his famous *Cur Deus Homo* implies that the problem of hell may be solved by appealing to God's infinite attributes. *Cur Deus Homo* is not originally relevant to hell, but Anselm raises the idea of why human beings are infinitely indebted to God in this book. Because God is infinitely honourable, and deserves each human being's complete submission, when people sin, they have offended God and fallen short of his glory. Since the offended object is of infinite value, the price of offense is infinitely high as well. Therefore, it is just for God to inflict infinite punishment on the damned in this situation (Perry, 2016, p. 9).

As Adams (1975, p. 442) argues, Anselm's proposal is historically understandable. In the feudal society where Anselm lived, the price of hurting a serf and a noble was different. The nobler one hurts, the higher the wergild is. Therefore, one's punishment was influenced by the social status of the victim. This view of justice is embedded in Anselm's cultural, historical, and social milieus, but it is no longer acceptable and seems to be implausible today. Nowadays, most people agree that the seriousness of an offence should not be decided by the social status of the victim.

For example, suppose that two persons both assault their cohorts, and that the damage and harm caused by them are the same. We will expect that the two persons would receive

the same punishment since they committed the same crime and elicited equal damage and harm. If a person finally receives more severe punishment because her victim is more distinguished than the other victim, we will think that it is unfair and unjust. The moral disvalue of a crime should not be decided by the social status of the victim.

Nonetheless, what Anselm says should not necessarily be understood as social status. This interpretation of Anselm may be erroneous. In *Monologium*, chapter 15, it is implied that ‘he would equate worthiness of honour with ontological status (Adams, 1975, pp. 442–443)’. Putting the problem of interpretation aside, Anselm does inspire a way to answer the problem of hell. He points out that some values of the offended object can influence the degree of culpability. It can be other values rather than social status. Intuitively, ontological status does play a role in the process of evaluation of one’s sin. Different kinds of creatures have different ontological statuses and values.

For instance, killing different kinds of creatures for no good reason will evoke different kinds of reactions (Manis, 2019, p. 26). If there is no justifying reason, killing a weed typically does not annoy people; killing an insect, like a cricket, may elicit a few complaints; many people will seriously condemn the act of killing a dog; undoubtedly, most people will agree that murdering a person deserves the severest moral condemnation among the four killings. The above four actions have no distinction in their nature. They

are all actions which put a creature's life to end for no justifying reason. However, they weigh differently on the scale of justice. We will not treat them with moral indifference because the victims of the four killings are of different ontological statuses.

Similarly, God enjoys an ontological status which is infinitely greater than any other being and creature. People who offend God by sinning thus deserve correspondingly infinite punishment. Nevertheless, this response at least has the following two problems:

Firstly, the offending-infinite-God response still needs to delineate the principle which determines the ontological status of a being (Manis, 2019, pp. 26–27). For example, it has to explain why human beings possess a higher ontological status than dogs so that the crime of offending humans is more serious. Similarly, why does God own an infinitely high ontological status? One might be able to detail the principle by appealing to certain attributes. For instance, it is possible that because human beings are more rational and mentally complex than crickets, human beings have a higher ontological status. In this case, the ability and degree of rationality and mental complexity are the criteria which determine the ontological status and the moral disvalue of offence against it.

In the same way, it is possible to map the principle by appealing to God's infinite divine attributes, such as God's morality, wisdom, and aesthetics. Such a principle may not be easy to delineate, but intuitively, animals, human beings, and God do not share the same

ontological status. It is not impossible for proponents of this view to construct such a principle.

The second problem does not concern the ontological status of the victim, but the act of the offence itself. The problem is as follows: the seriousness of sin could be affected by the ontological status of the victim, but the ontological status is not the only factor. The seriousness of an offence itself will also influence its degree of moral disvalue. Different harmful and offending acts *per se* constitute different moral disvalues. For example, human beings have a higher ontological status than dogs; therefore, killing a human is a more serious offence than killing a dog, everything being equal. This is the case when the two offences belong to the same kind and degree. If the two offences are different in nature and degree, it is not a matter of course that the offence against a person deserves more demerit than the offence against a dog. Cruelly torturing and killing a dog is usually more severe than slightly scratching someone's skin. Therefore, the demerit of an action is not only decided by the ontological status of the victim, but also by the offence itself. Proponents of this view need to identify what sin committed against God is worthy of infinite moral disvalue.

It seems that the answer is that all sins are against God, and they all deserve infinite moral disvalue and punishment. Crisp (2003, p. 39) indicates that 'any single sin is

sufficient to warrant everlasting punishment because any single sin incurs an infinite demerit by virtue of being committed against a being of infinite glory and honour.’ However, why is it the case? Why does every sin against God, who has infinite ontological status, deserve infinite moral disvalue? It may be because we all owe absolute obedience to God. Any sin will render our obedience incomplete, as James 2:10 says, ‘For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking all of it.’ In addition, the violation of obedience makes us fall short of God’s glory, and God’s glory is invaluable. Since we owe complete obedience to God, we cannot compensate God with additional obedience (Perry, 2016, p. 10). Thus, sin will create infinite moral disvalue by falling short of God’s glory, and will make a person deserve infinite punishment.

Even if the above two problems are solvable, the offending-infinite-God response still shares a similar problem with the continuing-sinning response: why cannot people in hell repent? If they repent and believe in the salvation accomplished by the triune God, they will be acquitted and saved into heaven. There must be something different in hell which makes it impossible for the damned to repent and accept God’s salvation. The above two responses both lack relevant explanations.

I will now investigate the common grace response. I propose that the common grace response can explain why God allows the damned to suffer in hell forever and why the

damned cannot believe in God and repent their sins to be saved from hell.

### **7.3 The Common Grace Response**

In this section, I propose that the damned will remain in hell forever because they have lost the so-called common grace. According to non-universalistic Christian traditions, people either go to heaven or hell after death by accepting or rejecting God's salvation. The common grace response proposes that when some people continue rejecting God's salvation, they will lose all of God's common grace at a certain point. Consequently, they will suffer in hell and lose the ability to receive God's salvation because they no longer have the aid of common grace to contain and restrict the effects of sin. To begin with, I will introduce what qualifies a person to go to heaven and then illustrate how common grace can help solve the problem of hell.

### ***7.3.1 The criterion for heaven***

Heaven is the place where saints will enjoy God's eternal presence and bliss. Among all kinds of bliss, the greatest one is the beatific vision of God. Believers can consummately communicate with God and 'see' God's face, in a way that is unknowable to believers in the earthly life. It is the highest bliss one can ever enjoy. Not everyone can go to heaven to live in the abundant blessedness of God. Only the righteous can. To be righteous means to be sinless and utterly obedient to God. One can become righteous, justifying himself or herself in the eyes of God through two approaches. The first is to justify oneself by works; the second is by faith. To justify oneself by works, one has to live an absolutely holy, innocent, sinless, and just life. A person has to be utterly obedient to God in everything and every way. Basically, no one can earn her ticket to heaven through this approach since everyone is a descendant of Adam, and is therefore born in original sin imputed (or inherited) from him. With original sin, the will of humanity has become depraved and inclined to sin against God. Consequently, no one can lead an absolutely obedient life without any aid from God. Justification by works is an impasse. People have to take the other approach to be saved from sin and to become righteous.

With regard to the second approach, justification by faith, different traditions embrace different views. Even within the same tradition, there are subtle distinctions between different theologians. For the purposes of this discussion, I adopt the general view of the

protestant tradition, and it is sufficient for me to draw on its general description for the sake of argument.

The protestant tradition generally considers justification by faith in a forensic sense. When a believer believes and accepts the salvation accomplished by Christ on the cross, she will be declared righteous by God, just as a prisoner is pronounced innocent in a court. There are two elements in justification by faith. First, one's sins are remitted, and second, Christ's righteousness is imputed to the believer. Through faith and by the holy spirit, believers are mysteriously united with Christ. Through this mysterious union, Christ has taken the sin of believers as his own, and suffered the result of sin, namely death, on the cross. In addition, Christ's righteousness which he earned by leading an absolutely holy and obedient life, is imputed to believers. Believers, therefore, can escape from the mire of sin and are seen as righteous in the eyes of God (McGrath, 2020, pp. 238–240). Believers will then be qualified to enter heaven to enjoy eternal bliss and communication with God and other saints after death.

Noteworthy, God cannot allow sinners to go directly to heaven without being justified first. But why cannot a supremely good God simply permit everyone to stay with him in heaven? The reason is as follows.

First, it is not just for God to simply allow sinners to go to heaven. To reward sin with

eternal bliss and treat evil and good people equally, is unfair and unjust. God's justice does not simply neglect one's sin and has to reward it with due punishment. God will assign different consequences for those who choose good and those who choose evil.

Furthermore, if evilness and goodness are unimportant relative to a person's final destiny, people may not be motivated to labour to follow God's moral commandments and instructions that he has stipulated in scripture and put in human consciousness. One would follow them because being moral is good in itself, but consequence still plays an important part in moral life. If there is no corresponding fair consequence for moral and immoral acts, the motivation for pursuing morality will be abased greatly.

Finally, if people go to heaven in a sinful state, they will be consumed by God's glory and holiness when they 'see' God. It is fatal for sinful humans to see God's face. When Moses asked God to show him his glory, God refused to manifest himself without reservation. God told Moses that no one could see his face and still live. Moses could only see God's back because sinful human beings cannot bear God's full and unreserved majestic splendour and holiness (Exodus 33:17-23). There are other examples in scripture that support this view. When Isaiah saw God sitting on the throne, his first reaction was that he was ruined, because he was unclean and had seen God (Isaiah 6:1-5). He thought that once sinful and unclean humans see God's face, they will immediately be consumed

by the holiness of God.

We do not know how people in heaven enjoy the beatific vision of God. It may be quite different from how we see material things. Saints in heaven, when resurrected from the dead, are transformed in some way to 'see' God without being consumed by his glory and holiness. God's glory and holiness hence are manifested in a consummate and splendid way. Sinners who are not cleansed and transformed cannot bear this manifestation. It would be disastrous for them to perceive this manifestation. As a result, God cannot just allow any person to go to heaven directly. It may be worse for sinful people to be directly consumed by God's consummate holiness than to suffer in hell. They may be literally burned by God's holiness. People who enjoy eternal bliss in heaven must be innocent and righteous.

Generally speaking, people may have no problem with a sinful person not going straight to heaven. The real problem lies in why God permits sinners to bear unending punishment in hell. Why cannot God simply create a limbo for those who are not qualified to go to heaven, or punish them for a limited time and then save them to heaven? And why can people in hell not believe in Christ and be justified by faith? I propose that the reason is that they have lost God's common grace by defying God and immersing themselves in sin to a certain degree. In explaining why this is the case, we need first to delineate the role

of God's grace in the salvation of human beings.

### ***7.3.2 Common grace and special grace***

Fallen human beings cannot be justified by faith without help from God. They need God's grace in the process of salvation. In terms of salvation, God's grace can be sorted into two kinds: common grace and special grace. Both kinds of grace are indispensable for human salvation, though common grace is not directly relevant to salvation.

According to the 1924 Christian Reformed declarations, common grace has at least the following functions (Mouw, 2001, p. 40, emphasis original): '(i) "natural" blessings, such as rain and sunshine; (ii) the restraining of evil in human affairs; and (iii) positive acts of civic righteousness.' The declarations propose that common grace has many benefits for the human race and for the world. Without it, human society and the natural order would fall into disarray. Nonetheless, this is still not the whole picture of common grace which has far broader implications than only the aforementioned three points. Abraham Kuyper distinguishes the influence of common grace on human beings in terms of interior and exterior operation. The latter includes human achievements, such as scientific and artistic accomplishments. The former covers a person's inner virtues like love, piety, and sympathy (Mouw, 2001, p. 43). Natural happiness should also be considered as the effect of common grace's interior operation. In summary, common grace has restricted the influence of sin and enabled human beings to develop and accomplish all kinds of achievements and happiness in the world.

The aim and function of common grace are not to save people from sin to eternal blessedness. Instead, it allows the world and human society to function well to a certain extent, without being thoroughly ruined by sin. The fall of Adam influenced both human beings and the natural world. After the fall, human beings are corrupted by sin and have become depraved. Also, the natural environment has become less friendly and more violent. Animals have become dangerous and can attack human beings, invasive plants have grown up from the earth, and the geological and meteorological conditions of the earth have also become violent.<sup>35</sup> Sin has influenced the whole world after the fall, but it does not completely dominate because of common grace. Human beings did not immediately die of sin after the fall. Sin's wage of death does not immediately assault humankind while they are depraved in sin. The natural world has become dangerous for human beings, but it still yields food for human beings. Human beings are disposed to sin but consciousness and reason still work to a certain degree that human beings are not totally evil. Common grace ensures that human beings will continue to live, reproduce, and develop in the world.

In the case of Noah's flood, we can see how God has exerted his common grace to prevent the world from collapsing from sin.

First, in Noah's time, people were so corrupted that God had to wipe them out of the

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<sup>35</sup> Here I adopted Abraham Kuyper's view about the changes of the natural environment of the world after the fall. See Kuyper, 2016, chap. 2, 36, 37.

earth through a big flood. After the flood, God promised that ‘never again will I destroy all living creatures, as I have done (Genesis 8:21b).’ This promise implies that the natural elements, being mediated and moderated by common grace, are milder after the Noahic flood so that such fierce natural disasters would not occur to destroy in such a way, and what is left for special grace would not be a desert world without many human beings.

Furthermore, since the flood, common grace has operated more powerfully in human hearts. Before the flood, the wickedness of the human race had become so great that ‘every inclination of the thoughts of the human heart was only evil all the time (Genesis 6:5b).’ Human beings were influenced by sin to the degree that what they did and thought was evil all the time. In contrast, after the flood, ‘every inclination of the human heart is evil from childhood (Genesis 8:21b).’ The effect of sin is restrained. Humans are still depraved, being inclined to evil since childhood, but they are not as corrupted as before the flood, i.e., they would not only engage themselves in evil desires and deeds all day long (Kuyper, 2016, pp. 25–26). Common grace operates interiorly in the human heart to keep human morality and society from being devoured by sin.

In this way, common grace contributes to the preparation for God’s redemptive plan. It ensures that the world will not be ruined by human immorality and the disordered natural elements before the redemptive plan is fulfilled.

Special grace, in contrast with common grace, directly aims at human salvation. It may indirectly enhance the well-being of the world by renewing and reforming an individual in a way that this person will abstain from evil deeds and contribute positively to the world, but this is not its primary effect. One of its main goals is to renew human beings' free will and to make them capable of believing in and loving God so that they can receive the salvation accomplished by Christ. The fall of Adam and Eve in Eden brought about the ensuing depravity of all humanity. As a result, human free will is perverted. No one can seek God and decide to believe in God with her own power and will. Special grace has to intercept and renew the corrupted human will to render them capable of submitting to God and being saved.<sup>36</sup>

Furthermore, special grace has to cooperate with common grace to save one from sin. Common grace is indispensable for the salvation of an individual because it keeps a person's conscience active, prevents a person from being completely devoured by sin, and makes it possible for special grace to redirect and renew this person's free will to accept the salvation of God. Without the interior operation of common grace, human beings will become too immersed in evil to believe in Christ, repent, and receive his salvation. The following analogy may help illustrate this point. A patient is curable only when she is still

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<sup>36</sup> I will not deal with the problem of predestination here. Either (1) particular grace is offered to everyone but an individual person can resist it, or (2) particular grace is only given to some elected people and is irresistible, but the damned are absolutely responsible for their fall, fits my project.

alive. Once the 'life' has left the patient, there is no way to save her. The aliveness of the patient is the basis of recovery. When this basis has gone, then the chance of a cure has disappeared too.

Similarly, common grace keeps one spiritually alive. When common grace is absent from someone, this person is completely devoured by sin, and is spiritually dead consequently. At this point, special grace cannot heal anymore. That is, special grace is unable to renew the conscience and redirect the free will of this person. This person, whom special grace cannot give aid to anymore, will lose the ability to love God and repent in turn.

There is no direct indication that the interior operation of common grace is necessary for the application of special grace in the scripture, but people before the Noahic flood may be a possible illustration. Human beings at that time were so corrupted that 'every inclination of the thoughts of the human heart was only evil all the time (Genesis 6:5b).' God thus wiped them from the land, and only Noah and his family were saved. This event may imply that common grace seemed not to work interiorly in those people's hearts anymore, and hence they were unable to be redirected and renewed by God's special grace. This case supports that special grace needs to exert its effect on the basis of common grace.

In summary, under the operation of common and special grace, one is able to be justified by faith and to be qualified for heaven. After introducing God's common and special grace, let us turn to the question of why God will send people to hell and why the damned in hell cannot believe in Christ to be justified and saved.

### ***7.3.3 Hell: the consequence of losing common grace***

Common grace plays a vital role in human prosperity and the salvific plan of God. However, God's common grace will not be available for sinners forever. If one keeps rejecting the belief in Christ (to be justified by faith), God will withdraw his common grace at a certain point. When God withdraws it is not knowable to us, but it must happen before the final judgement. That is because, after the final judgement, everyone's destiny is decided. After the withdrawing of common grace, a person would then (i) suffer from her sin, and (ii) be incapable of believing in Christ and repenting to avoid the full depraved influence of sin. The two consequences are reasons why the damned will suffer eternally in hell. They are caused by the damned themselves rather than God. Hence, God is not morally culpable for the eternal suffering in hell. I will further explain why the withdrawing of common grace from the damned will lead to the above two consequences.

First, without common grace, the natural environment would be too extreme and violent to inhabit. Hell is a place where no common grace operates (suppose that hell is indeed a place where the damned dwell). It must be painful to live in such a place. The harsh environment is one of the sources of suffering in hell. In addition to it, the damned themselves are also the origin of agony. Without common grace, sin would completely corrupt and dominate everything of the damned. What remains in the hearts of the damned would be only hate and evil. The damned would not be able to find inner peace. They

would thus suffer from inner unbalance and emotional torment. In addition, if the damned can get in touch with each other in hell, they would hurt each other mentally, physically, and spiritually since sin has utterly devoured them. Without the administration of common grace, the damned would suffer both externally and internally in hell.

Furthermore, the damned would not only suffer, but also would lose the ability to believe in Christ and repent due to the lack of common grace. Special grace needs to work in those who are not absolutely engulfed by sin. If human beings are completely corrupted by sin, there will be no space for the holy spirit to minister God's special grace because nothing is left in the hearts of the damned for the holy spirit to enlighten and renew. In short, because common grace no longer operates in the hearts of the damned and the damned have been absolutely immersed in sin, God cannot work through special grace to make them believe in Christ and to be justified by faith. The damned, therefore, cannot get rid of the full influence of sin and would suffer forever.

People may question that with their own free will, the damned should be able to repent in hell since a rational person would do so to escape from endless and intense suffering. However, the damned are spiritually dead, so their rationality and free will are utterly distorted by sin as well. Sin has blinded them to the degree that they treat good as evil and evil as good. They can neither believe that God is good, nor that God will

faithfully fulfill his promise of salvation for believers. They also cannot love God. Maybe they would just think that God is a tyrant who likes to see other people tortured, or that God is a liar who deceives them that they can end suffering by believing in him and repenting. Sin has the power to break the relationship between God and humans. Unbelief caused by sin is a common phenomenon for all depraved humans. This effect of sin would become fully-fledged in hell, where sin thoroughly dominates.

As a result, due to the loss of common grace, neither can the damned believe in God with their own corrupted will and reason, nor can God's special grace renew them. Everything is too late at this point.

Nevertheless, why does God not supply each human being with common grace forever? God is almighty and benevolent. It seems that God has both the power and will to provide common grace ceaselessly. The reason is as follows:

First of all, God does not have any obligation to guarantee his grace to people forever unless he puts himself under this kind of obligation by his own promise. Out of his mercy, he has offered his common grace to human beings after the fall, but he does not promise that it will be available to all forever. He only promises that he will give eternal blessedness to righteous people in heaven, where his grace will never abate and depart. God is not bound to provide his everlasting grace to those who do not match the condition

for eternal bliss.

Furthermore, before God withdraws his common grace forever, he gives sufficient opportunities for people to believe in Christ and to repent, but the damned refuses to do so. When they reject God's salvation, they refuse not only God, but also God's grace. Since they do not want God to be their lord, they do not qualify for God's grace as well. The damned, by rejecting God, have thus decided that they do not want or need God's grace. They, rather than God, should be responsible for the consequences of losing all of God's grace.

Finally, if God offers his common grace to everyone ceaselessly, it means that everyone, regardless of good or evil, can acquire a certain kind of good eternal life. This kind of eternal life would not be as good as eternal bliss in heaven, but it would still be much better than eternal death in hell. Nevertheless, this result will bring about the following problems.

The first problem is that, in this way, God would reward evil with good. No matter how evil a person is, he can still acquire eternal life with the blessings of common grace. God's justice and morality are consequently violated. God's justice requires that he rewards what one deserves so that he could not reward sinful humans with such eternal life. In addition, consequences also play an important part in morality. Morality will be

seriously subverted when good results always follow immoral behaviours.

Furthermore, in this situation, people will keep misusing talents and grace that God gives them to sin since they are not renewed and are still inclined to sin. For the sake of salvation and other reasons, God has temporarily allowed the misuse of his grace by humans, but it will not last forever. At a certain point, when God has given sinners enough chances to repent and his purposes have been fulfilled, he has to withdraw his common grace to prevent its misuse. God cannot forever condone the abuse of his grace.

In Matt 28:14-28, the lazy servant did not realize his responsibility to utilize the wealth entrusted to him, so he was deprived of his portion. This parable implies that everyone should responsibly make use of the talents and resources received from God. In one sense, sinful humans are worse than the lazy servant above since sinful humans positively misuse common grace in evil deeds, while the lazy servant's fault consists of passively doing nothing. If it is reasonable to take away the lazy servant's entrusted portion, it makes even more sense to withdraw common grace from people who misuse it and do not want to repent.

For the above reasons, God should not grant his common grace to unrighteous people for good.

## 7.4 Conclusion

By introducing Christian theism to deal with the evidential argument from evil, I have also imported the suffering assumed by the doctrine of hell. Therefore, I must deal with the suffering in hell to prevent my project from being undermined by it. I first argue that skeptical theism and the other two responses could not successfully deal with the problem of hell. Skeptical theism does not work when sufferings and evil are infinite and severe. The other two responses, the continuing-sinning response and the offending-infinite-God response, cannot answer why the damned cannot repent and accept God's salvation to end their eternal suffering in hell. The three responses accordingly fail to answer the problem of hell. After examining the above three responses, I suggest that on the basis of the doctrine of common grace, we can formulate a defensible reply, the common grace response, to the problem of hell. Common grace is necessary for salvation. When one keeps rejecting God's salvation, God will withdraw his common grace at a certain point. After losing common grace, one will be thoroughly engulfed by sin and is unable to believe in God and repent. Eternal pains and sufferings also follow the loss of common grace, but it is the damned's own choice leading to this misery condition. The damned themselves, rather than God, are responsible to the existence of hell. In addition, the common grace response has slightly revised the scheme of the traditional view of hell, but it does not digress too much.

As a result, Christian theism has sufficient resources to deal with the problem of hell.

The problem of hell does not invalidate the threefold response raised in this thesis.

## **Chapter 7**

### **Conclusion**

Rowe argues that many evils in the world seem to be gratuitous, and these evils are, hence, evidence against God's existence. To defend theism from being disproved by this argument, I have developed a threefold response. The threefold response is based on Christian theism. It consists of data-based skeptical theism, the evidential argument from evil against naturalism, and the divine justice theodicy.

Before constructing the threefold response, I first deal with the problem of restricted and expanded theism. Rowe indicates that given evil, the probability of expanded theism will not be greater than restricted theism. He argues that it is useless to appeal to expanded theism to reply to the evidential argument from evil. It is a great disadvantage for theists if theistic responses are limited to restricted theism. Furthermore, my thesis cannot succeed without exploiting resources from Christian theism. To reverse this disadvantage, I raise three models in chapter 2 to illustrate the usefulness of expanding a theory. Expansion is a useful activity that is not abnormal in theory construction.

After refuting the proposal that appealing to expanded theism is futile, I continue to develop the threefold response. The first is data-based skeptical theism. According to the data under the assumption of Christian theism, we are justified in believing that God would

not allow evil unless he has justifying reason. Therefore, we are justified in believing that God has justifying reason for evils occurring in the world. Data-based skeptical theism can defend theism from being *directly* disconfirmed by the evidential argument from evil.

However, data-based skeptical theism can defend theism only when there are no other competing theories for evil. For some people, theism is not the only theory in consideration with respect to evil. Atheists can argue that we should consider naturalism, and that naturalism is a more plausible theory because of its stronger explanatory power over evil. Data-based skeptical theism offers no explanations for evil, while naturalism seems to be able to explain why evil has occurred according to its naturalistic assumption. Consequently, naturalism has stronger explanatory power over evil than theism. Given the existence of evil, we should prefer naturalism to theism. The evidential argument from evil can still *indirectly* disconfirm theism when other plausible competing theories for evil exist.

Therefore, data-based skeptical theism alone is not sufficient to defend theism. It needs to be supplied with other strategies. Since many atheists adopt naturalism, I have treated naturalism as theism's major competing hypothesis for evil. Theism's explanatory power over evil must be higher than naturalism to avoid being indirectly disconfirmed by the evidential argument from evil. I raise the other two responses to ensure this goal. The

two responses are the evidential argument from evil against naturalism and the divine justice theodicy. The former argument has reduced naturalism's explanatory power over evil; the latter has boosted that of theism. The two responses together render theism's explanatory power over evil higher than naturalism.

As to the evidential argument from evil against naturalism, I argue that evolutionary accounts as ultimate causes are indispensable for naturalism to explain why certain human behaviours have occurred. I have investigated existent evolutionary explanations raised by evolutionary psychologists and criminologists for some moral evils. Then I argue that those evolutionary explanations do not clarify why the moral evils in question have occurred. As a result, naturalism lacks plausible evolutionary explanations for some moral evils, and those evils become evidence against naturalism. Naturalism's explanatory power over evil is reduced by those moral evils.

On the other hand, the divine justice theodicy raises explanations for natural and moral evils in the world to boost theism's explanatory power. I have analyzed divine justice into three categories: dispositive justice, retributive justice, and remunerative justice. Based on divine justice, I construct theistic explanations for the evil of the fall, moral evil after the fall, and natural evil after the fall.

The major reason for God to permit evil is related to God's just assignment of one's

deserts in the afterlife. In order to justly punish or reward human beings, God has to permit evil in the world. In the case of the evil of the fall, God permitted this evil because he wanted to grant eternal life to human beings, but he could only achieve so in a way that did not breach his justice. Hence, he cut the covenant of works with Adam to allow him to win eternal life for all human beings, but Adam failed. Human beings have fallen in sin since then. After the fall, to give human beings opportunities to accept or reject salvation and make moral choices, God permits moral and natural evil. In this way, God can justly assign deserts to people according to their merits or misbehaviours. In addition, before the problem of sin is solved, God cannot thoroughly prevent all moral and natural evil, or his justice will be compromised. He thus has to allow evil before the assignment of just deserts to everyone. Because of these reasons, God is justified in allowing moral and natural evil in the world. The divine justice theodicy thus has explained why God permits evil and has increased theism's explanatory power.

With the evidential argument from evil against naturalism and the divine justice theodicy, theism's explanatory power over evil is higher than naturalism. As a result, theism will not be indirectly disconfirmed by the evidential argument from evil.

By appealing to Christian theism, I have developed the above threefold response to the evidential argument from evil. This threefold response can prevent theism from being

directly and indirectly disproved by the evidential argument from evil. However, Christian theism assumes the existence of hell, and the eternal sufferings in hell may invalidate the arguments in this thesis.

To avoid this consequence, I raised a solution based on the doctrine of common grace. I propose that it is the damned themselves who keep refusing God's salvation. And God cannot offer them common grace forever. At a certain point, God has to retrieve his common grace and leave the damned to their sins. Afterwards, the damned will suffer from their sins because common grace is no longer available to arrest their sins. Therefore, hell is the result of the damned's free choice. God is not culpable of the damned's eternal suffering in hell. The problem of hell will not invalidate the threefold response.

In addition, the threefold response not only defends theism but also reverses the evidential argument from evil to disconfirm naturalism. The divine justice theodicy renders theism's explanatory power the same as naturalism, so it is sufficient to protect theism from being indirectly disproved by the evidential argument from evil. Moreover, the evidential argument from evil against naturalism further secures theism by reducing naturalism's explanatory power. As a result, naturalism's explanatory power over evil is lower than theism. Now theism is a more plausible hypothesis with regard to evil. The existence of evil disconfirms naturalism instead.

With both the divine justice theodicy and the evidential argument from evil against naturalism, theism's defence against evil is more solid. Atheists need to both argue against the divine justice theodicy and raise plausible naturalistic explanations for evil to completely defeat theism on the evidential problem of evil.

Finally, readers may think data-based skeptical theism redundant. Since divine justice theodicy and the evidential argument from evil against naturalism have made theism more plausible, data-based skeptical theism seems to be dispensable. However, it is useful in the following two situations.

First, some people may not consider naturalism as a competing theory to theism. It is sufficient for them to adopt data-based skeptical theism. They may think that naturalism has some serious defects and is not worth consideration. If we want, we can find almost infinite theories for the existence of evil. But some of them will be too defective to investigate. For example, the theory that evil is caused by an almighty jacket potato is incredible for most people. Thus, most people do not take the theory of an almighty jacket potato into consideration when investigating the cause of evil. Similarly, some people may have some plausible reasons to exclude naturalism, and data-based skeptical theism is good enough for them. They do not have to labour over further arguments to defend theism. Instead, they can concentrate on data-based skeptical theism.

Second, data-based sceptical theism is useful when theism and naturalism's explanatory power over evil is the same and deficient. Suppose that both theism and naturalism cannot plausibly explain evil X, and that their explanatory power over other evil is the same. Because of data-based skeptical theism, theism will not be disconfirmed by evil X. On the other hand, naturalism will be disconfirmed by evil X. Data-based skeptical theism renders theism some advantages over naturalism in the light of evil X. When theism and naturalism's explanatory power over evil is both incomplete and in a tie, data-based theism can exert its power to defend theism.

In summary, data-based skeptical theism, the evidential argument from evil against naturalism, and the divine justice theodicy constitute a plausible threefold response to the evidential argument from evil. With this threefold response, theism is defended. The evidential argument from evil is now more of a problem for naturalism (and atheists who adopt it) than theism.

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