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EVIL AND ABOUNDING LOVE

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Prof. Dr. Henricus MOROS

Prof. Dr. Ioseph Maria TORRALBA

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D. Eduardus FLANDES

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INTRODUCTION

Abstract: This excerpt intends to present Peter van Inwagen's theistic responses to the theoretical problem of whether the global and local arguments from evil succeed as philosophical arguments in favor of atheism. It outlines and briefly criticizes the defensive methodology he has developed, an ideal debate that purports to gauge the success or failure of a philosophical argument for a substantive thesis. Then it presents and explores further the possibilities of van Inwagen's free-will and anti-irregularity defenses in the light of the Christian doctrine on the creation of a world in a state of journeying and the human person's special vocation to personal communion and stewardship of the world.

Key words: evil, gratuitous evil, horror, God, theodicy, defense, free-will defense, anti-irregularity defense, theism, atheism, problem of evil, argument from evil, global argument, local argument, theist, atheist, agnostic, philosophical success, vagueness, chance.

Abstracto: El trabajo intenta, en primer lugar, presentar las respuestas de van Inwagen a los argumentos ateos desde el mal (argumento global y argumento local); en segundo lugar, evaluar críticamente la metodología que ha desarrollado, y, por último, explorar otras posibilidades que su respuesta presenta a la luz de la doctrina cristiana sobre la creación de un mundo «en estado de vía hacia su perfección última», y la especial vocación de la persona humana como imagen de Dios en camino llamada a la comunión personal y al gobierno del mundo.

Palabras claves: el mal, mal gratuito, horror, Dios, teodicea, defensa, defensa basada en el libre albedrío, regularidad, irregularidad, teísmo, ateísmo, problema del mal, argumento desde el mal, argumento global, argumento local, teísta, ateísta, agnóstico, éxito filosófico, vaguedad, azar.

Something seems to be very terribly wrong with our world. The evening news is replete with reports of the day's evils: vehicular accidents, terrorist attacks, domestic violence, tortures and gruesome murders, dying ecosystems, and the latest statistics on AIDS and starvation in third world countries. And of course, the wars and genocides of recent world history have defied any optimism about the goodness of human nature: the two world wars, the massacres of millions by 20th-century totalitarian regimes, the ethnic cleansings during the Yugoslav wars and the Rwanda genocide in the 1990's.

Recent catastrophes, such as the May 2008 cyclone in Myanmar and earthquake in China, claimed the lives of hundreds of thousands and sparked such reflections as «*Did the victims deserve all this? Where is God? Is this*

his judgment? How can an all-powerful, all-knowing, good God allow such horrendous suffering?»

What is evil, and why is there so much of it in our world? If there is an all-powerful, all-knowing, and all-loving God, why are there devastating cyclones and earthquakes? Why are there gruesome murders, freak accidents, cancers, epidemics, injustices?

In the latter part of the twentieth century, some analytic philosophers (e.g., J. L. Mackie) charged theists of holding inconsistent beliefs,¹ echoing the age-old questions of Epicurus and David Hume: *Is God willing to prevent evil, but not able? Then He is impotent. Is He able, but not willing? Then He is malevolent. Is He both able and willing? Why then is there evil?*

Analytic philosophical discussions of this prima facie difficulty of reconciling the existence of God with the existence of evil became popular during the latter part of the 20th century. Atheistic analytic philosophers developed so-called logical and evidential versions of the argument from evil. *Logical arguments from evil* purport to show that a mere «logical analysis» of the concept of «God» and the concept of «evil» can directly show the impossibility of God's permitting the existence of evil. *Evidential arguments from evil* consider «the way evil is manifested in the world and try to show that evil constitutes strong, even compelling evidence for the non-existence of an adequate moral justification for an omnipotent being's permitting evil to occur»².

Analytical theists, for their part, came up with their own solutions to the problem. These include free-will responses, epistemic defenses and skeptical solutions, no-best-of-all-possible-worlds defenses, natural-law theodicies, as well as the fairly recent *felix culpa* theodicy³ and the many-universes solution⁴. While all these responses have something to contribute towards a theistic solution to the problem of evil, they also leave much to be desired. It is generally agreed that the free-will defense of Alvin Plantinga has given an adequate solution to the *logical* problem of evil⁵. Nevertheless,

1. J. L. MACKIE, «Evil and Omnipotence», *Mind* 64, no. 254 (Apr. 1955): pp. 200-212.

2. Timothy O'CONNOR, «The Problem of Evil: Introduction», in *Philosophy of Religion: A Reader and Guide*, ed. William Lane Craig (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 2002), pp. 309-310.

3. See Alvin PLANTINGA, «Supralapsarianism, or "O Felix Culpa"», in *Christian Faith and the Problem of Evil*, ed. Peter van Inwagen (Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2004).

4. See Donald Albert TURNER, JR., «The Many-Universes Solution to the Problem of Evil», in *The Existence of God*, ed. Richard M. Gale and Alexander R. Pruss (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003), pp. 143-159.

5. See Alvin PLANTINGA, «The Free Will Defense», in *Philosophy in America*, ed. Max Black (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1965); *God and Other Minds: A Study of the Rational Justification of Belief in God* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1967); *The*

discussions for or against the *success* of the *evidential* argument from evil continue. It has been recognized that for any general reason a theodist proposes as morally sufficient to justify God's non-prevention of evils, it doesn't follow that this general reason suffices to morally justify God's permission of a *particular instance* of horrendous evil (e.g., the brutal murder of an innocent child).

One of the latest Christian philosophers to join the discussion is Peter van Inwagen. An analytic philosopher, van Inwagen is the John Cardinal O'Hara Professor of Philosophy at the University of Notre Dame (Indiana, USA) and is one of the leading figures in contemporary metaphysics and philosophy of religion. Although brought up as a Presbyterian and later as a Unitarian, van Inwagen recounts how as a young student he went through a journey of faith from being an agnostic, to intellectual atheist, and eventually to being a devout churchgoing Episcopalian. He, nevertheless, quips, «I regard myself as a Catholic, and the Anglican communion as a branch (separated from other branches by historical tragedy) of the Catholic Church that is mentioned as an article of belief in the Creeds»⁶.

The present work is an attempt to faithfully present van Inwagen's responses to the problem of evil – scattered in his various publications since the 1980's, culminating in his 2006 book *The Problem of Evil*⁷.

Nature of Necessity (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1974), esp. pp. 164-195; *God, Freedom, and Evil* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, Co., 1977), esp. pp. 29-64. For a comprehensive study of the theistic responses of Plantinga, see Francisco CONESA, *Dios y el mal: La defensa del teísmo frente al problema del mal según Alvin Plantinga* (Pamplona: EUNSA, 1996). Among those who expressed their judgment of the adequacy of Plantinga's reply to the logical argument from evil is Michael L. PETERSON, *God and Evil: An Introduction to the Issues* (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1998), pp. 33-43, esp. p. 41.

6. Peter VAN INWAGEN, «Quam Dilecta», in *God and the Philosophers: The Reconciliation of Faith and Reason*, ed. Thomas V. Morris (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), p. 37.

7. Peter VAN INWAGEN, *The Problem of Evil: The Gifford Lectures Delivered in the University of St. Andrews in 2003* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2006).

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EVIL AND ABOUNDING LOVE

1. THE METHODOLOGY OF VAN INWAGEN'S RESPONSES

Van Inwagen sees the problem of evil as springing from the undeniable fact that there is a fundamental *prima facie* opposition between the existence of a loving and all-powerful God and the existence of evil in the world. He acknowledges that in Western intellectual and religious history, the phrase «the problem of evil» now actually refers to a vague conjunction of many problems of evil, whose scope includes practical, existential, pastoral, and theoretical aspects.

1.1. Clarifying Which «Problem of Evil» Is Being Addressed

Believers in God face a *practical problem of evil* when some terrible experience in their lives affects their beliefs about God and their attitudes towards God¹. E.g., a mother whose child dies of leukemia, would ask: Can I continue to trust in a supposedly provident God who answers prayers – now that He has remained indifferent to my prayers and done nothing to save my son?

The *radical problem of evil* is the problem of how to account for the extreme reaches of moral depravity. In Hannah Arendt, this is also the philosophical, psychological, anthropological problem of how to account for the seeming banality with which members of twentieth-century totalitarian regimes carry out the massacres of millions of people. It asks: how can it be that some people carry out horrendous crimes (e.g., mass murders) as though it were the most perfectly natural and banal thing to do, even a moral duty?

1. *Ibid.*, pp. 5 and 152, n. 6.

The *metaphysical problem of good and evil* asks: What are good and evil? Could there be a world that contained good but no evil – is this even metaphysically possible?

The *theoretical problem of evil* is the problem of whether or not the argument from evil succeeds as a *philosophical argument* to prove the non-existence of an omnipotent, omniscient, and morally perfect God. Atheists allege that the argument from evil indeed constitutes strong evidence against belief in the existence of such a God. The *theistic* philosopher's problem of evil is how to respond to the argument from evil in a way that defends the rationality of theism.

As an analytic philosopher, van Inwagen chooses to address directly only the theoretical problem of evil.

For a philosophical discussion of the argument from evil to proceed in order, atheists and theists agree to attach the same meanings to the terms «evil» and «God». By the word «God», they both mean «an omnipotent, omniscient, and morally perfect Person». For the atheist of course, there is no actually existing being that corresponds to the concept «God» so conceived. I mention in passing that a less-than-omnipotent-God (such as the God of process theism)², or an impersonal God, or a morally imperfect God would radically alter the nature of the discussion of the argument from evil, so that it is no longer the same argument from evil as posed in Western intellectual and religious history.

By the word «evil», both theists and atheists would mean «the absence of something that ought to be present, according to a system of evaluation that they both take to be objective and universal». In cases where the atheist brings an argument from an alleged evil (say, the evil of the *suffering* of non-human animals) – but where it is debatable whether the state of affairs appealed to by the atheist indeed involves some evil (i.e., some absence of something that *ought* to be present) – the theist may respond in two ways. First, the theist may argue that the state of affairs appealed to by the atheist does not really involve a *privation*, the absence of something that *ought to be present*.

This is an important consideration because many issues in the problem of evil are resolved at this level. E.g., if organic death itself, or the

2. See Charles HARTSHORNE, *Omnipotence and Other Theological Mistakes* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1984), esp. pp. 6-27. More recent responses to the problem of evil that appeal to «process theism» rather than to «traditional theism» include David Ray Griffin, *Evil Revisited: Responses and Reconsiderations* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1991); James A. KELLER, *Problems of Evil and the Power of God* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007). Keller argues that the problem of evil cannot be answered if a theist insists on God's omnipotence, and that only an understanding of God's power as found in process theism can make possible an adequate solution and at the same time provide a concept of God that is religiously adequate.

biological mechanism itself of pain, or the natural processes themselves of earthquakes, volcanic eruptions, etc., are labeled as «evils», an analytic theist may readily point out that these phenomena *in themselves*, detached from considerations of the individuating circumstances of the occurrence of each instance, may not involve absences of «goods that... ought to be there» (e.g. the loss of *lasting existence* as *this organism* in death does not involve the loss of something that... ought to be there. Indefinitely prolonged embeddedness in an organic world for *this organism* does not seem to be something that ought to be there).

A theist, however, may also choose to respond to an argument from an alleged evil in a second way. Even if *some* argument from evil, for example, the argument from the sufferings of beasts, can readily be refuted by suggesting that it is doubtful whether there is really such a thing as the evil of non-human animal *suffering* (since these creatures may not have self-consciousness or sense of themselves as continuing beings), a theodist may dare the atheist: a theistic response can grant (at least for the sake of argument) that some animals indeed *suffer* in ways analogous to human sufferings and that this state of affairs involves some evil. Van Inwagen uses this approach. He grants that the atheist can mount distinct arguments from evil – one that uses human suffering resulting from free human agency and another that uses the sufferings of non-human animals that have nothing to do with free human agency.

1.2. The Global-Local Taxonomy of Arguments from Evil

Van Inwagen rejects the traditional taxonomy of arguments from evil into the logical and evidential varieties. Most theistic responses (e.g., Plantinga's) to the argument from evil would usually address first the *logical* problem of evil, and only after refuting it do they move on to address the evidential argument from evil. Van Inwagen compares this roundabout approach to a defense lawyer who tries to demonstrate the innocence of his client by first establishing that it is at least possible «in the broadly logical sense» that the defendant had an evil identical twin who probably was the one who committed the crime, or that some extra-terrestrial beings committed the crime. After all, these stories are possible in the broadly logical sense, and must be taken into account.

Van Inwagen prefers instead the global-local taxonomy for its directness in getting right into the real issues. The *global argument* argues that the existence of evil *in general* is not consistent with the existence of God. The *local argument* argues that the existence of a given particular evil (e.g., the brutal murder of *this* child: five-year-old Mari Luz Cortés) points to the non-existence of the God of theism.

The global-local taxonomy of the argument touches both evils that are the result of the *human* abuse of freedom (I call these «*lapsarian evils*») and evils that have nothing to do with the *human* abuse of freedom (I call these «*extra-lapsarian evils*», of which the best candidates for examples are such *sufferings*, as there may have been, of higher-level sentient non-human animals before there were humans on earth)³. One must carefully note that this distinction (by van Inwagen himself) is not exactly equivalent to the traditional distinction between *moral* and *physical* (or *natural*) evils. For van Inwagen, some of the evils usually lumped under the rubric *natural evil* (e.g., death and destruction of innocent children from random events in nature occasioned by an earthquake, tsunami, etc.) may possibly be connected with the human abuse of free will after all (at least the *primordial abuse*). [See the discussion of van Inwagen's free-will defense below.]

Thus, when challenged with a certain argument from evil, van Inwagen categorizes it as to whether the *scope* of the evil/s offered as evidence against theism is global or local, and as to whether the *type* of evil at issue is lapsarian or extra-lapsarian. Here then are four categories:

- 1) the global argument from lapsarian evils (e.g., human suffering in general; morally wrong actions in general)
- 2) the global argument from extra-lapsarian evils (e.g., the pains and/or sufferings of pre-human animals in general)
- 3) the local argument from lapsarian evils (e.g., the horrendous sufferings of *this* woman as she was being brutally mutilated; the sufferings of *this child* buried alive during *this* earthquake)
- 4) the local argument from extra-lapsarian evils (e.g., the pains and/or sufferings of *this* animal – e.g. a fawn as it burns to death in a forest fire – long before there were humans on earth).

This taxonomy by van Inwagen enables him to propose a «composite response»⁴ with these features: a) a different general reason for God's global permission of each of the two types of evil; b) a parallel strategy (i.e., use

3. In van Inwagen's composite response, the angelic-corruption-of-nature defense of C. S. Lewis (as well as the abuse of free will by *non-human persons*, which Plantinga offers as a species of the free-will defense that is possible in the broadly logical sense) is considered as an alternative explanation for the *extra-lapsarian* evil of the sufferings of beasts, especially those that existed long before there were humans. Thus, obviously, in van Inwagen's schema, the «lapse» referred to in *lapsarian* evils is the *human* lapse in the good use of freedom, not any supposed *angelic* rejection to love God. «Lapse» seems to be the right word to use indeed since a «lapse» connotes the possibility of a «getting back on the right track» on the part of the one who lapsed. Human beings are, of course, forgivable, redeemable and reconcilable creatures capable of «getting back on track» through God's plan of redemption and their free cooperation. Angels, on the other hand, are traditionally described as capable only of one radical and irrevocable choice to love or reject God.

4. Cfr. VAN INWAGEN, *The Problem of Evil*, p. 113.

of arguments that have similar logical structures) for showing the failure of local arguments using either kind of evil.

The methodology of van Inwagen's «composite response» to the atheistic challenge from evil will now be examined.

1.3. The Ideal-Debate Test of a Philosophical Argument

Despite Plantinga's technical definitions of *defense* and *theodicy*⁵, van Inwagen attaches some special conceptual features to «theodicy» in his 1988 essay⁶. A theistic response to the argument from evil can still be called a «theodicy» if it claims *plausibility*, more than just «possibility in the broadly logical sense», even if it lays no claim to *knowing* God's actual purposes.

In the 2003 Gifford Lectures (published as *The Problem of Evil* in 2006), van Inwagen decides to use Plantinga's technical distinctions⁷. As in the 1988 essay, he does not claim to *know* God's actual purposes, and, of course, that alone is reason enough for him to call his 2003/2006 project a composite «defense» in Plantinga's sense. The claims van Inwagen makes for his theistic responses, whether he calls them a «theodicy» or a «defense», include:

1) «Epistemic possibility», i.e., «plausibility», or, in the expression repeatedly used (in its various forms) by van Inwagen, «truth-for-all-anyone-knows»⁸.

2) Sufficiency, not comprehensiveness, in explaining God's reasons for allowing evil.

3) Use of stories taken from Christian revelation⁹.

4) Consonance with the well-known facts of science and history¹⁰.

5. In Plantinga's use of these terms – at least in the 1970's – a *defense* only claims to tell us some *logically possible* reasons for God's allowing the existence of evils. A *theodicy* claims *true knowledge* of God's actual reasons for allowing the existence of evils.

6. Peter VAN INWAGEN, «The Magnitude, Duration, and Distribution of Evil: A Theodicy», in *God, Knowledge, and Mystery: Essays in Philosophical Theology*, by Peter van Inwagen (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1995), pp. 96-122; first published in *Philosophical Topics* 16, no. 2 (1988): pp. 161-187. Subsequent page citations are from the 1995 book.

7. VAN INWAGEN, *The Problem of Evil*, p. 65.

8. VAN INWAGEN, «The Magnitude, Duration, and Distribution of Evil: A Theodicy», pp. 96-98.

9. *Ibid.*

10. PETER VAN INWAGEN, «The Argument from Evil», in *Christian Faith and the Problem of Evil* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2004), p. 68.

For van Inwagen a theodicy may indeed be verbally identical with a defense¹¹. As he reflects on some data from Christian revelation, he remarks that those who do not share his allegiance to these data may, of course, just call his project a «defense» (in Plantinga's sense), if they want, and still give a fair hearing to *all* the contents of the essay. And so, when van Inwagen's work on the problem of evil is taken as a response to *atheists*, it appears to be modest in its aims and in its strategy: it merely tries to show that the argument from evil fails *as a philosophical argument* for atheism. [Of course, a Christian theist who hears van Inwagen's response would see that the propositions van Inwagen brings before atheists as merely «true for all anyone knows» are in fact propositions whose truth is guaranteed by a source other than the natural light of human reason alone (e.g., faith in the truth of divine revelation).]

To show that the argument from evil fails as a philosophical argument, van Inwagen asks: When can we say that a philosophical argument for a *substantive thesis* (e.g., «God does not exist»; «God exists») is a success? And when can we say that it is a failure? He proposes the following criteria for philosophical success: *An argument for p is a success just in the case that it can be used, under ideal circumstances, to convert an audience of ideal agnostics (i.e., agnostics in regard to p) to belief in p – in the presence of an ideal opponent of p, who tries to employ every rational means possible at every stage of the debate to keep the audience from being converted to p*¹².

And so, van Inwagen presents his response to the problem of evil in the context of an imaginary debate, conducted under ideal conditions. He puts the discussion in the mouth of two imaginary characters: an Ideal Theist (male) and an Ideal Atheist (female) debating before an ideal audience of agnostics. They are «ideal» not only in the sense of «imaginary», but also in the sense that they are supposed to possess the highest possible intelligence, the highest possible degree of philosophical and logical acumen, and are intellectually honest when evaluating the relevant arguments¹³. In the case of the ideal agnostics, they are, moreover, supposed to be ideally neutral, that is, they are supposed not to have the slightest predilection, emotional or otherwise, for either theism or atheism. And yet, they are supposed to be very eager to come to know the truth of the matter¹⁴.

The debate follows the forensic model. *Theism* itself is under trial – accused of inconsistency, for holding the co-existence of God and vast amounts

11. VAN INWAGEN, «The Argument from Evil», p. 62; van Inwagen, *The Problem of Evil*, p. 7.

12. VAN INWAGEN, *The Problem of Evil*, pp. 45 and 47.

13. *Ibid.*, pp. 42-43.

14. *Ibid.*, pp. 44 and 47.

of evil. The prosecutor is the Atheist, and therefore she has the burden of proof. She must convince the ideal neutral audience of agnostics, serving as jurors, that atheism is true beyond reasonable doubt. The Ideal Theist acts as a defense lawyer for *theism*. The defense counsel needs only to come up with a story, true-for-all-anyone-knows, in which the evidence (i.e., the existence of evils) can be shown to be consistent with the innocence of the accused, i.e., the truth and consistency of theism.

The imaginary characters are supposed to take all the time they need to hear and to refute each other's arguments. At the end of the imaginary debate – when «nothing more can be said», says van Inwagen – the ideal audience of neutral agnostics will then give their verdict: they are either unanimously convinced by Atheist's argument from evil and now are converted to atheism, or they unanimously find the allegations contained in the argument from evil as «not beyond reasonable doubt» and therefore would remain as agnostics¹⁵.

Predictably, of course, van Inwagen's imaginary agnostics, after hearing the defense, are not converted to atheism by the argument from evil. And so, van Inwagen the real-life philosopher in effect tells us that indeed the argument from evil fails as a philosophical argument for atheism.

Some complaints have been raised against van Inwagen's methodology and criterion of philosophical success¹⁶. Some question the plausibility of van Inwagen's supposition that ideal proponents, as well as ideal agnostics with no predilection whatsoever, are the best indicators for the success of an argument¹⁷. It also seems that when a creator of an ideal debate says that his ideal characters are «of the highest possible intelligence» and therefore «ideal» in that sense, he cannot just leave it at that. Unless the theistic creator of an ideal debate specifies the background knowledge and beliefs of his imaginary agnostics, as well as the degree of credence («probable», «highly probable», «totally devoid of any significant probability of being true», etc.) they assign to various propositions, theories, etc., it would be

15. *Ibid.*, p. 45.

16. Cfr., for example, David ALEXANDER, «Three Consequences of van Inwagen's Account of Philosophical Success», a panel discussion paper at the Second Annual Philosophy of Religion Conference at Baylor University, Waco, Texas in 2007, retrieved 15 May 2008 from the World Wide Web: <http://www.baylor.edu/content/services/document.php/41351.pdf>. See also Daniel M. JOHNSON, «A Counterexample to van Inwagen's Criterion for the Success and Failure of Philosophical Arguments», a panel discussion paper delivered at the Second Annual Philosophy of Religion Conference at Baylor University, Waco, Texas in 2007, retrieved 15 May 2008 from the World Wide Web: <http://www.baylor.edu/content/services/document.php/40622.pdf>, pp. 2-4.

17. Cfr. William HASKER, «The Problem of Evil», a review of Peter van Inwagen's *The Problem of Evil*, in *Notre Dame Philosophical Reviews* (2007-03-12), retrieved 15 May 2008 from the World Wide Web: <http://ndpr.nd.edu/review.cfm?id=9064>.

hard for the real-life readers of the ideal debate to have some objective basis for affirming that indeed, given the arguments the creator puts into the mouth of his imaginary defender, there's no other way for the verdict to be (in ideal conditions) but as he says it would be: a unanimous one in favor of the defense¹⁸.

Having said the above, I'd still say that van Inwagen's imaginary debate is an engaging literary device. It at least clarifies that when atheists accuse theism of inconsistency by brandishing the argument from evil, they are the ones who have the burden of proof. Moreover, one need not suppose with van Inwagen that ideal agnostics (if they are possible at all) would always be *unanimous* in their verdict, or that there will ever come a point (so long as there are still philosophers searching for the truth) when nothing more can be said on a philosophical issue. It just might be advisable that each reader of van Inwagen's ideal debate should imagine himself sitting as one of the jurors: After hearing the discussions van Inwagen puts into the mouth of his ideal characters, how would I (as a juror) judge the argument from evil? After all, what ultimately matters is not what a bunch of ideal agnostics say about an argument (or better said, what a theistic creator of an ideal debate would say that *his* ideal agnostics would say in regard to a philosophical argument); what ultimately matters is what *I* say as a rationally thinking person in regard to a philosophical problem.

Van Inwagen thinks *there is no philosophical argument that is a success according to his criterion*. The argument from evil, like other philosophical arguments, will thus, predictably, be shown to be a failure. It doesn't have the power to convert an audience of ideal agnostics to atheism even after the best efforts of an ideal atheist. Van Inwagen attempts to show how that is so.

We will now reconstruct, first, the free-will defense that van Inwagen especially sets in the methodological context of an imaginary debate based on the forensic model. Although he doesn't present his anti-irregularity defense in the context of this ideal debate, van Inwagen affirms that the verdict of «genuinely neutral agnostics» remains to be his standard for evaluating the argument from the sufferings of beasts, as well as the arguments in his defenses¹⁹.

18. Cfr. Richard SWINBURNE, Book Review of Peter van Inwagen's *The Problem of Evil*, in *Mind* 116, no. 463 (July 2007): p. 791. See also Kenny BOYCE and Justin MCBRAYER, «Van Inwagen on the Problem of Evil: the Good, the Bad and the Ugly», a panel discussion paper presented at the Second Annual Philosophy of Religion Conference at Baylor University, Waco, Texas, in 2007, retrieved 15 May 2008 from the World Wide Web: <http://www.baylor.edu/content/services/document.php/41162.pdf>.

19. VAN INWAGEN, *The Problem of Evil*, p. 113.

First, Atheist, who has the burden of proof at this stage, lays an argument from evil in support of her atheistic thesis.

Secondly, Theist, the defense debater at this point, responds by casting doubt on at least one premise of the argument from evil. Theist is not required to show that the argument is false, but only that something in it is doubtful. Neither is he required to weaken Atheist's allegiance to her own premises, for what matters is the agnostic *audience's* acceptance or non-acceptance of those premises. The defender may tell «just-so stories»²⁰ where both God and evils of the kinds and amounts found in the actual world co-exist.

Thirdly, Atheist presents a rejoinder to the doubt-casting statement of the defense by pointing out some flaws in Theist's stories. This rejoinder takes the form of a reformulation of the original argument in such a way that now it escapes the first criticism of Theist.

Fourthly, Theist replies to the rejoinder of Atheist. Steps Three and Four are repeated for as long as one of the debaters still has something to say.

2. THE FREE-WILL DEFENSE AGAINST THE GLOBAL ARGUMENT FROM EVIL

What follows is a reconstruction in propositional form of the initial speeches of van Inwagen's imaginary debaters.

2.1. The Global Argument from Evil

Atheist's first speech contains the initial presentation of the global argument from evil:

- (1) There are evils in the actual world where free human beings find themselves²¹.
- (2) God, if He exists, is omnipotent, omniscient (or at least knows about the evils of the world that free human beings know about), and morally perfect.

20. VAN INWAGEN, «The Magnitude, Duration, and Distribution of Evil: A Theodicy», p. 106, n. 7; quoting Daniel Dennett, *Elbow Room: The Varieties of Free Will Worth Wanting* (Cambridge: M.I.T. Press, 1980), p. 38.

21. The addition of the adjective «free» to «human beings» is deliberately anticipated here (for our expository purposes), even if it does not yet appear in Atheist's First Speech. Atheist, of course, doesn't have any problem with this qualification and she in fact agrees, in her second speech, that human beings in the actual world are free.

- (3) The existence of all evils in the actual world where free human beings find themselves is not *consistent* with the existence of the omnipotent, omniscient, and morally perfect God²².
- (4) Therefore, since there are evils in the actual world where free human beings find themselves, no omnipotent, omniscient, and morally perfect God exists.

Atheist's Proof for Proposition (3)

- (5) *All* the evils in the actual world where free human beings find themselves are evils that an omnipotent, omniscient, and morally perfect God, if He exists, *is able to prevent*, knows about, and wants to prevent, without thereby allowing the occurrence of an evil equally bad or worse, or losing a greater good.
- (6) In a created world where there are free beings, God, if He exists, *can ensure* that there would be no evils²³.
- (7) Hence, if there had been an omnipotent, omniscient, and morally perfect God, there wouldn't have been any evil in the actual world where free human beings find themselves.

Van Inwagen's free-will defense proposes the exact contradictory of both Atheist's Premise (5) and Atheist's Premise (6), as will be shown shortly. God *cannot* do the things that Atheist's Premises (5) and (6) say He can. The bulk of the defense would, of course, be in presenting arguments why such things are intrinsically impossible.

Consequently, if Premises (5) and (6) can be shown to be «false, for all anyone knows», so will Atheist's Premise (3). Atheist's Premise (3) may well be false because its contradiction is possibly true, namely, «The existence of *all* evils in the actual world where free human beings find themselves is not inconsistent with the existence of the omnipotent, omniscient, and morally perfect God».

2.2. The Free-Will Defense Against the Global Argument

Supplied with the implicit premises, the free-will defense that van Inwagen puts in the mouth of his imaginary Theist is reconstructed as follows:

22. We may note that although van Inwagen expressly prefers the global-local to the logical-evidential taxonomy, he nevertheless begins his ideal debate between Atheist and Theist with some points first made in discussions of the logical problem, but he does so not under the rubric «the logical problem of evil». See van Inwagen, *The Problem of Evil*, p. 68.

23. One way to try to prove this premise might be by appealing to the *compatibilist* theory of free will, as van Inwagen acknowledges. See Peter van Inwagen, *An Essay on Free Will* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983), pp. 106-152.

2.2.1. *The Simple Form of the Free-Will Defense*

1) An indispensable part of the goodness of this world is the existence of intelligent beings which are capable of abstract thinking, love, and free choice between contemplated courses of action.

2) Creaturely free will is a necessary condition for creaturely love and creaturely free choice²⁴.

3) A logically necessary condition for creaturely freedom is non-determination by God, i.e., God cannot give a creature a *free* choice between *x* (doing good) and *y* (doing evil), and *ensure* that the creature would choose *x* rather than *y*, for this is metaphysically impossible²⁵.

4) God, granted that He exists, *created* free intelligent beings and made sure that He did not determine them in regard to their free acts.

5) Some intelligent beings misused their freedom and produced a certain amount of evil and suffering in the actual world.

The actual commission of moral evils has never been a part of God's eternal plan. Moreover, if the world could have been much worse than it actually is, then it is at least possible that God does everything His omnipotence could do to increase the probability that His free creatures would *freely* choose to do the good. However – granted that the incompatibilist theory of free will is true – despite all that omnipotence can do, the free creature remains in a very real sense actually *able* to turn against God, against his fellow humans, against the world, and against his own reason and self-integrity. But *God does not eliminate creaturely freedom because of its necessity in making possible the immensely great good of the creature called out of nothingness to come to love God (and his fellow creatures and himself in God).*

Van Inwagen addresses the well-known fundamental objections against most free-will defenses. These objections concern the nature of free will itself. They include the question on the supposed compatibility of free will with determinism, the supposed truth of some counterfactuals of creaturely freedom (what is sometimes called «God's middle knowledge»), and the supposed incompatibility of divine foreknowledge and creaturely freedom.

24. The qualification «creaturely» is a careful addition to van Inwagen's «free will is necessary for love», in anticipation of what van Inwagen himself considers, namely, the objection that says the divine persons of the Trinity (in Christian Theism) are not free to love or not to love one another (for they *necessarily* love each other), and that therefore the thesis that «free will is necessary for love» is not necessarily true. See van Inwagen's response to this objection in *The Problem of Evil*, pp. 165-167, n. 10 to Lecture 5.

25. One way to try to prove this premise might be by appealing to the *incompatibilist* theory of free will. See van Inwagen's «Three Arguments for Incompatibilism» in his *An Essay on Free Will* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983), pp. 55-105.

At this point, one can clearly see the ingenuity of van Inwagen's preferred methodological context. It wouldn't matter so much in an ideal debate that both incompatibilism and compatibilism, for example, are *probable* theories of free-will, with each account possessing good arguments supporting it. The Ideal Atheist cannot just dismiss before the Ideal Agnostics the free-will story as false on the ground that it is objectionable, given *her compatibilist account* of free will. Since she has the burden of proof, she must demonstrate before the agnostics that compatibilism is the correct theory, and that incompatibilism is false. Unfortunately for the atheist, compatibilism is not yet known to possess a decisive philosophical argument such that anyone hearing it would be converted to it. A compatibilist *theory* of free will is just *one* account of free will, and the incompatibilist theory is *another*. Arguments can be offered in support of both sides, but both fall short of coming up with a convincing proof²⁶.

2.2.2. *The Expanded Free-Will Defense*

Van Inwagen next addresses Atheist's expected rejoinder: *isn't it the case that many of the horrendous evils in the world obviously don't have anything to do with the abuse of freedom by human beings: cancer, plagues and epidemics, earthquakes, tsunamis, and cyclones?*

In what he calls his «expanded free-will defense», van Inwagen carefully notes that many of the things that the Atheist calls «evils» are not by themselves evils. For example, earthquakes and cyclones are but normal processes in the natural world; what might be called «evil» – in fact, what are usually called «natural evils» – are the agonizing deaths and destructions brought about by *the random events* that are occasioned by these processes in nature, and given the fact that the actual world has stable natural

26. In many places, van Inwagen acknowledges this point. He gives three arguments for incompatibilism as well as three arguments for compatibilism in his *An Essay on Free Will*, pp. 55-105 and 106-152. See also VAN INWAGEN, «Compatibilism and the Burden of Proof», *Analysis* 40, no. 2 (Mar. 1980): pp. 98-100, and RICHARD FOLEY, «Reply to van Inwagen», *Analysis* 40, no. 2 (Mar. 1980): pp. 101-103. See also VAN INWAGEN, «On Two Arguments for Compatibilism», *Analysis* 45, no. 3 (June 1985): pp. 161-163; «When Is the Will Free?» *Philosophical Perspectives 3: Philosophy of Mind and Action Theory* (1989): pp. 399-422; «The Mystery of Metaphysical Freedom», in *Metaphysics: The Big Questions*, ed. Peter van Inwagen and Dean W. Zimmerman (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 1998), pp. 365-374; «Moral Responsibility, Determinism, and the Ability to Do Otherwise», *The Journal of Ethics* 3 (1999): pp. 341-350; «Free Will Remains a Mystery», *Philosophical Perspectives 14: Action and Freedom* (2000): pp. 1-19; Peter van Inwagen, «How to Think about the Problem of Free Will», retrieved 15 May 2008 from the World Wide Web: <http://philosophy.nd.edu/people/all/profiles/van-inwagen-peter/documents/HowThinkFW.doc> [to appear in *The Journal of Ethics*].

laws. «Random events in nature» would be, for example, a particular heavy object falling at a particular place at a particular time on the occasion of a particular earthquake, or a particular tree being uprooted and smashing on the ground at a particular place at a particular time on the occasion of a particular gust of wind.

Van Inwagen offers this defense story as «true for all anyone knows»: God created the first human beings in an original state of holiness and justice. In this original state of holiness and justice, the first human beings enjoyed some sort of preternatural powers: they were able to avoid getting in the way of random events in nature – which they knew about in advance – and thus they were able to avoid getting harmed by these events. When the first humans abused their freedom, the effects included: loss of the preternatural gifts, susceptibility to being destroyed by random events in nature; suffering when they, in fact, were not able to escape from these random events; a frame of mind that tends to do moral evil. These effects were inherited by subsequent generations. All the evils and sufferings that human beings suffered from them on until now can be traced back to that aboriginal abuse of free will in two ways: 1) Moral evils subsequently committed – and which brought so much evil and suffering both to the perpetrator and the victim – became all the easier to commit because of the acquired frame of mind that now tends to do evil. 2) In man's fallen state, where there are no more preternatural powers, escaping destruction by the random events occasioned by nature's normal processes became all the more difficult.

Thus, in van Inwagen's defense, there is a sense in which at least a good part of human suffering after the alleged primordial abuse of freedom can still be traced back as a consequence of the abuse of freedom after all – at least of that primordial abuse of freedom, one of whose natural consequences was separation from God, loss of the preternatural gifts, and an inherited tendency to do what one ought not to do.

Van Inwagen's expanded free-will defense again draws from some data from Christian revelation and adds the following propositions as «true for all anyone knows»:

1) After human beings abused their freedom, God set into operation an Atonement plan (a plan of «at-one-ment») designed to restore separated human beings to union with Him.

2) A necessary condition for the Atonement plan to succeed is that human beings are made aware of the bad situation of their state of separation and that they would once more freely decide to love God the second time around.

3) A necessary condition for human beings to be aware of the bad situation of their state of separation is that God should leave in place (i.e., not prevent) a certain amount of evil in the actual world.

4) Total miraculous cancellation by God of *all* the natural consequences of the abuse of free will (i.e., all the evils and sufferings of human beings) would be: deception on the part of God to human beings in regard to their true miserable state of separation from Him. Moreover, cancellation of *all* human sufferings would remove the only motivation fallen human beings have for turning back to God²⁷.

5) Therefore, given that human beings abused their freedom, God is justified in not preventing at least *some* amount of evil (e.g., the sufferings naturally consequent upon the human abuse of freedom) in order to provide a necessary – though definitely insufficient (since it awaits the free human response) – condition for the success of the Atonement.

Van Inwagen again adds: For all anyone knows – since it is, after all, possible to imagine that the actual world could have been much worse than it is – it is at least possible that God is continually preventing a great number of the evils that would have naturally obtained without His special intervention.

Van Inwagen ends his imaginary Theist's expanded free-will defense by making the following claims:

- (6) God indeed *will bring* His plan of Atonement («at-one-ment», i.e., union of creatures with God) to fruition in due time²⁸.
- (7) «When God's plan of Atonement comes to fruition, there will never again be undeserved suffering or any other sort of evil»²⁹.
- (8) «If there is still suffering, it will be merited: the suffering of those who refuse to cooperate with God's great rescue operation and are allowed by him to exist forever in a state of elected ruin – those who, in a word, are in Hell».
- (9) When God's plan of Atonement comes to fruition, those human beings who *loved* God, i.e., *freely chose to be reunited with*

27. VAN INWAGEN, *The Problem of Evil*, p. 88; van Inwagen, «The Magnitude, Duration, and Distribution of Evil: A Theodicy», p. 113.

28. In a context where a *theodicy* need not limit itself to the claims of «restricted theism» but may legitimately make use of claims taken from «expanded theism», such as Christian truth claims deduced from revelation, the claim that «God brings His plan of Atonement to fruition in due time» is certainly more than just «logical in the broadly logical sense». It has the force of being held to be *true* by theists in a certain tradition, namely, Christianity. Indeed the holding of this proposition to be *true* is even shared by theists of the two other monotheistic religions (Islam and Judaism). The three monotheistic traditions would of course propose divergent propositions as regards the details of how this plan of Atonement is being brought to fruition by God. But all three traditions *believe it to be true* that a plan of Atonement whereby creatures can be reunited with God is one of those things that God does for His people.

29. VAN INWAGEN, «The Magnitude, Duration, and Distribution of Evil: A Theodicy», p. 102. Cfr. VAN INWAGEN, *The Problem of Evil*, p. 89.

Him by freely cooperating in His rescue operation, will enjoy happiness forever in a *state* of elected union with God called Heaven³⁰.

- (10) The expected value of allowing all the total number of evils in the actual world until the final completion of God's plan of Atonement, given that God indeed provides such a completion (an eternity of happiness in a communion of love with God), is positive³¹.
- (11) Current knowledge of human pre-history and evolution does not disprove any of the claims in the expanded free-will defense³².

Van Inwagen concludes that since the expanded free-will defense is a story that is possible, reasonable, and one that doesn't give anybody reason to reject the whole of it or even any part of it on *scientific* grounds, the ideal audience of impartial agnostics can indeed be reasonably imagined to give the verdict he believes they would: a unanimous one in favor of the defense.

However, the ideal Atheist can still raise the objections from the *great amounts*³³ and *horrendous varieties* of evil there are in the actual world.

We now turn to the rest of van Inwagen's imaginary debate.

3. THE FREE-WILL DEFENSE AGAINST THE LOCAL ARGUMENT FROM EVIL

After the first round of discussions, Atheist grants that the expanded free-will defense has shown that God *could not have totally done away with every evil* there is in the actual world. Atheist even grants that the *inability* of God to prevent the abuse of free will («inability», i.e., in the relative sense that God also decides to let free creatures significantly exercise their freedom) may well imply, granted that Theist's free-will story is true, either

30. VAN INWAGEN, «The Magnitude, Duration, and Distribution of Evil: A Theodicy», pp. 112-113. Cfr. VAN INWAGEN, *The Problem of Evil*, p. 89.

31. Using the language of one of Swinburne's four conditions that must be fulfilled for God to be justified in allowing an evil, this formulation expresses van Inwagen's rather poetic rendition of the same thought: «[T]his present darkness, "the age of evil", will eventually be remembered as a brief flicker at the beginning of human history. Every evil done by the wicked to the innocent will have been avenged, and every tear will have been wiped away». VAN INWAGEN, *The Problem of Evil*, p. 89; van Inwagen, «The Magnitude, Duration, and Distribution of Evil: A Theodicy», p. 102.

32. Cfr. VAN INWAGEN, «Quam Dilecta», pp. 50-55.

33. Cfr. VAN INWAGEN, «The Argument from Evil», pp. 64 and 68; van Inwagen, *The Problem of Evil*, p. 73.

the *inability* of God to prevent «natural evils» *in general*, or God's *having morally sufficient reasons* for allowing these evils *in general*³⁴. Thus the following have been shown to be *not inconsistent* with the existence of an omnipotent, omniscient, and morally perfect God:

- the *general* scenario where human beings freely do evil, separate themselves from God, are without the protection of preternatural powers, and are vulnerable to potentially destructive random events occasioned by the normal processes in nature;
- the *general* scenario where human beings suffer from the evil consequences of events caused by the abuse of free-will.

As logical consequence of the above, the expanded free-will defense has shown that the following are *not inconsistent* with the existence of God:

- the existence *in general* of certain kinds of «natural evils». E.g., the wounding, psychological traumatizing, maiming or killing of people by random events (e.g., falling debris, falling boulder) during such natural phenomena as earthquakes and cyclones;
- the existence *in general* of certain kinds of moral evils, as well as their specific evil effects. E.g., suffering caused by petty theft, a slap, slander, etc.;
- the existence *in general* of specifically horrendous evils – «*horrors*» *in general*, for example – where «horrors» simply mean «very bad events»³⁵ whether brought about directly by free human agency or not. One of the consequences of their separation from God is that humans now live in a world in which horrors happen at random. Most often, the distribution of horrors has nothing to do at all with the moral state of the subjects (e.g., birth of a baby without limbs, rape and murder of little children).

34. Atheist's grant here about God's possible inability to prevent «natural evils» should be understood in just the general sense adduced by Theist, namely, that it's possible that at least *some* of the sufferings endured by humans after the primordial abuse of free will (e.g., deaths during earthquakes) are due to the fact that they no longer enjoy preternatural powers that would have warned them of potentially harmful random events occasioned by nature's normal processes. Atheist grants, for now, that a morally perfect omnipotent God may indeed have a morally sufficient reason for allowing the existence of such examples of «natural evil», namely, that God had to leave in place *some* of the evil consequences of the abuse of free will in order to at least provide a necessary (though of course insufficient) condition for the Atonement. Atheist does not grant a point that is not even brought out by Theist yet, namely, natural evil involving pre-lapse animal suffering.

35. VAN INWAGEN, *The Problem of Evil*, p. 95.

3.1. The Local Argument from Evil

The local argument from evil launches an attack making use of a particular *instance* of gratuitous horror that actually took place in the past, say, *this particular gratuitous horror*: the brutal murder of five-year old Mari Luz Cortés near the port of Huelva, Spain in January 2008 (henceforth referred to as «the Murder of Mari Luz»³⁶).

Atheist's Main Argument

- (13) The Murder of Mari Luz was a gratuitous horror.
- (14) If the Murder of Mari Luz had been prevented by God from occurring (given that an omnipotent, omniscient, and morally perfect God exists from all eternity), the world would be no worse than it is.
- (15) If the world would be no worse than it is by an omnipotent God's prevention of the Murder of Mari Luz, He would have prevented its occurrence if He was able to.
- (16) If an omnipotent, omniscient, and morally perfect God exists from all eternity, He was able to prevent the Murder of Mari Luz from occurring, and able to do so in a way that would have left the world otherwise much as it is.
- (17) The Murder of Mari Luz in fact occurred.
- (18) Therefore, since this instance of a clearly gratuitous horror was not prevented, no omnipotent, omniscient, and morally perfect God exists from all eternity.

Atheist's Support for Her Proposition (14)

- (19) The world would be no worse than it is by the prevention of the Murder of Mari Luz because:
 - (19a) God's plan to have a world where human beings significantly exercise their freedom would not have been frustrated by the removal of the horror that was the Murder of Mari Luz. If this single incident was removed from the several-thousand-year history of free human beings, the

36. This example is chosen for this study. Both van Inwagen and Marilyn Adams make use of a true story that was reported in the press in the 1980's about a woman who was attacked by a man in an isolated place sometime in the 1980's. The man chopped off her arms with an ax, raped her, and left her to die. The woman, however, survived and was severely traumatized for life. Van Inwagen refers to this whole incident as «the Mutilation». See *The Problem of Evil*, pp. 97-98 and 168, n. 1 of Lecture 6. See also ADAMS, «Horrendous Evils and the Goodness of God», *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, supplementary volume 63 (1989): pp. 297-310; reprinted in revised form in *The Problem of Evil*, ed. Marilyn McCord Adams and Robert Merrihew Adams (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), pp. 209-221.

world would be very much as it is: Human beings are still significantly free.

- (19b) God's plan of Atonement will not be frustrated just because the Murder of Mari Luz did not occur. The accomplishment of God's plan of Atonement would not even be significantly affected by the prevention of the Murder of Mari Luz.

Atheist's Support for Her Proposition (15)

- (20) An omnipotent, omniscient, and morally perfect God, if He exists, would have prevented the horror that was the Murder of Mari Luz unless there was some *greater* good that *only* the Murder of Mari Luz could make possible, or unless there was an equally bad or worse evil that *only* the Murder of Mari Luz could prevent.
- (21) There was no greater good that only the Murder of Mari Luz could make possible. All the proposed goods are either ones that can be made possible and are even achievable by other, less evil means than the Murder of Mari Luz, or ones that do not necessarily outweigh the horror of the Murder of Mari Luz, or both.
- (22) There was no evil equally bad or worse that only the Murder of Mari Luz could prevent. All the proposed evils are either ones that can be prevented by the occurrence of other, less evil means than the Murder of Mari Luz, or ones that are not necessarily equal or worse evils than the Murder itself.

Atheist's Support for Her Proposition (16)

- (23) There are ways available to an omnipotent, omniscient, and morally perfect God by which He could have brought about the prevention of the Murder and left the world much as it is. For example, God, if He exists, could have brought it about that the would-be murderer suffered a broken ankle an hour before the Murder, or that Mari Luz did not go out of the house to buy a packet of crisps on that fatal day.
- (24) If the omnipotent God had employed these ways, He would have prevented the Murder of Mari Luz and left the world much as it is: He would still have human beings exercising their freedom significantly, and He wouldn't be putting the Atonement in danger of being frustrated.

3.2. The Free-Will Defense Against the Local Argument

Many theists would reply to the local argument by casting doubt on *Premise (13) of the Argument from This Particular Gratuitous Horror*: «The Murder of Mari Luz was a gratuitous horror».

This is a possible approach and it certainly proposes a scenario whereby Atheist's premises *can* be false. It offers the following simple defense of theism: «For all anyone knows, the world (considered under the aspect of eternity) is a better place for containing the [Murder]... God has brought, or will at some future time bring, some great good out of the [Murder], a good that outweighs it, or else has employed the [Murder] as a means to the prevention of some even greater evil... [F]or all anyone knows, the great good achieved or the great evil prevented could not have been, respectively, achieved or prevented, even by an omnipotent being, in any other way than by some means that involved the [Murder] or some other horror at least as bad as the [Murder]»³⁷.

If the Murder of Mari Luz has at least one of these characteristics – necessity in the prevention of an evil equally bad or worse, or necessity in making possible the achievement of some greater good – then it was not in fact a gratuitous horror. Both Atheist and Theist may agree that it was a horror, but while Atheist says it *was* a gratuitous horror, the Theist using this approach says it was *not* a gratuitous horror. Premise (13) of the Local Argument from *This Particular Gratuitous Horror* is squarely contradicted. Peterson calls this theistic approach a very traditional one: the theist does not make a commitment towards believing in the existence of pointless evils³⁸.

Skeptical theists, of course, such as Wykstra and Alston would find it enough for refuting the local argument to simply point out the incapacity of the human cognitive condition to comprehend God's purposes at all times³⁹. No human is in the position to say that a particular horror proposed as gratuitous is not in fact the necessary means (or a necessary part of the necessary means) to achieve a greater good or avoid an evil at least as bad. Consequently, skeptical theists conclude that the argument from gratuitous evil cannot even get past the initial premise on the gratuitousness of some horrors, or past the initial premise on the gratuitousness of *this* particular horror.

37. VAN INWAGEN, *The Problem of Evil*, p. 98.

38. PETERSON, *God and Evil: An Introduction to the Issues*, p. 30.

39. See, for example, Stephen J. Wykstra, «The Humean Obstacle to Evidential Arguments from Suffering: On Avoiding the Evils of "Appearance"», *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 16 (1984): pp. 73-93; «Rowe's Noseum Arguments from Evil», in *The Evidential Argument from Evil*, ed. Daniel Howard-Snyder (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996), pp. 126-150. See also William P. ALSTON, «The Inductive Argument from Evil and the Human Cognitive Condition», in *Philosophical Perspectives 5: Philosophy of Religion* (Atascadero: Ridgeview, 1991), pp. 29-67; «Some (Temporarily) Final Thoughts on Evidential Arguments from Evil», in *The Evidential Argument from Evil*, ed. Daniel Howard-Snyder (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996), pp. 311-332.

While he acknowledges the possibility of skeptical solutions, van Inwagen moves on to another approach, one that grants (at least for the sake of argument) the existence of *gratuitous* horrors. Van Inwagen's response admits, and even calls «plausible», the following premise:

(25) There has been, in the history of the world, at least one gratuitous horror such that if it had not occurred, the world would be no worse than it is⁴⁰.

Van Inwagen's response attempts to cast reasonable doubt rather on the following premise of Atheist:

Proposition (15) of the Argument from the Gratuitousness of This Particular Horror: «If the world would be no worse than it is by an omnipotent God's prevention of the Murder of Mari Luz, He would have prevented its occurrence if He was able to».

3.2.1. *Refutation of the Moral Principle Appealed to by Atheists*

The first step is exposing the implied presupposition behind Atheist's Premise (15), namely, the supposition that the following proposition is a *basic* moral principle that applies to God's moral situation in regard to evils:

(SP) If one is in a position to prevent some evil, one should not allow that evil to occur – not unless allowing it to occur would result in some good that would outweigh it or preventing it would result in some other evil at least as bad.

The above proposition has been called the «standard position on evil» (SP)⁴¹. This is the same moral principle Rowe describes as «basic» and supposed to be shared by both theists and non-theists⁴². Anyone who describes the above proposition as «a *basic* moral principle» is in effect claiming that such a proposition is *necessarily* correct⁴³, i.e., correct in any possible world where it is applicable.

40. VAN INWAGEN, *The Problem of Evil*, p. 99.

41. Cfr. Michael ALMEIDA, «Evil's Vague Necessity», a paper presented at the Second Annual Philosophy of Religion Conference at Baylor University, Waco, Texas, in 2007, retrieved 15 May 2008 from the World Wide Web: <http://baylor.edu/content/services/document.php/41630.pdf>, p. 1.

42. William L. ROWE, «The Problem of Evil and Some Varieties of Atheism», in *The Problem of Evil*, ed. Marilyn McCord Adams and Robert Merrihew Adams (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), p. 129.

43. Cfr. Richard SWINBURNE, *Providence and the Problem of Evil* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), p. 19.

The success of the local argument from evil, Atheist thinks, greatly depends on supposing that the basic moral principle above is indeed necessarily correct as a *moral principle*, and that it is the correct moral principle *to appeal to* when evaluating God's moral accountability with regards to the evils of the world. The atheist supposes that this principle is *applicable* to the state of affairs where God is the moral agent who allows and prevents certain evils. With these suppositions, Atheist then charges God of not acting in accordance with the principle.

Here, Lowell Friesen reminds us that a moral *principle* tells an agent in what manner he *ought* to act or not to act, and that therefore any defense of theism against the local argument would have to do one of two things: either it must grant Atheist that such a principle is correct as a moral principle and that God *acts* in accordance with it after all (contrary to the atheist's charge), or that it must show that the principle is wrong in the first place *as a moral principle*⁴⁴. Van Inwagen chooses to do the latter.

Contrary to Atheist's claim, van Inwagen's Theist argues that SP is *not* a correct basic moral principle. Supplied with the supplementary premises, here is our reconstruction of van Inwagen's

Theist's Main Argument:

- (1) A basic moral principle concerning an agent's prevention of evils is one that is necessarily correct in any state of affairs (in any possible world) in which there is an agent preventing some evils and allowing some evils.
- (2) The moral principle appealed to by Atheist is necessarily correct if and only if there is *no* state of affairs (involving an agent preventing some evils and allowing some evils) in which it can be wrong – i.e., wrong, because it obliges a moral agent to do something the agent is not morally obliged to do.
- (3) But there is a state of affairs (involving an agent preventing some evils and allowing some evils) in which the principle can be wrong, namely, that state of affairs:
 - (3a) where a moral agent is justified in the permission of a *certain* amount of evil for the accomplishment of some good purpose, but where the *amount* of evils necessary for the accomplishment of this purpose is *vague*;
 - (3b) where the vagueness of this matter is due to the fact that there are *no precise boundaries* between the terms in question;

44. Lowell FRIESEN, «Vagueness, Moral Obligation, and van Inwagen's Defense of Theism from the Local Argument from Evil», retrieved 15 May 2008 from the World Wide Web: <http://people.umass.edu/lfriesen/research/van%20inwagen%20on%20the%20argument%20from%20evil.pdf>, p. 8.

- (3c) where, therefore, there is no number n such that (i) if the agent had prevented n (or fewer) of the evils that the agent in fact allowed, the good purpose would have been achieved just the same, and (ii) if the agent had prevented $n + 1$ (or more) of those evils from taking place, the good purpose would not have been achieved⁴⁵;
- (3d) where the prevention of any number, m , of evils would not have a significantly different effect from the prevention of $m + 1$ evils or $m - 1$ evils as regards either the achievement or the non-achievement of the good purpose;
- (3e) where, therefore, no significant overall good and no significant overall evil is achieved by the prevention of any number, m , of evils which the prevention of $m + 1$ evils or $m - 1$ evils could not have achieved as well; and
- (3f) where, therefore, there is *no minimum amount of evils necessary* for the accomplishment of the good purpose; and
- (3g) where, therefore (given the no-minimum thesis), the moral agent is not morally obliged to prevent *any* given instance of evil (and thus not morally reproachable for allowing *some* instance of evil) that is not necessary for the accomplishment of some greater good or the prevention of an evil equally bad or worse.
- (4) But the application of the moral principle appealed to by Atheist to the state of affairs described in Theist's Proposition (3) above in effect obliges the moral agent to prevent the occurrence of *any* instance of evil that is «not necessary for the achievement of some greater good or for the prevention of an evil equally bad or worse».
- (5) Therefore, the moral principle appealed to by Atheist is not a necessarily correct moral principle in any state of affairs in which there is an agent preventing some evils and allowing some evils.
- (6) Therefore, the moral principle appealed to by Atheist is not a *basic* moral principle concerning an agent's prevention of evils.

Theist's Proof for His Proposition (3) (*the wrongness of the principle as shown when it is applied to a state of affairs where a moral agent has to act in situations where there are no precise boundaries regarding the terms in question*):

45. Cfr. VAN INWAGEN, *The Problem of Evil*, p. 106.

- (7) A moral agent who justifiably permits a certain amount of evil and prevents a certain amount of evil necessarily draws a line somewhere between evils he allows and evils he prevents.
- (8) In the state of affairs described in Theist's Proposition (3), where an agent is justified in the permission of a *certain* amount of evil but where *vagueness* persists as regards the *amount necessary* for the achievement of some good purpose), *any* line that the agent decides to draw between prevented evils and permitted evils would in effect be an arbitrary line.
- (9) A line drawn between prevented evils and non-prevented ones is *arbitrary* when there is no special reason for the moral agent's placing it exactly where it is and not somewhere else where it could have included the prevention of one more instance of evil, despite the fact that this latter alternative is equally conceivable as the actual placement.

Example (based on van Inwagen's): A jail warden is in a position to (i.e. «able to» and «morally permitted to») subtract or not to subtract a day in prison from the ten-year prison sentence of a convicted felon. In this example, the judge has given the warden the power and authority to determine how many prison days to subtract from a prisoner's sentence, provided only that he be guided by the principle that the prisoner should be left at least «with the minimum number of prison days necessary to achieve the good purpose of deterring him from committing another felony». It is a vague matter, at least to this warden, how many prison days (granted that a day in prison is an evil) he would be obliged to subtract from prisoner Blodgett's ten-year sentence in order to leave the prisoner with just the minimum prison time consistent with deterring him from re-offending.

Consequently, it is also a vague matter to the warden whether ten years (i.e., 3,652 days) minus two days or ten years minus three days is the magic number for effectively deterring Blodgett. The warden however feels that ten years minus two days would not have a significant deterring effect compared to ten years minus three days, in the same way that ten years minus three days would not have a significant deterring effect compared to ten years minus four days. In short, the warden feels that whatever deterring effect a given number of days in prison (n) is supposed to have, the same number of days minus one ($n - 1$) will practically have the same deterring effect.

When the warden, however, thinks about the reduction of the sentence to one day in prison compared to *no* day in prison at all, he still feels that there's no significant difference as regards the deterring effect of these two options; but the reason this time is because one day in prison *doesn't deter* the crime of felony at all. But where does the magic number for effective deterrence lie? Unfortunately, it is vague to the warden. But he has to make a decision as to how many prison days to subtract from the pris-

oner's sentence. Given the vagueness of the matter, he cannot but draw an arbitrary line, say, ten years minus 96 days. That would be preventing the evil of «prison day number 3,557», and leaving the prisoner with just 3,556 days in prison.

There is no special reason for setting the reduction at 96 days. The warden is definitely in a position to reduce 97 instead of just 96 days. But he doesn't do that. Otherwise, unless the vagueness disappears, the same principle that obliges him to pick 97 rather than 96 would then oblige him to pick 98 rather than 97, and then 499 rather than 498, and then 3,000 rather than 2,999, and so on, until it gets to the choice between 2 days left in prison and 1 day left in prison, and then 1 day and 0. But of course, 0 or 1, 2 or 3, or perhaps even 4 or 5 days in prison, and so on, would not effectively deter felony, or so it appears to the warden at least. But then again it's vague for the warden at what exact number of days in prison felony begins to be deterred for prisoner Blodgett.

- (10) A moral principle that in effect prohibits a moral agent from drawing an arbitrary line in a state of affairs where it is impossible *not* to draw an arbitrary line is wrong.
- (11) But Atheist's supposed moral principle, when applied to the state of affairs described in Theist's Proposition (3), in effect prohibits the moral agent from drawing an arbitrary line where the moral agent cannot but draw an arbitrary line.
- (12) [explanation of the preceding] The way by which Atheist's supposed moral principle prohibits the drawing of an arbitrary line (where there being no arbitrary line is impossible) is the following: Atheist's principle *obliges* the moral agent to prevent *every* evil (*any* evil brought into the discussion) he is in a position to prevent – even under the given conditions of vagueness – to the effect that either:
 - (12a) No line at all is drawn between justifiably prevented evils and non-prevented in the sense that *all* evils are prevented; but this in effect negates the state of affairs described in Theist's Proposition (3) where the agent is justified in allowing a *certain* number of evils; or
 - (12b) The line drawn is non-arbitrary at least in the sense that it *must* include the prevention of *this* particular instance of evil (e.g., preventing what would have been a convicted felon's 3,556th day in prison rather than just the 3,557th) – and, for that matter, any single isolated instance of evil that may, one by one, be brought into the discussion (although, presumably, the ones that are not yet presently brought into the argument in a single act of argumentation may be justifiably allowed); but then, repeated ar-

gumentations, each time based on a different instance of evil until every single evil will be covered, will have the accumulated effect that the agent will be left with *no* evil that he is *not obliged* to prevent. But this in effect again negates the state of affairs described in Theist's Proposition (3) where the agent is justified in allowing (i.e., not obliged to prevent) a *certain* number of evils.

- (13) Therefore, since it prohibits the drawing of an arbitrary line where it is impossible *not* to draw an arbitrary line, Atheist's supposed moral principle is wrong when applied to the state of affairs described in Theist's Proposition (3).

But then, what van Inwagen's Theist has so far shown in the above demonstration is simply that the moral principle («the standard position on evil») appealed to by Atheist is *not applicable in a certain situation*, i.e., it is not the correct moral principle to guide an agent's actions in preventing or allowing some evils where certain boundaries are vague, at least *to the agent*. In itself, the demonstration above is not yet a defense of theism against the local argument from evil, since, for all anyone knows, the above demonstration may be correct but it is irrelevant to a state of affairs where *God* is the moral agent preventing and allowing certain amounts of evil.

For there to be a defense of theism based on the preliminary demonstration above, van Inwagen's Theist has to state that God's situation in preventing a certain amount of evil and not preventing a certain amount *is* in fact (or at least, that it is *possible* to suppose that it is in fact) an instance of the state of affairs described in Theist's Proposition (3), i.e., that the matter on the minimum amount of evil necessary for the Atonement must be vague *to God*.

Van Inwagen's Theist says that this is the case – at least according to a certain account of vagueness – as the next sections will show. (Of course, according to another theory of vagueness and combined with the concept of omniscience, van Inwagen's defense becomes problematic since the omniscient moral agent God would then never find Himself in the state of affairs described in Theist's Proposition [3], as will be explained below).

3.2.2. *The No-Minimum Argument*

In his defense of theism against the local argument, van Inwagen's Theist proposes:

PROPOSITION (14) [*claiming that the state of affairs where God is the moral agent preventing and permitting some evils falls under the general state of affairs described in Theist's Proposition (3)*]:

It is possible that the state of affairs of the actual world is one:

- (14a) where God is justified in the permission of a *certain* number of evils in accordance with His Atonement plan for separated humans, but where the *amount* and membership of the instances of non-prevented evils necessary for the success of His Atonement Plan is vague;
- (14b) where the vagueness of this matter is due to the fact that there are *no precise boundaries* between the terms «evils necessary for the success of the Atonement» and «evils unnecessary for the success of the Atonement»;
- (14c) where, therefore, there is no number n such that (i) if God had prevented n (or fewer) of the evils which He in fact allowed, the Atonement would have been successful just the same, and (ii) if God had prevented $n + 1$ (or more) of those evils from taking place, the Atonement would *not* have been a success⁴⁶;
- (14d) where the prevention of any number, m , of evils would not have a significantly different effect from the prevention of $m + 1$ evils or from $m - 1$ evils, as regards either the success or the failure of the Atonement;
- (14e) where, therefore, no significant overall good and no significant overall evil is achieved by the prevention of any number, m , of evils which the prevention of $m + 1$ evils or $m - 1$ evils could not have achieved as well;
- (14f) where, therefore, there is *no minimum amount of evils necessary for the success of the Atonement*; and
- (14g) where, therefore (given the no-minimum thesis), God is not morally obliged to prevent *any* given instance of evil, and thus not morally reproachable for allowing *some* instance of evil, that is not necessary for the success of the Atonement or for the prevention of the failure of the Atonement.

If van Inwagen's reasoning from the general state of affairs concerning *all* moral agents (Theist's Proposition (3)) to the particular state of affairs concerning the moral agent God (Proposition (14)) is to be valid, then we must presume van Inwagen's Theist to be saying something to this effect: Even God now finds Himself in a situation where He cannot but draw a morally arbitrary line between prevented and non-prevented evils. Having created human beings (who turned out, as a contingent matter of fact, to abuse their freedom) and having set in motion the accomplishment of a plan of Atonement, the morally perfect God is now in a situation where He prevents *certain* evils, but where He cannot prevent *all* evils, without

46. Cfr. VAN INWAGEN, *The Problem of Evil*, p. 106.

thereby bringing about the worse evil of having His Atonement plan fail. But then the amount of evils necessary for the success of His Atonement Plan is vague. There are no precise boundaries between the terms «evils necessary for the success of the Atonement» and «evils unnecessary for the success of the Atonement». Nevertheless, God has to draw a line somewhere. And so, wherever He draws it, it will be an arbitrary line. There is no non-arbitrary line that *God* can draw – just as none of the moral agents in the general state of affairs described in Theist’s Proposition (3) is able to draw a non-arbitrary line⁴⁷.

One particular gratuitous horror, such as the Murder of Mari Luz, simply happened to be among the evils on the «non-prevented evils» side of the arbitrary line. There is no special reason for the exact placement of the line where it actually is. God was very much in the position to prevent the Murder of Mari Luz. But He did not. But then He is not bound by the moral principle appealed to by Atheist, because, given the vagueness of the amount of evil necessary for the success of His Atonement Plan, God is in a state of affairs where it cannot logically be demanded of Him that He act according to Atheist’s supposed moral principle. This makes the principle wrong as a moral principle⁴⁸.

We take note at this juncture that (14b) is the account of *vagueness* according to which van Inwagen says his (14a) must be understood. But, of course (14b) is not the only account of vagueness.

47. To say, however, that «there is no non-arbitrary line that God can draw» has at least two senses. The first sense says only that there is no line that God can draw that does not look arbitrary *to those who evaluate God’s moral accountability* and by which they can judge whether God acted wrongly or justifiably in not preventing a particular evil. The second sense includes the first and says in addition that there is also no line that can be drawn that does not look arbitrary *to God Himself* and by which He can make a specific decision in regard to preventing or allowing a particular evil. According to an alternative approach, one that resembles the approach of most skeptical defenses, only the first sense can be and should be insisted – while the second sense may be left open (and it is better left unsettled) – by a van Inwagen-type of defense that uses an account of vagueness. (More of this will be said in the next sections.)

48. As far as van Inwagen is concerned, if the moral principle appealed to by Atheist is to be wrong *as a moral principle*, i.e., wrong as a guide to a moral agent’s action (and not just as the *wrong principle to invoke* in certain states of affairs), then it must be wrong as a guide to action for *all* moral agents, whether human or divine, in any state of affairs where they prevent a certain number of evils and allow a certain number of evils, but where the boundaries between «evils necessary for the accomplishment of a good purpose» and «evils not necessary for the accomplishment of the good purpose» are vague. Moreover, as already expressed earlier, Atheist’s principle is wrong because it prohibits the drawing of morally arbitrary lines where circumstances are vague and where therefore it is impossible *not* to draw morally arbitrary lines if the agent must act. Now, whether or not it is reasonable to suppose that God ever finds Himself in a situation where He is vague about something would depend on which particular account of vagueness one supposes, as will be shown shortly.

And so, how does van Inwagen intend «vagueness» to be understood in his Theist's Proposition (14), as well as in Theist's Proposition (3) earlier? According to Lowell Friesen's analysis, van Inwagen's defense of theism from the local argument pushes the acceptance of a particular (non-epistemic) account of vagueness, one that many philosophers do not accept⁴⁹.

3.2.3. *Rejection of the Epistemic View of Vagueness*

Van Inwagen's Theist employs a *reductio ad absurdum* to reject epistemicism. According to epistemicism, natural language terms, such as «tall» and «short», have precise extensions in themselves. There is a certain height (in precise millimeters, say n mms.) such that people who reach it would be «tall», while those who are a millimeter shorter would be «short». There is thus a precise boundary between tallness (e.g., n mms.) and shortness (n mms. minus 1 mm.). James Cargile also refers to this account of vagueness as the *realistic account*. There is some specific instant at which a creature, for example, ceases to be a tadpole and becomes a frog, and some specific instant at which a child acquires the ability to speak English while an instant before he did not⁵⁰.

But such finite creatures as human beings are irremediably ignorant of such precise boundaries because of their epistemological limits, e.g., their failure to know in full detail the relationship between the world and relevant linguistic conventions and practices of the relevant linguistic communities on a particular occasion of utterance⁵¹. We are, so to speak, vague about the precise extensions of our natural language terms. As a result, people are not uniform in their use of the predicates «tall» and «short». But, according to epistemicism, this is not because these terms do not have precise extensions; rather, people simply have inexact knowledge of the exact fact of the matter out there.

The suggestion, of course, is that if natural language terms have precise extensions in themselves, then it is not true that no non-arbitrary line can be drawn between two contraries of the vague variety. It is technically

49. FRIESEN, «Vagueness, Moral Obligation, and van Inwagen's Defense of Theism from the Local Argument from Evil», pp. 1 and 13.

50. James CARGILE, «The Sorites Paradox», in *Vagueness: A Reader*, ed. Rosanna Keefe and Peter Smith (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 1996), pp. 96 and 98.

51. Timothy WILLIAMSON, *Vagueness* (London and New York: Routledge, 1994), especially pp. 203-212, 217, 231, 234-237. For his detailed explanation of the source of human beings' ignorance of the cut-offs of vague predicates, see also Timothy Williamson, «Vagueness and Ignorance», in *Vagueness: A Reader*, ed. Rosanna Keefe and Peter Smith (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 1996), pp. 265-280.

possible, according to the epistemic account, for there to be a non-arbitrary line between «tall» and «short» people, once the epistemic status of the one who applies these predicates improves in regard to *knowing* the boundaries. In fact, it is simply a question of finding out the exact boundaries since, according to epistemicism, vagueness is nothing but a *species* of ignorance with respect to extensions⁵². Consequently, epistemicism insists that the vagueness regarding the boundary between evils necessary and evils unnecessary for the success of God's Atonement plan is a question of not knowing the exact boundaries, but that such precise extensions exist.

Now, van Inwagen's defense of theism against the local argument has these two features: it grants (for the sake of argument) Atheist's proposition that there are gratuitous evils, and it uses *vagueness* as a central feature. This type of defense, however, cannot succeed if vagueness is understood in the epistemic sense. There are two reasons.

First, if van Inwagen adopts an epistemic account of vagueness, then he would have to deal with the following objection: If natural language terms have precise extensions and if vagueness were only a matter of finding out the exact boundaries between two contraries, then an *omniscient* being such as the theist's God would surely know such boundaries. There doesn't seem to be anything logically contradictory in supposing that if precise extensions exist between natural language terms, they can be known by an omniscient being. If so, then the matter regarding the exact minimum amount of evils necessary for the success of the Atonement Plan would not be vague to an omniscient God, even if it is to humans.

But if it is not vague to God, then Theist's Proposition (14) cannot be used as an instance of Theist's Proposition (3). God's epistemic status in regard to the minimum amount of evils necessary for the success of the Atonement would not be the same as humans' epistemic status in regard to it. Consequently, even if the state of affairs described in Proposition (3) correctly represents the state of affairs that *human* moral agents sometimes find themselves in, it doesn't follow that the omniscient God would ever find Himself in a state of affairs where He is vague about something. And even if human beings are sometimes excused from acting according to the moral

52. Van Inwagen's already expressed in «Why Vagueness Is a Mystery» his rejection of vagueness theories that defend the existence of precise boundaries. A Northern European adult male with a height of 200 centimeters, for example, would be «just tall: tall without qualification». But, for van Inwagen, there is simply no precise height (in precise number of centimeters) that marks the greatest lower bound of the category «just tall», even if a man with a height of 150 cm. would obviously be «just not tall». But van Inwagen hastens to add that if heights compose a continuum, then it seems that there is a *least* height such that a man of that height is tall, for how can there *not* be such a height? He admits, «I have no idea how to resolve this paradox». See Peter VAN INWAGEN, «Why Vagueness Is a Mystery», *Acta Analytica* 17, no. 29 (2002): pp. 15-16.

principle appealed to by Atheist on the ground that they are vague about certain boundaries, it doesn't follow that *God* will not be bound by the moral principle. In fact, it would seem to follow that God is bound to act according to the principle (supposing that it is correct, if not proven to be wrong on other grounds) since, given the epistemic account, He would not be vague about the boundary between evils necessary and evils unnecessary for the success of the Atonement Plan. Hence, it would seem that Theist's attempt at showing the supposed error of the moral principle appealed to by Atheist would not really be relevant to a defense of Theism against the local argument.

And here is a second reason why van Inwagen's defense cannot use an epistemic account of vagueness. If he affirms that omniscience includes knowledge of the precise boundaries of natural language terms, then he would be forced to take perhaps the only theistic way out: give up granting to Atheist that gratuitous evils exist. But in doing so, van Inwagen would then simply be taking the skeptical approach, casting reasonable doubt on the premise that there are gratuitous evils at all. This, however, would in effect be contrary to van Inwagen's preferred approach to the problem of gratuitous evils, where he grants the atheist that *«there has been, in the history of the world, at least one gratuitous horror such that if it had not occurred, the world would be no worse than it is»*.

3.2.4. *Chance and Arbitrariness in the Prevention and Non-Prevention of Evils*

No matter how many evils God decides to prevent, *He has to draw a line somewhere*. To one side of the line lie the cases of prevented evils that God in His mercy and love decided to prevent. To the other side of the line lie the cases of non-prevented evils that God, also in His mercy and love, decided to allow so that the great creaturely good of the Atonement will come to fruition. Van Inwagen's non-epistemic account of vagueness suggests that this line is a morally arbitrary line wherever God draws it, and that its actual placement in the actual world is a matter that God left to chance.

When human beings misused their free will and separated themselves from God, the existence of horrors was one of the natural and inevitable consequences of this separation. Each individual horror, however, may well have been due to chance... [W]hen and where it happens, may well be a matter of chance. In separating ourselves from God, we have become... the playthings of chance⁵³.

53. VAN INWAGEN, *The Problem of Evil*, p. 103; see also «The Magnitude, Duration, and Distribution of Evil: A Theodicy», pp. 115-116.

But van Inwagen clarifies just what he means by «chance»:

What I shall mean by saying that an event is a «chance» occurrence, or a state of affairs a «matter of chance» or «due to chance», is this: The event or state of affairs is without purpose or significance; it is not a part of anyone's plan; it serves no one's end; it might very well not have been. A chance event, in other words, is one such that, if someone asks of it, «Why did that happen?» the only right answer is: «There is no reason or explanation; it just happened»⁵⁴.

Van Inwagen's saying that «an event has no explanation» does not mean that the event has no *proximate* explanation whatsoever. E.g. The death of a man who gets run over by a car while routinely crossing the street would have some proximate explanations: the car brakes failed, the driver was drunk, the man was distracted, etc. But this may still be a «chance event» in van Inwagen's sense. The death of the 5,578, 231st victim of the Holocaust would of course have proximate explanations (some of which might still be accessible to investigators through some diligent research), and still such death would be a «chance event» in van Inwagen's sense. To say of an event that «there is no reason or explanation for it; it just happened» means in van Inwagen's context that God had no specific reason for allowing *this* event (a particular evil), although He may indeed have some general reason for allowing events of *this kind* (pointless evils).

Van Inwagen does not intend his concept of «chance» to be incompatible with Divine Providence. In fact, he defends the rightful place of chance in a world sustained by God with such propositions as the following:

- (1) The world (or «universe», «cosmos», «nature», etc.) consists of a certain number of «elementary particles», i.e., small, indivisible units of matter.
- (2) God's creation and conservation of the world (and of all things in it) means that God constantly supplies each of these elementary particles with causal powers, so that each one possesses some intrinsic capacity to affect the motions of other particles.
- (3) Each particle almost always possesses the same causal powers.
- (4) On certain occasions, however, God performs a miracle in the following sense: He momentarily supplies a few particles with causal powers different from their normal powers, thereby caus-

54. Peter VAN INWAGEN, «The Place of Chance in a World Sustained by God», in *Divine and Human Action: Essays in the Metaphysics of Theism*, ed. Thomas V. Morris (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1988), pp. 220-221.

ing some part of the natural world to diverge from the course it would have taken without this momentary supply of abnormal powers⁵⁵.

- (5) God's *eternal plan*⁵⁶ as regards creation consists of the totality of all His decrees except «reactive decrees» (i.e., those decrees issued by God in response to a contingent event that God has not decreed).
- (6) Some of the events that take place in the world are «reactive», i.e., they are issued by God in response to a contingent event that God has not decreed (e.g., the carrying out of God's plan of atonement for separated humans, after they *actually* fell; God's healing of a sick man in response to a prayer).
- (7) Some of the events that take place in the world are therefore not part of God's eternal plan, e.g.:
 - (7a) that the particular species *homo sapiens* (human nature as it is actually known today) should exist is not a part of God's eternal plan; but the existence of rational animals made in God's image and possessing free will and capable of love is part of God's plan⁵⁷.

55. Because of the views expressed in the above propositions, Alfred J. Freddoso («Comment on van Inwagen's "The Place of Chance in a World Sustained by God"», retrieved 15 May 2008 from the World Wide Web: <http://www.nd.edu/~afreddos/papers/chance.htm>) accuses van Inwagen of weak deism, to which charge van Inwagen counters that a God who continuously sustains all things in existence and continuously conserves their causal powers is «immanent enough» for him, and thus his position cannot be charged of *denying* that God directly causes alterations in the created world, which is what deism is. See van Inwagen, «The Place of Chance in a World Sustained by God», p. 215, n. 4.

56. Van Inwagen adds the qualification «eternal» so as to technically distinguish between God's «eternal plan» (or God's «unqualified plan», or God's plan *ante omnia saecula*) and God's plan in response to a contingent event that is not part of His eternal plan. See van Inwagen, «The Place of Chance in a World Sustained by God», p. 223, n. 8. Freddoso, however, finds it too restrictive to categorize the objects of God's decrees to just states of affairs that God brings about *by Himself*. Freddoso presents an alternative account of divine decrees in which «the objects of God's decrees are non-evil states of affairs that God brings about directly either by Himself or *in cooperation with* (free and non-free) created or secondary causes». Moreover, Freddoso identifies a third sort of divine decree – «*permissive decrees*», he calls them – whose objects are evil states of affairs that God knowingly permits to obtain. And so, under Freddoso's account, every event in the created universe is either antecedently or consequentially or permissively willed by God.

57. Van Inwagen's view is that, for all we know, what God planned was only that *some* rational beings would be capable of loving Him and thus share an eternity of happiness in union with Him, but as to what the *precise nature* of these rational beings would be (and, we may add, whether they would be beings of only one particular species or of more than one species) is something that God may well have left to chance. [See van Inwagen, «The Place of Chance in a World Sustained by God», pp. 225-226, 229.] Of

- (7b) that human beings should *actually* abuse their freedom and suffer as a natural consequence is not part of God's eternal plan; but God's allowing a certain amount of evil and suffering in general is now part of God's «contingent rescue plan» in response to man's actual rebellion⁵⁸.
- (8) A chance event's not being part of God's plan may be due to one or more of the following sources of chance: a) human free will; b) natural indeterminism⁵⁹; and c) the «initial arrangement» of the world's elementary particles.
- (9) Among the events that are simply due to chance and not part of God's plan are *some* particular instances of evils (e.g., the Murder of Mari Luz) even if God may have a morally sufficient reason for allowing a certain amount of evil of this kind in accordance with His «contingent plan» of Atonement for separated humans.
- (9) It may be that *some* (other) particular instances of evils are such that God has a special reason for allowing *them*.
- (10) It may be that *sometimes* God miraculously [in the sense of «miracle» specified in Proposition (4) above] intervenes in the course of nature to *prevent* some particular evils – but He does not do this all the time.

In van Inwagen's schema, it is in response to the contingent fact that humans *actually* abused their freedom that God *reactively decreed* to leave in place *some* of the natural consequences of this abuse. God had a vast array of alternative amounts of evils to allow (other than the actual amount). But since, as van Inwagen argues, there is no such thing as *the* minimum amount necessary for the success of the Atonement, God, to some extent, left to chance the *exact* number of actual evils. If it is noted that among the sources of «chance events» in van Inwagen's account is human free will,

course, if one theist would like to add the thesis that it was definitely only man (with precisely his human nature as it is known today) that God planned to create so as to share with Him an eternity of love and happiness, this would not contradict the first proposition as stated.

58. Freddoso would describe the actual creaturely abuse of freedom as an object of God's *permissive will*. God wills only in an extended sense – just in the case of permissive decrees – the deviations of creatures from God's non-reactive decrees or God's antecedent plan.

59. Van Inwagen defines natural indeterminism as the thesis that «the distribution of all the particles of matter in the universe at a given moment, and their causal powers at that moment, do not determine the subsequent behavior of the particles». In an indeterministic universe, a given state of affairs will have more than one outcome. God does not decree the outcomes of «swerves in the void» since – as even modern physics tells us – «swerves» are not determined by the causal powers of particles. See van Inwagen, «The Place of Chance in a World Sustained by God», p. 224.

then it seems plausible indeed to say that the *exact* actual amount of evil is something that God has to some extent left to chance.

For example, it can be that God does everything (except determine Joe) to increase the probability that Joe would tell the truth rather than lie to a friend today. God supplied the usual causal powers to the particles that made up Jo's brain and vocal cords so that Jo could speak intelligibly and exercise his freedom to tell the truth – an opportunity for moral good which Jo misused today. Jo freely decided to lie and thus increased the actual amount of evil in the world. Of course, God could have miraculously intervened to prevent Jo's lying. But then, it cannot be that God always performs «miraculous interventions» to prevent the telling of a lie. If it is insisted that God ought to have prevented *all* cases of lying (while allowing other moral evils) since humans would still be significantly free, anyway, in a world where lying is impossible, then the same supposed moral obligation that required God to prevent lying would have to be required of God in regard to the prevention of murder, then adultery, etc., and their consequent sufferings. Now if God *always* intervened to prevent *every* moral evil and its consequent sufferings, He would have forfeited the good of there being a world where humans exercise their freedom efficaciously. «[Humans] would not have efficacious free will if God ensured that only their good choices were efficacious»⁶⁰.

God's allowing the particular evil of Jo's lying today (and at least some of its consequences) set the actual amount of evil slightly more than what it would have been had God prevented the lie. Hence, as van Inwagen says, «it may be that God has decreed, with respect to this vast array of alternative, morally equivalent amounts of suffering, that *some* member of this array shall be the actual amount of suffering, but has left it up to chance which member that is»⁶¹.

Thus, if one of the sources of the chance event of Jo's lying today was *his* free will then, it was «by chance» that the actual amount of evil in the world was increased by Jo's telling that one lie. God had no specific reason or explanation for allowing *Jo's telling that lie* and *thereby increasing the actual amount of the world's evils*, although God may indeed have morally sufficient reasons in general for allowing events like the telling of a lie (e.g., preserving these states of affairs: there being creatures significantly exercising their freedom, and there being a necessary, though insufficient, condition for the success of the Atonement). But, obviously, the actualization of both states of affairs couldn't have been made impossible by God's

60. SWINBURNE, *Providence and the Problem of Evil*, p. 11.

61. Peter VAN INWAGEN, «The Problem of Evil, the Problem of Air, and the Problem of Silence», *Philosophical Perspectives 5: Philosophy of Religion*, ed. James E. Tomberlin (Ridgeview: Atascadero, 1991): p. 144.

prevention of one or two instances of lying. In this sense, the increase in the exact total amount of evils in the actual world by Jo's lying today (God not preventing it and its evil consequences) is a chance event, even if Jo was personally morally responsible for his lie.

The *exact* actual placement of the arbitrary line between prevented evils and non-prevented ones is a matter that God left to chance in much the same way that, since no significant overall good is achieved by the number of strands of hair on Ed's head exactly totaling up to 105,768 on April 14, 2008, then its being exactly 105,768 on this day and not 105,769 or 105,767 is a matter that God «left to chance». Similarly, the *exact* actual placement of the line between the evils that God prevents and the evils that God allows is a contingent matter of fact that has no special *a priori* moral reason or explanation for being exactly where it is, i.e., where it includes the Murder of Mari Luz, but excludes the Murder of my Aunt Lucy, in the «non-prevented evils» side. And, of course, when humans do not see any special explanation why something *is*, and is as it is when it could have been otherwise than it is, they simply say it was by «chance» that the event took place the way it did.

Some, however, find too strong the claim that the amount of evils necessary for the success of the Atonement is vague even *to God*. They prefer the weaker claim: So long as the amount of evils necessary for God's purposes are vague to humans (whether or not it is also vague to God), wherever God puts the cut-off point between permitted evils and prevented evils, its actual placement would always look arbitrary *to humans*, and would appear to them to be a «matter of chance», in the sense of having no explanation discernible *to humans* at least, whether or not God has a special reason for its occurring *exactly* the way it did.

3.3. Consequences of Some Alternative Accounts of Vagueness

I will do two things in this section. First, I will try to explore the consequences of substituting van Inwagen's account of vagueness with some alternative accounts to see if any of them would make a better conceptual framework for a vagueness-based defense against the local argument from evil. Secondly, I will propose what, in my judgment, a theistic defense using vagueness as a feature can at most appeal to if it is to be acceptable to an audience of ideal agnostics regardless of their predilection for one or other account of vagueness.

In transition, we ask: If for van Inwagen «the amount of evils necessary for the success of God's Atonement Plan» is «vague» in a non-epistemic sense (with its no-minimum thesis), in what specific sense are they «vague»? According to what account of vagueness are these states of affairs said to be «without precise boundaries»? There are a number of al-

ternative accounts of vagueness⁶², but van Inwagen's Theist doesn't specify according to which particular non-epistemic account «vague amounts of evil» should be understood.

We now explore the consequences of some alternative accounts of vagueness on a van Inwagen-type of theistic defense that keeps the following two features: non-epistemic vagueness as a key feature, and insistence on granting Atheist that gratuitous evils exist.

3.3.1. *Supervaluationism and Evil's Vague Necessity*

One popular alternative to epistemicism in the literature on vagueness, as we have just seen, is supervaluationism. Lowell Friesen prefers to call it the «indecision view» of vagueness. According to this view, vague natural language terms have *imprecise* extensions as a result of *semantic indecision*, i.e., intelligent agents simply have not bothered to specify precisely what the necessary and sufficient conditions are for such vague terms as baldness, redness, tallness, thinness, fatness, etc. People could, perhaps, do so, if they so desired, but they haven't⁶³. The important thing to note in this account of vagueness is what it says about the *source* of the vagueness, namely, a person's undecidedness, for whatever reason, to set the precise extensions of his concepts.

If van Inwagen's use of «vagueness» in his defense of theism against the local argument is to be understood according to the indecision view, it would have the following two consequences. First, it offers one plausible explanation why the matter regarding the minimum amount of evils necessary for the success God's Atonement plan is vague *to us human beings*. This matter is vague to us because we are undecided about the extensions of many of our concepts and terms. For example, we have not decided precisely on what a «restored world» would look like, or on what the necessary and sufficient conditions would be for there to be a «restored humanity», etc. Consequently, given our indecision on a lot of concepts related to our understanding of a «divine plan of Atonement», we would not be the type of epistemic agents to be clear about the amount of evil required for the success of this divine plan of Atonement.

62. For a survey of different accounts of vagueness, see Rosanna KEEFE and Peter SMITH, eds., *Vagueness: A Reader* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 1996). See also Rosanna KEEFE, *Theories of Vagueness* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000); and Delia GRAFF and Timothy WILLIAMSON, eds., *Vagueness* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2000).

63. FRIESEN, «Vagueness, Moral Obligation, and van Inwagen's Defense of Theism from the Local Argument from Evil», p. 14.

But then the vagueness of this matter *to us* human beings is irrelevant to whether or not God is bound to act according to Atheist's supposed moral principle. (Of course, the vagueness of this matter *to us* would be relevant to whether or not we are in a position to accuse God of moral imperfection on the ground that He did not prevent *this* particular evil, e.g., the Murder of Mari Luz. But this would be another defensive approach, the one that I think most skeptical approaches would suggest van Inwagen's Theist should have pursued.) So long as van Inwagen sticks to his defensive strategy of showing the wrongness of the moral principle appealed to by Atheist when applied to situations where the boundaries between certain terms are vague, he must show that it is a vague matter *to God* how many evils are necessary for the success of His Atonement plan.

Unfortunately – and this is now the second consequence of using the indecision view of vagueness – the defense would be committed to affirming that the vagueness is due to God's semantic indecision. Let us quote Friesen on what divine semantic indecision would be like.

[God's semantic indecision] is tantamount to saying that the concepts involved in God's thought or the predicates involved in God's language, to whatever extent it makes sense to speak of God's concepts or God's language, don't have precise extensions. But is this consequence consistent with God's nature as it is traditionally understood? In order for God to be «guilty» of semantic indecision, God would have to be undecided about what the extensions of his concepts were. But why would God be undecided about the extensions of his concepts? Is it the case the [sic] God can't be bothered to make his thought precise? Or is God not capable of making his thought precise in the required way? An affirmative answer to either question seems inconsistent with God's nature⁶⁴.

A God, therefore, who is semantically undecided, or worse, a God who is semantically indecisive, doesn't appear to be consistent with the traditional concept of God – unless a van-Inwagen-type proposal would again be made to modify the traditional definitions of omnipotence and omniscience, arguing this time that *semantic decision* regarding the issue under discussion is an intrinsically impossible state of affairs and hence semantic *indecision* in this case would not really be inconsistent with both attributes. However, there doesn't seem to be any coherent way of doing this.

64. FRIESEN, «Vagueness, Moral Obligation, and van Inwagen's Defense of Theism from the Local Argument from Evil», pp. 14-15.

3.3.2. *Indeterminism and Evil's Vague Necessity*

Different variations of the indeterminist approach to vagueness – for example, the ones defended by Kit Fine and Steven Rieber – do not fare any better when used as the conceptual framework for van Inwagen's vagueness-based defense. Kit Fine's indeterminist account of vagueness includes the claim that «*ordinary ambiguous sentences* are neither true nor false when one disambiguation is true and the other is false»⁶⁵. Thus, the sentence «John went to the bank» is neither true nor false if John went to the river bank but not the money bank⁶⁶. Vagueness in this case is due to the fact that one has not precisified which sentence is referred to (i.e., whether it is «John went to the river bank» or «John went to the money bank») when «John went to the bank» is uttered⁶⁷.

Once we apply, however, this account of vagueness to the parallel sentence relevant to a defense of theism («The amount of evil *m* is necessary for the Atonement»), it would be clear right away that we have the following consequences: There seems to be no morally sufficient reason why an omniscient and morally perfect God should be undecided about which precisification to employ in order for Him to remove the ambiguity of the sentence «The amount of evil *m* is necessary for the Atonement». If vagueness were only a matter of ambiguous sentences, then an omniscient God could easily have removed this ambiguity. But then if God's vagueness is removed, van Inwagen's strategy of showing the wrongness of the standard position on evil cannot be employed anymore. (Of course, a very different defense of theism can be made by appealing only to the ambiguity of the same sentence *to human beings* discussing the argument from evil.)

Rieber's indeterminist approach to vagueness uses the concept of *overlap ambiguity*. «The indeterminacy of what is said in uttering an overlap-ambiguous statement is a consequence of the indeterminacy of the speaker's *intentions*». For example, when a speaker says «There is a cow in the field», his *intentions* are indeterminate between two propositions such

65. Steven RIEBER, «A Defense of Indeterminism», *Acta Analytica* 17, no. 29 (2002): p. 78, citing Kit FINE, «Vagueness, Truth and Logic», in *Vagueness: A Reader*, ed. Rosanna Keefe and Peter Smith (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 1996), pp. 137-138.

66. Kit FINE, «Vagueness, Truth and Logic», p. 138.

67. Keefe and Smith, however, point out that Fine's example here is more a case of *ambiguity* rather than *vagueness*, although, certainly some terms can be ambiguous *and* vague, such as «bank», which has two quite different main senses: financial institutions and sloping river edges. See Rosanna KEEFE and Peter SMITH, «Introduction: Theories of Vagueness», in *Vagueness: A Reader*, ed. Keefe and Smith (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 1996), p. 6.

as «There is a bovine in the field» and «There is a mature female bovine in the field»⁶⁸. Under this account of vagueness, the statement «The amount of evil m is necessary for the Atonement» would be an overlap-ambiguous statement due to the speaker's indeterminate intentions.

And, of course, if a theistic defender using this approach to vagueness is to use van Inwagen's strategy of showing the incorrectness of the standard position on evil, he must take it to be the case that it is the moral agent God who speaks such a statement at least to Himself (in a way analogous to human utterance), when making the decision about which evils to allow and which to prevent. But, again, it seems contradictory to the traditional concept of God that He should be indeterminate in His intentions upon His utterances. (Of course, as we noted above, a very different defense of theism can be made using only the overlap-ambiguity of the same statement to *human beings* discussing the argument from evil.)

From what has been shown above, it is clear that a van Inwagen-type defense (one that insists on granting Atheist the existence of gratuitous evils and that employs vagueness as a key feature) would have disastrous consequences for theism when the vagueness is interpreted according to the supervaluationist (or indecision view) or the indeterministic approaches to vagueness.

We now turn to explore briefly the possibilities of one other account of vagueness on a theistic defense against the local argument from evil.

3.3.3. *Ontic Vagueness and Evil's Vague Necessity*

According to this view, there is «ontic vagueness». Vagueness does not reside in the relationship between thought (and, by extension, language) and the world. Vagueness is rather a fundamental feature of the world itself. Variations in the account of what constitutes ontic vagueness have been given. «Some have said that ontic-vagueness is a result of the fact that properties are vague; others have said that vagueness is a feature of the objects that instantiate properties; still others have said that ontic-vagueness is a result of the indeterminacy with respect to property instantiation»⁶⁹. A *vague object* would be one that has indeterminate, or fuzzy, spatio-temporal boundaries – e.g., the indeterminate edges of a cloud, the indeterminacy of the exact temporal span of a person's life, the fuzzy boundaries of Mt.

68. RIEBER, «A Defense of Indeterminism», pp. 78-79.

69. FRIESEN, «Vagueness, Moral Obligation, and van Inwagen's Defense of Theism from the Local Argument from Evil», p. 15.

Everest⁷⁰, or the temporally vague entity called «the Roman Empire»⁷¹. A cloud, for example, would still be the same cloud if one, two, three, or four, etc. molecules are removed from it one at a time. But it is vague at which number of removed molecules it ceases to be the same cloud or to be a cloud at all.

The common feature in these variants of ontic vagueness that is really important for our discussion here is the *source* of the vagueness. In this view, vagueness is a fundamental feature of the world (or the object) itself. Lowell Friesen sees at least two costly consequences when this account of vagueness is combined to a van-Inwagen-type defense against the local argument.

First, since vagueness is located in the very nature of the world itself, future empirical investigation may well disconfirm any one of the variants of the accounts of ontic vagueness. Consequently, according to Friesen, this would make the success of a theistic defense that incorporates this theory of vagueness dependent on the findings of future science.

I would like to note, however, in spite of this supposed consequence imagined by Friesen, that it is far from obvious whether the vagueness of «the amount of evil necessary for the achievement of God's Atonement plan» can ever be disconfirmed at all by empirical scientific investigation, whether at present or in the future. Before such a possibility can be evaluated coherently, one would have to be clear first about how the vagueness of the amount of evil necessary for the Atonement may be «located in the very nature of the world itself».

A second supposed consequence envisioned by Friesen is more practical. Many of the various ways of understanding ontic vagueness, Friesen says, are «philosophical non-starters»⁷². The general consensus among philosophers is that most accounts of ontic vagueness are untenable. They doubt, for example, whether it is coherent to say that properties or objects are vague in themselves, or that it is an indeterminate matter whether or not an object instantiates a property.

Keefe and Smith explicitly make the observation that «several... authors dismiss the notion of vagueness in the world, maintaining that it does not even make sense»⁷³. Bertrand Russell also implies that vagueness

70. KEEFE and SMITH, «Introduction: Theories of Vagueness», p. 50.

71. Peter VAN INWAGEN, Book Review of Peter Unger's *Identity, Consciousness and Value*, in *Noûs* 27, no. 3 (Sept. 1993): pp. 377-378. For further arguments on his thesis on the conceptual impossibility of establishing the boundaries of things by convention, see Peter van Inwagen, *Material Beings* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1990), pp. 6-12.

72. FRIESEN, «Vagueness, Moral Obligation, and van Inwagen's Defense of Theism from the Local Argument from Evil», p. 15.

73. KEEFE and SMITH, «Introduction: Theories of Vagueness», p. 16.

cannot be a feature of the world itself because «vagueness and precision alike are characteristics which can only belong to a representation, of which language is an example... Apart from representation, whether cognitive or mechanical, there can be no such thing as vagueness or precision; things are what they are, and there is an end of it»⁷⁴. Michael Dummett adds that «the notion that things might actually *be* vague, as well as being vaguely described, is not properly intelligible»⁷⁵.

In short, if most philosophers are not sympathetic to ontic vagueness and they have good reasons for doing so, then employing this account of vagueness to a van-Inwagen-type free-will defense against the local argument from evil would be costly for the theist, especially in van Inwagen's methodological context of an imaginary debate before an audience of agnostics. If the ideal agnostics can be reasonably imagined to react as most philosophers do to ontic vagueness (i.e., find it simply improbable, and even false), then a defense employing this account of vagueness would be in danger of being judged a failure in refuting the atheist's local argument from evil.

Thus far, we have shown that van Inwagen's Theist's defense against the local argument definitely rejects epistemicism because this account of vagueness forces van Inwagen either to abandon his grant to Atheist that gratuitous evils exist, or that it leads van Inwagen to admit that the wrongness of the moral principle appealed to by Atheist is not proven after all, since an omniscient God can hardly be imagined as unable to know the precise extensions of natural language terms if these in fact exist. But then alternative (non-epistemic) accounts of vagueness, when used as the framework for van Inwagen's defense, have their own problematic consequences, too. The supervaluationist (indecision view), as well as the indeterminist account of vagueness, leads to the unacceptable proposition that God is semantically or intentionally undecided, while ontic-vagueness accounts are philosophical «non-starters» and would be costly for theists in the debate against atheists.

In short, there is a need to continue examining the available accounts of vagueness (or to create new accounts⁷⁶) and see whether they make better

74. Bertrand RUSSELL, «Vagueness», in *Vagueness: A Reader*, ed. Rosanna Keefe and Peter Smith (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 1996), p. 62.

75. Michael DUMMETT, «Wang's Paradox», in *Vagueness: A Reader*, ed. Rosanna Keefe and Peter Smith (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 1996), p. 111.

76. Terry Horgan and Matjaž Potrč speak of several central and unresolved issues in vagueness (e.g., «Does vagueness apply to language and thought exclusively, or does it genuinely exist in the world? Should one aim to eventually supplement vagueness by precise terms, or is vagueness ineliminable in principle? What is the proper diagnosis of the infamous *sorites* paradox? Should classical two-valued logic be modified in order to accommodate vagueness, and if so how?»). Terry HORGAN and Matjaž POTRČ, «Vague-

partners with a van-Inwagen-type defense that insists on using vagueness as a key feature and on granting the existence of gratuitous evils. The current unresolved questions concerning vagueness must lead the theist who insists on featuring vagueness in his defense, *especially* if he also uses van Inwagen's ideal debate before agnostics as methodology, to be more cautious in his claims – as the following section suggests.

3.4. Limiting the Claims of Vagueness Defenses

As we have just seen, making a stand – as van Inwagen does – that the minimum amount of evils necessary for the Atonement is *vague to God* (just as it is to us) would unnecessarily commit one to either of the following problematic theses:

1. It is metaphysically impossible for an omnipotent, omniscient God to know the precise boundaries between the terms «evils necessary for the success of the Atonement» and «evils not necessary for the success of the Atonement» *even if* such boundaries exist.
2. It is metaphysically impossible for an omnipotent, omniscient God to know the precise boundaries between the terms «evils necessary for the success of the Atonement» and «evils not necessary for the success of the Atonement» *because* there simply are no such precise boundaries.

Of course, the first thesis is immediately objectionable on the ground that an omniscient God would know about everything that exists, if it exists at all. But then, it is possible for a theist to make the distinction between God's not *knowing* something and God's not *foreknowing* something. A theist, for example, can offer a defense along the following lines: In the same way that it is possible for the omniscient God *not* to have *foreknowledge* of the free acts of creatures (and it was His free choice that this should be so⁷⁷), so – it might be argued – is it also possible for God not to have *foreknowledge* of the precise extension of the term «amount of evils necessary for the success of the Atonement» insofar as God has freely decided to invite human beings to be His *free* partners and co-operators in the success of the Atonement. God, in His mercy and love, has chosen to make human beings His free co-workers in bringing creation to perfection and making the world an «evil-free zone» as much as possible.

ness: From Epistemicism to Transvaluationism», *Acta Analytica* 17, no. 29 (2002): p. 7. See the different articles on vagueness in this issue of *Acta Analytica* edited by Horgan and Potrč. See also the papers from the 1998 conference on Vagueness in Bled, Slovenia, published in *Acta Analytica* 14, no. 23 (1999).

77. Cfr. SWINBURNE, *Providence and the Problem of Evil*, pp. 3-4.

In that way, both Creator and free creatures affect the final extension of the term «exact amount of evils that was necessary for the success of the Atonement for all human beings who ever existed and were significantly free». It may be added that at the end of time, when all evils shall have come to pass, God will *know* (it will no longer be vague to Him) how many evils were necessary to at least provide the necessary condition for the Atonement of *all* human beings there ever were whom God actually allowed to exercise their freedom significantly. (Of course, some of these, possibly, would freely reject God forever.) The extension of the terms will be clear by then, since God will have known all free human acts (and their consequences) that humans will have done until the accomplishment of the Atonement⁷⁸.

The second thesis above [i.e., that God's vagueness is explained by the no-precise-boundaries thesis] raises the question *why* even God's concepts and terms do not have precise extensions. Each of the different non-epistemic accounts of vagueness highlights a possible explanation for the phenomenon of vagueness among human beings. But, as we have seen, each explanation becomes problematic when dealing with a supposed *divine* vagueness. Thus, as long as no successful explanation is given on how an omniscient *God* (not just *human beings*) should be vague about such important matters as how much evil to allow in order to achieve His purposes at the least cost, a defense that explicitly includes the thesis that «God is vague about the amount of evils necessary for the Atonement» leaves much to be desired.

My suggestion is: Since featuring one available account of vagueness to the exclusion of the other accounts in a van-Inwagen-type defense against the local argument has such costly consequences for the theist, why not leave open the question on whether or not the matter is vague to God, and make only a limited claim, namely, that the matter is vague *at least to humans*, whether or not it is to God? While van Inwagen explicitly rejects epistemicism, a theistic defense featuring vagueness need not make this claim. But neither does it endorse epistemicism to the exclusion of the other accounts of vagueness.

Thus, we have the following proposals:

3.4.1. *A Defense Appealing Only to the Vagueness of the Matter to Humans*

I propose that the following alternative vagueness-based defense against the local argument avoids the complications of a vagueness-based

78. For example, among the significantly free acts of humans are procreation and development of the temporal world in certain ways. I will pursue the possibilities of this response below under the section «A Defense Appealing to God's Freely-Chosen Vulnerability».

defense that explicitly rejects epistemicism, such as van Inwagen's. I especially highlight that «vagueness» in the proposition below [Proposition (15)] is meant to claim only the vagueness of the matter *to human beings*. It makes no stand at all in regard to the issue whether the matter on «the amount of evil necessary for the success of God's Atonement Plan» is also vague to God. Of course, not making any stand on this matter no longer advances the strategy of van Inwagen, which includes as an essential step the exposition of the wrongness of the standard position on evil (SP) as a basic moral principle. But of course, making a stand on this issue is not necessary at all in a defense or in a theodicy which attempts to «justify the ways of God before *human* criticism».

I intend the following proposition to be a modification of van Inwagen's Theist's Proposition (14).

Proposition (15): It is plausible to suppose that the actual state of affairs of the actual world is one

- (15a) where God is justified in the non-prevention of a *certain* amount of evils in accordance with an Atonement Plan for separated humans, but where the *exact amount*, type of distribution, and membership of the instances of non-preventions (of evil) necessary for divine purposes (e.g., the Atonement) are vague *to human beings*⁷⁹;
- (15b) where, therefore, it is a vague issue *to human beings* whether a given particular evil should or shouldn't be a part of that set of instances of non-preventions (of evil) necessary for divine purposes (e.g., the Atonement); and
- (15c) where, therefore (given the vagueness of the matter *to human beings*), no human being can legitimately charge God of moral imperfection simply on the ground that He did not in fact prevent *this* one particular instance of evil.

I highlight the differences between this proposition and its parallel proposition, van Inwagen's Theist's Proposition (14). In (14a), van Inwagen's proposes that the minimum amount of evil necessary for the atonement is vague to the moral agent *God*, which vagueness *de facto* «excuses» Him from acting according to Atheist's supposed basic moral principle SP, just as human agents in similar situations of vagueness are also excused from acting according to this standard position on evil SP. But while van Inwagen's Proposition (14) is intended to show (as in

79. Rather than talk of «evils necessary for divine purposes», I prefer the expression «the non-preventions (of evils) necessary for divine purposes». The parentheses serve to clarify that I intend the adjective «necessary» to modify «divine *non-preventions* of some amount of evil», rather than «evils».

his Proposition [3]) that SP is therefore wrong as a basic moral principle on the ground that there are situations where the agents preventing and allowing certain evils *cannot be* reasonably obliged to abide by SP, *my* (15a) *does not* make a stand whether the amount of evils necessary for the Atonement is vague to God.

Naturally, my Proposition (15) doesn't have to be an instance of Theist's Proposition (3) and thus will have nothing to do with showing the correctness or wrongness of SP. But a theistic defense using vagueness is not required to show that SP is wrong. And so I intend «vague» in my (15a) to mean only that «the exact amount, type of distribution, and membership of the instances of non-preventions (of evils) necessary for divine purposes is vague to human beings». In effect, my (15a) is also saying that any line that God draws between evils He prevents and evils He allows would always look arbitrary to humans.

But since *no* stand is made on whether the amount of evil necessary for the success of the Atonement is *also* vague to God (15a) does not in effect make a stand on whether the line that God draws also looks arbitrary to *Him* such that He then doesn't have any non-arbitrary guide by which He can make a specific non-arbitrary decision in regard to preventing or allowing a particular evil.

As already noted under «The No-Minimum Argument», there are at least two senses in which to understand the statement that «there is no non-arbitrary line that God can draw». The first sense says only that there is no line that God can draw that does not look arbitrary to *those who evaluate God's moral accountability* and by which they can judge whether God acted wrongly or justifiably in not preventing a particular evil. The second sense includes the first and says in addition that there is also no line that can be drawn that does not look arbitrary to *God Himself* and by which He can make a specific decision in regard to preventing or allowing a particular evil.

Because of the costly consequences of presupposing that «the amount of evils necessary for the Atonement» is vague to God and that therefore there is no non-arbitrary line that He can draw (in the second sense), I propose that only the first sense should be insisted – while the second sense may be left open – by a van-Inwagen-type defense that uses an account of vagueness.

On the one hand, a theistic defense using the idea of the impossibility of God drawing a non-arbitrary line *in the first sense* claims only that human beings, who are vague about the extension of «the evils necessary for the success of the Atonement plan», cannot legitimately charge God of moral imperfection on the ground that He did not prevent *this* particular evil. This would hold true whether one employed an epistemic or a non-epistemic account of vagueness. Under an epistemic framework, a theistic

defense using vagueness may suppose: a) that nothing is vague to God because, being omniscient, He would have known the precise boundaries of the phrase «amount of evil necessary for the Atonement»; and b) that this matter is, understandably, vague to us epistemically limited human beings. Under the indecision view, this matter is still vague to us on account of *our* semantic indecision due to a failure to precisify our terms, but now the theistic defender avoids the complications of representing God as semantically undecided, since in the first place, nothing is claimed at all about anything being vague to God.

On the other hand, a theistic defense using the idea of the impossibility of God drawing a non-arbitrary line *in the second sense* makes the unnecessary additional claim – unnecessary, i.e., for the purposes of giving a defense – that even God (who Himself is vague about the extension of «evils necessary for the success of the Atonement») cannot have a non-arbitrary choice where to put the line between evils He prevents and evils He allows. As we have seen, making this additional claim pushes the theist as well as his audience of agnostics to a non-epistemic account of vagueness – with such costly consequences.

Of course, what a defense requires is only that *human* criticism against the ways of God would be refuted, and in the present context, this means only refuting a certain argument raised *by humans* who are vague about the boundaries of evils necessary and evils unnecessary for divine purposes. The issue is then simply whether or not it is legitimate *for humans*, to whom this matter is vague, to morally accuse God. There is no necessity to make a stand on whether this matter is also vague to God. Moreover, when a defense insists on making the unnecessary move of taking the stand that this matter is also vague to God, it would be committing itself to a particular account of vagueness, which may cost it its credibility before those who don't consider this account of vagueness plausible at all. And of course, there is no reason to suppose that everyone in van Inwagen's ideal audience of agnostics would unanimously consider *one* particular account of vagueness to be probable at all.

Hence, with the above clarifications, I propose that if (15a) in Proposition (15) is plausibly true, *regardless* of whether the epistemic or the indecision view of vagueness is used as theoretical framework (15b) and (15c) would logically follow. If atheists insist on accusing theists of believing in a non-omnipotent or in a morally imperfect God on the basis of *this* single un-prevented evil (e.g., the Murder of Mari Luz), the defense may well appeal to the principle of presumption of innocence: «The accused is innocent unless proven guilty». Human accusers (atheists) as well as human judges (the audience of agnostics) cannot of course «convict» theism of inconsistency on the basis of a vague accusation, something that none of them can establish.

Regardless, therefore, of whether or not the issue on the exact amount, type of distribution, and membership of non-preventions (of evils) necessary for divine purposes is vague *only* to humans (i.e., they are not necessarily vague to God), those who accept that the minimum amount of evils consistent with God's plan is vague *at least* to humans cannot convict theism of holding inconsistent beliefs on the simple ground that *one* particular instance of evil was not prevented.

3.4.2. *A Defense Appealing to God's Freely-Chosen Vulnerability*

Finally, there's a line of thinking suggested by ontic vagueness which, in my judgment, has good chances at succeeding when pursued more elaborately. God's vagueness – to the extent that it can be granted that God can be vague about anything at all – is, according to the lines suggested by ontic vagueness, due to the fact that this vagueness is fundamentally related to the nature of the world that God has morally sufficient reasons for creating as it is. Now, what is the nature of the world that God has *freely* created? Or, at least, what may be one of its *fundamental* features? One feature of the actual world is that it is a world where there are free human beings whom, in accordance with His plan, God would allow to exercise significant freedom both in their moral choices and amoral choices.

Among the choices that some human beings can make and whose carrying out God does not prevent (or at least, not all the time, granted that God does make a few miraculous interventions here and there for His own good reasons) is the exact number of offspring they will procreate in their lifetime. These offspring, since they in turn will be allowed by God to be significantly free, will in turn decide on the number of offspring they will bear in their lifetime. This goes on until the consummation of the world (whether such consummation will be due to a special intervention from God and to what extent, or simply due to the world's taking its due course and reaching its natural end according to the normal functioning of its natural laws). Since individual human beings are directly responsible for some good and evil in the world, and would in turn be the subject of some evils, there is no telling how many evils and what varieties there would be in the world from its beginning until its consummation.

The final amount of evils – as well as, correspondingly, the total amount of good – in the world thus depends (it was God's will that it should depend) partly on the free decisions of human beings. If human beings are to remain significantly free and God does not set a predetermined amount of evil such that when humans shall have brought about this much amount of evil He would destroy the world, then the exact total amount of evils up

to any given time since the beginning of the world was something that God could not have foreknown. This is simply a logical consequence of the concession (which van Inwagen makes) in regard to the traditional concept of omniscience. Divine omniscience, van Inwagen proposes, does not include foreknowledge of creaturely free acts.

Consequently, granted that God could not have *foreknown* the exact total number of humans and the total amount of good and evil they would *freely* do and thus the total amount of consequent evil and suffering they would be subjects of up to any given time since the beginning of the world, neither could God have foreknown the total amount (and exact distribution) of non-preventions (of evils) necessary to bring about a logically necessary condition for the success of the Atonement Plan.

No matter what the omnipotent God does to increase the probability of His creatures making the right choice, He cannot logically enforce or ensure that *every* human being would *freely* return to Him. And it's possible that some human beings would not make it their final choice to be united with God, and so they remain in an eternal state of separation from God, which is called «Hell». James L. Crenshaw calls this God's «freely chosen vulnerability».

In choosing to endow humans with self-determination, the deity has relinquished full exercise of power and knowledge: human freedom entails divine constraint. Moreover, by entering into covenant relationship with particular human beings, he has made himself vulnerable, subject to the uncertainty of human choice. Vulnerability belongs to the essence of any intimate relationship, which must be grounded in mutual freedom. God's relationship with the creatures made in his own image bears the painful scars of this freely chosen vulnerability... Divine vulnerability [is] a divine dependence on reciprocal love that cannot be ascertained unless submitted to radical choice⁸⁰.

If God is justified in giving the gift of freedom at all, then He is justified in allowing a necessary condition for *there to be* creaturely freedom at all, namely, the *possibility* that such a freedom might be abused. That such a freedom might *possibly* be abused is not evil in itself. Its *actual* abuse constitutes moral evil. But the *actual* abuse of this freedom by the creature is, of course, not necessary for this freedom to be there. And it was not part of God's plan that freedom should be abused by the creature.

And so, we see here that a variant of ontic vagueness can be used in a defense of theism against local arguments from evil in just this sense:

80. James L. CRENSHAW, *Defending God: Biblical Responses to the Problem of Evil* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), p. 82.

The vagueness of the matter concerning the amount of non-preventions (of evils) necessary for the success of the Atonement is in great part due to the fundamental nature of the world that God freely created – a world in which it is God's will that there be intelligent creatures significantly exercising their freedom (for the immensely outweighing good that only freedom can make possible, namely, creaturely love, the love of creatures for their Creator, and the love of creatures for one another in God). Insofar as God could not have foreknowledge of freely-willed creaturely acts, God could not have foreknowledge that creatures would *actually* do evil at all in the first place, or, if they would, how much evil they would do. Consequently, there could not have been any foreknowledge of the «exact amount of evil God leaves in place to provide a necessary condition for the success of the Atonement».

Other variables come into play – such as the psychology, the temperament, the culture, personal experiences, etc. of an individual person – all of which condition (but not determine) the free acts of individuals. The past free choices of an individual increase the probability (but not determine) the way he makes present choices. Consequently, the exact extent of the work of motivating individual human beings (including, e.g., how much suffering that is the natural consequence of a wrong choice must be left in place) to make a loving return to God is also something that God could not have foreknown.

We note that this defense of theism still appeals to the vagueness of the matter concerning «the amount of non-preventions (of evils) necessary to provide a necessary (though insufficient) condition for the success of the Atonement Plan for fallen humans», and – more importantly – that this matter is vague *to God*. Hence, this defense is compatible with van Inwagen's strategy of showing the wrongness of the standard position on evil (the moral principle appealed to by Atheist). But the stress here is that this vagueness on the part of God is due to His *free decision* to create a world in which some intelligent creatures exercise their freedom significantly. It is also due to His *free decision* to entrust the stewardship of creation to human beings. That is to say, human beings can freely exercise their freedom in caring for the world in their own creative ways (such ways as they would gradually discover) in accordance with God's plan. God ensures this by not *foreknowing* their free actions. Again, this is, in a manner of speaking, part of «God's freely-chosen vulnerability».

4. THE ANTI-IRREGULARITY DEFENSE AGAINST THE ARGUMENT FROM EXTRA-EXTRA-LAPSARIAN EVILS

The human person is radically different from everything else in the created world. Hence, it is not implausible for the theist to suppose that in allowing human sufferings God may have reasons that are different from those He has for allowing evils that have nothing to do with the intentional actions of human agents to befall on the rest of creation, if there are such evils.

It may or may not be that beasts suffer (or that pre-lapse beasts suffered) and it may or may not be that the general biological mechanism of pain is evil, but *if* animal suffering is treated as an evil (both before and after the alleged Fall), then the atheist can use this to present an argument from «the evil of bestial suffering». Theism has to be defended against the argument from these alleged evils, which, by definition, are not covered by the free-will defense.

A preliminary question is: Is it possible for there to be a *good* created world containing no evil whatsoever? Or, since «evil» in the previous question is rather misleading, is it possible for there to be a *good* created world without the following features: some things lack (or have to a lesser degree) some of the things that other things have, and some forms are generated at the expense of the corruption of other forms? Would these lacks and losses and relative imperfections be «evil»?

4.1. Are «Metaphysical Evils» Extra-Lapsarian *Evils*?

Given our definition of «evil», what Leibniz and others would call *metaphysical evil* would not really count as an evil, because we take it that all parties agree that «evils» would only be those «absences or lacks of something that, according to a system of evaluation that one takes to be objective and universal, *ought to be there*». «Metaphysical evil», however, refers to the basic fact of finitude⁸¹, of there being «order and hierarchy of different degrees of perfection (or imperfection)» in the universe⁸². In the context of Leibniz' *Theodizee*, it refers to the «ontological imperfection of all created things in comparison with the perfection of God»⁸³. It is a thing's

81. John HICK, *Evil and the God of Love*, 2nd ed. (London: Macmillan, 1977), pp. 13-14.

82. Paul WEINGARTNER, *Evil: Different Kinds of Evil in the Light of Modern Theodicy* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2003), p. 9.

83. Armin KREINER, *Dios en el sufrimiento: Sobre la solidez de los argumentos de la teodicea* [Gott im Leid], trad. Roberto H. Bernet de la nueva edición ampliada, Friburgo

essential limitation as *that* thing and as distinct from other things. «Metaphysical evil» is therefore not a description of *something* that is not there which *ought to be there*. The lion's incapability to fly constitutes no evil (according to the above definition) since the ability to fly is not something that, according to a system of evaluation that one takes to be objective and universal (e.g., evaluation of a particular lion from the standard of a supposed-to-be-universal-and-objective *leonine nature*), ought to be there.

The essential variety and gradation of things can only be made possible by «metaphysical evil». Individuals of a certain species lack (or possess to an essentially lesser degree) what belongs to individuals of another species. But given our working definition of evil, this variety and gradation would not constitute an evil, properly speaking. St. Augustine says in the *City of God*:

[N]o nature at all is evil, and this is a name for nothing but the want of good. But from things earthly to things heavenly, from the visible to the invisible, there are some things better than others; and for this purpose are they unequal, in order that they might all exist⁸⁴.

Seen in the context of the whole good universe, such potentially destructive *individual* things and organisms as fire, frost, wild beasts, etc. are, in Augustine's words, admirable in their own places, excellent in their own natures, beautifully adjusted to the rest of creation, serviceable, and graceful in their contributions as to a commonwealth. St. Thomas Aquinas adds:

The judgment... of the goodness of anything does not depend upon its order to any particular thing, but rather upon what it is in itself, and on its order to the whole universe, wherein every part has its own perfectly ordered place⁸⁵.

de Brisgovia-Basilea-Viena 2005 (Barcelona: Herder Editorial, S. L., 2007), p. 35, quoting G. W. Leibniz, *Theodizée*, I, 21.

84. St. AUGUSTINE, *City of God*, Bk. XI, chap. 22, excerpted in *The Problem of Evil: Selected Readings*, ed. Michael L. Peterson (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1992), p. 194.

85. *Summa Theologica*, part I, q. 49, a. 3. See also part I, q. 21, a. 1, which argues that «God exercises justice, when he gives to each thing what is due to it by its nature and condition». See also *Summa Contra Gentiles*, Bk. I, chap. LXXI: «The good of the whole is of more account than the good of the part. Therefore, it belongs to a prudent governor to overlook a lack of goodness in a part, that there may be an increase of goodness in the whole... Now, if evil were taken away from certain parts of the universe, the perfection of the universe would be much diminished, since its beauty results from the ordered unity of good and evil things, seeing that evil arises from the failure of good, and yet certain goods are occasioned from those very evils through the providence of the governor... Therefore, evil should not be excluded from things by the divine providence». *Summa Contra Gentiles*, trans. Joseph Rickaby, S. J. (London: B. Sc. Oxon., 1905).

Indeed, the distinction and graded order of things is indispensable for the perfection of the universe. There would have been no perfection in the universe without the perfection of those beings that make up the universe, and it is necessary that each thing be put in its proper order and grade of being. Their specific place in the whole order, i.e., their specific grade of being, is at the same time that which fully gives them sufficient reason to be part of the complex whole⁸⁶.

Moreover, for all we know, the corruption of some substantial forms (e.g., this fawn burned to ashes by this forest fire; or this deer devoured by this lion) and the generation of others are also *necessary* features of any physical world run according to natural laws – especially a world where there are living sentient organisms. If so, then the general phenomenon of corruption and generation in the physical world does not involve losses or absences of things that *ought to be there*, especially if it is plausible to suppose there is some intrinsic good in there being such a physical world.

I propose, and subsequently defend, that a nearly regular physical world run according to indeterministic quantum mechanical laws – where some things are corrupted and others are generated – is the best eventual temporary dwelling place, if not the *only* possible one, for incoming rational beings to be able to perform genuinely free moral choices. This, however, leads to more questions, which we will address in their proper places: Why must there be non-human animals at all, or at least why must there be *pre-human* animals at all? Why did God not create beasts simultaneously with humans? Why are there too many animal lives that appear to contain more bad than good?⁸⁷ In short, if the whole world is made by God to be the temporary dwelling place of rational beings, why must the stage be set up at such an expense as millions of years of ancestral suffering? These objections have been raised and we will address them presently.

That corruption and generation are indispensable in a physical world run according to natural laws – supposing that this is true – has obviously nothing to do with any alleged misuse of human freedom. Indeed our re-

86. Ángel Luis GONZÁLEZ, *Ser y participación: Estudio sobre la cuarta vía de Tomas de Aquino*, 3ª edición revisada y ampliada (Pamplona: EUNSA, 2001), p. 86.

87. Keller offers the following example which he takes from Jay McDaniel, *Of God and Pelicans* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1989), pp. 19-20. According to McDaniel, white pelicans usually lay two eggs, the second one coming two days after the first egg was laid. In due time the first egg hatches two days ahead of the second, which serves as a sort of a «back-up egg». The older sibling usually kicks the younger sibling out of the nest. The younger «back-up» sibling usually dies of hunger or exposure if the first one survives. Only when the first one dies does the younger sibling receive the full attention of the mother. Keller concludes that the life of the younger sibling seems to be a good example of an animal life that contains more bad than good. See KELLER, *Problems of Evil and the Power of God*, p. 27.

sponse includes the following proposition: *Consistent with God's eternal plan, the paradise-world of the pre-lapse humans already contained the phenomenon of predation among non-human animals and the corruption and generation of forms involved in it.* But then, if this is indispensable for the perfection of the universe, then obviously the permanent *organic* existence of an individual creature would not be something that *ought to be there*, and therefore the fact itself of its corruption involves *no evil* (according to the definition of «evil» agreeable to all parties in the discussion).

I suggest that «evil» in the following quotation from Aquinas – which he uses to refer to the natural phenomena of corruption and generation of things – expresses what is usually referred to as «*metaphysical evil*».

God and nature and any other agent make what is best in the whole, but not what is best in every single part, except in order to the whole... And the whole itself, which is the universe of creatures, is all the better and more perfect if some things in it can fail in goodness, and do sometimes fail, God not preventing this. This happens, firstly, because «it belongs to Providence not to destroy, but to save nature», as Dionysius says (Div. Nom. iv); but it belongs to nature that what may fail should sometimes fail; secondly, because, as Augustine says (Enchir. 11), «God is so powerful that He can make good out of evil». Hence many good things would be taken away if God permitted no evil to exist; for fire would not be generated if air was not corrupted, nor would the life of a lion be preserved unless the ass were killed⁸⁸.

To conclude this section, we note that all parties in the discussion – theists, atheists, and real or imaginary agnostics – agree in regard to metaphysical evil. Hence, «metaphysical evil» involving beasts – whether it refers to the *fact* of variety and gradation in the non-human animal world or to the *general phenomenon* of corruption and generation of non-human animal forms as exemplified in the phenomenon of predation – does not figure anymore in the discussion below.

But, of course, atheists can still mount their argument from alleged cases of *biologically gratuitous pain* and *gratuitous* animal suffering. This will be addressed in its proper place below.

4.2. Against the Global Argument from the Sufferings of Beasts

Van Inwagen's anti-irregularity defense tells a story, «true for all anyone knows», where God exists and allows beasts to suffer in the same

88. *Summa Theologica*, part I, q. 48, a. 2, ad 2.

ways and amounts as the actual ones. The four key propositions of this story are:

- (1) Every world God could have made that contains higher-level sentient creatures either contains patterns of suffering morally equivalent to those of the actual world, or else is massively irregular.
- (2) Some important intrinsic or extrinsic good depends on the existence of higher-level sentient creatures; this good is of sufficient magnitude that it outweighs the patterns of suffering found in the actual world.
- (3) Being massively irregular is a defect in a world, a defect at least as great as the defect of containing patterns of suffering morally equivalent to those found in the actual world.
- (4) The world – the cosmos, the physical universe – has been created by God⁸⁹.

The fourth proposition is a consequence of the main thesis of theism. If there is an *omnipotent* God, then it is by His power that there is a physical cosmos that comes to be and is conserved in being. And this is nothing else but creation and conservation. The first three propositions will now be elaborated.

4.2.1. *Moral Equivalence between a Massively Irregular World and a World Where Higher-Level Sentient Creatures Suffer*

Van Inwagen's *higher-level sentient creatures* are «animals that are conscious in the way in which (*pace* Descartes) the higher non-human mammals are conscious»⁹⁰. Whatever the merits of the no-self-consciousness thesis and the no-suffering thesis, van Inwagen chooses to defend theism without having to deny that the higher non-human mammals are conscious and that they do *suffer*. Whether these non-human animals consciously *suffer* (i.e., there is a rudimentary self that organizes pain sensations) or they only have a succession of pain sensations but not a perception of succession, the anti-irregularity defense addresses the *prima facie* difficulty presented for theism by both positions.

For van Inwagen, two states of affairs are «*morally equivalent*» when there are no morally decisive reasons for preferring one to the other. Two patterns of suffering are thus morally equivalent either because they are not in any interesting sense comparable or because there is no morally decisive reason for preferring one to the other (van Inwagen's example:

89. VAN INWAGEN, *The Problem of Evil*, p. 114.

90. *Ibid.*

a world containing cancer but no war and a world containing war but no cancer). With two morally equivalent states of affairs, there are no morally decisive reasons for supposing that one is equal to, the same as, greater in value or lesser in value than, the other.

A «*massively irregular world*» for van Inwagen is 1) a world in which the laws of nature fail in some massive way because of God's ubiquitous miracles protecting every higher-level sentient creature from suffering, supposedly to bring about a hedonic utopia; or 2) a world that came into existence five minutes ago but complete with memories of an unreal past; or 3) a world in which beasts felt no pain despite the fact that they have the same physical structures and exhibit the same pain-behavior of actual beasts.

A «*nearly regular*» world, on the contrary, would be a world with a stable natural order and stable natural conditions⁹¹. It is a world run according to stable, regularly functioning natural laws, and therefore one that has general regularity of sequence. Such a world, according to John Hick, has general causal regularities.

[It would] involve, for example, that two solid objects cannot occupy the same region of space at the same time, and that a certain degree of heat destroys the tissues of the body. But in a world of fixed structure animals are liable sometimes to collide with solid obstacles, or to be submerged in water or burned by fire, or to fall on hard ground, or become entangled with projecting branches and be injured. And if these animal organisms are helped to live out their lifespan by a protective sensitivity to pain, which prompts them to avoid or retreat from dangerous situations, it is inevitable that this mechanism will be used and that they will in the course of their lives experience not a little pain⁹².

When this nearly regular world is suddenly transformed into a massively irregular world, things will be very different in the irregular world: Every pain-producing situation is systematically prevented by constant adjustments in nature. The world would be so unstable that pain mechanisms of sentient creatures would never even have developed in the first place since these are superfluous anyway. God (or a legion of faithful guardian angels) would be there to see to it that fire, which gives warmth (and, in the case of future rational animals, cooks food and makes metal malleable so as to make possible the manufacture of useful implements), suddenly becomes harmless *every time* random events in nature bring it too close to living animal flesh. (Other miraculous interventions have been suggested:

91. Cfr. KELLER, *Problems of Evil and the Power of God*, pp. 17 and 25. For van Inwagen, a *nearly regular world* is the opposite of a *massively irregular world*. See *The Problem of Evil*, p. 171, n. 19.

92. HICK, *Evil and the God of Love*, pp. 304-305.

God temporarily or permanently alters the nature of animal flesh in such a way that it can suddenly withstand prolonged contact with fire; or, God could suddenly put a miraculous shield between fire and animal flesh so that there never would be any real contact; or, as the fire threatens to burn, God suddenly ceases to sustain most of the more energetic photons in existence⁹³, etc.)

No animal ever drowns or falls from a precipice by accident (or by intention, in the case of suicidal rational animals). Water or air suddenly loses some of its normal properties whenever some animal is in danger of drowning, or else some temporary alteration in the law of buoyancy suddenly saves the animal. When some animal falls from a ravine, some momentary alteration in the laws of gravity sustains the animal in mid-air, or some guardian angel suddenly supports the animal so that it may not dash its feet against a stone, or the hard surface of the ground instantaneously becomes soft as foam at the precise moment when the falling animal touches the ground. Sharp objects used to cut food and other hard surfaces miraculously turn blunt when they get into contact with living animal flesh. Such properties of things as hardness, softness, texture, combustibility, etc. must be continually adjusted according to the exigencies of every random event in nature (a falling stone, a biting predator's teeth, lightning, etc.) so that no animal ever suffers any pain and/or suffering.

Hearing all of the above, an objector would most likely butt in and ask: But why not indeed?

The issue thus turns into one of implications. At this point, we merely outline some of the effects of massive irregularity (as we will come back to these in more detail under «The Defect of Massive Irregularity and the Good of Near Regularity»):

1) In the case of irrational animals, there would neither be the need nor the possibility for developing abilities for instinctive adaptation to changing circumstances in nature, and this would most likely prevent the progress of *natural* evolution.

2) In the case of rational animals, there would neither be the need nor the possibility for reasoned calculation of the events and movements in nature.

Consequently, as Hick puts it, there would be

absence of any need to comprehend nature and to learn to predict and manipulate its movements. For in a world of continual «special providences» the laws of nature would have to be extremely flexible: sometimes gravity would operate, sometimes not; sometimes boiling water would be

93. VAN INWAGEN, «The Place of Chance in a World Sustained by God», p. 216, n. 4.

hot, sometimes cool; and so on. There could be no sciences, for there would be no enduring world structure to investigate⁹⁴.

Consequently, for rational animals it would be a world where there is neither the need nor the possibility for taking personal responsibility. There would be «no need for exertion, no kind of challenge, no problems to be solved or difficulties to be overcome, no demand of the environment for human skill or inventiveness. There would be nothing to avoid and nothing to seek; no occasion for co-operation or mutual help; no stimulus to the development of culture or the creation of civilization»⁹⁵.

Van Inwagen's Proposition (1) then proposes this disjunction: «*Every world God could have created that contains higher-level sentient creatures either contains patterns of suffering morally equivalent to those of the actual world, or else is massively irregular*». When God designs a world, the laws of nature are either indeterministic or deterministic. It seems impossible, however, that the laws of nature would be deterministic – at least according to the theory of quantum mechanics favored by most physicists according to which the laws of nature are quantum-mechanical, which is essentially *indeterministic*.

But if they are indeterministic, then, for all anyone knows, any initial state of the world in which God plans higher-level sentient creatures would eventually exist might eventually be succeeded by states involving vast amounts of pain and suffering. Moreover, if the laws of nature are indeterministic, then it seems impossible that God can fine-tune the initial state of the universe in such a way that it would make an eventual hedonic utopia causally inevitable. Due to this natural indeterminism, a duplicate universe that is similar to ours at the beginning could have evolved differently, but so long as it is run by natural laws, and God does not constantly intervene in its natural functioning by ubiquitous omni-protective miracles, there would still be patterns of higher-level sentient suffering morally equivalent to those found in the actual world.

It is also reasonable to suppose that if the arbitrary values (at least arbitrary *to us*) of our universe's physical parameters had been slightly different, the universe wouldn't have contained intelligent life⁹⁶. If this is so

94. HICK, *Evil and the God of Love*, p. 306.

95. *Ibid.*, p. 307.

96. Cfr. ALVIN PLANTINGA, «Two Dozen (Or So) Theistic Arguments», retrieved 15 May 2008 from the World Wide Web: <http://philofreligion.homestead.com/files/Theistic-arguments.html>, pp. 5-9. For scientific arguments for the thesis that if the physical constants of our universe had been slightly different, life (especially intelligent life) couldn't have existed, see, for example, B. J. CARR and M. J. REES, «The Anthropic Principle and the Structure of the Physical World», *Nature: International Weekly Journal of Science* 278 (12 April 1979): pp. 605-612. Carr and Rees argue that «the basic features of galaxies, stars, planets and the everyday world are essentially determined by a few microphysi-

and if our universe is the only model we have for how a universe might be designed, then, for all *we* know, pain is an essential component of the natural evolution of higher-level sentient creatures, which are the immediate evolutionary precursors of human beings.

Thus, where God creates a world in which there are higher-level sentient creatures, it seems metaphysically impossible for God to prevent the suffering or the pain sensations of these sentient creatures except by means of ubiquitous miracles thereby bringing about a hedonic utopia, and this would make that world massively irregular.

Van Inwagen then argues that, as far as we can see, these two states of affairs (there being a massively irregular world and there being a regular world containing patterns of suffering of higher-level sentient creatures) are *morally equivalent*; there are no morally decisive reasons for God to prefer one to the other option. If so, then it is not inconsistent with God's moral perfection to actualize that state of affairs of there being a world in which higher-level sentient creatures suffer in ways and amounts morally equivalent to those found in the actual world.

But why must there be higher-level sentient creatures?

4.2.2. *The Good of There Being Higher-Level Sentient Creatures*

«Some important intrinsic and extrinsic good depends on the existence of higher-level sentient creatures; this good is of sufficient magnitude

cal constants and by the effects of gravitation... [S]everal aspects of our Universe – some of which seem to be prerequisites for the evolution of any form of life – depend rather delicately on apparent “coincidences” among the physical constants». See also John D. BARROW and Frank J. TIPLER, *The Anthropic Cosmological Principle* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986); Malcolm S. LONGAIR, *Los orígenes del universo* [título original: *The Origins of Our Universe: A Study of the Origin and Evolution of the Contents of our Universe*, 1991], trans. Tomás González Llarena (Madrid: Alianza Editorial, S. A., 1992), chap. 5, pp. 119-139. In Paul Charles Williams Davies, *Cosmic Jackpot: Why Our Universe Is Just Right for Life* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Co., 2007), esp. pp. 129-150, Davies focuses on the so-called «Goldilocks factor» – the fitness of the universe for life – and argues that if the strength of any one of the four forces of nature (the *strong* and the *weak* nuclear forces, gravitation, and electromagnetism) and the masses of the various sub-atomic particles had been altered, even by a small amount, the universe would have been rendered sterile. In another book, Paul C. W. Davies cites scientists George Simpson and Stephen Jay Gould as saying in effect that if some catastrophe were to wipe out all intelligent life on Earth and leave only microbes, it seems unlikely that these microbes would then follow a broadly similar evolutionary development and replay the emergence of fish, vertebrates, reptiles, mammals, and eventually intelligent bipeds. «There is little reason why life should go beyond the level of microbes, and no expectation whatever that it will advance obligingly towards intelligence and consciousness, still less develop humanoid characteristics». Paul Charles Williams DAVIES, *The Origin of Life* [first published as *The Fifth Miracle*, 1998] (London: Penguin Books, 2003), pp. 254-255.

that it outweighs the patterns of suffering contained in the actual world». Van Inwagen simply regards the following as obvious: A world containing higher-level sentient beings would have a much larger amount of *intrinsic good* than a world in which the highest organisms were worms.

Moreover, van Inwagen also suggests the *extrinsic value* of there being higher-level sentient creatures: Intelligent creatures made in the image and likeness of God cannot evolve directly from the lower animals such as worms or oysters; their immediate predecessors must be animals possessing higher-level sentience⁹⁷. But God has morally sufficient reasons for creating rational beings made in His image and likeness, namely, to communicate *ad extra* His goodness and love and invite rational creatures to share an eternity of love and happiness in union with Him. Therefore, God is justified to actualize that state of affairs where the immediate predecessors of rational beings would be higher-level sentient creatures.

The above suggestion, however, to my judgment, invites the following objection: It seems to underestimate the omnipotence of the God Who can «make descendants of Abraham out of stones». If God is omnipotent, why can't He *a fortiori* bring it about that intelligent creatures made in His image and likeness spring directly from worms and oysters – granted that there is indeed some intrinsic value in there being such intelligent creatures? That would have saved the sentient world a lot of evolutionary pain and suffering. Besides, if a defense is to include anyway the thesis that the genesis of rationality involved a special miracle from God, why didn't God perform this special miracle earlier in the evolutionary line? Why didn't God perform the miracle of ontological change from worm to human being rather than from the last non-human primate to human being?

Is the theist going to say that this cannot be because this would have involved so grand a miracle as to cause massive irregularity in the animal world? If that is so, then the theist would have to say explicitly that the miracle involving the genesis of rationality must be so minimal that it will not forfeit the good of there being a regular world in which there are sentient beings. But then the resources of an omnipotent God seem to indicate that it would not involve a grand miracle, one that forfeits near regularity, for Him to bring it about that rational beings descend directly from worms and oysters.

To answer this objection, I think the theist's most promising rejoinder would be to appeal to the vagueness of the matter concerning the boundaries between the terms «amount of miracles that bring about massive irregularity» and «amount of miracles that do not bring about massive irregularity». Or perhaps, the theist can say that wherever God puts the

97. VAN INWAGEN, *The Problem of Evil*, p. 120.

boundaries between the terms «*adequate* non-human ancestors from which human bodies are to *evolve directly*» and «*inadequate* non-human ancestors from which human bodies are to *evolve directly*», God cannot but draw a morally arbitrary line.

I would then suggest that «*adequacy* as an ancestor for a human being» would explore Hick's concept of *epistemic distance*. The free rational animal, Hick suggests, must be embedded in a larger stream of organic life where he feels close affinity with some creatures in the organic world and, in this way, be epistemically distant from God, to whom he can then *freely* lift up his mind and heart. It was part of God's plan that the rational creature be embedded in a world where the divine presence «could have been much more evident» so that – as Joseph Ratzinger says in another context – where God is not as manifest as tangible things are in the organic world, the rational creature may freely encounter God within his own heart⁹⁸. Thus, for there to be the good of epistemic distance, the rational creature must find himself in the company of non-human animals. Part of being in company with and being biologically related to non-human animals is that the rational creature must have *evolved from* non-human animals.

I then proceed to argue first, van-Inwagen-style, that no matter which particular species we assign (or God assigns) to be «the most adequate non-human ancestor from which human bodies are to evolve directly», it is always possible to have chosen the next lower or the next higher species without significant diminution (or gain) of the good of «*adequacy* as an ancestor for a human being». Applying the *sorites* paradox, use this reasoning to go one step at a time down the evolutionary ladder. Somewhere down the lower half of any proposed evolutionary history of human beings, however, we just intuitively think it is no longer the case that the bodies of certain animal species would have been adequate candidates for the role of immediate predecessors of humans. That is to say, if toads, for example, are to be the immediate predecessors of humans, would it be convenient for a rational animal to have the body closely similar to that of a toad that remains a toad? Would the brain and nervous system of a toad be adequate for rationality? If anyone still insists that the answer is yes, I invite him to go lower in the evolutionary line and consider worms and jellyfish, and then germs. Would these still be adequate candidates for rationality?

No doubt the objector would say that the above paragraph misses the point because the point of the objection is that the body of a lower-level animal, no matter how «*inadequate*» it may be in its present state as a candidate for the office of immediate predecessor of rational beings, can

98. Cfr. Joseph RATZINGER (Pope BENEDICT XVI), *Jesus of Nazareth*, trans. Adrian J. Walker (New York: Doubleday, 2007), pp. 34 and 37.

easily be transformed by an omnipotent God through a series of miraculous re-arrangements of the particles in the lower-animal's body so that it becomes a higher-level sentient animal's body in a few seconds. To this newly-existing higher-level sentient animal, God could then have infused a rational spiritual soul (immediately created by God), and – lo and behold – He could have had His first human being right away. This, concludes our imaginary objector, would have saved the pre-human animal world a lot of ancestral suffering.

To answer this objection, I suggest that «*close affinity* with some creatures in the organic world» is in turn a good quality with no sharp boundaries (at least *to us* humans who discuss arguments from animal suffering). That means – let us suppose that this is correct – there is some intrinsic value in there being *some* «*continuities* between humans and other social animals»⁹⁹ (namely, its value in bringing about epistemic distance) but that this term («*affinity*» or «*continuity*») has no precise extensions (at least *to us*).

For all anyone knows, such «*close affinity* (or *continuity*) with some creatures in the organic world in order that the rational creature might be epistemically distant from God» includes that state of affairs where the rational creature would be sentient in the way that *only* the higher-level sentient creatures are sentient. More importantly, I suggest in addition, that part of this «*affinity* or *continuity* to things in the organic world» is that such sentience of the future rational animal *shall have been the product of natural evolution in a world run by regular natural laws*, in much the same way that the sentience of the higher-level non-human sentient animals also *naturally* evolved. In short, it could plausibly be supposed that God wants the rational animal to realize that he (at least his body) was fashioned from the elements of the organic world and evolved from them *naturally*, in the same way that his evolutionary predecessors, as well as his contemporary animals, evolved naturally.

In the previous sentence I said that God wants the future rational animal to realize that «at least his body» evolved *naturally* from the organic world. I would even go farther and say that if certain currents of thought are to be *granted* as correct – (it is not necessary, though, for the effectiveness of my argument to actually *believe* and *endorse* these proposals to be correct) – then the extension of the term «the good of there being *continuity* between humans and other animals» might perhaps include the *natural* evolution of human morality from basic tendencies humans share with other social animals.

99. Cfr. Frans DE WAAL, *Primates y filósofos: La evolución de la moral del simio al hombre*, trans. Vanesa Casanova-Fernández (Barcelona: Paidós, 2007), pp. 39 and 86.

According to these currents of thought, morality is not a conscious decision adopted by rational animals in a concrete temporal moment; it is the product of social evolution, a direct prolongation of social instincts that we share with other animals¹⁰⁰. Non-human animals are, of course, not moral beings insofar as they belong to *species* that are irrational¹⁰¹. But that doesn't negate the supposition that there are basic tendencies, shared by both man and beast, but which in man become occasions to be a moral being in a significant way. In many higher-level animals, for example, we find instinctive caring for the young and many other tendencies analogous to the human tendency to care for others and protect them from harm¹⁰². My point is that these currents of thought would in fact lend support to my argument, at least to the extent that they are correct. In short, «continuity with other creatures in the organic world» can signify many things. The more human beings are «continuous» with higher-level sentient animals, the more it becomes plausible that they ought to have *naturally* evolved from them (as they most probably *actually* did), and not from worms and oysters. According to these currents of thought, the human capacity for compassion, empathy, and cooperation with others couldn't have evolved *naturally* from worms and oysters.

If the above is correct, then the immediate *natural* evolutionary predecessors of rational animals must be the higher-level sentient creatures, not such lower-level sentient animals as toads. In a regular world, converting

100. Frans DE WAAL, *Primates y filósofos*, p. 30. See also Frans B. M. de Waal, ed., *Tree of Origin: What Primate Behavior Can Tell Us about Human Social Evolution* (London: Harvard University Press, 2001).

101. I emphasize this point by italicizing «*species*». On the one hand, chimpanzees and other higher-level sentient animals may display such a good degree of animal intelligence and instinctive behavior that an *externally similar* behavior displayed by human beings would have a moral dimension. Studies have shown (those of Samuel Gosling, for example) that chimpanzees display behaviors where they can be bribed, can be jealous, «can be conscientious: they think before they act, they plan and they control their impulses», etc. in humanly analogous ways. See Jessica Bennett, «Just Like Humans», *Newsweek*, 18 June 2007, p. 52. A study has even proved accordingly that primates have a «sense of justice and fairness» analogous to those of humans. See Jaime CUNNINGHAM and Adam PIORE, «My Fair Monkey», *Newsweek*, 29 September 2003, pp. 44-45.

On the contrary, infants and mentally retarded human beings might display an external individual incapacity for actual rational and moral behavior. The fact remains, however, that there is a huge gap between being *human* and being *non-human*. Infants and mentally retarded people are *of a kind* (a species) that is capable of rational behavior. Chimpanzees which do better than certain humans in certain memory tests and chimpanzees which care for their young (more than certain human parents do!) are *of a kind* (a species) that is neither rational nor capable of moral behavior. I owe this point to Carl COHEN, «The Case for the Use of Animals in Biomedical Research», in *Social Ethics: Morality and Social Policy*, 5th ed., ed. Thomas A. Mappes and Jane S. Zembaty (New York: The McGraw-Hill Companies, Inc., 1997), pp. 458-467.

102. WAAL, *Primates y filósofos*, pp. 39, 41, 49, 52, 83, and 86.

higher-level sentient primates (for example) to human beings – i.e., God’s giving the bodies of these primates the gift of rationality (along with the infusion of a *human* soul) without doing much else besides in the way of a *major* rearrangement of the particles of their primate bodies – would satisfy the conditions of there being sentience for the new rational animal and having had this sentience (and all other natural tendencies that eventually would be morally useful for the future rational animal) *naturally* evolve¹⁰³.

I may also add that bringing about the existence of rational creatures by *natural* evolution is more in keeping with the general policy of preserving the world’s general causal regularities and thus of the stability of the natural order. Of course, God could have worked the miraculous ontological transformation a step earlier so that the ontological change would have been from «the higher-level sentient creature a step lower than the apes» to human, instead of from ape to human. That wouldn’t have forfeited «*natural* evolution». But that is precisely the point: the term is vague. And if non-epistemicism is correct, the term has no precise extensions, and that makes it impossible for there to be a morally non-arbitrary line (at least *to us humans*) dividing *natural* from *unnatural* evolution. And, in my judgment, that is enough to prohibit any human from accusing God of moral imperfection for having placed the ontological change exactly where it actually is.

It must be noted, though, that the above paragraphs are meant to respond to those who object against God’s having humans descend directly from higher-level sentient primates on the ground that God could have done it earlier. But so long as it can be agreed by all parties in the discussion that some good is achieved by having humans descend directly from higher-level sentient creatures, and that these creatures are the more adequate evolutionary predecessors of humans than worms and oysters are, then there shouldn’t be any need to appeal to some vague feature in a world where this state of affairs obtains. (We still need to appeal to vagueness, though, to defend the apparently arbitrary divine choice – it looks arbitrary at least *to us* – of the *particular higher-level sentient animal species* for the office of «immediate predecessor of humans»).

If we set aside the vagueness of the matter concerning what *exactly* constitutes a certain species’ being «higher» than another species, then the following should also be said: In a world in which God decrees that there should be variety and gradation in being and in which God decrees that the higher species genetically evolve from among the existent higher-level species rather than from among the lower-level ones, then it is only logical

103. To preempt possible objections, I also suggest that there are no sharp boundaries (at least *to us*) between «*natural* evolution» and «*unnatural* evolution» as well as between what constitutes «a *major* rearrangement of particles in a body» and only «a *minor* rearrangement».

that human beings should evolve directly from such higher-level non-human primates rather than from worms and oysters. And this connotes millions of years of ancestral suffering.

Still, the atheist might object, isn't a «hedonic utopia» imaginable, one where the higher animals evolve from the lower ones but in which God *miraculously* intervenes in order to prevent *any* case of animal pain or suffering that would have been a necessary part of *natural evolution*? After all, the following state of affairs is *conceivable*:

God, by means of an ages-long series of ubiquitous miracles, causes a planet inhabited by the same animal life as the actual earth to be a hedonic utopia. On this planet, fawns are (like Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego) saved by angels when they are in danger of being burnt alive. Harmful parasites and micro-organisms suffer immediate supernatural dissolution if they enter a higher animal's body. Lambs are miraculously hidden from lions, and the lions are compensated for the resulting restriction of their diets by physically impossible falls of high-protein manna, or else, although all living things evolved from a common ancestor, a hedonic utopia has existed at every stage of the evolutionary process¹⁰⁴.

Surely then, continues the objection, some sort of zoological paradise totally devoid of animal pain and suffering isn't logically impossible at all. True, this zoological utopia would be massively irregular, but so what?

In the context of his anti-irregularity *defense*, however, van Inwagen claims only that there are no morally decisive reasons for supposing that massive irregularity is a greater or lesser defect than (or whether in the first place it is comparable to) the defect of there being patterns of suffering of higher-level sentient creatures such as those displayed in the actual world. After all, «the question is whether there is a *prima facie* case for the thesis that the actual sufferings of beasts constitute a graver defect in a world than does massive irregularity»¹⁰⁵.

Advocating a form of modal skepticism, van Inwagen says that anyone who considers the one or the other state of affairs as constituting the graver defect would in effect be making an entirely subjective value judgment that has no value at all. It may be that we have a faculty (stemming from some combination of gift from God, product of evolution and social inculcation) for judging correctly the relative values of states of affairs involving day-to-day practical concerns of human beings (e.g., whether a table could be placed in another room). But then our modal intuitions *cannot* be trusted when making modal judgments concerning *states of affairs of*

104. VAN INWAGEN, *The Problem of Evil*, p. 115.

105. *Ibid.*, p. 121.

cosmic magnitude. Consequently, anyone's leanings to one side or the other concerning the values of such states of affairs of cosmic magnitude as massive irregularity in a world or patterns of suffering of higher-level sentient creatures would be subjective, unreliable, and untrustworthy.

Undermining van Inwagen's call to modal skepticism when dealing with value judgments on the relative values of cosmic states of affairs, Boyce and McBrayer argue that «God has a *prima facie* moral obligation to actualize a massively irregular world without suffering over a regular world with extreme suffering»¹⁰⁶ for the former is morally preferable to the latter on the following grounds:

a) Clocklike regularity at the expense of millions of years of animal suffering is valuable only insofar as it pleases God's egocentric aesthetic sense and would be worse than millions of years of irregularity without the sufferings of billions of sentient creatures;

b) Alleviating animal suffering costs God nothing or relatively little (only a violation of a divine aesthetic concern like the beauty inherent in regularity); and

c) By analogy, a dog that experiences severe pain in a regularly functioning computerized kennel is worse off than a dog that doesn't suffer at all in an irregularly functioning kennel.

Against the view appealed to by Boyce and McBrayer that clocklike regularity is valuable *only* insofar as it satisfies an egocentric God's aesthetic concerns, I point out that there is more to regularity than this view suggests! In the first place, there doesn't seem to me any cause for concern that God should be «egocentric», since God *Himself* is the source, the sustenance in being, and the end of all creation; and of course, God's being the center and goal of creation, unlike creaturely egocentrism, is not incompatible with perfect love *ad extra*, i.e., His bringing all creatures, with their loving cooperation (in the case of rational creatures), to their highest good. God *Himself* is their highest good.

In the second place, I point out that regularity in the world may be *primarily* a necessity for the type of free rational creatures that human beings are to be brought eventually by God, with their loving response, to fellowship with Him, in accordance with His plan. It may be that such regularity satisfies somebody's aesthetic concerns, but it would be of *secondary* importance that a regularity that was necessary for the accomplishment of some plan should also be pleasing. In fact, we may well say that God is pleased with His creation – «God saw that everything was good» (Gen. 1) – insofar as His eternal decrees are being carried out in it just as He planned

106. BOYCE and MCBRAYER, «Van Inwagen on the Problem of Evil: the Good, the Bad and the Ugly», pp. 17-19.

it. If we can plausibly defend the position that regularity in the world is, for all anyone knows, a *necessary condition* for bringing creatures (especially free intelligent creatures called to loving communion with God) to their *highest good*, then even a God who was pleased by creating the *regular* world as He actually did cannot be accused of that kind of selfish indifferent-to-the-good-of-others egocentrism (very common among creatures) that Boyce and McBrayer allude to.

We will try to defend this position in the next section: massive irregularity frustrates a very good divine plan, while near regularity provides a necessary condition for the accomplishment of such a plan.

4.2.3. *The Defect of Massive Irregularity and the Good of Near Regularity*

Reichenbach suggests the following disjunction: Every possible world that God could have designed either operates according to natural laws or is one that God directs by constant miraculous intervention¹⁰⁷. As van Inwagen points out, however, for all anyone knows, in any world run by natural laws that are quantum-mechanical and indeterministic, no amount of divine fine-tuning necessarily makes *causally inevitable* a hedonic utopia totally devoid of any patterns of suffering of higher-level sentient creatures. If some amount of ancestral *suffering* is a necessary part of evolution (granted for the sake of argument that the phenomena of predation and natural selection through a process of survival-of-the-fittest involve instances of «the evil of bestial suffering»), then natural evolution cannot take place in a world where all ancestral suffering is prevented by ubiquitous miracles. Thus, if God is to totally ensure the non-existence of suffering in a world, God would have to run this world by ubiquitous miraculous interventions at the price of forfeiting the good of a nearly regular world in which natural evolution takes place according to stable natural laws. But a world run by ubiquitous divine miracles results in massive irregularity, which is a defect in a world.

Van Inwagen defines a *defect in a world* as «a feature of a world that (whatever its extrinsic value might be in various worlds) a world is intrinsically better for not having»¹⁰⁸.

Van Inwagen proposes that massive irregularity is a defect that is at least as great as the defect of there being patterns of suffering of higher-level

107. Bruce REICHENBACH, «Natural Evils and Natural Laws: A Theodicy for Natural Evils», *International Philosophical Quarterly* 16, no. 2 (1976): pp. 187-189.

108. VAN INWAGEN, *The Problem of Evil*, p. 115.

sentient creatures as there are in the actual world. If deists and other thinkers are right in considering any degree of irregularity in the world as not in keeping with God's power and wisdom, then a fortiori *massive* irregularity is an even greater defect indeed for them. This explains why these thinkers tend to dismiss the miraculous.

One, of course, doesn't have to be a deist to see that massively irregular worlds would also be massively *deceptive* (e.g., a world that began to exist five minutes ago but replete with memories of an unreal past; or a world where beasts have the same physical structure and pain-behavior of actual beasts but which do not really sense pain). But a world that is massively deceptive would be inconsistent with a perfect being.

A world that is massively irregular and massively deceptive would also render impossible the drawing of even simple conclusions based on the assumption of regularity in that world. Thus, if the physical world is to be the eventual dwelling place, even if only temporarily, of rational, free, and moral beings when they eventually emerge in the scene – we humans believe that we now occupy this office – then the pre-human world must be prepared in such a way that it becomes the most fitting place for, if not the only place compatible with, the existence of such rational beings. But there is some reason to think that a world run by naturally indeterministic laws, even if no amount of divine adjustments could totally eliminate sentient suffering in such a world, is a more fitting place to be the eventual dwelling place of rational and moral beings than is a massively irregular world run by ubiquitous divine miracles. The totality of the negative consequences (for then incoming rational beings) of lack of regularity of sequence in a massively irregular world provides such a reason.

Reichenbach enumerates some such consequences: absence of a necessary relation between cause and effect, uncountable variety of events following a given set of conditions, impossibility of rational action, impossibility of planning for future events, and the impossibility of rational expectations, of making predictions, of estimating probabilities, of calculating prudence, and of accomplishing rationally conceived goals. Quoting F. R. Tennant, Reichenbach adds the following consequences: impossibility of the accumulation of ordered experience, impossibility of the formation of habit, character, culture, and intellectual development. In effect, it becomes impossible for there to be moral beings in any significant human way in such a world.

Therefore, for a world to be a fitting place for the eventual emergence of rational beings, it must have general regularity of sequence.

It cannot also be the case that God ought to have done the following: have a massively irregular world up to the time of the last pre-human ancestors and then suddenly have a regular world simultaneous with the sudden genesis of rationality. This cannot be the case if we accept the thesis that

some intrinsic good can only be achieved by having humans directly descend from higher-level sentient primates – e.g., that the higher-level sentience of these primates is part of their being «(the most) *adequate* non-human ancestors from which humans are to descend directly»; or that the great good of «epistemic distance from God» includes «having basic continuities with higher-level sentient creatures» and «having such continuities in the way that higher-level non-human animals have their own continuities with lower animals, namely, *natural evolution*». And, of course, for all anyone knows, *natural evolution* and consequently the eventual emergence of the non-human sentient predecessors of human beings from their own evolutionary ancestors would have been made impossible in a massively irregular world.

Moreover, if we take account of the suggestion (mentioned earlier) concerning the evolutionary history of the human capacity for morality – at least where it concerns the development of certain basic tendencies (shared by both man and irrational animals) that in rational man turn out to be occasions for significant moral actions – then I would say that such basic tendencies couldn't have developed in a massively irregular *pre-human* world. Would mother apes, for example, develop the instinct to feed their young if God always and without fail miraculously eliminated all cases of hunger pangs among baby apes? Likewise, the instinct for self-preservation and the motherly instinct for protecting the young wouldn't have developed in a massively irregular world where God miraculously intervenes every time a random event of nature (e.g., a falling rock, a flood, a landslide, a predator attack, etc.) threatens to destroy a helpless animal. If therefore such basic animal instincts are later to be very valuable for the moral lives of eventual rational animals, a massively irregular world that makes impossible their gradual natural development must really be defective.

In the generally regular world in which rational animals find themselves (a world where as a matter of regularity hunger pangs do not miraculously go away when one doesn't do anything about the hunger), rational animals are capable not only of acting according to their animal instincts; they are also faced with *moral* decisions, e.g., to feed or not to feed themselves, to care or not to care for their young, to share or not to share food with others, etc. They gradually discover that some actions are good (sharing food, refraining from setting another man on fire, etc.) while some actions (and omissions, e.g., not feeding the young) are evil.

On the contrary, in a world where there is no regularity of sequence because God constantly intervenes, «either one could not will evil, or the evil which one willed could not be actualized»¹⁰⁹. In Reichenbach's example,

109. REICHENBACH, «Natural Evils and Natural Laws: A Theodicy for Natural Evils», pp. 187-188.

if Delilah is to be prevented from doing evil to Samson and the Israelites, then God has several options: bring it about that the wine Samson drank would not put him to sleep, or bring it about that the scissors Delilah used to cut Samson's hair suddenly became dull, etc. Moreover, since Delilah's having some evil thoughts and intentions already constitutes some moral evils, then a constantly intervening God would have to prevent these moral evils as well by means of some special miracle in Delilah's nervous system or brain state just as she is about to think evil thoughts.

Indeed it may be that God, for some reasons, *occasionally* makes these miraculous interventions. But a world in which *no one* can will evil and *no one* can have the evil he wills actualized would be a world in which there is no true freedom of moral choice¹¹⁰. For there to be true creaturely freedom of choice, something must really be at stake. A person that decides to turn away from God, or harm a fellow person, must really be *able* to do so. Massive irregularity brought about by ubiquitous divine miracles makes this impossible. Conversely, God's making impossible the commission of such evils increases the massive irregularity of that world.

Therefore, in a world where God wills that there would eventually be rational beings significantly exercising their freedom, massive irregularity is a defect, a feature that such a world is intrinsically better for not having.

Moreover, according to Reichenbach, the prevention of all instances of evil by means of God's ubiquitous miraculous interventions brings about self-contradictory situations. This holds true, for example, where the very thing that is good for one *individual* creature might not be good for another *individual* creature. In situations where there is scarcity of food, some individual animals die of hunger while other individual animals survive. In such a situation of scarcity, only a special intervention could have saved all animals in both groups. Otherwise the survival of one group means the death of the other. Therefore, if goodness in this situation were simply equated with preserving the life of *all* individual animals, then the normal course of nature – without a specific divine intervention for *this* particular occasion – necessarily brings about a «good» for one group that is not «good» for another. God, of course, cannot be morally reproached for this state of affairs so long as we remember that the good of the whole created reality requires that some *individual* things in it fail in goodness. At a smaller scale, it may indeed be good for the general ecosystem that some individual animals die while other individual animals survive. This is simply part of nature's system of check and balances in a world functioning with general causal regularities.

110. Cfr. C. S. LEWIS, *The Problem of Pain* (Glasgow: Collins, 1940), p. 27.

Among rational animals, C. S. Lewis says, there are often situations that, owing to the fixed nature of the world, cannot possibly be equally convenient and pleasurable to each member of a society. But «this is very far from being an evil: on the contrary it furnishes occasion for all those acts of courtesy, respect, and unselfishness by which love and good humour and modesty express themselves. But [at the same time] it certainly leaves the way open to a great evil, that of competition and hostility»¹¹¹. To bring about the great moral good of people sharing and helping one another, God must not *always* modify the behavior of matter to produce unpredictable alterations (e.g., one small piece of bread miraculously triples in size to fully satisfy three hungry people)¹¹². People, however, often choose to exploit the fixed nature of matter to hurt one another (e.g., the strongest or the most cunning sometimes takes advantage of the fixed nature of an iron bar to beat the two other hungry men to death).

Finally, massive irregularity is also a defect in a world in the sense that without God's constant adjustments such a world immediately dissolves into chaos and thus makes impossible the eventual handing over of the government of the world to humanity¹¹³. If it is true, as claimed by Christianity, that God's plan was to entrust the world to the care of human beings, then a massively irregular world couldn't have been the type that could be entrusted.

4.3. Against the Local Argument from the Sufferings of Beasts

The anti-irregularity story is now going to be employed to respond to the *local* argument from the sufferings of beasts, which uses a particular episode of bestial suffering, e.g., Rowe's fawn. This response – parallel to van Inwagen's response to the local argument from lapsarian evil – likewise uses vagueness as a key feature, as well as the no-minimum thesis.

But what of the hundreds of millions (at least) [of gratuitous evils such as a burning fawn's sufferings] that have, no doubt, occurred during the long history of life? Well, I concede, [God] could have prevented any one of them, or any two of them, or any three of them... without thwarting any significant good or permitting any significant evil. But could he have prevented all of them? No – not without causing the world to be massively

111. *Ibid.*, p. 26.

112. A God-man may indeed perform the miracle of the multiplication of loaves (in the literal sense) but it is not obvious that his doing this *all the time* wouldn't have forfeited His plan for humanity to grow in love for Him and for one another.

113. VAN INWAGEN, *The Problem of Evil*, p. 123.

irregular. And, of course, there is no sharp cutoff point between a world that is massively irregular and a world that is not – just as there is no sharp cutoff point between a penalty that is an effective deterrent for armed assault and a penalty that is not. There is, therefore, no *minimum* number of cases of intense suffering that God could allow without forfeiting the good of a world that is not massively irregular – just as there is no shortest sentence that a legislature can establish as the penalty for armed assault without forfeiting the good of effective deterrence¹¹⁴.

Here's a reconstruction:

- (5) It is possible that the actual state of affairs of the world is one
- (5a) where: God is justified in the permission of a *certain* amount of evil (e.g., bestial suffering) in order for there to be a nearly regular world, but where the *amount* and membership of the instances of non-preventions (of evils, such as bestial suffering) necessary for there to be a nearly regular world is vague;
 - (5b) where: the vagueness of this matter is due to the fact that there are *no precise boundaries* between the terms «massively irregular world» and «nearly regular world»;
 - (5c) where: therefore, there is no number n such that (1) if God had prevented n (or fewer) of the evils which He in fact allowed, there would have been a nearly regular world just the same, and (2) if God had prevented $n + 1$ (or more) of those evils from taking place, there would *not* have been a nearly regular world;
 - (5d) where: the prevention of any number, m , of evils would not have a significantly different effect from the prevention of $m + 1$ evils or from $m - 1$ evils, as regards either there being a nearly regular world or there being a massively irregular world;
 - (5e) where: therefore, no significant overall good and no significant overall evil is achieved by the prevention of any number, m , of evils which the prevention of $m + 1$ evils or $m - 1$ evils could not have achieved as well;
 - (5f) where: therefore, there is *no minimum amount of evils necessary for there to be a nearly regular world*; and
 - (5g) where: therefore (given the no-minimum thesis), God is not morally obliged to prevent *any* given instance of evil, and thus not morally reproachable for allowing *some* in-

114. VAN INWAGEN, «The Problem of Evil, the Problem of Air, and the Problem of Silence», p. 164, n. 11.

stance of evil (e.g., Rowe's fawn), that is not necessary for there to be a nearly regular world or for the prevention of there being a massively irregular world.

- (6) From a vast array of alternative, morally equivalent amounts of suffering, God has decreed that *some* member of this array shall be the actual amount of suffering, but has left it to *chance* which member of this array would be the amount that actually obtains¹¹⁵.
- (7) Any line that God could have drawn between instances of animal suffering He prevents and instances of animal suffering He allows is a morally arbitrary line¹¹⁶.
- (8) The particular evil in question (e.g., Rowe's fawn) simply happened, for no special reason or explanation at all – other than that type of «chance» that has its own place in a world providently sustained by God – to be on the «actuality» side of the morally arbitrary line that God drew.

Again, «chance» in the above propositions should be properly understood in the light of what van Inwagen says about an event's happening «by chance», namely, that it was not part of God's eternal plan (or anyone else's plan) that *it* should take place, and take place at this or that particular time and place and with its particular circumstances¹¹⁷. But, of course, there may be a general reason why *events of that kind* happen in general, e.g., God acts according to His general policy that He preserves the significant exercise of creaturely freedom, or that He runs His regular world – *any* world that He could have created to be the eventual temporary dwelling place of rational creatures – by applying naturally indeterministic stable laws upon the initial state of the particles of that world.

The next section will argue that while pain sensations, sufferings, and organic deaths in a generally regular world hurt individual animals, it is probably good for animals in general and for the whole organic world that it should be one that contains a regularly functioning pain mechanism. It will then argue in the end that God is justified in not preventing all cases of biologically gratuitous pain, for if He did, the good of a regularly functioning pain mechanism would have been forfeited.

115. VAN INWAGEN, *The Problem of Evil*, p. 124.

116. As has been said, I qualify that it is advisable to claim only that the line God draws between prevented and non-prevented cases of animal suffering looks arbitrary *at least to us human observers*.

117. VAN INWAGEN, «The Place of Chance in a World Sustained by God», p. 220.

4.4. Pain and Death in a Stable Organic World

Van Inwagen does not speak at length about the *necessary* role of pain, suffering, and organic death in a world with stable natural laws and where conscious animals *naturally* evolve. But he does propose that this thesis is «true for all anyone knows». He suggests in an endnote the arguments of Yancey and Brand in *The Gift of Pain* as support for the thesis that pain is a good of great value in such a world¹¹⁸.

The following is the basic *general proposition* (supported with arguments from medical literature on the subject of pain): A regular pain mechanism is one of the most, if not *the most*, efficient means by which individual sentient animals (both irrational and rational) can be alerted against threats to their bodily integrity, against destructive random events in the natural world, and against potentially harmful conditions in their environment. We suggest that, in the absence of a plausible alternative, a regularly functioning pain mechanism might as well be one of the most efficient, if not *the most efficient*, means by which God brings about that both beasts and human beings normally preserve their organic bodily integrity in accordance with *specific* laws (e.g., particular laws associated with an animal's membership in a specific *species*) in a regularly functioning organic world.

Part of our argument is the claim that any other alternative – other than ubiquitous special interventions that necessarily bring about massive irregularity (whose negative consequences we have already exposed) – would either be not as efficient as pain, or else involves defects that are at least morally equivalent to whatever defects may be associated with there being a regularly functioning pain mechanism. If so, then any actualized state of affairs in which a regular pain mechanism makes possible the attainment of the goods for which this mechanism is meant (see the basic general presupposition in the previous paragraph) would be at least *morally equivalent* to any other humanly conceivable alternative way by which God could have achieved those same goods. In the absence of a *better* alternative that we can conceive of, we humans cannot accuse God of moral imperfection or failure in omnipotence for bringing about a reliably regular pain mechanism.

118. VAN INWAGEN, *The Problem of Evil*, p. 170, n. 12.

4.4.1. *Biologically Useful Pain*¹¹⁹

A pain mechanism in a stable organic world would have the following characteristics: it must be reliably regular enough (like many other phenomena in that world) to be useful, and it must be efficient enough to maximize the probability of the achievement of the above-mentioned goods (see the general presupposition above).

Part of the good of the regularity of the pain mechanism in a regular world is that animal bodies have stable natural properties, i.e., they do not irregularly alternate between being vulnerable and being totally invulnerable to pain. If there is some threat to the animal's organic bodily integrity that calls for a particular type of instinctive or calculated response from the animal, pain sensations must be such that what they are indicating (e.g., tissue damage, need for nourishment, etc.) in a particular instance of pain would, as a matter of regularity, be the same as in more or less similar instances. The pain sensations must also be such that they maximize the probability of the animal's making the appropriate responses.

In a regular world where a regular pain mechanism turns out to be (God not preventing this) the way by which animals preserve their organic bodily integrity, logically it is not better for animals to have total insensitivity to pain than for them to be regularly capable of pain sensations. In fact, total painlessness would be terrible for a sentient animal in that world.

One rare physiological disorder is a congenital insensitivity to pain which deprives the individual animal of a valuable *biological warning system* possessed by most other animals of the same species. Animals born with such a disorder bump into sharp objects, wound themselves, but hardly make any appropriate response in order to avoid further damage to their bodily integrity¹²⁰. His work with leprosy patients convinced Dr. Brand of the horrifying consequences of a world without pain. He remarks:

Life without pain is too dangerous... For the painless, danger lurks everywhere. A larynx that never feels a tickle does not trigger the cough

119. In his discussion of the biological utility of pain and pleasure, Paul Draper makes use of the contrasting concepts of *biologically useful* pain (or pleasure) and *biologically gratuitous* pain (or pleasure). According to Draper, pain is biologically useful when it a) causally contributes to one of the biological goals of an organic system (or to one of the biological goals of some other goal-directed organic system of which it is a part); and b) its doing so is not biologically accidental. Pain would be biologically gratuitous when it is not biologically useful (e.g., the pains of a terminal cancer patient just before he dies). See Paul DRAPER, «Pain and Pleasure: An Evidential Problem for Theists», *Noûs* 23, no. 3 (June 1989): pp. 334-335.

120. Philip YANCEY and Dr. Paul BRAND, *The Gift of Pain* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan Publishing House, 1997), pp. 3-5. See also HICK, *Evil and the God of Love*, pp. 297-298.

reflex that relocates phlegm from the lungs to the pharynx, and a person who never coughs runs the risk of developing pneumonia. The bone joints of insensitive people deteriorate because there are no whispers of pain encouraging a shift in position, and soon bone grinds against bone¹²¹.

Yancey and Brand describe the normal functioning of the pain mechanism in terms of the language-of-pain metaphor.

Pain employs a wide tonal range of conversation. It whispers to us in the early stages: at a subconscious level we sense a slight discomfort and change positions in bed, or adjust a jogging stride. It speaks louder as danger increases: a hand grows tender after a long stint at raking leaves, or a foot grows sore in new shoes. And pain shouts when the danger becomes severe: it forces a person to limp or even to hop or else quit running altogether¹²².

The above description can of course be applied to irrational animals instinctively adjusting their body movements in response to the stimulus that pain gives, thus protecting their bodily integrity.

Sometimes, though, when the brain is occupied with many other activities, the pain sensation does not register right away. Soldiers in battle, athletes at play, or animals fighting over a carcass may not immediately sense their injuries while the action is going on. Religious ecstasy (as in the case of martyrs), hypnotism, placebos, an abnormal masochistic state of mind, as well as «one's conscious interpretation of the significance of the pain that one feels is also important», have also been known to minimize the pain experience. In other words, in these cases the pain is sensed but the emotional response to it (namely, suffering) is diminished or put off¹²³. Here's Dr. Brand's description of how the pain mechanism works

I divide the experience of pain into three stages. First there is the pain signal, an alarm that goes off when nerve endings in the periphery sense danger...

At a second stage of pain, the spinal cord and base of the brain act as a «spinal gate» to sort out which of the many millions of signals deserve to be forwarded as a message to the brain. Damage or disease may sometimes interfere: if the spinal cord is severed, as in paraplegia, peripheral nerve endings below the break may continue to discharge pain signals, but those signals will not reach the brain.

The final stage of pain takes place in the higher brain (especially the cerebral cortex), which sorts through the prescreened messages and decides

121. YANCEY and BRAND, *The Gift of Pain*, pp. 185-186.

122. *Ibid.*, p. 176.

123. HICK, *Evil and the God of Love*, pp. 294-297. See the literature on pain that Hick refers to on pp. 294-302.

on a response. Indeed, pain does not truly exist until the entire cycle of signal, message, response has been completed¹²⁴.

A regular pain mechanism thus serves as a reliable indicator that announces that something is wrong *when the injury has just begun*, i.e., before serious injury sets in. The pain mechanism in effect «advises» the animal against further injury by forcing the animal either to withdraw or to struggle to remove the source of the injury. A high-tech thermograph is a poor substitute for a healthy pain mechanism, since this device detects a problem only after the fact, not before, and usually *when it is too late* to do something. «The beauty of pain is that it lets you know right away when you are harming yourself».¹²⁵ This is true at least in cases involving what Hick calls «the primary function of pain», namely, «the *healthy* animal's management of itself within the external environment»¹²⁶. Instances of *biologically gratuitous* pain – e.g., ones that serve no self-preserving purpose anymore since the animal is terminally ill anyway or is going to die anyway (cfr. Rowe's fawn) – present a special difficulty and will be addressed shortly.

A regular pain mechanism also protects *in advance*. A fawn that begins to sense an uncomfortable increase in temperature as it comes too close to a forest fire instinctively withdraws and avoids getting burned. Among higher-level sentient animals (e.g., rational animals), the higher brain is involved in the experience of pain. The memory stores the unpleasantness of the pain experience, thus protecting the animal in the future¹²⁷.

Most people and most irrational animals display aversion to pain sensations. But that is precisely part of pain's efficiency. It must be unpleasant. It must persist while the danger is still there. It must hurt sufficiently to maximize the probability of the animals' doing something *right now* (whether by reason or by instinct) to survive the threats to their physical integrity¹²⁸. As Yancey and Brand put it, a *normally functioning* pain system is not the enemy, but the loyal messenger announcing the enemy. It would be dangerous indeed for animals to regard pain as an enemy. (*Human* animals are often inclined to regarding pain as an enemy.) «Once regarded as an enemy, not a warning signal, pain loses its power to instruct. Silencing pain without considering its message is like disconnecting a ringing fire alarm to avoid receiving bad news»¹²⁹.

124. YANCEY and BRAND, *The Gift of Pain*, pp. 201-202.

125. *Ibid.*, p. 166.

126. HICK, *Evil and the God of Love*, pp. 300-301 (italics added).

127. YANCEY and BRAND, *The Gift of Pain*, pp. 121-122, 216-217.

128. *Ibid.*, pp. 177, 217-218.

129. *Ibid.*, p. 188.

Pain sends a signal not only to the individual animal but also to the larger group of which the individual is a member¹³⁰. Through the external manifestations, an individual's pain sends a message to the rest in the group that a certain organic state is pain-producing. Consequently, there must be something wrong with it and something must be done: remove the cause of the tissue damage of which the pain is the signal, rescue the individual from the painful situation, do something so as not to have a similar situation in the future, etc. Oftentimes, expressions of *human* suffering are in effect pleas for communal help. Among irrational animals, appropriate responses may be no more than the instinctive protection of one by another, as exemplified by a mother hen that wards off a puppy threatening to harm her baby chicks. Instinctive memory of past pain-producing attacks has of course made possible the development of this motherly instinct for protecting the young. The probability of learning such basic procedures of preserving the self¹³¹ or some other member of the species could only have been *maximized* by pain. The maximizing factors for this habit-formation would be pain's reliable regularity, persistence, and intensity.

Finally, Yancey and Brand suggest that one of the greatest goods that a regular pain mechanism makes possible is the *freedom to explore life*.

The freedom to explore life is one of pain's greatest gifts... I am free to walk barefoot across rock-strewn ground, to drink coffee out of a tip cup, and to turn a screwdriver with all my strength, because I can trust my pain signals to alert me whenever I approach the danger point¹³².

Non-rational animals, of course, may not exactly have the kind of «*freedom to explore life*» that human beings enjoy. But it is at least plausible to claim that there is some intrinsic good in a state of affairs where irrational animals are able to move about and «play around» in a *stable* natural world and a reliably regular pain mechanism alerts them of dangers, stimulating them to make instinctive adjustments that preserve their physical integrity.

Since ubiquitous divine miracles bring about the defect of massive irregularity, it seems that God is justified in giving sentient animals (both rational and irrational) a pain mechanism that is *biologically useful* for individual animals partly on account of its reliable regularity and its efficiency. Unless, therefore, there is some other alternative that we have good reason to believe is *morally preferable* (i.e., not only *morally equivalent*) to a regu-

130. Cfr. *ibid.*, p. 21.

131. For lack of a better term, when I say «preserving the self», I mean to include not only the self-preserving actions of rational animals, who have a consciousness of themselves, but also those of irrational animals that, properly speaking, *may not* have «selves», at least not in the way that rational animals do.

132. YANCEY and BRAND, *The Gift of Pain*, p. 230.

lar pain mechanism, I propose that God's equipment of the organic world with a regular pain mechanism is indeed morally justified.

Now, what about particular instances of *biologically gratuitous* pain?

4.4.2. *Biologically Gratuitous Pain*

If the primary function God attaches to pain in a stable world is alerting animals against threats to their bodily integrity, against destructive random events in the natural world, and against potentially harmful conditions in their environment so that they can make the appropriate self-preserving adjustments, why doesn't God prevent individual cases of *biologically gratuitous pain*, e.g., the pains of a terminally ill animal, or the pains of a fawn as it burns to death in a forest fire? I think part of the answer lies in God's good reasons for keeping the regularity of the world.

A regularly functioning pain mechanism, says John Perry, is like a car alarm that signals theft but also sounds off when no theft is occurring, as when some innocent child comes too close to the car and touches it out of curiosity. The regular functioning of the car alarm mechanism makes it reliable in signaling theft. Many people may be irritated by the unpleasant sound of the alarm and would rather prefer cars that do not have alarms. But the car alarm inventors are justified in that the good of discouraging car theft is worth all the unpleasant sounds of car alarms that, as a consequence of their regular functioning, go off even at times when no theft is occurring.

Moreover, all the wailing and all the pains of a dying animal are like the unpleasant sounds of «a car alarm that is uselessly set off, by an explosion that has pretty much destroyed the car anyway»¹³³. The car alarm in this case no longer serves the purpose of preserving *this* particular car. And yet, that alarms in general should be regular in sounding off is probably necessary to make possible the general good of discouraging car theft.

Similarly, in a regular world, fire must hurt – as a matter of regularity – as it burns animal flesh, whether the animal manages to escape from the fire and so is only slightly burned, or the animal fails to escape and so is burned to death. A wound brought about by a random event in nature must hurt whether or not it eventually leads to death. That this ought to be so increases the probability of the animal's reacting (instinctively or rationally) in ways that maximize its chances of survival.

133. John PERRY, *Dialogue on Good, Evil, and the Existence of God* (Indianapolis: Hackett Pub., 1999), pp. 62-64.

And there is also some intrinsic good in the following state of affairs: God communicates *ad extra* his causal powers to *some* creatures. That means, in the case of *rational* animals, that even if God is the First and Principal Cause, rational animals are truly made to participate in God's causal powers¹³⁴. God is *fully* the cause of some creaturely operation – inasmuch as every creaturely operation presupposes the creature's act of being, which participates in God (Pure Act) – even as rational creatures moving about in a stable natural world are also *fully* the causes of the same operation. There is, however, no contradiction in saying that God is the *total cause* of something even if He is not the *exclusive cause* of this thing¹³⁵. For our purposes, this point implies that in a given case of, say, a severe wound brought about by a random event in nature, the individual human being in pain and/or those around him are truly *able* to do something – e.g., to treat the wound, to give and receive help – and thus the survival of the suffering individual is truly caused by the rational creature/s. Or, rational creatures could remain indifferent and thus the individual bleeds to death from the wound that, in a regular world, wouldn't have led to death. In the latter case, there is indeed some truth in saying that the human decision not to do anything when something could have been done *caused* the death of the individual.

The regular functioning of the pain mechanism therefore increases the probability of this good: individual and communal action to eliminate unnecessary pain and suffering (whenever it is prudent to do so) and to make it more bearable and meaningful especially when it is no longer biologically useful *for the individual sufferer*.

Some free-will responses to the problem of evil would, of course, include many other goods that a general state of affairs where God allows individual cases of biologically gratuitous pain is supposed to make possible (e.g., an individual sufferer's sharing in the divine work of atonement, soul-formation, greater perfection through suffering, being-of-use, etc.). For the general achievement of all these proposed goods, I suggest that it is vague (at least *to us*) how many instances of biologically gratuitous pain God must allow so that these goods would not be forfeited. This vagueness should be enough for any human not to dare accuse God of moral imperfec-

134. Cfr. *Summa Theologica*, part I, q. 83, a. 1, ad 3. «But it does not of necessity belong to liberty that what is free should be the first cause of itself, as neither for one thing to be cause of another need it be the first cause. God, therefore, is the first cause, Who moves causes both natural and voluntary... [B]y moving voluntary causes He does not deprive their actions of being voluntary: but rather is he the cause of this very thing in them; for he operates in each thing according to its own nature».

135. Ángel Luis GONZÁLEZ, *Teología natural*, 5ª edición corregida (Pamplona: EUNSA, 2005), pp. 241-244.

tion or failure in omnipotence for permitting individual cases of biologically gratuitous pain.

I emphasize that ensuring the regularity of the pain mechanism as a general policy may not be God's *only* reason for allowing *some* instances of *human* animal pain. (That keeping such regularity cannot be the reason for a *specific* episode of *human* animal pain is obvious from the plausible supposition that if *this* particular human pain had suddenly been miraculously eliminated, the pain mechanism in the organic world wouldn't have suddenly become massively irregular.) Sometimes, God may indeed have special reasons which He attaches only to *this* specific pain episode and not to others of the same sort (e.g., only by *this* pain can *this* particular man be converted, and significantly perfected spiritually; only by *this* terminal cancer pains can *this* patient achieve the good of participating in the redemptive work of God, etc.). Sometimes this special reason becomes clearly known while the pain is being sensed, sometimes only hinted at, sometimes known only in retrospect or sometimes not at all by the sufferer or by any human observer.

But the point in the anti-irregularity defense is that even in cases 1) where a special reason exclusive to a particular episode of pain/suffering is *truly absent* (even from God's point of view); and 2) where *this* particular pain episode could indeed have been prevented by God without loss of the general good of regularity of the pain mechanism (as, logically, any particular episode could be), God would still have been sufficiently justified already against *human criticism* just by the following: a) He must allow a certain amount of pain to keep the regularity of the pain mechanism; and b) nobody (not human beings certainly) can pinpoint a minimum total number of pain episodes necessary in order for there to be a reliable pain mechanism and in order to avoid massive irregularity in the pain mechanism.

Of course, if God is sufficiently justified already against any *human criticism* in the way proposed by the anti-irregularity defense, there is no preventing a theist who wants to add the following: From any particular episode of a *biologically gratuitous* pain sensation, God always *can* (and indeed sometimes *does*) draw some *particular* goods of great intrinsic value¹³⁶. But it wouldn't matter to the anti-irregularity defender whether

136. To say, of course, that only *this* particular pain episode could have made possible the achievement of *this* particular good of great value (e.g., St. Therese's having a chance at participating in the redemptive work of God by *this* particular *suffering*, the one she had as she was dying of tuberculosis) presupposes the distinction between the dying patient's biologically gratuitous pain sensations that by themselves may be without spiritual value, and the whole «tribulational system» (cfr. LEWIS, *The Problem of Pain*, pp. 84-85) occasioned by the pain sensations and that includes, in the case of *this* patient, the emotional response of suffering lovingly offered to God. There is, therefore, some sense in saying that *this* particular good («the suffering of great redemptive value, occasioned

these goods could have been achieved *only* by the particular pain episode or they were also achievable by other means. For even if these goods were achievable *only* by the particular pain episode, the anti-irregularity defender does not avail of this supposed fact. (Indeed, God's making possible the achievement of certain goods so that a particular person may then be enabled to *freely* will these goods cannot, logically, ensure this particular person's actual *free* cooperation in the achievement of these goods. But again, the anti-irregularity defender does not need to be reminded of this, since he has no need of this line of defense, for whatever it is worth.)

Indeed, it would not count against the anti-irregularity defense that *some*, or even *all*, instances of *biologically gratuitous* pain are turned by God into occasions for the achievement of other (non-biological) goods of great value. But the anti-irregularity defense against the local argument from evil would always warn the theist against employing any of these goods as *the* sufficiently justifying reason for God's permission of a particular instance of biologically gratuitous pain.

CONCLUSION

We now gather together in one stretch the general conclusions we have reached from our study.

First, we have shown that *theism* has not been successfully demonstrated to be false by any of the arguments from evil so far employed by atheists. The relevant terms (e.g., «evil» and «God») were made clear and agreeable to all parties in the discussion – whether theist, atheist, or agnostic. Although van Inwagen simply equates «evils» with «countable bad things», we tried to explore the richness of the traditional definition of «evil» as *privatio boni*.

CONCLUSION (1) Evil is «the absence of some good or perfection that, according to a system of evaluation that one takes to be objective and universal, ought to be present».

This description of evil emphasizes both the objective and the subjective elements of evil. When people judge some state of affairs to be involving some evil, they agree as *judging subjects* that some objective order of goodness is violated. Thus, evils are not just matters of perspective or personal taste, and so they should be distinguished from the subjective aversion to the states of affairs involving them. The statement that «evil ex-

by tuberculosis and lovingly offered by St. Therese») couldn't have been achieved if God miraculously prevented all of St. Therese's pain sensations.

ists» simply means there really are cases of privations of good in the actual world.

The term «God» has also been clarified for all parties in the discussion. God is «something than which a greater cannot be conceived» and, as such, He is, among other things, an omnipotent, omniscient, and morally perfect Person who created the universe. Any alternative conceptions of «evil» or «God» (e.g., a less-than-omnipotent God, an impersonal God, a God in process, etc.) radically transforms the problem so that it is no longer the problem of evil as traditionally posed in Western religious and intellectual history.

Second, we have highlighted van Inwagen's appeal to an incompatibilist theory of free-will as at least «probably true». This suggests at least the probability that:

CONCLUSION (2) It is metaphysically impossible for God to ensure that no moral evil gets done in a world where He allows free creatures to significantly exercise the freedom necessary for creaturely love and communion.

The actual commission of moral evils has never been a part of God's eternal plan. We have also shown that if the world could have been much worse than it actually is, then it is at least possible that God does everything His omnipotence could do to increase the probability that His free creatures would *freely* choose to do the good. However, despite all that omnipotence can do, the free creature remains in a very real sense actually *able* to turn against God, against his fellow humans, against the world, and against his own reason and self-integrity. But *God does not eliminate creaturely freedom because of its necessity in making possible the immensely great good of the creature called out of nothingness to come to love God (and his fellow creatures and himself in God)*. Creaturely freedom is thus a necessary element in God's plan to call to personal communion those whom He first called out of nothingness.

Third, our study has also shown that a world/universe designed to be the eventual dwelling place, even if only temporarily, of free human beings intended by God to be capable of loving and being loved, would have to be *regular*. It must have fixed stable laws and regularity of sequence. We have argued that this regularity is probably necessary as God guided the evolution of the world (and all organisms in it) towards becoming the most fitting home, even if only temporarily, of the first *human* free beings (as having intrinsic worth distinct from those of *angelic* free beings). Massive irregularity would have made impossible the natural evolution of the higher-level sentient beings that would in turn be the immediate evolutionary predecessors of human beings made in the image and likeness of God. Hence:

CONCLUSION (3) It would be metaphysically impossible for God to ensure a regular world destined to be entrusted to the stewardship of human free beings, without allowing for the possibility that there would be some extra-lapsarian evils in that world (e.g., animal pain and, possibly, animal suffering).

Fourth, moving beyond what van Inwagen argues in his anti-irregularity defense, I incorporated the insights of natural-law theodicies. I have shown that once the existence of *human* free beings was already actualized in the world, the regularity of that world had to be maintained for the significant exercise of freedom. God's constant miraculous interventions to prevent the commission of any moral evil and the feeling of any pain or suffering resulting from the abuse of free will and from man's unimpeded interaction with different natures (living and non-living material bodies) would have made the world a «hedonic paradise». But it would have been a massively irregular world where no significant moral good could be done, where no genuine love could develop, and consequently no personal communion could take place. But this would be contrary to God's original plan for His creation in general and for man in particular.

Clearly then, unalloyed pleasure and the total absence of pain and suffering at the cost of personal growth in love and communion is not the supreme value in this world. Growth and perfection in love and ultimately communion with God is. God actualized the necessary, though insufficient, conditions for this good of great value to be made possible. He created a world *in statu viae* («state of journeying») and eventually entrusted it to the care of humans, who themselves are images of God *in statu viae*. Man is a *homo viator* who journeys to greater states of perfection in the context of a regular material universe where he encounters and establishes personal communion with his fellows and with God. The world, with its fixed laws and regularity of sequence, is the arena for personal communion. Therefore:

CONCLUSION (4) It is metaphysically impossible for God to ensure that there would be no evils that could potentially result from random events in a material world whose fixed laws and regularity of sequence God preserves as a necessary condition for the significant exercise of creaturely freedom and love.

Fifth, part of the divine entrustment of the world to the care and stewardship of humans is God's communication of His causal and actualizing powers to humans. God enabled humans to significantly develop the world in their own creative ways in accordance with what they would progressively discover to be God's will and God's plan for the world. This power to do so much good logically involves the possibility of its being

misused to do so much evil. The inherited consequences of the primordial abuses of free will have compounded the difficulty since, given the fall of man from an original state of holiness and justice, growth and perfection in love has now become even more arduous. Thus, God *reactively decreed* to provide a necessary condition for fallen man's growth and perfection in love. Therefore:

CONCLUSION (5) Besides all the things that Christian revelation says God has done and continues to do to redeem His fallen creatures (e.g., Incarnation and the Paschal Mystery, perfection of the *imago Dei* through transformation into the *imago Christi*), *it is now* (i.e., given the contingent event of creatures abusing their freedom) *metaphysically impossible for God to bring to completion His plan to call creatures to eternal communion with Him without leaving in place some amount of evil and randomly distributed suffering that are the natural consequences of the primordial as well as the subsequent abuses of creaturely freedom.*

And, of course, this *non-total cancellation* of the natural results of our rebellion (plausibly, God does spare us from a lot of evil that otherwise would have obtained!) is not necessarily taken as punishment in the sense of a vengeful God unleashing His fury on erring humans without any thought of these creatures' highest good. It is rather seen as a logical consequence of God's non-deception to His creatures in regard to their true state after the primordial abuse of freedom. This non-deception is in turn necessary for the growth and perfection in love of creatures who have inherited the *imago Dei* now impaired and disfigured, though not destroyed by sin.

Sixth, in the context of merely *justifying* God's ways before *human* criticism, I have shown that an appeal to the phenomenon of vagueness *sufficiently* casts reasonable doubt on the atheist's allegations. Vagueness characterizes many of the states of affairs appealed to by the atheist in her local arguments. For example:

(a) The minimum amount of «metaphysical evils» [essential ontological limitations that are of course not evil in the sense of CONCLUSION (1) above] necessary for the good of a world *in statu viae* is vague *at least to human beings*;

(b) The minimum amount of God's non-preventions of «such-moral-evils-as-an-individual-person-may-actually-commit-in-his-lifetime» necessary for God's preserving this person's significant exercise of freedom is vague *at least to human beings*;

(c) The minimum amount of God's non-preventions of «such-moral-evils-as-may-be-actually-committed-by-human-beings» necessary for God's preserving the good of the significant exercise of creaturely freedom is vague *at least to human beings*;

(d) The minimum amount of God's non-preventions of «such-extra-lapsarian-evils-as-there-may-actually-obtain-by-chance» necessary for God's preserving the regularity of a world eventually entrusted to the stewardship of human beings for the sake of personal communion is vague *at least to human beings*. Therefore:

CONCLUSION (6): Given evil's vague necessity (or non-necessity) for goods of great enough value, no particular instance of either a lapsarian or an extra-lapsarian evil can be used by a human being to successfully argue against the non-existence of an all-powerful, all-knowing, and all-loving God.

Lastly, I note that a mere theoretical justification of God's ways before human criticism is inadequate to address all the *existential* problems and the anguished cries of suffering individuals. But I hasten to add that this inadequacy is a result of two things. First, a project that merely *defends* God's reputation as beyond moral reproach does not in fact make positive assertions about what else such a God does for His people besides fulfill His supposed moral obligations to them. Secondly, suffering individuals are not primarily searching for (or at least do not stop at) mere intellectual demonstrations of God's moral blamelessness. At the heart of every anguished lament, every sigh of frustration, and every cry of desperation is the plea for assurance that it still makes sense to live on, that one can count on the understanding, empathy, acceptance, and help of others, and, especially, that one is loved (by God through the events in one's life) and that therefore there is hope that all will be well in the end.

Thus, instead of limiting ourselves to a fruitless search for «goods» with logically necessary connections to every suffering, I suggest a «moving on» to a theodicy that uses the resources of Christian revelation and tries to make sense of evils in the context of God's calling the human person to participate in His intimate life as Abounding Love.

The theological and existential limits of a *philosophical* reflection on evil have always been acknowledged by theistic defenders.¹³⁷ We, too, humbly acknowledge these limitations. And, of course, a *Christian* philosopher who sincerely searches for the answers to the ultimate questions takes it very seriously that certain truths are beyond the reach of unaided human reason. And so, he looks up to another source of truth. The self-revelation of God, Christ the Way, the Truth, and the Life has taught us this truth: God Himself freely suffered and died for love. From this great paschal mystery of Christ's Passion, Death, and Resurrection, there came about the great

137. CONESA, *Dios y el mal*, pp. 441-443.

good of human nature being enabled again to enter into communion with God and with one another in God.

In the end, a theodicy would have to acknowledge the lesson of the Cross. If even Christ the God-Man freely embraced suffering and death for the sake of love, thereby conquering sin and eternal death, and is now gloriously triumphant, then God has taught us that the supreme value in this world is not the total avoidance of all pain and suffering but the love that overcomes evils, abounds in the face of evils, and ultimately leads to life in Christ.

Indeed, where sin and evils abound, Love abounds all the more!

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